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Intimate Cartographies: Healing Partition Trauma Through Personal Memory in Shamsie's *Kartography*

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Abstract: Karachi, as a frontier province, has always been subjected to demographic transformation several times owing to the migrations that took place during and after the Partition of 1947. It was overwhelmed with atrocious violence due to the civil war of 1971, the increasing alienation of the Muhajirs, and the politics of autochthony since the 1980s. Kamila Shamsie's novel, *Kartography* (2001), situates the memories of the novel's characters to remind us of the core essence of Karachi, which at its best is "intimate with strangers" (190). Intimacy as a concept eludes concrete definitions. Then, how do we characterise this intimacy through personal memories? Does it serve as an alternative narrative against the memories of violence and hate that prevailed between the Sindhis and the Muhajirs? Can it heal the indelible mark of violence that abounds in the memories of the inhabitants of Karachi? This paper aims to look into how memories of intimacy between a place and a person establish what Yi-Fu Tuan marks as the quality of "at homeness" (220) of Karachi against the traumatic collective memory of the migrants caused by the partitions of 1947 and 1971 in the novel, *Kartography*. Through a close reading of the novel contextualized against the works of Oskar Verkaaik, Rita Kothari, Priya Kumar, Pierre Nora, Karen J. Prager, and Yi-Fu Tuan, this paper attempts to answer whether personal memories of what makes a place 'home' stir further problems of autochthony or instil a camaraderie in the face of the collective memory constituting warfare, communal and ethnic divides, and bloodshed. Lastly, it would also explore the possibility of a new approach towards memory studies where one attempts to heal trauma through intimate memories of harmony.

Keywords: *Personal Memories, Intimacy, Trauma, Karachi, Healing.*

Introduction

> "Back then, of course, maps weren't used for travel. They were mainly used for illustrating stories. There stands Mount Olympus. That's where Theseus fought the Minotaur. That kind of stuff. So, maps weren't about going from point A to point B; they were about helping someone hear the heartbeat of a place." (Shamsie 102)

So says Raheen while explaining the significance of maps in terms of the tales of places where people created memories in Kamila Shamsie's poignant love letter to Karachi, *Kartography* (2001). Karachi, as a frontier province, has always been frequently subjected to demographic transformation owing to the migrations that took place during and after the Partition of 1947. This ever-evolving city houses a diverse spread of ethnicities, from the Muhajirs to the Pathans and the Sindhis. After the Partition of 1947, the wider narrative of the migrants of South Asia has been ignored and crystallized under the homogenous identities of 'Pakistanis' and 'Indians'. The nationalist discourses of these epochal conflicts employ the over-familiar Indo-Pak or the Hindu-Muslim binaries (Ansari 150). While segregating the displaced immigrants into these broad categories, one section was welcomed as people arriving home, and the other one was forcibly ousted and condemned for forsaking their nation. Amidst these nationalist discourses, Cara Cilano argues that literary narratives, like *Kartography*, offer up and transmit across generations national identities that serve as alternatives to the nationalist ones, thereby displacing the authority of nationalist history across generations (Cilano 2). *Kartography*, as a novel, attempts to showcase the interactions among the diverse ethnicities of Karachi. The text not only provides a nuanced perspective of the seeds of autochthony but also offers the scope to analyse every individual's relationship with their identity and how they negotiate with it while

