



Poetics and politics of post-partition cultural memories in Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*

Qurratulaen Liaqat & Asia Mukhtar

To cite this article: Qurratulaen Liaqat & Asia Mukhtar (2022): Poetics and politics of post-partition cultural memories in Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*, Contemporary South Asia, DOI: [10.1080/09584935.2022.2057440](https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2022.2057440)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2022.2057440>



Published online: 07 Apr 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 13



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Poetics and politics of post-partition cultural memories in Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*

Qurratulaen Liaqat ^a and Asia Mukhtar^b

^aEnglish, Forman Christian College, Lahore, Pakistan; ^bInternational Relations, Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

The term 'cultural memory' signifies a shared memory of a group of people inhabiting a common geographical location with a mutual understanding of religion, culture, and society. While fiction, non-fiction, and fine arts are used for archiving, reconfiguring, and reflecting on the communal memories that are historically, culturally, and politically significant, artefacts such as paintings and photographs are used to keep accurate historical records. This study argues that Kamila Shamsie's novel *Kartography* (2002) is a literary rendition that fictionalises the most relevant collective memories of post-Partition Pakistan by providing a new perspective on resolving the political, ethnic and sectarian issues in a postcolonial community. The textual analysis of the novel, in association with cultural memory theoretical perspectives, reveals that it is a 'mythistorical' text that mythologises the history of Pakistan. The characters have been personified and condensed into ethno-racial stereotypes. The city of Karachi has been reconstructed into a literary chronotope, and human relationships have been used as metaphors to revisit the political mistakes of the past. Hence, this text is not only an artistic mimesis of post-Partition Pakistan's 'cultural memory', but also a promulgation of a cultural change required for a more cohesive and peaceful South Asian regional politics.

KEYWORDS

Cultural memory; Shamsie; Karachi; Pakistan; Bangladesh; South Asia; international politics

Literary genres are taken as potential sites to record, reshape, and disseminate individual and collective memories. Written by Kamila Shamsie, *Kartography* (2002) is an aestheticised version of historically sensitive collective memories relating to the separation of East Pakistan and the 1971 civil war. The text focuses on the major ethnic and racial conflicts that arose in Pakistan and reflects on the consequences of those historical events. It is an allegorical account of the stimuli behind the civil war of 1971 and the ethnic clashes that erupted in Karachi in the 1990s. This novel highlights measures Pakistan could take today to avoid such tragic happenings in the future. It is a configuration of the emerging postcolonial collective identity of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural Pakistan. This study argues that *Kartography* is a poetic rendition of these two most shocking events of Pakistan's cultural memory, with a broader political resonance for the post-Partition South Asian region.

Shamsie's novel provides an insight into the cultural memory of post-Partition Pakistan. The term 'cultural memory' represents a collection of momentous incidents which happened in a communal past. J. Assman (1995) defines cultural memory as 'figures of memory' whose 'memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)' (129). Cultural memory unifies and stabilises a distinctive communal identity.

In other words, it is a collection of significant historical retrospections of a group preserved by textual reproductions and reiterations. We study *Kartography* according to this definition, as a text which fictionalises important tragic memories of the communal past in post-Partition Pakistan, to not only encapsulate Pakistan's cultural memory but also symbolise the lessons that can be learned by revisiting these painful events. Hence, it is a fictional document which reconsiders important historical incidents that form an integral part of Pakistan's postcolonial cultural history.

Literary theorists believe that 'Memory and processes of remembering have always been important and dominant topics in literature' (Neumann 2008, 333), because literature acts as a 'memorial medium' (Erll and Rigney 2006, 112) and contributes to the 'larger discussion of the ways in which societies recollect their past' (Erll and Rigney 2006, 112). In fact:

Literature is culture's memory, not as a simple recording device but as a body of commemorative actions that include the knowledge stored by a culture, and virtually all texts a culture has produced and by which a culture is constituted. Writing is both an act of memory and a new interpretation, by which every new text is etched into memory space. (Lechman 2008, 301)

Thus, literature's role is not limited to record-keeping. It also gives new interpretations of existing memories. Literature and memory are similar in that they both rely on the 'condensation of memory figures with metaphors, symbols, and motifs ... [of] narrativization' (Erll 2011, 145). Herbert Grabes (2005) explains that literature is a significant medium for recording 'cultural memory' (xiv) which has great value for 'active cultural memory' and can be used as references for memories or archives (Grabes 2017, 31). In this way, literary texts also act as 'Relay stations ... Stabilisers ... Catalysts ... Objects of recollection ... [and] Calibrators' (Rigney 2008, 350–351) of collective memory. In fact, literature 'forms an important part of ... cultural repertoire' (Burke 2017, 20). By recording and offering new interpretations of Pakistan's agonising past, *Kartography* can provide valuable insights to reflect upon the culturally and politically significant memories of post-Partition Pakistan and their ramifications for the future.

Pakistani literature of the postcolonial era often focuses on recording memories of Pakistan in the context of Partition. For instance, the short story *Toba Tek Singh* by Saadat Hassan Manto can be analysed as a palimpsest for reading the impact of the partition trauma on the psyche of the inhabitants of the Subcontinent. Qurratulain Hayder's *River of Fire* (1959) is an epic-scale narration of the history and collective consciousness of the Subcontinent. *Ice-Candy Man* (1989) by Bapsi Sidhwa also narrates the tragic cultural memories of the Partition. In the same way, recent Pakistani novels like *The Geometry of God* (2009) by Uzma Aslam Khan, and *The Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2011) by Muhammad Hanif highlight the dictator era of Zia-ul Haque in Pakistan. Similarly, many contemporary Pakistani Anglophone novels, such as those written by Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, and Nadeem Aslam explore the post-9/11 milieu, which was also a crucial site of Pakistan's cultural memory because of the country's involvement in the war against terrorism. Thus, Pakistani fiction tends to operate as the cultural memory of the pre- and post-colonial Pakistani community. Shamsie's *Kartography* (2002) is also such a text, illustrating two important historical sites of Pakistan's cultural memory: the partition of Pakistan and Bangladesh in 1971 and the violent ethnic riots of the 1990s in Pakistan.

