

## Furo Wariboko's Interactional Emphasis in A. Igoni Barret's *Blackass*

**Mohammad Salman al Farisi**

English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana

Malik Ibrahim Malang

[mosalmanalfarisi@gmail.com](mailto:mosalmanalfarisi@gmail.com)

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Corresponding

Author:

Mohammad Salman Al

Farisi

[mosalmanalfarisi@gmail.com](mailto:mosalmanalfarisi@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*The concept of identity theory highlights that individuals may possess multiple identities, elucidated through prominence hierarchy and salience hierarchy. This thesis aimed to explore the prominence hierarchy and its effects on Furo Wariboko, the central character in A. Igoni Barrett's Blackass Novel. The study felt under the realm of literary criticism, as the researcher analyzed and interpreted the literary work. Employing a sociological approach to the analysis, the study focused on the sociological aspects portrayed in the novel. Additionally, the analysis incorporated the interactional emphasis of identity theory as proposed by George McCall and J.L Simmons. Data for the research were drawn from A. Igoni Barrett's Blackass novel in the form of words, phrases, and utterances. The researcher gathered the data by identifying and categorizing relevant citations from the novel. Subsequently, the data were analyzed by describing and explaining the quotations based on the interactional emphasis of identity theory. The results of the analysis demonstrated that the prominent hierarchy significantly influences Furo's decision to alter his identity from his original "Furo Wariboko" to a new identity as "Frank Whyte." Then, Furo's choice of prominence hierarchy as "Frank Whyte" has noteworthy implications for him in various aspects, including social, economic, and psychological dimensions.*

**Keywords:** hierarchy, identity, sociology

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### INTRODUCTION

Understanding identity has become an important task in human life. Socrates, one of the great Greek philosophers, said that knowing oneself (*gnooti seauton*) is the beginning of humans interacting with themselves and a solid capital to interact with others (Naisaban, 2004). Knowing yourself means finding your Identity. Identity serves to distinguish and integrate self and personal awareness from various dimensions (Bamberg, 2011). Identity is a very fundamental thing in the individual. The concept refers to what is owned, identified, and positioned in the social environment. The formation of this self-identity is

influenced by various factors that come from outside himself or his social environment (Crossley, 2000; Thoits, 2013).

According to identity theory, each individual has several identities based on their place and function in society's network of interactions. Identity is formed due to internalizing societally anticipated roles or actions (Stryker & Burke, 2000). Identity theory demonstrates the connection between self-concept and human behavior by integrating internal identity with social structure. This is closely linked to their relationships in society (Murnieks, 2007). According to Stryker and Burke (2000), the connection between identity and roles is found in the meaning of the two. When the meaning of Identity coincides with the meaning of roles, Identity can predict behavior. According to Stryker and Burke (2000), the choice of roles is a result of the Identity that shapes the self-concept. The identities within the self are arranged in a hierarchical order based on their importance (salience).

The focus of McCall and Simmons' (1978) research is on role identities. Below, we go into greater detail about the importance Stryker (2002) focuses on role identities and the expectations connected to people's roles in the social system. The distinctive quality of role identities is more likely to be emphasized by McCall and Simmons. Idiosyncratic features are people's particular perceptions of their identities and how these identities are negotiated with other people throughout interaction.

Self-identity determines who the person is. The importance of self-identity lies in the direction and intensity of a person's response. If a person considers their Identity meaningful to them, it will positively impact their behavior (Burke, 1991). Individuals will be motivated to give meaning to their behavior consistent with the meaning of their Identity. This condition is called congruence (Burke, 1991). Stets & Serpe (2016) said that when congruence conditions occur, positive emotions will arise. Individuals will feel happy and continue to carry out their activities. Conversely, the absence of verification of self-identity will result in negative emotions.

Individuals have several identities due to their diverse roles in society (McCall and Simmons, 1978). Therefore, the prominence hierarchy and salience hierarchy were introduced to define multiple identities. Prominence hierarchy describes an actor's ideal self, or which roles are central, essential, and long-lasting. The situational self is represented by the salience hierarchy. It is based on anticipating how people will act in specific circumstances. According to McCall and Simmons, people will typically prefer to act out a more prominent identity when given the chance to do so in a circumstance. However, some circumstances prevent the adoption of significant identities since they don't offer rewards. As a result, individuals become more aware of role identities that they should activate in particular situations. These are the prominent identities. However, one of the literary works that reflect the use of interactional emphasis is a novel titled "Blackass" by a Nigerian writer named A. Igoni Barret.

