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# Kartography- A Mesh of Turbulent History and Hybrid Identity

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## ABSTRACT

Kartography (2001), a novel by Kamila Shamsie, talks about the diasporic struggle of various characters with hybrid identities. The present study deals with the hybrid identities of characters earned in newly created 'third spaces'. The concept is given by a Post colonialist critic Homi K. Bhabha (1994). It talks especially in terms of how hybrid characters like Karim have to maintain 'ambivalence'<sup>1</sup>. The process of self-actualization of the main characters of the novel under discussion has been marked by the struggle to diminish geographical borders and embrace cultural globalization. Karim's struggle with the previous culture in Karachi and the present culture in London entitled him to a transnational identity that is to survive his ambivalent diasporic challenges. His mother's Bengali. This is the space that Bhabha believes is a part of the resistance. This space lies between the articulation of mimicry and mockery while subverting the dominance of the West. ethnicity after the partition of Bangladesh from Pakistan in 1971 instantly marks her outsider, alienating her from a country of which once she was a part. Karim's struggle for a global identity and his love for mapping extends the boundaries and create a liminal or third space where cultures and identities co-exist and facilitate him in his self-recognition. In diasporic writings nostalgia of the origin never fades away, however, new cultural identities emerge in response to multiculturalism. The current research undertakes how people in third space earn hybrid identities in response to the deculturation of either of the two or more parent cultures that can lead to more defined new global identities.

**Keywords:** Hybridity, multiculturalism, third space, Global Identity, Diaspora

## Introduction

In postcolonial discourse, the dynamics of reading, writing, and analyzing literature took a different turn and writers started writing from the perspective of the colonized. Postcolonial literature often deals with the challenges of diaspora, displacement, and an individual pitted against two or more parent cultures. Homi k. Bhabha, an expert on cultural discourse, explains the terms 'hybridity' and 'third space'. He contends that all cultural proclamations and systems are created in a space that he calls the 'third space of enunciation' in his book *The Location of Culture* (2004) he explains in the following word: The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and references an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. (Bhabha 54)

It's in the 'in-between space' which carries the grafting of cultures and identities. The concept was widely used for a diasporic setting where characters and their reliability with their native and new setting are what make their identity peculiar. They always fight between what and where they were (native setting) and what and where they are (new setting) and this cultural negotiation wins them a more defining position which is neither of the older version of identity. The novel *Kartography* (2001) by Kamila Shamsie is a post-partition novel dealing with the tumultuous aftermaths of partition and bringing chaos not even in society but in the lives of those living in that turbulent period leaving characters in psychological anonymity. The characters in the novel are dealing with issues about an identity crisis for instance Karim, who was made to leave the country to live peacefully because of civil unrest in Pakistan. He felt estrangement and displacement because of the hybridity and his struggle of self-actualization. His mother's Bengali-ness has snatched away the love of his life and identity while living in Pakistan being judged at every step for being a dark-skinned Bengali who has no identity other than her ethnicity. The civil unrest is correlated with the unrest in the familial lives of the four main characters: Zafar, Maheen, Ali, and

Yasmeen.

The above-mentioned characters lived in a pre-Bangladesh partition era enjoying and partying and having the fiancés of their dreams. The unfortunate incidents of 1971 took away their liberty from them in the form of swapping of fiancés as put by Karim while talking to Raheen, another primary character; he said “You know if I wasn’t me, you wouldn’t be you” (4). The swapping of fiancés took place between their parents which foreshadowed their relationship till the end of the story. The burden their history has put on their shoulders was so intense that it took the reins of their lives in its hands and molded the characters’ lives and their actions accordingly. “Historical events cannot have the same meaning for those who only hear about them as compared to those who experienced them directly”(Shamsie 177).

