

The Role of Literature in Shaping Perceptions: A Study of Burnt Shadows and Global Narratives

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze how modern expressions of prejudice, i.e., against marginalized groups, are a development of previous racist ideologies. It uses Edward Said's *Orientalism* alongside Fredrickson's "scavenger ideology" to discuss how fictional accounts construct Muslim identities along with sociopolitical narratives (Said, 1978). The study analyzes Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* as an anti-dominant account to challenge mainstream representations of the Muslim community. The deconstruction model of Derrida is applied to this study to critique oppositional oppositions within Western literary works depicting the link of Muslim identity to radicalization. By positioning *Burnt Shadows* within racial and religious discourses, the present research foregrounds literature's potential to promote a more realistic understanding of Muslim identity. In conclusion, the research highlights how counter-narratives have the potential to broaden the conversations about representation, identity, and cross-cultural encounters within literary studies.

Key Words: Islamophobia, Racism, Deconstruction, Narratives, Interfaith Dialogue

Introduction

The shadow of Islamophobia lurked in the West even prior to the 9/11 attacks, something Edward Said explained in *Orientalism* as a product of the self-created dichotomy between the Occident and the Orient. The system required establishing an "other" to anchor Western supremacy, something that originally found expression in differential patronage of Arab-American feminist readings of Islam. The 9/11 events, however, hugely magnified these existing tensions and turned them into a powerful propaganda tool that mixed religious identity, ethnic background, and racist ideology and labeled Muslims as "terrorists." Within the context of the "war on terror," Considine (2017) analyzes the racialization of Islam, a process shaped by historical, domestic, and geopolitical trends. The post-9/11 environment encouraged an explosion of literary works that depicted Muslim youth as impressionable and susceptible to radicalization (Considine, 2017). This research paper discusses Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* as a counter-narrative that defies Islamophobic stereotypes, giving us a view by a Muslim author that unpacks Western depictions of radicalization. The book critiques the "war on terror" and disproportionate focus on innocent lives, particularly showing how prejudice and fear have informed the rest of the world about Muslim society. Through centering a Muslim voice, *Burnt Shadows* is an overdue counterpoint to overreaching dominant discourses, which frequently simplify and demonize Muslim identity.

The definition of phobia identifies it as a 'mysterious dread.' The joining of the words 'Islam' and 'phobia' into one linguistic compound gives rise to a religious-based racial discrimination that functions as Islamophobia. Muslims experience systematic targeting through this fear-based rhetoric due to their religious identity although they do not face discrimination for their actual behavior. The presence of Islamophobia constitutes more than prejudice because it works as an institutionalized force across Western

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cultural manifestations that needs prolonged critical study to dismantle its destructive effects. This study uses George M. Fredrickson's theory of racism as a "scavenger ideology" to analyze how racism and Islamophobia were responsible for creating fear and hatred against the Muslim community following the 9/11 attacks (Abbas, 2017). The "othering" process in literature has, throughout history, been a driving force behind racial hierarchies, and within the post-9/11 world, such othering has come to dominate Muslim identities as part of a discourse of fear and suspicion. As racism shares a close nexus with xenophobia, it works in the ambit of 'religious intolerance.' The prejudice here stems from the Orientalist tradition of perceiving one's adversaries as the 'other' (Bleich, 2011). Literature thus becomes a strong location where both the establishment and deconstruction of these bias structures take place.

The emerging tension against Islam and Muslims is not a contemporary development in the West, given the evidence brought forth by the Runnymede Trust Report. This report describes Islamophobia as a structural system that curtails opportunities for British Muslims while explaining that "the analysis together with extensive research about it in Runnymede's 1997 report provides a better understanding of Britain's upcoming multi-ethnic and multi-faith landscape than a solitary survey utilized for television broadcasting" (Anderson et al., 2021). This British society has multiple ways for Muslims to experience Islamophobia through work-related discrimination combined with physical assaults and property damage as well as biased media representation along with discriminatory practices in national institutions like healthcare and education. Systemic challenges have established permanent negative effects on Muslim communities through sustained processes of isolation and marginalization (Sutkutė, 2023).

