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Liminal Margins and the Appropriation of the Inherited Codes and Imposed Patterns in Abdulrazak Gurnah's The Last Gift

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Abstract

The study explores the immigrant's identity crisis in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *The Last Gift* from the lens of hybridity and liminality. It analyses how the host society determines identity formation and the tension they experience between their cultural heritage and the prevailing norms of the host culture. As described by Turner, liminality accounts for the transitions that Gurnah's characters experience while shaping their identities. Their adaptation to Western traditions impacts their cultural identities, making Bhabha's ideas of hybridity and mimicry particularly relevant. The characters' struggles to assimilate illustrate their liminality as they struggle with preserving their authentic culture. Second-generation immigrants also confront the challenges of balancing assimilation with a desire to reconnect with their roots. The characters embody hybrid identities, navigating their differences while keeping inherited codes and imposed acts that indicate the elements of liminality and hybridity at a time. By the end of the novel, both characters exhibit enriched hybrid identities, demonstrating the crucial role of liminality and hybridity in their identity formation throughout the novel.

Keywords: Hybridity, diaspora, immigration, identity, postcolonialism

Introduction

Utilizing two postcolonial concepts as a lens to examine Gurnah's novel will enhance our understanding of how these immigrants forge their identities amidst the dynamics of Hybridity and Liminality. Hybridity is frequently encountered in postcolonial theory and cultural studies, particularly in discussions surrounding cultural ambivalence. Hybridity emerges from the interaction of two or more distinct cultures. A hybrid individual may

embody elements of one or both of their parents' cultures, yet they represent a unique and separate formation that differs from either parent.

Hybridity arises from the interactions between colonizers and the colonized within both colonial and postcolonial contexts, playing a vital role in the postcolonial cultures of various regions. This concept has attracted the attention of many scholars engaged in postcolonial studies. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha redefines hybridity, shifting its focus from a racial perspective to a semiotic understanding of culture, especially within a postcolonial framework. He explores how hybridity exemplifies the resilience of the subaltern and challenges imperial ideologies, identities, and aesthetics through acts of resistance against imperial dominance. Bhabha emphasizes the importance of hybridity in undermining and reclaiming dominant discourses (Kraidy, 2002). Ashcroft et al. (2007) connect the concept of hybridity to Bhabha's analyses of the dynamics between colonizer and colonized, highlighting the mutual construction of their identities and their interdependence. Bhabha posits that cultural statements and systems originate from a space he calls 'Third Space,' where acknowledging the complex nature of cultural identity helps address the themes of 'exoticism' and 'cultural diversity.' The productive potential of this Third Space is important as it has roots in colonial or postcolonial contexts. Engaging with this unfamiliar area can help us understand that acknowledging the divided nature of expression might allow us to envision a global culture. This culture would not rely on the appeal of multiculturalism or the mere existence of various cultures but on recognizing and expressing the hybrid nature of culture itself (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38). Bhabha defines hybridity as a third space that exists between different cultures, encapsulating the notion of cultural ambivalence within a postcolonial framework. Hybridity reflects the active nature of colonial power, presenting its changing dynamics and constants. It represents a deliberate turn in the domination process through denial, which involves creating varied identities that uphold the 'pure' and original identity of those in authority (p. 112). Hybridity distorts and shifts the points of discrimination and dominance, interrupting the imitative or self-absorbed needs of colonial authority. At the same time, it re-engages with the symbols of power often viewed with awe, employing subversive strategies that redirect the focus of the marginalised back onto the source of power (p.112). Homi Bhabha argues that hybridity should not be seen as a genealogical issue but as a concept linked to colonial representation. He states that "colonial hybridity is not a problem of genealogy or identity between two different cultures which can then be resolved as an issue of cultural relativism" (1994, p. 114). Thus, hybridity challenges the consequences of "colonial disavowal," allowing knowledge that has been previously rejected to infiltrate the dominant narrative, thereby questioning its legitimacy and standards of recognition. He emphasises the complexity of viewing disavowed knowledge solely as expressions of 'cultural otherness'. He insists it is "not just the content of disavowed knowledge. They are expressions of cultural otherness or colonialist treachery that return to be recognized as counter-authorities" (p. 115).

Bhabha challenges the notion of cultures being fixed and pure, arguing instead that cultures are dynamic and fluid. He highlights the significance of the Third Space, which reshapes meanings and contexts into a complex process (p. 116). This view of culture contradicts traditional ideas that see culture as a homogenising and unifying force based on a singular, 'original' Past preserved through national traditions. Although hybrids may rely on the existence of a pure culture, Bhabha refutes the idea of stable or pure identities, elaborating on this theme. Consequently, the Third Space, while difficult to define concretely, creates conditions for expressions that reveal cultural meanings and symbols as lacking fundamental unity or permanence. This implies that even identical symbols can be

interpreted, adapted, and recontextualised in various historical and cultural contexts (p. 37). Bhabha conceptualises the third space as a liminal zone that challenges the notion of cultural authenticity. Bhabha's idea of hybridity dismantles the longstanding belief that positions Western civilisation as superior and distinct. Hence, he challenges the notions of purity and authenticity in culture, highlighting the hybridisation of cultures. This idea suggests that what we consider impure or inauthentic cultures arise from historical interactions between different cultures. Cultural hybridity is not a static phenomenon; it is dynamic and subject to ongoing discussions, with continually evolving identities being reshaped. Bhabha states that no culture exists independently and cannot be entirely self-sufficient. This is true not only because other cultures challenge its dominance but also due to its symbolic processes that continuously emphasise the desire for a fundamental, complete, and unified identity (Bhabha, p. 210). For the native populations in colonised regions who lacked a sacred text, the Bible was perceived as "signs taken for wonders", a symbol of colonial power and a representation of colonial aspiration and control (1994, p. 102). Bhabha suggests they were "using the powers of hybridity to resist baptism and to place the project of conversion in an impossible situation" (1994, p. 118).

