Female agency in *Burnt Shadows* and Postcolonial Feminism in the EFL Classroom

Author: Vanja Floryd  
Supervisor: Anna Greek  
Examiner: Anna Thyberg  
Term: Spring 2019  
Subject: English  
Level: Bachelor  
Course code: 2ENÄ2E
Abstract

This essay analyses *Burnt Shadows* (2009) by Kamila Shamsie from a postcolonial feminist perspective, with a focus on agency of women, representation and re-presentation, and cultural stereotypes. The degree of agency in the main characters Hiroko, Elizabeth and Kim is discussed, followed by an analysis of the re-presentation of Indian, Pakistani and Arab Muslim women characters in the text, with a focus on homogenisation and voice. Moreover, suggestions of how to teach *Burnt Shadows* with a postcolonial (and) feminist lens within the course English 6 in the Swedish upper secondary school EFL classroom are discussed. It is concluded that Hiroko, Elizabeth and Kim have voice and agency to various degrees. Moreover, it is stated that Indian, Pakistani and Arab Muslim women are represented in a stereotypical and homogenising way, and their lack of voice obstruct the possibilities of regarding these characters from a contextual, historical, and cultural perspective. The pedagogical framework concludes that *Burnt Shadows* can be used to study postcolonial feminist theory in the EFL classroom. Given that the teacher is open-minded, inclusive and objective, the teaching can pursue equality and solidarity in line with the fundamental values of the Swedish upper secondary school.

Key words

*Burnt Shadows*, Kamila Shamsie, postcolonialism, feminism, literature, women, agency, EFL, upper secondary school
Table of contents

1 Introduction 1

2 Theory 4
   2.1 Postcolonial feminist theory 5
      2.1.1 Representation and re-presentation 5
      2.1.2 Othering 7
      2.1.3 “Third World women” 7
      2.1.4 Agency 9
      2.1.5 Cultural stereotypes 11
   2.2 Writings on Burnt Shadows 12
   2.3 Pedagogical framework 13
      2.3.1 The Syllabus 13
      2.3.2 Teaching Literature 15

3 Literary analysis 19
   3.1 Hiroko 19
   3.2 Elizabeth 23
   3.3 Kim 25
   3.4 Indian, Pakistani and Arab women 27

4 Teaching practices 30
   4.1 Pre-knowledge 30
   4.2 Teaching Postcolonial Feminist theory 31

5 Conclusion 35

6 Works cited list 37
1 Introduction

This essay presents a postcolonial feminist literary analysis and teaching discussion of the novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009) written by Kamila Shamsie. The literary analysis has a focus on female agency, representation and representation, and cultural stereotypes in *Burnt Shadows*. Thereafter, the pedagogical section discusses how to teach *Burnt Shadows* with a postcolonial, feminist and gender lens to EFL students in the Swedish upper secondary school.

*Burnt Shadows* and postcolonial feminism might seem to have nothing in common with EFL teaching. According to Truong Thi My Van, the literature of the EFL classroom is often concerned with famous and award-winning works, considered to be canonical (3). However, Wisam Khalid Abdul-Jabbar is critical to the lack of postcolonial literature in the classroom, and the high school teachers Susan Coryat and Colleen Clemens realised late in their teaching that the British canonical literature in their classroom lacked in presence of female authors (Abdul-Jabbar 222; Coryat and Clemens 42-3). This can indicate that the English literature teaching in the EFL classroom could benefit from literature written by women, and that postcolonial literature could be a good addition to the genres taught.

Furthermore, *Burnt Shadows* involves themes of social questions, gender issues and historical perspectives. These subjects are timeless, applicable to current-day contexts, and the language required to discuss them is useful also for situations beyond the literature seminar. Moreover, a feminist approach to literature is in specific supported by the curriculum for the Swedish upper secondary school, which states that teachers should, in their teaching, regard and respect norms and values aligned with human rights and equality between people (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Curriculum” 4; 10). Therefore, *Burnt Shadows* is relevant to the EFL classroom.
The storyline of *Burnt Shadows* stretches between 1945 and the early years of the 21st century. The novel follows women and men through their lives, facing recurring complications caused by the Second World War, the fall of the British Empire and the Partition of India. It also illustrates the social climate surrounding immigrants and refugees during the postcolonial era, and it involves the motifs of racism, class structures, and gender inequalities.

The central character of the story is the Japanese school teacher Hiroko Tanaka. Her father and the love of her life, Konrad Weiss, are both killed in the 1945 nuclear attack on Nagasaki. In grief, Hiroko travels to British India to visit the remaining relatives of Konrad: his half-sister Elizabeth and her husband James Burton. Hiroko’s arrival does not only affect the relationship between the Burtons, but also brings her together with their employee Sajjad Ashraf. Despite the critique of their cultural differences, Hiroko and Sajjad start a new life after the Partition of India. Yet their past should prove to be inescapable, and their connections to the Weiss-Burton family will affect them for generations.

The most important female characters in the novel are Hiroko, Elizabeth and Elizabeth’s granddaughter Kim. I suggest that women have voice and agency to various degrees, empowered by challenging gendered stereotypes, being educated, and being or becoming emancipated. In the literary analysis, I discuss their individual possibilities of voice and agency, and how it is either expressed or suppressed, from various perspectives on voice and agency. However, since *Burnt Shadows* evolves around the fall of British India, I argue that there should be an equal emphasis on not only the Western women but also the Indian, Pakistani and Arab women affected by the Partition of India.¹ Nevertheless, there are few or no detailed

---

¹ It is not expressed in the novel from where some women originates. What is clear is that one area described in the novel is inhabited by women and men origination primarily from Pathan and Hazare people. Some may originate from other Arabic countries, but this is not
representations and/or re-presentations of other than white or Japanese women in the novel. It seems as if voice and agency is constricted to Hiroko, Elizabeth and Kim, who are Japanese respectively white, Western characters. As Urvashi Butalia states in her essay, there is little research and documentation of the lives and deaths of Hindu and Muslim women during and after the Partition, which is one reason to raise awareness of the absence of these voices (19-20). Since there are few or none Hindu women characters in the novel, the focus of analysis is Muslim women. My next argument is thereby that the presence, voice, and/or agency of Indian, Pakistani and Arab Muslim women in the novel is overtaken by voices and agencies of the characters Hiroko, Elizabeth and Kim, as well as by male characters. This will be shown through giving examples from the novel and reading them through a postcolonial feminist lens with a focus on representation, re-presentation, agency and to some point voice.

As a final point, I suggest that Indian, Pakistani and Arab Muslim women are re-presented in a stereotypical way, which contributes to a homogenous image of these groups of women as being oppressed.

The results of the analysis are set in a teaching context. The multicultural classroom of today, alongside with current political discussions of equality in society and school, creates a need to uncover structural differences between societies and people, as well as the discourses used to approach them. Therefore, I suggest how the postcolonial (and) feminist perspective is relevant to the EFL classroom, and present possible methods for teaching these theoretical concepts when reading *Burnt Shadows* with students taking the course English 6.

specified. In the lack of more precise definitions, I address these women as “Pakistani and Arab”; fully aware of reality’s differences between these women, their history and their cultures. The concepts representation and re-presentation are explained in section 2.1.3.
In the following section, postcolonial feminist theory is presented. There, the definitions of theoretical concepts and terms in the essay are explained. Amongst others, Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s work *Under Western Eyes* (1984) is used. In her article, Mohanty examines how the homogeneity of “Third World women” is constructed by Western feminist scholars, which is relevant for the literary analysis. Moreover, cultural and gendered stereotypes of “Third World women”, Muslims, and Western women, are presented, as well as previoius writings on *Burnt Shadows*.

