

An Irony of Fate: a Book Review of Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggars' Strike*

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Abstract: *Many novels written just after independence in West Africa critically examine post-independence life in most West African states. These normally capture stories with themes like corruption, bribery, smuggling, fetishism, religion, politics, among a host of others. This is the thematic situation of stories from both English and French-speaking West African nations. The issue of corruption and its attendant ills, religion and superstition, and many interesting subjects take centre stage in this paper as it critically takes readers through the novel identifying every necessary point that the novel covers. The paper, which is a book review concludes that the writer presents a fine story line that makes her story come alive to educate, inform and entertain her readers, aside highlighting the satirical innuendoes that the novel pushes against a cross-section of individuals in the West African society.*

Key Words: beggars, satire, Islamic society, flashback, politics

1.0 Introduction

The history of begging in Senegal and in particular most African countries is an issue with political, socio-economic and religious dimensions. Its repercussions affect not only the beggars themselves but also the whole socio-cultural structure of society (Zoumanigui, 2016). According to French (1996), begging is an age-old profession throughout most developing countries. The underprivileged in society, more often than not, resort to begging to make a living. Those who beg to make a living are mostly people who have physical disabilities and thus are rendered incapable of partaking in any work, hence cannot make a living through work. It is important, however, to mention that among these people are able-bodied men and women who can engage themselves in physical work but have deliberately resorted to begging because they regard it as a very lucrative business venture.

Culturally, the practice of begging is frowned upon but is allowed to go on because of some humanitarian reasons, among others things. In the religious vein, it is most acceptable for people who have to give 'alms' to those who do not have. However, in the Islamic religion, it is obligatory for every well-meaning Moslem to give to the poor when he or she has something in abundance. This is given mostly in the form of alms (Sen, 2011). One pillar among the five Islamic pillars stipulates that every Moslem who is in the position to give should give alms to the poor. Most Moslems have, therefore, diligently obeyed this Islamic stipulation. The reason is that they believe that almsgiving opens up doors to success and prosperity. Edung (2014) believes this is something, which is

embedded in both the minds of the givers and beggars (receivers).

Since Islam stipulates almsgiving, many beggars also feel that it is their right to be given alms. In most West African countries, therefore, the streets are packed with lots of people who want to be given rather than give. Edung (2014) explained that this has, to a very large extent, created a big problem to politicians who believe that the numbers of the beggars are increasing and they serve as a nuisance to the tourism industry and the environment in general. Tourists who are mostly foreigners are attacked from all angles; on the streets, in their hotel lodgings, at the mosques, and almost everywhere. Certain politicians feel that if steps which are very necessary are taken to drive these beggars away from the streets, the society will be a place worth living in. In Senegal and to the Islamic societies in West Africa, there are various types of politicians who believe in the view that success can be theirs if they give alms to the poor. Most of them, therefore, secretly seek spiritual advice and prayers to get higher political posts, even though they are not qualified for the posts they seek. When these spiritualists suggest the impossible like giving alms to the beggars that they themselves have sacked so that they can give whatever they have for them, they willingly do so, thereby promoting begging again. Aminata Sow Fall, therefore, goes all lengths to satirize or criticize this particular practice in whatever form it takes in this short novel.

One other thing to take note of is the issue of female emancipation, which is sweeping across the globe, especially in developing countries, where women are extremely marginalized or relegated to the background so that they have no image of their

own. In Islamic societies, the role of women are mostly regarded as second-place so that women can be treated with absolute disregard and yet will have no say to stand for their right against their husbands' wishes: The issue of primary concern to us dwells on that of marriage. Islam, through the Qur'an (Koran) accepts polygamy, specifically polygyny (where a man marries more than one woman) on the condition that he is capable of looking after all of them and treating them well socially, spiritually, economically and probably, sexually (Sen, 2011). This is what is going on in many Islamic societies as Aminata Sow Fall wrote this interesting story. It is clear why Arungwa (1989) postulates that she (Fall) aims at criticizing this practice as she feels that a woman should have a man to herself without sharing with another woman, especially where she has toiled tirelessly with the man before he became rich.

2.0 The Position of Beggars in the Islamic Society

Begging is a situation where a person who "is in need" caps in hand or makes a request to be given something from someone who has more. This situation has turned into an institution in almost every Islamic society throughout the world, and Islamic West African countries are no exception. In Senegal, for instance, where the story is set, Obinaju (1995) mentioned that begging is taken on as a profession by many individuals who can even work and earn a living for themselves and their families.

