

# Between and Beyond Metamorphosing Identity: A Biopolitical Reading of *The Metamorphosis* and *Blackass*

Samirah Tabassum

Lecturer, Dept. of English and Humanities, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh  
samirah.tabassum@ulab.edu.bd | ORCID: 0000-0003-3579-865X

## Abstract

This paper offers a critical comparative reading of the representation of animal and racial metamorphoses in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915) and A. Igoni Barrett's *Blackass* (2015), respectively, with a view to underscoring how the processes and consequences of metamorphosing identity foreground biopolitics. While the first novel muses on the transformation of Gregor Samsa, a human being, into a monstrous vermin, the second novel, a farcical take on Kafka's narrative, traces the transformation of Furo Wariboko, a black Nigerian, into a white-skinned man. The comparison is premised upon two axes: first, the human-animal interaction and tension that inform anthropocentric speciesism on one hand and the civilized-white/savage-black binary opposition on the other; second, the circuits of economic privilege and social accommodation. Exploring the ways in which we identify ourselves and are identified by the people in power, the paper locates the identity rubric of the human subjects in two different settings where the logic of the world is disturbed by unusual transformations and the disabled/non-disabled binary is put in a dialogue. In its enterprise of unmasking disability from its hegemonic referents, the paper incorporates insights from Disability Studies, Critical Posthumanism, Critical Race Theory, and Critical Animal Studies. By exploring the potential of debility's capacitation, that is, the extraction and exploitation of "body maiming" and/or "body capacities" in *The Metamorphosis* and *Blackass*, this paper suggests a non-anthropocentric interspecies vision of affective politics.

**Keywords:** metamorphosing identity, biopolitics, anthropocentric speciesism, debility

## Introduction

"As Gregor Samsa woke one morning from uneasy dreams," so starts Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915), "he found himself transformed into some kind of monstrous vermin" (29). One hundred years later, in 2015, A. Igoni Barrett, an emerging Nigerian writer, took a farcical shot at Kafka's enigmatic story of transformation in his debut novel, *Blackass*, that starts with a similar startling shock: "Furo Wariboko awoke this morning to find that dreams can lose their way and turn up on the wrong side of sleep" (1). Furo, a young black Nigerian, awakes on the morning of a job interview only to find that he has been transformed into a white man. Barrett upgrades Kafka's domestic drama of animal metamorphosis to an experimentation of racial metamorphosis for the contemporary readers by introducing yet another form of abrupt change and initiating a different series of aesthetic interventions in his farcical take. However, in both cases, the characters undergo a shift in their position



produced by the materialist view of capitalist society. The transformations cause a shift in their ability/disability but with curiously different effects: while animal metamorphosis shrinks Gregor the human's world, racial metamorphosis somehow enlarges Furo the black man's horizon. Based on two major vectors – capitalism and biopower, this paper explores how and why the identities of the protagonists are metamorphosed. The paper traces how the worlds in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and Barrett's *Blackass* expand from the personal sphere to a greater sphere through apparently unusual transformations. It also addresses the issues of animality and capitalism – factors that inform the biopower of debility, which leads to the discussion on the ways the body and identity of an individual – even irrespective of their being able/disabled – can be “maimed” vis-à-vis capitalistic productivity. What is important to explore is how *The Metamorphosis* and *Blackass* metamorphosed the maiming of identity.