The pedagogical framework consists of curricular and syllabus-related support for teaching postcolonial and feminist literary theories, followed by previous research on literature and language teaching. Amongst the authors are Deborah Appleman, Helene Decke-Cornill and Laurenz Volkmann, Abdul-Jabbar, and Bo Lundahl. The first four are concerned with postcolonial (and) feminist perspectives within literature teaching, and Lundahl suggests methods to support students when reading in a foreign language.

2 Theory

In section 2, the main points which the literary analysis is based on are presented. Representation and re-presentation, othering, “Third World women”, and agency are all explained, and Mohanty’s work *Under Western Eyes* is presented. Given the topic of the essay, terms and expressions must be defined, especially as scholars use them differently and some expressions have no fixed definition. Moreover, to understand for example representation, I suggest that a background on othering is required. Furthermore, a background of agency (of women) is given, including comments on voice, since they in theory often are interconnected. Moving on, the cultural stereotypes section aims to present views on “Third World women” and Muslim women from a Western perspective. The section also
aims for highlighting the ideal image of the Western woman, to explain the contrast between her and the “Third World woman”. Following this is a section of previous writings on *Burnt Shadows* which address feminism and/or agency.

After the section of postcolonial feminist theory, extracts from the curriculum and syllabuses for the Swedish upper secondary school are highlighted. Then, theories, methods and concepts related to literature and EFL teaching are presented.

2.1 Postcolonial feminist theory

Introducing this section is a quote by Mary Eagleton, which summarises one of the main concerns of feminist theorists.

For feminist literary scholars, the recurring questions underpinning this relationship are: who is speaking and how is she speaking; to whom is she speaking and on behalf of whom is she speaking; how does she read me; how do I read her? (Eagleton 382)

This saying expresses the different perspectives which must be considered when reading from a feminist lens – how to avoid suppression of female voices through one’s own (mis)conceptions about, for example, the living conditions of the women in focus. That would also include reflection upon the reader’s own social role and status. This is relevant when discussing how postcolonial feminism can be used in the classroom.

2.1.1 Representation and re-presentation

Representation and re-presentation are important concepts for postcolonial feminist theory. The editors of *Gendered citizenship and the politics of representation* (2016), Hilde Danielsen et al., explain representation in a political context. There, it translates to “standing for” or “acting for” (Danielsen et al. 5-6). The authors furthermore discuss the assumption that women in for example politics act immediately in the interest of women: “Should we assume that women should only stand for
women or should they also act for women?” (Danielsen et al. 6). This is a relevant question especially when regarding one woman as the voice and agency of “all women”. Obviously, that is a homogenisation of women as one group with the same interests, which is discussed in section 2.1.4.

Whereas representation is the “standing for”/“acting for” concept, the editors argue that re-presentation is central to how women are represented in media, and how they are present in various cultural matters (Danielsen et al. 6-7). The concept is about how gender is “constructed, expressed and interpreted within shifting social, cultural and political contexts” (Danielsen et al. 7). In other words, re-presentation is not about the act of being representative for a group of individuals, but about how the individuals and groups “represented” are portrayed. In postcolonial feminist theory, how groups are “expressed and interpreted” might be especially important, in the question of re-presenting individuals in a way which leaves space for their voices and agency (Danielsen et al. 7).

In Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s discussions of representation and re-presentation, the primary matter is about voice: who is speaking, and for whom. She also presents a similar view of the two named concepts as Danielsen et al.: "Two senses of representation are being run together: representation as ‘speaking for,’ as in politics, and representation as ‘re-presentation,’ as in art or philosophy” (Spivak 28). Interpreting Spivak, she further states that “running” representation and re-presentation together in scholarly texts is not valid, because a theorist can in this sense not be representative of a group. The individuals belonging in such a created group are re-presented in a way which is not true to reality (Spivak 28).

Mohanty argues that there is a difference between how Western feminist scholars represent themselves and how they re-present “third world
women”. This self-representation tends to put Western women in a superior position to the re-presented women (Mohanty “Under” 337).

In this essay, I henceforth also use the expression re(-)presentation, in cases where it is possible to talk about both representation and re-presentation.

2.1.2 Othering

To support understanding of representation, re-presentation and homogenisation, an explanation of othering is included. Ania Loomba (2015) explains that othering is the “production of an irreconcilable difference” between binaries such as black and white, man and woman, and “self and other” (Loomba 72). During colonialism, it was yet another tool for colonisers to differ themselves from the people they colonised, and make themselves superior (Loomba 72). Loomba writes further that early re-presentations of for example Muslims, Africans and Turks often occur in “discussions in ‘colonial discourse’. . . as the static product of a timeless opposition between Western’ and ‘non-Western’ peoples and ideas” (72). The word is still relevant, for example because it can reveal “us-and-them”-notions in for example re-presentations of cultures, which is discussed closer in section 3 and 4.

2.1.3 “Third World women”

To begin with, Mohanty’s definition of the term “Third World” is given. Mohanty admits the issues with naming geographical areas “third” or “first” world, since such expressions in themselves are homogenising and generalising. She argues that they maintain ideas and norms related to, amongst others, culture and ideology, but that “Third World” is the most

---

3 When quoting, “Third World” is written with or without capitalisation depending on the text quoted. Remaining cases is written with first letter capitalised in agreement with the Oxford English Dictionary (OED).
suitable term available (Mohanty “Under” 354n3). In agreement with the generalising tone in the expression, the term is in this text put within quotation marks - obviously with reservations for quotes - to state the critical use of it.

As for all groups with political and socioeconomic interests, women across the world need persons to represent the collective voice of their interests. In that way, possibilities to forward important questions, and make local and global changes, are enabled. However, all women do not share the same struggle, all women do not consider themselves oppressed and all oppression of women is not caused by the same things. It is rather contextually, culturally and historically bound (Mohanty “Under” 338; 340). Therefore, representatives should only represent those with the contextually similar interests and struggles. Otherwise, the representation might transform into a re-presentation untrue to reality. This can further cause homogenisation of the re-presented group, since the representative might not understand the specific and contextual political and societal interests of the represented. It might also maintain inequalities in possession of power amongst women, and thereby create othering between two groups. For example, Western women have a social privilege in juxtaposition to women elsewhere. They might therefore not be be suitable to represent, even less represent, less privileged women, due to their assumed inexperience of historical and social aspects of other cultures than their own.

Despite the power inequalities between various groups of women, homogenising re-presentation is according to Mohanty a recurring matter amongst many Western feminist scholars (“Under” 335-8). She argues that they often construct non-Western women as a homogenous group, “Third World women”, in which their assumed oppression by patriarchy, specifically the “sameness” in this oppression, connects them to each other (“Under” 335-8). Mohanty points out the difficulties with creating a homogenous group such as that, emphasising that oppression always appears
in a context specific to history, ethnicity, and local social culture. Thereby, she states, one oppression cannot be “the same” as another (“Under” 338; 340-2; 344; 348).

Mohanty gives examples to justify her arguments. She explains, amongst other things, that sociocultural structures as labor division between men and women, or segregation of women in religious contexts, cannot be contracted as “oppression of women” and regarded through a lens of sameness (“Under” 347). These aspects are bound to a cultural context and must be regarded from there.

2.1.4 Agency

There is no absolute definition of agency, thus it can be defined in different ways and be of various natures dependent on what discipline it is used within. Various scholars are therefore addressed to show various types of agency and explain in what way it is used in this essay.

The book *Voice and Agency* (2014) by Jeni Klugman et al. discusses why voice and agency are important to make political changes for women and girls, and how this can be attained. The writers define agency as a capacity of making individual decisions, and of acting on these decisions “to achieve a desired outcome” (Klugman et al. 21). Moreover, they define voice as the ability to make oneself heard in society and “to shape and share in discussions, discourse, and decisions” (Klugman et al. 21).

