

Navigating Identities: Psychological Transformation in Igoni Barrett's *Blackass* and Mohamed Mbougar Sarr's *The Silence of The Choir*

Naomi Kehinde Ibitoye-Ayeni
College of Agriculture, Ahmadu Bello University, Kabba

Abstract

The relationship between identity and transformation has been explored in African literature. While literary scholars have discussed themes relating to identity construction, they seem to overlook how identity constructs lead to psychological transformation in literary texts. Evidently, humans experience transformation in peculiar ways. This can happen physically, psychologically, ideologically, and otherwise. This study, therefore, investigates the depiction of identity and psychological change in Igoni Barrett's *Blackass* and Sarr's *The Silence of the Choir*, paying close critical attention to events and the roles of the characters. The selected novels were purposively sampled due to their evident portrayals of identity and transformation. This study is qualitative as it analyses the events which unfold in the primary texts. The analysis is anchored to Mezirow's Transformation Theory and Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory. The study reveals that identity hinges on certain factors. It also reveals that transformation manifests in different ways beyond physical traits.

Keywords: Psychological, Transformation, Identities, Navigating.

Introduction

Literary writers continue to explore the complex psychosocial manifestations of identity. Identity is a major aspect of human relationship, and it is explored in different literary and cultural expression. The concept of identity is a very dominant issue which cuts across works of African literature. The capturing of this concept in literary works underscores the utilitarian nature of African literary texts. Identity is a very broad concept to explain. Many scholars have provided their views on the concept, but as time progresses, semantic flaws are noticed in the views. This difficulty in giving a satisfactory meaning to the concept of identity informed the contribution of Gleason (1983), who asserts that even the dictionary does not provide an ample definition of the concept.

Identity means sameness and continuity of the individual self over time and developed through psychosocial stages (Erikson 1968). Wilson (1975), for instance, believes that identity is biological, that it deals with inherent behaviour. The view reveals that identity is developed. The developmental stages take place in the same individual, hence Erikson's reference to the continuity of the individual self. According to him, the development of the identity does not present a new or different individual but helps people realise the different traits which make that individual unique.

The evolution of studies (documented) in identity can be traced to the 19th century with the monumental work of William James, a worthy mention. In 1890, he published the *Principles of Psychology*, a study in which he does an analytic surgery on the psychological effects and roles of identity in humans. James foregrounds the mental, clinical conditions which are observable in individuals in reaction to the creation and recreation of identities for them. In the research, the thought processes, influenced by identity and how it informs behaviour are examined. James' work motivated the works of other researchers who built on the assumptions and conclusions, provided in his work. One of the notable works, after James', on identity formation, is George Mead's (1934) *Mind, Self and Society*. Mead's work is an impressive and detailed study which underscores the transitional process or effect of identity formation. Mead gives prominence to the self-aspect of identity as he crystalises how an individual thinks and shapes an identity for himself. The individual, according to Mead, then presents himself as that identity and encounters rejection or validation by the society. The text further gives attention to the relevance of psychological tenacity in the handling of societal pressure in reaction to the identity, presented by the individual. The work also provides a reversal of the process as it examines how social constructs (identities, created by the society) affect an individual's thoughts and how the thoughts are decisive of the identity he creates or accepts. Since these early studies were undertaken, writers have continued to explore the concept of identity from the psychological and social perspectives.

Ojaide (1992) opines that African literature represents the sociopolitical realities and values of Africans. By sociopolitical values and realities, he means the events and ideas with which Africans are identified. According to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Africans cannot talk about gaining independence from colonial rule when they, Africans, still write in the language of the colonial masters. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's words were

influenced by the disrespectful comments about the African continent by the westerners. The westerners had said, before the conference, that Africans have no literature, neither do they have culture. One factor, which motivated the claim that Africa has no literature, is the use of the English language in African literary productions. The racist comments made Ngugi wa Thiong'o and other African scholars to see the need of writing in African indigenous languages. Ojaide in his article is of the opinion that writing in African indigenous languages elevates cultural uniqueness and oral traditions. He means that when stories, poems, and plays are written in African indigenous languages, the works promote the culture of the speakers of the language and by extension promote the African continent in which the people live.