### **Animality and Race**

The problematic concepts of animality and race appear as two major vectors in the novels that maim the identity of Gregor Samsa and Furo Wariboko. The western concept of animality incorporates aspects like savagery and vulgarity. The west circulated this concept across borders and into a politics of social relations. Concepts of savagery and vulgarity being enforced and infused in the minds of people created the civilized-white/savage-black binary oppositions. This problematic concept of racial binary has a lot to do with the civilized-human/savage-animal binary as the conceptual frame

through which the archetypal Human was historically defined in the Western culture process carried not only an oppositional (Human versus Animal), but also a hierarchical and temporal logic. In most interpretations of the human-animal ranking, the animal-like status of certain categories of human has been conceived pejoratively. (Anderson 12)

The concepts of race and animality are no longer the concerns of biology and nature only. Being inspired by critics like Foucault and Gramsci, race has entered the field of social agency and contestation. As such, animality and racism are parts of discursive and material inclusions or exclusions linked to power. Colonial power formations include the practices of othering where the white justifies their superiority by enforcing inferiority on the black that is no different than the human's self-definition as the best of all creations through exploring the idea of animality. Animality and racism have been a crucial reference point for constructing difference and hierarchy in Western cultures and eventually have gone beyond the borders to enter into the politics of relations.

The identities of Gregor and Furo are constructed and re-constructed by the vectors of animality and race. These western perceptions reduce the state of Gregor after the transformation and Furo before the transformation. The corporatization of blood relations in Gregor Samsa's case and the moral degradation that eventually occurs in Furo Wariboko's case are examples of how animality and racism enter the politics of relations. As a consequence of these hegemonic practices, Gregor in *The Metamorphosis* is no longer considered to be a part of his family and Furo in *Blackass* becomes selfish and left with no

intention to return to his family.

### **Conflict in *The Metamorphosis*: Corporatization of Blood Relations**

This section offers a brief analysis of the conflict that exists in the novella. The conflict is brought to light through Gregor Samsa's transformation. There is a shift not only in Gregor's identity related to his ability but also in the relationship that he had with his family members. The result of the transformation of the character is seen to be highly influenced by the corporate nature of the surroundings. From a Marxist point of view, Gregor is shown to be alienated from the products of his labor by the capitalists who own the productions. Gregor is trapped by his employer through a combination of capitalist force and his necessity to provide for himself and his family which, according to Marx, is the "human law" that gives the capitalist owners the ability to control and neglect the workers if needed (Marx 47). However, the negligence that Gregor receives is not limited to that of the employers only, but stretched to his very own family members for whom he had been working selflessly.

To start with, the protagonist of *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa, hates his job as a traveling salesman but feels the obligation to continue working to provide financial support to his family. He accepts the role of the money-earner in his family when his father fails. Being a cog in the capitalist machine, he is so concerned about earning for his family that his job becomes the first thing that comes to his mind when he discovers his sudden transformation into a bug:

But what was he to do now? The next train went at seven; to catch that, he would have to hurry at a frantic speed, and his collection of samples wasn't packed yet, and he certainly didn't feel particularly fresh and lively himself. And even if he managed to catch the train, he couldn't escape a dressing-down from the boss, for the attendant from work had been waiting at the five-o'clock train, and had long ago informed the boss that Gregor had missed it. (Kafka 30)

Even after such a drastic transformation, Gregor is concerned about reaching his workplace in time and imagines what might happen next. His concerns are logical as a lot of things are dependent on his job. His standing in the family before the transformation is solely due to his earning on which the other family members survived as parasites. This can be justified by the change in his relationship with his father, mother, and sister after the transformation.

As a son, Gregor feels the obligation to pay off his father's debts and support him financially. He does everything to benefit his father without being concerned about his own preferences. Gregor's father does not possess the same selfless feelings that Gregor does. Rather, the father uses the son for his own benefit and gets used to the fact that Gregor is working hard to provide for the entire family. Despite the hard work, Gregor's relationship with his father is distant. He appears to be close to his sister only. It might be that the father is ashamed of making his son work to pay off his debt or not being the breadwinner anymore. In such cases, it may be expected that the father would be

supportive of his son but his true resentment is revealed soon after Gregor's transformation into a bug. His father shows disgust and hostility towards him as he no longer has the ability to earn and has turned into a burden for the others. In the first encounter between the father and the transformed son, the former becomes hostile and

with his right hand he seized the chief clerk's walking-stick, left behind by their visitor on an armchair as well as his hat and overcoat, and with his left he fetched a large newspaper from the table, and stamping his feet, set about driving Gregor back into his room by waving the stick and the paper. None of Gregor's pleas helped, none of his pleas was understood; however submissively he turned his head, his father stamped all the more vigorously with his feet. (Kafka 42)