The diaspora or people with mixed identities have to face a lot of difficulties while living away from their native culture. The migration or movement is not always voluntary; sometimes characters are forced due to personal or political reasons to leave their homeland. When a person leaves his or her space of one parent culture, he or she becomes a diaspora with a lot of difficulties and hardships. The biggest challenge diaspora feels in a new place is displacement, estrangement, and alienation. The diasporic person who has left his hometown for whatever purpose expects the new hometown to provide peace and solace but sometimes ends up losing his/her real identity. This is what Maheen experiences in Pakistan and Karim in London. Creation of a third space is not an easy job to get a new identity that is satisfying to cope with the diasporic challenges and it is a matter of a day or two. Their journey was never easy yet came with circumstances they never imagined. The diasporic communities or writers experience a diasporic anxiety’ which strips them of their identity making them aloof and alienated where they can’t relate to either self; the one they have come running from or the one they want to clad themselves in. They feel like in the wilderness because they can’t relate to the very aura of the new space, there and then a ‘Third space’ is created for them. The third space explains the uniqueness of each person as a ‘Hybrid’. Between our birth in 1947

and 1995, the dead bang between our beginning and our present is 1971, of which I know next to nothing except that there was a war and East Pakistan became Bangladesh, and what terrible things we must have done then to remain so silent about it. Is it shame at losing the war, or guilt about what we did to try to win that mutes us? (270) The above-mentioned lines state the tragic incident of 1971 when Bangladesh became autonomous.

The division could be the physical one but both the parts will have fragments from the past i.e. Maheen: once a Pakistani but after partition a Bengali who can never be a Pakistani again. Kamila Shamsie's characterization is close to what she has experienced and gives the reader an insight into what it is like to feel an outsider being not an outsider in your homeland and an outsider in a place you think you can call home. Karachi's my home, you know. Why did those bloody Muhajirs have to go and form a political group? Once they're united they'll do God knows what. Demanding this, demanding that ... Who the hell are these Muhajirs to pretend it's their city! (40-41). The word Muahjir is synonymous with the word migrant but has a very strong impact depriving one of identity and making him/her an abject. The diaspora in the same way is a sophisticated version of muhajir. The air, culture, and people of one place are always detrimental and prejudiced toward the diaspora. They never let the diaspora adjust in that very place they came looking for peace from their past making it worse for them. The air they breathe away from their native land always reminds them of the air they left, the cosmic balance disrupts the chemical processes in their bodies giving them anxiety and depression. The memories, culture, the ownership of their native land always pull them back no matter what the situation is. The same has happened with Karim who never felt at home in London and craved the love and friendship he had with Raheen and other friends. The dependence too much on what has happened in the past shaped the lives of those who even never knew the truth. The biggest displacement and fear Karim faced was the history of his parents which was a repercussion of the history of the place they live in. The hybridity never left any character in Kartography alone because of their history either familial or

political. The damage done was collateral which is quite evident in the lives of Maheen, Zafar, Ali, Yasmeen, Karim, and Raheen. The two main characters to be discussed in this paper are Maheen and Karim who both are the victims of an identity crisis the former because of her Bengalines and the latter, a hybrid character, having both Pakistani and Bengali blood running through his veins. “How can I marry one of them? How can I let one of them bear my children? Think of it as a civic duty. I’ll be diluting her Bengali bloodline” (232).

The dilemma of identity in *Kartography* is the main issue with the anxieties of the characters. The culture and social roles they are torn between never let them have an exclusive identity of theirs. Consequently, Masheen’s divorce and Karim’s journey toward self-actualization were the only way out. The decision both the characters took was a reaction to their past sufferings. Their past haunts them at every step: Karim about the trauma her mother faced due to her ethnicity and Maheen because of the rejection by her lover after being engaged. Shamsie’s flashback technique to bring the story of the parents with the current story of the protagonist of the novel adds universality to the novel and themes that lasted for generations. The writing of the Third World typically fills in as the portrayal by which Western subjectivity may account for itself. Through her works, Shamsie revives parts of narrating one starts asking what the purpose of recollecting and disremembering the past is. For one, a purposeful anecdote currently turns into a worldwide inference and not a public character. The irregular pattern of narratives of the characters foreshadows the life they have been spending. Shamsie (1973) is a Pakistani-British novelist who was born in Karachi. She usually takes Karachi as one of the backgrounds of her novels. She undertakes political turbulences of history and pours light on the survival of characters during those disorders in the country. In her books, Shamsie compactly portrays how the drawn lines cause individuals to endure extraordinary torments regardless of what the main driver might be. It should be noted, nonetheless, that all things verifiably go through ceaseless change. A long way from being officially fixed in some romanticized past, they are dependent upon

