

POWER RELATIONS REPRESENTED IN *BURNT SHADOWS* AND *HOPE AND OTHER DANGEROUS PURSUITS*

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Abstract

This paper examines the critics of power in *Burnt Shadows* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*. As a literary study, this paper tries to find the main cause of the political and economic downfall of colonized countries and countries destined for immigrants and diasporas mentioned in the text by focusing on political clashes between policy makers and the people through power relations, a theory suggested by Michel Foucault to deconstruct interlinked power distribution among social hierarchies. These novels talk about the dynamic life of a post-war family and immigrants, victims of the policy makers who hold the power over the people. The ignorance over millions of human lives turns them into mere statistics rather than sentient beings. Therefore, this paper argues that these novels try to evoke humanity's issues by intertwining storytelling for every chapter through characters' intrigues of life related to the actual real-world problem. This paper uses a descriptive qualitative method, analyzing textual evidence written in the narratives. The findings indicate that the characters express their resistance through personal traits, pop-culture references, and acts of defiance against those in power, despite feeling powerless.

Keywords: Power Relations, Governmentality, Muslimah Literature

INTRODUCTION

War and migration are not only historical or humanitarian issues; they are also consequences of power. Political decisions made by states, military institutions, and border authorities determine who is protected, who is displaced, who is allowed to move, and who is treated as a threat. In literary narratives, these large structures of power become visible through individual lives. Fiction can therefore challenge the reduction of war victims and migrants into statistics by showing how political violence, forced movement, and institutional control affect bodies, identities, memories, and everyday survival.

Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* and Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* both explore how vulnerable people live under such structures of power. Shamsie's novel follows Hiroko Tanaka from the atomic bombing of Nagasaki to post-9/11 political anxieties, tracing how war, empire, displacement, and suspicion continue across generations. Lalami's novel portrays Moroccan migrants who attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea into Spain because economic hardship, corruption, social limitation, and border inequality make migration appear to be their only possible path toward a better life.

Although the novels differ in setting, form, and historical scale, they are comparable because both represent displacement as the result of political and institutional power. In *Burnt Shadows*, war does not end with physical destruction; it continues through trauma, racial suspicion, surveillance, and the long reach of geopolitical conflict. In *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, migration is not presented simply as personal ambition but as a response to social exclusion and as an experience controlled by borders, documents, police, and immigration law. Both novels therefore reveal how power regulates movement and transforms displaced people into subjects who are watched, categorized, and restricted.

Michel Foucault's concepts of power relations and governmentality provide a useful framework for reading these representations. For Foucault, power is not possessed only by rulers or governments; it circulates through institutions, social relations, legal systems, and everyday practices. Governmentality explains how modern power manages populations by classifying, observing, regulating, and normalizing them. Applied to these novels, this framework shows how military violence, border control, immigration papers, legal status, and surveillance become mechanisms through which displaced characters are governed.

Several previous studies have examined issues related to migration, gender, identity, and postcolonial agencies in *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*. Alami (2012) argues that Lalami's depiction of "illegal" crossing is connected to historical memory and postcolonial agency, while Mamah (2020) reads migration in the novel as both a physical and symbolic crossing shaped by social injustice. Segall (2019) focuses on gender and religious transformation, showing how women characters negotiate belief, agency, and social constraint. Abunasser (2016) further emphasizes the deterritorialized self in Lalami's novel, explaining how migrant identities are suspended between Morocco and Spain. In a broader theoretical context, Bauböck and Faist (2010) discuss diaspora and transnationalism, while Czarnecka (2018), Lynch (2014), and Foucault's own works provide important foundations for understanding power relations and governmentality. These studies are useful for understanding migration, identity, and power; however, less attention has been given to a comparative reading that connects *Burnt Shadows* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* through Foucauldian power relations and governmentality. This study addresses that gap by examining how state violence, border regulation, and

bureaucratic authority operate across both texts and how marginalized characters respond to these forms of control.