Klugman et al. state that agency can express itself in multiple ways, as mentioned through making one’s own decisions, through one’s relationships, through possessing properties or privileges as land, education or health, through participating in politics and through movement (35). The authors stress especially the importance of mobility for agency. They define it as “an individual’s physical capacity to move freely beyond the household”, but also “to move across social and economic spheres” (Klugman et al. 35). The authors also claim that mobility infuses “social and
professional networks” and “enables participation in the economy and civic life” (Klugman et al. 35). In *Burnt Shadows*, mobility is indeed one major thing that proves agency for Hiroko especially, which is shown in section 3.

Another way of defining agency is to set it in relation to language and the act of speech. Scholars within this discourse argue that agency needs spaces to exist, or to be mediated (Ahearn 112; Miller 444). Laura M. Ahearn proposes a definition of agency as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” as well as “the idea of mediating agency through a sociocultural space (112). In a similar way, Elizabeth R. Miller claims that spaces as interactive, sociocultural mediums in themselves can have agency, which is realised through creating linguistic meaning in those spaces (444-7). To connect agency and language, Ahearn presents an anthropologist linguistic perspective. In this discipline, language is seen as “social action, a cultural resource, and a set of sociocultural practices” (Ahearn 110). Language is thereby a social action, just as agency might be the capacity of taking action. Drawing upon Miller and Ahearn, language and the act of speech can therefore be seen as one form of agency in a sociocultural context.

Ahearn also presents a critical review of certain definitions of agency. For example, she disagrees with feminists who regard agency as a parable to resistance towards patriarchy (115). The author suggests that such a perspective “is only one of many forms of agency” (115). With a reference to Ortner (1995), Ahearn states that “there is no such thing as pure resistance” because of the complexity of the motivations which found all human action (116). This is important for the essay’s main questions, due to their nature of investigating how agency is portrayed in different characters.

As mentioned in the introduction, Butalia tries to cover living conditions of Hindu and Muslim women during the process of the Partition of India (19-20). In her article, she describes a story of the Village Thoa Khalsa in India, where about 90 Sikh women took part in a “collective suicide” a few months before the Partition (14). Many villages in the area
were under attack, and in the mass killing women were abducted, raped, and violated (14). According to Butalia, these suicides was an expression for the women involved to remain “pure”, preserve the “honour” of their community, and to eliminate the risk of being forced to conversion (13-16; 19-20). Butalia questions whether these women were victims, or martyrs taking action, and states that there might have been both (15). Some could have acted upon the cultural idea of honouring the community, others chose death than experience the horrible events that might have caused them instead, and many could have acted upon the conditions of the particular circumstance (Butalia 15-16). Butalia also suggests that the men that used to protect the village were unable to protect the women since the Partition caused fights and raids upon villages (15). However, without the voices of these women, it is impossible to conclude their reasons for committing suicide. What is clear is that it is contextually bound, and that is further discussed in section 3.4.

2.1.5 Cultural stereotypes

The “sameness” in oppression described by Mohanty contributes to the reproduction of “the average third world wom[a]n”, that is, a cultural stereotype (“Under” 337). According to Mohanty, the average “Third World woman” is portrayed as sexually restrained, uneducated, family-oriented, victimized and tradition-bound (“Under” 337). Some re-presentations which Mohanty found in Western feminist writings illustrated “Third World women” as all of them being dependent on society (“Under” 339). Mohanty refutes these ideas, and claims that what “Third World women” share “if anything”, is their struggle against structures in society (“Under” 339). In contrast, Mohanty explains that Western women re-presented in texts written by Western feminist scholars often self-represent Western women as “educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions” (“Under” 337). Although this
is a self-representation, it is clear that the images are in direct opposite to the stereotypical “Third World woman”, as well as the Muslim woman, which is shown in the following paragraph.

Morey and Yaqin describe current-day Western stereotypical images of Muslims. For men, this is “the bearded Muslim fanatic”, and for women, “the oppressed veiled” (Morey and Yaqin 2). The authors explain further that the most frequent opinions on the Muslim body center mainly around the Muslim woman: “Muslim women have been at the center of headscarf debates across Europe that have served to reiterate their supposed difference from women of other diasporas and to confirm their supposed position as victims of an oppressive religion” (Morey and Yaqin 40). Seemingly, the Muslim veil or headscarf symbolises, at least through the Western gaze, oppression of women. Agreeing with this, Kendra Sarna writes in *Encyclopedia of Global Religion* (2012) that the Muslim veil for women have received tough critique especially from European countries, perhaps due to the Western assumption that Muslim clothing is related to oppression of women and terrorism (234-6).

2.2 Writings on *Burnt Shadows*

Two analyses which address *Burnt Shadows’s* main character Hiroko’s possibilities of agency and set the novel in a feminist context, are Gohar Karim Khan’s “The Hideous Beauty of Bird-Shaped Burns: Transnational Allegory and Feminist Rhetoric in Kamila Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows*” (2011) and Daniela Vitolo’s “The performance of identity in Kamila Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows*” (2016). Khan draws parallells to transnationalism, nationalism and feminism in his article, and Vitolo has a close focus on identity and agency.

Both authors agree that Hiroko challenges societal structures and norms, and they also discuss Hiroko’s transnational character (Vitolo 3; Khan 54). Vitolo believes that Hiroko’s transnationality is connected to the
lack of a fixed identity, through which she can challenge cultural norms and thereby resist nationalism (5; 7). Khan, on the other hand, suggests that Hiroko’s transnationality makes her “embrace” nationalism and turns her into a symbol of an alternative definition of “homeland” (63; 67).

Furthermore, Vitolo and Khan claim that Hiroko has agency (Vitolo 3; Khan 60-3). Khan emphasises it by highlighting the lack of agency in Elizabeth. He agrees that Elizabeth has voice, but it is clear that she does not inhibit any agency before meeting Hiroko. He argues that Hiroko becomes “a feminist muse” to Elizabeth, who finds her strength to question her “most frustrating and unfulfilling bond of marriage” (Kahn 60-1). The friction between voice and agency in Elizabeth is revealed in the analysis, and a similar viewpoint is suggested related to Elizabeth’s granddaughter Kim.

2.3 Pedagogical framework

Here, relevant parts of the syllabus for the course English 6 are presented, to support the teaching of *Burnt Shadows*, and postcolonial (and) feminist literary theory. Reading *Burnt Shadows* requires a certain level of language proficiency, and being used to reading in English, which is why the target group for the teaching discussion are students taking the course English 6. After these examples, theories and research in teaching literature, postcolonialist, and feminist theory to students are presented to support the teaching ideas stated in section 4.

2.3.1 The Syllabus

The curriculum for the Swedish upper secondary school states that [t]he inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity between people are the values that the education should represent and impart. (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Curriculum” 4)

These fundamental values support discussions of female voice and agency, as well as re-presentations of individuals and groups. Such subjects aim for
addressing equality between people and between genders, and fostering solidarity between, in this case, women, but also between different cultures.

Furthermore, the steering documents for the subject English claim introductively that

[knowledge of English can . . . provide new perspectives on the surrounding world, enhanced opportunities to create contacts, and greater understanding of different ways of living . . . (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “English” 1).

*Burnt Shadows* corresponds well to this aim, with its multicultural, historical and varied perspectives on the world. Moreover, the documents states that the teaching of English aims for developing students’ “knowledge of living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “English” 1). This aim justifies thus the postcolonial (and) feminist perspective which the teaching objectives strive towards.