Ashcroft et al. (2007) explain hybridity as the formation of new transcultural identities that arise within the intersection created by colonization. Hybridity can manifest in various forms, including linguistic, cultural, political, and racial. In the context of post-colonial discourse, hybridity denotes an intercultural and linguistic space that exists between different identities. Hybridity implies a continuous relationship between the 'self' and the 'other,' resulting in a mixed and impure culture. It challenges the rigid duality of thought that has traditionally separated the colonizer from the colonised and natives from foreigners. Bellour (2016) notes that hybridity, emerging from post-structuralism, has dismantled the long-standing Manichean worldview that divided existence into stark 'binary oppositions' such as self/other, coloniser/colonised, man/woman, and master/enslaved person. In this framework, the first terms have often been seen as superior, while the second has been marginalised. However, postcolonial discourse deconstructs these binaries, illustrating how they are interconnected and mutually dependent. Bellour also emphasises that the concept of Self is defined as the Other, reflecting the fluid nature of cultural boundaries and the interdependence of cultures rather than their isolation. Bhabha's notion of hybridity is important for understanding the dynamics between binary categories, particularly the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised.

Liminality describes a state or space between different identities, locations, or periods. In postcolonial theory, liminality is used to analyse the cultural in-betweenness in the interactions between colonisers and the colonised (Cuddon, 2013). The term itself is derived from 'limen,' meaning 'threshold,' and is utilised in psychology to refer to the boundary between sensory perception and subliminal awareness (Ashcroft et al., 2007). Within postcolonial theory, the importance of liminality lies in its ability to describe a space where cultural transformation can occur. This transcultural area allows individuals or groups to develop a sense of self, marked by ongoing movement and exchange between identities. For example, a colonised individual might find themselves in a transitional space that bridges colonial narratives and the embrace of a new, "non-colonial" identity. However, this identification process is dynamic, characterised by interaction, contestation, and appropriation rather than simply shifting from one identity to another (Ashcroft et al., 2007). Liminal figures are described as thresholds by Turner (1977). The characteristics of liminality, or those of liminal individuals, are inherently ambiguous because this state and these individuals elude the usual classifications that define roles and positions within a

culture. Liminal beings exist in a space that is neither one place nor another; they occupy a middle ground between the roles dictated by law, tradition, and social customs. As a result, their unclear and undefined characteristics are depicted through a diverse range of symbols in various societies that perform rituals for social and cultural transitions (p. 95).

Turner expands on the analytical framework put forth by the French ethnographer Arnold Van Gennep, who identifies three essential stages in the process of ritual progression: rites of separation, transition, and incorporation. Van Gennep points out that individuals navigate numerous life passages and career changes, remarking, "The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another" (1960, p. 2-3). He also highlights the often implicit nature of transitions within social groups and contexts. These transitions unfold as a sequence of stages with recognizable beginnings and endings, which are fundamental to human existence and often reflected in significant life events such as "birth, puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death" (p. 3). Specific ceremonies mark each phase. As Van Gennep notes, "For every one of these events, there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined" (p. 3). Rites of separation can be seen in funeral practices, rites of incorporation are crucial in weddings, and rites of transition play an important role during events such as "pregnancy, betrothal, and initiation" (p. 11).

Turner defines Liminality as "the midpoint of transition in a status sequence between two positions" (1974, p. 237). This concept encourages an exploration of fluidity in identity and culture. As noted by Ruberto (2009), Turner focuses on a specific phase of the 'ritual process' that symbolizes the transition from a 'limen' state into a realm of rituals that transcend ordinary understandings of time and space, alongside the 'mimetic enactment' of certain aspects of the crises that lead to this separation. Turner is particularly drawn to the interplay of lowliness and sacredness and the sense of homogeneity and comradeship that these liminal phenomena evoke. In these rituals, we experience a "moment that transcends time," both within and outside the existing social framework. This moment briefly highlights an awareness of a shared social connection that no longer exists in its original form yet has also split into various structural relationships (Turner, 1977, p. 96).

