



## Emotional (Un)Belonging in Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love*

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**Abstract.** War and its aftermaths are at the kernel of *The Memory of Love*, yet, rather than only dwelling on loss and suffering, the novel explores the enabling possibilities of emotion, and love in particular, as the title suggests, through the lenses of characters who are survivors or witnesses of the devastating civil war in Sierra Leone. In this article, I shall argue that Forna's novel encourages the reader who has not experienced first-hand such distressing events to recognize the emotional spaces of others. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's views of emotions as openness (2004), I shall analyse the reasons behind these apparently unlikely interpersonal emotional connections. I shall examine how the main characters in the novel, Mamakay, Agnes, Kai and Adrian, establish interpersonal relations that allow them to come to terms with the ordinary spaces that surround them and eventually construct alternative emotional spaces. The narrative, thus, depicts emotions as fluid, non-static temporal positions, from where to start alternative journeys of surviving and of being. The spaces of emotion form a continuum in the characters' lives: they are never fixed, never stable, never secured but always adapting, reinventing themselves and changing.

**Keywords:** Aminatta Forna, *The Memory of Love*, emotion, space, (un)belonging.

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### 1. Introduction

Forna's *The Memory of Love*—winner of the Commonwealth Writers Prize and shortlisted for the Orange Prize in 2011—is grounded in the period of peace that followed the war in Sierra Leone which began in 1991 when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led by Foday Sankoh attempted to overthrow President Momoh and finished in 2002 with the RUF's disarmament and demobilization. War and its aftermaths are, thus, at the kernel of *The Memory of Love* and, for this reason, the novel has been analysed focusing on pain and human rights claims (Norridge 2013) and through the lenses of trauma studies (Gunning 2015; Craps 2014), which, as Stef Craps and Gert Buelens claim, are “almost exclusively concerned with traumatic experiences of white Westerners [...] ignoring or

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marginalizing non-Western traumatic events and histories” (2008: 2). For Stef Craps, in order to overcome its Eurocentrism, not only does Trauma Theory need to broaden its focus of analysis and acknowledge “the traumas of non-Western or minority populations for their own sake” (2014: 48), but it also has to recognise that “the uncritical cross-cultural application of psychological concepts developed in the West amounts to a form of cultural imperialism” (2014: 48). In this respect, Stef Craps in “Beyond Eurocentrism: Trauma Theory in the Global Age” (2014) has analysed *The Memory of Love* as an example of a literary work that “call[s] for a more inclusive, materialist, and politicized form of trauma theory” (51).

Nonetheless, war is not portrayed in *The Memory of Love* as a tangible presence but as a vivid past that unravels through memories and the emotional spaces associated to them. Therefore, rather than framing my analysis within Trauma Studies, I shall analyse the novel stressing the processes of healing, emotional recovery, and identity (re)negotiation after the experience of suffering and loss. Non-arbitrarily, the narrative’s main locations are a hospital and a psychiatric institution, which makes healing a central theme in the novel. Yet, I shall argue that it is not only within those institutionalised centres that successful healing takes place but also in the ordinary places where characters live their daily lives and establish networks of social and emotional relations. It is my contention that *The Memory of Love* explores the enabling possibilities of emotions through the interpersonal connections and the emotional spaces established among characters who are survivors of the devastating civil war in Sierra Leone or witnesses of its consequences. Moreover, *The Memory of Love* encourages the reader who has not experienced first-hand such distressing events to recognize the emotional spaces of others.

