

A Charred World: Mapping Chasms and Loss in Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*

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ABSTRACT

Kamila Shamsie's novel, *Burnt Shadows*, is a riveting rendition of lost homelands, resilience, new beginnings, cross-cultural relationships, terrorism, violence, love, and loss. Spanned over a period of fifty-seven years, the geo-political narrative traverses five countries showcasing the entwined lives of the three generations of the Weiss-Burttons and Tanaka-Ashrafs families, covering a vast expanse of history ranging from the Second World War to Guantanamo Bay. It chronicles the horrors of the Nagasaki bombing, the brutalities of the Partition of India and Pakistan, the paranoia around the nuclear race in the sub-continent, the Cold War and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and its response, and the aftermath of 9/11 New York. The novel is a critique of politics, conflicts, and violence. Shamsie critiques the maddening struggle between the power structures and their devastating consequences. The novel also delineates the fundamentalist notion of treating people with different worldviews as a threat. Hiroko Tanaka, the protagonist, is a warrior and a survivor who loses her world twice but rebuilds, only to lose it for the third time with her son's capture. The proposed paper seeks to expose the chasm that engulfs the contemporary world and trace the losses several characters suffer throughout the novel. It also aims to explore several nations' internal landscapes and the multidimensional consequences of new and emerging conflicts that seamlessly replace the old wars. It also seeks to find possible ways to bridge the chasms.

Keywords: Chasm, loss, geo-political, Second World War, Partition, 9/11, politics, violence.

Kamila Shamsie, the Pakistani-British author of immense potential, makes an exemplary effort in drafting an epic of a novel with cosmopolitan undertones. *Burnt Shadows* (2009) Unraveling in four segments titled 'The Yet Unknowing World: Nagasaki, 9 August 1945', 'Veiled Birds: Delhi, 1947', 'Part-Angel Warriors: Pakistan, 1982-83' and 'The Speed Necessary to Replace Loss: New York, Afghanistan, 2001-2', the narrative traces the historical threads of a shared

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past of two families from the concluding days of World War II in Japan, and India on the verge of the chaotic Partition to the early 1980s Pakistan, followed by the post 9/11 New York and Afghanistan amidst the reverberations of the attack. The novel primarily revolves around Hiroko Tanaka, a victim, and survivor, a resilient woman who watches her world crumbling down multiple times and rebuilds it each time with her resolute spirit. Apart from her father, she loses her fiancé Konrad to the bomb, seeks refuge in India, befriends Ilse and after falling in love for the second time, she marries Sajjad, the Muslim employee of the Burtons. She suffers a second blow with the murder of her husband who becomes a victim of geo-political strife. Her final blow comes with her son Raza being taken captive to Guantanamo Bay. The political upheavals disrupt the lives of several characters in the course of the novel. Adriana Kiczkowski in her research article titled, *Glocalization in Post-9/11 Literature*. *Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie reflects, “In one way or another, all the characters in the novel are survivors or victims of traumatic events that are intertwined with different political conflicts. The distinctive features of their characteristics emerge bit by bit from these complex, multidimensional global events.” The novel is a blend of distinct nationalities, including Japanese, German, British, German cum British, Indian migrated Pakistani, Pakistani, American, and Afghan, thus offering a cosmopolitan worldview. In his thesis, *Transitivity Analysis of Hiroko’s Character in Burnt Shadows*, Abdul Rashid asserts, “Lost homelands, nationalities and different identities are knotted with the history of the state and state terrorism.” It is a saga of lost homes, new beginnings, cross-cultural relationships, blending of different ethnicities, iconoclasm, geo-political conflicts, disastrous consequences of war, and redefining of historical narratives.

Politics and violence are inextricably interlinked. Violence is pervasive in all systems of government, from monarchy to communism to democracy. Bloodsheds have fed the systems of government at various levels and at various times. The governments perpetrate violence, considering it to be an indispensable tool, to intimidate the masses. In his research paper entitled, *Politics and Violence*, Gopal Singh makes a vital remark, “The century has become, as Lenin predicted, a period of wars and revolutions, in truth, a century of violence”.

