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**Mapping the Fugitive Soul: Deleuzian Territorialities and the Politics of Displacement in Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows***



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**Abstract**

In the contemporary global landscape, citizenship often oscillates between a precarious privilege and a tool of bureaucratic exclusion. This research explores the protagonist Hiroko Tanaka in Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* to examine how the diasporic body navigates the volatile transitions of the modern nation-state. By employing the philosophical framework of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, specifically the triad of territorialization, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization, the study investigates the systematic erosion of belonging across decades of geopolitical upheaval. Using a close textual analysis method, the paper tracks Hiroko's trajectory from the atomic destruction of Nagasaki to the post-9/11 paranoia of New York. It argues that her journey is not merely a search for home, but a series of violent deterritorializations where her identity is stripped by colonial and state-sanctioned narratives. The analysis reveals that when the state displaces the marginalized, it does not leave them in a vacuum; instead, it forcefully reterritorializes them within punitive legal frameworks and "legislative fictions." The research concludes that Hiroko's enduring precarity is not a failure of personal assimilation but a deliberate outcome of a global system that weaponizes statelessness. Ultimately, the study exposes how the state engineers a permanent state of reterritorialized stasis, ensuring that the marginalized subject remains legally and socially tethered to the periphery.

**Keywords:** Reterritorialization, Hiroko Tanaka, Diasporic Statelessness, Deleuzian Theory, *Burnt Shadows*, Institutionalized Marginality.

**Introduction**

The contemporary global landscape is increasingly characterized by a dialectic between the frictionless flows of transnational capital and the intensifying striation of national borders. In this milieu, citizenship has transitioned from a stable legal category to a volatile instrument of bureaucratic exclusion, often oscillating between a precarious privilege for the elite and a punitive mechanism for the marginalized (Kanwal, 2021). Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009) serves as a critical literary intervention into this discourse, tracing the life of Hiroko Tanaka across six decades and five countries to expose the systematic erosion of belonging through the machinery of the modern state. By situating Hiroko's trajectory within the philosophical framework of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari—specifically their concepts of territorialization, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization—this research investigates how the state apparatus engineers a permanent state of reterritorialized stasis for the displaced subject (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Shamsie (2009) introduces several historical events of a jarring nature, such as the bombing of Nagasaki, the 1947 Partition of India, and the post-9/11 "War on Terror," which serve as "historical collisions" that disrupt the process of cultural transmission (Svensson, 2023). These tragedies are not merely backdrops but active agents of "absolute deterritorialization," stripping individuals of their social codes and familiar environments (Veyret, 2018). The analysis argues that Hiroko's journey is not a quest for a teleological "home" but a series of violent decodings and recodings where the

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state weaponizes statelessness to tether the fugitive soul to the institutionalized periphery. In this "administered world," the state functions as a "machine of capture," seeking to organize the flows of human desire and labor into manageable segments that serve nationalistic agendas (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

For the diasporic subject, displacement is not merely a physical relocation but an ontological shift into "unprivileged migrancy" (Cilano, 2013). This research posits that the state utilizes "legislative fictions"—legal frameworks that redefine origin and status—to maintain the marginalized in a state of precarious "otherness" (Shamsie, 2009). The state's "necropower," as described by Achille Mbembe, operates alongside these Deleuzian territorialities to create "death-worlds" or states of exception where the law is suspended to target specific bodies (Kanwal, 2021). From the atomic branding of Hiroko in Nagasaki to the detention of her son, Raza, in Guantánamo, the narrative exposes a global system that transforms historical trauma into a permanent identity marker, such as the term "Hibakusha," which effectively consumes the individual's potential for sovereign self-definition (Svensson, 2023).

Furthermore, the introduction of Deleuzian theory allows for an examination of the "rhizomatic existence" Hiroko attempts to maintain. Unlike the "root-tree" or arborescent model of the state, which fixes points and follows a binary logic of "us" versus "them," the rhizome represents an anti-genealogical stance defined by alliance and constant flux (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Hiroko's "linguistic consciousness"—her ability to move between Japanese, German, English, and Urdu—functions as a "line of flight," a pathway of escape from the state's totalizing ideologies (Rehman & Yasmin, 2025). However, as the novel spatializes history, it reveals that these lines of flight are frequently captured by the "royal science" of the state, which employs empirical regularities and surveillance to ensure subordination (Veyret, 2018).