Over the years, *Kartography* has been analysed from multiple theoretical dimensions. Daniela Vitolo (2019) indicates that it is an expression of the silenced memories of the 1971 Pakistan debacle. It has been interpreted as a memory map (Mallot 2007), a literary cartography of postcolonial Pakistan (Anjaria 2008), a narrative of the legacies of 1971 (Herbert 2011), and as a historical novel (King 2011). It also suggests the need to re-imagine home spaces (Kanwal 2015). While all these studies initiate insightful debates on issues of nationhood, history, place, and ethnicity in Pakistan's postcolonial and post-Bangladesh identity, few critics have focused on the poetics and politics of collective memory in this text.

This study aims to fill this research gap by examining the collective memory as well as the significance of its political aesthetics for South Asian regional politics. The research also unpacks the

multiple interpretations of the text by employing the theoretical framework of 'cultural memory'. This paper is divided into two parts. The first part focuses mainly on the aesthetics used to record Pakistan's 'cultural memory'. It deconstructs the role of narrative strategies, the novel's setting, and the fictional characters in disseminating the memories of the Pakistani community in the post-colonial era. The second part examines the political implications of *Kartography* for the larger South Asian region.

***Kartography* and the hermeneutics of 'cultural memory'**

The narrative in this novel is 'mythistorical'. Literary theorists of cultural memory argue that literature has always been equated with mythmaking due to its inevitable connections with memory and storytelling. At some basic level, mythmaking and history are somehow connected (Burke 2017, 20). 'Mythistory' is a portmanteau word – combining 'myth' and 'history' – implying the fictionalisation of history. It is a term used for modern historiographies (Mali 2003, 14). Shamsie's novel is a 'mythistory' in that it creates a fictional account about the actual historical facts which is an imaginative revision of Pakistan's history and akin to a 'historiography'.

Fictional accounts create their own mythistory by 'moulding of fact into types of myth' (Cornford 1907, 32). The writer's imagination is used to mythologise the memories of individuals and groups (Burke 2017, 21). 'Myth', as a term, 'may refer not only, as always, to the viable, collective "dreams," sacred and secular, of primitive societies, but also to the emerging visions of modern men' (Murray 1959, 213). Therefore, novels like *Kartography* may be regarded as what Burke (2017) calls 'mythologies of our times' (27). Therefore, this novel can be interpreted as a mythistory of postcolonial Pakistan.

The 'mythistory' of *Kartography* is set in Karachi city and chronicles the story of the two generations. It records the historical memories of postcolonial Pakistan, reconfiguring them into a myth, thus 'petrifying' Pakistan's 'cultural memory' (Erll 2011, 144) into a myth. Set in 1971, it narrates the history of four friends (Ali, Zafar, Yasmin, and Maheen) living in Karachi. These main characters belong to various provinces, races, and ethnicities of Pakistan. For instance, Zafar is a *Muhajir*¹ by his ethnicity and is engaged to Maheen, a Bengal,² whereas Ali is a Punjabi³ and is engaged to Yasmin, a *Pathan*.⁴

During the tragedy of East Pakistan in 1971, Zafar unintentionally insults Maheen due to her Bengali origin (an incident further explored later in this paper). Because of the derogatory remarks Zafar makes about Maheen, the four friends must change their partners to stay together and keep their friendship intact. Ali ends up marrying Maheen and Zafar gets married to Yasmin. When Raheen (Zafar and Yasmin's daughter) asks Ali about the details of this instance, he says, 'The Music Changed' (Shamsie 2002, 45). The four friends choose the imagery of 'the Waltzing couples changing partners' (45) to avoid questions about this partner swap because it would be socially awkward to admit an ugly truth about the deeply ingrained prejudices in Pakistani society. However, 'Off the dance floor, synchrony cannot exist' (45) and ultimately, Kareem's parents, Ali and Maheen, get divorced.

In Shamsie's novel, the historical events of Pakistan's cultural memory are presented through imaginative settings and fictional characters who personify various political, religious, and ethnic beliefs. Murray (1959) argues that 'Myth' usually describes 'a critical event in which important beings or personified forces are involved, an event with some humanly consequential' themes and plots (214). Since *Kartography* fictionalises critical events in Pakistan's history and exploits characters as personifications, it qualifies as a mythistorical text.

In order to analyse the aesthetics of *Kartography* as a representation of Pakistan's cultural memory, Astrid Erll's notion of 'collective text' can also yield valuable insights. She coined the term 'collective text' to elaborate upon 'literature's function as a circulation medium that disseminates and shapes cultural memory' (Erll 2011, 164). She believes that:

Narrative voice, perspective, and focalization, literary chronotopoi (time-space combination), metaphors, and symbols, to name just some particularly significant examples, are strategies involved in the performance, or staging of cultural memory in literature. (ErlI 2011, 154)

In *Kartography*, all the characters' narrative voices and perspectives stage the historical contingencies of Pakistan. Usually, the collective-text approach emphasises 'envisioning literature as a part of memory culture, entangled in its social, medial, and mental dimensions' (ErlI 2011, 171). The poetics of *Kartography* also unfold various characteristics and subtleties of post-Partition Pakistan's 'cultural memory'. Its contextualisation, narrative voice, characterisation, time-space combination, and plot construction all configure the edifice of Pakistan's socio-historical, ethnic, and racial memoir which will be explained in the upcoming pages.