the continuing part of history, culture, and force. Shamsie's method of communicating the tales of people and the country is carefully illustrative of the arrangement of horrendous relocation, experienced independently and all things considered.

Shamsie intrigued home as the point of convergence of her diasporic composing. The in-between of hybridity gives a strange kind of strength as explained in *The World and Home* (1992) that the subject "inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality" (9). The objective of this research is to investigate how the ambivalent behavior of the diasporic character is a resistance to the native; to analyze how the newly created identity becomes more defining and powerful and to examine and interpret how the hybridity of the displaced people is important to lessen the border and to support the diasporic needs.

## Literature Review

Diasporic writers have imparted an important contribution to producing postcolonial literature. Postcoloniality doesn't free the colonial ruler from his history of oppression thus it is important to understand that this 'post' in fact doesn't mean after something rather it pertains to new forms of subjugation and domination for the global South. Bhabha also explains this in *The Location of Culture* (1994) "Postcoloniality, for its part, is a salutary reminder of the persistent 'neo-colonial' relations within the 'new' world order and the multinational division of labor. Such a perspective enables the authentication of histories of exploitation and the evolution of strategies of resistance." (Bhabha 9) As Foucault said that power breeds resistance and the subjects can only be made subjected to power until one is free and not in chains (Foucault). The characters in diasporic settings are free and they choose to resist in their ways. That's why Bhabha considers 'ambivalence' a better stance as it is a combination of mimicry and mockery. To him, mimicry is a form of action to destabilize the hegemonic powers from a postcolonial perspective. He believes that homogeneity should be criticized and it strengthens the rule of the oppressor.

Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) condemns western civilization for considering the people of third-world countries as an object who needs to be studied and to be known about. Said mocks the civility of the west that thinks that these people can't present themselves nor know themselves; hence they need representation and produce knowledge about these countries through the western lens. In the neo-orientalist<sup>2</sup> perspective, the notion of the orient has turned even more disturbing as the western literati consider it limited to Muslim countries only. "In contemporary neo-orientalist writing, the very concept of the Orient has been reduced to Muslim societies as well as the Muslim diaspora in the West"(Hasan 2015).

A modern form of western conception about the East and Islam particularly post 9/11, Western thinking has taken a new turn towards their former colonies. Islamophobia is one of the patterns of Neo-oriental beliefs of the West. Spivak however in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak (1998)" defends this notion that there are vulnerable communities and they need to be represented as they cannot speak for themselves. The characters in *Kartography* are round characters and not flat so they created their peculiar identities within their third space. They earned this space after fighting back the barrier of the cultural and lingual superiority of any of the parent cultures. This identity is acquired after having sabotaged the borders, and the division of the borders must be evaded to reconcile with the hybrid identity within liminal space. Cultural pluralities should be welcomed particularly in the aftermath of colonialism insists upon this multiculturalism. "Today, the cultural map needs to be redrawn" (Wolf). This paper talks about how colonialism and Othering can't be limited to the relationship between the East and the West. How Otherness becomes a phenomenon related to neocolonialism and pushes people towards the demerits of multiculturalism as in this novel's case the characters with Bengali identity were treated.

## **Research Methodology**

This is descriptive research that takes into account the irregular narratology of the novel through textual analysis. The main idea of

this paper deals with the postcolonial and post-partition effects in diasporic writings. Bhabha's theories of 'third space' and 'hybridity' have been used for theoretical framework. This is qualitative research and through textual analysis of the texts and characters, hybrid identity within the third space will be discussed.