This paper argues that *Burnt Shadows* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* critique power relations by showing how state violence, border control, and bureaucratic authority turn displaced people into regulated subjects. At the same time, both novels show that marginalized characters are not entirely passive, because they resist through memory, movement, speech, survival, and everyday acts of defiance. By reading the two novels comparatively through Foucault's theory, this study demonstrates how literature exposes the human consequences of political systems that transform suffering into data and mobility into a problem of control.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies on Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* have emphasized migration, crossing, identity, and postcolonial agency. Alami (2012) argues that Lalami's representation of "illegal" crossing is not merely an economic issue but is also shaped by historical memory and postcolonial relations between Morocco and Spain. Similarly, Mamah (2020) reads crossing in the novel as both a physical movement across borders and a symbolic passage through social, ideological, and psychological boundaries. Abunasser (2016) further explains that the migrant subject in Lalami's novel becomes deterritorialized, suspended between Morocco and Spain and unable to belong fully to either space. These studies are important because they show that migration in Lalami's fiction is not simply individual escape, but a condition produced by history, inequality, and institutional exclusion.

Studies on gender and vulnerability in Lalami's novel further show how migration is shaped by social and economic pressures. Segall (2019) examines religious transformation and gendered agency in *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, especially how female characters negotiate belief, survival, and social constraint. Cohen and van der Meulen Rodgers (2021) also provide a useful framework for understanding how capitalist structures and gendered forms of labor produce vulnerability among women. These perspectives help explain why characters such as Faten and Halima do not migrate only because of personal desire, but because patriarchal, economic, and institutional pressures limit their choices. Within the focus of this study, however, gender is treated as one dimension of vulnerability under broader systems of power rather than as the central framework.

While Lalami scholarship highlights border crossing and migrant identity, Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* can be approached through war, displacement, and transnational power. The novel moves from Nagasaki to India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the United States, showing how historical violence travels across time and geography. Bauböck and Faist's (2010) discussion of diaspora and transnationalism is useful for understanding how identity is formed across borders, while Crippa et al. (2025) help contextualize conflict as

one cause of migration. In this sense, *Burnt Shadows* can be read alongside Lalami's novel because both texts represent displaced people whose lives are shaped by political violence, border regimes, and unequal global power.

Michel Foucault's theory of power relations and governmentality provides the theoretical foundation for this study. In *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault (1980) explains that power circulates through social relations rather than existing only in the hands of rulers. In *The Foucault Effect*, Foucault (1991) develops the concept of governmentality to describe how modern power manages populations through institutions, classification, regulation, and normalization. *Discipline and Punish* (1995) further show how bodies become objects of surveillance and discipline. Lynch (2014) and Czarnecka (2018) clarify this framework by emphasizing that power operates through networks of relations, while Ferreira-da-Silva et al. (2015) demonstrates how Foucauldian theory can be applied to bureaucratic and administrative systems.

Based on these studies, this paper positions itself at the intersection of migration studies, postcolonial literary analysis, and Foucauldian power theory. Existing research has discussed Lalami's representation of clandestine migration, gendered agency, and deterritorialized identity, while broader theoretical works explain diaspora, transnationalism, power relations, and governmentality. However, there remains a need for a comparative analysis that reads *Burnt Shadows* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* together through state violence, border control, bureaucratic authority, and resistance. This study fills that gap by examining how both novels humanize displaced subjects who are regulated by political systems yet continue to resist through memory, mobility, speech, and everyday defiance.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method because it examines literary texts through interpretation rather than numerical measurement. The primary data are textual evidence from Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* and Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, especially passages that represent war, migration, border control, bureaucracy, displacement, and resistance. The secondary data are scholarly works on migration, diaspora, transnationalism, gendered vulnerability, postcolonial agency, and Foucauldian power theory, as discussed in the literature review.

