

**Root Identity as a Postcolonial Authenticity Crisis in
Abdulrazak Gurnah's *The Last Gift***

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Abstract

This study adopts Martin Heidegger's concept of authenticity as its heuristic tool to investigate root identity as a postcolonial identity crisis in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *The Last Gift* through the lens of postcolonial literary theory as part of the main currents in the study and practice of African literature. In the modern world with the increase of migrant identity crisis situations, hybrid nations and constitution of countries with different cultural identities and diversities, identity placing and tracing come to the center stage. This is because African literature in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been seen as containing contradictory impulses, binary oppositions sort of –towards acceptance or rejection. To Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger, it is authenticity and inauthenticity. It manifests in Fredrick Nietzsche as Apollonian and Dionysian predicaments. It is “us” and “the others” in postcolonial context and Albert Camus calls it rebellion and conformism. The expression of this binary takes various forms because African fictive characters are portrayed to have emerged from colonialism and have evolved with them a double inheritance: authenticity and inauthenticity. Hybridity is one of the consequences of this dual heritage, creating uncertainty as to where and how root identity is to be ascertained among characters in the novels. In Gurnah's *The Last Gift*, Hanna and Jamal come to a clearer understanding of their root identity underwritten by the Sailor's tales which their father, Abbas, planted in the radio tape

they received as his metaphorical last gift. Their mother, Maryam also returns to Exeter to find root into her own identity, having suffered from root identity and its predatory effects from childhood. Any sincere criticism of African literature offers one of the most important ways in which these root identity and migrant perceptions are expressed, and it is in Gurnah that the day-to-day realities experienced by these migrant characters have been most alluringly determined.

Key words: Migration, Authenticity, Inauthenticity, Hybridity, Root identity.

Introduction

Countries that have had colonial experience typically have a dual inheritance and this situation is not automatically remedied by the attainment of independence. At independence, writers from these former colonies start up a conversation around what is perceived as their pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial experiences. These three conversations are encapsulated into the postcolonial discourse. Postcolonial is a term used for an era when colonies achieved freedom from European colonization. The term post colonialism concerns the effects of colonialism on cultures and communities which are formerly occidental colonies. Historians used it after the Second World War, WWII, to refer to the post-independence time. Post-colonialism may also refer to the crises migrant characters encounter as they try to grapple with colonial experience and what is originally theirs. Though there are political changes in the post colony, many nations got independence and no more they are colonies, but culturally and economically there appear many dilemma and crisis, they are still in confusion about their culture and identity. The appearance of national and ethnic identity dilemmas and endurances in ascertaining what is authentic in order to bridge the gap of its inauthentic opposite “defined and redefined after the collapse of the Empire, the continuous movement between margin and centre (be it spatially,

socially or metaphorically circumscribed), the interpretation and reinterpretation of common history" (Loana Elena Marinescu 90). In fact, colonialism was not only a power control but it was a cultural control by the colonizer in which still colonized people are tied to in one way or the other. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin argue that “All post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination, and independence has not solved this problem" (2). The postcolonial atmosphere and situation is characterised by the tensions of struggling of newly independent states to achieve their cultural, political, and psychological identification, reflect their privacy, establish their self-determination different from that imposed by the colonizers that always leads to imbalance. The struggle of the colonized subjects for their cultural identity and the social formation of the new independent nations is an aspect of cultural transformation that leads to a continuous, if not a perpetual conflict with the colonizer's culture. What characterizes postcolonial era is the resistance to colonialism and seeking identity to confirm their independence, which many countries in the post colony have not succeeded in doing. Then, the population movement and migration from former colonies to the colonizer's countries created new mixed, hybrid societies that clash with each other culturally in one hand and in the other hand between the citizens and migrants.

Through colonial tutelage, most of the African fictive characters have carried with them the cultural experiences which predate colonialism and persisted along the relics of colonialism. These have affected the value system or the acceptable values in the behavioral patterns of characters found in the fictions either written by citizens of these countries or handed to them by the colonial masters as a moral handbook. More often, some of the fictions written by the formal colonized people who live abroad or African diaspora writers portray their own experiences and showcase major characters struggling to become or lost in their

own crisis of filiation. Placed in this isthmus of a middle state are the questions of authenticity, inauthenticity, and root identity.