Shamsie uses the techniques of condensation and personifications in order to transform her fictional characters into stereotypes which amplify ethnic, racial and cultural prejudices and resentments. Neumann (2008) argues that in the fiction which records individual or collective memories, characters are usually stereotypes (335). In *Kartography*, the condensation of individual characters into stereotypes shapes the country's cultural memory. Moreover, all major and minor characters stand as personifications of racial, ethnic, sectarian, cultural and provincial attitudes. The individual characters stand as metonyms for their racial, ethnic, sectarian and geographical associations. The characters unpack the psycho-social dimensions of the cultural memory depicted.

Zafar is a prototype for the *Muhajir* community, an ethnic division of those who migrated to Pakistan at the time of partition in 1947 and who are still considered allies of India, traitors, and outsiders in post-Partition Pakistan. Zafar represents this community and the prejudices the group faces in Pakistan still today (Shamsie 2002, 223). Similarly, Maheen represents the Bengali community, which was marginalised in the aftermath of the Partition (Shamsie 2002, 42, 182, 183, 191, 232). Ali stands as a stereotypical Punjabi and Yasmin represents the Pathan community in Pakistan. Raheen epitomises the spirit of Pakistani Anglophone writers seeking to include marginalised voices of post-Partition Pakistan into the mainstream meta-discourse of Pakistani nationalism. Karim (Ali and Maheen's son) is a representative of the diasporic community of Pakistan, wanting to integrate a disintegrated post-Partition country into a cohesive map with all its singularities and diversities.

Some minor characters from the Pakistani elite give insights into the prevailing discrimination against certain communities in Pakistan. For instance, Asif – a feudal lord from the province of Punjab – calls Zafar an immigrant (Shamsie 2002, 202) and ostracises nomads in his lands (Shamsie 2002, 313). Aunty Runty's racist remark about Karim (Shamsie 2002, 74) and Aunty Leila's hate speech against *Muhajirs* (Shamsie 2002, 40–41) unpack the prejudices against the *Muhajir* community. In the same way, minor characters from the lower middle classes such as a victimised Bengali waiter (Shamsie 2002, 183), a well-educated unemployed *Muhajir* thief (Shamsie 2002, 27), and nomads (Shamsie 2002, 313) represent unheard marginalised voices. In this way, *Kartography* serves a collective narrative using multiple narrative voices and illustrating numerous perspectives of victimiser and victimised groups in postcolonial Pakistan.

Karachi, in this novel, has been used as a 'collective space' for all of Pakistan to revisit two traumatic points in the ethno-racial history of post-Partition Pakistan. The choice of Karachi city to stage the cultural memory of Pakistan is one of the most important elements to untangle multiple layers of embedded meanings in the novel. Critics have also pointed out that Karachi city has been used as a 'postcolonial microcosm' (Anjaria 2008, 224), 'central chronotope' (Anjaria 2008, 230) of the narrative, and as a synecdoche, metonymy and personification of Pakistan (Anjaria 2008). *Kartography* hints at 'the role of literature in investing a space with meaning and in the production of a place' (Kumar 2011, 174). Therefore, the choice of this particular city can also have implications for analysing the novel as a cultural document.

Drawing on ErlI's (2011) insights on the aesthetics of a collective text, it is observed that two literary chronotopes (time-space combinations) have been used to revisit Pakistan's collective

traumas, specifically Karachi in 1971 and Karachi in the 1990s. It has also been used as a spatio-temporal location inhabited by multiple individuals located in different provinces with diverse ethnicities and races, and in two different time-space combinations. As a collective space, Karachi is used to 'hear the heartbeat' of Pakistan (Shamsie 2002, 180). This city demonstrates the cultural, ethnographic, racial, and geographical diversity of postcolonial Pakistan. It has been transformed from a piece of land into a vibrant, living and breathing entity – a character unto its own – reflecting on the psyche, philosophy, culture, politics and issues of a postcolonial location yet to be appropriately mapped to capture the diversity of its inhabitants.

Raheen imagines a personified Karachi talking to her, 'I am a breeding ground for monsters, but don't think that is the full measure of what I am' (Shamsie 2002, 232). Here, the city of Karachi is talking to Raheen on behalf of all of Pakistan, which might seem to be a breeding ground for the monsters who hate each other on the basis of race, ethnicity, economic disparity and sect, but is not the full measure of what it is. Indeed, Pakistan is much more than these banal divisions: it is a country inhabited by people – like Zafar – who have accepted the mistake he made in 1971 in his apology letter to Maheen (Shamsie 2002, 176). Moreover, this Pakistan has reared youngsters like Raheen and Kareem who are ready to reconfigure their country so as to include the marginalised communities and spaces (Shamsie 2002, 337–338).

The first significant literary chronotope in the novel is 1971 Karachi. This time-space combination unpacks the first collective tragedy of the newly emerging postcolonial Pakistan. According to Erll (2011), collective texts act as 'vehicles for envisioning past ... [they] create, circulate, and shape contexts of cultural memory' (Erll 2011, 164) and generate 'cultural schemata' (170). *Kartography* revisits one of the most traumatic incidents in Pakistani cultural memory by creating a new context to interpret the tragedy of West Pakistan's separation through the separation of two lovers. This novel is 'symbolic and lays out the meanings in metaphors' (Lezard, *The Guardian*, 2003). The separation of Zafar and Maheen has already been identified as a symbol for the partition of East and West Pakistan in 1971 (Kanwal 116) but is in fact an analogy used to stage and fictionalise the collective tragedy of the civil war of Pakistan in 1971. This couple's tragedy can be read as a collective tragedy.