Ultimately, this establishes that *Burnt Shadows* is a critique of the "rabid nationalism" that thrives on the creation of enemies and the regulation of movement (Shamsie, 2009). By weaving the personal trauma of Hiroko and her family into the grand political upheavals of the 20th and 21st centuries, Shamsie demonstrates how the state engineers stasis for the marginalized while facilitating global flows for the powerful (Veyret, 2018). The research that follows will track this trajectory across four key historical ruptures, uncovering how the politics of displacement is a deliberate outcome of a global border regime that seeks to capture and categorize the fugitive soul (Kanwal, 2021; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

### **Literature Review**

The scholarly reception of *Burnt Shadows* has evolved from initial postcolonial appraisals of hybridity to a rigorous interrogation of the novel's engagement with global necropolitics and transnational trauma. Veyret (2018) identifies deterritorialization as the "grammar" of the contemporary Pakistani novel, arguing that Shamsie's work is built upon a tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces, where the "alpha and omega" of trauma are joined across generations by historical collisions in Hiroshima and New York. This spatial dislocation creates "lines of flight" that contradict the traditional logic of national borders, allowing the narrative to traverse disparate geographical points (Veyret, 2018). Similarly, Kanwal (2021) expands this biopolitical critique by applying Achille Mbembe's concepts of "necropolitics" and "necropower," asserting that Shamsie's fiction illustrates how states exercise the right to kill by creating "states of exception" through anti-terror

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legislation. This turns marginalized populations into "zombies" inhabiting "death-worlds," effectively exposing the structural injustices inherent in modern democracies (Kanwal, 2021).

The theme of exile and personal development is central to the analysis provided by Svensson (2023), who utilizes the theories of Edward Said and Stuart Hall to investigate Hiroko Tanaka's character. Svensson argues that Hiroko's development is both internally driven and externally impacted by displacement, leading to a "greatly diminished" attitude toward nations and a cynicism toward traditional nationalistic values (Svensson, 2023). This sense of "unprivileged migrancy" is further explored by Rehman and Yasmin (2025), who delve into the complexities of multiculturalism and hybridity. They conclude that Shamsie's portrayal of identity in conflict-ridden times offers a significant contribution to understanding the effects of globalization on individuals who must negotiate the tension between preserving cultural roots and adapting to hostile new environments (Rehman & Yasmin, 2025).

Modernist innovation and structural experimentation are the focus of Sania Abbas, Javaid, and Saboor Hussain (2026), who argue that Shamsie's use of non-linear chronology and temporal fragmentation are necessary processes for defining "trans-historical trauma." They posit that the novel "spatializes history," disrupting Eurocentric narratives of development by intertwining the 1945 bombing of Nagasaki with the Cold War in Afghanistan and the post-9/11 era (Abbas et al., 2026). This linguistic and structural resistance is echoed by Iqbal and Anwar (2025), who employ Critical Discourse Analysis to uncover ideological power structures and gendered voices. They find that while female characters are often "ideologically silenced" by patriarchal and state systems, they regain agency through "memory, empathy, and cross-cultural solidarity," transforming discourse into a place of resistance (Iqbal & Anwar, 2025).

Global connectivity and the concept of "glocalization" are explored by Kiczkowski (2023), who reflects on how all characters in the novel are survivors of traumatic events intertwined with multi-dimensional global conflicts. She notes that the distinctive features of Shamsie's characters emerge incrementally from these complex events (Kiczkowski, 2023). Rashid (2023) complements this by asserting that lost homelands and nationalities are inextricably "knotted with the history of the state and state terrorism," highlighting a world where politics and violence are permanently interlinked. Furthermore, Malik (2021) examines the "transnational identities" in the novel, focusing on the interplay of trauma, displacement, and belonging, while Sobia Khan (2025) suggests that the colonial paradigm of hyper-nationalism has been replaced by a "transnationalism" where diasporic subjects confront a merger of imperialism and exceptionalism.

