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ABLEISM ACTIVISM THEORY: EMERGING PERSPECTIVE IN LITERARY CRITICISM

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Abstract
Critical disability theory was preceded by a good number of models of disability as instruments for analysing disability in various disciplines but rarely in literature. It is in an attempt to fill this gap that ableism activism theory is propounded in the present research. This new theory is found apt for critical analysis of ableism/ableism activism in literature. It comprises eight-point criteria for evaluating and classifying a literary work as ableism activism literature. Sembène Ousmane's postcolonial novel Xala is used here to study ableism/ableism activism in the light of ableism activism theory. The findings of this research show that Xala meets satisfactorily the new theory's eight-point criteria for evaluating and classifying a literary work in this dimension and so qualifies to be ranked as ableism activism literature.
Keywords: ableism, ableism activism theory, literary criticism, *Xala*, Sembène Ousmane

Résumé
La théorie du handicap critique a été précédée par un bon nombre de modèles du handicap en tant qu'instruments destinés à faire l'analyse des incapacités dans une variété de disciplines mais rarement en littérature. C'est grâce à l'effort de combler ce vide que la théorie d'ableism activisme est promulguée dans la présente recherche. Cette nouvelle théorie s'avère appropriée pour l'analyse critique d'ableism/ d'ableism activisme dans le domaine de la littérature. Elle dispose de huit critères qui servent à juger et à classifier une oeuvre littéraire comme partie intégrante de la littérature d'ableism activisme.Xala, un roman postcolonial de Sembène Ousmane sert ici de tremplin pour étudier l'ableism/l'ableism activisme à travers la théorie d'ableism activisme. D'après les constatations de cette recherche, Xala remplit de façon satisfaisante les huit critères dont on juge et classifie une oeuvre littéraire comme littérature d'ableism activisme. Il se range donc parmi les oeuvres de la littérature d'ableism activisme.
Les mots-clés: ableism, théorie d'ableism activisme, critique littéraire, *Xala,* Sembène Ousmane

Introduction

At creation, "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good (Gen. 1: 30). By implication, the world created by God was devoid of every form of deformity or disability, be it cognitive, visual, physical or mental and so can be rightly qualified as "ableist". God even blessed humans and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply, subdue and have dominion (Gen. 1:28). So, all people at the onset were "ableist". Even Saul's son Mephiboshet, who was with disability, was not born with it, but fell from the person carrying him and became lame. It is not surprising that as Ashley Eisenmenger contends: the world

wasn't built with people with disabilities in mind, and because of that, the world we live in is inherently "ableist" (eisenmenger@accessliving.org).

Thus as human societies began to witness the appearance of certain individuals with disabilities unfavourable attitudes and treatment of them emanate following the tendency to consider them as inferior comparing their abilities vis-à-vis those of able-bodied members of the society. There is the tendency to show dislike for and prejudice against people with disabilities; stigmatize them, and treat them as the other. This gave rise to the concept of ableism, which is quite recent. Ableism tends to classify certain social category as inferior just like racism, sexism, and xenophobia. Whereas the racist feels superior to a person or people from another racial group, a sexist to a female sex or gender, a xenophobic to people from other countries, the ableist feels superior to individuals with disabilities.

Oxford English Dictionary defines ableism simply as discrimination in favour of able-bodied individuals. Ableism, also known as ablism, disabilism (Brit English), anapirophobia, anapirism and disability discrimination, is also defined as the discrimination or prejudice against people who have disabilities, and can take the form of ideas and assumptions, stereotypes, attitudes and practices, physical barriers in the environment, or larger scale oppression (*Unban Dictionary*). Andrew Pulrang-Forbes adds that ableism can also refer to any statement or behaviour directed at a disabled person that denigrates or assumes a lesser status for the person because of his/her disability (http://www.forbes.com).

In the context of the present work, ableism refers to social and political prejudice, discrimination and ill-treatment meted out to people with or perceived with disabilities based on the assumption that they are inferior to able-bodied people in society: and so are defined by their disabilities and excluded. What emerges clearly in this definition is the dual nature of ableism viz.:

i. It is about the individual behaviour
ii. It is also about social structures and institutions.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ratified in 2008) lays emphasis on this dual nature of ableism as it states that "disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders (sic) their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others" (https://literariness.org>disability).

