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**The Cartography of Belonging: Hybridity and Memory in Sorayya Khan's *We Take Our Cities with Us***

**Aqsa Qadeer**

M. Phil Scholar in English Literature, Riphah International University, Faisalabad Campus  
Faisalabad

[aaqsaansari66@gmail.com](mailto:aaqsaansari66@gmail.com)

**Dr. Zahra Rubab**

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Riphah International University, Faisalabad  
Campus, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

[zahra.rubab@riphahfsd.edu.pk](mailto:zahra.rubab@riphahfsd.edu.pk)

**Muhammad Rashid**

M. Phil Scholar, Department of English Literature, Government College University Faisalabad,  
Punjab, Pakistan

[iamminhas4@gmail.com](mailto:iamminhas4@gmail.com)

**Ayesha Sattar**

M. Phil Scholar in English Literature, Riphah International University, Faisalabad Campus  
Faisalabad

[sattaayesha@gmail.com](mailto:sattaayesha@gmail.com)

**Saba**

Alumna, Department of English Literature, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab,  
Pakistan.

[sabas8964@gmail.com](mailto:sabas8964@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT**

*This research article explores the intricate dimensions of transnational identity, geographical dislocation, and mnemonic preservation in Sorayya Khan's seminal memoir, *We Take Our Cities with Us: A Memoir* (2022). Operating at the vital intersection of postcolonial life writing, memory studies, and spatial theory, this paper argues that Khan constructs a sophisticated "cartography of belonging" that resists static, essentialist definitions of nationhood, race, and home. By analyzing how Khan weaves together her complex Pakistani-Dutch-American heritage across seven cities and three continents, this study deploys Homi Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity and the Third Space alongside Pierre Nora's formulation of lieux de mémoire (sites of memory), Marianne Hirsch's paradigm of postmemory, and Gaston Bachelard's poetics of space. The analysis demonstrates how Khan reconfigures domestic and urban spaces including Lahore, Islamabad, Vienna, and Amsterdam as active, psychological archives. These environments transcend passive backdrops for personal grief, functioning instead as palimpsestuous landscapes where macro-historical ruptures such as the 1947 Partition of British India, World War II traumas in Nazi-occupied Europe, and post-9/11 Islamophobia intersect with micro-histories of maternal loss and familial survival. Ultimately, this article illustrates how Khan's narrative models a form of rhizomatic belonging. Through this self-reflexive process, narrative documentation operates as*

*an architectural act of counter-mapping, establishing the sovereign page as the ultimate space of habitation and existential endurance for the hyphenated, global subject.*

**Keywords:** Sorayya Khan, Hybridity, Third Space, Lieux de mémoire, Postmemory, Spatial Theory, Pakistani Anglophone Literature, Transnational Life Writing.

### **INTRODUCTION: The Elasticity of The Diasporic Grid**

In contemporary transnational life writing, the traditional configuration of “home” as an unyielding, single geographic coordinate has increasingly been supplanted by fluid, multi-layered models of spatial interiority. But diasporic subjects always find themselves in what Edward Said (2000) has famously called the “generalized condition of homelessness,” a state of dislocation wherein the geography of the self is fractured by migration, historical trauma, and geopolitical upheavals. Sorayya Khan’s *We Take Our Cities with Us: A Memoir* (2022) emerges as a highly sophisticated and profoundly moving text within this tradition, offering a radical reappraisal of the relationship between geographic localization, memory, and personal identity. In this non-fiction work, which breaks free from the boundaries of her popular fiction, including *Noor* (2003), *Five Queen’s Road* (2009) and *City of Spies* (2015), Khan turns her analytical and creative eye inward, utilizing non-fiction to map her own complex reality of growing up between Europe and Pakistan, and subsequently residing in the United States. Khan’s memoir is an elastic architectural space that fuses geography, trauma and identity across seven different cities – Vienna, Lahore, Islamabad, Syracuse, Ithaca, Amsterdam, Maastricht and three continents.