The analysis is guided by Michel Foucault's concepts of power relations and governmentality. Power relations are used to examine how authority circulates through states, institutions, social hierarchies, and interpersonal relations. Governmentality is used to analyze how modern power manages people through classification, surveillance, legal status, borders, documents, and bureaucratic procedures. These concepts allow the study to identify how displaced characters are not only affected by direct violence but also regulated by political and institutional systems.

The research procedure consists of several steps. First, the two novels are read closely to identify passages related to state violence, migration control, bureaucratic authority,

and resistance. Second, the selected passages are categorized according to the main analytical concerns of this study: war and geopolitical violence in *Burnt Shadows*, border control and immigration bureaucracy in *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, and characters' responses to these systems of control. Third, the passages are interpreted through Foucauldian theory and supported by previous studies on migration, transnationalism, gendered vulnerability, and power. Finally, the findings are compared to show how both novels humanize displaced subjects who are turned into regulated bodies by political systems.

The scope of this study is limited to textual analysis of the two novels and does not attempt to measure real migration data or evaluate political policy directly. Historical and political contexts are used only to support literary interpretation. Therefore, the method emphasizes how novels represent power, displacement, and resistance through narrative structure, characterization, imagery, dialogue, and selected textual details.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that *Burnt Shadows* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* represent power as a system that operates through war, borders, bureaucracy, gendered norms, and everyday forms of regulation. In *Burnt Shadows*, power appears most clearly through state violence, geopolitical conflict, and the long-term effects of war on displaced subjects. In *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, power is represented through border control, immigration law, legal documents, and the classification of migrants as legal or illegal. Although these systems restrict the characters' movements and identities, both novels also show that power is never absolute because marginalized characters continue to resist through memory, mobility, speech, survival, and ordinary acts of defiance.

A significant finding of this study is that both novels move the discussion of power away from a simple opposition between oppressor and victim. Instead, they show that power is dispersed through many connected mechanisms: the state, the military, immigration offices, family expectations, economic inequality, language, and social judgment. This confirms Foucault's view that power should not be understood only as direct domination from above, but as a network that organizes what people can say, where they can go, how they are identified, and whether they are recognized as legitimate subjects. Therefore, the displaced characters in the two novels are not controlled by one single authority; they are shaped by overlapping systems that regulate their bodies, memories, movements, and social possibilities.

State Violence and Geopolitical Power in *Burnt Shadows*

"Faintly, he wondered if he really believed this. 'No, modernism does not belong to the English. The opposite, in fact. They've reached the end of their history. They'll go back to their cold island and spend the next ten generations dreaming of everything they've lost.' 'They sound like the Muslims of India.' Sajjad stood up, laughing." (Shamsie, 2009, p. 53)

In *Burnt Shadows*, state violence operates not only through direct military destruction but also through the long historical effects of empire, war, and geopolitical suspicion. Sajjad's statement about English modernity challenges the assumption that civilization and progress belong permanently to colonial power. His irony suggests that power is unstable: empires imagine themselves as permanent, yet they can also decline. Through this dialogue, Shamsie represents power relations as historical and reversible rather than fixed. This point supports Foucault's idea that power circulates through social relations and is always accompanied by the possibility of resistance.

This reading is strengthened by Foucault's claim that power does not simply belong to one sovereign center but moves through changing relations, institutions, and historical formations. In this sense, colonial authority in *Burnt Shadows* is not only represented as political domination but also as a system that shapes ideas of modernity, civilization, language, and cultural value. Czarnecka (2018) explains that power can be understood as a network of relationships rather than a single possession, and this helps clarify why Shamsie's novel presents empire as both powerful and vulnerable. Sajjad's mockery of English decline reveals that imperial power depends on historical narratives that can be challenged, repeated, or reversed by colonized subjects.