The Second World War is considered to be the bloodiest war in the history of humanity. Kamila Shamsie, in the first section of her novel *Burnt Shadows* entitled, “The Yet Unknowing World” touches upon the disastrous consequences of war. The protagonist, Hiroko Tanaka, a twenty-one-year-old woman is in love with Konrad Weiss, a German refugee in Nagasaki. The

dropping of the atomic bomb, “Fat Man” on Nagasaki on the morning of August 9th, 1945, blows up her world in a split second, obliterates everything she was familiar with and mars her life. The explosion snatches away both, her father and Konrad, and, consequently, the dreams of her blissful future. Her back is scarred with bird-shaped burns, a fusion of “Charred silk, seared flesh” (27) to serve as an indelible reminder of the horrendous event and everything she has lost. The detonation of the bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was a part of the strategic bombing campaign launched by the United States Army Air Force against Japan. The assault came as a response to the four-year-old attack on Pearl Harbor, staged by Japan on December 7, 1941. Japan was driven by the ambitious objective of displacing the US and establishing itself as the dominant power in the Pacific. An article entitled *The Path to Pearl Harbor* states that “The flotilla aimed to destroy the US Pacific Fleet base at Pearl Harbor.” The conflict traces its history to the political dynamics of the two nations, where Japan’s imperialist expansion policy soured its relations with the US. The United States responded by imposing economic sanctions on Japan aiming to keep the Japanese aggression in check. In retaliation, Japan cemented its alliance with the Axis powers to enter the tripartite pact with Germany and Italy forming the historical Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Axis. In a vicious cycle of conflicts, the US declared war on Japan following the downpour of Japanese firepower to decimate the US Pacific Fleet based at Pearl Harbor. The United States’ decision was met with Japanese Axis ally, Nazi Germany, lashing back by declaring war on the United States. The United States, which had manifested a powerful isolationist movement until then, found itself in a global conflict, thus entering a two-war front. The expansion of global interests of the concerned nations and a race for power supremacy subjected the nations and their people to humongous bloodshed. The geo-political conflict inevitably resulted in war and violence, cost countless lives and inconceivable devastation. The war's monstrosity claimed tens of thousands of people, and tens of thousands were maimed for life. Women were raped and children were orphaned. The world map changed significantly due to the number of countries destroyed. The International Monetary Fund released an article entitled *Destruction and Reconstruction (1945-1958)* observing that, Combat and bombing had flattened cities and towns, destroyed bridges and railroads, and scorched the countryside. The war had also taken a staggering toll on both military and civilian life. Shortages of food, fuel, and all kinds of consumer products persisted and, in many cases, worsened after peace was declared. War ravaged Europe, and Japan could not produce enough goods for their own people, much less for export.

However, the adverse effects of war aren't limited to just the physical world but wreak havoc on the emotional and psychological realms as well. Amrita Rathi in her research article entitled *Psychological Impact of Victims of War and Conflict* points out that "Death, injury, sexual violence, malnutrition, illness, and disability are some of the most threatening physical consequences of war, while post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety are some of the emotional effects." Shamsie reflects on the repercussions of war, presenting Hiroko as symbolic of the survivors in a charred world. The horrors of war and violence disrupt lives and dismantle families, thus begetting communities of emotionally disturbed humans. The detonation of the atomic bombs swept the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki of its people, reducing them to mere shadows just the way Konrad was diminished to no more than a shadow, "a long shadow." (29) The explosion and radiation subjected the survivors to leukaemia, cancer, miscarriages among other dreadful ramifications. Hiroko suffers a miscarriage in the following months and loses her unborn daughter, Hana. Years later, she has to struggle to conceive for the second time. Her son, Raza, is rejected by his love interest, Salma, for fear of being deformed and passing on some kind of deformity to his children. Raza is reduced to a "bomb-marked mongrel." (191) The repercussions of the blast show up in the most unimaginable ways. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, abbreviated as ICAN, published an article titled *Hiroshima and Nagasaki Bombing* stating that "It takes 10 seconds for the fireball from a nuclear explosion to reach its maximum size, but the effects last for decades and span across generations."

The persistent fear of an airstrike intensifies the fretful atmosphere in the warring nations. The mushroom clouds and the air-raid sirens echoed the constant threat that the Japanese were living under. Ever since Germany's surrender, the Germans, or the ones with German ties, living in Japan were suspected of having divided loyalties. The Germans were no longer an ally and this sudden shift in Konrad's status from an Axis ally to some shadowy disposition, put him under close surveillance by the military police, and his loyalties under question. Literature and writing in wartime nations are the first to be impeded. Shamsie substantiates this by subtly mentioning the suspension of the women's fashion magazine *Sutairu* and by depicting Konrad's German nationality and his longing to write about a cosmopolitan Nagasaki in a paranoid imperialist Japan as reasons and evidence enough to accuse him of treason. Hiroko's father, Matsui Tanaka, an iconoclastic artist is labeled a traitor for his outbursts against the Japanese emperor, his imperialist expansion policies, and kamikaze militarism, and Hiroko is

stigmatized as a ‘traitor’s daughter’. The warring nations’ prioritization of militarism over education is also vehemently critiqued and Hiroko’s dismay over the process of dehumanization by forcing the youth into kamikaze militarism is evident when she comments, “boys were more functional as weapons than as humans.” (7) The severing of ties, the fear of being monitored closely by the military, the creation of chasms by branding people as patriots or traitors, and the loss of human potential in the name of sacrifices made for the nation are some of the lamentable consequences of such horrific wars.