Furthermore, one of the core content aspects of English 6 is the teaching of “[c]oncrete and abstract subject areas related to students’ education and societal and working life” (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “English” 7). Therefore, to motivate the students and create teaching opportunities, the work with the novel can be adapted to the specific programme where the teaching takes place. As will be discussed, postcolonial feminism has a complex theoretical background (e.g. Appleman 70; Decke-Cornill and Volkmann 214). Therefore, both teachers and students could benefit from the students’ interests and the pre-knowledge required to discuss the text.

As a suggestion, the national programmes Humanities, and Social Science can be especially appropriate to apply mentioned theories and *Burnt Shadows* to, since their profiles to various degrees focus on the interrelations between the individual, and the local and global society. The Humanities programme is more attentive to culture and language, whilst the Social Science programme has for example politics and power relations as central
teaching objectives (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Upper” 217; 237). Topics and contents as these are related to the main points of the literary analysis, which are developed in section 4.

2.3.2 Teaching Literature

Decke-Cornill and Volkmann, editors of *Gender studies and foreign language teaching* (2007), discuss the importance of bringing postcolonial literature into the EFL classroom. With a reference to Ashcroft (1989), they state that the impact which colonialism has had on human life makes it essential for EFL teaching (Decke-Cornill and Volkmann 210). The editors emphasise the teaching of binaries, “such as white/black, civilised/primitive, good/evil, master/servant”, since such discourses were the foundations of many imperialist ideas and still contribute to current-day oppression of people (Decke-Cornill and Volkmann 210). The authors admit that postcolonial feminist theory is complex, but state that the critique of Western feminism and the (post)colonial female subject “would be highly desirable” to teach “at least partly” to EFL students (Decke-Cornill and Volkmann 214).

Appleman is also of the opinion that literature theories can be difficult to comprehend. She argues that feminist and gender theory can be “confusing” for both teachers and students, but supports its importance in the classroom (70). The author proposes that students can benefit from feminist theory since it highlights portrayal of both women and men in literature as well as in the world (Appleman 71).

Appleman furthermore emphasises the importance of supporting boys when working with feminist literary theory. They might feel excluded, or experience reluctance towards feminist claims of for example patriarchy. This might make it problematic for them to even apply a “feminist lens” to a text (Appleman 79-81; 84). Important to emphasise, however, is, as Klugman et al. write, that female agency does not result in less male agency (21). This statement shows that feminism mainly strives towards equalising the gaps of
power between genders, which is a valuable argument for the inclusive classroom. Appleman urges teachers to focus on gender studies rather than feminist studies, to reach out to more students (79; 85).

The students should be aware of what Michael R. Hill writes in *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society*, that “[p]atriarchy is one of the most enduring and pervasive of all social patterns” (629). This is true for many societies, not least the Western one. However, it should also be remembered that the hierarchial structures of patriarchy primarily depend on factors as race and class. Hill describes “the classic patriarchal paradigm”, which is the Western ideal man corresponding to variables such as white, at least upper-middle class, highly educated with a preferable career, in good health, Christian, a husband and a father (630). Seen from this perspective, not only the voices and agencies of women must be recognised and raised in the classroom, but also those of men who do not fit into this ideal male standard. Thereby, emphasising that all men do not have the same power is another way of supporting young men when attempting a feminist and/or gendered lens to a reading.

In “‘Under Western Eyes’ Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles”, Mohanty hopes for a global solidarity between feminists (“Revisited” 503). The author suggests teaching models on approaches in feminist studies, which foster solidarity between feminists across the globe (“Revisited” 518). She emphasises that a teacher should use a comparative structure where various cultures and ethnicities are compared, rather than “adding” ethnicities to a concept based within a Western perspective (“Revisited” 521-2; 518). Moreover, Mohanty discusses the issues with “exploring” the “foreign woman” as subjects of knowledge (519). This can again create an us-and-them-notion, when specifically studying what is “distant from home” (“Revisited” 520). The feminist solidarity model might therefore be a way of teaching to strive for avoiding that multicultural students experience being the subject of knowledge in class (Mohanty
“Revisited” 521-2). In Mohanty’s “feminist solidarity model”, the relationships between local and global are emphasized, and “the interconnectedness of the histories, experiences, and struggles of U.S. women of color, white women, and women from the Third World/South” (Mohanty “Revisited” 521-2). The model is “attentive to power” and should make use of history to teach both individual and collective cases of experiences and oppression of women (Mohanty “Revisited” 522). As mentioned in section 2.3.1, solidarity is one of the fundamental values of the Swedish upper secondary school, which makes Mohanty’s model relevant for the classroom (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Curriculum” 4).

Keya Maitra is just as Mohanty critical to “universal sisterhood” which in her words exists only when there is a belief of “women's shared experiences of oppression” (327). She agrees with Mohanty that it might be better to talk about “feminist solidarity . . . where sisterhood cannot be assumed a priori, ahistorically on the basis of gender” (Maitra 327). In other words, assuming sisterhood is suggesting sameness in oppression, and this is, as have been discussed, homogenising and maintains the superior position of Western women in the global society. This can be addressed in the classroom, that is, feminism is not automatically sisterhood, but rather a form of solidarity.

Different teaching strategies can be used to improve and support the students’ understanding of a postcolonial and occasionally culturally different text. Lundahl discusses the difficulties with comprehending a text in a foreign language if its content is far from the reader’s own cultural experiences (24). He proposes:

On the one hand texts can and should be introduced as a source for knowledge about different countries. On the other hand we must respect the cultural load of texts. (Lundahl 24 [my translation])
Using texts to teach about the world is natural, but using literary texts for the same purpose is another type of question, which is critically discussed in section 4.

Lundahl emphasises scaffolding as a valuable support for students. He suggests such activities which can be built-in during the teaching of a text, for example pre-teaching of words, visual aids and a holistic, rather than a detailed, textual focus (42-3).

Moving on, Abdul-Jabbar addresses certain issues with teaching postcolonial literature to benefit the (assumed) interests of multicultural students. He explains that these students might experience that they “are being implicated” in teaching situations, or that they are afraid of letting out their own opinions (225). Abdul-Jabbar also stresses the choice of text, since it is important that it supports the students in their attempts “see the world from the perspective of the other” (225). That would suggest that a novel which the teacher thinks represents multiculturality might suppress multicultural students, if it presents a one-way, Western perspective of “the other”.

However, Abdul-Jabbar believes that postcolonial literature written by minorities also represents minorities in a “true” way, and that makes it valuable for the classroom (224). Appleman agrees with Abdul-Jabbar, and claims further that all students must acquire the ability “to read the world in multiple ways” (87). Although this is true, the teacher must be careful with how it is carried out. Quoted in Johnston and Mangat (2012), Ricker-Wilson retells a classroom episode where 10-grade African-Canadian students discussed *To Kill A Mockingbird* (Lee 1960), but felt that they were the object of a literary discussion during “a lesson on racism for white students” (Johnston and Mangat 46). This reveals the importance of the teacher stepping out of their own cultural comfort zone before approaching postcolonial literature with students. The following saying by Abdul-Jabbar might therefore also include the teacher:
Students need to be urged to examine their own culture in order to realize that theirs is not the centre of the world. Therefore, students must be conscious of the challenges that the Other experiences in ‘foreign territory’ in his or attempt to seek assimilation, which the self in ‘home ground’ is unaware of: In terms of the self, it is a process of becoming consciously aware of history – what made me what I am, and how can I become actively participatory in that creative process? (Abdul-Jabbar 225)

The “what made me what I am”-question is recalled in section 3 and 4, as it is relevant for reflections on one’s subjectivity and active part in society. The quote thus concludes the theoretical part of postcolonial feminist theory and suggestions of pedagogical practices in literary teaching. The following section is the literary analysis of *Burnt Shadows*.