reconciling with the collective memories of the trauma of Partition and the Liberation War of Bangladesh. However, in Karachi, through a close examination of the history of the Sindh region pre- and post-Partition, one can understand the construction and the cultural impact of ethnic identities. Sindhi Hindus, who were wealthy and prosperous, dominated the economy, but were quite different in terms of manners and language from the Hindus of the rest of undivided India. This economic and social domination was disrupted, and it eroded slowly after the advent of the "Muhajirs", the Urdu-speaking Muslims, in Karachi after Partition, leading to a constant tussle between the two ethnic factions and their contradictory historical narratives. In 1947, to safeguard their autonomy, the Sindhis chose Pakistan to settle. However, owing to state-sponsored persecution, Sindhi Hindus were forced to leave Pakistan, leaving their properties behind for the immigrants. The Sindhi version of this persistent discord argues how the Muhajirs were given preferential treatment and allowed to usurp the provincial politics of Karachi despite the Sindhis being a majority in numbers. However, the Muhajirs argue that they helped in creating the nation of Pakistan, thereafter leaving India, where Muslims have been a minority. They attribute their rise to prominence in the administrative and commercial affairs of the State to their education, refined skills, and expertise ("Sindhis and Mohajirs in Pakistan").

It is important to note that the concretization of the Muhajir identity as an ethnic one did not happen in a day. As Rita Kothari and Priya Kumar rightfully observe, Karachi was a witness to "....the construction or dilution of ethnic identities (Muhajir and Sindhi Hindu); the politicisation of ethnicities (Muhajir and Baloch); the dilution and/or minoritisation of the Sindhi language and culture in India; the effect of governmentalities, like the census, that were conducted against the backdrop of Partition-related migration; and the rise of the Muhajir Qaumi Movement and the politics of autochthony" (Kumar and Kothari 774). The term 'Muhajir' alludes to the migration of the first Muslims from Mecca to Medina. Therefore, when migrants from India arrived in Pakistan, it was likened to a pilgrimage and their arrival in the new

homeland was welcomed wholeheartedly by the people already residing there as a form of quasi-religious duty. Muhajir was then an inclusive term and did not connote any specific ethnic or linguistic group until the late 1950s, when the term had become specifically associated with Urdu-speaking migrants from India's Muslim minority provinces who had settled in the city of Karachi and other urban centres of Sindh (Sarah 150). Muhajir slowly transformed into an abusive word, reminding the Urdu-speaking Muslims that they were not from here. In an attempt to subvert the denigration, the migrants appropriated the Muhajir identity and constructed themselves as a distinct ethnicity. This was further fortified by the emergence of the Muhajir political movement in the Sindh region, thus overwhelming cities like Karachi with conflicts and increasing alienation of the Muhajirs. Karachi, since then, has become the warfront of overwhelming violence between two antagonistic ethnicities.

Amidst the unabated violence that abounds in this city, Kamila Shamsie situates the memories of the novel, the characters of *Kartography*, to remind the readers of the core essence of Karachi, which at its best is "intimate with strangers" (190). The novel adopts a self-reflexive narrative structure as it collates letters, polyphonic voices, and essays to reflect the diversity that the identities of its characters hold. Raheen and Karim, the two principal characters of the novel, embody the dialectical voices in the novel to finally establish how it is necessary to go back to the collective memory of the trauma of the Liberation War of 1971 that largely defines the history of cities like Karachi and intercept it with personal memories of intimacy and friendship to help the process of healing of an individual's trauma as well as their bittersweet relationship with their home. Raheen and Kareem are the generation of post-memory, carrying the traumatic knowledge and experience of their parents - Ali, Maheen, Zafar, and Yasmin. The novel traverses through two epochs of violence - the civil war of 1971, which led to the brutal persecution of the Bengali population in East Pakistan and the 1980s, when the frustration among the Muhajirs was rising exponentially due to Zia-ul Haq's authoritarian policies that promoted ethnic divisions.

Zafar, a Mujahir, carried the weight of this alienation, which was also borne by his daughter, Raheen. Their right to call Karachi their home has been questioned in the novel repeatedly, rather derisively, simply by virtue of their ancestors arriving in Pakistan a few generations later than the 'native' Pathans and Sindhis. An instance testifying to the omnipresent politics of autochthony is when Laila and her husband, Asif, casually mock the Mujahirs and assert their ethnic dominance over the land of Karachi, calling it their home as they have lived there for generations:

> "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 22)

