

“The Final Continent”: Geographies of Emotions and Emotional Geographies in Jhumpa Lahiri’s Short Fiction

Éva Pataki

University of Debrecen

Introduction

In the “Introduction” to their edited volume, *Emotional Geographies* (2007), Joyce Davidson, Liz Bondi, and Mick Smith point out that emotional geography has “a common concern with the spatiality and temporality of emotions, with the way they coalesce around and within certain places” (3). A study of literary representations of this spatiality may be especially suitable for unraveling the complex emotional relations between people and environments and may lead to a better understanding of geographies of emotions and emotional geographies, that is, the “intersubjective representations of territories” articulated through memory (Proglío 10) and how feelings generate and mediate our behaviors in and attitudes to places and spaces through bodily and lived experience and emotional associations. My paper maps the location and formation of emotions in and with regards to places, investigating the interconnections between individuals’ sense of place, remembering through place, affective relationships and attachments, in a selection of Jhumpa Lahiri’s short stories: “The Third and Final Continent” from *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), as well as “Unaccustomed Earth” and “Going Ashore” from *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008). Engaging in a close reading of Lahiri’s texts with a primary focus on the aspect of emotional geography, my interdisciplinary analysis charts the development of emotional attachment and a concomitant sense of belonging and self in the characters, as well as of their evolving affective

relationships with people and (remembered) places. My contention is that the two processes intertwine, are mutually constructive, and constantly changing, as emotions are fundamentally “relational flows, fluxes or currents, in-between people and places” (Davidson et al, 3).

Davidson et al. also point out that “much of the symbolic importance of [...] places stems from their emotional associations, the feelings they inspire of awe, dread, worry, loss or love” (3) – as demonstrated by the multitude of emotional geographies in Lahiri’s fiction. Born in the UK to Bengali parents and immigrating to the US at the age of three, Lahiri has had a first hand experience of the diasporic condition, portrayed so eloquently in her short story collections *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), as well as her novel *The Namesake* (2003). Her writings may thus be regarded, on one hand, as postcolonial immigrant narratives, with an emphasis on the immigrant experience, uprooting and re-rooting, a crisis of cultural identity generated by straddling two worlds, and Bhabhaian hybridity as a “third space” of the “in-between” (38), as well as mapping geographies where “emotional displacement, cultural habitations, and liminality are experienced” (Bruno 347). On the other hand, with its transnational, often cosmopolitan characters, her fiction may also be labelled “neo-cosmopolitan,” which Binod Paudyal explains as “blurring the distinction between home and abroad, and [...] imagining a global community, characterized by transcultural exchanges and transnational affiliations” (16). Interpreted as such, Lahiri’s fiction may also be approached from the field of literary geography – “the study of *space in literature*; or else, *of literature in space*” (Moretti 3, original emphasis) –, investigating the specific role of geographical locations in shaping the narrative structure of the stories (Moretti 8) and the identity of the characters. Furthermore, drawing on Bertrand Westphal’s geocritical concepts of multifocalization and polysensoriality (122), emphasizing the importance of consulting multiple texts and interpretations for a more complex and thorough understanding of places, as well as on and Yi-Fu Tuan’s (1990) notion of topophilia, denoting an affective bond between people and place, an analysis of geography in Lahiri’s writings may offer considerable new insights into place/specific places and the processes through which such emotional bonds are created.

Within and at the intersection of these various approaches, the present study focuses primarily on the interconnectedness of geography and emotions with regards to Lahiri’s ‘fictional’ diasporians, mapping

the character's literal-metaphorical journeys and emotional geographies through analyzing their affective bonds with both people and places, and the vital role these emotional relationships play in a redefinition of the notion of home, of belonging, and, by extension, of the self.

Re-rooting

Home is where the heart is. As commonplace as it may sound, the old saying could be a suitable epigraph to Lahiri's fiction, including her short story, "The Third and Final Continent." The unnamed protagonist-narrator immigrates from India to the US (via the UK) for a job, arriving with the preconception and expectations of tourists – a temporary engagement with space and place – only to form an emotional attachment to and sense of belonging in his chosen home through the meaningful human relationships he builds with his first landlady, Mrs. Croft, and later his wife, Mala.

