

## Exploring Cultural Displacement, Unhomeliness and Identity Crisis in Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*: A Transnational Dynamics

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### Abstract

Cultural displacements affect immigrants' lives both physically and psychologically. Almost every migrant faces the adverse effects of leaving their home country. One way to avoid these shortcomings is through transnational ties. The present study aims to explore the themes of cultural displacement, unhomeliness, and identity crisis faced by the main characters of Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009) due to forced migrations based on global dynamics. It also focuses on the strategies these characters employed to cope with their psychological dilemmas using Bhabha's (1994) concept of "Unhomeliness" and Boccagni's (2010) concept of "Transnationalism" as theoretical underpinnings of this study. The current research qualitatively analyzes the main characters from two clans (Weiss-Burtons and Tanaka-Ashrafs) to explore the correlation between unhomeliness and transnationalism. It seeks to interpret the effect of multiple global dynamics on an individual's daily life. It also intends to explore the strategies they employed to negotiate their identities in new cultural contexts. The findings reveal that repeated migrations significantly impacted characters' sense of identity and belonging. Transnational ties, however, played a crucial role in helping them navigate cultural displacement and develop a sense of home.

### Keywords:

Cultural displacement;  
 Unhomeliness; Identity crisis;  
 Migration; Transnationalism;  
 Transnational ties.

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## 1. Introduction

The concept of 'migrancy' is not just the physical displacement of migrants from one place to another. However, it is also a metaphorical cultural displacement and negotiation of identity in the globalized world (Bhabha, 1994). *Burnt Shadows* (2009) is a multigenerational tale that explores this theme of cultural displacement and unsettled identity in the postcolonial world. It also

highlights how, despite cultural displacements, the characters try to make sense of their identities. The story mainly revolves around two families, the Burtons and the Ashrafs. The members of these families are caught up in the historical events that force them to relocate and re-adapt to different cultures and societies due to global dynamics. Since the characters needed to relocate and readapt in different locations (often more than once) due to the war and other global dynamics. As a result, they all long for a sense of home and belonging throughout the novel. This repeated relocation made the protagonists diasporic, and they experienced unhomeliness throughout their cultural journey. Through her characters, Shamsie portrayed that while individuals can depict the complexities of identity and belonging in a globalized world. Transnational ties, however, can still help them find solace in one another. The study intends to focus on the concept of cultural displacement, unhomeliness, and transnational experiences faced by the multi-generational characters of *Burnt Shadows*. For this purpose, the current research draws on Bhabha's *concept of unhomeliness* and Boccagni's *concept of transnationalism* as its theoretical framework. The present research, therefore, aims to achieve the following objectives.

1. To analyze the concept of cultural displacement and its psychological impact on the characters' sense of identity in *Burnt Shadows*.
2. To examine the theme of unhomeliness in the novel and how it manifests through the characters' experiences of displacement and readaptation.
3. To analyze the strategies employed by the characters in *Burnt Shadows* to cope with the negative effects of cultural displacement and negotiate their identities in new cultural contexts.

The novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009) explores the impact of war on individuals and societies, starting from World War II to the aftermath of 9/11. The story begins with Hiroko Tanaka surviving the bombing of Nagasaki, leading to her journey to India and later Pakistan. Sajjad Ashraf experienced displacement during the partition of India, while Raza Ashraf struggled with his mixed heritage in Pakistan. The story mainly revolved around Hiroko Tanaka's journey through Nagasaki, Tokyo, Delhi, Karachi, Abbottabad, and finally New York. However, throughout her journey, the Burton-Weiss family also played a crucial role. This multigenerational novel portrays how these characters negotiate their identities in response to historical events, highlighting the complexities of cultural displacement and the search for belonging. The selected text explores the themes of trauma, loss, identity, and belonging against the backdrop of historical events. This paper first attempts to analyze each main character, individually explaining their traumatic past experiences and cultural journey, and then focuses on the aspects that helped these characters in relocation and readaptation. According to Bhabha (1994), in this postcolonial world, colonization affected both the colonized and colonizers, as both have experienced cultural displacement and unhomeliness in the process of relocation. The analysis, therefore, focuses on