In this timeline, Zafar and Maheen's relationship is depicted as a difficult one because of the discrimination against both the *Muhajir* and *Bengali* communities. Indeed, the discriminatory behaviour of most of the Karachiites toward Bengalis and *Muhajirs* is evident throughout the text (Shamsie 2002, 42, 182, 183, 191, 232). Zafar and Maheen's romantic relationship symbolises the integration of East and West Pakistan, which was later spoiled because of the political, economic and racial marginalisation of Bengalis (Kanwal 2015, 116). From the beginning of the novel, Zafar and Maheen's relationship is in danger: Zafar is constantly being ostracised both for being a *Muhajir* and for getting engaged to Maheen. In the club where Zafar plays tennis, he is teased by fellow clubmates: 'Who wants to play with the Bingo lover?' (Shamsie 2002, 191). Even after 20 years since his migration, he is still considered to be connected with India and a *Muhajir* (Shamsie 2002, 191). The most catastrophic moment of the novel occurs when Zafar's neighbour, Shafiq, asks him how he can love and marry a Bengali when the very same Bengalis killed his brother. Put on the spot, Zafar impulsively calls his marriage to Maheen a 'civic duty' to dilute her 'Bengali bloodline' (Shamsie 2002, 232). This unconscious slip of tongue provides deep insight into the unconscious of a Pakistani mind, providing a glimpse of deeply embedded cultural discriminations that can ruin human destinies and societies. Although Zafar does indeed love Maheen, he is affected by the ethno-racial hatred and cruelty prevalent at the time in Pakistan's history. His response shows how even he is unable to spare his individual unconscious from the harmful effects of the collective psyche. As readers, we see Zafar doesn't mean what he says, but can also see how he has unintentionally internalised the prevalent prejudices about Bengalis. On a personal level, this interaction hints at the personal tragedy and Zafar and Maheen's separation. On a state level, it symbolises the internalised prejudices of Pakistani natives against Bengalis at the time of the civil war in 1971 which ultimately led to the Partition of postcolonial Pakistan.

The second literary chronotope is the spatial location of the city of Karachi in the 1990s, a difficult time for Pakistan as a postcolonial nation. Later in the novel, the focus shifts to Raheen and Karim who face another significant fault-line in the cultural memory of postcolonial Pakistan – ethnic violence in 1990s Pakistan. While Raheen and Karim's past is affected by the historical incidence of the East Pakistan partition, their present is jeopardised by the extremely violent riots of the 1990s. Rioting was rampant and bloodshed abundant in Karachi – the result of conflicts between many ethnic and provincial groups such as the Sindhi, Punjabi, Pathan, and *Muhajir*. These ethnic riots in 1990s Karachi were a reaction against the social, political, economic, and cultural marginalisation of the *Muhajir* community in Sindh (Wright 1991; Ahmar 1996; Verkaaik 2004; Gayer 2007).

Kartography also highlights the injustices and unfair behaviours toward the *Muhajir* community in Karachi. Many literary critiques have analysed how the *Muhajirs* are depicted in the novel (Kumar 2011, 2016; Kabir 2013). Take the well-educated *Muhajir* car-thief, for example, who cannot find employment. In 1990s Karachi, there was a restrictive employment quota for the *Muhajir* community which failed to accommodate all the *Muhajirs*, the majority of whom were far more highly qualified than individuals in other communal groups (Shamsie 2002, 227). Exemplifying this, Aunt Leila's hate speech against *Muhajirs* reveals the mindset of local *Sindhi*⁵ people toward Muslims who migrated from India and who, in the 1990s, had already been living in postcolonial Pakistan for over 40 years. Aunt Leila bursts out:

Demanding this, demanding that. Thinking that just because they are a majority in Karachi they can trample over everyone else. Like they did in '47. Coming across the border thinking that we should be grateful for their presence ... Do you hear the way people like Zafar and Yasmin talk about 'their Karachi'? My family lived there for generations. Who the hell are these Muhajirs to pretend it's their city? (Shamsie 2002, 38)

Zafar is a *Muhajir* and Yasmin a Pathan, so both are being marginalised in the hierarchy of mainstream Karachi which – in the novel – serves as a symbolic spatial structure for Pakistan. In response to Leila's unreasonable behaviour, Zafar thinks:

What kind of immigrant is born in a city and spends his whole life there, and gets married there, and raises his daughter there? And, an immigrant's daughter, was an immigrant too ... if I told them Karachi was my home just as much as it was anyone else's, would they look at me and think: another Muhajir. Immigrant. Still Immigrants, though our family had crossed the border nearly four decades ago. (Shamsie 2002, 39)

The ethnic marginalisation reflected in this excerpt highlights Pakistan's history and underscores two things: it explicitly unravels the periphery's violation of ethnic rights and implies that Pakistan has learned nothing from the tragic 1971 partition of Bangladesh. Indeed, certain injustices still prevail, with the threat of becoming volatile at any given moment. It also serves as a warning that postcolonial nations would be wise to assimilate all minor and major groups into a country's mainstream culture, at the very real risk of the political situation further deteriorating.

