UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

# ‘OTHERED BODIES’: INTERROGATING DISABILITY IN THE AFRICAN NOVEL

ADUSE-POKU SAMUEL

2024

**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST**

# ‘OTHERED BODIES’: INTERROGATING DISABILITY IN THE AFRICAN NOVEL

BY

**ADUSE-POKU**

Thesis submitted to the Department of English of the Faculty of Arts, College of Humanities and Legal Studies, University of Cape Coast, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy degree in Literature in English

APRIL, 2024

# DECLARATION

## Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature: ..... Date: .....

Name: Aduse-Poku Samuel

## Supervisors' Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Principal Supervisor's Signature: ..... Date: .....

Name: Prof. Theresah Patrine Ennin

Co-Supervisor's Signature: ..... Date: .....

Name: Prof. Rogers Asempasah

## ABSTRACT

In recent times, there has been a growing interest in the study of how disabled characters are represented in African literature. This is partly inspired by the call for researchers and scholars to present the African perspective on the ongoing disability discourse which hitherto, was considered to be dominated by Western thoughts and ideas. In this research, I examine the representation of disabled characters in *The Last Duty* by Isidore Okpewho, *The Beggars Strike* by Aminata Sow Fall, *Silence is My Mother Tongue* by Sulaiman Addonia and *The Book of Memory* by Petinah Gappah. All these literary texts are novels by African writers and they involve the representation of characters who are disabled. By situating my discussions within disability studies, I examine how these characters are 'othered' by their respective societies as a result of their perceived body differences. I offer the hybrid interpretative framework as a viable way of reading the selected texts. This approach involves applying relevant perspectives on disability studies as they have developed over the years through a close reading of the texts while maintaining an eye on what may be described as 'African' as far as issues pertaining to disability representation is concerned. This study shows that characters whose bodies do not meet the societal perception of the ideal body are 'othered' based on their body difference. This therefore makes them victims of labelling, stigmatisation, stereotyping and marginalisation. In this regard, cultural and religious beliefs play a critical role in how bodies are perceived and treated in these societies. Again, this research shows that the intersection between sex and disability is at the core of the texts understudied. Even though the disabled characters are initially denied participation in the sexual activities in their societies, they find ways to fight for inclusion. I conclude that in their quest to present a realistic presentation of the disabled in their texts, the selected authors risk being accused of presenting mainly negative narratives about the disabled characters.

## KEY WORDS

Disability

African

Representation

Othering

Normate

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to God for making me who I am today.

I am also eternally grateful to my supervisors, Prof. Theresah Patrine Ennin and Prof. Rogers Asempasah, both of the Department of English, University of Cape Coast, for their guidance, encouragement, enthusiasm about my work, commitment, patience and support which helped me to complete this thesis. Their comments and inputs inspired hope in me and challenged me to do my best.

To Prof. Afful and Prof. Traore of the Department of English, University of Cape Coast, I cannot thank you enough. I greatly cherish every opportunity I had to listen to you and be inspired by your words.

To my dear wife, Lawrencia and our children, thank you for supporting me on this journey. Thanks for the sacrifices you made to make this possible. This achievement is for you.

To my mother, my siblings and my in-laws, I appreciate your prayers and support. Our God is faithful.

Again, I am most grateful to all my teachers, especially, the late Mr. A. A. Amoako who taught me a number of Literature courses during my undergraduate days at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. Mr. Amoako was so excited about 'this gentleman from Toase Secondary School who was very good in Literature.' His confidence in me was a great source of inspiration.

Finally, to Pastor Francis Adjapong, Rev. Osei Yaw Afoakwa, Rev. Fred Kyei Danso, all members of Yielded Generation and all friends and loved ones who believed in me, prayed for me and supported me, may the good Lord richly bless you all. See what the Lord has done!

## DEDICATION

To my dear wife, Lawrencia Aduse-Poku, for being a great source of support and encouragement to me; my mother, Margaret Owusu Acheampomaa and my mother-in-law, Juliet Ramos for believing in me.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

## Background to the Study

The study of various forms of representation in the literary text is very important as far as the literary field is concerned. Since what writers capture in their texts usually have direct correlations with what pertains in the real world, a very important activity that readers, researchers, reviewers and academics pay attention to is how a particular writer represents different sectors of society, phenomena, ideology, belief systems etc. in his or her writings. Such an exercise is very critical in illuminating the point of view of the writer in order to examine the perspective he/she brings on board as far as various styles and thematic areas are concerned. Such studies are revealing since they help in unravelling the deeper meanings of what is represented in literary texts. Whether a writer meant what is communicated by a text or not is a matter that becomes open to diverse interpretations. Literary works, therefore, usually assemble bits and pieces of information from the real world, while the work of the critical reader or researcher is to pay particular attention to the writer's perspectives with regard to his/her representation of what is included in the text.

A literary representation of a group of people, a thing, phenomena etc., has as part of its roles, drawing attention and giving agency to that which has been given space in the text. It is indeed safe to assume that a writer does not just accidentally put characters into a text, just as incidents are not merely put together to tell a story. The world of a work of literature is indeed intentionally planned and the citizens that live in it are deliberately chosen in order to tell a particular story. This deliberate representation creates agency whereby that which takes the stage in the literary discourse begins to draw questions, comments and discussions. This works hand in hand with the plot in telling the story the writer wants to be heard. We, therefore get to see that which the author wants us to pay attention to.

Consequently, the universe of any particular text serves as a great avenue through which readers encounter different characters and also get to experience what they go through in the worlds in which they find themselves. Indeed, just as the happenings in the real world are diverse, what writers represent in their works also differ. Similarities, may, however, be seen in the thematic concerns of the characters, the geo-political issues represented, as well as the socio-cultural concerns of texts that originate from various parts of the world.It is worth noting that different reasons account for the representation of people, societies, issues etc., by authors in their respective texts. Primarily, most representations draw attention to what has been presented in the text. This is why in writing about the various areas of interest, authors are mindful of their backgrounds. Indeed, whether it is for aesthetics, a call to action or an attempt to champion a view point, issues that find their way into literary works are as varied as issues that exist in the real world. What this means is that not only is what is represented important, but also how it is represented is also of great importance since it reveals far more than what we can imagine. As a mirror of society, when literature allows characters that exist in the real world to be captured within its space, such representations can sometimes either influence people positively or enforce stereotypes even outside the text (Micthell & Snyder, 2000). Literature, therefore, serves as an effective space for representing and addressing very pertinent issues in society. Also, what a literary text may seek to represent about a people can serve as an effective window through which we may view that particular society.

Within the African literary space, it can be argued that the representation of various characters by the African writer is closely tied to the authors' sense of commitment to their respective societies. For the African writer, writing is not just for writing sake. Writing is intricately connected to that which society calls upon the writer to bring to the fore (Achebe, 1978; Nyamndi, 2006; Soyinka, 1968). This means that at any point in time, the challenges, hopes and aspirations of the African continent in general and even issues that have to do with

specific countries and societies end up becoming the major pre-occupation of African writers. Right from the authors who emerged during the colonial and post-colonial eras, like Achebe, Soyinka, Aidoo, Armah, Ngugi etc., to those who may be considered as being contemporary or modern African writers, such as Adichie, Yaa Gyasi, Gappah, Mda etc., thematic concerns that directly have to do with the happenings on the African continent have always been a key part of what has been captured in African literary texts.

For the African writer, writing could also be premised on what the writer senses the need to write about in order to achieve a particular purpose in society. Just like the former, these types of writings have sought to move the African people towards particular directions. What is, therefore, well acknowledged is that what makes the African literary work of much relevance is not merely an issue of aesthetics but the thematic concerns it addresses (Achebe, 1978; Nyamndi, 2006; Soyinka, 1968). In this regard, literature continues to be a very active and potent field where African writers have written about colonialism (Gikandi, 2008; Osei-Nyame, 2020), dictators (Spencer, 2012; Asika, 2011), corruption (Mohd, 2014; Obiora, 2016) etc. It has also been used in addressing issues such as the clash between tradition and modernity (Babaee & Babaee, 2012; Morrison, 2018; Watts, 2008), gender and sexuality (Ennin, 2012; Uko, 2011; Zabu, 2021), conflicts and civil wars (Awogu-Maduagwu,2018; Nabutanyi,2013; Okolocha,2012), child labour among others. As far as a matter is of essence to society, the literary field becomes an effective means of addressing it. Ideas are also propounded and shaped within the African literary space. Indeed, there have even been times when the issues raised in certain texts have operated in the realm of foretelling events that were to happen in society. For instance, Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* continues to be as relevant today as it was when it was first published because of how the story clearly reflects the current state of corrupt practices in most African countries. Through the characters represented in various literary texts, the African writer is able to not

merely serve as a social commentator but also as one who represents, directs and shapes the perspectives, discourse, directions and dreams of his/her society (Morrison, 2008; Nyamndi, 2006).

It is indeed very clear that African writers play a very important role in terms of shaping societal discourse, presenting alternative ways of looking at issues and mirroring what may be deemed as being African in a bid to present such perspectives as a way of promoting and maintaining values, concepts, ideals and norms that are critical to the people who are described as Africans (Morrison, 2008; Nyamndi, 2006). Like most literatures of the world, African literature continues to present perspectives and angles that help readers in their appreciation of African societies. According to George D. Nyamdi (2006), 'The writer is therefore not only a teacher in the retrospective sense of the word; he is also and especially a social seer who identifies and highlights the weaknesses of present-day society' (p. 571).

Over the years, one key component of society which the African writer has sought to represent is the vulnerable or marginalised group. Ukande (2016) rightly states that writers serve as a voice for the voiceless in their societies. As a result, the work that writers produce usually tends to give voice to the very marginalised in society who may not have anybody to speak for them. This role of African writers is, therefore, part of their commitment to their respective societies.

This kind of representation has been multidimensional. The first is the general representation of characters by authors, which eventually tends to include issues that affect groups such as women, children, immigrants, people trapped in war-torn countries etc. While this type of representation is by no means accidental, the issues that affect groups that may be considered to be marginalised are not usually given much attention. For instance, a novel on war may mention the presence of children playing in passing without paying much attention to the consequences of the war on the physical, social, educational and psychological

wellbeing of the children. This is what gives rise to the second type of representation, which has to do with a deliberate effort to write stories that capture the particular experiences of minorities and the marginalised in African society. The works of most female African writers which deal with the challenges women go through as far as the need for empowerment of the female is concerned will belong to the latter group.

With the rise of female African writers such as Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta, Efua Sunderland, Mariama Ba, Adichie, Yaa Gyasi, and Gappah, among others, the African woman has been given voice and agency within the African literary discourse. In the texts of these African writers, women are able to assume more dominant and important roles which hitherto was not the case. By representing women and issues that bother them, these female African writers have contributed greatly to empowering women through their writings, challenging narratives that are biased against women, highlighting unjust systems that patriarchal systems use against women as well as presenting women more positively. This type of representation has, therefore, been critical in how it has portrayed abuse against women and also captured various religious and cultural beliefs that do not benefit females within various African societies.

Regardless of the efforts being made by African writers regarding issues that are of relevance to the continent, there are still a lot of areas that are yet to be given the much-needed attention in the African literary text. This is because of the plethora of issues that are going on, which have the colourings of Africa and those with global dimensions that call for the African perspective. In fact, since there has always been the call for proper representation of Africa as far as the global discourse on matters is concerned, it becomes much more pressing for writers, especially those with African backgrounds, to continue offering the African perspective on various global issues (Falola & Hamel, 2021).

The other side of this important issue is that there are various characters and themes that are sometimes represented across several African literary texts without any critical attention being paid to them by researchers. However, as such issues begin to gain currency within literary circles, African writers avail themselves in actively contributing to the discourse. In this case, African literature tends to mirror society while, at the same time, it serves to chart a path for the future by also contributing to global discussions on pertinent issues. As the world continues to pay attention to issues that have to do with the environment, gender issues, sexualities, immigration, war, climate change etc., African writers tend to present what may be described as the African perspective on such issues. At the same time, African literature scholars and researchers also continue to dissect the materials that purport to represent the African perspective on issues in a way to highlight, discuss and even debunk certain claims that certain authors may make in their writings.

As conversations regarding issues of importance sometimes emerge from various parts of the world, especially the West, some of these discourses continue to attract the attention of academics, policy makers, researchers and society in general. It then becomes necessary for perspectives from other parts of the world to be brought on board. This helps to prevent situations of overgeneralization and also allows for wider and more diverse perspectives pertaining to views from other continents, nations and people groups to be shared on matters arising.

**Disability Studies and the Literary Space**

Over the years, one area that has been of keen interest to researchers is disability. Just as queer, race and feminist theories deal with matters concerning specific groups, disability studies follow in that same order. Falola et al. (2021) state that the fight for disability can be compared to the fight for the rights of women and other civil rights in how they all 'challenged stereotypes and lobbied for change' (p. 51). Indeed, disability studies have been

on the rise due to society's realisation of the need to ensure the rights, welfare and the needs of persons with various forms of impairment. The emergence of disability studies is attributed to the success of the disability rights movement in the late twentieth century in the Western world. As movements dedicated to ensuring that the rights of disabled persons are respected in society experienced some victories in the 1970s, it led to the emergence of disability studies, which continued in the tradition of fighting for the rights of people with various impairments (Falola et al, 2021).

Dan Goodley (2011) states that 'Disability studies are a broad area of theory, research and practice that are antagonistic to the popular view that disability equates with personal tragedy' (p. xi). The emergence of disability studies has, therefore, ensured that issues concerning disability are given the necessary attention as a way of creating awareness, fighting against discrimination and seeking for the rights of people with impairment to be respected. Significantly, as Dan Goodley (2011) posits, disability studies have come to represent the 'a broad area of theory, research and practice that are antagonistic to the popular view that disability equates with personal tragedy' (p. xi). We can say that disability studies follow the line of the discourse that has become very prominent as a result of the rights and identity movement (Hall, 2016). It concerns itself with people who are put in the bracket of the 'disabled' in societies.

The study of the literary representations of disabled characters is one aspect of disability studies that has continued to gain ground over the years. As disability studies, which is interdisciplinary in nature, continue to attract attention, researchers have turned to investigate how the literary space has been used by writers to write about and discuss disability issues from the literary perspective. This approach is considered to be important in how it draws attention to disability without allowing it to be relegated to the background. The use of the literary space to champion disability issues is, therefore, in line with a key agenda

of disability studies which has to do with challenging the social marginalisation of people with disabilities (Hall, 2016). Consequently, disability studies aim at rescuing the presence of disabled characters from the fringes by paying attention to their representation and giving them agency. For Hall (2016), the various ways of representing disability within the literary work 'open up discussions about some of the most pressing issues of our age' and also 'provide creative opportunities for close reading' (p. 1).

What is commonly agreed on is the fact that disabled characters have long existed in the literatures of the world, and the African context is no exception. While mirroring various societies, literature has sought to capture body differences and impairments with regard to how various societies and cultures perceive and treat them. Right from oral literature to written texts, from ancient writings to modern texts, characters whose bodies appear not to align with how the greater majority in a particular society look and appear have been represented in various literary works in ways that reveal societal perceptions about body difference. In Africa, there are myths, folktales, songs, proverbs and various forms of oral literature that feature disabled characters. (Acquaviva, 2020; Adom-Opare, 2022; Ibrahim, 2022; Etieyibo, 2022; Moasun & Mfoafo-M'Carthy, 2020; Ojok & Musenze, 2019). These representations have served as a very important way of revealing societal beliefs, attitudes, understanding and perceptions toward various forms of bodily differences. According to Graziella Acquaviva (2020), 'The imaginary that society constructs around impairment and disability appears to be rich in metaphors that are full of prejudices and shadows of ancient fears' (p. 1).

To understand how bodily differences are perceived within a particular society, one only needs to pay attention to the various oral traditions of that society. This is why paying attention to how societies play a critical role in how disability is perceived and treated within various cultures is very important to researchers and academics who are into disability

studies. Such works on disability, therefore, consider the concept of who is 'normal' or not as well as what informs various cultures and societies as far as their concepts of disability are concerned (Falola et al., 2021, p. 49). The place of society in the representation of disability is, therefore, at the very core of disability studies since it is societies that render certain bodies 'disabled' by serving as the determiner of which body should be considered as being normal or not. To disability scholars, therefore, disability is determined by various societies and cultures in terms of how they categorise bodies ((Falola et al., 2021, p. 49).

Due to the complex and varied nature of perceptions about impairments and body differences within different societies and cultures, it makes it very relevant for researchers to focus their attention on studying disability within specific contexts, cultures and locations. Hamel and Falola (2021) posit that with regard to the African context, any attempt to study disability must be wholistic in how it takes into consideration 'the actual contexts of African experiences and acknowledges both how Africa creates problems for traditional disability studies approaches, even as it also offers exciting new potentialities' (p. 1-2).

While tracing the rise of disability studies within the literary space, Alice Hall (2016) states that even though disability studies were inundated with perspectives from the social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s, as seen in the organizational setups and publications that followed that tangent, the emergence of cultural studies in the 1980s ensured that issues about disability became of interest to researchers and scholars in the humanities. Hall (2016) mentions 'Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Lennard Davis, Brenda Brueggemann, David T. Mitchell and Susan L. Snyder' as some of the key scholars whose works have sought to examine literary works that are written by people with impairments as well as works that involve issues to do with disability.

Undoubtedly, literary works play a critical role in rescuing disability from the realm of the private to the public space so that as people read such texts, they get to engage the

discourse around disability through the characters who have been represented in order to have better understanding and perspectives about the whole phenomena. Disability, therefore, ceases to be a personal tragedy that an individual keeps away from public view (Hall, 2016; p. 16). According to Hall (2016), 'Literary writing provides an important way into the wider field of disability studies because of its potential to reach diverse populations and to locate narratives of disability in particular familial and social networks, historical and geographical locations, and political contexts' (p. 15-16). Hall further states that 'Literary writing has the potential to reach large and diverse populations; it serves a pedagogic function in the sense that it not only documents but also shapes attitudes towards disability' (p. 4). For Hall (2016), a major challenge with such representations, however, is that negative stereotypes, false images and ideas about disability may sometimes be conveyed and become ingrained in the minds of people through various disability representations. Consequently, this must be corrected through literary works as a way of departing from how such works sometimes end up reinforcing oppressive ideas of normalcy, sentimentalise, and solidifying stereotypes about disability.

Unfortunately, even though research in disability representation in Africa is gaining momentum, not many studies have been done on disabled characters in a way to understand the lived experiences of such characters within the African text. It appears that African writers have long used disabled characters in order to tell their stories without having a focused agenda to tell the disability story. Again, even when issues of disability are presented, the plights of the disabled characters seem to escape the eyes of various researchers. It is, therefore, not surprising that even though issues of disability abound in African literature, the primary concern about disability studies has for a long time not been about the disabled characters who are only used to make a point. There is, however, a current growing interest in the representation of disabled characters in African literature that focuses on disability

agency, and this forms part of a response to the global interest in how the literary space is used to give agency to disabled characters. This is, therefore, contributing greatly to studies that aim at examining, understanding and theorising disability representation in the African text. This venture has, however, taken inspiration from the waves of disability studies that emanated from the Western world.

Since all societies are not the same in the way various body differences are viewed and interpreted as being 'abnormal' or 'disabled', the need to pay attention to how the issue of disability is captured and represented in various cultures and societies remains very crucial. Indeed, the question of who qualifies to be classified as being 'disabled' or 'able' has different answers in different cultures. Different societies have their standards of determining who is able as well as who is disabled. When one does not measure up to what is considered to be normal in a given society, the individual is then classified as being disabled. This presupposes that there is always an ongoing form of comparison between what is and what is not the norm within various cultures and societies. There is also a comparison between who is and who is not 'able.' These determinants, as mentioned, are, however, society or culture-specific. Again, these measuring lines of differentiating between the able and the disabled are very important when it comes to determining what is the norm as well as how the abnormal is looked at and treated within specific cultures and societies. While certain general conditions may be cross-cultural when it comes to who may be classified as a disabled person, there are some differences when it comes to how various people groups determine, classify, view and react toward disability. This way of understanding disability representation helps us to appreciate the issue of disability in a particular text while we pay attention to the cultural nuances.

**Politics of Words: Defining disability**

'Disability' as a term is very much contested. To Dan Goodley (2011), 'the word 'disability hints at something missing either fiscally, physically, mentally or legally." (p. 1). In his view, 'To be disabled evokes a marginalised place in society, culture, economics and politics." (p. 2). It is worth admitting that such a view, as posited by Goodley, is the product of society. As Garland-Thomson (1997) explains, "Disability, then, is the attribution of corporeal difference—not so much a property of bodies, {but} as a product of the cultural rules about what bodies should be or do" (p. 6). Indeed, various studies have revealed the challenges, neglect, stigmatization and rejection that persons with disabilities face in real life (Mclaughin et al., 2008; Priestley, 2001; Meekosha, 2008; Goodley,2011).

With the rise in the politics regarding terminologies surrounding disability studies, there has been an attempt by scholars in this field to differentiate between 'impairment,' which is defined within the field of medicine and has to do with a form of defect with regard to the various body parts and disability which is seen not to be negative but having to do with social identity (Sherry, 2007; Shakespeare,1999). According to Sherry (2007), when regarded this way, disability ceases to be a 'medicalised identity' but simply 'an identity that is based on identifying as someone who navigates the world in atypical ways, facing attitudinal and physical barriers.' (p. 10) Disabled People's International defines impairment as 'the functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental or sensory impairment' while defining 'disability' as 'the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers. (DPI, 1982, quoted by Dan Goodley, p. 8). Hall (2016) also states that 'there is not a clear line between impairment and disability: what it means to be disabled is flexible and determined by specific social and political contexts (p. 50). This, therefore, suggests that even though impairment may be within a person, an individual becomes disabled as a result of his/her

society. Consequently, within the field of disability studies, referring to somebody as being 'disabled' is not a way of demeaning the person. To refer to an individual as being 'disabled', therefore, has to do with making reference to one who faces restrictions and stigma and is treated unfairly by society as a result of his/her body difference.

What is obvious is that, in most societies, disability carries with it a notion of corporeal difference and uncleanness that automatically means that the disabled person is stigmatized and sidelined in society. In fact, this sidelining of disabled people can even be traced to the Biblical days of the Old Testament, where a person suffering from leprosy was supposed to live in the outskirts of his/her community and be announcing, 'Unclean! Unclean!' whenever he/ she was drawing near to people. This confirms how societies play a key role in the 'othering' of disabled persons. This means that societies have their concepts of who or what is a normal human being. All those who do not fit into the normal are, therefore, part of the 'others.' There is usually a portrait of 'normal' by which societies measure and analyse its members. This concept of the 'normal' and the 'ideal' is what sets out a society's expectations of its members. That is why disability takes on a societal colouring and changes from one society to the other. What one society may classify as being a disability may not be considered the same by another society. It all depends on the body configuration that a particular society may celebrate as against one that is considered to be different and therefore not normal.

In fact, one of the criticisms that have been launched against disability studies is the claim that since it originated from the West, the views expressed by the early proponents were Eurocentric (Chris Bell, 2006; Snyder & Mitchell, 2006; Meekosha, 2011). This is due to the fact that the issue of disability is largely affected and influenced by the culture of specific groups of people. Hence, since most of the leading figures within the disability circles are mainly from Western countries, their ideas and perspectives are generally

considered as not being truly representative of what pertains to disability in other cultures especially when it comes to the Global South. Lipenga (2014) believes that African views regarding disability have not been given the needed space and attention as far as disability studies are concerned. He, like some other researchers, believes in embarking on championing African disability studies as '...part of a refusal of the amputation of non-Western literature from the discourse of disability studies' (Lipenga, 2014; p. 2). This is based on his premise that '...the discourse of mainstream disability studies remains equally ignorant of non-Western representations of disability across other genres' (p. 8). According to Baker (2015), even though Western perspectives on disability have influenced how disability is viewed and analysed in most parts of the world, there have been calls to seek newer ways of viewing disability that takes into consideration of society, religion and culture especially within the African context. Such an approach is even more critical and needed now, considering the fact that societies and cultures within Africa have different ways of conceptualizing and viewing disability and body differences, as posited by Imafidon & Baker (2022). The identify that within Sub-Saharan African societies, the ways by which disability is viewed are deeply inherent due to the fact that it has been passed on from one generation to the other over long periods. This is what influences their perceptions, attitudes, understanding and ways of handling disability. They further add that not considering the voices of disabled persons within such African societies will be a great act of disservice, which will mean that the experiences such persons go through will not be properly documented and attended to. Kehinde refers to disability as 'a polysemic term that differs from one culture to another culture' (Kehinde, 2010, p. 4). Indeed, this view is held by many other scholars, such as Susan Whyte and Benedicte Ingstad (1995), who are of the view that there is a likelihood of running into problems when we attempt to universalize the definition of disability. Hall

(2016) states that 'what might be perceived as a disability in one culture, or period, may not be identified as a disability in another' (p. 8).

As researchers begin to take much more interest in disability studies in the African literary field, there is a call for the emergence of a form of disability studies that takes into proper consideration the African worldview and context. This present study is one such response to the need to present the African perspective on disability studies. Even though various African nations and communities have their ways of classifying, viewing and reacting towards conditions that may be termed as disability, the contexts do not differ much as compared to perspectives on disability from the Western world. In essence, for disability studies, especially in the literary field, to become relevant in the African context, it is argued that it must be properly situated within the African context and must also be representative enough to ensure that it does truly address the various issues concerning disability and also truly reflects how they are represented in the African literary text.

In this study, the reference to characters with impairments and body differences as 'disabled characters' is not meant to carry any form of negative connotation. I, define a 'disabled character' as an individual who, by virtue of possessing bodily features and characteristics that are regarded to have deviated from what society or group of people accept to be the norm or ideal, tends to suffer discrimination, stigmatisation and or limitations in their attempt to live and express themselves as full members of a particular society. This definition is in line with the social model of disability that looks at society as disabling individuals and not the medical model that sees the disabled character as a body with a defect that is in need of medical attention. When disability is regarded this way, it helps in unravelling how, by representing disabled characters, the literary text helps in highlighting how society, through its beliefs, ideologies, stereotypes etc., disables certain individuals and renders them as 'other.'

**Purpose of the Study**

This study seeks to analyse how disability is represented in some selected African novels. It will focus mainly on the disabled characters represented in the selected texts by examining society's treatment of disabled characters, how disabled characters are 'othered' by those considered able or normal in society and how the representation of disabled characters reveals societal beliefs and perceptions about disability.

**Objectives of the Study**

For any project to be focused and successful in achieving what it sets out to do, there is a need for clear objectives to guide the process. Consequently, in our study of *The Last Duty* by Isidore Okpewho, *The Beggars Strike* by Aminata Sow Fall, *Silence is my Mother Tongue* by Sulaiman Addonia and *The Book of Memory* by Petinah Gappah, the following are the objectives that will be pursued in this present study:

1. Conduct a textual analysis of the use of disability stigma and stereotypes in presenting the portrait of the disabled character in the African literary text.
2. Discuss the intersections between disability and sex in African literature.
3. Examine the portrayal of male characters as being 'feminised' as a result of their impairments.
4. Analyse how disabled characters are presented as being part of other vulnerable groups in society who are treated as being inferior.

**Research Questions**

In order to help us to effectively address the research topic, the following questions have been formulated to guide our discussion of *The Last Duty* by Isidore Okpewho, *The Beggars Strike* by Aminata Sow Fall, *Silence is my Mother Tongue* by Sulaiman Addonia and *The Book of Memory* by Petinah Gappah:

1. How are disabled characters portrayed through the use of disability stigma and stereotypes?
2. What role does sex play in African disability narratives?
3. How are male characters portrayed as 'feminised' as a result of their impairments?
4. How are disabled characters presented as part of vulnerable groups in society who are treated as being inferior?

**Significance of the Study**

This study will contribute significantly to the ongoing discourse on the representation of disabled characters in African literature. Even though, in recent times, a number of research works and studies have been carried out in this field of study, there is still a lot to be done in an attempt to properly situate African disability studies within the context of the global discourse. Indeed, such work is very much needed and critical since the area it intends to look at is yet to receive the much-needed attention it deserves. Scholarly works such as the present study will, therefore, help to analyse issues such as the othering of disabled characters, discrimination against disabled persons, how characters deal with their disabilities, as well as new ways of viewing disability in the African literary space.

The findings of this study will inform the readers and policymakers in Ghana, Africa and the rest of the world about how the literary space can be used to help individuals to appreciate and correct societal perceptions about body differences. The present study is also intended to encourage a lot more research into disability literary studies within the Department of English, University of Cape Coast.

**Thesis Statement**

Indeed, it has been clearly established that there is an abundance of disabled characters within postcolonial texts (Barker, 2015; Mark, 2007; Quayson, 2007; Shang, 2016). Within the African literary space, this has contributed to the increasing number of research works that focus on both African oral literature and written texts by African authors (Barker, 2015; Eskay et al., 2012; Quayson, 2007). While a significant work on disability studies like Quayson's *Aesthetic Nervousness* (2007) offers a very important typology of disability representation in literary texts, I am of the view that the fact that what he presents is not centered on only African literary texts makes it difficult for him to capture very important elements in works by African authors which help us to appreciate the African dimensions of disability representation. While Lipenga (2014) and others argue for attention to be paid to disability characters in African films and written texts, my work takes the discussions on disability representation in African literature further by discussing how these characters are presented as being 'othered.' Here, I pay attention to the contexts in which the characters find themselves as well as how various elements such as religion, culture and society contribute greatly to the perception of body differences in the various texts.

In my study of *The Last Duty* by Isidore Okpewho, *The Beggars Strike* by Aminata Sow Fall, *Silence is my Mother Tongue* by Sulaiman Addonia and *The Book of Memory* by Petinah Gappah; I focus on examining the important role African literary texts play in serving as the avenue through which societal perceptions about body differences are represented as well as how characters with various body differences and impairments are marginalised, stigmatized, stereotyped and presented as 'the other' in the literary text due to how different their bodies may appear as compared to the greater majority of the members of the society they belong to. The approach I use in paying attention to the important roles of the

interactions that go on within the respective societies is very critical in revealing how the disabled characters are perceived as well as how they also react to societal perceptions.

**Methodology**

This work is a qualitative research which focuses on the content analysis of *The Last Duty* by Isidore Okpewho, *Beggars on Strike by* Aminata Sow Fall, *Silence is my Mother Tongue* by Sulaiman Addonia and *The Book of Memory* by Petinah Gappah as the primary texts. This is an art based research design which means that the contents of the selected novels will be examined through a close reading of the novels, after which the highlighted issues relevant to the study will be analysed. The art based design helps the researcher in exploring, interrogating and describing social phenomena. This form of textual analysis is very important since it will help to reveal very pertinent issues relevant to this study as captured in the texts (Bauer et al., 2014; McKee, 2003; Smith, 2017).

By way of content textual analysis, a close reading of the texts will reveal the underlying interactions between characters, meanings attached to different bodies and societal perceptions that play a key role in how the disabled characters in the texts are represented (Vimal and Subramani 2017). This approach will therefore help me to explore the complex socio-cultural nuances that exist in the selected novels with respect to what the disabled characters tell us about their conditions as well as what the other characters communicate to us in terms of societal perceptions about people with body differences (McKee, 2003; Smith, 2017). In order to appreciate society's role in rendering people with perceived different bodies as being the 'other,' textual analysis of data from the selected novels will also help us to pay close attention to the social contexts of what is said about different bodies and the subjective meanings they carry. This will help in revealing how the 'othering' of perceived different bodies within African societies is at the core of the selected novels. This is critical since this present study departs from merely considering disabled characters as metaphors in African

novels but rather focus on paying attention to how literature contributes to revealing, addressing and shaping perceptions about disability.

I will therefore examine the representation of the disabled characters by paying attention to how their interactions with the other characters in the texts represent various forms of stereotyping, stigmatisation and segregation based on body difference. Such close analysis of the texts will be done using the disability theory. The study of characters will not be limited to one particular gender or impairment. This is because, in this present study, our interest is neither limited to a particular gender nor impairment.

**Synopsis of The Last Duty by Isidore Okpewho**

*The Last Duty* is a novel written by Isidore Okpewho in 1976. The plot of the novel is influenced by the Nigerian civil war, which took place between 1967 and 1970. Even though *The Last Duty* is described as a war time narrative, not much action of war takes place in it. We are, however exposed to various socio-political challenges war times bring to societies. As a fictional work, the novel reveals the challenges that children and women go through during war times. The woman at the centre of the novel is Aku whose husband has been arrested on the charge of working for the enemies. In the absence of her husband, Aku has to navigate life in such a difficult time of war where things are turned around in society. She only has her son with her, and she looks for ways to help herself and her son survive what the period presents.

Aku tries to preserve herself by staying loyal to her incarcerated husband. However, after a while, the sense of insecurity she has to deal with as a single parent in wartime, as well as the economic hardship she has to endure, leaves her with no choice but to give herself to the man who was behind her husband's incarceration. Unfortunately, the tag of Aku as a woman whose husband is arrested for being a rebel supporter affects Aku negatively to the extent that she is not able to freely engage in activities in the community. Toje, who is a rival

of Aku's husband, begins to show kindness to Aku. He sends her food, clothing and provisions through Odibo. Aku later gives in to Toje's advances. Unfortunately, Toje is unable to have sex with Aku. As a result, in order to attend to the sexual starvation she has been suffering from, Aku eventually turns to Odibo, Toje's supposed imbecile disabled nephew, for sexual satisfaction.

**The Beggars Strike Aminata Sow Fall**

Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggars Strike* is a very captivating story that presents issues of politics, disability, religion and begging. It is about a strike action that is embarked on by the beggars in a fictional West African state. As the city develops, the state officials begin to regard the presence of the beggars as a nuisance. Consequently, plans are put in place to drive the beggars away from the city centre so that tourists and other visitors will not have the unfortunate event of meeting such beggars. Various forms of abusive ways of dealing with the beggars are adopted, such as beating and manhandling them. This leads to the unfortunate deaths of some of the beggars as they attempt to run away from the officials during some of their raids.

The beggars decided to embark on a strike as a result of the maltreatment they suffered at the hands of the city officials. This is when they come to the realization that based on the religious and cultural beliefs of the people, they, as beggars, are actually needed by the same citizens who consider them as being unwanted. The beggars, therefore, decide to camp themselves in a house on the outskirts of the city. As the beggars are eventually dealt with, it leads to an increase in the number of tourists and the city is generally considered to be very clean and welcoming. One person who benefits so much politically from this victory over the beggars is Mour Ndiaye, the Director of Public Health Services. Due to the success in ridding the city of beggars, Mour's ambition of becoming the Vice-President of the Republic gains a

lot of momentum. It becomes a known secret that the president of the republic is considering Mour for the position of Vice President.

Ironically, Mour's celebration of victory and anticipation of a coming victory is truncated when the Mallam he consults gives him a clear instruction that he is supposed to give alms to beggars who are stationed at the various corners of the city. Unfortunately for him, this instruction came at a point when the beggars had started their strike action. During the period of the strike action, the beggars were only accepting alms in their houses, which were on the outskirts of the city, where various people used to visit to give them alms in a way to attract luck in various areas of their lives. Mour's attempt to bribe and also deceive the beggars to go back to the city centre and position themselves at places where he could meet them and give them what the spiritualist tasks him to do in order for him to be picked as the Vice President does not succeed. The beggars fail to do his bidding. Eventually, as the time given for the direction by the Mallam concerning the alms given to beggars elapses, the president announces another person as the Vice President.

It is worth stating that in the novel, the position of beggars is directly connected to the disabled. The terms 'beggars' and 'disabled' are therefore used almost interchangeably. Hence, by looking at disabled characters, we rely on the direct and indirect references to disabled characters in the novel who are the main components of the beggars who are treated as a nuisance and an unpleasant 'other' that needs to be dealt with and thrown away from the public view.

**Silence is my Mother Tongue Sulaiman Addonia**

Sulaiman Addonia's *Silence Is My Mother Tongue* presents the story of a girl, Saba, who as a result of an ongoing war in her country, Eritrea, arrives in a refugee camp in East Africa. The story also grants us access into the life of Hagos who is Saba's mute older brother. They move to the refugee camp with their mother. There, they get to meet other

people who, as a result of the war, had also moved from Eritrea and become refuges in another country. Saba is presented as a girl with high hopes and expectations concerning climbing the academic calendar. However, the war and its effects leave her living in disillusionment as she keeps waiting for when there will be an opportunity for her to return to the classroom.

It is in such a community that Saba and Hagos have to forge a new identity in the midst of all the expectations of their new society. The rule of men is carried from Eritrea and becomes the order of the day at the refugee camp. However, due to the fact that Hagos is mute, Saba assumes full responsibility for her older brother. The relationship that exists between them is such that it even sometimes becomes a topic of discussion in the community. In such a hostile environment, Hagos and Saba's lives are so intertwined that it becomes difficult to separate the two. Through them, we get to experience life at the refugee camp even as Hago learns to navigate his way through as a mute character living in a refugee camp.

**The Book of Memory Petinah Gappah**

*The Book of Memory* is a novel set in Zimbabwe. It is about an albino woman who, at the time the story begins, is in prison with the charge of having murdered Lloyd, a white academic who offered to take care of her. The novel grants readers access to the lives and challenges of albinos in the Zimbabwean society. The challenge Memory goes through as a result of her being an albino helps in presenting to us how individuals with such body differences are 'othered' as a result of cultural and religious beliefs about albinism. Memory's mother tries every means possible to help restore Memory's skin to what could be considered to be normal. She does that through visiting pastors, medicine men and the rest. Unfortunately, all these do not work out.

As a result of a family secret that Memory and her siblings were not privy to, Memory and her only surviving sister are moved away from their parents. Memory is sent to live with

Lloyd, the wealthy white academic and her sister is taken to a boarding school. Even though Lloyd takes very good care of Memory, she lives with the mindset that her parents sold her to Lloyd in order to get rid of her. Through Lloyd, Memory gets a very good education, and her skin is also properly taken care of. Life becomes more comfortable for her until she finds out that the person she considers her lover is also Lloyd's gay partner. This brings a lot of enmity between Memory and Lloyd.

Memory travels to the States for further study, after which she returns to Zimbabwe. By this time, she had decided to forgive Lloyd and had reconciled with him. Memory returns to the house one day to see Lloyd murdered. In her attempt to give Lloyd a more honourable death narrative, Memory decides to shoot Lloyd's dead body and dump it in the swimming pool so that no links will be drawn to Lloyd's past as a gay man, which his original death situation would have revealed. Unfortunately, as Memory tries to drag Lloyd's body to the poolside, she is seen by Lloyd's sister, who calls the police. The police at the station where she was sent trick her into signing a police statement, which was later on used to indict her of having committed murder. Memory is arranged before the court and sentenced to death.

At the prison, she gets in touch with somebody who tries to help her out. The content of the novel is, therefore, a product of an attempt by Memory to reflect and write down everything concerning the case which she could remember. The story ends with Memory being reconciled with her long-lost surviving sister through whose narrative she gets to connect the missing dots of her life.

**Justification for Selected Texts**

This study is based on texts extracted from *The Last Duty* by Isidore Okpewho, *The Beggars Strike* by Aminata Sow Fall; *Silence is my Mother Tongue* by Sulaiman Addonia and *The Book of Memory* by Petinah Gappah. I chose an initial set of about ten novels which contained elements of body differences and impairments. After carefully reading through the

texts, the selected texts were purposively sampled based on four key considerations. First of all, there is the presence of at least one disabled character in each of the texts. Secondly, in all the texts, characters whose bodies are considered to be different tend to be othered by those who are considered to be normal. The third factor is that the texts were written by writers from different parts of Africa. The texts were written by a Nigerian, an Eritrean, a Senegalese and a Zimbabwean. I believe that the views of these authors represent perspectives on disability from the Western part of Africa, Southern Africa and the Eastern part of Africa. Finally, the bodily differences that will be treated using disability studies range from a man with a withered arm in *The Last Duty*, various disabled characters in *The Beggar's Strike*, a mute elder brother in *Silence is My Mother Tongue* and an albino girl in *The Book of Memory*. It is therefore expected that the texts to be studied will prove helpful in addressing the topic, purpose as well as objectives of the study by revealing how disabled characters are considered and treated as the 'other' in the African literary text.

**Organisation of the Study**

The first chapter, which is the introduction, will present the background to the study, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the objectives of the study, research questions, the theoretical framework, the delimitation of the study, imitation of the study, the research design as well as the Organisation of the study. Chapter 2 of the research is a review of relevant literature on the selected texts. Chapter 3, which is entitled 'The other bodies: Examining theories on disability representation in African Literature,' will seek to discuss disability theories as a way of establishing a theoretical framework for analysing disability in African literary texts understudy. Chapter 4, which has the title, 'Portrait of The disabled other': Analysing disability stigma and stereotypes in Okpewho's *The Last Duty,*" will be an examination of disability stigma and stereotypes in *The Last Duty*. Chapter 5 of the study is titled "'Being/Becoming' a Man: An examination of sex as a symbol of masculine Power in

Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty."* This chapter will focus on how sex serves as a symbol of masculine power for the disabled character in *The Last Duty*. Chapter six, "'Feminised Male': A study of the representation of the mute character in Sulaiman Addonia's *Silence is My Mother Tongue,"* discusses how, as a result of a character's impairment, he and his younger sister trade their gender for each other's. The seventh chapter, which is entitled "'Black but not Black, White but not White': Examining the othering of the albino character in Petinah Gappah's *The Book of Memory,"* delves into the othering of the albino character in the text result of her body difference. Chapter eight is dedicated to a discussion of the image of the disabled characters in the text understudy as a result of their collective identity as beggars. The ninth chapter is the conclusion of the work. In this chapter, the discussions will be concluded, and necessary recommendations will be given accordingly.

**Conclusion**

This introductory chapter of the study has given a general outlook of what this study is about. This has been done through various discussions on the background to the study, purpose of the study, objectives as well as research questions that guide the study. The chapter has also looked at the methodology, limitations and delimitations of the study, the synopsis of the selected texts, and the justification for the selected texts. The organisation of the study has also been discussed in order to give a better appreciation of how the thesis has been structured.

# CHAPTER TWO

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Introduction

The previous chapter served as an introduction to the entire study. It gave insight into critical issues such as the background to the research, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions as well as the organisation of the study. A synopsis of the selected texts was presented and an attempt was made to justify the selected texts as being appropriate for such a studyThis chapter presents a review of relevant literature that has to do with the present study. This is done by looking at studies done on the representation of disability in literature with particular emphasis on the African literary text. It further reviews studies that have been carried out as far as the selected texts. This will help to properly situate this present study within the context of other works that have been done in the area of disability representation in African literature in order to put the present study in the right perspective. I begin the review by looking at the representation of disability in African literature. It then continues by reviewing studies that have been done on the selected texts. This aspect of the chapter begins with a review of works on Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty* which is followed by Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggars Strike*, Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory* and finally, *Silence is my Mother Tongue* by Sulaiman Addonia.

Writing, to the postcolonial African writer, is not a mere individual quest for aesthetic display and grandeur but a channel of representing essential issues that need to be addressed. The issues that the African writer writes about are those that are usually of relevance to either his/her immediate society, the African continent, the black race or global issues that are of significance to Africans. Since literature has always played an important role in African

societies, the issues that are represented in various literary forms end up gaining the attention of readers, listeners and researchers alike. Like other societies, the literature of African societies tends to be the windows through which individuals gain access to and get to understand what is of importance to a particular African society, their perspectives on various issues, as well as what shapes their views. What is obvious then is that even though the beauty of African literary forms cannot be overemphasized, it is the social roles they play that are considered to be much more critical.

The views that African writers capture in their writings can be traced directly to the thematic concerns of the oral traditions that existed long before formal writing started. This is a clear indication of how, as members of their respective societies, the works of most African writers help to present how thoughts, ideas, beliefs and attitudes toward issues have either evolved, been maintained or totally discarded. Such awareness helps in appreciating how society's ways have either resisted attempts of modernism or have been transformed to meet the demands of the times.

Consequently, researchers have long been interested in paying attention to the various issues raised in postcolonial African literature as a way of seeking to analyse, understand and appreciate the perspectives and directions for the different phenomena that are of relevance in African societies. Such presentations help to offer the African view point on issues which are sometimes of global relevance. This is what qualifies those issues to be given space in the African literary text. It is, therefore, not surprising that the thematic concerns of various written texts by African writers have been examined in order to highlight what exactly a particular author seeks to present. A lot of studies that have been done in the field of African literature have focused on the thematic concerns of African writers. Critical issues such as colonialism, neocolonialism, war, domestic violence, corruption, and gender, among others,

have been explored by writers from various angles and perspectives. Studies on thematic concerns have presented viewpoints and the shifts in viewpoints that have occurred over time.

Since the style a writer adopts in presenting a particular story plays a significant role as far as the development of the plot is concerned, a lot of studies have been done in that area. Indeed, there have also been studies that have focused on the plot, point of view, language etc., which African writers use. Studies that focus on these elements help to unravel very salient items which hitherto would have remained hidden especially when reading is done just at the surface level. The focus on stylistics and other linguistic elements of the literary text has proven to be very important in how texts are read and appreciated.

**Disabled Characters in African Literature**

As it has been said, disability is all around us. Unfortunately, an initial journey to explore the issue of disability within the African literary text sometimes gives rise to the question of whether there are even disabled characters or not (Quayson, 2007). Since not much attention has been given to the study of disabled characters within African literary texts, it has ended up clothing disabled characters in such contexts with thick layers of cloaks of invincibility. It is either most readers and researchers have not seen the disabled characters represented in the texts or such characters appear to be generally missing. Other reasons have accounted for the seeming nonexistence of disabled characters. These will be discussed as we continue with our discussion in this chapter.

Indeed, disabled characters have long existed, even in the oral literature of various African societies. Such representations have tended to reveal the thoughts and perceptions of how the disabled are viewed. Even though the work done in this area is not exhaustive, there have been research works that have looked at how oral forms such as proverbs, folktales, legends etc., reveal the way disability is viewed and constructed within certain African societies. In fact, the issue of the depiction of corporeal variations has long been part of the

oral literature from the African context. Studies that have been done in this area have revealed how impairments have been viewed from the perspectives of religion and culture. The cultural and religious dimensions of viewing disability are very key when discussing disability representation in African oral traditions. Different body conditions are revered or rejected in various African societies based on the cultural and religious understandings attached to them. These beliefs and attitudes are therefore not limited to only real life experiences but oral traditions of the people which end up being passed on from one generation to another.

There have been studies on African literary works that have sought to examine what the representations of impairments and body differences reveal about the societies and cultures that are represented in both the oral and written literature of Africa. In fact, various studies which focused on disability representation in oral literature of African societies indicate the presence of disability stigma and stereotypes (Acquaviva, 2020; Adom-Opare, 2022; Ibrahim, 2022; Etieyibo, 2022; Moasun & Mfoafo-M'Carthy, 2020). While commenting on disability representation in Swahili literature, Acquaviva (2020) states that while the Swahili written literature reflects the kind of injustices and unfair treatments disabled characters go through, 'the writers engage themselves to carry out an awareness campaign against ableism and superstition that is still widespread in society' (p. 17). This means that the literary narratives of such characters are meant to achieve the goal of exposing what disabled characters go through and thereby fight for equal treatment for such disabled characters even beyond the confines of the universe of the text.