Turner emphasizes that liminal identities and moments are characterized by their existence "in and out" of both temporal and physical, as well as territorial frameworks, which makes them resistant to straightforward definitions. The liminal state represents a transitional phase that is marked by a sense of being "not yet" integrated into the socio-cultural and economic systems, as described by Ruberto (2009). For example, an adolescent exists in this in-between space, transitioning from childhood to adulthood through a rite of passage known as the post-liminal stage. Turner also highlights that these liminal moments and figures possess the capacity to challenge and question the foundational values of the cultures from which they arise: "When liminality is viewed as a phase of stepping away from typical social behaviours, it can be understood as a time to critically examine the core values and principles of the culture in which it takes place" (Turner, 1977, p. 167). Moreover, Turner endorses Dr. Maria Douglas's perspective that describes transitional beings, often viewed as eccentric, as "polluting" to those who have never experienced such a state and as ambiguous. Their pollution and ambiguity arise from their lack of a definitive status or position; instead, they fluctuate between identities. Turner illustrates this by stating that they can be neither completely one thing nor the other, or perhaps a mixture of both; not necessarily located in any specific place, or possibly nonexistent entirely; they exist in a state of being 'in-between' all established reference points in space, time, and structure (Turner,

1967, p. 97). Turner's concept of liminality offers valuable insights into the transitional moments and characters in Gurnah's novel. This framework serves as a solid foundation for analysing the liminal figures present in the work.

Liminality and Hybridity in *The Last Gift*

Liminality and hybridity are recurrent themes in Gurna's fictions, and the related concepts such as mimicry, third-world, difference, ambivalence, cultural identity, anxiety and cultural Identity are repeated themes in Gurnah's storyworlds (Mondal, 2022; Wasiq, 2024). *The Last Gift* explores various themes, focusing on the dilemma of identity. The narrative is not structured linearly; instead, Gurnah presents the story through the consciousness of the main characters. It follows Abbas, an African man from Zanzibar who has relocated to England, leaving his homeland behind. Abbas's journey begins with a significant change as he enters school, becoming the first educated member of his family. He endures the harsh treatment of his miserly father, who prefers him to work alongside his brothers instead of pursuing education. As the story unfolds, Gurnah highlights Abbas's transition to a new life after completing his schooling and attending college. Eventually, he marries a wealthy girl from next door. Through this marriage, Gurnah examines the dynamics of a mixed-class relationship and the subsequent implications that drive Abbas to migrate from his homeland, leaving behind his family and pregnant wife.

The narrative later delves into the life of Abbas and his new family after their migration. After settling in England, Abbas falls in love with Maryam, a girl with uncertain roots who was raised as a foundling. They have a daughter named Hanna, and following Western traditions, they decide to get married. Later, they welcomed another child, Jamal, and made their home in Norwich. However, Abbas remains silent about his past and does not share his origins with his children until the novel's end. This silence has detrimental effects on his children. During their childhood, both Hanna and Jamal faced challenges in their new environment, leading to a crisis of identity as they were viewed as different by the local community. As they grow into adolescence and adulthood, they begin to question their father's past and the reasons behind his secrecy. Hanna immerses herself in Western culture, searching for freedom and an outlet for her repressed desires. However, she struggles with the immigrant experience, which hinders her efforts at full assimilation. While also adopting aspects of the Western lifestyle, Jamal feels a strong pull towards understanding his heritage and navigating the complexities of his mixed identity. By the novel's conclusion, both siblings confront their roots through a recording in which Abbas reveals his story before his passing. Inspired by this revelation, Jamal decides to document their father's life.

In *The Last Gift*, Gurnah delves into the theme of migration, exploring the journey from one's homeland to an unfamiliar host country and its consequences. The novel has liminality and hybridity themes, manifest biologically through mixed marriages and culturally through the interactions between different ethnic groups. The story centres around Abbas, the protagonist, who undergoes various transitions from childhood to death. These experiences play a crucial role in shaping his identity as a liminal and hybrid individual navigating a foreign land where his destiny is already set. Throughout the narrative, Abbas copes with concepts of liminality, mimicry, hybridity, and double consciousness. Analyzing

his character reveals two significant stages in his life: the period before migration and the one that follows.

Abbas is the youngest child in a family led by his miserly father, Othman, who prioritizes hard work above all else to the detriment of education. This family's values dictate that children obey their father, leaving little room for any aspirations. However, Abbas is fortunate enough to be sent to school. His journey to education is described as a significant struggle: “he was the only one in the family who was sent to school. What a battle that had been going to school” (p.56). This opportunity is largely due to the encouragement of his brother Kassim, who advocates for Abbas's school attendance. Additionally, government recommendations highlighting the importance of education serve as motivation for Kassim and provide a push for their father to allow Abbas to attend school.

Despite his father's reluctance, Abbas begins school at the start of the new academic year. This moment signifies his entry into a "post-liminal" phase, where he must adapt to his new identity as a student. Schouten (1991) defines this adaptation as the process through which individuals respond to their new status, and Abbas's successful incorporation is evident, although it is repeatedly challenged. His time in school is often disrupted, as his father frequently pulls him out to satisfy his selfish demands. Despite the interruptions reflecting Abbas’s transitional state, his initial success in his educational journey signals hope for his future transformation. Frequent interruptions caused by his father keeping him away from school, along with periods of illness due to fever that confined him to bed for an extended time, compounded the challenges he faced. This illustrates the liminal phase Abbas experienced before his migration. He is caught between needing to pursue his education and fulfilling his father's labour demands. This duality creates a brutal struggle for him, positioning him as an in-betweener, juggling the roles of a student and a dutiful labourer. Hence, he feels unanchored, existing in a liminal space rather than fully belonging to either role.