## 2. Exploring Genealogy and Belonging in Aminatta Forna’s Writing

Due to the geographical location where the novel is set and the fact that Forna is the daughter of a Scottish woman and a Sierra Leonean man, she has been classified as an author whose ethnic origins and dual heritage are systematically taken into consideration: “I find myself referred to as an African author less often. I have a new label, ‘transnational writer’” (2015: n.p.). I am aware that Forna has written against this labelling process: “We hyphenated writers complain about the privilege accorded to the white male writer, he who dominates the western canon and is the only one called simply ‘writer’” (2015: n.p.) and has claimed that classifying “is the very antithesis of literature. The way of literature is to seek universality” (2015: n.p.). Nonetheless, in this paper, I shall frame Forna’s narrative within the literary tradition of Contemporary Black British Women Writers for whom questions of identity, (un)belonging and genealogy have been and still are of paramount importance—together with thematic concerns of first-generation writers who focused mainly on problems of displacement, racial discrimination, and the search for roots (Weedon 2008).

In the literary work of other awarded contemporary Black British women writers such as Andrea Levy’s *Small Island* (2004), Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000) or Diana Evans’s *26a* (2006), belonging is negotiated in relation to a specific national location: Britain and, in particular, London. Moreover, such

novels portray characters whose sense of (un)belonging derives from feelings of not being able to be part of British national imagery and fully participate in British life without, at some point in their lives, being perceived and defined by other members of Britain's social fabric as outsiders. These novels not only (re)inscribe the history of a large part of British society that has been obliterated or silenced in canonical literature or official accounts of British history, but go beyond the thematic concerns of first- and second-generation migrants' writings, portraying Britain as a hybrid location, and validating different ways of being British and different strategies of inhabiting such a multicultural location; in other words, "[they] normalise the experiences of ethnically diverse people and, in so doing, contribute to a hybrid view of British society" (Pérez-Fernández 2009: 155).

Forna's *The Memory of Love* transcends such thematic concerns and enriches this Black British tradition by redefining this idea of belonging and genealogy by investing in the collective narrative of her father's country, Sierra Leone, which after the civil war needs to re-construct a new sense of nation and a new feeling of (collective) belonging. Forná departs from her individual memory and the individual memories of the fictional characters she creates to arrive at and re-construct a new collective memory. Forná has explained that: "all my characters had experiences different from my own and though it was generally assumed by western critics that I had a great deal in common with my West African characters, I had never in fact been an 80-year-old peasant woman, a university dean or a surgeon" (2015: n.p.). Nonetheless, Forná undoubtedly has an emotional attachment to Sierra Leone, as Sierra Leone is the country where her first book, the memoir *The Devil that Danced on Water* (2002) is set, and a location that resonates in her second novel, *Ancestor Stones* (2006). Moreover, it could be argued that the writing process of these first books was an exercise of collecting memories in which Forná conflated the memories of her genealogical past with the past of her father's nation, a process that is present in her first book, the memoir *The Devil that Danced on Water* (2002):

In the late 1990s, I began the process of collecting memories. The first memories I collected were my own. They were fragments from the first ten years of my life and they were memories of events that had taken place in Sierra Leone in my own family. But they had never been spoken about them [sic]. ... And as I collected the memories I placed them in concentric circles [...] And the process of writing a memoir is essentially the process of remembering and in so doing challenging everybody else to remember too. (Forna 2006b: 74)

This notion is also a central feature of her novel *Ancestor Stones* (2006) where, as she has pointed out, "the idea of the 'stones' derives from a story I was told about how each woman would choose a stone from the river and would give it to her daughter. The stone represented the collected memories of the mother. Gradually, you collect a group of stones you carry with you" (Forna 2006b: 80).

In this respect, Forná's novels have also been studied alongside the works of other contemporary women writers of African origin such as Nawal El Saadawi, Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie or Sefi Atta as examples of what Annie Gagiano has referred to as a new corpus of "women writers of African origin" (2013: 47) whose works share a "strong sense of nationhood" (2013: 47) and "evidence these

authors' interest in recording politically and morally evaluative accounts of their nations" (2013: 47). Gagliano goes on to examine how the nation in their work is "neither romanticised nor sentimentalised, but it is nevertheless acknowledged as *an ongoing emotional as well as cultural-political presence in the authorial imagination*" (2013: 47; my italics). I am interested in approaching *The Memory of Love* from this perspective, for emotions are central elements in the narrative and Forna had a personal emotional investment in the narrative she created as she knew first-hand the situation in Sierra Leone previous to the conflict.<sup>2</sup> Much like the stones that are at the core of her second novel, the emotions and emotional connections portrayed in *The Memory of Love* form the baggage each character carries.