This article argues that Khan constructs a rigorous “cartography of belonging” that relies on the dialectical interplay between hybrid identity, as conceptualized in Homi Bhabha’s theory of the Third Space, and mnemonic preservation, as articulated in Pierre Nora’s framework of *lieux de mémoire* and Marianne Hirsch’s paradigm of postmemory. We argue that the diasporic subject in Khan’s text is not only located in geographic places but also internalizes the city as a psychological archive that reorganizes identity in opposition to the structural breaks of the mid to late twentieth and early twenty first centuries. Such historical fault lines are the cataclysmic Partition of British India in 1947, the lingering devastation of World War II in Europe and the pervasive surveillance and xenophobia of post-9/11 America. Khan’s story suggests that “belonging” is not a precondition or a basic state to which one is born, but rather an active process of spatial and narrative mapping. Her self-reflexive practice demonstrates how the concealing and revealing of a parent’s death and the preserving and documenting of a multi-generational family line animates the physical page into a sovereign territory, a “meta-city” that can contain the “in-between” antithesis of being.

This study historically shows Khan’s life-writing to explore how the memoir undermines the essentialist categories of race, religion and nation state that shape the global discourse today. Khan’s identity is unique in that she inherits the traumas of European fascism through her mother’s harrowing childhood experiences in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands as well as a victim of the colonial and postcolonial fears of South Asia, having grown up in her father’s upbringing in the newly divided Pakistan. This double inheritance, when laid over her experience as an adult woman of color raising brown sons in a hostile socio-political United States in the aftermath of September 11, becomes an urgent critique of the apparatus of borders, exclusions, and state sanctioned othering. Khan’s title, *We Take Our Cities with Us*, is itself an epistemological statement, one that assumes that the material city, with all its streets, architecture, and political turbulence, is essentially portable, living on within the migrant’s psyche as an indelible set of spatial practices and sensory residues. The melody of the text using Khan’s own poetic metaphor—constantly recalls notes that have been abandoned, and a narrative rhythm is

created that suggests the past is never gone but is, instead, a palimpsest that can be seen under the present reality.

### **Literature Review: Diaspora, Memory, And the Pakistani Anglophone Memoir**

Khan's memoir must be read in the context of the overall South Asian Anglophone life-writing, as well as the burgeoning genre of Pakistani diasporic literature. In recent years, the themes of nation-making, historical trauma, and the dislocated geographies of displacement have been a source of a fascination in Pakistani Anglophone literature. The Partition of 1947 has been the subject of pioneering work in both fiction and non-fiction for a long time, which has not only divided a sub-continent but also created an ongoing issue of territorial belonging and identity. Sara Suleri's monumental memoir *Meatless Days* (1989) set an important precedent in the field of life-writing, a precursor in which national history is woven through with profoundly personal and elegiac observations on the female body, language, and loss of motherhood. Suleri's writing was an example of the use of the domestic realm as a micro-cosmic space for the study of macro-political change, with a highly rhetorical and non-linear style of prose that resonated with the nature of memory itself. *We Take Our Cities with Us* is a direct ideological and formal continuation of Suleri's project, however, Khan's work stretches the spatial boundaries of the genre by adding another dimension: tripartite cross-cultural dynamics (Pakistani, Dutch, American), which challenge the normal postcolonial binary of East-West.

Contemporary Pakistani Anglophone writers, such as Kamila Shamsie, Mohsin Hamid, and Bapsi Sidhwa, have often been the focus of critical inquiry as they negotiate the "transnational turn" (A. K. & Rukmini, 2022). In Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009), for example, the story moves between Nagasaki, Delhi, Pakistan and post 9/11 New York, and how global wars are reflected in individual lives. Similarly, Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) narrates the psychological division of the Pakistani immigrant body in the wake of American imperial surveillance. But where these fictional narratives play with creative proxies to engage with the anxieties of cross-cultural negotiation, Khan's memoir does away with the protective veneer of fiction, engaging instead with the material archive of her family's history. As can be seen from the above, the writing of the Pakistani diaspora often has to deal with the difficulty of writing for a western audience about the homeland and at the same time dealing with the exclusionary and chauvinist practices of the host country, as has been pointed out by critics like Raza Rumi (2015). In contrast to this programmatic burden, Khan denies any singular cultural representativeness, favoring instead the "rhizomatic" kind of belonging outlined by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), in which belonging is more a series of multiple and non-hierarchical connections between different geographic nodes than a rootedness in a single ancestral soil.

