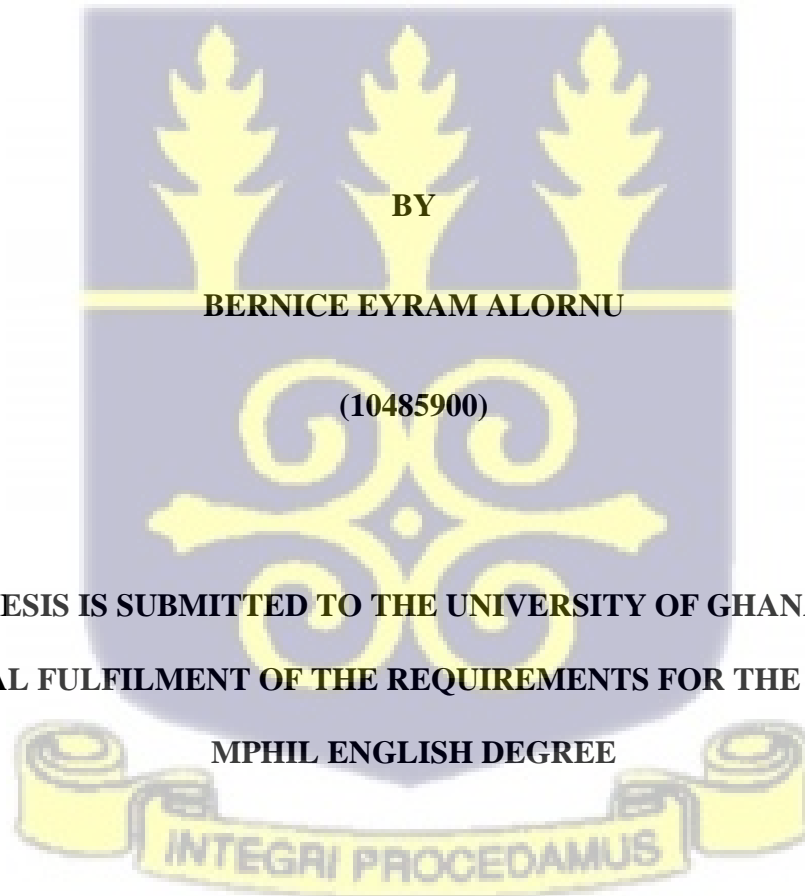


UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

“WALKING IS NOT A PREREQUISITE FOR TROUNCING YOU:”
REPRESENTATIONS OF DISABILITY IN TWO AFRICAN COMICS AND TWO
AFRICAN NOVELS



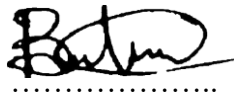
THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF
MPHIL ENGLISH DEGREE

JULY, 2022

DECLARATION

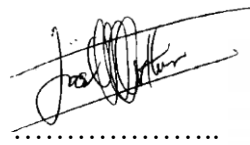
I declare that apart from the references that have been duly acknowledged, this thesis is a product of my own research, and has not been published or submitted anywhere either in part or whole for the award of any degree.

Candidate


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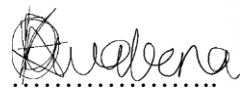
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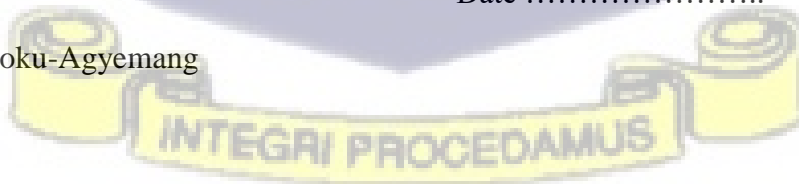
Date ...22 JULY 2022.....

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Date ...27th July, 2022.....

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(Co-supervisor)



DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, my friends and me.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My foremost appreciation goes to Almighty God for the strength and grace granted me to complete my work.

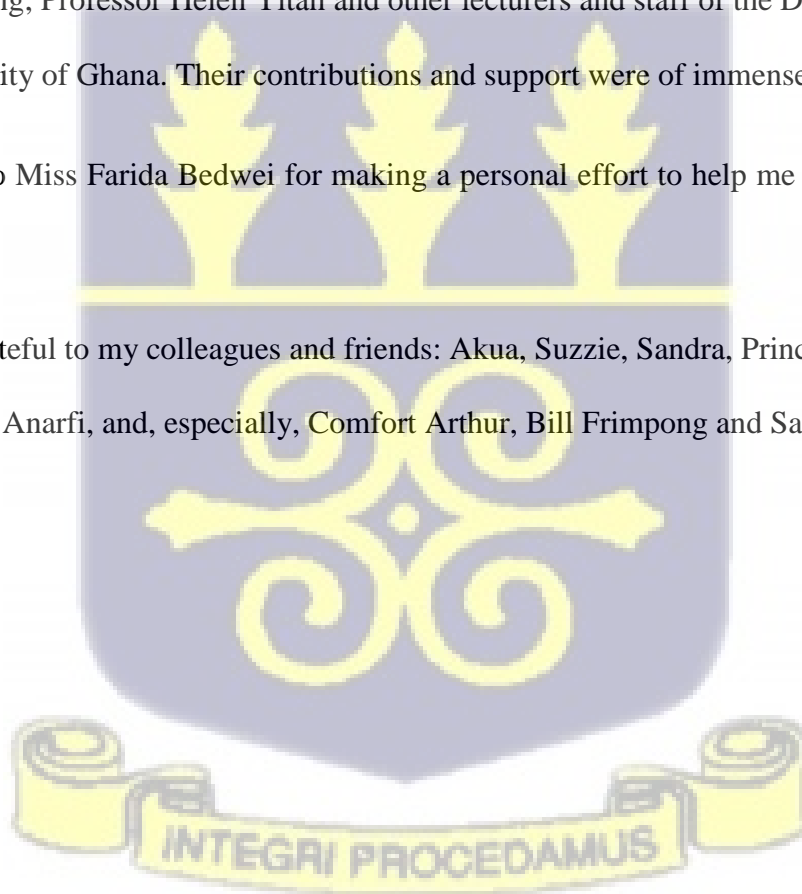
I am also thankful to my supervisor, Dr. J.B. Amissah-Arthur, for his guidance, contributions and encouragement throughout the conduct of this research.

My appreciation, also, goes to my parents and siblings for their love and support.

I am also forever grateful to my Head of Department, Dr. Augustina Dzregah; Dr. Kwabena Opoku-Agyemang; Professor Helen Yitah and other lecturers and staff of the Department of English, University of Ghana. Their contributions and support were of immense benefit to me.

Special thanks to Miss Farida Bedwei for making a personal effort to help me get her comic for my research.

Finally, I am grateful to my colleagues and friends: Akua, Suzzie, Sandra, Princess, Betty, Sheilla, Michael Anarfi, and, especially, Comfort Arthur, Bill Frimpong and Samuel Armah.



ABSTRACT

The purpose of literature in representing society to itself creates an avenue for the discussion of issues that pertain to the lives of individuals and communities. Literary production, therefore, provides, among others, a means for the projection of the marginalised, including persons living with disability. The present thesis interrogates the relationship that exists between disability, power and the supernatural by providing a comparative analysis of four works of literature: Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments*, Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggars' Strike*, Mmbasu Mbwabi and Salim Busuru's *Dunamis* and Farida Bedwei's *Karmzah*. The objective is to unearth the convergences and divergences between the novel and the comic in their representations of disability, and by so doing, determining the relevance of the comic as a genre in the African literary space. The findings indicate that although the two genres diverge substantially in terms of form, they converge in their construction of the characters who embody disability and spirituality. The findings further provide an insight into the relevance of the comic for not merely African popular literature but also for African literary scholarship and social criticism.

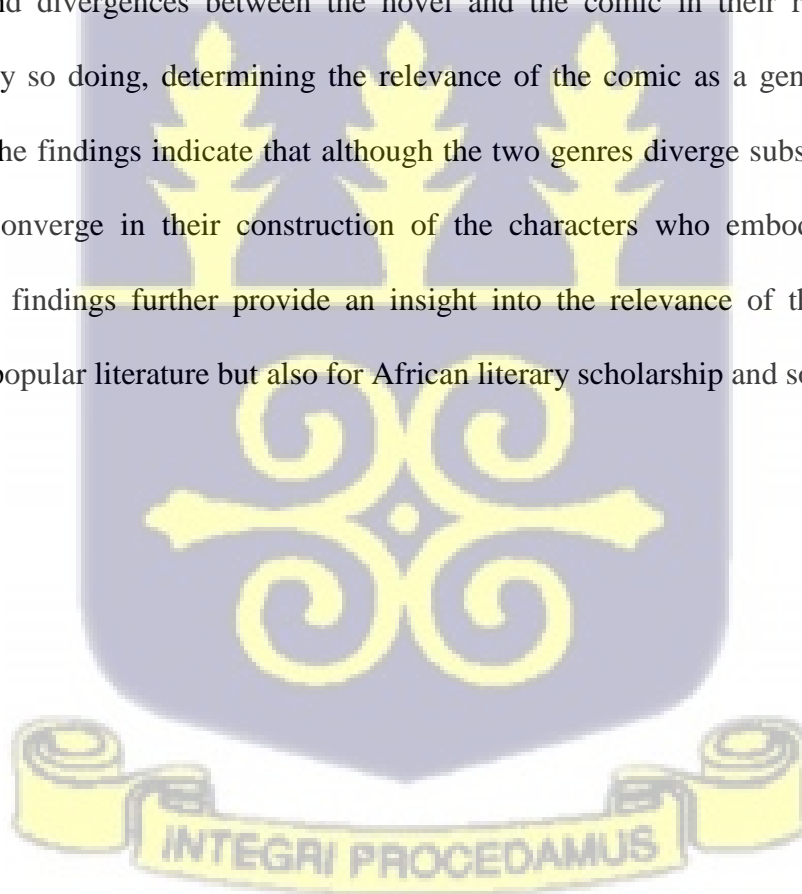


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CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the study and discusses the study's general overview. It provides a general background on the topic, as well as the texts for the study. It also contains the objectives, significance, justification, methodology and theoretical framework of the research. Finally, it presents the structure for the project.

1.1. Background to Study

Literature has been a tool for reflecting and affecting society through its diverse genres. The arts of writing, performance and storytelling have provided diverse ways of presenting, representing and representing people and ideas. As literature plays an important role of portraying life and society, different social groups of people are projected. This has led to diverse research on the various groups of people who exist in our society, including people living with disabilities (PWDs). The purpose of this paper is to explore how the African comic contributes to character construction of PWDs. It will be done in comparison to selected African novels to determine how similar or diverse they are in the representation of PWDs.

Defining disability can be a complex task, since disability may be seen differently from one perspective to another. This is so because the term 'disability' covers a wide range of characteristics that may be visible or invisible. In an effort to define disability and its implications, Lutz and Bowers (74-78) identify two perspectives to defining disability: the rehabilitation perspective and the social perspective. The rehabilitation perspective conceptualises disability as "an individual problem of functioning," while the social perspective describes disability as a problem constructed by the society and physical environment. This

present research will study the different perspectives of disability presented in the various selected works, and examine how they help in the construction of those characters.

1.2 The Comic as Literature

In literary criticism, especially in African literary studies, the comic is not a genre that is usually discussed. Usually, scholars choose to analyse the traditional forms of literature such as the novel, the short story, drama and poetry. In order to determine if the comic genre qualifies as literature worth studying, it is necessary to examine the literary characteristics of the form.

There are certain elements of literature that make literary works what they are. These elements include plot, setting, characters, conflict, point of view, theme and imagery. These elements contribute to the literariness of a piece of writing. The comic, as a genre, largely shares some of the characteristics making the form not merely literary, but worth studying as literature. The comic makes use of language in an artistic way just as any form of literature as defined by Baharti and Showkat (1). Alissa Burger emphasises this by stating that:

...graphic novels demonstrate the same characteristics as more traditional works in the same genre. For example, a memoir shares the life experiences of its author, regardless of the medium in which it is presented, while fictional graphic novels possess the same literary elements as a short story or novel, such as plot, setting, characterisation, and point of view, even if those elements are realised or depicted through the combination of text and image rather than text alone, as in their more traditional counterparts. (3)

As a genre, the comic falls into the category of popular literature and is not very different from the usual forms of literature that is known to literary scholars. Aside the elements of literature that are present in the comic, the thematic focus of the comic is similar to that of traditional

literature. The major feature of comic that differentiates it from other forms of literature such as the novel is the use of pictures. The use of images in the comic helps to place emphasis on the story that is being told. Moreover, the comic falls under the category of popular literature. However, it has not received much attention for research in African literary studies. There is therefore a need to focus on the comic when it comes to African literary studies.

1.3 Introduction to Focus Texts

The African comic is a genre that is fast growing. Twenty-first century Africa has seen the emergence of several works of literature presented in the comic form. These are comic novels that are written by comic writers and illustrators from different parts of Africa. Writing comics in Africa has expanded the channels for discussing a wide range of issues. It also helps to project Africa to the rest of the world. Some issues addressed in African comics include crime, poverty, discrimination, relationships, slavery, health, and a lot more. These issues help to increase awareness about the social and political issues that affect certain societies on the African continent as well as possible solutions to problems. An example is Kobe Ofei's *Lake of Tears*, a Ghanaian graphic novel that addresses the issue of child trafficking on the Volta Lake. Achieving the purpose of the comic may be done by introducing a superhero or any other hero figure. For instance, in the comic *Kwezi*, the reader is introduced to the superhero character Kwezi. In *Kwezi*, the superhero comes about by being one of the chosen of a star that appeared in the sky. He uses his powers for selfish gain until he discovers the real purpose of having those abilities. The role Kwezi, which is to fight crime and help build humanity, contributes to the achievement the purpose of the comic: to create awareness about human actions that destroy or build the society. In a non-superhero comic, though there may be no super character, there is a presentation of a character who contributes to achieving the purpose of the comic. For example,

in *Lake of Tears*, there is Kyei. After being rescued from drowning by Aya and his sister, Kyei comes to the realisation the dangers that surround him. Together with his friends, he has the role of finding ways to make things better. The actions and experiences of these three characters help in exposing the dangers of child trafficking and child labour, and how prevalent they are on the Volta Lake and in surrounding villages. Some examples of African comics include *Avonome*, *Kugali*, *Noirobi*, *Spy Agent SK*, *Kezi and Mozi*, *Fikira*, *Oluronbi*, and the classic *Akokhan* by Frank Odoi.

Although the comic is a popular genre, especially for children, it fails to focus much on representation of people living with disabilities in the African setting. *Karmzah* by Farida Bedwei and *Dunamis* by Mmbasu Mbwabi and Salim Busuru are two of the very few African comics that seek to represent this group, and do so by projecting disability in a more positive light. The analyses of the comics will be done in comparison to how disability is presented in canonical African literary works. The canonical texts that will be used in this comparative study are *The Beggars' Strike* by Aminata Sow Fall and *Fragments* by Ayi Kwei Armah.

Dunamis is a Kenyan comic which reveals a group of superheroes with physical disabilities. The main focus within the group is Kenny, a boy with albinism and other defects that come with it. These superheroes fight against obstacles which they face in their society. Their main battle however is against Jinamizi, a witch doctor with terrifying powers, who wants to capture and kill Kenny for some ritual.

Karmzah is a Ghanaian comic about Morowa Adjei, an archaeologist and a person living with cerebral palsy. She becomes Karmzah (the superhero) by gaining superpowers from an ancient artefact, and this enables her to fight criminals.

As seen from the brief backgrounds of the selected comics to be studied, these are superhero comics. As pointed out by Duncan Omanga, the role of the superhero is to fight evil and dark forces in the society. Superheroes, especially in African comics, have usually been portrayed as people with normal functioning bodies who have a plus of superpower abilities. The idea of superheroes or comic characters with physical disabilities is one that is seen more in Western comics, such as those from Marvel and DC Comics. Some examples of disabled characters from Western comics include the following:

- **Dr. Niles Caulder:** Also known as The Chief, this character is a paraplegic. Despite his movement challenges, he is a backbone to other superheroes. He possesses super intellect that enables him to acquire immeasurable wealth to support them.
- **Cyborg:** As the name clearly suggests, Cyborg, whose original name is Victor Stone, is a man-machine. Without the machines attached to him, he will not function as a man. Because of his mechanical attachments, his body is stronger compared to that of a normal human body. His abilities include super-strength, super-speed, flight, super-vision, and the ability to connect to external computers. His body also contains a variety of tools and weapons.
- **Dr. Strange:** He was a talented neurosurgeon who was involved in a car accident that affected his nerves, causing him to lose function in his hands. In his quest to find a cure to his impairment, he acquires skills in magic and martial arts. With these abilities, he protects the world against evil.
- **Hawkeye:** Also known as Clint Barton, this superhero has a hearing impairment. He is well versed in martial arts. He also has extraordinary skills in using range weapons such as the bow and arrow.

- **Daredevil:** Just like many other superheroes, Daredevil (Matt Murdock) is highly skilled in the martial arts. He is a blind superhero. Losing his sight led to the heightening of his other senses beyond human abilities.
- **Professor X:** He is also known as Charles Xavier. Professor Xavier uses a wheelchair due to paraplegia. He has strong telepathic abilities.
- **Echo:** Her alternate non-superhero name is Maya Lopez. As it is typical of superheroes, Echo possesses great martial art skills. She is an athlete: skilled in acrobatics and ballet. As she is a deaf character, she relies solely on her vision to communicate with others. She possesses incredible photographic vision, which enables her copy motion. She is able to perfectly copy the movements of other people, including other superheroes.

As seen from the above, these Western superhero comic characters possess both disabilities and extraordinary abilities at the same time. In most cases, their extraordinary abilities are as a result of their physical impairment. The same cannot be said of comics written by Africans about Africa. African superhero characters are usually portrayed in a way that highlights only their extraordinary abilities. These selected works by Bedwei, and Mbwabi and Busuru are therefore exceptional when it comes to superheroes with physical disabilities. The afore-mentioned comics show two sides of the heroes: their physical disabilities and their extraordinary abilities.

Fragments by Ayi Kwei Armah is a novel that exposes societal expectations of a “beento” in postcolonial Ghana. This theme is achieved through the experiences of the character Onipa Baako. Baako returns home after receiving education from the United States of America. He hopes to contribute to national development through his writing, and also to honour his family. In the end however, Baako finds himself in a state of rejection, as his goals are unfulfilled. One of the characters in this novel is Naana, Baako’s blind grandmother who, in spite

of her disability, has more vision than other characters. She is one of the focal characters for this study.

Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggars' Strike* is a novel that explores power relations through politics and religion. This theme is seen through the role that beggars play in the society that the characters find themselves in. The characters that will be examined in this text are Nguirane Sarr and other minor characters with disabilities.

The purpose of this research is to examine representations of PWDs in the African graphic novel. It will also further reveal the role that African comics play in disability studies. This will be done in comparison to how disability and ability are represented in the traditional novel.

1.4 Objectives

There are three main objectives for this study. The first objective of the study is to explore the representation of disability in *Karmzah* and *Dunamis*. This will involve a careful examination of the comic genre present the actions and thoughts of these characters. It will also deal with how the characters' interactions with other characters help to make them who they are.

The research will also examine the construction of characters with disabilities in *The Beggars' Strike* and *Fragments*. The goal here is similar to the first objective. However, the approach of examining the novel will be slightly different, considering the difference in genre forms.

After exploring representations in each type of literary genre, the study will finally examine the differences and similarities in representing disability the comic and the novel.

1.5 Research Questions

- In what ways do *Karmzah*, *Dunamis*, *The Beggars' Strike* and *Fragments* represent ability and disability?
- How are characters with disability constructed in the selected texts?
- In what ways do the novel and comic converge and diverge in their representation of ability/disability?

1.6 Scope of Study

This research will be centred on examining the construction of physically disabled characters in two selected African comics: *Karmzah* and *Dunamis*, in comparison to those in *The Beggars' Strike* and *Fragments*. The analysis will be done within the space of how disability and ability are represented in literature.

Since the study will focus on characterisation, it will mainly be centred on the following characters: Kenny, Shaddie and Lulu in *Dunamis*; Karmzah in *Karmzah*; Nguirane and other disabled characters in *The Beggars' Strike*; and Naana in *Fragments*.

1.7 Limitations

Given the focus of the study as provided above, any other aspects of the texts, such as style, plot, setting and themes will be discussed only in relation to characterisation. Aside from characterisation, all other elements of literature are secondary and ancillary to the primary concerns of the study.

1.8 Justification

Ability and disability are usually seen as not being able to exist together. The idea of disability gives the picture of someone who is not able to perform physical and social activities that are normally expected of him. However, these selected works show characters with disabilities who possess power to do more than is expected of them. It will therefore be interesting to look at how ability and disability can exist in the same space, as well as how the selected works help to achieve that.

In addition to this, the comic is being studied in comparison to the novel because they are both literary forms. Even though the comic and the novel are not quite the same due to their forms of presentation, they both contain elements of literature, which are necessary for literary analysis.

1.9 Significance of Study

This study sheds light on the intersections that emerge from performing a comparative analysis between novels and comics to highlight the construction of disability across different genres.

1.10 Statement of Problem

In as much as there have been quite a number of studies on disability studies in African literature, these studies place emphasis on representations in canonical African literary genres. This is because African literary characters with disabilities are usually seen in novels, plays, short stories and film. Some of these texts include Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, Cyprian Ekwensi's *The Drummerboy*, Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*, Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple*

Hibiscus and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and J. M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*. These characters with disabilities are also usually seen in the background of the plot, with negative stereotype attached to them.

Also, literary studies which focus of African superheroes do not pay much attention to characters who are presented as having some sort of disability. An example is Duncan Omanga who examines Frank Odoi's *Akokhan* in discussing the making of the superhero. This creates a problem of partial representation of the people who actually make up the African community in literature. The under-represented community, the PWDs, therefore provide relatively new and fresh social material for literary exegesis.

1.11 Methodology

This section discusses two main areas: the approach to analysis of the research and characterisation. The first part will discuss the means by which the selected works will be critically examined. The second part will be a discussion on the relevance of characterisation in this study.

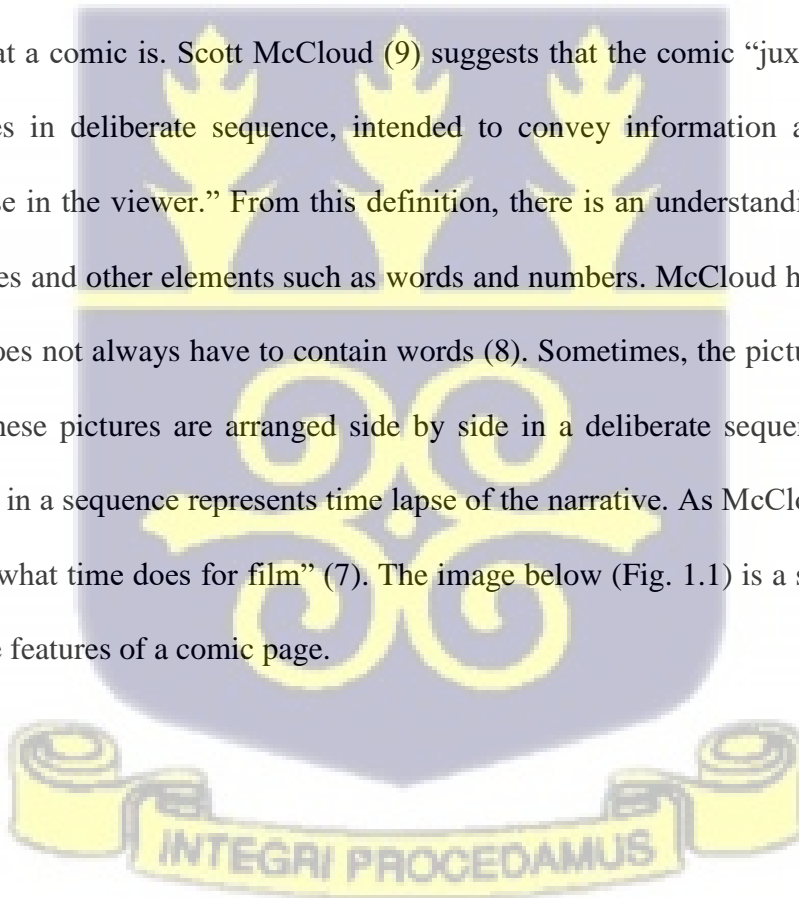
1.11.1 Approach to Analysis

This research will be conducted using the qualitative research approach. The research aims to achieve its objectives through the analysis of texts and visual images, since this study is going to involve the use of comics and traditional novels. The analysis will also explore the extent to which these literary forms represent ability. It will examine and compare how the two genres construct characters with disabilities, as well as how both texts and visual images work together to bring meaning to the selected works for the study.

In analysing the comic, the various features such as captions, panels, composition, speech and thought bubbles, and sound effects will be considered. These will all be done with a focus on characterisation. The various components of the comic and their functions will be discussed. This will be done to aid understanding of how the selected comics are going to be analysed.

1.11.2 Features of the Comic

Just like every genre, the comic possesses certain features that help one to identify what it is. Before further discussions on the features of the comic, it is essential to have a working definition of what a comic is. Scott McCloud (9) suggests that the comic “juxtapose[s] pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce aesthetic response in the viewer.” From this definition, there is an understanding that the comic comprises pictures and other elements such as words and numbers. McCloud however points out that the comic does not always have to contain words (8). Sometimes, the pictures are enough to tell the story. These pictures are arranged side by side in a deliberate sequence. The space in between pictures in a sequence represents time lapse of the narrative. As McCloud puts it, “space does for comics what time does for film” (7). The image below (Fig. 1.1) is a sample of a comic strip showing the features of a comic page.



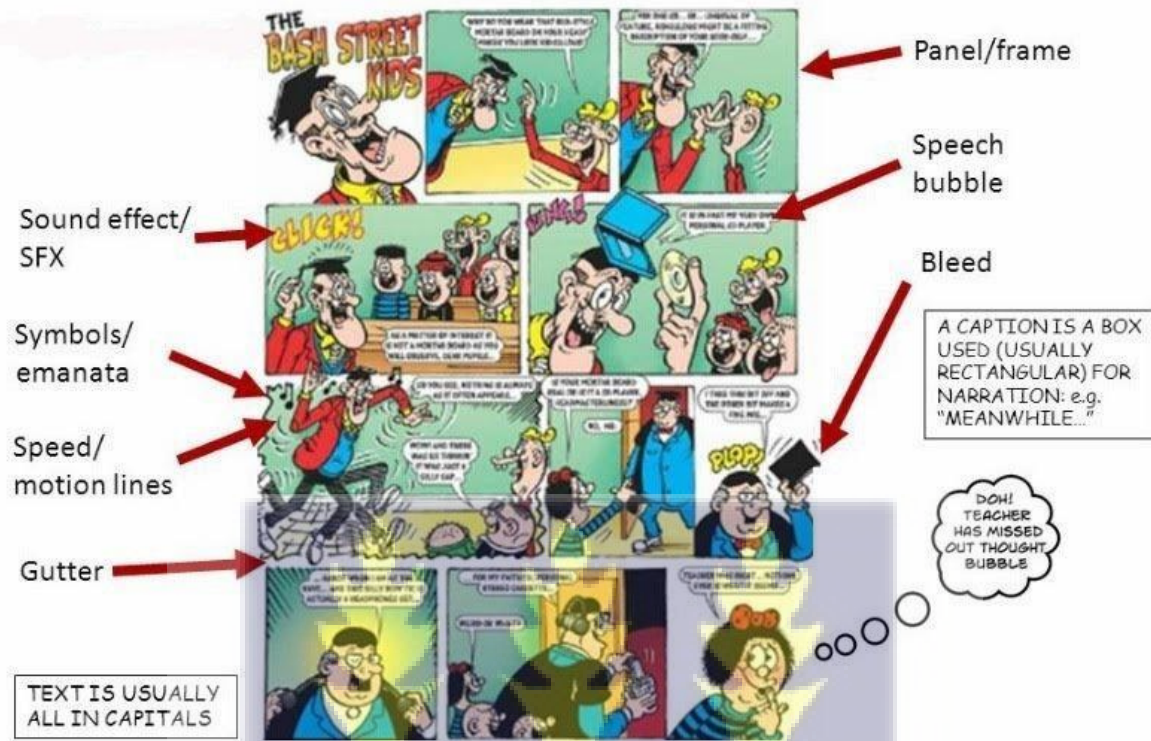


Fig. 1.1 Parts of a Comic Strip or Page

The following are further explanations to the image that has been presented above:

- **Panels:** As seen from Fig. 1.1, the panel is the frame that represents each section of the page or the strip. Some are usually bigger than others, depending on the space the writer/illustrator wants to present on the narrative.
- **Speech bubbles/balloons:** As dialogue exist in comics, the speech bubble contains the words spoken by the characters. The speech bubble comes in various shapes and sizes, depending on the purpose of the dialogue or the style of the comic. In addition, there are

different types of speech bubbles to represent different kinds of speech presentations: normal speech, an exclamation or a whisper.

- **Thought bubbles:** The thought bubbles are similar to the speech bubble. The difference is in its shape and purpose. It is used to present the inner thoughts of characters.
- **Caption boxes:** These are the boxes that contain some narration from the narrator of the story. It gives further information about what is happening in the story.
- **Gutter:** This is simply the gap between the panels. Together with the panels, it helps the reader to envision space and time in the narrative.
- **Onomatopoeia/sound effects:** These are also similar to the speech bubble. The purpose of this is to mimic sounds that are made in the comic. It helps to enhance imagery. The image below shows examples of sound effects used in comics.

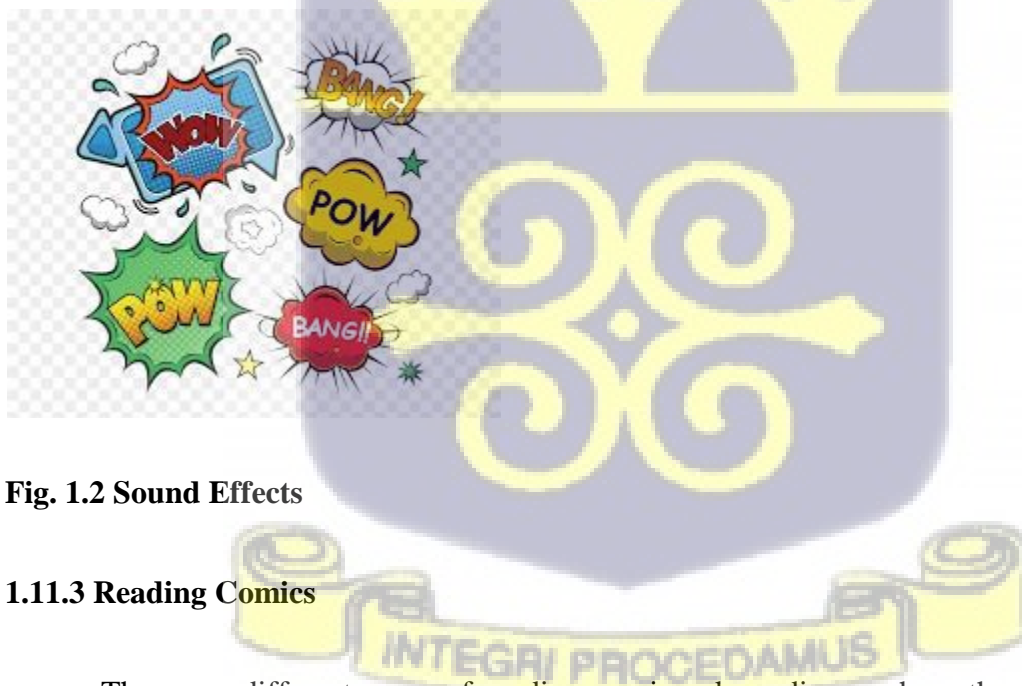


Fig. 1.2 Sound Effects

1.11.3 Reading Comics

There are different ways of reading comics, depending on how the writers/illustrators arrange the sequence of images that tell a story. The way a comic strip is arranged is mainly as a result of the origin and type of comic they are. For example a Japanese comic, also known as

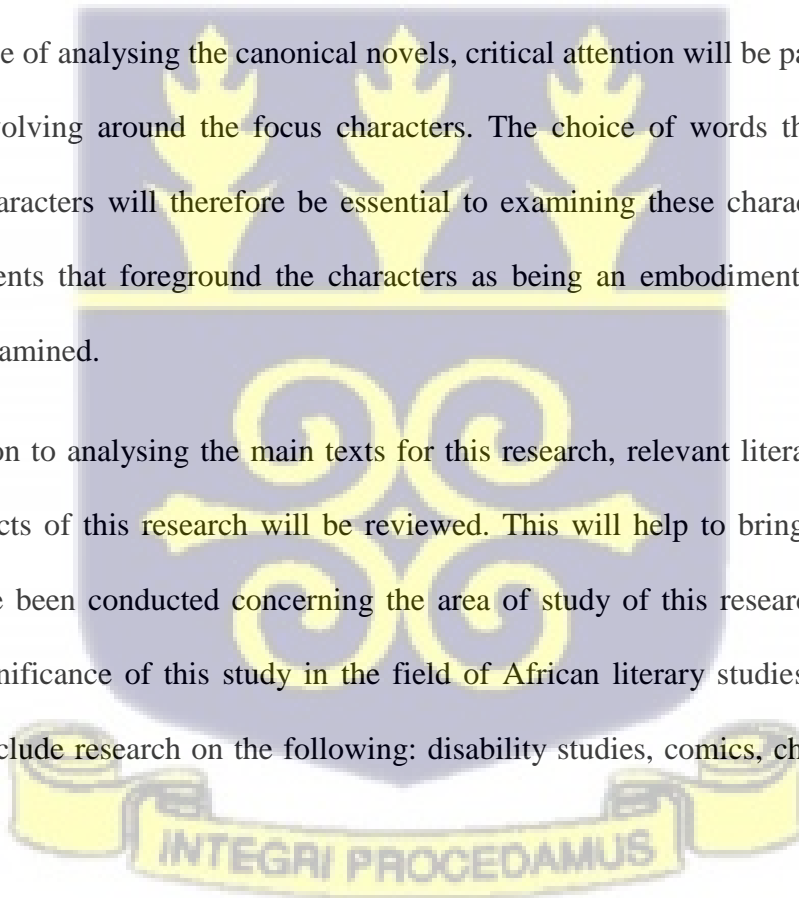
Manga, is read from right to left, top to bottom. The comics that have been selected for this research are read from left to right, top to bottom just as how a typical Western comic is read.

In examining the selected comics for the current research, specific codes will be used to indicate page numbers and panel numbers. The purpose of this codification technique is to ensure easy identification of panels and comic contents. For instance, the citation code for the second panel on page 3 will be (pl. 2: p. 3); where “pl” means panel and “p” indicates the page number or the sequence.

1.11.4 Analysing the Novels and Other Literature

In the case of analysing the canonical novels, critical attention will be paid to the dialogue and narration evolving around the focus characters. The choice of words that are used in to present these characters will therefore be essential to examining these characters. Overall, the various components that foreground the characters as being an embodiment of disability and ability will be examined.

In addition to analysing the main texts for this research, relevant literature pertaining to the various aspects of this research will be reviewed. This will help to bring out the different studies that have been conducted concerning the area of study of this research. This will help establish the significance of this study in the field of African literary studies. Literature to be reviewed will include research on the following: disability studies, comics, characterisation and (super)heroism.



1.11.5 Characterisation

One important element of literature is character. A character possesses an identity and performs a role in a given narrative. The way a character is portrayed contributes to the thematic message of a literary text. Characterisation, therefore, is an essential part of literary texts. It is the main contributing factor to how characters are represented as far as narration is concerned. It is by the means of characterisation that a character is created and developed in any piece literary work.

Other literary scholars like Pedavoah and Somone have discussed two types of characterisation. These are direct and indirect characterisation. Direct characterisation happens when the writer directly gives information about a character. With indirect characterisation, the writer presents the character through other means and allows the reader to deduce what type of character is being portrayed.

Somone (16) identifies four ways by which a writer can depict a character indirectly: the thoughts and feelings of the character, the appearance of the character, actions of the character, and dialogues that the character participates. The thoughts and feelings of the character have to do with what the character thinks about, as well as what the character feels physically and emotionally. In the case of a genre such as the comic, the character's thoughts are presented in the form of a thought bubble. The appearance of a character includes facial expressions and gestures, corporal features and the choice of clothing. The actions of the character are activities they perform/what the characters do. It may also refer to how a character reacts to situations. Dialogue has to do with what a character says. In portraying these, the traditional novel relies on the use of words. The comic, on the contrary, mainly utilises images to present these, especially the appearance of the character. In examining characterisation in the selected literary works, this

research will explore how the authors/narrators project the abilities and disabilities of these characters. The analysis will include both direct and indirect characterisation.