The researcher believes that every human being could be relevant to the interactional emphasis identity theory, which emphasizes the awareness of multiple Identities in every person. Salience hierarchy and Prominence hierarchy were used to categorize the Identity Hierarchy. The alteration in the Furo Wariboko Identity was a reflection of the divided hierarchy of identity. The inspiration for this study drives the researcher. The study chooses the Blackass novel by A. Igoni Barret in accordance with George McCall and J. L. Simmons' Interactional Emphasis of identity theory.

Blackass novel begins with the life story of a Nigerian named Furo Wariboko. But one day, a strange thing happened. When he woke up, his skin became white. He was confused. Since his skin turns white, he becomes more confused than anyone. Furo felt so devastated. Then, he decided to leave his family. Eventually, he realized that his change as a white person could give him so many fortunes. Then, he decides to keep going on with his condition. Many people treat him well than on his previous skin as a black person. He did white people things and took some advantage of being white. He got many more privileges than ever (Barrett, 2015).

Moreover, the novel talks about satire on culture, cliché moments to Furo Wariboko, how he quickly gets a job, his new girlfriend, his past life, and others. Also, Blackass is a remarkable literary work since it won some awards as one of the best novels in the world. Therefore, Blackass attracts the attention of researchers to study it. Through some studies, researchers showed some gratitude towards A. Igoni Barrett successfully brought a different kind of novel about racism (Morris, 2016).

Furthermore, the researcher locates certain earlier studies considered relevant references. Some researchers have researched a related topic. (Adebayo. S, 2020) in his study titled *The black soul is (still) a white man's artefact? Postcoloniality, post-Fanonism, and the tenacity of race(ism) in A. Igoni Barrett's Blackass* concluded in a typical post-racial setting where white privilege might not be common, Blackass as a sophisticated novel represents a diverse psycho-sociology of race. Other perceptions and interpretations of white privilege exist. It had to do with racism's institutionalization as a result of colonial racism. By highlighting the globalization and threat of white supremacy, it implied that racism only exists in societies with multiple racial groups. This study was compared to earlier studies because it could help researcher gain new perspectives when looking for information about white privilege.

Second, (Olondo, 2020) with a journal article titled *The Fluidity of Identity: Representation of Intersectionality in Igoni Barrett's Blackass*. It expressed concern regarding the identity assumptions made by people based on their skin color. It examines how Nigerian author A. Igoni Barrett employs his Blackass novel to submerge us in the racism present in post-colonial Nigeria. In order to show how Barrett conforms to and subverts these ideas to show the nuances of inferiority in the African subject compared to the superiority of the "white" protagonist, the researcher also looked into the numerous fallacies associated with various identities. In order to explore the complexity of Identity, this research had focused on the intersectionality portrayed in the Blackass novel, which aims to expose various fallacies and binaries related to race and gender. This study added information about the disparity between white people and black people in relation to the issue of skin-color stereotypes.

Third, (Dwivedi, 2020) in his study titled *Skin Colour Hegemony in Blackass: A Critical Study*, had observed the discrimination toward skin color. The lighter skin seemed to get easiness to succeed in this world nowadays situation. This skin color hegemony had grown to become a concern of the researcher. Further, the study used Hegemony theory to unfold the issue brought by A. Igoni Barrett through his novel titled "Blackass." The researcher found that the lighter skin people's hegemony was more like a constructed narrative. The study showed how the hegemony of lighter skin people portrayed in Blackass is the same as with a nowadays severe issue. The lighter skin people tend to dominate the colored people's countries such as Nigeria. Then, the researcher described

the main character named Furo as representing how the lighter skin people are treated in Nigeria. This research was used in previous studies because it was able to contribute to researchers to finding the data related to the privilege of being white.

Fourth, (Alfaisali, H. S. A. 2021), in his master degree thesis titled *Race Traitors and Individual Psychology In John Howard Griffin's Black Like Me, Andrea Levy's Small Island, And Igoni Barrett's Blackass*, analyzed the three novels "Black Like Me," "Small Island," and "Blackass," which were chosen to represent three different locations (the USA, UK, and Nigeria), and time periods (the 1950s, 1940s, and 2010s), to find out why racial traitors leave their races and how white privilege heightens feelings of inferiority or superiority. The concept of "Race Treason" by Noel Ignatiev was combined with the Individual Psychology Theory, "White Privilege" from "Critical Race Theory," and the Individual Psychology Theory. As an example, "Individual Psychology" was interested in examining feelings of inferiority and superiority, whereas "Race Treason" was concerned with ending the "White Privilege" that accorded superiority feelings to members of the white race and inferiority feelings to members of other races. As a result, the researcher had been able to find information about the reasons why black people typically fear white people.