The nature of Islam is such that it is so liberal to the extent that many unfortunate people have been catered for. One of the five pillars of Islam makes it obligatory, just like the hajj and the call to prayer obligations, for every well-to-do Moslem to give alms to the poor even with the minutest offer that one can make (Beeman, 1992). This has, more or less, empowered a lot of people to enter the begging "profession". Cazenave (1991) explained that most Moslems believe that when they fulfil the almsgiving obligation, they are bound to gain favour from God and humankind so that a lot of doors of success would be opened to them. Beggars in the Islamic society, therefore, have the belief that their poor presence in the society is very much worthwhile, since without them there would be no success for the almsgivers. Beggars are, therefore, regarded as very important in the Islamic society. Their absence from the society would mean an incomplete social stratum that will bring no development. In this vein, therefore, even though there is a popular cliché that "when beggars strike, beggars die," beggars in the Islamic society can decide to strike and not die afeared, but rather survive. This is typical to what happens in the novel, *The Beggars' Strike*.

3.0 The Position of Women in the Islamic Society

Right from the very beginning of Sow Fall's writing life, she demonstrated that she is capable of taking society to task for neglecting the plight of women in society, especially in the Islamic world. Her novels have had and still have a socio-political impact on society as a whole, irrespective of religious boundaries.

Women in the Islamic society are stipulated by the scriptures of the Holy Qur'an to be servile to their husbands. Male supremacy is an absolute domination which reflects in very clear terms on every aspect of social, political and cultural life. In the home, male supremacy is very much entrenched. In Sen (2011) much insight is thrown on this issue when he mentions that this is even entrenched in the mosque where worship takes place. Not much can be written home about on this issue for discussion. The man has the religious right if he so wishes, to marry as many wives as he pleases; "one, two, three, and even four" provided he could sustain and treat all the women equally in economic, financial, social and sexual terms without any problems. This has given a lot of Muslim males some form of right to go ahead to marry new wives, even when their first wives had done so much for them to see them through the strong arms of poverty (Coly, 2006).

It is the position of this paper that most Islamic women are getting themselves educated and as such are seeing or realizing the need for this practice to stop. The few educated women have come to prefer the western monogamous way of marriage, where the man struggles with one woman, and so ultimately shares or enjoys his successes, losses and triumphs with her alone. In *The Beggars' Strike*, we learn of a poor traditional woman, Lolli who struggles through thick and thin with her husband, Mour Ndiaye to sail through poverty. However, she comes face-to-face with submitting herself to her husband's request to add another wife to her. She disliked the idea because her young educated daughter, Raabi talked her into believing that this is a wrong and evil decision that her father was taking and so she (Lolli) should resist it. However, after lots of consultation with her (Lolli's) own parents, she is cowed into submission because of Islamic doctrines. Women, therefore, have no rights to resist certain measures taken against their wishes in the Islamic society (Pikthall, 1998).

4.0 The Atmosphere of the Novel

According to Holman and Harmon (1986) the term "*atmosphere*" is one of three branches of setting in a piece of literary work. The others are *time* and *place*. Atmosphere could also be the prevailing mood or feeling that the work generates. There may be one or more expressions of atmosphere. Palmer (1979) adds that a particular work may induce fear, pervasive gloom, violence, joy and many others, depending upon the action, themes and characters.

4.1 The Atmosphere of Violence

The atmosphere of *The Beggars' Strike* is well placed in line with the subject matter and the themes in the novel. One obvious aspect of the atmosphere is the violence, which is registered during the national campaign or raid against the beggars. It begins with the wild hunt of the beggars who perch in the corners of the streets of the city. Actually, the violence first emanates from the side of the beggars when they beseech the city and attack people for alms. Keba Dabo explains this attitude of the beggars when he is seen driving from home to work. He vividly describes the way and manner the beggars attack innocent people just to beg for alms from them. Keba's primary concern lies in the way these violent attacks for alms destroy the tourism and hospitality industry. The man Keba, therefore, vows to put an end to this activity. When his boss, Mour Ndiaye, therefore, orders that the beggars be driven away from the street corners, he doesn't waste much time in organizing people to destroy the front of the beggars.