Zafar is an important figure in both time-space combinations. Not only does he represent the *Muhajir* community, he also serves as a collective metaphor for Pakistani displaced identity following the Partition. Zafar and his *Muhajir* identity can be interpreted as a spatio-temporal metaphor for a newly independent Pakistani nation which is still configuring its new identity. The depiction of his character and other characters around him unfold the internalisation and continuation of discriminatory colonial attitudes against certain races, sects, groups and communities. Zafar's identity hints at the newly emerging types of colonialism in postcolonial Pakistan which dominated and discriminated against the Bengali community following the Partition. These neo-colonialisms erupted due to the differences in race, ethnicity, sect, language and geographical associations. A microcosmic representation of the Pakistani community, Zafar hurts Maheen beyond repair by making an offensive remark about her Bengali origin. As previously mentioned, Zafar says aloud that his marriage to Maheen is a 'civic duty' of a Pakistani to dilute Maheen's 'Bengali bloodline' (Shamsie 2002, 232). This ultimately leads to their separation. Through their relationship, the novel chronicles the racial prejudices embedded in the 'collective memory' of postcolonial Pakistan. If Zafar stands as Pakistan's collective unconscious that harbours prejudice against the Bengali race (considering them inferior),

then Maheen serves as the epitome of the Bengali race facing racial discrimination and hatred in post-Partition Pakistan.

Later on, in the 1990s, Zafar once again faces socio-economic marginalisation. At this point, his character elucidates another layer of constant marginalisation that is prevalent even after 40 years of independence from colonial rule. At this point in the novel, he is the victim of prejudice. This further develops his character in relation to a suffering postcolonial community. Hence, Zafar's character epitomises Pakistan's ethnic prejudices, conflicts, and injustices which persist in this postcolonial country.

***Kartography* – a stimulus for socio-political change**

The second part of this paper focuses on the political lessons the novel configures in light of two violent historical moments in Pakistan's cultural memory, arguing that *Kartography* is not only an aesthetic rendition to be read for pleasure, but that it also conveys a political message for cultural change in postcolonial South Asia. Fictions of memory or collective texts are related to the aestheticisation of cultural memory through literary devices and also cause a cultural change. These texts actually act as a:

... medium of cultural self-reflection, literature – through its aesthetic structure – [paving] the way for cultural change symbolically empower[ing] the culturally marginalised or forgotten and thus figur[ing] as an imaginative counter-discourse. (Neumann 2008, 341)

Kartography also insinuates a need to reflect on, and bring change to, post-Partition Pakistan by hinting at 'the need to solve present problems through understanding the past' (King 2011, 147). In this sense, *Kartography*, as a collective text, promotes cultural change in two distinct ways. On the one hand, it motivates Pakistan and Bangladesh to face the reality of the 1971 tragedy and accept the mistakes of the past; and on the other, it magnifies the 'ethnoscapes' (Appadurai 2006, 469) of postcolonial countries, calling for 'cultural heterogenization' (Appadurai 2006, 468) and the inclusion of micro-narratives in the dominant discourses – for instance, stories of ethnic, sectarian and religious minorities. Whereas Zafar and Maheen's story highlights the need to revisit and draw lessons from the past, Raheen and Karim's generation suggests the possible ways through which marginalised groups can be included in the meta-discourse of a country – such as writing stories about them and creating a pictorial representation of their cartography. Karim suggests, 'We'll be Eratosthenes and Strabo working hand-in-hand' (Shamsie 2002, 337–338). Both couples (Maheen and Zia, Raheen and Karim) insist on the need to learn lessons from the past.

Zafar and Maheen's tragic separation provides a new way to perceive and interpret Pakistan's 1971 civil war – a very sensitive issue for both Bangladesh and Pakistan. It is an instance of 'locally contested history' (Iqbal 2017, 106) because East Pakistan, as a phantom map, 'haunts the politics and psyche of not only Bangladesh, but of Pakistan and India too as implicated nations' (Kabir 2013, 45). It also 'persists in the memories of ... intellectuals as a utopian hope that was formed and then disappeared in the brief span of just over two decades' (Kabir 2018, 910). In other words, it is a contested history involving three prominent South Asian countries which also implies far-reaching and serious ramifications for the region's politics.

This historical reality has multiple interpretations, significations and implications in the collective memory of Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. It was a time when Bengalis killed non-Bengalis (Ahmed and Zahoor 2019, 31; M. Shamsie 2017, 22) and the Pakistani army killed Bengalis (Butt 2017, 44; Jalal 1991, 312). However, India was implicated as a collaborating force behind the Bengali uprising against Pakistan. In the early 1970s, Bengalis did not have political rights and took offence. This in turn ignited the fires of a civil war – one that saw Pakistan suffer massive casualties and damage to the infrastructure, which ultimately escalated into the separation of East Pakistan and its emergence as the independent state of Bangladesh in 1971. While this is a historical truth, it was a 'victory ... liberation ... creation of a new nation' for Bengalis and a 'double loss' for Pakistanis (Zaman and

Farruki 2008, x). Indeed, both 'states have failed to come out of the bitter shadow of the past' (Noor 2003, 47) and 'the traumatic break of East and West Pakistan continues to haunt bilateral relations' (Ahmed and Zahoor 2019, 31). The materialisation of the new state of Bangladesh was never properly included in the mainstream narrative of Pakistan because:

... reinvention of history by the selective contraction, misinterpretation and even omission of certain periods believed to be detrimental to the process of nation building in Pakistan's Selective Memory and Forgetting. (Behuria and Shehzad 2013, 353)

The politico-historical trend of contraction, misinterpretation and omission also had a significant impact on the majority of the Pakistani literature produced in the emergence of the new state of Bangladesh and the aftermath to the events leading up to it. Cara Cilano (2010), for example, argues that the '1971 Bangladesh Liberation War occupies an inverse position in Bangladeshi and Pakistani English language fictive traditions' (65). In other words, despite irrefutable evidence that this event holds a significant place in historical and fiction writing from Bangladesh, Pakistan has resorted to retelling the event in a way that obviates the need to admit responsibility for the events of the past.

