

Hegemonic Masculinity and Emasculation in Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggars' Strike*

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Abstract – Although there is a growing literature on men and masculinities in Africa (Lindsay & Miescher, 2003; Morrell & Ouzgane, 2005; Uchendu, 2008; Mugambi & Tuzyline, 2010), the question of hegemonic masculinity in Aminata Sow Fall's novel, *The Beggars' Strike* remains unanswered. Through the lens of masculinity, this paper attempts to demonstrate that masculinity is fluid and subject to change or contestation; in some instances it can be challenged by men and women alike. The protagonist, Mour Ndiaye, is Director of Public Health Services, who is obsessed with his ambition of becoming the Vice-President of the Republic. To please his President, he removes all the beggars from the streets of the city, for he consider their presence as harmful to public health as well as the prestige of Senegal. This unbearable situation prompts the beggars to organize a strike in which they refuse to return to the city streets to receive donations. Consequently, Mour lost the vice-presidency, as the President appointed Toumane Sane, Mour Ndiaye's rival, as Vice-President of the Republic. His young and educated second wife, Sine, equally challenges him. As an enlightened woman, she refuses to submit to Mour's traditional patriarchal control. In both situation we can see how, the powerful and "Big Man" Mour Ndiaye, has been emasculated.

Keywords: Aminata Sow Fall, Emasculation, Hegemonic masculinity, Masculinity, Polygamy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Aminata Sow Fall's novel, *The Beggars* has been frequently submitted to feminist analyses. Although the female protagonist, Lolli, has been the focus of many feminist readings, little attention has been devoted to exploring the life of male protagonist, Mour Ndiaye, through the lens of masculinity – hegemonic masculinity to be precise. The many feminist analyses of *The Beggars' Strike* provide strong evidence of Sow Fall's novel being a primarily female-centred novel, one that explore issues of womanhood, femininity and sexuality, however, the author also gives considerable attention to issues of manhood, masculinity, hegemony and power. Aminata Sow Fall has herself stated that, unlike her colleague Mariama Bâ who was a confirmed advocate of female emancipation or feminism to be precise, she (Sow Fall) writes as a sensitive citizen who wants to talk about what she observes around her and not specifically as a woman. In fact, as Zell, Bundy, and Coulon rightly point out, *The Beggars' Strike* was inspired by a scene which the novelist witnessed one day in the street involving beggars:

The idea of the novel came to her one day when she saw a group of beggars fighting over a bowl (*battù* in Wolof) of couscous that someone had given them.

Whoever gave them the food, she thought, had felt the need to give, and she wondered what people would do if beggars began to refuse their offerings. (Zell et al., 1983, quoted in Edung, 2014)

This paper focuses on issues of power and masculinity, especially how Mour Ndiaye, the chief character climbs from what Karl Max termed “lumpenproletariat” rag poverty (Cited in Aguessy, 2014) or a ‘good-for-nothing’, i.e., a male of questionable masculinity, to his attainment of hegemonic stature as a ‘Big Man’, and becomes the richest and most powerful man. We follow him in his quest to accumulate those socio-cultural symbols that denote manhood and power, particularly what can be constructed into hegemonic masculinity.

2. SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVEL

Aminata Sow Fall’s *The Beggars’ Strike* (1981) was originally published in French in Dakar in 1979 by Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines as *La Grève des battù* (in Wolof refers to a calabash or a wooden bowl used by the beggars to collect alms from believers). The story is set in Dakar, the Capital city of Islam-influenced Senegal. In the narrative, we learn that the government wants to clear the city streets of beggars who are defined as running sores, and whose presence is considered harmful to the European and American tourists who should not see the filth and dirt of in the society as represented by the beggars. The protagonist, Mour Ndiaye, who is the Director of Public Health and Hygiene, is a man obsessed with his ambition of becoming the Vice-President of the Republic. In order to clinch the appointment, Mour Ndiaye needed to put up an outstanding performance in his present duty, and the most pressing need in that line of duty is to get rid of beggars from all the streets in the city, to pave way for tourism.