Moreover, the critical turns in memory studies and postcolonial geography today focus on the fact that memoirs authored by a cross-cultural subject do not document history, but rather what Radhakrishnan (1996) describes as "diasporic mediations". These mediations are an effort to blend different worlds conflicting epistemologies together. Literary critics have especially concentrated on Khan's previous work and how she has dealt with the issue of historical recovery; for instance, her novel *Noor* is a direct examination of the historical trauma of the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, and *Five Queen's Road* explores the domestic undercurrents of Partition in Lahore. The critical consensus suggests that Khan has always possessed an exceptional capacity to read history through the intimate architecture of the home (Blumberg-Kason, 2022). In *We Take Our Cities with Us*, this ability is taken to its ultimate level. Expanding this critical trajectory, Zahra, Qamar, and Shaheen (2024) utilize Critical Race Theory to argue that the memoir transcends personal bereavement to expose the systemic marginalization of religious and ethnic minority subgroups across global and local axis. They map the structural

traumas of post-9/11 Islamophobia in the West alongside the post-Partition vulnerabilities of Hindu and Christian communities in Pakistan, framing the text as an act of political and historical resistance. While their study highlights these raw socio-political exclusions, this current paper extends the discourse by analyzing how these exact historical fractures are actively spatialized and internalized within the physical and psychological cartography of the diasporic subject. While numerous stories of immigrants in the United States and Canada have been told, the memoir addresses a significant gap in contemporary literary scholarship, which is the exploration of biracial and multinational identity in the Pakistani diaspora, a subject that has yet to be thoroughly discussed. In Khan's text the parameters of the "immigrant novel" or the "postcolonial memoir" are destabilized, as the modern global subject is not a single and complete but an accretion of historical moments and spatial practices that traverse seemingly insurmountable borders.

### **Theoretical Framework: The Confluence of Hybridity And Spatial Mnemotechnics**

To systematically analyze the layered spatialities and memory-scapes in Khan's memoir, this study combines a dual theoretical framework: Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theories about hybridity and the Third Space, and important formulations from memory studies, Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, Marianne Hirsch's postmemory, and Gaston Bachelard's poetics of space. The utility of combining distinct theoretical axes to decrypt complex literary subjectivities is well-established in contemporary Pakistani scholarship. For instance, Rashid and Akram (2025) demonstrate how a systematic application of Crenshaw's intersectional framework can unveil the convergence of gendered vulnerabilities and elite class privileges within rigid patriarchal power structures. While their study applies this dual methodology to historical fiction to reclaim silenced female agency, this current paper repositions the intersectional lens alongside postcolonial spatial theory to examine how these compounded identities operate within a diasporic, non-fictional memoir. This conversation between these separate theoretical traditions can help to develop an analytical framework that is able to account for the political nature of Khan's cross-cultural identity and the high levels of emotive and psychological mechanisms of her spatial writing.

Homi Bhabha's seminal work *The Location of Culture* (1994) offers the theoretical vocabulary needed to decrypt Khan's subjectivity as a biracial, multinational being. Bhabha's rejection of cultural purity implies that all cultural statements and systems are developed in a space he calls the "Third Space of Enunciation". For Bhabha, hybridity is not a harmonious synthesis of two apparently separate cultural essentials but is instead a highly political and ambivalent space of negotiation in which binarism of self and other, colonizer and colonized, or native and foreigner are essentially confused. Bhabha writes:

*"It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial pedigree. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory... may open 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."* (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38)

Khan literally embodies this Third Space in her physical being and in her psychological journey in dealing with her Pakistani-Dutch identity. She exists in a liminal space that defies the totalizing force of Pakistani nationalist discourses and western orientating paradigms. Her identity is one which is permanently "in-between", and she makes this a constant source of creativity. The page is her way of negotiating this ambivalence and it becomes the physical space of Bhabha's Third Space, where different worlds are collected, questioned, and brought into harmony with each other.

To examine the interaction between this hybrid identity and the transmission of personal and collective trauma from one generation to the next, this study draws on Pierre Nora's classic essay, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire" (1989). Nora posits a profound historical rupture in the modern era, in which organic, lived memory has been eliminated by the bureaucratic, institutional forces of history. Thus, modern societies are forced to create and preserve, on purpose, certain places of memory (*lieux de mémoire*) that will not allow the past to be utterly erased. Nora's contention is that the emergence of "places of memory" is a result of the absence of "real environments of memory" (1989, p. 7). They may be objects, spaces, institutions or even artistic texts that are hyper-invested with mnemonic significance. The seven cities that Khan mentions are not simply administrative units on a map but are rather literally *lieux de mémoire*. The organic networks of her multi-generational family are constantly under threat from death, migration and political displacement, so Khan invents individual houses, streets and urban landscapes as sacred archives meant to hold her shifting history.