The novel's engagement with gender dynamics and alternative forms of sociality is investigated by Ahsan and Raza (2024). They argue that Shamsie facilitates a pathway to "female homo-sociality" through "dis-identification," challenging the traditional binary of man-woman relationships by utilizing the idea of platonic friendship as a shared goal (Ahsan & Raza, 2024). This is supported by Nawaz, Shoaib, Ali, and Younis (2024), whose eco-critical study emphasizes "environmental consciousness." They argue that the landscapes in Shamsie's work are not passive backdrops but active forces that materialize memory and collective anxiety, directly impacting the psychological stability of characters (Nawaz et al., 2024).

Critiques of Western representation are offered by Abbas and Iqbal (2023), who

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provide a "Re-Orientalist" reading. They argue that Shamsie's depiction of characters is often "politicized and partial," suggesting that Eastern self-representation remains under the control or direction of Western perspectives (Abbas & Iqbal, 2023). This is contrasted by Chambers (2021), who views Shamsie as a "critical cosmopolitan." Chambers argues that Shamsie's cosmopolitanism issues forth from the perspective of the marginalized—Muslims, migrants, and women—challenging universal norms that are essentially ethnocentric and rooted in imperial global designs (Chambers, 2021). Finally, Hamid (2025) provides a corpus-stylistic analysis of national identity reconstruction, noting how Shamsie's use of language replicates and simultaneously opposes hegemonic ideologies.

While these scholars have addressed trauma, necropolitics, and cosmopolitanism, a gap exists in the systematic application of the Deleuzian triad of territorialization to examine the specific "weaponization of statelessness." Most scholarship views Hiroko's mobility as a form of cultural hybridity, but few have explored how the state apparatus specifically engineers her stasis through "legislative fictions" that ensure her permanent marginalization. This study seeks to bridge that gap by analyzing Hiroko's trajectory as a series of captures and escapes within the striated spaces of the modern world.

## Theoretical Framework

The primary theoretical lens of this study is the post-structuralist philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, particularly their exploration of the relationship between bodies, power, and the coding of space. Central to this framework is the concept of a "territory," which is defined not merely by geographical borders but by "codes"—an explicit or implicit array of concepts, expectations, and actions that order movement and establish stability (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In *Burnt Shadows*, these territories represent the rigid structures of the nation-state, which attempt to fix Hiroko Tanaka's identity through three primary processes.

First, territorialization constitutes the organization of a milieu through the institution of codes, creating a predictable ordering of bodies often modeled on the "root-tree" or arborescent structure (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This model plots a point and fixes an order according to a binary logic, such as "citizen" versus "foreigner" or "colonizer" versus "colonized." Second, deterritorialization occurs when these codes are disrupted, and the territory enters a chaotic mixture of movements (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This process can be "relative," coexisting with established systems, or "absolute," where an entire regime of power is dismantled, such as the total decoding of Hiroko's world in Nagasaki. Third, reterritorialization is the "recoding" of these decoded flows into new systems of order. The state or capital often captures these flows to ensure that escaping desire and labor are once again regulated, settles on a new found stability in their patterns of movement (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

This study further utilizes the distinction between the "machine of capture" and the "war machine." The state apparatus functions as a machine of capture that employs "royal science"—a methodology based on general regularities and empirical measurements to ensure subordination and capture individuality (Veyret, 2018). In *Burnt Shadows*, the state uses royal science to categorize Hiroko as a "Hibakusha" and Sajjad as a "subject of a foreign state," thereby stripping them of their sovereign agency (Svensson, 2023). By contrast, the "war machine" is external to the state and operates in "smooth space." Hiroko's postmodern nomadism is analyzed as a

"molecularisation of self" that moves between urban spaces to discover new forms of "nomadic interconnectedness" (Veyret, 2018).