If Mour becomes Vice-President, he believes that, as a symbol of high status, he must have a young and educated wife by his side. Therefore, without regard for the feeling of his first, loyal but illiterate wife, Lolli, he marries the vibrant and sophisticated office girl, Sine. After the streets have been cleared of the beggars, and in order to enhance his chances of becoming Vice-President, Mour is asked by his marabout, Kifi Boukoul, to slaughter a cow and distribute alms to the beggars in all the corners of the city. But, because the streets have been cleared of the beggars, Mour cannot offer the prescribed sacrifice and consequently he is not made Vice-President of the Republic.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This article benefits immensely from the lens of masculinity as purported by Connell (1987; 2005), as well as Lindsay and Miescher (2003). In the 2005 edition of her book *Masculinities*, Reawyn Connell starts by stating that there are varieties of masculinities and femininities, and that “masculinities are configurations of practice structured by gender relation,” which means that masculinity is not a mere character type or behavioral norm, but part of “the process of relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives.” She concludes that “masculinity, to the extent that the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality, and

culture” (Connell, 2010, p. 71). According to Lindsay and Miescher (2003), the term masculinity refers to “a cluster of norms, values and behavioral patterns expressing explicit and implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others” (2003, p. 4). As can be deduced from the foregoing, not only men but also women possess and exhibit features of masculinities. In addition, masculinity is not a biological category. Rather, it is a socially and culturally constructed ideology, having multiple representations and subject to change and revision. In other words, men are not born with masculinity as part of their genetic make-up; rather it is something into which they are acculturated and which is composed of social codes of behaviour which they learn to produce in culturally appropriate ways.

Another concept articulated by Connell and that will be useful to my study is hegemonic masculinity, which she defined as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell, 2005, p. 71). In essence, hegemonic masculinity refers to that view of masculinity which has established dominance in society; it creates cultural images of what it means to be a “real man.” In addition, this form of masculinity is mostly supported by social institutions such as schools, religion and law, to cite only a few.

4. DISCUSSION

Using irony and humour, Aminata Sow Fall presents the protagonist Mour Ndiaye who, after losing his employment following a brawl with his European boss, whom he accused of “treating the [Africans] worse than dogs” (*TBS*, p. 5), got involved in politics, and when his party came to power, he was appointed Director of Public Health and Hygiene, in recognition of his unconditional activities as a party militant. This allowed him to attain his fame and “Big Man” status – a wealthy man who has acquired a social promotion, which is materialised by his physical appearance and the luxury he and his family enjoy:

Now that he has everything he can wish for: a house, two cars at his disposal, domestic staff paid for by the state. Sometimes he is worried by his opulence, especially at official ceremonies when he has to be careful that the buttons of his dinner-jacket don't burst. (*TBS*, p. 19)

We can see here the importance given to property for the assessment of masculinity. For Mour Ndiaye, to have a house of his own amounts to not only being free and not subject to harassment by landlords, but it is also the guarantee of his authority over his family for whom he is the sole provider. Additionally, as Daouda Loum (2010, p. 282) observes, “To gain his place in society in general and in his family in particular, a man should strive to acquire wealth in order to pass it to his children” (2010, p. 282). Ironically, this publicly acquired status of hyper-masculinity, as we can see later, will be challenged by the beggars.

It should be stressed that in some cases, wealth can symbolize strength; the amount of money a man spends (or wastes) on himself, his wife and his children confers high social status upon him. In light of this, embezzlement has become common in African society, especially among some politicians who view their position in government administration not as a service but rather as a way to enrich themselves and enhance the masculine status. This reminds me of

a certain African politician who once told his government officials: “a person who works in a farm must feed on the farm produces.” This was one way of encouraging those people holding government positions to use them to their advantage and misappropriate as much government funds as they can. This situation is unfortunate, misappropriating money is being perceived as an emblem of worth. However, as Daouda Loum (2010) rightly points out, this conception is neither rational nor ethical. In the people’s psyche, to get a good position in government administration or in a company is viewed as a reward for one’s work.

The position of power that Mour Ndiaye acquired makes him arrogant and uncompassionate towards the plight of the poor and underprivileged. Ironically, he has forgotten the time he was unemployed, “when he could scarcely make both ends meet. When he went about hollowed-cheeked and anxious eyed. When he had only one shirt that he had to wash out overnight and put to dry on the stove” (*TBS*, p. 19). Now that he is wealthy, Mour Ndiaye looks down upon the beggars, forgetting that “hunger and poverty compel some of them to beg, and so remind those who are better off that paupers too exist” (*TBS*, p. 2). It is important to remember that Mour Ndiaye was appointed Director of the Department of Public Health and Hygiene not on merit but solely because of political reasons.