1.11.6 Comparative Analysis

The present study is going to involve a comparative approach to analysing the two genres. Comparative analysis is a research approach that involves a comparison of various aspects of two or more sets of literary data. It provides an avenue for viewing literature from different perspectives. According to Robert J. Clements, the purpose of comparative literature is not to set one set of literary data against another.

Instead, it provides a method of broadening one's perspective in the approach to single works of literature—a way of looking beyond the narrow boundaries of national frontiers in order to discern trends and movements in various national cultures and to see the relations between literature and other spheres of human activity. (5)

In view of this, a comparative approach will be used in order to highlight the divergences and convergences of the two genres used in this research. Using this approach will help broaden the perspectives of representing disability in literature. The comparative approach will target both form and content of the novel and the comic.

1.12 Conceptual Framework

Disability studies is an academic discipline which deals with what disability is and its consequences in different contexts such as culture, politics and society. It involves the differentiation between what is considered a normal ability versus what is seen to be a disability.

It examines the two aspects of disability as a medical condition and as a societal imposition of limitations. According to Simi Linton, it aims to integrate people with disability properly into the society (518).

This concept of societal integration, as well as what is considered normal or abnormal, has been transferred into literary studies. This allows for critical examination of how a character is built within the context of the text. With this idea, the study will analyse the selected texts through the lens of literary disability studies.

This study will however not limit itself to physical and social state of disability as described in disability studies. The focus of the analysis will be to examine PWDs through the lens of concepts of disability in comic characters explored by Kelly Gross and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson.

1.12.1 Disability Stereotypes

Stereotypes in literature are common occurrence due to the existence of labelling in the real world. The practice of stereotyping creates perceptions in the mind of people even before they get to know an individual. These perceptions generate certain expectations which may cloud the judgements of a person. The use of stereotypes in literature, therefore, creates a pattern in characters with shared identities. The practice of stereotyping is, however, not limited to representation in traditional forms of literature, but also in popular literature such as the comic. Kelly Gross examines stereotypes which are attributed to disabled characters in comics:

Pitiable and pathetic, laughable, object of violence, his/her own worst- and only- enemy, sinister and/or evil, burden, atmosphere(background), nonsexual, super crip, incapable of fully participating in everyday life (27-28).

These stereotypes generally associate disability to negativity.

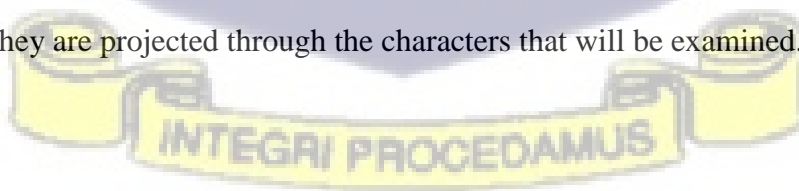
In as much as Gross' study is relevant in comic studies, it focuses on Western comics rather than African comics. As the stereotypes are originally associated with comic characters, the analysis will first determine the extent to which the African comics reflect these stereotypes. The research will then go further to assess how similar the African comic is to the African novel in terms of stereotypical representation.

1.12.2 Disability and the Extra-Normal

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson explores the connection between disability and comic characters.

She defines disability as “a violation of the normal and expected” (ix), which is an explanation of what the extra-normal is. With the extra-normal involving the existence of something that is considered as beyond normal, it is one feature that is usually seen in comic or cartoon characters. An example is the Popeye character, who has exaggerated big forearms that represent his arm strength. The huge forearms do not only emphasise his strength, but they also give him a caricature appearance. There are many other examples of the use of exaggerated features in comic characters.

The current research will, therefore, explore the relationship between disability and the extra-normal as they are projected through the characters that will be examined.



1.13 Structure of Thesis

The entire thesis will be structures as follows:

Chapter One will feature the introduction and general background to the study. It also outlines the objectives, significance, justification, methodology and theoretical framework of the research.

Chapter Two will provide review of the critical literature for the study. This includes reviews of relevant literature on the concepts of ability and disability. Literature on the study of comics as well as the idea of (super)heroism will also be reviewed.

Chapter Three will deal with analysis of ability and disability in the selected superhero comics, *Karmzah* and *Dunamis*. Selected characters from these comics will be analysed in terms of how the comics help to construct these characters.

Chapter Four will examine ability and disability as portrayed in the selected canonical novels, *Fragments* and *The Beggars' Strike*.

Chapter Five will compare and discuss the findings of the analyses done in the previous chapters. It will also contain the conclusions and recommendations for further studies.



CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on the various aspects of this research. In reviewing, literature the first part of this will examine how disability is defined. This will help to bring out a working definition for disability in this paper. There will also be a review of research that have been conducted in the field of disability studies, both in African and Western literature. In addition to these, this section will review literature on disability in comics, and also literature on how a superhero is defined. The aim of this chapter is to reveal the gap that this research is filling as well as its focus. Below is a review of various scholarship that help to highlight the gap as well as put the research into perspective.

2.1 Defining Disability

Some scholars in the field of disability studies have pointed out certain terms/words that are used to replace “disability”, depending on the meanings they intend to communicate. Some of these words include impairment, disorder, abnormality and dysfunction. However, this group of scholars have argued that disability is a social construct rather than an anatomical problem. Lipenga in his “Introduction” to his research on “Narrative Enablement” points out this debate. According to Lipenga (15), impairment is used in describing differences in bodily appearance and functions. These bodily differences include loss of body parts, visual impairment, hearing impairments, and other bodily defects. Disability, as a social model, is however seen as a result of a social environment which restricts people with physical impairments. In view of the debate on the use of the term “disability”, it will be necessary to point out that the term disability will be

used interchangeably with impairment, as far as this research is concerned. However, the idea of disability will not only focus on impairment but its implications as well.

Disability is a part of human existence. As disability is a major part of the society, people encounter it at a point in their lives. It is a way of identifying a person; just like race, gender, sexual orientation and other concepts of social, political and religious classification. Although disability has been part of human living for ages, it is difficult to define it clearly. Kehinde (60) describes it as a “polysemic term that differs from one culture to another”. Disability therefore can mean different things to different people. This section of the literature review discusses some definitions and elements of the concept. The purpose of investigating the various meanings of disability is to help bring out the converging point of what the concept is about universally. It will also bring to the fore the idea of disability that this research will be built upon.

According to Ghana Statistical Service, disability can be defined in various ways. One way to define disability is the inability of an individual to perform “defined social roles” within the individual’s sociocultural and physical environment. Disability can also be described as the physical state of a person, which is as a result of a disease, an injury or any other form of health condition. In addition to this, the report mentions three levels in which disability can occur: impairment in body function or structure, a limitation in activity, and a restriction in participation. This definition projects disability as a problem of physical limitation, where a person’s body does not allow him/her to do what is expected. This definition by Ghana Statistical Services centres on disability as a physical impairment. It also goes further to add the consequence of these impairments as part of the disability.

Bowers and Lutz go further to discuss two different perspectives in defining disability: the rehabilitation perspective and the social perspective. According to them, these two perspectives

are opposing in nature yet, it is possible to integrate them. The work describes the rehabilitation perspective as one that focuses on individual illness or physical disability. It assumes that a person with a disability cannot perform expected social functions, and therefore dependent on the society. The social perspective, however, focuses on social change and equal opportunities. It projects the independence of PWDs through an acceptance of their physical conditions. This gives them the ability to create change in the society.

Issues concerning disability have received mixed reactions both in the society and in literature. As some may accept disability as simply being a part of life, others tend to interpret it in various ways. This may be due to certain religious or cultural beliefs. Quayson, in his “Introduction”, presents some symbolic viewpoints to the meanings of disability. His study makes reference to biblical depiction of disability in ancient times. This includes disability being associated with uncleanness, resulting in isolation. Disability may also be seen as a form of punishment. Additionally, it “challenges to man’s sense of pride and self-sufficiency” (23). The consequence of this is charity towards PWDs. These reveal a belief in the connection of disability to the supernatural.

The ideas that have been discussed above reveal and pull together varied definitions of disability. They show its implication on literature and society. The social implication of impairment will be included in discussing disability in the various works.

2.2 Disability Studies in African Literature

Ato Quayson in *Aesthetic Nervousness* provides a balance in terms of scope by analysing both African and non-African texts. His analyses are based on works from four writers: Samuel

Beckett, Toni Morrison, Wole Soyinka and J. M. Coetzee. His work explores the anxieties that come with encountering disability. Though his work includes disability studies in African literature, it is limited to canonical works of literature.

According to Chireboah-Ansah, who looks at disability in Kumawood movies, the messages of the movies tend to be the opposite of depicting disability. This is so because though the messages of the film are positive, they fail to promote the rights and capabilities of PWDs. Film, like any form of literature, tends to reflect the society that we live in as well as to correct the ills of the society. His study therefore helps to highlight the need for promoting the capabilities of PWDs.

For Oliver, his research involves a study of four African texts. His study, though in the field of literary studies, dwells on the same issues of misrepresentation and underrepresentation PWDs. His research also does not include the comic in any way.

The various works that have been reviewed above prove that a lot of research has been done on disability in literature that dwell on the negative aspects of disability as represented in literature. In spite of this, some researchers have worked on investigating positivity within disability in African literature.

In an effort to reveal how ability can grow out of disability, Kehinde examines the character Michael K. in J. M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K.* Michael K. is described as a physically and socially disabled person who struggles to find a place in society. Kehinde asserts that Coetzee's depiction of such a character gives a positive viewpoint rather than "a pessimistic message" (73). The ability that is seen through the analysis of Michael K's struggles reveals the ability of people with disabilities to win their battles of everyday struggles. Despite the fact that

Kehinde shows a positive side to disability in his study, the text he uses focuses on the disadvantaged position of the character than his ability to save himself from his troubles. This research will go a step further by analysing characters who are portrayed as possessing a greater ability than Michael K.

From the above, studies which have been conducted usually show the negatives of disability in literature. Also, those that examine comics are non-African whereas those that work within the scope of African literature do not include comics. There is thus the need to expand the scope of research in disability by looking at the African comic, and to reveal positive aspects of disability.

2.3 Disability Studies in Western Literature

Linton seeks to expose distorted representations of disability in literature and other art forms, and to “weave” them back into society as contributors to history. Linton further explains that misrepresentation or underrepresentation of disability is partly as a result of social rules that exclude disabled people.

Bérubé examines how the disabled body is connected to the narrative that represents disability. He points out that disability studies is not just another literary field, but a study that encourages disability as part of the narrative. He makes the conclusion that rereading from the disability point of view leads to the rereading of “temporality, causality, and self-reflexivity in narrative,” (576) which in effect makes self-representation a possibility.

Audrey Baker explores the depiction of disability in young adult fiction published Britain and Ireland between the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The purpose of her research is to examine whether the reality of disability can be portrayed accurately. In addition to

that, she also tests if such a depiction can be done simultaneously with presenting “positive role models” (6).

2.4 Disability Studies in the Comic

In representing difference, Gross asserts that we often fall back on stereotypes. Her study looks at the stereotypes in representing disability in comics. Gross’s work re-emphasises Bilken and Bodgan (1977). According to these studies, there people with disabilities are represented in the following ways: burden, pathetic, non-sexual and incapable of participating in everyday life. These ways of defining PWDs is biased since there are PWDs who are the opposites of these stereotypes. Some people without physical disabilities also have the tendency to be a burden on others. This shows that different types of people can fit into any of the above no matter who they are. Considering the similarities in the findings of the two studies, not much has changed in representing disability over the years. There is therefore a need to focus on inclusion and diversity when it comes to producing and reading comics as Gross suggests.

Though these studies aim to promote the integration and projection of disability in a positive light, their scopes do not include African literary studies. It will therefore be necessary to expand the scope of disability studies in comics by looking at the African comic.

2.5 The (Super) Hero

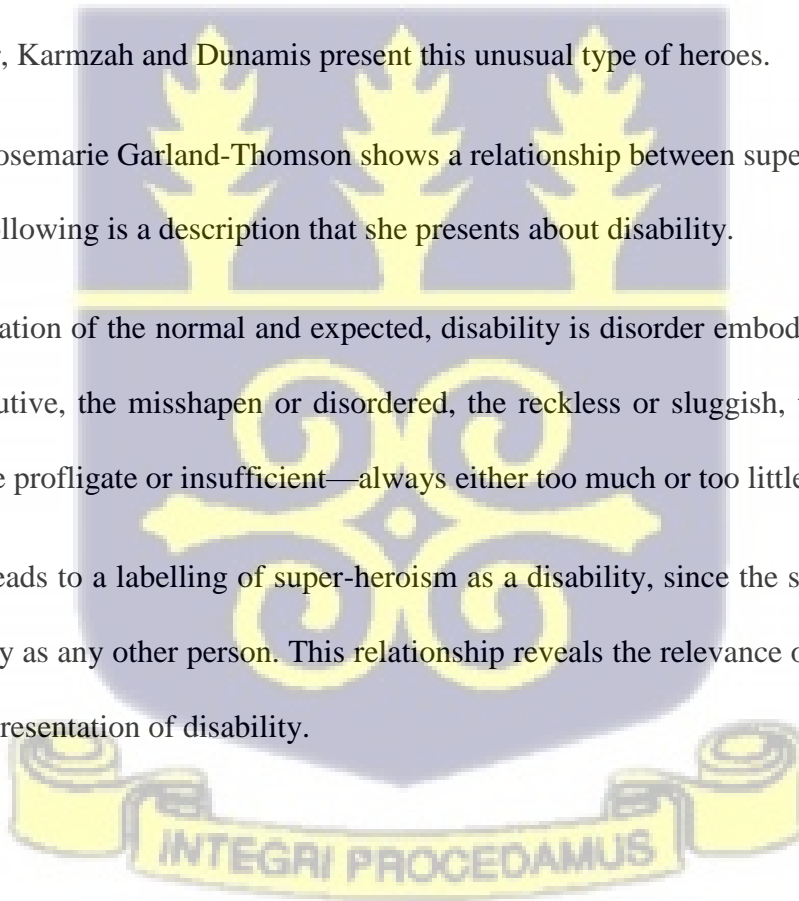
One important aspect of this research is the idea of heroism/superheroism and its relationship with disability. In order to explore the relationship of these two concepts, it is necessary to have knowledge of, and to understand the embodiment of a hero or a superhero. Usually, whenever the idea of the ideal superhero comes to mind, Superman is the image that comes to mind. He possesses incredible abilities beyond what any superhero could have: super vision, laser eyes,

super hearing, flight, super speed, super strength and invulnerability to external harm. The role he plays as a superhero is reflected in other superheroes as well. When it comes to thinking about African superheroes, Black Panther is the character that usually comes to mind. The Black Panther has received some attention in the field of researching the “black” superhero. However, other African superhero characters can be explored. The general characteristics and duties of a superhero are identical in both Western and African comics. As pointed out by Omanga, “the African comic superhero is a response to, and not simply an appropriation of, the more famous Detective Comics (DC) and Marvel comic superheroes” (264). Considering what the presentation of a superhero is, it is rather unusual to have someone with extreme limited abilities to qualify to be one. However, Karmzah and Dunamis present this unusual type of heroes.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson shows a relationship between superhero abilities and disability. The following is a description that she presents about disability.

As a violation of the normal and expected, disability is disorder embodied: the enormous or diminutive, the misshapen or disordered, the reckless or sluggish, the flamboyant or silent, the profligate or insufficient—always either too much or too little (ix).

This definition leads to a labelling of super-heroism as a disability, since the superhero does not function normally as any other person. This relationship reveals the relevance of the comic in the discussion of representation of disability.



2.6 Review of Literature on *Fragments* and *The Beggars' Strike*

As literary works by two of the most famous writers of African novels, *Fragments* and *The Beggars' Strike* have received a lot of attention in the African literary space. The following is a review of some scholarship that are based on the two novels.

Shittu Kelani Okunade examines the Aminata Sow Fall's socio-political vision in the novel. She discusses the topic of leadership by focusing on some major events in the story and connects it to happenings in modern African societies. Okunade makes the assertion that Western civilisation has destroyed the communal spirit that originally existed in Africa. Instead of the brotherhood that should exist among Africans, some leaders are not sympathetic with the citizens. An instance is how Mour Ndiaye completely gets the beggars off the streets against their will, but later asks them to return because he needs them.

Mark Beeman argues that the point of view that Aminata Sow Fall presents begging is consistent with the structural-functionalist sociological approach. The study shows how different elements and institutions that make up a society are necessary for the existence of one another. These elements are therefore structured and well-integrated into the society. Fall the presents beggars in a different light rather than considering them as outcasts.

Mike Edung explores environmental problems as discussed in the novel. His research takes a critical look at the effects of cultural and religious beliefs on the socio-economic development of a nation. He makes the argument that Fall presents a message that label beggars as hazards to the society, and that cultural and religious beliefs can be detrimental to the growth of the society.

John D. Ajala's research of critically examining the novel, describes Fall as an advocate for the marginalised in the Senegalese society. He highlights how Fall presents the challenges the beggars face as well as the importance of the beggars in the society. He makes the conclusion that Aminata Sow Fall is "an impressive spokeswoman for the underprivileged." (152)

From the above review of some studies on *The Beggars' Strike*, it is evident that researchers are usually drawn to the socio-economic or socio-political aspects of the narrative. These studies also highlight the relevance of the novel in modern African societies. They however do not give full attention to the issues of disability that are presented in the novel.

Rosemary Colme's study of two of Ayi Kwei Armah's novels, *Fragments* and *why are we so blest?* highlights the issue of social alienation of the educated elite from the rest of the people. Through Baako's character, he takes a critical look at the idea of the conflict of the material against the spiritual, and how destructive materialism is.