The next section of the novel titled ‘Veiled Birds’ unfolds in 1947 Delhi and takes us back to the days awaiting and ensuing The Partition – days filled with the horrors of riots, atrocities, and communal violence, particularly in Punjab before engulfing the entire nation. “Stories from the Punjab, of Muslim men slaughtered, Muslim shops set on fire, Muslim women abducted.” (87) The Partition of India is one of the most significant and darkest events in the history of the world that fanned the flames of the most spine-chilling mayhem humankind has witnessed. The dawn of Independence came with a heavy price. The Partition that was meant to sow the seeds of two separate and independent dominions, India and Pakistan, rather became the ground for a ferocious bloodbath. Khushwant Singh, the celebrated novelist, documents the communal resentment in his well-known novel, *Train to Pakistan*, “Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped.” The immediate aftermath of the Partition was the bilateral exodus of the Hindus and the Muslims followed by communal riots, massacres, brutalities, rapes, disfiguring of bodies, separations, and loss of homes. Millions of people were displaced along religious lines, giving birth to a prodigious refugee crisis. Thousands of innocent lives were lost in the bloodiest carnage. The Partition trauma was further intensified by mass abductions, involuntary spiritual conversions, and predatory sexual brutalities. William Dalrymple, the noted historian, in his article *The Great Divide: The violent legacy of Indian Partition*, states that “Some seventy-five thousand women were raped, and many of them were disfigured or dismembered.” The vultures of religious fanaticism preyed upon the innocent masses by preaching their hate ideology in the name of faith. The religious fundamentalists on both sides of the spectrum grabbed the opportunity to propagate their beliefs by exacerbating sectarian violence and thus subverting the aspirations of laying the foundation for secular democracies. The Islamic and Hindu extremists were successful in their bid to deeply ingrain hatred in their respective communities

and consequently, neighbors slay each other and friends turned foes. The religious extremism ruptured communal harmony and dismantled lives on both sides. People got separated from their loved ones and bore testimony to their homes being set on fire, their women being raped and their children being butchered. Nisid Hajari, the acclaimed Indian-American writer and foreign affairs analyst, in his book, *Midnight's Furies: The Deadly Legacy of India's Partition* writes,

Gangs of killers set whole villages aflame, hacking to death men and children and the aged while carrying off young women to be raped. Some British soldiers and journalists who had witnessed the Nazi death camps claimed Partition's brutalities were worse: pregnant women had their breasts cut off and babies hacked out of their bellies; infants were found literally roasted on spits.

Sajjad expresses his love for Delhi throughout the novel and laments the creation of the separate nations of India and Pakistan as it would not only tear down the social and cultural fabric of India but would also disintegrate relationships. The populace was split into binaries as the extremist forces were at work. The camaraderie that was an intricate feature of the community, fell to shambles. Reflecting on the status quo, Shamsie comments, "Everything was turmoil, every day brought news of further atrocities and relationships that had seemed to be cast in steel disintegrated under the acid question: Are you for India or Pakistan?" (105)

Sajjad, with a heavy heart, moves to Istanbul with his beloved wife, Hiroko, to protect her from yet another trauma as the communal makeup of Delhi was at its worst, experiencing multiple waves of barbarity. The scene becomes aptly vivid when James Burton comments: "They haven't even settled the boundaries yet. Millions of people with no idea which country they'll find themselves in less than a month from now. It's madness waiting to happen. And Delhi...so many Muslims, so many Hindus. If the violence reaches there, it'll be carnage." (118) The city was wrapped in brutality, and the extremists intensified the ferocity by igniting the discussions about protection and defence, justice and revenge, and by branding select people as the infidels. "The Partition riots had overtaken Delhi, and the Old City had become a virtual siege town." (124) The Hindu-Muslim strife at that time was diabolical. The atrocities committed against the minorities were fundamentally barbaric, which makes Sajjad grieve over the disheartening state of affairs back home, "Muslim homes in New Delhi are being destroyed. Women pulled out of their beds at night." (125) The madness unfolding around Partition is quite evident from Singh's words, "The winds of destruction are blowing across the land. All we hear is kill, kill." Sajjad's family itself suffered multiple blows. Altamash, Sajjad's elder brother, is slain in the Partition riots. His brother Iqbal refuses to live in the city that killed his brother and leaves for

Lahore. His family “tried to follow him but they were on one of those trains. The ones that arrived with the dead as their cargo.” (161) The post-Partition scenario forces Sikandar, Sajjad’s brother, to move out of their family home in Delhi along with his own and Altamash’s family and are compelled to live in such deplorable conditions that Sajjad fails to muster up the courage to visit them.