His father "forced him back, hissing like a savage" while all he wanted was to reach out to his mother who was shocked at the first sight of Gregor after the transformation (Kafka 42). But "then his father gave him a vigorous kick from behind, which this time was truly a deliverance, and he flew, bleeding heavily, into the depths of his room. More, the door was slammed shut with the stick; and then at last all was still" (Kafka 43). His father cannot tolerate the sight of his transformed son and decides to bombard him with apples while his sister begs him to spare Gregor's life. His treatment, attitude, and intention of causing injury to his son reveals his hatred despite the selfless feeling that Gregor always had for him. Now that his father is no longer dependent on him and has found himself employment, he feels no obligation to tolerate Gregor. On the other hand, Gregor's mother appears to be more caring towards her son as she happens to be the first person to inquire about him when he was getting late for work on the day of his transformation. "'Gregor!' – it was his mother – 'it's a quarter to seven. Aren't you going to leave?' That gentle voice! 'It's a quarter to seven. Hadn't you a train to catch?'" (Kafka 31). Mrs. Samsa worries about the state of her son and says that something must be wrong with him as he was not coming out of his room even when the chief clerk arrived. She rushes to the chief clerk and defends her son:

'He's not well, believe me, sir. What other reason could there be for Gregor to miss a train! Indeed, the boy thinks of nothing but the business. (Kafka 35)

Gregor also has a very close relationship with his sister, Grete. Even after his transformation to a fearful bug, Grete decides to take care of her brother, sympathizes with him, and serves as the connecting bridge between his parents and him. She is the only family member to come to Gregor's room every day, bring him food, and figure out his change in appetite as:

To try out his taste she brought him a large selection, all spread out on an old newspaper. There were some old, half-rotten vegetables, bones from yesterday's supper covered in a white sauce that had gone solid, a few raisins and almonds, some cheese which two days ago Gregor had declared was uneatable, one piece of dry bread, one piece of bread spread with butter, and one piece spread with butter and salt. As well as these she also put down the bowl, now probably intended once and for all for Gregor, which she had filled with water. And out of tact, for she knew Gregor would not eat in front of her, she left hastily and even turned the

key, just so that Gregor might see that he could make himself as easy as he wanted. (Kafka 46)

She becomes the self-appointed caretaker for her brother and Gregor greatly appreciates her care. However, towards the end of the second section, a change in Grete's treatment towards Gregor can be located. She does not sympathize with him as earlier and appears to be completely inconsiderate of her brother's feelings. It seems that she no longer can tolerate the sight of the hideous insect living in the den. Realizing this, Gregor selflessly hides himself under the sofa until, at one point, "he was ... completely covered, and his sister, even if she bent down, couldn't see him. ... (A)nd Gregor even believed he caught a grateful glance when on one occasion he cautiously lifted the sheet with his head to see how his sister was taking the new arrangement" (Kafka 51-52).

Soon Grete gets a job as a salesgirl and is left with very little time to spare for Gregor. She now quickly pushes any old food into his room with her foot before rushing off to work both in the morning and at noon. She no more cares whether the food had only been nibbled at or left completely untouched. Her work being on her priority list, she hardly has time to clean Gregor's room like before and soon the room becomes filthy with grime and dust all over the walls and floor. With the hope of some extra income, the family brings in three boarders and becomes occupied with activities to please them. That is, the members of the family who were completely dependent upon Gregor's income, now start working to earn by themselves but are still in need of more money. Gregor initially loses his strong position in the family due to his inability to earn after the transformation and eventually loses connection with the entire family as they get busy with work to earn money.