Mour Ndiaye is obsessed with his ambitions. He dreams of a nomination to the position of Vice-President of his country. To gain the favour of the President, he embarks on the evacuation of the street beggars from the city centre to the outskirts of the city, alleging that they are “an oozing wound that is hurting the booming tourist industry” (Azodo, 2007, p. 174). The narrator describes the beggars in the following manner: “. . . These beggars, these *talibés*, these lepers and cripples, all these derelicts . . . these dregs of society . . .” (*TBS*, 1). Associated with sub-humans, these dregs of society, as Mour Ndiaye view them, must be removed from the metropolis and banished to the outskirts, to make way for a booming tourist trade that warrant the beautification of the city.

Thus, Mour Ndiaye reminds his Assistant, Keba Dabo, of the Minister’s order that the city be cleared of beggars, and urges him (Dabo) to take a more decisive action in this regard. For Ndiaye, such action is necessary and urgent because, besides the fact that the beggars constitute “a running sore” which turns away tourists from the country, thereby threatening the national economy by depriving it of the much needed foreign exchange earned from tourism, there is the added responsibility that “we really can’t let them invade our cities and form a threat to public hygiene.” (*TBS*, p. 2-3). For the outsiders to be interested in visiting the capital, the beggars must be kept away from the public. They should not be visible to the outsiders. They are to be relocated to another place of about 200 kilometres away. This is to make them invisible to the visitors (the Whites).

Mour Ndiaye explains to his marabout, Kifi Boukoul, the reason why the beggars must be removed from all the city streets:

Well, you see, nowadays, people who live a long way away, in Europe and the United States of America, White people especially, are beginning to take an interest in the beauty of our country. These people are called tourists. You know, in the old days these White people came to rob and exploit us; now they visit our country for a rest and in search of happiness. That is why we have built

hotels and holiday villages and casinos to welcome them. These tourists spend huge sums of money to come here, there are even special societies over in Europe who organise these journeys. And when they visit the cities they are accosted by beggars and we run the risk of their never coming back here or putting unfavourable propaganda to discourage others who might like to come [...] We are the ones who are responsible for the destiny of our country. We must oppose anything which harms our economic and tourist development (*TBS*, p. 17-18)

Finally, after several raids, Keba Dabo and his men succeeded in putting all the beggars permanently out of town; Mour Ndiaye was excited. The President congratulated him for the job well done: “Mour Ndiaye [w]as awarded the Order of Merit, an honour which is reserved for nationals who have shown quite exceptional qualities. He is [awarded such] a rare title for succeeding in breaking up the celebrated ring of [beggars] who deprived the State every year of hundreds of millions and who, till then, had constituted a national scourge that no one had been able to eradicate” (*TBS*, p. 50).

At this point it is important to note that, Mour is so far portrayed as ambitious, exploitative, corrupt, haughty, hypocritical and selfish. As Ajala (1990) observes, “Mour represents the exploiter of the underprivileged, for he uses the masses to achieve his ambition. In his eagerness to become Vice-President, he sacrifice the comfort of the beggars” (1990, p. 143). Mour epitomizes those African leaders who, because of their selfish interest and insensitivity, do not think twice before taking decisions which affect the masses.

The idea of welcoming the white men to African societies remains an indisputable fact. As Iyanda (2018) further observes, among the reasons for embarking on tourism is to have knowledge of other cultures and natural events. It could be a source of income as those visitors would engage in commercial activities in one way or the other. This is what many African leaders perceive as a way to increase their internally generated revenue. To achieve this, many policies by policy makers are to the detriment of the citizens.

The Beggars could no longer allow themselves to be sent to untimely grave; to avoid harassments, imprisonments, physical abuse and unnecessary embarrassments they decided to reserve themselves to the place cleared for them. As we shall see later, the rich with their wealth will now visit these beggars in their area. They could not survive despite their arguments against the presence of the beggars on the streets. This new area could be likened to segregation that existed during the colonial era. The privileged black discriminate against their black counterparts due to their medical condition. The basic necessity of good living was not provided, the road not tarred, no pipe-borne water, no traffic light as in the city. This remind us of the segregation in the colonial period, as seen in Mongo Beti’s novel *Houseboy* (1966), where indigenous Africans were living in villages in thatched house without electricity, and where there were untarred roads; whereas their European employers were living in better conditions, away from the Africans. In Church, Europeans were seated comfortably in sofas in front, while African were seated behind, on tree logs as they listened to the white priest sermon. The narrator reveals thus:

In the Church of Saint Peter at Dangan the whites have their seats in the transept beside the altar. They can follow the Mass comfortably seated in armchairs covered with velvet cushions. . . [On the other hand] the nave of the church is completely reserved for the Africans. They sit on tree trunks instead of benches and these are arranged in two rows. (*Houseboy*, pp. 35-36)

Although Mour Ndiaye managed to rid the street off beggars, he was simply wrapped in his arrogance and masculinity dipper without thinking through his plan. He ignores the boundaries of his power as well as the obligation of the rich toward the poor, as required by his Islamic-influenced society. Indeed one of the Five Pillars of Islam is “Zakat,” the giving of alms to the poor and the needy. According to the teaching of Islam, charity is an indispensable duty. Those who generously give to the poor, in this case the beggars, do so hoping to receive God’s favour in return, as explained in the following statement by Nguirane, one of the beggars: “[The rich] make offering so that God may grant [them] long life, prosperity and happiness” (*TBS*, 37). Almsgiving is thus based on sacred system of exchange which, according to Gadjigo (1989), “also provides the giver a sense of security and, in traditional thinking, opens the door to wealth, prosperity, and peace of mind” (1989, p.142) However, one should not assume that Islam encourage laziness. To the contrary, as Iyanda (2018) opines,

The religion of Islam is designed to guarantee the establishment of a noble and virtuous society where all will live well. The religion encourages helping others. It discourages begging as a profession. It views begging as an act that eliminates a person’s honour and self-esteem. It commands and persuades working and views it as a high virtue. It forbids and disapproves laziness and begging. It also orders and encourages Muslims to give food to the poor and to oblige the one who asks for something. However, begging, which impairs human honour and virtue, shatters personality and leads to exploitation of benevolent people’s pure feeling. The prophet of the religion said a lot on the act of begging, in one of his sayings in (*Zakat*, 103) he is quoted thus, “some among you do not ever abandon begging. Finally, on the Day of Resurrection, that dishonourable person will meet Allah with no flesh left on his face”. Despite the fact that Islam encourages the rich to give to the needy, it discourages people from begging. It is also said in the novel that religion prescribes help for the poor, but it doesn’t tell the poor to cause continuous disturbance to their neighbours (*TBS*. p. 15). Islam encourages the ruler to be conversant about the elderly who haven’t enough to eat and also the infirm. The policy should be to make life bearable to all citizens, as these people should be catered for, and for the infirm to enjoy life as citizens because their infirmities are not by their own making (2018, p. 37).

It is interesting to note that the beggars themselves are conscious of this religious teaching and confidently use it to justify their life-style, and even claim it as a right. As one of the beggars explains: “those who are better off must give some of their wealth to the poorer ones. That’s what religion says: when we beg, we just claim what is our due” (*TBS*, p. 61). Indeed Salla Niang, the strike ring leader, is echoing the ideas which another beggar, Nguirane, has been telling the others, to prove to them the feasibility of the strike which he proposes they should embark upon (*TBS*, 37-38). One can then understand why marabouts are always

prescribing to their clients alms-giving and sacrifices which consist of making donations to the poor and the beggars, as we see so many times in the novel. One such instance is Mour Ndiaye who religiously believes the prescriptions of the marabout Kifi Boukoul, and puts in everything in an effort of carry them out to the letter, in the hope of securing the post of Vice-President of the Republic.

Shortly after he succeeded in putting all the beggars out of town, therefore creating a conducive environment for tourism, Mour Ndiaye, as usual, visits Kifi Boukoul, one of his many marabouts – holy man spiritual adviser - to consult him over his Vice-Presidential ambition. Kifi Boukoul tells him that his chances of becoming Vice-President will be enhanced only if he performs a ritual sacrifice:

You will have what you desire, and you will have it very shortly. You will be Vice-President. To achieve this, you must sacrifice a bull whose coat must be of one colour, preferably fawn. The ground must be soaked with the blood of this bull which you must slaughter here in the courtyard of this house; then you must divide it into seventy-seven portions which you will distribute to the *battù*-bearers. [These] are beggars who walk about the streets to beg. This offering must go to its correct destination, otherwise everything risks going wrong. It must go to genuine *miskin*, that is to genuine paupers, people who have nothing and who would starve, were it not for their *battù* which they stretch out to passers-by. (*TBS*, p. 58)