Once he falls ill, Abbas becomes unable to attend school or help his father, reflecting the condition described by Turner (1967) for liminal entities as being “neither one thing nor another, or maybe both; or neither here nor there or may even be nowhere” (p. 97). This liminal state suggests that Abbas's transition from his past role is incomplete, aligning with Yang's (2000) notion of a temporal separation. He has not entirely disengaged from his previous identity but finds himself balancing his old and new roles. This social and cultural separation signifies a new aspect of Abbas that has emerged through his education, significantly influencing his identity. Until he completes his schooling, this transition does not involve a moral division, as he continues to adhere to his ethical principles.

At sixteen, Abbas faces another form of separation, which Yang (2000) refers to as spatial. After passing his exams, he qualifies for a teacher training college six miles from his hometown. Eventually, he can no longer resist the collective wishes of the family for Abbas to attend college. Abbas's sister, Fawzia, pours some of her dowry gold to cover the tuition. She also convinces her husband’s relatives to assist Abbas during his studies by providing him with a small storeroom while he attends college. Abbas finds himself in a new environment, significantly changing his life and identity. However, this transition is not entirely abrupt, as he remains an in-betweener. He experiences some of his life's happiest and most joyful moments during this time. While living in the storeroom of his sister's relatives' house, he undergoes a significant transformation. He marries a girl from the neighbouring house, which plays a crucial role in shaping Abbas's new identity and accelerates his journey to England. While living in the storeroom of his sister's relatives'

house, he undergoes a significant transformation. He marries a girl from the neighbouring house, which plays a crucial role in shaping Abbas's new identity and accelerates his journey to England.

The narrative unfolds at the start of his third year in college. He is mainly oblivious to matters of love and relationships. Instead, he listens to his friends discuss their experiences, feeling a twinge of envy but never truly anticipating that he might experience the thrills of intimacy himself. Nonetheless, he begins to uncover the latent potential for a significant transformation in his character that is on the verge of occurring as he: "fantasied and guiltily sinned on his own" (*The Last Gift*, p.132). According to Turner (1979), this moment marks the beginning of his transformation as he stands at the cusp of shifting from celibacy to marriage. The change starts when he catches sight of the girl next door, glancing at her through a slit in the storeroom window whenever she appears on her terrace. This act represents a bold move for a shy teenager lacking confidence and skills beyond his dedication to academics. He continued to watch her until the girl's father discovered them. In line with conventional expectations, Abbas faces the consequences for his behaviour, as his sister learns about the situation from the girl's aunt. Fawzia then informs the family that Abbas has "dishonoured the girl of a wealthy merchant"(p. 133). This incident provides his father with an opportunity to express his anger and reproach towards him: "Their books have taught you to give yourself such airs that you think you can go and fuck a rich man's daughter" (p.136).

Othman, known for his thriftiness, attributes his son's transformation to the influence of Western culture. According to Tyson (2006), adopting the behaviours of colonisers can be seen as a form of mimicry. Abbas's actions indicate his potential to forge a hybrid identity as he navigates the dualities of his cultural background and the unfamiliar culture he is drawn to. Thus, his behaviour stems from an external culture rather than being aligned with his original values. Abbas finds himself in a state of moral conflict, influenced by two main forces: the unintentional allure of the girl next door, an external factor, and his longing for intimacy, an internal drive (Schouten, 1991). Fawzia informs the family that they should propose marriage to the girl's family to resolve the issue honourably. Unfortunately, Abbas has little say in the matter. Interestingly, this realisation makes him grin slyly, suggesting a secret satisfaction with the arrangement, indicating his desire for intimacy, an internal force recognised by Schouten (1991). The marriage proposal, serving as a resolution for the harm he caused, acts as an external force that propels Abbas towards change. With Fawzia's support, the marriage is ultimately arranged, ushering him into a new phase of life as the husband of a daughter from a wealthy family.

Abbas's journey of integrating into his new life takes an unexpected turn, prompting him to flee the country and seek a new beginning. In the initial months of his marriage, everything seemed idyllic for Abbas. He discovered the personal space, freedom, comfort, nourishment, and intimacy he longed for at his father's home. These joyful experiences felt almost surreal. Yet, Gurnah poignantly captures the notion that such happiness is fleeting. Abbas faces interruptions in his quest for stability and certainty. His initial sense of belonging is undermined by the disrespectful treatment of his wife's family. Later, he finds that his wife begins mimicking her parents: "Every blessing has a poisonous thorn hidden in it" (p.138). His wife's brothers have ridiculed him, and while he laughs it off, telling himself not to let it bother him, the hurt still lingers. He believes that their disdain stems from his poverty and the behaviour of his family. Despite his attempts to rationalise their behaviour, he finds it increasingly difficult to shake off the humiliation of their mockery. This ongoing disdain leads him to view himself with contempt, as he feels his

shortcomings make him deserving of their scorn. Amidst this turmoil, he discovers that Sharifa is pregnant. However, as the delivery approaches, a creeping doubt takes hold: he begins to suspect that the child might not be his. He can't shake the feeling that this could be a scheme devised by the affluent family to cover up some wrongdoing and protect their daughter from disgrace. The thought of being deceived haunts him relentlessly. These factors work as an external force that hastens his flee and puts him on the threshold of another transition to a new self, living in a strange land with several challenges. This decision represents a hesitant and compliant teenager's most significant and unforeseen transformation. After fleeing his home country, he undergoes a spatial and cultural disconnection, entering a transitional phase of liminal space where he finds himself caught between different worlds.