the experiences of both colonizers (Burtons) and colonized (Tanaka-Ashrafs) through different historical timelines to explain how the war and global dynamics affected them individually. In an attempt to define the social and personal effects of war, Clausewitzian (1940) remarked that there are two types of post-war dilemmas. One is related to the physical being of the individuals who are people getting injured or losing their limbs and becoming handicapped. While the other one is the psychological aspects through which they lose their nationalism, identity, and social role. The latter aspect of war has recently proved to be more deadly than the former (Qadri et al., 2021). Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* mainly presents this aspect of war on both national and individual levels.

The present research employed the theoretical framework of Bhabha's "*Unhomeliness*" and Boccagni's conceptualization of "*Transnationalism*" to analyze the main characters of *Burnt Shadows* (2009). Bhabha's unhomeliness is a psychoanalytic terminology that he borrowed from Freud. According to Huddart (2006:55), the feeling of unhomeliness is "*an involuntary recurrence of old and familiar*". As Bhabha described in his work, *The Location of Culture* (1994), "*Unhomeliness is the traumatic ambivalence of colonial discourse which, in denying the native its voice, calls into question the identity of the colonialist*". Shamsie presented this idea of unhomeliness through different characters (especially through Hiroko Tanaka and Raza Konrad Ashraf, the protagonists) to explain cultural displacement due to war and other global dynamics that affected individuals psychologically. According to Boccagni, immigrants living at a distance create transnational ties to maintain their links with different social institutions back home.

These transnational ties can be defined as social relationships and practices at 'a distance' that allow immigrants to exert relevant influence on the social lives of those who are left behind and vice versa, the latter to impact the life course of the former in significant ways (Boccagni, 2010).

The study shows that although the main characters of *Burnt Shadows* had to migrate multiple times in the novel, the impact of migrancy was different on every character's identity. Perveen (2021) categorized migrants into two groups: privileged and unprivileged. "The privileged migrancy may be a luxury while an unprivileged one is a desperate need" (Cilano, 2013). In this sense, since the Britishers had the freedom to move to and from India, their migrancy is privileged and thus did not impact their cultural journey as drastically as Hiroko's and Sajjad's migrancy did. Both Hiroko and Sajjad were forced out of their nations (homes) due to traumatic experiences and the subcontinent partition, respectively. So, their migrancy was unprivileged, and this affected their identities differently. Their son, Raza Konrad Ashraf, is also an unprivileged migrant who faces an identity crisis with an ambiguous sense of belonging. Raza is a Pakistani-German-Indian, as his name shows, with Japanese blood running in his body from his mother's side (Perveen, 2021). While Hiroko has accepted her 'foreignness' throughout the novel, Raza

still suffers in search of belongingness and a sense of identity. Cilano (2013) described it as “existential unsettledness”.

## 1.1 Literature Review

The relationship between memory and literature has influenced the literary environment for centuries. Kamila Shamsie is also one of the authors who has explored the relationship among memory, space, identity, and literature in her works, including *Burnt Shadows* (Kiziltas, 2021). Similarly, Sharma (2023a) provided a descriptive qualitative analysis of Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* to explore “memory, media, and modernity” in the play. Sharma (2023a) analyzed how Williams employed ‘memory’ to enhance the dramatic effect by revisiting historical experiences. Similar to the historical narration of *Burnt Shadows*, this study also highlighted how the play successfully portrayed human suffering through historical events. Nazeer et al. (2021) explored how the main characters (Hiroko Tanaka and Raza Konrad Ashraf) of *Burnt Shadows* challenged the traditional notions of Nation, Home, Community, and Sense of Belonging through their multi-linguistic qualities. The research claimed that linguistic consciousness also influences cultural identities in a transnational dimension. According to this research, Languages played very important roles in the lives of both characters. Their linguistic diversity highlighted their multiculturalism and hybrid identity, making them borderless individuals as they readily accepted multiple languages and cultures (Nazeer et al., 2021). In addition, Sharma and Begum (2024) uncovered the significant role of contemporary tools in improving transnational ties in the digital age. It highlighted the role of social media networks (SMN) in teaching and learning. It emphasized creating student-centered learning environments through SMN and connecting different geographical and cultural regions.