The protagonist's first impression of Cambridge, Massachusetts, involves a sensory and bodily experience of sounds: "flashing sirens," "a powerful hiss, throughout the night," a "distracting, at times suffocating" noise he feels "deep in [his] ribs" (TFC 191), which resonate with the uneasy feeling of having to adjust and find his place in a strange land. For the next six weeks, the narrator tries to create a sense of belonging by looking for familiarities between Britain and the US, such as going to Woolworth's and reading the Boston Globe so that he "would grow familiar with things" (TFC 192) but initially it is rendered difficult by the difference, which manifests itself in the bodily experience of the "stifling room" and the "suffocating" noise outside (TFC 191). What makes the recollection of his early days of arriving in and trying to adjust to the US so intriguing and his attempt so futile is that he uses London "the narrator's second and transitional continent" (Bahri), as a point of reference, not his home town Calcutta, that is, he compares one immigrant experience to the other, which may lead to a sense of familiarity but – due to the transitoriness of both – not to that of belonging. A few weeks later he finds a temporary abode at an old widow's house in a street "shaded with trees," "stray blades of grass pok[ing] between the cracks of the footpath" and "a tangle of forsythia bushes" (TFC 194), where "the alien and foreign [mingles] differently into the familiar" (Bahri), as exemplified by his daily encounter with Mrs. Croft – characterized with the adjectives "tough," "battered," and sharp" but interestingly giving him

“undivided attention” (TFC 194) – and their endless conversation about the landing on the moon, which she demands to be acknowledged by an amazed “Splendid!” (TFC 196) and which is, apparently, a symbolic parallel with the narrator’s move to the US. With time, this routine creates familiarity and slowly turns into a concern, then empathy for the 103-year-old woman. Taking care of her upon her daughter’s request generates a growing sense of belonging as “a yearning to make skin stretch beyond individual needs and wants” (Probyn 6), that is, truly caring for someone, which he only becomes fully aware of when realizing his own disappointment with the old woman acknowledging his leaving for new lodgings with a simple, rather aloof “Good-bye, then” (TFC 208).

The narrator’s warm relationship with Mrs. Croft is juxtaposed to his initial distant and cold attitude to Mala, his wife through an arranged marriage. In the first few days of their marriage (before his move to the US), he does nothing to console her when Mala cries. Instead, he reads his guidebook excitedly, displaying more interest in the US than his wife. Later he remains untouched by her words in the letter she has sent, and, upon her arrival from India, he appears to be somewhat irritated by having to help her get adjusted to her new way of life, explaining his attitude by claiming “I was [...] used to sitting on the bench with Mrs. Croft. The only thing I was not used to was Mala” (TFC 208), despite their shared roots and cultural identity. As Deepika Bahri notes, Lahiri here suggests that “the foreign may be recognised as familiar, the familiar seen alien,” depending on emotional attachment or the lack thereof, which greatly determines the narrator’s sense of place as well: the couple’s first home does not feel like home. This perception may be explained by his lack of emotional participation, a crucial element of experiencing a spatial environment (Hasse 52), and implies an “interconnected location of emotions in people and places” (Davidson et al. 6).

A profound change in the couple’s relationship begins when he takes Mala for a walk in Mrs. Croft’s street, in an unconscious attempt to create some kind of a connection between the familiar of his new circumstances (Mrs. Croft and her house) and the unfamiliar of his old life (Mala). Mrs. Croft and Mala’s encounter finally breaks the ice between the couple as he realizes their shared experience of immigration. His wife’s gestures and attitude, when being inspected by the old lady, remind the narrator of his first day of arriving in London, the sense of being a stranger, of having to prove himself and adjust to a new cultural space. Furthermore,

Mrs. Croft's claim that Mala was "a perfect lady" (TFC 213), creates a point of connection, not only between the two women, through their shared attribute of modesty, but between the narrator and Mala as well, the former recognizing familiarity in the latter, which leads him to develop an emotional attachment and a shared sense of belonging in their new home as well: "we looked at each other and smiled. I like to think of that moment in Mrs. Croft's parlor as the moment when the distance between Mala and me began to lessen. Although we were not yet fully in love, I like to think of the months that followed as a honeymoon of sorts. Together we explored the city and met other Bengalis, some of whom are still friends today" (TFC 214). Their newly found connection leads the narrator to develop a shared sense of belonging as well, an "emotional (even ontological) attachment, [...] a feeling 'at home'" (Yuval-Davis 10): their mapping of the city leads to an increasingly growing familiarity and attachment, turning Cambridge into an emotional geography, as their bond strengthens and they create more relationships from the local shopkeeper to fellow immigrants, suggesting that emotions are "intrinsically relational" (Davidson et al. 7).