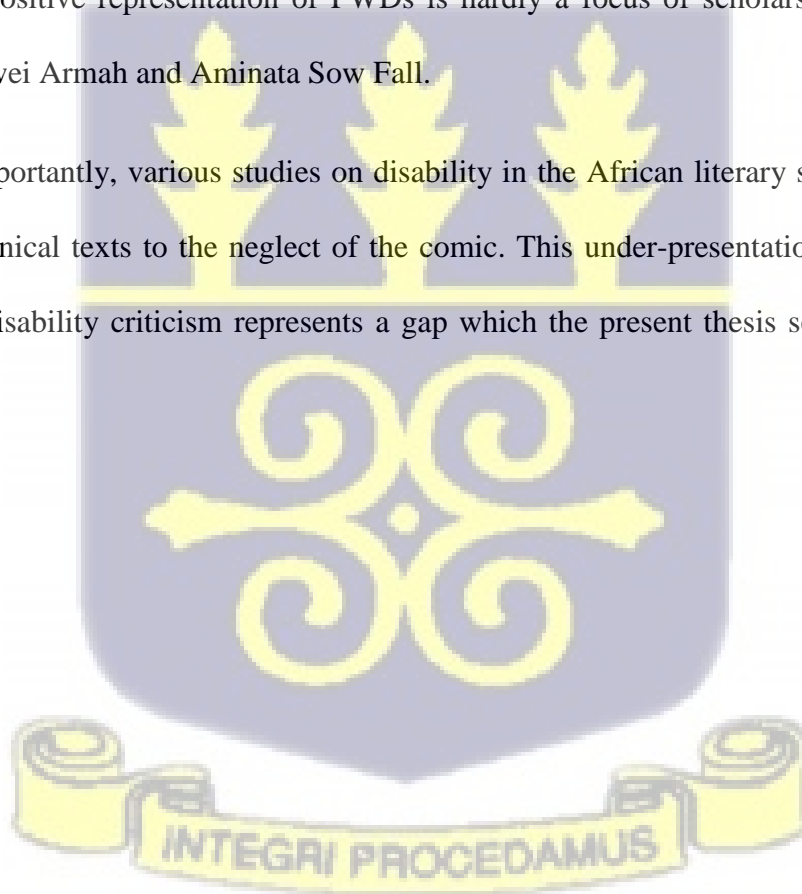
Further, the discussion of the issue of materialism and alienation is also present in the study by Kirsten Holst Petersen on the novel. He focuses on the roles of Baako and Naana, and how their existence projects an African societal expectation which is more dangerous than Western influence.

Other examples of studies conducted on *Fragments*, such as those from scholars like Kwadwo Osei-Nyame, Joyce Johnson, Abena Gyaawa Ofori, Edward Lobb and others, generally analyse the themes of alienation, social classification, community and materialism. These analyses also tend to focus on the life of the main character, Baako.

2.7 Conclusion to Literature Review

To sum up this chapter, a number of points are derived from the various literatures that have been reviewed. The definitions of disability and the superhero have been clearly presented in order to make the analyses in the present thesis more comprehensible. Also, in reviewing literature on disability in African studies, it is evident that the scholarships focus mainly on traditional forms of literature. The comic genre does not receive that attention in the discussion of disability in African literature. Moreover, studies on the representations of disability usually focus on the negativity that is projected through characters with disability. From the review, it is also clear that positive representation of PWDs is hardly a focus of scholars who analyse the works of Ayi Kwei Armah and Aminata Sow Fall.

More importantly, various studies on disability in the African literary space have hugely focused on canonical texts to the neglect of the comic. This under-presentation of the comic in the context of disability criticism represents a gap which the present thesis seeks to contribute towards filling.



CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS OF ABILITY AND DISABILITY IN *KARMZAH* AND *DUNAMIS*

3.0 Introduction

This chapter analyses the construction of characters with physical disabilities in Farida Bedwei's *Karmzah*, and Mmbasu Mbwabi and Salim Busuru's *Dunamis*. It reveals the details of the personalities of these characters as well as the nature of their disabilities. The characters in focus for this chapter are Morowa Adjei/Karmzah in *Karmzah* and Kenny, Shaddie and Lulu in *Dunamis*. This analysis is based on the first issue of each comic, therefore, the narration for mainly introduces the characters. In order to achieve the goal of this chapter, the various elements of representation will be critically explored. These will include words, images and colours. The analysis will reveal the themes of the comics which are presented as a consequence of the character construction in the works. The chapter will first analyse *Karmzah* after which an analysis of *Dunamis* will follow. In analysing *Karmzah*, the main character will be examined in two parts: as Morowa Adjei and as her alter ego, Karmzah. The section will examine the writer's representation of Morowa Adjei and her alter ego, Karmzah, and how the duality of the character's personality provides the basis for her strengths and weaknesses." In the case of *Dunamis*, the characters will be examined individually, after which their connections to one another will also be examined. Finally, the chapter will provide a comparative examination of the divergences and convergences between the two comics.

3.1 Character Construction in *Karmzah*

In the first issue of *Karmzah*, "The Unleashing," the writer presents a young Ghanaian woman who encounters an extraordinary event in her life. This event takes place in the course of her work as an archaeologist. Morowa, the main character, gains superhuman abilities and

becomes Karmzah, a superhero. The experience bestows upon her a greater responsibility, despite the fact that she is living with a disability. In this section, we get to see how the writer incorporates her disability in portraying the main character as both Morowa and Karmzah. In placing this character in the context that she finds herself, the writer highlights how her disability propels her abilities. The writer, therefore, projects an antithetical, mythical logic which is a key feature of the comic as a genre. It is a logic which demonstrates how super-ability emerges from disability, and super-strength from extreme weakness. Such a logic is consistent with the world in mythical works such the ancient epic, the folktale, the Bible and other medieval genres placing the comic and its characters in a well-documented tradition that thrives on celebrating the superhero who emerges from the sub-zero.

3.1.1 Morowa Adjei

Superheroes in comic books usually have two personalities: the original persona and its alter ego. This duality allows the superhero to switch identities between living normal and extranormal lives. Using Superman, the eponymous superhero of DC Comics films, as an example, the writer allows him to have his life as a superhero as well as live like an ordinary human. As a human, he is a journalist by the name Clark Joseph Kent – even though it is not his birth name. He is originally a super being who has to adopt human nature to live as a human. In the case of the main character of *Karmzah*, she also gets to have two personalities. Her situation is slightly different from Superman in the sense that she is originally human and later gains her superhuman abilities. In Chapter 1 of the current research, more examples of superheroes and their alter egos have already been mentioned. Some of the superheroes that have been mentioned earlier were originally ordinary humans who later gained extraordinary abilities. The adoption of this technique by Bedwei agrees with Omanga's assertion that the African comic is an

appropriation of the more famous DC and Marvel comics (264). Though Omanga's assertion is valid, there is a much older African folk tradition that provides excellent examples which might have influenced

Bedwei's work. For instance, the Akan oral folktale—*AnansesEm* (Ananse tale)—tradition is replete with stories in which orphans, the disabled people and social outcasts acquire extraordinary ability as a result of a talisman or gift bestowed by supernatural beings. A typical example of such folktales is dramatised by Martin Owusu in *The Legend of Aku Sika*. In the tale, Aku, a young woman, is ridiculed by the king's other wives and the community as unfit to marry the king because of the suspicion that her left hand, which is always hidden in a cloth, is a stump. Unable to bear the embarrassment of public censure and ridicule, Aku decides to drown herself in the river. From the river emerges a mythical snake who instructs Aku to put her stumped hand in its mouth. When she withdraws the hand from the bowels of the snake, she discovers that her hand has not merely been restored, but that it is made entirely of gold. On the day contrived to embarrass her in public by her rivals, Aku displays her supernaturally-grown, gold hand to the amazement of her enemies. She is consequently allowed to marry the king as her enemies are incarcerated to serve their death sentence. Similar stories of supernatural heroism abound not only in the Akan folktale tradition, but also in the oral narrative tradition of Africa. For instance, the 13th century Malian epic, *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* recorded by Djibril Tamsir Niane in 1960, features the hero, Sundiata Keita who is ugly beyond comparison and unable to walk till he turns seven years. His mother is also an ugly hunchbacked nicknamed "Buffalo Woman" because of her unseemly appearance. She obtains her powers from sorcery. With her supernatural gifts, she helps Sundiata overcome the scorn, ridicule and existential threats and enables him to defeat

Sumanguru Kante to found the Malian empire. Bedwei, therefore, has a very vast array of authentic oral folk material to work with in creating her superhero, Morowa Adjei/Karmzah.

Morowa Adjei is the main character's non-superhero personality. In introducing this character, the writer situates her in an environment that helps to foreground who she is. This way, the reader gets to know a lot about her strengths and weaknesses in her usual everyday life. She is first introduced to the reader as someone who works in an office. This information is presented in a caption box that states; "It's late night in the office. Morowa is alone with the security guard outside" (pl. 1: p.1). Though in this panel, we only see the security man standing outside the office, we gain some information about the main character through the narration in the caption box. First, the reader gets to know that she has a job. Another discovery that the reader makes is that she has been left alone in the office. From the information presented, it is possible to deduce that the character is someone who can be trusted to take care of herself.

The next panel, however, reveals another side of Morowa. The reader gets to know that she is a young woman with a disability. Evidence of this is the pair of crutches leaning beside her on her work table. From this, one gets to know that she has a problem with mobility. In spite of this problem, she is depicted as a hard worker from her thought about how the week has been "long" and "draining." She is seen working with a computer while she has this thought. Another evidence that emphasises her depiction as a hard worker is seen when her co-workers are introduced. One of them addresses her as a "workaholic" (pl. 4: p. 2). Her co-workers – Kola and Panyin – have just returned from a dig, which explains why Morowa has been working alone in the office. Morowa's self-sufficiency and independence defy the stereotypical representations of disability. For instance, Kelly Gross, in her study of disability in the graphic novel, emphasises

certain stereotypes of disabled people identified by earlier research. Out of the ten stereotypes mentioned in Gross' work, Morowa's character goes against the following: pitiable and pathetic, always the background character and a burden (27-28). In a typical narrative on a disabled character in an African context, the disabled character is likely to be seen begging for alms or finding ways of getting support from others. The character's means of survival would then be dependent on what others can do for him or her. However, this is not the case for Morowa. She is seen as being able to work in order to cater for herself. Also, for a character with mobility challenges, she is not seen to depend on her colleagues in order to move around. Most importantly, she is the main character of the narrative rather than a background character.

In spite of Morowa's capabilities, her disability limits her in certain aspects of living. An example of this is her reason for not going on the field dig with her colleagues (pl. 5: p. 3). As she puts it, "I would have come if it weren't for these stupid muscle spasms." At this point, the reader gets to find out other symptoms of her disability. The following dialogues reveal a major part of the nature of her disability. These dialogues are found in speech bubbles in different panels of the page:

Kola: How are you feeling now? Are you still in pain, I would be happy to give you a leg rub.

Morowa: Oh pain and stiffness is [*sic*] all gone now. Yesterday, I went on a long walk, logged 5,000 steps.

Panyin: ...Those of us without any palsy will not get up and start walking up and down without a reason. (Bedwei, 4)

In the conversation above, the writer puts other characters in a position of awareness of Morowa's challenges. Their response to their encounter with disability is that of support rather than sympathy. She is not portrayed as the stereotypical pathetic and pitiable disabled character

that Gross points out. Both Panyin and Kola recognise that her impairment restricts her from performing certain tasks such as those that they can. However, they do not respond to her circumstance in a negative manner. Rather, their recognition of her disability contributes to better interaction among the co-workers.

According to the Department of Developmental Medicine of the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne, cerebral palsy is a disability with a range of symptoms that a person can experience. They define cerebral palsy as

...a disorder of muscle control which results from some damage to part of the brain. The term cerebral palsy is used when the problem has occurred early in life, to the developing brain (2).

Just like any other physical disorder, cerebral palsy is associated with certain symptoms that aid in diagnosis. Even though the manifestation of the palsy may differ from one person to another, symptoms may include the following:

problems with hearing, problems with eyesight, epilepsy, intellectual/ learning disability, perceptual difficulties, gastro-oesophageal reflux, orthopaedic problems, constipation, nutritional difficulties, saliva control problems, recurrent chest infections and bone disease. (7-8)

In view of the symptoms that have been identified, Morowa seems to be living with challenges of her own and tries to overcome them in order to achieve the kind of life she hopes for. As a person living with cerebral palsy, there is the likelihood of having an intellectual/learning disorder, as mentioned in the previous paragraph. However, Morowa is depicted as a character with strong intellectual skills. She is given the task of determining the artefact that Kola and Panyin have brought from the dig. By studying the inscriptions on the artefact, she is able to point out that it is likely an artefact from the ancient Mali Empire. This also proves that she is highly educated, knowledgeable and experienced. As a person living with

cerebral palsy, going through the levels of education can be quite challenging, thus her educational status proves her resilience and determination to achieve her goals in spite of her challenges.

One aspect of Morowa's life that the text does not mention is her family (whether biological or adopted). Even when the narrative moves to her home, she is seen to be living alone. It is however possible to deduce that Morowa has a supportive family through her formative years until she becomes independent. This is revealed through the level of education she has and her ability to handle tasks on her own. Being able to learn to perform tasks is one thing that she has been helped with. In addition, the absence of family members in her life reinforces the character of Morowa as uniquely independent, strong and non-conforming to the traditional representation of disability. Her agency is confirmed by the fact that she lives alone and there are no family ties in her life. The above discussion on the character of reveals both weakness and strength of Morowa as a disabled person. It demonstrates her ability to participate in everyday life, with few limitations.

3.1.2 Karmzah

Karmzah is the superhuman, superhero personality of the main character. In other words, she is alter ego of Morowa. She comes into being on the evening that Morowa is left alone in the office again to figure out the origin of the ancient artefact from the dig. Usually, superheroism is a result of a chance encounter that bestows life-changing abilities on a character. In Karmzah's case, it is an accident that leads to the unleashing of her superhuman abilities. When the process of her transformation from an ordinary person to a superhuman occurs, her emotions go through

three phases: terror, confusion and excitement. This encounter opens her up to certain experiences that she does not expect to go through.

3.1.3 The Unleashing

The making of a superhero in Western comics usually involves some sort of scientific process. This could happen either through an experiment or through an accident. The famous Western human-to-superhero characters such as Spiderman, Daredevil and Captain America are proof of this phenomenon. Peter Parker becomes Spiderman after being bitten by a radioactive spider. This accidental bite gives him spider-like super abilities. Daredevil (Matthew Murdock) is an example of a superhero who becomes disabled and a superhero at the same time. He loses his sight due to a toxic waste accident. However, his other senses are heightened. Steve Rogers becomes superhuman after being injected with Professor Erskine's Super Soldier Serum. After being frozen for years, he is discovered by the Avengers and becomes Captain America. In the making of Karmzah, the accident technique is adopted. However, there is no scientific method involved. In making the superhero, African comics usually connect the superhero to the supernatural that is, relating to the spirit world. Evidence of this is seen in the popular African comics such as *Akokhan*, *Avonome* and *Kwezi*. The trope of using the supernatural to inaugurate the superhero in the African comic context is in keeping with the aforementioned African oral narrative tradition, where deities intricately socialise with humanity and pass on mystical powers to them. In the African folk tradition, there is hardly any separation between the physical and metaphysical realms. The two domains of reality are intricately interwoven facilitating the occurrence of the empowerment that makes the superhero. It is this logic of reality that Bedwei employs in addition to the use of the accident. Bedwei, therefore, appropriates both African and

Euro-American conventions in creating Karmzah, making Karmzah a truly universal heroic archetype. When Morowa is left with the artefact for close examination, she accidentally knocks it down from the table when using her computer's mouse. She screams in horror as the artefact falls and breaks. The next thought that comes to mind is for her to fix it with glue before her boss, Dr. M. finds out. Being able to figure out a solution to the problem, however, does not bring relief. She does not get the chance to fix the broken artefact because of the strange sight of red smoke emerging from the item. Contact with the strange smoke transfigures her. The smoke first makes contact with and possesses her crutches before getting to her when she touches it. Presenting the transformation in this manner helps to highlight disability as a part of her image. The implication of this is that the inclusion of her whole being is important to the task that lies ahead. The image below shows the result of her transformation into a superhero:



Fig. 3 Karmzah

The image above is a representation of the physical appearance of Karmzah. From the image, her physical disability is clearly presented in the use of her crutches and the knee braces on both of her knees. The handles of her crutches also have a “K” inscribed on them. The “K” represents the name Karmzah. The inscription on the crutches creates a sense of belonging between the superhero and the symbol of disability. The creation of this connection helps to highlight the relationship between disability and super-ability. This feature also emphasises the essence of disability in the being of the superhero. In addition to including her identity as a disabled person, Bedwei projects Karmzah’s African identity as well. Her hair changes into locks of natural hair. Complementing her hair is her *batakari* outfit. By creating Karmzah in this manner, the writer’s technique helps to preserve the identity of Morowa. This projects the idea that a person does not have to change his or her identity in order to be in the state of ability. In reference to the Western technique used in the creation of a superhero, the writer of this comic diverts from the usual toxic chemical and lightning method. She rather creates an African ancestral spiritual connection: through the origin and agent of the power, and the process of power acquisition.

The next step the writer takes after creating Morowa’s alter ego is to reveal her super powers. This is where Muzu is introduced. Muzu emerged from the ancient object that created Karmzah. He used to be the spiritual protector of one of the kings of the ancient Malian Empire. The presentation of the appearance of Muzu evokes the idea of the genie – the corrupted form of the jinn of Middle-Eastern and African origins. The genie is an ancient spirit that is trapped in objects, usually lamps, and is able to grant wishes when released. The use of the jinn character is

a main feature of the famous Arabian Nights: the collection of Middle Eastern folktales. They are trapped in objects as a form of punishment or imprisonment. In Muzu's case, it was as a result of accidentally turning a king into a lizard. Muzu's statement demonstrates his resemblance to the jinn: "But you were the one who broke me out of imprisonment...I am going to empower people with various challenges with superpowers, starting with you." (pl. 4: p. 14) According to modern Western popular literature depictions, the genie is trapped in a lamp, and grants wishes when released. In order for the genie to perform his task of granting wishes, he needs the help of his beneficiary to be released first. In this instance, Muzu needs her help in performing an urgent task. This is something that she does not feel qualified to do as she replies in the third panel of the same page; "What? Already? Why me? Why not Kola or Panyin, they were the ones who dug you up?" (Bedwei, 14) Her confidence at this point is low. Before her task is assigned to her, Muzu helps to reveal her various abilities as a superhero. Her realisation of her superhero abilities helps to boost her confidence.

The abilities of superheroes vary from one to another. Usually, a superhero is seen to possess two or more abilities. These typically consist of skills in the martial arts, which are complemented by some other form(s) of super power. These super abilities may manifest in the form of heightened consciousness, super-strength, invisibility, ability to flight and super-speed. Karmzah's experience of discovering her superpowers becomes an exciting adventure for her. Being able to discover her powers motivates her to accept her mission. The demonstrations of her powers are seen from the pages 15 to 24. The following represent the various abilities that Karmzah possesses and how they operate and are activated.