Qadri et al. (2021) examined the post-war effects on lives and identities through the female protagonist (Hiroko Tanaka) in Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*. The study explored the efforts of different characters, especially Hiroko, to relocate and reassert themselves in a post-war scenario under the postcolonial theoretical framework. The study observed that language was a crucial element throughout Hiroko's journey of oppression, displacement, and forced migration. The findings revealed that *Burnt Shadows* explored the idea of identity construction during war through different timelines of history. Sharma (2024) also stated that the use of the native language is a helpful tool among students to learn a new language. Furthermore, building strong bonds among peers is a vital factor that influences students' motivation to learn English among diasporic identities within South Asian contexts.

Pervez (2018) provided a post-colonial analysis of *Burnt Shadows*, focusing on elements like Mimicry, the Other, Eurocentrism, Hybridity, Nationalism, and Metropolises, as reflected through the characters of Sajjad Ashraf and James Burton. Both these characters represented the colonized

India and the colonizer British Raj, respectively. This study identified that Sajjad was a puppet in the hands of James Burton. It was only after the arrival of the female protagonist (Hiroko Tanaka) that Sajjad's life gave him a sense of freedom, and he later proved himself a nativist.

Sarvat (2014) analyzed the influence of different cultures on identity in Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* in the field of postcolonialism. The study claimed that the concepts of culture, hybridity, and identity are inseparable. This paper argued that in the postcolonial world, the process of hybridization challenges the purity of cultural identity, as no culture can claim complete purity or absolute identity loss. This research concluded under the theoretical framework of Homi K. Bhabha's '*Cultural Hybridity*' that the characters in the novel faced influences from multiple cultures, but their identities are more reflexive than adaptive. Joshi & Patil (2022) also focused on the different types of identities explained in *Home Fire* and *Burnt Shadows*. The research explained the main characters of both novels and claimed that Shamsie's characters have a postcolonial perspective and present multiple cross-cultural identities. The characters continuously relocated from one location to another because of global dynamics. Thus, this makes them diasporic characters. The study also observed that both the colonizers and the colonized became diasporic as they had to flee their homelands and establish a new life in new environments. Similarly, Sharma (2023b) analyzed the protagonists Ahad and Vasu to portray their quests to establish new identities in "*New World*". Thus, the narrative highlighted the themes of displacement and cultural clash through the main characters. Hence, the study (Sharma, 2023b) provided a rich literary debate on identity and transition. Likewise, Sharma et al. (2023) also analyzed how students' engagement in digital spaces shapes their identities. It focused on how the use of literary texts in virtual reality or social media environments influences intercultural competence among learners. The study remarked that digital spaces support hybrid identities. Thus, it helped students to navigate their sense of self in transnational contexts.

## 2. Research Methodology

The current research explores the correlation between unhomeliness and transnationalism by qualitatively analyzing the main characters of Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*. The study utilizes Bhabha's (1994) theoretical framework of unhomeliness and Boccagni's (2010) conceptualization of transnationalism for analysis. While Bhabha's unhomeliness explores "an involuntary recurrence of old and familiar", Boccagni's Transnationalism analyzes the impact of transnational ties in immigrants' lives at three levels (individual, family, and wider public sphere level). Through these theoretical frameworks, this study aims to interpret the physical and psychological adverse effects and shortcomings of migration faced by the key characters and how they tried to cope with them. The characters selected for analysis include Hiroko Tanaka, Sajjad Ashraf, Raza Konrad Ashraf, Elizabeth Burton, and Harry Burton. These characters were chosen based on their

direct experiences of cultural displacement, migration, and transnational mobility in the selected novel. The multiple relocating and readapting experiences faced by the selected characters make them ideal for analyzing the themes of unhomeliness and transnationalism. For this purpose, the study focuses on the textual passages that align with the thematic relevance to the framework of unhomeliness and transnationalism. The study explores the in-depth thematic textual analysis approach of the main characters to interpret how cultural displacements affected their identity and sense of home. Relevant passages from the novel were manually reviewed according to the themes derived from the theoretical framework.

