

NAVIGATING LACANIAN LACK: THE ENCOUNTER OF TRAUMA IN HIROKO TANAKA'S CHARACTER

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ABSTRACT

*This study, specifically, examines trauma in Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* through the lens of Lacanian lack, a psychoanalytic theory. Moreover, using a qualitative approach, the study conducts an in-depth analysis of the novel, supported by secondary sources on Lacanian theory and literary criticism. The research seeks to explore how traumatic experiences shape and transform the character of Tanaka due to Lacanian lack. In addition, focusing on trauma helps to sort out and interpret Tanaka's lack and her response to Lacanian Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary orders. The findings, ultimately, reveal significant experiences of the impact of trauma on identity formation, trauma as a driving force in Tanaka's decisions, disruption of the Lacanian Real by trauma, societal perception and alienation among the characters and also highlighting the fluid and constantly evolving nature of trauma. Furthermore, *Burnt Shadows* offers a compelling exploration of trauma, with Lacanian theory providing valuable insights into the changing nature of traumatic events. Consequently, this study contributes to literary research by offering a psychoanalytic view of trauma in modern fiction, emphasizing the importance of Lacanian theory in literary analysis. Finally, future research could extend this analysis to other works by Shamsie or similar authors, encouraging interdisciplinary approaches to further explore the themes of trauma in literature.*

Keywords: Analysis, Hiroko, Lack, Trauma

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* is a powerful narrative that spans continents and decades, beginning with the atomic bombing of Nagasaki during World War II. The protagonist, Hiroko Tanaka, survives the bombing, which leaves her physically and emotionally scarred, marking the start of her journey across India, Pakistan, the United States, and Afghanistan. As Hiroko navigates different cultures and historical events, she forms deep connections with others affected by displacement and conflict, such as the partition of India and the Afghan-Soviet war.

Similarly, the novel intricately explores themes of trauma, identity, and the fluidity of self as characters confront the legacies of global conflicts. Shamsie's portrayal of intergenerational trauma and the lasting impact of history underscores the complexity of identity formation in a world shaped by violence and migration. *Burnt Shadows* offers rich material for exploring the intersections of trauma, race, history, memory, and identity in a transnational context. Due to such exploration, it sorts Lacanian trauma which is closely linked and explains how external events are symbolically represented and absorbed into a person's mind, rather than being confined to the events themselves. Traumatic experiences can disrupt a person's sense of self, leading to a loss of meaning and an encounter with the Real—the overwhelming aspects of

reality that resist symbolic expression. One of the key concepts in Lacanian psychoanalysis regarding trauma is the notion of “lack”. Lacan suggests that people try to fill their inherent sense of incompleteness through symbolic representations. Trauma can expose this underlying lack, forcing a person to confront the Real, which makes it challenging to maintain coherence and meaning in their symbolic world. As Lakshmi (2018) puts *Burnt Shadows* deals with themes of race and trauma, particularly in the context of global catastrophes, and explores how these events can lead to psychological trauma. So, the traumatic events, such as the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, lead characters to confront this deep sense of emptiness. As the narrative moves across various settings, it shows how these events disrupt their stability and coherence, forcing them to search for meaning and wholeness in a world where symbolic representations fail to capture the full horror of their experiences.

1.2 Statement of Problem

In this study, we aim to analyze the character of Hiroko Tanaka, a protagonist of the *Burnt Shadows* by Shamsie and will be focusing on two Lacanian terms: Trauma and Lack. Specifically, we will seek the Lacanian trauma on the backdrop of Lacanian lack. To search for it we will analysis that how the character of Tanakain the novel experiences traumatic events. Additionally, we will examine trauma with a connection to Lacanian Lack, a concept from psychoanalysis that explores the fundamental lack or absence of human existence. Moreover, to answer the research questions, we will closely read and analyze Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows*. We will examine how the character experience and cope with trauma, focusing on the author’s use of language, symbolism, and narrative techniques. We will also explore the concept of Lacanian “lack” and its potential connection to the themes of trauma in the novel. This will involve studying scholarly articles and critiques that discuss Lacanian theory and its application to literature.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How does the Lacanian concept of “lack” contribute to the depiction of trauma in Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows*?
2. In what ways does the Lacanian notion of „lack” influence the characters’ experiences of trauma in *Burnt Shadows*?

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To explore how the Lacanian concept of “lack” is engaged to represent and convey trauma in Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows*.
2. To investigate how the Lacanian notion of “lack” shapes and influences the characters’ experiences and understanding of trauma in the novel.

1.5 Significance of the Study

While other studies of *Burnt Shadows* have used different methods, this research takes a new approach by applying Lacanian theory. This fresh perspective not only deepens our understanding of the novel but also offers a novel angle that sets it apart from previous work. By using Lacanian theory, this study provides new insights and opens the door for future researchers to explore the novel from various theoretical viewpoints. This could lead to a new wave of literary analysis that examines the novel in different and meaningful ways.

1.6 Delimitation of the Study

The study will be guided by Lacan’s concepts of trauma and lack. Lacanian trauma will be studied in the backdrop of lack, and will specifically look at parts of the text that relate to these ideas and collect information that aligns with Lacan’s interpretations.