Fifth, (Iromuanya. J. 2020) in the study titled "White Man's Magic" A. Igoni Barrett's *Blackass*, *Afropolitanism*, and (Post) *Racial Anxieties*." Through *Afropolitanism* and (Post) *Racial Anxieties* perspective, the researcher found that "Blackass" was a portrayal that describes the benefits of becoming white people instead of black people. The "White Man's Magic" that Furo acquired was a local representation of the global system of white supremacy that was fostered by European colonialism. The researcher was also concerned that those who support afropolitanism would likely end up colonizing other people because they ignore the system of white supremacy. This research had contributed to the researcher providing the data that contained the benefit of becoming white people in contrast with black people.

Last, (Rono, D. C. 2017), in the study titled "Social media as a literary technique in Igoni Barret's *Blackass* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*." The study's objective was to study how social media was used in the works of Barret and Adichie. Examining the various social media tools used and their functions was part of the research into how social media could be used as a storytelling tool. I also looked into the possibility of using social media as a venue for telling stories. The effectiveness of social media techniques for expressing theme issues was also examined in the study. Social media operated as an integrated but distinct field from creative writing. The two authors incorporated a variety of social media elements into their story. Adichie used the blog gadget in *Americanah*, whereas Barret uses Twitter in *Blackass*. In one section of *Blackass*, you could find tweets. Social media usage aligned with the turning point in the story. It exhibited Barret and Adichie's investigation of novel modes of communication. This study tried to identify how people may use social media to tell a tale and manipulate it as a narrative method. This research was used as previous studies because it could contribute to researchers to open up researchers' insights in finding some data related to social media use.

All the previous studies have the same object to study. Besides, there are none of the previous studies uses the interactional emphasis of identity theory. In this case, the researcher only found six previous studies regarding the analysis of the *Blackass* novel. The case indicated that there are still a few studies about *Blackass*'s novel. In addition, interactional Emphasis Theory indicated that every person had some factors while



establishing their Identity and possibly had some identity activated based on the situation. The researcher assumed based on the description provided above, the identity alteration of Furo Wariboko, the protagonist of A. Igoni Barret's *Blackass*, would be compatible with The Interactional Emphasis Theory. The researcher applied George McCall and J. L. Simmons' Interactional Emphasis, an identity theory, to the sociological analysis. This study aimed to find out the factors behind the decision of Furo Wariboko's identity change that identity change portrayed during the process of his identity change. The researcher decided to analyze using this theory because some studies mainly focus on racism instead of analyzing Furo Wariboko's identity change.

## RESEARCH METHOD

In order to analyze the research data from the *Blackass* novel, this study employed a literary criticism methodology. Literary criticism was used to analyze or evaluate works of literature. It usually involved a discussion of literary works and connected your ideas with other study results. Furo, the protagonist in A. Igoni Barret's *Blackass* novel, was analyzed in-depth using literary criticism to determine his prominence hierarchy and salience hierarchy.

As a result of the data being gathered in the form of the novel's main character's words or utterances, this study fitted into the category of qualitative research. The identity prominence hierarchy and salience hierarchy indicated by Furo are examined using the interactional emphasis of identity theory by McCall and Simmons. The researcher explained why Furo decided to entirely alter his identity and what kind of situational identity Furo possesses. The main character, Furo, experiences a process of identity changed in the *Blackass* novel. As a result of this approach, this study was expected to learn a lot about Furo's prominence and salience hierarchies.

Based on the object formal, the researcher used the sociological approach in analyzing the *Blackass* novel. The sociological approach uncovered the relationship with the novel. Usually, the sociological approach examined the author's reflection on society. The sociological approach could represent what the author saw within society, which was brought in their style.

The data source used by the researcher is a literary work in the form of a novel, *Blackass*. This novel was written by a Nigerian writer named A. Igoni Barret and published by Graywolf Press on January 3, 2016. This novel was published in the United States and the language used in this novel is English. This novel has 272 pages published in hardcover printed form and can be accessed as an e-book. The use of a novel as a data source provided a unique and rich source of information for the researcher.

To collect the data, there were some steps. The first one was the researcher used the "scanning" read technique on A. Igoni Barret's *Blackass* to identify some essential points of the novel. The second was underlining, highlighting, and taking notes on the words or sentences related to the research questions. The third was classifying the data that compatible with the interactional emphasis of identity theory by McCall and Simmons in the analysis.