## Analysis

Kartography (2001) is an ode to Karachi. It traces the psychological and political repercussions of the civil unrest of 1971 in Pakistan. No one can get away from the clutches and aftermaths of any political unrest. The title of the novel takes us to the passion of mapping the city Karim, the protagonist of the story, but the mapping we see is both metaphorical and literal. Karim is not only mapping the routes of the city but also mapping his memories, looking for answers, making the connection to different events, and finding the meaning of his own identity. Karim has never been in comfort, he was always looking for answers, for reasons of the very famous "fiancé swap" which has left her mother to be a subject of ridicule till the end of the story. This quest not only affected his relationship with Raheen his childhood friend but with other characters as well. The paper deals with the third space in which the characters of the novel embrace their hybridity and work for the deculturation of the parent cultures. Bhabha's third space in Cuddon's (2013) words has been explained below:

A theoretical term coined by the postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha (1949– ) to describe a space in which we can overcome the problematic claims of cultural purity and homogeneity, and embrace the hybridized nature of cultures. According to Bhabha, this is a potentially productive space that may 'open up the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*'. ( 740)

The two events changed the lives of all the main characters and their children; they couldn't even get out of the trauma till the end of the story. History had witnessed people moving from one place to

another. The world's history is littered with mass migrations. Such migrations were mostly performed in searching for new locations in which to establish a home to provide a better standard of living is one of the primary motifs. The triggers for such movements are not always solely economic, but oftentimes much more traumatic, involving violent conflict, distress, and the loss of loved ones (Sadecka 2014).

Karim and I curled our lips at each other...Going crabbing and hanging out at Baleji Beach and driving to the airport for coffee, the world is full of possibilities now that one of our crowd—Zia—drove, and the rest of us had chipped in with birthday and Eid money to buy him a driver's license that claimed he was born in 1967, before the moon landing, before the Civil War of '71, before my mother and Karim's mother swapped fiancés and wondered why they hadn't earlier. (Shamsie). The above-stated lines contextualize the contention of this research paper, that how far the fights for the 'third space' and struggle of the characters for hybrid identities have helped shape their lives in a promising manner. The event of 1971 and the fiancé's swap is what put Karim and Maheen in a very peculiar position in their lives.

The political unrest didn't only change history but had adverse effects on the lives of people living in that era which the novel talks about. The civil unrest stripped some of their lives but many of their identities. For instance, Maheen, in turbulent times, the one who faced great backlash from society and her so-called lover who left her because now she has become a Bengali. Space and place are ideas that are normally underestimated in battles. The idea of place can be perceived from multiple points of view a home, an area, a city, or some country. What parts it from the theoretical idea of space is the significance, or implications, attributed to it. The place is a space that anyone can get appended to, that can give one a sensation of connectedness, a sense of possession. Can one remake that equivalent sensation of closeness in another climate? Would one be able to credit the equivalent signifying to a new space that was recently saved that is called 'home'? (Sadecka 2014). This research paper

revolves around finding the identity and significance of a new home. The incident of 1971' incited in the general public a general racist attitude. People started talking behind her back which unsettled her. This conversation of Maheen is with his lover Zafar before the fiancé swap but how that joke turned into reality. Zafar seemed so avid in accepting her but ultimately fell victim to the discriminatory attitude everyone was indulged in. "If the two cultures fail to assimilate into one another, the intercultural contact would result in ethnic relations"(Zahoor & Abdul). So when Ali asked by Raheen about the fiancé swap Ali's answer made Raheen confused more than ever "So why didn't you marry my mother?" I said. Uncle Ali looked at me the way someone wearing half-moon reading glasses might peer at something in the distance...'The music changed,' he said" (Shamsie 30).

The cataclysm in society in 1971' was also proved to be a catastrophe for the families living at that time and Zafar, Maheen, Ali, and Yasmeen's lives were one representation of the several collateral damages. The situation has been portrayed in the article "This place is now your home" in the following words: For the upper-class Karachiites described by *Kartography*, having endless parties and social events is also a way of distracting themselves from the everyday reality of hatred and street violence. But this is not a solution that is made to last. People hurt each other, relationships break, and families fall apart. (Sadecka 2014).