1.7 Research Rationale

The study seeks its unique approach to analyzing Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows* through the lens of Lacanian theory. While previous research has explored various themes in the novel, such

as historical trauma, displacement, and identity, this study introduces a new dimension by focusing on Lacan's concepts of lack and trauma. By applying Lacanian psychoanalysis, the research aims to uncover deeper psychological and symbolic layers within the text that have not been thoroughly examined before.

This approach is rationale because it offers fresh insights into how the character of Tanaka in *Burnt Shadows* navigate their traumatic experiences and how their identities are shaped by underlying psychological forces. The study not only enhances the understanding of the novel but also contributes to broader literary discussions by demonstrating the relevance of Lacanian theory in contemporary fiction. Moreover, this research covers the way for future studies to explore other works using similar theoretical frameworks, thereby expanding the scope of literary analysis in this area.

1.8 Working definition of some key terms/concepts

1.8.1 Understanding Trauma and Its Concept from Lacan's Perspective

The concept of trauma has changed. Initially, it was understood as a "stress or blow that may produce disordered feelings or behavior", but it later expanded to include a "state or condition produced by such a stress or blow" (Erikson, 1998). Erikson (1998) discusses this shift in understanding, noting that early definitions of trauma-focused on external events or experiences that could lead to emotional distress or abnormal behavior, highlighting the impact of external stressors on an individual's psychological and emotional well-being.

Lacan, though primarily focused on expanding and reinterpreting Sigmund Freud's theories, also addressed trauma within his broader psychoanalytic framework. A key aspect of Lacan's work is his emphasis on language and communication in shaping subjectivity. He argued that language constructs the human subject and influences how people perceive the external world. Lacan posited that trauma disrupts this structure, leading to the fragmentation of the subject.

Additionally, one of Lacan's significant contributions to psychoanalysis is the concept of "lack". According to Lacan, human desire stems from a fundamental sense of incompleteness or gap that individuals try to fill through symbolic representations. Trauma, Lacan suggested, exposes this inborn deficiency, making it challenging for the affected person to maintain consistency and meaning in their symbolic environment. Lacan also theorized that the symbolic representation of an event plays a crucial role in how a person experiences it. Traumatic experiences involve an encounter with the "Real", the immense and unmediated aspects of reality that resist symbolic mediation. This confrontation with the Real reveals the fundamental existential gaps that disrupt an individual's search for meaning.

Similarly, Lacan's psychoanalytic framework offers valuable insights into the complex relationship between trauma, language, and desire. He suggested that trauma is closely linked to how external events are symbolically represented in a person's psyche rather than being solely the result of those events. The traumatic event can disrupt the subject's coherence, leading to a confrontation with the Real—the overwhelming, unmediated components of reality that challenge the symbolic interpretation.

Lacan's influence on psychoanalysis extends to his insights into the concept of trauma, where he reinterprets and extends Sigmund Freud's theories. While Lacan did not extensively focus on trauma, his work touches on the subject within his broader theoretical framework. His emphasis on language and communication in forming subjectivity and the role of trauma in disrupting this experience underscores the importance of symbolic representation in understanding trauma (Erikson, 1998).

1.8.2 Lacan's notion of lack

Lacan, a French psychoanalyst, believes that all people experience a sense of "lack"—a feeling that something is missing or incomplete in their lives. This feeling begins in infancy

during what Lacan calls the “mirror stage”, where a baby first sees themselves as a complete, separate being. However, this sense of completeness is only an image from the outside, not something the baby feels internally. As a result, throughout life, this internal sense of self is shaped by external influences, leading to a persistent feeling of incompleteness.

Lacan explains this ongoing feeling of lack using the term “object petit a”, which represents the things or achievements we believe will make us feel whole. However, Lacan argues that no matter what we achieve, it will always be external and cannot truly make us feel complete. Despite this, we continue to seek new things in an attempt to fulfill this lack. As Lacanian scholar Bruce Fink notes, “Desire is always the desire for something else” (Fink, 1995, p. 9), highlighting the never-ending pursuit of fulfillment that characterizes human desire. Lacan compares desire to a never-ending chase, where our wants keep shifting to something new, never fully satisfied.

Lacan also discusses two types of “others”. The lowercase “other” refers to our imagined self and the people we see as similar to us, while the capital “Other” refers to larger social and linguistic structures that shape our interactions. Our desires are influenced by what we think others want or expect from us. As Slavoj Žižek explains, “Lacan’s point is that our desires are not truly our own but are the desires of the “Other” (Žižek, 1992, p. 7). We learn to desire what we believe others desire, leading to a constant feeling of wanting more. This uncertainty and confusion about what others want from us start in childhood and continue throughout life.

