

**Cultural Duality, Political Betrayal, and Burden of History in Kamila Shamsie's Novel
*Kartography***

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Kamila Shamsie's Kartography (2002) through three interconnected themes: cultural duality, political betrayal, and the burden of history. Drawing on the postcolonial perspectives of Homi K. Bhabha, W. E. B. Du Bois, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Frantz Fanon, the study explores how these themes shape the identities and relationships of the novel's protagonists, Karim and Raheen, within the complex sociopolitical landscape of Karachi. The article argues that cultural duality in Kartography is not a condition that can be easily resolved but an enduring reality produced by colonial legacies, ethnic divisions, migration, and competing cultural affiliations. The novel's representation of political betrayal extends beyond the national and political sphere into family relationships and individual consciousness, revealing how political conflicts and unspoken grievances are transmitted across generations. Furthermore, the article examines the burden of history, particularly the unresolved legacy of the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, as a force that continues to shape the lives of characters who did not directly experience the events. The metaphor of the map in the novel's title is therefore significant not merely as an aesthetic device but as a representation of the ways in which space, identity, belonging, and national history are constructed and contested. Ultimately, Kartography demonstrates how personal identities and familial relationships remain deeply entangled with the political divisions and historical memories of the nation.

Keywords: *Kartography, Kamila Shamsie, cultural duality, political betrayal, 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, postcolonialism, hybrid identity, Karachi, third space, historical memory*

INTRODUCTION

Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (2002) resists the separation of the personal from the political, the present from the past, and the emotional from the historical. Set against the turbulent political and ethnic history of Karachi, the novel explores the lives of its two central characters, Karim and Raheen, whose friendship and personal relationships are deeply shaped by conflicts that precede their own lives. Their experiences demonstrate that individual identity cannot be separated from the geographical, political, and historical conditions in which it is formed. In *Kartography*, geography is therefore never merely a physical space; it is closely connected to identity, belonging, memory, and power. The title itself foregrounds the significance of mapping, suggesting that the representation of geographical space is also a way of understanding how identities and histories are constructed, divided, and contested.

This article focuses on three interconnected concerns in *Kartography*: cultural duality, political betrayal, and the burden of history. These concerns do not function as separate thematic elements but intersect throughout the narrative. Cultural duality emerges through the characters' negotiation of multiple cultural affiliations, geographical spaces, languages, and generational experiences. Political betrayal, meanwhile, extends beyond the sphere of the state and enters family relationships and individual consciousness. The political violence associated with the history of Pakistan, particularly the events surrounding the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, creates wounds that remain unresolved and continue to influence subsequent generations. History thus becomes a force that shapes the lives of characters who did not directly experience the events of the past but nevertheless inherit their consequences. The

novel consequently presents the past not as something completed but as something continually remembered, suppressed, reconstructed, and transmitted.

Shamsie's own transnational background provides a relevant context for understanding the novel's concern with cultural and geographical displacement, although the present study does not treat the author's biography as evidence of the novel's meaning. Born in Karachi in 1973 and having lived and studied in both Pakistan and the United States, Shamsie writes from a position that engages with questions of cultural affiliation, geographical belonging, and divided identities. These concerns are reflected in *Kartography*, particularly through characters who negotiate the tensions between personal identity and the histories attached to the places in which they live. The novel's Karachi is therefore not simply a setting but a contested geographical and cultural space in which individual and collective identities are continuously produced and challenged.

The article is organized into four analytical movements. The first examines cultural duality and considers how Shamsie constructs divided and hybrid identities across geography, language, generation, and psychology. The second focuses on political betrayal and traces how the consequences of political violence, particularly the trauma associated with 1971, move from the level of the state into the family and ultimately into individual consciousness. The third examines the burden of history, focusing on the processes of remembering, suppressing, and reconstructing the past through characters, family relationships, silence, and memory. The fourth brings these concerns together through the novel's cartographic metaphor, examining how mapping functions as a means of representing and questioning relationships between geography, identity, belonging, and history. Through these interconnected concerns, *Kartography* reveals that the personal lives of its characters remain inseparable from the political and historical forces that have shaped their world.

Research Questions

1. How does Shamsie portray cultural duality and hybrid identity in *Kartography*?
2. How does political betrayal shape characters' consciousness and mirror post-1971 collective trauma?
3. How do duality and betrayal drive identity fragmentation in the protagonists?
4. How does the cartographic metaphor interrogate belonging and displacement in the novel?
5. How does colonial and Partition trauma shape intergenerational relationships in the novel?
6. How does the novel use language, space, and memory as resistance or submission?

Objective of the Study

Based on the research problem, this study has some goals:

1. Analyze how *Kartography* represents the construction of cultural identity in the context of Karachi.
2. Examine the novel's depiction of political betrayal and its impact on personal relationships and societal trust.
3. It will explore how Kamila Shamsie uses historical events, particularly the partition of East Pakistan in 1971, to shape the narrative and characters.

4. Explore the connection between memory, history and identity in how the protagonists' lives are shaped.
5. Evaluate how the novel critiques national history and presents alternative perspectives on truth and collective memory.
6. Analyze the role of class, ethnicity, and social divisions in creating cultural and political tensions throughout history.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the last decade, the interest in Kartography has increased significantly and the work of the scholars who have approached the novel have laid the foundations. Within the context of a diasporic space, Rafia Kiran Zahid and Hafiz Muhammad Tanzim (2022) used Bhabha's concept of third space to show how the characters in the novel developed hybrid identities, which highlighted the experience of cultural in-betweenness and the positive aspects of cultural in-betweenness more than the negative aspects and more on the former than the latter.