3 Literary analysis

To begin with, the characterization and agency of Hiroko, Elizabeth and Kim is described. This is followed by an analysis of the (lack of) voice and/or agency of Indian, Pakistani and Afghan women in the novel, for both certain characters and groups of women.

3.1 Hiroko

Hiroko’s agency springs partially from her personality of stubbornness and her dedication to what she does, but it is also dependent on her possibilities created through her fluency in multiple languages, her education and her freedom from responsibility of a family. The aspects of what agency can be, suggested by Klugman et al., can apply to Hiroko, especially making and acting on one’s own decisions, and possesing education (35). Education, or knowledge, is a key condition for her to act on the behalf of her own decisions, as examples will show.
Hiroko states for herself that “to know [is] to want”, and her wants require her to seek knowledge (Shamsie 16). If education, in the sense of knowledge, is seen as an aspect of agency, it is clear that knowledge gives Hiroko agency in multiple situations (Klugman et al. 35). Hiroko’s most useful knowledge must be her language proficiency. Apart from her mother tongue and English, she also speaks German and Urdu. Hiroko’s ways of “seeking assimilation”, as Abdul-Jabbar writes, is to learn the language of the place where she is situated, which also gives her the possibility to “become actively participatory” in creating her own identity (225).

As Ahearn suggests, language and agency are related if seen as a socioculturally mediated practice (110-2). It is clear that Hiroko’s ability to switch between languages gives her the opportunity to act on her decisions, and achieve her intended outcome (Klugman et al. 21). For example, speaking German to Elizabeth gives the two of them a space for befriending each other and share intimate thoughts, without being interrupted by Elizabeth’s husband James. In that space, they can develop a relationship which in the end leads to Elizabeth separating from James. Without the possibility to talk within their own linguistic space, they might not have had the same experience of sisterhood and would not have found a common ground to share and act out upon.

In addition, Miller states that a sociocultural space can have agency when creating linguistic meaning within them (444-7). This can be compared to when Hiroko learns Urdu with Sajjad. Both characters are concerned with and aware of the linguistic and specifically semantic meaning of language and words. Their sociocultural space of action is created through language learning and language sharing discussing meanings of words in Urdu, English and Japanese. It could be interpreted that the meaning of words which they create beteen them, and the ability to speak with each other in each other’s mother tongue, is a fundamental condition for them to have agency in acting out their love and marrying. From Miller’s definition,
Hiroko’s and Sajjads’s sociocultural space is agentive in itself due to the uniqueness in their shared meaning of languages (444-7).

When Hiroko arrives in India, James Burton is surprised that she has travelled there alone. Hiroko asks him guilelessly: “Yes. Why? Can’t women travel alone in India?” (Shamsie 46). Thereby, Hiroko expresses confidence in her lone travelling, and her statement makes her independence from family duties visible. Her life situation contributes thus to her agency, through the possibilities of making her own decisions (Klugman et al. 21). Moreover, mobility as an important condition for agency comes across (Klugman et al. 35). Since Hiroko’s mobility enables her “capacity to move freely beyond the household” she can, as the authors state, “build and maintain social . . . networks” and be a part of “economy and civic life” (Klugman et al. 35). Hiroko travelled to Tokyo for work, and her ability to move from there gives her new social and civic possibilities in India. Thereby, Hiroko’s mobility gives her agency.

There are few situations where Hiroko’s agency seems to be inhibited. Most uncomfortable and alien she feels around the other colonisers which James and Elizabeth socialise with, as is seen when she attends an evening gathering:

She didn’t know how to behave around these people - the rich and powerful, a number of whom had asked her about the samurai way of life and thought she was being charmingly self-effacing when she said the closest she had come to the warrior world was her days as a worker at the munitions factory. (Shamsie 64)

Here, the British colonists are portrayed as shallow individuals with a worldview similar to the colonialistic binary and othering perspective (Loomba 72). The voice of Hiroko seems to be drenched in the foolishness of the white. However, despite being the only Japanese woman there, the aspects which agency can include as language, education and her relationship to the Burtons, help her to not become a silent voice, represented and spoken
for by others (Klugman et al. 35). Thereby, it becomes clear how agency and voice are interrelated. Possessing different sociocultural properties strengthens the value in, and the acceptance of, Hiroko’s voice. She answers the woman’s naïve question about samurais in a way which will either embarrass or silence the questioner, which spares her from further comments.

Related to Hiroko’s capacity to choose, is Vitolo’s viewpoint that Hiroko’s challenging of cultural norms prevents her from fixing her identity (5). As a nuclear bomb survivor, Hiroko has a uniqueness to her. This makes her feel unable to identify with Japanese women who do not have any experience related to the bomb (Shamsie 140-1). Perhaps to protect herself from the global stigma around the bomb and its survivors, or because of shame, Hiroko chooses to keep her experiences to herself (Shamsie 140-1; 49). Either way, this choice results in Hiroko not having a fixed Japanese identity (Shamsie 49). She cannot relate to Japanese without experience of the bomb, and there are few survivors in the world, perhaps none but her in India and Pakistan. The unfixed identity which Vitolo discusses is thereby Hiroko’s identity, since she has the opportunity to choose who she wants to be (5). Just as Vitolo concludes, the floating identity is related to Hiroko’s agency, both because of the choice itself to not choose an identity, and also because it gives her even more freedom to choose (5-7).

Surviving the bomb contributes thereby to Hiroko’s unfixed character, but that in itself does not immediately give her agency. It is rather the fact that she can enact her visions despite the complete destruction which the bomb caused her outer and inner world, which feeds her agency. The physical and mental wounds are a burden to her, and regarding the taboo it is around being a hibakusha, a survivor of the bomb, her voice and agency could have been inhibited through homogenisation of her into a victimised group of survivors (Shamsie 49). Nevertheless, her freedom from family duties, her mobility and her education gives her the opportunity to choose to not fall into this group. As Hiroko herself says, “[t]he bomb did nothing
beautiful”, but her actions against the destiny it chose for her is a self-reassurement for Hiroko of her possibilities of agency (Shamsie 92).

3.2 Elizabeth

Before meeting Hiroko, Elizabeth is living in a traditional Western marriage with James Burton. The latter uses his male privileges to make decisions without Elizabeth’s consent, for the sake of his self-representation and his interests and enjoyments in life. For example, James places the couple’s son Henry (later Harry) at a boarding school in London even if Elizabeth refuses, and he does not let her take part in everyday decisions such as when to attend picnics or have visitors (Shamsie 72). Elizabeth is torn between the unhappy, self-destructing marriage and her thirst for love and companionship which she so misses from the early years of her marriage (Shamsie 73-4).

Elizabeth has voice, which shows in her possibilities to interact with whoever she wants and in how she is allowed to speak her mind and opinions (Klugman et al. 21). For example, she has a community of friends, she is allowed to talk to men, she is the one to invite Hiroko to stay with the family and she can run arguments with James without any particular consequences (Shamsie 35; 48-9; 72; 78). Moreover, as a counterpart to the stereotypical “Third World woman” who is seen as sexually restricted, Elizabeth’s sexual life with her husband is expressed as free (Mohanty “Under” 337). After Konrad’s death, Elizabeth describes to herself how she “reached for James night after night” to achieve “assurance of her own body’s existence” and take “refuge” in orgasm “which felt like obliteration” (Shamsie 69). It seems as if Elizabeth is the one taking the initiative for sex, “reaching” for her husband in the need of “assurance” that she even is alive, that she has a body. During these occasions, Elizabeth had thereby a sort of agency to follow the urges of her flesh. Again, turning to Klugman et al., she takes action – initiating sex – to achieve the desired outcome – orgasm (21).
However, this occasion in Elizabeth’s life (which happened as a consequence to Konrad’s death) is seemingly rare. As Khan points out, Elizabeth has more voice than agency (60-1). Although she can make herself heard and have opinions, James is the one who makes the final decisions in important matters. Thereby, Elizabeth is limited in taking action.