Theoretical Standpoint

Some of the familiar issues in the discourse of African literature of the twenty-first century reveal the preponderance by writers, some of who live abroad, to confront the notions of migration crises in their art renditions occasioning from a call to self-examine one's own authentic existence in a world of diverse narratives. Through their narratives, they reveal varying prevalent social realities, especially, as it affects the blacks living in a land that could be called foreign, for lack of a better word. It is common, as one reads these literary works to encounter the child-protagonist as it grapples with the vicissitude of daily existence and identity formation in a dystopian environment, and as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin will affirm, “more than three quarters of the people living in the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism.” Ashcroft et al go further to assert that, “literature offers one of the most important ways in which these new perceptions are expressed and it is in their writing, and through other arts that the day-to-day realities experienced by colonized people have been most powerfully encoded” (1). Postcolonial theory stands out as almost the most important tool for confronting African literature because of diverse area of its interface with migration, root identity, authenticity, inauthenticity, and crisis of filiation. Postcolonial theory therefore “deconstructs and reimagines personal, cultural and national identities” (Kirsti Bohata 2).

The term “postcolonial” has remained a subject of spirited argument and controversy especially over what it should and does represent. At one level, postcolonial is used to refer to the period between colonization and right after independence only, while at another level, the periodization is stretched further down, beginning from the moment of colonization down to the present day. This is in view of the fact that the colonizers are still in remote

control of the affairs of the colonized nations. In essence, this paper subscribes to the position of Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* that the term postcolonial “is best used to designate the totality of practices, in all their rich diversity, which characterizes the societies of the postcolonial world from the moment of colonization to the present day, since colonialism does not cease with the mere fact of political independence and continues in a neo-colonial mode to be active in many societies” (xv). The implication is that the term “postcolonial” is used to refer to diverse practices which incorporate all the effects of colonization by imperial Europe both within the moment of colonization and afterwards. Post-colonial studies which emerged from the varied experiences of colonized peoples represent the expression of such colonial experiences. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin observe that “postcolonial studies are based in the 'historical fact' of European colonialism and the diverse material effects to which this phenomenon gave rise” (2). One of the “diverse material effects” of British colonization of some part of Africa, for instance, is the denigration of the indigenous culture through the superimposition of western culture. The derogatory representation of “others” as different from “us” and the stereotyping of the natives found expression in the colonial documentation or writing by colonial administrators, adventurers, sailors, researchers and missionaries. Literature remains one of the most readily available and important modes of expressing the existential realities prevalent in the postcolonial societies. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin further posit that, “what each of these literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerge in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctly post-colonial”(2). Essentially, the experience of colonization is responsible for shaping and reshaping the culture of colonized societies and by extension the writing that emerged from such

societies out of the horror of imperial domination. The socio-economic and political realities that characterize colonized societies and their literature are products of the imperial process of colonization and its continuation in diverse forms in present times. Postcolonial practice therefore involves an attempt, a predilection to engage in a public discourse of the effects of European colonization of native populations and supplanting and denigration of indigenous ways of knowing. Ashcroft et al summarize this view through their submission that:

The practice of postcolonial theorizing involves discussion about experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. None of these is 'essentially' postcolonial, but put together they form the complex fabric of the field (*The Post-colonial Studies Reader* 2).

The experiences of migration, authenticity, in authenticity and root identity constitute the material effects and reactions to colonialism. The major aim of this paper is to follow the traits of the characters in Gurnah's *The Last Gift* in order to show how their colonial experience and migrant background model their inter/intra personal relationships and define their lost but found identity as the events of the story progress. Herein lays the question of their authentic or inauthentic existence in a world immersed with fear and black stereotype.