Finally, the concept of the rhizome is applied to Hiroko's linguistic consciousness. Unlike the hierarchical tree, a rhizome connects any point to any other in an essentially heterogeneous collective assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Hiroko's life represents an anti-genealogical spatial stance defined by the conjunction "and...and...and," existing as an "intermezzo" between cultures (Veyret, 2018). Her use of "lines of flight"—pathways of escape and mutation—allows her to temporarily evade the state's totalizing ideologies (Rehman & Yasmin, 2025). This theoretical triad provides the necessary vocabulary to investigate how the state engineers a "permanent state of reterritorialized stasis," ensuring that the marginalized subject remains legally and socially tethered to the periphery through legislative fictions and the weaponization of statelessness (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

### **Discussion & Analysis**

#### **Nagasaki and the Absolute Deterritorialization of the Body**

The narrative begins with the "absolute deterritorialization" of Nagasaki on August 9, 1945. This event is not merely a historical marker but a "direct expression of power and evil" that physically decodes Hiroko's world (Svensson, 2023). In Deleuzian terms, the atomic bomb functions as a terminal machine that dismantles the established "root-tree" of Hiroko's teacher-identity, her family, and her future with Konrad Weiss. The novel literalizes this deterritorialization through the physical branding of the body: "Her back was a map... of a place no longer inhabitable" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 3). This description is complemented by the searing of the birds on her kimono into her flesh, resulting in a fusion of "Charred silk, seared flesh" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 27). This physical branding marks the inception of Hiroko's "diasporic nature," where her back becomes a manuscript on which geopolitical upheavals are literally transcribed (Svensson, 2023). Veyret (2018) identifies this as one of the novel's "two historical collisions" (the other being 9/11) that form the "alpha and omega" of transgenerational trauma. The state's "necropower," as theorized by Mbembe, operates here by turning a living body into a "burnt shadow," a site where the state exercises its right to kill or permanently disfigure (Kanwal, 2021). The destruction is so absolute that it strips away all local value and social relations—a "decoding" that leaves Hiroko in a "chaos of movement" as she seeks to reconstruct a sense of self outside the ruins of Japan (Veyret, 2018).

The state further captures this trauma by imposing a mythicized identity upon the survivor. Hiroko is reterritorialized within the Japanese social framework not as an individual with potential, but as a symbolic archetype: "Already she had started to feel that word 'hibakusha' start to consume her life. To the Japanese she was nothing beyond an explosion-affected person; that was her defining feature" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 49). The term "Hibakusha" carries a "spatio-temporal dimension" that prevents Hiroko from being an actor in a socially familiar environment (Svensson, 2023). This labeling constitutes a form of state capture where the individual is reduced to a "single element: vengeance or justice," and all other components of their personality are "shrugged off" (Kanwal, 2021; Veyret, 2018). Rehman and Yasmin (2025) argue that such "institutionalized acts of violence" ensure that the marginalized subject is never fully reintegrated but remains legally and socially tethered to the trauma of their origin. Consequently, Hiroko's decision to leave for Delhi is her first "line of flight"—

a willful rejection of the state's traumatic coding in search of a "smooth space" where identity can be negotiated rather than imposed (Veyret, 2018).

### **Colonial Striation and Rhizomatic Resistance in Delhi**

In 1947 Delhi, Hiroko enters a territory defined by the "royal science" of British colonialism—a machine of capture that utilizes "rigid segmentation" to order the world into binary categories of colonizer and colonized (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). James Burton represents this arborescent logic, viewing his Muslim employee, Sajjad Ashraf, as an "Other" whose culture and ambitions are systematically undermined (Abbas & Iqbal, 2023). The colonial state attempts to capture Hiroko by confining her to the role of a "foreign object" to be managed or "mothered" by Elizabeth Burton. James attempts to limit Hiroko's linguistic and social exploration, reinforcing the colonial hierarchy: "It's not necessary. English serves you fine. The native... can understand simple English if you just know a clutch of Urdu words to throw into the mix" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 57). James's dismissal of Urdu is a manifestation of the colonial "striated space" that seeks to maintain an asymmetry of power between the West and the Orient (Svensson, 2023). Svensson (2023) identifies this as an attempt at the "infantilization" of Hiroko, where her agency is suppressed by the monologism of dominant colonial discourse. By restricting her to English, the state attempts to reterritorialize her within a manageable segment of the Raj's hierarchy. However, Hiroko's knowledge of both Eastern and Western languages (Japanese, German, and English) allows her to "disrupt all hierarchies" of the British Empire, resisting the unevenness of colonial intimacy (Svensson, 2023).