Their postcolonial feminist reading brings to the fore the plight of Bengali women trapped in the violence of 1971 and its aftermath, a facet of the novel neglected by previous criticism, by Sanjib K. Biswas and Priyanka Tripathi (2020). In their work, Quratulain Liaqat's and Asia Mukhtar's (2022) approach to cultural memory is applied to the novel, highlighting how Shamsie uses storytelling to remember and pass on the collective experience of partition and its consequences.

Perhaps most insightful analysis of what Caroline Herbert (2011) calls Shamsie's "lyric maps", the novel's use of memory, emotion, and poetry as means of representing the city of Karachi, is that of Caroline Herbert. Huzaifa Ali (2025) has extended the field by reading the novel through a Marxist lens, examining the class structures and economic inequalities within the novel, while Awais Qarni (2025) has applied an intersectional lens, using the work of Crenshaw, Bhabha, Spivak, Butler, and hooks to show the intersections between ethnicity, class, and gender as they manifest in the novel's representation of Karachi.

The other existing scholarship that is less directly related is that which deals with the specific interplay among all three of the novel's main preoccupations, cultural duality, political betrayal, and history, rather than separately with each of these. The purpose of this article has been to fill this void by showing how each concern creates and perpetuates the others and how the cartographic metaphor brings them together at the level of the formal construction of the novel.

Cultural Duality: A Condition, Not a Problem

Theoretically, the concept of cultural duality can be understood through W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness" and Homi K. Bhabha's theory of the "third space." In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois describes double consciousness as the experience of seeing oneself through the eyes of a society that constructs one as an "other." Although Du Bois developed the concept in relation to African American experience, it provides a useful framework for understanding the divided consciousness of individuals who negotiate more than one cultural identity. In a postcolonial context, such divided identity is not necessarily a temporary condition but may become an enduring feature of the individual's sense of self.

Bhabha develops this idea through his concept of the "third space," which is neither a simple middle ground between two cultures nor a space in which cultural differences disappear. Rather, it is a space of negotiation in which identities are continually constructed and reconstructed. The third space is characterized by ambivalence, cultural negotiation, and the disruption of fixed distinctions between self

and other, East and West, and tradition and modernity. This framework is particularly useful for reading *Kartography*, where Karim and Raheen occupy different but overlapping positions between Pakistani and Western cultural influences. Shamsie does not present cultural hybridity as an easy resolution of cultural difference. Instead, she presents it as a condition that the characters must continuously negotiate.

The first significant representation of cultural duality in the novel emerges through the contrasting experiences of Karim and Raheen. As political and ethnic violence intensifies in Karachi, Karim's family moves to London while Raheen remains in Karachi. At first, this geographical separation appears to establish a clear distinction between the diasporic subject and the subject who remains attached to the homeland. However, Shamsie complicates this distinction by showing that neither physical migration nor remaining in one's homeland provides a complete escape from cultural displacement. Karim remains psychologically connected to Karachi despite his physical distance, while Raheen, although she remains in Pakistan, inhabits a culturally hybrid environment shaped by both Pakistani traditions and Western influences.

Karim's relationship with Karachi illustrates the complex connection between geography, memory, and identity. From London, he repeatedly attempts to reconstruct Karachi through maps, suggesting that geographical representation becomes a way of maintaining a connection with the city from which he has been separated. Yet the maps cannot fully reproduce the Karachi he remembers. The city of memory differs from the city that continues to change through political violence, social transformation, and the passage of time. His attempt to map Karachi therefore becomes more than a geographical exercise: it reflects his struggle to preserve a sense of belonging to a place that he can no longer experience directly. The incompleteness of the map parallels the incompleteness of his relationship with the city and with his own identity.

Raheen's experience demonstrates that cultural duality does not depend solely on geographical displacement. Although she remains in Karachi, she belongs to an English-educated and culturally hybrid social environment in which Pakistani traditions coexist with Western cultural influences. Her position therefore complicates the assumption that remaining in one's homeland guarantees an uncomplicated sense of belonging. For Raheen, cultural duality operates within the same geographical space: it emerges through competing cultural values, languages, social expectations, and ways of understanding Karachi. Her identity is consequently shaped by the interaction between local belonging and cultural influences that extend beyond the boundaries of Pakistan.

Through Karim and Raheen, *Kartography* challenges the idea that cultural identity can be divided neatly between "home" and "abroad," or between "East" and "West." Karim's physical movement to London does not sever his relationship with Karachi, while Raheen's physical presence in Karachi does not place her outside the experience of cultural hybridity. Their different experiences reveal that cultural duality is not simply the consequence of migration but a broader condition of postcolonial identity. Shamsie therefore presents cultural duality not as a problem requiring a final resolution but as an enduring condition that individuals must negotiate in their relationships with place, memory, culture, and one another.

Language and the Colonized Mind

Shamsie brings the problem of cultural duality into sharper focus through the characters' relationship with language, education, and cultural references. Their familiarity with Western literature and intellectual traditions might initially be interpreted as evidence of a colonized consciousness, in which Western culture is privileged as a source of intellectual and cultural authority. However, *Kartography* complicates such an interpretation. An outright rejection of Western cultural influences would be equally artificial because the characters have been educated within a social and linguistic environment shaped by both Pakistani and Western traditions. Their engagement with Western cultural references

therefore does not necessarily represent a rejection of their Pakistani identity; rather, it reveals the complex cultural formation of postcolonial subjects.

Language is particularly significant in this context. The characters inhabit a linguistic and educational environment in which English carries considerable cultural and social authority, while Urdu and other local linguistic and cultural practices remain important to their sense of belonging. This coexistence prevents identity from being understood through a simple opposition between the indigenous and the Western. The characters cannot simply choose one cultural system and reject the other because both have contributed to the formation of their identities.