The three levels of transnational ties based on Boccagni's (2010) conceptualization of transnationalism are explained below:

- The Individual Level focuses on the relevance of transnational ties by examining immigrants' attitudes.
- The Family Level focuses on the relevance of transnational family life by examining how distance affects the social life of family members.
- The Public Sphere Level focuses on the migrants' attitudes and behaviors in the public sphere beyond their orientations or their family belongings.

### 3. Research Questions

This research aims to answer the following questions.

1. How do the characters of *Burnt Shadows* present the themes of cultural displacement, unhomeliness, and identity crisis?
2. In what ways do transnational ties help different characters deal with the adverse effects and shortcomings of migration and cultural displacement?

#### 3.1 Textual Analysis

Among all characters, Hiroko Tanaka serves as the central figure who illustrates profound cultural and psychological displacement. Her historical journey started with her migration from Nagasaki after the bombing of WWII. While the bomb left her physically scarred, her migration also affected her sense of self. The war affected Hiroko not just physically but also psychologically, as it marked the beginning of her unhomely existence. The three black scars on her back (mostly referred to as bird-shaped scars) were powerful symbols that represented her continuous trauma and displaced identity. Like these scars, the effects of war and destruction on her life never faded and became a sustained transnational signifier of her past life. Hiroko and her son, Raza, were both referred to as Hibakusha (affected by the bomb). In Japan, the bomb became her identity. *“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*” (p. 49). Thus, the physical traces of war not only influenced her migration from Japan to Delhi but also symbolized Bhabha’s themes of cultural displacement and unhomeliness. After the bombing, Japan was no longer her ‘home’. She lost her sense of belonging. Driven by the loss of her fiancé, Konrad Weiss, and the devastation of her homeland, she seized the first opportunity to migrate to Delhi and reconnect with Konrad’s half-sister. This relocation was not just geographical but also emotional as it symbolized her effort to construct a new home. Hiroko’s relocation aligns with Bhabha’s unhomeliness, where the familiarity becomes disrupted and the individual attempts to reconstruct the identity within a transnational context. When she reached Delhi in 1947, the colonized India was going through the process of partition, which meant that the situation there was not as peaceful as she expected. Despite the political upheaval of partition, her relationship with Elizabeth Burton (later known as Ilse Weiss) served as a symbol of enduring transnational connection. Both Ilse and Hiroko shared the same language (German) that served as the idea of home for both characters and helped them reconstruct their identities within a transnational context. For Ilse, it was a symbol of the unbroken relevance of the motherland, while it reminded Hiroko of her connection with Konrad and her lost solace. Another character, who helped Hiroko through her cultural displacement journey, was Sajjad Ashraf, who worked for the Burtons in Delhi.

Through the character of Hiroko, the female protagonist, the novel experienced an identity shift when she migrated from Nagasaki. *“I always planned on leaving Nagasaki, you know. I was never sentimental about it. But until you see a place you’ve known your whole life reduced to ash, you don’t realize how much we crave familiarity”* (p. 99). She craved familiarity, but she did not want to go back to Nagasaki. Hiroko’s journey embodies Bhabha’s unhomely identity as she continuously attempts to reconstruct it. The bomb destroyed not only her family and her fiancé but also her sense of home. Even though she is displaced and continuously longs for the idea of a home in Delhi, she does not want to leave for Nagasaki. As it's not her home anymore. All she will receive there are judgmental glances from people for being a Hibakusha. This shows how the bomb has physically and psychologically affected individuals like Hiroko.