The present study has the major objective of promulgating a new theory in the field of literary criticism for analysing ableism/ableism activismand it is called ableism activism theory. A number of models have evolved for analysing disability in disability studies. Critical disability theory is also applied for disability studies in multi-dimensional approaches. A literary theory to address specifically ableism activism in literature is not yet in sight; this is what motivated this study. Ableism activism theory propounded here is, in actual fact, an emerging perspective in literary criticism.

There is the need to examine briefly what pioneering disability theorists had done previously, take a cursory look at representations of disability in literature before describing the new literary critical theory(ableism activism theory),putting it into application using Sembène Ousmane's *Xala*and finally drawing up conclusions.

Disability Models

The traditional "deficit" model and the "pathological" model have been in existence before the "medical model of disability." All these models of disability ascribe negative meaning to disability following its stigmatization of disabled people as damaged, inferior and requiring fixing or rehabilitation or a cure. The medical model defines people by their disability. It also promotes personal identity for the disabled individual.

Pioneering scholars in the field of disability studies came up with a new model tagged "social model of disability". This social model directs attention away from the body of the one with disability to the way the society treats the disabled persons. This is against the background that as Simone de Beauvoir, the French feminist, opined: one is not born but rather becomes a woman" (meaning: it is culture and not biology which determines what it means to be a woman (Beauvoir 1952:247). And so, it is society not biology which determines what it means to be a disable person.

Using the social model to analyse disability has important benefits, viz.: it enables disabled persons find a group identity in spite of the numerous differences among them. Take, for example, the physically challenged on wheelchair, certainly, does not have similar needs with individuals with cognitive and visual impairments. Simi Linton, therefore, jettisons the "medicalization of disability" or the medical model in preference to social model of disability, contending that disabled people are connected, not by personal symptoms, but by "social and political circumstances that have forged them as a group" (https://literariness.org>disability). Furthermore, the social model features disabled citizens

as holders of rights. The social model of disability maintains that people with disabilities are disabled by barriers operating in society that exclude and discriminate not by their impairment or difference. The barriers in question can be physical, for example, buildings not having toilets accessible to persons with disabilities (https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk).

Even though the social model was found crucial by Tom Shakespeare; he opted for more sophisticated methods which see disability as a phenomenon requiring different levels of analysis and interventions ranging from the medical to the social-political (https://literariness.org>disability).

Sharon Snyder and David Mitchel, in a somewhat similar manner, came up with the cultural model of disability. This cultural model explores disabled people's bodies while in interaction with the societies around them (https://literariness.org>disability). Thus the cultural model of disability envisages disability as a community; people identifying with a particular group or culture (for example; deaf culture), and became more involved with that culture and embrace their disability as part of their identity.

Tobin Siebers, for his part, propounded the theory of complex embodiment which envisages disability as a product of both the environment and features peculiar to the bodies in question such as "chronic pain, secondary health effects and aging (https://literariness.org>disability).

Even though scholars in the field of disability studies lay emphasis mostly on cultural aspects of disability, the field and policy makers largely focus on a combination of biology and culture.

Critical Disability Theory

Critical disability theory first published on Monday, September 28, 2019, contests traditional disability studies. It refers to a diverse, interdisciplinary set of theoretical approaches which aims to analyse disability as a cultural, historical, relative, political and social phenomenon, rather than an individualized medical issue attached to the body. Some use the term "critical disability studies", for example, Meekosha & Shuttleworth, Vehmas & Watson (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*).

Critical disability theory captures a wider range of approaches including those originating from the field of philosophy. Thus, unlike traditional disability studies, critical disability theory "actively seeks alliances and has produced work in conversation with other key areas of critical thought: critical race theory, postcolonial theory, and continental philosophy, among other strategies" (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). It also takes into account

exclusions, framing, and normative presuppositions of disability studies, favouring intersectional approaches and expansive inclusion.

Critical disability theory is a methodology not a subject-oriented area of study. As a methodology, the theory involves scrutinizing not bodily or mental disabilities but the social norms which define specific attributes as impairments, as well as the social conditions which concentrate stigmatized attributes in particular populations (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*).