Pakistani literature has mostly remained quiet about the tragic separation of East Pakistan in 1971. Recently, however, there has been a renewed awareness and emphasis on knowing the facts about this historical event. In her book *Hybrid Tapestries* (2017), leading literary critic of Pakistani fiction, Muneeza Shamsie, asserts that there has been a growing literary response to the 1971 tragedy after the year 2000, with Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* being one of the many literary responses. Shamsie's novel, however, is unique in the sense that – as a collective text – it does not shy away from accepting the harrowing mistakes Pakistan made in 1971 and heralds a change in writing trends about the 1971 civil war. Not only does it admit to the rampant discrimination against the Bengali community in post-Partition Pakistan, which led to the separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan, but it also stimulates a paradigm shift in the collective political epistemology of the South Asian region about this incident.

Towards the end of *Kartography*, Zafar writes an apology letter to Maheen. Aroosa Kanwal (2015), a notable critic of Pakistani Anglophone fiction, interprets it as 'a symbolic apology from [the] Pakistani nation to Bengali people who suffered at the hands of West Pakistani elites' (116). As a collective letter by the Pakistani nation to Bangladesh, it can be construed as a confession of the intentional and unintentional mistakes of the past, but also prompts both nations to forget this painful part of their history and move forward toward a positive development in their mutual relationship. Indeed, Zafar's apology letter to Maheen, is actually an invaluable lesson in promoting better international relations among the regional states of South Asia. In his letter, he writes:

What happens when you work so hard to forget a horror that you also forget that you have forgotten it? It doesn't disappear – the canker turns inwards toward that swirling darkness and holds it up to the light. (Shamsie 2002, 176)

At this moment in the novel, Zafar is presented as what Genette (1980) theorises as 'a reminiscing narrator or figure who looks back on his ... past, trying to impose meaning on the surfacing memories from a present point of view' (40). In this collective text, Zafar is not only talking to Maheen, but he is also actually talking to both Bangladesh and Pakistan. The attempt to deny the horror of this historical tragedy has increased the canker in the hearts of both countries. Pakistan, as a state, has never forgotten this tragedy but has instead consciously chosen not to acknowledge this painful part of its collective memory for the simple reason that the truth is too difficult to accept. While Bengalis did indeed suffer at the hands of the state army, it is a historical fact that these same Bengalis were behind the bloodshed suffered by the inhabitants of Western Pakistan. The above excerpt (Zafar's letter) is a poetic rendition and diagnosis of the problem in the mutual relationships of Pakistan and Bangladesh. Both countries are trying so hard to forget the atrocities of 1971 that instead of letting go of these painful memories, they have further deeply etched these wounds onto their

collective memory. This historical grudge between these two countries is increasing with the passage of time and it would not dissipate until and unless tackled with bravery, courage, truthfulness and confessions of mistakes. Shamsie's fictional account ostensibly provides a neutral ground to pave the way for both countries to accept the horrible realities of the past and move forward. Taken as a whole, her novel suggests that if the traumatic historical mistakes are accepted without omissions, the relationship between Bangladesh and Pakistan can improve – in turn having positive implications for South Asian regional development.

Zafar's apology letter to Maheen also highlights the harmful effects of intentional forgetting or 'collective aphasia' (Waterman 2015, 71), something that still haunts Pakistan's present today. While in the novel, Pakistan is depicted as a state that 'act[s] as though history can be erased' (Shamsie 2002, 313), Shamsie emphasises that history cannot be erased, it simply keeps reiterating itself in one form or the other, be this historical or fictional. Both countries are afraid to remember this cruel past, believing that the 'cost of remembering may break ... wilted spirits' (Shamsie 2002, 313). To escape from the shame of past mistakes, Pakistanis pretend they have forgotten everything about this historical tragedy. In the novel, however, Zafar accepts it: 'But we can learn how to rise above the mistakes of the past, and that we haven't done. As a country we haven't. Not in the slightest' (Shamsie 2002, 319). Here, while reminding Pakistan of its past mistakes of ethno-racial discrimination, Zafar is the embodiment of Pakistan's collective conscience, asking it to 'rise above the mistakes of the past' (Shamsie 2002, 319). The letter clearly conveys that Pakistan ought to ensure that this tragedy not be repeated, lest it causes further traumatic events in this postcolonial country's cultural memory.

As a collective memory text, the novel shows another cultural change through Raheen and Karim's efforts to appropriately map Karachi. Tapping into multiple levels and kinds of mapmaking, the novel uses the extended metaphor of 'cartography' to suggest an all-inclusive map of the intangible *ethnoscapes* of post-Partition Pakistan. While Karim relies on the actual *skill* of mapmaking, Raheen seeks to work with 'literary mapmaking' (Shamsie 2002, 180) to uncover the true nature of charting collective memory in a postcolonial country. Ultimately, they both find a cohesive way to settle their differences, with Karim proposing an interactive internet map – a fine balance between actual mapmaking and the storytelling of diverse linguistic, ethnic, racial and regional identities:

You start with a basic street map, OK, but everywhere there are links. Click here, you get *sound files of Karachiites telling stories of what it's like to live in different parts of town*. Click there, you get a *visual of any particular street*. Click again, the camera zooms in and you see *a rock or a leaf or a billboard that means something to that street*. Click, you see *streets that exist seasonally*, like your lunar street. Click, you see which sections are under curfew. Click, you hear *a poem* ... We'll be Eratosthenes and Strabo working hand-in-hand. (2002, 337–338, emphasis is in original)