This preservation of memory is further complicated if the events being recalled are from a time before the author was born, a phenomenon that Marianne Hirsch (2012) refers to as "postmemory." According to Hirsch, postmemory is the connection the generation after has to the personal, collective and cultural traumas of the generation before, traumas that they "remember" only through the stories, images and behaviors in which they were raised. The experiences of postmemory are conveyed in such a way that they often feel like memory themselves, and they are imaginatively invested and created to make up for the lack of historical knowledge. Khan is a quintessential subject of postmemory; her Dutch mother has passed on her sharp and unhealed memories of her survival of the horrors of World War II in Europe, and her Pakistani father has passed on his silent yet profound memories of the horrors of the Partition of 1947. Her memoir is a critical study of how these second-hand memories, transmitted by her family ancestors, contribute to her primary experiences of the world, setting up a temporal double exposure in which the trauma of the mid-20th century keeps seeping into her present day.

Finally, Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1958) offers an effective phenomenological model to understand the psychological and historical interactions at the home level. Bachelard concentrates on the human psyche that lives in space and suggests that the house is one of the main ways of understanding the human soul. The house is not merely a structure of architecture for Bachelard, it is an internal container of dreams, memories and intimacies of the past. He claims, "the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace" (1958, p. 6). But, in the diasporic memoir, the domestic space is frequently marked by instability and fracture. This article argues how Khan takes the concept of the emotion of domestic space from Bachelard, the postcolonial politics of Bhabha, and the spatial mnemotechnics of Nora, and how, by combining these, she is able to analyze ways in which the traumas of history are localized, lived, and eventually transformed into a narrative cartography of survival in the home, which is the material space of her analysis.

### **Analysis: The Geography of Grief And Maternal Memory**

Sorayya Khan's memoir is triggered by the main structural and emotional event: the death of her mother in Holland due to leukemia. The depth of this sorrow triggers a radical psychological crisis and Khan's spatial coordinates of her whole life are thrown into disarray. In *We Take Our Cities with Us* maternal loss is never experienced as an abstract, disembodied sorrow; but is always a decidedly localized, spatial one. The body of the mother is clearly correlated with the cityscapes in which she lived, thereby creating an indestructible bond between maternal memory and geographical space. The mother herself is the most transnational link in the family matrix: a

European woman who immigrated to Pakistan in the 1950s to marry a Pakistani man, living in a wholly different cultural landscape, while holding on to the traumas of her own youth in the Netherlands. Thus, Khan's lament for her mother is not only for a mother, but also for a primary archive to which her hybrid identity was tethered through physicality.

Most apparent is Khan's complicated and evolving relationship with Vienna, her native city, as she localizes her grief. In Vienna, Khan's father died a sad and sudden death in a botched surgical operation years earlier and she has completely severed all ties, even psychologically, with the city, and has erased it from her personal history. Khan's description of this defensive move of spatial excision is savage:

*"I, on the other hand, excised the city from my life as if I had no history with it—as if I hadn't been born there nor been a childhood resident nor visited as an adult. I threw it out of my life like the children's outgrown clothes." (Khan, 2022, p. 42)*

The profound quotation demonstrates that the diasporic subject deploys spatial erasure as a coping mechanism to deal with intolerable trauma. Khan's appropriation of the major European capital as "outgrown clothes" suggests that she is trying to impose sovereign control over her geography, as if a major European city—and this history—can be discarded at will. But when her mother is diagnosed with leukemia, this illusion of control is shattered. With her mother's impending death, Khan is pulled back into Vienna, both physically and psychologically. The city itself experiences a transformation in terms of its narrative, moving from a place of individual trauma to a place of potential reconciliation. Physical geography, which has been intolerable as a reminder of the loss of the father in the past, has become a necessary place of maternal reclamation. The problem is that when Khan comes back to the city, she will have to face the fact that the past cannot be removed, it's got to be plotted on a map and become part of her.