After Abbas's efforts to integrate have been disrupted, he is consumed with thoughts of escape. According to Adam et al. (1976), these factors are external forces that drive Abbas towards a new sense of separation. He prepares to enter yet another liminal phase, which unfolds over a prolonged period during which he finds himself homeless before eventually reaching England. After weeks of contemplating his escape, he decides to stow away on a ship that happens to be short of hands: “These days they throw stowaways overboard, so we hear, but I was lucky because the ship was short of hand and I was signed on” (p. 244). He has escaped his homeland, marking the beginning of a new life as a sailor navigating the seas. This separation is total and definitive; he knows he will never return. It is also a moral estrangement, as he leaves behind his wife and their unborn child. During this time, Abbas lacks a permanent home or stable employment, emphasising his state of limbo, a situation that Turner (1977) describes as being neither here nor there for those in transitional phases. His first refuge outside of Zanzibar is on the SS Java Star, where he has hidden himself. The separation from his past role and the emergence of a new identity grants him a sense of freedom, unshackling him from previous constraints. He embarks on a journey across various countries and seas during this transitional phase, often called a liminal period. Along the way, he forms friendships and experiences the thrill of love. His transient lifestyle resembles that of a 'hooligan,' leaving him feeling displaced and ambivalent. Being an outsider in the places he visits poses a significant barrier to truly assimilating into those communities. As a result, Abbas remains in a state of liminality, existing in the in-between spaces of life. This state continues for fifteen years until he meets Maryam, a somewhat grounded girl who captures his heart. Their relationship blossoms in Exeter, leading to their eventual marriage: “a goodbye kiss on the fourth evening and made love for the first time that weekend” (p. 17). This event highlights two significant aspects: first, it signifies the end of Abbas's wandering lifestyle, and second, it symbolises the beginning of his new and settled life in England.

Abbas finds himself in a context that, as Hudart (2006) describes, is "unhomely because it is always changing and being defined by others who are perceived not to belong" (p.56). This relates to Bhabha’s concept of hybridity, which is closely tied to mimicry. As Kraidy (2006) states, Bhabha’s idea of cultural hybridity is expressed through such mimicry. Hence, Abbas’s actions are significant markers in his cultural hybridization journey. By distancing himself from his past identity as a 'hooligan', he enters a transitional phase characterized by his relationship with Maryam. It’s important to note that Abbas’s experiences across diverse countries and cultures have fueled his desire to move away from his traditional values. The incorporation process begins when the couple departs from Exeter. This geographical shift is temporary, as their final destination is Norwich, where they plan to reside permanently. The process of incorporation has been progressing

positively. Once settled in Norwich, he secures a job as an engineer at an electronics firm. Also, they formally marry, marking a significant milestone that reflects the Western lifestyle embraced by Abbas. This event further contributes to the evolution of his hybrid identity, which navigates between familiar and unfamiliar cultural landscapes. Interestingly, he remains committed to his cultural roots by refusing to throw birthday parties for his children, stating that such celebrations do not align with his cultural values. Despite straying from some traditions, the essence of Islamic practices still resonates strongly within him: " he did not celebrate his birthday. Their Ma did not celebrate her birthday" (p.36).

Despite his efforts to preserve his cultural roots, they ultimately remain unfulfilled. He finds himself caught between the desire to maintain his identity and the necessity of adapting to a new culture. This internal conflict leaves him feeling dislocated as he attempts to keep his heritage intact while navigating an unfamiliar European environment. As a result, he occupies a space that is neither one culture nor the other, reflecting the liminal state described by Turner (1977). Although this state of being caught in between is often disrupted, it persists and is characterized by his silence. Another illustration of this cultural clash is seen during Christmas, where Gurnah highlights the process of hybridization through mimicry: "A wasteful of pagan drunkenness, he called it, but one day he bought a small silver tree and some lights" (p. 36) The images show how Abbas engages in mimicry, adapting aspects of Western culture and lifestyle. While this adaptation may be only partial, it is evident nonetheless. Bhabha (1994) characterizes this act as a form of mimicry, where the colonized (the Other) tries to reflect the colonizer (the Self), capturing the essence of "almost the same but not white" (p. 88). The examples of mimicry demonstrated by Abbas shape his cultural identity as a hybrid as he embodies a blend of African and British cultures. Tyson (2006) reinforces the concept of mimicry as a way for the colonized to seek acceptance within the context established by the colonizer.