This condition reflects the central nature of cultural duality in *Kartography*. Shamsie does not portray her characters as passive victims of Western cultural influence, nor does she present cultural authenticity as something that can be recovered through the complete rejection of the West. Instead, she depicts identity as the product of historical and cultural processes that cannot easily be separated. The education the characters receive, the language through which they communicate, and the literature through which they understand themselves are all shaped by the colonial and postcolonial contexts in which they have grown up. Their cultural duality therefore emerges not from personal indecision but from the historical conditions that have produced their identities.

In this sense, *Kartography* moves beyond the binary of “colonized” and “authentic.” The novel suggests that postcolonial identity is formed through continuous negotiation between cultural influences rather than through the selection of one culture over another. Cultural duality is consequently not presented as a failure to achieve a stable identity; it is an enduring condition of the characters’ experience.

Generational Duality: Two Pakistans in One Family

Cultural duality in *Kartography* operates not only at the individual level but also across generations. The parents of Karim and Raheen belong to a generation shaped by the political and social realities of the Pakistan that existed before and around 1971. Their children, however, inherit a markedly different Pakistan: one increasingly marked by ethnic violence, political instability, and uncertainty about national identity and belonging. Shamsie uses this generational difference to demonstrate that cultural identity is shaped not only by geographical and cultural affiliations but also by the historical experiences inherited from previous generations.

Raheen's question, “*What does 1971 have to do with now?*” (Shamsie 269), articulates the novel's central problem of generational inheritance. The question initially separates past from present, but the narrative gradually demonstrates that such a separation is impossible: the consequences of 1971 remain embedded in family relationships, identity, and political consciousness.

The two generations therefore inhabit different understandings of the same nation. The older generation carries the unresolved consequences of 1971, while the younger generation grows up in the shadow of an event that has not been adequately explained to them. The parents' relationship with the past is characterized by guilt, pain, and silence, whereas their children experience the consequences of that silence without possessing the complete knowledge necessary to understand its origins. The result is a generational form of cultural duality in which the same family contains different relationships to Pakistan and to its history.

This generational divide is significant because the younger characters sense that something has been withheld from them, even when they cannot identify precisely what that absence is. Because the past is not openly discussed, its effects are experienced initially as personal confusion rather than as the consequence of historical and political events. What appears to be a problem of individual identity is therefore connected to a larger history that the previous generation has been unable or unwilling to articulate.

Shamsie thus presents silence as an important mechanism through which cultural and historical divisions are transmitted across generations. The children do not simply inherit the events of the past; they inherit the silence surrounding those events. Their incomplete understanding of their parents' experiences produces a gap between generations, making it difficult for one generation to fully explain itself to the other. Cultural duality in *Kartography* therefore extends beyond the opposition between East and West or Karachi and London: it also exists between past and present, parents and children, memory and silence. In this sense, the novel suggests that the burden of history can shape identity even when that history remains unspoken.

Karachi as a City of Dual Identity

Shamsie extends the theme of cultural duality from the individual to the city itself. In *Kartography*, Karachi does not appear as a unified or stable geographical entity; rather, it is represented through a series of contradiction.

ns: beautiful and violent, intimate and threatening, familiar and alienating. The city undergoes a significant transformation across the historical period represented in the novel, as its cosmopolitan character increasingly becomes entangled with ethnic violence, political conflict, and social division. Yet Shamsie does not allow one image of Karachi to replace another. The city's violence exists alongside its beauty, just as its divisions exist alongside the characters' deep emotional attachment to it. Raheen's description of Karachi as containing "air pockets of beauty" captures this contradictory relationship with the city.

The question, "*How do you eat your roots?*" (Shamsie 76), provides a particularly significant expression of the novel's concern with cultural belonging. The metaphor of roots suggests an attachment to place, culture, memory, and identity, while the question itself points to the impossibility of possessing or preserving that attachment in a complete and uncomplicated form. For Karim, who leaves Karachi for London, geographical distance intensifies his desire to remain connected to the city. Yet his relationship with Karachi cannot simply be restored through physical return or memory. The city he remembers is continually changing, while his own understanding of it is shaped by distance, memory, and displacement. His attachment to Karachi therefore becomes a form of cultural duality: he belongs to the city emotionally while simultaneously experiencing it from outside.

Raheen's experience presents a different form of the same duality. Unlike Karim, she remains in Karachi, but her relationship with the city is not uncomplicated. She recognizes its ugliness, violence, and social disorder while continuing to perceive moments of beauty within it. Her reflection on discovering something beautiful amid "dust and rubbish" and the city's physical deterioration illustrates her ability to hold contradictory perceptions of Karachi simultaneously. She neither idealizes the city nor rejects it. Instead, she develops a particular cultural literacy through which beauty and violence can coexist within the same geographical space.

This ability to hold contradictory realities together is central to Shamsie's representation of cultural duality. Karachi cannot be understood exclusively as a beautiful homeland or as a violent and divided city. For Karim and Raheen, it is simultaneously a place of belonging and displacement, affection and fear, memory and loss. Their relationship with the city therefore reflects the broader condition of postcolonial identity: belonging does not require an uncomplicated or idealized relationship with one's place of origin. Rather, identity may emerge from the ability to negotiate contradictory experiences of the same cultural and geographical space.

Karachi thus functions in *Kartography* not merely as a setting but as a manifestation of cultural duality itself. The city contains multiple and competing histories, identities, and memories, just as the characters do. Shamsie uses this geographical complexity to challenge the assumption that a place can possess a single, stable identity. Through Karim and Raheen's different relationships with Karachi, the novel

demonstrates that cultural belonging is not based on choosing between contradictory versions of a place but on learning to live with their coexistence.