Data analysis involved a number of procedures after data collection. The researcher's initial task would be to find the data relevant to the prominence hierarchy and the impacts of the prominence hierarchy. Then, the researcher identified the evidence quotation to support the data by applying a sociological approach and the interactional

emphasis of identity theory and identified the data deliberately by combining the researcher's arguments which were relevant to the theory and the data source. Last, the researcher summed up the result of the discussion at the end of the study in the conclusion segment.

## FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### ***The Factors that Convinced Furo to Change His Identity from His Original Identity As "Furo Wariboko" to A New Identity As "Frank Whyte"***

The researcher conducted an analysis of Furo's identity shift in the novel *"Blackass"* by A. Igoni Barrett, specifically focusing on the convincing factors of Furo's new identity as "Frank Whyte." The analysis explored the role of support, commitment, and rewards in shaping an individual's identity within the context of a prominence hierarchy. The analysis found supporting evidence for each aspect, including Furo's interactions with various individuals that highlighted the crucial role that support plays in shaping his position within the hierarchy.

#### *Support*

The analysis stated that support is a key factor in shaping an individual's identity within the context of the prominence hierarchy. The analysis used Furo's experiences as a case study to explore the ways in which support impacts an individual's position within the hierarchy.

The first example of support found in the novel was when Furo receives financial assistance from a stranger named Ekemini to pay for a motorcycle taxi. This support helped Furo to navigate the challenges of getting to his job interview on time, which was an important step in his efforts to improve his position in the prominence hierarchy. Although Furo initially had to convince Ekemini with a fake scenario to get the money, the fact that she is willing to lend him the money demonstrates the importance of social support in shaping an individual's position in the hierarchy. It can be seen from the example below:

*His confidence mounted along with her curiosity. 'It's not like I chose to trek to my interview, you know,' he said, and held her gaze. Settling deeper into character, he softened his tone: 'I was attacked by robbers this morning. They took my car, my wallet ... and my phone. I was lucky to get away with my documents.' He tapped the folder under his arm. (Barret, 2016, p. 7)*

*In the silence that followed, Furo and Ekemini were jostled together by a flash wave of pedestrians. With her chest pressed against him and her breath in his face, Furo almost regretted lying to her. But he had no choice, he told himself, no choice at all. (Barret, 2016, p. 7)*

*After a bit of suspicion, Ekemini offered help by offering money for bike fare. She waited a beat, and then spoke in a rush, her tone embarrassed. 'Can I give you some money for the bike fare?' Furo's grin was truthful. 'That would be nice of you. It's just a loan, of course.' (Barret, 2016, p. 7)*

The expression on Ekemini's face was pleased as she handed the recipient a thousand naira note that she had taken out of her handbag. As she left, Furo thanked her. Inquiring about his phone number in case he wanted to return the borrowed money later, he opened his folder, took a pen out, and handed it to her.

In summary, Furo got borrowed money from Ekemini as a form of support. Ekemini willingly lends the money for Furo to get a bike. Even Ekemini has a slight bit of suspicion. Without a doubt, she lends the money. Maybe the suspicion is why such white people have a Nigerian accent and claim that he is Nigerian. Furo may get the money by playing a fake scenario, but it turns out to make Ekemini believe it just like that. According to McCall and Simmons, money loan assistance is one of support.

The second example of support in the novel is when Furo is helped by a stranger to pass the job interview queue. This support helps Furo to secure a job at a book advertising company, which is another important step in his efforts to improve his position in the prominence hierarchy. The stranger who helps Furo does so without expecting anything in return, demonstrating the importance of altruistic support in shaping an individual's position in the hierarchy.

*He needed the job more than he feared a lynching. Lucky then that he didn't have to face his convictions, because the tension eased when the mob leader – this idiot who wants to get me in trouble, Furo thought with a flash of hatred – raised his voice: 'It's a nonsense job anyway.' He turned his attention back to Furo. 'You have to go inside and write down your name, then collect a number from Tosin, the woman at the front desk. She will call you in by your number.'* (Barret, 2016, p. 10)

Later, the man also tried to convince Furo that for sure he would get the job. Then, Furo thanked the man because he helped to pass the job applicant's queue. Furo went ahead and ran to the receptionist.