Oloruntoba-Oju (2013) interrogates the representation of female identity in African literature. Oloruntoba-Oju asserts that African postcolonial literary works depict women as passive and subordinate in all social, economic, and marital aspects. What the critic tries to reveal here is the minority function which women play in the society. Oloruntoba-Oju opines that women are not given significant roles in the various economies of postcolonial Africa. The scholar reveals that women are domesticated, stating in clear terms that they, women, in Africa are reduced to just motherhood and wifehood.

Ibe et al. (2021) examine the creation of identity for characters in performance art and how it contradicts their actual identity off camera. The researchers foreground the dual identity which actors live with, and how it influences their relationship with people off set. The researchers give close attention to one of Nollywood's legendary actors, Sam Dede. The article examines and compares the actor's action-related roles and his calm and unassuming identity off screen. Ibe et. al's study, however, focuses on performance art not novels like the current study.

Furthermore, literature thematizes experiences of physical and psychological transformation. The prefix 'trans' is indicative of a process that builds on an already established one. Formation simply means emergence. It can be said, therefore, from the preceding logic, that transformation is the formation of a new state from an already formed or existing one. It is the recreation of a new form from the existing one or from an external factor. When it is said that a society has been transformed, it means it now wears a look different from its initial appearance. When some individuals attend workshops or other academic gatherings, they assert that the experience transformed them. The testimony establishes the mental and behavioural transformation which

the gathering has stirred in them. This reality shows why Mezirow (1978) in *Perspective Transformation* sees transformation as a change in a person's perspective, frame of reference or world view. According to Mezirow, transformation involves critical reflection. This reflective exercise, according to him, involves thinking and challenging assumptions, beliefs and values.

Mezirow's contribution above buttresses that of Mead which gives huge attention to the involvement of the mind in discourses on identity. The role of literature in facilitating psychological transformation and rehabilitation has been observed by scholars (Owonibi, 2010; Kekeghe, 2021). Mezirow tries to establish that transformation starts when critical thoughts are given to certain aspects of society, deciding whether to accept them or to reject them. This demand, stated by Mezirow, clearly mirrors the constructs which characterize various societies and residents' reactions to the constructs. It has been stated how the Igbos challenged the identity, created for them. It led to the agitation for self-governance. It is also the case of the major ethnic groups in Delta State. The quest to challenge beliefs or assumptions on boundary discourses birthed a crisis. Another demand, which Mezirow says is involved in the discourse on transformation, is perspective shift which involves changing one's purview of himself, others, and the world. This clearly is mental transformation which is usually created by deep thoughts and experiences. When one makes assumptions about a concept but later discovers, probably through experiences, that his assumption is wrong, he may immediately change his view about that concept. This is the shift which is referred to, and it is a demand in transformation. A person can also make a shift in the way he sees himself.

The depiction of the twin themes of transformation and identity is an understudied aspect of literary research. Most existing studies have only examined each of the concepts separately. Altwi (2013) explores the thematization of identity in literary works. The study however explores the concept with attention given to how the depiction of identity transforms the mind of the reader. One of the works, examined in the study, is Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Altwi examines how Okonkwo's role will help to shape or transform the thoughts and behaviours of readers for decisions on identity. Altwi also discusses the character of Sethe in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, showing how she confronts her past identity as a slave, to create a new and comfortable identity. Altwi's work does not give a close attention to how the negotiation for identity leads to psychological and ideological transformation. Also, the

study does not examine physical transformation of characters. This study, therefore, examines the intersections of identity and psychological as well as ideological transformation in Igoni Barrett's *Blackass* and Mohamed Mbougar Sarr's *The Silence of the Choir*.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Psychoanalytic and Transformation theories. The choice was informed by the realization that the selected novels possess episodes of psychological and ideological transformation. Psychoanalytic theory is an offshoot of psychological literary criticism. The theory was propounded by Sigmund Freud, an Austrian personage in neurology. Freud clinically used the theory in the treatment of his patients who had mental disorders. The psychoanalytic theory investigates the action and reactions of characters to different experiences. It examines also the factors which inform the traits which characters manifest in works of art. Since the theory is an appendage of psychology, the researcher deploys it to establish how experiences determine what a character thinks about and how the thoughts consequently decide or influence his behaviour.