Hiroko resists this striation by forming a rhizomatic connection with Sajjad through the Urdu lesson: "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" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 90). This connection functions as a "rhizomatic assemblage" that bypasses the hierarchical trunk of the state. Ahsan and Raza (2024) argue that Hiroko's choice to learn Urdu—and her discovery of terms like *gham-kaur* (grief-eaters)—signals her trust and emotional negotiation with her new environment (Rehman & Yasmin, 2025). By identifying similarities between Japanese and Indian traditions, she engages in "nomadic becoming," a physical and aesthetic mobility that is a willful choice against "territorializing oppressive forces" (Veyret, 2018). Iqbal and Anwar (2025) suggest that while the state attempts to ideologically silence such voices, Hiroko regains agency through "cross-cultural solidarity," transforming the Urdu lesson into a site of resistance against patriarchal and colonial power structures.

### **Partition, Karachi, and Legislative Fictions**

The 1947 Partition functions as a violent reterritorialization where the state apparatus employs "legislative fictions" to categorize and fix the movement of bodies (Shamsie, 2009). Sajjad Ashraf becomes a victim of this "machine of capture" when he is denied re-entry into his ancestral home in Delhi while vacationing in Istanbul. "They said I chose to leave... They said I'm one of the Muslims who chose to leave India. It can't be unchosen. They said I can't go back to Dilli. I can't go back home" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 125). Veyret (2018) argues that this denial is a "mode of apprehension" where the state's history of partition is internalized as a permanent identity rupture. By labeling Sajjad's absence as a "choice," the state weaponizes statelessness, transforming him from a resident into a "subject of a foreign state"—a legislative fiction that erases his

ancestral rights (Svensson, 2023). This forced displacement into Karachi ensures that Sajjad remains in a state of "reterritorialized stasis" (Kanwal, 2021).

In 1980s Karachi, the state's "political ecology" further striates personal lives. Hiroko maintains a "rhizomatic existence," remaining "at home in the idea of foreignness" (p. 141), but her son, Raza Konrad Ashraf, suffers from an "unsettled identity" (Rehman & Yasmin, 2025). Raza perceives himself as a "bombed-marked mongrel" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 191), a self-identification that mirrors the state's failure to provide a "smooth space" for multicultural identities. This confusion leads Raza toward the "mujahideen" training camp, a Deleuzian "war machine" that the state ostensibly supports but ultimately uses as a pretext for surveillance (Veyret, 2018). Rashid (2023) asserts that identities in this section are "knotted with the history of the state and state terrorism." The camp represents a site where "boys were more functional as weapons than as humans" (p. 108), illustrating how the state captures nomadic desire and tethers it to a militarized logic (Ahsan & Raza, 2024).

### **New York and the Global State of Exception**

The post-9/11 section in New York represents the final reterritorialization of the global diasporic body into a "hostile environment" (Svensson, 2023). The 9/11 attacks act as a second "historical collision," triggering "wholesale carnage" and a global "state of exception" (Veyret, 2018; Kanwal, 2021). In this territory, the state exercises "necropower" through anti-terror legislation that creates "death-worlds" where populations are treated as "zombies" without rights (Kanwal, 2021). The novel's prologue—and concluding reality—details the literal stripping of the subject's agency: "Once inside the cell, they remove his shackles and tell him that he'll be clad in an orange jumpsuit. The chill shine of the metal bench causes his body to cower" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 1). Raza's detention in Guantánamo is the physical manifestation of the "weaponization of statelessness." Sobia Khan (2025) argues that the immigrant becomes a "convenient subject" for a law that transcends territorial limits. Kanwal (2021) asserts that Raza has been transformed into *homo sacer*—a life that can be killed by the state with impunity because it exists in a "juridical void." The state's "machine of capture" here is absolute; it discards the individual's history and potential, reducing him to a "terrorist suspect" through the "conflationary rhetoric" of global security (Kanwal, 2021; Sobia Khan, 2025).