- Running with super-speed: she activates this by balancing on her crutches while lifting her feet off the ground. Her initial average running speed is 1km/minute. There is the possibility for her to exceed that limit by working on her technique. Her speed ability is compared to that of the Flash, a DC Comics superhero who is known for his super speed ability.
- Using the rope tie: pressing the edge of the crutch handles, which has been labelled “K”, releases a rope that ties up anything in its way. This happens within seconds to activation.
- Shooting darts: they are shot from the bottom of the crutches when they are both lifted at once.
- Flight: if she spins around, her batakari allows her to fly up as high as 20 feet.
- Hacking devices: her mask is fitted with smart glasses that allow her to hack into any Bluetooth device and wireless networks, and control any connected devices.
- Martial arts: her ability to fight is possible with the help of her crutches. She can balance with the crutches elevated for a maximum of thirty seconds, after which she will fall on her “bum”. She can choose to continue fighting sitting down or stand up again.
- Ability to speak any language when the need arises.
- Teleportation: in order to get to her destination, she needs to mention the name of the town three times and spin around.

By taking a critical look at the abilities she possesses, there are certain observations that can be made. First, her Karmzah personality cannot be activated without her crutches. Moreover, out of the eight abilities that she possesses, her crutches play an integral role in four of them. In constructing her character in this manner, Bedwei makes use of the character’s disability as a tool for her super-ability. In as much as she is able to go beyond the limits imposed by her disability,

the writer makes an effort to project her shortcomings as well. She recognises that the character's disability does not disappear in the midst of her superpowers. Despite the fact that the most useful of her abilities depend on the use of her crutches, she can only balance without them for a maximum of merely thirty seconds. In addition to this, Muzu cautions her: "Whatever you do, do not lose contact with your crutches for more than two minutes, else you will lose your superpowers and revert to Morowa." (pl. 1: p. 20). In essence, her superpower is dependent on the symbol of her disability: the pair of crutches. Through the use of the warning and the performance of the teleportation ritual, the writer further projects the relationship between Karmzah and spiritual practices. As typically demonstrated through African films and drama, people who consult spiritual sources for help are usually given careful instructions and warnings. When the characters violate the rules, they usually either lose the power or face harsh consequences. Sometimes, these characters are instructed to perform certain brief rituals in order to activate the powers they seek. This is similar to Karmzah's ritual of spinning and mentioning the name of a place three times. Finally, as an amalgam of the African and Euro-American conceptualisations of the hero, Karmzah's superpowers represent a fusion between the supernatural and modern technology, making Karmzah a conflation of the atavistic, ancestral spirituality on the one hand and postmodern science on the other. Karmzah, therefore, represents the archetypal hero of a "post-scientific" world. Christopher T. Hill defines "post-scientific society" as that society whose leading innovations and productivity "will be based principally not on world leadership in fundamental research in the natural sciences and engineering, but on world-leading *mastery of the creative powers of...individual human beings, their societies, and their cultures.*" Bedwei's Karmzah is, therefore, a new, unique species of superhero who taps into the creative and mystical powers of her African society while still appropriating the

advantages derived from Western technology. Such a superhero is futuristic in outlook and not readily available in literary texts, making Bedwei's work a significant literary contribution to the conceptualisation and characterisation of the notion of the literary hero.

In every superhero story, be it Western, Asian or African, there is always an important task for the superhero character. These tasks are usually in the form of social obligations such as fighting crime or saving the environment. For Karmzah, her assignment is to travel to Mozambique to rescue the son of a Nigerian oil magnate who has been kidnapped. Before she gets on to her assignment, she is given a practice session of fighting some thugs who show up at the office. This is the doing of Muzu as he explains; "...you need to practise your fighting skills before you end up getting beaten in Pemba" (pl. 5: p. 20). The writer uses this to show a boost in the character's confidence, in making the maximum use of her abilities. When she has practised enough by defeating the thugs, she moves on to her main assignment.

In Pemba, Mozambique, she encounters two groups of before she finally gets to rescue the young man who has been abducted. The writer to help reveal other characters' perspectives on Karmzah uses these two groups of people. The first group of people she makes contact with are the young men from whom she asks for directions. One of them inquires of her; "What's a pretty girl like you doing here alone?" (pl. 3: p. 25). Deducing from the manner in which she has been addressed, this other character supposes her to be vulnerable because she is a woman; not because of her disability. It is possible that the writer is trying to present a side of living with disability where the "abled" see the disabled as a normal part of society. It is also possible that the disabled may be seen as different, but the other person chooses not to speak of it. This situation is slightly different from what Morowa faces in the office. In the office, she is treated like a normal part of the society. However, her colleagues do not fail to recognise her disability.

They include it in their conversations as and when it is necessary to. They are also supportive when needed.

The writer also uses the second encounter to show another side of a PWD as far as social interaction is concerned. This involves the kidnapers, also known as the villains of the narrative. Introducing a villain in a superhero comic is essential to the purpose of the superhero. This creates an avenue for their superpowers to be utilised. In some cases, the villain also possesses some form of superpowers. Those are the ones referred to as super villains. In *Karmzah*, the enemies she is tasked to fight have no superpowers. Despite this, her task of rescuing the captive is met with its own challenges: first, she has to endure bullying from the criminals and second, she has to fight them. The thugs use her disability as a means to bully her.

One of them says to her; "...What are you going to do? Beat us up? You cannot even walk properly" (pl. 3: p. 26). This represents a group of people who disrespect PWDs. They usually consider PWDs to be weak, or at the bottom of the social ladder, and stereotyped as unable of performing any normal tasks. *Karmzah* does not allow this to affect her self-esteem. Rather, she gives the criminals an unexpected comeback in the fourth panel of page 26: "Walking is not a prerequisite for trouncing you!" After a fierce battle with the abductors, she is able to locate the hostage. The man she rescues only recognises her as a superhero and a friend.

A careful study of the circumstances of her empowerment reveals that Morowa was not specifically chosen to be *Karmzah*. She happens to become a superhero only because she happens to be the one to free Muzu from the ancient vase. The depiction of the ability to do and means to possess that ability as depicted proves two things. Firstly, it shows that anyone can get the ability to do anything, no matter who you are. Anyone can be born with certain capabilities, others may acquire them at a point in their lifetime, and for others, they may simply get the

opportunity to do. In the case of African superhero comics, there are different types of characters that get the opportunity to gain superpowers. Morowa/Karmzah falls in two categories: female and person living with a disability. Other examples of African comic characters that became superheroes include Avonome, also known as Hilda Avonomemi Moses, an able-bodied woman who wakes up in a cemetery with a supernatural ability, but no memory of her past. African comic writers have therefore performed a commendable task of creating superheroes from characters that belong to the various social groups. The second message that the depiction sends is that Morowa's physical impairments are not a hindrance for her to be placed in a position of responsibility. In fact, her being chosen and given the opportunity helps in discovering the strengths in her disability.

3.2 Character Construction in *Dunamis*

Mmbasu Mbwabi and Salim Busuru's *Dunamis* is a comic set in Kenya. According to Tay of Squid Magazine, the creators of the comic define *Dunamis* in three ways: "miraculous power, natural ability, power in action." As this comic raises awareness of discrimination towards the marginalised, it creates a space for the marginalised to have power. The comic raises awareness on albinism and other forms of disability. The discussion of albinism with other is necessary due to the similarities in experiences. In South Africa, for example, there was a move to consider albinos as disabled people. They claimed that people living with albinism were being discriminated against just like those living with disabilities (Mswela). In the first issue of the comic, what the writer does mainly is to introduce the readers to the characters that are in this narrative.

There is no doubt that there are people who accept albinism as a normal part of life. However, albinism in Africa has received a lot of negative reactions. This is not only attributed to their physical appearance but due to the myths that exist within some African societies about albinism. In some African cultures, for example, it is believed that people with albinism do not die; they simply disappear. In an investigative video documentary by Ghanaian journalist Anas Aremeyaw Anas, he exposes the plight of albinos in Tanzania. He reports on a young boy and girl who have their body parts severed for ritual purposes. In an interview with some members of the society, he gets to know that the bones of these albinos contain powers that can make a person successful. He confirms this by interacting with one witch doctor while undercover.

The present analysis will focus on a number of these characters: Kenny, Shaddie and Lulu. The analysis will especially examine the challenges that the main character faces as well as how he deals with those challenges. These characters will be examined alongside other characters in order to reveal the nature of the focus characters.

3.2.1 Kenny

Kenny is the main character of this comic and a pupil of the Makutano Primary School. As a young boy living with albinism, he encounters certain difficulties. People living with albinism are usually considered to be as healthy as any normal person. However, there are certain health challenges that come with the condition. These challenges include visual impairment and lack or low amount of melanin. These challenges affect their everyday living. As a person living with albinism, Kenny has to live with these physical health conditions. Even in school, he is seen to be wearing a red sweater over his uniform. This is to help protect his skin from direct exposure

to the sun, which can lead to severe skin damage. Wearing a sweater is one way that he is able to deal with the physical shortcomings that come with albinism.

Mbwabi and Busuru reveal the idea of the albino as different when he first introduces Kenny. When Kenny is introduced, he is isolated from the others and described as being different. This is not only because he is different in appearance, but he is the only one who was really paying attention to the science lesson.

The double science lesson felt like slowly drowning in mud. No one was really attentive...and those who were, are considered different. (pl. 2: p. 1)

His ability to pay attention in class is likely a consequence of him having no friends to keep distracting him during lessons. The isolation he experiences then becomes an advantage to him since it contributes to his better understanding of lessons taught.

Even as a character who tries to stay away from trouble, Kenny is seen to experience both verbal and physical attacks. The first instance attack against Kenny is seen immediately after the narrator describes him as different. A boy in his class addresses him as “Whitey” (pl. 3: p. 1) – in reference to his pale skin tone. His appearance is what makes him a target for bullying. This is emphasised by the caption box which states “...being different makes you a target” (pl. 1: p. 2).

The statement emphasises the social problem of hostility towards difference. Also, with the difference making a person stand out, it makes it easy for others to bully people with differences.

As Zablon, the class bully, shoots his ear with paper on a sling, none of his other classmates is seen to sympathise with him. They rather laugh at him as he screams in pain. The sound effect

“TWAP” and the shaky emanata on Kenny’s ear in panel five are proof of the intensity of the shot to his ear. To add to his pain, the bully goes on to refer to him as “still a loser” (pl. 5: p. 2) and an “idiot” (pl. 5: p. 3). In this situation, his colleagues do not recognise his humanity. Rather,

he is regarded as an object of mockery. His way of dealing with bullying is simply by ignoring the bullies as much as possible. The only reaction he is seen to show breaking his pencil to vent his anger. He chooses not to fight the bullies. Rather, he hopes and waits for the end of the school day in order to escape the ordeal.

Although the class bully takes delight in making Kenny's life miserable, he considers it a waste of time. He says to Kenny; "This is a waste of time anyway...we will waste some more time on Monday." (pl. 5: p. 3) From this statement, it is revealed that bullying is something that Kenny has to deal with every school day. Since he has no one to come to his rescue, he is seen as weak and helpless.

After school, he is seen to be a loner since he walks alone. Other children are seen to move in groups. Outside school, Kenny has his own challenges that he has to face and fight alone. Being alone exposes him to a greater danger that he faces due to his condition. Due to the belief that people with albinism possess some supernatural power is prevalent in countries like Kenya and Tanzania, Kenny becomes a target for ritual murder. He encounters such kidnappers as a car chases him on his way home from school. Sensing danger, he decides to run in order to find a safe space to hide. The people he is trying to escape from are Jinamizi and his gang. Fortunately, for him, his super speed ability makes it difficult for the kidnappers to catch up with him despite chasing him in a car. Although there a lot of people where Kenny is being pursued, almost no one makes an effort to do something about the situation. The only people that react after noticing the chase are Charè, Shaddie, Lulu and Dubbu. This goes to show how society is usually unbothered about issues that concern the minority in society.

3.2.2 The Super Villain

A super villain is a character in a comic book who is evil or a criminal, and also possesses superhuman abilities. He or she is the antagonist of the superhero comic narrative. Andrea Waling, on *Deconstructing the Super(hero)villain*, makes the point that villains are portrayed as lacking the sense of morality. Therefore, people are not expected to associate with them. When it comes to the bodies of super villains, Waling notes that they usually do not have the perfect bodies as superheroes. According to Waling, their bodies are usually deformed, asymmetric or mutated. They are a representation of the grotesque. There are however some exceptions that do not have grotesque bodies. Some common examples of popular grotesquelooking super villains in Western comics include the Joker, Darkseid, the Penguin and the Scarecrow. The joker for example is portrayed as a clown-faced villain. The Penguin and the Scarecrow, as their names suggest, both have a resemblance to a penguin and a scarecrow respectively. For Darkseid, he has a skin of stone as a result of an acquired mutation.

Jinamizi is the super villain in this comic. He is a powerful witch doctor with terrifying powers. In *Dunamis*, the technique of using the grotesque super villain is seen. Jinamizi has an appearance that is close to that of a monster. He has a severe face with long droopy earlobes. He is even seen to have claw-like hands. He is seen to have the ability of shooting purple lightning. Lulu compares it to an “exploding power transformer” (14). Jinamizi is portrayed as a bigger threat as compared to the bully in school. Like other super villains, Jinamizi is a criminal. He kidnaps albino children for ritual purposes. Evidence of this is his quest to capture Kenny for of ritual purposes. He is therefore a threat to Kenny and other people living with albinism in that community. As Kenny tries to escape danger, he catches the attention of some other characters that come to his aid.

The role of Jinamizi in the construction of Kenny's character is to emphasise on the belief in the connection of people with albinism with the supernatural. In places like Tanzania and Kenya, as investigative journalist Anas helps to uncover, it is believed that the bones of albinos contain some sort of spiritual power. In Ghana and other African countries, it is generally believed that albinos never die; they simply disappear. The existence of Jinamizi in the life of Kenny presents Kenny as a character who lives in fear of being abducted and harmed. The part of Kenny's life has made him an observant character. At a point, he recognises that a car is following him from a distance (pl. 2, p. 5). His early detection of being followed is what gives him the chance to get away from the men in the car. Considering all what Kenny's character entails, Mbwabi and Busuru use the comic as an avenue to project what people like Kenny go through in the real world. The comic has therefore been used for social representations just as much as other forms of traditional literature.

3.2.3 Support Characters in *Dunamis*

Unlike Karmzah who has to fight her battles solo, Kenny gets to have a team that supports him. When being pursued by the witch doctor, Kenny is able to run fast and long enough to catch the attention of other characters that go to his aid. These characters are Shaddie, Lulu, Charè and Dubbu.

3.2.4 Shaddie and Lulu

Shaddie and Lulu are a pair of related characters who are introduced together. Shaddie is a visually impaired boy, while Lulu is a much younger girl with a brace on her leg. When they are introduced by the writers, Shaddie and Lulu are seen walking home from school. They are both wearing school uniforms to prove that. Shaddie has on a pair of dark spectacles and holds a

cane in one hand while holding Lulu's hand with the other. Though he is blind, Shaddie is given a responsibility of getting the home safely. These two are depicted in a manner that shows them as complementing each other. As Shaddie is a guard to Lulu, Lulu helps to guide Shaddie. She gives him details of things that can be seen when he needs it.

Both Lulu and Shaddie's disabilities do not limit them from going into spaces that require ability. As already mentioned, both of them are students; which means that they perform tasks that other children perform. They have the opportunity and the ability to learn in order to create a life for themselves. Lulu shares her lesson about animals and tells him that she wishes to have the ability to run as fast as the cheetah. He says to her; "I believe you can, and there are also so many other things you can do better." (pl. 7: p. 7) Despite their physical impairments, Shaddie believes that they have the ability to do anything that they desire to do. Here, the writer widens the scope of ability to include the will of a person to do. In addition to being able to participate in academic and other activities, the writer places them in a situation of being of help to another. They are placed in the scene of Kenny's encounter with Jinamizi. This becomes possible because of Shaddie's ability to hear what is happening at the site from afar. He gets Lulu to guide him to the scene of the Kenny's predicament. On their way to the scene, Lulu raises concerns about the possibility of danger. However, Shaddie assures her of safety by telling her; "Don't worry. I'm here." (pl. 4: p. 9) His reassurance demonstrates how he does not consider his impairment as a hindrance to protecting Lulu.

3.2.5 Charè and Dubbu

Charè and Dubbu are the other characters that are put in the position to come to Kenny's aid. Even though the creators of the comic mention that the five characters have disabilities,

Charè and Dubbu show no visible sign of a disability in the first issue. There is a possibility that these characters could have hidden disabilities such as cognitive disabilities or deafness. In this case, the comic recognises that not all disabilities are visible to others.

Charè is a student at Kenny's school. She is a character who does not see Kenny's difference to be of relevance in her decision to come to his aid. She only sees a boy in danger and decides to help. This goes to show that not everyone discriminates against Kenny. She is the first to notice that Kenny is in trouble. Being the first help to get to Kenny, she is the first to fight the kidnappers with her superpower. Charè has the ability to control plants through the ground. She can be seen kneeling with her fingers touching the ground as she controls the plants (pl. 3: p. 13). She succeeds in defeating the other gang members, leaving Jinamizi as the last man standing.

Dubbu is the last person to be attracted by the chaos. The noise awakens him from his sleep, so he decides to find out what is happening. As already pointed out, his disability is not visible. However, the use of the thought bubbles instead of a speech bubble could be an indication of a speech impairment.

From the above, the writer shows that Kenny is not powerful enough to fight on his own. In spite of the fact that Kenny has super speed that can allow him to get away from attackers, it is not enough to save him from imminent danger. Creating a super character in this manner shows that sometimes, super characters need the help of a team in order to conquer. The use of the team in superhero narratives is a technique that has been used over the years by comic writer. In Western comics, some famous superhero teams include the Justice League, the Planetegers of *Captain*

Planet the Fantastic Four, the Ninja Turtles and the Avengers. Kenny's new friends thus come in help to work together to fight against the evil witch doctor. By using the team approach, the writer projects the idea of support from sympathisers. In other words, people living with albinism cannot fight against discrimination and violence by themselves. They need other people to join to help them in their fight. In this comic, other characters with disabilities are found in this team. As characters living with disabilities, they are the most likely to understand Kenny's situation.