Despite distancing himself from his past as a Muslim, he still maintains a connection to his roots, albeit in a nominal way. He feels a sense of belonging to his Islamic heritage and actively seeks to teach his children the principles of Islam and what it truly means to be a Muslim. This creates a contradiction within Abbas's character; on the one hand, it reflects his embrace of the colonizing culture, while on the other, it highlights his cultural in-betweenness: "Sometimes he told them what it meant to be a Muslim " (p. 113). Abbas exists in a state of silence, struggling with a mental struggle between his past and present. He emotionally detaches from his current yearning for his family, reflecting on the regret of abandoning his former wife and unborn child. Unable to manage these feelings of remorse, he finds himself in a liminal space, caught between two worlds: his homeland and a host country which he perceives as unfamiliar and unwelcoming: "Ba's silences were dark, and his solitariness had a feeling of menace as if he had gone somewhere where it would not be pleasant to meet him" (p. 32). Thus, Abbas tries to manage his feelings of regret and shame. This stems from his past actions, which weigh heavily on him. His silence signifies this shame, serving as a primary reason for his prolonged concealment of his past. This silence also signifies an internal struggle between his past and present, highlighting his ongoing sense of liminality. As Turner (1977) described, he is "betwixt and between," lacking a stable state or position. Abbas finds himself neither fully engaged in his present life with his new family in the host country nor able to return to his homeland; instead, he endures a silent turmoil filled with shame and regret. According to Bamber et al. (2017), being stuck in this neither-here-nor-there state represents a form of permanent liminality.

Liminality and Hybridity in the Second-Generation Immigrants

Liminality and hybridity are recurrent themes in Gurna's fictions, and the related concepts such as mimicry, third-world, difference, ambivalence, cultural identity, anxiety and cultural Identity are repeated themes in Gurnah's storyworlds (Wasiq, 2024). Cultural, spatial, and social dislocation can make immigrants feel detached from their identities in an unwelcoming environment. Nevertheless, there are ways to navigate such challenges. Hybridity can provide a meaningful resolution to this crisis, even as it maintains a sense of ambivalence and separation. The outcome often hinges on how welcoming the local population is; if not, immigrants may endure dislocation, resulting in prolonged liminality. In *The Last Gift*, Gurnah illustrates the experiences of second-generation immigrants as they navigate various stages of life that shape their identities in a cultural context vastly different from their own. Additionally, Gurnah highlights the impact of liminality and hybridity on the identity formation of these children.

During their early childhood, Hanna and Jamal remained closely connected to their father's culture, largely unaware of what it meant to be immigrants in a foreign land. They were raised as obedient Muslims free from any unrest. However, things began to change once they started school. Gurnah depicts the challenges that Hanna and Jamal face, both with their peers and the wider community. As their father keeps their cultural roots hidden, they struggle with feelings of displacement and alienation. The native students regard them as different and strange. Jamal, in particular, faces hostility and unkindness, growing up with a profound sense of difference and alienation: "in the ingenuous and sometimes insistent and cruel questions the children asked about his country and its customs" (p. 45). As someone who feels dislocated, it's clear that he is often viewed as peculiar and distinct. Jamal is ambivalent; he embodies what Turner (1967) refers to as liminal beings, often seen as unsettling to those with defined identities. As mentioned earlier, this process takes years to resolve, and Hanna has encouraged him to claim, "This is my country." Nonetheless, the sense of being different and out of place remains apparent, even if he tries to appear indifferent: "The teacher might be talking about poverty in the world and would not be able to resist a quick glance in his direction. Poverty is to be found in places where people like him [Jamal] lived" (p. 45).

The way the teacher looks at Jamal and Hanna mirrors the perceptions of the host society regarding marginalized individuals in need of salvation by Europeans. This moment heightened the feelings of alienation and strangeness the characters had already been experiencing. Another instance where Gurnah illustrates the host society's attitude towards people of colour, such as Jamal and Hanna, is when: "Whenever someone old and dark-skinned shuffling along the pavement in the way of old people … they chuckled, the children he grew up with and glanced at him, embarrassed for him" (p. 45-46).

Jamal and Hanna struggle with their lack of connection to their roots, leading to a deep psychological conflict as they struggle to integrate into the host society during their childhood. They experience internal and external turmoil, which highlights their liminal existence; they feel they belong nowhere. Society perceives them as rootless, lacking a clear identity. Drawing on Turner's concepts, they are seen as 'polluting' and 'unclear.' Their differences from the native population place them outside societal norms, marking them as anti-structure. This conflict persists into adulthood, a period that signifies a significant transformation in their lives. While Hanna fully embraces a Western lifestyle, Jamal

hesitantly approaches this integration. To honour their Islamic heritage, they have been kept away from Christian events. This initiative by Abbas aims to preserve his cultural roots, which seem to have faded in the new environment: "Her parents were given the choice to exclude her, which they accepted. As a result, Hannah was exempt from participating in any Christian events" (p.113).

Transitioning from a previous identity to a new one undoubtedly involves numerous changes that must be carefully considered. Through Hannah and Jamal, Gurnah illustrates the liminality experienced by immigrant children, which is crucial in shaping their identities within the host society. This liminality also serves as a driving force in the hybridization of Hannah and Jamal. The two navigate three phases of liminality, allowing them to adopt Western norms and facilitate their assimilation in a challenging and unwelcoming environment. As she begins university, she distorts herself from her father's rules. She sheds her previous identity and stands on the brink of embracing a new self as British, even though her sense of Britishness is still evolving. This separation is reflected in her name, appearance, and behaviour change. Hanna preferred to go by the name Anna when she was outside her home. Using this name gave her a sense of confidence that was reflected in her voice, her eye movements, and her fashion choices, which suggested she put thought into her appearance. It seemed like she was intentionally transforming herself into someone she felt better about (p. 31).