### 3. Stressing the Enabling Possibilities of Emotion in *The Memory of Love*

*The Memory of Love* spans three decades and the narrative continues to be an exercise in genealogical "rememory",<sup>3</sup> as it invests in Sierra Leone's collective memory. The novel interconnects the present time with past recollections using Elias Cole,<sup>4</sup> Mamakay's father and Adrian's patient, as the linking element between past and present events. Through his memories, the novel goes back to that period of time when some of the elite represented in the narrative by characters such as the Dean, Johnson, the police officer and Elias Cole himself, all of whom being complicit during the war, had previously made profit by being involved in the oppressive politics that preceded the conflict. Colonialism and its consequences thus appear as an undercurrent in the novel.<sup>5</sup> Forna has denounced the fact that the present-day situation of Sierra Leone stems right from its colonial past: "to destroy a country's systems and not replace them with something that the country knows and has lived with and has come organically from the centre of that country, leaves the field wide open for the sort of events that took place" (2006b: 79). Thus, *The Memory of Love*, by retracting in time to the years preceding the conflict, is implicitly laying responsibility upon colonial practices for Sierra Leone's post-colonial situation.

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<sup>2</sup> In particular, she experienced the execution of her father when she was 11 years old, as she herself explained in the memoir *The Devil that Danced on Water*.

<sup>3</sup> The term "rememory" was used by Toni Morrison in her novel *Beloved* (1987). Caroline Rody in her analysis of Morrison's work, explains how "'Rememory' as trope postulates the interconnectedness of minds, past and present, and thus neatly conjoins the novel's supernatural vision with its aspiration to communal epic, realizing the 'collective memory' of which Morrison speaks" (101).

<sup>4</sup> Elias Cole is the character in the novel who indirectly unites all other characters since, at the end of the novel, he turns out to be Mamakay's father. Cole is Adrian's patient and, like Agnes, plays a crucial role in helping Adrian (and the readers by extension) piece back together the history of Sierra Leone. Cole, a former university professor, involved in the political upheavals of the 1960s, is the link between the past and present history of Sierra Leone. The fact that he is presented as a dying character symbolically reads as a need to leave past historical events behind in order to embrace a more promising future for the country. Yet, the fact that his (his)story is paramount to the development of the novel's plot further stresses the importance of remembering and acknowledging the past in order to move towards the future.

<sup>5</sup> For example, there is reference to colonial practices in Africa when Kekura compares the landing on the moon in 1969 with the Scramble for Africa: "This is the new scramble for Africa. The scramble for space. A hundred years ago it was us they were fighting over. Our land, our wealth, our souls" (149).

Nonetheless, rather than focusing on the disabling consequences of colonisation and the devastating consequences of war, I would like to study the ways in which *The Memory of Love* stresses recovery and healing and presents characters who are able to reconstruct the sense of emotional belonging to the country. The novel depicts both physical and psychological healing, a dichotomy that is embodied in the characters of Kai Mansaray, a Sierra Leonean orthopaedic surgeon, and Adrian Lockeheart<sup>6</sup>, a British psychologist<sup>7</sup>. Yet, Forna's narrative questions institutionalised healing and portrays an asylum which has scarce resources and where clinical practices are dated and insufficient for the illnesses patients suffer from. When Adrian visits the male ward in the asylum for the first time he is shocked: "OK, ready? She [Ileana] said. Adrian nodded. He is not ready, though. For this. He isn't yet able to make sense of it, but he will. Attila's manner. The silence that overlays the entire place. They keep the patients drugged. Drugged and chained" (83-84). The narrative depicts an image that recalls Victorian practices of keeping patients chained in order to restrict their mobility. Such an image is described by Foucault in "Birth of the Asylum" (1988) in relation to the methods introduced in England by Tuke and Pinel at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century at The Retreat asylum in York. Examining the practices used, Foucault states: "We know the images. They are familiar in all histories of psychiatry, where their function is to illustrate that happy age when madness was finally recognized and treated according to a truth to which we had too long remained blind" (241). Yet, as Foucault argues, the asylum became a location where emotions were controlled and channelled: "The asylum no longer punished the madman's guilt, it is true; but it did more, it organized that guilt" (247). Accordingly, in *The Memory of Love*, characters' successful healing processes mainly take place outside the psychiatric institution portrayed in the novel and are directly connected to their abilities to create emotional relations to one another.