Sajjad has been planning for a long time to return to his homeland, India, once the Partition violence ceases and peaceful times follow. Once his Delhi is calmer, he does everything that needs to be done to get back but he is denied permission to return to Delhi. Political fundamentalism had made the return impossible for the people who had fled the country at the time of Partition. Sajjad’s agony is reflected when he tells Hiroko, “They said I’m one of the Muslims who chose to leave India. It can’t be unchosen. They said, Hiroko, they said I can’t go back to Dilli. I can’t go back home.” Sajjad and his Dilli are lost to each other, forever and that is a wound that cuts deep. The Partition opened a chasm and what followed was migration and displacement at an unprecedented scale. Mohammed Waseem, an eminent Pakistani author and professor of Political science, in his book, *Political Conflict in Pakistan*, adds that “The process of migration of millions of Muslims from India to Pakistan under the aegis of a migrant state put in place an ethnic hierarchy led by Mojahirs and Punjabis.”

Post-Partition, the security landscape of Pakistan grew more volatile, and reports have shown a marked escalation in terms of the intensity, magnitude, and frequency of conflict and violence on Pakistani soil. Saira Yamin and Salma Malik in their report titled *Mapping conflict trends in Pakistan* affirm that “This escalation is in part a result of the nexus between sectarian militants and terrorist outfits.” The collective and undeterred presence of sectarian militant groups targeting the Shia sect, the state terrorist outfits, and the political parties account for the unabated violence and political destabilization of Pakistan, thus slackening its peacebuilding mechanism. The country’s failure to curb the growth of militant activity and discourse underscores the inadvertent need for political reform. Even students and education didn’t remain untouched and Shamsie attempts to give a glimpse of this “new wave of aggressive religion” (142) that the youth was brimming with, by narrating an incident when Hiroko visits a bookstore and is informed by the owner that just recently a group of barged into his store looking out for books that were against Islam and Hiroko was shocked to know how the portraiture of a woman served as parameter enough for a book to be termed unIslamic. Even religious, educational institutions play a crucial role in shaping and aligning young minds with

the rampant fundamentalist ideology. Waseem rightly critiques that the “Madrasahs indoctrinate a dichotomous worldview, stoke sectarian conflict, and attempt to govern gender relations, producing a combative mind among students.” The religious ideology is so deeply embedded in the minds that a fellow citizen even tells Hiroko not to read War and Peace or any Russian book for that matter because “They are the enemies of Islam.” (142) Pakistan embraced religion and Islamic ideology as the organizing principle of the state which further fueled sectarian strife and significantly contributed to the unprecedented rise of Islamic militancy. Religious ideology came to dominate the public space, and the establishment even censored literature they considered a threat to Islam. Waseem, in one of his papers entitled, Patterns of Conflict in Pakistan: Implications for Policy, writes: “From partition onwards, the ulema, or Islamic theologians, increasingly appropriated public space and, over the course of half a century, assumed the role of an Islamic establishment. This establishment—and the militancy that has become associated with it—now challenges the legitimacy and authority of the state.” The state introduced Islamic studies as a compulsory subject at the school level, and when Raza fails in getting through the exam, Sajjad is utterly disappointed with the Pakistani government “trying to force religion into everything public” (146) Hiroko is disgusted at the governments use of devotion as a prerequisite to nationalism and almost instantly relates a similar situation in Japan during the war. The Pakistani idea of associating identity with religion is fundamentally flawed. It is imperative to quote Waseem who establishes, “While Indian nationalism was rooted in the idea of India, Muslim nationalism in Pakistan and elsewhere was rooted in the “two-nation theory”— based on the notion that religion, rather than territory or ethnicity, determined identity.” The Sunni sect found itself in the majority in Pakistan right after the Partition and the religious and sectarian divide further worsened the situation of the Partition-torn Pakistan by initiating a religio-communal conflict. Waseem states, “The new state soon found itself dominated by a Sunni majoritarian nationalism, eventually leading to sectarian strife. There were incessant calls to declare other communities—including Ahmadis, Shias, Ismailis, and Zikris—as outsiders to Islam.” The ethnic conflict between Pakhtuns and Mohajirs and the religio-sectarian strife unfolding between Shia and Sunni sects and further between Barelvis and Deobandis, the two prominent Sunni sub-sects further widen the chasm. Raza’s Afghan friend Abdullah’s possession of the AK-47 in Karachi foregrounds Christine Fair and Peter Chalk’s argument in their study titled United States Internal Security Assistance to Pakistan that “Criminal violence in the city includes the trafficking of guns, narcotics, women, and children.” Pakistan provided the necessary backing to militants and thus played a