Mour Ndiaye who religiously believes the prescriptions of the marabout Kifi Boukoul, is determine to put in everything in an effort of carry them out to the letter, in the hope of securing the post of Vice-President of the Republic. It is interesting to note that, the strength of the people's belief in the power of alms, especially when they have been prescribed as sacrificial offerings by marabouts, is what makes Mour Ndiaye to decide, saying: "This offering [. . .] I shall make it in the prescribed manner [. . .] whatever it may cost me [. . .] I shall have the post of Vice-President [. . .] I must have it" (*TBS*, p. 70). Mour Ndiaye said this as he pondered on the sacrificial offerings prescribed for him by the marabout, Kifi Bokoul, to enable him (Ndiaye) get appointed as the Vice-President of his country.

But the city has been "cleansed" of the beggars who had retreated to their new Slum-Clearance Resettlement Area, and who, in turn, have decided to go on strike as a protest against their inhuman treatment and the violation of their status "as citizens with full rights like everyone else" (*TBS*, p. 37). As a result, Mour Ndiaye is unable to exercise the necessary sacrifice. The tables have turned completely as the rich and important Mour Ndiaye is compelled to look for beggars and travelled to their new place. He wants the beggars to remain at their posts in the city so that he can distribute alms to them as prescribed by his marabout. Having failed in this bid, Mour Ndiaye next goes to plead with his assistant, Keba Dabo, to go and invite the beggars back into the city to enable him make his sacrificial offering to them in the streets. And when Keba Dabo would not cooperate, Ndiaye goes himself to invite the beggars back into the city, even if for a few hours. The beggars, to whom he had introduced himself as Mour Ndiaye, the Director of the Department of Public Health and Hygiene responsible for their evacuation, treat him with contempt as he addresses them, but he swallows it all and persists. In his next attempt, he makes two trips to the beggars' compound, simply

dressed, as he thinks, “to put the beggars at ease” (*TBS*, p. 79), but they refused and made jest of him.

After a long oration, Salla Nyang who controls the beggars promises Mour: “Monsieur Ndiaye, you can go. Tomorrow, if it pleases the Creator, all the beggars will be back at their old posts” (*TBS*, p. 85). Mour rushes home to slaughter the bull. He cuts the flesh and packages the neat according to Kifi Boukoul’s precise instructions. He loads the meat and other items into a van and like a lunatic, he wanders around the four corners of the city in search of absent beggars: “Not soul at the Main Market; no *talibés*, no beggars, no *battù*. Mour’s heart begins to beat faster [. . .] Then Mour feels a weight on his chest, he has difficulty in breathing, there is a ring in his hears” (*TBS*, p. 88). Mour Ndiaye has been tricked. He has been deceived by the beggars, especially by Salla Niang who used a ruse as one way of getting rid of him. Mour Ndiaye is infuriated and begins to curse the beggars:

‘The rogues! The hypocrites! The liars! That’s the reason why they are reduced to begging. . . They’ve got what they deserve! They’ve taken me for a ride, they’ve deliberately deceive me! . . . That woman lied to me shamelessly! They’ll pay for it one day . . . I’ll get even with that rabble yet! Just let them wait! (*TBS*, pp. 89).

The beggars revolted against their inhuman treatment. For Mour Ndiaye to be Vice-President seems impossible as the beggars are not on the streets any longer. This is not limited to Mour Ndiaye alone, many others visit the new location with different articles as alms. They do not consider the distance or the bad road. Those that drove them away still troop to the new location, very far and not as good for human habitation. The purpose of their visit was for their prayers to be answered.

Mour Ndiaye returns to the Resettlement. After some stifled conversation with the impertinent Salla Niang, Mour dips his hand into the pocket of his boubou and hurls several wads of bank-notes at the beggars. They jumped up and scramble for the bank-notes: “That’s for your bus fare; so you can go into town and take up your places in the streets, can you?” he said. The beggars responded in unison: “Yes, yes, we’ll come . . . this afternoon!” (*TBS*, pp. 92-93). Yet they did not come. On Salla Niang’s instruction, the beggars resolved to continue with their strike. Conscious of their new power, the beggars remain totally indifferent as Mour Ndiaye pleads with them, but no one has moved. Mour Ndiaye, the “Big Man” is utterly ignored and his gift rejected despite his continued pleas.