It is my contention that the possibilities of recovery are depicted in the narrative by focusing on the ways the three main characters (Mamakay, Kai and Adrian) establish interpersonal relations that allow them to come to terms with the ordinary spaces that surround them after the War and the memories associated to it, in the case of Mamakay and Kai, and after displacement and loss in the case of Adrian. These new networks of personal relations they construct help them to (re)build emotional spaces and negotiate new senses of (emotional) belonging, and are a crucial part in the process of healing. Moreover, such connections show the characters' capacity to move beyond trauma and pain and offer the possibility of growth, advancement and movement.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the characters' ability to create new

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<sup>6</sup> Adrian's surname has symbolic connotations. He comes to Sierra Leone as a way of finding himself and giving sense to his own existence. It is in Sierra Leone where he is able to break his emotions free and open his heart again: "the truth is since arriving here his life has seemed more charged with meaning than it ever had in London. Here the boundaries are limitless, no horizon, no sky. He can feel his emotions, solid and weighty, like stones in the palm of his hand. Everything matters more" (228).

<sup>7</sup> The symbolic connotations of Adrian's surname are worth mentioning. It suggests Adrian's inability to express his emotions and truly establish emotional attachments with his patients and his surroundings in the United Kingdom until he travels to Sierra Leone and meets Mamakay. It also reminds readers of Craiglockhart hospital in Edinburgh where soldiers suffering from psychological wounds during WWI were taken.

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting down that Sara Ahmed reminds us of how: "The word 'emotion' comes from Latin, *emovere*, referring to 'to move, to move out'. So, emotions are what move us. But emotions are also *about*

emotional connections after War evinces their advancement (movement) towards recovery as much as the process by which they are able to root a new sense of emotional belonging (attachment) to the country after the War. As Sara Ahmed claims: “the alignment of some bodies with some others and against others takes place through the affecting of movement; bodies are disorganized and reorganized as they face others who are already recognized as hated or loved, as giving pain or pleasure” (Ahmed 2004b: 33).

Furthermore, I argue that Forná presents this route towards recovery as an enabling universal human experience. It is not that my analysis disregards, obliterates or overlooks the undeniable specificity of the novel’s background (Sierra Leone), but attempts to embrace the universality of the emotions depicted from the very beginning in *The Memory of Love*. The novel opens with the portrayal of a bed-bound man, Elias Cole, who is revisiting his own memories, memories which “in the atmosphere of the room [...] float and form” and it continues with the following quotation:

I heard a song, a morning as I walked to college. It came to me across the radio playing on a stall I passed. A song from far away, about a lost love. At least so I imagined, I didn’t understand the words, only the melody. But in the low notes I could hear the loss this man had suffered. And in the high notes I understood too that it was a song about something that could never be. I had not wept in years. But I did, there and then, on the side of a dusty street, surrounded by strangers. The melody stayed with me for years. (1)