Freud developed a structural theory in which he structured the human mind into the id (the human desires), the super ego (the reality check), and the ego (the moral principle). An individual, who cannot control or moderate his urge for certain needs, has his id dominating his mind. If the individual portrays consistent preference for morals, his super ego dominates his mind. Then, if the individual demonstrates moderation in his urges and portrayal of morality, his ego dominates. In explaining the psychoanalytic theory, Freud also gave prominence to the response of characters to episodes of war and other unhealthy encounters.

Owonibi and Gbogi (2009) aver that the Freudian psychoanalytic theory generally gives clear explanation of issues which border on mental health. The psychoanalytic theory also hinges on how the mind, the instinct, and sexuality work. This is according to Barry (1995). Barry's view here explains the role of the mind, as stated already. He makes efforts to show that Freud's theory makes adequate provisions for the workings of the mind and the behaviour.

There are critics who have used the psychoanalytic theory in the critical reading of creative texts. Ajimuda (2016) examines the representations of character traits, informed by different social agents. Deploying the psychoanalytic theory, Ajimuda examines the depiction of repression, revolt, and the human desires and environmental elements which birth them. Ajimuda's investigation reveals the tenets of the

psychoanalytic theory as an analytic tool which analyses the events and emotional issues which affect character traits. Mbaro (2019) further makes clear the focus of a critic who deploys the psychoanalytic theory. He locates the emotional states of the characters through the various narrative devices, deployed by the novelist. This knowledge aids his realisation and X-ray of the factors which inform the various portrayals of character strengths and weaknesses in the novel. Clearly, the psychoanalytic theory is relevant to this study. This is because the novels for appraisal have many events, related to identity, and the effects of those events on the emotional states of the characters. These confirm the suitability of the psychoanalytic theory for this study as it is concerned with character traits and the conditions (identity) which inform their roles.

Transformation theory, on the other hand, was proposed by Mezirow in 1978. Although, it is not a popular or common theory in literary research, it has been used by some critics to examine episodes of transformation in literary texts. The theory was informed by Mezirow's observation of the wife's behavioural transformation after she gained admission into the university. This theory gives huge attention to the relevance of experience to the transformation of an individual. According to Fleming (2018), Mezirow's transformation theory is a very reliable one in discourses of transformation. According to the scholar, the theory deeply examines the possibilities of transformation as an individual exists in the society. This theory focuses mainly on how individuals understand their experiences and their individual selves as they relate in the society with friends, family, and other people. It also gives attention to how individuals reflect on previously formed assumptions about them and their current experiences. The merging of the transformation theory with the psychoanalytic theory is an appropriate, critical decision as the combination will help the researcher to properly investigate identity and transformation without leaving out important details.

Intersections of Identity and Psychological Transformation in the Novels

Identity is a dominant theme in Mohamed Mbougar Sarr's *The Silence of the Choir* and A. Igoni Barrett's *Blackass*. Mohamed Mbougar Sarr was born on June 20, 1990, in Dakar, Senegal. He is a Senegalese writer who writes basically in French. Sarr is the son of a physician, and he, Sarr, grew up in a large Serer family in Diourbel, Senegal. A. Igoni Barrett was

born on March 26, 1979, in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, to a Nigerian mother and a Jamaican father, Lindsay Barrett, who is a novelist and poet. Growing up, Barrett was exposed to the world of literature through his father who played a significant role in supporting his writing career.

Sarr's *The Silence of the Choir* explores the experiences of 72 African migrants in the small fictive town of Sicilian. The work gives attention to the intricacies of identity formation, community, and human connection in the face of adversity, exposing the challenges, encountered by migrants in maintaining their sense of self and belonging in a new environment. Through the characters' experiences, Sarr portrays the relevance of understanding and empathy in reducing cultural divides and inspiring relationships between people from different backgrounds. The narrative represents how identity is determined by experiences, relationships, and cultural contexts. By showing the dynamics between the migrants and the townspeople, Sarr emphasizes the need for concern/compassion in building relationships and encouraging a sense of community. Clearly, the novel presents a relatable and thought-provoking depiction of identity, highlighting its different manifestations and the ways in which it can be shaped by experiences. In the novel, Sarr explores how characters navigate through identity constructs yielding to psychological and ideological transformation.