In another study on how persons with disabilities are labelled in Akan proverbs, Moasun & Mfoafo-M'Carthy (2020) conclude that, '…Akan proverbs predominantly label people with disabilities negatively, thereby leading to their stigmatization, marginalization, and exclusion' (p. 2). According to them, in Ghana, the greater majority of Akan proverbs

that exist portray a negative image and stereotypical views about persons with disabilities. This, therefore, contributes to how such persons are 'marginalized, stigmatized, shunned, and some of them brutalized' (p. 2). What is obvious is that these negative views, as expressed through such proverbs, tend to capture the cultural perceptions about disability. They are demeaning and discriminate against persons whose body types are considered to be not worthy of celebration. As Moasun & Mfoafo-M'Carthy (2020) rightly put it, 'As much as they play significant functions in society…proverbs can be a source of violence and disempowerment—especially to vulnerable groups of people' (p. 2). This view is also shared by Adom-Opare (2020), who similarly states that 'The understanding of disability in Ghana is rooted in cultural and religious beliefs that are mostly negative and discriminatory in their conceptions of disability' (p. 4). These beliefs are then 'translated into myths, stories, and folktales' and end up contributing to the stigmatisation and marginalisation of persons with disabilities. She calls for the rejection of such cultural and religious beliefs since they lead to 'mental health issues such as anxiety, inferiority, self-consciousness, fear, marginalization, exclusion, etc.' (Adom-Opare, 2020, p. 17).

Undoubtedly, research in African literature has also revealed other ways in which disabled persons are viewed within certain African cultures and societies. This is supported by Ibrahim's (2022) conclusion in his work on disability representations in some selected Nigerian prose works that 'the characters with disabilities are empowered with various forms of supernatural abilities which are all grounded in the represented cultures of each prose-work' (p. 2). Especially when it comes to the postcolonial text, various bodily differences are represented as writers seek to capture society and the goings on. Mostly, those with such bodily differences are 'disabled' or rendered ineffective by their respective societies, and such representations are captured in literary texts.

In some instances, the oral traditions of African societies reveal the reverence that disabled characters enjoy in some African oral traditions. Ayo Kehinde's (2010) work brings to the fore not only how disabled characters can even be found in African cosmologies but also the reverence attached to them 'in the past.' Even though his reference has to basically do with Nigeria, this applies to the oral literatures of other African societies. Consequently, through the legends, myths, folktales, praise poetries and other oral traditions of some African societies, it has been revealed how people with certain body conditions enjoy places of reverence. It is, however important that in the case like what Kehinde reports, the significance of such individuals is usually tied to whether or not society continues to uphold the belief around their body conditions as well as the systems that gave them a place. This means that as the culture of a people or their belief systems undergo certain changes, the place that people with certain body conditions occupy also changes. The quest for modernisation and the influx of foreign religions have caused changes to some of these belief systems.

The African literary text has also served as an important avenue for revealing the lived experiences of the disabled characters. An important aspect of such representations is the 'othering' of the characters with various body differences by the so-called normate. The underlying reasons, intentions and beliefs that inform the othering of the disabled characters are usually hidden in these texts, and a very close reading of such texts reveals so much. Indeed, the challenges that disabled characters face in postcolonial African society are enormous. As various African communities are struggling to make basic amenities available for the majority of their citizens, some of these nations are still figuring out the various bodies that make up the national body in order to adequately attend to them.

Unfortunately, while at the global and local contexts, there is a march towards modernisation and putting in place systems that will make room for all forms of bodies, the traditional beliefs, religious ideologies, cultural ideologies, civil wars, inadequate

infrastructure, lack of social welfare systems to attend to the various members of society continue to make life for those with various body differences, unbearable. In some cases, it is as if, based on an individual's otherness, he/she is not expected in society, considered to be a source of bad luck or may generally be regarded as being good for nothing. The stigma that surrounds other bodies in African societies has found its way into the African literary text. Whether as a way of challenging existing stereotypes or normalized narratives which until recently remained unchallenged, the way African writers have represented individuals with body differences have been very telling and revealing.

Negative attitudes toward the disabled are prominent in a lot of African cultures (Quayson, 2007). Again, a particular society's cultural and religious understanding of various body differences usually serves as the foundation for discriminating against those with various impairments. In his conclusion to *Aesthetic Nervousness*, Ato Quayson (2007) identifies three elements that are at the core of the negative attitudes towards disability within the Ghanaian context. It is worth noting that these three attitudes that Quayson identifies are not limited to just the Ghanaian society. They cut across almost all African cultures and belief systems. The disabled are regarded as not being whole and are therefore stigmatised and discriminated against. This ends up affecting them in the expression of their potential, sexuality and humanity. They are excluded from certain spheres of communal life due to their perceived lack of wholeness and cleanness. Culture, therefore, becomes a key tool in subjugating and maligning the disabled (Lipenga & Ngwirab, 2018; Ncube & Mtenje, 2019). Again, the disabled are assigned to the lowest part of society, where they are seen to belong. Spatially, the disabled are assigned the floor, and they are not supposed to rise beyond that. This, therefore, turns them into objects of scorn, rejection and unacceptability. There are proverbs and other sayings that represent the disabled as being perpetually assigned to a place of undesirability. Indeed, even when the disabled are consulted, it is because they are

perceived to possess a metaphysical ability that can be of benefit to the normate. They are, therefore, assigned to a place of begging and dependency on the charity of the able-bodied ones. What is certain is that these thoughts permeate the African's view and understanding of the disabled and disability. These views on disability are what have been carried into the written African text.

In her seminal work on disability representations in the postcolonial novel, Clare Barker (2015) discusses how disability has occupied a key place in postcolonial novels. As a result of the essential role disability plays in postcolonial fiction, Baker argues that an awareness of disability is relevant for those who read postcolonial literature because of how often issues of disability feature both in the postcolonial text and various societies. Baker posits that bodies that look different have been a key part of postcolonial literary works. Such representations focus on the individual bodies and have implications for politics at both the national and global levels. To her, disability is very important to postcolonial literary writings due to the various poignant images and metaphors of 'dismembered nation-states; silenced subaltern subjects; economies crippled by international debt; healing through decolonisation and the reclamation of indigenous knowledge' disability offers (p. 100). Baker continues that 'as a trope, a narrative device, disability enables postcolonial writers to tell vivid stories about colonialism and its aftermath, stories that resonate outward from a character's disabled body to address 'damage,' inequality, and power and its abuses in the postcolonial world' (p. 100). According to Shang (2016), 'The body is a key representational medium in art in general and in literature in particular' (p. 144). In the postcolonial text, therefore, disability has been mostly used as a metaphor. Within such texts, disability usually becomes representative of a sick continent, a fragmented people, a diseased body, and an intruded space, among others.

This common pattern has mainly caused the focus on disability studies to be shifted from the attention the disabled body calls to itself to rather, the violence the postcolonial

society has suffered as well as the sickness that has been inflicted on it (Sherry, 2007; Quayson, 2007). Various images of a crippled, diseased and barren land paint a picture of a society that the evil of colonialism has destroyed, the corruption of the ruling class or the disintegration caused by violence (Sherry, 2007). Obviously, this shift of agency from the disabled characters to a disabled continent is problematic to the agenda of championing the cause of the disabled who rather deserve to be heard. It denies the disabled characters agency, and they are rather relegated to the background.

Baker (2015) again identifies the use of disability as an allegory for the 'colonial 'damage' and 'dysfunctionality' of postcolonial nation-states.' (p. 102) In her study of Tsitsi Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions*, Baker sees the use of disability as a trope to capture the idea of 'colonialism as a disease infecting the national body' (p. 102). To her, using disability as a national allegory may 'cause us to question the ethics of such representation' since 'Allegorical uses of disability can be highly problematic as they reinforce the association between disability and negative conditions such as disorder, deviance, or dehumanization' (Baker, 2015; p. 103). It is, therefore, not surprising that such disability narratives usually tend to reinforce stereotypes about disabled characters. When disability is used as a mere allegory for colonial damage, the body of the image of the disabled character in the text becomes a means to achieve an end and not an end itself. This is because the writers merely use such representations to put their messages across without having any genuine interest in addressing the woes and plight of the disabled characters. According to Barker (2015), in the course of using disability as an allegory, disabled persons may end up being excluded from those being fought for and rather be subjected to 'deprivation and abuse' (p. 104).

David Mitchel and Sharon Snyder's (2000) rejection of the use of disability as tropes in literary works has been a key referent point as far as disability studies are concerned. They refer to such instances of disability being used as a metaphor as 'narrative prosthesis' since

disability is being used as a mere 'crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight.' This view presents literary writers who use disability as a mere metaphor without any intention of giving agency to disabled characters as being opportunistic. What such writers do is exploit disability by using its power to draw attention to the issues they want to raise. However, they do not have any real commitment to addressing the pertinent issues that bother on disability. Indeed, the treatment of disability as a narrative prosthesis denies the disabled characters from receiving the agency that they deserve (Baker, 2015). The lived experiences of the disabled characters become subservient to the national and global issues they are used to represent. These forms of disability representation are, therefore, opportunistic and do not properly take into account the lived experiences of the disabled. Such narratives may also thrive on stereotypes, exaggerations and misrepresentations just in order to ensure that the writer is able to put his or her point across.

For Shang (2016), the important role the body plays in the artist's attempt to represent various phenomena in society cannot be overemphasized since it serves as a deep symbolic means of capturing various issues, viewpoints, perspectives and dimensions of what the artist wants to present. It is therefore not surprising that 'the body metaphor' has served as 'one of the recurrent metaphors through which power is imagined and narrated' (Shang, 2016; p. 144) in African literature that has to do with postcolonial society. Shang continues to say, 'The question of power relationship can thus be understood as the relationship between bodies, their strengths and frailties; their contextual myths and stereotypes; their pleasures and pains; their honour and shame; their sustenance and diminution, etc.' (p. 144). The body, therefore, serves as a canvas on which the artists depict various imaginations 'of cultural, socio-economic and political power' (p. 144). Indeed, the idea of the disabled body being a mere

canvas for the artist to depict issues that are deemed important has been dominant as far as disability studies regarding the African literary space is concerned.

Sherry Mark (2007) also raises issues about how disability and post-colonialism are sometimes considered to be interchangeable metaphors. She posits that there is an interconnectedness that exists between disability and post-colonialism whereby in the 'social construction of the nation,' disability becomes a determiner when it comes to determining 'bodies worthy of citizenship rights' (p. 10). For Sherry, "disability should not be treated as a metaphor for postcolonialism, and that postcolonialism should not be treated as a metaphor for disability. Each experience may share some similarities, but they are also quite distinct" (p. 19). Sherry (2007) discusses the frequent use of disability as a metaphor, as 'a symbol of evils of colonialism' (p. 14) and as 'an additive model of identity' in postcolonial texts (p. 16). Sherry, however, rejects the tendency of 'treating postcolonialism as a metaphor within disability' and 'treating disability as a metaphor within postcolonial writing.' (p. 14).

Within the African context, one thing that is worthy of note is that there is nothing like a general image of who or what is a normal African and who or what is not? This is as a result of the numerous ethnic, global and national perceptions of beauty which are engrained in the cultures of different people groups. In fact, this is not only an African issue since it has to do with the concept of disability in societies across the world. Baker argues that 'When we look for normality in postcolonial literature, however, it can prove itself to be a slippery concept that shifts according to cultural location and features of the local society and environment' (p. 101). According to her, what may 'elicit stares and exclusion' (Baker, 2015; p. 101) in one culture or society may not elicit the same in another culture or society. This is because of the principle of a bodily difference being 'exceptional and stareworthy.' She, therefore, states that 'postcolonial novels reveal cultural differences in the way that disabilities are interpreted, understood, treated, and managed; and disability representations can offer insights into

communities' metaphysical beliefs, structures of care, and attitudes to minorities' (p. 101). The idea of the normal can, therefore, change quickly and drastically as one moves from one culture to another, one environment to another and one society to another. This idea of conceiving who/what is normal and who/what is not will be taken up further in the chapter on the theoretical framework.

There are a number of works that have sought to study disability representation in African literature. In his study of Michael K's characterisation in J. M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*, Kehinde posits that the attention of postcolonial and postmodern writings has moved from the issues that used to be the focus of attention in literary texts to 'the marginalised plane of discourse…the disabled, the poor, the disempowered, the third world.' (p. 6). Kehinde studies the representation of Micheal K, who at birth had a defect that affected his lip and left nostril. Kehinde describes K's challenges as being 'multi-dimensional and complex' because 'he belongs to the coloured race; he is fatherless, and he is from a very poor background. He is thus an object of manifold subjectivities. He is born into a world of oppression, deprivation, homelessness, chaos and raging unceasing wars' (10).

Kehinde concludes that even though certain works of art present disabled characters as being victims, K 'breaks free and unchains himself with a view to letting people know that people with disabilities are among the many groups of individuals who make up their communities' (16). He intimates how K refuses to be 'an under-confident, passive and highly desponded 'Other,' excluded from the society by an arrogant, bullying, and destructive 'Self' (p. 14). Kehinde sees Coetzee's portrayal of K, who is a disabled character, as being positive since K is 'given a space and identity' and also serves as the 'eponymous hero of the story, a noticeable deviation from some precursor African texts which privilege the high and mighty as their eponymous heroes/heroines' (p. 13). The fact is that while disability has found a place in the postcolonial text, the disabled have not received the agency that they need in order for

their lived experiences to occupy the centre of analysis and discussions when it comes to the examination of disability representation in such writings. Again, narratives that challenge the stereotypical portrayal of disabled characters in African literary texts are usually lacking.

So far, we have discussed the issue of disability as it pertains to African literature. We will now turn attention to a review of some of the works done on the selected texts for this present study.

**Review of literature on The Last Duty by Isidore Okpewho**

*The Last Duty* by Isidore Okpewho is one of Nigeria's novels that has received a lot of critical attention. The novel, which focuses on life in Nigeria during the Biafra war, has gained attention for its treatment of the war theme, the plight of women during the war themes, as well as the unique style Okpewho adopted in his narration. Indeed, various theories and concepts have been applied in examining the characters, style and themes of the novel. In their study, *Sexual exploitation and the Nigerian civil war: A study of Isidore Okpewho's The Last Duty*, Don Emenike and Success Asuzu (2023) examined how women are exploited in Nigerian war novels using Okpewho's *The Last Duty*. Their study used the feminist objectification theory in order to analyse certain instances in the novel that highlights the sexual exploitation of women within a war environment. Their study found that women are sexually exploited and objectified for the sexual pleasure of men during war situations. From the experiences of Aku, who, as a principal female character in the novel, is sexually exploited by Toje and Odibo, Emenike and Asuzu argue how the female is objectified and sexually exploited for the satisfaction of the males. This situation is said to have come about as a result of Aku's vulnerability during the wartime. Emenike and Asuzu's work centres on how some men use women to satisfy their sexual desires, especially during war times (p. 131).

The fact that women are sexually exploited during war times has been represented in a lot of African literary texts. Indeed, with regard to the specific case of war narratives on the Nigerian civil war, also known as the Biafra War, there have been various attempts to show how females were sexually exploited during the wartime. Such studies tend to focus on women and how they suffer sexually when their nations are at war. What is, therefore, presented in this instance is the divide between males and females. Such studies, therefore,, put all the men and their activities together and do the same for women in order to show how one group tends to be victims at the hands of the other.

Imoh Abang Emenyi's (2006) study of the same novel examined how poverty is feminized. He also discusses the contribution of patriarchy to the deformation of women in *The Last Duty*. He posits that the structures society has put in place invariably pushes women to the 'periphery of existence', which ensures that whenever Aku 'comes to public focus, it is to enact the drama of immanence' (p. 90). To Emenyi (2006), 'Women's economic powerlessness is a major factor that makes them vulnerable to exploitation.' (p. 93) Such a stand seems to offer reasons why the economic powerlessness of women can be blamed for the inability of women to stand on their own during war times. The study, therefore, concludes that what Okpewho's novel does is to push the female to 'where she has always been made to serve among the poor and weak people' (p. 90). In his conclusion, Emenyi calls on Nigerian writers to produce a new image and identity of female characters that will depart from the depictions which they have been formerly associated with. This new female character is, therefore, expected to be empowered so that she can live above the challenges that she is confronted with. While Emenyi's observation and recommendation regarding Okpewho's novel may be valid, Okpewho can be forgiven, considering the fact that what he does through his work is to present what such women go through during war times. To push for a total elimination of characters like Aku in *The Last Duty* is to deny the reality of their

existence. While it is important to present female characters who are not entirely dependent on men for survival, what really needs to change are the structures of society that ensure the presence of such circumstances in reality.

Again, Emenyi's study also sheds light on females and their subjugation in a patriarchal environment. Indeed, the urgent need to present 'a new female character' takes centre stage and every other thing is relegated to the background. What happens is that issues concerning women, who are regarded as one of the main marginalised groups in society, tend to attract comments and discussions more than other marginalised groups such as the disabled. While this is in no way to play down the importance of highlighting issues that have to do with females, it is a testament to how, due to the growth of various forms of African feminism, the female agency has gained much more attention than other areas of interest such as disability.

There has also been a stylistic study of *The Last Duty* by Okpewho by Patience Onyinyechi Nnaji (2014). She focused on 'the stylistic idiosyncrasies embraced by Okpewho in passing his message.' Nnaji refers to Okpewho's narrative technique as an 'individualistic style.' According to Nnaji, this stye helps the author to allow the characters to grow and reveal themselves to the readers without what might have been authorial interruptions. As a result, we are able to judge the characters on the basis of their personal development and presentation without having to accuse the author of the ills such characters are involved in. Nnaji identifies the special use of punctuation marks such as dash and ellipsis as well the use of figures of speech such as litotes, rhetorical questions, anaphora and others to 'beautify the work.' Nnaji also refers to Okpewho's use of different sentence types for effect in the writing of the novel (p. 76). By focusing on the narrative technique employed by Okpewho, what Nnaji succeeds in is highlighting how the author succeeds in allowing the various characters

to present their sides of the story. Nnaji is, however not necessarily interested in placing too much emphasis on any particular character.

Similarly, Esther Robert (2014) work on the 'Syntactic Features in Okpewho's *The Last Duty* and Nwapa's *Never Again* focuses on the 'syntactic features of the language' (p. 81) used in the two novels. She posits that, the sentence types that Okpewho and Nwapa use in their respective works clearly represent the writing styles of male and female writers. By way of similarity, Roberts identifies the two authors' use of insults and abuse in their works as being representative of the kind of language used during war times. She concludes that, these styles adopted by the authors in talking about war in their novels contributed greatly in helping them to 'communicate the message of the Nigerian civil war and achieve realism' (p. 81).

'Beyond Victimhood: Female Agency in Nigerian Civil War Novels' by Enajite E. Ojaruega (2021), presents a significant shift from various works on the Nigerian civil war narratives that focus on how females are part of the most vulnerable victims during wartimes. Indeed, such depictions of the female as a victim appear to be a traditional viewpoint that has been addressed in several studies on African novels that have female characters. In fact, when it comes to narratives based on wars, children and females are mostly looked at as being victims and vulnerable groups beyond anything else. However, Ojaruega's work presents a very important perspective that dwells on the female agency in such war novels. This is aimed at how women actively participate and positively contribute to the life and progress of society during such difficult times. Women are, therefore, moved away from the fringes of society and are presented as strong and helpful individuals who show so much resilience in the face of adversity and become key pillars to their families and societies in general. The author sees Aku's ability to stand in for her husband and take care of their child while her husband is away as a reversal of gender roles, which Aku successfully executes. To the

author, 'The depiction of women's agency in war-time narratives leads to explorations of female activism and heroism. The analysis of female agency has been carried out here with a view to helping reframe the way women in war and post-war periods are portrayed and perceived…" (p. 11).

Another aspect of Okpewho's *The Last Duty* that has received attention is the issue of disempowered masculinities. In his study, Chimdi Maduagwu (2013)focuses on the portrayal of men in Okpewho's *The Victims* and *The Last Duty*. This work is premised on the fact that gender is socially constructed. Hence, males are forced to live up to the expectations society has of them based on their gender. Maduagwu examines the male characters by looking at how they embrace their roles and how they are 'either consciously or unconsciously. Dragged into areas of weaknesses and disempowerment' (p. 11) due to their inability to live up to their gender roles and expectations. The author reveals how males tend to accept their gendered roles and live their lives in an attempt to fulfil those expectations. Consequently, the failure to meet the societal gender roles and expectations leads to males becoming disempowered. The author sees male incompetence as being a phenomenon that stems from within the individual, while disempowerment is a product of outside forces based on the socio-economic conditions of a particular male.

What I find to be problematic with Madwuagu's work is how he designates Odibo as being 'incompetent and disempowered' (p. 20). Indeed, since Madwuagu's focus is on masculinity in terms of how the male characters assert their maleness by living up to societal expectations of their gender, his analysis of the representation of Odibo is limited in terms of the insight it presents regarding the disabled character. In this present study, we pay much more attention to Odibo's character in the light of how his disability is presented, how he navigates his way in society and how he tries to seek a place in society. I, therefore, disagree with Madwuagu in how he assigns Odibo to a place of 'utter uselessness.' It is rather worth

noting that just as masculinity is constructed, how Odibo's body is viewed is also a product of society. Hence, it is not enough to state how a character is rendered utterly useless without delving into the critical role society plays in disabling those who are deemed to have extraordinary bodies.

Another aspect of Okpewho's *The Last Duty,* which has been studied, has to do with how he employs juvenal satire to highlight the corruption, rot and failings of society. Felicia Annin and Cynthia E. Osei (2020) focused on how the author uses dark humour to address the ills in Nigerian society. They consequently argue that 'Morally, both Toje and Odibo's corruption is seen in their flirtation with Aku, Oshevire' wife. Odibo takes advantage of Aku's circumstances and lures her to warm his bed' (p.16). Their interpretation of the events of the text hinges on the fact that what the author exposes in the novel is meant to call for a change in society. Hence, as readers are confronted with these extremes of human character that require condemnation, the plot highlights what is wrong with society and calls for a change.

Edwin Onwuka (2021) in his work explored the representation of Nigerian soldiers in Okpewho's *The Last Duty* and Festus Iyayi's *Heroes.* There is an attempt not just to put all the military men together but also to analyse the character types, how they are depicted and how such literary depictions can be impactful on the perception of the military in Nigeria. Through his analyses of the two novels, the author identifies five character types that represent how individual soldiers are portrayed aside from the collective portrayal of the military in the novels. He argues that these types of military men serve as a microcosm of the Nigerian society.

From the foregoing, what is obvious is that most of the works that have been done on Okpewho's *The Last Duty* have focused on the issue of the war. This is rightly so considering the fact that that is the main issue around which the whole story is built. Other studies have

also focused on marginal groups, such as females, with regard to the atrocities they go through during times of war. Aku, as a character, has been of key importance to studies that look at wartime sexual exploitation, feminization of poverty as well as the challenges women go through when they find themselves in similar circumstances. Issues such as patriarchy and corruption have also been discussed. These key thematic areas have gained attention in previous studies by other researchers. Okpewho's narrative technique, language and other literary elements have also been analysed. However, what appears lacking is a focused work that discusses the issue of disability as well as how the disabled character is viewed and othered in the text.

**Review of literature on The Beggar's Strike by Aminata Sow Fall**

A number of studies have been conducted on Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggar's Strike*. Due to the nature of the issues raised in the novel, various studies have been done that have tried to look at the sociological, economic and religious dimensions of what the plot is about. Cecilia Quansah et al. (2017), in their review of *The Beggar's Strike*, identified the following as the thematic concerns of the novel: charity and begging, The Economic Theme, dignity, corruption and the Clash between poverty and riches, the theme of politics as well as public policy versus private ambitions. Interestingly, there is no mention of the disabled characters as identifiable actors in the story.

Mark Beeman (1992) also discusses Sow Fall's novel by arguing about how her presentation of begging in the novel 'presents the institution of begging from a point of view consistent with the structural-functionalist sociological approach (p. 163). What this particular study does is reveal how people from other cultures are able to appreciate the issue of begging within the society that Sow Fall presents. From his study, Beeman (1992) posits that 'literature may also provide us with specific socio-political concepts and paradigms' (p. 163). This is in line with how the perspective on begging that is represented in the novel is

representative of the kind of people who are written about. The study points out that it is instructive that Mour, who becomes the face of the system that fights against begging rather ends up becoming a deviant and suffers greatly as a result. The literary space is therefore presented as a very important arena to even help people who want to understand the various African societies.

In his study of the strategies of resistance in *The Beggar's Strike*, Yohann C. Ripert (2018) examines Sow Fall's novel by looking at how beggars and women as subaltern figures engage in resistance. He argues that 'By staging women challenging heteronormative practices in the same way as beggars strike to resist exclusion, the novel draws attention to different strategies of resistances' (p. 30). The study establishes how the novel reveals the disillusionment that followed the independence of most African states. To Ripert (2018), while there is no clear argument for or against tradition or modernisation, the figures of beggars and women are presented as symbols of resistance to both extremes as the postcolonial African states begin to grow and develop.

In 'The sociological probing of Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggar's Strike*,' Rabiu Iyanda (2018) discusses the novel from a sociological point of view by analysing the discrimination the beggars suffer in this fictitious African society. He sees the novel as an attempt to address the social problems which Fall discusses. Iyanda blames 'cultural contact' for the segregation that the beggars suffer. The author, therefore, rejects the situation whereby, in order to please Western visitors, the beggars are sacrificed and driven away from the city centres. To him, urbanization, tourism and the quest for a clean city should not lead to methods of treating disabled persons as far as the African continent is concerned. Iyanda posits that the African approach to handling the less privileged is communal. Hence, cultural contact and modernism should not negatively influence countries, especially when it comes to norms, cultures and values. To Iyanda, 'Sow Fall makes us realize that many government

policies do not many citizens in such a society. The able-bodied cannot survive without the aid of these people called handicapped. Everybody is indispensable in any given society.' (P. 3)

Even though the issue of beggars being in the city centre and the environmental issues it comes with are at the core of Sow Fall's *The Beggar's Strike*, it is difficult to accept Mike Edung's (2014) claim that Sow Fall presents the beggars as an environmental nuisance. This is certainly far from the point that Fall makes. Edung (2014) posits that '…beyond merely presenting the beggars as an environmental health hazard, *The Beggar's Strike* has gone on to present the idea that cultural beliefs and practices could seriously threaten the success of measures aimed at tackling this social problem (p. 58). I totally disagree with this assertion as far as what the plot presents is concerned. In as much as issues regarding the environment, culture and religion are raised, it cannot be justified that, per what the author represents, Fall sees the beggars as the problem.

In 'Hegemonic Masculinity and Emasculation in Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggars' Strike*, Sylvester Mutunda (2018) focuses on how the issue of masculinity gets challenged and contested. Mutunda sees Mour's younger wife, Sine's refusal to submit to her husband's demands as a way of resisting his male dominance. This, Mutunda believes is made possible because Sine is educated. This, therefore, suggests that with proper education, women will be able to stand against the male dominance of the likes of Mour Ndiaye. The paper also alludes to the beggars' refusal to give in to the demands of Ndiaye as a way of he being emasculated. However, I see the essence of this action as being beyond masculinity. Indeed, the beggars demonstrate that they care much more about their ability to rise and assert their dignity.

It can be seen from the works that have been done on Fall's novel, none of them has paid particular attention to the characters with impairments by using the lens of disability studies. It is important to recognise that by discussing the representation of these disabled

characters who constitute a major part of the beggars in the novel, we are able to appreciate how African literature also captures the experiences of such characters with regard to their being part of other vulnerable groups.

**Review of literature on The Book of Memory by Petina Gappah**

Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory* places the issue of the plights of albinos in certain African societies at the forefront. Indeed, albinism is a very critical issue in many African societies and it is therefore not surprising that attention is given to it in this important novel. A very significant work done on *The Book of Memory* is Lipengaa and Ngwirab's work on albino subjectivity in Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory*, Meg Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing*, Unathi Magubeni's Nwelezelanga: *The Star Child*, and Jenny Robson's *Because Pula Means Rain*. By using disability studies, Lipengaa and Ngwirab (2018) discuss how agency is achieved in the novels that were studied. Their study highlights how novels create agency for albinos by raising the issues of how they are treated in societies. They contend that authors intentionally imbue 'the albino figure with otherworldly characteristics, such as an association with the supernatural world' (p. 1474). To them, giving albinos a voice is a way of literature helping to address issues surrounding albinism in Africa. The study, therefore, brings how the texts 'challenge the harmful stereotypes that abound in society' (p. 1485).

In his paper, Ngom (2022) looks at the issue of memory as presented in Gappah's *The Book of Memory*. He argues that with regard to memory, 'the individual intertwines with the collective'(p. 38). Consequently, it is not something that is done in isolation but rather 'group-induced.' The act of remembering is therefore seen as an act that is 'enacted in a social context with groups acting as cues.' From his study of the issue of memory in Gappah's novel, Ngom concludes that the need for Memory to retell the experiences she went through has a cathartic effect on her at the personal level and on all others who may be going

through similar experiences. I agree with Ngom on how such a narrative does not only offer an opportunity to narrate what albinos go through but that the story being told itself contributes to the healing of the wounds albinos suffer as a result of their perceived differences.

Ncube and Mtenje (2015) focused on how Memory, who is a black albino, and her adoptive parent, Lloyd, who is a white 'closeted gay', can be considered as marginal figures who belong to the margins of Zimbabwean society. Memory as a black albino 'perceived as dirty and a contagion' while Lloyd as 'a white, closeted gay man lives in danger in what the authors refer to as 'Mugabe's homophobic Zimbabwe' (p. 10). The authors argue that it is the difference between the two characters that pushes them to the margins of society and eventually causes them to find comfort in each other. What I think that Ncube and Mtenje fail to realise is that whether it is about the treatment of albinos or gays in Zimbabwe, the treatment meted out to the persons in these categories did not start during the reign of Robert Mugabe, who served as the country's president. While it is true that we can classify Memory and Lloyd as being part of endangered minorities within the Zimbabwean society, this is beyond political but a revelation of how the citizens, as a result of their culture, perceive and treat differences, especially when it contradicts their cultural and religious beliefs.

This present study follows the line of other works that see Gappah's novel as contributing to fighting for the rights of albinos. This study is, however, unique in how it interprets the experiences of Memory, the perceptions of society and the reactions of the other characters as being various forms of rendering the character with a supposed different body as being 'the other.' By focusing on various elements that add to the othering of the albino character, we succeed in highlighting how othering of people who may look different is so much ingrained into the very fiber of society.

**Silence is my Mother Tongue Sulaiman Addonia**

Currently, not much has been done on Sulaiman Addonia's Silence is my Mother Tongue. This may be a result of the fact that the author may not be known in most Anglophone countries. What is readily available in the novel are reviews that have been done on the novel.

## Conclusion

This chapter focused on a review of relevant literature on the present study. From the foregoing, it has been revealed that disabled characters have always been present in African literature, both oral and written. However, not many studies have been done as far as the study of the lived experiences of the disabled characters in African literature is concerned. This present study will, therefore, contribute greatly to the attempt by African scholars to offer the African perspective to the discussion on disability representation in the literary text. Even though certain efforts have been made by some researchers with regard to disability representation in some of the selected texts, the focus of this study is to look at the disabled characters as 'othered' beings and the modes of othering, areas of othering and how the disabled characters seek to fight back being othered by their respective societies is very much needed. The next chapter is a discussion of the theoretical framework that guides our study of disability representation in African literary texts.

# CHAPTER THREE

# 'THE OTHER BODIES': EXAMINING THEORIES ON DISABILITY REPRESENTATION IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

## Introduction

In chapter two of this work, I reviewed the relevant literature on disability representation in African literature. There was also a review of some of the studies which have been done on the selected texts. The review showed that the issue of the representation of disabled characters in the selected texts has not received much attention. This chapter focuses on the theoretical framework used for this present study. Here, I discuss disability literary theory by tracing its advancement, especially in the field of literary studies. This is done to help lay the necessary foundation for the analysis of the selected texts.

As studies into the literary representation of disabled characters in the African literary texts continue to gain attention, the question of the appropriate theoretical framework that should guide such discussions continues to be raised. I begin this chapter by discussing disability literary studies as a broad theoretical framework. This means that views and ideas that have to do with disability studies will be discussed accordingly. This is done with the aim of tracing how disability representation in the literary text has progressed over the years especially with regard to the various models of disability studies that have been influential. This is meant to offer useful insights into how these ideas and perspectives can be harnessed in helping us to theorise the issue of disability representation within the context of African literature. This approach, therefore, does not subscribe to doing away with theories, thoughts and perspectives on disability that emanate from the Global North.

Indeed, once the formal development of disability studies started in the West, I am of the view that there can never be a total rejection of how the field has developed, especially when it comes to certain key propositions by the leading scholars in the field. Of course, what must guide anybody who seeks to contribute the African perspective on disability representation to the global discourse is a readiness to reject what is not applicable to the African context while seeking to offer a suitable framework for analysing disability representations. This requires reviewing what has already been done, doing away with what is not applicable and coming up with ways that will be very useful as far as scholarship on disability literary theory is concerned. I will, therefore, be discussing key concepts and ideas by disability scholars who have helped to shape the development of disability literary studies. These are the main concepts and ideas that have guided my study of the representation of disabled characters in selected African literary texts.

**The Rise of Different Models of Disability Studies**

The attempt to understand the matters concerning disability started with what is known as the medical model. This model of viewing and analysing disability served as the lens through which those in the medical fields, especially considered people with impairments. The medical model considers disability as a sickness or defect to do with the body that has to be cured through the intervention of medicine (Kaplan, 1999). This model is what has thrived so much especially within medical circles.

Another model of approaching disability issues is the social model. This emerged later on and rather sought not to focus on the path of the medical model. The social model, which has enjoyed a lot more acceptability as a result of the politics surrounding disability, considers disability as a 'normal aspect of life' without attributing to it any notion of defect that needs to be cured through medical intervention (Kaplan, 1999). In effect, one of the main objectives of the social model is to do away with the situation whereby a sort of importance

that comes with privilege is assigned to any particular type of body and to also clear the barriers to accessibility so that all types of bodies will be seen as being able (Shakespeare, 2010; Goodley, 2011). Whereas the medical model considers the human body with impairment as being in need of healing, the social model sees society as being in need of healing in order to give all its members equal opportunities and privileges. Hence, while the medical model considers people with impairments as 'medical tragedies' in need of healing and medical attention, the social model looks at those bodies in terms of how they are rendered disabled by society. The social model of disability sees disability as referring to 'the forms of oppression, restricted activity, exclusion, and discrimination that people with impairments might face, from inaccessible environments to prejudice and hate crime' (Baker, 2015; p. 101). According to Tom Shakespeare (1999), a leading figure in disability studies, disability studies offer new ways to help in the appreciation of disability. This way of understanding issues to do with disability came out of the decision by disabled persons to rise up and fight for their rights. Shakespeare further states that the focus of disability studies has been on examining and dealing with the injustices, discriminations, stereotypes and the ill treatments that disabled persons suffer. Disability studies, therefore, consider how 'people with impairment are disabled by society, not by their bodies' (Shakespeare, 1999; p. 54).

This view by Shakespeare puts into the right perspective what disability studies have sought to achieve over the years, which is a new way of looking at disability in terms of the roles society plays in rendering individuals with various impairments 'disabled.' It also gives a hint of the departure from a previous way of viewing people with impairments as being medical tragedies who stand in need of healing. Discrimination and prejudice against people with a disability take centre stage when it comes to the social model instead of seeing such individuals through the medical lens as people who need healing or medical treatment.

There have, however, been some objections raised against the social model. McDouglas (2017) claims that 'the social model was marred…by its inability to change able-bodied persons' perception of 'normal' and the need to have persons with disabilities live up to it' (p. 358). Indeed, he raises very pertinent issues regarding the usefulness of the social model. Undoubtedly, bodies within any particular society or culture may be viewed differently. This is a fundamental issue which cannot be overlooked. However, while McDouglas' (2017) claims are important, they do not constitute enough grounds to reject the social model. Indeed, failure to acknowledge that societies do pay attention to body differences will be idealistic. It can therefore not be argued that the social model champions the separation of people into 'able' and 'disabled.' That disabled persons are classified as 'the other group' is not the doing of the social model.

**The 'Normate' and the 'Extraordinary Body'**

Various societies have their concepts of the 'normal' and the 'others.' Usually, the 'others' are those whose body configurations are not normal and do not fit into what a society sees to be ideal. Indeed, one key concept that has shaped disability studies is Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's concept of 'the normate.' This is what informs the issue of society's construction of the normal body. According to Garland-Thomson (2017):

> The term normate usefully designates the social figure through which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings. Normate, then, is the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them. (p. 8)

Garland-Thomson's definition exposes how in most cultures and societies, there is an ideal concept of a 'normate'. To be normate is to be a human being who meets the body standards of society without having any form of faults, defects, abnormalities or flaws as far as the body is concerned. Since this social figure is projected by society, a child from the day he or she is born is continuously compared with society's image of a normal body until that

child dies. It is the basis by which one measures him/herself as being normal or different. One,, therefore, has to measure him/self against such societal standards and also be measured by others. It is indeed a 'constructed identity' that accepts some people and rejects those who are deemed not to qualify. As Garland-Thomson indicates, this constructed identity is rooted in culture, and those who constructed it use it as the basis for assuming power and authority. To be regarded as being normal, then, is to be clothed with inclusivity, acceptability, power, authority and beauty in society. On the other hand, to miss the mark of the normate is to draw attention to oneself, to be rejected, to become a wonder, and also to be considered as being deviant, flawed, abnormal and disadvantaged.

The irony is that; such kind of bodily configuration is illusive. Garland-Thomson (2017) argues that 'only a minority of actual people' will fit into the strict definition of the normate (p. 8). This socially constructed image of the normate, therefore, remains an ideal picture that people strive to match. However, it continues to be a means of creating groups of those with normal bodies against those who do not have normal bodies. In order for individual's not to be sidelined, they 'try to fit the description of the normate.' (p. 8) The desire of individual members of a society, therefore, is to fit into its society and culture's perception of the normate. This is very critical because it contributes to where one is categorised and also determines the power an individual wields and the privileges that come with them.

Another important term worth considering is 'extraordinary bodies.' Garland-Thomson uses the term 'extraordinary bodies' to refer to those whose body configurations don't fit into what society considers as the normate. She states that,

> The meanings attributed to extraordinary bodies reside not in inherent physical flaws, but in social relationships in which one group is legitimated by possessing valued physical characteristics and maintains its ascendancy and its self-identity by systematically imposing the role of cultural or corporeal inferiority on other. (p. 7)

In fact, the social construction of a body considered to be normal and one considered to be extraordinary is the beginning of the creation of a social 'other' based on bodily configuration. As Thompson (2017) mentions, it is not the supposed 'inherent physical flaws' concerning one's body that are the issue. It is, however through the interactions that go on in society that those who are deemed to have 'valued physical characteristics' become accepted and affirmed as they are set on a path of significance and superiority. Some bodies, therefore, get legitimatized while others are automatically clothed with the cloak of the 'inferior other.' By assigning extraordinary bodies to an inferior position and placing on them the 'role of cultural or corporeal inferiority,' society begins to create classifications among bodies. Those whose bodies deviate from what the majority considers to be normal within a particular society or culture do not go without being noticed, uninterpreted or even punished, whereas those whose bodies conform to the ideal images of the normate get accepted, celebrated and rewarded. To match society's concept of normal is to be a human, while to have any valued parts of the body missing or not functioning well based on society's normate construction of the body is to be the 'other.'

Referring to American society, Garland-Thomson (2017) argues that, 'The disabled figure operates as the vividly embodied, stigmatized other whose social role is to symbolically free the privileged, idealized figure of the American self so powerfully etched into our collective cultural consciousness' (p. 7). Indeed, this situation is the case for most societies. There is an innate collective consciousness in every society that automatically serves to include and exclude certain members of the society from various power brackets. Consequently, right from conception, once an individual is seen not to have a body that matches the ideal body type, the person begins to fall on the power scale. This falling is all part of the ways society disables people with body differences. The disabled figure is therefore treated as the 'stigmatized other' and a deviation from the normal. The whole of

society seems to operate with a collectively agreed-upon description of those who are normal and those who are not. As Garland-Thomson (2017) further states, 'Cultural dichotomies do their evaluative work: this body is inferior, and that one is superior; this one is beautiful or perfect and that one is grotesque or ugly.' (p. 7). This creates an 'economy of bodies' whereby bodies that are deemed not to be good enough to 'become spectacles of otherness while the unmarked are sheltered in the neutral space of normalcy' (p. 8).

From what has been said so far, what is clear is that the dichotomies among bodies are the products of various cultures and societies. Members who belong to such cultures, therefore, carry such concepts of the 'normate' and the 'other' with them in their consciousness, and it is against such that they measure all those they meet. It can, therefore, be said that the creation of a 'corporeal other' is a key part of cultures all over the world. This, therefore automatically ensures that bodies that do not qualify to be considered as normate become sidelined, stigmatized and clothed with inferiority, as Garland-Thomson (1997) rightly suggests. According to Stone-Macdonald and Butera (2012), 'As a marker of identity, disability creates a social position for an individual that is constructed in response to widely held notions of normalcy.' (p. 6) Individual bodies are judged according to society's generally accepted notions of normalcy, and those who fall short are considered as the 'other.'

Further, societal constructions of corporeal normalcy and otherness carry with them privileges and challenges, respectively. To be denied the status of a normate is to be pushed into the category of 'the other.' A disabled person is, therefore, one who has what is considered to be an extraordinary body according to a particular society's definition of what is a normal human body based on the bodily configuration; such an individual is then assigned the place of a spectacle of an inferior other. For Garland-Thomson (2017), to be considered an 'inferior other' carries with it a meaning that goes beyond the biological

makeup of an individual. Such figures are 'products marked by socially determined stigma, defined through representation and excluded from social power and status.' (p. 8)

Indeed, since most societies are patriarchal, 'The non-normate status accorded disability feminizes all disabled figures' (Garland-Thomson, 2017; p. 9). This is because, in such patriarchal societies, power resides with men and the female is considered to be weak. As a result, to be disabled is to be feminized. The disabled male is not 'able' to perform masculine duties and, therefore, has his masculinity questioned. There is also the situation whereby the disabled male is denied participation in certain privileges and roles that go with the gender. For instance, in areas of traditional leadership, there are a number of African societies that do not permit one deemed to be disabled to be crowned a chief or even enter certain places of the palace. Again, people who are classified as being disabled tend to have challenges in expressing their sexuality. It is as if society expects people with disabilities to be sexually numb.

Ironically, per the strict interpretation of what disability is, most people are 'disabled', but only a few are aware of their disabilities. Consequently, it is those whose disabilities become too glaring and, therefore, attract public attention who end up not being able to escape the classification. Again, the likelihood of people who are considered today to be able-bodied becoming disabled as a result of accidents, wartime violence, illness and even old age is very high. In fact, it is said that every so-called able-bodied person is capable of becoming disabled at any moment in life. As Shakespeare (1999) indicates, it is therefore not surprising that the term 'Temporary Able-Bodied' is rather used for those whom society considers to be able and normal based on their body and the working of its parts. He further states that it is very likely that for most people alive today, the tendency of them ending up becoming impaired or becoming disabled later on in their lives is something that they cannot escape. Shakespeare argues that persons who hitherto never had any form of impairment dread

becoming disabled at any point in time because, in most societies, 'identity is constructed on the basis of strength and invulnerability' (p. 63).

According to Goodley (2001), 'Disability affects us all, transcending class, nation and wealth. The notion of the TAB – Temporarily Able Bodied – recognises that many people will at some point become disabled' (p. 1). Indeed, disability as a category to which other members of a society are assigned is considered to be very 'fluid, and perhaps more threatening, to those who identify themselves as normates than such more stable marginal identities as femaleness, blackness, or non-dominant ethnic identities.' (Garland-Thomson, 2017; p. 14). This is because, whereas blackness, femaleness and other identities in society may be more static in terms of admitting new members who qualify to be described as such, disability opens the room for even normates who, through any event of life, such as wars, accidents or sickness or old age may end up becoming disabled or unable to properly use certain body parts. Again, the more visible one's disability is, the more attention it receives from society and the greater the possibility for society to classify such an individual as being an inferior other. Consequently, when a disability is not seen too much, it sometimes escapes the staring and questioning of society.

Interestingly, when it comes to the relationship between the normate and the non-normate, there appears to be a form of tension or nervousness. Garland-Thomson (2017) states that,

> A non-disabled person often does not know how to act toward a disabled person: how or whether to offer assistance; whether to acknowledge the disability; what words, gestures, or expectations to use or avoid…Perhaps most destructive to the potential for continuing relations is the normate's frequent assumption that a disability cancels out other qualities, reducing the complex person to a single attribute. This uncertainty and discord make the encounter especially stressful for the nondisabled person unaccustomed to disable people. (p. 12)

It is this nervousness which characterises the interactions between a disabled and a non-disabled person that is eventually carried into literary representations. This kind of invitation to comment on disability, which faces a sort of resistance at the same time, is what informed Ato Quayson's (2007) concept of 'aesthetic nervousness' in his work entitled, 'Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation.'

**'Narrative Prosthesis'**

One of the major works on disability representation in literary texts is David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder's *Narrative Prosthesis (Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse.* In *Narrative Prosthesis*, David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (2000) offer great insight into disability representation in literature. Their study examines 'the meanings assigned to disability as a representational identity in narrative art' (p. 1). They posit that 'disability has been a forthright interest of literary narrative' (p. 2). They classify the function of disabled characters within the literary domain 'primarily in two ways: 'disability pervades literary narratives, first, as a stock feature of characterisation and, second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device' (p. 47). They consequently 'term this perpetual discursive dependency upon disability narrative prosthesis' (p. 47). The term 'Narrative Prosthesis', as used by Mitchell and Snyder, therefore refers to 'both the prevalence of disability representation and the myriad meanings ascribed to it' (p. 4). They further state that their 'phrase narrative prosthesis is meant to indicate that disability has been used throughout history as a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight' (p. 49).

Mitchell and Snyder's work is largely informed by the important relationship that exists between literature and disability as far as the issue of representation is concerned. To them, 'literature continues to serve an important explanatory function in the cultural understanding of disability' (p. 26). In terms of what literary works seek to achieve by serving

as a space where readers get to see and interact with disabled persons, Mitchell and Snyder (2000) argue that the complexities that surround the representation of disability in Literature are a very significant issue when it comes to why and how authors write about disability in their texts.