During their summer holidays, Elizabeth tries to convince Hiroko that she and Sajjad are too different to be together. She argues:

Women enter their husbands’ lives, Hiroko - all around the world. It doesn’t happen the other way round. We are the ones who adapt. Not them. They don’t know how to do it. They don’t see why they should do it. (Shamsie 98)

Elizabeth is jealous of Sajjad for the attention he gets from Hiroko, wanting someone to care only for her and no other. As Hiroko and Sajjad get closer to each other, Elizabeth experiences Hiroko “drifting away from her towards Sajjad, as James and Henry had already done” (Shamsie 84). Since she still tries to be the good wife of James from time to time, it can be assumed that she wishes that she had a love similar to Hiroko and Sajjad’s love in her own marriage, or in any relationship (Shamsie 73).

From a feminist point of view, her descending marriage with James inhibits Elizabeth’s trust in her own abilities to take action. She is the woman who has entered his life, and she needs to adapt to be able to stay married to him. This belief suppresses her possibilities for agency. However, somewhere in her heart she knows that she deserves more than living under James's decisions. Again, stated by Khan, Hiroko is the one to reinforce strength and commitment into Elizabeth (60-1). When Hiroko talks about what she wants in life, Elizabeth realises that her own wants are suppressed. As mentioned, Hiroko thinks that “to know is to want”, but Elizabeth did not really know what she wanted until she met Hiroko. She begins reflecting upon how her life mostly is about what she does not want but still must agree
to, to not upset James (Shamsie 100). This is followed by Elizabeth taking action to follow her wants.

Elizabeth’s newly found agency is revealed in a letter to her brother where she secretly explains to him that she is leaving James (Shamsie 117). As Ahearns writes, this “resistance against patriarchy” is indeed only one form of agency, and more important is as Ahearns also claims, that the motivations that incite human actions are more complex than simply “pure resistance” (115-6). Nevertheless, it is clear that Elizabeth is not leaving James because she has found the strength to resist. More probably she has realised her deepest wants, those motivating her actions rather than resistance in itself.

3.3 Kim

Kim is the daughter of Elizabeth’s son Henry, or Harry which becomes his American name. Kim’s parents are divorced, and her American mother is by Harry described to be a travelling, social woman who rather lets Elizabeth babysit Kim to “earn a break” from the latter’s teenage tantrums (Shamsie 184). Indeed, Kim is a load and demanding teenager, but this also shows that she early in life has a voice. For example, she has no shame in arguing with a Pakistani man in a video shop as a fifteen years old girl, and she especially emphasises that no one but her has a deciding role of what is appropriate for her (Shamsie 167).

When Kim grows up, she studies to become a structural engineer (Shamsie 265). This can be interpreted as a result of her agency. In line with Klugman et al.’s definition of agency, making decisions and acting upon them, Kim has chosen her studies and her area of work for herself (21). Moreover, she aims for a career within a male-dominated vocation, in other words, a field where patriarchy is traditionally vast. Here, she uses her voice to push forward in the, to refer to Hill, “most enduring and pervasive of all social patterns” (629). Clearly, a woman must be able to make herself heard
in a context where she represents a minority (Klugman et al. 21; Danielsen et al. 6-7). Moreover, pursuing one’s voice amongst the socioculturally dominant group “men” can be resembled to the feminist agency of resistance towards patriarchy mentioned by Ahearn (115). As Ahearn states, this is one of many agencies, which is why I suggest that it must be read contextually (115). Therefore, in the context of choosing a job traditionally represented by men, Kim has agency.

However, it could be argued that Kim has more voice than agency, similar to Elizabeth as described in section 3.2. Kim has a fear of things falling apart and coming to an end (Shamsie 265; 267). Her mother believes the divorce between her parents is the reason for that fear, whilst Elizabeth believes Kim simply has a need for control (Shamsie 265-7). Already as a girl, Kim was interested in engineering, which could indicate that she has an urge for control, and even more so, order (Shamsie 173) Nevertheless, I would argue that neither control needs or her parent’s divorce have created Kim’s phobia. They might rather exist due to her father Harry’s ways of coming and leaving as he likes regardless of his daughter’s needs. Harry has always been an absent father, and he is aware of it:

[T]o this girl, he’d been a fleeting presence since she was four years old and divorce had ended familial life in DC . . . He was a failed parent, he knew this . . . (Shamsie 168)

Employed by the CIA, Harry travels a lot, and he is more dedicated to his work than to family life (Shamsie 168). Despite this, Kim still loves him more than he deserves, especially as a teenager. When Harry embraces is teenage daughter, it is expressed that “[s]he felt such a rush of warmth and safety to be pulled in against him that it made her step away, scowling” (Shamsie 168). Apparently, the young Kim experiences a need to be humble in the times she meets her father, in the hope that he will not leave again.

From a background of an ambiguous relationship with her father, Kim’s sincere fears seem to break out in relation to the fall of the Twin
Towers, and the attack on the Pentagon on 9/11 (Shamsie 265; 270). Seeing her city fall apart coincides with the life-long fear of losing CIA-employed Harry, makes her want to control anything which in reality is out of her control. Thereby, it can be suggested that Harry has developed Kim’s fear of losing things and seeing things fall apart. This proposes also that he contributes to suppressing Kim’s full possibility for agency. Her fear forces her to an almost self-destructive dedication to her work to prevent things from breaking, to make sure everything is stable and safe around her, and thereby she is bound to fear and cannot be entirely free.

3.4 Indian, Pakistani and Arab women

Whereas Hiroko, Elizabeth and Kim have voices and agency to various levels, other women in the novel have neither of those. Those women are also less developed characters, frequently re-presented as oppressed, and also represented by men. The way in which the women are re(-)presented simplifies an assumption that they are all oppressed by men, which thereby can be read through Mohanty’s critique of the homogenisation of “Third World women” (“Under” 335-8). The aim for this section is therefore to examplify how Indian, Pakistani and Arab Muslim women are characterised in the novel, and the point which I hope to make is that contextual, cultural, and historical awareness is required to make any assumptions of the ability for voice and agency of these women.

The women in the Afghan areas in Pakistan are hardly present, only described briefly from Hiroko’s son Raza’s point of view. When Raza searches these areas for his new friend Abdullah, he walks past “covered-up” women who he consider “best to ignore” (Shamsie 196). It is not clear if Raza ignores the women for the risk of upsetting other men, or making the women any harm, but they are are by Raza re-presented as voiceless, faceless objects, in line with the veiled stereotypes of Muslim women which Morey and Yaqin write about (Morey and Yaqin 2).
Further on, fourteen years old Abdullah explains to Raza that he “had to stay here to look after the women” instead of accompanying his elder brother to Peshawar (Shamsie 197). At Abdullah’s home, Raza observes how more than one woman keep themself away from the two young men inside the small house. Only Abdullah’s young sister comes out to quietly serve Raza tea (Shamsie 197). Raza’s rhetorics suggests an oppressive culture where women are intimidated and taken care of by boys. However, this passage must be regarded in its context, timely and socioculturally. Without details of Abdullah’s religious orientation within Islam, and without any knowledge about the women mentioned, or their experiences in their culture, no conclusions about agency can be made. Just as Klugman et al. state, agency can express itself from privileges like education, properties, and mobility (21; 35). What is known is that boys and girls living in the area probably do not go to school, since Abdullah explains to Raza that he did so “[b]efore this”, meaning Partition, but not anymore (Shamsie 197). Moreover, the women do also seem to have a limited amount of mobility, and in the home, they either choose or are obliged to keep away from the men. However, without hearing the voices of the individual women and girls, we cannot assume that they are uneducated, as the “stereotypical ‘Third World woman’”, or oppressed to the point where they cannot take a single step without the consent of a male (Mohanty “Under” 337). I suggest that this shows how the reader can be fooled into homogenising the women as “all oppressed”, when they have no voice to express themselves in the text (Mohanty “Under” 335-8).