Critical disability theory has the assumption that those individuals who have the label of disability share in overlapping and intensifying oppressions with pathologised and devalued persons in circumstances not easily recognized as "disabled". Schalk clearly puts it thus:

> One can study disabled people and not be doing critical disability studies and one can be doing critical disability studies and not be directly studying disabled people (plato.stanford.edu).

Against this background, critical disability theory is also interested in topics not readily recognized as concern for disability studies. For example, protest against radicalized disparities in health, education, policing; struggles for environmental justice and reproductive freedom: HIV/AIDS and fat activism; the writings of Andre Lorde on blindness and cancer and of Gloria Anzaldna on early menstruation and diabetes (plato.stanford.edu). What is striking here is that critical disability theory finds application in analysing disability in various disciplines but rarely in literary criticism.

Disability studies are presently recognized as a vibrant, interdisciplinary and intersectional field of study encompassing works from diversities of disciplines such as sociology, education, anthropology, history, medicine and law. There is, however a general concession that there is no exact equivalent of disability studies in French. An erudite French disability historian Henri-Jacques Stiker observes that disability studies sometimes unsatisfactorily referred to as "les études sur le handicap" does not exist at an institutional level in France.

Alexandre Baril has no contrary view as he contends that departments or programs in French-speaking universities mount no disability studies. Nevertheless, Zina Weygand highlights that French social scientists are beginning to include disability in their research agenda. The limitations notwithstanding, some works have contributed enormously to the development of disability studies in France, for example: Zina Weygand's *Vivre sans voir*, Jean-Christophe Coffin's *La transmission de la folie and* Stiker's *Corps infirmes et sociétés*. There are

interesting examples of historical enquiry that places disability at their centre. *Eléments pour une contre-histoire de la cécité et des aveugles* edited by Marion Chottin is a disability study in the area of history. The Paris-based peer-reviewed journal *ALTER: European Journal of Disability Research/Revue européenne de recherché sur le handicap* publishes edge-cutting disability research from the perspective of social science in both French and English just as the *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies sur l'incapacité*. In a move that ushers in a new direction in French Disability Studies, two graduate researchers, Céline Roussel and Soline Vennetier organized in November 2015 the first major international conference in France to openly encourage disability-studies-inflected reading of literature and art.

Critical disability studies, or the examination, analysis, and critique of literary and cultural representations of disability, is not always easily distinguishable from the wider concerns of disability studies activism but it is increasingly turning out to be a significant dimension in disability studies. Cathy Kudlick's interpretation of Guy de Maupassant's short story *L'aveugle* seems to be the most outstanding example of critical disability study in French literature. The study demonstrates that Maupassant's story reveals that the blind man suffered more as a result of the way he was treated by others than by what he failed to see. Kudlick argues that even though the blind man operates almost exclusively from within a "pathological" or "deficit" model of disability, Maupassant's text, nevertheless, reveals how disability can be understood as a socially constructed phenomenon (academic.oup.com)

Opinions remain divided as to whether deaf studies, referred to in French as "les études sur la surdité" is a strand of disability studies or a discipline on its own. Unlike disability studies, more broadly, Deaf Studies actually have some institutional backing in France (academic.oup.com).

Activism and Critical Disability Theory

Activism is the policy or action of using rigorous campaigning to cause political or social change (Oxford Languages). Activism simply means embarking on an action to effect a social change; this can occur in a myriad of ways and a variety of forms (https://simmons.libguides.com>activism).*Cambridge English Dictionary* defines activism as the use of direct and noticeable action to achieve a result, usually a political or social one. Activism is the use of direct often confrontational action to achieve an end, either for or against an issue. Activists in human history include Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman and Nelson Mandela.

There is a record of a good number of influential individual activists who have their project and collectives and are doing great work in line with critical disability theory. Activism around critical disability theory deals with a variety of topics ranging from immigration and unjust hiring practices to ableism and storytelling. As a result of material impacts of oppression including economic oppression and exclusions in higher education, many of these activists use popular web platforms, including social media, to launch their advocacy and disseminate their work. Activist Alice Wong leads the disability visibility project founded in 2014. This online space is dedicated to recording, amplifying and showing disability media and culture (Disability visibility project). Philosopher Shelley Tremain blogs in online forums to examine political and social matters relevant to disability.