When learning about Mrs. Croft's death, the narrator puts down the sense of loss to the fact that "Mrs. Croft's was the first death I mourned in America, for hers was the first life I had admired" (TFC 214-15). As he knew very little of the old lady, this admiration may be better explained by the sense of home she helped create in him through their emotional relationship, well-illustrated by the fact that some twenty years later, when visiting his son in college, the narrator always drives through Mrs. Croft's street, reliving the memories and recalling their shared experience with Mala, amazed "that there was ever a time that we were strangers" (TFC 215). When the narrator claims that "here was my first home in America" (TFC 215), his perception and memory of the old lady's house as 'home' indicates both the development of emotional attachment and the location thereof: Mrs. Croft and her house "became a fixed point in the geography of his story about becoming a citizen, a husband, and a father" (Boykin Hardy 36-37). Mrs. Croft indirectly aided the narrator in developing an emotional bond with his wife, as well as having a sense of belonging to place and space, Cambridge, and, by extension, the USA as well – a legacy his son can be proud of:

Whenever he is discouraged I tell him that if I can survive on three continents than there is no obstacle he cannot conquer. While the astronauts, heroes forever, spent

mere hours on the moon, I have remained in this new world for nearly thirty years. I know that my achievement is quite ordinary. I am not the only man to seek his fortune far from home, and certainly I am not the first. Still, there are times I am bewildered by each mile I have traveled, each meal I have eaten, each person I have known, each room in which I have slept. As ordinary as it all appears, there are times when it is beyond my imagination.” (TFC 216)

The protagonist’s words indicate that his experience and achievement, unbelievable yet likewise “splendid,” mirrors that of the astronauts, in terms of the distance they traveled and the unfamiliarity awaiting them at the final destination, “the final continent.” His memories of the journey towards emotional attachment and a sense of belonging, both metaphorical and geographical, echo Owain Jones’s claim about the spatiality of memory, as it is “bound up with processes of place and emotional attachments to place” (Jones 213). By the same token, the protagonist’s memories of home and developed sense of being highlight what Steve Pile calls the spatiality of narratives of the self (111), i.e. coming to life through the interconnectedness of self, memory, place, and emotional attachment and resonate with Jones’s claim that “remembering being-in-place, and perhaps remembering through place, through emotions of (remembered) place are powerful elements of emotional geographies of the self” (213).

The same link and inherent spatiality are further explored in Lahiri’s “Unaccustomed Earth,” which reveals the complex emotional relationship of Ruma and his retired father, through the story of his brief visit to Ruma’s new home in Seattle and the memories of their past. Their narrative describes a host of (emotional) geographies: the places and spaces they visit, inhabit, or call home, take roots in or run away from. While in “The Third and Final Continent” first Mrs. Croft and her house, then Mala served as metaphors for home, in “Unaccustomed Earth” taking roots is metaphorised through the trope of the garden, likewise intertwined with emotional relationships to people and home.

For Ruma’s father, gardening is a solitary activity and a labor of love. The memory of toiling “in unfriendly soil” (UE 16) in the garden of their home in the early years of immigration not only reveals the difficulties of settling in the host country but also “his ability to choose his own fate” (Hsin-Ju 177). Furthermore, Lahiri uses the metaphor of gardening to show how emotional landscapes are created and cultivated through emotional bonds with people. Besides roots, the garden too symbolizes home for the

father and in this interpretation, it is inextricably linked to his late wife: “It was the one thing he missed about the old house, and when he thought about his garden was when he missed his wife most keenly. She had taken that from him” (UE 49). Apparently, having lost his wife, he decided to sell the house and move to a small flat alone, an action that his daughter perceives as “wiping out her mother’s presence” (UE 6). The trauma caused by her sudden death is thus readily connected to the loss of the family home, including the garden, as well as his inability (or, perhaps, unwillingness) to continue working towards a sense of belonging, which marks a considerable change in his emotional geographies as well. If home is lost and emotional attachment to people and places causes pain, then traveling and the detachment of the tourist seems to be the obvious solution, offering the promise of uprooting and motion, which he is wishing for and deliberately choosing.