In analyzing the before/after relationship of the protagonist with the family members, the animal/human relationship also has to be brought into account. The activities of the family members justify the unconscious human desire to categorize animals (other than human) to be less than human. Humans use the human-constructed human/non-human binary to place themselves in a superior position and justify their actions or treatment towards animals:

Although human-animal dualism certainly is not an invention of capitalism, we should acknowledge, first, the influence of the capitalist mode of production on animal exploitation and, second, the complexity of connections between a number of modern dichotomies and particular stages of capitalism. (Kowalczyk 184)

When a person descends from being a human to being someone less than a human, it places him in the disabled category. Let us shed light on the scenario that usually exists in a family where one of the children is disabled. Such a family may be expected to adapt with the differently abled child who is likely to have different needs. It brings a shift in the role of the mother as she has to go beyond individualism and have "an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others" (Braidotti 49). Gregor's shift from abled to disabled was not positively received by his family who held on to the notions of normalcy that in this case is highly influenced by capitalism.

The change in the relationship between the protagonist and his family members is solely because of the transformation that caused Gregor's disability for which he could no longer play the role of the breadwinner. This disability caused by the transformation takes the form of a "personal tragedy" imposed on Gregor by capitalism that isolates and excludes him from being a part of the family and society (Russell 211). Gregor's disability can thus be marked as

a socially-created category derived from labour relations, a product of the exploitative economic structure of capitalist society: one which creates (and then oppresses) the so-called "disabled" body as one of the conditions that allow the capitalist class to accumulate wealth. Seen in this light, disability is an aspect of the central contradiction of capitalism, and disability politics that do not accept this are, at best, fundamentally flawed strategies of reform or, worse, forms of bourgeois ideology that prevent this from being seen. (Russell 212)

Commodification of the body occurred due to industrial capitalism that created a new class of disabled who did not conform to the standard worker's body. The labor-power of these disabled people was erased and they were excluded from paid work. As a result, people who lost their ability to earn were identified as a social problem which had its solution in segregating them from mainstream life. In Gregor's case, he was segregated by his own family for losing his ability to earn.

### **Championing/Challenging Capitalism in *Blackass*: Brain vs Body**

Employment also appears as a crucial issue in the novel *Blackass*. Being an ordinary Nigerian man, Furo could not find a job and was dependent on his parents even at the age of 33. Resigning from eighteen years of service at the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Furo's father invested in a chicken farm which was a failure. His mother did a banking job that "paid four times more than her husband earned" (Barrett 27). He envied his sister who, despite being five years younger, had more confidence, intelligence, and smartness. Furo's relationship with his family before/after the transformation remains untold in the novel unlike Gregor's before/after relationship with his. Rather, the story shifts from personal relationship to relationship with new people in the society whom the protagonist encounters after undergoing racial metamorphosis. Unlike Gregor, Furo embraces his metamorphosis as his new skin becomes his capital in various ways. He lands a better job with higher pay, a laptop, and company car without even having to stand at the interview queue – that too in a country with 50 percent youth unemployment. Ekemini, a random woman whom he meets in the street, offers him help. She not only asks if he needs to call someone but also offers money for his bike fare and gives him a thousand naira note while "her face was pleased as she handed it over" (Barrett 8). He is given an extra chunk of meat at the buka. Syreeta offers him help whenever needed, along with shelter and money as she was a woman "(w)ho knew the going value of a white man in Lagos" (Barrett 47). She searches for an opportunity to come close to a white man like Furo and does not hesitate to offer him her place to stay at. She proposes that he should get a massage to relax himself and says "I can give you one if you want.' She held up her hands, showed her palms to

him. ‘I’m good with my hands. And my house is not far from here’ (Barrett 39). Furo is valued and treasured by unknown people even on the streets as if his whiteness was a brand sealed on his forehead that everyone stared at and wanted to achieve.