*'Yes, go and write your name,' the man agreed, and nodded vigorously, but did not release his grip on Furo's shoulder. 'You will get the job, for sure. Me and you have plenty things to talk about.' His eyes bored into Furo's, and his face hardened, shed its friendliness, twisted into a scowl. 'Watch out for Obata!'* (Barret, 2016, p. 10)

*The vehemence of his words spattered Furo with spit, and this time he couldn't help it, he raised a hand to wipe his face before muttering, 'OK, thanks.' He shrugged off the man's hold, drew away from him, and ran the gauntlet of hostile faces towards the building entrance.* (Barret, 2016, p. 10)

In that case, Furo got his second fortune on his interview day. A stranger helped him to pass the job applicant queue. The man also convinced Furo that he would get the job. The man looked sincerely and helped Furo. It could be noticed that Furo got the support because of his skin color.

Overall, the analysis suggested that support played a crucial role in shaping an individual's identity within the context of the prominence hierarchy. Social, economic, and emotional support were all important factors in helping individuals navigate the rewards and penalties associated with different positions in the hierarchy, providing them with the resources and encouragement needed to maintain a positive self-concept and achieve their goals. The examples from Furo's experiences in "*Blackass*" demonstrated how support can impact an individual's position in the hierarchy and emphasized the critical role that it played in determining one's place within this complex social structure.

### *Commitment*

The analysis also found that commitment was a factor in shaping an individual's identity within the prominence hierarchy. It could help individuals establish and maintain their positions within the hierarchy, as well as shape their self-concept and sense of identity. Furo's commitment to his new identity as Frank Whyte was evident throughout the novel. He changed his name, mannerisms, and even his accent to fit into his new identity. Furo's commitment to his new identity showed how it can shape an individual's position within the hierarchy.

Commitment was a crucial factor in an individual's experiences and identity within the prominence hierarchy. In the context of A. Igoni Bar-rett's "*Blackass*," Furo's commitment to his chosen identity as a "white man" is a complex and multifaceted process that shapes his experiences within the social structure. This commitment encompasses more than just a desire to fit in or attain a higher status; it involves a deep-seated belief in the superiority of whiteness and a willingness to reject his Black identity entirely. Furo's unwavering commitment to this chosen identity enables him to navigate the complexities of the prominence hierarchy and interact with others in a manner that supports his desired status.

In the following data analysis, the researcher will explore how Furo's commitment to his chosen identity shapes his experiences within the prominence hierarchy. Through this analysis, the researcher would provide insights into the multifaceted nature of commitment and how it influenced an individual's position within the social structure, specifically in relation to Furo's commitment to his "whiteman" identity.

Furo's commitment to his chosen identity began with his decision to use his "white" identity after getting his first job. Furo came from a family that has struggled financially for years, with his father owning a failed chicken farm and his mother working tirelessly to provide for the family. Furo saw his father as a failure, someone who was unable to provide for his family and support them financially. He was also envious of his sister's successes and abilities, and he felt that he had to do something to change his fate and become a better person than his father.

*The chicken farm never recovered from that blow. Neither did Furo's father, who kept the business open mainly as an excuse to escape the house every day. By the time Furo gained admission to university and departed for Ekpoma, his father's business was nothing more than an inhouse joke and his mother had accepted her everlasting role as the sole financier of everything Wariboko. (Barret, 2016, p. 25)*

*The chicken farm never recovered from that blow. Neither did Furo's father, who kept the business open mainly as an excuse to escape the house every day. By the time Furo gained admission to university and departed for Ekpoma, his father's business was nothing more than an inhouse joke and his mother had accepted her everlasting role as the sole financier of everything Wariboko. She covered Furo's fees as well as his sister's; she kept the house in food and settled the utility bills; she bought his father a second-hand Peugeot 405 so he could do the household shopping while she was at work; and every December, when the wild rush for Christmas chicken quickened the hearts of failed farmers across the nation, she granted the loan for the few hundred broiler chicks his father bought and fattened for pocket change. Furo couldn't remember when it began to dawn on him that his father had settled for defeat in a war he still pretended to fight. He likely knew earlier than 2009, but it was that year, after he returned to his mother's house upon completion of his youth service, that he realised it was his father he pitied the most. (Barret, 2016, p. 25)*



On the first night of his change, Furo decided not to go home. He could not be home in this situation. He feared that his family would not accept him. So, he decided to sleep in an abandoned building. Furo felt so lonely. Something was triggering his mind. On his mind, how big his family worries about him. But later, he remembered the memory of each of his family members. When it came to his memories about his father, he started furiously. Furo saw his father as a failure person. A lousy memory about his father was just unacceptable for him, such as a failure in business, lack of enthusiasm for work, drowning in failure, and basically could not take care of the house—even Furo's mother took over the responsibility of all of the housework.