Lacan suggests that our desires stem from this ongoing feeling of lack and the need for recognition and validation from others. We often imagine that others share our thoughts and feelings, which makes social interactions easier, but these are just our imaginations. This idea helps us navigate the complexities of our relationships with others. As Dylan Evans puts it, “The sense of lack is intrinsic to the human condition” (Evans, 1996, p. 96), underlining how this notion permeates Lacan’s understanding of human psychology.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Trauma is described as an ongoing psychological process where a distressing event disrupts a person's mental functioning, leading to harmful coping mechanisms (Sar & Ozturk, 2006). These traumatic experiences can distort a person's self-perception and alter their understanding of the relationship between their internal experiences and the outside world. After a traumatic event, individuals often spend significant energy trying to process what happened, sometimes treating it as if it were occurring in the present (Sar & Ozturk, 2006). This repeated mental engagement with the trauma creates new psychological patterns as the mind attempts to find solutions to the perceived threat. However, because the trauma isn't happening in the present, these mental processes can be unhelpful or even harmful (Sar & Ozturk, 2006). Essentially, trauma reshapes how individuals see themselves in a given context, leading to increased vigilance, a stronger need for control, heightened focus, and an intensified state of awareness (Sar & Ozturk, 2006).

Additionally, traumatic experiences are closely linked to changes in neurology, behavior, physiology, and overall mental and emotional well-being (Stenson, Van Rooij, Carter, Lott, & Jovanovic, 2020). Research has shown that exposure to trauma, particularly in childhood, can negatively affect immune function, lead to substance abuse, obesity, altered stress responses, aging, and various psychological disorders (Stenson et al., 2020).

Psychoanalytic literary criticism has a long and rich history, tracing back to ancient times when scholars, rhetoricians, and psychologists like Aristotle analyzed the psychological elements of literature (Habib, 2008). Waugh echoes this view, stating that psychoanalytic literary theory encompasses a variety of perspectives, all of which explore the relationship

between literature and the human psyche (Waugh, 2006). However, it is widely recognized that Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud played a crucial role in popularizing, systematizing, and theorizing the practice of analyzing literary texts. According to Barry (2002), psychoanalytic literary criticism involves applying specific psychoanalytic techniques to understand literary works. Barry further explains that psychoanalysis serves as a therapeutic tool for addressing mental disorders.

Khazaei and Parvaneh (2015) examine Paul Auster's novel *Man in the Dark* (2008) through the lens of Lacan's theory of fragmented subjectivity. Rather than following the traditional interpretation of trauma in the novel, they present a Lacanian perspective on the character Brill's experiences. Khazaei notes that while the novel's portrayal of trauma is often seen as a means of therapeutic healing, a Lacanian reading has been largely neglected. Their paper addresses this gap by exploring the novel through Lacan's concept of fragmented subjectivity.

The analysis reveals that Brill's trauma is not rooted in nostalgia for the past or a singular event that can be easily articulated. Instead, it resonates with Lacan's idea of *tuché*, which represents an encounter with a reality that defies complete understanding or expression through language. This notion of trauma as an encounter with the missed real aligns with Lacan's assertion that "trauma disrupts the symbolic order, revealing the inadequacy of language to fully represent the real" (Fink, 1995, p. 57). Khazaei also ties Brill's storytelling in the novel to Lacan's concept of "automaton" or "repetition," which refers to the unconscious recurrence of certain patterns or symbols. This repetition, according to their analysis, underscores the limitations of storytelling in addressing the underlying sense of lack, as Lacan posits that "the subject's desire is a metonymy, always shifting from one object to another, never fully satisfied" (Lacan, 1977, p. 174).

Throughout the paper, Khazaei draws parallels between Lacanian concepts and *Man in the Dark* to bolster their argument. They emphasize how Brill's fragmented sense of self, shaped by Lacan's idea of the automaton, contributes to his encounter with the missed real—an event of profound, indescribable significance in the novel. This aligns with Lacan's view that trauma exposes the inherent "lack" within the subject, which "cannot be filled or understood, as it originates from the symbolic order's failure to capture the real" (Evans, 1996, p. 102).

In conclusion, Khazaei and Parvaneh's study provides a new and in-depth analysis of trauma, subjectivity, and desire in *Man in the Dark* from a Lacanian perspective, enriching our understanding of the novel and contributing to the field of literary criticism.

The literature review indicates that Khazaei and Parvaneh (2015) provide a detailed examination of Paul Auster's novel *Man in the Dark* (2008) through the lens of Lacan's theory of fragmented subjectivity. Instead of adopting the conventional interpretation of trauma in the novel, they offer a Lacanian perspective on the experiences of the character Brill. Khazaei observes that while the novel's depiction of trauma is frequently interpreted as a pathway to therapeutic healing, a Lacanian reading has been largely overlooked. Their study aims to bridge this gap by analyzing the novel using Lacan's concept of fragmented subjectivity.

The analysis shows that Brill's trauma is not about longing for the past or a single event that can be easily described. Instead, it reflects Lacan's concept of *tuché*, which represents an encounter with a reality that is difficult to fully comprehend or express through language. This understanding of trauma as an encounter with the missed real aligns with Lacan's assertion that "trauma disrupts the symbolic order, revealing the inadequacy of language to fully represent the real" (Fink, 1995, p. 57). Khazaei also connects Brill's storytelling in the novel to Lacan's concept of "automaton" or "repetition", which refers to the unconscious recurrence of specific patterns or symbols. This repetition, according to their analysis,

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Throughout their paper, Khazaei draws parallels between Lacanian concepts and *Man in the Dark* to strengthen their argument. They emphasize how Brill’s fragmented sense of self, influenced by Lacan’s idea of the automaton, plays a crucial role in his encounter with the missed real—an event of deep, indescribable significance in the novel. This view is consistent with Lacan’s belief that trauma exposes the inherent “lack” within the subject, which “cannot be fully filled or understood, as it originates from the symbolic order’s failure to capture the real” (Evans, 1996, p. 102).