Sajjad’s brother Iqbal seems to consider women to be his property. Talking about his “mistress”, he express dislike about her want to leave for Pakistan.

‘She is threatening to go to Pakistan,’ Iqbal said. … ‘I told her last night I will do whatever I must to keep her here.’ … ‘Did you forget you have a wife?’ ‘I’m allowed a second wife.’ (Shamsie 103)
Furthermore, Iqbal believes his wife to be less of a wife if she does not allow him to marry the mistress (Shamsie 104). Here, two women, the mistress and the wife, do not have voice, or agency. They are represented by the voice of Iqbal, who on his own characterises the stereotypical view of an oppressive Muslim man. They are thereby re-presented as stereotypical “Third World women”, family-oriented and sexually restrained (Mohanty “Under” 337).

After Partition, Sajjad describes how Iqbal left his family to go to Lahore, and that his wife and children died on their ride with a cargo train when they tried to follow him (Shamsie 161). The actions of Iqbal’s wife can be related to Butalia’s discussion of the Sikh women who committed suicide, since it can be questioned why Iqbal’s wife undertook a dangerous journey to follow him (115). It does not seem as if she had death in mind, bringing her children, but the decision must be contextually and culturally bound just as for the Sikh women (Butalia 115). Iqbal’s wife might have been trapped in bad living conditions now her husband did not provide for the family anymore, and she might not have been able to work, for practical or traditional reasons. Being left alone, she was forced to take action in some way for the sake of her children. Similar to Butalia’s claim, there is not much information about Iqbal’s wife, and the action might have been a reaction to the conditions of the specific context (115-6). Since the voice of the wife is mediated only through Sajjad, she does not have one, and it cannot be concluded why this assumed agency through mobility drove her towards the husband who had left her. What can be stated is that this is another example of how important context and culture is for interpretation, and how the reader’s own cultural experiences affect the reading.

Finally, Sajjad’s mother is another woman who is stereotypically characterised. She is portrayed as a faithful, warm person who values the traditional way of living. In the novel, her main function is to take care of her sons and daughter, and arrange their marriages (Shamsie 38). This image corresponds to Mohanty’s description of “the average Third World woman”
who is for example traditional and devoted to her family (337). Even more clear does Sajjad’s mother appear when she dies. This makes her look like a symbol for the traditional Indian Muslim family, before the Partition of India. To exemplify, Sajjad decides to leave his home in Dilli behind when his mother passes away. Before that, such an action was unthinkable.

He could not see himself in the household. Not without his mother. … [S]he had been the certainty that no matter how often he circled Delhi he would always return to the world of Dilli. (Shamsie 106)

For Sajjad, his mother was home, and home was his mother. Moreover, his final decision of asking Hiroko to marry him is also dependent of the death of his mother, since he thinks of such a marriage as a “betrayal of his mother” (Shamsie 107). Tradition is thereby embodied within Sajjad’s mother, and when she dies, he is brave enough to confront tradition and marry the woman he truly loves. This does give a one-sided picture of Indian Muslim women, and creates a stereotypical and homogenous picture of them as being traditional without any exceptions.

4 Teaching practices

Here, suggestions for teaching practices with *Burnt Shadows* and postcolonialist (and) feminist literary theory within the EFL classroom are discussed. First, the students pre-knowledge of the novel’s themes and historical contexts is mentioned, as well as pre-teaching of literary theories. Then, a discussion of how to apply the literary analysis and postcolonial (and) feminist theories in the EFL classroom is presented.

4.1 Pre-knowledge

Important for reading and teaching *Burnt Shadows* is the student’s pre-knowledge about colonialism, British India, the creation of Pakistan and the 9/11 terror attack. Therefore, scaffolding activities suggested by Lundahl
can be used to support the students both before and during their reading (42-3). Lessons on the mentioned historical events can be held, in forms of for example films, readings of short texts and research performed individually by the students. This can be both helpful and motivational for the students to back up their reading comprehension.

For the target theories, Decke-Cornill and Volkmann write that postcolonial feminism might be difficult to include in the teaching (214). Also here a scaffolding approach can be made, by teaching pieces and set them in a context. As a suggestion, a broad collective approach to the novel can be used, where history, culture and context are discussed. Then, relevant concepts for postcolonial (and) feminist theory can be taught, and examples from the novel can be given so that the students have a context already, when they should attempt to apply the theories to the novel themselves.

4.2 Teaching Postcolonial Feminist theory

When teaching postcolonial (and) feminist theory, being inclusive and open-minded as a teacher might be the most important aspect. Including all genders, cultures and ethnicities in a way which let them have their own voices in the classroom is important. For the feminist theoretical part, Appleman’s claim that boys should be specifically included during feminist and/or gender studies, can be recognised (79-80; 85). Here, I would like to suggest an addition to that saying. Teaching postcolonial feminist theory, which includes retrieving and refuting colonist binary ideas as “Western/Third World” and “black/white”, should also regard the issues with reinforcing the binaries “man/woman” (Loomba 72). Therefore, the teacher should consider, just as Appleman states, to use the term “gender studies” in addition to “feminist studies”, and thereby include gender identities beyond the binarie of women and men (79; 85). As written in section 2.1 with a reference to Eagleton, about how to read the speaker in relation to her and one’s own identity, teachers should also engage students in reflections of
their own identities when reading a text from a particular perspective (382). This cannot be achieved if no other gender identity is included than males and females. Although *Burnt Shadows* in itself might not be beneficial as subject to for example queer studies, due to the lack of queer motifs within it, this should not be an argument for students who would like to apply such a lens in their reading. Within the conditions for the education, student’s ideas and opinions should be welcomed, although they are not what the teacher expected or assumed when planning the work area.

Returning to supporting of boys when teaching feminist theory, the teacher should furthermore provide various images of gender in society. Klugman et al.’s claim can therefore be relevant to address, that feminist theory is not about competitions between female agency and male agency (21). The point is to emphasise equality, since there are inequalities between genders on various levels and in various contexts all over the world. As mentioned in section 2.3.2, boys in the classroom should not be pointed out as representatives of the oppressive patriarchy (Hill 629). Patriarchism should rather be objectively described and contextualised and compared, and with a reference to Hill, “the classic patriarchal paradigm” as he describes can be contrasted to all other men who do not fit into this stereotypical box (630). This is an attempt to make the classroom more inclusive and having a focus on gender theory rather than putting all the focus on different struggles of women.

Moreover, Mohanty’s feminist solidarity model can be considered when teaching postcolonial feminist theory (“Revisited” 521-2). As mentioned, solidarity is a key word for the fundamental values of the upper secondary school, and this can be regarded through the use of Mohanty’s concept (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Curriculum” 4). As Mohanty writes, this model engages the learners in comparing differences to each other from historical and contextual perspectives, instead of stressing differences as if “they” are different to “us” (“Revisited” 521-2). The concept of “sisterhood” and the
issues with it can be difficult to teach to students who are new to such perspectives and ideas (Maitra 327). However, homogenisation through an assumed collective oppression, described by Mohanty, could be explained to students through text examples, current day examples and simplifications of words (Mohanty “Under” 335-8). Then, this can be contrasted with solidarity, in the sense of acknowledging women’s different struggles.