By examining these systemic problems, this research enriches the discussion of racism and Islamophobia, illustrating the ways in which English literary texts can be used as instruments to combat misconceptions and reverse their negative impacts. As more voices come forward to counter these stories, an increasing body of work attempts to recover Muslim identities from misrepresentation. The availability of Muslim writers such as Shamsie establishes the need for counter-narratives that challenge prevailing representations and provide more authentic representations of Muslim lives. Literature, if critically examined, can redefine public opinion and destroy deep-rooted stereotypes. Humaira Riaz establishes Islamophobia as a racial expression that is prevalent in literary fiction to better understand US views about Islam and Muslims. Based on selected literary works from Lorraine Adams and John Updike and Don DeLillo combined with the concepts of racism from Fredrickson Riaz discerns how fiction conceals racism behind Islamophobia. The author advocates for mandatory interfaith public participation as a method to minimize interreligious disputes (Riaz, 2022). Kathawalla et al, investigate how "Islamophobia" is used in contemporary disputes. He establishes Islamophobia as a social science concept by defining it as subconscious negative emotions directed at both Islam and Muslims using data from prejudice research about concept development and associated social systems. The process of racialization leads to experiences of discrimination called Islamophobia which affects both Muslims and those mistakenly seen as such thus creating a particular form of prejudice (Kathawalla, 2024).

Literature Review

Jacques Derrida developed literary criticism theory that evolved the field of analysis. According to "A Brief Description of Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction and Hermeneutics" deconstruction became prominent in the late 1960s to state that "all texts have ambiguity". Here, this ambiguity stands for the natural multiplicity of meaning in texts (Derrida, 2016). In addition to deconstruction, this section discusses pertinent literature on racism, giving a better insight into Islamophobia. Well before the 9/11 attacks, immigrant life had already challenged the "melting pot" ideology, a pillar of racial thought. The fall of the Twin Towers in New York later further fueled racism in American social systems, with South Asian immigrants being branded as inferior and linked to terrorism. Religion has become a major aspect of modern-day racism, in which Islam is perceived as an intimidating religion in American fiction, and it is an expression of an American "phobia" of being replaced, stolen from, or murdered by Muslims.

Runnymede Trust Report refuted the "closed view of Islam" as being woman-oppressive, citing the multifarious manner religions and cultures are treating women and suggesting that Islam is more liberated and respectful of women than some other faiths. Nevertheless, this stereotypical figure has continued to appear in the media, meaning that Islamophobia is not a new or secondary phenomenon but an expression



of racial prejudice and bias (Trust, 1997). Racism exists as a social doctrine that supports the belief in racial superiority between diverse human groups. The modern notion of racial groups and racist beliefs originated during Western imperial expansion while asserting genetic supremacy to support European control over Africa and Asia (Fredrickson, 2002). The combination of emancipation and nationalism with imperialism caused escalating racial animosity across Europe and the United States during the nineteenth century. Fredrickson asserts ethnic discrimination from the nineteenth century maintained its fundamental characteristics of power which allowed those in control to enforce hostile sentiments about specific individuals or social groups. Powerful groups extended their prejudice when they feared the loss of their authority to the oppressive group.

Abbas asserts that modern culture tends to overlook the complex weave of Islamic identities, resulting in destructive misunderstandings. The anthology tries to fill this knowledge gap by looking into the pivotal position of Islam in the construction of postcolonial identity. It explores contentious ideas such as Islamopolitics and women's identity, hoping to better understand Muslim life and encourage new research on religion's influence. These emotions reflect the explicit anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic sentiments after 9/11. This research seeks to provide a positive image of Islam and Muslims by dispelling these myths (Abbas, 2023). Sadaf explores how contemporary Pakistani novels written in English challenge prevailing Western perspectives on 9/11 and its "War on Terror." Through analyses of Kamila Shamsie's "Burnt Shadows" and Jamil Ahmad's "The Wandering Falcon," she demonstrates how these works broaden the literary landscape of 9/11 narratives by offering distinct viewpoints (Sadaf 2018). In contrast to traditional racism and xenophobia, Islamophobia is primarily the stigmatization of a religion and its adherents, and as such, Islamophobia is a violation of the human rights and dignity of Muslims. Therefore, "Islamophobia racism" has emerged, with the same ideology as that of racism and originating from prejudiced Western attitudes towards the Muslim world, particularly for the sake of continuing its dominance throughout the world.