The Question of Authenticity

Authenticity and in authenticity are found in the concept of existentialism. Existentialism designates the series of thinkers in the Post-Hegelian tradition of European philosophy. It became the

most influential philosophical movement between the late 18th and throughout 19th centuries. It is better classified as a movement rather than a school. The reason for this is because it is not a coherent system of philosophizing like rationalism, Thomism, Platonism, and others. Existentialists do not believe in "abstract speculation but rather are interested in concrete human existence, their philosophizing begins from man rather than from nature" (John Macquarrie 14). The question of authenticity is raised by Soren Kierkegaard (who is often referred to as the father of existentialism), Martin Heidegger (although would not like to be called an existentialist), Fredrick Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Albert Camus, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Simon de Beauvoir, and Jean-Paul Sartre. The condition and quality of the existing human individual remains the kernel of their philosophies. Consequently, themes such as, "human subjectivity, facticity, finitude, absurdity, nothingness, anxiety, guilt, death, essence and existence, among others" (Jim Ijenwa Unah and Chris Osegenwune 129) recur in their different analysis of the human condition. In their determination to make man live an affirmative form of life, "they denied all forms of abstractions with respect to existence. Against all objectives and abstractions, existence, for these thinkers, takes precedence over essence" (David Nyong 37).

Existentialists believe that against all odds, man must make every effort to live his life to its fullness on earth. They understand that there are some human "givens," otherwise called facticity of existence, which may not allow man to affirm himself and achieve all that he wants on earth. For that reason, the only way to confront these existential "facticities" is to man up (be courageous) and live authentically. In existentialism, the concept of authenticity is used to "describe the way of living of one who takes full cognizance of the meaninglessness of the world yet deliberately follows a consistent course of action" (Unah and Osegenwune 27-28). Unfortunately, even though human beings may decide they want to live in a way that is true to their deepest beliefs, desires and passions, most of them do not in the true sense

of the word. They are always comfortable following others: their friends, parents, teachers, the media, trends, husbands and wives. Others' views and opinions often shape what they do. They think, most often, that it is more consequential to be likened and to fit in than it is to be themselves or to be truly who they are. Many of them always think that they are not good enough, that is, they lack self-worth and would require others' approval for them to be truly human. Consequent upon this, they always do everything within their ambit to be like others who they think are better than they are. One of the adverse effects of colonial and postcolonial experiences on the colonized people is that most people of African origin such as Hanna in Gurnah's *The Last Gift*, still think that being African in culture and in values is a sign of primitivism, barbarism and lack of civility; thus, they do everything to appear like the white even when the facts point to the contrary. By so doing, the necessity for authenticity becomes further relegated as a mark of weakness and not coping up with civilized norms. This makes them begin to drift along the inauthentic way of existence.

This study adopts Heidegger's concept of authenticity as its heuristic tool. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger talks about a certain special kind of being in the universe. That being he calls *Da-sein* or human being, human reality. While every other thing in the universe simply is only *Da-sein* or human being exists. Existence for this special kind of being, Heidegger says, "is a possibility which exceeds actuality" (294). It is a possibility because human existence is a project which continues to actualize itself with affirmative and purposive action. Heidegger calls this purposive action, authenticity. Authenticity refers to what is "formally unique and particular to each individual human being. The unique first-person structure of existence," what Heidegger calls its "mineness" (Taylor Carman 233). According to Yalom qtd. in Shawn A. Rubin, the concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity activate two fundamental modes of existing in the world: "a state of forgetfulness of being, and a state of mindfulness of being. To live in the state of forgetfulness of being is to live in a