The decision in which Zafar took place changed the course of his life and all coming after him ie. Karim and Raheen were a result of something very unusual. Zafar's decision was manipulated by some ethnic anxiety going on and made him take a hard decision in his life. Zafar's decision proved that ethnic discrimination won over love. But somehow Zafar regretted his decision later on but the damage had already been done which can never be undone. "How can you do it? You are going to marry one of them. You are going to let her have your children. How? (116). Zafar's decision was spurred by his friend Shafiq's comment whose baby brother's body was found in erstwhile East Pakistan and could not be even identified. He alleged Zafar of being a traitor if he would marry Maheen.

He knew that being with Maheen would be a great backlash from the society and people around him as he was already being labeled as a “bingo lover” and hated by people around him. On the contrary, Maheen too had to face a lot of blowouts, the major from Zafar and several others from the zealots as once a beggar spat on her face in public. She was treated as Other. *The Wretched of the Earth (1963)* speaks for such vulnerable communities, the way they are treated as if they are “unlike the original inhabitants, the others” (Fanon 38). All the madness that incident brought, shackled the roots, and from there sprouted betrayed love. Maheen’s life was changed there and then when loyalties shifted. All the events which took place in the past made their children skeptical of themselves. Karim had a peculiar maturity in his nature which was quite evident even in childhood because the stories of betrayal he had been listening to had a very strong on his sensibility and consciousness. The political and familial anxieties never let children enjoy their childhood because the questions they had were still not answered. “...there was gravity to Karim’s anger, a sense of cause and effect, some terrible notion of consequence. Did no one but I see that? While the rest of us were still just changing, Karim was maturing”(15). In *Location of culture (1994)* hybridity has been defined as “Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal” (Bhabha 159). Karim was a product of an insider (Ali) and an outsider (Maheen) having a hybrid quality as he was aware that his mother’s bengaline is in his blood, his genes, and nothing could deny it not Ali’s blood. Karim was a hybrid product who is dealing with that anxiety of belonging to nowhere. He never can claim to be a Pakistan or Bengali, so, what was he? This question never let him rest. His inclination toward cartography can be one answer that he was not only mapping the routes and roads of his beloved Karachi but also looking for traces of himself, his own identity. Karim’s hybridity and complexity of identity put Raheen and his relationship in a very different position.

They both don't know what they mean to each other. They had spent

their childhood together, in all the beauties and ugliness they were together but Karim's aloofness and indifference to Raheen and his parents are disturbing not only for his peace of mind but for others as well. Raheen had the feeling for him alone, he might too but he didn't let those feelings head up. Even Raheen didn't know what she has in her heart for Karim but there was something. Something which made her feel bad was when Karim had to leave Karachi. Karim's father didn't want him to stay in chaotic times and took him away to London, where Karim felt more displaced and estranged. The day Karim left made Raheen shattered and alone but still she thought the one who is going to suffer more will be Karim, all alone in an alien country having no friends at all. But it wasn't even easy for Raheen either who has never been away from Karim. Raheen and Karim's relationship was way different but Karim cannot even infer what he feels for her. "That night as I cried myself to sleep I knew that, somewhere in the sky, Karim was doing the same; and some of my tears were his tears, and some of his tears were mine"(65).

Karim's fight specifically for self-actualization in the newly created third space had helped them in reconciling with the past of their parents. Karim was wandering around the world because the last blowout he faced was his parent's divorce which was not so unpredictable but Karim had to respect that decision. Maheen has at last left Ali for another man, a man who was known to no one because she couldn't hold to the excruciating life she had in Karachi. This made Karim more displaced and alone. Karim used to exchange letters with Raheen and sent her strange cutting of maps and atlases, that dream of him being a cartographer was somehow fulfilled by his voyages to different parts of the world. "Your essay finally caught up with me in Rome. Just got here, hours before I left for the airport. It's been all around the world trying to find me. Australia, Morocco, Lapland." (87)