*Yes, he was doing the right thing, he was even surer. (Barret, 2016, p. 27)*

*Better his family retain their image of him and he his of them. (Barret, 2016, p. 27)*

Furo didn't want to fail like his father, and obviously, he envied his sister's completeness. From there, Furo began to realize that this change into white could change his fate. He had high hopes to be a better person than his father and competed with his sister. He felt that his change would be worth it for the future.

Furo's decision to use his "white" identity was not just a desire to fit in or attain a higher status; it was also a rejection of his Black identity. Furo believed that by adopting the persona of a white man, he could escape the limitations of his Black identity and achieved success and prosperity. He saw whiteness as a symbol of power and privilege, and he believed that by becoming white, he could gain access to these benefits.

In addition, Furo's commitment to his chosen identity was multifaceted and complex, involving not just a belief in the superiority of whiteness but also a willingness to reject his Black identity entirely. He went to great lengths to maintain his "whiteman" persona, including changing his name, dyeing his skin, and altering his speech and mannerisms. Furo's commitment to this persona was enable him to navigate the complexities of the prominence hierarchy and interacted with others in a manner that supports his desired status.

*"Whyte, too, felt right, felt like his, and, in a slow voice that burred in his ears, he said both as one: 'Frank Whyte.' His eyes watered as he stared at the flashing lights on the TV screen. 'Frank Whyte, Frank Whyte,' he repeated, blinking to clear his eyes." (Barret, 2016, p. 99)*

*He had found his name. (Barret, 2016, p. 99)*

This would be the next step for Furo to change his identity completely. After he saw the missing person news in the newspaper, he denied his previous black identity. He tried to find any other solution to this problem. An idea came to his mind. Furo decided to change his name. He came up with a scenario that he is from America, and his name should fit with his country of origin as what he pretends to Syreeta. A name came to his mind. That is "Frank Whyte."

*Then he picked up the notepad sheet on which Tetsola had scribbled 'frank.whyte@gmail.com' and 'habanigeria789', his official email address and his temporary password. He logged into the brand-new mailbox and changed his password without trouble, then read his first email, a welcome from Gmail. (Barret, 2016, p. 114)*

Furo took the laptop to work with him, opened a browser, and signed into his Yahoo mailbox. He had not been online for two weeks. Of course, there was a ton of notification coming. There are three hundred and seventeen unread emails, many of them newsletters from the job-listing websites he was subscribed to, but he notices one email from his mother, several from his father and his sister, and countless Facebook and Twitter notifications from friends, relatives, and total strangers. Then he read his mother's email, sent on 22 June, which read: 'MY SON WHERE ARE YOU???' he is now regretting opening his mailbox. He opened the mailbox settings, scrolled down until he found the option he sought, and deleted his account.

His Facebook wall was also flooded with news of his disappearance. It annoyed Furo. Then he opened Twitter and found his sister tried to reach and find him via Twitter, whether in a direct message or mention tweet. Furo can't handle the emotion from all of these social media things as stated previously. He wants to change his identity completely. He decides to make a new email by using his new name.

However, Furo's commitment to his chosen identity also has negative consequences. He becomes isolated from his family and community, and he experiences feelings of guilt and shame for rejecting his Black identity. He also realizes that his "whiteman" persona is not sustainable and that he cannot maintain it indefinitely.

In conclusion, Furo's commitment to his chosen identity highlights the importance of commitment in an individual's experiences and identity within the prominence hierarchy. It also demonstrates the multifaceted nature of commitment and how it can influence an individual's position within the social structure. In the case of Furo, his commitment to his "whiteman" identity shapes his experiences within the prominence hierarchy and ultimately leads to his downfall.

### *Rewards*

Lastly, the analysis found that rewards are a factor in shaping an individual's identity within the prominence hierarchy. Rewards can be both tangible and intangible, and they play a crucial role in motivating individuals to maintain their positions within the hierarchy. Furo's reward for his new identity is a sense of belonging and acceptance in the white community. By changing his identity, Furo gains access to a higher social status and the rewards that come with it.

The discussion focuses on the concept of the prominence hierarchy and the rewards associated with it. The prominence hierarchy is a social ranking system where individuals are valued and rewarded based on their position and level of authority within a group. In this system, those who hold higher positions are considered more valuable and receive greater rewards. These rewards can be both material and non-material, such as social status, recognition, and admiration. The higher the position, the greater the rewards. The novel "Blackass" by A. Igoni Barrett illustrates this concept through the protagonist, Furo, who undergoes a transformation from a black man to a white man overnight. As a result, he experiences a shift in his social status, and his new appearance grants him access to a world of privilege and power. Furo's change in appearance and social status highlights the prominence hierarchy and the rewards that come with it.