The bird-shaped scars on her back denote her old identity. She was aware that, like the scars, the bomb (identity) would never leave her. *“Do you still think about it a lot? About Nagasaki?”* ... *She touched her back, just above the waist. ‘It’s always there”* (p.176). She was afraid that the bomb would affect her and her children's lives. She always appreciated the way her life had turned out, which would never have happened if she had never left her previous home in search of a new one. The novel portrays and appreciates humans’ ability to adapt and overcome any situation. Listening to Hiroko’s story, Harry once remarked, *“Partition and the bomb, Harry said, interrupting her. The two of you are proof that humans can overcome everything”* (p.181). Both Hiroko and Sajjad Ali Ashraf had lost their homes due to global dynamics, but found a home

within each other. While explaining his marriage to Harry Burton, Sajjad once said, “– *we both had too much loss in our lives, too early. It made us understand those parts of the other which were composed of absence*” (p. 163). Like Hiroko, Sajjad's character also experienced significant cultural and identity shifts throughout the novel. While working for the Burtons before the partition, he struggled to overcome the class difference and colonial power dynamics. He wanted to redefine his social position. When Hiroko first started learning Urdu from Sajjad, he emphasized that he was not a servant like Lala Baksh but rather working under James so that one day he could also join his firm as a lawyer. This represents his struggle for self-determination within the colonial framework. Even though this dream was never achieved, it shows how he was aware of social hierarchy as a colonized and wanted to overcome it. He was happy in his home, but after the partition, he could not return to Delhi, and his character also became displaced. After the partition, the novel illustrated that a part of Sajjad was lost, which was never restored. Thus, like Hiroko, Sajjad also represented Bhabha's themes of unhomeliness, displacement, and identity crisis. Ultimately, both Hiroko and Sajjad found solace and a sense of home in one another. Their shared traumatic past created a deep emotional bond and helped them to start a new life in a different cultural context. In this regard, they became each other's transnational tie. Their companionship helped them avoid the isolation of displacement and forge a new sense of belonging.

Hiroko and Sajjad shared feelings of unhomeliness due to a lack of familiarity in Delhi (India), which was followed by the partition. Most of Sajjad's family and friends were leaving for Pakistan in search of a new world that would feel like home. This shows how individuals longed for a sense of home and were ready to relocate to find their new identities and homes. “*I have to learn how to live in a new world. With new rules. As you have had to do.*” (p. 113). For Sajjad, Dilli-Delhi was a great city with vast opportunities. During the partition, he left Delhi because of the Hindu-Muslim riots. While it was necessary, it felt like a betrayal to him. This shows how non-political individuals were psychologically impacted by the inescapable consequences of war and global dynamics. When he attempted to return to his home in September 1947, he could not because he was a Muslim, which scarred him for life. “*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*” (p. 125). However, despite everything, Dilli remained his idea of home. Once in Pakistan, he said, “*Dilli is Dilli...My first love. I would never have left it willingly. But those bastards didn't let me go home*” (p. 161).

When the story shifted to Pakistan during 1982-3, both Hiroko and Sajjad's suffering still did not end as displaced characters. Their sixteen-year-old boy, Raza Konrad Ashraf, illustrated Bhabha's theme of identity crisis that centers around instability and hybridity of identity. He was facing an identity crisis due to his hybrid features & background that he received from his parents.

This shows how even after relocating, individuals could not escape the aftermath of war. Raza, who inherited exceptional language skills from her mother, was experiencing an identity crisis throughout the novel. Despite having the privilege of practical and forward-moving parents, who had to leave their homes but re-adapted to their situations to build a new home together. Raza was tangled up in different crises regarding his identity.

There was something she had learned to recognize after Nagasaki, after Partition: those who could step out from loss and those who would remain mired in it. Raza was the miring sort, despite the inheritance he should have had from both his parents, two of the world's great forward-movers. (p. 146).

Raza rejected his Japanese heritage and felt uncomfortable using the Japanese language in front of his friends. Speaking a language of a country that he had never visited made no sense to him. Raza was also embarrassed and hopeless, as despite being an intellectual student, he had failed the exams twice due to his panic attacks. Raza was aware that people see him differently because of his unique hybrid background. He was perceived as deformed by the bomb. Even though he was born in Pakistan and had never gone to Nagasaki throughout his life, this made him realize that he was an outsider and would always be treated like this in his birthplace. This shows how Raza's life and identity were affected by the bomb, which he was never directly a part of. Thus, the dark past of Hiroko never left her or her son. Raza portrayed the theme of alienation and trauma throughout the novel. He ended up living a life of dual identity (Raza Ashraf & Raza Hazara). This sense of alienation and unhomeliness changed Raza's life forever. The dual identity of Raza later became the reason for his father's death and made him realize that he was an outsider. *"Thank you for your advice. You were right. People like me better when I don't tell them who I am"* (p.220). Despite the traumatic experiences of Raza, language played a significant role in Raza's life as it gave him a sense of power and served as a transnational tie for him across different cultural contexts.