It is significant to note that activism around critical disability theory highlighted here has to do with social and political actions carried out by activists in real life situations on forums like social media seeking to better the lot of individuals with disabilities. It is apt for analysis of disability in disciplines like sociology, philosophy, law, anthropology and medicine, etc., but not for literature. It is this void that the ableism activism theory promulgated here seeks to fill.

Representations of Disability in Literature

Disability has been featuring in literature for many centuries in the past. Top ten books on disability fiction are:

1. Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mocking Bird*
2. John \Stein Beck's *Of Mice and Men*
3. William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*
4. Herman Melville's *Moby –Dick*
5. Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night- time*
6. Frances Hudson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*
7. Albert Camus' *The First Man* (English version of *Le premier homme,* a posthumous work)
8. Elizabeth McCracken's *The Giant's House*
9. John Irving's *A son of the circus*
10. Andrew Solomon's *Far from the Tree*

(https://www.the guardian.com.)

Other disability literary works include: Guy de Maupassant's short story *l'aveugle,* Diderot's *Lettre sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient,* both texts featuring visual disability; Albert Camus' *La mort heureuse* featuring physical disability, Paul Wilson's *Mouse and the*

Cossacks featuring a young girl with speaking disability; *Someone to Watch over me, Do White Whales Sing at the Edge of the World?* And *Noah, Noah*, all three by the same author, Paul Wilson and featuring characters with learning disability (https://www.theguardian.com). Disability literary work in African Literature include Gabriel Okara's *The voice,* Cyprian Ekwensi's *The drummer boy*, Elechi Amadi's *The concubine,* Sembène Ousmane's *Xala* and Aminata Sow Fall's *La grève des battù* (*The Beggars' Strike*).

Ableism Activism Theory

Ableism activism theory presupposes that persons with disability in the mimetic world are viewed as sub-human or inferior beings who constitute a bundle of nuisance to the entire society. They, therefore, suffer from social and political prejudice, discrimination, stigmatization, oppression, violence and even exclusion. Their suffering is to the point of orchestrating activism of the disabled fictional characters which may take the form of revolt, or protest, direct often confrontational action spearheaded by a protagonist with or perceived with disability in order to achieve an end, either for or against an issue. By engaging in ableism activism, these fictional characters with disabilities succeed in disempowering able-bodied protagonists steeped in superiority complex. They succeed in deconstructing them, humiliating and disgracing them and throwing them overboard. Ableism activism theory showcases the author's ableism in the literary text, his/her advocacy against the thingification and exclusion of the fictional characters with disabilities. Given that literature is the mirror of society, ableism activism literary theory presents, so to say, the author's ableism activism in real life.

It is important to note that not all literary works which feature disability can qualify to be ranked as ableism activism literature. For example, Guy de Maupassant's *L'aveugle* and Diderot's *Lettre sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient,* even though they feature visual disability and are aptfor disability studies and equally pass for ableism literary works, they cannot be ranked as ableism activism literature. Ableism activism theory provides eight-point criteria for evaluating and classifying a literary work as ableism activism literature. For a literary work to be evaluated through the lens of ableism activism theory and found fit to be ranked as ableism activism literature, it must satisfy the following criteria:

1. It must feature a protagonist with disability apart from several other characters with disabilities.

2. It must feature an able-bodied protagonist/central character, rich, high ranking and influential.
3. Characters with disabilities are subjected to violence, oppression, prejudice, discrimination, disdainful treatment, mockery and thingification.
4. They are chased about, arrested and locked up, humiliated and even excluded.
5. They are ill-treated to the point of staging a revolt, a protest or direct confrontational action spearheaded by the protagonist with or perceived with disability to achieve an end either for or against an issue so as to usher in a social and political change.
6. The able-bodied protagonist is brought low, humiliated and disgraced through the covert and overt actions of the fictional characters with disabilities.
7. The disabled characters' ableism activism is critical for the disempowerment of the able-bodied protagonist deemed superior.
8. The disabled characters' ableism activism is, by implication, the author's ableism activism or advocacy for or against an issue in real life.