Political Betrayal: From the Nation to the Family

Political betrayal in *Kartography* is not confined to the actions of the state or to the political events of 1971. Rather, Shamsie demonstrates how political betrayal extends from the national sphere into family relationships and individual consciousness. The betrayal associated with the violence and political divisions surrounding the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War does not disappear with the end of the historical event; its consequences continue to shape the lives of subsequent generations. Political history therefore becomes part of the private sphere, influencing relationships between parents and children, friends, and members of the same community.

Shamsie presents betrayal as a process that moves across different levels of experience. What begins as a political and national crisis produces consequences within families, where silence and secrecy prevent the younger generation from fully understanding the past. The children inherit not only the consequences of political decisions made before their birth but also the emotional burden attached to those decisions. In this sense, political betrayal becomes intergenerational: the past is transmitted not necessarily through direct explanation but through silence, avoidance, fragmented memories, and unresolved tensions.

The movement from the nation to the family is therefore central to Shamsie's treatment of political betrayal. The novel suggests that political violence does not remain outside the private lives of individuals. When national history is suppressed or left unexplained, its unresolved tensions reappear within personal relationships and shape the ways individuals understand themselves and others. Political betrayal consequently becomes both a historical and psychological experience, linking the actions of the state to the intimate lives of those who inherit their consequences.

The 1971 War: The Wound That Does Not Heal

The Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 is never narrated fully or directly in *Kartography*. Instead, the event remains present through fragments, silences, evasions, and incomplete accounts. Like a wound whose visible surface may have healed while its effects remain, 1971 continues to shape the lives and relationships of characters who did not directly experience the war. Shamsie's narrative strategy is significant because the absence of an explicit account does not eliminate the past; rather, it demonstrates how suppressed histories continue to influence the present through silence and unresolved memory.

Within the novel, the legacy of 1971 represents a profound form of political betrayal. The conflict exposed the tension between the idea of Pakistan as a nation united through Muslim identity and the political, ethnic, and regional divisions that ultimately contributed to the separation of East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh. The violence associated with the conflict therefore becomes significant not only as a historical event but also as a source of unresolved questions about national identity, belonging, and responsibility. In *Kartography*, Shamsie is less concerned with providing a complete historical account of the war than with showing how its consequences survive within families and individual consciousness.

Shamsie's rhetorical question "*What happens when you work so hard to forget a horror...*" (305)—presents forgetting as an active process rather than a passive absence of memory. The novel consequently treats historical silence as productive: what is suppressed does not disappear but returns in altered psychological and social forms.

This historical burden becomes particularly personal through Karim's Bengali mother. Her identity complicates any simple understanding of Pakistani national belonging because her personal history is

connected to a conflict that has remained difficult to acknowledge openly within the family's experience. Her presence in Karachi after 1971 creates a continuing connection between the city in which the characters live and the history that their generation has inherited but does not fully understand. Through her character, Shamsie brings the consequences of political betrayal into the private sphere, showing that national histories are experienced through bodies, families, identities, and relationships.

The significance of 1971 in *Kartography* therefore lies not only in what the characters know about the event but also in what they do not know. The younger generation encounters the past through incomplete stories, silences, and emotional tensions rather than through a coherent historical narrative. This absence of explanation becomes itself a form of historical inheritance. The characters inherit the consequences of a history that their parents struggle to articulate, demonstrating how political betrayal can move from the state into the family and ultimately into individual consciousness. The wound of 1971 consequently remains open not because the event itself continues to occur, but because its memory has never been fully confronted.

Zafar's Betrayal: Personal Choice in a Political World

The novel gradually unfolds the revelation surrounding Zafar, Karim's father, and his involvement in the events of 1971. Shamsie deliberately delays the disclosure of Zafar's actions, allowing the significance of his past to emerge gradually rather than presenting him immediately as either a villain or a victim. His situation is shaped by the political circumstances of the war, in which the choices available to individuals are morally complex and carry consequences regardless of the decision made. Nevertheless, the difficult circumstances surrounding Zafar's choices do not erase their ethical consequences. His actions remain connected to questions of loyalty, responsibility, and betrayal.

The significance of Zafar's actions extends beyond the historical moment in which they occurred. Their consequences reach into the life of Karim, who was not yet born when these events took place. Karim's eventual discovery of his father's past therefore transforms his understanding not only of Zafar but also of his own identity. He is forced to confront a history that preceded his existence but nevertheless forms part of his personal and familial inheritance. Shamsie thus demonstrates that political history does not remain external to the individual: it enters family relationships and becomes part of the way subsequent generations understand themselves.

Zafar's character is significant precisely because Shamsie avoids presenting him through a simple opposition between hero and villain. He is neither completely absolved nor reduced to a figure of moral failure. Instead, he is presented as an individual whose personal choices are made within the constraints of a larger political catastrophe. This ambiguity allows Shamsie to explore the relationship between individual responsibility and historical circumstance. Zafar's actions are simultaneously personal and political, and their consequences continue long after the original events have ended.

Through Zafar, *Kartography* connects political betrayal with the inheritance of history. The younger generation does not simply inherit the consequences of political events; it also inherits the unresolved moral questions attached to the choices of the previous generation. Karim's discovery demonstrates how a hidden political history can become a personal crisis, forcing him to reconsider his relationship with his father, his family, and his own sense of identity. Political betrayal therefore moves from the level of the nation into the family and ultimately into the individual consciousness, reinforcing the novel's larger argument that the past cannot be separated from the present.

Karachi as a Betrayed City

The theme of betrayal in *Kartography* extends beyond family relationships to the relationship between individuals and the city they inhabit. Karachi is represented not simply as a geographical setting but as a city whose possibilities have been compromised by political conflict, ethnic division, and historical

violence. The cosmopolitan character associated with Karachi's early history is gradually challenged by political instability and the intensification of ethnic tensions during the 1980s and 1990s. Shamsie uses this transformation to suggest that the city's divisions are not merely natural expressions of ethnic difference but are also shaped by political histories and struggles over belonging, representation, and power.