This map, with its differences, 'reminds readers that maps and memory should be considered together' (Mallot 2007, 283). Distinguished Pakistani literary critic Aroosa Kanwal argues (2015) that mapmaking in this novel, 'aims for a deterritorialization and reterritorialization of diverse cultures and identities present in post-Partition Pakistan' (123), suggesting a need for a postcolonial nation to seriously reconsider its diversity before strictly categorising its people. Echoing this, Karim hints, for example, at the need for literature, history, geography and politics to work together to enrich and reconfigure a cohesive cultural memory which is inclusive of all the sections of a post-colonial society. The novel has political resonance for the betterment of intra- and international relation issues in the South Asian region. Thus, the cartography motif in this collective text is not only used to map out Pakistan's collective memory, but is also used as an extended metaphor to bring cultural change to the post-Partition Subcontinent in an effort to emphasise the need to include marginalised narratives into the mainstream discourses of a postcolonial country.

Kartography's retelling of the tragic bloodshed of the 1971 civil war and ethnic riots of the 1990s in Pakistan implies the necessary corrective foreign and domestic policy changes needed for a more

peaceful South Asian political environment. By using two sites of memory from Pakistan's history, it invites South Asian states to revisit their policy matters vis-à-vis many kinds of prejudices still prevalent in the South Asian region that are fed on the ideas of religion, race, ethnicity, gender and political affiliation. It provides deep insight into the cultural memories and identity politics of a postcolonial state where multiple ethnicities, races and groups are still trying to achieve stability in a still-young political system. It also warns all postcolonial states about the dangers of withholding minority rights in any newly liberated country, as the feelings of deprivation could potentially lead to civil wars like 1971.

Hence, it is not simply a reiteration of the 1971 civil war or the 1990s ethnic riots in Karachi, but also a valuable insight into the political mistakes made on the basis of race, ethnicity and socio-economic division in a nascent postcolonial state. While to some it may sound far-fetched, this novel also warns other postcolonial South Asian states to avoid ethnic, religious, sectarian and racial discrimination. It arguably implies the need for states to admit past mistakes rather than sweeping them under the proverbial rug, since – if they remain unresolved – these sensitive political issues will worsen relations in the South Asian region.

In conclusion, this paper demonstrates that *Kartography* is not meant simply as a fictional tale, but also suggests a paradigm shift in regional politics. It transcends the boundaries of fiction, illustrating the possible interconnections which can be drawn by interdisciplinary analyses of the novel, especially in terms of Sociology, Political Science and International Relations. This paper illustrates that *Kartography* as a mythistory reshapes Pakistan's painful cultural memories. Through the use of literary techniques such as metaphors, symbols, personification and motif patterns, it condenses Pakistan's postcolonial 'cultural memory' into individual tragedies. Pakistan's diverse ethnicities are personified as fictional characters serving as stereotypes for their respective ethnic identities. The spatial structure of Karachi city is used as a literary chronotope and an extended metaphor to highlight the need to promote the politics of inclusion. In this regard, the novel serves a didactic purpose in terms of its ability to inform the domestic and regional politics of a postcolonial and post-Partition Pakistan. It calls for the honest admission of mistakes embedded in the sites of Pakistan's cultural memory for better inter-regional relationships. It promotes the need to learn from the past and assimilate both micro- and macro-narratives for the peaceful co-existence of multiple ethnicities, classes, provinces, races, and sects in postcolonial contexts. Thus, this literary rendition of Pakistan's post-Partition collective memory reconfigures the country's collective past, reflects on the inherent faultlines in the collective present, navigates toward unity in diversity and signposts a possible roadmap for the development of a more peaceful and cohesive South Asian region in future.

Notes

1. The Muslims who migrated from the Indian part of the Subcontinent at the time of Partition (1947) and settled in Karachi, Pakistan are called Muhajirs.
2. A native of the region of Bengal (was a part of Pakistan from 1947 to 1971 and now known as Bangladesh).
3. The Punjabis are inhabitants of the province Punjab, Pakistan.
4. The people from the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Western Pakistan.
5. Residents of the province of Sindh, Pakistan.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Qurratulaen Liaqat, Assistant Professor of English Literature, critically analyzes Postcolonial, Post 9/11, and Posthuman discourses of Pakistani Anglophone Fiction. Among her recent publications are 'Drone fiction, empathy gap and the reader: Mohsin Hamid's short story *Terminator: Attack of the Drone*' (2022) *Textual Practice*, Taylor & Francis; and

'Nonwestern Posthuman Cyborg Ontologies: The Man-Automobile Relationship in Mohsin Hamid's Fiction' (2021), *Literature and Aesthetics*, Sydney Open Journals.

Asia Mukhtar, Assistant Professor International Relations, writes on South Asian energy security, human security, and regional security. Among her recent publications are *Threat Perception : Pakistan's Nuclear Program* (2013) and 'Prospects of Food Security in South Asia: A Substantial Debate' (2020), *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*.