The discussion of geopolitical power in *Burnt Shadows* is also important because Shamsie does not present war as an isolated event. The bombing of Nagasaki, the Partition of India, Cold War politics, the Afghan conflict, and post-9/11 suspicion form a chain of historical violence that follows Hiroko and the next generation across different national spaces. This continuity suggests that state violence produces not only immediate suffering but also long-term categories of suspicion and belonging. Hiroko's body, memory, and migration history become evidence that war continues after the battlefield has disappeared. In this way, the novel broadens the meaning of power by showing how political decisions made in one place continue to govern intimate lives elsewhere.

Border Control and Governmentality in *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*

"The clock on the wall at the Guardia Civil post shows six in the morning. Murad sits on a metal chair, handcuffed. There are men and women, all wrapped in blankets like him, huddled close together to stay warm. He doesn't recognize many of them; most came on other boats. Scarface sits alone, smoking a cigarette, one leg resting on the other, one shoe missing." (Lalami, 2005, p. 8)

In *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, the border functions as a form of governmentality because it determines who may move freely and who becomes classified as illegal. The Guardia Civil scene shows migrants transformed from individuals with hopes and histories into detained bodies gathered in one institutional space. The handcuffs, blankets, metal chair, and official post emphasize that the border is not only a geographical line but also an apparatus of classification and control. Through this scene, Lalami shows how the state manages migrant bodies by arresting, separating, observing, and reducing them to the category of unauthorized entrants.

This finding supports Alami's (2012) argument that Lalami's depiction of illegal crossing is inseparable from historical memory and postcolonial agency. The migrants' crossing is not merely a private attempt to enter Europe; it is shaped by unequal histories between Morocco and Spain and by the continued power of borders to divide mobility from immobility. Mamah (2020) also reads crossing in the novel as both physical and symbolic, and the Guardia Civil scene confirms this interpretation because the migrants cross not only the sea but also a system of legal judgment. Through Foucault's concept of governmentality, this moment can be read as a process in which the state manages mobility by producing categories such as documented, undocumented, legal, illegal, citizen, and foreigner.

Compared with *Burnt Shadows*, Lalami's novel presents power on a smaller and more immediate scale, yet the effect is equally political. The migrants are not caught in global war, but they are caught in a global hierarchy of mobility that privileges some passports and criminalizes others. The sea crossing therefore becomes more than a journey from Morocco to Spain; it becomes a test of who is allowed to imagine a future. The border produces fear before, during, and after the crossing because the characters know that their value will be judged through documents, nationality, labor status, and police recognition. This finding strengthens the argument that governmentality works by making mobility conditional and by transforming hope itself into a regulated and risky act.

Bureaucratic Authority, Documents, and Legal Status

"Martín didn't seem to mind the sarcasm. 'I want to help you,' he said, stroking her arm. He said he could help her get her immigration papers, that he knew of loopholes in the law, that she could be legal, that she wouldn't need to be on the streets, that she could get a real job, start a new life." (Lalami, 2005, p. 75)

Bureaucratic authority in both novels demonstrates how power becomes effective not only through violence but also through documents, legal categories, and institutional knowledge. Martín's promise to help Faten obtain immigration papers shows how legal status becomes a tool of control. His knowledge of "loopholes in the law" gives him power over Faten because she needs documents in order to become socially visible, employable, and protected. From a Foucauldian perspective, this scene shows governmentality at work: the state's categories of legal and illegal create dependency, while individuals who understand the system can exploit those who remain outside it.

Foucault's discussion of governmentality is useful here because it shows how modern power governs through administrative procedures rather than only through force. Immigration papers are not neutral objects; they determine whether Faten can work, move, rent, or live without fear of exposure. Abunasser's (2016) idea of the deterritorialized self also helps explain Faten's condition, because her lack of secure legal status leaves her suspended between spaces: she is no longer fully protected by Morocco and not yet recognized by Spain. Her vulnerability is therefore produced by the

bureaucratic system that makes legality a condition for dignity, safety, and social belonging.