Ableism Activism Theory for Literary Ableism Activism Study

Two novels in Francophone African Literature can readily be analysed critically in the light of ableism activism theory. They are Aminata Sow Fall's *La grève des battù* (The Beggars' Strike) and Sembène Ousmane's *Xala*. The present research examines critically *Xala* for ableism activism using ableism activism theory.

1. In *Xala*, there are many fictional characters with disabilities-visual, physical etc. (the lame, the blind, the leper, the legless, the one legged ones etc. (Ousmane, 1973: 161). There is also a protagonist with or perceived with disability following struggles for environmental justice. El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye, as the novelist narrates to us directly from the mouth of this protagonist using one of his film techniques (flashback technique), seizes a large expanse of land belonging to members of his clan to which belongs this protagonist with or perceived with disability. When the clan members seek for redress in the tribunal, El Hadji uses his influence, and power to get all the owners of the clan land chased away. The protagonist with or perceived with disability makes persistent efforts to get social justice. But El Hadji uses his influence to get him jailed. On getting out of prison, he is dispossessed of his land, pauperized to the point of resorting to beggary as a means of livelihood. The novelist does not delineate this character with any sickness or medical impairment but paints him as

materially inferior to the likes of Bèye in the fictional world. Ousmane leaves this character with no clear identity; there is no mention of his family. He probably intentionally fails to give this modern hero a name; he is simply referred to as the beggar, what goes to buttress his anonymity and allegorical role (Onyemelukwe, 2015: 52). The beggar is more of a symbol than character. He is a person with material disability. It is in this sense that he is considered a protagonist with or perceived with disability. Some people may not perceive him as disabled because of his having no physical deformity. Such people will perceive him as a false beggar and liken him to Salla Niang in Aminata Sow Fall's *La grève des battù.* It would seem like Ousmane, in this narrative, portrays him with disability (material disability) and is letting the reader recognize that material impoverishment (abject poverty) is also a form of disability. Thus in the context of this study, the beggar is presented as a protagonist with or perceived with disability.

2. Ousmane projects in *Xala* a central character, EI Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye, who at the beginningof the story is able-bodied, rich, high ranking and influential. He is the representative of the comprador-bourgeoisie according to Marxist theory. Very rich but dishonest, the merchant, a Muslim and polygamist lives with his three wives and eleven children in an ostentatious way in Dakar in Senegal. He is an opportunist and shrewd businessman; and has just joined the Senegalese Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

3. The novelist describes vividly in *Xala* how the characters with disabilities are oppressed, disdainfully treated, mocked at and thingified. The vengeful beggar as earlier highlighted, is dispossessed of his clanic land hurled into prison by El Hadji and on coming out of prison ends up as a beggar. He is thingified to the point of becoming a vagabond, devoid of all-money, food, clothing, shelter, and fundamental human needs. Creating conditions which will prevent an individual from meeting his/her basic human needs of food, shelter and clothing (i.e. deprivation) is a form of violence. Denying somebody his/her fundamental human rights, eg., the right to life, the right to keep his/her identity, human dignity and honour, is a form of violence. This is structural violence, which ensues from the systematic ways a given social structure or social institution kills people slowly by making it impossible for them to meet their fundamental needs (Onyemelukwe, 2009: 12-13).

As the corrupt bourgeois engages in squander mania promoting concurrently joblessness, abject poverty, beggary, and human rights violation, he is subjecting the beggar and his likes more and more to structural violence since all these fall into the culture of structural violence (Onyemelukwe 2009:155-172). Several times, El Hadji got the police to arrest the beggar and

lock him up. But the moment he is free from the police net he returns to the same spot in front of the bourgeois' office (Ousmane, 1973: 49).

4. The vengeful beggar is not alone in being chased about, arrested and locked up in police cells, and humiliated by the police. Many other characters with disabilities in the study text are victims of such oppression, humiliation, prejudice, social injustice and exclusion. The vengeful beggar summarizes the ill-treatment meted out to the characters with disabilities, the so-called beggars, in what he describes as El Hadji's sins: 'construisant "sur l'infortune des humbles et honnêtes gens," la spoliation, I'expropriation, la méchanceté, l'injustice vis-à-vis des opprimés' (Ousmane, 1973:165).