As a witness to this scornful accusation towards her parents from their closest friends, Raheen confronted her identity as a Muhajir and the complex reality about her home, Karachi, for the first time. While Raheen negotiates her relationship with Karachi as a Muhajir, Karim carries the afflictions of a rupture that happened during the civil war of 1971. The destiny of Zafar and Maheen, who were formerly betrothed, was completely altered because of the backlash faced by Zafar for wanting to marry a Bengali. The increasing tensions that threatened their safety ultimately led to the swapping of fiancées, resulting in the impending doomed marriage between Karim's parents, Maheen and Ali. The novel recounts these pivotal points of rupture within the wider rubric of history as well as the personal lives of the characters through the voices of a child of divorce and a child of estrangement from her homeland, and examines how they reconcile with their respective intergenerational trauma.

Kartography, in the spirit of doing justice to its title, delves into this complex relationship of collective and personal memories through the varied perceptions of maps. This paper aims to look into how memories of intimacy between a place and a person establish what Yi-Fu Tuan marks as the quality of "at homeness" (220) of

Karachi against the traumatic collective memory of the migrants caused by the irrevocable historical moment of the partitions of 1947 and 1971 in the novel *Kartography*. Through a close reading of the novel, this paper will attempt to answer whether personal memories of what makes a place 'home' stir further problems of autochthony or instil a camaraderie in the face of the collective memory constituting warfare, communal and ethnic divides, and bloodshed.

Theoretical Lens

One must pay attention to the phrase that Shamsie uses, that is, Karachi at its best is "intimate with strangers" (Shamsie 190). Intimacy as a concept eludes concrete definitions. However, Karen J. Prager in *The Psychology of Intimacy* draws an assertion that intimacy is necessary for human well-being as it seems to "buffer people from the pathogenic effects of stress" (1). The question that then arises is, how is intimacy expressed? How do we quantify it? Through an etymological examination, the "intimate" is defined as inmost, intrinsic, from the Late Latin "intimatus", and a past participle of "intimare" which means "make known, announce, impress". Therefore, through these antithetical definitions, one can understand that intimacy, as a noun, is the act of sharing the deepest and innermost consciousness between each other. Intimacy can only be visibly traced in one-to-one relationships. In light of this, Prager further discusses how intimate interactions are differentiated from personal relationships by the act of confiding between partners. It is then, in essence, brought down to an individualized matrix where disclosing or making oneself familiar with the other through private and personal details builds trust and, in turn, intimacy between two individuals.

Intimacy can also be gauged on the basis of how comfortable and uninhibited one feels in the presence of another. It is an act of unburdening the weight that represses our desires and getting accepted for being our authentic selves. Shamsie has adopted this approach to define the dynamics of the characters between each other and

Karachi. One can understand the tumultuous relationship between Ali and Maheen through minute observations like, "I saw Uncle Ali flick an insect out of his wife's hair. Aunty Maheen looked startled and then smiled, and they regarded each other curiously, as though they hadn't seen one another in a very long time" (Shamsie 6). One can also understand the amicable conjugal relationship and the "absent minded intimacy" between Zafar and Yasmeen where they share glances and Zafar is found pushing at Yasmeen's chair with his bare foot, "pretending he was about to tip it over, and she gave him a look—one of those officious looks of hers—" (Shamsie 3). The registers of intimacy, much like the noun itself, elude definitions as it is clandestine and a knowledge so sacred that it is shared only between the two individuals. The most distinct relationship is that of Raheen, daughter of Zafar and Yasmin, and Karim, son of Maheen and Ali, the one-time crib companions, who seem to share a single consciousness, whose language of anagrams and metaphors is only privy to them. Their relationship is a point of departure for an exploration of the dynamics between their parents, friends, and, most importantly, the city of Karachi.