Keba ensures that the beggars were brutally forced out of the streets. The brutality with which the beggars were forced out of the streets suggests another form of violence. As it has been noted earlier, Keba vowed to use all means possible to make the streets "clean". No matter how forcibly they were driven away from the streets, the beggars kept coming back. The more they came back, the more they were driven away with extra force. In the process, many beggars were physically maimed. Other beggars were treated with all wickedness just because they were begging people who voluntarily give them something to make a living. The violence with which they were met was so serious to the extent that one of the beggars lost his life during the raid. This beggar is Maidiabel. It is his death that really propels the beggars to come to terms with reality to realize that they are no longer needed on the streets, hence the need for them to take action. When these beggars initiate their strike action, they do it with all seriousness such that it seems as if they are engaging in a violent activity that sends a man like Mour Ndiaye into a speechless but confused condition.

The beggars' "violent" refusal to return to their former posts on the streets brings about the demise of Mour's gigantic hopes and aspiration of being elected as Vice-President of the Republic. This "violent" refusal was to bring to the attention of the authorities that they know their human rights so much so that they will not allow another person among them to suffer and die like their counterpart, Madiabel. Obinaju (1995) explains in no uncertain terms how the human rights of the beggars were undermined. His paper highlights the human rights aspects of Fall's novel as opposed to the popularly held notion that the whole idea of the beggars resisting their push away from the streets of the

Capital was economic survival. He uses the discourses between some of the round characters in the novel like Mour Ndiaye and Keba Dabo to drive home the human right rhetoric.

4.2 The Atmosphere of Superstition

There is the atmosphere of superstition presented in the novel as well. Superstitious beliefs are seen unfolding with the events in the novel. This may be seen in the fanatic ideologies propounded by certain characters, especially Mour Ndiaye.

There is an aspect of the Islamic religious beliefs (five pillars of Islam), which stipulates that every well-to-do Moslem who has poor brethren and friends, should extend a helping hand to them. Many Moslems who are so much poised in fulfilling this Islamic obligation of almsgiving really will go all lengths to do anything possible to make it a duty. This has, therefore, made the whole concept fanatical in nature and seems so superstitious.

Mour's belief in the supernatural works of Marabouts like Serigne Birama and Kiffi Bokoul is an indication of the superstitious nature of some individuals in the novel. We learn of the belief of Mour Ndiaye that he can gain protection from all manner of spiritual forces if he showers gifts on spiritual soothsayers. It, therefore, does not come as a surprise when Serigne Birama, Mour Ndiaye's life-long spiritual consultant becomes angry at Mour's extra consultations with other spiritualists. This, he displays openly to Lolli. The atmosphere of superstition thus becomes another important aspect of the setting of the novel.

4.3 The Atmosphere of Tradition

The atmosphere of tradition is also very much entrenched in the novel. The main characters that are used judiciously by Aminata Sow Fall to colourfully paint this atmosphere include: the two Marabouts, Serigne Birama and Kiffi Bokoul; the typical Senegalese spouses, Mour Ndiaye and his wife Lolli; the beggars, Nguirane Sarr, Gorgui Diop and Salla Niang. These characters uphold tradition to the highest one because of how they perceive their surroundings in the traditional set-up. The two Marabouts, Serigne Birama and Kiffi Bokoul strongly uphold traditional values which include upholding the pillars of Islam, among which are almsgiving. It is no wonder, therefore that the two Marabouts suggest antidotes to Mour's quest for political power and progression which seem counter-modern but typically tradition. Mour and his wife, Lolli are also characters whose actions typify, traditional values.

5.0 The Themes of the Novel

The Beggars' Strike is a small novel in size but broad in the projection of its ideas and the issues that it raises. It is because of this that the novel contains a number of themes, which would be considered in details below. The following are the

most prominent of the themes in the novel: charity and begging; the economic theme; theme of dignity; theme of politics; the social theme; the clash between traditional beliefs and modern western ideas and beliefs; the theme of conflict between public policy and private ambition; the role of women and liberation of women; corruption and the contrast between poverty and riches; the theme of realism and hypocrisy and the theme of education, among others.