3.3 Chapter Conclusion

The above discussion, character construction in the two comics, is seen to be influenced by the social environment within which these characters find themselves. Characters of two different backgrounds are depicted. Morowa has a job as an architect, while the characters in *Dunamis* are students. The nature of their abilities and disabilities are mainly projected through the challenges that they face. The representation of varying disabilities demonstrates how African comics are not centred on only one type of disability. Also, both comics present both negative and positive reactions to disability by other characters. In connection to the spiritual, both comics have demonstrated the belief in the relationship between disability and the supernatural. The depiction of this, however, differs. In *Karmzah*, it is demonstrated through the nature of the superhero. *Dunamis*, on the contrary, demonstrates this through Jinamizi, the villain. In terms of character construction, both comics mainly use the indirect form of characterisation. This is so because the narrative form allows the reader to know the characters from what is shown through direct speech, sound effects and the presentation of actions in picture form. The reader is therefore able to make deductions and judge the characters based on what he/she sees. Finally, both comics show strength in the individual as well as through teamwork.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSING *FRAGMENTS* AND *THE BEGGARS' STRIKE*

4.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses how Aminata Sow Fall and Ayi Kwei Armah represent characters with disabilities in *The Beggars' Strike* and *Fragments* respectively. The chapter consists of two sections. The first examines how Naana is woven into the narrative by looking at her strengths and weaknesses as a person with a disability. The second discusses the construction of Nguirane and other characters with disability in *The Beggars' Strike*.

4.1 Analysis of Disability in *Fragments*

In *Fragments*, Ayi Kwei Armah tells the story of a young man, Baako Onipa or Onipa Baako – which literally means “one man.” This name is reflective of his character as a loner, since he finds himself in a frustrating situation of trying to fit into a society that does not understand him. He travels to the United States for further studies. On his return, he is faced with certain expectations as a “been-to,” due to the materialistic society that he comes home to. The term “been-to” is used in reference to someone who has returned home from studying or working overseas. There is a general idea that anyone who returns from overseas is rich, and therefore expected to give out gifts to family and friends. However, Baako has a limited understanding of this belief. This results in conflict among characters of this narrative. Through the presentation of conflicting ideologies, Armah explores the various life expectations from the perspectives of the different characters in this novel. While most of the people that Baako encounters are believers of materialism, Naana is seen to have a conflicting view.

4.1.1 Naana

Naana is Baako's grandmother. She is an old woman with a visual impairment. As an old woman, her physical challenge is not only limited to her blindness but includes the bodily changes she experiences due to old age. Old age is usually associated with anatomical changes such as decrease in organ functions, susceptibility to sicknesses and, weaker bones and muscles. Old people are therefore considered to be one of the weakest social groups within society. Priority is thus given to them when it comes to assisting people to perform tasks. Consequently, the aged are not actively engaged in household activities. With the possibility of having one or more of the shortcomings associated with old age, Naana is portrayed to be a strong character rather than a weak one.

In *Fragments*, Armah offers Naana two major roles in the narrative. He does not only create Naana as a character in the story; he also gives her the role of being a narrator of events. Armah's narrative technique creates thirteen chapters of narration that allows the story to be told from different perspectives. Naana is the narrator of the first and last chapters of the novel. Her narrative role demonstrates how significant she is to the plot of the narrative, as she is the one who introduces and concludes the story of the novel. As a narrator, she introduces the events and characters that have contributed to the recent circumstances of her family: the day of Baako's departure and the hope of his return. The events of Baako's departure, as recounted by Naana, highlight a turning point in the life of the protagonist. This event consequently births the central theme of the novel. As Naana narrates happenings prior to the departure of her grandson, she reveals the role that she plays to ensure that his journey is a success. She tells of her brave act of satisfying the ancestors with enough drink as opposed to Uncle Foli who only cared about how

much drink he could have for himself. The name “Uncle Foli” used by Armah shows a semblance to the word “folly” which associates the actions of the uncle to foolishness. He is therefore revealed as a character with a shallow sense of reasoning as compared to Naana who thinks deeply about situations.

In the course of anticipating Baako’s return, Naana reveals her belief in the cycle of life. Her first statement states: “Each thing that goes away returns and nothing in the end is lost.” (11) She emphasises this belief and her faith in the return of her grandson saying that “nothing has been done so grave that in this case the circle should be broken. Through her reminiscing of events, her character is also introduced. She plays a role that is deeply connected to the life and experiences of Baako.

Baako’s return is the second main event in the life of his family. This is because of the perception that being a returnee from overseas has made him a better person: a man that can turn the circumstances of his family around. His mother confirms this by saying to Juana; “He will come back a man. A big man.” (56) His return has, therefore, been much anticipated by them, especially by his mother and grandmother. As he tries to return, his mother, at a point in time, loses hope of his return. The reassurance of his return is only after she receives a letter from her son as well as a confirmation from a prophet. Naana, on another hand, is a blind old woman who still has faith in the return of her grandson. She speaks the following lines in memory of the correction she made to the libation ritual before Baako’s journey.

One thing I will continue to tell them over and over again: he will return. They who have their eyes with them still but are nonetheless the shadowy ones, they will not have the hardness to destroy me for knowing that, because it is a knowledge close to their souls also, though they know it only as a wish, and it almost a stranger to them. (12)

These lines highlight the theme of vision and in the narrative. Naana compares herself to those who have the ability to see physically yet are unable to see as much as she who is blind does.

The following sections of this chapter examine certain events in the life of Naana that highlight her strengths and weaknesses.

4.1.2 Strengths of Naana

Despite the fact that Naana's disability hinders her from performing certain necessary tasks, she is not entirely negative towards her disability. In fact, she considers her blindness a timely blessing. Thus, she says: "Sometimes I know my blindness was sent to me to save me from the madness that would surely have come with seeing so much that was not to be understood." (23)

This speech is necessitated by her memory of the city's lights and chaos on the night of Baako's departure. Her acknowledgement of her disability as a blessing helps to reveal her perspective of what she considers to be the important things of life. She demonstrates here that the luxuries of life are mere material things that can distract one's focus in life. Hence, she is glad that she is free from the madness of materialism. Her perception of life eventually becomes one of the pillars that support Baako in his uncomfortable life as a returnee. She therefore values her grandson for who he is and not because of the material benefits that other characters hope to receive from him. Aside her relationship with Baako, Naana is generally able to see and relate with things that other characters are unable to see. They are unable to visualise more important things because they have been blinded by the assets of the physical world. This aspect of Naana's life is proof that her weakness is a contributor to her strength.

Naana's ability to pay attention and recognise situations is not only limited to happenings of the present. She also has the ability to see into the future. During her conversation with Baako at the outdoorings, she predicts the loss of her great grandchild.

Still, I'm not forgetting my anger. You should have saved the child."

"He's all right, Naana."

"You talk like a child, yourself. Where have they put him?"

"They made a thing to put him in, Naana. He's just here, lying in it."

"My mind can see him lying in state now."

"He's all right, Naana, really. He's been very quiet." (262)

Here, Naana likens Baako to a child just before she inquires about the pouring of libation. Her worry about the libation has a semblance to what happened before Baako's departure for his studies abroad. In Baako's case, the cycle of life is not broken because the ritual was done properly. However, her great grandson's life cycle is broken because the family refuses to pour libation. Baako does not understand the gravity of the situation as much as Naana does. He only refers to it as a new festival.

Naana also recognises that the people around her have lost focus of the more important things of life. She appalled by the fact that tradition has been abandoned. The following proves how she believes her family to be blind by disregarding tradition. It also exposes her thoughts on how she also considers herself as a visionary.

She sighed. "Great Friend, they have taken to forgetting the ancestors themselves. They do not look to those gone before, and they do not see the child. Where are their eyes, then? (262- 263)

In addition to the above, Naana is one character that supports Baako as much as she can. Like other characters, Naana might not fully understand who Baako is as a writer. Despite this, she shows interest in Baako's work as much as any aspect of his life. An example of this is in Chapter 8 when Naana comes to speak to her grandson when he sets fire to some of his written work. In this scene, both Naana and his mother, Efua, are present. The only thing that his mother helps him with is the fire with which he burns the scripts. Naana, on the contrary, goes closer to Baako to demonstrate the care she has towards him. She is even interested in knowing why Baako would want to destroy his work. Her action opposes that of Baako's mother, who asks what the scripts are yet shows no interest in what he does with them. Baako recognises Naana's concern for him. The following lines prove both of their feelings towards each other in that situation.

He laughed weakly, and rose to go.

"Don't go," Naana said. "Sit with me. You're sad, aren't you? I can't understand why you always refuse to tell me what is happening."

He sat by her, and saw the strain on her face disappear.

"Will you talk to me? Not now, if you don't want to, but another day?"

"I will, Naana, but not today." (222)

Here, Baako has not described his inner troubles concerning his writings to his family. Yet blind Naana recognises that Baako is troubled and approaches him to see if she can be of any help to him. Recognising Baako's problem proves Naana's ability to pay attention to situations. Even so, that this is not a trait that is usually expected of a blind person. The expression "...the old woman had been right in her blindness" (251) is proof of this. Despite her willingness to avail herself to help Baako deal with his problems, Baako is not willing to share the details of his problems with

his grandmother. He does not seem to think his grandmother will be able to understand the depth of his problems. Telling Naana that he will tell her another time is then a way to satisfy her interest for a while.

4.1.3 Weaknesses of Naana

Although Naana admits that she possesses a vision that is beyond the physical, she realises that she is of no use to anyone. She says so herself: “Only the strong ones can fail to be understood and still survive, and I am of no use to anyone...If I see things unseen by those who have eyes, why should my wisest speech not be silence?” (12) Her complaint about being useless in this context is not admittance to actually being useless, but it reveals other characters’ reaction to her physical impairment. To them, the loss of a physical capability is a reduction of the usefulness of a person. In the case of Naana, her condition is even worse since she is not only blind but also old.

Even as a strong character, it is undeniable Naana has her shortcomings: her disability, old age and her inability to come to terms with the practices of the modern society in which she finds herself. From the first chapter of the novel, one consequence of Naana’s physical impairment is told. She does not realise that night has fallen, thinking that she is receiving warmth from the sun. The thought of this happening makes her reveal her inabilities in the statement: “I am person no more, unable to help myself.” (12) Apart from the fact that Naana talks and reminisces about her weakness, there is evidence in some of her actions to prove it. An instance of this is a description of how she walks “at her usual slow, blind pace (108).

In addition to the above, Naana’s disability also receives certain responses from other characters. These contribute to highlighting her physical weakness and limitations. In some

instances, there has been the need for other characters to come to her aid in order for her to perform some everyday tasks that require them to be her physical eyes. One of such is in the first chapter, where she is prompted about the sun going down, and the need to go back in the house because it is night. Another of such instances is during the “outdooring” when Baako has to help his grandmother to drink and update her on events of the ceremony (262). Her reliance on other characters in this manner makes other characters see weakness in her, even when she does not seem to need their assistance in the moment; this includes Baako:

“Go back Naana,” he said, holding her arm. “Go back to your room and rest. I will go and see what made Araba cry out.” (108)

Baako finds a need to attend to Naana first instead of Araba who needs the help more. This proves the perception of helplessness that others have towards the old woman. This gesture reflects one way by which the nondisabled react when they encounter disability: the urgent need to offer support to the “helpless”. In this situation, it is clear that Araba is the one that needs the most assistance because she is having a medical emergency. Therefore, Baako could have simply ignored Naana in order to go and offer the needed assistance to his sister. He however takes time to ensure the safety of his grandmother before going on to help his sister.

There are certain instances in the narrative which bring out her shortcomings as a person with a disability as well as her capabilities as a person with a disability. One of such is when Araba goes into labour and needs to be taken to a hospital. Even in her old and blind state, she goes ahead of Baako to find out what has happened to Araba. Even though she is expected to sit back in her state, as Baako asks her to do, her first instinct to go to Araba’s aid. Her shortcoming at that point is revealed in the way she walks: “her usual slow, blind pace”. (108) Also, Naana makes use of her sense of smell in order to compensate for her inability to see. She is able to tell

that Araba's cry has to do with the unborn baby. She is able to tell the danger that both mother and baby may probably be in:

“It is the baby; I smelled blood,” Naana said, her eyes staring and her closed mouth trembling with fear. “But Great Friend, this is such an early time for him to come, if he is to stay now.” (108)

Though she is able to determine to determine the problem at hand, she allows Baako to take charge of the situation since she cannot do much to help Araba in her (Naana's) state. Even when Baako brings the taxi driver in to help, Naana immediately recognises the presence of a stranger in their home. Without being informed by the presence of the man, she just goes ahead to ask Baako about his friend.

Another event in which both Naana's shortcoming is revealed is the outdoor of Efu and Kwesi's baby. During this event, Naana asks Baako to help her with her food and drink. She does not hesitate to ask for help because she knows what her limitations are. Moments before the presentation of this weak side of Naana, Naana shows Baako what she is capable of in spite of her inability to see:

“Ah, Baako, it was you I was searching for,” she said. He gave her a chair near the low veranda wall he'd been sitting on. “I would have found you, too,” the blind old woman continued.

“How, Naana?”

“You're smiling. Your voice says you don't believe me. But I can always find you. I was listening for a silence in the noise. I knew you'd be there.” She laughed. (262)

The above also proves how attentive Naana is to Baako's character. She recognises that Baako is different from the others. Hence, describing him as the silence within the noise.

4.1.4 Naana versus the Society

The clash that Naana is involved in is mainly against her family and the society. The opposition between her and the other characters is a conflict of ideals, which is mainly a result of generational differences. The conflicting perspectives are projected through the life of Baako. On one hand, Naana shows value to basic human principles while the family and the society on another hand are focused on material things. The society and Baako's family are expecting him to own and provide certain things by reason of being a "been-to." For instance, quite a number of characters have inquired of his car. Even the young lady at the outdooring refuses to accept that Baako has no car, and she keeps asking him about it. She thinks that Baako is only joking about not owning a car, and that the car is still on its way to Accra. The materialistic view and expectations of these characters is what pushes Baako to insanity. In the end, Naana is the one who wins. The rest of the family and the society only end up destroying Baako's life by driving him to insanity.

They also lose because Baako cannot be their source of material wealth as they expect.

4.1.5 Life and Death

In the last chapter of the narrative, Naana is given the role of concluding the narrative just as she begins in the first chapter. In the final chapter, she reiterates her belief in the cycle of life.

The first statements of both chapters are similar to each other. The first chapter states:

Each thing that goes away returns and nothing in the end is lost. The great friend throws all things apart and brings all things together again. That is the way everything goes and turns around. That is how all living things come back after long absences, and in the whole great world all things are living things. All that goes returns. He will return. (11)

Then the last chapter states:

The time has come. What lies outside me is ready for me, and I too am ready to go. Such inward readiness to go does not come if this world here has room and use for us. When there is no use the spirit in us yearns for the world of other spirits, travellers who have crossed over from this side, just as the spirit themselves hope and wait for the new one coming. (277)

Throughout the last chapter, she places emphasis on how ready she is to die and how material things are fleeting. Restating this shows how unswaying she is, thus contributing to her visionary trait as a character. Her readiness to transition into the land of the ancestors demonstrates her willingness to be an example of the cycle of life. Her last words, which also end the whole narrative are quite instructive in this direction:

I am here against the last of my veils. Take me. I am ready. You are the end. The beginning. You who have no end. I am coming. (286)

4.2 Character Construction in *The Beggars' Strike*

In *The Beggars' Strike*, the writer discusses issues of politics and religion by putting the marginalised at the fore. In the novel, the characters with disability are mainly seen to be street beggars. The novel centres on the clash between the socially-marginalised and political authorities. This consequently demonstrates how these beggars, otherwise known as the *bàttu* bearers, affect the political success of Mour Ndiaye. Mour Ndiaye is the director of the Department of Public Health and Hygiene. In the story, he is a man who has risen from an unfortunate background to that of privilege. As a man of great ambition, Mour Ndiaye would do anything to position himself in a higher office. His successes are however accomplished with the help of three other characters: his wife Lolli, his assistant Keba Dabo and his marabout, Serigne Birama. With the help of his assistant, Keba, he works towards a promotion to a higher political position. The events lead to the revelation of how the characters with disability are built into the narrative.

4.2.1 Characters with Disability

This section discusses the PWDs in *The Beggars' Strike*. The discussion entails how the characters are portrayed by means the stereotypes that are associated with disability. The discussion reveals how the society views the PWDs in the narrative. It also analyses the interaction between the PWDs and other characters that results from the stereotyping.

The beginning of this narrative introduces the reader to some of the negative stereotypes that are attached to PWDs in literary works and society. PWDs are described by some members of the society as being sinister, objects of violence and a burden to the society. Their existence is so much of a bother that the issue concerning them has become worthy of being published in the newspaper. A newspaper publication shows that the issue is one that is of utmost concern.

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. The Capital [*sic*] 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. 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 [*sic*] men, these parodies of human beings, as persistent as they are ubiquitous! (1)

The above description of the beggars depicts them as being a nuisance to the society. The description of this group of disabled characters makes them seem less human. They are therefore not worthy to be seen on the streets like any other person. Other derogatory description of these characters is the reference to them as “these folk who poison the air with their smell” (14) and “an obstacle to the hygiene of the City” (17).

Mour Ndiaye and Keba Dabo are the two characters that are instrumental to the clearing of the beggars from the streets. In a conversation with Keba Dabo, Mour Ndiaye expresses worry about the issue of the beggars on the streets. His claim is that it is affecting economic development negatively. Their conversation reveals immense frustration about the existence of these beggars on the streets. Mour Ndiaye believes that their existence is detrimental to the progress of the city. He blames them for the reduction of the number of tourists in the last year as well as unhygienic conditions in the city. Mour Ndiaye reveals his feelings about the situation to Keba by stating the following:

These beggars, they...well, they're making life a bit difficult for us, really. Didn't I tell you to do something about them?

'You realise,' the latter went on, 'their presence is harmful to the prestige of our country; they are a running sore which should be kept hidden, at any rate in the Capital. (2)

His statement expresses an association of the PWDs to isolation, as they do not deserve to be in public with other people. There is creation of an image of uncleanness of the characters. The presentation of the ideas of isolation and uncleanness alludes to the social treatment of people with leprosy as seen in the Bible. The conversation proves how seriously he views the issue of the beggars on the streets, hence his efforts to get them out of the public space.