ORCID

Qurratulaen Liaqat  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6356-8814>

References

- Ahmar, Moonis. 1996. "Ethnicity and State Power in Pakistan." *Asian Survey* 36 (10): 1031–1048.
- Ahmed, Zahid Shahab, and Musharaf Zahoor. 2019. "Bangladesh-Pakistan Relations: Hostage to a Traumatic Past." *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 57 (1): 31–51.
- Anjaria, Ulka. 2008. "A Literary Kartography: Urban Space and the Postcolonial Novel." *South Asian Review* 29 (1): 216–233.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 2006. "Disjunction and Difference." In *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, 468–472. New York: Routledge.
- Assman, Jan. 1995. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." *Cultural History/ Cultural Studies* 65: 125–133.
- Behuria, Ashok K., and Mohammad Shehzad. 2013. "Partition of History in Textbooks in Pakistan: Implications of Selective Memory and Forgetting." *Strategic Analysis* 37 (3): 353–365.
- Burke, Peter. 2017. "Shaping Memories in Literature and Cultural Memory." In *Literature and Cultural Memory*, edited by Herbert Grabes, Mihaela Irimia, Andreea Paris, and Dragos Manea, 19–30. Leiden: Brill.
- Butt, Ahsan I. 2017. *Secession and Security: Explaining State Strategy Against Separatists*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Cilano, Cara. 2010. *National Identities in Pakistan: The 1971 War in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction*. London: Routledge.
- Cornford, Francis. 1907. *Thusydidies Mythistoricus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Erll, Astrid. 2011. *Memory in Culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Erll, Astrid, and Ann Rigney. 2006. "Literature and the Production of Cultural Memory: Introduction." *European Journal of English Studies* 10 (2): 111–115.
- Gayer, Laurent. 2007. "Guns, Slums, and 'Yellow Devils': A Genealogy of Urban Conflicts in Karachi, Pakistan." *Modern Asian Studies* 41 (3): 515–544.
- Genette, Gérard. 1980. *Narrative Discourse*. Oxford: Basil Backwell.
- Grabes, Herbert. 2005. *Literature, Literary History and Cultural Memory*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.
- Grabes, Herbert. 2017. "The Value of Literature for Cultural Memory." In *Literature and Cultural Memory*, edited by Mihaela Irimia, Andreea Paris, and Dragos Manea, 31–49. Leiden: Brill.
- Hanif, Mohammed. 2011. *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*. New Delhi: Random House India.
- Herbert, Caroline. 2011. "Lyric Maps and the Legacies of 1971 in Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47 (2): 159–172.
- Iqbal, Asif. 2017. "Thinking Beyond Nationalism in South Asia: Reading the Local as Postcolonial in Fault Lines: Stories of 1971." *South Asian Review* 38 (1): 101–113.
- Jalal, Ayesha. 1991. *The State of Martial Rule: The Origin of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defense*. Lahore: Vanguard.
- Kabir, Ananya Jahanara. 2013. *Partition's Post-Amnesias: 1947, 1971, and Modern South Asia*. Delhi: Women Unlimited.
- Kabir, Ananya Jahanara. 2018. "Utopias Eroded and Recalled: Intellectual Legacies of East Pakistan." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 41 (4): 892–910.
- Kanwal, Aroosa. 2015. *Rethinking Identities in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction: Beyond 9/11*. New York: Springer..
- Khan, Sorayya. 2003. *Noor*. Islamabad: Alhamra Publishing.
- Khan, Uzma Aslam. 2009. *The Geometry of God*. Northampton: Interlink Books.
- King, Bruce. 2011. "Kamila Shamsie's Novels of History, Exile and Desire." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47 (2): 147–158.
- Kumar, Priya. 2011. "Karachi as Home and the Uncanny Homecoming of Muhajirs in Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*." *South Asian Review* 32 (3): 161–181.
- Kumar, Priya. 2016. "Muhajirs as a Diaspora in Intizar Husain's *the Sea Lies Ahead* and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 39 (4): 855–872.
- Lechman, Renate. 2008. "Mnemonic and Intertextual Aspects of Literature." In *Media and Cultural Memory*, edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, 301–310. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co.
- Lezard, Nicholas. 2003. "Love, Betrayal, Sacrifice ... and Humor." *The Guardian*, June 7. theguardian.com/books/2003/jun/2007/featuresreviews.guardianreview2
- Mali, Joseph. 2003. *Mythistory: The Making of a Modern Historiography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Mallot, J. Edward. 2007. "'A Land Outside Space, an Expanse Without Distances': Amitav Ghosh, Kamila Shamsie, and the Maps of Memory." *Literature Interpretation Theory* 18 (3): 261–284.
- Murray, Henry Alexander. 1959. *Myth and Mythmaking*. New York: Wesleyan University Press.
- Neumann, Birgit. 2008. "The Literary Representation of Memory." In *Media and Cultural Memory*, edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, 333–244. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH.
- Rigney, Ann. 2008. "The Dynamics of Remembrance: Texts Between Monumentality and Morphing." In *Media and Cultural Memory*, edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, 345–356. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH.
- Shamsie, Kamila. 2002. *Kartography*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Shamsie, Muneeza. 2017. *Hybrid Tapestries. The Development of Pakistani Literature in English*. Karachi: OUP.
- Verkaaik, Oskar. 2004. *Migrants and Militants: Fun and Urban Violence in Pakistan*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP.
- Vitolo, Daniela. 2019. "History, Borders and Identity: Dealing with Silenced Memories of 1971." In *Routledge Companion to Pakistani Anglophone Writing*, edited by Aroosa Kanwal and Saiyma Aslam, 35–46. New York: Routledge.
- Waterman, David. 2015. *Where Worlds Collide: Pakistani Fiction in the New Millenium*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Wright, Theodore P. Jr. 1991. "Center-Periphery Relations and Ethnic Conflict in Pakistan: Sindhis, Muhajirs, and Punjabis." *Comparative Politics* 23 (3): 299–312.
- Zaman, Niaz, and Asif Farruki, eds. 2008. *Fault Lines: Stories of 1971*. Dhaka: University Publishing Ltd.