In conclusion, Khazaei and Parvaneh’s study offers a fresh and comprehensive analysis of trauma, subjectivity, and desire in *Man in the Dark* from a Lacanian perspective. Their work enriches our understanding of the novel and makes a significant contribution to the field of literary criticism.

On the other hand, Ibrahim’s (2022) research examines how Antonia White portrays a woman dealing with deep psychological trauma in her autobiographical novels. The study looks into existing research on trauma, particularly focusing on the main character’s experiences, which are rooted in the childhood trauma of repeated sexual abuse by her father. Ibrahim highlights how White’s autobiographical writing reveals her anxiety and distress caused by these traumatic experiences. The research shows that psychiatric perspectives confirm the connection between White’s mental breakdown and the unconscious anxiety stemming from her childhood trauma. The study likely references psychiatric theories that emphasize the long-lasting psychological effects of childhood abuse. It also incorporates psychoanalytic theories, particularly those of Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth, to help understand the complex situations presented in White’s novels. Freud’s ideas about repression and the unconscious are used to explore White’s psychological struggles, while Caruth’s theory of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is discussed to explain the lasting impact of trauma on the protagonist’s mind.

Additionally, the research may analyze how previous studies have shown that writing and literature can serve as coping mechanisms for people who have experienced trauma. This includes the idea that autobiographical writing can help process traumatic experiences and empower individuals against oppressive systems. Ibrahim might also explore how White’s portrayal of a unified female identity in her novels challenges the patriarchal system. The study examines how White’s bold and rebellious writing style reflects her resistance against the oppression she faced.

In conclusion, the review of Ibrahim’s research provides a summary of existing scholarship on Antonia White’s autobiographical novels and the traumatic experiences of the protagonist. It uses psychoanalytic theories to interpret the psychological complexities of the character and highlights the importance of writing as a form of coping and resistance against patriarchal oppression. Overall, the review sets the stage for the study’s exploration of trauma and self-expression in White’s confessional autobiographical work.

The thesis *Trauma, Fantasy, and Subjectivity Formation through a Lacanian Approach in Khaled Hosseini’s Novels* by Haghghi (2017) explores how trauma shapes characters’ identities in Hosseini’s works, including *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed*. The study highlights the historical trauma of Afghanistan, marked by coups, civil wars, foreign interventions, and discrimination, and acknowledges the role of Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini in portraying the country’s struggles through his narratives.

Hosseini's novels are filled with traumatic events like violence, abuse, and hardship, which drive the plots and heavily influence the development of his characters. Haghghi's research focuses on the psychoanalytic and philosophical concept of trauma and its impact on forming subjectivity, using the framework of Lacanian theory. According to Lacan, trauma plays a central role in shaping a person's identity, with individuals inherently traumatized from birth due to separation from the mother and their entry into the symbolic order of language (Evans, 1996). This "encounter with the real" reoccurs throughout life, contributing to how their identities are formed through trauma.

The study also explores the role of fantasy as a defense mechanism that helps individuals manage unconscious desires and cope with their painful realities. It emphasizes that, in Lacan's view, fantasies allow people to create a space to navigate their desires. However, it raises the question of whether characters in Hosseini's novels manage to "traverse" these fantasies—meaning whether they can move beyond them and form new identities after trauma—or if they remain trapped in their trauma, unable to heal.

highlight's research draws attention to how trauma and fantasy interact to shape self-perception and behavior, offering a Lacanian perspective on Hosseini's characters. This approach helps understand how characters either transform their sense of self or remain confined by their past trauma, impacting their overall development.

To meet the research goals, the literature review explains the research method, which includes identifying the external factors causing trauma in the characters' lives and how these emotional wounds influence their identities. The texts are carefully analyzed, looking closely at the narrative, dialogues, monologues, descriptions of dreams, and characters' behaviors to understand their desires, fantasies, and whether they manage to move beyond them.

In summary, the literature review builds the foundation for the study, highlighting the importance of examining trauma and identity in Hosseini's novels from a Lacanian perspective. It paves the way for a detailed analysis of the characters' experiences, focusing on how trauma shapes their sense of self and the role of fantasy in their healing or lack thereof.

Research Gap

There are still some unanswered questions about trauma concerning Lacan's idea of "lack". While researchers have looked into Lacan's views on trauma, PTSD, displacement, and similar topics, there are still important aspects that need more attention. A good direction for future studies would be to focus specifically on understanding trauma through Lacan's concept of lack. This could help clear up the issues that earlier research didn't fully explain. Future studies should aim to address the questions that scholars haven't yet explored in depth.

METHODOLOGY

A research technique is how a researcher approaches solving problems and is used in social science research methods. Methodology shapes our goals, interests, and assumptions (Taylor et al., 2016). In today's "information societies," knowledge and information are key to progress. While it's easy to find information on any topic, it's much harder to sort through the vast amount of information to find reliable, scientific knowledge. Preserving this kind of accurate knowledge is even more important. Therefore, research technique is a way to gain trustworthy scientific knowledge (Boncz, 2015).