Unlike Mour Ndiaye who has political reasons for fighting the beggars, Keba Dabo's issue with the beggars is rather personal. He is simply disgusted by them. To him, it is dehumanising for a human being to beg his/her fellow human being for money. Although he keeps his opinions to himself, he does fail to think of how filthy and shameless he considers these beggars; not considering that some of them are compelled to beg due to poverty. Keba is a representation of individuals who do not actively attack disabled beggars physically or verbally, yet they purposely make it a point to not be helpful to them. Although he demonstrates a negative attitude towards

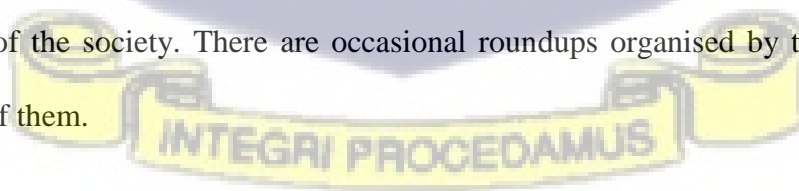
them, Keba does not consider them as lowly as other characters do. Keba does not regard them as less of humans; the reason he finds disgusting is that they are beggars. He holds the view that everyone should be able to provide for themselves no matter who they are. With this reason and several others from other members of the society, the beggars receive negative treatment constantly. An encounter between a young man and a blind beggar is one example of how these physically-challenged characters are treated.

Just as a young man was coming out of the shop, a beggar was feeling his way in and hit him with his stick. The young man swore at the beggar; the latter came back at him with some choice obscenities, to everyone's stupefaction. (1)

Taking a look at the above encounter, the young man is the one that has the ability to see and prevent a collision. However, he places the blame on the blind beggar who is only trying to find his way around. Also, the reaction of the people around shows solidarity with the young man instead of the blind man. They do not react to the young man swearing at the beggar. Yet, when the blind man retaliates, they are stunned. As the beggars are beginning to get fed up with how they are treated by the rest of the society, they speak up about how they feel. The blind man expresses his frustration by saying:

'Oh! Just because we're beggars, people think we're dogs! We're beginning to get fed up with the way we're treated!' (1)

As a result of this view of the beggars, they encounter harsh treatment from the government and some members of the society. There are occasional roundups organised by the government in order to get rid of them.



4.2.2 Strength and Limitations of Characters with Disabilities

In the present section of the study, we take a critical look at the physically-challenged characters in *The Beggars' Strike* and provide an examination of their strengths and weaknesses. First examine the general representation of the characters will be examined. After, a critical analysis of individual characters will be done in order to explore their strengths and weaknesses.

The negative treatment of these disabled characters consequently leads to the revelation of their strengths and weaknesses. The story presents characters with varying disabilities and their appearance as *battu* bearers. The *battu* is simply the vessel that the beggars use in collecting the money offered them.

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 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. (10) For most of the beggars, begging is not what they would choose to do if they had no disability. In a conversation about their being oppressed, one of them says; "...we begged because we couldn't work because of our physical infirmities." (61) Their disabilities have made most of them unable to work for themselves. As a result, many of them are living in poverty. This necessitates the need to give them in order for them to survive. Sagar Diouf, Keba's secretary, reminds her boss of this by telling him; "...religion teaches us teaches us we must help the poor.

How could they live otherwise?" (15) The statement to her boss is also a way to remind him of the importance of giving in Islam, which is the religion practised in their society. Even Serigne Birama sympathises with the beggars and does not understand why Mour Ndiaye should be fighting the less privileged in the society. During a conversation with Mour Ndiaye, he asks with astonishment; "You, having trouble with the beggars, you who gives so freely? Why should you have trouble with the beggars?" (17)

Another way by which these characters are portrayed to be weak is through struggling with non-disabled people for the same opportunities. It shows PWDs as weaker than able-bodied people.

...there's a whole crowd of people waiting already at the bus-stop and they rush at it and it's soon full up. So only the able-bodied men get on first. Beggars and women aren't strong enough to face the scuffle which often degenerates into a free-for-all. (89) The ability of the able-bodied to be stronger than the disabled is not unheard of since they have an anatomical advantage over PWDs. The categorisation of the PWDs with women is to emphasise the association of disability, as women are considered weaker than men.

Aside the presenting the disabled characters as a group, there are instances where characters are presented as individuals. The following gives more details about how some of these characters are constructed individually.

4.2.3. Madiabel

Madiabel is one of the disabled beggars that are affected by the actions of the government. He is one of the characters who are depicted as helpless in the conflict. He later loses his life as a result of his helplessness. The events that lead to Madiabel's death reveal different forms of oppositions he faces. He first faces resistance from the workers in the hotel in front of which he begs. This leads the manager to complain about him to the police, who in turn organises a round-up to get him away from the location. The measure taken against him begging at the hotel seems harsh, considering he is one lame man. The round-ups do not only involve the simple act of driving the beggar off the location; they are also physically assaulted. It is from him escaping from harm's way that he gets knocked down by a speeding vehicle. The following discussion of Madiabel's death by the beggars reveals how serious the round-ups are:

‘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’re human beings.’ (11)

Even after such an unfortunate incident, what actually causes him to lose his life is the fact that he was denied proper medical attention. The treatment meted out to Madiabel reveals further how he is considered as a ‘nobody’.

Aside Madiabel’s demise, there are other things that are said about him. This information that goes further into Madiabel’s life proves that he is not a weak or useless character as some other characters view him. He is portrayed as a hard worker who only resorted to begging due to unfavourable circumstances, and his goal to keep providing for his family.

...Madiabel the lame beggar. He had been a tinker in his native village, mending pots and pans. But fewer and fewer people brought cooking-pots with holes needing to be patched up...the agent...disappeared one fine day without paying him...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. (10)

It is clear from the above, that Madiabel has a life any normal person would. The fact that Madiabel has wives and children proves that disabled people are sexual beings. This information disproves the assumption that PWDs are non-sexual are pointed out by Kelly Gross. Another stereotype that is refuted here is how the disabled character is seen as a burden. Madiabel is seen in the above passage to be the provider for his family of eleven. He in fact even had a job, and only resorted to begging because someone cheated him. Even as a man that is away from his family, he takes the responsibility of providing for them seriously.

Despite the fact that Madiabel was not a part of the strike that the beggars organised against the government, his death was one of the factors that influenced the strike. Through his suffering and death, he thus becomes a strong tool for overcoming opposition against the disabled.

4.2.4 Papa Gorgui Diop

Papa Gorgui Diop is an old man with a comic talent that is admired by many. He portrayed as a man who exhibits tolerance and wisdom. At a time when he and his friends are being attacked in the roundups, he encourages others to be patient and reasonable in their reaction to the situation. The following shows how the other characters see reason in the words he speaks.

When you beg you have to learn to be patient, to put up with a lot of things. If you need something from someone, you have to satisfy his whims. Besides Nguirane, those who give to us aren't the ones who knock us about. ' Many voices are raised above the general murmurs. 'That's true, that's true. Gorgui Diop's quite right. You have to learn in life not to let a situation get out of hand. 'Gorgui Diop spoke the truth. Gorgui Diop's words are dictated by reason and wisdom.' (21)

The description of his character portrays him as a character who is tolerant with situations and does not fight oppositions that come his way. He rather tries his best to avoid the problem he faces. His character proves that not everyone has the will to fight when opposition comes their way.

4.2.5 Nguirane Sarr

Nguirane is one of the blind men among the beggars. He was not blind from birth. He lost his sight as a result of an illness. He is a beggar who carries himself with an air of extreme importance. For a blind man, he knows how to dress and be presentable enough to others:

Among them is blind Nguirane Sarr, always correctly dressed with his tie, soiled starched collar, dark, gold-rimmed spectacles, invariable navy-blue suit and white stick. Nguirane Sarr has a somewhat distinguished air, perhaps because he always holds his head high and bent slightly to the left. (9)

He is not the only that regards him as important. Details about his begging site reveals how important he is to some members of the society:

His vantage point is the roundabout near the Presidential Palace where he regularly receives a coin, to which is associated a wish, from everyone who is about to obtain an audience with the President of the Republic. Charity opens doors, so here goes a final coin to open the door of the President's heart. (9)

Unlike, Papa Gorgui Diop who likes to handle situation calmly, there is Nguirane Sarr who is intolerant of how they are treated. After being personally attacked severely, he speaks out about his feeling concerning how they are treated.

'They're beginning to make our lives intolerable. Just because we're beggars, they think we're not quite human!'

And yet he had thought he had won their respect and even their friendship...

'They laid into me today. They tore my clothes, confiscated my stick and broke my glasses...Is that a way to treat a human being?'

Nguirane is at the end of his tether. Blood is oozing from a cut over his right eye that stretches down to his ear. (20)

From the above, Nguirane is seen to have the idea that he was respected by others. He is therefore in shock that he was treated harshly by them. He has a high standard for himself, and does not look down on himself. The respect he has for himself is what makes Mour Ndiaye think of him as a "cheeky blind beggar never moved for the money" (93). He is even described as a "jackanapes of a blind beggar" (98) by Mour Ndiaye just because he is not moved by money that Mour Ndiaye throws at the beggars.

4.2.6 The Beggar in the North

There is also the mention of a beggar who was accorded respect by many. This beggar of the north is a representation of a person with disability who is not regarded as unimportant.

He had seen in a city in the north of the country, the extraordinary case of a beggar who attracted the respect and admiration of the whole population. This man only begged once a week, on the night of Thursday to Friday. This was for him the occasion to pay tribute to God's might and sing the praises of the glory of the Prophet. (94)

Even as an old man who is visually impaired, his character is a representation of strength. What makes his case more impressive is the fact that a man who cannot see has a great sense of fashion.

...dressed majestically in an ample white or indigo boubou stiff with starch, worn over an equally ample *turki*, from which a kind of small tab, at the neck, pressed against the Adam's apple of the venerable blind old gentleman, leaning on his stick. (94)

His stick as used here does not only represent his fashion sense but also a symbol of his disability, as he needs it to find his way around. It is in fact his disability that creates the chance for admiration by others. This is because his way of life is not expected of an old, blind beggar. The creation of his character reveals the author's tendency to relate respect to visually impaired characters. Evidence of this is how Nguirane's character is presented.

4.2.7 The Woman Who Never Begged

The Beggars' Strike mainly categorises its disabled characters as *bàttu* bearers. However, there is the mention of a woman, who in spite of her disability, never decided to become a street beggar. This is a woman who is disadvantaged in ways: a one-armed woman and a single mother. For a period of time, she had to rely on her husband's family to be able to care for her children. However, after some conflict with the family, she decides to cut herself off and be independent.

She works hard the best way she can in order to take care of her children without having to beg on the streets. She wins the admiration of Keba Dabo as a result. She is a representation of a strong character who works against her challenges in order to achieve her goal. She therefore disproves the assumption that PWDs are always dependent or burdens on others.

Overall, these disabled characters are not as helpless as others may think them be. After his experience with them, Mour Ndiaye “thinks to himself that these people are possibly not as wretched as one might have imagined” (81).

4.2.8 Overcoming the Government

In the centre of this narrative is the strike by the beggars. The strike is a response to the governments order for the beggars to leave the streets. As a result of the harsh treatments from the government, the beggars decide to leave the streets.

During the initial roundups, the beggars keep going back to the streets to beg making it difficult for the government to get rid of them. In the beginning, they are obstinate about leaving the streets because begging is the source of their income. Therefore whenever the raids are executed, they go into hiding briefly and return as soon as situations are calm again. The government therefore decides to find a harsher way to get rid of them for good. They also try to control the minds of the beggars into thinking that what they do is degrading. From the manner in which Keba instructs the taskforce to deal with the beggars, it is revealed that the Government considers the activities of the beggars as an offence.

‘If it is their first offence, 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 the begging lowers their dignity.’ (2)

After the government goes to the extreme of physically abusing them, they decide to stop going to the streets to beg. Knowing how important they are to the society, they are not afraid to give up begging on the streets. As they are no longer on the streets, people who want to perform their Islamic duty of giving then have to go to their home to offer their gifts and money. Proof of this is seen in the following: “They are desperate, terrorised; they want a solution which will ensure that they are treated as citizens with full rights like everyone else.” (37)

The strike is what begins the downfall of Mour Ndiaye. In order to assure his political promotion, is supposed to give offerings to the beggars. This offering is however supposed to be offered on the streets. Mour decides to pay them a visit to get them to return to the streets. The sight meets makes him think he can easily get them to come back to the streets to receive his offering:

Nguirane Sarr, in his suit and tie, continues to draw plaintive melodies from his guitar; he sings the song of friendship that a little girl composed far-off times to immortalise her play-mate, the hippopotamus, who was shot by a cruel hunter.

Mour was struck by the sight. Astonishment rather than compassion. He has never seen, as if simultaneously projected onto a screen, the image of so many physical defects, so much physical decrepitude and human disintegration from which, it is true, some patches of light stand out... (80)

He however realises how wrong he is. Despite telling him that they would show up, none of them shows up on the streets. Out of anger and frustration, he lashes out, “The rogues! the hypocrites! the liars! That’s the reason why they are reduced to begging... They’ve only got what they deserve!” (89)

However, desperation makes him realise that he needs to do the will of the beggars in order to get them to comply. As the narrator puts it; “What was he to do? For the moment they’ve got the

power in their hands” (89). He considers how the beggars make a fool of him as “an irony fate” (98) because he thinks that he could move them with his money. He decides to put up with their behaviour because he needs their help. In the end, the beggars win the war that was waged against them.

From the above discussion, the beggars do not only have individual positive traits, but they are also strong when they come together as a team. The writer presents a united group of characters that win a war by relying on one another. The writer also shows how they are important in the lives of the able-bodied characters in the novel.

4.2.9 Friends of the Disabled

With the harsh treatments that the disabled characters receive from non-disabled characters, there are characters that stand with them throughout their troubles. Examples of such characters include Serigne Birama, Salla Niang, and Sagar Diouf. Serigne Birama and Sagar Diouf speak against the harsh treatment of the disabled. They are presented as characters that have respect for the disabled characters even though they are not disabled themselves. For Salla Niang, she is closely associated with the beggars. She is in charge of their collections and makes sure that the beggars have what they need. She has respect for them because she considers them as family.

After examining the characters in *The Beggars Strike*, we see a presentation of characters that do not only exist as a group, but there are aspects of the lives of the PWDs that are exclusive from others. This presentation makes the reader aware of the struggles and successes of the PWDs both as a group and as individuals. There is also a representation of both positive and negative response to disability.

From the discussions of the novels in this chapter, there are two approaches to character construction of PWDs from one novel to the other. First of all, *Fragments* presents the disabled character as being alone in her struggle while *The Beggars' Strike* presents most of its disabled characters as being part of a group. Moreover, this group of disabled characters are shown to be in a physical fight with the government, whereas Naana is seen to be in a cultural battle with her family and society. There are also traits of similarity in both narratives. One is how characters are constructed in a way that shows their spiritual significance. In terms of character presentation, both narratives use both the direct and indirect forms of characterisation. Finally, both novels present characters that use their disabilities as tools of success in the challenges that they face.



5.0 CHAPTER FIVE: COMPARISON, FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In this chapter, discoveries made from the representations of disability in the novel and the comic will be compared. The chapter will also conclude the research. It consists of four sections: comparison between the two genres, the findings of this research, the conclusion of the paper and recommendations for further studies.

5.1 Comparison between the Comics and the Novels in Representing Disability

Taking into consideration the forms of both genres of literature, it is clear that there is bound to be some dissimilarity between them. Despite the difference in presentation, thematically, both genres explore social concerns through their characters, especially regarding the experiences that surround the encounter with disability. For instance, there are projections of stereotypes, challenges and strengths that accompany disability. Having examined the two genres in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, the purpose of the present section is to highlight the similarities and differences in representation between the genres. This will be done by showing how representations of disability are portrayed in terms of form and content as revealed from the previous discussions of the main texts.

5.1.1 Disability Stereotypes

In both genres, the disability stereotypes mentioned by Kelly Gross are present. Though Gross mentions the stereotypes in relation to disability in comics, they are also evident in the traditional novels. There is a demonstration of the stereotypes through how other characters perceive the characters with disabilities. In the traditional novels, especially in *The Beggars' Strike*, the negative stereotypes are attributed to PWDs through the way that they are described

and treated by other characters. It is evident in both genres that other characters mostly view the disabled characters through a lens of negativity. Kenny's bully, for instance, considers Kenny as laughable. There are also the thugs in Pemba who treat Karmzah as being pathetic. In the traditional novels, Naana's family treats her as a burden who is unable to fully participate in everyday life due to her visual impairment. The family's attitude towards Naana emanates from the fact that they have to help her perform daily activities. In *The Beggars' Strike*, the newspapers and government officials describe the disabled people with multiple stereotypical epithets: pitiable and pathetic, laughable, objects of violence, their own worst- and only-enemy, sinister and evil, a burden on the government and the society, and being incapable of fully participating in everyday life. The hugely discriminatory perception of society explains why the disabled are bullied and disregarded. The representation of these relationships among the characters in both genres demonstrates how the writers of both genres project the ordeals of PWDs in some African societies.

Taking a look a look at the disabled characters away from the perspectives of other characters, we see a defiance of some of these negative stereotypes. Firstly, none of these characters are shown to be in the background of the narratives. They all play major roles in the navigation of the plots in both genres. Even in *Fragments* where Baako is the main character, we have seen how Naana's existence is essential to the events of Baako's life. In *Karmzah* and *The Beggars' Strike*, the foregrounding of the disabled characters begins from the titles of these narratives. The plots of the stories are then built around these characters as well. Secondly, the character constructions in the selected texts prove that disabled characters are not portrayed as being their own worst enemies. On the contrary, they face enemies that are external. They are also portrayed to be the solutions to the enemies they encounter. One clear case of this in the

traditional novel is how the beggars come together to find a solution to the harassments they experience frequently from the government. Rather than making situations worse for them after what happened to Madiabel and Nguirane, they decide to leave the streets. Their decision to stay away from the streets is proof that they desire what is best for them; in this case, that is not getting injured. In *Dunamis*, this point is proven through the efforts of the children joining hands with Kenny to help save him from abduction. The other disabled characters, Naana and Morowa/Karmzah, are also depicted as characters who want and do what is best for their family and friends, and themselves. Naana is careful to remind herself and her family of the right way of doing things in order not to encounter negative consequences. Morowa also puts a lot of hard work into making a living for herself. She also takes matters concerning her health seriously and she continually exercises her muscles to stay fit. Thirdly, the PWDs are not depicted as evil or sinister beings. In these narratives, their existence is beneficial to other characters. They serve as sources of blessings, guidance, protection and rescue to others. These are all traits that represent positivity in the life of an individual.