*'Good man,' Arinze said. 'So let's get down to details. The position I'm offering you is Marketing Executive. You'll be my point man, my big gun, the person I send out to bring in important clients. It's high-level marketing – you'll have to dress formally for meetings. The*

*company will provide you with an official car and a driver. How does that sound so far?'*(Barret, 2016, p. 15)

*'Perfect. Now your salary. Executive pay at Haba! starts at eighty thousand a month. That's what you'll earn at first. But you'll also get a percentage on your sales. For sales of up to five hundred books, you get two point five per cent. For sales of five hundred to a thousand, you get...'* (Barret, 2016, p. 16)

*While Arinze reeled off percentages, Furo was calculating his good fortune in decimals. This offer of employment was the first he'd ever got, and a salary of eighty thousand naira was eighty thousand times better than nothing. It was also fifty thousand more than he'd expected, as the vacancy he'd applied for, the salesperson job, paid thirty thousand naira. Even better, this position came with a car and driver, free transportation, meaning more money for him. With all that money in his hands he wouldn't need anyone. He could feed himself, buy new clothes, start his life for real, and still have enough left over to save towards renting an apartment. Eighty thousand naira wasn't just money, it was freedom. For the first time since waking that morning, Furo had no doubts about the path to take. (Barret, 2016, p. 16)*

The data provided in the text shows how Furo's whiteness grants him greater rewards in society and how he uses his newfound privilege to navigate his new identity. Furo easily earns his first job at Haba! Ltd as a Marketing Executive with a starting salary of 80,000 naira per month. This is 50,000 naira more than the salary for the position he applied for, the salesperson job. Additionally, Furo will receive a percentage on his sales, an official car, and a driver. Furo calculates his good fortune in decimals while Arinze, his employer, reels off percentages. This job offer is the first Furo has ever received, and the salary he is offered is a significant improvement on what he had hoped for.

Furo's change in appearance and social status highlights the importance of social identity and how it affects an individual's place in society. In Furo's case, his transformation from a black man to a white man grants him greater access to privilege and power. He uses this newfound privilege to secure a high-paying job that provides him with financial freedom. Furo's story highlights the impact that race and social status have on an individual's opportunities in life. It also highlights the importance of recognizing and challenging systems of privilege and power that perpetuate inequality in society.

In conclusion, the concept of the prominence hierarchy and the rewards associated with it are evident in the novel "Blackass" by A. Igoni Barrett. The protagonist, Furo, undergoes a transformation that grants him access to privilege and power, and he uses this newfound privilege to secure a high-paying job. Furo's story highlights the impact that race and social status have on an individual's opportunities in life and underscores the importance of recognizing and challenging systems of privilege and power that perpetuate inequality in society.

In conclusion, the analysis of Furo's identity shift in "Blackass" demonstrates the role of support, commitment, and rewards in shaping an individual's identity within the prominence hierarchy. The novel illustrates how social support can provide resources and encouragement needed to achieve one's goals, how commitment can shape one's self-concept and sense of identity, and how rewards can motivate individuals to maintain their positions within the hierarchy.

### ***The Impacts that Furo Experienced when Changing His Identity from His Original Identity as "Furo Wariboko" to A New Identity as "Frank Whyte"***

The transformation of Furo Wariboko into Frank Whyte in Igoni Barrett's novel "Blackass" has significant economic, social, and psychological impacts on his life. This transformation highlights the interactional emphasis of identity theory and how individuals' identities are shaped by external factors such as their perceived race and social status. Furo's decision to adopt a white identity is influenced by the prominence hierarchy in Nigerian society and the privileges associated with whiteness. This research will examine the economic, social, and psychological impacts of Furo's transformation and explore how they reflect the complex interplay between identity, power, and society.

#### ***Social Impact***

Furo's transformation into Frank Whyte has a significant impact on his social standing and the way he is treated by others. As a black man in Nigeria, Furo faced discrimination and limited opportunities due to his race. However, as a white man, he gains access to privileges and opportunities that were previously unavailable to him. This highlights the fluidity of racial identity and how it is shaped by external factors such as appearance and social status.

For example, when Furo first wakes up as Frank Whyte, he notices the differences in the way people treat him based on his perceived race. He notes

*"They looked at me differently than before. Respectful, friendly, helpful. The way they looked at me before was different. Suspicious, critical, and sometimes just plain hateful" (Barrett, 2016, p. 63).*

This change in his perceived race has a significant impact on the way he is treated by others and the opportunities that are available to him.