They are of the view that 'What has proven most striking in the humanities' investigations of disability and the construction of this study is the overview of disability throughout history and across cultures that literary and filmic archives provide' (p. 42). By contrast to the depth of insight disability representations in the literary texts provide, Mitchell and Snyder posit that 'Whereas the survey of policies, incarcerating institutions, legislation, and so forth, provides an overview of state-authored responses to quandaries posed by disabled populations, fictive representations provide access to less legalistic or 'official' contexts for understanding disability' (p. 42). Mitchell and Snyder (2000) believe that 'The history of disability, like the history of any socially produced constituency, proves surprisingly uneven and multifaceted' (p. 43). Studies on literary works on disability offer researchers within the humanities the opportunity to examine and explore representations of disabled persons in literary contexts. Since these literary representations appear very close to what happens in society, they help in changing the narrative around disability (Hall, 2016; p. 43)

Since the representation of disabled characters across cultures and eras is not static, it appears then that a literary work that examines disability representation in the literary space helps us to 'understand this multiplicity' in the 'richness' of such reorientations as they have been captured in various texts. 'After all, how do we adequately assess our own era's reactions and representations without a thoroughgoing knowledge of other cultures and generations? What does it say about our own culture's penchant for designating disability if previous cultures did not see the need for doing so?' (p. 43). Consequently, 'The humanities

component of disability studies offers scholars and students the ability to return to a history of representations to reassess our understanding of disability and thus of ourselves' (p. 9).

Mitchell and Snyder (2000) suggest that 'it is the narrative of disability's very unknowability that consolidates the need to tell a story about it' (p. 6). As a result, when it comes to literary works that capture 'characters with disabilities,' the very important question is 'not whether a disability is a cause or symptom of, or distraction from, a disturbing behavioral trait, but whether its mystery can be pierced by the storyteller' (p. 6). 'The production of disability as a human oddity or exceptional limitation in science, as in art, would be founded upon the norm's ability to disguise itself as transparently average' (p. 29). The challenge of Mitchell and Snyder, which is of great importance to this present study, is that '…while stories rely upon the potency of disability as a symbolic figure, they rarely take up disability as an experience of social or political dimensions' (p. 48).

In terms of the various disability intersections, Mitchell and Snyder (2000) posit that 'Since culture is consolidated within the space of shared social critique, disability studies scholarship in the humanities advances out of similar methodological beginnings as gender, race, and sexuality' (p. xiii). This is indicative of the various intersections that disability representation has in the literary text. It also confirms how disability studies continue in the tradition of other studies and theories that emanated from various right group movements. Mitchell and Snyder (2000) further argue that even though 'scholars in literary and cultural studies have produced important readings of individual disabled characters and the centrality of disabled types to specific genres, we have largely neglected to theorise the utility of humanities work for disability studies in particular, and disabled populations in general' (p. 16). Indeed, even while it is true that '…one book cannot present an exhaustive account of disability 'types' or characters' (p. 1), what is obvious is that a sustained study of various

representations of disabled characters in literary texts will go a long way in helping readers to better appreciate issues to do with disability especially as presented in various literary texts.

Mitchell and Snyder (2000) state that 'Physical or cognitive inferiority has historically characterised the means by which bodies have been constructed as 'deviant' (p. 2). As a result, persons who have conditions that affect their physical or cognitive abilities are considered within most cultures as being undesirable, discrediting and also serves as 'the material marker of inferiority itself' which people do not want to be associated with. To them, disability, therefore, becomes a 'master trope of human disqualification', which is 'presented as occupying a unique identity that must navigate the terrain between physical/cognitive differences and social stigma' (pp.2- 3). Mitchell and Snyder consider the use of prosthetic devices by disabled persons to help them to overcome the stigma associated with their conditions in order for them to become acceptable in society. The use of such devices helps to blur the lines that separate the normal from the abnormal.

In view of this, one key objective of literary analysis of the representation of disability in literary works is to 'exemplify the ways in which disability has been a sign of inferior life itself' (p. 3). The presence of the disabled body in society and the reactions it receives can therefore be likened to 'the freak show' which 'promised the spectacle of a glimpse into the taboo underworld of human oddity' and 'testified to 'the cultural fascination with spectacles of difference' (p. 37). Indeed, how the disabled character is represented as a 'freak' on the show whose mere presence attracts the attention and reactions of the so-called normal persons in society becomes of great interest to literary analysis.

**'The Self' and the 'Other'**

The binary that exists between persons in various societies can be said to be rooted in the concept of 'the self' and 'the other.' Such a binary is what brings about separation among people with different bodies. There have been a number of theories and ideas about the

concept of 'self' and the 'other.' Brons (2015) traces how the development of the concept of 'the other' within French philosophical discourses took centre stage in the greater part of the 20th century. He makes references to key figures such as Hegel, Kojeve, Fred and Lacan. In this study, I follow the stance taken by Jean-Francois Staszak on the concept of 'the other' in his 2008 work, 'Other/otherness.' In this text, he argues that:

> Otherness is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group ('Us,' the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups ('Them,' Other) by stigmatizing a difference-real or imagined-presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination. To state it naively, difference belongs to the realm of fact and otherness belongs to the realm of discourse. Thus, biological sex is difference, whereas gender is otherness. (p. 2)

What this means is that for 'Otherness' or 'othering' to occur, there is usually a dominant in-group whose members elevate themselves to a place of relevance by pushing other groups to the domain of being 'the Other.' This process of creating such divides in society is, therefore, premised on a perceived or real difference between the two groups. The dominant in-group, therefore, uses this 'real or imagined' difference to its advantage by using it as the basis for negating the identity of the dominated out-group. It is this same difference that becomes the reason why the dominated out-group is stigmatized and discriminated against. What this suggests is that otherness is a conscious way by which dominant in-groups establish themselves as being the original, the norm, the authentic, the real, the relevant etc., as they use certain differences to their advantage. To Staszak (2008), therefore, otherness is largely due to the 'point of view' and the 'discourse' based on the perception of the one who sees the other as such.

It is the application of a particular principle of negation which, therefore, leads to the classification of individuals in society. The principle of othering in any particular instance, therefore, serves as the key for inclusion or exclusion from the 'two hierarchical groups: them and us' (p. 2). The outgroup is therefore considered as a group based on its 'opposition to the

in-group and this lack of identity' (p. 2). 'This lack' is, however, relevant as far as it helps the dominant in-group to maintain its identity and superiority since it is merely 'based on stereotypes that are largely stigmatizing and obviously simplistic' (p. 2). The more the in-group is able to set itself apart and ensure that it upholds its supposed peculiar identity, the more it is able to assert itself over the dominated out-group. The existence of the out-group is, therefore, a direct creation of the in-group, which needs the existence of such 'others' in order to demonstrate how special it is. To Brons (2015), 'This psychological need of self-affirmation drives the construction of the superior self/in-group versus the inferior other/out-group' (p. 76).

Othering, therefore, operates based on a binary that places human beings in two categories. This categorisation becomes the basis of division, which also affects how those in the two divides are perceived and treated. The main category, which is considered as 'the norm', refers to those 'whose identity is valued.' This group, therefore, becomes the dominant group who are largely clothed with power, beauty and authority. On the other hand, the minority category is 'defined by its faults, devalued and susceptible to discrimination' (p. 1). Staszak (2008) suggests that 'Dominated out-groups are Others precisely because they are subject to the categories and practices of the dominant in-group and because they are unable to prescribe their norms' (p. 2). The only way out for the out-groups to cease being Others is for them to break free from the impositions by the in-groups. This is done through the out-group's rejection of the negative image placed on them. They then create their sense of identity that normalizes them and makes them acceptable.

Staszak further posits that at the core of 'the construction of otherness' is 'the asymmetry in power relationships' (p. 2). The existence of a dominant in-group and a dominated out-group sets the stage for the power dynamics that exist in society. The dominant in-group, as a result of its ability to project itself as the original, tends to wield

power, whereas the dominated out-group lives occupies the position of the other. Staszak continues that it is 'Only the dominant group' that is 'in a position to impose the value of its particularity (its identity) and to devalue the particularity of other (their otherness) while imposing corresponding discriminatory measures.' (p. 2). A part of the benefits of being the dominant in-group is the capacity to create a positive image that elevates the 'Self' above any other identities. This positive image becomes the basis for judging what is the norm and what is abnormal.

Consequently, the identity that the dominated out-group possesses is what the dominant in-group ascribes to it. This means that the negative image ascribed to the dominated out-group is not based on fact but is simply a result of the fact that the dominant in-group imposes the 'corresponding discriminatory measures' on the dominated out-group. As a result, while the dominant in-group has the power to describe itself, the image of the dominated out-group is largely dependent on what the dominant in-group says.

Staszak (2008) argues that 'The ethnocentric bias that creates otherness is doubtlessly an anthropological constant' since 'All groups tend to value themselves and distinguish themselves from others whom they devalue' (p. 3). Othering is, therefore, rooted in a dominant in-group attributing value to itself while at the same time devaluing a dominated out-group. He further adds that while 'Certain constructs are specific to certain societies (such as the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy) and others seem universal (such as the male/female dichotomy), what is evident is that 'All societies, then, create the self and the other within their own set of categories' (p. 3). For example, while discussing how the West constructs otherness, Staszak mentions the following as some of the key categories: geography, spatial organisation and exotism.

Since othering has its roots in studies about colonization, Staszak points out an example of such a dominant group as 'Westerners in the time of colonisation' (P. 1) who

placed themselves in a more refined category and rather stigmatized all other groups as 'others, Barbarians, savages or people of color' (p. 1). By so doing, these Westerners relegated 'the peoples that they could dominate or exterminate to the margin of humanity' (p. 1). To Staszak, therefore, the otherness of those relegated by the dominant group is based on 'their supposed spatial marginality' (p. 1). He further adds that 'certain types of spatial organisation, like segregation or territorial construction allow the opposition between the self and the other to be maintained or accentuated' (p. 1). Consequently, in cases where it appears a certain value is placed on the 'other,' Staszak (2008) argues that it is purely based on 'exoticism' and this is 'done in a stereotypical, reassuring fashion that serves to comfort the self in its feeling of superiority' (p. 1).

It appears that a very critical principle for establishing 'the self' and 'the other' in most communities is mainly on the basis of body differences. When it comes to the sociocultural construction of bodies, there appear to be certain ideals that various cultures and societies look out for in order for an individual's body to be classified as being part of the dominant in-group or the dominated out-group. From the concept of otherness and othering, it can be said that societies construct the dominant and acceptable image of what an ideal body is based on what is commonly shared by the majority of people. Hence, for a body to deviate from what is considered as being the ideal body is to be relegated to the inferior category.

The 'othered body' is without power and rather suffers from negative representation, subjugation and maltreatment. It is therefore the case that most of the time, the othered body becomes marginalised and denied a voice. To be othered, therefore, comes with a lot of negative connotations, which such persons have to fight and deal with. In applying the concept of othering to the disabled character, we refer how, as a result of people with various impairments being in the minority, their condition gets them eliminated from the group of those whose bodies are deemed to have conformed to what a society considers to be normal.

People with impairments, therefore, tend to suffer greatly as a result of the societal perception that they do not fully conform to the image of the acceptable body. Such bodies, therefore, become stigmatized and are viewed based on the stereotypes developed by those that belong to the dominant in-group. Having a different body also means that one may be denied power and will also be considered as not being good enough. In fact, since the dominant in-group usually arrogates to itself concepts such as beauty, acceptability, desirability and worth, those whose bodies are denied access to the category of the dominant in-group become objects of ridicule and mourning. The normal body is, therefore, the body that the dominant in-group accepts. This means that to have a body that does not conform to the normal body in a particular society is to sometimes be denied full participation in the life and activities of that society. People with impairments are therefore 'othered' in society, and their representation in the literary text reflects the same. According to Acquaviva (2020), 'The imaginary that society constructs around impairment and disability appears to be rich in metaphors that are full of prejudices and shadows of ancient fears' (p. 1).

**Some bodies are Different: Representing the 'Corporeal Other'**

It appears that most ableist societies have inherent codes in the various areas of societal life that serve as the basis for accepting or rejecting bodies that are deemed to be normal or not. Body worthiness is, therefore, ingrained in the very fiber of such societies to the extent that the one who does not measure up to what a society considers to be normal is considered to be a deviant. In order to appreciate how a particular society views body differences, it is critical to pay attention to what informs their separation of one body from the other, as well as the value that is placed on different types of bodies. It is the factors that lead to the separation of bodies from one another that help to reveal how, based on that society's

concept of the ideal body, their cultural and religious beliefs and expectations of its members, among others, serve to either include or exclude people from those considered able or not.

As writers begin to write about various body forms, they end up also representing bodies that do not strictly align with the concept of the normate of a particular society. According to Garland-Thomson (2017), 'Disability functions as a multivalent trope, though it remains the mark of otherness' (p. 9). She contends that 'The very act of representing corporeal otherness places them in a frame that highlights their differences from ostensibly normate readers. Although such representations refer to actual social relations, they do not, of course, reproduce those relations with mimetic fullness' (p. 10). The representation of the non-normate is, therefore, based on the social relations between the non-normate and the normate. As a result of the literary work seeking to mirror what is going on in society, including the power relations that exist among various groups, the representation of corporeal otherness may sometimes end up projecting the differences that exist between the disabled character and the normate reader.

Consequently, 'Stereotypes in life become tropes in textual representation' (Garland-Thomson, 2017; p. 10) of disabled characters. Garland-Thomson argues that such representations of corporeal otherness are not able to capture the relationship between the normate and non-normate with what she calls 'mimetic fullness.' Garland-Thomson (2017) further elaborates her claim, thus, 'The more the literary portrayal conforms to the social stereotype, the more economical and intense is the effect; representation thus exaggerates an already highlighted physical difference (p. 11). To her, 'Not only is the relationship between text and world not exact, but representation also relies upon cultural assumptions to fill in missing details' (p. 11).

Indeed, the issue of literary representations being steeped in 'cultural assumptions' is not limited to disability studies. It applies to almost every other issue that literature seeks to

mirror as it gazes at society. The challenge, however, is how such portrayals may end up hardening into 'stereotypes or caricatures.' Nevertheless, if the literary artist is writing about what goes on in society, he/she cannot be blamed. Garland-Thomson further asserts that the representation of disabled persons usually treats such characters as mere objects without giving them the platform for them to express themselves. Hence, most writers tend to benefit from the benefits of having disabled characters without giving them room or voice for them to be heard.

**Disability and Sex in the Literary Text**

The othering of disabled characters reflects in the various sectors of the lives of people with impairment. It is, therefore, not surprising that the area of sexuality is very critical if we are examining the othering of disabled characters in the African literary text. Such an exercise is therefore useful in helping us to understand how the whole subject of sex matters to those considered to be disabled, as well as the impact of the othering of disabled characters on how they express their sexuality and also actively participate in the sexual activities that go on in their communities.

By rendering people with impairments as being the 'other,',' most societies have ended up sidelining and eliminating disabled persons from fully participating as active members of their respective societies. To be tagged as being the 'other' as a result of having an extraordinary body comes with its various associations and connotations. Unfortunately, since the extraordinary body is considered an imperfect body, it already becomes the victim of stares, discrimination, ostracization and stigmatisation. These bodies are, therefore, not celebrated but rather despised and considered to be not ideal enough to participate in sexual activities. The body with impairment is then seen as carrying with itself a sense of inadequacy and also suffering from meeting the societal standards of what is considered to be visually

appealing. In essence, if a body does not meet a society's consideration for what is accepted as being aesthetically beautiful, it becomes automatically abhorring to the normate. Even in situations where individuals may not have any form of dislike for such bodies, its lack of appeal to the normate makes it appear to be unfit for sexual relations. This, therefore, makes those with extraordinary bodies eliminated from those considered sexually appealing and, therefore, must be excluded from the sexual lives of societies.

The sad reality is that this view of society that the extraordinary body is not appealing and should, therefore, not be considered for the purposes of sex appears to have become largely accepted by those with various forms of impairments as a result of the socialisation disabled persons go through. This brings to the centre the issue of the hierarchy of bodies in society as a result of body differences. The idea of the ideal body, therefore, tends to create a hierarchy of bodies. By hierarchy of bodies, I am referring to a situation whereby some bodies may be deemed much more acceptable or desirable than others based on the preferences of society. I argue that society tends to rate bodies in ways that are both overt and subtle. For instance, when it comes to beauty pageants in real life, there are usually requirements to do with the specific types of bodies that are accepted or not. Acceptability and rejection of bodies based on body differences, therefore, creates a system of celebration or mourning when it comes to the type of body one possesses. Even when it comes to the recruitment of people into security services, certain body features are highlighted as being desirable. As a result, an individual having a certain type of body will find it very hard, if not impossible, to be accepted into some agencies. This is a result of the hierarchy of bodies that exist in societies. This means that an individual's body difference can deny such a person, various opportunities just because it does not match what is considered to be ideal. This concept of hierarchy of bodies, therefore, plays a key role when it comes to individuals

having the opportunity to freely participate in their respective society's economic, political, educational and even sexual life.

It appears that the closer one's body seems to match a particular society's idea of what a normal body is, the more admirable and acceptable the person becomes when it comes to being allowed to participate in relationships that involve sex as far as that particular society is concerned. This then serves as the standard of determining which body must or must not participate in the sexual activities of a society. Unfortunately, such misconceptions become a normal part of socialisation in most communities. The normate grows with the mindset that those with impairments are not part of the sexual community, and those with impairments grow to accept that their bodies are not worthy of participating in sex. As a result of society's rejection and sidelining of extraordinary bodies, some people with impairments usually grow up with a mindset that their bodies are not deserving of sexual pleasure. The sense of being made to feel that they are not desirable makes people with certain impairments accept the false belief that they are unwelcomed visitors as far as participating in the sexual lives of their respective societies is concerned. The sense of inferiority and undesirability becomes internalised in the minds of certain people with bodies considered to be extraordinary within some communities.

Again, in some societies, it is believed that marrying a disabled person automatically means that one's offspring or generations will eventually suffer from the same impairment. This is indeed a huge challenge that makes it difficult for people with bodies considered to be extraordinary sto be able to actively participate in the sexual lives of their societies. In fact, as part of the marital processes of certain societies, communities, tribes and ethnic groups, families do conduct background investigations to ensure that the one who wants to marry a member of their family does not have any form of impairment. Consequently, this situation makes it difficult for certain individuals with disabilities when it comes to getting a marriage

partner. The impairment becomes a source of mockery and the reason for rejection when it comes to marriages being contracted. This belief is very strong due to how it is sometimes even spiritualised.

Closely connected to the above is the notion that disability is a result of an individual, his or her family, ancestors etc., suffering from a curse or punishment. Indeed, the existence of such beliefs makes it difficult for a disabled person to be able to effectively get a sexual partner in his or her society, especially if the person is a normate. The belief that the one with impairment has been cursed or is suffering as a result of a punishment, especially by the gods, is a stigma that affects people with certain kinds of impairments. Indeed, in some African cultures, this belief is very strong and predominant. This superstitious belief contributes greatly to the reason why some disabled persons can never even conceive the thought of being involved in any form of sexual relationship. Once it is believed that an individual's impairment is a result of a curse, the person and the family he or she comes from get ostracized and stigmatized. They are, therefore, considered not worthy enough to participate in sexual activities because of the fear of the curse being transferred to the one who engages in sex with the one whose disability is considered to be the result of a curse.

In his work on 'The Sexual Politics of Disabled Masculinity,' Tom Shakespeare (1999) takes on the very key issue of the challenges disabled men go through in dealing with issues of disability and gender. According to Shakespeare (1999), The practice of disabled persons being pushed into the category of being asexual or even a third gender has very negative consequences on the identity of such persons as well as the opportunities they get to enjoy in their respective communities. This categorisation is demeaning and leaves disabled persons conflicted as far as their images of themselves are concerned. This reference to disabled persons as being asexual also has a negative impact on the various aspects of the

lives of disabled persons, with the sexuality of disabled people and their gender role expectations being at the forefront.

Shakespeare argues that when it comes to the image of disabled women, 'it seems that there is a synergy—a reinforcement— between the traditional notion of women and the traditional notion of disability' (p. 56). This statement he makes is premised on his stance that the traditional notion of women and the traditional notion of disability do not differ in the way societies construct the two. What this suggests, then, is that to be disabled is to become feminised. This unfortunate situation, according to Shakespeare, indicates that the societal image of a typical woman, which goes with 'adjectives…such as innocent; vulnerable; sexually passive or asexual; dependent; objectified' (p. 6), is the same image that is imposed on people with disabilities whether they are males or females.

This brings in the intersection between disability and gender. As Shakespeare (1999) states, the concepts of 'disabled women, gender and disability often reinforce a second-class status' (p.56) even though disabled women may however not conform to societal expectations when it comes to 'physical appearance, childbirth, mothering and taking care of the family. Unfortunately, the patriarchal nature of most societies has ensured that women are traditionally assigned the position of being second-class in society. This wrong ideology, however, seems to align with what it means to be disabled in those societies. On the other hand, it appears that when it comes to gender and disability, it is the male who may be quickly relegated from the status assigned to him in society based on his gender. As Shakespeare suggests, to be disabled is to become feminised. This means that when a man has an impairment, he is no longer regarded to be man enough and is consequently pushed into the female gender.

According to Shakespeare (1999), 'The traditional account, such as it is, of disabled masculinity rests therefore on the notion of contradiction: femininity and disability reinforce

each other, masculinity and disability conflict with each other' (p. 57). This is critical in helping us to appreciate what disabled males and females go through as a result of their impairments. While 'femininity and disability reinforce each other,' the disabled male gets relegated from the category of being a male and ceases enjoy the privileges that come with it because 'masculinity and disability conflict with each other.' This way of viewing masculinity is what is described as 'hegemonic masculinity.' Ennin (2022) states that 'This masculinity culturally and stabilizes a structure of dominance and oppression in the gender order' (p. 3). Unfortunately, what exists is that disabled males are not admitted into this class of masculine class and, therefore, become 'othered' as a result of their impairments.

To Shakespeare (1999), 'Masculinity as an ideological and psychological process is connected to prejudice against disabled people in general' (p. 58). He premises what he says on the fact that 'the commonplace argument' indicates that the 'male identity rests on separation from, and superiority to, the other (p. 58). However, in this case, the 'other' of the masculine gender is not only the female gender but all those who share the qualities and features of the traditional notion of a woman, which includes disabled persons, whether male or female. A disabled male is, therefore, 'othered' because he does not fit into the traditional notion of a male.

According to Shakespeare (1999), 'Masculine ideology rests on a negation of vulnerability, weakness, and ultimately even of the body itself. Such elements are denied, and projected onto the other, who is subsequently denigrated and rejected' (p. 59). He,, posits that 'disabled people can be conceived of as others" (p. 59) since they represent the inferior form of what is considered to be the ideal male. To him, 'In films and other cultural forms, disabled characters act as vehicles for the feelings and anxieties of the non-disabled viewer: disability is used as a metaphor for tragedy, or heroism, or evil' (p. 59). Shakespeare argues that Connel's concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' 'does not only undermine disabled men's

subjectivity but also has a role in the generation and maintenance of prejudice against disabled people in general' (p. 59).

Consequently, Disabled men do not automatically enjoy the power and privileges of nondisabled men, and cannot be assumed to have access to the same physical resources' (p. 61). Shakespeare further states 'Disabled men face social exclusion, poverty, violence and abuse. Disabled people are twice as likely to experience physical and sexual abuse as non-disabled people, and this abuse affects both men and women' (p. 63).

Referring to the notion of male dominance championed by the concept of hegemonic masculinity, Ennin (2022) further states that,

> While this dominance is most clearly seen in the unequal power relations between men and women, it also occurs among men as part of a hierarchy of historically specific masculinities. Subordinate masculinities are those masculinities that are negatively related to hegemonic masculinity, internal to the gender order, best exemplified by gay men, whereas marginalised masculinities are negatively related to the gender in terms of some other social category or relational structure such as class, ethnicity or impairment. Multiple masculinities thus exist in relationships of contest and negotiation to one another. However, hegemonic masculinity is seen to exert force on the gamut of competing masculinities. (p. 3)

As Ennin indicates, the disabled male belongs to the class of 'marginalised masculinities.' I argue then that to be assigned the place of marginalised masculinities is to be made to occupy the place of the 'masculine other' in society. This form of othering such males, therefore, comes with stigmatisation, stereotyping, exclusion and shame.

The disabled characters who belong to marginalised masculinities have to deal with other males who belong to higher categories in the masculine order. Since these characters are feminised, they have to also navigate their way through society while battling with the conflict of not being ideal males and not females either. Even though the notions of disability and gender are socially constructed, Shakespeare argues that 'Neither masculinity, nor disability, should be reduced to the level of physical determination, and it is necessary to be

open to the variety of strategies employed by different disabled men' (p. 57). Ennin (2022) states that 'The recent trend in masculinity studies is to interrogate and focus on the fluidity, instability, and contradictory nature of masculinity' (p. 2)

Another important thing that comes up when it comes to dealing with masculinity is the issue of sexuality. Shakespeare (1999) states that 'One of the problems, for disabled men, and men in general, is that male sexuality is conceived traditionally in a phallocentric and oppressive way' (p. 57). He continues that, 'Popular notions of disabled masculinity focus obsessively on perceived impotence and lack of manhood' (p. 57). To him, 'This narrow notion of normal sexuality—which is focused primarily on the male erection—is detrimental to the sexual and psychological health of both men and women' (p. 58). It is, therefore, not surprising that the ability to have sex becomes a symbol of masculine power in some societies. For us as literary researchers, we are to pay keen attention to how disabled makes negotiate their sexualities in literary texts.

In the African literary text, the intersection between disability and sexuality remains an important issue worth exploring. Indeed, the experiences of the various disabled characters that are depicted in the various literary works become a very important avenue through which we are able to see what such persons go through, even in real life. By having a closer look at the lived experiences of disabled characters in the texts, readers get to be confronted with issues that, even in real society, remain taboo topics. The way authors, therefore, represent issues regarding disabled characters and their sexual lives reveals the tensions that people with impairment deal with when it comes to issues to do with sex, how society perceives them, the challenges they go through, as well as how they negotiate issues to do with their sexuality. In examining these forms of representation, therefore, we are interested in how the disabled characters as othered beings handle their sexuality and also either participate in or get rejected from sexual activities. The societal barriers that seek to prevent the disabled from

actively participating in the sexual life of their societies, how the disabled fight against such barriers, as well as how they express their sexualities, therefore become very critical in this exercise.

The intersections between sex and disability, therefore, serve a greater purpose than merely being presented as a metaphor. Unfortunately, it appears that even when the sexuality of disabled persons is captured in texts, it is sometimes done to depict something else. What then happens is that not much attention is therefore given to what the representation of the sexual activity of the disabled actually means to those who suffer such experiences in real life. Particular attention must be paid to the representation of the sexuality of disabled persons as a way of seeking to understand how their place as othered persons in society tends to negatively affect even their actions when it comes to living out their sexuality.

Unfortunately, even in real life, disabled persons are mostly deemed or perceived to be asexual by their societies. Some of the reasons that account for that have been discussed already. One of the negative impacts of this perception is that such individuals also grow up to accept such views about their sexuality. This is what has contributed greatly to presenting 'disability' and 'sexuality' as being antithetical. It is as if, as part of the unwritten codes of certain societies, to be disabled is to have no sexual feelings, not to be worthy of sexual relations and to be banned from actively participating in the sexual activities of one's society in a way that is deemed normal. This, therefore, contributes to an attempt to numb the sexual feelings of the disabled in real life.

At a point in time, certain people with impairments begin to realise that contrary to what society has made them accept about their sexuality, they also have feelings. This apparent realization and desire to participate in the sexual activities of their societies then becomes worthy of attention. Here, the disabled, just like the subaltern, begins to fight back in a way to express his/her feelings that have not been given expression. Doing so, however,

means fighting the various barriers that have been placed there by society against the ability of those with impairments to express their sexuality. Again, how such an expression of sexuality is done becomes a point of great interest. While the author may risk being judged for not presenting a perfect picture of the sexual lives of the disabled, what is represented in the literary texts offers us a great opportunity appreciate these issues that exist in real life, and as we are confronted with how the disabled go through them and confront them, this is able to shape the perceptions of the readers. The literary representations, therefore, give better insight into these pertinent happenings in society.

In exploring issues to do with disabled characters in African literary texts, what we must not forget is the tensions that arise as a result of the characters with certain impairments seeking to participate as full members of their respective societies. Unfortunately, since those with impairments are classified as not being part of the normate, they get barred from fully enjoying all the rights and privileges of being human. Indeed, it is this act of disabling people with impairments that the social model of society dwells on. Consequently, the tensions that surround the sexuality of disabled characters are the doings of society. By paying close attention to how these tensions affect the actions and inactions of the disabled characters, we are able to better appreciate the very important role of sex as far as the discourse around disability representation in the literary text is concerned.

**Ato Quayson's Typology of Disability Representation**

Quayson's *Aesthetic Nervousness* (2007) is undoubtedly one of the ground-breaking works on the representation of disability in literary texts. As an African scholar who qualifies to be called a global citizen, Quayson brings to bear on his work, his rich personal experience with disability, his knowledge as an African and his vast knowledge as an academic in dissecting the issue of disability and its representation. At a personal level, Quayson's

firsthand experience of disability through the eyes of his grandfather and his father gave him an initial ticket and invitation to inquire about an issue that has not been properly attended to.

Again, Quayson's work is arguably one of the most influential works by an African academic in the field of disability representation. Quayson presents an all-embracing approach to discussing disability without necessarily limiting it. This approach is both beneficial and problematic. On the part that the work offers a broad appreciation of disability and its representation, Quayson's work is very important. However, his broad approach does not appear to have given him the opportunity to focus so much on disability studies that have to do with the African context. In the end, what is obvious is the fact that there are so many great insights Quayson offers, which are very valuable when it comes to the issue of how disability is represented in the literary text.

The typology of disability representation Quayson offers in *Aesthetic Nervousness* is a very important part of his work. Quayson rightly refers to what he presents as 'a provisional typology of disability representation' since he by no means seeks to lay claim on offering an exhaustive list that captures how disability is represented. However, what he offers serves as a great starting point for discussing disability representations in the literary text. What he does is to present to us various representations of both physical and non-physical disability as it pertains to literature.' According to Quayson (2007), since, in reality, disability calls for a form of 'interpretation, literary representations of disability are not merely reflecting disability; they are refractions of that reality, with varying emphases of both an aesthetic and ethical kind (p. 50).

Quayson's typology of literary representations of disability offers us a way of categorising, in a broad way, how disabled characters have been represented in various texts. By working on texts by Samuel Beckett, Toni Morrison, Wole Soyinka and J. M. Coetzee,

Quayson attempts to demonstrate how disabled characters represented in the texts he studies fall under one more of the categories of representation.

**Disability representation in the African text: A Hybrid Contextual Interpretive Framework**

The presence of disabled characters in African literature is not in doubt. What is rather a matter of concern is the limited attention that has been given to such an important area, especially in the field of literary analysis. As we begin to pay closer attention to the characters in African literature, what becomes obvious is that disabled characters have been all around us, but because issues surrounding disability have been subsumed in other themes and ideas, disabled characters have not received the deserved focus.

The treatment of the issues of disability in the African literary text goes beyond what existing model the discussion of disability representation in a text must fit into. In examining the representation of disability, the initial focus must be what they reveal about the societies where the stories are set. Indeed, a close reading of disability representation in the African literary text will show how such representations reveal the social attitude, the religious belief, the communal confusion in handling what appears different, the role of modern medicine in making life bearable for those with impairments, the stereotypes, as well as difficulty in determining where the disabled belong in the modernisation agenda of some African cities.

A representation of disability in the African text, therefore, must be interested in the tensions that are built up within the text as a result of society's inability to properly determine where those with bodily differences belong and how they should be treated. These tensions reflect what exists in real life and capture how disability is viewed and treated in real life. Whether these representations are able to perfectly capture the lived experiences of disabled characters or not is a matter which remains open for discussion. Nevertheless, what is obvious is the African writer's use of the literary space to force society to consider what it is quick to

ignore. What is obvious is that people with various body differences are presented as the 'other' of the so-called 'normate.' The literary text, therefore offers the opportunity for the reader to have a proper engagement with individuals who are considered to be 'other' in society. Through reading the literary text, the reader gets to properly focus his gaze on those with impairments, interact with them, see their conditions well and also get to see how such individuals are treated in the real society. This engagement is very critical in how it normalizes that which is considered abnormal. Characters who are considered by society to be different get closer to the reader, who is then able to engage them through the reading of the text.

What is obvious is that the African literary text does not appear to have grown in the way the Western counterpart has in terms of how medical advancements are able to empower characters with impairments with various forms of abilities. While in the Western world, access to prosthetics, wheelchairs and other tools has made life bearable for those with impairments, these do not appear to be so in most African societies. Hence, while how Western societies contribute to disabling people with disabilities seems to be generally going down, it is not the same in the African literary text. The result of this is that while science fiction, life writings and even novels from the Western world may now have characters that are not limited by their environment, the situation may be different as far as the African context is concerned. The African writer's urgent call is to mirror the situation in which those with impairments find themselves first.

In order for disability literary studies within the African literary field to develop and positively contribute to the global discourse on the subject, I suggest the use of a hybrid interpretive contextual framework. This framework advocates that readers and researchers enter the African literary text which has disabled characters with an open mind, with the intention to understand the cultural, religious, economic and psycho-social nuances that

influence how such characters are presented as the 'other.' As Hall (2016) observes, 'The call to globalize disability studies by extending it beyond Euro-American settings and universalized models leads, paradoxically, to a return to the local' (p. 50). This, therefore, calls for 'a focus on the cultural location of disability' (p. 50). It is worth stating that the approach I am suggesting is against adopting in wholesale what is thought to be Western perspectives concerning the issue of disability representation. However, I do not support any call for total rejection of ideas and perspectives merely based on where they originate from. The hybrid interpretive contextual framework, therefore, aims at applying already existing thoughts on the issue of disability studies by contextualising them in order to determine what applies to the African context or not. By so doing, researchers and scholars in the field will be able to avoid the trap of seeing existing literature on the matter as being antagonistic to the African perspective. This approach thrives on applying the best that is known and thought on the subject by contextualizing them to see those that fit and those that do not. The African culture and society, as presented in the various texts, the interactions that go on between the disabled characters and the other characters, as well as how the narratives reinforce or dispel disability stereotypes, serve as the key focus of this approach to studying disability representation in the African text.

**Figuring How the Disabled are Othered in the African Text**

The other aspect of this approach to disability studies is the call to pay close attention to what the disabled characters say about themselves, what others say about the disabled characters and the way the disabled characters are projected as being different. This means that one who wants to study the representation of other-bodies in the African literary text must seek to go beyond what is written by seeking to properly understand what is being communicated. This will better help in identifying where to place the various characters.

Here, I wish to suggest that in order to properly investigate how people with extraordinary bodies are othered in the African literary text, questions such as the following may be critical:

1. How is the society's conception of the normate and extraordinary bodies presented?
2. How does the society react towards and treat the body differences of the characters in the text?
3. Does the narrative enforce or dispel societal stereotypes about disability?
4. What are the tensions that exist in the othered person as he/she attempts to interact with society?
5. How does medicine play any role to make life a bit bearable for the othered individual?
6. How do cultural, religious and metaphysical beliefs concerning the othered character contribute to how disabled characters are treated?
7. Is the disabled character used as a mere metaphor or given agency to communicate with the readers about the plights of the disabled?
8. How is the othered person's quest to express his/her sexuality represented in the text?
9. How do the othered characters seek to break free and live as members of the society?
10. Are there any technological inventions which are presented as playing any key role in making life bearable for the othered body?

These questions, therefore, are very critical as we seek to study the othering of disabled characters in the selected texts using the hybrid interpretive contextual framework. It is important to state that in drafting the objectives and research questions for this study, I was guided by the above questions. This means that even though the present study will not seek to provide answers to all the questions stated, the focus of this study helps us to arrive at the same point where these critical questions that guide the hybrid interpretive contextual framework lead to.

## Conclusion

This chapter sought to offer a review of disability theories and also offered a framework which will guide the discussion in this study. Indeed, the study of the othering of disabled characters is influenced greatly by Garland-Thomson's concepts of the 'normate' and the 'extraordinary body.' This study has chosen the path of a hybrid contextual interpretive framework which seeks to understand the representation of disability in the African text by paying attention to the African culture and society as presented in the various texts, examining the different layers of interactions that go on between the disabled characters and the other characters as well as analysing how the novels and the messages they send across reinforce or dispel disability stereotypes.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# PORTRAIT OF 'THE DISABLED OTHER': ANALYSING DISABILITY STIGMA AND STEREOTYPES IN OKPEWHO'S *THE LAST DUTY*

## Introduction

The previous chapter of this work was a discussion on disability theory, which served as the framework for this study. The chapter sought to put in the right perspective the theory that underpins the literary analysis undertaken in this study by tracing how it has developed over the years. I also situated the discussions on literary disability studies within the African context and offered the hybrid contextual interpretive framework as a viable way of reading and analysing the representation of disabled characters in African literary work. The hybrid contextual interpretive framework allows scholars and researchers to apply relevant aspects of disability studies, as it has developed over the years, in their study of disability representation in African literary texts while maintaining an eye on what may be described as 'African' as far as issues pertaining to disability representation is concerned. This approach of studying disability representation in the African literary text is therefore based on the close reading of texts in an attempt to examine critical issues such as the place of the disabled character in

society, perceptions about disability and how the disabled character is presented as 'the other' in the various African societies the texts seek to represent.

In this chapter, we begin the discussion of the selected texts for this study by looking at the portrait of the disabled character as represented in Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty.* This will help us to see the kind of image that represents disability in the text. Indeed, this kind of image reveals how the society within which the story is set perceives and reacts towards disability especially when it comes to the stereotypes and stigma associated with it. Our focus in this chapter is to therefore analyse the representation of Odibo, who is presented as the 'crippled other' in the text. Through a close reading of *The Last Duty*, this chapter takes a critical look at the representation of Odibo by looking at how his physical impairment becomes the basis for his being stigmatized and manipulated in his society. The disability stereotypes used in the text will also be analysed in our bid to examine how they all contribute towards the othering of the disabled character. The analysis looks at how, as a result of his impairment, Odibo is othered by the normate; he internalises his identity as 'the other' in his society as well as how he is presented as 'the other' in his interactions with the normate in the society.

According to Goodley (2011), 'To be disabled evokes a marginalised place in society, culture, economics and politics' (p. 1). The fundamental marker that underlies the othering of disabled characters in most societies is physical body difference. Danielle H. McDougall (2017) states that 'The pathologizing of disability can be examined within the context of how other groups are 'othered' because of their difference' (p. 359). In Okpewho's *The Last Duty*, physical body difference plays a key role in determining who is considered a disabled character. I use the term 'physical body difference' in this context to refer to a difference in body type that appears visible or perceivable by others through the use of their senses of sight or hearing. According to Aidan Diamond and Lauranne Poharec (2017), bodies become

'othered' based on 'observable difference from the normate' (p. 403). This means that if there is something about the body of a character that is markedly different from the bodies of the other characters represented in the text, such a character assumes the position of 'the other.' As Mitchell and Snyder (2000) posit, 'Physical and cognitive inferiority has historically characterised the means by which bodies have been constructed as 'deviant'" (p. 2). This is because disability is defined by 'a notion of difference from what is perceived to be 'normal' in terms of health and embodiment' (Barker, 2015, p. 101).

Consequently, the more visible one's body difference is, the more markedly different a character becomes. Rod Hermestson (2017) posits that disabled persons are presented as 'the other' in both the media and literary works, and they are also 'represented stereotypically as pitiable, evil, burdensome…or as self-pitying' (p. 34). Disability, therefore greatly affects the relationships that exist between disabled characters and other characters, the powers they wield, what is deemed possible for disabled characters to achieve, as well as the challenges they face. Usually, the absence of other characters that have similar body types may tend to even highlight more what is deemed to be missing or considered to be defective in an individual's body.

**Creating an 'Other': Physical Body Difference as a Marker of Otherness**

Okpewho's *The Last Duty* presents to us a story that takes place during a wartime. We are introduced to Aku whose husband is arrested and jailed as a result of the machinations of Chief Toje, his business rival. Toje, who, as a result of his involvement with prostitutes, becomes impotent, decides to test his potency by engaging in an adulterous relationship with Aku. Toje takes advantage of the support he offers to Aku to use to manipulate her into accepting to be his mistress. Unfortunately, due to Toje's impotence, he is unable to sexually satisfy Aku. Ironically, it is Odibo, a crippled errands boy of Toje, who succeeds in having sex with Aku. This leads to a relationship which develops between Odibo and Aku. When

Toje gets to know of this, he engages Odibo in a machete fight which eventually leads to the tragic end of the story.

As we are introduced to Odibo in *The Last Duty*, he tells us that, 'I know I am nothing. I know I have nothing.' (p. 6). These words of Odibo set the tone for what will become a dominant picture of this disabled character. The entire presentation of Odibo in the novel is, therefore, influenced greatly by this sense of worthlessness he embraces. This is revealed in the Odibo's repetition of 'I' as he refers to the things he has grown to believe about himself. His physical difference, therefore, becomes symbolic of 'cultural undesirability' (Mitchell and Snyder, 2000; p. 2). We find out that Odibo's sense of worthlessness is rooted in how he sees himself as an individual. Odibo informs us that he has 'only one good arm' (p. 60) because he is crippled in the other arm. This crippled arm serves as the source of his physical difference. Toje consequently describes him as 'a damned cripple' (p. 176) who is not good for anything. Apparently, his crippled arm is different from what all the other members of the society have since it does not conform to what is expected of the normal human body. Garland-Thomson (1997) argues that rendering such a body as being disabled is because it does not fit into the cultural expectations of bodies in his society. According to Aidan Diamond and Lauranne Poharec (2017), 'Bodies that do not physically or socially conform to social norms' are 'negatively defined as 'abnormal'' (p. 403). It is therefore not surprising that Odibo walks with the consciousness of one who recognises and accepts that he is different from all others, as evidenced in, 'I have only one arm. And what can a man do with only one arm?' (p. 60). This conclusion Odibo comes to is based on his society's concept of the normate and the extraordinary body (Garland-Thomson, 1997). The emphasis Odibo places on having 'only one arm' is a form of admission that his body structure does not measure up to what is considered to be a normal body.

According to Mitchell and Snyder (2000), 'disability has been a sign of inferior life itself' (p. 3). Odibo's body difference is therefore classified as an anomaly, a deviation or a defect, which renders him as 'the other' since he appears different. It is this tag of having a defect which then sets the disabled character apart from the other characters. Odibo, therefore becomes disabled by his society as a result of the tag that is placed on him that having only one arm makes him incomplete as a human being. As Acquaviva (2020) states, 'The inability of disabled people to participate fully in community life is not caused solely by the impairment. Societal factors, including hostile or misinformed attitudes of individuals towards them, also operate to exclude them' (p. 2). The estimation of Odibo's body as being outside the norm is a form of societal exclusion that excludes him from being a full participant in the happenings in his society.

Of all the characters in the novel, it is Odibo who is presented as having a body difference that is perceivable by those who encounter him. What is clear is that the socialisation Odibo receives is critical to his perception of self. As he himself mentions,

> All I ever grew up to see was a stump where a left arm should be. And however, it came about-my getting one arm instead of two like everybody else-it is impossible that the same fate that gave me one arm should have addled my brain?' (p. 60)

It appears that as a result of what Odibo observes and is taught about the ideal human body, he comes to affirm the perception that there is something wrong with his own body. The image of Odibo presented here is that of an individual who looks down on himself. The simile used is Odibo's way of comparing his body to the bodies of others. After such comparison, he rhetorical asks why fate will be so unfair to him by denying him a normal body and also ensuring that he does not have a good brain.

Hall (2016) states that 'disability is understood in the act as an impairment that limits at least one life activity or is perceived as doing so' (p. 5). In the case of Odibo, even though

his impairment does not serve as any form of real limitation, it is the societal perception of his condition that disenables him. It is indeed very possible that if Odibo had grown to realise that all the other members of his society had only one arm, he would not have considered it a challenge for him to have only one good arm. Here, Odibo is denied membership in the dominant group because of his body difference. Those whose bodies are considered to be ideal, therefore, become the dominant-in group, while the likes of Odibo, whose bodies are considered to be defective, become members of the dominated out-group (Staszak, 2008). Odibo's acceptance that a left arm should have been where a stump was is also a result of his comparing his body to those of others.

Comparison is therefore key in determining which body is normal and which body is not normal as far as societies are concerned. Garland-Thomson (1999) calls this 'the attribution of corporeal difference' (p. 6), which becomes the basis for discriminating against those whose bodies are considered to be deviations. This means that to determine whether a body is normal or abnormal in a society calls for a form of comparison whereby bodies are judged based on that particular society's concept of the ideal body (Garland-Thomson, 2017; Diamond & Poharec, 2017). It is when bodies are compared that various classifications, categorisations and segregations occur. Bodies are, therefore, always being consciously or unconsciously compared with others in order to see what meets the standard and what does not. Odibo's attitude in blaming 'fate' (p. 60) for his condition is a way of mourning his own body because of its presumed defect and unacceptability. He blames 'fate' for being unfair to him in not ensuring that he had the same body type as all others. The only thing he uses to console himself is what he refers to as 'something my late father said to me long, long ago keeps coming back to my mind any time it dares run away with itself: God never leaves a job half done…' (p. 62). This allusion to Odibo's grandfather is what he holds on to event though his lived experience in society presents him with different sets of facts. According to Goodley

(2011), in addition to societies discriminating against disabled persons, such individuals have also been 'hated, made exotic, pitied, patronised and ignored' (p. xi).

Odibo describes himself as an 'awkward mass of a body' (p. 60) and something which is 'utterly useless' (p. 60). In fact, he laments:

> What use is this awkward mass of a body, he said, if you cannot help yourself. And you have no mind, No sense. Nothing. All you have is a huge body. And that is of no use to anyone. No use at all, not even to yourself. Utterly useless.' (p. 60)

Indeed, Okpewho's style of writing helps Odibo to keep engaging this internal dialoguing that helps him to try to make sense of his personhood. The sense of being worthless that Odibo keeps expressing about himself is an indication of the negative image he has internalised. The dominant portrait of Odibo, as presented throughout the text, is a brainless, worthless and weak hulk who only has a huge body but nothing else to offer. The use of negative adjectives, metaphors and similes by Odibo as he presents himself to the readers paints the image of an individual who does not consider himself to be as important as the normates in his society. According to McDougall (2017), disabled persons are considered to have 'deviated from the conformity and homogeneity expected in normal society' (p. 359). Odibo's negative view of himself, therefore offers us the opportunity to not merely see how he perceives his condition but also the kind of socialisation he has had. I am of the view that the thoughts that Odibo expresses in the above extract are all part of statements he grew up believing about himself as a result of what others told him. Odibo's description of himself as being 'utterly useless' is something he has come to accept about himself just because he is crippled in one arm. It is ironical how a defect in one arm is used to discredit an individual's entire body.

Once Odibo accepts that his body is useless because he has a defect, it affects his sense of worth. This is why he states that 'I know I am not worth much. Or anything. I know I cannot help myself or anybody. I cannot think or do anything. But it is hardly my fault. I have

only one good arm' (p. 60). According to Hermeston (2017), disabled persons may internalize disability stereotypes, which can be harmful to them. Again, we see that Odibo regarding himself as not being worth much is directly connected to the fact that he accepts that he has 'only one good arm.' This view of Odibo being worthless as a result of his having a crippled arm disables him and renders him insignificant in his society. Odibo, therefore, becomes disabled not so much because of his impairment but because he is presented as being worthless and is made to accept such a negative image of himself. From what Odibo says about himself, I am of the view that the disabling of Odibo as a character is greatly dependent on the kind of disability stereotypes he is made to believe about himself and not merely because of his defect. How a society, therefore, treats people with certain body peculiarities or differences goes a long way in affecting how such persons are able to function properly and effectively in those societies.