Uprooting

When, after his wife’s death, the father sells their home and starts going on package tours in Europe “in the company of strangers” (UE 3), he seems to be searching for the unfamiliar, for no emotional attachment, no roots, no belonging through his travels. The neutral tone of the postcards he sends to his daughter makes her think “there was never a sense of her father’s presence in those places” (UE 4). As opposed to the narrator of “The Third and Final Continent,” who searches for familiarity for the sake of emotional attachment, and creates home and a sense of belonging in the US through emotional relationships, Ruma’s father opts for the opposite, abandoning his home and finding a sense of freedom granted by his travels. His constantly being on the move may suggest the uprootedness of the diasporian as he becomes “the unlikely transnational subject” (James 49), and his lack of presence in these places may indicate a conscious choice of not belonging. Staring through the window of a plane, “[t]he sight filled him with peace; this was his life now, the ability to do as he pleased, the responsibility of his family absent just as all else was absent from the unmolested vision of the clouds” (UE 8). It is this absence that characterizes his emotional landscape, projected onto the geography of his travels. In contrast with the annual visits back to India with his family, laden with anxiety, sadness, and shame, in Europe he can adopt the emotional detachment of the tourist instead of

the emotional attachment and concomitant painful memories of the man ‘at home’ – at least until he meets a fellow traveler, Mrs. Bagchi, described as “adamant about not marrying, about never sharing her home with another man, conditions which made the prospect of her companionship all the more appealing” (UE 9). It seems that the father is drawn to her because of her independence, having no strings attached, and unbelonging. On the other hand, as both prefer solitude (UE 29), their relationship is based more on a need for companionship, on similarities rather than differences – it is an emotional bond between two kindred spirits, which does not contribute to attachment to and belonging in place.

At this point, as Ruma notes, “wearing a baseball cap that said POMPEII, [...] her father resembled an American in his old age. With his gray hair and fair skin he could have been practically from anywhere” (UE 11). What is most noteworthy about this quotation is that the father’s appearance as an American tourist, and always knowing the exact distance between A and B, workplace and home, suggests both physical and mental assimilation and a sense of belonging to his chosen home, evoking Jones’s assertion that “[e]ach spatialized, felt moment or sequence of the now-being-laid-down is, (more or less), mapped into our bodies and minds to become a vast store of past geographies which shape who we are and the ongoing process of life” (206). On the other hand, the father’s image and behavior as a tourist point to a desire for rootlessness, for belonging in movement. His wife’s death taught him that belonging and emotional attachment lead to unavoidable and unbearable loss. Therefore, he is watching life and places indirectly, through frames – a typical tourist behavior entailing the lack of participation and attachment – and counting/keeping distance from the familiar (family and home) but embracing the unfamiliar (Mrs. Bagchi and traveling the world).

Between two trips, the father pays a short visit to his daughter in her new home in Seattle, which generates a surprising sense of familiarity and triggers memories of the past: in Europe “he was reminded of his early days in America, understanding only a word or two of what people said, handling different coins” but in Seattle, “as on a summer night in Pennsylvania, moths fluttered against the window screen, and sometimes an insect would bang against it, startling him with its force” (UE 28). While the detachment and unbelonging of the tourist are reminiscent of the immigrant’s sense of rootlessness and placelessness, through the sense of similarity between his old home and Seattle that this memory creates, Seattle becomes a place that

he could emotionally attach to – due to its familiarity and the presence of family, and especially his grandson, the next generation that could strike roots in this land. The emotional association of the two memories thus demonstrates the way emotions “interact constantly with our conscious and unconscious selves, memories and environment” and how these associations as “transactions of body(ies), space(s), mind(s), feeling(s)” help the father “make sense of/practice the world” (Jones 205-6).

Jones’s words become especially noteworthy when examining the following memory of the family home: “The bedroom in which Romi and Ruma had both been conceived was dreary, morning light never penetrating, and yet he considered it, still, the most sacred of spaces. He recalled his children running through the rooms, the pitch of their young voices. It was a part of their lives only he and his wife carried with them” (UE 29). It seems that the memory of becoming a father and the emotional relationship with his family is what turns places (whether the family home or Ruma’s house) into emotional geographies, with an inherent opportunity to become home and provide him with a sense of belonging. The fact that Seattle triggers the memory of the first home in US, a small apartment in Garden City, New Jersey, and all it stands for may therefore be one of the reasons why the father does not want to go sightseeing in Seattle but instead turn his attention to cultivating Ruma’s garden, a task that allows him to bond with his grandson and teach him his native Bengali language. On the other hand, he admits to himself that he might be emotionally detached from Ruma because she “resembled his wife so strongly that he could not bear to look at her directly” (UE 27), and he fears having to face the memory of his wife, of losing her and abandoning their home.