world of 'things,' immersed in 'everyday distraction,' 'absorbed idle chatter' and primarily concerned 'about the way things are' (30-31). According to Rubin, this is what Heidegger refers to as the "inauthentic modes of everyday existence" (42). The inauthentic modes of existence involves "dwelling in the world without being in control of it" (John Tiez 43). Authenticity is its direct opposite. Authenticity involves living according to "what is formally unique and particular to each individual human being, [since] the 'auth' in 'authenticity' means own, proper, or peculiar, what is authentic, then, is what is most my own, what is essential most proper or peculiar to me" (Carman 233). Here, authentic experience requires that "we choose ourselves in order to overcome or transcend those elements of life that we have no choice over, such as our parentage, biological makeup and place of birth" (Mathew McDonald 58). Authenticity here entails that characters in Gurnah's *The Last Gift* have been exposed to, or have been carried away by the 'publicness' of everyday living, and have thereby become alienated from their own trueness of being, for "when *Da-sein* [loosely translated as human existence] occupies itself entirely with its world of care and gives itself up to the publicity of the 'one like many,' something like a fight of the *Da-sein* from itself as from its authentic potentiality of self-being reveals itself" (Heidegger 60). *Da-sein* as a being there has a thrown existence. In other words, man's existence is an existence that is thrown without why. His existence has no *ab initio* meaning; meaning only comes to his existence by virtue of how and what he authentically makes out of it. Man first exists: "he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterward defines himself. If man as existentialists conceive of him cannot be defined, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later and then he will be what he makes of himself" (Jean-Paul Sartre 22). And because the essence of man as *Da-sein* is to exist, there are two ways in which he can live his life in the quest to actualize all his possibilities: he can live or exist authentically or inauthentically. In Heidegger's determination, human reality is a reality whose meaning is defined in reference to

other realities. In other words, man as an existing being, does not exist alone. He exists with other human beings, and it is through the reality of these other human beings like us that meaning is conferred on our individual existence. But, while living with others, Heidegger further warns that man must not allow the fact of the other to deny him his individual authenticity. Man must not allow the reality of "the human other" to rob him the reality of his own individuality. In other words, although man is a being that lives with others, his existence is not a collective existence but an individual existence who has his own life to live and his own death to die, his own identity to protect, and his own unique mannerism. For Heidegger, "if Da-sein makes no choice, and allows himself to be carried away by an 'undefined public,' 'the nobody,' 'everybody' and 'they factors,' 'Da-sein' ensnares himself in inauthenticity" (268). Heidegger however says that this process can still be reversed if Da-sein will endeavour to "bring itself back to itself from its 'lostness' in the 'they' life-world (268). When this happens, human existence becomes authentic and impactful. This is the state of rediscovery of being that happens when Hanna comes to the realisation that she cannot fit into the normal British life of Nick's family in Gurnah's *The Last Gift*.

The Question of Identity

In postcolonial context, identity is a complex concept that would be difficult to define. The identification of an individual or a group or a nation in postcolonial terms is related to the "other:" that means the post-colonies recognize themselves "us" with the existence of the "other." Otherness is a feature to recognize identity in postcolonial era, which also means it is twofold, "both identity and difference, so that every other, every different than and excluded by is dialectically created and includes the values and meaning of the colonizing culture even as it rejects its power to define" (Sachchidanand Sinha 4). In addition, this binary relation of otherness created a kind of identity dislocation and paved a hierarchical situation in the period. The national identity that's formed in a post-colonial states "is believed to be never fixed

and is very changing according to environment and culture, because of transfer and sovereignty which leads to a confusion in identity" (Francis Chan I). As part of the effects of colonialism, what constitutes the colonized people's identity is not stable and fixed, rather it "emerges as a kind of unsettled space or an unresolved question in that space, between a number of intersecting discourses" (John Hall 10). The impact of colonial legacy was multi-dimensional, besides there was different consequences of colonialism in different locations, the issue of identity appeared in different shapes and forms. Collective and individual identities also differ physically and psychologically. The resistance of decolonization process took various outlines due to countries, societies and individuals. Therefore, identity "is not simply imposed. It is also chosen, and actively used, albeit within particular social contexts and constraints.

Through the lens of postcolonial authenticity and inauthenticity crisis situation of the characters, this paper covers the crisis of filiation that the Zanzibar family in Gurnah's *The Last Gift* suffers by benefiting also from Eduourd Glissant's theory of root identity. The crisis of filiation experienced by Gurnah's characters can be linked to what Glissant refers to as "root identity" and its "predatory effects." Root identity, according to Glissant rests on the "violence of filiation, of a genealogy going back to a founding myth or origin of a land, which becomes a territory" and has to be preserved by being projected onto other territories, making their conquest legitimate" (33). This conception, misconception or lack of identity rests on the idea of autonomous self-perception of the Abbas family that then "sets in motion the thought of other and of voyage" (Tina Steiner 127) as the paper closes up with Abba's family and the crisis of filiation.