These words uttered by Elias Cole verbalised a memory; the sensory experience of hearing a song. The character does not understand the lyrics but the melody in itself conveys universal emotions: that of love and loss. Forná’s *The Memory of Love* is emotionally gripping and this, as Zoe Norridge explains, is the result of characters that are “so quintessentially human and easily recognizable” (2012: 19). Although the novel explores the emotional spaces of loss and love through the lenses of characters who are survivors or witnesses of the consequences of the devastating civil war, it encourages the reader who has not experienced first-hand such distressing events to recognize the emotional spaces of others. Beyond the immediately obvious answer of the power of good literature to open up the possibility of reader identification, I would like to explore how the reasons behind these apparently unlikely interpersonal emotional connections—for the emotions are not grounded in a shared materiality—lie in what Ahmed has described in terms of that idea of openness: “Emotions may involve readings of such openness, as spaces where bodies and world meet and leak into each other” (*The Cultural Politics* 2004: 69). Moreover, such a conception of emotion “challenges any assumption that emotions are a private matter, that they simply belong to individuals or even that they come from within and *then* move outward towards others” (Ahmed 2004a: 117; italics in the original).

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attachments, about what connects us to this or that. The relationship between movement and attachment is instructive” (2004c, 27).

Such an understanding of emotions in terms of *openness* and the depiction of them as a liquid that leaks connects emotion to space as fluid categories. Feminist geographer Doreen Massey has analysed space as a set of social relations as the result of the “vast complexity of the interlocking and articulating nets of social relations” (1994: 168). Sara Ahmed, for her part, has pointed out emotions’ abilities to “define the contours of the multiple worlds that are inhabited by different subjects” (2004: 25) and has claimed that “emotions *do things*, and work to align individuals with collectives—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments” (Ahmed 2004b: 26; italics in the original). *The Memory of Love* stresses this characteristic of emotions and space by intertwining the lives of its main characters—Elias Cole, Mamakay, Kai and Adrian—and the social and emotional relations they establish. Kai and Adrian establish a friendship initially based on their professional careers, their sharing of the same apartment: “in the days and weeks that follow, the rhythms of their lives begin to intertwine” (51), and their relation is further connected by the fact that they both love, and eventually will mourn, the same woman: Mamakay<sup>9</sup>. Besides, Freetown is the location where this closed network of relations, this shared space of dwelling takes form.

#### 4. Creating Alternative Emotional Spaces in *The Memory of Love*

Freetown is presented in Forna’s novel as a place that offers the possibility of happiness and recovery; the opportunity for new beginnings even in adverse circumstances. Such a view of the capital city questions happiness as a social construct associated to privilege and social hierarchies, and subverts discourses that attribute happiness to specific (Western) ways of living. *The Memory of Love* portrays happiness in an environment that the West—embodied in the character of Adrian—deems inadequate. As Adrian himself recognizes: “He didn’t come here looking for happiness. He came here to change who he was” (362). Adrian also aims to help the local population and this motivation to come to the country is seen by his local acquaintances (mainly Kai and Attila) as a mere trophy for a European’s emotional self-fulfilment: “What to do? There were too many like Adrian, here living out their own unfinished dreams” (220); Adrian’s motivation can be analysed as a “New White Man’s Burden”; a responsibility towards others who are perceived by him as being less privileged.

Yet, Adrian experiences a disassociation with his own ideas about war once he is face to face with the true reality in Sierra Leone: “*This is our country*. He was rejecting Adrian’s offer of help. It was this that had stung so much, the idea he was neither wanted nor needed. It has simply never occurred to him” (320). Characters’ experiences of war cannot be comprehended following Western ideas or therapies. Adrian’s practices prove inadequate in such a context: ““This is their reality. And who is going to come and give the people who live *here* therapy to cope with this?” asks Attila and waves a hand at the view. ‘You call it a disorder, my friend. We

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<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Elias Cole, who is Adrian’s patient, turns out to be Mamakay’s father.

call it *life*” (319; italics in the original)<sup>10</sup>. Adrian has to acknowledge that “people here don’t need therapy so much as hope. But the hope has to be real—Attila’s warning to Adrian. *I fall down, I get up*. Westerners Adrian has met despise the fatalism. But perhaps it is the way people have found to survive” (320; my italics).