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

A multi-aspect theoretical framework serves to analyze how Islamophobia presents as racism within the selected literary work. George M. Fredrickson defines racism as a "scavenger ideology" through his essential theory. Fredrickson explains how racism survives by seizing available social stereotypes that already exist and growing with shifting social conditions to continue marginalizing targeted groups. The model specifies how new racism and Islamophobia take advantage of preexisting stereotypes coupled with Muslim and Islamic anxieties. Empirically validated evidence to explain how Islamophobia manifests throughout our social world. The analysis of exclusion combined with violence alongside prejudice and discrimination from the Runnymede trust report provides an effective framework for studying the social factors that enable Islamophobic discourse even though its focus remains on British society. The research evaluates discrimination representation in the text by utilizing these discerning categories to investigate their fictional existence.

Through Theory of Deconstruction Jacques Derrida established analytical instruments to destroy power systems that enable racist and Islamophobic dialogue. Through deconstruction, we can understand how language constructs meaning as well as discover the discriminatory prejudices that influence Western perspectives about Islam and Muslims (Derrida, 2016) This technique demonstrates importance because it challenges the basic truths in the selected text which exposes the hidden ideological framework behind the creation of the Islamic Other. Qualitative analysis forms the core methodology that interprets the selected literary text. Through this method, one can obtain a deep understanding of how language functions with narrative and ideology together. The research incorporates *Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie as an Asian work that creates alternative accounts about Islam and Muslims in opposition to dominant Western perceptions. The study incorporates this book to reveal distinct cultural approaches that fight against stereotypes of Muslims.

Analysis

Kamila Shamsie observed the unimaginable damage inflicted by the constant terrorist war together with its consequences that affect human life at both small and large scales. Familiar with the grand narratives constructed by Western and American media to justify international political power games, she wrote this

novel to present the other side of the story and the catastrophic, lasting effects of these power games on innocent individuals who are treated as "children of a lesser god". From the context of traumatic displacement, Shamsie begins with the depiction of a prisoner at Guantanamo Bay from recent history and connects him to Hiroko Tanaka's character, a direct victim of the atomic explosion in World War II. These hegemonic power approaches of global stakeholders become exposed thus enabling readers to understand how warfare victims face ongoing traumatic displacement just as their families did in past conflicts. Through *Burnt Shadows* Kamila Shamsie uses her historical perspective to portray the way "otherness" develops when drawing distinctions using national borders as well as religious identity and geographic locations.

Burnt Shadows spans a broad historical timeline, from World War II to the era of Guantanamo Bay, tracing the final days of the war in Japan and India leading up to the 1947 Partition. The prologue of *Burnt Shadows* depicts a prisoner in Guantanamo Bay, highlighting the extreme trauma of dehumanizing displacement. The preface describes this scene: "Once inside the cell, they remove his shackles and tell him to undress. He shrugs off his grey winter coat with brisk competence and then- them watching, arms crossed- his movement slow, fear making his fingers awkward on belt buckle, and shirt buttons. They do not wait until he is naked, but take up his clothes and depart. When he's dressed once more, he anticipates that he'll be clad in an orange jumpsuit. The chill shine of the metal bench causes his body to cower" (Banerjee, 2024).

The narrative depicts Raza's mother Hiroko Tanaka's life story as a Japanese school teacher from Nagasaki who survived the atomic bomb explosion on August 5, 1945. Hiroko Tanaka survives the atomic bomb yet suffers the loss of her father together with her fiancé and her entire known world simply vanishes. In vivid detail, Hiroko experiences the light which in reality drives her to move forward when the dust irritates her mouth and nose upon landing. "When she lands the dust enters her mouth and nose and produces sharp discomfort. The hot temperature of the air envelops the body at a sudden moment. She brushes her shoulder before tracing the area that should be covered by silk fabric. Moving her hand towards her lower back she presses two dissimilar textures together which become observable as both flesh and silk. She believes this burning sensation which she felt when she dropped indicates what is happening to her body. There is no sensation now. She strikes the portion that lacks both skin and silk. Nothing exists in the region where she touches" (Banerjee, 2024). Following the explosion, she hears the American justification for the destruction, claiming the bombings were necessary "to save the Americans' lives," emphasizing the perceived value of American lives. This creates a stark irony when considering the post-9/11 narrative, where Americans portrayed themselves as innocent victims and fueled Islamophobic racism by constructing the "Taliban controversy" and portraying Muslims as terrorists. Following the devastating event in her life, Hiroko journeyed to India, seeking a fresh start and reconnection with her half-sister. There, she met and married Sajjad, an Indian Muslim from Delhi. Due to Partition, they relocated to Pakistan and settled in Karachi. Their son, Raza, was born a seemingly ordinary child, inheriting his mother's features and a love for languages. The novel, *Burnt Shadows*, unfolds across four distinct sections, chronicling the intertwined histories of two families, spanning from the catastrophic atomic bombing of Nagasaki in World War II to pre-Partition India in 1947, Pakistan in the early 1980s, post-9/11 New York, and war-torn Afghanistan. This narrative highlights the ongoing struggle for supremacy and the pervasive nature of racial, national, and religious discrimination, which have fueled imperialism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism. Despite claims of humanity, enlightenment, culture, and civilization, the standards for judging "us" versus "them" remain starkly disparate, reminiscent of the justifications used for the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, purportedly to "save American lives," and the more recent bombardment of Afghanistan with daisy cutters. From World War II to the War on Terror, countless lives have been irrevocably altered, resulting in massive displacement, a profound trauma in itself.