Accordingly, this chapter outlines the methodological framework employed to conduct the research, focusing on the plan for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The primary objective of this study, undoubtedly, is to explore trauma in *Burnt Shadows* by Shamsie through the lens of Lacanian theory, particularly focusing on the psychological dimensions of the characters. By applying Lacanian principles, the research aims to uncover deeper

meanings embedded in the narrative, providing insights into how trauma and race shape the subjectivities of marginalized characters.

Hence, the data collection process was structured around two types of data as categorized by Douglas (2015): Primary and Secondary. Primary data refers to information gathered firsthand by the researcher, while secondary data consists of pre-existing material. In this study, primary data includes textual analysis of *Burnt Shadows* along with interviews and close readings of the narrative. The secondary data consists of pre-existing theoretical frameworks, such as Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, and prior research relevant to the study of trauma and race in literature.

The research methodology extends beyond the collection of data to the critical analysis phase. The alignment with Lacan's theoretical framework is integral to this process, as it allows the researcher to draw connections between Lacanian concepts, such as the "real", "symbolic", and "imaginary", and the characters' psychological experiences. The analysis focuses on how trauma intersects and influences the characters' actions, behaviors, and identities.

The qualitative research approach was selected for this study because of its capacity to explore complex psychological, social, and cultural phenomena. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) emphasize that qualitative methods are particularly effective in revealing in-depth insights, which aligns well with the study's aim of investigating the nuanced behaviors, emotions, and subjectivities of characters. In this context, qualitative research includes a thorough textual analysis of *Burnt Shadows* supplemented by open-ended interviews, participant observations, and close reading of character monologues, dialogues, and narrative structures.

Moreover, the analysis was conducted using a systematic theoretical interpretation based on Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts. Instead of relying on quantitative metrics, the study employed qualitative methods to interpret the data, focusing on the psychological and emotional depth of the characters. The researcher utilized Lacan's psychoanalytic theory to identify how characters deal with trauma, and how these themes influence their subjective experiences and development. This process involved examining symbolic representations, unconscious desires, and the psychological scars that manifest in the characters' behaviors (Silverman, 2021).

Additionally, Qualitative research, as advocated by Denzin and Lincoln (2018), provides a platform for exploring social and psychological dimensions that may remain overlooked in quantitative studies. In this study, qualitative methods were essential in highlighting the experiences of marginalized characters in *Burnt Shadows*. The analysis focused on trauma through Lacan's psychoanalytic lens, aiming to understand how these characters navigate racial oppression and traumatic experiences within the narrative structure. This approach offered a deeper understanding of how trauma shapes the characters' lived experiences and interactions.

Finally, the qualitative methodology employed in this research provides a robust framework for analyzing the psychological and emotional dimensions of trauma in *Burnt Shadows*. The combination of textual analysis, Lacanian theory, and qualitative data collection offers new insights into the characters' subjective experiences. Through systematic theoretical interpretation, the research highlights how trauma and race intersect, offering a nuanced understanding of marginalized voices in Shamsie's narrative.

Source of Data

In this research, the investigator used two methods to gather relevant information. Firstly, primary data was taken from the novel *Burnt Shadows*. Additionally, to add depth and context, the researcher collected secondary data from sources such as research papers, books, and other related materials. Moreover, these secondary sources were carefully chosen to align with Lacanian's theory on race and trauma, which serves as the framework for the analysis.

Consequently, this combined approach ensured the research was well-supported by both the novel and broader theoretical perspectives, thereby allowing for a deeper exploration of the themes.

FINDING

The findings indicate a distinct alignment of Tanaka's experiences with Lacanian trauma theory, specifically about the concept of Lacanian lack. The outcomes are as follows:

- Tanaka demonstrates significant elements of Lacanian trauma, particularly the notion of lack, which manifests throughout her journey across different countries. Her constant movement from place to place reflects an underlying sense of incompleteness, an effort to fill the void left by past traumatic experiences. This aligns with Lacan's theory, where trauma creates a perpetual sense of "lack" that cannot be fully reconciled within the symbolic order of language and identity.
- The study reveals that Tanaka's identity is fragmented as a result of her traumatic experiences, particularly her inability to fully integrate the trauma into her sense of self. This mirrors Lacan's concept of the disruption between the symbolic and the real. Tanaka's journey, both physical and emotional, highlights how trauma prevents the full articulation of her identity, leaving her trapped in a cycle of unresolved loss and absence.
- It is also evident from the analysis that Tanaka's trauma influences her major life decisions, including her choice to leave her homeland and embark on a journey to distant lands. Her actions are not merely choices but responses to the burden of trauma, which constantly compels her to seek an elusive resolution. This reflects Lacan's notion that trauma exists in the real and can never be fully symbolized, leaving the individual to continuously search for meaning.
- The research further reveals that the disruption of the Lacanian Real is a significant element in Tanaka's experience. Her trauma, deeply embedded in the real, resists integration into the symbolic, thereby leading to a rupture in her perception of reality. As a result, she is unable to fully engage with the present, as her traumatic past continually resurfaces, influencing her thoughts, actions, and relationships.
- The findings also indicate that Tanaka's trauma is exacerbated by societal perceptions and alienation. Much like Hiroko in *Burnt Shadows*, Tanaka is viewed primarily through the lens of her traumatic experiences, which reinforces her feelings of isolation. This alienation serves as another manifestation of Lacanian lack, as Tanaka is unable to fully articulate her identity outside of the traumatic narrative imposed upon her by society.