Khan's journey moves into the past to examine her mother's beginnings in the Dutch cities of Amsterdam and Maastricht, to comprehend the extent of this maternal archive. This voyage is an obvious example of "postmemory" (Hirsch 2012). Khan interpellated the physical sites of her mother's youth, trying to fill in the basic traumatic experiences that have formed the character of her mother. She discovers a history of profound displacement: her mother's childhood in Holland as well as in the Netherlands during World War II, forced to live under the Nazi occupation, was fractured both by the systemic violence of the war and by an intimate, domestic betrayal, her grandfather's abandonment of the family, leaving her grandmother to raise eight children alone in a state of absolute destitution. In order to try to "fill in" her mother's past stories, Khan travels to Maastricht and Amsterdam, making her mother's geography real, material. She walks the same streets, gazes at the same canals, stands on the same bridges, and is making the effort to traverse the distance in time between herself and her mother's formative years. In this way, Khan shows that maternal memory can be considered a palimpsest—an autobiographical, modern, biracial woman who writes her own identity over historical traces of European suffering during the war, traces that her mother carried across the world to Pakistan. This process of mapping maternal memory also reveals the deep undercurrents of cultural isolation that characterized her mother's life in Pakistan. For almost 30 years, her mother resided in Pakistan, and felt like an outsider in many ways, a European soul in the complex social structures of Lahore and Islamabad. Khan meticulously records the small, material ways her mother maintained her connection to the Netherlands through specific domestic rituals, imported foods, and letters written to far-off relatives. These are what Nora (1989) calls portable *lieux de mémoire*, micro-spaces of Dutch identity that are sustained in the foreign space of South Asia. When her mother is diagnosed with leukemia, these fragile boundaries collapse. The illness eradicates borders between her worlds, geographical and cultural, to come face-to-face with the

realities of Europe and Pakistan in a painful collision. Khan's story telling is perfect in this way; her prose jumps decades and continents in a single paragraph, as a hospital room in New York or a street in war-time Amsterdam is as close as a childhood home in Lahore. In search of her mother, Khan is forced to become a mapping tool to map the intangible forces of emotion, probing the lines of love and inheritance that elude the fixed contours of national geography.

### **The Third Space of The Hybrid Memoir: Navigating Lahore, Maastricht, And Beyond**

The geography of grief underpins the emotional structure of the book while Khan's cartography of her physical homes in Pakistan allows for a political as well as postcolonial analysis. At the heart of this exploration is her profound connection with her father's ancestral home at Five Queen's Road, Lahore. In this memoir, the specific address, shared by one of her major novels and the central setting for the book, is not simply a real estate or geographical location but a living, breathing historical character. The house of Five Queen's Road is a literalization of Homi Bhabha's (1994) idea of the Third Space a place of deep ambivalence, history break, and culture transposition. Khan discovers the house has a complex, multi-layered history, and was constructed during the British Raj period and later owned by a Hindu gentleman, Dina Nath. In the fast-paced and violent tumultuous days leading up to the Partition of British India in 1947, Dina Nath's family decided to stay in Lahore and not move to India, despite the immense hardship and peril. Dina Nath converted to Islam, drew a line through the house and looked for a Muslim tenant to find a home on the opposite side of the line to save his life and the lives of his family from the gruesome communal violence which erupted in the newly formed state of Pakistan against the Hindus. Khan writes:

*"Five Queen's Road didn't belong to her in-laws, even if they behaved as if it did. She learned that the house was partitioned shortly before British India was, in 1947. The border that cleaved the country produced the independent nations of India and Pakistan; the border that cleaved the house shifted, growing or shrinking depending on perspective and the passage of time." (Khan, 2022, p. 78)*

This analysis shows the nature of how national trauma is privatized and given a spatial dimension. The physical wall that was built down the center of Five Queen's Road is in perfect correspondence with the Radcliffe Line, an arbitrary line that split the Indian subcontinent, and turned the domestic home into a micro-cosmic location of political partition. The house is an extraordinary place of cultural hybridity when Khan's father's family takes up residence in one part of the house, and when Khan's mother, a Dutch woman, is introduced to Pakistan in the same confines. It's a place where a colonial British architectural plan, a secret and protective Hindu-Muslim divide and a white European bride all exist side by side. An "anxiety of belonging" and a "religious anxiety" are thus structurally embedded in the walls of the house, which is no longer merely the "nest" of psychological security that Bachelard (1958) described. Khan's childhood recollections of running around the alleys of Lahore and exploring this fractured house remind us that a hybrid subject is not one that looks for pure, undivided territories, but rather learns to move across lines, borders and divisions.