vital role in the upsurge of the Taliban and the Jihadi movement by providing a guarded space for establishing the mujahideen camps. Imtiaz Ali in his research entitled *Karachi Becoming a Taliban Safe Haven?* reports, “Taliban activists have been fleeing FATA under the deadly impact of U.S. drone attacks, and Karachi is emerging as a safe haven for them.” Shamsie’s narrative that features Abdullah as a mujahideen recruiting agent in Karachi, his passionate outbursts regarding his participation in the war for liberation and justice, his constant longing to join his brothers in the mujahideen camps, coaxing Raza to get along, the training camps set up along the Pakistani border, the truck driver dropping them at a deserted place somewhere near Peshawar, Raza’s encounter with the men carrying Kalashnikovs, and the sight of guns hanging “like metallic fruit, from the tree’s branches” (229) evidently substantiates Imtiaz’s study. Peshawar too was manifesting itself as a “hub of espionage and jihad” (213) making militancy, a way of life.

The Partition of India in 1947 subsequently altered the majority/minority ratios in the sub-continent, dragging the Hindus and Muslims, the dominant groups in India and Pakistan respectively, into an intractable political conflict. Zvi Bekerman, in a similar study titled, *Working toward the De-essentialization of Identity Categories in Conflict and Post-conflict Societies: Israel, Cyprus, and Northern Ireland*, notes that “Within each of these communities, there is a perception that the other community is to be blamed for the conflict and the resulting violence and suffering.” History foregrounds the representation of the “other” through the rivaling nationalist discourses. Even textbooks, festivities, rituals, and celebrations act as agents in systematically triggering hatred and prejudice for the adversary. Michalinos Zembylus, a Greek author and professor, in his book *The Politics of Trauma in Education*, finds that “Over the years, each community has formed negative opinions of the other, not only through the official education system but also through social imagery, the mass media, and familial and social circles.” The metanarratives focused on the themes of violence and trauma inflicted by one side on the other, making it imperative to dwell on the sufferings and agony of the past. With the reversal of the ratio stemming from the Partition, the Sunni sect found itself in the majority in the newly formed Pakistan and thus began the ‘othering’ of the Shia sect. The interethnic conflicts fracture social cohesion and leave scant opportunities for interaction between the two chief ethnic groups.

The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan was a typical manifestation of social imperialism. The Soviet’s attempts to quell the insurgency through bombings, aerial attacks, and decimation

cracked open a chasm of irretrievable losses. This became the impetus for the Afghans to wage a war seeking their liberation. The Mujahideen, essentially Islamic in origin, came together to foment an uprising, vowing to drive the Soviets out of their land. This rebellious spirit is rooted in each Afghan from a very young age and finds expression in Abdullah, a fourteen-year-old brimming with Afghan nationalism. Abdullah is engaged in the supply chain of arms and ammunition, desperately waiting to reach the desired age to join his elder brothers in the ‘mujahideen’ training camps and prepare for the war. Shamsie states, “Abdullah’s brothers were all mujahideen – he grew up knowing it was his next step.” His bond with Raza, who assumes a Hazara identity, develops on a shared pretext of avenging the Soviets for the destruction and suffering caused and “to drive the last Soviet out of Afghanistan.” (220) Abdullah views the shared past as a bridging agent between the two. Afghans and Arabs, irrespective of their distinct ethnicity, came together to put a strong footing against the enemy. Abdullah and his brothers fought for peace and liberation from the Soviets, wishing to create a safe sanctuary for their future generations where they will “measure hand-span against a pomegranate, not a grenade.” (320) But even after successfully ousting the Soviets from their land, peace couldn’t be restored. The Taliban, “with no memory of this land, no attachment to anything except the idea of fighting infidels and heretics.” (320) soon took over and the wars distorted the map of Afghanistan forever.