Adrian has a genealogical emotional attachment to Sierra Leone as well, because it is “the place where his mother had nearly been born” (67). Through the novel, Adrian’s main emotional space is that of a sense of displacement and loss; he has not only lost a sense of place physically speaking as he has migrated from London to Freetown, but he also suffers an emotional loss; he loses his westernised sense of identity, his previous values and his past conception of the world. Before coming to Sierra Leone, he was just someone else consuming the economy of emotion: “His private clients in England, from the moment they left the room they ceased to exist. He did not allow their lives to spill into his” (68). Much like his wife, Lisa: “World events resolved continuously, independent of human agency. War, coups, poverty—those existed on a par with viruses, cyclones and black holes in space. *One expended emotion with economy*” (46; my italics). Adrian leaves behind his wife and daughter and finds an alternative way of being and living in the world. Sierra Leone temporarily becomes his true home: the place where he can root a true sense of identity.

The idea of the connection between emotions and space as fluid categories is highlighted through Adrian’s experiences, since it is through the emotional link established with Mamakay that he is able to develop a sense of belonging to the country: “in her [Mamakay] he found his escape, this sleeping woman, for she offers him a way out of himself [...] She wandered by accident through a portal into the hollow of his heart and led him into the light” (362). Through love, Adrian learns to inhabit the city and he becomes familiarised with the spaces that surround him. Such locations become familiar places; no longer mere empty surfaces but canvasses inscribed with meaning. They are transformed, for Adrian, into a palimpsest of emotions and memories:

Through Mamakay the landscape of the city has altered for Adrian. For the first time since he arrived, the city bears a past, exists in another dimension other than the present. Places he passes, the Mary Rose, the water pump, already hold memories. Growing in confidence in the city and his place in it, Adrian heads out of town towards the Ocean Club. (255)

Adrian is able to see beyond his previous Eurocentric assumptions and to contemplate the city in a new light: “The city has begun to unravel itself for him, he is becoming privy to its secrets and ways, the geography of its contours” (255). Nevertheless, Adrian does not succeed in establishing a strong enough emotional link with Sierra Leone to help him root a true sense of belonging without Mamakay; for that reason, when she passes away while giving birth to their daughter, Adrian returns to England unable to overcome that loss.

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<sup>10</sup> For an analysis of the ways in which the novel presents the limitations of Eurocentric psychiatric practices see Stef Craps, “Beyond Eurocentrism: Trauma Theory in the Global Age”.



By contrast to Adrian, and although he has experienced emotions of love and loss yet more severely, Kai stands for hope, and his emotional space is that of healing. Unlike Adrian, in the end, Kai stays in Freetown, opening up the prospect of a new emotional belonging to the country. It is not arbitrary that one of the reasons for Kai to stay is the desire to conclude the reconstructive surgery of his most challenging patient, symbolically called Foday. Foday is a young man unable to walk due to “two congenital abnormalities of the lower limbs. Blount’s disease and talipes in both legs, plus a dislocated kneecap, which had floated around the side of this left leg. [...] Unbelievably, Foday walked” (121). Kai is the orthopaedic surgeon who operates on the disabled body of his patient, breaking up his bones and tendons in order to re-align them again in an attempt to eventually restore his full physical abilities.