Furo’s skin is the capital that earns him a girlfriend who provides him with all possible things. On the other hand, his girlfriend, Syreeta, wants to achieve a status that only whiteness or having a white partner could ensure. She not only gives him shelter but also ensures that he has everything he needs. In return, she uses his whiteness to fulfill her need as she introduces him to her friends with “He’s American,” in a tone “whose casualness did not hide her satisfaction” (Barrett 86). All of her friends are married to white men and their satisfaction lies in showcasing their white partners: “In the time that followed his arrival in their midst, Furo learned that Baby was married to a Dutchman, Ivy to a Canadian, Chika to an Englishman, Ego to a German, and Joy to the Italian” (Barrett 87). They are rather fascinated by the social status that they could earn for themselves by marrying a white man or by visiting fancy foreign countries:

“I just got back from Atlanta,” said a lady whose large feet were emphasized by her zebra-striped tights. She uncrossed one leg and immediately crossed the other. Balancing her glass on her knee, she shot a questioning look at Furo. “Lovely city. I attended a business conference with Gianni, my husband. He’s Italian.” (Barrett 86)

By getting married to a white man Syreeta and her friends can ascend to a better social position. They believe that “what they must have is whiteness at any price” (Fanon 34). Furo is dependent on Syreeta, but to her, the value of a white man’s company is more than the money and support she is offering in exchange. Towards the end of the novel, Syreeta reveals that she is pregnant with Furo’s child as soon as she gets a hint that Furo might be leaving her. Her desperation to live with Furo is an example of successful enforcement of hegemonic construction of hierarchy in the society where the whites are placed above the blacks even in a black country like Nigeria. For a black man,

there is only one way out, and it leads into the white world. Hence his constant preoccupation with attracting the attention of the white man, his concern with being powerful like the white man, his determined effort to acquire protective qualities—that is, the proportion of being or having that enters into the composition of an ego. As I said earlier, it is from within that the Negro will seek admittance to the white sanctuary. The attitude derives from the intention. (Fanon 36)

A person may be entitled to social status because of his education, work, skills, or talent. But Furo’s social status is based on the skin color he transmogrifies to. This skin color is the tool that helps him to receive attention from people who would never care for him otherwise. It increases his value not only in the job market but also among the ladies. When Furo meets Syreeta’s friends he recalls his university days:

The ladies reminded Furo of his university days. They were a type he recognized but hadn’t gotten a chance to mingle with at close quarters, to sit beside and be

addressed by. They were the very ones who had partied at the trendy nightclubs that ordinary students could only dream about, who had travelled three hundred miles every Friday from Ekpoma to Benin City in the chauffeured rides of their aristos and returned in flocks on Sunday with excess cash and branded clothes and stories of their carousals that were the grist of campus gossip and front-page news of local celebrity rags. (Barrett 86)

His new skin color increases his popularity among the ladies. He gains access to gatherings with the type of ladies who would not mingle with any average man. Furo's skin transforms him from an ordinary man to one whose presence is a form of satisfaction and pride for the people around him.

Furo's before/after state in the society portrays the position of a black man among his own race. The scenario is even more crucial when the society is white as it creates scope for constant comparison of the two races. To be black in the United States means

to face increased likelihood, relative to Whites, of living in poverty, attending failing schools, experiencing discrimination in housing, being denied a job interview, being stopped by the police, being killed during a routine police encounter, receiving inferior medical care, living in substandard conditions and in dangerous and polluted environments, being un- or under-employed, receiving longer prison sentences, and having a lower life expectancy. (Emile 295)

The human capital that appears to be of more importance here is not knowledge, education or skill but the skin color that one has or is likely to be born with. This capital is conceptualized by the whites and so everything that the whites have, including certain names, becomes the canon or the standard. In the novel, Furo Wariboko changes his name to Frank Whyte, a name that matches his whiteness and the new clothes that he had bought. A Nigerian name could never meet the standards:

He had been trying out names as he chose his clothes for work, but none yet sounded right, none felt like his to keep. At first he considered taking Kalabari names, and then Itsekiri, Efik, Yoruba, but he soon gave up on Nigeria. In his new life he was American and his new name would confirm that. A new name from the new world for the new him – that sounded right. (Barrett 101)

The capitalist market prioritizes a white man's caliber over a black man's. A white man and his brain, being superior, deserves a higher rank in the workplace and ensures better salary. This is reflected in the novel as "Syreeta felt that his status, his oyibo-ness, had been taken advantage of. She argued that he was worth way more than eighty thousand and a company car, and when he sighed with indifference, she told him that the first job she'd got out of university had paid two hundred and fifty thousand. She was also given a car, the Honda" (Barrett 110). The corporate world has been favoring the whites and has created an invisible hegemonic difference between white/black brains. The hegemonic mindset makes them believe that recruiting a white man in a company not only attracts attention but also moves them to a better position. When Furo goes to see Mr. Umukoro, he meets



a woman who is astonished to see a white man working for Haba. When Furo reveals that he is the new Marketing Executive, the “woman’s face cleared. ‘Marketing executive,’ she said, drawing the words and nodding slowly. ‘It seems Haba is moving up!’” (Barrett 123). The presence of a white employee in a company would also be helpful for advertisement. Mr. Umukoro realizes this and initiates a conversation with Furo:

“You know my business is advertising.” Umukoro stared at Furo until Furo kened he was awaiting acknowledgement. “I work mostly with multinationals,” he continued after Furo nodded, “and most of their local branches are headed by foreigners. You white men like to do business with your kind.” He dropped his gaze to the books on the table and a spasm of distaste curdled his face. “How much is Abu paying you? A hundred thousand per month? One fifty? I’ll double that. And I guarantee you’ll learn more about marketing than a bookseller can teach.” He smiled his sinister face again. “Are you interested?” “Excuse me?” Furo said. “I want you to work for me.” (Barrett 125)

This hegemony that was initiated by the whites has extended from them to the blacks and the superiority of white brains has been engraved in the minds of the black. The treatment that Furo receives before and after the racial transformation is a consequence of this hegemonic concept that dominates the corporate capitalist world where appearance gets more priority than the brain.

### **Biopolitics of Debilitation**

Deborah A. Stone, a political scientist, offers a theory of how the state allocates people either to the work-based or the needs-based category by using medical certification. Through an analysis of government and intellectual justifications that give coherence to activities related to the concept of disability, she justifies how disability becomes an important “boundary” category for two incompatible distributive systems. The state uses the social construction of disability as the biopolitics of debilitation to control the state-controlled welfare system. In the normal process of aging, disability is expected to hit everyone someday. However, as Puar mentions in the “Preface: Hands up, don’t shoot!” of *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*, the biopolitics of debilitation is not intended to advocate democratization of disability:

as if to rehash the familiar cant that tells us we will all be disabled if we live long enough. In fact, depending on where we live, what resources we have, what traumas we have endured, what color our skin is, what access we have to clean water, air, and decent food, what type of health care we have, what kind of work we do ... we will not all be disabled. Some of us will simply not live long enough, embedded in a distribution of risk already factored into the calculus of debilitation. Death’s position. Others, at risk because of seeming risky, may encounter disability in ways that compound the debilitating effects of biopolitics. (Puar xiv)

Both Gregor and Furo are victims of the biopolitics of debilitation. Biopolitics regulate their body capacities and the changes after or the state before the transformation are highly

affected by biopolitics. This effect is the debilitation that the characters undergo in the hands of biopolitics. As such, despite being differently abled after the transformation, Gregor does not get any recognition. On the other hand, Furo only gets recognition when he transforms to a white man. In both the cases, the body appears as the most dominating factor that regulates their flow of life. All the changes that the characters undergo are directly or indirectly related to their body. The concept of this body is constructed and enforced by biopolitics. As such, Gregor's differently abled body causes debilitation since it does not match the standard of body that biopolitics argues for. On the other hand, in the case of Furo, not getting a job before the transformation proves that his black body is not capable of doing what a white body can do.