Although the Weiss-Burton clan is the representative of the British Raj (colonizers) in the novel. Due to global dynamics, they also had to relocate and readapt throughout the story, and hence faced unhomeliness both physically and psychologically. Burtons, as colonizers, were settled in Delhi before they had to leave because of partition. While Elizabeth Burton was married to James Burton, she represented the theme of alienation and unhomeliness. Among other British people (including her husband, James Burton), she always felt that neither Britain nor Delhi was her real home. She once expressed her feelings of unfamiliarity to Hiroko as, *"I'll tell you something that I've never told anyone, not even James. The British Empire makes me feel so ... German"* (p.68). Like Raza, she symbolized the themes of alienation and cultural displacement. She experienced the trauma of leaving her home (Germany) and was now living a life that did not feel like home anymore. Her troubled marriage and uncertain future left her with the feeling of

Bhabha's unhomeliness. She wanted to save her son, Henry Burton (later known as Harry Burton), from similar traumatic experiences, but it was too late. For Harry, India and Indians became his idea of home. Thus, after the partition, he also lost his identity. He confessed while going to Sajjad's home in Karachi that Sajjad was the first man that he had ever been conscious of loving. While he was working for the CIA in the Islamabad embassy during the Cold War, he went to Karachi, availing the first chance he got to meet his long-lost friend and teacher, Sajjad. Since Harry was born in India, he still considers it his first home and has a fondness for the people of India and Pakistan. For him, staying in England was just a way station. During his stay in London, he never really enjoyed staying there, as students used to make fun of his Indian accent and expressions (physical and verbal). It was his cricket skills (that he also learned from Sajjad, other than the Urdu language) that made him a school hero, which also changed when he left for New York to join his mother. So, he urged him to work on his language, as his cricket skills would not help him in America. Thus, language also served as a transnational tie for Henry beyond geographical boundaries. Henry's struggle to adapt in different cultural contexts illustrates Bhabha's theme of cultural displacement. Language was one of the key elements that helped him mitigate the trauma of cultural displacement and identity crisis.

For Henry, Sajjad was also another transnational tie that gave him a sense of familiarity and home in Pakistan. While he considered Sajjad and Delhi as his home, Harry was also aware that he would always be considered an Englishman, an outsider. This represents that while Britishers were privileged migrants, they also experienced Bhabha's sense of alienation and displacement in India. They will always be 'the other' among Indians. Despite all this alienation and unhomeliness, the novel explains how the Burtons and Ashrafs were almost always there for each other and shared an extraordinary transnational relationship. They all somehow acted as a 'home' for each other. The given lines summarize how Weiss-Burtons and Tanaka-Ashrafs were there for each other and their journey together through multiple generations and historical timelines. "*Weiss-Burtons and Tanaka-Ashrafs – we are each other's spiders.*' Then he and Harry placed side by side the stories each knew of their families." (p.350).

Throughout the novel, language plays a very crucial transnational role in both Weiss-Burton's and Tanaka-Ashraf's lives, especially throughout their journey to relocate and readapt, going through multiple historical events. Right from the start, the novel presents language as playing a crucial role in Hiroko's relationship with Konrad, which resulted from having a common language. It became a possibility because she knew how to speak German. Language enhanced their intimate relationship, though it did not last for long, as it was disrupted drastically by the bomb. However, it was her connection with Konrad that later gave her the courage to move to a completely new country in search of a home. When she met Konrad's half-sister, Ilse Weiss, in Delhi, both Ilse and Hiroko shared an intimate friendship because of language. Ilse, who was then