The table has turned over, the beggars who not long ago were treated like the dregs of society, have now become kings. It is now Mour who has to go to the beggars’ settlement to beg them to return to the streets for a while so that he can make his prescribed sacrifice. The contented beggars refuse to cooperate even after Mour has tried every methods, including begging and even bribing them. Mour cannot, therefore, offer his prescribed sacrifice and is professionally and psychologically destroyed. In a reversal of roles, Mour becomes a beggar, while the beggars become the privileged. The beggars have triumphed over their oppressors.

As we can see, now the beggars can no longer bear the suffering, discrimination and persecution, and they begin to speak out. As Ajala (1990) rightly points out, being fully aware of the religious obligation and the psychology of the almsgivers, the beggars – especially

because of the harassment and humiliation they now experience – become self-conscious and self-righteous. They demand they be treated with equality, dignity and respect. They would like everybody to know that the roundups organized by the police against them has made their life a misery, and that all and sundry should not forget that they are equally human beings who deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

Placed in the position of entreating the beggars to return to the city, Mour is humiliated and ridiculed, he has been brought down low and made to somehow regain his sense of humanity. He is pushed to physical and mental exhaustion; his family life suffers, and ultimately, he fails in his bid to the Vice-Presidency. Instead, the President appoints Monsieur Toumane Sane, Mour Ndiaye's rival, as Vice-President of the Republic. The reversal of power relations between the rich and the poor, the able and disable, the well-connected and unconnected, is now complete; the strike has succeeded as the beggars have demonstrated their worth. Mour Ndiaye's journey into hegemonic masculinity results in humiliation. The humiliation that he suffers is an indication of something gone wrong in the African political structure.

It is evidence from the above that Sow Fall lays bare the vices and follies of Mour: greed, selfishness, short-sightedness, lack of self-knowledge callousness, lack of concern for the needs of others, hypocrisy, and, above all, overweening ambition. Mour Ndiaye in my view, is an embodiment of those African "Big Men" who emerge in the wake of European colonialism; those men who "have honed the attitudes and prerequisites of dominant masculinity in much of post-colonial Africa" (Lindsay and Miescher, 2003, p. 18) and have "gained their hyper-masculine status through wealth, followers and connections to political power – attributes which in turn support each other" (Lindsay and Miescher, 2003, p.141-142). Mour Ndiaye also represents the emasculation of Africa's political elites, who are seen as class of corrupt leaders, incapable of engaging in productive economic activities that would improve people's lives.

Mour Ndiaye's obsession with power and authority is reflected not only in the public arena but also in his family relationships. As noted earlier, in much of post-colonial sub-Saharan Africa, the "Big Man" has become a most desirable mode of masculinity. To paraphrase Lisa Lindsay and Stephan Miescher (2003), the success of a "Big Man" is also reflected in his ability to have multiple wives, this is an indication of his virility (Lindsay and Miescher, 2003, p. 18). We should be reminded that, prior to becoming Director of Public Health, Mour Ndiaye had no job. In essence he was like the beggars he now despise. Contrary to the way gender roles are designated in patriarchal societies, his wife Lolli did everything she could in order to support her family, as she says:

Twenty years of marriage! You were nothing, nothing but a miserable beggar! And I backed you up, I put up with everything patiently, I worked my fingers to the bone, now you want to share everything you've got with another woman, thanks to my patience and my hard work [. . .] When you were nothing, who slaved away? Who wore herself a shadow to keep the home going on the smell of an oil rag? [. . .] Where did all the money go that my father and brothers gave me because they were sorry for me? Into the pocket of marabouts, to unlock the door to better times for you! And where did all my boubous disappear to, leaving

me only one to my back that I wore month in, month out? One solitary boubou that in the end couldn't be distinguished from my skin, so that people didn't say "That woman there, that's Lolli Badiane!" [. . .] In wind and rain and sun, always the same boubou, because the others had all been sold, the same as my bracelets and ear-rings, so that we could keep up some semblance of decency in our lives and not let the children starve. Have you forgotten that already? Ungrateful wretch and liar that you are! (*TBS*, pp. 31-32)

These lines are highly significant. They prove that Mour Ndiaye is unmanly. As Daouda Loum (2010) rightly points out, "in traditional or Islam-influenced Senegalese society [or indeed any other African community], the head of the family is the only breadwinner and it is incumbent upon him to provide his wife and underage children with a roof, food and clothing. Therefore, failure to fulfil this duty means to be unmanly, emasculated, effeminate or unconscious" (2010, p. 281). But now that he has a higher position and is wealthy, Mour Ndiaye decides to take Sine, a seventeen year-old (the same age as his daughter) who works as secretary in a travel agency, as his second wife. We learn how they met in the following excerpt:

Mour met her at a hotel in a neighbouring country, which he had visited with his Minister [. . .] He had been attracted by her spontaneity, her youth and especially by the ease with which she expressed herself in the official language (French), with which Mour himself still had some difficulties. She was very elegant and very modern (*TBS*, p. 32).