Kamila Shamsie elaborates on the covert properties of Islamophobia in her elegant writing as she details how it affects people individually. She explains that 9/11 triggered the war on terror which led Harry to send Raza to Afghanistan during the first US military contract signed by A and G. The shareholders showed excitement about potential immediate and long-term financial gains. Raza Konrad Ashraf proved too valuable as a translating expert to abandon during that time because he had disguised himself as an Afghan before. This section demonstrates how fighting terror evolved into a profitable business that



reduced Raza to becoming a strategic military tool. The system of Islamophobia makes use of his religious background after he relies on deception about his identity in order to survive. The novel exposes the heavy emotional burden that affects individuals who have family or friends impacted by this type of prejudice. The difficult mystery about Raza causes Hiroko to question her knowledge of his life. The mother lost sight of the youth who enticed Raza toward destructive behavior and instead focused on a man who understood about distant homelands and absolute return. The revelation by Hiroko marks her shift toward understanding Raza through empathy as she accepts their mutual connection to displaced living and lost homeland roots. This demonstrates Raza's intense pursuit of escape through vivid scenes of his running from those who hunt him. "He fought against survival during his military combat as he never knew American capture was imminent". Through this scene, the story shows how Muslim populations endure traumatic experiences because of both racial discrimination and Islamophobia and concludes with xenophobic events. Raza's fear coupled with his necessity to hide and his body's intense suffering from his ordeal illustrates the actual outcomes of perpetual public suspicion.

During Raza's encounter with Abdullah's brother, Ismail, at the shrine, the young man who had escorted them to the mujahedeen camp addresses Raza as "Raza Hazara" and questions why he denied being Afghan. Raza replies, "The Americans will be looking for you...I mean, they're looking for the man who called me...yesterday...they think you are involved with the murder of an American" (Banerjee, 2024). This exchange highlights the pervasive suspicion and tension following the 9/11 attacks, where even innocent Muslims were subject to doubt and suspicion. The assumption of guilt based on p Twenty years later, when Raza and Abdullah reunite, Abdullah recounts a story his mother told him about Raza's life "So, your mother lost her family and home to war; your father was separated from the city whose poetry and history had supported his family for generations; your second father was killed in a hail of bullets in Afghanistan; the CIA believes you're a terrorist; you traveled in the hold of a ship, aware that if you died no one would ever know; home is something you remember, not someplace you live; and your first thought when you arrive safely is how to assist a friend you haven't seen in twenty years, and this is the part of the story you tell the least about. Raza "(Banerjee, 2024). Raza notices through touch that the Abdullah from twenty years ago would not show such kindness. Abdullah's mindset changed according to him because he was now residing in a different reality, he said. Kemal became the tenth person in ten days since his disappearance. Everyone lacks any word from his direction since his disappearance. Seasoned immigrants from New York distribute their nets indiscriminately through the city in an attempt to capture any Muslim (Banerjee, 2024). The exchange between the characters indicates how society has changed along with its growing suspicion which tests even friendships that have lasted more than twenty years proximity and perceived association underscore the insidious nature of prejudice.