There are, however, some differences in how some of the stereotypes reflect. It is observed that the comics do not represent the sexuality of their characters. For instance, in *Dunamis*, the silence on the issue of sexuality is understandable because the disabled characters are children. In *Karmzah*, however, Morowa is a young woman of marriageable age. Despite her age and her achievement, she is not portrayed as being in any amorous relationship or having any children. Though the representation of sexuality is absent in the comics, it is present in the traditional novels. There is Naana, who is the mother of Efua. Also, in *The Beggars' Strike*, there are some disabled characters, who have spouses and children. Some of these characters include the woman who never begged and Madiabel – who even has two wives and eight children. The

representation and non-representation of the characters' sexualities reflect the readership and the purpose of the works. The novel is a genre that typically targets a mature readership. Considering the styles and subject matters discussed in both novels, it is clear that a mature audience is the target. Also, the representation of sexuality is essential to the discussion of family relations in the novel. Unlike the novel, *Karmzah* and *Dunamis* tend to focus mainly on disability rather than other forms of identifying the characters. The silence on sexuality also emphasises the young target readership of the comics.

5.1.2 The Supernatural

Another observation is that both genres make provision for a connection between disability and the supernatural. In both genres, there is a reflection of the belief in the closeness of the disabled to the supernatural. An example of this belief system is seen in Ayobami Kehinde's statement on Yoruba myths, legends and folktales on the disabled:

...the disabled are referred to as 'Eni Orisa' (Divine Beings). It is believed that they are the closest allies of Obatala, the Yoruba god of creation. In the Praise Poetry of Iran Olufe (the Olufe Clan), the disabled are said to be welcome visitors at and even residents of 'Ile Orisa Obatala' (the Obatala Shrine). In these legends, the lame, the blind, the albino, the hunchback and the like were, in the past, always found in the palace of Ooni of Ife. There, they performed wonderful and unexpected exploits. (62)

In the traditional novels, first, in *Fragments* to be specific, we see how Naana is more spiritually sensitive and more drawn away from materialism than the other characters in the novel. In *The Beggars' Strike*, giving to the disabled is believed to be a source of blessing to the giver. This is the reason why givers go to the extent of finding the beggars even when the beggars have left the streets. Even Mour Ndiaye who dislikes the beggars perseveres to get them back on the streets as

he believes that his political success depends on them. Similarly, the comics provide a representation of a belief system akin to the novels. For instance, Kenny becomes a target whereas Karmzah makes an astonishing discovery. Kenny becomes a target due to the association of people with albinism with ghosts, witchcraft and curses. They are a therefore a source of spiritual fortification. As a witchdoctor, Jinamizi shares in this belief that Kenny is a source of supernatural power to make him more powerful; the reason why he decides to abduct Kenny. In *Karmzah*, the writer presents a fusion of disability and the supernatural in the person of Karmzah. When she becomes a superhero, it is evident that her crutches are the main source of her abilities and identification; just as it is a representation of her disability. Through this technique, there is a presentation of the idea of the supernatural and disability coexisting. The presentation of both characters in the way that they are expresses a belief in the connection to a divinity. In other words, it shows that these characters possess something that is greater than the natural.

In examining the manner in which each genre explores the theme of the supernatural, the comic demonstrates the supernatural on another level. There is the introduction of the superhero with extra-normal abilities. In the comics, though the characters are presented to be experiencing the life of any usual disabled person, there are some instances in the narratives that these characters reveal certain abilities that are unusual to normal everyday living. There exist extranormal activities such as super-speed, ability to control plants, teleportation and even the ability to speak multiple languages without having to learn to previously. With the abilities that these characters possess, they placed in positions of responsibility. They are made to become the solutions to social problems as well as agents of discipline and punishment to socially deviant characters. Clear instances of this include the fight against Jinamizi in *Dunamis*, and Karmzah's

rescue mission in Pemba. Unlike the comics, the traditional reveal a depiction of characters who have a usual everyday life. Although the disabled characters in both *Fragments* and *The Beggars' Strike* are not superhero characters, they still become the solutions to social problems as well as agents of discipline and punishment to other characters. They are able to achieve these without being given a direct responsibility to do so.

With regards to the concept of spirituality that has been discussed, both genres create characters that are both the embodiment of disability and spirituality. In this way of presentation, the genres are seen to show a convergence on their portrayal of the relationship between disability and spirituality. An example of a Western disabled character possesses supernatural powers Toph Beiphong of Nickelodeon's *Avatar* series. As a member of the of the fictional earth kingdom and possesses the powers of earth bending and metal bending. Earth bending is the ability to manipulate the earth in various forms. It is one of four natural element bending abilities that exist. The elements of nature are air, water, fire and earth. Earth bending for her creates an extension for her senses since she has been blind from birth.

5.1.3 Strength in Disability

Moreover, the strengths of characters in both genres are projected through their disabilities. With the analysis conducted in the two previous chapters, we have seen the roles that their disabilities play in achieving their successes in the various narratives. Even though PWDs would typically be seen as weak due to certain physical limitations, the writers of both genres give them some advantage over other characters. The disregarded street beggars become the “bosses” when the rich eventually realise the important role they play in the latter's success. Naana is able to focus on the more important aspects of life as her blindness shields her from the unnecessary glamour of the world she finds herself in. Similarly, Kenny is able to build

resistance against attacks as a result of his condition. He has a speed advantage that helps him to get away from his bullies and attackers. Karmzah's abilities are linked to her disability as a means of defence against opposition. Another way by which their strengths are projected is through their physical capabilities in everyday life. They are not useless as Naana describes herself in *Fragments*. In both genres, we see evidence of disabled characters living normal everyday lives such as having jobs, attending school and having spouses and children. Narratives of both genres therefore demonstrate that disability is not a presentation of weakness, but an opportunity for strength to be revealed. In other words, the comic and novel converge on the perception that disability is only apparent, and that, ultimately, what is believed to be a handicap provides useful resources to enable the disabled to live a worthy life. The logic involved in turning disability into strength—and sometimes 'super strength' or 'super-ability'—is found in nature. In the animal kingdom, for instance, it is the animals disadvantaged by lack of physical size and strength that are usually the most venomous: the scorpion, the snake, the shrew, the spider, the box jellyfish, the gila monster, the cone snail, the stonefish, among others. The natural instinct for self-preservation makes these small, and, therefore, disadvantaged preys develop extraordinary abilities to defend themselves, just as the disabled in the worlds of the comic and novel do. In the world of myth, also, it is the disadvantaged animals that possess the craftiest wiles. For instance, all the tricksters in mythology are small animals. In the African mythological landscape, there is Ananse (Spider) as the archetypal Akan trickster; in the Yoruba tradition, there is Ajapa (Tortoise) as trickster; among the Igbo trickster is Mbe (Tortoise); there are Leuk (Rabbit) and Bouki (Hyena) as tricksters of the Wolof of Senegal and The Gambia. In European mythology, there is the cunning trickster Fox, who also features in Native American folklore as

Coyote. In North American folklore, there are Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox as tricksters. Evidently, all these animals are relatively small and disadvantaged when compared with the formidable neighbours they share the habitat with such as Lion, Elephant, Crocodile, Rhinoceros and others. Incidentally, in most of these myths and folktales, the trickster is closely associated with divinity. In the Akan tradition for instance, Ananse is the uterine brother of Nana Nyankopon (God) (Amissah-Arthur). In literature and mythology, therefore, it seems, disability or the disadvantage that comes from physical inferiority is often compensated for by the assumption of the supernatural/super-strength/super-ability. From the above, one can suggest that the convergence between the comic and novel on the account of the resourcefulness of disability reflects the mythopoetic logic of the folktale and myth and, therefore, projects a universal perception of disability.

5.1.4 Conflict

The works from both genres project the idea of multiple oppositions against the disabled characters. For instance, the beggars in *The Beggars' Strike* face resistance from Mour Ndiaye, Keba Dabo and the task force that execute the round-ups. In *Fragments*, when it comes to the idea of what is expected of Baako, Naana is seen on one side of the conflict whereas other family members and acquaintances of Baako stand on the opposing side. *Dunamis* presents Zablon the bully as well as Jinamizi and his gang. Karmzah has to fight a gang of thugs in order to rescue the hostage. From this form of representation, there is the projection of the idea that, PWDs have to face and overcome multiple obstacles in order to achieve their goals. The presentation of multiple oppositions against these characters reinforces the idea of strength in disability.

Further, both genres are seen to provide two perspectives when it comes to facing opposition. Just like in the traditional novel, the comic gives a representation of both the solo effort and the team effort. The solo effort, on one hand, has to do with the character having to fight his/her opposition(s) alone. In the traditional novel, this can be seen in *Fragments* as Naana's ideologies conflict with other members of her family. Another example of the solo effort is seen in *Karmzah*, during Karmzah's rescue mission in Pemba. On another hand, the team effort involves the characters fighting as a team or group, or the character getting help from another character in his/her fight against the opposing force. In *Dunamis*, for instance, other characters like Shaddie, Lulu, Dubbu and Charè come to Kenny's aid to fight against the witch doctor. In *The Beggars' Strike* also, the representation of unity of the beggars proves to be a weapon that helps them withstand the pressure of their war against the government. The technique of presenting both the solo and team efforts is a reflection of how PWDs face their everyday challenges in the real world. In some instances, some have dealt with their problems by themselves; while in other instances, some have friends, sympathisers and activists that help them deal with and overcome their challenges.

The primary texts of this research explore two types of clashes: the fist fight and the ideology fight. The fist fight refers physical combat between two opposing sides whereas the ideology fight involves a conflict of beliefs, ideologies or mind-sets. Both comic works feature fist fights. This is typical of superhero comics as there always has to be a hero/heroes and a villain. The villain is necessary for the creation of a physical obstacle for the hero to overcome. Trying to overcome the obstacle then becomes a way for the hero to make use of the abilities that he or she possesses. This idea is what is depicted in *Karmzah* when Karmzah fights with the thugs. She utilises all the super-abilities at her disposal in order to emerge victorious after the

fight. Dunamis also demonstrates this through the fight against Jinamizi. The purpose of including the combat feature is usually to allow the superhero to perform a social responsibility.

Like in the comics, there is a representation of the physical conflict in the traditional novel. In *The Beggars' Strike*, the writer includes the physical struggles that exist between the beggars and the government task force. Although the characters in this novel face a similar circumstance to those of the characters in the comics, they do not win their battles with physical weapons or special abilities. It is through their way of thinking that helps them gain advantage over their adversary. In *Fragments*, there is a conflict of beliefs as Naana's beliefs conflicts with those of the other members of her family. Even with the existence of this form of conflict, Naana is still placed in a position of responsibility just like the hero. She strives to get her family to do things the right way in order to avoid disaster. From this discussion, it is realised that the traditional novels explore both types of clashes while the comics present only the fist fight.

In the battles that the disabled characters find themselves, certain weapons are created by the writers to help these characters win their wars. The weapons they use are not necessarily physical harmful devices, but a part of their identities as PWDs. Their weapons include vision, the battu, crutches, fear and unity. These symbols of disability that are built into these narratives become the powerful tools that help them overcome their opposition.

The issue of opposition represented by both genres emanates from the existence of difference. In different societies, as also represented by several works of literature, difference becomes a cause of bullying and discrimination. A deviation from the norm of a society usually generates intolerances that may lead to attacking the one considered different. The existence of such human nature is the cause of social ills such as racism, xenophobia and religious

intolerance. Including opposition in thus an indication of its existence in the world of disability, which is what both genres represent.

5.1.5 Formal Presentation

Whenever there is a discussion of differences and similarities between two genres of literature, one obvious feature that stands out first is the forms of presentation. In this case, there is the comic and the traditional novel. The physical features of both genres have already been discussed in the first chapter of this research. The discussion of these features has aided in the analyses that have been done in the two previous chapters of this work. The discussion on form here thus focuses on how the form contributes to the telling of the stories in the selected works.

To begin with, both genres make use of the third person narrative point of view. The narrators used in all four literary works tell the story by existing outside the story. However, two different forms of the third person narrator are seen in the two genres of literature. In *Fragments* and *The Beggars Strike*, the narrators are omniscient narrators. They follow all the characters and know all their thoughts and actions. This way, different perspectives of a story is presented to the reader. For instance, the round-ups in *The Beggars' Strike* are considered different things by different characters. From the perspective of Mour Ndiaye and Keba Dabo, it is just a way of cleaning the streets of filth. To the beggars, organizing the round-ups is a form of harassment and a way to rob them of their livelihood. In the same way, the narrator in *Fragments* follows all the thoughts and actions of all the different characters. This helps the reader to understand the connection between characters better and how it affects that plot of the narrative. In analysing the comics, I realised that there is a third person narrator who only follow the main characters of the story. As a result of using this technique, the reader only gets to know what other characters are

doing only when a main character is present at the scene. This is what is seen in both cases of *Karmzah* and *Dunamis*. For example, the reader gets to know about Kola and Panyin because Morowa works with them in the same office.

The use of dialogue in literature contributes to making the characters in a work realistic to the reader. In all the primary works in the current research, the reader gets to know the disabled characters mostly through dialogue. In all the four primary works of this research, the writers rely immensely on the use of dialogue to convey the fears, beliefs, emotions, successes, failures and the next line of action of the characters involved. This helps to make the characters more relatable to the reader.

Moreover, the reader gets to see the different ways by which characterisation is presented in these works. Considering the form in which comics are written, the reader gets to know the character by him/herself. This is because the reader gets to see the actions of the character, the appearance of the character as well as the speech and thoughts of the character. With this technique of representing character, there is indirect characterisation. In the traditional novels, there is the use of both the direct and indirect forms of characterisation. Although there is a blend of the two types of characterisation, the indirect dominates as the writers show far more than they tell.

Plot is an essential part of any narrative piece since a story cannot exist without a plot. In discussing plot between the two genres, there exists some variation in the plot sequence. Both comics present their narration in a chronological sequence. Even in a case where Bedwei wants to present some past information in one instance in *Karmzah*, she simple allows the character to tell it, rather than taking the narrative back in time. Muzu therefore has to be the one to tell the story of how he got trapped in the vase. He tells the story in his present circumstances instead of

the writer creating new panels to tell the story. This chronological plot sequence is absent from the way the traditional novels are written. In *The Beggars' Strike*, the narration mostly follows a time order. However, there are some major flashbacks that keep sending the narrative back in time. Some instances of this include the stories of the beggar from the north, Salla Niang, Madiabel and how Mour Ndiaye built a relationship with Serigne Birama. In *Fragments* also, the time order is not chronological. The writer makes use of flashbacks to make the past relevant to the present. One important flashback in the story is found at the beginning of the narrative, where the reader gets to know about the events before Baako's departure. The placement of this flashback is essential as its relevance affects the entire plot of the narrative.

From examining the forms, it is clear that both genres contain necessary elements of a narrative such as plot and dialogue. However, the presentation of ideas differs from one genre to the other. The divergences in narrative points of view and the techniques of characterisation demonstrate the varied ways by which issues of disability can be discussed. Also, unlike the novel that allows the narrator to make comments about the characters, the comic allows the reader to know the character without narrator interference.

5.1.6 Conclusion to Comparative Analysis

From the above discussion, it is evident that disabled characters can play the same roles as other characters of different social groups. The need for such representation is thus seen in how the four writers of the primary texts construct their characters in the stories they tell. By comparing how the two different types of genres construct these characters, it is clear that though techniques may differ, there is still some semblance between the two types of writing.

From the comparison, there is a clear revelation that disability stereotypes do exist in narratives that include PWDs. However, it is not always the case. The presence or absence of stereotypes will depend on how a writer chooses to construct a character into the narrative.

Also, though the characters are constructed differently, they still connected based on their experience and the purpose they serve. They affect the success of the lives of other characters in the respective narratives whether the characters are superheroes or not. The characters are created as a solution to issues that exist in the society. In other words, they play hero in their own different ways.

5.2 Findings

By analysing and comparing the character construction in the various works in this research, there is a revelation of the relevance of the diverse ways of constructing disability in a work of literature. This research has focused on the analyses of four works of literature that are categorised under two genres of literature.

In the area of disability studies in literature, it is clear that the works used in this this research are viable sources of information for analyses and discussion. They contain different relevant thematic concerns and stylistic presentations that can contribute to knowledge in disability studies, especially in the African literary space.

In representing the disabled characters, the writers construct not merely their disabilities a circumstance of life, but as an ironic identity. The writers of these works are careful to build the life experiences of the characters around their disability, but they are life experiences that empower rather than disempower them. The construction of the visionary character, for instance,

is projected through visual impairment. In the same way, the crutch becomes is not merely a symbol of identity but of support and strength for the superhero character.

In depicting disabled characters, these works highlight the struggles of PWDs and various ways by which they overcome such obstacles. From the analyses of the four literary works, it is realised that most of the challenges that the disabled people face are external. Rather than their physical impairments being an obstruction to them, it is society that limits them from having the lives that they aspire to live.

The section on divergences and convergences of the two genres demonstrates the connection that two different forms of literature can have. By examining the two genres side by side, it is clear that the comic genre is not so different from the traditional novel in terms of the purpose they serve. Just as in the novel, relevant literary elements exist in the comic making it possible to provide a comparative study of the two genres. It should, therefore, be possible to admit the comic into the mainstream of literary analysis since there are more elements that unite the comic and the novel as literature than separate them.

5.3 Conclusion

The findings of the present study – that examined *Dunamis*, *Fragments*, *Karmzah* and *The Beggars' Strike* – emphasise the fact that literature comes in different forms. The manner in which representations of disability is achieved in the comics serve a similar purpose to that of the traditional novels. The comic is, therefore, a relevant genre of literature and an instance of the many evolutions of the novel, the others being: the digital novel or e-novel, the audio novel, the hypertext novel and many other emerging forms.

5.4 Recommendation for Further Research

The African comic, in recent years, has brought about the emergence of writers that are interested in telling the story through both words and pictures. The present study has attempted to highlight the importance of the emerging African comic genre by demonstrating its relevance not only to the context of African literary studies but to the global critical discourse on a topic that is universally relevant: disability. Disability is, however, not the only focus of the comic. For further research, therefore, characters of other social groups such as the aged, women or children may be explored. This can be done with comic texts from other African writers.



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