The cause and result of change in identity and position of both the characters (Gregor Samsa and Furo Wariboko) are influenced by the calculus of debilitation where their positions change from the work-based category to the needs-based category and vice-versa. Disability, as shown by the Disability Studies critics, is caused by the biopolitics of debilitation. Being related and highly influenced by debilitating factors like capitalism, race, speciesism, etc., this maims the identity of a body. As such, even if the body is a normal/standard body devoid of any impairment, the debilitating factor that leaves the body with no other option but to shift from the work-based category to needs-based category acts as a reduction in normal/standard ability.

### **Maiming Identity: Gregor Samsa**

Before the transformation, Gregor was a human worker trapped in the hands of his employer being “the boss’s creature, stupid and spineless” (Kafka 31). He is assigned to play a specific limited role within a larger capitalist system that forces upon him the mentality of an insect obeying the command of its host for survival. Despite the discomfort he feels at work before the transformation and, with his new body and treatment by his family members after the transformation, Gregor never revolts. It appears that his mentality and body cannot be detached from his work/labor. As such, despite being a part of the production, his identity as a human is maimed by the force of capitalism. Later, his new transformed physical state is that of a monstrous vermin which gives rise to a different set of abilities that allow him to crawl, walk on the walls, etc. However, Gregor’s state of being differently abled hardly gets any recognition as it does not comply with the normal notion of ability that is required to work and earn a living. His identity was debilitated in the hands of different forms of recognition of disability that “shroud debilities and forms of slow death while also effacing the quotidian modalities of wide-scale debilitation so prevalent due to capitalist exploitation and imperialist expansion” (Puar xvi).

If seen through the lens of Stone’s categorization of able/disabled people then, Gregor’s change in position can be said to be from the work-based category to the needs-based category. That is, from an able body to a disabled body that is now dependent on others to provide for it. However, the identity of Gregor as an independent human self was seen to be debilitated even when he had the ability to work. Prior to the transformation, Gregor is reduced from a human being to a worker and, after the transformation, he is reduced from

a worker to an insect that lacks the ability to work. He already undergoes “slow death” or physical wearing because of the workload in the first half. Lauren Berlant in “Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)” discusses the slow death of the US waged workers whose bodies

will be more fatigued, in more pain, less capable of ordinary breathing and working, and die earlier than the average for higher-income workers, who are also getting fatter, but at a slower rate and with relatively more opportunity for exercise. (775)

Gregor too appears as a worker who is fatigued with no potential or interest in demanding what he deserves. His identity is debilitated to such an extent that he does not even realize his position or dignity as an independent self and rather accepts the debilitated identity constructed by the people around him.

On the other hand, in the second half, Gregor’s transformation from a human to a non-human allows his family members and others to navigate the bases of human-animal relationship where his position descends to a greater extent and is left destined for death. Thus, in the process, Gregor’s identity is maimed twice. First, in the hands of his employers and second, in the hands of humans. In both the cases, he becomes the “Other” as termed by Edward Said. The state does not directly kill Gregor but maims his identity to such an extent that he is left destined to die. The fact that he is not killed by the state but rather left debilitated might appear as a relief but in reality it is not so.