This central motif of the narrative metaphorically conflates Kai’s surgical efforts with the nation’s attempts at recovery since, just as much as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), led by Foday Sankoh, has dismembered bodies and infringed wounds on the population during the War, after such devastating violence a new nation needed to emerge. Kai, thus, treats patients whose bodies have been wounded or whose limbs have been severed during the war. He re/constructs their shattered bodies, but he is apparently unable to heal their minds or his own distressed psyche:

The memories come at unguarded moments, when he cannot sleep. In the past, at the height of it, he had attended to people whose limbs had been severed. Working with a Scottish pain expert years later, he treated some of those same patients again. They complained of feeling pain in the lost limbs, the aching ghost of a hewn hand or foot. It was a trick of the mind, the Scotsman explained to Kai: the nerves continued to transmit signals between the brain and the ghost limb. The pain is real, yes, but it is a memory of pain. (184)

Kai operates in silence, concentrating on the quietness of the theatre: “operating affords him a privacy, an escape from the world into a place which has its own narratives” (123), and, as Forna has pointed out, Sierra Leone as a country has partly negotiated national recovery through silences: “We have reached a period in the aftermath of war and people do want to forget, to get on with their lives, to plant their crops, to have children. They want to move on and that is enabling those who were complicit to stay quiet for even longer” (2006b: 79). In his in-depth analysis of the novel, Craps, like Norridge, sees silence as a coping mechanism which, according to Craps, “plays a beneficial role in keeping trauma at bay” (2014: 55) and thus becomes a “valid way of surviving the suffering inflicted by the war” (2014: 55).

Yet, remaining silent is presented in the novel as a practice that can trigger dangerous consequences. Agnes is the character in the novel that best embodies the disabling results of silence. Agnes is incapable of coping with the knowledge that her daughter has married the man that killed her husband, which is why she resorts to “fugue” as a copying mechanism. Her son-in-law is a constant reminder of her loss and this makes her mourning process a pathological one. Fugue, according to Forna’s description in the narrative, involves “the mind creat[ing] an alternative state. This state may be considered a place of safety, a refuge” (325). In Western

psychiatric terms, this is a condition connected to severe post-traumatic stress disorder and known as “fugue”: “a disorder of memory that occurs following emotional or psychological trauma and results in a loss of one’s personal past including personal identity” (Glisky 2004: 1132). For Agnes, fugue entails her erratic travelling far from home and becomes her only possible way of living. Moreover, the story of what happened to Agnes’s family during the war is reconstructed in the narrative through the memories of different witnesses: “In hushed voices, told behind a curtain in a quiet room and in the eye of the night, from the lips of many” (306). Agnes’ story is, by extension, the story of Sierra Leone during the war as a whole; it is an example of the collective memory Forna is contributing to: “Each person told a part of the same story. And in telling another’s story, they told their own. Kai took what they had told, given him and placed it together with what he already knew and those things Adrian had told him” (306).

Mamakay is the character in the novel represents this idea of constructing a new collective nation for the country after the war: “Mamakay is right, it’s as though the entire nation are sworn to some terrible secret. So, they elect muteness, the only way of complying and resisting at the same time” (322). She herself is an example of resistance. She refuses to leave Freetown as she is able to see happiness in the place: “This is my home. This is where I want to live. I want to raise our children *in this place*” (378; italics in the original). Thus, she resists hierarchical discourses of happiness—Kai’s and Adrian’s wishes to leave the country in favour of a better life in America and Britain respectively:

This is no place to live one’s life. It is his fault, not Mamakay’s, for she knows no other life. [...] Here there is nothing, they are both at the mercy of this place, like everybody else. At home, his home, it will be different. She will be happy, for what is there not to be happy about living beyond the shadow of disaster. (418-419)

Finally, even if Mamakay passes away at the end of the novel, she embodies the possibility of a new beginning, since she gives birth to a daughter, a new-born baby that represents the future possibilities of the country. Moreover, Adrian and Mamakay’s daughter is the result of the love between a British man and a Sierra Leonean, which clearly opens up a new reading of the old colonial relationship the novel implicitly criticizes and establishes a never-ending emotional connection between both countries. Adrian leaves their daughter behind for Kai to bring up. The little girl thus symbolises an emotional attachment that, as fluid as the Atlantic Ocean, will forever separate and join Kai and Adrian. The ocean, the emotional link Kai and Adrian share, stands for movement:

So, what attaches us, what connects us to this or that place, or this or that other, *so that we cannot stay removed from this other*, is also what moves us, or what affects us so that we are no longer in the same place. Hence movement does not cut off the “where” of its inhabitation, but connects bodies to other bodies. (Ahmed 2004a: 27)

Both Kai and Adrian contemplate the sea at the end of the narrative. For Kai the sea represents the future and the prospect of new (re)births: “It has become a regular event, every fortnight or so, the trip to Malaika beach” (442). It is significant that Kai is accompanied by his nephew Abass and Adrian’s and Mamakay’s daughter, two young children, as both can be said to impersonate possibility and hope. Kai immerses himself in water carrying the little girl “into the waves upon his shoulders” (444). Moreover, the narrative suggests that Kai has overcome his traumatic experience during the war for he is able to cross the Peninsula Bridge again—the place where he experienced a traumatic episode during the War<sup>11</sup> —, an achievement that is symbolically emphasized by the fact that he is driving to the reggae lyrics “*Well they tell me of a pie up in the sky*” (445) of Jimmy Cliff’s song *The Harder They Come* (1973). Yet, for Adrian in Norfolk the sea does not offer the same possibility of beginning anew. Contemplating the sea brings back his painful memories: “he watches the sea and imagines” (438).

Whereas Kai’s actions reinforce ideas of advancement and movement, Adrian’s emotions stand for stagnation and paralysis. This dichotomy of movement and paralysis is both literal and figurative. On a literal level, Kai moves at the end of the novel crossing the Peninsula Bridge and swimming in the sea; on a figurative one, he has evolved as a person who has been able to overcome the traumatic experiences of the War and is now able to take responsibility for the lives of two children, helping them to grow up and become adults. Adrian, however, merely sits and contemplates the sea while dwelling on past memories and mourning for a past that can never be: “For death takes everything, leaves behind no possibilities, save one—which is to remember. [...] So he sits and watches the sea and thinks of Mamakay” (439). Adrian, rather than looking towards the future, inhabits an emotional past that is marked by the impression left by Mamakay, an impression which “is a sign of the persistence of others even in the face of their absence” (Ahmed 2004b: 30).

## 5. Conclusion

All through her novel, Forna presents characters whose feelings cannot be wrapped in existing words and ordinary spaces but must be negotiated in silences, memory and the memory of love. Pain and loss and the memory of love are the baggage that all the characters have to carry through life. They occupy a place in their emotional space(s) that when first experienced overwhelm and obliterate any other possible emotion. Yet, learning to live with those emotions and finding ways of adjusting to them are vital in order to reduce the space they occupy in that baggage. The novel perfectly shows that “[f]eelings do not then simply reside within subjects and then move outward toward objects. Feelings are how objects create impressions in

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<sup>11</sup> Kai is kidnapped together with Balia, a nurse, from the hospital where they are working by rebel forces. During the time of their captivity, Kai is raped with a gun and then shot, together with Balia, on the Peninsula Bridge: “He saw the man pull the gun out of his belt, raise his hand and take aim. Kai closed his eyes. He leaned his body backwards, holding tight on to Balia, backwards over the railing, until he felt himself topple under the weight of their combined bodies. [...] Something thudded into them. A bullet. He could not tell whether he had taken it or Balia. He was falling. [...] Then comes the sting of the water” (434).

shared spaces of dwelling” (Ahmed 2010: 14). *The Memory of Love* emphasizes the fact that emotions such as identity and spaces are malleable and in the process of being created and re/created. They are neither static nor fixed positions from where to stand; on the contrary, they are temporal positions from where to start alternative journeys of discovery, of remembrance, of being, of surviving. The spaces of emotion form, thus, a continuum in our lives. They are never fixed, never stable, never secured but always adapting, reinventing themselves and changing.

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