Ousmane uses the beggar as his mouthpiece to expose and indict the complementary rapport between the El Hadjis and the beggars; in other words, the African bourgeoisie represented by Bèye gives birth to the oppressed class, the lumpen-prolétariat represented by the beggars (the disabled persons), the impoverished masses and prostitutes, in short, *les damnés de la terre* (the wretched of the earth), to borrow this term from Frantz Fanon (Fanon, 1981) (Ousmane, 1973:164-165).

Ableism Activism by Characters with Disabilities in *Xala*

The vengeful beggar is at the lead of the confrontational action or revolt against El Hadji, a protest against the ill-treatment meted out to the characters with disabilities in the novel, *Xala*. The attack is twofold viz: implicit and personal revolt and explicit and collective revolt. First, the vengeful beggar secretly casts a spell, *xala* on El Hadji. *Xala* is a Wolof word meaning sexual impotence. After his clandestine destruction of his oppressor's sexual virility, a symbolic death, an event that takes place the night of El Hadji's marriage to his third wife, 19 year-old N'Goné, the beggar stations himself in front of El Hadji's office and sings away. It is not stated in the story the nature of his songs whether they are the usual innocuous songs of a beggar who is asking for alms or the griot's kind of caustic songs castigating violators of norms and customs. One would be more inclined to believe they belong to the second category given that El Hadji is said to be the only person in the vicinity perturbed by the beggar's songs. As the narrator puts it; the beggar was very well known at the joint but the only person put off by him is El Hadji. As a result, he invites the police a number of times to arrest the beggar. Anyway, the beggar usually returns to the same spot as soon as he is released from the police station, and continues his cold war against his adversary.

Significantly, the *xala* cast on Bèye leads to the comprador-bourgeois' series of movements from one marabout to another in the effort to regain his tumescence. As he declares: "I want de be cured, i.e., to become a man once more" (Ousmane, 1973:85). These movements correspond to Bèye's search for his lost identity, his lost manhood or his progressive debasement and dependency. El hadji is not only sexually/physically impotent, but he is also ineluctably morally, economically and politically enfeebled as a result of the beggar's clandestine vengeance on him.

El Hadji's consultation with all the known "face-katts" and "seet-katts" liquidates his purse, costs him time which affects his business. Consequently, his shop goes empty with no restocking. He gets more and more in debt, gets dismissed from the Association of "Le Groupement des Hommes d'Affaires". Creditors harass him up and down. He falls drastically and to compound his lot, his second and third wives desert him. He is abandoned by all business associates, friends, relatives except Modu, his driver, and his faithful and completely submissive first wife, Adja Awa Astou. What a humiliation! What a disgrace! How are the mighty fallen!

With respect to the second form of revolt – explicit and collective revolt, the vengeful beggar and leader of the group is depicted as a dynamic leader with great rhetorical ability and influence (Onyemelukwe 2015: 55). He leads a horde of beggars to the villa of Adja Awa Astou where he confronts El Hadji directly with "I am retaliating. What I am now is your own making (Ousmane 1973. 164-165). In a thunderous voice he commands El Hadji: "Say nothing at all, if you want to be cured" (163). "If you want to be cured, do what I tell you" (170). In a nutshell, he reminds him of the story of usurpation/expropriation of the land belonging to his clan, etc.

The beggar offers El Hadji a cure without charging him any money. What it entails is for him, El Hadji to be stark naked and receive spittle three times from each of the beggars. The beggar is bold, determined, extroverted and really vengeful. Interestingly, the political consciousness and active participation of all the beggars cannot fail to strike one. They exhibit a high sense of cohesion in their defiance of their opponent somewhat recalling that of revolting beggars in Sow Fall's *La grève des battù*. Our critical analysis reveals that there are three levels of crowd action in *Xala* even though they do not occur sequentially: verbalization of the values and aspirations of the mob, their attack on objects belonging to their adversaries and finally, attack on persons concerned (Acuff al. 1973; Le Bon, 1895 and Smelser, 1963).

As usual, Sembène Ousmane ends his novel on a note of suspense. He does not tell the reader if El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye actually gets cured of his *Xala* or not at the hands of the vengeful revolting beggars.