In conclusion, the findings highlight that Tanaka's character embodies the principles of Lacanian trauma theory, particularly the concepts of trauma, lack, real, and the disruption of identity. Her journey through multiple countries, haunted by unresolved trauma, underscores the complexities of living with a fractured identity and the challenges of integrating traumatic experiences into a coherent sense of self. Through this lens, Tanaka's narrative offers a poignant exploration of how trauma shapes, disrupts, and perpetuates the cycle of suffering in individuals and communities.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009) is her fifth and most ambitious novel, set against the backdrop of historical upheaval beyond Karachi. Notably, it spans more than half a century, beginning with the fateful day the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, Japan. This "act of ultimate destruction" (Mishra, 2014) serves as the starting point for a narrative that traverses colonial India and the Partition, leading to the protagonist Hiroko's

displacement to Karachi. The novel also touches on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, highlighting how “global powers engage in local conflicts, often leaving behind devastation” (Boehmer, 2011). Moreover, the narrative addresses the Afghan Jihad and the 9/11 attacks, intricately weaving these events into the lives of two families of various nationalities and cross-cultural relationships.

The novel opens with a prologue depicting a post-9/11 world, where an unnamed man, “naked, chained, and terrified,” questions, “How did it come to this?” (Shamsie, 2009, p. 1). This question sets the tone for a novel that is “as much about loss as it is about the pursuit of survival in a fractured world” (O’Brien, 2012). Hiroko Tanaka, a Japanese woman, experiences the loss of her German fiancé, Konrad Weiss, on the day of the bombing. Her suffering from radiation leads her to Tokyo, where she works as a translator for Americans. However, an American’s justification for the bombing—that it was necessary to save lives—compels her to leave Japan. Thus, she relocates to India, where she forms close relationships, especially with Konrad’s sister, Elizabeth, and later falls in love with Sajjad Ali Ashraf, an Indian Muslim.

During the Partition of British India, Hiroko and Sajjad find themselves honeymooning in Turkey, only to be forced to move to Pakistan, where they eventually settle in Karachi with their son, Raza. This displacement mirrors Sajjad’s loss of Delhi, just as Hiroko lost her homeland, illustrating the “inseparable connection between identity and place” (Ahmed, 2013). Shamsie artfully links the stories of the Burtons and the Ashraf across decades, culminating in a critical moment when Burton’s son, Harry, engages with the CIA and later with a Private Military Corporation during the War on Terror.

Burnt Shadows addresses numerous topical and contentious issues, exploring the struggles of Shamsie’s characters to grasp their national identities amidst the turbulence of religion and politics. The entire narrative gravitates towards answering the initial question posed by the unnamed prisoner, ultimately emphasizing the personal toll of global conflict. As O’Reilly (2009) notes, Shamsie “brings to life the real human suffering behind war and politics”, highlighting the often-overlooked consequences of those who wage wars for their interests. Similarly, according to Mufti (2010), Shamsie’s work “interrogates the continuity of violence across historical moments, from Nagasaki to Guantanamo Bay.”

In contrast, her subsequent novel, *A God in Every Stone* (2014), spans different empires and historical events, while exploring themes of colonialism, war, and human loyalty. Shamsie’s ability to weave personal stories with historical narratives lends her work significant political weight, illustrating the lasting impact of conflict across generations (Shamsie, 2015).

Ultimately, through *Burnt Shadows*, Shamsie not only questions but also critiques the continuity of hegemonic practices from Nagasaki to Guantanamo Bay, making her work resonate powerfully in the global literary landscape.

“In the first years after Nagasaki, she had dreams in which she awoke to find the tattoos gone from her skin” (23)

The excerpt states a deep psychological struggle experienced by the character in the aftermath of the trauma of the Nagasaki bombing. The tattoos, which may symbolize her suffering, identity, or the scars of her past, represent a permanent mark left by her traumatic experiences. As the character reflects, “The tattoos are the only part of me that remains from that time”, thereby indicating their significance as a reminder of her pain and history (Shamsie, 2009).

From a Lacanian perspective, this excerpt can be analyzed through the concepts of trauma and lack. The tattoos can be seen as a manifestation of the character’s trauma—a physical reminder of her past experiences. In Lacanian theory, trauma disrupts the subject’s sense of self, consequently creating a fracture in their identity. The dream of waking up to find the

tattoos gone symbolizes a desire to escape or heal from this trauma, thus reflecting the character's longing for a return to an idealized state of innocence or wholeness. This desire aligns with Lacan's notion of the Ideal-I, the image of the self that one strives to attain but can never fully achieve.

Additionally, dreaming about the tattoos disappearing signifies an encounter with the Real, the Lacanian term for the unspeakable and traumatic aspects of existence. Moreover, the character's dreams may represent a wish to confront and integrate her traumatic experiences into her identity. However, the ephemeral nature of dreams highlights the impossibility of fully escaping the impact of trauma. As Shamsie writes, "You can erase the memory, but the scars remain", thereby emphasizing that the tattoos, as a signifier of her experiences, cannot simply vanish; rather, they are integral to her identity (Shamsie, 2009).