"Larbi smiled bitterly. Here she was, the purist, the hard-liner, the anticorruption activist, but in the end, she wanted her friend to get special treatment, just like everyone else. 'No more talk of meritocracy?' he asked. Noura looked down." (Lalami, 2005, p. 27)

The conversation between Larbi and Noura further shows how bureaucracy is shaped by patronage and social pressure. Noura's request for special treatment contradicts her anticorruption ideals, revealing that institutional fairness is difficult to maintain when personal networks influence access to opportunity. Ferreira-da-Silva et al. (2015) note that Foucauldian approaches to administration help explain how institutional systems discipline people while also producing unequal forms of evaluation. In Lalami's novel, meritocracy becomes fragile because bureaucratic power is not neutral; it is shaped by family ties, class position, and personal influence.

This scene also complicates the idea that bureaucracy works only through formal rules. Ring and Grasso (2022) show that corruption often operates through intimate and institutional connections, while Ottervik and Su (2023) connect patriarchal systems with unequal forms of fairness. In Lalami's novel, access to opportunity depends not only on official qualifications but also on family relations, social position, and the ability to request exceptions. Therefore, bureaucracy becomes a field of power relations in which formal ideals such as meritocracy are weakened by informal networks. This supports the paper's broader claim that power operates through both visible institutions and everyday social arrangements.

Gendered Vulnerability under Systems of Power

"Sajjad had no political allegiances, but many narrative preferences in the stories of history: two of his favourite characters were the Rani of Jhansi and Razia of the Mamluk Dynasty: powerful women who led troops and sat in council with men. And it was his mother who had told him their stories and made him fall in love with those images of womanhood." (Shamsie, 2009, p. 52)

The novels also reveal that displacement is gendered because women experience power through additional pressures of social judgment, economic dependency, and bodily vulnerability. Sajjad's admiration for the Rani of Jhansi and Razia of the Mamluk Dynasty introduces an alternative image of womanhood that challenges patriarchal assumptions about authority. These historical women are remembered as figures who led armies and participated in political councils, spaces usually associated with masculine power. In this sense, Shamsie uses Sajjad's memory to suggest that gender hierarchy is not natural or permanent but historically contested.

This point corresponds with Segall's (2019) reading of Lalami's novel, which emphasizes that gendered agency is shaped by religious, social, and political pressures

rather than by a simple opposition between oppression and freedom. Gendered vulnerability in both novels should therefore be understood as part of wider power relations. Women characters face social expectations about respectability, family duty, sexuality, faith, and work, while also being affected by state violence and migration systems. Cohen and van der Meulen Rodgers (2021) further show that economic structures often intensify women's vulnerability, especially when labor and survival depend on unequal social arrangements. Thus, gender in this study functions as a supporting dimension of governmentality because women's bodies and choices are disciplined by both institutions and social norms.

The gendered dimension of the findings also strengthens the comparative value of the study. In both novels, women's vulnerability is not caused only by personal weakness or private misfortune; it is produced by the intersection of political history, family authority, economic need, and institutional control. Hiroko's survival is marked by the visible and invisible wounds of war, while Faten and Halima face social expectations and economic pressures that limit the choices available to them. These women do not simply suffer under power; they expose how power enters domestic life, work, sexuality, respectability, and the body. The novels therefore show that governmentality is not only a matter of state policy but also of everyday norms that teach women where they may belong and how they may survive.

Resistance through Memory, Mobility, and Speech

"Modern India will start the day the English leave. Or perhaps it started the day we used their language to tell them to go home." (Shamsie, 2009, p. 52)

Although both novels expose oppressive systems of power, they also show that displaced subjects resist through language, memory, movement, and survival. Sajjad's statement about using English to tell the English to leave demonstrates how the language of colonial authority can be transformed into a tool of resistance. Rather than treating English only as a sign of domination, the passage presents language as a contested space where the colonized can speak back to imperial power. This supports Foucault's view that where power exists, resistance is also possible.