5.1 Charity and Begging

The theme of charity and begging is one prominent issue of concern for the reader of the novel. The issue of charity is considered in line with an inept consideration of religious obligatory rights. In the context of the story, those that give to charity feel it is a matter of religious obligation to do so. However, there is an aim attached to their giving to charity. They expect to recoup some benefits from this humanitarian gesture. Zoumanigui (2016) also explains the factors that have contributed to the persistence of forced child begging in Senegal. He further explains that on a broader scale, the practice of forced child begging is an interpretation made by people from a socio-cultural perspective that it is a social phenomenon which has been accepted in the Islamic society. That means that, sarcastically, the charity givers do not do so out of pure love or the so-called humanitarian grounds for which they give out alms but they do so with the expectation that they will gain something at the end of it all: blessings, favour or protection from Allah. In this vein, therefore, three particular events in the story can be analysed to serve this purpose. Mour is reported showering gifts periodically on Serigne Birama and his village folks. Serigne Birama, of course, also prays and chants out words of inspiration unto Mour's life and his family. Birama also promises to intercede on behalf of Mour for daily protection and favour before Allah.

Keba Dabo's past also triggers another similar incident about the issue of charity and begging. Keba Dabo's uncle who takes responsibility of Keba and his siblings' welfare and education decides to shirk responsibility because of a very small incident. It is just because he feels the task he has taken upon himself to look after them is an act of charity. This infuriates Keba's poor mother who decides to put her feet down to look after her own children all alone through thick and thin. This act of seriousness by his mother forms the basic principle of Keba's future life.

Mour Ndiaye who aims at conquering the vice-presidential seat is forced to give to charity. He finds it tough delivering his goods to the beggars who are on strike. Begging is also made an issue of priority on the minds of readers. The institution of Islam stipulates in the Holy Quran (Surahs: 2: 3; 7:156; 19:31; 19:55; 21: 73; 23:4; 27:3; 30:39; 31:4; and 41:7) that the alms, among other things, are only for the poor, the needy, the free, the

captives and the debtors (Khanam, 2009). The situation is highlighted even more forcefully by Zoumanigui (2016) when she examines the situation that has contributed to the prevalence of forced child begging in Senegal. These so called "poor" and "captives" have also taken advantage of this religious stipulation to beg. This is what makes Keba Dabo sick. It is, therefore, a theme that runs throughout the novel. Arungwa (1989) and Ohaegbu (1994) both share a similar view that the themes of charity and begging are major subjects that run through the novel.

5.2 The Economic Theme

This theme is basically seen in the book from varied scenes. The very genesis of the conflict that erupts at the beginning of the novel is economic in nature. The government decides to clear the beggars off the streets because of an economic reason. It is the fact that it is killing the tourism industry that brings about the clearance of the beggars from the streets. The government feels that the very nature of the operations of the beggars, "These dregs of society", creates a destructive role to the tourism industry. Keba carefully describes the way beggars attack tourists anywhere they go as an eye-sore that should be covered. This makes him vow earnestly to lead the parade that is launched against the beggars and their activities. This situation really helps in developing the economic theme in the novel.

Another situation in the novel that brings about the development of the economic theme in the novel is the activities of the beggars and those that give to them. Hitchcott (2009) in her review of the book edited by Ada Uzoamaka Azodo entitled *Emerging Perspectives on Aminata Sow Fall: The Real & the Imaginary in her Novels* mentions that the economic undertones are used as a major driving force by the writer to begin the major conflict that erupts in the novel. She also postulates that the practice of begging that becomes a major issue for discussion in the novel is representative of a major prevailing situation in most developing countries across the world. Even though charity-givers or givers of alms gave out gifts or alms to beggars on the pretext of fulfilling a much obliged religious stipulation, they did so on grounds of rationalistic and economic reason that they may gain something in return. Of course, what they hoped to get include blessings, favour, protection and the like. Much care should be taken, however, when it comes to rationalizing this condition. The reason is that if one argues about the fact that givers of alms expect nothing, then why then should some of these givers of alms, if not all of them, go all the way to where the beggars have camped together in a remote rural district and beg the angry beggars to take their alms. It is very sarcastic, indeed!

The beggars take full advantage of this situation to exploit the "poor" alms-givers to such an extent that the story talks about some beggars deciding on

which gifts they would like to take and reject those they felt was "below expectation". Most of the beggars, except a few of them, really see begging as a most lucrative economic business venture. After all, beggars do not pay any form of taxes, neither do they pay any user-fees or due for the places they stand to "trade" like the other workers or traders seen roaming the streets of the town. Mention is particularly made of Nguirane and Salla Niang. Nguirane sends money to the village every time for the upkeep of his family. Another man dies through the raid that is conducted and a big loss is reported to his family. Salla Niang, who was initially a maidservant, feels that she has come to reality and must have her own life with her two young children and husband. The only business which Salla finds useful and economically viable is begging for alms. This she does with her two younger children and she succeeds in gaining economic freedom and success in it until the raid comes. Finally when the raid comes, she puts up herself and she organizes the beggars to come and stay with her to fight against the society all because she knows that begging is economically beneficial.