This is why Odibo's confession that he 'cannot think or do anything' (p. 60) reveals that even though he is only crippled in one arm, he is made to accept that this supposed defect has rendered him as being mentally unfit. The ability to 'think' is contrasted with the ability to 'do.' Unfortunately, the image we are presented of Odibo is that he is unable to do any of them. In this regard, physical impairment is presented as being synonymous with an individual losing his/her cognitive abilities. It is important to realise that Odibo's assessment of himself based on his body difference makes him not only devalue himself but also present himself as a fool who cannot even think for himself. It can be observed that the stereotype that physical disability affects the cognitive ability of people with impairments is not only unfortunate but also a manipulative tactic. As Odibo accepts that he cannot think, he cedes power to Toje, who wants to use Odibo to achieve his purposes. What is obvious is the fact that it is not really true that Odibo cannot think. Rather, it is Toje who manipulates Odibo into thinking that he cannot think in order for him to succeed in gaining control over his life.

Odibo wonders why 'the same fate that gave me one arm should have addled my brain?' (p. 60).

Another way this negative perception of self as a result of body difference affects Odibo is seen in how he considers any dream about a better future as being a mere 'painful fancy' (p. 62). The use of the oxymoron shows the fact even though Odibo wishes that the dream will become a reality, he has no confidence that that can ever happen. In fact, Odibo's sense of hopelessness as a result of his defect develops to the extent that he cannot even dream of having a better future. He sees his dreams as being impossible to achieve:

> Sometimes I dream mighty dreams. I dream I am a full man, complete with everything, including two strong and healthy arms. Ruling over this town, and sitting comfortably on top of inexhaustible riches, and my house paved with gold. I wake up cursing God for burdening my sleep with such painful fancy. For I know I can never realise even the minutest portion of that wild fantasy. I don't have anything up my head.' (p. 61-62)

While one may consider Odibo's reference to 'mighty dream' as a form of exaggeration, it is also a testament of how all his life is reduced to dreams and fantasies which he considers impossible to be realised.

It is interesting to note that Odibo's image of himself as being a half-man denies him full participation in the communal life of his society. He sees his body as being 'utterly useless', and he considers himself as having a 'addled brain.' He considers himself as not being fit enough to be in charge, rule, enjoy the best things of life and even possess power. The only place where Odibo is able to imagine himself as being a complete man is in his dreams. Odibo dreams that he is a 'full man, complete with everything, including two strong and healthy arms.' It is worth noting that all the good things Odibo imagines himself doing in his dreams are contingent on him having 'two strong and healthy arms.' No wonder he wakes up from such dreams only 'cursing God for burdening' his 'sleep with such painful fancy.' To Odibo, to dream of a better life with his crippled arm is a painful fancy which cannot be

realised. That is why when he wakes up to reality, he tells us that not even the 'minutest portion of that wild fantasy' will be fulfilled because he has nothing up his head. Odibo is, therefore, caught up in a situation where he sees nothing good about himself and cannot even accept the possibility of anything good happening in his life. He is just a prisoner of choice living in a hovel. That having certain impairments renders one's future as being hopeless is a disability stereotype that keeps Odibo not aspiring to become anything useful in life. Odibo words reveal that he sees a bleak future that has no hope or promise for him.

It is therefore not surprising that Odibo's perception of his body difference even ends up affecting how he relates with other members of society. Aku observes that:

> Beneath that seeming hostility of the man was the unquestioning servility of a dog. Or maybe his crippled arm was the reason. For as he sat there before me, I could also see that he was making every effort to hide his defect, casting furtive glances now and then as though he thought someone was about to unveil his stump of an arm' (pg. 65-66).

It is important to note that before Aku gets close to Odibo, she interprets his tendency to withdraw and keep to himself as a form of 'hostility.' Metaphorically, Aku compares way of srvimg Toje, his master, to the 'unquestioning servility of a dog.' This metaphor shows how Odibo is reduced to that of animal who is merely at the service of his master. It is rather later on that Aku realises that the effort by Odibo 'to hide his defect' is because of the discomfort of being different. Odibo's fear of having the 'stump of an arm' unveiled is, therefore an admission of a sense of inferiority as a result of the physical difference in his body. This then becomes visible to Aku and others who come into contact with Odibo. As readers, we are able to focus on the tensions that ensue as a result of Odibo's impairment. This is not normally acceptable in real-life situations. Ultimately, Odibo's crippled arm becomes a subject which creates tension between Odibo and Aku. The crippled arm, due to its difference, calls for questioning by the normate. However, the normate does not know how to go about finding out what might have caused one arm to be crippled. Such kind of

questioning is deemed as being inappropriate because of the discomfort it may cause. Just as it pertains to life outside the literary text, different forms of body differences tend to cause people to stare at the one with the body, which is deemed to be different. The sense of discomfort Odibo feels is because he sees himself as being different based on the fact that his body does not perfectly match what the majority have. It is, therefore, not surprising that the sense of being 'the other' as a result of his body difference affects Odibo's confidence in terms of his interaction with the normate. Unfortunately, this is what is termed as he being seemingly hostile.

The interactions that go on between Odibo and other characters help us to realise how that influences Odibo's perception of himself. Tom Shakespeare (1994) argues that people who are not disabled enjoy demeaning those who are disabled because that is what makes them appear powerful, generous and important. Significantly, Toje refers to Odibo as being a 'useless mass' (p. 8), 'The damned imbecile' (p. 209), 'brute' (p. 212), a 'worthless body' (p. 8), among other demeaning words. Toje also refers to Odibo's room as 'a hovel' (175). The stigmatisation of Odibo by Toje shows how people with impairments become objects of scorn and ridicule because of the difference in their bodies. Toje uses negative adgjectives to paint a demeaning image of Odibo and also make him an object of ridicule in the sight of others. As Brons (2015) rightly indicates, it is the 'psychological need of self-affirmation' by the normate that 'drives the construction of the superior self/in-group versus the inferior other/out-group' (p. 76). For Odibo, the negative perceptions about him as a character with a perceivable body difference become what causes him to lose the dignities, privileges and respect of those in his male category. For Toje, ensuring that Odibo forever lives with a negative image of himself is something he does deliberately as part of his plans to manipulate him. As a manipulator, creating in his victim a sense of dependency on him is very critical. That is why Toje manipulates Odibo into thinking that without him, he is nothing. The use of

insults and derogatory terms to describe and refer to Odibo is a key manipulative tool Toje uses in order to make Odibo see himself as inferior to others even though he also has something he is hiding. Toje succeeds in doing this because he is considered to be a normate and, as such, has the right to determine the identity of Odibo (Staszak, 2018).

Indeed, if Odibo went through life feeling worthless and useless, it was because Toje made sure to give him reasons to do so and always reminded him that as an individual with a crippled arm, he was good for nothing. Odibo's body becomes the subject of constant insults and derogatory remarks. Odibo's body becomes the focus of Toje's attack. This is indeed a deliberate attempt to demean Odibo by letting him feel that as a result of his impairment, the rest of his body is good for nothing. What is obvious is that at this stage, what Toje is doing is not merely stigmatizing him as a result of his impairment. By describing Odibo as having no mind and no sense but having a huge, useless body, Toje seeks to impose a sense of superiority over Odibo, which will then elevate him above the disabled other. This is a key strategy used by the members of the dominant in-group to create a positive image for themselves and, at the same time, construct a negative image for the members of the dominated out-group (Staszak, 2018). For Toje, this strategy helps to keep Odibo in a place of bondage where he cannot break free from his influence and manipulation. The more Odibo is made to feel useless as a result of his body difference, the more he remains tied to Toje and gets to be used to serve the needs of the superior normate. This is why, in all of this, it is Odibo's body that becomes the focal point. The sense of uselessness Toje imposes on Odibo is a manipulative strategy meant to imprison him forever so that he will always feel that he is at the mercy of the superior normate.

The result of Toje's manipulative othering of Odibo is very dire. Indeed, when manipulative normates force a false identity on those with extraordinary bodies, the acceptance of such a negative image can lead to the internalization of the manipulative words,

descriptions and treatments meted out by the normate. This, therefore, creates a false identity for the disabled other. This even becomes a greater bondage for the disabled to break free from since the false identity becomes what the disabled accepts concerning himself and how he tends to perceive himself. As Staszak (2018) indicates, 'all groups tend to value themselves and distinguish themselves from others whom they devalue' (p. 3).

**Disability Stereotypes**

Through Odibo's internal monologues, as well as his interactions with the other characters, there are other images presented about him that can be seen as disability stereotypes. According to Garland-Thomson (2017), when it comes to the representation of disabled characters, disability stereotypes are often repeated in literary texts. Garland-Thomson further indicates that the more the literary representation seeks to be realistic to what pertains in life, the more likely the representation may exaggerate 'an already highlighted physical difference' (p. 11). To Hall (2016), 'Certain novels, plays, short stories and poems reinforce oppressive ideas of normalcy, sentimentalise and solidify stereotypes about disability' (p. 4). For the African writer who commits to truly represent his/her society (Achebe, 1978; Nyamdi, 2006; Soyinka, 1968), the challenge becomes how issues about disability can be represented in ways that they do not become counterproductive. This is very critical since, as Hall (2016) says, 'literary writing has the potential to reach large and diverse populations; it also serves a pedagogic function in the sense that it not only documents but also shapes attitudes towards disability' (p. 4).

Odibo tells us, 'I have only one arm. And what can a man do with only one arm? They say I inherited it from my family long dead. I don't know' (p. 60). The rhetorical questionings Odibo asks are symptomatic of the internal battles within him. These words of Odibo reveal a key stereotype about disability, which is that impairments are hereditary. This understanding of disability may be as a result of the belief system in his community. It

appears that one of such dominant ideas, which is a stereotype that is used to sideline and discriminate against those with impairments, is that they are inherited. It is, therefore, not surprising that in some African communities, when an individual wants to marry into another family, one of the key background checks done is whether there are people with impairments or any form of chronic sickness from the would-be partner's family. Indeed, the notion that when there is a disabled person in the family, the likelihood of others developing the same impairment is not only demeaning but discriminating (Quayson, 2007). It is a way of denying people with impairments to fully participate in the lives of their respective societies. It is interesting to note Odibo's reference to a 'they' who told him that his impairment was inherited from a ,long-dead family member. In fact, this notion of disability being inherited is one of the major means of stigmatizing various forms of bodily differences and impairments. Even though such a notion of disability being passed on from one family member to another may not have any scientific basis, in most cases, it sometimes assumes a spiritual status whereby individuals begin to believe without any form of doubt in the veracity of such false claims.

Another stereotype that we see through Odibo's lamentation about how Toje treats him is that those with impairments can only survive in life by depending on the normates. It appears that the systems of most societies have been ordered in such a way that ensures that disabled persons tend to 'suffer economic hardship' (Goodley, 2011; p 2). This is what translates into the stereotype that for disabled characters to survive, they must depend on the normate. Odibo tells us:

> Ever since Toje became mixed up with Oshevire's wife. Calling me names in her very presence. Telling her I am no use to my hearing. Pointing to my crippled arm saying that what can I do with only one arm. That I am useless, and that without him I would be a dead man by now because I can't fend for myself.' (p. 60)

Odibo is made to see himself as being a helpless being who needs the normate in order to survive. He is also made to believe that he must depend on those with normal bodies. This system of creating a hierarchy of human beings whereby some are dependent on others is what Toje uses to ensure that Odibo remains in his grips. Unfortunately, this erroneous belief is also internalized by Odibo since he comes to the place of accepting that without Toje, there is nothing he can do to help himself. Shakespeare (1997) states that it is the supposed passivity of disabled persons that helps those considered to be normal to see themselves as being superior.

Consequently, disabled persons are presented as being at the mercy of able-bodied persons. Hermeston (2017) states that disabled persons are 'represented stereotypically as pitiable, evil, burdensome…or as self-pitying' (p. 34). As a manipulator, Toje intentionally feeds Odibo with a negative image of himself which makes it difficult for him to accept himself in order to access his capabilities. Calling Odibo derogatory names before Aku and making him see himself as being inadequate is a deliberate agenda by Toje to ensure that Odibo remains under his control. According to Shakespeare (1999), the concept of 'disability often reinforces a second-class status' (p. 56). Toje makes sure to get Odibo to believe that as a person with a different body, his survival and existence are based on the benevolence of the normate. This is definitely false since it is merely a ploy by Toje to make Odibo have a low image of himself and, therefore, give up on any hope of breaking free from his manipulation.

It can again be seen that Toje makes Odibo feel that he is economically dependent on him. Odibo mentions that:

> It is not fair, to try to disgrace me in the presence of nobody else, and a woman at that. I know I am not much use, but he should at least allow me a little pride. And give me a chance. For maybe someday I can try to do something to help myself; and stand on my two feet. And then I won't have to offend his sight any longer. And he won't need to bring shame upon me, most of all in the presence of a woman.' (p. 60-61)

It is therefore not surprising that as part of achieving his freedom, Odibo dreams of a future where he will no longer be dependent on Toje and will, therefore, have the opportunity to escape from some of the embarrassments he has been subjecting him to. Unfortunately, Odibo feels indebted to Toje and cannot see how he can break free:

> I don't like the whole business. I know I have no choice. I cannot protest against this strange service, for one word could rob me of all the favours that Toje sees fit to bestow upon me in his kindness: food, old clothes, even the very glory that I am in his service and under his control.' (p. 61)

It is as a result of Odibo seeing himself as being at the mercy of Toje that makes him feels that he has no choice but to continue doing the bidding of Toje. Ironically, Odibo does not realise that Toje's only interest in him is because he wants to use him to achieve his own parochial interest. Consequently, Odibo is successfully mentally maimed by Toje to the extent that he has to look to him for food and old clothes. In fact, Odibo is under the control of Toje and is itself presented as a source of honour. Odibo has been made to think that he has no choice apart from depending on Toje, whose only interest is to manipulate Odibo and use him to achieve his evil plans.

**'A Brooding Hulk of a Cripple': The disabled character as an object of disdain**

**of a Cripple': The disabled character as an object of disdain**

In *The Last Duty*, Okumagba's disdain for Odibo is revealed in how he deliberately and constantly refers to him for his impairment. Labelling is considered to be a key way by which disabled characters are stigmatized and marginalised (Moasun & Mfoafo-M'Carthy, 2020). After one particular enemy raid, Okumagba tells us that there were in Aku's house, 'the woman herself, her son and that brooding hulk of a cripple, Odibo. I had seen him go into the house earlier in the evening, and I do not think he had come out all through the prolonged raid. (pg. 201) The offensive description of Odibo as a 'brooding hulk of a cripple' is a demeaning way of referring to Odibo by mentioning his impairment. The metaphor of a

'brooding hulk' also further paints a negative image of Odibo which reveals how Okumagba has no regard for him. Here, the reference to Odibo's impairment is a way of stigmatizing him. According to Adom-Opare (2020), the wrong understanding of disability, which causes people to stigmatize disabled persons, can negatively affected them mentally. In another instance, while still commenting on the suspicion he had about Odibo, Aku and Chief Toje, Okumagba tells us:

> I feel sure now that there must be some dirty business going on among the whole damned lot of them-the cripple had even spent a couple of nights or more in that house. The sight of him going into the place had turned my stomach with anger. I would have been glad of an opportunity to put an end to his hulking life and forever save myself from this most odious details. Why should I be condemned to watch over him go in and have his orgies while I endure every mood of the weather. (p. 201)

Here too, Okumagba's reference to Odibo as 'the cripple' and his intent to 'put an end to his hulking life' is a clear portrayal of the deep-seated hate he has for Odibo. What was repulsive to Okumagba was not just the act he suspected Odibo to be involved in but the fact that Odibo was crippled in one arm. Okumagba, therefore, finds it insulting for him to be offering protection to a man he does not consider to be worthy enough of such courtesies. Since Odibo is considered as being the 'other' in society, Okumagba is repulsed by the fact that he has to offer a form of protection to such a character, especially when he had cause to think that something untoward was going on between Odibo and Aku. It is, therefore, not surprising that Okumagba disregards Odibo primarily by referring to him in a demeaning way and presenting a negative image of Odibo. Okumagba is annoyed because, as a soldier on duty, he ends up guarding a cripple whom he considers worthless. Barker (2015) acknowledges that while various forms of impairment 'may not limit a person's functions,' they may 'subject them to stigma and discrimination from others' (p. 100).

Okumagba's constant reference to Odibo's defect shows how Odibo's body difference becomes a key symbol of negative identity for him as a character. Since the physical body

difference of Odibo is considered to be a defect, he ends up being referred to by that condition. Indeed, by referring to the individual with a physical body difference by a particular impairment or defect they have, the possessor of such a body ends up being reduced to what may be considered as a negative condition. This is why, normally, this kind of reference to individuals by their physical body differences is negative and demeaning. In *The Last Duty*, Odibo's crippled arm ends up becoming the point of reference when it comes to, he being addressed or referred to. This form of negative referencing is part of what is considered to be the stigmatisation of the disabled as a result of their body difference.

**Towards An African Disability Narrative**

Since literature tends to mirror society, it may be argued that what writers represent in their works is merely what pertains to society. The challenge, however, arises as to whether literary artists should be held responsible for the kind of imagery they paint about disability in their texts or not. While what the author presents may be argued to be an attempt to merely paint a picture of what goes on in society, such a position, however, does not totally exonerate writers when it comes to their works being subjected to scrutiny. Indeed, the stories that are told, as well as how they are told, have consequences that sometimes go beyond what the writers initially estimated or even imagined. The subtle or overt messages that are passed on through various literary works, therefore, become very essential as we consider the broader thematic concerns of those works. Such messages may not necessarily represent the views of the author but rather serve as giving readers access to different societies in order to reveal the attitudes and perspectives of people towards different phenomena. Therefore, while such stereotypical representations of the disabled can be injurious to the fight for disability rights and identity, they seek to paint a picture of some of the silent battles that are easily ignored in real life because they have become the norm.

What this means is that while authors have a duty to ensure that through their works, certain negative narratives about disability get corrected, there will still be texts that, even though they may not appear to portray disabled characters in a positive light, may still have a good contribution to make as far as disability studies are concerned. Such texts may not necessarily represent the author's opinion but rather help to capture very difficult issues that society usually ignores, especially because of how sensitive they may be. These matters that concern disabled characters are relevant, and the literary space helps readers to encounter characters who battle and deal with such situations.

Consequently, the focus of the researcher in unearthing issues about disability as presented in the literary texts is how the disabled characters are represented as members of their respective societies, especially the interactions that go on that involve them and the normates. Indeed, since disability and the matters related to it have to do very much with society and culture, the literary work becomes a key space that offers us insight into how the disabled characters are presented as the 'other' in their respective societies. A study of disability representation as it pertains to the universe of the text, therefore, requires that the researcher pays particular attention to what is both said and implied when issues about disability come up in the literary text. This is why a close reading of the text is very critical. This means that the interactions between the normate and those with extraordinary bodies become a key way by which we understand how disability is perceived within a given society, as presented in the literary text. By this, we can talk about society as it has progressed and how various changes that have either occurred or have not occurred help us to understand how such societies view disability. We can also view society and its treatment of disability issues based on the various happenings in that particular society. For instance, we could look at the situation of disabled characters in a particular society when there is peace as well as

during times of civil unrest. In fact, all these representations of societal perceptions and changes tend to contribute greatly to the study of disability within the world of literature.

From our discussion of the representation of the disabled character in *The Last Duty*, it can be seen that Odibo, who is crippled in one arm, is presented as a stereotypical character whose portrayal succeeds in throwing light on how people whose bodies appear different become victims of othering in their societies. On the surface, we may readily reject and denounce the disability representation in Okpewho's novel because it does not appear to paint a good picture of people with 'other bodies.' In fact, the thought of considering Okpewho's novel as presenting a negative African disability narrative is very valid. In this context, I refer to a negative African disability narrative as the kind of narrative that does not present disabled characters as being empowered or seeking to empower them to live beyond the limitations and negative images placed on them by their respective societies. A negative African disability narrative may, therefore, leave readers even much more prejudiced against disabled individuals in real life since the picture such narratives present only serves to enforce negative images about the disabled. However, to disregard such narratives is to call for a form of utopic narratives that will seek to glorify disabled characters even more than they appear in real life. Indeed, this may end up being counterproductive by not painting the real picture of the struggles and issues disabled characters go through in their daily lives.

The opposite of the negative disability narrative is what could be considered a positive African disability narrative in terms of the portrayal of disabled characters. This is the kind of narrative that presents disabled characters in a new and fresh perspective that reveals the beauty, potential, capabilities and 'normalessness' of one's body being different in the midst of other bodies. This is a departure from the seemingly realistic narrative that focuses on portraying disability and its associated challenges in African society. Such a narrative, therefore, is empowering in the sense that the disabled characters are not presented as being

limited by their otherness as they seek to achieve their dreams and maximize their potential. It is again empowering in presenting how people with body differences navigate through life without becoming victims of discrimination, stigmatisation and stereotyping. This type of disability narrative may even present stories about how characters with various body differences are doing well in various sectors of life without being limited by their supposed impairments. It may also capture technological advancements and support systems in societies that are helping to make the lives of individuals with different bodies live without much hindrances. This way, even the readers can see people with body differences in a new light and such a renewed mindset can help in the interactions in real life.

Unfortunately, narratives about empowered disabled characters in African literary texts seem not to have grown to this level yet. It is therefore not surprising that in *The Last Duty*, Okpewho's narrative may be described as negative in the sense that the disabled character at the centre of the text is not empowered but rather presented as a stereotypical disabled character whose actions and inactions leave much to be desired. However, the subtle or overt messages that are passed on through these kinds of African disability narratives become essential as we consider the broader thematic concerns of those works. Their thematic concerns give readers access to different societies in order to reveal the attitudes and perspectives of people toward different phenomena. This is an attempt to capture the lived experiences of disabled characters by using literature as the medium. Therefore, while such stereotypical representations of the disabled can be injurious to the fight for disability rights and identity, they seek to paint a picture of some of the silent battles that are easily ignored in real life because they have become the norm. What such texts present mostly tend to be a call to action in addressing the issues that are raised.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined the portrayal of Odibo as the crippled other in Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*. The analysis reveals that while Okpewho's novel may be considered to present a negative view of disability, it helps to unravel a very key issue that has to do with how, by being othered and stigmatized by their societies, people with impairment sometimes end up becoming victims of manipulation by some of the normates in society. Chief Toje capitalizes on Odibo's crippled hand and uses that to make Odibo look down on himself. The result is that the more Odibo, as a crippled other, internalises the negative opinions and manipulations by Toje, the more difficult it becomes for him to break free from his control. What is, therefore, revealed is that the othering of people with impairment is a deliberate attempt by some members of society so that they can have control over such persons and use them for their evil plans.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# BEING/BECOMING A MAN: AN EXAMINATION OF SEX AS A SYMBOL OF MASCULINE POWER IN ISIDORE OKPEWHO'S *THE LAST DUTY*

## Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the portrayal of Odibo as a disabled character in Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*. The chapter focused on the use of disability stereotypes and stigma to present Odibo as a character who is othered as a result of his body difference. It was argued that disability stereotypes and stigma offer us the opportunity to see how people with various impairments are seen and regarded in their societies. Again, such stereotypes and disability stigma are sometimes intentionally used by certain normates to present a negative image of people with impairments and thereby render them as being 'the other.' Stereotyping and stigmatisation are, therefore, deliberate tools of manipulation that are used by some normates to ensure that people with impairments remain in bondage and are unable to break free from their control.

This present chapter focuses on how sex is used as a symbol of masculine power in Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*. Shakespeare (1999) observes that 'masculinity as an ideological and psychological process is connected to prejudice against disabled people in

general' (p. 58). The focus of the chapter is to, therefore, trace the sexual journey of Odibo right from the beginning of the novel till the end. It looks at the phases Odibo goes through as he grows from being a seemingly asexual character to an individual who asserts his sexuality even in the face of challenges. This analysis adds to discussions on the intersections between sex and disability in the literary text by revealing how sex plays a critical role in the character development of the disabled character in the novel. The transformation the disabled character goes through in the area of his sexual life, as well as the role sex plays in the novel, are therefore critical to what this chapter seeks to unravel. Christopher Krentz (2018) has observed that, as interest in disability studies continues to rise, there seems to be a special interest in 'how gender, sexuality, race and class overlap, and in how social construction and chosen identities intersect' (p. 357).

Sex and disability are at the core of Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*. In the novel, Chief Toje becomes impotent after sleeping with a prostitute. This information is revealed by Emuakpor who is regarded as a good traditional healer:

> I have always said that money makes a fool of a wise man. And some of the men we have around here don't strike me as the best example of wisdom. Look at a man like Toje. He has money all right. But at his age does he not know any better than to go all the way to Iddu and start scrubbing around with prostitutes? Now, he ends up impotent. (p. 169)

Toje's impotence becomes very key as far as the development of the plot of the novel is concerned. Emuakpor considers Toje's decision to engage with a prostitute as being ironic since it does not align with his claim of being a wise man. Toje, considers being impotent as a sign of weakness and shame for him. He is portrayed as a character who greatly cherishes the rights and privileges that come with being a respected male in his community. He sees himself as the 'most important man' (p. 175) in the community. Consequently, he tries to cover up his impotence as he goes about seeking a solution to the problem. While referring to the important role sex plays in Ghanaian society, Ennin (2021) states that 'sexual prowess'

plays a key role when it comes to 'the ultimate test of masculinity' (p. 95). Consequently, 'many impotent men go to great lengths to avoid being exposed as this will diminish them in the eyes of the community' (p. 94). It is, therefore not surprising that the ability to have sex becomes a very important and defining factor as far as the determination of masculine power is concerned in *The Last Duty*.

In the process of seeking a solution to his impotence, Toje decides to use Aku as the lady with whom he will exercise his sexual potency. The choice of Aku as the object by which Toje tests his potency is very deliberate. The first reason is that in the absence of Aku's husband, Toje becomes a key benefactor to Aku. This form of dependency, therefore, makes it difficult for Aku to deny Toje's sexual advancement. For Emenike and Asuzu (2020), the position Aku occupies in the novel presents her as being objectified for the sexual pleasure of men. Indeed, Toje does not expect Aku to mention her escapades with another man while her husband is in prison to any other person. Most importantly, the choice of Aku can be interpreted as being symbolic of a masculine power war. Indeed, Toje refers to the possibility of being able to sleep with Aku as 'the prize' (p. 175).

Toje, who succeeds in getting Oshevire imprisoned as a result of the two being business rivals, seeks not only to try his sexual power on Oshevire's wife but also conquer her as part of the battle between the two males. This is why when Toje hears that Aku's husband, Oshevire, is about to be released from jail, he laments 'I had rather that I had full sexual knowledge of his wife before he was released than miss the prize and face the double shame' (p. 175). In fact, Toje does not see the whole community of Urukpe seeing him as an adulterer as being as much of a problem as he was living 'with the deep personal knowledge' that he is 'the most important man in the town is impotent' (p. 175). Toje presents sex as occupying a place of power and great importance in the village of Urukpe. In the novel, the ability to have sex is symbolic of one's masculine power. It is, therefore, not surprising that

Toje goes to every extent seeking solutions so that his situation will not become known, not even to his wife. To him, for his wife or any other person to know of his predicament is for him to lose the cloak of power that he is clothed with. He is, therefore, ready to take every risk in order to regain his potency, which is a key sign of his masculine power. While Toje's impotence can be explored in greater detail in the context of disability, I choose to focus on Odibo's physical impairment since that becomes the basis for his othering. Indeed, as Garland-Thomson (2017) indicates, 'A disability's degree of visibility also affects social relations. An invisible disability, much like homosexual identity, always presents the dilemma of whether or when to come out or pass' (p. 14). I treat Toje's impotency as a form of invisible disability that does not greatly affect his relationships with the other characters in the novel, even though it is overall impact on the novel's plot is enormous.

As a respected man of his community, Toje cannot, however, afford to be seen patronizing the house of a woman who is staying alone with her son because her husband is in prison. He, therefore, decides to not only use Odibo as his middleman in order to get to Aku but also use Odibo's room as the place where he meets Aku. On the part of Odibo, since Toje is able to successfully create in him a mindset of dependency, Toje expects that he will continue to do his bidding. Toje refers to Odibo as, 'A damned cripple, who feeds from my hand!' (p. 176). He also calls Odibo and Aku 'two people who owe their very existence to me!' (p. 203). Again, Odibo also reveals how Toje succeeded in manipulating him by revealing that:

> It was he that made me so painfully aware of my defect. If it wasn't for him the saying that God never left a job half-done would have had an entirely different meaning for me. It was he that had chained my mind, my whole being. (p. 182)

By succeeding in creating in Odibo the mindset that he is totally dependent on him and that he cannot do anything for himself because of his impairment, Chief Toje tries to diminish Odibo's significance and make him perpetually think less of himself. Symbolically,

Odibo refers to this as the chaining of his mind. This is Toje's way of ensuring that Odibo does not ever rise to become a threat to his relationship with Aku. According to Anna Mollow and Robert Mcruer (2012), 'disabled people's access to sexual partners is further restricted by a pervasive cultural de-eroticisation of people with disabilities' (p. 4).

**The sexual growth process of Odibo**

Odibo, as a disabled male, is placed right at the centre of a masculine test of sexual potency, which then becomes the basis for him to rediscover his masculinity. What is obvious is the fact that as Aku begins to go to Odibo's house, there appears to be no suspicion from the members of the society that something is going on between the two of them. Again, Toje also does not seem to have any cause to be concerned about allowing Odibo to get close to Aku. In fact, this is not merely because Toje knows Odibo to be loyal. Odibo is initially presented in the novel as being asexual because of his impairment. As Shakespeare (1999) indicates, disabled men are usually disadvantaged when it comes to how male sexuality is traditionally constructed. It is, therefore, not surprising that due to his impairment, Odibo appears to be discriminated against even in the area of sexual pressure.

**The perceived asexual stage**

Indeed, the sexual journey of Odibo, who is the disabled male character in the text, can be grouped into a number of stages. A careful analysis of these stages reveals Odibo's growth as a character in terms of his sexuality and how that helps him to fully accept himself as a complete male. I refer to the first of Odibo's sexual journey as the perceived asexual stage. During this stage of the narrative, Odibo is presented without any sexual connotations or interests. He does not appear to either possess or express any sexual feelings to the opposite sex. According to Shakespeare (1999), the perception that 'disabled men are

perceived as safe is an example of biological reductionism' (p. 62). In fact, having a sexual relationship with a woman does not appear to be something that Odibo is interested in or capable of doing.

I argue that this stage is possible because, at this point, the disabled character, as in the case of Odibo, has imbibed a lot of negativities about who he is, what is possible for him and what he can achieve as far as life in general is concerned. Garland-Thomson (2017) states that the non-normate status accorded disability feminizes all disabled figures' (p. 9). What is obvious is that due to the disability stigma, Odibo grows up being used to, he tends to pity himself rather than see any form of value in his body. While referring to himself, Odibo states, 'I know I am not worth much. Or anything. I know I cannot help myself or anybody. I cannot think or do anything. But it is hardly my fault. I have only one good arm' (p. 60). The devaluing of an individual's body as a result of an impairment can, therefore, contribute greatly to that person feeling unwelcomed as far as participating in the sexual activities of his society is concerned. According to Tobin Siebers, 'disability signifies sexual limitation, regardless of whether the physical and mental features of a given impairment affect the ability to have sex' (p. 42).

A key characteristic of this stage is Odibo's disinterestedness in having any close relationship with women. It is, therefore, not surprising that at this point, Odibo expresses his dislike for women in general. This is revealed in how much going to Aku's house to call her for Toje becomes something that Odibo greatly struggles with. It is also worth noting that Odibo's discomfort with being around women influences him to make comments that portray him as being sexist. In fact, Odibo appears to have no problem with the maltreatment that he suffers at the hands of Toje. However, he becomes increasingly uncomfortable when Toje makes all kinds of negative comments about him in the presence of Aku. In fact, Odibo sees

the presence of Aku as a reason why Toje continues to demean and castigate him. Odibo laments:

> I don't like the whole thing. And I don't like the woman. I can't understand what is that they are doing with each other. I suppose I am not meant to understand. But as long as that woman is around, I know I will continue to be an object of ridicule. And perhaps one day she too will laugh at me. Women are like that. And that is why all my life I have had nothing to do with any woman. It is bad enough with men. Women would only drive me to kill myself…' (p. 61)

The words of Odibo portray him as one who is naïve, misogynist or misinformed. Obviously, this anti-women attitude is Odibo's way of preserving himself from any form of embarrassment. By being made to feel like 'the other' of the normal male, Odibo decides to stay away from women who he thinks will only make his situation worse. Indeed, at this stage of Toje's activities with Aku, Odibo does not have the full understanding of what is even going on between them. However, since he is the one Toje uses in getting to Aku, Odibo is pushed into the situation of coming face to face with Aku, and he sometimes ends up being embarrassed before her. This painful reminder of being nothing and becoming an object of ridicule is what Odibo tries to avoid, especially, in terms of his relationship with women. Odibo makes us aware that:

> Ever since Toje became mixed up with Oshevire's wife. Calling me names in her very presence. Telling her I am no use to my hearing. Pointing to my crippled arm saying that I can do with only one arm. That I am useless, and that without him, I would be a dead man by now because I cannot fend for myself.' (p. 60)

It is obvious that Toje intentionally denigrates Odibo in front of Aku in order to ensure that he never becomes desirable to Aku. This is revealed in the sense of helplessness captured by Odibo's statement. Calling Odibo names in Aku's presence, referring to him as being of no use, pointing to his crippled arm and saying that Odibo is useless are all ways Toje uses to keep Odibo from being a competitor. According to Tobin Siebers (2012), sex

may be the privileged domain of ability' (p. 40). This means that the more Odibo is presented as being a worthless disabled person, the more undesirable he becomes as a potential sexual partner. To Siebers (2012), 'sex appeal determines the opportunity to have sex' (p. 41). Therefore, 'the greater a person's capacity to attract partners, the more opportunities to have sex' (p. 41). It is, therefore, not surprising that Odibo makes a specific statement about Aku in particular and women in general, which is not only sad but also revealing. He tells us, 'One day she too will laugh at me. Women are like that. And that is why all my life I have had nothing to do with any woman. It is bad enough with men. Women would only drive me to kill myself…' (p. 61).

While we may be tempted to condemn Odibo for stereotyping women, what he says rather pushes us to pity him instead of castigating him for the sexist comments. These words reveal a deep-seated fear of Odibo, which is a result of his being made to feel insignificant. As a male living in a patriarchal society, Odibo is stripped of privileges, power, honour and dignity accorded to the so-called able-bodied men. He is, therefore, caught up between not being a man with full masculine privileges and not being a woman, either. Odibo also suffers from imagining that all who come into contact with him will eventually laugh at him as a result of his impairment. This mindset is what makes him critical of women and even risk being described as a male chauvinist. It is ironic to see Odibo's claim that 'Women are like that' and 'And that is why all my life I have had nothing to do with any woman.' What is certain is that due to the fear Odibo harbours about women and the worry of being totally stripped of any dignity left for him, he tries to avoid women in general. Due to the low self-image Odibo develops as a result of his crippled arm, he tries to avoid women as much as possible.

Toje commands Odibo around and shows no respect at all to him:

> Dress up the bed and get lost,' he often tells me, and 'Did I hear you mutter something? You should consider it a favour that a man of my stature should bring himself to set foot in this hovel.' And to the woman, he would say, 'Oh, he is just a fool. All he's got is a big body but hardly any sense,' and all that kind of language. (p. 138)

By deliberately speaking to Odibo in a demeaning way, Toje only seeks to assert his masculine power over him. Toje certainly tries to project himself as a superior male who considers himself as being above Odibo who is a disabled male character. Toje treats Odibo as 'the other' male who doesn't deserve much of the dignities that come with being a complete male. Toje metaphorically describes Odibo's room as a hovel and describes Odibo as a 'big body' with no sense.Toje's deliberate choice of negative words to paint a low image of Odibo is intentionally done to ensure that Odibo does not break free from his control.

Consequently, Odibo suffers from a damaged identity as a result of the othering he suffers at the hands of Toje. Odibo is totally sidelined and made to feel useless before Aku. He is denied his place as a man and consequently has to depend on others for his survival. As a result of the insults, stigma and pains Odibo suffers because of his body difference, he recoils himself and tries to live life as 'the other'. As a man living in a society where physical defects make one a victim of stigmatisation, Odibo allows himself to suffer in the hands of other males but decides to stay away from women just for his own peace of mind. Odibo confesses that:

> I don't mind what they decide to do with each other. It is not my place to question the movements of two people who have chosen to have an affair. But what I do mind is that I should be made to suffer any indignities that I know I do not deserve. (p. 13)

Indeed, Toje and Aku's adulterous relationship marks a period of trauma for Odibo since it begins to trigger certain fears and insecurities, he had been harbouring all along. He tells us:

> It wasn't so bad before the war and before we came into contact with Oshevire's wife. Then I took my insults without complaint.

> But it's not the same now, with me being shamed in front of a woman. All my life, I have avoided women because I know they would not stop short of calling me a cripple.' (p. 138-139)

This first stage of Odibo's sexual development is, therefore, filled with his being presented as a victim of stigmatisation and manipulation. He also tries to stay away from women because of the fear of being ridiculed by them. An observation Aku makes is very significant:

> I looked across at Odibo. I knew I had little reason to expect goodwill from a man who walked straight into my house without offering me a greeting—without even looking at me—as though he had come to collect a debt. But I felt certain that if it was the wish of Toje who sent him that he should keep watch over my boy while I stayed away, he was bound to do so. That much I could see. Beneath that seeming hostility of the man was the unquestioning servility of a dog. Or maybe his crippled arm was the reason. For as he sat there before me I could also see that he was making every effort to hide his defect, casting furtive glances now and then as though he thought someone was about to unveil his stump of an arm.' (p. 65-66)

In this particular instance, Odibo is compared to a debt collector who only goes after his duty. He is also described as having the 'unquestioning servility of a dog.' Aku attributes this way of behaviour to the fact of Odibo being crippled in one arm. Odibo manifests his discomfort when others, especially women, see his crippled arm. No wonder, according to Aku, Odibo makes 'every effort to hide his defect.' Odibo's crippled arm is therefore presented as being a great source of worry to him in his interactions with female normates due to the stigma associated with it. It is, therefore not surprising that as he comes across people, he tries to hide it so that it does not become visible for them to see.

From the preceding, it can be observed that the first phase of Odibo's sexual development presents him as being asexual. He is also seen as not being in any form of relationship with women. This is mainly because of the stigma that goes with his defect and his fear that getting close to women will even make things worse for him. This phase of his

life, therefore, presents a character whose sexual feelings have been numbed because there appears not to be any possibility of Odibo ever having any such relationship with any woman. According to Tom Shakespeare (1999), the perception that disabled men are considered to be safe for females to be around without any sexual activity taking place is 'an example of biological reductionism' (p. 62). In fact, the fact that disabled persons struggle more with getting sexual partners than those considered to be normal has been well-acknowledged by a number of disability scholars (Ncube & Mtenje, 2019; Quayson, 2007; Shakespeare, 1999). It is, therefore, no wonder that Odibo grows up accepting what appears to be the reality. Again, during this stage, Odibo is presented as not posing a threat to Toje, his master. His only usefulness is presented as serving as an errand boy for Toje. Odibo is also seen as being innocent of whatever may be going on between Toje and Aku. This sense of naivety is most likely as a result of his non-participation and lack of involvement in matters concerning sex. Again, he is not seen as having any interest in any form of sexual relationships in his society, as he appears to be only focused on running errands for Toje, which is closely tied to his daily survival. Indeed, he has been made to see himself as one who is crippled in one arm and, as a result, is not worthy to be involved in sexual relationships. Undoubtedly, his wrong perception and fears about women play a key role in Odibo staying away from having any form of amorous relationship with those of the female genders Nic Hamel and Toyin Falola (2021) state, 'sexuality for disabled people of all genders is rife with stereotypes and misconceptions' (p. 26). These stereotypes and misconceptions that surround the sexualities of disabled persons contribute greatly to getting them marginalised when it comes to sex.

**The stage of discovering sexual feelings**

The second stage of Odibo's sexual transformation in the novel is what I refer to as the stage of discovering sexual feelings. This is the stage whereby, due to certain occurrences in the life of Odibo, he is awakened to the reality of he not being asexual. At this point, Odibo

begins to discover the innate sexual feelings that society has forced him to numb as a result of his impairment. This discovery stage is marked by how Odibo starts imagining and thinking about the possibility of he participating in the sexual life of his society. The first thing that happens here is that Odibo's body becomes sexualized in the sense that it positively catches the attention of Aku. Here, regardless of Odibo's defect, a female begins to see his body as being worthy of admiration and also considers him a candidate for sexual activity. The disabled character, therefore, becomes visible to other normates in a way that is not demeaning or patronising. In an encounter Aku has with Odibo, Aku confesses:

> And what a fine man he was too. In the negligence of sleep, he had not covered up his stumped arm properly, for it stuck out from under a fold of the cloth with which he had so anxiously hidden it when he had first entered. But the rest of his body bespoke a man-now that, happily, sleep had stripped him of his pretense and thrown him bare to my stolen glance. ' (p. 73-74)

This statement from Aku is very significant. It signifies a departure from Odibo's disabled body being regarded as worthless to becoming noticed as an object of beauty. This is the first positive image of Odibo which is presented in the novel. Here, we see Aku, who is a member of the dominant in-group affirming Odibo's body. Aku notices Odibo as being 'a fine man' whose body is worthy of admiration. It is interesting how it is during Odibo's time of vulnerability, when he is unable to pretend and cover up his supposed defect, that the beauty of his body is revealed. Odibo being asleep is, therefore a strategy that the author uses to offer Aku the opportunity to properly gaze at the body of the disabled character. The result of this is the conclusion that 'the rest of' Odibo's 'body bespoke a man.' It is interesting how, hitherto, Odibo's crippled arm had been used to discredit his entire body. I argue that the admiration of the body of the disabled character symbolically clothes Odibo with a sense of dignity, especially as far as Aku is concerned.

Again, the appreciation and sexualization of the disabled character's body by Aku can be deemed to be symbolic of how it is a normate who invariably invites Odibo to be

considered worthy part in the sexual activities of his community. Aku, as a normate, examines Odibo's body and sees it as being worthy of admiration and acceptance. It appears that without the permission of the normates, the 'disabled other' does not get permission to live as a sexual being in his community. This is because it is the normates who constitute the dominant in-group in society who have the capacity to give any form of identity to the members of the dominated out-group (Staszak, 2008). According to Garland-Thomson (2017), 'To be granted fully human status by normates, disabled people must learn to manage relationships from the beginning. In other words, disabled people must use charm, intimidation, ardor, deference, humor or entertainment to relieve nondisabled people of their discomfort' (p. 13). In the case of Odibo and Aku, the affirmation of Odibo clothes him with a positive identity which he had not even imagined to be possible. Indeed, it is from this point that we witness Odibo having an encounter with Aku that begins to lead him to discover himself sexually. Odibo's discovery of his sexuality comes after he also gets to see and admire Aku's body. Indeed, this becomes possible due to the errands Odibo runs for Toje. It is the running of errands for Toje by Odibo that enables him to get closer to a woman, albeit unwillingly. As Odibo is forced into proximity to Aku, He begins to take a closer look at Aku's body and admire her:

> As she passed by, I eyed her furtively. It was not my fault. Toje had before tried to get me to look at the woman-until he thought I was looking too much for my good. So somehow my eyes have become used to stealing occasional glances through no fault of mine…I watched her pass by to the bedroom. She had a wrapper tied to her body, reaching from the breasts to just below the knee and exposing the upper part of the breasts and the beautiful legs and toes. She didn't see me looking at her, but I was. I swallowed as I saw these things. (p. 135)

In this second stage of Odibo's sexual journey, the discovery of sexual feeling is closely connected to an external element that serves as a trigger of emotions within the disabled character. In the case of Odibo, he gets to be accidentally exposed to the body of a

woman in a way that leaves a lasting impression on him. Odibo presents the image of him 'eyeing' Aku in a sexual way. At this point, the image Odibo paints of Aku shows that he no longer sees her as an enemy. On one particular occasion, Aku's son mistakenly opens the door at a time when his mother is completely naked. Coincidentally, Odibo was looking in that direction as the door opened:

> He pushed the door open-and there it was. The full naked form of the woman! Once drawn to the sight, my eyes could not of their own natural will detach themselves from the wonder that confronted them: a trunk smooth as a pebble, bristling womanhood and a lot of hair where it should be! She was pulling a dress over her head, standing near a bed and facing the doorway. As soon as she heard the door fly open, she quickly turned round and out down her arms, covering herself with the dress…But something went through me that I had never felt before… (p. 135-136)

The exposure to Aku's body ignites in Odibo the long bottled-up sexual feelings that earlier appeared non-existent. The exposure to the naked body, therefore, serves as a trigger that makes Odibo realise that he is not asexual after all. Through the use of simile, Odibo compares the smoothness of Aku's body to a pebble. He intentionally paints an image of not only the body of Aku but her womanhood as well. This helps us to appreciate how this experience changes him with regard to how he used to see women. Odibo's confession that 'something went through me that I had never felt before' is, therefore, a testament to how that experience contributes greatly in sowing a desire in him, which causes him to also start desiring a sexual relationship with a woman. Still referring to this incident, Odibo further mentions that:

> The child will never know why I am looking at him. I am not even in total control of my thoughts. For already my mind is beginning to draw a connection between this boy and the figure that hit my eyes only a while ago, the picture which now can never leave my mind. (p. 137)

Here too, Odibo mentions how the picture of the naked woman he saw will never leave him. The image of Aku alters Odibo's perception. We begin to see, from this point, the

image of a character who, regardless of his defect and what he used to think about women, begins to have sexual desires running through him.

This lasting impression, therefore sows in Odibo a desire for the opposite sex. It can be realised that as Odibo's sexual desires get triggered, he begins to fantasize about Aku. This is what then sets him thinking and even wondering about what Toje might have been doing with Aku. In an instance where Odibo gets the opportunity to enter Aku's room, He expresses this sentiment:

> It is a nice bed,' I say, feeling the bed, while a slight sensation runs through me. *Maybe she sleeps naked. And she would be quite a sight. Could she ever want me near her?* I sit down at the edge of the bed. What can Toje be doing now with Oshevire's wife in my place? (p. 141)

We see how Odibo begins to move from being an outsider as far as sexual activities that go on around him are concerned to a point where he indicates the sensation that runs through him even at the mere sight of Aku's bed. The disabled character also grows to a stage where he begins to fantasize about the female body and also considers the possibility of sleeping near Aku on the same bed. Through the use of rhetocircal questions, we see Odibo questioning himself as to what Toje and Aku have been doing at his place. This is clearly a key point where we see Odibo begin the process of breaking free from any box within which he had been kept as far as his ability to think and imagine issues to do with sex are concerned. In fact, Odibo even starts to exhibit tendencies of jealousy and pride in terms of his being a man and his fellow man, Toje, seeking to outwit him. Odibo tells us:

> My hatred for Toje grows more and more every minute. I wish I could hurt him. I wish very badly that I could do something that would really hurt his pride. And then he would know what it means to make me feel the way I do when he does those things that he does to me. (p. 144)

As Odibo becomes more sexualized, therefore, the more he grows in his pride as a man who is even willing to hurt another man because of a woman.