Foucault's theory is important for this section because it prevents resistance from being understood only as open rebellion. If power circulates through everyday relations, then resistance can also appear in everyday practices. Sajjad's use of English against colonial authority, Hiroko's insistence on remembering the violence of Nagasaki, and the migrants' decision to cross the sea all show different forms of agency within constraint. Bauböck and Faist's (2010) discussion of diaspora and transnationalism also helps explain why mobility can function as both vulnerability and resistance: crossing borders exposes characters to regulation, but it also shows their refusal to remain fixed in the spaces assigned to them by poverty, war, or empire.

The strongest form of resistance in these novels is not always heroic confrontation but the refusal to disappear. Hiroko resists by carrying memory across borders and by refusing to let history be reduced to official narratives of war and security. Lalami's migrants resist by crossing, speaking, negotiating, working, praying, returning, or continuing to desire dignity despite the systems that define them as illegal or disposable. These forms of resistance may appear small, but they are significant because they interrupt the categories imposed by power. The characters insist on being seen as complex human beings rather than as migrants, suspects, victims, or administrative cases. This is where the ethical force of both novels becomes clear: literature restores individuality to people whom institutions often reduce to files, threats, or statistics.

Taken together, the two novels show that power works through both visible and invisible mechanisms. In *Burnt Shadows*, state violence leaves bodily, emotional, and historical marks that continue across generations, while colonial and geopolitical power shape how characters understand identity, belonging, and suspicion. In *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, border control and bureaucracy determine whether migrants are recognized as legal subjects or rejected as illegal bodies. These findings extend previous studies on Lalami's crossing, deterritorialized identity, and gendered agency by placing them in a comparative framework with Shamsie's representation of war and displacement. They also confirm the usefulness of Foucault's theory because power in both novels operates not only through armies and police, but also through documents, language, gender norms, institutions, and everyday interactions. Yet neither novel presents the characters as completely powerless. Their resistance appears in acts of remembering, crossing, speaking, negotiating, and surviving. Through these representations, Shamsie and Lalami humanize displaced people and challenge political systems that turn suffering into statistics and mobility into a problem of control.

In summary, the discussion demonstrates that *Burnt Shadows* and *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* present displacement as a condition produced by interrelated systems of power rather than by individual failure or accidental movement. Shamsie emphasizes how war, empire, and geopolitical suspicion continue to govern lives across generations, while Lalami focuses on how borders, documents, corruption, and immigration law regulate migrant bodies and futures. Through a Foucauldian perspective, both novels reveal that power operates through state violence, bureaucracy, gendered expectations, and everyday social relations. However, the characters' acts of remembering, crossing, speaking, and surviving show that resistance remains possible even within restrictive systems. This synthesis confirms the central argument of the study: literature can expose the human consequences of political control while restoring dignity and individuality to displaced subjects.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* and Laila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* represent power relations through state violence,

border control, bureaucratic authority, and resistance. Using Foucault's concepts of power relations and governmentality, the analysis shows that power does not operate only through direct violence, but also through institutions, borders, documents, legal categories, surveillance, and social norms. In *Burnt Shadows*, power is represented through the long-term effects of war, empire, displacement, and geopolitical suspicion. In *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits*, power appears through migration control, immigration papers, detention, and the classification of migrants as legal or illegal subjects.

The comparison shows that both novels humanize displaced people by refusing to present them as passive victims or anonymous statistics. Although the characters are regulated by political and bureaucratic systems, they continue to resist through memory, movement, speech, negotiation, and survival. Their resistance may not always overturn oppressive structures, but it reveals that power is never complete or absolute. Through these representations, Shamsie and Lalami demonstrate that literature can expose the human consequences of political systems and restore ethical attention to people whom states often reduce to numbers, threats, or administrative categories.

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