5.3 Dignity

The theme of dignity is presented clearly in so many different domains and from so many different angles or perspectives. These are mostly realized from the national point of view. These include: Keba's resistant stand in the face of his superior's admonishment, Mour Ndiaye's dignity and self-esteem that come on the line, and of course, that of the beggars as well, and finally, Lolli's impressionistic resistance in the face of marital threat.

The theme of dignity can be well fetched out from the very beginning of the novel when the beggars are said to openly tarnish the dignity of the state with their activities. One character who brings this to bear is Keba Dabo, the assistant director of the Department of Public Health and Hygiene. Keba reveals that the way and manner through which the beggars operate, attacking people in the office, on the streets, at streets corners, and town centers, etc, go a long way to tarnish the dignity of the state to a very large extent. It is, therefore, a matter of National Dignity Recovery Programme that they embark upon the raids which bring about the driving away of the beggars from the streets.

Keba's staunch and steadfast decision to refuse Mour's personal proposal to bring back the beggars for only a few hours if not minutes, really goes a long way to develop the theme of dignity in the novel. Keba feels that Mour has no sense of discipline, respect for public policy and above all, does not respect his (Keba) human dignity. In order to prove to Mour Ndiaye that he has a sense of human dignity at stake, which he hopes to preserve, he confidently refuses to do what his boss requests him to do. He is quoted to have said, "I

will not be party to such sordid, odious bargain, which are contrary to human dignity".

When the beggars are cleared off the streets, they feel humiliated. Salla Niang confirms this when she openly rallies all the beggars together and convinces them that they have a dignity to cherish, nurture and preserve. By this act alone, Salla Niang helps to develop the theme of dignity in the novel.

Lolli, the quiet, obedient and loving wife of Mour Ndiaye also feels threatened when the husband, Mour announces his intention to marry another woman. Lolli had been quiet all along about issues concerning women's emancipation and their multiple role-play in society. Her daughter, Raabi, puts these issues of female emancipation are unnecessary and one of those childish, foolhardy thoughts. She, however, learns of the loss of her personal dignity when Mour announces his intention to take on a second wife. She even feels more humiliated when the husband gives her his reasons for taking such a decision.

The husband, Mour explains that she is not educated and as such cannot accompany him to grand functions. She tells Mour to revisit the past in his thoughts and see if she is being treated fairly by Mour, especially with the reasons he gives. She explains to Mour how she had suffered to keep him [Mour] and the children going, especially when he loses his job. Indeed, Lolli's dignity which was put on the line helps in the development of the theme of dignity in the novel.

5.4 Corruption and the Clash between Poverty and Riches

Corruption is a very important aspect of the novel, *The Beggars' Strike*. It is highly displayed throughout the entire plot. Aspects of corruption, which are openly highlighted include: the activities of some of the beggars, especially those who are not physically handicapped, and Mour's political post and his new lifestyle. One can, however, not refuse to take a glance at Keba's anti-corruption stand. The refined mode of corruption by Sagar Diof and her friend Mademoiselle Dieng would also be given some attention. Hitchcott (2009) emphatically submits that a major emerging trend in most West African countries is the issue of corruption. However, it is crucial to say that it is the issue of corruption that clearly shows the contrast between poverty and riches.

Some beggars in the novel are not maimed; yet, they have positioned themselves among those who are physically handicapped and engage themselves in the system of begging. This is a form of extortion and thus, qualifies to be considered as a mode of corruption. Salla Niang, for example, cannot be left out of this situation. Aminata Sow Fall aimed at criticizing this practice in the society.