Whether he is successfully cured or not is not important. What matters here is the ableism activism carried out by the characters with disabilities in the novel. Their action of direct confrontation with El Hadji, who previously subjected them to oppression, structural violence, suppression, intimidation, inferiorisation, exclusion and thingification is to put an end to all ill- treatment meted out to them, to put an end to ableism.

Humiliation and Disgrace of the previously Able-bodied Protagonist

Even if the proposed cure by the vengeful beggar is interpreted as successful, the fact still remains that the whole process has subjected the previously able-bodied protagonist to thorough humiliation and disgrace. Imagine all those characters with disabilities pouring spittle on a stark naked El Hadji. It is, without doubt, a process of dehumanization of the social individual in a postcolonial situation, the oppressor turned victim. Bèye accepts to pass through this absolute humiliation and disgrace in desperate need to recover his tumescence.

Disempowerment of the Previously Able-bodied Protagonist

Notice that before the revolting mob of characters with disabilities, El Hadji was completely obedient and submissive. He is completely stripped of his power and Neron complex. Thus the disabled characters' ableism activism is critical for the disempowerment of the previously able-bodied protagonist steeped in superiority complex. At the resolution of the plot, El Hadji, far from being able-bodied, is not only sexually impotent but also economically, financially, politically and physically impotent. He is completely ruined by the *xala* put on him by the vengeful beggar. He is completely disempowered. In short, the characters with disabilities in *Xala* succeed in deconstructing the comprador-bourgeois El Hadji and throwing him overboard. One spits at a rotten, decaying, smelly object. The hungry beggars have a field day in Adja Awa Astou's villa, the venue of their direct confrontational attack on their opponent. They triumph over him. In fact, the novel ends with a successful outburst of desperation and vengeance: El Hadji Abdou Kader Bèye, representative of the comprador-bourgeoisie responsible for the birth of characters with disabilities (the lumpen-prolétariat), experiences complete disability at their hands.

Fictional Ableism Activism: A Reflection of Authorial Ableism Activism in Real Life

This study draws up an inference: the ableism activism carried out by characters with disabilities in *Xala* reflects Sembène Ousmane's ableism activism in real life; his advocacy against cultural, social and political injustices, ill-treatment meted out to individuals with disabilities

be they pathological, medical or material in society, his advocacy for effective and appropriate rehabilitation of persons with disabilities and for treating them not as sub-humans or inferior beings but as humans capable, like able-bodied members of the society, of reaching their potentials in life.

Evaluation of Xala as Ableism Activism Literary Text

In this study, ableism activism theory is applied to Sembène Ousmane's postcolonial novel*Xala*to analyse critically ableism/ableism activism.Our findings show that *Xala* meets satisfactorily the eight-point criteria for evaluating and classifying a literary text as ableism activism literature.

Conclusion

It has been largely demonstrated in this research that there have been various models of disability such as the traditional 'deficit', 'pathological' and 'medical' models of disability etc., and later, critical disability theory. The latter contests traditional disability studies and analyses disability as a cultural, historical, relative, political and social phenomenon rather than as an individualized medical issue attached to the body. It is an interdisciplinary, intersectional set of approaches which finds application for analysing disability in various fields of study such as anthropology, history, sociology, education, law and medicine. There is, however, a general concession that there is no exact equivalent of disability studies in France. That notwithstanding, some works have contributed enormously to the development of disability studies in France. The study takes a cursory look at representations of disability in literature including North American, French, Francophone and Anglophone literature. Activism around critical disability theory is examined also. It is found that activism around critical disability theory highlighted has to do with social and political actions carried out by activists in real life situation via forums like social media seeking to better the life of individuals with disabilities. It is appropriate for analyzing disability in various disciplines

like biology, philosophy, psychology, history, law, medicine, anthropology and education etc. but not for literary criticism. It is this void that the new ableism activism theory seeks to fill. Ableism activism theory is found apt for critical analysis of ableism/ableism activism in literature. It evolves eight-point criteria for judging and classifying a literary work as ableism activism literature. This study uses the new method of literary criticism (ableism activism theory) to analyse Sembène Ousmane's *Xala* for ableism/ableism activism. The findings of this study show that *Xala* meets satisfactorily the eight criteria for evaluating and classifying a literary text as ableism activism work. Hence the conclusion that *Xala* qualifies to be ranked as ableism activism literature.

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