This sense of contested belonging appears in the following passage:

"Karachi is my home, you know, why did those bloody Muhajirs have to go and form a political group? When they're together, they do what? My family had lived there centuries before, who the hell are these Muhajirs that they pretend it's their city!" (pp. 40–41)

The speaker's anger is directed explicitly toward the Muhajirs, but the passage reveals a deeper struggle over the meaning of belonging to Karachi. The question of who has the right to claim the city reflects competing historical memories and competing understandings of ownership, identity, and citizenship. The speaker's sense of displacement is therefore connected not simply to personal resentment but to broader political and historical processes that have transformed relationships between the city's communities.

In this context, Karachi itself can be understood as a space marked by political betrayal. The city's residents experience the consequences of historical and political decisions through everyday relationships, ethnic tensions, and competing claims to belonging. The legacies of Partition, the political consequences of 1971, and the ethnic conflicts that intensified in Karachi during the 1980s and 1990s contribute to a sense that the city's history has been imposed upon its inhabitants rather than collectively resolved. Shamsie transforms these historical tensions into personal experiences, showing how political decisions made at the level of the state can eventually shape the emotional and social lives of ordinary individuals.

The bitterness expressed in the passage is therefore significant not merely because it reveals hostility toward another ethnic community but because it demonstrates how political history becomes internalized as personal grievance. The speaker experiences historical transformations as a threat to his own belonging, while the city becomes the space in which competing memories and identities confront one another. Karachi is consequently "betrayed" not in a literal sense but through the failure of its political and social structures to accommodate its diverse communities. The city becomes another site where the consequences of political betrayal are experienced at the personal level.

Silence as Inherited Betrayal

One of Shamsie's significant contributions to the representation of political betrayal in *Kartography* is her treatment of silence as a mechanism through which betrayal is transmitted from one generation to another. The older generation's reluctance to discuss the events of 1971 does not simply create an absence of information; it shapes what the younger generation is able to know about itself, its family, and its national history. Karim and Raheen gradually become aware that aspects of the past have been withheld from them. They sense the presence of an unresolved history without possessing the knowledge necessary to fully identify or interpret it. The result is a form of inherited uncertainty in which a political history becomes part of the characters' personal identities even when its details remain concealed.

Shamsie therefore presents political betrayal not merely as a past political act but as something that can be reproduced through silence. When painful or politically inconvenient aspects of history are suppressed, the absence of open discussion does not make those histories disappear. Instead, the consequences of that silence are transferred to subsequent generations. The younger generation inherits

not only the effects of historical events but also the gaps, evasions, and unresolved emotions surrounding them.

The relationship between public history and private silence is particularly significant. When dominant national narratives minimize, suppress, or avoid difficult aspects of the past, families may reproduce similar silences within the private sphere. In *Kartography*, this movement from public history to private silence demonstrates how political betrayal enters everyday life. What begins as a failure of the state to confront its history becomes a failure within the family to communicate that history to the next generation.

Silence thus becomes a secondary form of betrayal. The older generation's decision or inability to speak deprives the younger generation of knowledge that is necessary for understanding their own identities and familial histories. Karim and Raheen are therefore forced to encounter the past indirectly, through fragments, tensions, and discoveries rather than through a coherent account of what happened. Shamsie suggests that the burden of history is intensified when it is transmitted without explanation: what is left unsaid can shape identity as powerfully as what is remembered and spoken.

History: What the Past Does to the Present

History in *Kartography* is not merely a backdrop against which the characters' lives unfold; it is one of the central forces shaping the novel's narrative and its characters' identities. Shamsie examines how events that belong formally to the past, particularly the 1947 Partition of India and the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, continue to influence the present. Although these events occurred before the younger generation was born or before they were old enough to understand them, their consequences remain embedded in family relationships, cultural identities, and perceptions of belonging.

The characters are therefore shaped by historical events that they did not directly experience. The significance of history lies precisely in this indirect transmission. The past reaches the younger generation through family memories, silences, incomplete explanations, misunderstandings, and unresolved emotional responses. What the characters do not know about the past can be as influential as what they know. Their attempts to understand themselves are consequently complicated by histories that preceded their own lives but remain present within their families and communities.

Shamsie thus challenges the idea that history is something confined to the past. In *Kartography*, historical events remain active through their consequences, memories, and absences. The emotional experiences of Karim and Raheen cannot be understood independently of the political and historical circumstances inherited from the previous generation. History becomes an intimate force: it enters family relationships, influences individual identity, and shapes the ways characters understand their connection to Karachi and to Pakistan. The burden of history therefore lies not simply in remembering what happened but in living with the effects of what has never been fully resolved.

Theoretical Framework

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) provides an important theoretical framework for examining the relationship between power, knowledge, and historical representation in *Kartography*. Said demonstrates how dominant powers construct systems of knowledge and representation through which particular peoples, cultures, and histories are defined and controlled. Although Said's original analysis focuses on Western representations of the East, his discussion of the relationship between knowledge and power provides a useful framework for examining the construction of dominant historical narratives in postcolonial contexts. In *Kartography*, this perspective is particularly relevant to the representation of 1971 and its aftermath. The novel draws attention to the gap between official or dominant versions of national history and the experiences that remain marginalized within those narratives. Shamsie consequently questions the assumption that national history is a neutral account of the past, revealing

instead how memory, power, silence, and political interests influence what is remembered and what is excluded.