Furthermore, Furo's transformation highlights how societal structures are designed to privilege certain racial identities over others. For example, when Furo applies for a job as Frank Whyte, he notes,

*"They looked at me and saw a white man, and that was all that mattered. It was like there was a checklist of qualifications for the job, and being white was at the top of the list" (Barrett, 2016, p. 106).*

This quote highlights the ways in which racial identity is prioritized over qualifications and experience in the hiring process.

#### ***Economic Impact***

Furo's transformation into Frank Whyte also has a significant economic impact. As a black man in Nigeria, Furo faced limited job opportunities and economic mobility due to systemic racism and discrimination. However, as a white man, he gains access to higher-paying jobs and economic opportunities that were previously unavailable to him.

For example, when Furo applies for a job as Frank Whyte, he is offered a significantly higher salary than he would have received as a black man. He notes,

*"I had never seen so many zeros before. It was more money than I had ever imagined"*  
(Barrett, 2016, p. 105).

This quote highlights the economic advantages that come with white privilege and the ways in which systemic racism limits economic opportunities for people of color.

Furthermore, Furo's transformation highlights the intersectionality of race and class. As a white man, he gains access to a level of wealth and privilege that was previously unavailable to him, but he also experiences a sense of disconnection from his former identity and struggles with feelings of guilt and shame.

### *Psychological Impact*

In addition to the social and economic impact of Furo's transformation, there is also a significant psychological impact. Furo struggles with the loss of his identity and the conflicting emotions that come with being a different race. He experiences a sense of disconnection from his former self and a loss of cultural and familial ties.

For example, when Furo encounters his mother as Frank Whyte, he struggles with how to interact with her. He notes,

*"I wanted to tell her who I was. But I couldn't. I didn't know who I was. Or maybe I did, but I didn't feel like him anymore. And I didn't know if he was still her son"* (Barrett, 2016, p. 97).

This quote highlights the sense of disconnection and confusion that Furo experiences as a result of his transformation.

Furthermore, Furo also struggles with internalized racism and feelings of guilt for abandoning his black identity. He notes,

*"I should feel guilty, but I don't. And that makes me feel guilty. I want to be black again, but I don't know how"* (Barrett, 2016, p. 138).

This quote demonstrates the internal conflict that Furo experiences as he grapples with his new identity and the societal pressures that come with it.

In conclusion, Furo Wariboko's transformation into Frank Whyte in Igoni Barrett's novel "Blackass" has significant economic, social, and psychological impacts on his life. The research highlights the interactional emphasis of identity theory and how individuals' identities are shaped by external factors such as their perceived race and social status. Furo's decision to adopt a white identity reflects the complex interplay between identity, power, and society, as well as the fluidity of racial identity and the ways in which it is shaped by societal structures. The social impact of Furo's transformation is evident in the way he is treated by others and the opportunities available to him. The economic impact is demonstrated in the economic advantages and opportunities that come with white privilege, while the psychological impact is characterized by Furo's struggles with his new identity, loss of cultural and familial ties, and internalized racism.

### **CONCLUSION & SUGGESTION**

In the study, the researcher identifies the prominence hierarchy of Furo's identity transformation, from his original identity as "Furo Wariboko" to his new identity as "Frank Whyte." This transformation was influenced by several factors, including support,



commitment, and rewards, which played important roles in Furo's decision to change his identity. Furo's new identity as a white man gave him access to various economic and social advantages, which further reinforced his decision to maintain his new identity. By choosing to embrace his new identity as Frank Whyte, Furo establishes a new position for himself in the social hierarchy, demonstrating how identity changes can lead to a shift in one's prominence hierarchy.

This study also explores how Furo Wariboko's transformation into a white man named Frank Whyte in "Blackass" affects his economic, social, and psychological well-being. It emphasizes how external factors, such as race and social status, shape an individual's identity. Furo's decision to become white reflects the complex relationship between identity, power, and society, and how racial identity is shaped by societal structures. Furo's transformation affects the way he is treated by others, the opportunities available to him, and the economic advantages that come with white privilege. It also has a psychological impact, as Furo struggles with his new identity, and experiences loss of cultural and familial ties and internalized racism. This study highlights the importance of understanding the complexities of identity and societal structures in addressing systemic discrimination and promoting social justice.

The analysis of Furo's prominence hierarchy of identity and salience hierarchy of identity, which are based on the identity theory by George McCall and J. L. Simmons, is the only focus of this study. The researchers want the reader to understand Furo Wariboko's interactional emphasis by reading this thesis and the Blackass novel. The researcher also advises the following researchers to look at the other aspect. The following researcher could also go into greater detail about the previous analysis.

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