Shamsie also touches upon the ‘War on Error’, or more appropriately, the Global War on Terrorism. It was a US-led campaign against militant and terrorist outfits like Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to put an end to global terrorism. It was a counter-terrorism campaign launched immediately after the 9/11 attacks. Shamsie critiques the madness unleashed with constant surveillance and torture by the CIA, hurling civil liberties into shambles. The drone strikes claimed the lives of terrorists and civilians alike. Harleen Singh in her research article titled *Insurgent Metaphors: Decentering 9/11 in Mohsin Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Kamila Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows* argues, “American life has continued at an unabated pace—whereas life in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan has been radically destabilized.” President George W. Bush called it “A war against all those who seek to export terror, and a war against those governments that support or shelter them.” The military campaign destroyed the training camps and toppled the oppressive and extremist Taliban regime, its members fleeing the land and seeking refuge. But the condescending idea of safeguarding the ‘American lives’ at the cost of civilian lives in Afghanistan caused

considerable devastation. Shamsie also critiques this snobbery of the superpower that considers the ‘American lives’ worthier than other lives twice in the novel – dropping the bomb on Nagasaki to save ‘American lives’ followed by the callous War on Terror. Richard Gray’s article entitled *Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis* criticizes the prejudiced American response, a recurring motif in the post-9/11 literature. Within these fictional narratives, he observes, “cataclysmic public events are measured purely and simply in terms of their impact on the emotional entanglements of their protagonists.” Muslim lives in the US were filled with consternation. One of Abdullah’s friends had gone missing and Abdullah is forced to quit driving and remain in hiding to save his life. Abdullah’s Afghan identity thwarts his prospects of continuing life as an ‘American’. Protection from persecution comes at a heavy price as he is compelled to depart from New York, a place he comes to associate with the idea of ‘home’. The suspected Afghans were under constant interrogation by the CIA and other private intelligence agencies. In the novel, Raza and Harry, who worked earlier for the CIA and later for a private intelligence service are seen chasing and interrogating the militants. An Afghan militant shoots Harry dead, thus propelling another round of interrogation. Steve’s suspicion implicates Raza merely for his allegiance to an Afghan. Raza’s Muslim identity acts as a foil in convincing Steve of his innocence. Shamsie writes, “He had never felt so sharply the powerlessness of being merely Pakistani (308). He escapes to save Abdullah from the US forces and prove his own innocence but it culminates in his being captured and taken as a prisoner to Guantanamo Bay. Asma Zahoor in her research article titled *Kamila Shamsie's Novel "Burnt Shadows": A Discourse Of Traumatic Displacement* firmly asserts, “War on Terror provided a license to the only superpower to justify that might is the only right. The detention facilities of the United States at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, have become representative of the gross human rights abuses perpetrated by the U.S. Government in the name of fighting terrorism.” Just days after the September 11 attacks when Hiroko asks Kim about the happenings in the world, Kim’s response contextualized in the neighborhood, “The last fire has almost burnt out.” (250) exasperates her. Harleen Singh reflects, “Hiroko’s antagonism is targeted at American isolationist policies that craft the “war on terror” within the jurisdiction of justice, retribution, and deterrence while ignoring the global reverberation of the violence unleashed in its name.” Shamsie condemns the US’s justification of the widespread suffering caused by the war, only taking the American narrative into consideration. Adam Hodge, in the introduction to his book, *The 'War on Terror' Narratives: Discourse and Intertextuality in the Construction of Sociopolitical Reality*, postulates that “9/11 merely

happens to be one narrative about the world on that particular day.” He continues that “in order to break down its dominance one needs to go beyond the picture propagated by the USA government and the media.” Shamsie has subtly made a dauntless attempt to write back to the Empire’ thus conceptualizing her novel into a powerful discourse of the traumatic displacement. Elleke Boehmer, a prominent novelist and founding figure in colonial and post-colonial literary theory, in her book, *Postcolonial Writing and Terror* accurately remarks, “By contrast with Anglo-American novelists . . . who regard terror as a force that cannot be incorporated within civic society, I would suggest that in the globalized world terror is a force that has been incorporated everywhere”