This paper primarily focuses on the intimacy with the city of Karachi and how that helps in the reconciliation with the traumatic experiences of the characters, bringing them close to the feeling of "at homeness" (Tuan 220) despite the turmoil that haunts the city. In his seminal work, *The Body Keeps the Score*, Bessel A. Van Der Kolk writes about how a traumatic experience leaves its traces on a large scale, like our histories and cultures or closer to home, on our families (12). At a personal and nuclear level, the dark secrets that trap the memories of trauma in our minds are surreptitiously passed down to the succeeding generations, thereby affecting their psychological, biological, and social well-being. Van Der Kolk writes that the part of our brain that is involved in ensuring our survival refuses to be in denial and, therefore, finds it difficult to let go of the memories of terror, which can be triggered at the slightest hint of danger (13). Thus, the mind, like paper, always carries creases, no matter how much you try to smooth out the past. Then, how can one heal from this?

Recovery from trauma requires reorganization of perception and reframing the memories of the place and the people involved in that cataclysm. More often than not, trauma completely demolishes an individual's sense of security and safety, leading to a detachment from others and the self.

However, through intimate relationships that offer a safe space and validate a trauma survivor's insecurities, one can see the scope of recovery and reconciliation. The difficult relationship that Karim and Raheen share with Karachi is a testament to how their intimate memories with the city helped them foster a sense of connection and belonging to a community, which in turn made them find the comfort and security of home in it. These memories help in the cognitive restructuring of their intergenerational trauma inflicted by the horrors of the Partition of 1947 and the civil war of 1971. Through a careful analysis of these intimate memories, we would map out the journey of healing in the text of *Kartography*.

Textual Analysis

Other than Raheen and Karim's relationship, what equally stands out is the intimate relationship that they have with Karachi. Raheen's perception of Karachi was, for the longest time throughout the novel, untainted by the politics of her identity as a Muhajir. Even amidst the curfews and the rising terror of the Mujahir Quami Movement, Raheen looked forward to her plans during the winter break, that is, "Going crabbing and hanging out at Baleji Beach and driving to the airport for coffee" (Shamsie 4), creating precious memories of friendship. It is Raheen's insularity towards the socio-political milieu of Karachi that becomes a point of contention with a disillusioned Karim, whose maps, initially marked as places where Karim and Raheen have woven memories, become more objective and detached from the intimacy of personal memories. Karim was an [offspring] of a disruptive marriage between two individuals who were not meant to be together. The climactic point of the novel unveils itself when we come to know that Zafar was betrothed to Maheen in the beginning, but owing to

the violence that erupted during the Civil War of 1971, Zafar broke off the engagement on a whim because Maheen was a Bengali living in Karachi. The swapping of fiancés became a casual tale between the two couples in the later years, even though it was borne out of a traumatic historic moment. This is where history and memory, though intermingled with each other, differentiate from each other, as Pierre Nora contends: "At the heart of history is a critical discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous memory. History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it" (9). Contrary to the argument of how history suppresses memory, we observe in this context how a memory that is now an amusing lore between two families' attempts to vanquish the afflictions of a bloodied history where atrocious communal violence and threats led to a complete change in destiny of Zafar and Maheen, thereby turning them into star-crossed lovers. The burden of the Liberation War of 1971 and the continuation of the MQM riots of the 1990s impinge themselves on the collective memory of two generations of characters in the novels.

The Muhajir Quami Movement, which initially started as a case of championing causes of ethnicity, later moulded its agenda into issues of class, as has been observed by Oskar Vervaaik. The novel is interspersed with traces of these historical tensions that abounded in Karachi, like the mention of the unemployed car thief who has now resorted to violence or the fatal accident of a Muhajir girl because of a Pathan bus driver's mistake that erupted into bloody riots. These brutal killings and bloodshed weighed more on the consciousness of Karim, who slowly grew more resolute about his identity as a Bengali from his maternal roots. He disdained Raheen for being in denial and not acknowledging the ramifications of her father's actions or just the general state of the terrorized Karachi. In the case of Karim, history indeed almost destroyed his intimate memories of Karachi and Raheen, Zia, and Sonia. For him, Karachi, from afar, has become a land of violence riddled with the politics of autochthony.