Mour's political post and his numerous activities clearly point to the fact that he is corrupt. Mour is given this post as Director of the Department of Public Health and Hygiene because of his selfless and militant but dedicated service to the ruling party, even though he is not qualified to be put there. Thus, there is no wonder that he pushes all the jobs on Keba Dabo, his assistant who is very qualified to do the job. Mour uses his position to build three villas for himself but in the name of his wife, Lolli. Lolli herself has so many clothes to wear that her clothes cannot enter her suitcases and wardrobe. Mour, too, grows a big potbelly since he eats sumptuous meals and as such should even be careful not to make his buttons give way at functions. In fact, Mour is very corrupt, as he uses state funds to gratify and win favour from people. He is seen showering money on the beggars just to get their consent to return to the streets for only a few minutes, within which time he will give them his alms and offering. It turns out that the beggars refuse to go. Aminata Sow Fall with this criticizes the issue of corruption in the society.

The assistant of Mour, Keba Dabo openly displays his dislike concerning corruption in the novel. In the first place, he doesn't see why people should hide behind hunger and physical mishaps to extort money from poor and innocent people. Keba refuses to give the government coupons to his secretary's friend, Dieng because he feels it will bring loss to the government at the end of the day. When Mour requests that he brings back the beggars for only a day, he refuses because he feels it is an unethical and morally-corrupt act. Sagar talks to him about the benefits he may recoup from that single act of bringing back the beggars but still he refuses.

It is interesting to finalise the argument on the subject of corruption in a way that it clearly displays the contrast between poverty and riches. Mour becomes rich because of corruption. Salla Niang enriches herself and elevates herself from poverty through her corrupt measures of engaging in begging. Finally, due to his anti-corrupt stance, Keba Dabo maintains his stance even in the face of an undignified opposition from his boss.

5.5 Theme of Politics

The theme of politics is a very crucial issue that really generates conflict in the novel. The political situation that Sow Fall creates is very typical of politics in most West Africa states. Political initiatives are taken without consultation with those whom the action or decision concerns. When this happens, there is always the possibility of getting turmoil, opposition and other forms of demonstrations and strives with its attendant political social and economic tension. In the novel, *The Beggars' Strike*, a similar thing happens. A political initiative of bringing about a clean-up of "a social canker", begging, which is believed to be an eyesore and generating the demise of the

tourism industry is enforced. In other words, the initiative was to bring boom and "beauty" into the tourism industry. When the politicians take this decision, they did not consult or inform the beggars and so the beggars decide to strike and this brings about conflict between the beggars and the State.

Appointments to political positions are also done, irrespective of one's educational background and managerial experience, expertise and acumen. This is common in West African politics. A similar thing is openly showed in the novel when Mour, for all his educational and managerial deficiencies is given the position of director of the Director of Public Health and Hygiene because of his past devoted and selfless work for the party.

The political theme is further developed when the announcement of the imminent cabinet reshuffle is announced. Many politicians feel shaky while some vie for other prominent and higher political posts other than what they already wield or hold on to. Much political tension is created after the president's announcement. Many politicians go all lengths to make the president favour them. These may be through spiritual means just like we see Mour doing in the novel by his consultations with different Marabouts. The political scene becomes tensed and brings about an end to the rising action hence resulting in the climax of the story. When Mour finally hears the president's choice of the new vice-president, it seems to him that his world had come to an end. The story ends with the announcement of the president's renunciation of the Prime-Ministerial position of Monsieur Toumane Sane and his new nomination to the post of Vice-President of the Republic.

5.6 Public Policy versus Private Ambitions

This theme becomes the over-riding basis for the whole story. In most societies, people in sensitive public positions do come into very serious situations involving the pursuant of their personal ambitions as against public policy. In the novel, *The Beggars' Strike*, Mour Ndiaye and Keba Dabo are the main characters around whom Aminata Sow Fall carefully weaves this situation.

Mour is the Director of the Department of Public Health and Hygiene and his assistant is Keba. They both come face to face with the pursuant of their private personal ambition in the face of the presence of a public policy. In the first place, Mour Ndiaye seeks the post of vice-president of the Republic and so he consults Marabouts who direct him to give alms to beggars on the streets of the city. Meanwhile, he and his colleagues in the political arena had earlier taken a decision and so had driven away the beggars from the town. These beggars get offended for the disregard of their human rights and so take refuge in a slum around the outskirts of the town. Since Mour is very much bent on attaining this personal ambition of his, he goes all lengths to get them back into the streets by

instructing his assistant, Keba to bring back the beggars for just one day to enable him [Mour] to distribute his sacrifice to them. Mour sells off his dignity and loyalty to the state for the attainment of his personal ambition.