**Unfulfilled Desires**

The next stage of Odibo's sexual development is marked by the revelation of the unfulfilled sexual desire of Aku as a result of Toje's impotence. At this stage, it becomes clear that Toje, who arouses the sexual feelings of Aku, is unable to satisfy her due to his impotence. This causes a feeling of frustration in Aku because of what her body has been taken through. This, therefore, sets the tone for how Odibo will eventually step in to prove himself as a more capable man as compared to Toje. Aku narrates what she goes through at the hands of Toje during one of their encounters:

> It is nearly morning now, and still, I cannot sleep. There is a strain on my eyelids, and my body feels half-cooked. But every time I close my eyes and pray for sleep to take control of me, I feel my ears straining with stubborn keenness to catch a sound and my mind fighting its way through a mist of doubts and questions…Then too with his hand he explored my groin with such blind vigour that at the end of the whole affair, not only was I left with a passion only rudely tickled, but indeed not even the little resistance that my body put up could save me from the resultant trickle of blood. As usual, he did nothing beyond that. (P. 157-158)

This depiction of Toje presents him as being weak and incapable of satisfying Aku even though he tries several times to have a sexual affair with. It also paints an image of a woman who is left unsatisfied as a result of a man's inability to satisfy her sexually. By not being able to do anything beyond leaving Aku's body with passion 'only rudely tickled,' Toje's impotence becomes symbolic of a lack of power. He leaves a job that is meant to help him to assert his masculinity, undone. This, therefore, renders him as not being man enough because he is unable to conquer Aku's body. The problem Toje finds himself in is best captured by these words of his:

> I would rather that I had full sexual knowledge of his wife before he was released than miss the prize and face the double shame: to be exposed to the whole community of Urukpe as a shameless adulterer and yet live on with the deep personal knowledge that the most important man in the town is impotent. God, I have no time to spare…' (p. 175)

Toje's words reveal how much of a shame it is for a man to be impotent in his community. Toje metaphorically compares being able to successfully have sex with Aku to winning a 'prize' which he cannot afford to miss. For him, the ability to have sex with Aku will be proof that his manhood is still active and an affirmation of his masculine power. That is why he is much more worried that even if he is caught having an affair with Oshevire's wife, he will still suffer from the personal knowledge that, as the most important man in the town, he could actually not have sex with Aku because of his impotence. Ironically, even though sexual impotence is akin to a male being powerless, it does not receive public stares as Odibo suffers with his crippled arm. However, having even a personal knowledge of it is something that Toje is unable to live with.

What follows then is the connection Aku begins to rather draw between Odibo and his incarcerated husband. This is based mainly on the sense of security that Aku feels about Odibo's presence. It also has to do with the memories Odibo's smell ignites in Aku concerning her husband. Aku states that:

> I had instinctively raised my hands to his shoulders for support, and rested my head against his chest. He did not move. He just let me hold on to him like that, not objecting in the least. And then a quick sensation went through me. It had to do with both the way he let me hold on to him securely, and with the smell of his body. For over three years I had not known this security and ungrudging support, and the smell reminded me of those times when my man had come home in the evening from the rubber farm with his body all wet and greasy yet inspiring in me a surge of passion. I held on for a long while to the body of Odibo, imbibing fully hot billy-goat smell that revived in me a feeling I had not known for years. It did not last very long, but the impression had been made. I raised my eyes to Odibo, but he turned away his face, and tried to disengage himself. (p. 159)

It is important to note that at this stage, Odibo's impairment becomes of no significance. He is seen and compared to another male who possesses qualities that a female desires. Again, what Aku tells us establishes the fact of mutual admiration that occurs between Aku and Odibo. Aku acknowledges the 'quick sensation that runs through' her body

as something she had not experienced for years. I also argue the 'billy-goat' smell of Odibo which revives in Aku a feeling she had not known for years can be interpreted as a mark of masculinity. Indeed, the sense of security, ungrudging support, billy-goat smell and the quick sensation Aku experiences end up elevating Odibo as a great embodiment of who a male is. Unfortunately, Toje never gets to be described in this positive way by Aku.

At this point, Odibo begins to appear as a more suitable replacement for Aku, as far as her husband is concerned than Toje. In fact, as Aku begins to desire Odibo sexually, memories of 'the endless loneliness,' 'lack of protection,' 'interminable anxiety,' 'loss of comfort,' 'the shame of living under the animal lust of Toje,' who only awakens passion but is unable to complete the process, which are all characteristics of the state in which she finds herself, begins to come to Aku's mind:

> I began to go over in my mind the painful life that I had been subjected to living since they took my man away. Luck has certainly not been on my side. The endless loneliness. The lack of protection. The interminable anxiety. The loss of comfort. The fact that I was now having to crawl on my knees-and spread my legs!- for a living. The total shame of living under the shadow of the animal lust of a man who merely tantalized desire in me, causing me to live only by thrift of passion when passion would want to overflow…' (p. 161)

Aku further reveals how Toje loses value in her sight as a result of his inability to complete whatever he starts with her. To her, Toje's inability to have sex with her could either be as a result of an attempt to bring shame on her or that Toje 'lacked true manly powers':

> My thoughts rambled on. Could Toje have deliberately wished to bring shame on me, merely gloat over misfortune? Or was it that he lacked true manly powers? I've heard that some men lose their manhood after a time. But it seemed to me a cruel act of fate that I should be made the victim of that sort of malady, condemned to live perpetually at the brink of desire and to be led on and on without any hope of achieving fulfilment. If it was now my lot to be Toje's whore, did I not have a right at least to be purged of my desire-unwilling as I might be-as often as it suited him to invite me to play the role? Fate, I insisted, had no reason to treat me to such

> underserved sadism, and –the shame of it!- I found myself praying deeply in my mind that whatever had come upon Toje should turn out to be a passing thing. I found myself wishing that someday he would summon up the power to slake the desire that he was continually working up in me!' (161-162)

By posing the rhetorical questions above, Aku reveals the unfortunate situation in which she finds herself. The use of 'power' by Aku at this stage is in reference to a man's ability to have sex with a female. Sex is therefore presented as a symbol of 'true manly powers.' Therefore, for Toje as a perceived normate to be impotent is for him to be considered to have lost the 'power' that makes him an able man. This is why Aku ashamedly begins to hope that Toje will be able to someday 'summon up power to slake the desire that he was continually working up' in her. This form of anticipation creates a sort of suspence in the novel and also serves as a way of foreshadowing what will become of Aku in terms of she being sexually satisfied by a man.

**Filling the Vacuum**

It is in the midst of the revelation of Toje's powerlessness that Odibo steps in. This is a stage of adventure for him as a disabled character as he seeks to act on his sexual desires. At a time when Odibo assumes that Aku is asleep, he sneaks into Aku's room. Aku reveals that:

> I felt my own hand playing with my groin! And it was in the midst of this act of self-disgrace that I heard the door of the other room creak…I stopped. My eyes turned slowly towards the direction of the sound, but I was careful not to let my body betray my attention. So, though I was lying supine, my eyes were directed at that door. Slowly it glided open. I waited. Soon after, I saw the dim silhouette of Odibo slowly emerge through the door. He was picking his steps very carefully. As he came nearer and nearer, I noticed that he was bare to the waist, with his cloth wrapped round his loin. He came closer and closer to my bed. I could now see him in full view. The stump of what should have been his left arm. His imposing build. The swell of his shoulders and of the biceps of his right arm the wraper of his trunk…He was every inch a man-his manhood scarcely faulted by the unfortunate loss of an arm. (p. 162)

The image of Odibo as presented at this stage is that of one whose manhood is 'scarcely faulted by the unfortunate loss of an arm.' In fact, Aku only refers to Odibo's

crippled arm in passing as she focuses on Odibo's 'imposing build,' 'the swell of his shoulders and of the biceps of his right arm', which makes her to conclude that Odibo is 'every inch a man.' A juxtaposing of Aku's reference to Toje's powerlessness as against his acclamation of Odibo's manhood reveals how the disabled character appreciates as a result of certain features he possesses, which are lacking in the body of the perceived normate male.

It is important to state that Odibo's dangerous adventure, which leads him to Aku's room while she is deemed to be asleep, presents him as a sexual pervert. He spies on Aku and invades her privacy. While referring to Odibo's visit to her room, Aku further describes that:

> He came to the foot of the bed, and stopped. I narrowed my eyes, so as not to betray my looking. I waited to see what he was going to do. He moved on, slowly, slowly. He came over to my side and stopped. I could feel his eyes all over me. I was completely nude. Only an edge of my cover-cloth sheltered my groin. Slowly he bent his head over me, and then proceeded to run his nose over my body-now over my thighs, now over my breasts, over my belly, then down again to my thighs. He raised his hand, and was about to run it over me, when on sudden instinct I jerked. He quickly withheld his hand, and raised himself to full standing position. I rolled over on my side, facing him fully now, but still pretending to be asleep and unaware of his presence. (p. 162-163)

What is obvious is how Odibo is presented as lacking any morals. In fact, knowing very well that Aku was a married woman, Odibo's attempt to spy on her presents him as being a sexual pervert, which feeds into a form of negative disability stereotyping. That Odibo becomes so consumed with getting to see Aku's naked body that he does not care about being caught also gives him an image of being careless, stupid and naïve. The actions he engages in as he sees Aku's body, such as running his nose over the woman's naked body, over her thighs, breasts and belly, only succeed in presenting Odibo as someone who is a threat. However, the revelation of Aku as a willing accomplice rather seeks to suggest that while Odibo's actions are not justifiable, they were meant to serve a need. This is a mutual need shared by both Odibo and Aku. Indeed, Aku describes Odibo as one with the look of a

defeated man, a man with sexual desires. Through the use of simile, Aku refers to Odibo as a fellow 'prisoner of circumstances.' She recounts that:

> I waited and waited. He never came back. But it was clear to me what he wanted. For a long time, I had been witness to the look of a defeated man that he walked about with. But events since yesterday evening seem to have thrown a light on another side of him, or perhaps an aspect of him that had since lain concealed under what I had always seen of him: natural human desires encumbered only by his subjugation to Toje. Was it my fault, therefore, that I should be drawn towards a man who, like myself, was a prisoner of circumstances-that I should be driven to seek comfort in a feeling of fellowship compounded, to be sure, with an increasing tug of desire? As the moments passed, my mind gloated over a picture that brought back cherished memories: the hot, manly smell of his body, the bristling physique that was sure to be housing eager powers…My eyes are strained and my body weak with forced wakefulness. Now and then, my mind stops in its self-indulgence to ask where my desires will lead me. I can hear the crow of a cock, announcing the nearness of day. Whatever it brings will find me waiting. (p. 163)

As this stage of Odibo's sexual development comes to an end, he is presented as possessing manly powers. Aku is, therefore ready to offer herself to Odibo because she considers him to be man enough. Aku's reference to the 'corw of a cock, announcing the nearness of day' is a form of foreshadow which prepares the minds of the readers for what will eventually happen between her and Odibo. Indeed, Aku indicates her preparedness for whatever the day brimgs. At this point, the sexuality of Odibo, which Aku describes as 'had since lain concealed under what I had always seen him: natural desires encumbered only by his subjugation to Toje' (p. 163), is fully revealed. It, therefore, becomes obvious that for Odibo to become sexually liberated, he has to break free from the control of Toje. Interestingly, with all that Aku goes through in the hands of Toje, she also desires somebody to set her free from sexual starvation. It is, therefore, not surprising that Aku describes Odibo and herself as being 'prisoners of circumstances.' For Aku, her desires have been awakened by Toje, who is unable to finish what he starts, while in the case of Odibo, Toje's subjugation has caused him to see his body as not being worthy of sexual desires and pleasure. Aku,

therefore, needs a man to satisfy her sexual longings to make her feel like a woman. This is a desire she is ready to risk everything to achieve. Odibo is also presented as being on a journey to discover himself as a male who has sexual desires.

**Sex as an epiphany of masculinity**

Sex serves as epiphany of masculinity for Odibo in his sexual development in *The Last Duty*. At this the stage of Odibo's sexual transformation, he realises that he is indeed a full man after he engages in sexual activity. This is the point where Odibo, as a disabled character, breaks all the societal barriers in order to participate in the sexual activities that go on in his society. This becomes both liberating and an eye-opener for Odibo who never imagined that he would ever enjoy such a privilege. Indeed, having sex with a woman a perceived male was unable to conquer sexually ends the battle for superiority. Sex, therefore, becomes a symbol of power for Odibo as a male character, just as it is the case in other societies (Ennin, 2022; Shakespeare,1999). Indeed, having sex with Aku becomes the greatest epiphany for Odibo as far as he is a complete man is concerned. Narrating his life before he got involved in sex, Odibo relives this unimaginable experience:

> How much does it take to be a man, bedside knowing that someone takes good and healthy notice of your manhood, and you can come out and receive the fresh, beautiful morning air full in your face without fearing that some other man would take you to task for it? For too long I have felt my body encaged in fear. Ever since I grew up to be aware of my physical deformity. I have lived a life of slavish caution hiding the stump of my arm, talking very little, giving human beings a good speechless distance, and –what's worse-avoiding women in the strange fear that they would make little of my manhood and of me. (p. 180)

It is obvious how, at this stage in Odibo's sexual development, his body moves from being mournable and pitiable to becoming something that one can cherish. The experience sets him free from the fears, caution and challenges of growing up with a physical deformity

imposed on him. It is only at this point that his 'late father's words that God never does a job halfway' become meaningful to him. Odibo confesses that:

> Besides, growing up in the shadow of my late father's words that God never does a job half-way, I have always carefully restrained my impulses in the belief that I could never achieve anything however hard I might wish to try. I have lived a false existence, a prowling shadow, bashful, timorous, without a voice, without a face, without any kind of identity. (p. 180)

Regarding his sexual intercourse with Aku, Odibo tells us that, 'I fell upon her lap and knew desire. When it was all over, she sighed deeply and said 'Thank you.' I felt mystified by those words, and even more so by the smile that I saw on her face' (p. 181). Odibo's statement on how he feels after having sex with Aku is a great revelation of the powerful effect of sex in setting Odibo free and making him feel like a complete man. After engaging in sex, Odibo begins to see the world in a different way compared to the inferiority complex he had as a result of his deformity. He exclaims that:

> Now, all that is gone. Gone! Now I know that I am a man like any other man. I have desires that should be satisfied, impulses that should be realised, and my big strong body is no longer there for nothing-'ineffective', as Toje has always told me to my face. After that woman let me into her body, I experienced a release of my long pent-up passion, I felt my whole body-my whole personality-loosen, and my entire being change. Now when Toje calls me a useless mass I am simply going to swallow his words without care, for I know the world has been thrown wide open to me. (p. 180-181)

Odibo's repetition of the word 'gone' is a way of laying emphasis on liberated he feels after having sexual intercourse with Aku. Indeed, not only does sex release Odibo from his insecurities as a man, but it also opens the world wide open for him. Sex becomes the key to a world of endless possibilities for Odibo. He further indicates that:

> I lay on my bed and tried to pull myself together. The outcome of my visit to the woman had exceeded my wildest dreams-if I had ever had any. Something had happened to me that even my dreams could never have entertained. For a brief spell, I was gripped with

> fear that I had set myself on a dangerous course and that I was doomed if Toje ever got to know what I had done. But then – I shook myself up. Gradually I began to feel my mind, my whole thinking, liberated from its habitual prison. (p. 181)

The liberating force of sexual intercourse also ensures that Odibo breaks free from the 'habitual prison' of Toje. He indicates that 'Something had happened to me that even my dreams could never have entertained.' To Odibo, the highest form of satisfaction he ever had in his life was to have a woman on his bed and have sex with her. He exclaims:

> This is heaven! To have a woman sharing my bed with me and not only not unwilling to wallow in such lowly circumstances but indeed loving every moment of it and addressing me in language I could have sworn I would never hear! This must be heaven…(p. 204)

The symbolic use of the word 'heaven' is Odibo's way of expressing the level of satisfaction he experiences after engaging in sex. Again, he repeats the word 'heaven' as a way of expressing how the sexual activity offered him the hughest form of excitement he had ever experienced. After having sex with Aku, Odibo becomes liberated from the notions of worthlessness he had been made to regard himself. Odibo is also presented as having sex with Aku as being a way of taking revenge on Toje. Odibo breaks free from the stigma and negative stereotyping he suffers as a result of his impairment. Odibo tells us:

> Anyway, I had a raw deal from Toje far too long. I had too long taken a beating I never deserved. It was he that made me so painfully aware of my defect. If it wasn't for him the saying that God never left a job half-done would have had an entirely different meaning for me. It was he that had chained my mind, my whole being. And now that I knew better than I ever did, I was glad to have taken my revenge on him-glad to have registered the mark of my personality on at least one thing that seemed to have put him in such an awesome advantage over me. (p. 182)

Again, after the sexual epiphany, Odibo begins to look for ways to survive without depending on Toje. This is a way of affirming himself as a complete male who does not need to depend on somebody else in order to survive. Talking about his future, Odibo mentions that:

> The war is still here, and many of the old chances of paid labour are now closed. But as I reflected further, a few places came to mind. Labour was needed to weed and sweep the Otota's compound. Labour was needed to keep the town's market clean. Labour was needed to reconstruct and rehabilitate some of the essential services here affected by the war. No doubt there must be a few other openings which I could explore. In time I could save up enough money to start a small farm or something like that. I knew life was not easy for a man with one arm, but it certainly wasn't hopeless. God was sure to lend a hand at some point. With a little help from Him. I might yet achieve enough for my needs and work out my own life like everybody else. God, indeed, never left a job half-done!' (p. 182-183)

Ultimately, it is sex that helps Odibo to accept himself as a man. Sex therefore does not only serve as a form of pleasure for him but a way by which he overcomes Toje in their attempt to prove their masculinities. At the end of the novel, it is Odibo who succeeds to show his 'manly powers' through his ability to satisfy Aku sexually.

**Conclusion**

This chapter presented an examination of the key role sex plays in affirming the masculinity of Odibo in Okpewho's *The Last Duty*. From the analysis, it is revealed that sex serves as a key symbol of masculine power in the novel. Toje and Odibo end up being pitched against each other in a battle of who is able to satisfy Aku sexually. Toje's failure to overcome his impotence, therefore, pushes him to a position where he loses his claim to power as the most important man in his community. However, for Odibo, sex becomes the door through which he becomes clothed with power, realises who he is and breaks free from the stigma associated with his condition.

# CHAPTER SIX

# 'FEMINISED MALE': A STUDY OF THE REPRESENTATION OF THE MUTE CHARACTER IN SULAIMAN ADDONIA'S *SILENCE IS MY MOTHER TONGUE*

## Introduction

In the previous chapter, we looked at sex as a symbol of masculine power in Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*. This was done by tracing the sexual development of Odibo in the novel. The chapter examined how sex serves as the epiphany for the disabled character in helping him to realise, recognize and assert his masculinity. By analysing the journey of Odibo's sexual life in the novel, we were able to trace how the disabled character grows from the perception of being asexual to becoming a full participant in the sexual activities in his society.

In this chapter, we shall discuss the representation of muteness in Sulaiman Addonia's *Silence is My Mother Tongue* by examining how Hagos's muteness renders him as the 'other' in a society where not being able to speak is considered to be an anomaly. We analyse the image of the mute character as presented in the novel, especially how such a character is viewed and presented by the normates. In this analysis, our focus is on how muteness as a body difference affects the perception of the normates about the disabled character, as well as how the impairment affects the educational, sexual and communal life of the disabled character. Muteness as a body difference is therefore important to us as we discuss it as a basis for the othering of the disabled character in the text.

## What does it mean to be mute?

In *Silence is My Mother Tongue*, Hagos' muteness is at the core of the whole narrative. The story mainly takes place in a refugee camp where Hagos, his mother and Saba,

his younger sister, run to as a result of the ongoing war in their own country. The narrative grants us access to life at the refugee camp and how the dynamics at the camp affect relationships, way of living and the dreams of the characters. For Hagos, his muteness becomes the basis on which every other thing that concerns him is presented, analysed and discussed. The representation of a mute character in such a situation helps us to appreciate how Hagos navigates through life. The writer, therefore, adopts a style that helps him to present the story in a way that allows the readers to journey through the various phases of Hagos's life. In the novel, even though Hagos' interactions and participation in the life at the camp helps us in getting to know the perception about muteness in that society, it is Saba who ends up becoming the character through whom most of the perceptions about muteness and the challenges of living as a mute character in an ableist society are represented in the text. In effect, there is a subtle hijacking of the voice of the mute character by the normates who assume the status of the voice for the voiceless.

Since in a normate society, a grown individual who possesses a mouth is supposed to communicate in a known language through the use of the mouth, the inability of a person to meet this requirement puts such a person in the category of being 'the other.' In this work, I do not read silence as a metaphor. Rather, the issue of the mute character's existence in the text and how the writer uses the literary space to give a voice to issues that pertain to muteness is what remains our major concern. By focusing on muteness as a condition that renders an individual who has it as being 'the other' in a normate society, this chapter further reveals how literature reflects and refracts society as far as the othering of people whose bodies are deemed as being different is concerned. Over here, the body difference does not necessarily have to do with that which can be perceived by sight but rather the sense of hearing.

In *Silence is My Mother Tongue*, muteness is synonymous with silence. The mute character is clothed with a cloak of silence, which disconnects him from most of the activities and the interactions in the society. The 'mute other' is presented as one who is merely gliding through life without having anything to live for because of his inability to speak. Saba refers to how Hagos glides '… through the bush as he did among people, unnoticed, unmarked' (p. 74). As a result of his impairment, Hagos is presented as one who exists without any dreams or ambitions. He goes about his life without being taken note of by the normates. Being mute, therefore, cuts Hagos off from community life, engagements and interactions. He goes through life 'unnoticed, unmarked' (p. 74). Indeed, while the war in Saba's country is presented as having greatly affected her and other characters in terms of what they wanted to achieve and how they wanted to live their lives, Hagos is presented as having no cares about life. Whether it is war or in a time of peace, Hagos is presented as being unaffected by the circumstances since he does not have much to live for. This view presents Hagos as being naïve and carefree as a result of his inability to speak. We get to hear that, 'Zahra wanted to help her mother with her quest to free a country, while Hagos did not need an independent country or a school or a job. He was a carefree in the camp as he was back home (p. 75). We are told that:

> Saba envied his peace of mind. He could sleep without delay and right through the night. Even on the night the war came, he seemed unperturbed. As he was when their mother told them that she had decided they had to leave their home. He'd simply started packing straight away (p. 79).

This image of Hagos having a mere existence without any care in life is a dominant part of what may be considered to be a negative portrayal of what it means to be mute. It is indeed a key part of the othering of the mute character as he is presented as being ambitionless, aimless and visionless due to his impairment. It also represents the challenge of being mute in a normate society where there are no opportunities for the mute character to

engage in any form of real communication with the normate as a result of having speech impairment. Interestingly, no reference is ever made to any attempt to make life better for Hagos as a result of his supposed condition. His inability to speak, therefore, almost cancels out any relevance that he has. According to Tom Shakespeare (1999), 'masculinity as an ideological and psychological process is connected to prejudice against disabled people in general' (p. 58). Indeed, Hagos as a disabled male character is unable to fit into his society's picture of who he is expected to be.

In the novel, what causes the mute character to become 'the other' is the normate's inability to either understand or speak the language of muteness. As Saba, Hagos's younger sister, rightly says, 'No one without a language is alive' (p. 94). When Saba is told that 'It must be hard living with Hagos,' Saba replies, 'Hagos is not mute to me…Maybe if you ever listened to him, you would hear him too…Hagos is not mute. But the world is not prepared to listen' (p. 62). The world's lack of preparedness to listen to the mute character is, in effect, another way of othering those with such conditions. What is obvious is that the world in which Hagos finds himself moves on without much regard for him or any attempt to reach out to him. His impairment becomes a key barrier in his attempt to participate in the social life of his community. It is interesting to note that even for a character like Saba, who goes all out to be there for Hagos, she tends to, at certain points, yearn for something more than the silence Hagos offers. There were times Saba, 'yearned for something else between them rather than silence (p. 97). On one occasion,

> When Saba arrived home, Hagos was sitting on the blanket. He didn't ask where she had been. Around him, she was free. Unlike her friends back home, she had never had to report her every move to the man in the house. At times, his silent presence in her life made Saba think he was a figment of her imagination. (p. 77)

That the mute character sometimes appears to be a figment of another person's imagination reveals how muteness is presented as being able to reduce the relevance of an individual in society.

It is worth noting that as a result of Hagos's muteness, he loses his significance of being 'the man in the house' (p. 77) since he is unable to take care of Saba who is his younger sister. Being mute is, therefore, presented as a condition that needs to be mourned due to how it renders the mute character irrelevant in society. As a woman who has a son who is mute, Hagos's mother laments over the condition of Hagos:

> Their mother had been hurt having a mute child and two dead infants. Saba's father said he couldn't live with the continuous wailing, and her inability to accept fate. Saba's mother lived her life waiting for the next misfortune to strike. He wanted to be with a woman who could love. He was gone by the time Saba turned six. (p. 51)

It is worth noting how the misfortune of 'having...two dead infants' is placed on the same scale as having a 'mute child.' In effect, having a mute child is considered as being as tragic as having children who die young. Muteness is, therefore, considered to be a misfortune that has to be mourned. It is, therefore, not surprising that Hagos's mother mourns over this state till her husband gets tired and leaves the marriage. The hurt having a mute child causes Hagos's mother is a revelation of the societal perception of an individual not being able to speak.

On another occasion, Hagos's mother cries again, 'What have I done to deserve this? The mother cried. God, why have you given me a mute son and a daughter who is deaf to me? (p. 86). While the reference to the dead child is metaphorical, we know that the mute son is in reference to Hagos. For Hagos's mother, having a rebellious daughter like Saba, who only brings troubles to her and is of no help, is the same as having a son who is mute. From the perspective of Hagos's mother, it appears that having a mute child is God's way of either

punishing or being unfair to people. By mourning such a condition, Hago's mother gives us the idea of how grave it is for one to give birth to a child who cannot speak.

Muteness is presented as being a great source of discomfort to the normates who are unable to communicate normally with those who are mute. In a conversation that ensues between Hagos and Saba, we see the tension and discomfort that exists between the two:

> The chirping of crickets drifted in through the window. Saba sat up on her blanket and crawled over to the other side. She shook Hago's shoulder.
> Hagos? Hagos, can you hear me?
> Silence.
> Hagos, I can't sleep. My stomach hurts.
> Silence.
> Does it feel like it has been weeks already to you too?
> Silence.
> But maybe it has. Do you know how long we've been here?
> Silence. (p. 48)

Hagos is presented as being not useful in terms of offering companionship. Silence is, therefore, presented as breaking down the free flow of interactions expected to take place within every normal family. The repetition of the word 'silence' shows how Hagos' inability to talk tends to negatively affect the atmosphere in the house. At a point, we see how silence is seen to have a great effect even on Hagos's family:

> The family of three sat to eat dinner.
> Three silences.
> Hers.
> Her brother's.
> Her mother's. (p. 94)

The effect of Hagos's silence is seen in how it breaks down the interactions expected to go on within their family. In fact, this lack of communication, as a result of muteness, becomes of great concern to Zahra, who tells Saba, 'Sometimes, your silence disturbs me, said Zahra. I mean, your brother's is natural, but yours feels forced' (p. 88). Hagos's silence is therefore presented as having a negative impact on his family since it breaks down social

interactions and does not allow the family to function properly. It is not surprising then that even Saba tries to habour the hope and expectations that her brother will one day talk:

> One thing Saba had left back home was her talkativeness. People used to say she talked for both of them. Not anymore. Her silence, though was temporary. Just like her brother's. When she was little, she always believed that Hagos would talk one day, and often fixed her eyes on his mouth, waiting to be the first to hear him utter his first word…Saba told Hagos that she needed to go to the open field. He put the dress aside and looked up at her, his mouth half open. A long time ago, he used to try to force himself to talk, to force out words. But every time he did, it was though each word was a large, sharp object carving the back of his throat. His cheeks inflated. His eyes widened and tears welled up in his eyes. Only incomprehensible sounds left his lips. He had stopped trying. (pp. 54-55)

Indeed, it can be seen that not much sense of value and worthiness is accorded the mute body especially as it gets into contact with the bodies of the normates. Hagos's inability to speak becomes a diminishing factor that excludes him from being an active participant in his society. He is actually relegated to the background of society. The first time Mr. Eyob requests to take a walk with Hagos, Hagos's mother retorts, 'I am sorry, Mr. Eyob, the mother said. But my son would be no good. He does not talk (p. 116). To Hagos's mother, therefore, one's inability to speak renders him or her as being not good enough to deserve the company of others.

Throughout the novel, the inability of Hagos to speak is, therefore, mainly interpreted negatively. As Hagos gets into contact with the normates, people expect that he is able to speak. Consequently, whenever he is able to either speak or respond to people, the reaction from the normates is usually negative. There is always a response of shock, disappointment and frustration. This represents how society is conditioned to expect that all its members should be able to speak. Hence, one's inability to speak takes one from the class of the

normates, and such an individual becomes 'the other.' During Hago's first encounter with Tedros,

> Saba turned when she noticed Hagos walking towards them, balancing two jerrycans filled with water on a stick over his shoulders. He tripped over a stone and splashed water on Eyob.
> Tedros rushed to his father's side. Papa are you all right?
> Eyob sat still, eyes fixed on Hagos. He said nothing.
> Taking a handkerchief from his pocket, Tedros dried the water on his father's shirts. I am sorry, Saba said. I am so sorry.
> Why doesn't he speak for himself? Tedros jumped to his feet, standing in front of Hagos. (p. 115)

Hagos is expected by his society to speak for himself. However, due to the fact that he is mute, he is unable to respond. It, however appears that some of the members of the society have no patience for individuals who cannot talk. Tedros' anger about why Hagos does not speak for himself is an indication of how Hagos is presented as not being a complete being. This is what moves Saba to assume the duty of becoming the voice of Hagos, who is the voiceless other.

**Muteness and gender role expectations**

The first thing we observe in the novel about Hagos and Saba's relationship is how Saba serves as the voice of Hagos throughout the text. Hagos is presented as not being able to speak for himself nor speak for Saba, who is his younger sister. This is because he is mute. Saba, therefore, assumes the role of Hagos's spokesperson. This is her way of saving her older brother from the embarrassment of being mute. By assuming the role of the one who speaks for Hagos, Saba ends up muting Hagos, who is already mute. It appears that Saba sees it as both her role and duty to come in and speak for her brother as a way of defending him and saving him from embarrassment. Right from the beginning of the novel, as they get to the refugee camp, Saba intervenes between Tahir and Hagos. In fact, Tahir had no idea that Hagos being mute:

> Before he drove away, Tahir took out a pen from his pocket. Hagos, he said, you remind me of myself when I was your age. I used to be silent too until I found a pen.
> Hagos, though, didn't reach for the pen.
> My son can't write, read or speak, their mother said.
> Tahir looked at twenty-something Hagos. Is this true, Hagos?
> Hagos stared ahead, away from Tahir.
> Saba nodded. Yes, it's true. (p. 24).

Interestingly, as Saba, who is a lady and a younger sister of Hagos, takes up the role of speaking for her elder brother, she faces resistance as a result of the traditions of their patriarchal society. Saba gets chastised for serving as the mouthpiece of her brother:

> Their walk was interrupted by a man searching for aspirin, by a young girl who whispered into Saba's ear, asking for cotton wool for her first menstruation, and by the large sock ball. Hagos doesn't wear socks, Saba said on her brother's behalf. Adding, 'Go to hell,' when the athlete replied that he pitied a man when a woman became his voice. (p. 47)

That the athlete declares how he pitied 'a man when a woman became his voice' is another indication of how Hagos loses value as a man as a result of not being able to speak for himself. As a male and the older brother, Hagos was supposed to speak for himself, his sister and his mother. However, his muteness causes Saba to take his place. Saba's attempt to help his brother is seen as a way of her usurping the powers of his elder brother. For Saba, however, taking Hagos's place involved taking his shame in order to ensure that he continues to have a picture of being perfect before their mother:

> Saba was used to bearing things on his behalf, even knowing that by doing so she helped maintain his perfection in her mother's eyes, and in everyone else's. When Hagos came home drunk one night and the mother smelt alcohol in the courtyard the following morning, Saba stepped forward and begged forgiveness. (p. 54)

Against societal expectations, Saba again assumes the role of the protector of the helpless Hagos. This helplessness of Hagos is presented as being a result of his muteness. During a communal search for water, Saba is not allowed to join the males because she is female. While 'The group of men left in search of the river,'

> Saba stood still. Her eyes combed the dark border of the camp, which crept nearer as some oil lamps died out. Darkness brought thoughts in her head. What is a snake or a scorpion bit her brother? A crocodile swallowed him whole?' (p. 27).

This expression of Saba being overly concerned for her brother is a testament to how she does not see Hagos being able to survive on his own without her help. In another instance, as Hagos jumps into a river to save a woman's jerrycan, Saba also decides to jump into it in order to ensure that her brother is safe:

> The woman lost her grip and the river tugged away the jerrycan. Hagos scurried into the water. Lamps were lifted high and torches were directed at him. Why is he doing this? Asked a man. Because the smallest of items have value now, said another. Hagos slipped. The river swallowed him, its shining golden layer swelling. Saba remembered the last time her brother had jumped into a flooding river back home to save a man who was escaping dergue soldiers. Facing up to danger was often his way of getting noticed. And Saba did what she always had done. She jumped in after him. (p. 28)

It appears that the main reason why Saba takes over the role of the protector of Hagos is because he sees Hagos as not being capable of himself as a result of his impairment. Being mute is, therefore, presented as being helpless and needy.

A very important point worth noting in the representation of the mute character in *Silence is My Mother Tongue* is how Hagos's condition of being mute leads to an exchange in gender roles performance between him and his sister. As Saba sees Hagos's impairment as a call to duty for her to take care of her older brother, this leads to a situation whereby she begins to act as a male while Hagos also takes over the duties of a female. Again, while Hagos is mostly presented in the novel as a disadvantaged and pitiable character as a result of his impairment, Saba assumes the image of a daring and adventurous girl. It is, therefore, not surprising that Saba is accused of being 'manly' by her mother and the midwife. Saba is described as having,

> Chosen to be this way: stubborn, focused, and unrelenting in her pursuit of excellence. She was proud of the trait these two women kept accusing her of as if it was an insult: being manly. (p. 87)

Indeed, gender performativity is a key basis upon which Hagos is presented as being the other in the novel. In this instance, the character with an impairment is seen as not being able to carry out his/her gender-specific roles as prescribed by a particular community. Since gender is considered to be a socially constructed identity, societies have expectations of individuals based on their gender. The performance or non-performance of these roles is, therefore critical in determining how well an individual fits into a particular gender or not. Expectations of various genders are therefore closely linked to the performance of certain roles as prescribed by society (Shakespeare, 1999).

It can therefore be clearly seen in Sulaiman Addonia's *Silence is My Mother Tongue* that there is a switch in gender role performance in the novel between Saba and his older brother, Hagos. Hagos is presented as the mute older brother of Saba, who, as a result of his impairment, is not very much involved in the communal life of his society. Saba on the other hand, is presented as a growing, ambitious girl who refuses to conform to the societal expectations of her gender. I argue that the switch in the gender performance roles between Saba and Hagos is a result of the latter's impairment. Saba is seen as '… the woman who had dared to live by her own rules' (p. 21), while her brother only comes across as a passive male who does not have much to contribute. As a result of the war in their country, Saba, her mother and Hagos escape to a refugee camp. It is here that we get to see how the impairment of Hagos ends up having a great effect on the way Hagos and Saba behave and carry out their activities. It appears however, that even though Hagos is Saba's elder brother, their roles changed as they grew up together. It is, therefore, not surprising that we see Saba now taking the leadership role as far as the two are concerned.

Hagos's inability to speak, therefore disconnects him from the larger community, and he ends up being restricted to the domestic space. Consequently, the home becomes the ideal place where Hagos feels much more comfortable to operate. This therefore offers Saba, who prefers to stay outside, the opportunity to leave home as Hagos stays behind with their mother. While Saba steps in to play various roles for Hagos, Hagos is also presented as one who makes being born a girl easier for Saba:

> Every woman, her grandmother told her once, carries an ideal man in her heart, someone who made the challenges of being born a girl a little easier. Hagos was that man for Saba. They linked each other's worlds. He carried out domestic chores, bought her clothes and shoes, and took care of her hair, all while she focused on her studies. (p. 45)

Hagos is, therefore not merely an older brother who takes delight in dressing, trimming the hair and painting the fingernails of his younger sister. Hagos 'cooked for their mother, washed and ironed her clothes, massaged her when back was aching, and made her ginger juice to soothe her heartburn' (p. 53).

The exchange of gender roles that occurs in the novel leads to the feminization of Hagos and masculinization of Saba, respectively. 'They were a match, he and she the other of the other' (p. 45). We are told that:

> Saba had given all her femininity to her brother. She remembered the midwife's words about Hagos. But Saba didn't have enough femininity to give, just as Hagos didn't have enough masculinity give her. They were born like that. But what struck Saba the more she thought about the statement that the midwife made, and that others had made about her and Hagos, was how they saw household chores as what defined being a woman. (p. 74)

The feminization of the mute male can be interpreted as a form of othering. Hagos's muteness is what makes him an easier counterpart of Saba, who desires a life of adventure and exploration of what is expected of Hagos as the male figure. Saba, therefore, gives her femininity to her older brother as she attempts to break free from society's gender role

expectations of her. According to Tom Shakespeare (1999), 'The traditional account, such as it is, of disabled masculinity rests therefore on the notion of contradiction: femininity and disability reinforce each other, masculinity and disability conflict with each other' (p. 57). Indeed, not only are their gender roles exchanged, but Hagos also takes on feminine habits and attitudes. 'Saba looked at Hagos. His hair covered his ears now. He ate like her mother. Fingers turned into an elegant spoon, his chewing inaudible. He was the girl her mother had always wanted (p. 96). The feminization of Hagos can again be seen in how Hagos takes an interest in carrying out activities that their society has reserved for females:

> Hagos took a bristle brush out of his jute sack and straightened his sister's naturally curly hair, though she liked it as it was. She tilted her head back as he arranged a red bandana to keep her hair away from her face. She had never told him she detested that colour. As he put earrings on her ears, she grimaced in anticipation of the itching she'd feel in reaction to the silver, and allowed him then to add a short heart-shaped necklace. He turned her into a cliché, she thought, as she coughed when he sprayed her neck with a perfume, he made from ingredients he picked up at the market back home. But then again, Saba thought, that which is cliché for many is original for someone as isolated and lonely as Hagos. (p. 46)

The result of the feminization of the mute male is that Saba takes over Hagos's place as the male of the house and as the elder brother. Indeed, she does not only assume the role of being Hagos's voice but also takes his place in society:

> Saba queued instead of her brother. If he could talk, she was sure, he would have done it. If silence was a language, she would not have forced herself to be his voice. She talked to people even when she didn't feel like it. She queued for hours to ask the aid centre questions about food, better clothes, for her, for her mother and Hagos. She bore the scorching sun as she waited for food, and like the trips to the river to fetch water or wash clothes, or to the bush to collect firewood, it marked its presence on her body. (p. 74)

At the refugee camp, Saba assumes a leadership role in her family and is forced to do things for her mother as well as her older brother. This 'marked its presence' in Saba's body.

It is worth noting that the more Saba takes over the role of Hagos as a result of Hagos's impairment, the more 'othered' Hagos becomes. This means that in othering the disabled character, there are certain activities by the normates that may appear harmless but rather add to the rendering of the disabled character as being of no use in his or her society. Hagos becomes a feminized male who is presented as not being of much relevance. This does not help in his personal growth and development.

Interestingly, this gender role exchange appears unacceptable to the members of society. This is revealed in the reaction that Saba receives as Hagos is seen cooking in the house:

> Four girls carrying buckets stood nearby on their way home from the river. They laughed as Hagos stirred flour into boiling water to make the porridge. Curse on you, one of the girls said Saba. Why are you making him cook? (p. 59)

The dilemma Saba finds herself makes it not easy for us to judge her. However, this mode of presenting the mute male reveals how, by circumventing the prescribed gender roles, Saba only ends up becoming a part of those who present her brother as 'the other.'

**The mute character and formal education**

In *Silence is My Mother Tongue*, another critical issue that is raised about the othering of disabled persons is how they are sometimes denied an education because of their impairment. In the novel, Hagos is withdrawn from school when it is determined that he cannot speak. The withdrawal of Hagos from school as a result of his impairment is another form of othering that the disabled character suffers in the novel. We get to know that Hagos is withdrawn from school for Saba to take over his place as a result of his impairment:

> Saba left Jamal and followed the Khwaja through the camp. His blue outfit reminded her of what her father had worn the morning he carried her to school to take Hagos's place, when Hagos was pulled from school by their parents after a visiting doctor diagnosed

> him as mute. That day, Saba saw Hagos hiding behind a tree outside the school. She waved at him. Hagos ran away. (p. 35)

It is very telling that the diagnoses of the doctor is what causes the educational journey of Hagos to become truncated. After being diagnosed as mute, Hagos loses his place at school to his younger sister. That one is denied formal education because of an impairment the individual has is a social injustice that calls for action. It is, however worth noting that this idea of replacing Hagos with Saba is done seamlessly. This shows how, generally, Hagos's society had no arrangement for people with such conditions in terms of getting a formal education.

As a result of Saba replacing her brother in school, she begins to feel very indebted to Hagos knowing very well that she is in school because Hagos is mute:

> Though she owned her mind, she had given her body to Hagos a long time ago. It made sense. She had taken his place in school and it was fair to give him this alternative form of self-expression. He used her skin in his way to write his story. (p. 47)

What becomes obvious is that it is Hagos' impairment, which society bases on to declare him as being unfit to attend school. That is why their parents decided to invest all that they had in Saba's education without having any concrete plan for Hagos:

> Saba was his confidante, his sole friend. She had first realised this many years ago. She had just returned home from the hospital, where she had undergone treatment for the burn injuries to her thighs, when Hagos barged into her room. Usually, he would knock before entering her room and she would have time to clear her bed of books, hide the words, the equations, the science and history taken away from him when his parents pulled him out of school and instead invested whatever money they had in her. (p. 46)

By denying the disabled character formal education as a result of his impairment, Hagos's mother appears to communicate that Hagos is not worthy of any form of educational investment. Such an unfair treatment further pushes such characters to the fringes of society, where they are condemned to remain for the rest of their lives. Indeed, disabled persons are

sometimes denied education because they are either deemed to be unfit for school or the school system does not have facilities to accommodate such persons. Through this form of treatment, the disabled child is made to grow with the mindset of not being worthy of certain important things society has to offer.

**'He will die a virgin': Muteness and sex in Silence is My Mother Tongue**

Another area where Hagos' muteness comes to play is his sexuality. As the novel begins, the first image of Hagos that is presented, as far as his sexuality is concerned, is that of a mute character who is suspected to have been abused by his younger sister. As Saba and her family arrive at the camp, we are told that,

> Saba spread out the other blanket on the opposite side of the hut. Here. Hagos and Saba would sleep. Share dreams. And a new life. This would be a place of reunion. They would spend nights talking. Laughing. Singing. Sharing stories from back home. And recounting childhood memories. Here, Saba would make up for the years she neglected Hagos. Years when she could see nothing around her apart from her textbooks. War had brought her closer to the person she had opened her eyes to first. Their mother often told her how, at only a few hours old, baby Saba had searched for milk on Hagos's chest. Hagos was also the first name she ever spoke. Hag. The other letters -o and s-came later. And like his name, his presence in her life would be realised piecemeal. ( p. 26)

Life at the refugee camp forces Saba and Hagos to share the same hut. This kind of relationship exists between Hagos and Saba, which consequently leads to the members of the community suspecting that a sexual relationship exists between them. Ironically, even though Saba is the younger of the two, she ends up being the one accused of sexually abusing her older brother:

> The men making up the committee of elders shut their eyes. After sipping on water fetched by the clerk, the judge rose to his feet again. He drew a deep breath. His authoritative voice returned. Ladies and gentlemen, he said. It pains me to state that we have charged Saba with a grotesque sexual act against a hapless man. Her own disabled brother…Saba abused Hagos. A woman cried as she beat her chest. Saba had abused poor Hagos. Our local doctor, the midwife, went around the court with a sliced onion to revive those who had fallen. The judge was on his feet again: Quiet. Quiet…The crowd quietened. His voice dropped. My brothers and sisters, he said. I have thought for weeks about whether it would be preferable to conduct this trial in private, given the magnitude of

> the accusation, but I decided against it. We must establish the facts. Just how did this woman manage to take advantage of a poor man under our own eyes? We must learn lessons so this hideous crime will never happen again. (p. 10)

Even though the trial appears to be well-intended, this whole scenario presents a negative image of Hagos as a disabled character. As a result of his impairment, Hagos is presented as not being able to take care of himself. He is, therefore, portrayed as not being safe even in the hands of his younger sister. Hagos is presented as a poor, disabled male who has to be protected from being sexually abused by his younger sister. The reference to Hagos as 'a poor', 'hapless,' and 'disabled brother' of Saba is not only negative but a projection of the societal perception of the mute character and how he is perceived to be helpless even when it comes to his sexuality.

In fact, Hagos's condition is also presented as being the reason behind the breakdown of the gender lines between him and his younger sister. Regardless of this, they still have to deal with the suspecting eyes of their society. At the trial of Saba, the midwife testifies:

> I have been suspecting something was going on between Saba, may she be cursed, and Hagos since the afternoon, a few months after our arrival at the camp, when I entered their hut and found them lying together on a blanket. May the Lord forgive me for repeating this in front of you, Your Honour, but I discovered then that they had been sharing the same blanket ever since we arrived in the camp. I had to restrain myself from slapping that shameless girl. But no amount of beating was going to change her. I wished her mother had listened to me and had left her back home instead of paying so much money to bring her to this camp. You will never have peace with that girl, I had told her mother. I beg you, dear judge, to give her a severe punishment…I found Hagos' hut full of women's clothes. Pants and bras in his bed. For all this time, Saba lived in his hut and must have shared the bed with him. (pp. 13- 14)

The presentation of an older male who is suspected to have been abused by his younger sister is indeed an indictment of Hagos himself as a male character. This is not something he can be proud of. It is also interesting how in the eyes of society, as Saba and Hagos are seen 'lying together on a blanket,' it is rather the younger sister, who is also a

female, that gets suspected. I argue that this supposed show of care and concern by the normate is another manifestation of the disabled character being othered.