Raheen's perception of Karachi, on the other hand, is in direct contradiction with that of Kareem's, who believes that her city can be best defined by the U2 song, "Where the streets have no name" (Shamsie 130). Raheen, even when she lives in New York, stays rooted to Karachi as her sense of belonging and "at homeness" (Tuan 220) has been constantly challenged by the people because of her identity as a Mujahir. Therefore, it becomes imperative for Raheen to hold on to the individual memories that she has made in Karachi against the broader historiography to sustain her feeling of belonging. She rebuffs Karim's accusations by stating that she does not have the luxury of being compassionate, as they go on with their lives like that because they like the facade of maintaining a kind of sanity. When they laugh, that's defiance. Her outright denial of Karim's accusations and asking him to stop telling her about the graves that he marks on that map highlights the distinction and the distance between their realities. Here, evidently, trauma (or the denial of the same) is being used to construct an alternative cognitive reality. Austin Sarat et al. in their introduction to *Trauma and Memory Reading, Healing, and Making Law,* outline two modes of healing of trauma: one through exposition and rationalisation of the trauma and the other, by providing individuals with a safe space in which the routines of everyday life can bridge the cognitive gap produced by the trauma (11). Shamsie masterfully employs both techniques in resolving the conflict that has underscored the lives of Raheen and Karim and their parents.

There, healing or a step towards some semblance of reconciliation occurs through a two-fold process, where Raheen confronts the horror of her past, rather than her father's past, which affected the lives of all of her loved ones, especially Karim's. Secondly, through the assertion of the everyday, banal yet intimate memories she shares with the city of Karachi, which triumphs over the constant uncertainty that was inflicted on her home. It echoes the epigraph by Italo Calvino that Raheen mentions in one of her letters to Karim. Through testimonies of how the people of Karachi share a beautiful camaraderie in their everyday lives, Raheen explicates that Karachi is not a

city of violence but rather a city where everyone finds a home. In the moments, when the flower-seller lady insistently gave a string of *mogras* to Sonia because she saw Raheen wearing one, or when the manager of the Karachi airport offered his car keys so that Sonia and Raheen reach home safely, the warmth and oneness offered so generously by the people of Karachi, is what makes Raheen believe in the hope of overall reconciliation. In her letter to Karim, she illustrates how during the month of Muharram when the Shia women under purdah have to go to the Imam Baragh daily, the "[b]ack and front doors are flung open, and the women walk through from the hallway of one house to the hallway of another until that alley within houses takes them all the way to the door of the Imam Baragh" (Shamsie 184). This alley ceases to exist after the end of the month, but Raheen asserts that it said more about Karachi than any other designated alley on the street map. Through these illustrations of hospitality and memories of intimate interactions with the citizens of Karachi, one is reminded of the innate kindness that human beings are capable of, of the paradoxical situation where selfishness and love can coexist in one place. Thus, through the dialectic voices of Kareem and Raheen, Shamsie indeed contends that Karachi, despite the conflicts it is riddled with, holds the possibility of reconciliation through acknowledgement of the horrors of history and the remembrances of beautiful personal memories of intimacy, which reinforces an individual's "at homeness" (Tuan 220).

The sense of 'home' is unique to the human experience, and home and intimacy live in close quarters in terms of the registers that define them. The ability to be vulnerable and lay our guard down is a common denominator between home and intimacy. Therefore, to feel a sense of "at homeness", one has to foster an intimacy with the place. This intimacy lies in the banality of our everyday experiences with the place. Geographer Yu-Fi Tuan in his book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1979) suggests that the quality of this *at homeness* "…is not just visible signs such as monuments, shrines, hallowed battlefields or cemeteries that inspire …awareness of and loyalty to a place; rather, familiarity, ease, repetition, and