Frantz Fanon's analysis of the psychological consequences of colonial and historical violence provides a second dimension to this framework. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon examines the ways in which systems of domination and violence extend beyond political structures and affect the psychological lives of individuals and communities. His work is useful for understanding the fractured sense of belonging experienced by characters in *Kartography*. Karim's difficulty in establishing a stable relationship with both Karachi and London can be read within this broader context of historical displacement and cultural dislocation. His uncertainty is not simply an individual weakness but is connected to the historical and political circumstances inherited from previous generations. The legacies of Partition, 1971, migration, and family silence contribute to a condition in which personal identity remains inseparable from unresolved history.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) provides a further framework for examining questions of silence, representation, and marginalized voices. Spivak questions the assumption that marginalized subjects can simply gain a voice once they are represented, drawing attention instead to the structures of power that determine who can speak, who can be heard, and whose experiences become part of dominant knowledge. This perspective is particularly relevant to *Kartography*, where the experiences surrounding 1971 are mediated through silence, incomplete narratives, and competing forms of historical representation. The experiences of Bengali civilians, victims of wartime violence, and communities whose histories have been marginalized raise questions about whose version of the past becomes authoritative. Rather than simply replacing the dominant narrative with a single alternative history, Shamsie's novel exposes the gaps and silences through which historical knowledge is produced.

Taken together, Said, Fanon, and Spivak provide complementary perspectives for reading *Kartography*. Said helps illuminate the relationship between power and the construction of historical narratives; Fanon helps explain the psychological consequences of historical and political violence; and Spivak provides a framework for understanding silence, marginalization, and the politics of representation. These perspectives support the central argument of this article that cultural duality, political betrayal, and the burden of history are interconnected in *Kartography*. The novel demonstrates that the past remains active in the present not only through what is remembered but also through what is suppressed, silenced, and inherited.

Memory, Fiction, and the Recovery of Truth

The treatment of historical memory in *Kartography* is subtle and complex. Rather than providing a sustained or direct account of the events of 1971, Shamsie foregrounds their consequences as they emerge in the lives of characters who inherit the effects of the past without fully understanding their origins. This narrative strategy draws attention to the relationship between historical knowledge and historical silence. For the generation born after 1971, the war is encountered not necessarily through a complete account of what happened but through fragmented memories, family silences, and competing versions of the past. The novel therefore demonstrates how the absence of historical knowledge can itself become a significant part of historical memory.

Shamsie's treatment of the past also challenges the assumption that history exists only in official records. The experiences of Bengalis and the political and human consequences of 1971 occupy a difficult position within the characters' inherited understanding of Pakistan. Rather than presenting a single authoritative version of the conflict, *Kartography* draws attention to the gaps and exclusions through which national history is remembered. In this sense, the novel becomes concerned not only with what history records but also with what remains difficult to articulate, remember, or transmit.

Shamsie's use of cartography provides another way of representing this relationship between memory and history. As Caroline Herbert (2011) suggests through the concept of "lyric maps," the representation of Karachi in *Kartography* is not limited to geographical description; the city is also remembered, imagined, and emotionally experienced. Mapping therefore becomes connected to memory. Karim's attempts to reconstruct Karachi from a distance demonstrate that a map can preserve certain relationships with a place while simultaneously revealing what cannot be recovered. The map is never identical to the city, just as memory is never identical to the past.

Historical recovery in *Kartography* consequently takes place through personal experience rather than through a straightforward reconstruction of historical events. The novel does not simply replace an official version of history with another complete account; instead, it exposes the gaps, silences, and emotional consequences produced by incomplete historical knowledge. Karim's search to understand his father becomes part of this process. In attempting to discover what happened before his own birth, he is also forced to confront a history that has shaped his identity without his knowledge. His personal investigation therefore becomes a form of historical reckoning, bringing into question the silences that have allowed the past to remain unresolved.

Through memory, fiction, and cartography, Shamsie demonstrates that historical recovery is not simply the recovery of forgotten facts. It is also an attempt to understand how the past continues to act upon the present. *Kartography* shows that what is suppressed does not disappear; it survives in family relationships, identities, memories, and silences. The burden of history therefore lies not only in remembering the past but also in confronting the consequences of what has remained unspoken.

Karachi as a Living Archive of Political History

Karachi occupies a central position in Shamsie's representation of history. In *Kartography*, the city is not merely a backdrop against which historical events take place; it functions as a living archive in which the traces of political and social history remain visible. Its streets, neighbourhoods, demographic patterns, and spatial divisions reflect the consequences of migration, Partition, ethnic conflict, and political struggle. The physical organization of the city therefore carries histories that are not always explicitly narrated. Individuals may inhabit particular neighbourhoods and move through particular streets without possessing a complete knowledge of the historical processes that produced those spaces.

The observation that "*Karachi kept moving*" suggests that the city cannot be understood as a fixed geographical object (Shamsie). Karachi is continually transformed by migration, violence, memory, and political conflict. Its geography therefore becomes a living record of historical change rather than a neutral setting.

This relationship between geography and history is particularly significant in the context of Karachi's changing ethnic and political landscape. The settlement of migrant communities after Partition, the displacement and marginalization experienced by different communities, and the political conflicts that reshaped the city have all contributed to the ways in which Karachi is organized and experienced. The city consequently becomes a material record of historical processes: political decisions and conflicts leave traces in geographical space, even when their origins are forgotten or remain unspoken.

Karim's maps of Karachi can therefore be understood as acts of historical reading. His attempt to represent the city does more than record its streets and neighbourhoods; it draws attention to the histories embedded within them. Every boundary on a map can suggest a history of movement, division, belonging, or exclusion. Mapping thus becomes a means of uncovering relationships between geographical space and political history. Even when Karim approaches the city through memory and personal attachment, the spaces he maps carry histories that exceed his individual experience.