Barrett's *Blackass* explores the theme of identity and psychological transformation. The novel explores the experiences of Furo Wariboko, a Nigerian man who wakes up one morning and discovers that his complexion has changed into that of a white man. This transformation serves as a lens through which identity, race, and privilege in contemporary Nigerian society can be viewed. Through Furo's journey, Barrett confronts societal norms and expectations, exposing the various futilities and relevance of identity. Like Sarr's work, Barrett's novel demonstrates how identity is determined by experiences, relationships, and cultural contexts; and how societal expectations and culture can influence one's sense of self. As Furo lives with his new identity, he encounters a world that is both familiar and strange where his new look grants him access to certain privileges that he could not access in his former identity. *Blackass* presents identity in a way that will spark thoughts in the reader about the power and social implications of identity. By presenting the various faces of identity, Barrett's novel provides a clear commentary on the human experience, motivating readers to think about the ways in which social expectations and norms influence people's understanding of themselves and others.

In both novels, the manifestations of identity struggles affect the characters' feelings and psyches. Therefore, the characters had to undergo psychological or emotional transformation and ideological transformation. In Sarr's novel, migrants are identified as people who demonstrate nostalgia. This view, which the novel pushes, cannot be refuted as most of those, who have left their countries, usually fall homesick. This happens when they reflect on the beautiful times, spent in their countries with their people who share the same culture with them. The emotional provisions, which migrants enjoy in their countries, are no longer available in their new environments. Rosa and Veronica are sisters in the novel. They argue about the emotional dispositions of the migrants. Veronica thinks that the migrants think only about how they can make money. Rosa disputes Veronica's thoughts in the following excerpt:

"That's not true," said Rosa to her sister. "They also talk about their families, how sad they are, how precarious their situation is, how they're scared they won't get asylum and haunted by the thought that they might never be able to go home. You've never experienced anything like that... (p. 65).

Rosa educates her sister against her unfounded views. She tells her in the excerpt above how thoughts regularly arise among migrants especially thoughts of uncertainties: they are not sure about certain events. This justifies the relevance of the psychoanalytic theory as a theory which gives attention to the thoughts and motivations of characters.

In Barrett's *Blackass*, characters react in various ways to their identity and the possible reactions of others to their identity. After Furo gets transformed, he decides to ensure that nobody sees his butt because it is still dark. He is not comfortable with Syreeta's reaction the last time she saw his butt. He is uncomfortable to reveal it again as shown in the following extract:

On my dressing table," she said she unlocked her legs. Furo felt trapped. Despite his dislike for the rub of rubber, he would wear two if Syreeta wanted. He would stand on his head if she told him to. But nothing would convince him to turn his back to her, not after what happened the last time she saw his buttocks (p.133).

Furo decides not to turn his back to Syreeta. If he does, she will see his "blackass". Furo makes this decision due to her feeling of shock and surprise when she first saw it. Through Furo's reaction/emotions, Barrett tries to underscore the feeling of discomfort, associated with an individual whose "self" contrasts with "society". Again, this psychological trait foregrounds the relevance of the psychoanalytic theory which gives attention to factors which motivate the decisions of characters.

When an individual goes through certain experiences, the experiences, most of the time, transform him as he begins to portray traits that are different from the traits he is known for. These traits can be negative or positive. A person's behaviour can get transformed negatively by a particular occurrence. His behaviour can also get transformed positively by an experience. These realities can also be associated with friendship. When an issue, like a betrayal, is experienced in a friendship, trust dwindles and commitment becomes weak. This fact is emphasized by Ekman (2003) who states that emotions are shaped by both evolution and individual experiences.