With this kind of othering, Hagos is stripped of the ability to initiate sex even on the assumption that something might have occurred between him and his sister. His innocence as an older male having 'pants and bras in his bed' also pushes him out of the class of normal males. It appears that the situation in which Hagos is seen with his sister goes contrary to what is expected of the normal male. Society therefore assumes that Saba, who is a normate, has taken advantage of her brother because of his disability. Consequently, the verdict of the midwife was that 'Saba didn't abuse her brother. Saba is innocent, she said. Saba is a virgin. Silence (p. 20) does no good to the image of Hagos. It is rather an indictment of the masculinity of Hagos.

Another important issue about the sexuality of Hagos as a mute character that is presented in the novel is that disability does not render males impotent or asexual. It appears that as a result of Hagos's impairment, he was perceived to be asexual. However, Saba later discovers that the manhood of her brother has not been extinguished because of his disability. One day, as Saba walks with Hagos, they see:

> …a woman bending low to blow on the charcoals of an open furnace. Her skirt lifted and crawled up on her skin.
>
> Saba looked away but noticed Hago's eyes lingering on the woman, who had managed to ignite the charcoals, the fire of the furnace rising and flickering between her dark thighs.
>
> Saba could not stop thinking about what had just happened as they arrived at the open toilet. Hagos's manhood hadn't been extinguished because he was disabled, like her cousin and her friends back home had assumed. Saba turned to Hagos and embraced him, letting go of his warm body when it occurred to her, she might be interrupting a beautiful moment in his head. (p. 56)

That disability extinguishes the manhood of a man is a misconception that gets debunked in this novel. It becomes clear that Hagos's muteness does not affect his ability to

express himself sexually. Indeed, the notion of disabled persons being asexual is very damaging to the chances of the disabled person's ability to actively participate in sexual activities in his or her society. Saba again confirms this fact of Hagos's manhood being active as he sees Hagos in possession of a nude painting:

> Saba put aside Hagos's collection of aromatic bottles and searched further. A leather bag at the bottom of the jute sack caught her interest. Inside, she found a set of colouring pencils and a stack of papers wrapped in a black lace scarf. A discovery in the middle of the pile distracted her from her thoughts. There it was, the nude painting gifted to her by the landlord. For years it had hung on the wall of her room back home. Saba wanted to take it with her when they fled but feared it would not fit in a camp. Yet Hagos had brought it. (p. 98-99)

It is worth noting that while the information on the disabled character's not having been affected by his disability appears to normalize the sexuality of the mute male, it also ends up becoming the basis for one of the greatest worries of Saba in the novel. Through Saba, we get confronted with the question of how a mute male expresses his sexuality in a society of normates. Disability is therefore presented as being a great barrier for the disabled man in taking part in the love relationships and sexual activities in his society. The intersection between sex and disability is, therefore, a major issue in Addonia's *Silence is My Mother Tongue.* This dilemma of Saba is expressed in various ways. In fact, she grows up with a great concern about how her brother will be able to participate in the sexual activities of their society. In Samhiya's encounter with Hagos, when Saba tries to provide an answer on Hagos's behalf,

> Samhiya rolled her head back and asked Saba, Why can't he talk for himself? Did I make him speechless?
> He is mute, said one of the boys behind Samhiya.
> Silence.
> Saba abhorred those moments when girls became quiet, perhaps pondering life with a handsome but disabled man. (p. 39)

We see Saba carrying the concerns of Hagos and seeking to help him as far as Hagos' sexual life is concerned. Indeed, Saba appears so overwhelmed by how, due to her brother's impairment, he will become relegated from the sexual life of their society. Here, the lines between the author re-enforcing a disability stereotype and the author's attempt to represent the challenges that confront mute males in expressing their sexuality are very thin. While what is presented in this particular novel is a literary representation of an existing phenomenon, what the author presents through the characters leaves room for various interpretations. For this particular text, I argue that just as it is difficult for the author to represent silence and muteness, this is an attempt for the author to communicate from his perspective what is observable within societies. The observations, therefore may not be fully accurate but help to provide a window of access to the world of the mute other. It, however attempts to represent the normate's fear about the ability of the disabled to actively participate in the sexual activities in society.

As far as Saba is concerned, disability has the capacity to deny her brother from finding a lover. After a visit from Samhiya, Saba:

> …sat on the bare wooden-framed bed held together with leather straps outside Samhiya's hut and watched as the city girl prepared tea. Saba believed Hagos was infatuated with her friend as the rest of the men in the camp, but because of his disability she was out of his reach. (p. 79)

For Saba, even though Hagos is infatuated with her friend Samhiya, Hagos' inability to speak, which is considered as a disability, eliminates him from being a contender. Being a mute male, therefore, renders Hagos as 'the other' who does not even stand the chance of being loved by a girl. As a disabled other, Hagos is presented as being condemned to a lonely and miserable future while all the other normates get married:

> Saba imagined him many years from now. Still alone. Time, though, moved on. The athlete and Samhiya married. With children. All the while, Hagos lay still in this camp, in this hut, on this blanket. Wrinkles had formed on his cheeks. And underneath his long eyelashes and kohled eyes, lines of exhaustion and of fatigues crammed together, clogging up his sight. He smelt of neglect, of years gone by untouched. An old sexless, loveless, lonely Hagos trailing the youthful athlete who had taken a different path to old age, with frequent stops at several oases to replenish his soul in the arms of lovers. (p. 78)

Interestingly, negative image of the sexual life of the mute character is painted by a normate who, being aware of societal barriers and stereotypes, does not see how her brother will be able to overcome such hurdles.

Again, Hagos is presented as being double othered as a result of being illiterate and mute at the same time. To Saba, no one will take an illiterate mute for a husband:

> And when Saba and Hagos sat down for breakfast, the dialogue of the night before replayed in her mind: Poor man. He is older than us, said the praise poet. His mother has been looking for a wife for him. But no girl, I mean even the poorest or the ugliest, would take an illiterate mute for a husband. (p. 96)

The gloomy picture Saba paints that not even the 'poorest or the ugliest' girl will even accept to take Hagos, '..an illiterate mute for a husband,', is a negative portrayal of the disabled other. While in context, Saba does not appear to stigmatize her brother, presenting such issues as statements of fact in the literary text seem to further destroy the image of the disabled other in society. By contrasting the marital prospects of Saba with that of Hagos, the latter is further othered and his future is presented as being very bleak because of his 'otherness.' Saba 'imagines herself 'at her wedding, in her husband's bed, a certain time in the future when her own children surrounded her, while Hagos remained in this blanket, in this hut, old, lonely, childless. Dying without ever experiencing love' (p. 97).

Interestingly, when the midwife and Saba's mother assumed that Mr. Eyob was interested in marrying Saba, 'She imagined some time from now when Eyob would succeed,

and her brother would be left behind, dying a virgin as the men at Azyeb's bar had predicted (p. 121).' The praise poet's words from the day before came again to Saba: Poor Hagos, he will die a virgin. (p. 98). For Saba,

> She found it strange that Hagos was twenty-something and had yet to grow a mustache or beard. That was a miracle. God ought to be thanked for Hagos's eternal youth, she thought. There was still time. Love was bound to find its way to him. (p. 97)

A mustache or beard is used symbolically to represent males. Unfortunately, that which is meant to be common to men is missing in the life of Hagos.

In fact, Saba even decides to go to every extent to ensure that she passes on her sexual experiences to her brother. One of the ways she does this is by trying to imagine herself as being Hagos during times when she gets very close and intimate with her female friends. It is, therefore not surprising that Saba then begins to imagine ways through which she can make love to other ladies on behalf of Hagos:

> Saba thought of Hagos. He had become more than the guilt she carried. Everything she did, she did for two. She spoke for two. She carried. She studied and dreamt for two. Asked questions for two. Her eyes were his, as were all her other senses. And now, as she looked at Samhiya, Saba wanted to fill the absence of passion in his life in a pragmatic way, in the same way, she fetched water to quench his thirst, brought him food from the aid centre and spinach from the wild to feed his hunger. Just as she filled the role of a best friend as well as a sister, she imagined it possible that he could make love through her. (p. 80)

In a more surprising way, Saba attempts to imagine herself as Hagos as she gets very intimate with Samhiya:

> Saba arrived at their hut from Samhiya's breathless and woke Hagos up from his sleep. Hagos sat up and rubbed his eyes. Saba held him- if he could only breathe in the smell of Samhiya's skin in hers, feel the pubic hair her tongue had touched for him, and see the shape of Samhiya's vagina reflected in her eyes. Hagos, though, closed his eyes and laid his head on Saba's thighs. (p. 80)

Ironically, even though Hagos' is presented throughout the novel as being in danger of not experiencing love because of his 'otherness', he is rather the one who finds a lover at the refugee camp. Hagos finds a lover, whereas Saba, who is very concerned about Hagos, gets married out of mere formality. Interestingly, the midwife, like many others, had assumed that Mr. Eyob was only trying to get to Saba by making Hagos his friend. That is why when Hagos's mother complains about the suspicion of people concerning the friendship between Mr. Eyob and Hagos, the midwife tries to calm her down:

> How can I sit there and listen to the things they are saying about my son? Said the mother. You know what that man asked me, ah, why a wealthy educated businessman from the city is interested in a villager who is mute and cannot read or write? Stop whimpering. At least they are not talking about her, for once, said the midwife, bringing a smile to Saba. And don't let crying be your first response. Can you not see it is good news? What's good about people belittling my son? Saba smiled when her mother talked back at the midwife, an elation that didn't last when the midwife said: Think for yourself and try to understand why Eyob is doing it. I expected you to realize this, but let me explain.
>
> You don't need to explain, said the mother. That man told me my son is … I can't even say it.
>
> God forgive us, said the midwife. Don't even say it. We don't have these things in our culture. Eyob is a man of God. He was married and he had a son. How can he do that if he goes with boys, ah? But people in this camp are jealous of your son and you. (p. 119)

However, when Mr. Eyob indicates that he has no interest in marrying Saba, Saba and Hago's mother laments:

> Mr Eyob, her mother said, her voice audible to all. Mr Eyob, but you also need to understand that people have been talking. They see you come here every evening, bringing gifts, and they wonder why a middle-aged man, who is rich and from Asmara, would befriend a young man who is a poor countryside boy and mute. (159-160)

Indeed, even though Mr. Eyob's position in society puts him above Hagos, being a homosexual in a society that frowns on such a sexual orientation makes him too another 'other.' It is, therefore, not surprising that the two men who are considered as 'the other' based on body difference and sexual orientation end up becoming sexual partners. Eyob declares:

> My younger self is finding a new life in a refugee camp, said the businessman. It is never too late to be who you truly are. Hagos taught me that (p. 132)

In the end, it is Saba who gets a firm confirmation of the homosexual relationship between Eyob and her brother, Hagos

> And as she sat back, she noticed her brother and the businessman entering the compound. Hagos, Saba mumbled. The two men sat on Eyob's bed outside. Hagos's beaming face overshadowed everything around it. Perhaps it was because of him that Jamal had set his cinema in that spot, Saba thought. Why else, she wondered to herself, did Jamal call his cinema Cinema Silenzioso? Hagos, the silent man who never uttered a word, yet could captivate the audience with his mere presence. A Signora, at attore cinematografico. But this cinema was another way to tell a story rooted in their tradition, their life. What she was watching was reality, not a film made in the West. What was unfolding before her eyes in the compound she was staring at through the cinema was part of her own life, made in the camp. Two Habesha men gazing at each other, two Habesha men who intertwined their fingers as they kissed in Cinema Silenzioso. (p. 170)

The sexual relationship that develops between Hagos and Mr. Eyob is symbolic of the societal barriers that the two characters defy in order for them to live beyond the expectations of their society. After Saba marries Eyob, she requests that Hagos be allowed to stay with her in her matrimonial home. Hagos' place in Eyob's house is significant since his:

> hut was to be filled with furniture Eyob had bought from Nasnet. Hagos's new bed would be the bed of the sex worker. The bed with the thick mattress that Nasnet brought with her when she was

> evicted from the city because the comfort of being on top of that material compensated for the duress of being under the weight of a man. (p. 170)

Hagos is, therefore, fully feminised at the end of the novel since as becomes the sexual partner of Eyob. Symbolically, as Hagos inherits the furniture and bed of Nasnet, the sex worker, he assumes the role of being the sex partner of Eyob. In the end, Saba sacrifices her supposed marriage so that her brother can continue to enjoy the homosexual relationship between him and Mr. Eyob. Hagos also follows a path that conforms to his desires and preferences.

## Conclusion

It is evident from the examination of the representation of the mute character in Sulaiman Addonia's *Silence is My Mother Tongue* that as a result of Hagos's disability, he becomes 'othered' by the other normates. The novel's direct reference to how Hagos's disability stood the chance of denying him participation in the sexual life of his community is evidence of the fact that giving the disabled character agency is a deliberate attempt by the author to give attention to issues that confront such persons. In the end, contrary to the fears and gloomy picture that is painted about Hagos because of his disability, we see him finding love. The homosexual relationship that eventually develops between Hagos and Eyob is a demonstration of how, by breaking free from societal molds, the disabled character is able to experience life and love in unique ways.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

# 'BLACK BUT NOT BLACK, WHITE BUT NOT WHITE': EXAMINING THE OTHERING OF THE ALBINO CHARACTER IN PETINAH GAPPAH'S *THE BOOK OF MEMORY*

## Introduction

In the last chapter, we looked at the representation of the mute male in Sulaiman Addonia's *Silence is My Tongue.* We examined how Hagos's impairment affects his gender role performance and ability to fully live as a complete man in his community. It was realised that Saba, who is Hagos's brother, takes it upon herself to play the roles of her elder brother and also serve as his voice. Saba is presented as being overly concerned about her brother's ability to find love because of his impairment. Ironically, Hagos breaks the societal norms and ends up in a homosexual relationship with Mr. Eyob.

This chapter focuses on the representation of the albino character as an 'othered' person in Petinah Gappah's *The Book of Memory*. The chapter delves into how, by looking different, the albino character becomes a subject of stares, ostracization and stereotyping by the normates. My focus in analysing the representation of Memory, who is an albino character, is therefore in line with what Ken Junior Lipenga and Emmanuel Ngwira (2018) refer to as the call to examine 'literary interventions into the subject of albinism on the continent' (p. 1473). It is the focus of my analysis that differs from their examination of Gappah's *The Book of Memory*. Again, I do a much more detailed analysis of the representation of Memory. The chapter pays particular attention to the attempt by Gappah to capture as realistic as possible, the societal treatment of albinos and how body difference plays a key role in how individuals are treated in their societies. The novel, which is a form of

a memoir by an albino lady called Memory, can be said to be Gappah's way of using literature to contribute to addressing the plight of albinos in Africa. By using an albino as the narrator of the story, Gappah's novel serves as a great window through which we observe how albinos are treated as the 'other' in certain societies. The novel, which is set in Zimbabwe, attempts a realistic portrayal of the woes of albinos as a result of their being different from other normates. According to Lipenga and Ngwirab (2018), albinism is considered to be 'a visible disability, perhaps indeed the 'most visible' one (p. 1477), and the representation of albino characters is the African literary writer's way of using literature to help address issues surrounding albinism in Africa.

Albinism is considered to be a very common condition in Sub-Saharan African countries. It is very prevalent in countries like Tanzania, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Nigeria. It is a medical condition which is considered to be hereditary. The condition mostly leads to great depigmentation of the skin, eyes and hair of the one who has it. It is, therefore, not surprising that the one who is an albino tends to appear different in terms of the colour of the skin, eyes and hair from those who may not be suffering from it, especially within black African communities. Indeed, it is primarily the physical body difference of albinos that sets them apart from other normates. The depigmentation of the skins, hairs and eyes of albinos within largely black communities make them appear markedly different from all others, contributing to the othering of those who have such conditions wherever they may find themselves.

Unfortunately, in some African societies, albinism is associated with stigma, stereotypes and superstitions that even put the lives of albinos in great danger (Lipenga & Ngwira, 2018; Ncube & Mtenje, 2019). According to Lipenga and Ngwira (2018), albinism is shrouded with mystery and superstition, and this plays a key role in endangering the lives of albinos on the continent. Ojok and Musenze (2019) argue that while the beliefs of Ancient

Africans about disability were not negative, it is the influence of Judeo-Christian religions that has led to how disability is perceived negatively within contemporary societies. However, this view may not be entirely true. For instance, in some African societies, albinos are murdered, and their body parts are used for rituals. Such practices are not merely a result of 'ignorance and harsh economic conditions' (p.5), as Ojok and Musenze suggest. These practices and beliefs have long been rooted in how certain African societies perceive body differences. It is these practices and beliefs that have, therefore, called for various forms of interventions to address such issues within various African societies. This is why some African authors have also sought to use the literary space to draw attention to the injustices and atrocities that albinos go through.

As a form of a memoir by a fictional character, the novel understudy serves as a very important material that reveals the lived experiences of albinos. Even though what Gappah presents is purely a work of fiction, the issues raised are based on the happenings in society. This is why Lipenga and Nwgira (2018) refer to the novel and others with similar focus as 'literary interventions that enable an appreciation of the person behind the skin' (p. 1472). The world of literature, therefore, helps us to realise that the albino character needs to be heard and understood. In the novel, through Memory's account of her life story, we are able to experience what it means to be an albino in the community in which she finds herself, as well as what pertains even in real life. By using Zimbabwe as the setting of the novel, it seems that Gappah is suggesting that what she has presented in a form of a memoir by a fictional character is verifiable in real life and we are able to appreciate the kind of negative perceptions and attitudes attached to being an albino (Lipenga & Ngwira, 2018). A key argument leveled against writers in this regard is that 'a lot of the representations of disabled people have tended to be rather negative and stereotypical' (Lipenga & Ngwira, 2018, p. 1475). According to Lipenga and Ngwira (2018), in their quest to use literary text to help

fight against what albinos go through as a result of their body differences, African writers present narratives that seek to present a realistic portrayal of what happens in society. They further assert that 'the task of Disability Studies at present is concerned with, among other things, the examination of creative representations of the disabled body, whether in literature, film or art' (p. 1475).

Of all the texts understudy, this is the only novel that has the disabled character functioning as the narrator. This is indeed a key strength of the novel in an attempt to present a realistic portrayal of what it means to be an albino in such a society, the perceptions about albinism, the challenges albinos go through and what they have to deal with. The story being written in the form of a memoir also helps Memory, who acts as the narrator, to present the issues in a near matter-of-fact way. I share with the view of Lipenga and Ngwira (2018) that the African novel helps readers to better appreciate the struggles of albino characters with regard to how they are othered and marginalised in society. As observed by Cynthy Haihambo and Elizabeth Lightfoot (2010), myths, beliefs and perceptions about disability vary across various African societies and groups. This, therefore, makes it necessary for those interested in disability representation in African literary texts to pay attention to the beliefs and perceptions of particular African societies when it comes to disability representation.

As the novel begins, we find Memory in prison as a result of the death of her white caretaker, Lloyd. The entire story is Memory's attempt to recollect her life's journey, especially as it pertains to how she got to stay with Lloyd, the mystery surrounding her family as well as how she ended up in jail. This recollection is, therefore, meant to help those who want to assist her in seeking a re-trial of her case. While Ncube and Mtenje (2019) focus on how Lloyd and Memory, who are members of dominated out-groups in their society, suffer from discrimination and marginalisation, I choose to focus on what Memory goes through as a result of her body difference instead. This is to help give proper attention to the albino

character in order to discuss what it means for Memory to navigate through her society's barriers and boundaries as a result of her skin condition.

By way of situating the story of her life in the right context, Memory indicates that:

> The story that you have asked me to tell you does not begin with the pitiful ugliness of Lloyd's death. It begins on a long-ago day in August when the sun seared my blistered face and I was nine years old and my father and mother sold me to a strange man. (p. 7)

Lloyd is an Oxford-trained white man who becomes the caretaker of Memory. Even though the arrangement of Memory staying with Lloyd was to last for a short period, he ends up taking care of Memory for the rest of her life. For the most of her life, Memory considered herself to have been sold by her parents to Lloyd due to the apparent lack of transparency that covered how Lloyd and Memory came to stay together. Interestingly, the very life and history of Memory's parents remained a secret to Memory. Memory tells us, 'Until they sold me to Lloyd, and I moved away, I knew nothing about them beyond the fact that they were my mother and father' (p. 20). The mystery surrounding how she gets to stay with Lloyd is something Memory grapples with all through the narrative until her sister shows up. Unfortunately, Lloyd also stays away from mentioning how Memory, who is a black albino girl, gets to stay with him in his house. Memory mentions that:

> Lloyd rarely talked openly about how I came to live with him. When he spoke of 'taking me in,' of 'giving me a home,' the good-hearted rich man taking in a poor black child, the cheerful Cheeryble giving room and board to an ungrateful Dickensian orphan. Except that it was really a case of the white man buying the black child, apart, of course, from the '*well, you know'*, as Officer Rollers called it, the condition that makes me black but not black, white but not white. That is how it was, and I will tell you all about it. (p. 12)

It is interesting to note that for Memory's society, a tale of Memory as a black girl getting the opportunity to stay with a white male is not surprising. As Memory states, it is just

a matter of a rich white man who offers to help a poor black child. However, the fact that as an albino, Memory gets to enjoy the privilege of a Dickensian orphan is what Officer Rollers finds it difficult to imagine. Metaphorically, Memory compares herself to a Dickensian orphan who is rescued from a very difficult life by a benevolent rich man. Ironically, in the case of Memory, her parents are alive but she can't have any contact with them again.

**'Oddities of appearance': The treatment of body difference in society**

The othering of Memory is therefore as, a result of her being an albino. Garland-Thomson (2017) states that 'the source of all otherness is the concept of a norm, a 'generic type' against which all physical variation appears as different, derivative, inferior and insufficient' (p. 20). While referring to albinism, Memory laments that it is 'the condition that makes me black but not black, white but not white' (p. 12). The paradox of neither being black nor white shows how albinos suffer from a lack of belongingness. Through Memory's recollection of events surrounding her birth, growth and, eventually, her stay in the prison, we get to experience how this condition is perceived and treated within Memory's society. One thing that stands out clearly in the novel is how body difference is very critical to how people are viewed within the society where the novel is set. Indeed, there have been increasing calls for 'new approaches to African disability based on the realities faced by disabled Africans' (p. 5). According to Lipenga and Ngwirab (2018), literary texts do not merely expose readers the presence of albinos. 'More than that, the novel, in particular the African novel in this case, permits a mode of knowing that enables a much-needed empathetic appreciation of the albino figure' (p. 1474). I am of the view that this 'mode of knowing is possible' for those who are interested in the literary representation of disability in African texts if some of the critical questions that guide the hybrid interpretative framework are considered in the close reading of the texts. Indeed, it is by paying close attention to how the albino character is perceived and treated in the text that will help us to know and appreciate different society's ways of

treating albinism. As Lipenga & Ngwirab (2018) rightly indicate, 'The novel thus acts as a classic mirror for reality, in which the readers are faced with their possible discriminatory practices from the perspective of the victim, and can thus create empathy' (p. 1476).

A close reading of *The Book of Memory* shows that the othering of Memory is characterised by how Memory is regarded and treated by the members of her society. This bias against Memory, which is because of her skin difference, is perpetuated by all manner of people in the society, including those who are supposed to be enlightened, including Officer Rollers. The novel also reveals that the negative reaction against albinos is so institutionalized that the media also becomes a culprit in pushing forth certain negative narratives against albinos. Memory indicates how when the issue of Lloyd's death came up, her 'condition' ended up becoming the focus of the media houses:

> In many ways I am glad that no one has chosen to tell my story. When the papers first reported Lloyd's death, they focused on my condition, just as had always been done in the township where I lived before Lloyd bought me. There was a brutal honesty in how the children regarded anyone different. (p. 17)

It is important to note how Memory's body difference, which she refers to as 'my condition,' takes centre stage whenever anything about her comes up. Memory's 'otherness' as an albino becomes highlighted by those enlightened, the media and the members of Memory's community. Through her narration, Memory reveals how, at every point in time and wherever she goes, people choose to rather focus on her condition. This appears to be the norm in the society she belongs. Memory indicates that 'There was a brutal honesty in how the children regarded anyone different' (p. 17) within her society. This suggests how, in this society, there is a certain idea of the ideal body, and as such, whatever is deemed to be different gets to be considered as being the 'other.' It is therefore not surprising that for the members of the society, whether children or adults, educated or poor, at school or in the neighbourhood, body differences become a subject of interest to all:

> If they saw a person with no legs, they did not point out a person with no legs, or a person with no sight; they shouted, *hona chirema*, *hona bofu*, come and see the cripple, come and see the blind man, calling attention to each deficiency. (p. 17)

Calling 'attention to each deficiency' is, therefore a key way by which people who look different are treated in Memory's society. This is a form of 'othering' people whose bodies are considered to be different or not ideal. This way of othering people is therefore revealed to be a key part of how body difference gets treated within that society. Such individuals are therefore referred to by their 'conditions' whether it in reference to one being a cripple or blind.

Indeed, what shows that the othering of different bodies based on their body conditions is a core part of Memory's society is how there is a developed register used in referring to people who appear different in society. Here, linguistic othering is a testament of how deep rooted the issue of body classification and othering is in this society. Having words for how people with body differences are referred to can be considered to be a key indicator of how such a society abhors and ridicules whatever is considered to be different. According to Giorgio Brocco (2015), 'a clue to the stigma attached to people with albinism in several African countries is present in the labels used to define them' (p. 1146). To him, it is these labels that reveal how albinos are considered to be a form of deviation from the acceptable human body. We are told that regarding the brutal honesty of the children in the society, in terms of how they treat body differences,

> Their attitude was implicitly rooted in the language itself. Bofu is in noun class five, denoting things, just like *benzi*, the word for a mad person. Chirema, like a *chimumumu*, is in noun class seven, also denoting things, objects, lifeless objects or incomplete, deficient persons. (p. 17)

Since language is a critical part of culture and socialisation, it is not surprising that these children grow up with the mindset that treating those whose bodies do not match a

certain ideal of a perfect body is normal. As Giorgio Brocco (2015) rightly indicates, 'labelling and terminologies attached to individuals with a disability thus represent clues about the society within which these people live' (p. 1149). The different classes of words that are used to apply to different body conditions are also very revealing. This is a clear demonstration of how linguistic othering works out in a society that sees some bodies as being desirable and other bodies as deviations. Some words seek to mark people considered to have deficiencies and defects as being the 'other.' This means that even the word that is used to refer to a person of a particular condition is a clear indication of the value society places on that person. Just as Memory states, such kind of attitude is 'implicitly rooted in the language' (p. 17). Giorgio Brocco (2015) posits that language 'discloses marginalizing and inclusive attitudes towards people with albinism as well as their everyday struggles to be accepted by their communities' (p. 1155). This view is shared by Hermeston (2017) who also states that, 'language communicates attitudes that have disabling effects' (p. 36). For instance, the word for a mad person is different from the word for an albino. As Memory indicates:

> As *murungudunhu* or *musope*. I find myself with normal people in noun class one. But *murungudunhu* is heavy with meaning. As a *murungudunhu*, I am a black woman who is imbued with the whiteness of *murungu*, of privilege, but *dunhu*, of ridicule and a fakery, a ghastly whiteness. (pp. 17-18)

While the word used for an albino places a person with such a body difference above a madman, what is obvious is that the reference to an albino as a '*murungudunhu* or *musope'* is a form of othering those with such body condition. Automatically, to be referred to by that name is to be informed that you belong to a lower class of human beings. Brocco (2015) asserts that through the use of language, a society's perceptions and attitudes about disability are revealed. Language itself, therefore, becomes a means through which a society 'constructs ideas and discourses about disability and albinism' (p. 1149). Consequently, an easy way for

one to see how disabled persons are considered to be 'the other' in a particular African society is to pay attention to the labels and names used to those whose bodies are considered to be different (Brocco, 2015). For Memory, who is a black albino lady, her condition is considered to be of 'ridicule and a fakery, a ghastly whiteness' (p. 18). This meaning of the words used to refer to albinos suggests that there is nothing or very little about the body of an albino that deserves to be celebrated. 'The naming is thus used as a tool of alienation. Worse still, it also becomes a way in which the character with albinism becomes dehumanised' (Lipenga & Ngwirab, 2018, p. 1480). It is, therefore, not shocking that a police officer who is supposed to be enlightened tells Memory, 'A nice-looking young woman like you,' she said. 'You are not so bad-looking, but for the, well, you know. You certainly know how to take care of yourself. I must give you that' (p. 10). The 'well you know' is an implied reference to Memory being an albino. The condition is, therefore considered to be a negative factor that subtracts from the likelihood of Memory being considered as a beautiful lady. Brocco (2015) is, therefore, right in stating that 'a clue to the stigma attached to people with albinism in several Africans is present in the labels used to define them' (p. 1146). Language, therefore serves as a great tool for discrimination and stigmatisation against albinos.

Due to the negative image that gets imprinted in her mind, Memory as an albino also begin to walk with the image of how different she looks as compared to others. According to Brocco (2015), 'albinism strongly influences the self-esteem of people affected by the condition. People with albinism must constantly prove that they are as normal and human as other persons' (p. 1148). While referring to her family's session with a photographer, Memory states that:

> When he photographed Joyi, Mobhi and me separately from our parents, he sat next to a large doll with a porcelain face that had staring eyes and a blank smile. Our pictures thus had a frozen quality; our eyes were brighter than new dollar coins, as though a light had been shone directly into them. I always looked pale, paler

> than everyone else, like a ghost against the others, as though I were a live and large version of the porcelain doll on my knee; the same doll that frightened me in my first week at Summer Madness, or a doll very like it. (p. 43)

The use of the simile here is very intentional. We see how progressively Memory compares herself to the other children as being 'a ghost' and 'the doll that frightened' her in her first week at Summer Madness. Of great significance is the fact that, as compared to other children, Memory sees herself as looking like a ghost and a mere doll. This simile which reveals a negative self-image could be said to be a result of how society has conditioned Memory to see herself. To the extent that Memory compares herself to inanimate objects is an indication of how she sees herself as 'the other.'

**'The world's gaze is on me': Looking different in a world of normates**

A very important aspect of the othering of Memory is seen in how as she goes about her daily activities, people react to her body difference. The particular focus on Memory's looks is a testament of how her body difference becomes the subject of the people she comes across. At a restaurant, Memory narrates how:

> …a white woman in the chocolate section of the department store came up to us as we moved towards the lifts. She wore glasses with frames that elongated upwards into points on each side of her face, giving her eyes a distorted look, as though I were seeing them through the milk bottles, the gold and silver topped ones that we bought at the shops. 'She looks like an angel; isn't she an angel?' she said. She gave me a dollar coin. It felt large and unfamiliar in my hand. (p. 8)

While 'She looks like an angel' may appear to be positive referencing, it only reinforces the notion that compared with others, Memory looks different. Again, the simile shows how Memory is considered to be different by those who see her. Once a sense of being different gets attributed to a body, it places it in the category of being the other. Memory also recalls how, even in her own house, her mother used to refer to 'those eyes' of hers:

> I have said that my mother comes to me in a cloud of fear. Perhaps a better word for the feeling that my mother gave me certainty. In that uncertainty lay fear. I never knew when she would laugh or cry or shout at us; I never knew when she would tell me to go outside and stop looking at her with 'those eyes.' (p. 109)

It seems that Memory's mother had an issue with how Memory's eyes looked as she kept telling her, 'Stop looking at me with those eyes. (p. 112). Again, when Memory moves into Lloyd's house, she encounters MaiJethro, who also questions her about her looks. Memory mentions that:

> The first time she saw me, MaiJethro made me stand before her in the kitchen while she assailed me with a thousand questions. Where was I from?…Did all my family look like me? Why did look the way I did? Had I been bewitched? (p. 184)

MaiJethro's rhetorical questions reveal how the albino character has to battle with being questioned by others as a result of being seen to be diffrenet. It is therefore not surprising that as Memory reflected on reports that were published about her in the newspapers, she 'imagined people talking of' her 'as the albino woman who has hanged (p. 73).' In fact, at a point in time in her life, Memory states how Simon told her that she '…looked like something that lived in the water, like the Ondine' (p. 222). He simile Simon uses by comparing Memory to 'something that lived in the water' is just another way of saying that she looked different. Obviously, the comments that people pass about Memory's body are an indication of how they regard her as being different. Toyin Falola and Nic Hamel (2021) regard these forms of 'social mistreatment' as being 'as disabling, if not more so, than physical or mental impairments' (p. 31).

The sense of being 'the other' is, therefore, clearly seen in how the world stares at and gazes at those whose bodies are considered to be different. Disability and storytelling are greatly intertwined. This means that what makes individual bodies to appear different tends to

elicit explanation (Davis, 1995; Garland-Thomson, 2017). Lipenga (2020) adds that 'there are always narratives created around the disabled character' (p. 178). This is a way to help others to make sense of the human conditions that are deemed to be deviations. Indeed, this refers to both real life and in the context of literary works since people want to know why certain individuals appear different (Davis, 1995). As far as Memory is concerned, 'Namatai was one of the handful of people that I had met who did not do that visible double take on first seeing me' (p. 185). The 'visible double take' is a clear indication of the reaction that people have as they come into contact with Memory. In effect, people staring and gazing at Memories become a part of her life no matter where she goes. The 'visible double take', therefore, appears to be a result of the shock and surprise that greet people as they come into contact with Memory. According to Garland-Thomson (2017), as those considered to be normates meet those who are deemed to have extraordinary bodies, 'The interaction is usually strained because the nondisabled person may feel fear, pity, fascination, repulsion, or merely surprise, none of which is expressible according to social protocol' (p. 12).

Wherever she found herself, Memory's body difference became the reason why people tend to look at her. This act of people starring at Memory is symbolic of the fact that she is seen to be different. She is 'the other'. This whole encounter is characterised by a sort of nervousness (Quayson, 2007). Memory mentions that:

> I spent much of my life trying to be invisible. But I was never truly invisible. Even in London, or Sydney, where I should have blended in with everyone, the world's gaze came with a double take. On the surface, my skin looked like everybody else's, but seen closer, my features are very obviously not Caucasians. I could feel the puzzlement on the face as the mind tried to work out what was different. (p. 62)

The world's gaze and double take clearly points to what Memory suffers wherever she finds herself. The 'world's gaze' which came 'with a double take' carries with it a sense of suggesting that a particular body appears different. It is a puzzle that the normates try to solve

as they gaze at the disabled body. Garland Thomson (2017) states that 'Besides the discomforting dissonance between experienced and expressed reaction, a nondisabled person often does not know how to act toward a disabled person' (p. 12). The body, which becomes the subject of the gaze or the double take, is therefore pushed into a class of being 'the other.' This is due to the 'normate's frequent assumption that a disability cancels out other qualities, reducing the complex person to a single attribute' (Garland-Thomson, 2017, p. 12). It is a way of the world telling those whose bodies may appear different that they do not belong to the class of the greater majority; hence, they are the 'other.'

The presence of an impairment, therefore, tends to cancel out every other thing that has to do with the disabled character. In the case of Memory, who is a black albino girl, she does not fit into her community where being a member is marked by a sense of blackness or brownness of body. This therefore, makes her a misfit within the black society. Unfortunately for her, within the white community, Memory's whiteness at a closer look reveals a certain difference, which becomes a puzzle to proper whites who then seek to 'work out what was different' (p. 62). This means that as a black albino lady, Memory's skin is considered to be different whether she is among blacks or whites. People consequently gaze at her because of her skin, which is considered to be 'of ridicule and a fakery, a ghastly whiteness' (pp. 17-18). According to Diamond and Poharec (2017), bodies that are othered in societies are in the 'minority,' and they are 'subject to notice, either in the form of Garland-Thomson's stare, an alienating identification of spectacle, or the objectifying gaze, in which the observer dehumanises the observed' (p. 403).

Memory refers to the gazing, staring and double take she suffers in her society to the freak shows that were organised in the Western world, especially in the 19$^{th}$-20$^{th}$ century ago to showcase individuals with extraordinary bodies (Garland-Thomson, 2017). Garland Thompson (1996) discusses how these freak shows revealed society's way of treating various

body types that were considered to be anomalies. When societies create categories for the ugliest person alive, the woman with the biggest buttocks, and the shortest person alive, these are all ways of the normates making a show out of body differences (Garland-Thomson, 2017). Indeed, this comparison and historical allusion is very poignant and shocking in how it takes the minds of the readers back to the inhumanity associated with such kind of treatment that used to exist many years ago. Memory's revelation is also a sad testament to how, over so many years afterward, the treatment that society affords to albinos and people whose bodies look different seem not to have become any better. This is both an indictment and a call to action. What Memory recounts is, therefore, not merely a case of an albino who has accepted her fate. It is rather a society that Memory succeeds in portraying as being backward, disabling and unfair in the treatment of albinos. Memory recounts that:

> I once found, in an old book at one of the antiquarian bookstores on Charing Cross Road in London, a facsimile of a handbill exhorting the public to witness: THE AMAZING WHITE NEGRO, YOURS TO SEE FOR 2S ONLY in Piccadilly. By then I had left home, but I had not completely let go of a childhood game that I had once played alone, in which I moved myself across time and space and imagined the alternative lives I could have had, had I been, for instance, born in Pompeii or in Egypt or in Atlantis or the Wild West. It struck me as I looked at that handball that any alternative life that I might have had in a freak show in Piccadilly in the seventeenth century would not have been particularly different from my childhood in Mufakose. The only difference was that, in the twentieth century in Mufakose, I was a freak who made money for no one.' (p. 63)

What Memory presents here, shows how whether in the seventeenth century 'in Pompei or in Egypt or in Atlantis or the Wild West,' or being born in Mufakose in Zimbabwe in the twentieth century, the othering and negative treatment that one suffers for being an albino does not differ except that in the former, her otherness would have been used to make money for her slave masters whereas in the present, she 'was a freak who made money for no one.' By being a 'freak,' what Memory suffers is the staring, gazing, ridiculing, shaming,

stigmatisation etc., she experiences in her society which are all products of her being considered as the other. As an albino, Memory considers her existence as a moving freak show as a result of the gazes of those who stare at her and give her a visible double take as she passes by. Her body is presented as a wonderful spectacle that attracts not only stares but also comments (Diamond and Poharec, 2017; Garland-Thomson, 2017). Diamond and Poharec (2017) posit that the 'Existing parallel to the freak was the monster; an archetype that walked the boundaries of the real and the unreal, representing the worst and best fears and aspirations of normates across politics, geography, and centuries' (p. 404).

Again, Memory's comparison of her current condition to the seventeenth-century treatment of freaks in lands outside of Africa is a clear demonstration of how the treatment of 'other bodiness' though it may differ based on cultural differences and time, seem to still share certain similarities in terms of the stigma, abuse, discrimination, ridicule and marginalisation people with extraordinary bodies suffer across generations. It appears that in every society, location or generation, it is always the case that 'bodily variety translates into hierarchies of the typical and aberrant' (Garland-Thomson, 2017, p. 19). This is part of my argument that developing African disability theories does not necessarily mean that Western thoughts on disability should be thrown away. Indeed, as interests in African disability studies continue to rise, the commonalities that have to do with how disability has existed in various societies should be explored even as researchers, we keep an eye on what particular details may be peculiar to the African situation. With regard to the freak, show Memory refers to, for example, it is clear that while certain societies do not necessarily organise freak shows today, what is obvious is that body differences in various societies have for long attracted the gaze, stares and questions of the normates in different forms and ways.

As Brocco (2015) indicates, all cultures have 'explanations for why some individuals have physical or mental differences as compared with 'the norm'' (p. 1146). It is the quest to

find answers and explanations as to why certain bodies are different that brings about the gazing and staring in various societies. It is worth noting that even after Memory returned to Zimbabwe as a highly educated lady whose skin had undergone great treatment and who was looking beautiful, she was still concerned about the stares of people. This reveals the negative impact of staring and gazing has on those perceived to have different bodies. Memory mentions that:

> Lloyd suggested that I consider teaching at the university. I chose to volunteer at the Archives instead, while I decided what to do. The place had its old pull on me still, and comfortable as I now was in my skin, I did not think I could bear to stand before the unblinking gaze of staring students. (p. 242)

We see how people with bodies considered to be different are 'othered' through the 'unblinking gaze of staring' normates in society. What then attracts the gaze, stares and questions of people is what that society considers to be different, abnormal or a deviation in terms of its standing when compared with the concept of the ideal body.

As far as society's reactions to the body differences of people in the township is concerned, Memory states that:

> In a township, everything odd, particularly oddities of appearance, is remarked on. But in my case, even as the people who looked odd, like Sekuru Jona, who limped on his left leg and lived across the street and made manyatera sandals Siyaso, spat whenever he saw me. MaiTafadzwa, who could only afford to feed her family on Lacto sour milk and *matemba*, muttered something under her breath and spat. The Phiri family two houses down from MaiNever's place, generally mocked because they were Malawian and the father had a sing-song voice and joined the *zvinyau* dancers on the banks of the Marimba River looked at me with eyes of pity.

What is very revealing in what Memory states about how society remarks on people considered to be 'oddities of appearance' is how, in her society, being an albino is considered to be a worse condition than having many other body defects. This is most probably a result of the cultural perception of albinism. As an albino, therefore, others whose looks were

considered to be odd could afford to despise Memory because, as far as their society is concerned, being an albino puts you below other 'odd-looking individuals.' Memory's reference to how 'Sekura Jona, who limped on his left leg' and MaiTafadzwa, who belonged to the poorest class in the society, spat on her whenever they saw her is a great testament to the shame, stigma and dishonour attached to being an albino as compared to other body conditions one may have. This means that in terms of bodyworthiness, being an albino was to be detested.

As an albino character, Memory reveals how she is treated differently as the 'other' both within the domestic and public spaces. Whether at home or outside the house, Memory's condition as an albino makes her be treated differently from others. She becomes a victim of harassment and name-calling wherever she goes. She also becomes the subject of various forms of superstitious beliefs. As a result of her skin condition, Memory tells us, 'My skin made it impossible for my mother to stretch or plait my hair. My scalp was too sensitive, and grew hot in the sun' (p. 118). Indeed, it may be argued that this level of othering is not necessarily negative because it happens simply because of the body difference that does not support the stretching or plaiting of her hair. That notwithstanding, since Memory's hair cannot be plaited like others, it tends to present her as being different compared to her siblings and other children. This definitely sets Memory apart from the other children in a way that portrays her as not being normal.

Again, as a result of the condition of her skin, Memory is not allowed to stay outside to play with the other children. She states, 'When I asked my father if I could play with the others, he said it was too hot, and I should sit in the shade at the side of the house and help him with his cars' (p. 141). It seems that her body condition requires that she be treated in a way that will ensure her safety and welfare. With reference to her ability to go out like other children, Memory states that:

> The only time I left the house with any regularity, apart from going to school and church, was in connection with what my mother called my illness. It was mostly my father who came with me to the hospital. When I was particularly ill, and the flies settled on my breaking skin, and I saw the world only through a well of water, my father wrapped me in a blanket, and I walked in the suffocating heat to the bus stop to take a bus to Gomo Hospital. (p. 119)

This is also another way by which the albino character is presented as being 'the other' as compared with other children. While the reference to flies settling on Memory's breaking skin may not be a pleasant image, it is in no way meant to present the albino character in a negative light. It is rather a way of revealing the challenges that such individuals go through especially, regarding the state of their skins. Of course, one may argue how this kind of representation may present the disabled character in need of healing, as the medical model suggests. It may also be said to be reinforcing stereotypes about albinos. However, I am of the view that in this particular context, the major concern of Gappah as an African writer in representing disabled characters goes beyond mere ideologies but a wholistic attempt at allowing readers to have an experience of what the disabled character goes through. In this regard, we must be able to distinguish between mere stereotypical representations and an attempt to be as realistic as possible in the presentation of the conditions that are presented in the literary text. Of course, while it is said that such kinds of representations may end up enforcing negative stereotyping, I believe we must judge the ultimate end and not merely its appearance in the text. In presenting the lived experience of Memory, therefore, the author captures the body as it dwells within the society. This ultimately involves the challenges that the albino character may go through, even as a result of the body being different. This way I am of the view that Gappah's presentation in instances like these should not receive negative backlash.

Another important issue *The Book of Memory* reveals is how, as a result of being 'othered' in their societies, children who are albinos become victims of torment, ridicule and

molestation among their peers. The novel is replete with situations and instances during which Memory gets to suffer as a result of her skin condition even among her peers. Here, the depiction of how these children become key agents in othering people whose bodies look different is a confirmation of the kind of socialisation they receive as they are born into their society. Memory refers to the torment she goes through both in her neighbourhood and outside of the place where she is known: 'I was in town, far from the torments of my school-playground nemesis, Nhau, who tormented me as much at home as at school because he lived on our street.' (p. 8). It is obvious that such negative treatment tends to have an impact on Memory. It becomes clear that Memory is unable to join the other children because of the effect of what she suffers at the hands of Nhau and the other children. They hiss at Memory, shout at her and laugh at her. Memory even suffers physical assault from one of the children. Due to her condition as an albino, Memory is seen battling with nature, which allows the sun to cause Memory's skin to crack and blister:

> But this was all in my mind. I longed to play on Mharapara with the others but I could not join in because, if I went out and stayed in the sun for any length of time, my skin cracked and blistered. I spent my days indoors with the sound of the township coming through my mother's shining windows, or I sat and observed them from our Sunbeam-red veranda. And when I did venture out, it was to be greeted as *murugudunhu*, so that I thought that must be part of my name. (p. 47)

The revelation of Memory's longing to play with the other children is a clear demonstration of the social rejection she suffers as a result of her condition. The result of being treated this way is that her movements become limited. Memory ends up being confined indoors. She only spends her 'days indoors with the sound of the township coming through' her mother's window because of the fear of the effect the sun will have on her body as well as how she is 'greeted as *murugudunhu*' to the extent that she begins to think that

such negative referencing must be part of her name. As result of suffering this way, Memory mentions that:

> I had been going in one direction, my sphere limited to house number 1468 Mharapara Street in Mufakose, to my two parents, my dead brother and two sisters, to my school, to my small joys and sorrows. Fighting Nhau's daily torments and the hissing of the children. Struggling to conquer the twelve times table. Longing sharply for food that we did not have, ready-made, store-bought food like candy cakes and Colcom pork pies and cream doughnuts. Fearing always the heat of the sun, and the smell of Mercurochrome and the purple stains of gentian violet that were dabbed on my blistering skin by the rough, callused hands of the nurses at Gomo Hospital. (p. 62)

As a result of being rejected by the other children, Memory is forced to merely imagine taking part in the games her peers are engaged in. She states that:

> I remember playing that game in Mufakose, or, I should say, watching the children on Mharapara Street playing that game while I imagined that I was part of it, waving an imaginary umbrella, shaking the skirt of my dress at the *chachacha*, and sticking out my foot with a flourish at *my shoe*. (p. 30)

This becomes her lot because of her condition as an albino. While Memory faces challenges with dealing with being the 'other' among the children in her neighbourhood, going to the township even appears to be much more troubling for her:

> And when my family made rare visits with me outside the township, the children of other townships did that thing that children do, they shouted to remind me I was a *murungudunhu*, and not content with that, danced around me and announced my presence to everyone. (p. 64)

Memory is, therefore, denied the opportunity to play with her peers just because of her body difference. The shouts and dance that the other children used to announce Memory's presence seemed to have had a traumatic effect on her which she could not stand.