From the above quotation, it can be seen that there is a big discrepancy between Mour and Siné, in both age and education, which as we will see later, will cause a misunderstanding and eventual break up.

Although both Lolli and her daughter Raabi oppose Mour's decision, he does not stop pursuing his desire, claiming that as sole provider and head of the household, he can do what he wants: "You hear Lolli, [. . .] just think; after all I'm the one who feeds you and keeps you, aren't I? And just tell me what contract am I tied by that prevents me from taking a second wife, if I so desire?" (*TBS*, p. 31). From this quote, it can be said that Mour assumes that a woman cannot do, think or say anything important, and that man's power, bestowed by patriarchy and expressed in his role as head of the family, has to be used to keep the woman in check because otherwise she will abuse her freedom. Consequently, he expects his wife to be submissive and remain silent whenever he talks to her. After all, he sees himself as the supreme head of the household, and if his wife fails to comply, she must pay for her insubordination. From the aforementioned, it is interesting to note that polygamy has become a barometer of masculinity. The more wives a man has, the more he proves his courage, physical strength, and sexual potency. For Mour Ndiaye – a man who is experiencing mid-life crisis – polygamy is a way to upgrade his public standing as a virile man.

At this point, it is to be noted that Mour Ndiaye, is really a selfish, ungrateful, manipulative and callous exploiter. As Ajala (1990) contains,

Mour has reached his present professional position by virtually climbing the ladder that is Lolli. She has always been faithful, patient, and helpful to him; and she hopes that Mour will become Vice President. She consults Marabouts

on behalf of her husband to ensure that he achieves his ambition. During his darkest hours, he has stood firmly by him. Now, the family is prosperous and she is just about to settle down to enjoy the fruit of her faithfulness and hard work when Mour, having exploited her enough, virtually discards her and marries young office secretary, Sine. (1990, p. 145)

It is also because of his selfish exploitative nature that he marries Sine. He believes that he is going to be appointed Vice President soon. But, before he gets the Vice Presidency, he must have an educated woman to compensate for his first wife Lolli who, by Western standards, is uneducated. Sine qualifies to be his second wife because she is young, fluent in French, and sophisticated. Therefore, Mour marries her not because he loves her but simply because it is necessary if she is to remain as a wife. And since she is important in his game plan, he obliges her.

As Mour Ndiaye sees it, the power relation between him and his wife is based on economic factors. Knowing that he is the sole provider, on whom Lolli now depends, Mour Ndiaye feels he has the right to do whatever he wants and she cannot resist his will. To assert his worth, masculine force and authority, Mour Ndiaye moves in with Sine. Like Modou, the protagonist in *So Long a Letter* (1979), Mour Ndiaye buys Sine a luxurious villa and spends most of his money and time with her while neglecting his family. This is ironic because he claims to be head of the house and its main provider, yet abandons his family. This buttresses Daouda Loum's (2010) argument that a man who claims to be breadwinner and head of the family, but fails to fulfil his duty is unmanly, emasculated and effeminate. Mour Ndiaye is unable to fulfil his expected traditional roles. Therefore, he does not deserve the status of head of the house.

Unlike Lolli, Sine is educated, enlightened and highly sophisticated. She rejects submission and asserts her independence and right to continue to exhibit her pre-marital life style and habits, such as smoking and wearing trousers and make-ups; she also rejects being given orders and prohibitions. Indeed, as the narrative reveals, Sine cannot let Mour Ndiaye muzzle her, neither trample on her human rights. Thus, she tells him:

Mour, if you think I'm prepared to be stuck here like a piece of furniture and receive your orders and prohibitions, then you're making a mistake! I'm a person and not a block of wood! [. . .] You are taking leave of your senses. [. . .] What are you thinking about? That I'm here just to satisfy your whims? No! I'm your wife, so treat me like a wife. Really, Mour, if you think I'm going to let you treat me like a common-or-garden object, then you've got another think coming! [. . .] We don't talk the same language! . . . We shall never talk the same language (*TBS*, p. 95-96).