The evolution, which Ekman mentions, can be physical and psychological evolution. In Barrett's *Blackass*, we notice how people's feelings get transformed due to their experiences. Most of the experiences are experiences which most of the characters are not used to, hence the emotional reaction. In *The Silence of the Choir*, we also see different episodes of psychological transformation, experienced by characters. During the X-ray of linguistic transformation, it was said that Amedeo tries to learn a new way of speaking by practising the language of the ragazzi people. He is a stranger to them, hence there is a kind of feeling which accompanied him to the setting. However, there is later a psychological transformation as his feelings about the people change. This is captured in the extract below:

But gradually, the wariness he aroused evaporated, his ability to listen grew stronger, and he was better integrated into village social life. It was during that extraordinary period, once he was able to communicate with the most important people... that he experienced a sudden leap forward. He was invited to spend a few evenings at the *ngel*, the rudimentary building made of wood and straw where the village elders gathered to speak. At last, they welcomed him. The village priest spoke with him. The seer spoke to him. Women no

longer fled when they saw him coming. The griottes entertained him with their poems and chants. He was allowed to attend certain initiation rites. Suddenly the austere Catholic priest, always plunged in his biblical texts, began not only to understand but to feel the ties that bound different people, the solidarity between the human and the sacred, the significance of the world as a *ngela* symbolic space where people talked among themselves and with those who came from them, a space where what was said mastered, where the world carried the sacred density of a creative gesture. All these things moved him greatly. His own Catholic faith, which he had not abandoned, was transformed, as if seen in a new light (pp. 43-44).

Amedeo, the priest, is in a new setting with people (migrants) of different cultural, linguistic, and religious identities. It is what the excerpt above captures. At first, he comes with thoughts and emotions, shaped by his culture. He is, at first, not comfortable with the people; but he later experiences a psychological transformation which the excerpt captures as his "wariness" being "evaporated". His feelings about the people have transformed into the type of tolerance and respect. When the people notice his psychological transformation, they "welcomed him" and "women no longer fled" from him. He is beginning to "feel" the ties that "bound different people". These words clearly capture Amedeo's psychological transformation a new feeling for the people in Altino.

Francesco Montero is the mayor of Altino. He is portrayed as a politically inspired character willing to shift his emotions when it will be beneficial to him. After he considers some political alternatives, a psychological transformation is noticed in him as revealed in the extract below:

The town was getting too small for Francesco Montero's ambitions. He'd been feeling increasingly cramped after three successive terms in Altino. He'd cut his teeth here; not only had they had time to grow long, but now they were also sharp, ready to tear at any obstacle that could stop him from showing the full measure of his political talents. He dreamt of entering the Italian parliament; he already saw himself in its seats as a magnificent orator, laying out his vision for

Italy and his solutions to the crisis the country had been going through for long (p. 75).

Montero's feelings about his status in Altino are beginning to change. He used to feel very comfortable with his residence, but that has changed. This is a psychological transformation, and it authenticates the relevance of the transformational theory which deals with changes in humans. Montero's transformed feelings also steer attention to the psychoanalytic theory which is one of the theories, adopted for this work. As explained, the psychoanalytic theory is tooled to interrogate the factors which inform the actions of characters. Montero wishes to rise to the status of an orator outside his current region in the Italian parliament. This is in line with one of the tenets of the psychoanalytic theory which investigates the motivations of characters. The narrator uses the word "cramped" to represent how imprisoned Montero now feels due to the psychological transformation he has experienced. Montero feels it is time to move to the Italian parliament to display his "political talents".

There is a bad smell and the residents of Altino are uncomfortable. At a point, the smell gets so bad, that people begin to run into their houses. It gets worse, that it begins to penetrate houses, extending the discomfort to those who have run inside. Some of the characters (Matteo Falconi, Francesco Montero, Gennaro Orso, Vera Rivera, Jogoy, Sabrina, Carla, and Signora Filipi) decide to defile the consequences of inhaling the stench. They decide to come out and trace the source. They start tracing and reach a conclusion that the area's septic tank has been breached. Gennaro Orso, who says his father was a plumber, alleges that some people deliberately used axes to spoil some parts of the general, septic tank. It is actually the migrants he accuses of the act. He says that "only the migrants" can cause the destruction "and stay calm" (p. 161). The towns people begin to attack the ragazzi. According to the narrator, the ragazzi, in reaction to the violence, experience a psychological transformation as they decide not to bear the attack anymore. They decide to get violent as well. This psychological transformation evidences the relevance of the two theories for this investigation the transformation and psychoanalytic theories as the psychoanalytic theory is deployed to trace the factors which inform the decisions of the characters while the transformation theory is deployed to examine episodes of change. In the following excerpt, the psychological transformation of the ragazzi is captured:

It was that violence that began to be felt in Altino. A number of the ragazzi were subjected to it, but they also perpetrated it themselves, sometimes with even greater cruelty. They became rougher, wilder, wilder, always looking over their shoulders. Their eyes gleamed with a bitter spark that no longer reflected the Dream, just the desire for survival at any cost. All the bitterness they'd been accumulating, all their dashed hopes, all the anxiety of their endless waiting, all their fears were coalescing into a knot of rancor. Their entire beings burned with a deep and distant anger that they no longer sought to contain. It exploded, a grenade of hatred, of resentment, a ruptured ulcer, but before all that, it gnawed away at the fabric of their inner lives. Before it flowed with blood into the world, their violence bled inside them (pp. 163-164).

"... no longer reflected the Dream..." clearly captures the psychological transformation which the ragazzi have experienced in reaction to the violence they are beginning to face. Above the excerpt, it is revealed how the ragazzi are accused of damaging the general, septic tank which then produces an unbearably bad smell. Violence ensues, and the ragazzi are the target. From the narrator's choice of words, the ragazzi had, before the accusation and violence, tolerated the attacks from the indigenes. A psychological transformation is then noticed when they decide not to be calm. They decide to react. The novelist deploys very striking metaphors to capture this psychological transformation. There is the use of "knot of rancor" to reveal how the ragazzi's initial feeling of fear transformed into hatred for the indigenes. The metaphor "a grenade of hatred" is also deployed to reveal the level of hatred that the ragazzi are now portraying in reaction to the violence they encounter. The novelist further uses the metaphor "the fabric of their inner lives" to expose the far-reaching transformation which the ragazzi have experienced.

In *Blackass*, there is also the portrayal of psychological transformation. Furo has been physically transformed, and this has been accompanied with different reactions. Furo understands his new physical transformation, and he is battling with a psychological shift to accommodate the new state. When he was dark, he never contemplated how to convince people about his complexion. Now, he is contemplating how to convince people about it and also how he can emotionally deal

with it. In the excerpt below, Furo's psychological transformation is captured as his emotions shift from comfort to discomfort:

He wished he had someone with whom to share his burden. If only he could go to his mother and say, 'Mummy, something is wrong, look at what happened to me!' And his mother would take control just like she did when he was seven and caught chickenpox from school. She would pacify his fears with promises of ice-cream binges. She would strip off his clothes and bathe him in warm, Dettol-smelling water, then rub him down with calamine lotion and set him loose to run shrieking around the house, her little war-painted savage. But he was thirty-three, too old now for blind belief in a mother's healing powers... For his was not a condition like cancer, where his mother would spend the rest of her life savings seeking a cure; or a condition that allowed for denial, say schizophrenia, where she would spend the rest of her life as his carer. At least, for cancer, his family would know that their misfortune was shared by others across the world, and for schizophrenia there was still the hope that once in a while the son they recognised would emerge from behind the phantasmal fog of his mind. What he had was neither physical nor mental, not in a sense that made any sense, and so it was as explicable to him as it would be to everyone else (p. 46).

The psychological transformation above is from confidence to unconfidence. Furo is not confident to reveal his condition to his mother like he used to do. The situation makes him engage in a flashback as he remembers when he could talk to his mother about chickenpox and other health issues. He thinks it would have been better if he were suffering from schizophrenia, that he would have been able to convey it to his mother or anybody. He says these words to show that the other health conditions are normal while his physical transformation is abnormal, hence he cannot reveal it to his mother. This is a clear psychological transformation from confidence to fear. Furo, however, reclaims his confidence later in the novel. There is later a second experience of a psychological transformation as he becomes confident to reveal his situation:

A spasm of laughter touched Furo's face but he forced it back in time. Yellow man was staring at Syreeta, who was bent double in the chair with her hands gripping her sides and her shoulders heaving. She laughed so long that Furo got embarrassed on Yellowman's behalf. Finally, she straightened up, flicked a tear from her eye corner with a finger, and then met Yellowman's look of brooding. 'Abeg, Yellowman, no kill me with laugh,' she said in a choked voice. 'My friend sabi speak pidgin. No need to wave your hand like person wey dey drawn.'