The cartographic metaphor consequently becomes central to Shamsie's understanding of history. The map does not simply reproduce an already existing geography; it reveals that geographical space itself has been shaped by historical forces. Karachi is therefore both a place of memory and a record of political change. Its streets and neighbourhoods preserve traces of events that the characters may not fully remember or understand, while Karim's maps attempt to make those relationships between space and history visible.

In this sense, history in *Kartography* is written not only in documents and memories but also on the ground. The city becomes a living archive in which political history, cultural identity, and personal memory intersect. Karim's act of mapping Karachi therefore becomes an attempt to read the historical meanings embedded in the city, demonstrating that to map a place is also, in part, to confront the histories that have produced it.

The Cartographic Metaphor: Mapping as Epistemology

The altered spelling of the novel's title, *Kartography*, foregrounds the relationship between cartography and the cultural, geographical, and historical world represented in the novel. The title immediately draws attention to the act of mapping, but it also suggests that maps are never completely transparent representations of reality. They select, organize, and define particular aspects of space while leaving others outside their boundaries. In *Kartography*, this incompleteness becomes significant because the same problem applies to representations of identity and history: neither place nor identity can be represented as a single, complete, and uncontested whole.

Maps are often associated with authority because they establish boundaries, identify territories, and organize geographical space. *Kartography*, however, questions the assumption that maps are neutral representations. A map necessarily involves selection: something is included, something is emphasized, and something is left out. What is excluded may therefore be as significant as what is represented. Shamsie extends this principle from geographical mapping to historical representation. Just as a map can privilege one understanding of space, a national narrative can privilege one understanding of the past while marginalizing other experiences and memories. The treatment of 1971 in the novel demonstrates this relationship between representation and exclusion, as the historical experiences of Bengalis and the political consequences of the war remain difficult to accommodate within dominant understandings of Pakistani national identity.

The political transformation of 1971 further demonstrates the relationship between cartography and identity. The creation of Bangladesh altered the geographical boundaries of the region and transformed the political identities of the people who inhabited it. A population that had previously been part of Pakistan became part of a new national state. In this sense, the redrawing of political boundaries also altered the geographical framework through which belonging and national identity were understood. Shamsie's novel connects this large-scale political transformation with the intimate experiences of characters whose identities continue to be shaped by its consequences.

Karim's personal maps of Karachi provide a more intimate version of the same problem. His maps attempt to preserve and understand a city that is continually changing, but they can never reproduce the city in its entirety. They are shaped by memory, distance, personal experience, and what Karim knows or does not know. Their incompleteness therefore becomes significant rather than merely defective. Karim's mapping reveals that knowledge of a place is always situated: the map represents Karachi from a particular perspective and cannot contain every history, memory, or experience associated with the city.

The cartographic metaphor consequently extends beyond personal identity to the politics of historical knowledge. *Kartography* invites us to understand political histories as forms of mapping: they organize the past, establish boundaries between significant and insignificant events, emphasize particular

experiences, and leave others at the margins. Such representations are not necessarily false, but they are inevitably selective and incomplete. The danger arises when a partial representation presents itself as the whole truth.

This is ultimately what Karim's relationship with cartography reveals. His goal is not to achieve perfect knowledge or complete control over Karachi. Instead, his maps demonstrate the importance of recognizing the limits of one's own knowledge. To acknowledge that a map is incomplete is to acknowledge that other histories, memories, and perspectives exist beyond its boundaries. In this sense, honest mapping becomes an ethical practice: it does not claim to possess the whole truth but remains open to what has been excluded, forgotten, or silenced.

Through the cartographic metaphor, Shamsie therefore brings together the three central concerns of *Kartography*: cultural duality, political betrayal, and the burden of history. Cultural identities are mapped through competing geographical and cultural affiliations; political power determines which spaces and histories are recognized; and historical memory remains marked by the boundaries between what is remembered and what is excluded. The map thus becomes more than an image of Karachi. It becomes a way of thinking about how people construct knowledge of place, identity, and history—and about the ethical responsibility to recognize what every map necessarily leaves out.

Characters as Bearers of History

Karim: The Reflective Self, Split Between Worlds

Karim is one of the principal characters through whom *Kartography* connects cultural duality with the burden of history. Thoughtful and analytical, he tends to examine his experiences through memory and reflection rather than simply accepting them. His introspective nature makes him particularly sensitive to the relationship between the present and the past. He repeatedly attempts to understand where his experiences come from and how his personal identity is connected to the histories of his family, his city, and his country. In this sense, Karim becomes an important bearer of historical consciousness in the novel.

Karim's identity crisis is not inherent but is shaped by his cultural and historical circumstances. He belongs to the Westernized elite of Karachi, is educated in English, and is familiar with both Pakistani and Western cultural traditions. His movement to London, however, places him within a different cultural framework. There, his identity can be reduced to the broad category of being Pakistani, while the particularities of his class, family, upbringing, and relationship with Karachi become less visible. When he returns to Karachi, he is similarly conscious of the distance created by his experience abroad. His position between Karachi and London therefore produces an uncomfortable cultural duality in which neither location completely resolves his sense of belonging.

Karim's relationship with Karachi further intensifies this duality. Distance does not eliminate his attachment to the city; rather, it makes him increasingly concerned with remembering and reconstructing it. His maps represent an attempt to understand a place that is simultaneously familiar and distant, remembered and continually changing. Geography therefore becomes inseparable from identity and history. Karim is not simply mapping Karachi as a physical city; he is attempting to locate himself within the cultural and historical world that the city represents.

His relationship with Raheen also demonstrates how personal relationships are shaped by historical circumstances. Their childhood friendship develops within Karachi's social and political environment, but their later relationship is affected by geographical separation, family histories, and revelations about the past. Their relationship therefore cannot be understood entirely as a private emotional experience. It is also influenced by the histories inherited from their parents' generation.