From the excerpted passage, it is clear how Sine challenges patriarchal tradition. As an educated, enlightened and very modern woman, she refuses to submit to Mour's control or to put up with behaviour which her co-wife accepts, as would the women of her mother's generation.

It is worth mentioning that, through Sine, Sow Fall gives women their share of justice: she portrays them as having the upper hand in an environment where they are not likely to

amount to anything. That is the reason why, in a heated argument with Mour Ndiaye over Sine's smoking habit, the latter does not miss the chance to remind him: "You are like someone from the Middle Age. And besides, if you stop to think, this is that's how you found me when you married me. Now you want me to change simply because I've become your wife. It's not logical! You ought to be able to put up with me just as you found me" (*TBS*, p. 96).

Mour's situation illustrates Connell's (2005: 77) argument that in any power relation, once conditions that legitimizes patriarchy collapse, male behaviour and the norms inscribed within masculinity change. Indeed, "the authority of men is not spread in an even blanket across every department of social life. In some circumstances women have authority; in others the power of men is diffused, confused or contested" (Connell, 1987: 109). Also, to paraphrase Michael Kimmel (2001), the image of those men who hold power is subject to change or contestation (2001: 271). This is true for Mour Ndiaye, he cannot exercise his male dominance anymore; his patriarchal control has eroded in the presence of Sine, who knows her rights and believes in an egalitarian relationship. While Mour is able to exercise his masculine power and privileges with his traditional and submissive first wife Lolli, he cannot do the same with Sine because she will not allow it. A close look at Sine reveals her force; she is empowered and seems to gather strength to speak up for herself. Her ideas, actions and attitudes challenge one of the foundation stones of hegemonic masculinity. She rejects the subjugation of women by men in any sphere of life.

Sine's resistance to her husband's control is a transgressive act. It compels Mour to realise that he has to blame no one but himself. He rationalizes the problem in terms of age difference. As the narrative reveals, Mour came to the conclusion that their misunderstanding arose from the great discrepancy in age between them, and because he was older than Sine, it was his duty to make certain concessions and grant Sine her wishes rather than imposing his authority, as this was detrimental to his respectability (*TBS*, p. 98).

It is therefore fair to state that Mour Ndiaye is engulfed in, and blinded by patriarchal norms and hegemonic masculinity. In other words, he is wrapped in power dipper that he believes nothing or no one can challenge him. He hangs on to patriarchal traditions because it can give him power and control over both men – especially the weak and defenceless – and women, but he does not realize that some traditions are losing meaning in a changing society and that they no longer work.

5. CONCLUSION

In her Novel *The Beggars' Strike*, Aminata Sow Fall joins ranks of African writers like Ahmadou Kourouma, Ousmane Sembène and Mariama Bâ to reveal the humiliation and ultimately the emasculation that can result from men's pursuit of hegemonic masculinity. In his relationship with the beggars, Mour Ndiaye decides to ban begging without taking cognizance of either the religious or economic implications of his action. As a Muslim, he is expected to know the significance of the beggars to the society and Islam. In addition, as part of the government apparatus, Mour Ndiaye should first have thought of alternative means of livelihood and shelter before removing the beggars from the streets. Furthermore, he should have considered the cultural and religious ramifications of his action before embarking on it.

Mour's emasculation ultimately serves as a metonymy for the political failure of postcolonial African male leaders that often sacrifice the welfare of the people in the pursuit of power and wealth – the crowning symbols of hegemonic masculinity.

This study also reveals Aminata Sow Fall's stance on feminism and polygamy. As a staunch supporter of polygamy and male chauvinism, Mour Ndiaye picks a younger and educated second wife Sine, in the hope to raise his masculine power status. He forbids Sine to smoke, wear trousers and make-ups. Nevertheless, Mour eventually loses the battle of wits and willpower, as Sine is not prepared to submit to his patriarchal control. Through Sine, Aminata Sow Fall has challenged the myth of male supremacy on one hand and female inferiority on the other. Finally, it could not be wrong to state that, through employment of literary devices such as irony and satire, Aminata Sow Fall comes out as an impressive spokeswoman for the underprivileged, men and women alike, who fight against the inequalities and discrimination which they experience. In other words, Aminata Sow Fall comes out clearly as a defender of the masses and as a champion of equal rights for women.

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