Yellow man's face lit up with excitement. 'Talk true? E dey speak pidgin?' 'Talk to am, you go see.'

Yellowman looked Furo in the face for the first time. His golden-brown eyes glistened like boiled sweets. He sucked on his lips, as if tasting his words, and then he fired, 'How you dey?'

'I full ground,' Furo replied.

'Hah hah --- correct guy!' Yellowman barked in exultation, (p. 173).

Syreeta is Furo's girlfriend while Yellowman is a character who represents Lagos street's life. There's a contrast between Furo's current psychological state and that which he portrayed at the exposition of the novel. Shortly, after he experiences a physical transformation, he demonstrates lack of confidence to interact with people or to speak with his mother about his strange transformation. However, in the excerpt above, he shows confidence by revealing his identity. He comes out to interact with people and even makes a pidgin expression to crystalise his identity.

In Sarr's *The Silence of The Choir*, Carla is one of the "Three Graces", a group of women who assist in the care of the ragazzi people. Like Amedeo, Carla comes with a particular thought about the ragazzi people. She, however, experiences an ideological transformation as she realises the identity of the ragazzi people. Her current idea about them is different from what she had earlier thought. The extract below captures Carla's ideological transformation:

... After ten years of cultural meditation, four receptions, and hundreds of *giri* care, Carla had learned to recognize signs of bitterness among the ragazzi. With this last group, however,

these signs pointed to something deeper and more vehement. The men's faces were harder, their questions more insistent, their attitude more distant and not as warm. This attitude didn't affect all of them. They were as if burned from the inside, gnawed by impatience, by incomprehension (p. 69).

Carla's idea about the ragazzi gets transformed. She did not know the bitterness which characterises the group. After her encounter with them, she learns of the "bitterness" among them. The narrator declares that the ragazzis have "harder" faces. The words, chosen by the narrator, establish that the ragazzis are angry people; but Carla didn't know until she visited them. The narrator further reveals the anger of the ragazzis by saying they "burned from the inside" and that they are being eaten "by impatience". These ideas, which Carla gains, are different from her initial impression about the ragazzi; and they are reflective of the discomfort of the people. Driven by her new idea about the ragazzi, Carl, in the following excerpt, reveals her further realisation:

She thought again of their faces, that atmosphere, and Veronica's question took on its full significance: these men were indeed waiting for something which, manifestly, they were not being given. But what was it? She had no idea (p. 69).

Fantini engages in an argument with Solomon, one of the migrants. Fantini is a native Sicilian and a poet. Solomon is already unhappy about the experiences of the migrants. He transfers his aggression to Fantini and even makes racist comments. This extreme reaction is a post-traumatic stress disorder which is due to the violence which he and other migrants have suffered already. In the excerpt below, Solomon confronts Fantini and his (Fantini's) response shows an ideological transformation:

"No, it's death that's calling me." "Don't answer."

"You don't understand. It's not calling for me alone, but for all of us. I'm not looking for a guilty party. We're all guilty. Some more than others. Think about that, instead of going to play football. Think about that instead of going to write. You're useless, like all poets. You can't do a thing in the face of this world that's collapsing."

The poet wanted to respond to his last two statements, which were horrific. But in the end, he decided not to, not out of despair or resignation, but because he had suddenly realized that Solomon no longer saw any difference between living and dying (p. 182).

The narrator uses "suddenly realized" to show the ideological transformation which Fantini has experienced. He comes to the scene with an idea, but after his encounter with Solomon, he experiences an ideological transformation, learning new things about the migrants through Solomon's aggressiveness. Because of the ideological transformation, he decides not to react to Solomon's verbal attack. Solomon calls him "useless" and makes utterances to imply that he, the poet, is irrelevant to the plights of the migrants and other people. Fantini believes that Solomon is traumatised, hence the narrator says that Solomon speaks that way because he no longer sees "the difference between living and dying." Fantini's ideological transformation authenticates Damasio's (1994) assertion that humans are thinking machines. Damasio's metaphor acknowledges humans' ability to learn, think, and make decisions, based on what they have learnt.