Authenticity/Inauthenticity: Abbas's Family and the Crisis of Filiation

Abbas is the major character in Gurnah's *The Last Gift*. He is portrayed as an immigrant character that lives in exile for forty-

three years. The novel opens with an insight about Abbas's migrant life when the narrative voice states "one day, long before the troubles, he slipped away without saying a word to anyone and never went back. And then another day, forty-three years later" (1; ch. 1, pt. 1). In running away from home, Abbas plunged his family into the crisis of filiation or root identity. This case of unknown identity endures from the beginning of the text through to Abba's lifetime. The family has only got to have a peephole into their root through the tape his wife, Maryam passed on to his children, Hanna or Anna and Jamal. Hanna becomes outraged for not knowing a single thing about her own background. And so, she is always eager to fight at the slightest mention of root identity. As it is said, an ageing is always uncomfortable whenever bone related issue is being talked about. Even though Hanna and Jamal seem they have their own autonomy and have liberated themselves from their immigrant status to the point they can now lead normal British lives in England, they do not have any sense of belonging, because they carry the feeling of their lost identity like a snail carries its shell in the manner of the classical Sisyphusian myth. Hanna, for instance, prefers to be called Anna since it sounds more British. She strives to create the image of a proper English girl. She wants to construct an identity for herself that is proper in Europe, and that is why the narrative voice says that "she herself preferred to be called Anna, and that was the name she used outside the house" (Gurnah 33; ch. 1, pt. 1), and she has already told her teacher "I hate the name Hanna,' she said. 'I don't know where they got it from'" (34). This is exactly what Heidegger refers to as "fallen:" a situation where man allows himself to be swallowed up by the cares of the world, he becomes fallen. And when this happens, Heidegger asserts, "he becomes inauthentic and lost in the 'they' life world" (32). According to Unah and Osegenwune, its authentic opposite "marks the tension between the individual's ability to attain self-realization in the midst of limiting conditions of facticity" (229).

In talking about the Abbas's family, the narrative voice

says "Hanna used to say to Jamal that they were a strange family, an odd family. Their mother was an abandoned baby who had no idea of her real parents, and their father never spoke about his" (29; ch.1, pt. 1). This family lives in this circle of lost root identity in the text. The narrative voice reveals that Abbas never talked to his children about their place of origin. So, Hanna is right to have insinuated that they are a strange family. We read from the narrator that Jamal patted his father on the thigh and asked him:

Why do you never talk about your family? Because he never had, at least never to do much more than draw a sketchy picture of a miserly father and a put-upon mother. Sometimes, often, he talked about being a sailor and the countries he visited, or the various bad jobs he had had to do over the years before he settled into the one he did for the rest of his life, as an engineer in the electronics factory. But never about his family or even about where he came from. When they were younger Hanna or Jamal asked, in the uncomplicated way of children, about where their grandparents were or what they were like, or other questions of that kind, but most of the time their father brushed their questions aside, sometimes with a smile and sometimes without. You don't want to know about that, he would say. Now and then he would tell them things, precious little things as they seemed to Jamal, but nothing very precise, nothing very concrete. It was as if he spoke out of a reverie, unguarded for a few moments, holding up a fragment of a whimsy before letting it float away into the blinding light (32; ch. 1, pt. 1).

The question above ignites a certain feeling of frustration and filial groping in Hanna who could not imagine why their parents' identity remains a mystery to them. She probes the psyche of Jamal out of frustration:

'They are lost,' she said. 'Ba deliberately lost himself a long time ago, and Ma found herself lost from the beginning, a foundling. What I want from them is a story that has a beginning that is tolerable and open and not one that is tripped with hesitations and silences. Why is that so difficult? I want to be able to say this is what I am. Yes, I know, so has every human being who has ever given the matter any thought, but I don't want to crack the mystery of the soul or the nature of being. I just want some simple boring details. Instead we get snippets of secret stories we cannot ask about and cannot speak about. I hate it. Sometimes it makes me feel that I am living a life of hiding and shame (33; ch.1, pt. 1).