Hanna begins to detach from her former self and moves into a transition phase. During this phase, Turner (1977) notes that transitional individuals possess "few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (p. 94). Similarly, Hanna undergoes various changes in her identity indicative of her emerging self. Yang (2000) describes that liminal beings go through different types of separations, including "spatial, temporal, and social/moral" (p. 383). In Hanna's situation, her separations have been spatial, social, and moral. The act of spatial disengagement is symbolized by her decision to leave her parents' home, with spatial separation playing a crucial role in shaping her identity. Her lifestyle choices and romantic relationships illustrate both social and moral disengagement. The way she dresses and speaks and her new identity as Anna highlight her departure from an old self that was not accepted by her community. It is clear that both Hanna and Jamal are regarded as 'Others' by those around them, prompting her decision to change. Given the circumstances, it seems she felt she had no other option.

Moral disengagement is evident in her romantic pursuits, which conflict with the values of her faith. Her actions are seen as sinful and significantly shift Hanna's identity. This disloyalty to her roots is a realisation she struggles with. This is demonstrated when Jamal playfully suggests he might change his name to Jimmy, implying that it might ease his anxieties. He notices that his comment has hurt her, making her feel disloyal to herself. This moment reveals her internal struggle between her desire to embrace Western culture and her guilt for straying from her heritage, reflecting her liminal state. Also, her father has consistently been unsettled by the changes in her lifestyle. Their relationship has been marked by conflict, particularly regarding her appearance and affairs. He struggles to accept her determination to adopt British norms. Hanna's embrace of Western customs can be seen as a form of mimicry. By adopting this lifestyle, Hanna, as a colonized individual, seeks to align herself with the natives. As Bhabha notes, she is "almost the same but not quite…. Almost the same but not white"(1994, p. 86, 89) Tyson further explains that mimicry represents the colonized person's efforts to gain acceptance from the colonizer, which is consistent with Hanna's experience.

Hanna is expected to enter the post-liminal phase following her transition and begin the process of assimilation. As she incorporates herself into the British way of life, her initial experiences of assimilation are positive, signalling the conclusion of her liminal state, according to Schouten (1991). Her romantic relationship with Nick, an Englishman, further enriches this positive assimilation. In this context, Hanna represents the Other, while Nick embodies the Self, meeting in what Bhabha (1994) describes as a 'Third Space.' This space transcends binary oppositions, offering Hanna "the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood-whether singular or communal-that initiate new signs of identity" (p.1). Hanna forges a hybrid cultural identity through mimicry and her bond with Nick. This relationship challenges traditional oppositions like Self/Other and fosters a new identity for Hanna as a hybrid figure. Putri and Clayton (2020) argue that this partnership highlights the interdependence and complementariness between the colonizer and the colonized, as both rely on each other to address specific desires or needs.

The process of her incorporation has faced interruptions on multiple occasions. Each time she encounters her boyfriend's family, she is reminded of her origins, which leaves her feeling out of place and different. Every question from Nick's relatives about her background makes her feel embarrassed. She perceives herself as an immigrant who is viewed as odd and inferior, and this sentiment lingers. She is acutely aware of the contrasts between her family and Nick's, which underscore a sense of European superiority. This is evident when she compares her mother to Nick's, his family's lavish lifestyle with her own struggles, and the varying ways people treat their mothers. As a result, she feels a persistent sense of inferiority as she often perceives herself as the only outsider in their gatherings. This feeling of difference leads to discomfort: "She did not say that to Nick because it made her sound like a whim, but she did not think they liked her" (p. 107). This highlights her sense of displacement, a perspective that Turner (1967) described as polluting and ambiguous due to her lack of a fixed identity. She finds herself in an internal struggle, caught between two identities: Hanna, the African woman who feels only loosely connected to her heritage, and Anna, who strives for closeness with the locals by embracing their culture. This ongoing conflict hinders her full integration into host British society. This also reinforces the idea that her separation is both partial and temporary, as she embodies neither pure Britishness nor pure African identity. Although cultural hybridity occurs, the underlying ambivalence remains intact, ultimately leading Anna to a state of permanent liminality.

During a dinner after the Easter service, she feels embarrassed and provoked by inquiries from Nick's uncle, the vicar Digby. Hanna stands out as the only one who seems different and unusual in that gathering: "And where do you come from?' Anna's British, Nick said curtly answering for her …. Yes, of course, Anna is British,' Uncle Digby said. But what she before she was British." (pp.116). Once again, she is reminded of her roots, which are largely a mystery to her. All she knows is that her father is African, and her mother feels rootless. Digby's probing questions leave her feeling embarrassed and pressured to provide answers she doesn't fully believe, like stating, "My father is from East Africa." When she asserts, "I am British," it seems insufficient for Digby. His implications suggest that, like Anna and other immigrants, simply identifying as British isn't enough without acknowledging their heritage, as they are perceived as not entirely fitting into that identity. This experience reinforces the immigrant perspective, shaped by how the local population views them during every interaction, accentuating their existence in a cultural and spatial limbo. The moment Anna and Nick part ways underscores Thiongo's (2000) concept that while colonizer and colonized may share insights, their fundamental differences and separateness persist. This further highlights the liminal state Anna finds herself in. Her

liminality is most obvious when she attests: "I feel myself suspended between a real place, in which I live, and another imagined place, which is also real but in a disturbing way" (p.278). It is clear that Hanna finds herself in a state of spatial in-betweenness, oscillating between two places while attempting to distance herself from the imaginary realm associated with her origins. Her identity as an immigrant plays a significant role in shaping her sense of self, contributing to her portrayal as a liminal hybrid figure.