The master class in spatial negotiation continues as the story moves from the historic organic density of Lahore to the clinical highly-planned landscape of Islamabad, the modern capital city of Pakistan. Khan's father relocated the family to Islamabad, a city that in 1972 was in the midst of construction, where he was accompanied by the grand promises of a postcolonial nation constructing their modernity. The transition from the cosmopolitan space of Europe to the raw, burgeoning grid of Islamabad is a seminal change in Khan's racial and cultural awareness. She explains how the strong South Asian sun and the sociopolitical climate changed her way of life and even her physicality: "It had even changed the color of my skin; I hadn't noticed, but

overnight, and in all the ways that mattered to me, it had become decidedly brown” (Khan, 2022, p. 104).

This is a stunning passage that offers a cartography of the body where hybridity is made visible and tangible. Skin color is not understood as a biological fact, but rather as a responsive geography, changing as their physical and political geography changes. In Vienna, Khan was seen in a certain racial way and in Islamabad, she is “decidedly brown,” which means she has been incorporated into the Pakistani society in a deep and visceral way. Islamabad is a place of incredible adolescent awakening: the political storms of the country, particularly the military dictatorship and the emergence of the Taliban, are the setting for the narrative. The personal coming of age and the traumatic hanging of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto are directly intertwined. With the wide and empty avenues and the looming Margalla Hills, the city is a different kind of Third Space compared to Lahore, one that is marked by state sponsored engineering and the anxieties of a fragile democracy. Khan’s story is a novelist’s portrait of this urban space: it is interwoven with the material production and political disintegration of the capital city, and her personal development.

Khan compares the historic, fractured structures of Lahore to the planned, precarious modernity of Islamabad, an impossible monolithic “Pakistani identity.” In the hybrid subject, Pakistan is always plural, a series of inhomogeneous urban realities that are never cohesive enough to tell a national story. The inner strife is compounded once Khan returns to Europe as an adult to visit Maastricht and Amsterdam where she follows her mother’s story. In these Dutch cities, she is faced with what is supposed to be her “motherland,” but feels like it is a foreign place. Her presence in the historic centers of Europe as a visibly brown woman, as a mother of American sons, as a practicing writer, is a global multiplicity that utterly complicates the homogenous cultural narratives of the West. Her body in Maastricht becomes a counter-mapping gesture; she inhabits her mother’s European past from the margins of erasure, and her own brown, Pakistani-inflected body is indeed a legitimate heir to the histories of the Netherlands. In a perpetual movement between Lahore, Islamabad and the cities of Holland, Khan’s memoir creates a complex model of transnational hybridity, not with the aim of eradicating differences but of letting them operate in productive and creative tension in the Third Space of her text.

### **Mapping The Unspoken: Narrative Archiving And Material Memory**

The last dimension of Khan’s cartography is the mapping of her family’s deep historical traumas, which haunt the domestic archive, instigating the study of how geopolitical changes of the world can be experienced in the intimate spaces of the domestic archive. Much of Khan’s memoir is shaped by her reality as an adult immigrant woman living in upstate New York, specifically in the racially charged, post-9/11 world of Syracuse and Ithaca, where she is tasked with raising “brown sons.” The home of her American husband is constantly breached by the state’s monitoring, the prevailing cultural fears of Islamophobia and South Asian/Muslim Americans, and the porousness of the boundaries between public and private. In writing about her children, Khan is acutely aware of their fragility, and how the sweeping, shadowy currents of geopolitics become, almost instantly, personal matters of physical and psychological survival for her sons. The seemingly benign geography of the American landscape that offered her family a space for cultural hybridity is shown to be a highly regulated geography in which notions of belonging are contingent, and racial policing is everywhere.

To set up this post-9/11 angst, Khan deftly employs a method of juxtaposition in time and place, pitting her current American plight against the first meeting of her parents in mid-1950s Chicago. At that time, Chicago was a center of academic and industrial activity in the Midwest, a city split clean through its own racial fault lines, but a place where international students had a place of

possibility. Both Khan's parents were outsiders, far from their homelands, when they met and fell in love in Chicago, an America that had yet to imagine the cultural fears of the late twentieth century. Khan explores the remaining material record of this courtship, the vast storehouse of correspondence between her parents, across continents. These letters are material objects of primary memory, as Nora (1989) would refer to as tangible *lieux de mémoire*. They're tangible objects that act as a paper bridge between a relationship that spans a huge geographic and cultural distance and predates Khan's life. These letters provide Khan with a critical space for reflecting on her own origins, for a narrative negotiation that attempts to transcend the tyranny of distance in an explicit act of textual communication.