Karim's anxiety and attachment to his city Karachi can never go away, whether it's hate or love. He has an undying part of himself buried there, the roads, the people, the air, and the stories of Karachi will never leave him. Even though when Karim was back, he felt like

he was dreaming and couldn't believe it. Raheen was happy but felt a strangeness that she couldn't even talk to me. She was thinking about the last talk they had on-call and Karim said that he loves her and will ever but the Karim she met is not the same. The story took a u-turn when Sonia's engagement broke off and Karim said he is ready to marry Sonia, this thing shattered Raheen. Karim's decision and his lack of communication with his parents and Raheen showed that he wasn't in his right mind. "I can't believe I'm back", Karim said. "The temptation is strong to say, there is no going back" (Shamsie100). The last lines of the novel give the reader an insight into what Karim has been waiting for since all his childhood and adulthood an anchor, which was Raheen whose name materializes his journey of life.

## Conclusion

The novel was written before the tragic event of 9/11 that has changed all trajectories of the migrated Muslim communities in the world. Shamsie's craft of writing can also be seen in her effort of indigenizing the language and made it according to the socio-cultural context of Pakistan, her home country. In the novel, Shamsie's challenges the fixed thoughts of regional origination of countries, characters furthermore, disengagement with an endeavor to conquer the past and its injuries to all the more likely secure the current circumstance and better set up the establishments for different prospects. Even though the novel is essentially written in English, she has straightened out the language phonetically in her socio-cultural setting (*Jadoon 2017*).

The road to self-actualization was paved by Karim's father when he left Pakistan amid civil unrest to provide Karim with a peaceful environment which led to the self-actualization of Maheen who took a divorce and married another man. Likewise, Karim's wandering and his traveling to different countries were in a Search for the real meaning of his self but ended up more confused. He kept on coming back to his country to reconfigure his identity and to solve the puzzle of the life he has lived. This anxiety won him a third space in

which the same hybrid identity that once made him an outsider, does the opposite job of his inclusion while blurring the limitation of boundaries around him.

The contention of the research was to trace the hybridity in characters like Maheen and Karim while living with people they have been born with. Their new identities of a new home that they found after reconciliation with the diasporic needs are more defining. This is the liminal space that comes after having conflicts with the strange environment and a sense of estrangement and displacement. Ethnic differences and Maheen's Bengalis had her suffer unfortunate incidents in her life, first the fiancé swap, second the divorce, and third Karim's cynicism. Maheen, at last, found her peace in another man and Karim's wandering came to an end at his love, Raheen. Karim and Raheen had, at last, come to know the whole story narrated by Zafar about the famous and excruciating fiancé swap. The story made Raheen hate his father and made Karim even more cynical. Karim had been like a wandering sage who has been through worst all his life and no storm could alter his course now. He already had an anchor to hold him back to his real self that was Raheen. They both had lived a life of longing, longing for love of each other and longing for truth. Maheen's ethnic hybridity and mixed blood were somehow transferred to Karim and half of her suffering too. Karim led a miserable life always lingering with anxieties and self-doubts. These two characters solidify that man is the product of the times he/she lives in. Their history took a toll on them and made them take decisions to change their lives. London and his exposure to Cartography gave Karim an altogether new identity that he yearned for. He had to go through acculturation<sup>3</sup> to relinquish his self-realization. Also, Maheen went through the process of non-conformity within her same culture to take a divorce and marry another man. She not only shaped this new identity within the liminal<sup>4</sup> space that she created but also her hybrid identity won the respect and acknowledgment that she always had wished for. Maheen and Karim are the product of the worst times; partition and political pestilence. The story ended on a good note for all Maheen was happy with her new husband away from all the prejudices and Karim found his way, his connection, and his safe

place: Raheen. ‘Follow me,’ I say. ‘I know the way (Shamsie 196).

3. This is related to one’s effort to assimilate a culture that is different from one’s parent culture.

4. This may be called the confused phase that comes during the struggle before reaching to the conclusive stage of identity.

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