The novel reaches its peak when police officers step inside. The first officer indicates towards Abdullah but the second merely shrugs while addressing him with "Sir?" in his direction. While wearing Abdullah's grey coat Raza loudly shouts the Islamic phrase "Allah-o-Akbar" which makes the officers notice him. Raza walks away from the police escort with handcuffs on while grey clouds drop frozen ice throughout the sky. He kept his eyes on the sidewalk while the terror disappeared as he breathed in the excitement of being outdoors. She would not recognize his face because of his lowered gaze. "His sole focus now was on the immediate destruction of ice through pavements and footwear and dirt which he stared at continuously. Any kind of interaction would lead to his complete destruction today". Through this depiction, the writer showcases the devastating effect of being jailed because of religious profiling. At another point, Raza's mother analyzes how major social groups become dehumanized. "In the big picture of the Second World War, what was seventy-five thousand more Japanese dead? Acceptable, that's what it was. In the big picture of threats to America, what is one Afghan? You are the kindest, most generous woman I know. But right now, because of you, I understand for the first time how nations can applaud when their governments drop a second nuclear bomb". The powerful reflection shows how marginalized groups face dehumanization when threats arise which leads to their suffering being minimized in society. This demonstrates that prejudice endures while violence continues in perpetuity.

In summary, this examination of Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* uncovers the depth of the effects of post-9/11 Islamophobia on communities and individuals. Through the life stories of Raza and Abdullah, the novel starkly depicts the widespread suspicion, fear, and dehumanization of Muslims in the West. The

narrative shows how terrorism warfare shifted into targeting Muslim identity then led to monitoring innocent individuals while taking away their civil rights. Through her narrative, Shamsie demonstrates the complex reality behind the singular Muslim–terrorist association while showcasing Muslim lives in full detail. Written against historical and political contexts the novel testifies about enduring prejudice effects and how society requires more understanding and empathy during present–day cultural division.

Findings

Through *Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie readers gain a profound understanding of historical traumas and religious discrimination against black and brown people during the post–9/11 era. The four disordered sections of the narrative structure show how international events from Nagasaki atomic bomb attacks to India's partition to US-led Afghanistan war activities and post–9/11 Muslim prejudice link into a single complex system. The novel demonstrates that social injustices from the past perpetuate long-lasting consequences of violence while affecting current expressions of marginalization. The main discovery within the text shows how the novel criticizes racial and religious stereotyping processes following the events of September 11 particularly against Muslim identities. The novel depicts how institutional discrimination wrongly blames people because of their racial and religious heritage through the experiences of its characters. Sajjad demonstrates the consequences of prejudice when wrongfully accused and reveals national surveillance practices directed at Muslim citizens because of global terrorism.

The free-flowing narrative of *Burnt Shadows* moves through multiple historical layers which confirm the pattern of suffering repetition in time. The atomic bomb shadows on surfaces at Nagasaki symbolize permanently scarred victims of violence including physical deformations alongside psychic trauma. Through this motif, the book demonstrates how pain transcends boundaries as it makes no distinction between racial religious, or national experiences of trauma. *Burnt Shadows* provides evidence that supports discussions about East–West relations by presenting a breakdown of traditional political and cultural barriers between these groups. Within its pages, the novel displays how international conflicts along with migration result in communication failures and conflicts between people. The text examines the war experiences of displaced people thus challenging dominant Western narratives that construct non–Western identities through suspicious stereotyping. The research findings demonstrate that *Burnt Shadows* delivers an alternate perspective that challenges mass media portrayals of Muslims and ethnic minorities after the 9/11 attacks. This text speaks out against Islamophobic replications and demonstrates how past injustices endure while calling for a traumatic response framework that transcends traditional racial and national frameworks.

Conclusion

The findings of this research demonstrate both the performance of literature to develop dominant Islamic stereotypes and its role in creating opposing perspectives about Islamophobia. Through *Burnt Shadows* Kamila Shamsie presents a detailed alternative story that refutes simple depictions of Muslim cultures. Throughout its narrative, the novel follows characters through space and time to demonstrate how historical dehumanization trauma, and displacement extend over time and distance. The book explains how "the war on terror" transformed into a totalizing conflict against Muslim identity which subjects its members to endless surveillance and continuous rights deprivation. The analysis of Shamsie's book demonstrates the importance of placing Islamophobia within its historical framework which includes colonial and imperial and new colonial systems.

The book verifies the multifaceted nature of Muslim existence through the profound stories of Raza and Hiroko that smash unified portrayals of the Muslim community. The novel depicts Islam through ever-changing elements that shape the identities of both religious practices and cultural expressions. Literature establishes its power as an effective tool through this study to invalidate discriminatory speech while delivering advanced understandings regarding controversial societal issues. Through storytelling, *Burnt Shadows* reveals how narratives act as a force that helps suppressed communities become human and confront prejudice against Muslims that narratives create. Readers together with scholars can develop an inclusive historical understanding of Islam in Western history by reading works that prioritize victim voices during Islamophobic incidents.



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