### **Maiming Identity: Furo Wariboko**

Fanon states that “the Negro is comparison” (163) and, being born as a black man, Furo is positioned in a world of constant comparison. Furo is a classic example of the black man who

is constantly preoccupied with self-evaluation and with the ego-ideal. Whenever he comes into contact with someone else, the question of value, of merit, arises. The Antilleans have no inherent values of their own, they are always contingent on the presence of The Other. The question is always whether he is less intelligent than I, blacker than I, less respectable than I. Every position of one’s own, every effort at security, is based on relations of dependence, with the diminution of the other. It is the wreckage of what surrounds me that provides the foundation for my virility. (Fanon 163-164)

The concept is engraved in the minds of people to such an extent that even in a black country like Nigeria, Furo’s transformation into a white man makes him the Other but a more potential one or the I with whom the entire society starts comparing itself. As such, before the transformation, Furo’s maiming of identity occurs in the hands of capitalism and biopower but right after the transformation, the entire society’s identity starts to maim as they begin comparing themselves with Frank Whyte (Furo’s new name).

Even in Nigerian society, blackness stands as a paradigm that holds the potentials to automatically debilitate one’s position in the world. The presence of blackness can be marked

as an imaginary/invisible reduction of ability of a person that stands as a disadvantage. This also explains Furo's struggle to get rid of the blackness from his buttocks after the transformation as he starts applying whitening creams despite the harm they were causing. Furo constantly attempts to get rid of this blackness that remains as if it were dragging him down with its invisible power of reduction. Though his buttocks remain covered, they are exposed to Syreeta and he does not want that to be his weakness. Blackness, of course, "is not by itself an impairment. However, disability law recognizes that many traits understood as disabling do not necessarily arise from a medical condition, but instead are simply traits that create disadvantage when combined with an inhospitable social or physical environment" (Emile 298). Furo's blackness was certainly a disadvantage as it kept him away from securing a job and receiving additional attention and importance.

Before the transformation, Furo's identity was debilitated by the society which failed to ensure employment for its people. The society with its hegemonic use of biopower reduces the ability of a person through debilitation and tries to establish it as a form of political negotiation where the person is made to believe that he lacks the ability to work. Racism and Othering are two such vectors of biopower that the state uses and enforces to establish this negotiation. Being unemployed in a capitalist world maims the identity of a person which happened in the case of Furo before the transformation. As the story progresses, it is noted that the same vectors of biopower bring a degradation in Furo's morality after the transformation as he starts believing that he is worth more in value because of his skin color. The degradation is intrigued by the society as well as the capitalist market where corporate personalities like Umukoro offer to double the wage in exchange of the labor saying, "How much is Abu paying you? A hundred thousand per month? One fifty? I'll double that" (Barrett 125).

In a capitalist world the identity of individuals is measured by social status that is highly influenced by the wage they receive from their work. Since the corporate world values white brains over black brains, whites like Frank land a job with a higher salary while the black Furo cannot, despite having the same capacities (and, in fact, being the same person). His whiteness becomes an asset to build his identity. But on the other hand, this same whiteness is the factor that maims his original identity as Furo Wariboko.

Gregor and Furo share the same vulnerability in the hands of biopolitics. Their identities are maimed by biopower that enforces standards for a body and its capacities. In order to re-conceptualize debility and capacity, it is important to identify the politics of debilitation and aim at identity through posthumanism that endorses non-anthropocentric and non-racial perspectives.

### Works Cited

- Anderson, Kay. "The Beast within': Race, Humanity, and Animality." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2000, pp. 301-320. doi.org/10.1068/d229.
- Barrett, A. Igoni. *Blackass*. E-book. Graywolf, 2015.
- Berlant, Lauren. "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 33,

no. 4, 2007, pp. 754-780.

Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Polity, 2013.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann. Pluto, 2008.

Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of Biopolitics*. St Martin's, 2010.

---. *The History of Sexuality*. Vol 1: An Introduction. Vintage, 1990.

Kafka, Franz. *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*. Translated by Joyce Crick, Oxford UP, 2009.

Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Progress Publishers, 1959.

Paul-Emile, Kimani. "Blackness as Disability?" *The Georgetown Law Journal*, vol. 106, no. 293, 2018.

Puar, Jasbir K. *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*. Duke UP, 2017.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books, 1979.

Stone, Deborah. *The Disabled State*. Temple UP, 1984.