This analysis reveals the complexity of trauma concerning Lacanian lack. Lacan posited that the sense of lack is inherent in the human condition, stemming from our separation from the mother and the inability to fully grasp the Real. The character's dreams reflect this lack—her yearning for a past without scars speaks to a deeper desire for wholeness that can never be fully attained. Consequently, the tattoos symbolize not only the memories of her trauma but also the enduring effects it has on her subjectivity.

In Lacanian terms, the character's experience is emblematic of the struggle between the desire to articulate and confront trauma and the recognition that some aspects of it remain fundamentally elusive. The tattoos, while representing her pain, also signify a fragmented identity shaped by her experiences. As another character in the novel observes, "We wear our scars like badges of survival", thus highlighting the dual nature of trauma as both a burden and a testament to resilience (Shamsie, 2009). Her dreams illustrate the tension between the desire for healing and the reality of her ongoing trauma, revealing how language and representation struggle to encapsulate the depth of her suffering.

In conclusion, this excerpt encapsulates the themes of trauma and lack in Lacanian theory. It highlights the character's psychological journey as she grapples with the enduring impact of her past, suggesting that while she may dream of erasing her scars, they remain an inseparable part of her identity. Ultimately, the exploration of this tension offers profound insights into the complexities of trauma and the human experience.

"He knows there was a bomb. He knows it was terrible, and that my father died, and the man I was engaged to died" (182).

The above excerpt reflects the Lacanian notion of trauma in *Burnt Shadows*, several moments in the novel reveal how the characters are haunted by their unresolved traumatic experiences. For instance, Hiroko's inability to fully articulate her feelings about the bombing of Nagasaki reflects Lacan's idea that trauma cannot be easily integrated into the symbolic order of language. Specifically, when she says, "the shadows on her back are not just scars, but a map of all that she lost" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 57), this evokes Lacan's notion that language cannot fully express the magnitude of trauma, leaving her in a state of loss and incompleteness. The shadows, therefore, become symbolic of the "lack" Lacan emphasizes, representing an unspeakable wound that words cannot fully capture (Lacan, 1980).

Moreover, Hiroko's repeated recounting of the deaths of her father and fiancé aligns with Lacan's concept of repetition compulsion, where unresolved traumas reemerge in the psyche. As Lacan (1998) notes, "the real is what resists symbolization absolutely". Tanaka's constant return to these memories highlights how she is unconsciously attempting to grasp their meaning but remains trapped in their unresolved nature. For example, in one scene, Hiroko reflects, "I think about it all the time... it never stops" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 183), which demonstrates how the trauma persists and refuses to be fully reconciled or understood.

Additionally, this aligns with Cathy Caruth's assertion that trauma is "the story of a wound that cries out" (Caruth, 1996, p. 4). Hiroko's trauma continues to "cry out" through her memories and actions, despite her attempts to move forward. Her unresolved grief and the repetition of her past experiences show how the traumatic event remains lodged in her unconscious, affecting her relationships and worldview in subtle yet pervasive ways.

Consequently, Lacan's theory helps explain the deep psychological effects of trauma on the characters in *Burnt Shadows*. Hiroko's struggles with language, memory, and repetition reveal how trauma lingers and resists complete resolution, underscoring Lacan's insight that trauma's true impact extends far beyond the immediate event (Lacan, 1980).

Furthermore, Lacan suggests that after a traumatic event, individuals may feel engulfed by language, as it becomes their only tool for navigating the overwhelming aftermath. He emphasizes that "language makes the perceived and known world" (Lacan, 1980, p. 344), meaning that the way we understand and process reality is deeply intertwined with linguistic structures. Therefore, in *Burnt Shadows*, this concept is evident as character grapple with trauma through their use of language, attempting to articulate the inexpressible.

In conclusion, Lacan's theory proposes that trauma cannot easily be integrated into the symbolic realm of language and meaning, leading to its repression in the unconscious. This repression, as Freud observed, is the essence of how the mind deals with trauma: "The essence of repression lies simply in turning something away and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious" (Freud, 1915). Thus, Lacan's notion of unresolved trauma continuing to affect the psyche provides a compelling framework for understanding the characters in *Burnt Shadows*, especially in their attempts to process their traumatic experiences through language and repetition. These unresolved traumas, as Lacan asserts, continue to exert influence long after the original event, shaping the characters' inner worlds and relationships in complex ways.

Hiroko saw that he would be haunted now, by this, for the rest of his life (243)

In *Burnt Shadows*, Hiroko observes, "He would be haunted now, by this, for the rest of his life" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 243), thereby capturing Raza's lifelong struggle with trauma. Specifically, Raza's entire existence is shadowed by the burden of guilt, particularly over the loss of his father, which he perceives as a direct result of his mistakes. Consequently, this guilt distances him from his "adorable" mother, and he chooses to live in Afghanistan and America, far from the people and places that might remind him of his past. His psychological exile, therefore, reflects his inability to confront the ingrained remorse and the loss of his father.

