

## ***Remembering the Crooked Line*** **by Pritika Chowdhry**

The *Remembering the Crooked Line* project is an intensive investigation of borders and cartography as technologies of colonization, nation-building, and ethnic divisions. This multi-part installation functions as an archive that makes transnational connections between nations that have been partitioned in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. India, Palestine, Ireland, and Cyprus - former British colonies, were divided along ethnic lines at the end of British rule. The cold-war era partitions of Germany, Korea, and Vietnam were partly put into place by the United States. The partition of Bosnia between Serbia and Croatia, and the proposed partition of Iraq into Shiastan, Sunnistan, and Kurdistan, are examples of the continuing use of partition along ethnic lines as a motif of neo-colonial domination.

I think of maps as the skin of the nation. By extracting real and fictionalized cartographic fragments of the border lines of each of the above-mentioned countries, and grafting them onto garments, board games, and kites, I attempt to give material form to the skin of the nation. While the physical human body is made elusive in this project, its absence is alluded to by several corporeal references. In each of these objects, the maps have been manifested on materials which have been manipulated to feel like skin. This installation is comprised of five parts. The first four consist of sculptural renditions of playing Ring-a-ring-a-roses, flying kites, playing a game of Parcheesi, and playing a game of chess. Each of these activities is played in the above-mentioned countries as per local customs. In this project, these games are cross-cultural motifs that highlight commonalities between these nations, and allow the viewer to engage with large transnational histories from a personal and individual location.

The fifth part of this installation is a multi-layered soundscape that further mines the charged tensions between the intimate and the national. The primary layer of the soundscape is comprised of a mother and her two daughters' alternately singing the Ring-a-ring-a-roses rhyme. There is a stark contrast between the joyful innocence of the young girls' singing and the somber gravity of the grown woman's voice. In the distant background, historic independence speeches by the first heads of the states of India, Pakistan, Israel, and the Irish Republic can be heard. The speeches have been laid as background on the primary track, along with national anthems of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Israel, and Ireland.

The title of this specific project is inspired by a novel titled "The Crooked Line," written by Ismat Chughtai, a Muslim feminist writer from India. This epic novel, which was penned in the late 1940s, traces the tumultuous life of a Muslim Indian woman from childhood through adolescence to adulthood. The politically charged backdrop of the novel is a complex tapestry woven from the partition of Ireland, the two world wars, and eventually, the partition of India. The protagonist eventually gets married to an Irishman who is in India as a news reporter. The novel makes allegorical connections between the common histories of British colonization that Ireland and India share. As a post-colonial text, it is significant in bridging the histories of two former colonies of Britain.

*Remembering the Crooked Line* project is the third in a series of installations that deal with partitions. My starting point for this series was intensive research in the history of the partition of India in 1947, and the ethnic violence that erupted in the South Asian subcontinent as a result of this watershed event. In the making of these works and doing further research, I realized that there are multiple histories of partitions. In fact, I found that partitioning communities and nations along ethnic lines is a recurring motif in geopolitical conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. And the *Remembering the Crooked Line* project seeks to make transnational connections between seemingly disparate geopolitical histories.