Memory's casual reference to the name-calling by the children as 'that thing that children do' (p. 64) reveals how she comes to the point of accepting such a treatment as being part of her normal lived experience. In fact, at no point do we see any adult stepping in to rescue Memory from this kind of treatment. We also do not even see any of the children not partaking in how Memory is treated. This is a clear demonstration of how the othering of people with different bodies is a normalized behaviour within Memory's society. Lipenga and Ngwirab (2018) state that 'one of the key features that draw our attention to the albino character's existence in society, her social being as it were, is the according of names' (p. 1478). Referring to another unpleasant experience she had as a result of her skin difference, Memory mentions that:

> On Mharapara Street, I had a torrid time of it, but at school, where children from other streets in Mufakose joined the children of my street, the tormenting reached unbearable levels. Nhau and his gang ran up to me to form a cordon beyond which they hissed at me and shouted or laughed. I was at least lucky in one respect-they never touched me. In grade two, when we had first moved to Mufakose, a boy had slapped me in the face. If my skin had been like the others', the slap would not have left a visible mark, but because of the absence of colour in my skin, his hand had left its outline on my face. From this incident had cone the children's fear, and the saying that *ukamurova anotsvuka ropa*- if you hit her, they said, her blood would rise to the surface. So, no one touched me. (pp. 66-67)

Indeed, the depiction of the kind of torture Memory goes through as a result of her body being different offers readers an opportunity to appreciate the lived realities of living in a society where being an albino makes one to be considered inferior. In effect, while the albino other may be branded as being withdrawn from society, it is the narration of the torments, ridicule and sufferings Memory goes through that give us an appreciation of what it means for one to be an albino in such a society. In real life, we may not be able to appreciate certain so-called anti-social behaviours of albinos within particular societies. However, the representation of the albino character gives readers the opportunity to enter the world of the

albino character and have a better understanding of what he/she goes through. Even at the convent school where Memory had relatively better treatment, she mentions that:

> My life found its total absorption in Umwinsidale. I made only one friend at school, a girl called Mercy, who came to the Convent in form two. She was a scholarship girl with milk-bottle spectacles. Her greatest value to me was that she did not ask questions that I did not want to answer. It also helped to have a friend because it meant that people did not think me stranger than I already was. (pp. 196-197).

**'I longed to be like all the others': When looking different becomes undesirable**

The albino character's longing to be like others is a clear portrayal of how society successfully 'others' people with body differences and pushes them into a life of being inferior (Mitchell and Snyder (2000). Since the albino character is made to see her condition as being detestable and undesirable, it appears that the only way out is to attempt to become like others whose conditions may receive better treatment in society. For Memory, the need to fit in and belong becomes a major worry to her. She bemoans that:

> I longed to be like all the others. I tried to get as dark as the other children. I longed to belong. I felt a sharp and burning envy of everyone I saw. I sought out obsessively the children with flaws. I would have given anything to be Nhau, who had a slash across his face. Lavina walked with a limp. The grade four class had cast her as a cripple in their end-of=-year play, and she had added a gritty sense of realism as she walked on the stage, exaggerating her limp as she moaned, '*Ini zvangu mushodogo, hee mushodogo.*' Whizi was cross-eyed; it was never clear if he was looking at you or not. Never, who was tall as a man but still played in the street with the children, and who talked out of the corned of his mouth, was given the nickname Drunken.
>
> I would have taken Whizi's eyes, and Lavinia's limp, and added to it Nhau's scar and Drunken's speech, only to have some colour in my skin. (pp. 67-68)

What Memory states here gives a better appreciation of how despicable being an albino is considered in the Zimbabwean society, which Gappah seeks to depict. Memory

confesses how the longing and desire to belong leads her to even envy other characters who equally are considered to be different, incomplete or disabled in society. For Memory to say that, 'I would have taken Whizi's eyes, and Lavinia's limp, and added to it Nhau's scar and Drunken's speech, only to have some colour in my skin' (p. 68) shows how, compared to other forms of body differences within the Zimbabwean society, being an albino is worse. This is also a confirmation of how bodies are viewed and ranked among various cultures. While all body differences may attract stares, gazes and all forms of negative treatment, it appears that in specific societies, certain body types tend to suffer more because of the cultural, religious and social perspectives about such bodies. It may, therefore, be said that when it comes to societies around the world, the more acceptable one's body difference is, the more acceptable an individual is in his or her society.

Indeed, the desperation to get dark skin by all means possible is a testament of the discomfort of being an albino other. Memory confesses that:

> I noted obsessively the different shades of the skins on my family. My father was dark brown. My mother had a smooth, light caramel complexion that was almost the same colour as her feet. Joyi looked like her but it seemed to me that, in me, my mother's skin had lightened to the point of disappearance. The lightness of skin had lightened to the point of disappearance. The lightness of skin that made my mother and sister beautiful had been bleached to the point of distortion in me. I was just three, possibly four, shades away from beauty. (p. 68)

For Memory, therefore, whether through religion, science, medicine, or applying makeup, all these efforts were just attempts by the albino other to fit in and become accepted. Memory tell us:

> I tried my mother's Pond's Foundation Cream, and her face powder, the same caramel as her skin. Its brown colour lay invitingly in its blue compact plastic case, and I smeared and smeared it all over my face until I realised that I would need more than one compact to cover my hands and arms. I hid the evidence

> of my attempt, and washed the cream away from my face. (p. 68-69)

Unfortunately, all these remedies do not help to make Memory's condition better. Memory reveals her disappointment as far as using creams and other beauty products became for her:

> Over and over again, I ran my fingers over the faces of the women in my father's Parade magazine. Joyi liked Parade because of Max Eagle, the private detective with gravity-defying karate kicks, but more absorbing to me were Caroline Murinda and Sarah Mlilo, the two Miss Luxes who advertised Lux Beauty Soap. I stared for hours at Caroline Murinda's cream dress, and the yellow belt that matched her yellow hat. I was dazzled by Sarah Mlilo's neat Afro hair and by her slim fingers making a chord on her shining guitar. But most of all, I was drawn to the radiant beauty of their brown skin. 'She cares for her beautiful complexion with Lux Beauty Soap' said the captions below their smiling faces…I believed that my skin could be as beautiful as theirs if only my mother bought Lux instead of Choice or Geisha soap. I even thought of stealing from my mother's purse so that I could buy the soap that would cure all my problems. Or perhaps it was not Lux, but Cleartone that I need. If I could not be like me would defeat that desire to disappear, to melt and only observe, and so I ignored Lameck because to acknowledge him was to see that in myself which I would rather not have been. (p. 69)

In fact, all the efforts Memory puts in as she attempts to look like all the others is a testament to how her society succeeds in making her feel as 'the other' who does not belong. She grows up seeing her skin as 'fakery ghast of whiteness' while her mother also reminds her of having such kind of skin because she had been cursed.

**A body in need of healing**

The disabled character, as being in need of healing, is also presented through Memory's hospital visits. In fact, as a result of Memory's skin condition, going to the hospital becomes a good option to help her cope with the challenges that come with being an albino.

The hospital becomes a place of seeking for a remedy for Memory's condition that needs medical care and support. Memory tells us that:

> At the hospital, the doctors lifted my eyelids, and the nurses put gentian violet on my blisters, leaving me with purple-stained skin. They told my father to keep me out of the sun. Mostly we saw the nurses, scowling beings in white who treated my illness as though it were an inconvenience. The white caps on their heads seemed to float, halo-like, in the air above them. They looked soft and clean and made me feel dirty and unwashed… But their hands, when they touched me, were rough and strong as they put stinging ointment on my broken skin. They seemed to think that they could scold away my illness if they shouted loud and long enough. 'Why do you sit in the sun when you know you are so sick?' (p. 120)

It can clearly be seen how at the hospital, Memory receives medical care to help her to be more comfortable. However, it is worth stating that while going to the hospital is not a challenge, the experience of Memory in the hands of the nurses, which may be representative of what others with the same condition go through, is what calls for attention. The reference to how nurses treated Memory's 'illness as though it were an inconvenience' (p. 120) and how they shout 'loud and long enough' (p. 120) at her reveals a form of othering that occurs at the hospital. The nurses' attempt to try and scold away Memory's illness and ask why she will 'sit in the sun' when she knows that she is sick is a way of reminding Memory that she is different. It is the type of negative treatment Memory suffers in the hands of the nurses that makes her to develop a phobia of going to the hospital as she says:

> I grew to fear the hospital, and when my father said we should go, I threw myself on the floor and grabbed a leg of the sofa and fought him when he tried to pick me up so that he often just gave up, and nature, when it chose, did the healing. (p. 120).

Again, by continuously going to the hospital for treatment, Memory ends up being presented as 'the other child.' It is therefore not surprising that even her siblings use her going to the hospital as a form of game:

> When they were not in school, my father insisted that Joyi and Mobhi come too. They resented this because they would much rather have been playing on Mharapara than sitting in the waiting room full of sickness and a hushed silence that did not encourage giggles and fidgeting. The only consolation for Joyi was that it gave her material to use in her games with the other children. 'Let's play Memo Goes to Hospital,' I heard her shout once, immediately followed by the loud squabbling voices of the other children insisting that they wanted to be the doctor or the nurse-no one wanted to be me. (p. 120)

Going to the hospital, therefore, becomes a part of Memory's life in an inseparable way. Indeed, the fact that none of the children was ready to play the role of Memory in their hospital game is an indication of how being an albino is never desirable not even when children are playing and are to merely pick roles to act them out.

**Albinism and superstition**

Another important aspect of the othering of those whose bodies look different is the presentation of the superstition that surrounds albinism in *The Book of Memory*. Indeed, such superstitious beliefs portray what various African societies belief about albinism (Brocco, 2015; Haihambo & Lightfoot, 2010; Lipenga & Ngwira, 2018). In his study of the labelling of albinism within the Tanzanian society, Giorgio Brocco (2015) observed that a lot of the people he interviewed had the perception that albinism was 'a condition attributable to God's will' (p. 1147). The novel presents how superstition about albinism is rooted in the cultural and religious beliefs of the people. As a result of the superstition surrounding albinism, people look to religion as a way of seeking for cure. We are told that Memory's mother rarely went with her to the hospital.

> Instead, she talked of consulting diviners. She was convinced that a portion or spell could be found that would make my problems disappear. Mine was not an illness, but a curse sent to her by her ancestors to punish her. This was the cause of some of the most frequent disagreements between my mother and father. (p. 120)

When referring to circumstances around her birth, Memory also mentions that:

> And then I was born, with no darkness in my skin, with no pigment, an albino, murungudunhu, with my ghastly whiteness. My mother believed that I had been cursed inside her womb. Joyi says my father told her that my mother was unable to feed me, and that I spent my first year at a mission hospital. They were asked to leave their new village as soon as the headman heard about my condition. (p. 285-286)

Indeed, superstition about body types reveals how individuals perceive and react towards certain body conditions within a society based on their beliefs, which mostly do not have any scientific basis. For Memory's mother, she believed that her daughter being born as an albino was 'a curse sent by her ancestors to punish her' (p. 120). It is therefore not surprising that she resorts to consulting diviners instead of following Memory to the hospital. Her belief that Memory's condition is a curse is her interpretation of her daughter's body appearing different. This is why she goes around with the hope of finding a spell that will be capable of setting Memory free from her condition. In essence, this belief shows how, within some societies, 'other bodiness' may be considered to be as a result of an individual being cursed. This may also explain why some individuals may throw away their children or refuse to seek for proper medical attention but rather resort to divinations, spells, charms etc. as they seek to deal with certain body conditions. Memory tells us that:

> Even though my father refused to sanction trips to healers, I recall at least three occasions when my mother and I left the house without my father's knowledge. Each time, we visited a traditional healer, and each time, my mother swore me to silence. In dusty little rooms in the townships of Harare, my mother waited for ancestral spirits to visit little round men and women who acted as mediums. But I was still unwell, my skin still broke and bruised, and I remained unhealed. (p. 121)

Superstition also plays a role in the way the other inmates relate to Memory while in prison. During her time in prison, Memory suffers othering as a result of the superstition that surrounds her body condition. She mentions that:

> When I first arrived, I found the usual fear-laced fascination and superstition around my condition. I am the first woman in more than twenty years to be sentenced to death. And it is not every day that one comes across a murdering albino outside a novel by Dan Brown. But it was my skin and my crime that caused other prisoners to shrink into themselves as they walked past me. (p. 36)

What Memory reveals is that as people meet her, the usual reaction is 'fear-laced fascination' and 'superstition. At the prison, her condition becomes the centre of attention as a result of the perception the other inmates had about her as an albino lady. Memory mentions that:

> The most hysterical reaction came from a pregnant inmate called Melody, who looked at me with her one eye round with fear screaming so loudly that the guards had to take her away. Jimmy said that she was afraid that I would infect the baby she carried. Years ago, this might have hurt me, but it doesn't now. It no longer hurts with the acid pain I felt as a child. It is a long time since I wanted to crawl out of my own skin.' (p. 62-63)

Melody's claim that Memory will infect her unborn baby with albinism is totally unfounded. This is purely a product of the superstitious belief Melody has about people who are albinos. Again, it is worth noting how Memory, as a victim of false superstitious beliefs, turns the unfair treatment she suffers in her favour. She successfully turns a negative situation to her advantage in how she handles Marvellous. While at the prison, Memory meets Marvellous, who tells her that new prisoners are to give their food to her. According to Memory,

> In the first weeks, I gave half my food to her without protest, but I soon came to see that I would starve if I did not find some ways to defeat her. So, I took to giving her long unbroken stares as she ate my food.
> 'Don't look at me with those eyes' she snapped.
> I was reminded of my mother. 'Don't look at me with those eyes of yours,' she often said, which never made sense to me, for I could only look at her with my eyes, and nobody else's, but I know now that she meant those eyes with no colour or pigment to them.

> At the next meal, I stared again at Marvellous, and again at every meal for four continuous days. After a week, she asked to be moved away from me. Jimmy told me that she had told the guards that looks I gave her are what killed her son, 'just like she killed that white man.' Marvellous became afraid of me and would not look at me when she passed. After that, I did not hesitate to use my condition to my advantage. (pp. 36- 37)

Even though this particular instance seems to bring a bit of humour to the narration, it shows how much superstition plays a critical role in how people perceive albinos. With the understanding of the superstitious beliefs people have about albinism, Memory decides to capitalize on it in a way to liberate herself from being bullied by Marvellous. The negative outcome, however, is how Marvellous ends up accusing Memory of being the one who killed her son.

While as a result of her beliefs about albinism, Memory's mother consults traditional healers, ancestral spirits and mediums as a way of seeking healing for her daughter, Memory herself is captured on a number of occasions, seeking to rely on prayers for healing. This further shows how religion becomes the avenue where people seek understanding concerning bodies that are different. In fact, just as medicine serves as a means of seeking healing, religion becomes the hope of others who are of the view that there is something wrong with the disabled body that needs to be addressed. In one of such church services, Memory tells us, 'For the first time in as long as I could remember, I prayed for something other than dark skin; I prayed for a tambourine of my own' (p. 129). On another occasion, she tells us:

> I prayed every second I could for God to darken my skin. After Reverend Bergen said, 'Ask anything of me, says the Lord,' I redoubled my prayers. I made all sorts of bargains, made promises about being good, about coming top in class. I promised not to slap Mobhi, and I even vowed not to hate my mother. But my skin remained what it had always been.' (p. 68)

Unfortunately, just as her mother's visit to traditional healers did not solve Memory's issue, she reveals how religion, in general, failed her in her quest for healing:

> Religion having failed me…When my father was not looking, I sat in the sun and wished for my skin to darken. It only made my skin red and sore and blistered. (p. 68)

**When 'the other' sees 'the other': Relationship between albinos**

In the novel, Gappah presents how albino solidarity exists among albinos. The picture of what it means to be with other albinos and the effects it has on Memory is captured in the text. Memory's relationship with other albinos can first of all be seen in terms of she rejecting any form of solidarity as a result of the negative image the other albino may make her to imagine herself. In an encounter with one white reverend minister, Memory confesses 'When I saw the Reverend, I was seized with a feeling that was part attraction and part repulsion. I thought, at first, but he is albino, he is just like Lameck and me. I looked closer and saw that he was just a white man' (p. 136-137). This sense of inferiority becomes so internalised that Memory rejects any form of comradeship from Lameck, who is a black albino male who lives in the same town with her. According to Memory,

> What made my situation worse- at least, as I saw it- was that I was not the only albino person in the township. The other was Lameck, who had squashed face and red, blotchy skin that broke over his arms and face. His hair was almost orange. Mine was just as strange, not black like everyone else's but closer to white, the same colour as my skin. Lameck stood in the same place every day; he sold tomatoes and maputi at the market that sprouted at the corner of Mharapara and Kafudzamombe Avenue…When he was not selling tomatoes, Lameck squinted at a James Hadley Chase novel, his fingers as white as the almost-naked women on the covers. (p. 64)

Memory's description of Lameck as having a 'squashed face and red, blotchy skin that broke over his arms and face. His hair was almost orange' (p. 64), showing how even to her, Lameck's body looks different from all others. It is a demeaning way of referring to another albino which is most probably because of how her society has programmed Memory to look down on such a condition. She also unconsciously falls into the trap of looking down on another person because of the condition of the person's body. Memory mentions that:

> Every time that I passed him, I saw the flies that settled on his mouth. I did not wonder that people were so afraid of me-I, too, was afraid of Lameck. It was terrible to me that he sought me out, that he offered me his solidarity; it was terrible that people should look at us and conclude that we were the same; terrible that when we passed him with my father on our way to school it was always to me, and only to me, that he sent his greetings. '*Hesi*, Memo,' he called each time, his cracked face smiling…I gave him no affirmation at all. His attempts to get me to enter some sort of melanin-free club failed. On those only-too-frequent occasions when I had to go to his stall to buy tomatoes, I looked down as he chatted endlessly about the novels he was perpetually peering at. (p. 65)

Just as how people with other bodies saw themselves as being superior to Memory, we see how she also rejects any form of solidarity with Lameck as a result of the notion that she looked better than him. The author intentionally allows an albino character to give one of the worst descriptions of what it means for one to be an albino. This could be regarded as a way of representing the hypocrisy that surrounds humanity's approach to viewing different bodies. It appears that individuals are constantly comparing themselves to others in order to determine how better their bodies are. However, what appears to be most applicable to Memory's repulsion is the social programming of members of a society towards bodies that look different. It appears that Memory believes that Lameck's way of handling his otherness gives rise to a negative image of what it means to be an albino. Memory, therefore, runs away from any image that reminds her of how she appears to others who look different. As she tells us:

> Lameck always contrived to give me things that I had not asked for, masau when they were in season, or mazhanje. I ate them quickly, with no guilt. I did not want to say anything that might suggest kinship. I see now, of course, that he was just as much a misfit as I was. I do not imagine that his parents named him after the original Lameck-Lameck, the father of Noah. Sister Mary Gabriel told me that Noah was an albino; that God had chosen to save an albino above all the people he flooded in his wrath.

> *And my son Methuselah took a wife for his son Lameck, and she became pregnant by him and bore him a son. And his body was white as snow and red as the blooming of a rose, and the hair of his head and his long locks were white as wool, and his eyes beautiful. And when he opened his eyes he lighted up the whole house like the sun, and the whole house was very bright. (p. 65-66)*

While it is true that Memory sees herself and Lameck as being social misfits, it is obvious that she, later on, grows to recognise that with the right support and medical care, the albino character is able to better enjoy life. Memory states that, 'It helped that money also bought me good skin, courtesy of a dermatologist' (p. 1940). As Memory compares her situation to that of Lameck, she mentions that:

> Lameck in Mufakose had no Lloyd or Sister Mary Gabriel to tell him of the wondrous origins of his name, or to spend money at the dermatologist's and buy creams and lotions with sun filters, as Lloyd did for me after he bought me, ointment that healed and mended my skin.
> I wanted to believe that I did not look to others as Lameck looked to me. He looked incomplete, as though he had been fashioned as *mahumbwe* play by a careless child, and then been fought over before being abandoned to be stamped on as the children hurried in to their suppers.
> Like Lameck's, my skin often blistered, but it was never as bad as his. My father made me wear a large grey school hat, and he made me wear it everywhere. Consequently, I did not have the protuberant pustules that Lameck had all over his face. (p. 66)

The difference that exists between Lameck and Memory, therefore, becomes apparent as a result of the support and medical care Memory receives. This is also done as a way of seeking for proper support, care and medical attention for albinos.

Another relationship between albinos we see is the one between Memory and Loveness' daughter. In the novel, Loveness who is a prison guard, has an albino daughter. In her case, she reveals 'that her daughter's father left her when the child was a baby. 'He could not cope with what, with her condition' (p. 221). Knowing how her society treats albinos,

Loveness does not really talk about her daughter's condition. She, however begins to show unusual kindness to Memory. Memory mentions that:

> I know that her daughter is called Yeukai, and she is in primary school. I would know this even if she hadn't told me because I iron her school uniforms every week. I know that she has some sort of illness that Loveness is vague about. (p. 102)

The result of Loveness having an albino child is how she decides to treat Memory well. Here, it may be argued that even though Memory was in prison, Loveness was able to recognise how as an educated albino, Memory could better understand her daughter and help her in her studies. Memory who becomes surprised by how Loveness takes interest in her states that, 'Her apparent friendliness to me is all the more remarkable as she vacillates between indifference and callousness towards the others' (p. 104). Memory later finds out that Loveness' daughter:

> …was a small girl, maybe twelve or thirteen, a small albino girl with freckles on her face and arms and thick glasses on her nose. In that moment, I understood everything that had baffled me about Loveness. The little girl blinked and scratched at the alabaster skin of her right arm. In that gesture, I saw myself again (p. 275).

Unlike how Memory rejected Lameck's albino solidarity when she was young, and they were both staying in the same community, she decides to offer help to Loveness' daughter by teaching her after school. Memory states that:

> With the reawakened memories of the children at my first school in mind. I asked Yeukai if the other children gave her problems at school. She was not the only albino child in her school, she said; there were three others, so everyone was used to her. The school absences are Yeukai's only problems. I have said that in her I saw myself again, but we differ in one respect. She wears glasses, but is otherwise healthy and well cared for. Loveness told me that there is now an Albino Society that gives free sunscreen and advice. (p. 276)

The difference between Memory's childhood days and that of Loveness' daughter has to do with an apparent communal support that begins to exist for albinos in Zimbabwean society.

**Dealing with being an albino other**

In the *The Book of Memory,* there is the presentation of certain coping mechanisms that help the albino character to deal with the sense of being the 'other' in society. The first is a decision for the albino character to refuse to see him/herself as being a mere object. This is captured in an advice Lloyd gives to Memory:

> That day, when I went home to Lloyd, he said to me, 'It is your choice, Mnemosyne. You can spend your life feeling sorry for yourself, or you can simply choose not to. You can invite people's pity or you can refuse to be an object.'

Again, education is also presented as a means of empowering the albino child in order to help her to excel in society. According to Memory,

> Had it not been for my condition, I would have been every teacher's dream. I sat quietly in class, in front of the room, where my father insisted to my teachers that I sit. I was not one of those children who eagerly put their hands in the air and yelled, 'Mistress, mistress, mistress,' but when called upon to answer a question, I always knew the answer. I was quiet and watchful, and my report every term spoke of a one hundred per cent pass rate in every subject. (p. 67)

While it is certain that being an albino affected Memory's ability to freely communicate in the classroom, her academic exploits set her above her colleagues, who even regarded themselves as being better than her. She reveals that:

> Once inside, I could get my revenge on the children who hissed and called out to me when I walked outside. In here, I could humiliate them by showing them that a *murugudunhu* like me had better brains than them. (p. 67)

Later in Memory's life, when Lloyd takes her to a convent school, the privilege of attending an expensive school also helps her to gain her confidence:

> As my new school, my life soon developed its own rhythm. The Dominican Convent was like the world outside, only in miniature. Money got me what a top girls' school gives: slight arrogance, self-

> belief. The blue skirt and beige blouse declared me a Convent girl, belonging by right to the upper levels of the school system. The straw boater linked me to the girls who had come before and those who would come after. I assumed a new identity…At school, I eventually became just another girl in a blue dress, and when I entered the secondary, another girl in a blue skirt and white blouse. In time, I gained the confidence that comes with any expensive private education. More than anything else, I felt an incredible sense of freedom: not from want but from scrutiny. I had not yet found home, but I found a place where I could belong. (pp. 193-194)

In fact, it is in this school that Memory indicates that she finds a place where she could belong. Here too, she ceased being an object of stares but a young girl with the privilege of an expensive private education which the majority of other people could not even afford.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be seen in what has been discussed so far that the albino character is treated as the 'other' in society as a result of the body difference. Through Gappah's novel, we gain great insights into the Zimbabwean society in terms of how albinos are perceived and treated. Albinism is presented as a worse form of body difference. The struggles of Memory as an albino character and the superstition that surrounds her condition are what affect how she is treated wherever she goes. The othering of the albino character can, therefore, be said to be based on society's perception of the ideal body and superstitious beliefs. These, therefore, serve as the basis of the albino stereotyping and stigmatization that goes on in the Zimbabwean society. To be an albino is therefore presented as being an undesirable condition and it is therefore not surprising that albinos and the people connected to them seek to look for solutions to help them become accepted by their society.

# CHAPTER EIGHT

# 'PEOPLE PARODIES': THE IMAGE OF THE DISABLED CHARACTERS AS MEMBERS OF THE BEGGARS IN AMINATA SOW FALL'S *THE BEGGAR'S STRIKE*

## Introduction

In the previous chapter, we looked at the representation of albinism in Petina Gappah's *A Book of Memory*. We discussed albinism as a body difference that causes individuals to be seen and treated differently as the 'other' in their societies. As it was realised, the novel can be described as Gappah's way of contributing to the discourse on how people with albinism are perceived and treated in society. The study revealed that albinos are mostly stigmatized, and they also become the target of ill-treatment as a result of their body differences. Memory's fictional memoir, therefore granted us access into the life of an albino character in terms of how such a condition affects her as well as how she deals with it.

This present chapter focuses on the representation of disabled characters in Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggar's Strike*. In this chapter, I examine the representation of disabled characters in the light of how they are depicted as members of a vulnerable group in society whose presence appears not to be welcomed. The chapter, therefore, looks at the image of the disabled characters and what they go through as a result of being part of the beggars, as well as the collective identity they share in the text. Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggar's Strike* is a key text that gives us insight into how the modernisation agenda of a society may pose a challenge in terms of how it conflicts with the traditional and religious beliefs of the society, the spatial planning of the communities, the social support system for the vulnerable as well as defining the place of the various players in the modern African society. Interestingly, disabled characters are at the core of persons who are affected by the changes that occur in Fall's novel.

The novel presents the story of a fictitious African nation that seeks to embark on a modernisation of its capital city and the challenges that follow as a result of it. As Haihambo & Lightfoot (2010) indicate, '…cultural beliefs, myths and attitudes must be understood if nations are to plan and implement policies and programmes with the intent of making a difference in the lives of their citizens with disabilities' (p. 77). They further state that:

> A key factor is that any programme that attempts to change attitudes regarding disability must be developed in light of traditional notions of disabilities. A sensitization programme that focus on welcoming people with disabilities, without addressing strong traditional views that people with disabilities are cursed from a supernatural cause, will likely have no impact on its target audience. Without discounting traditional values or beliefs, traditional authorities, regional councils, disability organizations and the education and health sectors need to frame the notion of disability in a positive manner that resonates with people with traditional values…The impact of cultural beliefs regarding disability on the development and implementation of policy is a complex issue, and each society will have its own unique integration of beliefs, myths, policies and community responses, and these will be dynamic as cultures are constantly changing (p. 85)

In the novel, the disabled characters are mainly presented as being part of a group of characters who are collectively referred to as 'the beggars.' They are presented as inferior citizens who are considered to be a threat to the society they belong to. In Fall's *The Beggar's Strike*, even though the generic term that is used for the collective group we are interested in is 'beggars,' this chapter is much more interested in the representation of these beggars as a result of the people with impairments who are part of the group. Indeed, a key component of the beggars in the novel has to do with characters with impairments and various forms of body differences. Consequently, reading the novel through the lens of disability studies helps us to focus on how such a depiction of disability and its related issues can be very revealing in helping us to appreciate what the characters with impairments go through in this fictitious

state. The place of the disabled characters in the text, regarding how the beggars are perceived and treated, is therefore very important to our discussion.

Our treatment of disability issues in this chapter, therefore, focuses on examining the identity that the characters with impairments assume, the challenges they go through as a result of being part of the beggars and how they deal with those issues. This way of studying the 'othering' of people with impairments is therefore connected to looking at the collective identities they sometimes share with other classes of people in the literary texts. This helps us appreciate disability and its intersections in the literary text. In this particular instance, I am of the view that by being presented as part of a vulnerable group that faces ill-treatment in the text, the disabled characters occupy an important place in the novel. As a result, analysing the issues that pertain to the representation of these characters is very critical in helping us to see how disability intersects with class and religion in the African literary text.

Indeed, a critical look at the representation of disabled characters in African literary text reveals how there does not appear to be properly laid down measures to cater to the dignity, needs and welfare of vulnerable groups in some societies. It appears that as the authorities in charge of nations and cities embark on the modernisation of cities, some of these vulnerable members of society who hitherto had a traditional, cultural or religious role to play in society, rather become a problem that needs to be dealt with. Issues of modernisation and the changes they bring to societies, therefore, end up causing a shift in how societies behave and the places their members continue to occupy. What is important to note, then, is that the developmental agenda of a society cannot and should not be pursued without properly taking into consideration the socioeconomic structures and religious and cultural belief systems of the respective societies. When this is not properly done, developmental agendas tend to become counter-productive, especially when they have not been properly thought through. Obviously, giving attention to the representation of such

issues in the literary text is very critical especially when it comes to how they reveal what certain people groups go through as well as how they deal with these forms of injustices.

In fact, it appears that the quest for development and modernisation itself places various societies in a position where there is a clash between the belief systems of the people and the aspirations for a modern society. Societies are then confronted with situations whereby they have to evaluate their belief systems and the place certain cultural and religious practices will occupy in the new society. As these societies continue to seek to modernize their cities and communities, certain conflicts are expected to arise as a result of the kinds of changes that may be required.

In fact, Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggar's Strike* presents a rather interesting perspective on disability as it pertains to some African societies. The text, which is set in a fictitious African state, presents a nation that intends to embark on a modernisation agenda as a way of attracting a lot more tourists. Ordinarily, such a drive is seen to be beneficial since it is considered that it will help to improve the economic prospects of the state. Unfortunately, a key challenge that this modernisation agenda faces is how to deal with the beggars whose presence in the city is considered to be inimical to the beautification and modernisation of the capital. It, therefore, becomes necessary that these beggars are driven away from the city centre in order to clear the city and make it appear more attractive to the tourists who visit the country. As a result, the government and its officials adopt various measures in their bid to rid the city of these beggars whose presence in the city is considered to be a despicable sight that must not be tolerated. Even though on the surface, the operation to clear the beggars off the city succeeds, new challenges begin to rise out of it. The depiction of the beggars and the treatment they suffer, how they react towards the agenda to do away with them and the consequences of the actions of the government officials are therefore critical in our study of disability representation in the novel.

Ironically, the dominant religion of this fictitious state enjoins its adherents to give alms. The practice of almsgiving as a religious rite also requires that there should be those who give the alms as well as individuals who receive the alms. The conflict in the novel, therefore arises as this nation tries to rid the city of beggars without taking cognizant of the effects of how tampering with such an important tenet of the religious belief of the citizenry will have on society. The author uses this conflict which arises to pass on very important issues to the readers concerning begging as a religious practice in certain societies and the problems the inability to properly handle such a practice, which is rooted in culture and religion, may cause any developing nation.

As Mark Sherry (2007) indicates, there is a 'need for culturally specific examination of disability and impairment' (p. 16). In *The Beggar's Strike*, an important observation that can be made about the beggars is how having an impairment seems to be a key factor that qualifies an individual to engage in begging in society. This shows how, as far as disability is concerned, religion even serves as the basis for the classification of body types in society (Adom-Opare, 2020; Quayson, 2007). An individual's body type, therefore, becomes key in whether it is included or excluded as far as the performance of a religious rite is concerned. This is seen in how, in undertaking certain religious rites, individuals are clearly shown the type of person that must be involved:

> One day…Mour comes down to earth again after a night of terrifying dreams. Troubled by these, he goes to ask counsel of one of his many marabouts who instructs him to make an offering of seven white cola-nuts to an old woman who has no physical infirmity. 'Be particularly careful not to give them to a blind woman! (p. 50-51)

It is worth noting that the marabout specifies that 'the seven-white cola-nuts' be given specifically to 'an old woman who has no physical infirmity' and that he should 'be particularly careful not to give them to a blind woman!' It is, therefore, evident how, based on

religious beliefs, some bodies are sometimes eliminated from being part of a religious rite that is to be undertaken. This clearly shows that religious beliefs and practices tend to serve as key determinants in how bodies are valued or not in different circumstances.

It can be said then that when it comes to the classification of bodies, religion, therefore, plays an important role in determining those who are considered as having normal bodies and those whose bodies are extraordinary. This becomes relevant when it comes to the performances of rituals and religious practices. Depending on the particular society in question, a particular body difference may, therefore, be celebrated or abhorred. On the same basis, some body types may be considered to have some form of spiritual advantage. This form of othering based on religious beliefs is a bit complex in how it plays out. Quayson (2007) sees this as one of the main typologies of disability representation. He argues that the representation of the disabled body is sometimes clothed with some form of mystical powers. In this vein, the role of disability characters in helping people to address sicknesses and body conditions, whether affecting an individual or community, has always been paramount. Sometimes, the supernatural interpretation of issues is invoked when there appears to be no simple way of describing what is going on based on the physical realities. The idea of the disabled body playing a role when it comes to the superstitious beliefs and religious practices of societies will later on be discussed further in this chapter.

The constitution of the crowd of beggars is generally described as comprising 'men and women of all ages and sizes, some crippled, some hale and hearty, all depending on their outstretched hands for their daily pittance' (p. 8-9). A closer look at the composition of persons that make up the beggars, however, reveals how those with impairments are at the centre of the collective group referred to as the beggars in the novel:

> And among the faces like masks with darkly protruding eyes, among the hoary heads and ulcerated limbs, covered with the pustules of scabies or eaten away with leprosy, among the rags

> which leave half-naked bodies which have long been innocent of any contact with water, among the beggars' crutches, sticks and *battu,* there are some adorable little tots who smile happily at life, twittering in rhythm with the clatter of pewter jugs. (p. 9)

The negative image of the beggars that is presented in the text, therefore, gives us an idea of how the disabled characters are perceived in this particular society. They are part of the poor in society, and they are presented as having all forms of impairments. Indeed, the description of 'faces like masks with darkly protruding eyes', 'hoary heads and ulcerated limbs, covered with the pustules of scabies or eaten away with leprosy' (p. 9) are all indicative of the kind of impairments and body differences that exist among the beggars. This description presents the disabled characters as a group of pitiable individuals whose condition is even worsened by the fact that what some of them had as clothes were 'the rags which leave half-naked bodies which have long been innocent of any contact with water, among the beggars' crutches, sticks and *battu'* (p. 9). It can further be observed that as part of the city landscape, people with all forms of impairments and body differences could be seen to be part of the beggars who litter the city. This, therefore, goes to say that disabled characters within the city are presented as being mainly beggars who stand at various places in order to beg for alms.

It can be deduced that in the African writer's representation of disabled characters, people with impairments are sometimes put together with other vulnerable people in society due to the common issues they share. The negative collective image of the disabled characters in the novel is therefore very critical in helping us to appreciate where society places people with such impairments. What is therefore presented in the novel is that a key factor for people with various impairments engaging in begging is that they are poor and cannot fend for themselves. The other very important reason has to do with the religious benefits the act of giving alms to these beggars accrue for those who engage in such religious practices.

In fact, the African worldview has long been shaped by the belief in supernatural beings and forces, which results in a commitment to certain religious rites and practices (Ned et al., 2022; Hamel & Falola, 2021; Nyangweso, 2021; Haihambo, 2010). It is, therefore, not surprising that in seeking to make sense of the happenings in the world, interpreting societal occurrences and even seeking solutions to issues, almost all African societies do not rule out how various supernatural beings and forces may be behind a phenomenon or may have the power to address the issue. The religious and cultural beliefs of societies, therefore greatly influence the social structure and practices of societies. These practices are, therefore, at the core of what holds such societies together. Therefore, to seek to do away with them is to cause the very foundations of society to shake. Indeed, it is such belief systems that make room for beggars to be stationed in city centres. In a way to let Keba appreciate the complex issue of having beggars in the city centres, Sugar quizzes:

> You know, Keba, you're wasting your time with the beggars. They've been here since the time of our great-great-grandparents. They were when you came into the world and they'll be there when you leave it. You can't do anything about them. In any case what's the idea of trying to get rid of them? What harm have they done to you?' (p. 14)

Here, Sugar reveals how the practice of people with impairments and other persons standing at various places to beg for alms has long been a key part of the culture of the people. What this supposes is that in such societies, the practice of having disabled characters resorting to begging is something that cannot be easily done away with.

In addition, almsgiving is considered to be a key religious practice that people are to obey. To Sugar, 'religion teaches us we must help the poor' (p. 15). Hence, people should not do otherwise. Here, the disabled who are part of the beggars are presented as helping individuals to carry out their religious obligation of carrying out almsgiving. For disabled

characters to position themselves in strategic points in society is therefore very critical. Unfortunately, what is obvious is that in their quest to drive away the beggars from the city centre, what the government officials fail to take into consideration is the role the belief system of the people plays in any society. Begging is, therefore, important to those who beg and those who give to the beggars. That is why Sugar sees the absence of beggars as rather going to create problems as she asks, 'But tell me, Keba, just answer one question: how would they live if they did not beg? And tell me this as well: who would people give alms to, as they have to give alms to someone, religion tells us so?' (p. 15).

As a modernist, Keba is, however of the view that religious beliefs should not lead individuals to lower themselves by engaging in activities such as begging. He, therefore, sees begging which is enshrined in the belief system of the people as being inhumane and backward. He regards the presence and activities of the beggars as a disturbance and that people who engage in such a practice only lower themselves. He intimates that:

> Religion prescribes help for the poor, but it doesn't tell the poor to cause continual disturbance to their neighbours. D'you hear, do you understand what I am saying? It's you and your sort who encourage this plague. Has our religion ever blessed the man who loses all sense of shame?' (p. 15)

Indeed, while it is duly acknowledged that Keba does not have trouble with giving, what is clear is that he does not subscribe to individuals using their conditions and religion as a reason to beg. This poses a very important question as to whether it is appropriate for individuals to be allowed to engage in such practices in the name of religion or not. We see how the quest for modernisation leads people to start questioning certain cultural and religious practices as being archaic. For the likes of Keba, even though religion may give certain individuals the right to engage in begging, such a practice is rather shameful and must not be condoned. In this same way of thinking, Mour Ndiaye states that 'It's every man's duty to work. It is to make them work that we are driving them out of City streets' (p. 18).

Dealing with this situation is therefore described as '…a very difficult undertaking, this fight against an evil that has gained such a stronghold. We have been at it for years and now, thank God, I think we've got the upper hand' (p. 18)

For Mour Ndiaye in particular, driving away the beggars from the capital is closely tied to his future political aspirations. Indeed, he embarks on this fight because of how critical it is to his own political ambitions. In fact, the success he chalks in making sure that the city is rid of beggars is what helps him to gain the attention of the Head of State:

> My Minister telephoned me to pass on the President's congratulations…It isn't easy to get the President's congratulations; he's very difficult to please! That's why, when he deigns to congratulate anyone, it means he's really satisfied.' (p. 18)

Ironically, it is this fight he commits to which eventually leads to his downfall as far as his political pursuit is concerned. He becomes a champion in fighting against an important religious practice, which was actually what delivered him from poverty in the first place. As he becomes blinded by the love for political power, he is unable to properly recognise how critical almsgiving is as far as religion is concerned.

For a religious person like Serigne, who acknowledges the important role of giving to the poor in society, any policy that involves clearing the city of beggars is dehumanizing. This is why he tells Ndiaye:

> Dear me! The City is dehumanizing you, hardening people's hearts so that they no longer pity the weak. Take care, Mour; God has said: 'Let the poor come unto me…Dear me! I don't understand this. You City folk, you're the ones who understand these problems. So, nobody must beg there anymore? (p. 17-18)

The disabled and the other characters who beg are therefore seen as weak and poor individuals for whom religion enjoins society to take care of as they engage in begging. Rising against such religious practice is therefore considered as being dehumanizing.

The challenge of respecting cultural and religious norms in the face of national development, therefore, becomes critical in the novel, for those in authority, such as Mour, the changing times require that society adapts to new ways of doing things in order for it to move on and make progress. This therefore requires that the status of disabled characters and other vulnerable groups in the society may subsequently change. Mour Ndiaye tells Serigne:

> Serigne, times have changed. We are the ones now who are responsible for the destiny of our country. We must oppose anything which harms our economic and tourist development…Serigne, what we really want in the long run, is for everyone to get down to a proper job. We want to discourage idleness, so we exhort everyone to get down to work. (p. 18)

This understanding by Ndiaye shows clearly how, in an attempt to seek development, this fictitious African state is caught up in the dilemma of either maintaining the status quo in terms of the religious and cultural beliefs about certain practices or restructuring how society works. In effect, Mour and others in government come to the conclusion that begging as a religious right for the weak and poor in society is idleness dehumanizing and should, therefore not be giving space within the new modern African city.

In Mour Ndiaye's attempt to explain to Serigne about the need to drive out the beggars, he further mentions that:

> Serigne, that's not the question. How can I explain …well, you see, nowadays, people who live a long way away, in Europe and the United State of America. White people especially, are beginning to take interest in the beauty of our country. These people are called tourists. You know, in the old days these White people came to rob and exploit us; now they visit our country for a rest and in search of happiness. That is why we have built hotels and holiday villages and casinos to welcome them. These tourists spend huge sums of money to come here, there are even special societies over in Europe who organise these journeys. And when these tourists visit the City, they are accosted by the beggars and we run the risk of their never coming back here or putting out unfavourbale propaganda to discourage others whom might like to come.' (pg. 17-18)

In fact, the beggars are blamed for the drop in the number of tourists that visit the country. As we are told, 'This year, the number of tourists has fallen considerably, in comparison with last year's figures, and it is almost certain that these beggars are to some extent responsible.' (p. 2). The verdict then is that beggars should no longer be tolerated in the capital city. 'We really cannot let them invade our cities and form a threat to public hygiene and the national economy' (p. 2-3). It is worth noting that at this stage in the developmental agenda of the state, the authorities are totally lost in terms of seeing any relevance in the presence of the beggars in the city. They are deemed to be 'a threat to public hygiene and the national economy' and must therefore be gotten rid of. What occupies the minds of the authorities is how to get rid of all the beggars so that the agenda to modernize the capital city and keep it clean will succeed.

In fact, in the novel, we are presented with arguments about how allowing the practice of begging to continue will be detrimental to the modernisation agenda of the city. We are told that 'This morning there has been another article about it in the newspaper: about how the streets are congested with these beggars, these talibes, these lepers and cripples, all these derelicts.' (p. 1). The reference to 'another article' is indicative of how this issue of beggars taking over the city has become of national importance to the extent that it keeps appearing in the newspapers. The beggars are presented as posing a great challenge to the city as we are told of how 'the streets are congested with' them. (p. 1). The verdict, therefore, is that, 'The Capital must be cleared of these people-parodies of human beings rather-these dregs of society who beset you everywhere and attack you without provocation at all times. (p. 1). The beggars are therefore accused of 'degrading themselves for profit' (P. 13) and should therefore be shown how that lowers their dignity.

Indeed, the image of the beggars that is presented right from the beginning of the novel is very demeaning. The beggars are described with very undignifying terms that only

succeed in painting a picture of how justifiable it is for society to do away with them. There is an intentional use of linguistic othering through the choice of the demonstrative pronoun 'these' in referring to the beggars. The repetition of 'these' in referring to the beggars shows a determination to exclude them from the larger society and any form of dignity in order to tag them as being inferior. It is, therefore, not surprising that the beggars are referred to as 'people-parodies of human beings' and 'dregs of society.' (p. 1).

The use of offensive words such as 'parodies' and 'dregs' is not only demeaning but also shows a total lack of regard for the beggars. The presence of beggars in the city is therefore presented as a challenge that needs to be curtailed if the society is to reach its goals of modernisation and attracting tourists. We are told that:

> You hope that the traffic-lights will never turn red as you approach an intersection in your car! And once you've overcome the obstacle of the traffic-lights, you have to get past another hurdle to reach the hospital, force your way through a bombardment to get to work in your own office, struggle to emerge from the bank, make a thousand detours to avoid them at the markets, and finally pay a ransom to enter the House of God! Oh! These men, these parodies of human beings, as persistent as they are ubiquitous! The Capital is crying out to be cleared of them. (P. 1)

What can be observed is that the positioning of the beggars in the city is presented as being problematic as they are stationed around traffic light intersections, hospitals, offices, markets and even mosques. These strategic points where people converge, therefore, serve as places where these beggars carry out their activities to the chagrin of the city officials.

For the city officials, the beggars do not deserve to be in the city. To them, 'The Capital is crying out to be cleared of them.' (P. 1). We are also told that when it comes to handling this matter, it is not a question of understanding the beggars, but 'it is a question of finding some way of getting rid of these people' (p. 2). The presence of the beggars is therefore presented as being suffocating as they are described as 'making life a bit difficult

for' (p. 2) others. Indeed, the beggars are presented as 'obstacles to the hygiene of the City…' (p. 17) and an unpleasant sight that must be brutally dealt with. While referring to the beggars, we are told that '…their presence is harmful to the prestige of our country; they are running sore which should be kept hidden, at any rate in the Capital.' (p. 2) This is a great indication of how society has no place for these citizens as a result of its modernisation agenda. Those who constitute the group of beggars are likened to a running sore that must be kept out of the sight of the public.

By removing the beggars from the capital, the city officials make the point that the urban space has no room for the beggars as far as its landscape is concerned. For Keba, driving away the beggars from the city centre becomes not a mere duty but an obsession. To him, 'These people must be got rid of' (P. 14). This agenda 'becomes an obsession with him' because of his belief that the beggars are people 'who poison the air with their smell' (P. 14). He therefore considers it as 'his business is to clean up the highways, to carry out his chief's orders and to get over this nausea that he feels at the sight of the beggars' (p. 15). In fact, as a subordinate, even though Keba was working for Ndiaye,

> Keba did not tell Mour Ndiaye his feelings every time a beggar held out his hand to him. He did not tell him how he nearly chocked when filthy hands were poked right into his car, as soon as he was imprudent enough to lower the windows, nor the remorse he felt when he conformed to the principle he had laid down never to give alms to beggars, a principle that was not inspired by meanness or churlishness, but simply because he was shocked to see human beings-however poor they might be-diminishing their own dignity by sponging on others in such a disgraceful , shameless fashion. He forgot that hunger and poverty compelled some of them to beg, and so reminded those who were better off that paupers too, existed. (p. 2)

This further confirms the fact that driving away the beggars from the capital city is therefore presented as a political agenda as well as a personal mission for various characters.