The memoir thus emphasizes a theme central to it: the uneasy, often volatile interplay among text, imagination, and historical facts. Khan recounts an intriguing and very telling story about talking with her mother, a fan of her fictional work and an avid reader. Her mother remembered one especially traumatic incident from one of Khan's novels as a real historical incident from their own lives, and Khan had to gently tell her that it was all a work of imagination, not history. The seamless fusion of fictional and real characters is a key element in Khan's creative approach. It visualizes memory as an active, creative process, and not a passive recording, using a narrative all the time to fill the empty spaces that historical trauma creates. To Khan's mother, the emotional truths she found in her daughter's novels seemed to be indistinguishable from lived experience. As this anecdote illustrates, this is the goal of Khan's oeuvre: her fiction and non-fiction are part of a larger grand archival project that strives to build from the ruins of the past a psychic home. As Khan noted in an interview regarding her writing process, drawing on different worlds and gathering them in a single place—on the page—helped her make peace with her in-betweenness (Sirisena, 2023).

The process of narrative archiving is beautifully captured in a haunting line that reverberates through the second half of the memoir: "The melody keeps remembering notes it left behind" (Khan, 2022, p. 132). This poetic formulation serves as an elegant theoretical statement that looks at the nature of diasporic memory. The "melody" is the continuity of the migrant's life which continues to unfold, and the "notes left behind" are the cities they left behind and their loved ones who died and the broken pieces of history which remain as ghostly notes in the psyche. Here, memory is not just a stockpile of pictures, but a temporal cadence, a rhythmic movement that is an acoustic cartography of the present and constantly trembling beneath its surface with the past. Narrative writing is listening to and recording this melody and letting the hybrid subject to discover the invisible links that keep the different worlds together. Khan's memoir is a significant anti-mapping exercise as it archives these unsaid emotional currents. It defies the official, state-enforced histories that attempt to label people according to their passport, race or national origin; it represents a sovereign cartography of love, loss and text, the ultimate space of belonging for the transnational subject.

### **Conclusion: The Sovereign Page As The Ultimate Habitation**

*We Take Our Cities with Us: A Memoir* by Sorayya Khan is a book that marks an important turning point in the current state of transnational studies, both in terms of the sophistication of theory and complexity of representation, and as an extremely moving, account of belonging in a fractured, but globalized, modern world. This research has shown that in her explorations of seven cities and three continents, Khan has created a highly developed "cartography of belonging," a synthesis that effectively combines Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theory of the Third Space with the extremely disciplined mnemonic structures of Pierre Nora and Marianne Hirsch. Khan tells her story to show that for a hybrid, cross-cultural subject, home is not one static and geographic space or one primary national identity. Rather, the home turns out to be an active,

psychological and narrative process, a mobile archive of sensory residues, material memories and localized historical traumas that the migrant can never fully abandon but carries with him or her, always, in the psyche.

Khan's writing explores multiple layers of her peculiar Pakistani-Dutch-American heritage, thereby contesting the dichotomous thinking that still dominates the political and cultural discourse today. Whether divided architecture in Five Queen's Road, Lahore, planned postcolonial grid in Islamabad, war memories in wartime Netherlands, or highly policed spaces of the post-9/11 upstate New York, her detailed mapping of the lived experience of the domestic sphere shows that global histories of violence and displacement are always deeply personal and local. The memoir makes clear that the maintenance of memory, especially the transnational and transgenerational traumas of postmemory and the horrors of maternal loss, depends on the active counter-cartography of the subject, who creates a map of their emotional currents of love and grief on the page, currents that, in the case of maternal loss, are visible only in the body.

In Khan's memoir, the written text itself is the ultimate sovereign space of habitation when the physical city of our lives becomes impossible through distance, death or political turmoil. Writing becomes the ultimate form of architecture, how the hybrid subject can collect worlds of their past and make these worlds live together in productive beautiful tension. The melody can confidently recall what it has abandoned within the confines of the page, creating a rich and productive space for creative force and existential endurance in a place of vulnerability, an "in between" place. Finally, Sorayya Khan's map of belonging is a template of survival for the modern age for readers all over the world; a map that shows us that we are not limited by the boundaries that close us out, but by the many beautiful cities we carry within us.

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