On the other hand, Jamal embraces a Western lifestyle that he adopts through mimicry, fueled by his romantic involvement with Lena. However, the lifestyle he has chosen differs somewhat from that of Hanna. Referring to Yang's (2000) classification of separation types, Jamal undergoes both spatial and moral separation. His spatial separation is evident when he moves out of his parent's house to live independently. This decision reflects a form of mimicry, as it deviates from the norms of his original culture. Turner (1977) notes that when individuals disengage from past roles, they enter a transitional phase where their old and new identities may be unclear or non-existent. For Jamal, this transitional period lasts a long time. It highlights his struggle between two worlds: the imaginary space he knows little about and the tangible reality he inhabits. He finds himself caught in a cultural conflict, which leads to a state of liminality; he is neither wholly part of one culture nor the other, existing instead in a space described by Turner as being "betwixt and between" (p.95). Although he develops friendships with locals and other Europeans like Lena, reminders of his African heritage persist. Jamal also shows a strong desire to connect with his roots, which is particularly evident in his conversations with his father in the hospital: "Why do you have never talk about your family?" (p.42). Jamal is searching for deeper insights into his heritage while also struggling with his father's silence, which has been a source of struggle for the children. Jamal's expressions reveal a sense of emptiness that makes him feel out of place between different cultures and identities. He continues to seek a better understanding of his authentic values (p.120).

Gurnah highlights a significant aspect of Jamal's character through his relationship with Lena. This relationship adds complexity to Jamal's sense of in-betweenness and contributes to forming a hybrid cultural identity. The novel does not suggest that Jamal had any previous romantic encounters before meeting Lena, indicating that this relationship represents a new transition for him. This connection supports Bhabha's (1994) idea that third-space hybridity transcends the binary division between self and other, as each relies on the other to satisfy certain needs and desires. This relationship illustrates Jamal's moral conflict, as engaging in an affair is considered taboo for him due to his Muslim background, even though his connection to Islam is largely nominal. The sense of otherness remains evident despite Jamal's romantic relationship with Lena. This is illustrated through Jamal's encounter with the store's owner, who displays open hostility towards him. Also, Ronnie, Lena's former boyfriend, expresses a racial bias when he discovers a postcard from Lena to Jamal, using derogatory terms like "nigger this and paki that." These instances are highlighted. Turner's (1967) concept is that those considered liminal are often viewed as impure, ambiguous, and outside the norm. Hanna and Jamal have clearly undergone a state of liminality as they transition away from childhood. This liminal phase is crucial in shaping their identities. It acts as a pathway for both to develop a hybrid identity. The in-betweenness felt by Hanna and Jamal is not a temporary phase; according to Bamber et al. (2017), they experience a form of permanent liminality. Szakolczai (2014) argues that a temporal situation can lead to an enduring state when it persists. Therefore, Hanna and Jamal's experiences exemplify a profound and lasting liminality.

Conclusion

The research highlights the concepts of Liminality and Hybridity as crucial for exploring and understanding the complexities of identity within Gurnah's *The Last Gift*. Liminality, particularly as described by Turner, provides valuable insights into the various transitions experienced by Gurnah's characters. These transitions play a pivotal role in shaping identities and influencing societal actions. Liminality emerges as a fundamental element in the formation of hybrid cultural identities. Given Gurnah's focus on multicultural themes and the intersection of different cultures in the novel, Bhabha's ideas of Hybridity and Mimicry are also essential for the analysis. The identity dilemma is evident in the characters explored in this study. *The Last Gift* illustrates the transition and adaptation to Western traditions experienced by these characters. These shifts and the integration of Western culture play crucial roles in shaping their identities. For Abbas, it is evident that his past career before migration resonates strongly, significantly contributing to his ongoing state of liminality. The influence of Mimicry is apparent in how Abbas constructs his identity. The study also highlights Abbas's inability to fully assimilate into the host society. His confrontation with his fate in an unfamiliar land is unavoidable and occurs against his wishes. Notably, he struggles to preserve his authentic culture while simultaneously failing to completely embrace Western culture. Silence plays a significant role in Abbas's journey, symbolizing his internal conflict between his past and present and emphasising his continuous state of liminality. Ultimately, this leads him to face the tragic reality of dying as an immigrant in a foreign land. Abbas's children struggle to assimilate into the host society while simultaneously seeking their roots. Hanna emerges as a perpetual hybrid and liminal figure, unable to fully assimilate into her new environment without feeling the weight of her differences. She exists in an ongoing liminality positioned between the tangible and the imaginary. The study highlighted the significant role of mimicry as a means for Hanna to adapt to a Western lifestyle. Both she and Jamal exemplify the concepts of liminality and hybridity that shape their identities. By the end of the narrative, Jamal appears as a hybrid figure without a fixed or unified cultural identity. They are more hybridized than their counterparts, having more profoundly embraced Western culture. Adapting to this lifestyle has significantly enriched their hybrid identities, leading them to adopt more Western traits. Ultimately, the study underscores that both liminality and hybridity play crucial roles in shaping the characters' identities within the novel.

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