In fact, the president of the state himself is of the view that 'The disabled are a nuisance' (p. 54).

As they try to drive away the beggars from the capital, the city authorities are seen employing very cruel measures. Here, the disabled characters are presented as part of a group of people who are molested in the novel and are treated cruelly. One of such cruel measures used in driving the beggars away from the capital is conducting raids to arrest and force the beggars out of the city. This involved beating them up and putting some of them in jail. While mentioning the efforts they are putting in to clamp down on the beggars, Keba states 'We organise raids every week; sometimes they're dropped more than a hundred miles away.' (P. 2). He however tells Ndiaye that as they try to drive the beggars away, 'the next day they're back at their strategic points. It's really getting quite beyond me, Sir' (P. 12). In fact, regardless of this initial opposition by the beggars, the resolve of the city authorities in riding the city of the beggars is in no doubt as they further indicate that:

> This time we must keep at it, make no concessions, keep on rounding them up. There must be daily rounds, from now on, instead of weekly. Yes, daily! We've got all the necessary means at our disposal: staff, cars. Petrol. These folks have got to be cleared off all the streets in the capital.' (p. 13)

The kind of force unleashed on the beggars as well as the resources that are committed to ridding the city of the beggars, serve as a clear indication of how unwelcomed such persons are as far as being in the capital is concerned. The authorities make it clear that they will ensure that they 'keep on the move throughout the City until it is completely cleaned up' (p. 13) of beggars. This is presented as part of the 'very clear instructions from the Minister' (p. 13). As part of the strategies to round up the beggars, the authorities decide to 'to track them down wherever they lurk' (p. 13) since the presence of the beggars is regarded as a very serious problem that needs to be brutally dealt with. The strategy then is that 'If it's their first offense, we shall try to reason with them, show them how degrading it is to exhibit

themselves in the street exposing their infirmities for profit. We must make them realise that begging lowers their dignity' (p. 13).

The inhumane treatment meted to the beggars is captured in how some of them suffer at the hands of the city officials and with some even dying as a result. In the case of Madiabel, the lame beggar,

> He had been a thinker in his native village, mending pots and pans. But fewer people brought cooking-pots with holes needing to be patched up or old saucepans needing new handles to be fixed. He couldn't sell any more cookers, for the agent who collected them and took them to the City to dispose of them had disappeared one fine day without paying him for the results of a whole year's work. Madiabel had two wives and eight children to feed and clothe, so one day he upped and left for the City and became a 'battu-bearer'- without a battu-simply holding out his hand for alms. Business was much better and he was able regularly to send his family clothes and money for food. (p. 10)

Unfortunately for Madiabel, on one occasion, 'The police proceeded to organise a round-up. As he was trying to get away, he ran out into the road without looking where he was going, just as a car came past at full speed.' (p. 11). As Salla confesses:

> Who wouldn't run, if he'd ever felt the sting of those whips? I take to my heels, I do, as soon as I catch sight of the fuzz. They lay about them like madmen; when they get worked up like that, they seem to forget that we are human beings. (p. 11)

In fact, it is not only Madiabel who suffers this way. Nguirane Sarr also complains that, 'They laid into me today. They tore my clothes, confiscated my stick and broke my glasses. It's too much, it's too much. Is that a way to treat a human being?' (p. 20). Other measures to rid the city of beggars include taking them far away from the city centre:

> Persistent offenders will be given a good lesson and put on a truck for Mbada; that's two hundred miles away, a village where there is practically no means of transport, so how will they manage to get back here!...If they come back they'll be put in prison! Yes, indeed! They'll land up in prison' (p. 14)

By sending these individuals to a faraway village, what this means is that the disabled and other beggars in the city are deemed not to accepted as far as being part of the city. This brings to fore the issue of managing urban spaces and the place of such beggars who for cultural and religious beliefs used to be a key part of such city centres. The beggars come to the point of concluding that the officials are, '…beginning to make our lives intolerable. Just because we're beggars, they think we're not quite human!' (p. 20). The frustrations of the beggars can be seen in the words of Nguirane Sarr who exclaims, 'We're not dogs!'… 'Are we dogs, now?' (p. 22). It is out of this frustration that leads the beggars to devise a plan to counter what the officials are bent on doing against them. The beggars, therefore decide to go on strike.

**Are we needy or we are needed?: When the subaltern fights back**

It is worth noting that the initial picture of the beggars that is presented in the novel is that they are living at the mercy of the other members of society. In this regard, they are presented as being poor and weak and therefore, stand in need of the support of others before they can survive. They are also presented as a nuisance and a great source of worry to their community. However, an important aspect of the portrayal of this vulnerable group in Fall's *The Beggar's Strike* is how they are able to recognise their rightful place in society and rise to fight against the system that seeks to subjugate them. This action by the beggars ultimately involves the characters with impairments. Indeed, this aspect of disability representation presents how, as part of those considered to be vulnerable in society, disabled characters are sometimes able to realise the power they wield and are able to stand up against the injustices meted out against them.

The disabled characters are therefore, presented as being part of a group in society that is needed to serve a religious purpose in their society. They realise the fact that they are not needy, but rather, they are needed in order for society to run effectively. This knowledge and

consciousness are what informs the resistance the beggars put up as the maltreatment they go through, and the injustices they face in the hands of the city authorities continue to increase. After the death of one of their colleagues, as a result of the brutalities of the city officials, we get to know that, 'The beggars are in a flutter of disquiet; there is a rumble and a grumble of suppressed anger. They have just returned from old Gorgui Diop's funeral. All they knew was that he had been picked up in a raid' (p. 36). This incident becomes the starting point for the ultimate strike the beggars decide to embark on in order to protest against the inhuman treatment they go through: 'If we don't look out, we'll end up like Gorgui Diop. Ngurane Sarr cries. 'We'll all die like dogs' (p. 36). Sarr continues to tell them, 'Now, my friends, the hour has come to make our choice; to live like dogs, pursued, hunted, tracked down, rough handled, or to live like men' (p. 38).

The rebellion and resistance the beggars decide to embark on are, therefore, rooted in the realisation of their importance in society. What Fall presents in her novel concerning the issue of disabled characters and other individuals who are engaged in begging is a brilliant way of presenting a perspective that eludes many. The novel, therefore brings up the critical issue of the giving of alms as a religious practice and how the disabled characters and the other members of the society involved in this practice are not necessarily a nuisance since they are needed in society not merely for people to give them alms but are essential members of society whose activities are to the benefit of the members of the society. Through Nguirane Sarr, the supposed leader of the beggars, a very cogent argument is put forth to show how almsgiving is observed as a religious practice not necessarily because people want to help the poor but because they have needs that have to be met. To her, giving of alms is first of all done to benefit those who give and not necessarily the beggars and the other supposed poor people who engage in such activity. Sarr tells the other beggars, 'People do not give out of love for us. That is quite correct. So, let us get organised! For a start, do not let's accept any

more of those worthless coins they throw us that will not even buy a lollipop' (p. 23). She, therefore, charges her colleagues to organise themselves and assert their rights as she says:

> Even these madmen, these heartless brutes who descend on us and beat us up, even they give to charity. They need to give alms because they need our prayers-wishes for long life, for prosperity, for pilgrimages; they like to hear them every morning to drive away their bad dreams of the night before, and to maintain their hopes that things will be better tomorrow. You think that people give out of the goodness of their hearts? Not at all. They give out of an instinct for preservation.' (p. 22)

As the beggars stop moving to the city centres to go begging for alms and rather remain where the city officials had pushed them to, we begin to see how the non-availability of beggars in the capital begins to have a great toll on individuals who needed to give alms to beggars for various reasons. It is the realisation that the disabled and the other persons begging for alms is not only because religion prescribes that people should give alms to the poor. I quote extensively what may be considered to be the real reason for why people give to beggars which also emphasizes the important role of people with impairments and other individuals who are engaged in begging:

> I've told you before; it's not because of our rags, nor our physical disabilities, nor for the pleasure of performing a disinterested good deed that people deign to throw us the money we get as donations. First of all, they have whispered their dearest and most secret desires to the alms they tender; 'I make you this offering so that God may grant me long life, prosperity and happiness…' 'This donation is so that the creator may remove all the difficulties I might encounter on my path…' 'In exchange for this contribution may the Master of heaven and earth help make to climb to the top of the ladder, make me the Head of my Department…' 'Thanks to this offering, may the Almighty drive away all my cares as well as those of my family, protect me from Satan, from man-eating sorcerers and all the spells that might be cast upon me…' That's what they say when they drop a coin or a little gift in the palm of your out-stretched hand. And when they are kind enough to invite you to share their steaming, odorous calabashes of millet porridge and curdled milk, do you imagine it's because they thought you

> might be hungry? No, my friends, that's the least of their worries! Our hunger doesn't worry them. They need to give in order to survive, and if we didn't exist, who would they give to? How could they ensure their own peace of mind? They don't give for our sake; they give for their own sake! They need us so that they can live in peace! (p. 37-38)

This detailed explanation of why people give alms to the disabled and other beggars may appear skewed to a achieve a particular agenda. However, it is a revelation of how as a result of religious belief, people with certain body types as members of those considered as beggars in society are assigned the place of 'the other.' This occurs because, by virtue of their conditions, society sees them as being clothed with some form of supernatural powers that have to be harnessed. Consequently, the othering of those with disabilities pushes them to the class of beggars who are needed in society as people go around giving them alms to help them to achieve all kinds of intentions. It is the realization that the act of the disabled and other persons begging for alms is not merely because their own doing but because it is a place that society has assigned them as is clearly revealed in this statement:

> Where will you find a man who's the boss and who doesn't give to charity so that he can stay boss? Where will you find a man who's suffering from a real or imaginary illness and who doesn't believe that his troubles will appear the moment a donation leaves his hands? Where will you find an ambitious man who doesn't think that the magic effects of charity can open all doors? Everyone gives for one reason or another. Even the parents of a man who's waiting judgement, expecting to be condemned, have recourse to charity, to blur the judge's reasoning, in the hope of an acquittal.' (p. 39).

As the novel comes to an end, we see Mour Ndiaye being asked by both Serigne Barima and Kifi Bokoul to give alms as part of rites to ensure his protection and also help him to gain favour before the president. Mour Ndiaye reveals to Serigne Barima that:

> …I would like the President to think of me. Serigne Barima, I do not have any secrets with you. A few months ago, the President

> said he was going to select a Vice President. Now the rumour goes that he will soon put this into effect. I would like you to pray for the President to think of me. (p. 18)

Interestingly, Serigne assures Mour Ndiaye that his request will be granted and then further prescribes some rituals for him to perform:

> That which you desire is in God's power to grant you. And I think that He will grab it, Insh' Allah. You shall have your wish if it so pleases God. All you have to do is to sacrifice a fine white ram. You will slaughter it with your hand; you will divide the meat into seven parts and distribute these to beggars.' (p. 19)

The request to make a sacrifice is reiterated as the condition that will ensure that Mour Ndiaye gets the political appointment he is hoping for:

> Insh' Allah, this post of Vice – President, he will obtain it. He must sacrifice a bull. He must divide it into thirty-three portions, which he must distribute among the poor on a Friday. None of the occupants of his own house must taste the meat. Insh' Allah, all will go well. (p. 23)

Kifi Bokoul also further assures Mour Ndiaye that, 'You will have what you desire, and you will have it very shortly. You will be Vice-President' (P. 58). He, however adds that:

> To achieve this, you must sacrifice a bull whose coat must be of one colour, preferable fawn. The ground must be soaked with the blood of this bull which you must slaughter here in the courtyard of this house; then you must divide it into seventy-seven portions which you will distribute to the battu-bearers. (p. 58)

When Mour asks about who the battu-bearers are and how he is supposed to go about the sacrifice to help him gain favour before the president, he is told that:

> They are beggars who walk about the streets to beg. This offering must go to its correct destination, otherwise everything risks going wrong. It must go to genuine miskin, that is to genuine paupers, people who have nothing, absolutely nothing and who would starve, were it not for their battu that they stretch out to passers-by. But this sacrifice that you will make must not be limited to one district of the town only. You are destined to be appreciated in the four corners of the town, in the four corners of the

> country, you will be a man if fame; this fame must be symbolised by the manner in which you distribute the meat from the sacrifice: offer this meat throughout the City, to the beggars in every district of the City. (p. 58)

It is at this point that Mour suddenly recalled 'that the beggars no longer beg in the streets, he has purged the streets of them and forced them to take refuge somewhere in a corner of one of the outlying districts' (p. 59). Eventually, all of Mour's efforts to get the beggars back to the streets so that he could offer the prescribed sacrifices to them proves futile. The president appoints a different person to be the vice president of the state. In the end, the power dynamics changes as the beggars become those others seek after as we are told that, 'People are really in the soup now,' the stall keeper went on. 'They are sort of beggars. Can you imagine an existence in which you can't make your daily offering to charity without travelling several miles' (p. 52).

**Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the representation of disabled characters in Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggar's Strike.* It is obvious from our discussion that Fall's presentation of disabled characters offers us an interesting perspective on disability representation in the African literary text. Here, we see the image of the disabled characters through their membership of those referred to as beggars in the novel. Even though they are initially presented as being a nuisance and a canker in society that needs to be dealt with, we see them rising to a place of power and relevance at the end of the novel. This is as a result of the fact that they realise the important role they play in society. The negative treatment of the beggars in the novel by government agencies calls for attention. Governements are to therefore seek for a humane way of dealing with beggars in the African society by taking into consideration their role social, cultural, economical and religious signifance.

# CHAPTER NINE

# CONCLUSION

## Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed how the disabled characters in Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggar's Strike* are presented. The chapter focused on the collective image that the disabled characters bear as part of the group of people referred to as 'beggars' in the text. The discussion revealed how disabled characters constitute a great majority of the beggars, and as such, their portrayal in the novel is a significant way by which we get to appreciate the representation of such characters as being part of various vulnerable groups in the African literary text.

This final chapter of the study serves as the conclusion to all that has been done so far. Consequently, in this chapter, I will offer a summary of the research as well as the key findings from the study. I will also share the implications of such a study and offer recommendations for future research as far as studies in disability representation in African literature are concerned.

## Summary of Research

This study aimed to examine the representation of disabled characters in some selected African literary texts. I focused on the othering of such characters by analysing critical issues such as how body difference plays a key role in the marginalisation of characters who may appear different or are assumed to lack certain body parts as compared to the greater majority of the individuals that make up their respective societies. The discussion

of the selected texts was done through the lens of literary disability theory. I was guided by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's concepts of the 'normate' and 'extraordinary bodies.' This very influential concept in disability studies suggests that societies operate based on a binary that classifies individuals. Those with bodies perceived to be normal are considered to be part of the normate and those whose bodies do not match society's concept of the ideal body are deemed to have extraordinary bodies. This binary aligns with Jean-Francois Staszak's 'Other/otherness,' which argues that there is usually a 'dominant in-group' referred to as 'the self', which usually wields power and therefore dictates and creates a positive image for itself and enjoys various rights and privileges.

On the other hand, there is a 'dominant out-group' which is considered to be 'the other,' which is clothed in inferiority, stigma and negative stereotypes. I applied these key concepts to my reading of the selected texts through the use of the hybrid interpretive conceptual framework. This framework, which recommends a close reading of the texts while paying key attention to certain critical questions, helped to reveal how people with impairments are perceived and treated in the various societies portrayed by the texts that were studied.

This study, therefore, focused on a literary analysis of the four key novels authored by writers of African origin, which I selected for this exercise. The diverse backgrounds of the authors served to help us appreciate the perspectives of these African writers who come from different African societies. Indeed, the writings of these writers are attempts to capture their various socio-cultural experiences about disability. Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty,* Sulaiman Addonia's *Silence is My Mother Tongue*, Petinah Gappah's *The Book of Memory,* and Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggar's Strike* served their purpose in showing us how various characters with impairments are othered by the other members of their respective societies.

The chapter one of this study served as the introduction. I presented a background to the study, statement of the problem, objectives, research questions, thesis statement, justification of the texts as well as the general outline of the study. What followed next to this chapter was chapter two, which was the literature review section of the study. I reviewed the literature on disability studies and representation in the literature with a particular focus on African literature.

Chapter three of the study was a discussion on literary disability theory. This chapter offered a great insight on disability studies which served as the main theoretical framework. In this chapter, I reviewed Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's concepts of the normate and the extraordinary, which guided this work. I posited that in examining disability representations in African literature, there is no need to totally reject theories, thoughts and ideas based on disability representations that originate from the Western world. However, by employing the hybrid interpretive framework, researchers with interest in disability representation in African literature can bring out what is unique about how disabled characters are represented in African literary texts.

Chapter four was the first analysis chapter of the study. This chapter focused on the representation of Odibo, who is a character with a crippled arm Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*. I examined the issues of disability stereotypes and stigma as employed in the text and the key role they play in the othering of the disabled character. It was realised that Odibo is treated as an inferior other as a result of his crippled arm. As a result of being crippled in one arm, Odibo suffers from negative stereotyping and stigmatisation by those who are assumed to have normal bodies in the text. Toje and Okumagba serve as the key characters through whom we experience how Odibo is negatively stereotyped and stigmatized as a result of his impairment.

The fifth chapter, which also focused on the analysis of Okpewho's *The Last Duty,* looked at the intersection between sex and disability in the novel. Here, the discussion focused on how Odibo is eventually pitched against Toje, and Aku becomes the prize they fight over. Interestingly, after Odibo succeeds in having an affair with Aku, he experiences an epiphany that brings him to the realisation that he is indeed a complete man. The chapter, therefore, traced what I term as Odibo's sexual development journey in an attempt to analyse how the disabled character grows through various processes as far as his sexual life is concerned until he gets to a place of accepting himself as being qualified to be described as being a man. In the end, Toje, who is a perceived normate, is rather unable to have sexual intercourse with Aku. It is, however Odibo, the man who was presented as not being man enough, who succeeds in having sex with Aku. The sexual act is, therefore, critical as far as the growth and development of Odibo in the text is concerned. Sex, therefore, becomes a symbol of masculine power in the sense that it is through the sexual act that Odibo discovers himself as a man and also breaks away from the manipulation of Toje. Again, while Toje is presented as being unable to have sex with Aku, even Toje tried several times, Odibo who is despised because of his impairment, is the one who is able to have sex with Aku and set her free from her sexual starvation. As Odibo succeeds in having sex with Aku, Odibo loses his invisibility and gains relevance before Aku.

The discussion on Sulaiman Addonia's *Silence is My Mother Tongue* was done in chapter six of this study. This chapter focuses on the portrayal of Hagos who is a mute male character in the text. The chapter examined how Hagos's inability to talk serves as the basis for his being othered. This was followed by chapter seven, which was a study of the othering of the albino character in Gappah's *The Book of Memory*. It was realised that within the society in which the story was set, body difference plays a key role in how people are perceived and treated. Chapter eight was the last analysis chapter and it focused on the presentation of the disabled

characters in Sow Fall's *The Beggar's Strike.* Here, I established that sometimes, the representation of disabled characters in the African literary text is done through presenting them as being part of a vulnerable group that is illtreated in society

**Key Findings**

In this study, I sought to find answers to the following research questions:

1. How are disabled characters portrayed through the use of disability stigma and stereotypes?
2. What role does sex play in African disability narratives?
3. How are male characters portrayed as being 'feminised' as a result of their impairments?
4. How are disabled characters presented as being part of vulnerable groups in society who are treated as being inferior?

With regard to the first research question, I showed through my analysis of the selected texts that the use of disability stigma and stereotypes forms a key part of how disabled characters are 'othered' in the texts understudy. The disabled characters are stigmatized and negatively stereotyped because of their body difference. This body difference, which may be an impairment or a deviation from what the society generally accepts to be the norm, therefore serves as the basis for the disabled characters to be treated as being 'the other.' Physical body difference is therefore seen to be critical, especially when it comes to differences that can be perceived by sight and hearing. The image of the disabled characters represented in the texts that were studied was mainly negative. I am of the view that this approach by the writers was intended to portray what such characters go through in real life. The texts therefore try to mirror society even though they risk being described as offering a stereotypical view of disabled characters.

My study of the selected texts, in the light of the second research question, revealed that the intersection between sex and disability is very critical as far as African disability narratives are concerned. Indeed, in the case of Odibo in *The Last Duty*, sex becomes the symbol of masculine power and even the epiphany for Odibo to discover his masculinity. What also becomes obvious is what appears to be the depiction of the 'fluidity, instability and contradictory nature of masculinity' as Ennin (2022) puts it. Our concept of what a real man is gets revised by the end of the novel. However, even though Odibo is able to satisfy a woman sexually, the way by which it happens ends up eliminating him from participating in the sexual activities of his community. As the novel comes to an end, Odibo is presented as a deviant who suffers much more stigma than was initially the case.

In the case of *Silence is My Mother Tongue*, the critical role of sex in the life of Hagos, who is a mute character, can be seen in how as a result of his impairment, he ends up becoming feminised. It is therefore not surprising that at the end of the novel, he is involved in a homosexual relationship. Sex, therefore, serves as the apex of the form of evolution Hagos goes through. It is worth noting that both Odibo and Hagos are initially presented as being asexual. However, by the end of the novel, they both find themselves involved in sexual relationships. Sex, therefore, plays a key role in the character development of both Odibo and Hagos in their respective novels.

I also showed through my examination of *Silence is not my Mother Tongue* that as a result of Hagos being mute, he ends up becoming 'feminised' based on his society's concept of what the feminine and masculine genders represent, especially when it comes to gender role expectations. This feminization of Hagos is seen in the way he exchanges his position as the elder child and the male child of his mother with Saba, who is his younger sister. In the presentation of Hagos and Saba, we see an exchange in the gender role performance for the two characters. Saba becomes the masculine version of Hagos, while Hagos becomes the

feminine version of Saba. The male with impairment also becomes domesticated as we rather see Saba presented as being daring, adventurous and always being outside.

My study of the last research question revealed that one approach that the African writer uses in presenting the othering of disabled characters is by presenting such characters as being part of a group of vulnerable individuals who are treated as being inferior in society. This can be seen in my analysis of the disabled characters in *The Beggar's Strike.* Through my analysis of what the disabled characters go through in the novel, I showed how the representation of the beggars contributes greatly in portraying the image of disabled characters in the text.

Finally, this study also contributed greatly in discussing how albino representation in the African literary text has as one of its key functions as showing how such characters are othered in their societies. This is seen in my analysis of Gappah's *The Book of Memory*, which can be described as a literary tool for shedding light on the plight of albinos in some African societies.

Throughout my examination of the selected texts, I was guided by the hybrid interpretative framework. This is seen in the research requestions I set out to investigate through my study of the selected texts. My research questions were therefore structured in a way that helped me to discuss the representation of the disabled characters in the selected African literary text through a close reading of the texts and an application of key concepts and ideas about disability studies with regard to how it has developed over the years. A look at the ten (10) critical questions I suggested under the hybrid interpretative framework will show how my examination of the texts has provided answers to the questions. I therefore present the questions and brief responses based on my examination of the texts:

1. How is the society's conception of the normate and extraordinary bodies presented?

In my examination of the concept of the normate and extraordinary bodies in the selected texts, I showed that there exists an idea of the ideal body in all the texts that were studied. It is, therefore, against this concept of the ideal, which represents the normal body that all other bodies are judged. Consequently, bodies that do not meet the expectations of their respective bodies are seen to be different and extraordinary and become consequently 'othered' by society.

2. How does the society react towards and treat the body differences of the characters in the text?

Generally, characters whose bodies did not match the ideal bodies of their respective societies were treated as the 'other.' Such characters suffered from stigmatisation, labelling and marginalisation as can be seen in all the texts that were studied.

3. Does the narrative enforce or dispel societal stereotypes about disability?

It is worth noting that in their quest to present realistic portrayals of the disabled characters, the various authors risk being accused of presenting the characters in stereotypical ways, especially in *The Last Duty* and *The Book of Memory*; Odibo and Memory are presented in ways that reveal the societal stereotypes that come with their conditions. Such stereotypical presentation of disabled characters is sometimes considered to be counterproductive, especially when it comes to the image that it presents to readers about various body conditions and differences.

4. What are the tensions that exist in the othered person as he/she attempts to interact with society?

In the discussion of *The Book of Memory*, I showed how Memory faces a lot of challenges in her quest to interact with the other children in her community. Her peers avoid her and suffers from various forms of labelling and stigmatisation as a result of her body difference. Again, In *The Last Duty* and *Silence is My Mother Tongue*, Odibo and Hagos

appear withdrawn from their respective societies as a result of their body conditions. The beggars in *The Beggars Strike* are also eventually sent to the outskirts of the city since they are deemed to be a threat to the modernisation agenda of the city authorities.

5. How does medicine play any role to make life a bit bearable for the othered individual?

The issue of how medicine is used to make life bearable for the disabled characters can be seen in the representation of Memory in *The Book of Memory*. In my discussion of the text, I examined how medicine plays a critical role in helping Memory to deal with her skin condition. This is however not the case in the other texts. Medical interventions do not get any attention at all.

6. How do cultural, religious and metaphysical beliefs concerning the othered character contribute to how disabled characters are treated?

What is evidently clear in my examination of the various texts that were studied is that cultural, religious and metaphysical beliefs of the various African societies that were represented in the texts control how people whose bodies are perceived to be different are viewed. While in the texts that were studied, the African traditional beliefs served as the dominant ways by which people with perceived different bodies were viewed, Christian and Islamic views seemed to also play critical roles in the way bodies are viewed and treated as can be seen in *The Book of Memory* and *The Beggar's Strike*,

7. Is the disabled character used as a mere metaphor or given agency to communicate with the readers about the plights of the disabled?

While all the texts that were studied gave central roles to the disabled characters, Gappah's presentation of albinism in *The Book of Memory* and Addonia's presentation of Hagos in *Silence is My Mother Tongue* stand out when it comes to how the disabled characters were given agency. This helped greatly in how readers are able to appreciate the

conditions of the disabled characters as well as the challenges they face in society. Again, I am of the view that even when authors present disabled characters in metaphorical ways, it is the duty of disability researchers and scholars to highlight the particular experiences of characters with impairments and body differences. There must, therefore, be a deliberated refusal to avoid treating the disabled characters as mere metaphors.

8. How is the othered person's quest to express his/her sexuality represented in the text?

In my analysis of the selected texts, I paid close attention to the intersections between sex and disability, especially as presented in Okpewho's *The Last Duty* and Addonia's *Silence is My Mother Tongue*. In my examination of the two novels, I discussed how the issue of sex became a focal point that shaped the novels. Again, even though the disabled characters in the respective texts are initially presented as being asexual, they end up becoming active participants in the sexual activities in their societies by the time the stories come to an end.

9. How do the othered characters seek to break free and live as members of the society?

In all the texts that were studied, I showed the challenges that the disabled characters as 'othered' persons had to deal with in other to freely participate as citizens in their respective societies. It can be seen that in all the texts, the overwhelming challenges that the disabled characters face led them at certain points to withdraw from the larger society. However, at various points of their development, the disabled characters try to fight back the marginalisation they suffer in society.

10. Are there any technological inventions that are presented as playing any key role in making life bearable for the othered body?

In the texts that were studied, technological inventions were presented as playing any key role in making life bearable for the disabled characters as. This may be because the authors whose works were studied chose to focus mainly on the state of the disabled characters in their societies and the challenges such people face. Consequently, if such technological interventions did not exist in the societies they wrote about, they did not feel obliged to include them.

**Implications of the Study**

This study has highlighted the oft-neglected discourse of disability and literature, and calls for more sustained examination of this phenomenon. Although disabled/differently abled characters are present in literary texts, we often keep silent about their portraiture in our literary analysis, rather focusing on the other characters. This silencing is borne out of a societal tendency to pretend not to see disability, which, ironically is all around us.This study is very important in how it has added to scholarship on disability representation in African literature, especially when it comes to how the presentation of disabled characters portrays the othering of such persons. It will also serve as an important reference point for others who may embark on research in this particular areaof study .

**Recommendations for future research**

As efforts are made to present the African perspective on disability representation in literature, I recommend that researchers and scholars take particular interest in various areas that intersect with disability representation. In fact, the field of disability literary studies is relatively new and therefore requires sustained studies into areas such as intersections between disability and sex, disability and religious beliefs, disability and social support, disability and medical care as represented in African literary texts. I also recommend the comparative study of disability representations by male and female African writers in order to access the kind of perspectives they bring to bear on the subject of disability representation.

Again, there must be a conscious effort to include literary texts that touch on disability representation in texts that learners study in schools. This will be a very important step in using literature to help address issues of disability. Indeed, just as areas such as gender studies and others have gained attention as far as research and studies in various departments are concerned, issues about disability studies must also be given the same attention. Courses in disability literary studies must be mounted for students right from the undergraduate level to the graduate level. Governements and educational institutions must consciously ensure that literary texts that focus on the representation of disabled characters are studied in schools with the aim of using literature to address issues such as stigma, stereotypes and injustices assoiated with disabled persons. This type of initiative will bring a sense of inclusivity within the school environment and also help to change negative perceptions about body differences.

## REFERENCES

### Primary Sources

Gappah, P. (2015). *The Book of Memory*. Faber and Faber Limited.

Okpewho, I. (1996). *The Last Duty*. London: Longman Group Limited.

Sulaiman, A. (2020). *Silence Is My Mother Tongue*. Minneapolis: Graywolf.

Sow Fall, A. (1981). *The Beggars' Strike*. Essex, UK: Longman.

### Secondary Sources

Achebe, C. (1978). The Role of the Writer in a New Nation. In: G.D. Killam (ed.), *African Writers on African Writing*. London: Heinemann.

Acquaviva, G. (2020). Disabling Stereotypes: The Perception and Representation of Disability in Swahili Oral and Written Literature. *Studi Magrebini*, *18*(1), 1-21.

Adom-Opare, F. (2022). Cultural Etiologies of Disability in Ghana: A Case of Food Taboos in Pregnancy. *Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal*, *18*(1 & 2).

Annin, F., & Osei, C. (2020). Creating Juvenalian Mirrors in Reading Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, *9*(12), 13-23.

Avoke, M. (2010). Models of Disability in the Labelling and attitudinal discourse in Ghana. *Disability and Society*, 17: 7, 769- 777

Awogu-Maduagwu, E. A. (2018). Gendered representations of women in war literature: a study of Akachi Ezeigbo's Roses and Bullets and Festus Iyayi's Heroes. *International Journal of Social & Management Sciences, Madonna University* (IJSMS), 2.(1), 1 – 9

Babaee, R., & Babaee, S. (2012). Tradition versus Modernity: A study on Emecheta's *The Bride Price. Journal of African Studies and Development*, *4*(6), 150-154.

Barker, C. (2015). Disability and the Postcolonial Novel. In A. Quayson (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Postcolonial Novel* (pp. 99–115). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316459287.007

Bauer, M. W., Bicquelet, A., & Suerdem, A. K. (2014). Text analysis: an introductory manifesto. In: Bauer, M. W., Bicquelet, A., and Suerdem, A. K., (Eds.) *Textual Analysis*. SAGE Benchmarks in Social Research Methods. Sage Publications, London, UK.

Beeman, M. (1992). A Sociological Interpretation of Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggars Strike*. Contributions in Black Studies . *A Journal of African and Afro-American Studies*. 9 (12)

Bell, C. (2006). Disability Studies is Eurocentric. "Introducing White Disability Studies: A Modest Proposal." The Disability Studies Reader. Ed. Lennard J. Davis. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 275-282.

Brocco, G. (2015). Labeling albinism: language and discourse surrounding people with albinism in Tanzania. *Disability & Society*, *30*(8), 1143-1157.

Brons, L. L. (2015). Othering, an analysis. *Transcience, a Journal of Global Studies* 6 (1):69-90.

Cole, E. (2021). Disfiguration, Trauma, and Disability: Reclaiming the Body and the Case against Prosthetics. In Falola, T., & Hamel, N. (Eds.), *Disability in Africa: Inclusion, Care, and the Ethics of Humanity.* (pp.161-185). Rochester : University of Rochester Press.

Davis, L. J. (1995). *Enforcing normalcy: Disability, deafness, and the body*. London: Verso.

Devlieger, P. J. (1999). Frames of reference in African proverbs on disability. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, *46*(4), 439-451.

Diamond, A., & Poharec, L. (2017). Introduction: freaked and othered bodies in comics. *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, *8*(5), 402-416.

Edung, M. (2014). Environmental Issues in Aminata Sow Fall's The Beggars' Strike: An Artist Impression of an African Social Problem. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, *4*(19), 54-59.

Emenike, D., & Asuzu, S. (2023). Sexual exploitation and the Nigerian civil War: a study of Isidore Okpewho's the last duty. *Preorc Journal of Gender and SexualityStudies*, *1*,131-154.https://journals.ezenwaohaetorc.org/ index.php/PREORCGESS/article/view/1442

Emenyi, I. A. (2006). Feminization of poverty: A reading of Okpewho's the last duty. *LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, *3*, 90-97.

Ennin, T., P., (2022). Men Across Time: Contesting Masculinities in Ghanaian Fiction and Film. *African humanities series.* NISC (Pty) Limited.

Ennin, T. (2014). The making of Akan men: Confronting hegemonic masculinities in Ayi Kwei Armah's The Healers and Ama Ata Aidoo's Anowa. *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men*, 2(2), 41-62.

Etieyibo, E. (2022). Disabilities in an African cultural worldview. *Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal*, *18*(1 & 2).

Falola, T., & Hamel, N. (Eds.). (2021). *Disability in Africa: Inclusion, Care, and the Ethics of Humanity*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press.

Falola, T., Carothers, A. L., & Hamel, N. (2021). Disability Studies: A Disciplinary Overview In Falola, T., & Hamel, N. (Eds.), *Disability in Africa: Inclusion, Care, and the Ethics of Humanity*. (pp. 47-75). Rochester: University of Rochester Press.

Ganle, J. K., Baatiema, L., Quansah, R., & Danso-Appiah, A. (2020). Barriers facing persons with disability in accessing sexual and reproductive health services in sub-Saharan Africa: A systematic review. *PloS one*, *15*(10), e0238585.

Garland-Thomson, R. (2017). *Extraordinary bodies: Figuring physical disability in American culture and literature*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Garland-Thomson, R. (1997). Extraordinary bodies. New York: Columbia University Press.

Garland-Thomson, R. (Ed.). (1996). *Freakery: Cultural spectacles of the extraordinary body*. NYU Press.

Gikandi, S. (2008). African literature and the colonial factor. In *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature: Volume 1* (pp. 379-397). Cambridge University Press.

Goodley, D. (2011). *Disability Studies*. Sage Publications Ltd. London

Haihambo, C., & Lightfoot, E. (2010). Cultural beliefs regarding people with disabilities in Namibia: Implications for the inclusion of people with disabilities. *International Journal of Special Education,* 25 (3), 76-87.

Hall, A. (2016). *Literature and Disability*. New York: Routledge.

Hamel, N. (2021). Paradoxical Dramaturgies: Disability, Ritual, and Resistance in the Plays of Wole Soyinka. In Falola, T., & Hamel, N. (Eds.), *Disability in Africa: Inclusion, Care, and the Ethics of Humanity.* (pp. 185-209). Rochester: University of Rochester Press.

Hamel, N., & Falola, T. (2021). Africanizing Disability: Toward an Articulation of African Disability Studies. In Falola, T., & Hamel, N. (Eds.), *Disability in Africa: Inclusion, Care, and the Ethics of Humanity.* (pp. 1-47). Rochester: University of Rochester Press.

Hermeston, R. (2017). Towards a critical stylistics of disability. *Journal of language and discrimination*, *1*(1), 34-60.

Imafidon, E., & Baker, C. (2022). Special Issue: Understanding Disability in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal*, *18*(1 & 2).

Ingstad, B. (1990). The disabled person in the community: social and cultural aspects. *International Journal of Rehabilitation research. Internationale Zeitschrift fur Rehabilitationsforschung. Revue Internationale de Recherches de Readaptation*, *13*(3), 187-194.

Iyanda, R. (2021). The sociological probing of Aminata Sow Fall's The Beggars strike. *Electronic Research Journal of Literature, 3*

Kaplan, D. (1999). The Definition of Disability. Retrieved from http://www.accessiblesociety.org/ topics/demographics-identity/dkaplanpaper.htm

Kehinde, A. (2010). Ability in disability: J. M. Coetzee's Life & Times of Michael K and the empowerment of the disabled, *English Academy Review*, 27(1), 60-72, DOI: 10.1080/10131751003755948

Krentz, C. (2018). *Disability Studies: An Interdisciplinary Introduction***.** Ed. David H. Richter. Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Ladele, O. A. (2016). Disabling Sexualities: Embodiments of a Colonial Past. *Graduate Journal of Social Science, 12*(1).

Lipenga, K. J. (2020). Reading Precarity, Disability and Narrative Agency in Helon Habila's Waiting for an Angel and Measuring Time. *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa, 32*(2), 178-186.

Lipenga, K. J. & Ngwirab, E. (2018). 'Black on the inside': albino subjectivity in the African novel. *Disability and the Global South*. 5 (2), 1472-1487

Lipenga, K.J., 2014, 'Disability and masculinity in South African autosomatography', *African Journal of Disability* 3(1), Art. #85, 9 pages. http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ ajod. v3i1.85

Maduagwu, C. (2013). Incompetent and Disempowered Masculinities in Isodore Okpewho's The Victims (1970) and The Last Duty (1976). *Alizés: Revue angliciste de La Réunion*, (37), 11-27.

McDougall, D. H. (2017). Conceptualisations of 'Normal' For Persons with Disabilities in the Context of Special Education. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity, 7*(6), 358.

McKee, A. (2003). Textual analysis: A beginner's guide. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

McLaughlin, J., Goodley, D., Clavering, E. and Fisher, P. (2008). Families Raising Disabled Children: Enabling Care and Social Justice. London: Palgrave.

McRuer, R. (2006). *Crip theory: Cultural signs of queerness and disability*. New York: New York University Press.

Meekosha, H. (2008). Contextualizing disability: developing southern/global theory. In *4th Biennial Disability Studies Conference* (pp. 1-20).

Meekosha, H. (2011). "Decolonising Disability: Thinking and Acting Globally." *Disability & Society,* 26 (6): 667-682.

Mik-Meyer, N. (2016). Othering, Ableism and Disability: A Discursive Analysis of Co-Workers' Construction of Colleagues with Visible Impairments. *Human Relations, 69*(6), 1341-1363. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726715618454

Moasun, F. Y., & Mfoafo-M'Carthy, M. (2021). The power of the tongue: Inherent labeling of persons with disabilities in proverbs of the Akan people of Ghana. *Qualitative Social Work, 20*(4), 911-927.

Mitchell, D. T., & Snyder, S. L. (2000). *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*. University of Michigan Press.

Mitchell, D. & Snyder, S. (2006). *Narrative prosthesis and the materiality of metaphor*. In L. Davis (ed.), The Disability Studies Reader (2nd edition). (pp. 205–216). New York: Routledge

Mitchell, D. T., & Snyder, S. L. (1997a). Introduction: Disability studies and the double bind of representation. In D. T. Mitchell & S. L. Snyder (Eds.), *The body and physical difference: Discourses of disability*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Mitchell, D. T., & Snyder, S. L. (Eds). (1997b). *The body and physical difference: Discourses of disability*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Mohd, A. B. (2014). Satire in Post-Independence African Novel: A Study of Chinua Achebi's *A Man of the People* and Ngugi Wa Thiango's *Wizard of the Crow*. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*. 2, (6), 17-21

Morrison, J. (2018). Tradition and Modernity in Chinua Achebe's African. *Research in African Literatures* , 49 (4), 14-26

Mustapha, Y. K. (2021). Exploring the Experience of Individuals with Physical Disabilities Regarding Stigma and Discrimination during Childhood: A review of literature. *African Journal of Health Sciences*, *34*(1), 98-116.

Mutunda, S. (2018). Hegemonic Masculinity and Emasculation in Aminata Sow Fall's The

Beggars' Strike. *International Journal of Educational Investigations*, *5*(6), 23-36.

Nabutanyi, E. F. (2013). *Representations of troubled childhoods in selected post-1990 African fiction in English* (Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University).

Ncube, G. & Mtenje, A. (2019). (Re)drawing the limits of marginality: 'Whiteness', disability and queer sexuality in Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory*. *Nordic Journal of African Studies, 28 (2, 1-16).* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337486381

Ndi, G. S. (2016). A question of the body: Colonial legacies and postcolonial imaginaries of power in African literary texts. *International Journal of English and Literature*, *7*(9), 143-151.

Ned, L.Y., Dube, K. & Swartz, L., (2022), 'Challenges and opportunities of centring the African voice in disability research', *African Journal of Disability* 11(0), a1089. https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod. v11i0.1089

Ngom, M. A. B. (2021). When the Personal and the Collective Merge into Oneness: The Dynamics of Memory in Petina Gappah's The Book of Memory. *Advances in Literary Study*, *10*(1), 38-65. https://doi.org/10.4236/als.2022.101003

Ngwira, E. (2021). Lost in Narrative: Representations of Mental Disability in Selected Malawian Literary Texts. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, *30*(4), 16-16.

Nnaji, P. O. (2014). A Stylistic Analysis of Isidore Okpewho's The Last Duty. *AFRREV LALIGENS: An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies*, *3*(1), 76-91.

Nyamndi, G. (2006). Prospective Commitment in African Literature. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 15(4): 566–578

Nyangweso, M. (2021). Disability in Africa: A Cultural/Religious Perspective. In Falola, T., & Hamel, N. (Eds.), *Disability in Africa: Inclusion, Care, and the Ethics of Humanity.* (pp. 115-137). Rochester: University of Rochester Press.

Obiora, F. C. (2016). Corruption in The African Novels: A Study of Helon Habila's Waiting for An Angel and Ayi Kwei Armah's The Beautyful One's Are Not Yet Born. *AFRREV LALIGENS: An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies*, *5*(1), 82-88.

Ojaruega, E. E. (2022). Beyond Victimhood: Female Agency in Nigerian Civil War Novels. *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, *23*(4), 2.

Ojok, P. & Musenze, J.B., 2019, 'A defence of identity for persons with disability: Reflections from religion and philosophy versus ancient African culture', *African Journal of Disability* 8, a490. https://doi.org/ 10.4102/ajod.v8i0.490

Okolocha , H. O. (2012). War and Absurdity: Reading the Manifestations of Trauma in Uwem Akpan's "Luxurious Hearses." *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, 23, 205-220

Onwuka, E. (2021). Portraits of the Nigerian Soldier in Isidore Okpewho's The Last Duty and Festus Iyayi's Heroes. *SAGE Open*, *11*(3), 21582440211046956.

Osei-Nyame, K. (2020). Neo-Colonialism and alienation in African fiction: Ayi Kwei Armah's Fragments. *Legon Journal of the Humanities*. 31(1)

Priestley, M. (Ed.). (2001). *Disability and the life course: Global perspectives*. Cambridge University Press.

Quansah, C., Okyere-Darko,D. & Tetteh, U. S. (2017). An Irony of Fate: a Book Review of Aminata Sow Fall's The Beggars' Strike. *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*.5 (2)

Quayson, A. (2007). *Aesthetic nervousness: Disability and the crisis of representation*. Columbia University Press.

Quayson, A. (1999). “Looking Awry: Tropes of Disability in Post-colonial Writing” In: *An Introduction to Contemporary Fiction: International Writing in England Since 1970*, ed. Rod Mengham. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999

Robert, E. (2014). Syntactic features in Okpewho’s The Last Duty and Nwapa’s Never Again. *British Journal of Education*, *2*(2), 81-94.

Ripert, Y. C. (2018). Beggars but not Women: False Premises and Strategies of Resistance in Aminata Sow Fall’s *The Beggars’ Strike*. *Lingua Romana.* 14 (1), 30

Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: First Vintage Books.

Shakespeare, T. (2010). “The Social Model of Disability.” The Disability Studies Reader. Ed. Lennard J. Davis. New York: Routledge, 266-73.

Shakespeare, T. (1997). Cultural Representation of Disabled People: dustbins for disavowal? In L. Barton & M. Oliver (Eds.), Disability studies: past present and future. (Vol. 3, pp. 217–233). The Disability Press.

Shakespeare, T. (1999). The sexual politics of disabled masculinity. *Sexuality and disability*, *17*, 53-64.

Shakespeare, T. (2006). The social model of disability. *The disability studies reader*, *2*, 197-204.

Shang, N. G. (2016). A question of the body: Colonial legacies and postcolonial imaginaries of power in African literary texts. *International Journal of English and Literature*, *7*(9), 143-151.

Sherry, M. (2007). (Post) Colonising disability. Special Issue of *Wagadu, Journal of Transnational Women’s and Gender Studies*, 4 (Summer), 10-22

Siebers, T. (2012). A sexual culture for disabled people. *Sex and disability*, *17*(8), 37-53.

Smith, J. A. (2017). Textual analysis. *The international encyclopedia of communication research methods*, 1-7.

Snyder, S. L., & Mitchell, D. T. (2019). *Cultural locations of disability*. University of Chicago Press.

Soyinka, W. (1968). The Writer in a modern African state. In: Per Wastberg (ed.), *The Writer in Modern Africa. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies*

Spencer, R. (2012). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and the African dictator novel. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 47 (2), 145-158. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021989412447490

Staszak, J. F. (2008). Other/otherness. *International encyclopedia of human geography*, *8*, 43-47.

Steverson, D. D. (2017). *The constitutive relationship between race and disability in African American literature: a Black critical disabilities studies approach*. The University of Alabama.

Stone-MacDonald, A., & Butera, G. D. (2012). Cultural beliefs and attitudes about disability in East Africa. *Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal*, *8*(1).

Ukande, C. K. (2016). The novelist and social commitment: a study of Meja Mwangi's The Bushtrackers. *AFRREV LALIGENS: An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies*, *5*(2), 125-135.

Uko, I. (2011). Female Sexuality in Contemporary African Literature: From Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* to Aidoo's *Changes* LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research, 8(3), 112-121

Vimal, J., & Subramani, R. (2017). Understanding qualitative content analysis in the light of literary studies. *Language in India*, 17(3), 478-488.

Watts, A. (2008) “Tradition vs. Modernity: Wole Soyinka's The Lion and the Jewel,” *XULAneXUS:* 5 (1) : https://digitalcommons.xula.edu/xulanexus/vol5/iss1/2

Whyte, S. R., & Ingstad, B. (1995). *Disability and culture: An overview.* In B. Ingstad & S. R. Whyte (Eds.), Disability and Culture (pp. 3-32). Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Zabu, C. (2021). Outing Africa: On Sexualities, Gender, and Transgender in African Literatures. *A Companion to African Literatures,* First Edition. Edited by Olakunle George