Hanna's struggle with identity triggers some feeling of curiosity in Jamal as a student of migration trends and policies in the European Union. This is why Jamal, "always, when he saw someone like him, someone dark, someone as old as his neighbour, he wanted to ask, where are you from? Have you come a long way? How can you bear to be so far away? Was it so intolerable there, wherever it was? It must have been, for you to choose to live in this ugly northern city. How has it been here in all these years? Have you come through? (60).

In the dinner scene with Nick's family, Uncle Digby pushes Anna a lot about her origin. That's why she is very uncomfortable in their company. It is equally the very reason she contemplates on not wanting to marry or bear a child for Nick. She feels so uncomfortable with Uncle Digby's constant chasing of her background. She just does not want to keep up with the Nick's and live in that internal distress all the rest of her life. Anna's belongingness to a British society in Nick's family becomes questionable since her identity is indefinable. She cannot trace her root. The following conversation speaks volume:

At some point Uncle Digby, who was sitting across from her, turned towards her with a pungently

benign smile and asked her, 'And where do you come from?' 'Anna's British,' Nick said curtly, answering for her. Anthony made a soft snorting noise. 'Yes, of course Anna's British,' Uncle Digby said. 'But what was she before she was British?' They were all looking at her, waiting for her to speak, to tell them what her real nation was. She wished she could get up and leave, and walk quickly to the train station and travel to wherever her real nation was. She wished she had more panache and knew how to charm people she did not like. 'Where are your parents from, Anna?' Uncle Digby asked, still kindly but smiling less fully, perhaps made suspicious by Anna's silence. 'My father is from East Africa,' Anna said, hating Uncle Digby for being an oily old fake and hating herself for being intimidated into a disclosure that she had no faith in. She had almost said I think but she had managed to suppress that (79-80).

After a puzzling silence, Uncle Digby goes on to ask, "you don't know where your father comes from! Well, I find this hard to believe" (80). Anna lives in the state of forgetfulness of being in what Heidegger calls inauthentic mode of everyday existence. That's the reason she is lost in this whole web of uncomfortable familiarity with Nick's family. Answering uncle Digby, Anna says, "I don't know," Anna repeated, unable to think of anything else to say" (80). Anna is rejecting that position of weakness of being lost. It has become imperative for her to get on with her life, however uncertain and inauthentic her identity is.

Maryam's own story is another web of a filial nightmare. The narrative voice describes how she was fostered from one household to another. This is exactly why Anna retorts, "I just wish their stories were not so pathetic and sordid" (132). Anna was almost drawn into tears when Nick told her:

I mean I feel sorry for people like you because you don't know how to look after yourselves. Your father was a whingeing tyrant, bullying everyone with one misery or another, in the grip of a psychic crisis, so it seemed. But he only had diabetes, a thoroughly treatable disease, that's all. Your mother was an abandoned baby and doesn't know who she is. Well, it doesn't take a genius to find out that kind of information. Why couldn't she just pay an agency to check it out for her? Or why couldn't you, or your brother, do it for her? She, and all of you, would have known within days. But no, it had to be another festering drama. And then it turns out your father is an absconder and a bigamist but he couldn't just talk about this, the whole crowd of you in the grip of a hopeless melodrama, acting like immigrants' (157).

This incident becomes an eye opener to Hanna. She not only walks away from Nick, she also comes to terms with her authentic self. That one is born short, slim, black, poor, born into a certain family and country are existential “givens,” in Heidegger's habit of thought, which have the capacity to weigh man down in perpetual grumbling. These facts are not of man's making. He is born into them and most often make man fallen with tendencies for resignation. As such, the feeling that we are “*factually*” thrown into the world, most often makes man run away from action, from choice and from himself. Man at birth, does not choose to be born nor the type of family to be born into, yet he is born anyway, and expected to accept these facts of existence with existential equanimity, which is where authenticity comes in. Hanna's realisation that she will perpetually bear immigrant status in Nick's family opens her eyes to find root into her own identity. Her real self that would now prefer to be called Hanna—with Mr. *Agbo* voice, instead of the soft and easy British name, Anna, begins to surge up.