When Keba is confronted with this tough directive from his boss, he does not waste much time to think about it to make a decision. He refuses to sell his loyalty to the state and his personal dignity for the attainment of goodwill and favour from his immediate boss. Sagar Diof tells him about the favour that Mour might give him should he [Mour] be made vice-president of the Republic. He, therefore, tells Mour clearly that he [Keba] cannot do him that favour because it is against his principles in life.

6.0 The Narrative Style

Writers, in general, adopt different procedural approaches to write down their stories. These approaches are adopted consciously and stylistically for both literary and stylistic effects. Any style that a writer adopts may have some form of impact on the literary work that he or she presents in the finished work. A writer's style may be a unique representation of that writer's own views of the life around us in print. Many technicalities form up the basis of a writer's narrative style. These may include aspects like the narrative technique or point of view, flashback, the story-within-a-story technique, satire, suspense, among others.

6.1 The Narrative Technique

The narrative technique is a style adopted by a writer to provide an account of events in a story (Mayhead, 1965). This is normally provided through style, plot, and point of view. In the novel *The Beggars' Strike*, the writer narrates the story beautifully using the third person narrative technique. Through this technique, the reader is made to assume the position of a child sitting by the fireside or on his bed ready to listen to a story being narrated. The third person narrative employs the third person pronoun in the narration. It is important to state, however, that Palmer (1979) in order to avoid monotony in the narration, a writer could choose to use direct speeches mostly through quotations, and blends that with reported speeches in the mainstream. There are also bits of dialogue quotes used in the narration. The fuselage of different techniques used in the narrative makes the novel an interesting piece.

6.2 The Flashback and the Story-within-a-Story Techniques

The flashback technique is used by most writers to re-enforce a particular theme or certain themes in the stories. The flashback mostly comes into focus in a particular work of art through the narrations of a character when he takes readers back into the past. It may also occur when a character reflects

into the past in his thoughts, especially in stories where the stream of consciousness is used. In creating the flashback, sometimes certain objects are made the tool or platform on which the writer stands to do the sweeping into the past. These may include objects like mirrors, water, transparent objects, light, old newspapers and diaries, among others.

In the novel *The Beggars' Strike*, the flashback technique is well displayed. When Mour decides to take on a second wife in the person of Sine, he makes it known to his faithful and devoted wife, Lolli. Lolli, who had been patient for the many years they had been married becomes so hurt and lashes heavily at Mour. In so doing, she recounts the days when they had been married not long enough and were struggling through poverty. It is through her complaints that we are forced to go back into the past to know more about the marriage of Lolli and Mour, the poverty of Mour's family, Mour's job as a clerk and his subsequent dismissal, Lolli's selflessness and dedication to keep the family moving after Mour is dismissed, Mour's irresponsibility during the early part of their marriage, Mour's affiliation to the political party and his final appointment as Director of the Department of Public Health and Hygiene. As the various flashbacks unfold, readers are told a different story other than the original story that is being told. We, therefore, get what is termed as the Story-within-a-Story technique being explored in the novel by Aminata Sow Fall. Through this, however, the themes of dignity, poverty and riches, among others are very well developed (Arungwa, 1989).

Further illustration of the use of flashback in the novel reveals to the reader much information about Keba Dabo's past. The flashback is recounted by Keba himself to his personal secretary, Sagar Diof after she had confronted him to yield to Mour's request to him to bring back the beggars to the streets and the subsequent request by Sagar to release a few government petrol coupons to her friend, Mademoiselle Dieng. Keba becomes principled because of an experience way back from the past. His poor mother had saved him from near-humiliation at the hands of his negligent uncle. She had sole-handedly toiled through thick and thin to see her children through school up to the university level without engaging herself in the pardonless and filthy practice of capping in hand. Through this flashback the infancy narratives of Keba Dabo's life and formation of his principled adult life are brought to bare giving us a 'story within a story'.

The story of Madiabel is also narrated in the flashback vein by the storyteller to readers. In taking us through the circumstances that brought Madiabel to the city to practise begging instead of his craftsmanship job of a tinker, the writer tells us a different narrative altogether within a narrative.

The story of Madiabel's trade, the hardship in the village and his sudden migration to the city and of course, circumstances leading to the death of the poor beggar are all recollections from the past. However, these help us to understand the situation of the beggars and most people who live below the poverty line in the society.