Conclusion

The above analysis demonstrates the depiction of identity and psychological transformation in Barrett's *Blackass* and Sarr's *The Silence of the Choir*. The characters and events in the novels show the role of literature in portraying identity and psychological transformation. In the primary texts, characters transformation physically, emotionally, ideologically, and otherwise. Through the experiences of the characters and their utterances, the researcher discovers these aspects of transformation. Psychological transformation, for instance, reveals the deep changes in an individual's feelings or behaviour while ideological transformation indicates a mental. By intersecting these elements together, literary works not only reflect the realities of human growth and change but also challenge readers to reflect on their own identities and the forces that influence them. With these representations of social and psychological realities, literature serves as a powerful medium for portraying the tensions and contradictions inherent in transformation—between stability and change, tradition and innovation, individual desires, and societal expectations. This study has underscored that

transformation is rarely linear or simple. Instead, it is a complex journey, marked by struggle, conflict, and moments of insight.

References

- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann.
- Apuleius (158 AD). *The Golden Ass*. (Translated by R. Graves). London: Penguin Books.
- Barrett, A. I. (2005). *From Caves of Rotten Teeth: A Collection of Short Stories*. Lagos: Daylight Media Services.
- Barrett, A. I. (2013). *Love Is Power, or Something Like That*. Lagos: Farafina Books.
- Barrett, A. I. (2015). *Blackass*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Cranton, P. (2006). *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide for Educators of Adults*. California: Jossey Bass.
- Damasio, A. (1994). *Descartes' Error: Emotions, Reason, and the Human Brain*. New York: Penguin.
- Deng, F. (1995). *War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan*. Washington DC: Brookings.
- Diamond, L. M. (2008). *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women's Love and Desire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Dirkx, J. (1998). The Transformative Learning Theory in the Practice of Adult Education: An Overview. *PAACE Journal of Literary Learning*, 7(12), 1-14.
- Driesch, H. (1908). *The Science and Philosophy of the Organism*. London: Walter Scott Publishing.
- Ekman, P. (2003). *Emotions Revealed: Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Inspire Communication and Emotional Life*. New York: Time Books.
- Erickson, E. H. (1968). *Youth and Crisis*. New York: WW Norton and Company.
- Fausto-sterling, A. (2000). *Sexing the Body: Gender, Politics, and the Construction of Sexuality*. New York: Basic Books.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings (1972-1977)*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Freud, S. (1923). *The Ego and the Id*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.

- Habermas, J. (1984). *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Hall, S. (1996). *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*. London: Arnold.
- Heraclitus (500 BC). *Fragments*. (Translated by T. M. Robinson. Toronto: University of Toronto.
- Hooks, B. (2000). *Feminism Is for Everybody*. Boston: South End Press.
- James, W. (1890). *The Principles of Psychology*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Kekeghe, S. (2021). Dramatic art, medical ethics and rehabilitation: Patient-centred therapeutic relationship in Omobowale's *The President's Physician*. *International Journal of Literature and Arts*, 9(4), 195–202.
- Lukacs, G. (1916). *A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of the Great Epic*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, Self and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mezirow, J. (1978). Perspective Transformation. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 28(2), 100-110.
- Morrison, T. (1987). *Beloved*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Ovid (8 AD). *Metamorphosis*. (Translated by A.D. Melville. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sarr, M. M. (2014). *Terre Ceinte*. Paris: Présence Africaine.
- Sarr, M. M. (2024). *The Silence of the Choir* (A. Anderson, Trans.). New York: Europa Editions.
- Tajfel, H. (1978). *Differentiation Between Social Groups: Shades in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. London: Academic Press.
- Taylor, E. (2008). Transformative Learning Theory. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2(119), 5-15.
- Wilson, E. O. (1975). *Sociology: The New Synthesis*. Cambridge: Harvard University.
- Woolf, V. (1925). *Mrs. Halloway*. London: Hogarth Press.