feeling alienated because of her troubled marriage, found comfort and strength in the presence of Hiroko. “... *from the moment Hiroko had mentioned Konrad, they had started to speak in German, and that doing so felt like sharing the most intimate of secrets*” (p.70). Thus, both Konrad and language served as common grounds between Hiroko and Ilse, further resulting in an everlasting bond between them despite having different cultural backgrounds. Similarly, when Hiroko started taking Urdu lessons from Sajjad, they developed a special connection that led to a major change in Hiroko’s life. Hiroko found solace in his company because her Indian traditions were more like her Japanese traditions. Both language and Indian traditions played a crucial role in Sajjad and Hiroko’s relationship. At one point, while talking about the concept of arranged marriages in India, she also confessed, “*It seems to me that I could find more in your world which resembles Japanese traditions than I can in this world of the English*” (p.90). Throughout her stay at Burton’s house, Sajjad was very kind and understanding to her, which made her fall in love with him.

During their stay in Karachi after the partition, Raza (Hiroko & Sajjad’s son) was presented as an intellectual boy who inherited her mother’s exceptional language skills. Even though his relationship with language was not as smooth as her mother’s, he often expressed his desire to work with language as a career. Initially, he found it very strange to use the language of a country that he had never visited. However, he also knew that he had this exceptional quality that nobody else had. “*He only spoke Japanese within the privacy of his home... Why allow the world to know his mind contained words from a country he’d never visited*” (p.139)? When he failed his exams, he expressed his love for language to her mother: “*I want words in every language, ... I think I would be happy living in a cold, bare room if I could just spend my days burrowing into new languages*” (p.146). While Raza experienced an adverse identity crisis in Karachi, it was language that helped him create a new identity.

Thus, language was a major transnational tie in the Burtons and Ashrafs clans. It played a significant role throughout the novel for the characters (Hiroko Tanaka, Sajjad Ashraf, Raza Konrad Ashraf, Elizabeth Burton, and Harry Burton) in dealing with their cultural displacement, unhomeliness, and identity crisis.

## Conclusion

This study has critically examined *Burnt Shadows*, addressing the psychological impact of cultural displacement and unhomeliness through the lived experiences of the main characters. As discussed in the methodology section, the study utilized the theoretical underpinnings of Bhabha’s “unhomeliness” and Boccagni’s “transnationalism”. Through the lens of cultural displacement, unhomeliness, and transnationalism, the analysis illustrates that identity is fluid rather than fixed. Aligned with the first objective, the analysis revealed that the characters such as Hiroko Tanka, Sajad Ashraf, Raza Konrad Ashraf, Elizabeth Burton, and Harry Burton represent profound

identity transformation because of trauma, displacement, and migration. The psychological effect of the cultural displacement might be different for every character, but it is clear that every character was struggling to find their identity and home. The struggle to find a sense of belonging and home is evident in the lives of the main characters. In connection with the second objective, the findings indicate that the theme of unhomeliness is not only visible through characters' disconnection from the physical place they used to call home, but also through their detachment from a stable sense of identity. Their continuous search for belongingness throughout the novel represents the theme of unhomeliness shaped by the geographical and psychological experiences of displacement. The study highlighted, addressing the third objective, that language served as a significant transnational tie to overcome characters' struggles in different cultural contexts. Through the main characters, the writer, Kamila Shamsie, presented how having a common language can act as a solace among different characters in a globalized world. All these characters' lives were interconnected through transnational ties, and thus, they all helped each other in making sense of their unhomeliness and identities.

Furthermore, this study contributes to postcolonial literary studies. It highlights the importance of relational ties to maintain diasporic identities. It offers a literary narrative to understand complex postcolonial and displaced identities, and highlights the effects of war, partition, and exile on them.

Future studies may focus on additional layers like gendered experiences of displacement while analyzing transnational and postcolonial literature. Moreover, comparative studies on South Asian and other diasporic literature can be done to analyze the role of transnational ties in different cultural contexts.

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### **Conflicts of Interest**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

### **Author Contributions**

The author was solely responsible for conceptualizing the study, analyzing the data, and writing the manuscript.

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