6.3 The Use of Satire

It has been widely acknowledged that the novel *The Beggars Strike* is a complete satire that rebukes different shades of people in the society (Okafor, 1985). Aminata Sow Fall directs her satire at almost every character in the novel. By entertaining readers, she also goes a step further to criticize the follies of individuals who went contrary to societal norms and the society itself for moulding and creating such individuals. Simply put, Aminata Sow Fall sought to expose hypocrisy and exploitation in her society (Gueye, 2014).

To illustrate these, Mour Ndiaye is one character that comes under the sharp critical eye of Sow Fall. Mour is all too busy to condemn begging and he heads a department that sees to the outright removal of the beggars from the streets. Yet, when the time comes for him to give alms to the beggars in order to fulfill his private personal ambition, he goes in to bring them back to the city, at least for a single day, if not for a few hours. Sow Fall uses Salla Niang to pass this criticism of judgment towards Mour Ndiaye. She says:

"But why do they wear reversible boubou! Why don't they remain what they are, and show their real face! ... Nii noo seu! How petty they are! They'll go anywhere to follow their ambition or if it's in their own interest, even if they go to the devil!" (p.85)

Politically, too, Mour partakes in the exploitation of his society. He has three villas to his credit but to cover up, he has used his wife, Lolli's name for the ownership of the houses. Sexually, he is a pedophile since he exploits young girls as seen in his wooing and marriage of Sine, a seventeen (17) year-old girl.

Another character who is criticized is Salla's last boss, "Monsieur". This man has been very vocal (outspoken) on the anti-Marabout campaigns on television, the radio and newspapers (mass media). In fact, he has advocated for the wiping out of "the curse of the Marabouts". The government has recognized his efforts and has decorated him, especially for his "fine speeches"; yet, this same

man and master of Salla Niang never left home in the morning without daubing himself with a mixture of powders and fermented roots that he kept in seven different pots. These are certainly prescribed to him by Marabouts who constantly "... fill his house. In fact, he gives them the most sumptuous meals when they are with him" (p.24). Monsieur has moral weakness. He could not keep his eyes from the firm breasts of Salla, which he attempts to fondle in his wife's absence. However, in his wife's presence he is most rude to Salla, even on "account of a speck of dust on the television or the collar of a shirt that has been badly ironed" (p.24). Of course, his wife, Madam once caught him in his usual attempts at pinching Salla's buttocks and fondling her nipples. He buys a land for Salla even as a maid. It is possible that it is one of his methods of trying to win Salla's love. Monsieur is, actually, a hypocrite that Aminata Sow Fall lashes her criticism at.

Salla Niang is yet another character that Aminata Sow Fall does not allow to escape criticism in the novel. Salla has no physical deformity and so could have worked to make a living for herself. In fact, she was working for Monsieur and Madam, but left to engage in the begging trade. She feels begging is more exploitative. She does her exploitation in a number of ways. She makes her twin children beg for her. She also buys the produce of other beggars at thirty percent less than the normal price. She stocks up her shop with these and possibly sells them at their normal price to the beggars. In this way, she makes money from the beggars. It is therefore, not surprising that she builds her house from the money she gets from begging. She finally succeeds, including the other beggars, in exploiting Mour Ndiaye when they collect their transport fare from Mour, a journey they will never make.

Aminata Sow Fall again turns her critical focus on the Marabouts. The Marabouts understand the desires and fears of their clients and, so, gradually get to control them. In so doing, the Marabouts can be assured of their livelihood. It may be for this reason that Birama becomes unhappy when he finds out that Mour has been having consultations with other Marabouts. Aminata Sow Fall is not happy about the opportunist activities of these Marabouts. Her introduction of these spiritualists, therefore, goes a long way to sensitize her readers about this unfortunate situation of the Marabouts in their exploitation of people within the society.

7.0 Conclusion

The novel is a satire written by a French female writer, Fall to ridicule certain prevailing practices within the West African politico-socio-cultural space. Clearly, the novel was written in French and translated into English for very obvious reasons: to broaden the scope of the reading audience. The paper has critically highlighted all the very important issues prevailing in the text. This was

meant not only to bring the attention of readers to very important literary issues in the text but also to show how successful Fall is in using the power of the written word using different narrative techniques like suspense, flashback, story-within-a-story techniques, among others to satirize

corruption, hypocrisy, the whole practice of begging for alms within the mainstream Islamic community and several others mentioned in the paper. It can be concluded that Fall succeeds in doing just what she is known widely for – writing satire.

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