Karim's difficulty in expressing his emotions directly can similarly be connected to the novel's larger concern with silence. His tendency toward introspection and delayed understanding parallels the older generation's reluctance to articulate the history of 1971. This does not mean that his emotional restraint is simply caused by the events of 1971. Rather, Shamsie establishes a significant parallel between Karim's difficulty in articulating his emotions and the family's difficulty in articulating its historical experiences. In both cases, what remains unspoken continues to influence the present.

Karim therefore becomes a bearer of history because he gradually discovers that the past has shaped him before he fully understands it. His cultural duality, attachment to Karachi, relationship with Raheen, and discovery of his family's history demonstrate that individual identity cannot be separated from inherited historical experience. He does not simply remember the past; he is compelled to understand how the past has already become part of who he is.

Raheen: Emotional Directness in a World of Suppressed Truth

In so many respects, Raheen is the opposite of everything Karim is. She is direct and outspoken, instinctive, and responds where Karim processes, confronting where Karim withdraws in to reflection. Unlike Karim, her reactions to the betrayals she finds out about, which are related to her parents and her past unadmitted, are not silent absorption and internal fragmentation, but instead, she responds with anger, withdrawal and confrontation.

But Raheen's emotional bluntness is no barrier to its effect of buried history. As history gradually reveals itself to her, her sense of herself is just as disturbed as Karim's is. She has developed her sense of self in part through trusting those who were closest to her: those who formed her, who had not told her the whole truth, but who had lied to her. This means that her sense of origin and identity is being re-negotiated and re-negotiated, and the withheld truth is a defining part of her family's emotional life.

Karim's and Raheen's differences are the novel's longest formal strategy in examining the spectrum of options for dealing with cultural dualism and political treason. The two characters imply that there is no right or wrong answer, to leave or stay, to reflect or face, to fragment and to confront, to turn inwards or to turn outwards, to be inquisitive or to be angry: be one of these or all of these is a legitimate way of reacting to the same impossible situation.

CONCLUSION

Kartography is ultimately a novel about the burden of inheriting a history that the younger generation did not experience but cannot escape. Cultural duality, political betrayal, and the burden of history are not three separate concerns that Kamila Shamsie simply brings together; rather, they are interconnected dimensions of the same postcolonial condition. The characters inherit a history marked by political violence and silence, a cultural identity shaped by competing affiliations, and a city whose geography preserves the traces of unresolved historical conflicts. The novel's central concern is therefore not simply what happened in the past, but how the consequences of the past continue to shape those who come after it.

Shamsie's treatment of cultural duality is significant because she refuses to reduce it to a simple opposition between East and West. In *Kartography*, cultural duality operates simultaneously through geography, generation, language, class, and psychology. It affects those who leave Karachi as well as those who remain; it shapes diasporic experience as well as the experience of belonging to Karachi itself. Karim's movement between Karachi and London does not resolve his divided sense of belonging, while Raheen's rootedness in Karachi does not free her from cultural hybridity. The novel therefore presents duality not as a problem that can be solved by choosing one culture over another, but as a condition that must be negotiated and lived with.

Political betrayal operates at both the national and intimate levels of the novel. The events surrounding 1971 represent a profound rupture between the state and those whose experiences were excluded from dominant accounts of Pakistani national history. The consequences of this betrayal, however, do not remain confined to the political sphere. They enter families, friendships, and individual consciousness. The older generation's reluctance to speak openly about 1971 becomes another form of silence through which the consequences of political history are transmitted to the next generation. Karim and Raheen therefore inherit not only the consequences of historical events but also the silences and omissions through which those events have been remembered.

The burden of history consequently becomes one of the novel's central concerns. In *Kartography*, the past is never simply past; it remains active in the present through memory, identity, family relationships, and geographical belonging. Events such as Partition and the 1971 war continue to affect characters who did not experience them directly. Shamsie's gradual revelation of suppressed information formally reproduces this experience: history emerges indirectly through silence, memory, family secrets, and emotional responses before it becomes fully intelligible. The characters discover that understanding themselves requires confronting histories that existed before their own lives but nevertheless shaped the world into which they were born.

The cartographic metaphor provides the formal structure through which these three concerns converge. Karim's maps of Karachi are not merely representations of geographical space; they are attempts to understand a city shaped by migration, ethnic division, political conflict, memory, and belonging. At the same time, the novel suggests that historical narratives can function like maps: they select, organize, include, and exclude. What is absent from a map may therefore be as significant as what it represents. The incompleteness of Karim's maps parallels the incompleteness of the historical knowledge available to the characters, particularly regarding 1971 and its consequences.

The significance of *Kartography* ultimately lies in its refusal to offer complete resolution. What remains unmapped, unknown, or unstable is not necessarily a failure of representation; rather, it reveals the limits of any attempt to possess complete knowledge of place, identity, or history. Shamsie suggests that cultural duality cannot simply be overcome, political betrayal cannot be confined to the past, and historical silence cannot prevent the past from shaping the present. The appropriate response is therefore not to impose a neat resolution upon these tensions, but to acknowledge their complexity and remain attentive to what has been excluded, forgotten, or left unsaid.

In this sense, *Kartography* transforms mapping from a geographical practice into an **epistemological** and ethical metaphor. To map Karachi is to encounter the histories embedded within its spaces; to recover suppressed history is to recognize what dominant narratives have excluded; and to understand identity is to acknowledge the cultural and historical forces that have shaped it. The novel ultimately demonstrates that the past cannot simply be put to rest when its consequences remain present. Cultural duality, political betrayal, and historical inheritance therefore remain unresolved not because Shamsie fails to resolve them, but because their unresolved nature is precisely what the novel seeks to represent.

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