Among the most dehumanizing implications of war, conflict, politics, and violence is the essentialization of identities. Religious, national, and ethnic identities constitute an important aspect of understanding the foundational being of an individual but shouldn’t be regarded as a defining feature. *Burnt Shadows* posits this caricaturing of identities as a compelling issue. The characters are boxed into clear-cut identities. Germany’s surrender reduces Konrad to a mere German refugee, and his half-sister, Ilse Weiss, who is forced to change her identity from an Anglo-German to the English, Elizabeth Burton, to escape the wrath of the power-hungry regimes. The bomb essentializes Hiroko’s identity as ‘Hibakusha’, an atomic bomb attack survivor, an identification that she hates, one that alienates her from her fellow Japanese, victimizes her, and drives her away from her ‘homeland’. Shamsie writes, “It was a fear of reduction rather than any kind of quest that had forced her out of Japan. Already she had started to feel the word ‘hibakusha’ start to consume her life. To the Japanese, she was nothing beyond an explosion-affected person; that was her defining feature.” (49) Elizabeth’s son, Henry, in order to pledge his allegiance to the Americans, transmutes his identity to Harry Burton. The Partition reduces Sajjad’s identity to first, a Muslim fugitive and further to that of a migrant, ‘a mujahir’, with no country to call his own. Post 9/11 America singles out the Muslim identity, branding Muslims as terrorists, and this essentializing of the Muslim identity has serious connotations. After the bombarding of the Twin tower, Afghans are inextricably linked with the Taliban, making life for Abdullah, or for any Muslim in the US, fraught with danger. Abdullah expresses his angst to Raza, saying, “New York now is nets cast to the wind, seeking for any Muslim to ensnare.” (353) Lisa Lowe, a Professor Emerita of Comparative Literature, in her book chapter, *Immigrant Literatures: A Modern Structure of Feeling* puts down, “Shamsie has shown how the crisis of identity is affected by the tragic national events between

Imperial Japan and England, the post-colonial India and Pakistan, a neo-colonial U.S.A., and a Talibanized Afghanistan are all indicted as perpetrators of injustice and violence.” Essentializing practices unveil how identities are construed and misconstrued. Raza is born a Pakistani, but his Japanese facial features render him an outcast, making him acutely sensitive to the racist remarks “Chinese, Japanese, money, please..” (182) by the children at a Karachi beach. His mother’s tragedy characterizes him as a deformed “bomb-marked mongrel” (191). He makes deliberate efforts to fit in by “downplaying his manifest difference.” (139) Raza recalls an incident when Bilal makes him and Altamash the objects of ridicule by asking a rickshaw driver to identify the Pakistani between the two cousins and Altamash unpleasantly explains, “In India when they want to insult a Muslim, they call us Pakistani... In Pakistan when they want to insult Mujahirs they call us Indian.” (190) The emphatic use of prefixes with the names as the defining traits like the German Konrad Weiss, the Japanese Hiroko Tanaka, the Anglo-German Ilse Weiss, the English James Burton, the American Harry Burton, the American Kim Burton, the Afghan Abdullah, the Muslim Sajjad Ali Ashraf, and the mujahirs, is a demeaning consequence of a socio-political conflict. It is the result of this essentializing practice that Raza, reduced to just a Muslim, is implicated in Harry’s murder and is hounded by the global power stakeholders. This essentializing of identity, stripping a person of his dynamic individuality, is a downright injustice. It subverts the whole idea of forging and fostering cohesive communities.

However, Hiroko and Raza, with their love for languages, constantly navigate through multiple identities. Raza refuses to be boxed into a single cultural identity, seamlessly switching from a Pakistani to an Afghan to an American, and his multilingual identity makes his travels and stays in Dubai, Miami, Afghanistan, and Iran admirably smooth. Sadia Nazeer et. al *Burnt Shadows: Transnational identities, Linguistics Consciousness and Hybridity* ‘Open the Universe a Little More!’: Transnational identities, linguistics consciousness and Hybridity in *Burnt Shadows*, observes, “He always lives on the “threshold” of the well-defined tropes of identity.” Hiroko serves as a paradigm to study the interrelationship between the political discourses and events and the dynamics of identity construction when placed in a transnational dimension. Hiroko’s journey from Japan to India to Istanbul to Pakistan and its refugee camps and finally New York, with her identities alternating between Japanese to Hibakusha to Mujahir to Pakistani to a foreigner, assign her a transnational identity. Gauhar Karim Khan in her research paper entitled *The Hideous Beauty of Bird-Shaped Burns: Transnational Allegory*

and Feminist Rhetoric in Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* opines that "She adapts to "foreignness" with unbelievable ease." With her quick adaptability and multilinguistic abilities, the notion of a singular identity is at once replaced by a multicultural one. Looking through the lens of Salman Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands*, it can be said that [Hiroko's] "identity is at once plural and partial."

Displacement is an inevitable outcome of wars and conflicts. Zahoor propounds, "The sufferings of the traumatic displacement are beyond the limits of time and space; they go on hunting their 'preys' wherever they go." Displacement makes the longing for 'home' a constant phenomenon, ironically making that return to home, imaginary. It is indispensable to reiterate Rushdie's concept of homecoming which is based on imagination:

... exiles or migrants or expatriates, are haunted by an urge to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge- which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation ... almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost: that we will, in short, create ... imaginary homelands.