Kim Burton's betrayal of Abdullah and Raza reflects the return of exclusionary nationalism: "The Muslim community will have to suffer until it gets its house in order... Strip-searching people who look like they're from the Middle East or Pakistan... Discriminatory stuff" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 301). Kim personifies the "moral dissonance" of Western power, where empathy is limited by racialized borders (Rehman & Yasmin, 2025). Her actions represent the "reterritorialization" of the next generation into the state's paranoid "root-tree" logic, where "racial legibility" determines who is allowed to move and who must be detained (Sobia Khan, 2025). Svensson (2023) notes that Hiroko's final disillusionment occurs when the United States, which she once viewed through the lens of cosmopolitan potential, becomes a site where identity is "weighed" and found wanting by the state's punitive framework. Ultimately, the novel illustrates that the state "engineers" a permanent stasis for the fugitive soul, ensuring that the marginalized remain legally and socially tethered to the periphery (Veyret, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* maps the struggle of the "fugitive soul" to maintain a rhizomatic existence against the arborescent power of the nation-state. This research has demonstrated that Hiroko Tanaka's trajectory across six decades is not merely a chronicle of displacement but a series of violent decodings and recodings that expose the modern state as a "machine of capture." From the absolute deterritorialization of Nagasaki to the global state of exception in post-9/11 New York, the state apparatus actively engineers the stasis of marginalized subjects within "legislative fictions" and punitive legal frameworks. By weaponizing statelessness, the state transforms the diasporic body into a permanent "Other," ensuring it remains legally and socially tethered to the institutionalized periphery (Kanwal, 2021; Veyret, 2018).

The study reveals that Hiroko's resilient nomadism—her "molecularisation of self"—functions as a persistent "line of flight" that resists the over-arching grand narratives of nationalism and ethnocentrism (Veyret, 2018; Chambers, 2021). Her multilingualism and reconstructive memory allow her to inhabit "smooth spaces" between borders, suggesting that true belonging is not a destination provided by the state but an unstable, evolving social relation (Svensson, 2023). However, the capture of her son, Raza, in the orange jumpsuit of Guantánamo underscores the terrifying efficacy of the state's "necropower" in the contemporary era. It illustrates how the "distributed infrastructures of the global border regime" have become pervasive enough to capture desire and movement anywhere in the world (Sobia Khan, 2025).

Ultimately, *Burnt Shadows* suggests that while the state attempts to reterritorialize the marginalized into manageable, traumatic archetypes like the "Hibakusha" or the "terrorist suspect," the fugitive soul continues to discover new forms of "nomadic interconnectedness" (Svensson, 2023). This resilience is found not in personal assimilation but in the unwavering determination to remain "different" while moving across cultures (Ahsan & Raza, 2024). The novel serves as a powerful rebuttal to the "monologism" of state-sanctioned history, insisting instead on a "transnational memory" that acknowledges all forms of suffering across the fault lines of the 20th and 21st centuries (Abbas et al., 2026; Veyret, 2018).

Future scholarly inquiry could benefit from exploring the intersection of Deleuzian "war machines" with the emerging field of war ecology in Shamsie's work, investigating how environmental degradation in "sacrificial zones" acts as a form of enduring imperial aggression (Rashid, 2023). Additionally, researchers might apply the Deleuzian concept of the "Body without Organs" to analyze the gendered dimensions of Hiroko's resistance, particularly how her physical back becomes a site where nationalistic and colonial codes are both seared and subsequently defied through female solidarity (Ahsan & Raza, 2024; Ahsan et al., 2023). Finally, a comparative analysis between *Burnt Shadows* and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* using the framework of "distributed infrastructures" could provide deeper insights into how the global border regime utilizes technology to "weigh the soul" of the modern migrant (Sobia Khan, 2025).

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