…homely pleasures accumulated over time make up the homelike qualities of a particular place" (159). Thus, the character's everyday familiarity with Karachi urges readers to insinuate that Karachi is not just a city of death but rather it is "intimate with strangers". Furthermore, Karachi becomes an intimate place for Karim and Raheen as the city stands as a witness to their journey from crib partners to lovers who share an intimacy so strong that they bear a single consciousness. It is an experience that is shared exclusively between Karim, Raheen, and Karachi, therefore crystallizing this relationship as a deeply intimate one. Thus, memories that trigger the feeling of "at homeness" (Tuan 220) about Karachi are at the centre of not only the reunion of two estranged lovers but also the rediscovery of home in the midst of war-torn violence in the city.

Conclusion

Kartography, through its nuanced narrative, manages to balance not only the ever-evolving dynamics of the relationships but also the individual's character development. However, one must observe that a quick resolution with a subsequent healing of trauma was reached at the end of the novel only because Raheen and Karim's trauma is secondary in nature. They neither confronted the brutality of the violence that their parents did nor did they experience the brunt of the chokehold that the authoritarian forces were holding against the underprivileged Muhajirs during the rising militancy of the MQM in the 1970s and 1980s. Their economically privileged status, wherein Karim moved to London, and Raheen moved to New York for her studies, enabled them to escape the drudgery of the lack of economic and social opportunities in Karachi. Their detachment from the ground reality is another reason that contributed to their reconciliation, as the spatial distance from Karachi helped them recalibrate their memories about it, reminding them of the memories that made Karachi a home for them. Therefore, the ease with which an intergenerational trauma was resolved must be discerned with measured scepticism as other variables — such as economic status, class, and the nature of the trauma — are also at play.

However, the novel skilfully challenges the notion of autochthony and who gets to call a place their home on the basis of the timing of their arrival. By showcasing the personal relationship every character has with the city, the novel upholds how this intimacy builds familiarity and makes Karachi a safe space for everyone, notwithstanding their ethnicity. At its core, it offers a conjunction of personal and collective memories that should delineate the maps and histories of the world. In her final letter to Karim, by attributing Raheen and Karim as Strabo and Eratosthenes, respectively, Raheen introduces a project where cartography will include personal testimonies of the inhabitants of that place. These maps would not only carry the lines and boundaries that divide alleys, regions, and nations but also memories of those particular spaces that spark intimacy - uniting and blurring the divisive lines. This foreshadows the current efforts of organizations like The Partition Archive of 1947 or 'Project Dastaan', which are interactive digital projects where users can find personal stories that fill the smaller, oft-ignored gaps of the larger history. It probes new possibilities for the next step in the domain of Trauma Studies- healing, where memories question the underpinnings of history. By shifting the focus on the objects that form a part of one's traumatic memories and building links that go beyond that event of terror, one can reframe their relationship with the place and the people that form a part of the traumatic memory.

While these personal memories solidify one's "at homeness" with the place they inhabit, they also run the risk of stirring up further problems of autochthony. It then becomes important to remind oneself of those particular memories that are deeply rooted in the multicultural and multiethnic rubric of the place. Shamsie ensured this through the display of long-standing friendships of two generations of Karachiites belonging to different ethnicities. Raheen, Karim, Zia, and Sonia nurtured their camaraderie in the face of the collective memory constituting warfare, communal and ethnic divides, and bloodshed. Their relationship with Karachi thus remained unfettered as its soil reminded them of their friendships. Karachi, even today, is

afflicted with divisive communal and ethnic violence. Protests by the MQM party and riots are still a daunting reality that haunts the Karachiites. This form of enquiry opens up avenues for the trauma survivors, especially the recipients of secondary trauma, to reconcile with their past that has been imbued with memories of violence. Moreover, for the dispossessed and displaced migrants, it will be an effective way of overcoming the insecurities that question their sense of belonging in their new homelands. Shamsie's use of intimacy as a technique of healing thus offers hope in the field of Trauma Studies, where one might attempt to bridge the distance between an individual and the place, they once called home.

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