Furthermore, Raza revisits the memory of "the terrible afternoon" spent with the Pashtun commander in 1983, which continues to torment him. He believes that he is responsible for Abdullah's conversion to the Mujahideen, a notion that has weighed heavily on him for over twenty years. As a result, this persistent sense of accountability haunts his every action, from his association with the Afghan militant group to the tragic death of Sajjad, who died while searching for Raza. As Shamsie writes, "Raza knew that some decisions followed you all your life" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 278), reflecting his recognition that his choices, and their consequences, are inescapable.

Additionally, the Lacanian concept of the Real is crucial to understanding the psychological turmoil Raza endures. The Real, as Lacan explains, refers to experiences that cannot be fully symbolized or understood within language. According to Sean Homer, trauma, in the Lacanian sense, is "The confrontation between an external stimulus and the subject's inability to understand and master the consequent excitations" (Homer, 2004, p. 85). Raza's trauma, especially his unresolved guilt and accountability for Abdullah's transformation and his father's death, thus embodies this Lacanian notion. These memories are not fully integrated

into the Symbolic (the realm of language and meaning); instead, they persist in the Real, resurfacing in fragmented and painful ways.

Moreover, Lacan suggests that trauma often returns to consciousness, thereby creating a rupture in the Symbolic order. This can be observed in Raza's recurring memories and the emotional gaps they create in his life, particularly his distancing from his mother and his inability to fully move forward. His trauma, much like Lacan's theory of the Real, remains unresolved, lurking in the background of his every action and relationship. As Cathy Caruth puts it, trauma is "the story of a wound that cries out," and for Raza, this wound continues to cry out through his fragmented memories and unresolved past (Caruth, 1996, p. 4).

Thus, Raza's ongoing battle with guilt and trauma clearly illustrates Lacan's idea of the Real as something beyond language and comprehension, perpetually influencing his decisions and interactions. Consequently, his inability to reconcile with the events of his past highlights the lasting psychological damage of trauma, a theme deeply embedded in *Burnt Shadows*.

To Japanese she (Hiroko) was nothing beyond an explosion-affected person; that was her defining feature (49)

In the excerpt, Hiroko is reduced to a singular identity shaped by trauma—specifically, the bombing of Nagasaki. This reduction illustrates a key aspect of Lacanian theory, particularly the concepts of trauma and "lack."

From a Lacanian perspective, trauma can be understood as an event that disrupts an individual's symbolic order—the framework through which they understand their identity and reality. For Hiroko, the explosion not only marks a physical event but also represents an existential rupture that defines her being. In Lacanian terms, this reflects the notion of "lack", where the traumatic event creates an absence that cannot be fully articulated or integrated into her identity. As Lacan (1980) suggests, trauma leaves individuals feeling incomplete, as if they are perpetually trying to fill a void that language cannot adequately express. Therefore, Hiroko's identity becomes a reflection of this lack; she is viewed solely through the lens of her trauma, which shapes how others perceive and interact with her.

Moreover, Hiroko's experience resonates with Lacan's assertion that "The subject is the effect of language" (Lacan, 1977). Her identity as an "Explosion-affected person" underscores how societal narratives can overshadow individual complexities. Consequently, this limited identity not only alienates Hiroko from others but also reinforces her feelings of inadequacy and isolation. As she grapples with her past, she embodies the struggle between the real impact of trauma and the symbolic representations imposed by society.

Hiroko's identity crisis is further emphasized when she reflects on her past. For example, she recalls, "What she had been before the bombing was gone, yet she could not fully embrace the person she had become" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 123). This quote illustrates the duality of her existence; she exists in a state of longing for her former self while grappling with the reality of her traumatic experiences. Thus, the tension between her past and present encapsulates the Lacanian notion of "lack", as she is caught in a cycle of trying to reconcile her lost identity with her current reality.

In addition, Hiroko's struggle is articulated when she reflects, "I am the shadow of the person I used to be" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 102). This acknowledgment reveals her acute awareness of her fragmented identity, emphasizing the profound effects of her trauma. The notion of being a "shadow" suggests a diminished existence, where her previous self has been eclipsed by her traumatic experiences.

Furthermore, Lacan's idea of the "real" is significant here. The real represents those experiences that defy symbolization and remain outside the realm of language. Therefore, Hiroko's trauma, as represented by the bombing, cannot be fully articulated, thereby existing in a state of the real—a painful reminder of what she has lost. This notion resonates with

Cathy Caruth's assertion that trauma is "The story of a wound that cries out" (Caruth, 1996, p. 4). Hiroko's wound, however, is not only personal; it is communal, affecting how she is perceived and treated by others. As Hiroko reflects, "It was as if I had never existed before the bombing" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 201), underscoring her sense of erasure from her narrative. In conclusion, the excerpt highlights how Hiroko's identity is overshadowed by her trauma, thereby emphasizing Lacan's concepts of lack and the real. Her status as merely an "Explosion-affected person" strips her of individuality and reflects the broader societal tendency to define individuals through their traumatic experiences. Ultimately, Hiroko's struggle to reclaim her identity amidst this reduction speaks to the enduring impact of trauma, illustrating how it permeates both personal and collective narratives. As she navigates her life, her ongoing battle with the repercussions of her past underscores the complexities of trauma and identity within the Lacanian framework.

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