Identity filiation in Gurnah's *The Last Gift* is a sustaining construct that holds the narrative of the novel from the beginning to the end. Having forced Abbas to speak into the radio tape which Maryam handed over to Hanna and Jamal as the metaphorical last gift, they started to trace their root. First, they tried to see if there is any existing conviction of who the parents of their mother are. Unfortunately, this revelation was not made as their attempt was nothing but futile. On the letter he writes to his sister Hanna, Jamal comes to the conclusion that “of course we'll go to Zanzibar. I want to see that tree where our father was shelling groundnuts while the great world was churning just out of eyeshot” (185). This going back is a way of humanity. That is why Uncle Digby waved Hanna's words away when she told him that she does not know where her parents come from. The narrative voice says that:

We see families falling apart because children do not want to know about the world their parents came from. To keep communities together, host and stranger need to know each other, but we cannot know each other if we don't know ourselves. We who care for the welfare of immigrants work as hard as we know how to get that message across, to encourage people to know. Those words *I am British* feel like a cold tragic blast to me sometimes” (80).

At the end, even if Hanna and Jamal could not locate the root of their mother's parentage, they are well aware of their father's. It is therefore the position of this paper that so many Africans living in Europe with lost identities should trace their identity. It is only through this rediscovery of self that everything authentic in them would come to full actualization.

Conclusion

Using Rene Girard's mimetic theory, Belachew Gebrewold has argued that African migration to Europe is not primarily driven by poverty and violence but by a mimetic desire to be like the former colonizers and to live among them. Gebrewold listed these

mimetic desires as desire for liberation, for recognition, for being, for equality and negation of difference “against the background of slavery, colonialism, Western cultural hegemony, imperialism, and evangelism” (3). In general, human relationship is characterised by at least three phenomena: dominance and recognition, scapegoating, and mimetic desire. These phenomena play a key role and analysis of the postcolonial migration to the West. As a consequence of Western power and hegemony, Africans have lost self-respect and dignity. Postcolonialism revisits, remembers, and interrogates the colonial past, which consists of colonial expression and the compelling seduction of colonial power. As a therapeutic or cathartic retrieval of the colonial past, “postcolonialism is not only willing to make but also to gain a theoretical sense of the past” (Leela Gandhi 4-5). This is possible because the colonized has a strong desire for independence from the colonizer, but on the other hand, still has a strong longing for the colonizer. This situation of a middle state is what has been discussed in this paper as identity crisis because the postcolonial theories study “the simultaneous hate and desire of the colonized and their voyeuristic gaze upon Europe and schizophrenic behaviour (Gandhi 11). Therefore, this paper has to study contemporary migration from Africa to the west in the postcolonial context because of its relationship with root identity crisis situation of Abba's family in Gurnah's *The Last Gift*.

The interrogation of “root identity as a Postcolonial Authenticity Crisis in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *The Last Gift*” leads to the observation of crisis of filiation and exposes the challenges migrant characters face as it affects their growth and maturation. Hanna's attitude portrays the wider African society where effort is made every day by the black race to expunge or obliterate their origin and fit into or belong to a new society in search of social status. Placed in this isthmus of a middle state, the African is perpetually lost. It is the conclusion and recommendation of this paper that African migrant characters and to a very large extent, the narrative life-world should portray characters that stand tall to what is essentially authentic “mineness” to them. Like Hanna and

her brother Jamal, African migrant characters should trace and re/locate their root for them to actually have a well-defined understanding of themselves. It is time Africans moved and owned their authentic selves both in writing and in action. Rediscovery and reassertion are the key functional relations the African migrant characters, and of course, in the life-world, should aim at and become intentional with. The good news is that no time is too late to call the self out from the “they life world” and affirm the self. In other words, the “they” life experience is just a stroll away which can be reversed the moment one realizes oneself and takes a firm and resolute decision towards self-retrieval. This is possible because what is lost in the “they” life is not a permanent state of being. Therefore, the existential call for self-retrieval from the “they” world is what Heidegger understands as authenticity, “When Da-sein thus brings itself back from the 'they,' the they-self is modified in all existential manner so that it becomes authentic Being-one's self” (313). The effort so far made in this paper is targeted at exposing Da-sein's potentiality to transcend its “thrownness,” “fallenness” in order to actualize its individuality, “mineness” of being.

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