Sajjad's agony at being forced to leave India, refusal to be accepted back and his alienation in Istanbul and subsequently in Karachi, at the loss of roots, are evidence enough of the trauma of displacement. Sajjad's Dilli is so deeply embedded in him that it makes "every other place in the world a wilderness of loss." (134) His grief on being abandoned from Delhi resurfaces in his conversation with Harry, "Dilli is Dilli...My first love. I would never have left it willingly. But those bastards didn't let me go home." (161) Harry himself, having been displaced first from India and then from England, identifies himself with the term 'mujahir' or migrant more closely than any nationality, inadvertently developing a shared understanding of the awful experiences of displacement is. Bill Ashcroft et.al in their book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* assert, "Communication of the experiences of the displaced people lies at the heart of the discourse of displacement." Hiroko goes through a series of ordeals of displacement from Tokyo to Delhi to Istanbul to Karachi and finally to New York. Her displacement from Japan is a direct repercussion of the Nagasaki bombing, marking the beginning of her string of makeshift homes. Further, she is displaced from Delhi to avoid the barbarity of the Partition. Next, she is hurled directly into the Karachi refugee camps from Istanbul, and her final displacement in the novel occurs when Sajjad's murder makes Karachi an alien city, and the race for nuclear power between India and Pakistan

further forces her to be relocated to New York. Her swift adaptability and resilient spirit transpose her subsequent dislocations from physical to psychological displacement. She stops designating a particular city with the idea of home and claims, “I’m at home in the idea of foreignness.” (141) Her seamless travels across the geographic borders and her familiarity with languages emancipate her from her past, despite carrying memories, myths, and symbols from different times with her throughout. Hiroko’s position is vindicated by the eminent author, theorist, and professor Iain Chamber’s words from his book *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, faced with a loss of roots, and the subsequent weakening in the grammar of ‘authenticity’, we move into a vaster landscape. Our sense of belonging, our language, and the myths we carry in us remain, but no longer as ‘origins’ or signs of ‘authenticity’ capable of guaranteeing the sense of our lives. They now linger on as traces, voices, memories, and murmurs that are mixed with other histories, episodes, encounters.

Raza’s mental displacement is underscored in his conscious attempts to belong to the mohalla he has lived in all through his life, constantly battling the feelings of being an “outsider” (189) Shamsie writes down, “...from this intersecting world Raza Konrad Ashraf was cast out” (189) Raza’s physical displacement begins with Sajjad’s death, taking him through the terrains of Dubai, Miami, Afghanistan, and Iran with an inexpressible longing for Pakistan, his synonym for ‘home’, a place to which, the return was virtually impossible. Raza’s plight aligns with Rushdie’s conceptualization of homeland which is not geographical but spatial. Past is actually beyond a place of return, as he postulates, “past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time.” He visits Sohrab Goth, a refugee hub for the displaced Afghans. Even Abdullah is forced to endure the trauma of displacement repeatedly on account of war, nationalism and defense, life and survival, migrating from Karachi to the training camps to Afghanistan to New York. On being coerced into exile post 9/11, he yearns for the past. When Hiroko meets him, she sees in him, “a man who understood lost homelands and the impossibility of return.” (313) Nazeer firmly argues that “it is impossible to return to the original homeland, it can only be re-constructed in memory.”

Burnt Shadows is a powerful rendition of the struggle between the power structures and their ravaging consequences. Lost homelands, resilience, new beginnings, terrorism, essentialized identities, displacement, violence, trauma, love, and loss weave together a heart-wrenching tapestry. It also focuses on transnational and geo-political conflicts and the dispensation of power. It also gives an insight into the churn of political mobilization that keeps working and

debunks the myth of Pakistan as an epitome of all villainy. Shamsie's portrayal of the sensitive issue of the process of recruitment, the way young children are lured to fight in the name of nationalism, and the consequential disruption of lives, which reaches its maturity in *Home Fire* is launched in *Burnt Shadows*. The novel is also a critique of fundamentalist notions of seeing the world in a perpetual state of warring conflict. The world is gradually moving towards a global one, embracing an open culture and thus assimilating formative influences from each other. Empathy and understanding will serve as bridges in a fractured and fragmented world where people are utterly divided and alienated from their surroundings. Shamsie reinterprets and redefines history and its shadows by sculpting Hiroko as a cosmopolitan character and has made a commendable attempt to depict the shift and collision of the tectonic plates of civilizations.

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