Moving on, concepts to teach in relation to *Burnt Shadows* are addressed. The main focus of the essay was to analyse female agency, representation and re-presentation, and cultural stereotypes in the novel *Burnt Shadows*. The students can be given this task as well, but perhaps with a broader, and more global, perspective. The teacher might have to be selective with the concepts, and also simplify some of them. It is important to remember that language in itself can be an obstacle to EFL students, so the teacher must adapt the level of theoretical depth to the student’s proficiency and ability. Therefore, the examples presented here can be debated, altered, or perhaps not even used, depending on the student group.

Hiroko is a useful character to have as an example when teaching about agency, since she is the female character with most agency in the novel. Giving the students simple definitions of voice and agency, as for example from Klugman et al., they can see how this comes through in Hiroko (21; 35). Her ability to make her own decisions is shown to be explicit in section 3, as well as her mobility. Also the agency of men can be discussed, and here, both James, Sajjad and Harry can be objects of analysis since they are characters with voice (and agency) throughout the novel.

Decke-Cornill and Volkmann mention “the speechlessness of the female subject” which is a main point in the literary analysis (see section 3.4) (214). Similar to the other theoretical concepts mentioned, this one is intricate and can be difficult for the students to understand. Moreover, approaching the lack of voice of Indian, Pakistani and Arab women in the novel, as stated in the analysis, might provoke intense and harsh discussions
amongst the students, about all from homogenisation to oppression of women. The point in the analysis is to show the tendencies of homogenisation in the novel, and to refute it due to the fact that the women have no voice. Thereby, no conclusions about their level of agency, or their assumed oppression, can be made since they appear in a context which the reader knows little about. This is not assumed to be explained during one lesson, even less an EFL lesson. The reader of *Burnt Shadows* must learn about these contexts for themselves to improve their understanding of voice and agency. If the teacher wants to raise these questions, they could make an interdisciplinary approach in for example a social science subject, so that the students could learn more about the early and modern history of Islam and Muslim culture before arguing about it.

Moreover, how women are represented and re-presented can also be addressed, but the teacher might consider using terms of portrayal or illustration rather than re-presentation. As argued in the literary analysis, the students can compare the portrayal of different characters, and as far as they are able to, read them with a postcolonial (and) feminist lens, as well as contrasting their observations to the society they are living in today.

In relation to this, cultural stereotypes become relevant as well. When retrieving cultural stereotypes in a text, the teacher would not like the students to have a similar experience as those in Ricker-Wilson’s example, who felt as if they were the object of the literary discussion during “a lesson on racism for white students” (Johnston and Mangat 46). However, as Abdul-Jabbar mentions, it is “[a] very challenging issue to students of different ethnic backgrounds” to make them speak up without “feeling awkward” in a postcolonial literature discussion (225). Therefore, I suggest that self-representation can be used to have students reflect upon how they re-p-present themself, and how their own culture does it, before engaging them in re-presentation of their opposite culture (Mohanty “Under” 337). As Mohanty explains, Western and/or non-multicultural students might discover
their own or other voices in society which tend to put Western culture in a
dominant position when representing themselves (“Under” 337). I argue that
talking about self-representation can make the students open up with
personal experiences, which can be important to share especially when
discussing both postcolonialism and feminism. Relating the novel and
theories to themselves might also be the first step to discover what is aimed
for, as Abdul-Jabbar also stated: "what made me what I am, and how can I
become actively participatory in that creative process?” (225).

Moreover, as Abdul-Jabbar states, postcolonial literature can be good
for representing minority people and their culture in a true way (224). I agree
that literature written by minorities might be the most genuine re(-)presentation
of their specific culture. However, I also argue that fiction always must
be read through a critical lens, since various aspects have affected the text to
become what it is, and readers themselves might affect how they interpret the
text. Thus, I refute what Lundahl writes, that literature can “be introduced as
a source for knowledge about different countries” (24 [my translation]). As
we now know from amongst others Mohanty, everything must be read and
interpreted contextually ("Under” 338; 340). Therefore, fiction is not the way
to acquire knowledge of the world, but a way to acquire knowledge of
different individuals’ perspectives on the world.

5 Conclusion

The postcolonial feminist literary analysis of *Burnt Shadows* shows that
Hiroko is the female character with most voice and agency in the novel, due
to her freedom from family duties, her mobility and her privileges of being
educated and proficient in languages. In addition, the analysis claims in
agreement with Vitolo that Hiroko’s fluent identity is related to her agency
(5-7). Rather than being homogenised as a victim of the bomb, Hiroko sets
herself free. Furthermore, the analysis states that Elizabeth has more voice
than she has agency due to the patriarchal structures in her marriage, but that she becomes an agent when she realises this position and divorces her husband. Moreover, the analysis of Kim concludes her to be in a similar position to Elizabeth. Although she has agency and voice in her job as a structural engineer, she is dependent out of fear to lose her father. Thereby, she is unable to act upon her own decisions – she rather acts upon fear.

Moreover, the analysis of the characterisation of Indian, Pakistani, and Arab women suggests that some of these identities are stereotypically represented. The portrayal of these women is argued to assume that they are oppressed in a homogenising way, mainly because they are represented through other voices than their own. This gives a one-sided perspective of the Partition of India, and the silence around Hindu and Muslim women in the centre of Partition recognised by Butalia is yet again silent (19-20). If read and interpreted uncritically, the lack of voices and agency amongst for example Muslim women can contribute to maintaining constructions of homogeneous groups where women share “the same” oppression. The analysis stresses the importance of historical and sociocultural context debated by Mohanty, and shows the essentiality of a critical reading of *Burnt Shadows* before assuming any collective oppression (“Under” 338; 340).

The suggestions of teaching objectives and teaching methods reveal that postcolonial theory and feminist theory is a difficult perspective to approach in a classroom, especially for EFL students. However, scholars as Decke-Cornill and Volkmann, and Appleman, emphasise its importance, and I agree that those lenses should be taught within literature studies just as any other critical lenses (Decke-Cornill and Volkmann 214; Appleman 70). In that sense, the role of the teacher is important, to maintain an objectiveness to the classroom discussions, and to support the inclusion of all genders, cultures and ethnicities amongst the students.

To build upon this essay, it would be interesting to perform a case study and implement postcolonial feminist literary theories in an English 6 class.
This could confirm or discard claims from the scholars mentioned in section 2.3, and it could also contribute with current reflections within the same area. The reactions from, and reflections made by, the students, could indicate how students in the Swedish EFL classroom identify themselves in the world and how they regard their contribution to shaping society. Also, how well EFL students respond to acquiring postcolonial (and) feminist theory could be interesting to find out, to be guided in what concepts should be emphasised and what aspects which must be simplified or excluded from the teaching.

_Burnt Shadows_ contains strong and interesting female characters, who can be interpreted in many ways. They have agency to various levels, and some of them are re-presented stereotypically, from a postcolonial feminist perspective but also from current-day sociocultural perspectives. Homogeneous re-presentations of people contribute to maintaining inequalities between different social groups, since it automatically makes one group superior to another. Because equal values are desired in schools and in teaching, postcolonial feminist theories can and should be taught to sustain the education of democratic and humanist members of the Swedish society.

6 Works cited list


National Agency for Education (Skolverket). "Curriculum for the upper secondary school”.

---. “Upper Secondary School”.

---. "English.”