The father thus turns down Ruma’s offer to move in with her, convincing himself that he “didn’t want to live again in an enormous house that would only fill up with things over the years” (UE 53) – a decision which might be justified by his ambivalent memories of and relationship with his ‘old home.’ Admitting to himself that the place he used to call home for decades was now just “the old house” where “he was still stuck in his former life” (UE 30) reveals how “emotions are embodied through an exploration of the shifting nature of emotional attachment to place” (Davidson et al. 6) and explains why he declines the offer saying “It is a good place, Ruma. But this is your home, not mine” (UE 52). Living with her daughter’s family would equal a return to a settled, rooted life – instead, the father chooses absence and freedom found in non-attachment to places and creates new,

different emotional geographies, based on what Elspeth Probyn refers to as “movement within belonging” (40) and belonging in movement.

A similar attitude to attachment and belonging may be detected in “Going Ashore,” the final short story of “Part Two: Hema and Kaushik,” a love story of two second-generation immigrants from India to the US, set mainly in Rome and the Italian countryside. The male protagonist, Kaushik, works as a photojournalist, drifting “across the globe without making meaningful ties” (GA 306), that is, building only temporary emotional relationships with both people and places. His travels offer him a chance to deliberately avoid the US, where he was born, and when nevertheless going there, to avoid “the miserable day trip to Massachusetts to see his father’s new life” (GA 305) with a new wife, echoing Davidson et al.’s idea of “the dynamic emotional interplay between [...] environments and people who variously use and avoid them” (9). Having an apartment in Rome as a temporary abode to inhabit between two trips, Kaushik cannot help but recall his first visit to Rome with his mother: “He remembered Rome, of course, from the only other time he’d gone there, on the way back from Bombay to Massachusetts with his parents. His mother was dying [...] And he had returned like a pilgrim to those places” (GA 307). Rome may not be home to Kaushik, but his memories reveal a certain degree of emotional attachment to the Italian city due to his affective relationship with his mother, whose memory is engrained in every stone of the city, turning it into both a deathscape, i.e. a place associated with death (Cf. Maddrell and Sidaway, 2010) and an emotional geography.

In contrast, when his father and his new wife visit him in Rome, instead of the memories coming to life at every corner, at each site and sensation, he feels that “they had left no dent on the place, and he never thought of their presence on the streets of Rome as he continued to think, now and again, of his mother’s” (GA 307). The father’s visit to Rome triggers a strange bodily experience:

In the lush grounds of the Protestant Cemetery, Kaushik had thought that a gnat was circling his head, and he kept swatting at it, putting out his fingers trying to flick it away. But the speck continued to accompany him wherever he went, quietly tormenting him, and he realized it was within him, that it was not possible to remove it or make it stop. [...] He was told he would grow used to it, and he had, more or less, not bothered these days [...] And yet it felt like an invasion of the part of his body, the physical sense that was most precious: something that betrayed him and also refused to abandon him” (GA 307-8).

A gnat in his head invading his body and tormenting him may be read as a metaphorical invasion of memories of his deceased mother and of the negative thoughts connected to his father, who seemingly moved on after his wife's death, creating a rift in his relationship with Kaushik, propelling him to avoid the family home and the US altogether, cutting all ties and uprooting, only to realize that although unbelonging may be a conscious choice, memories of the past unconsciously creep up on him and linger. It appears, then, that Kaushik's complex emotional relationship with Rome is just as much the product of his inability to let go of the fond yet painful memories of his mother as of his desperate attempt to not form any emotional bond with his father's new family. His loss and detachment may be read as a symbolic death of his roots or, as Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt puts it, "the death of memory and a disruption of the hyphenated existence when the hyphen itself is disrupted" (161). Whenever he returns 'home' from his travels, "the land provokes an emotional response" (Bruno 377) and as Kaushik revives and re-lives these memories and projects them, as well as the emotions they entail, onto the Italian capital thereby contributing to its atmosphere.

According to Gernot Böhme, "Atmospheres are indeterminate above all as regards their ontological status. We are not sure whether we should attribute them to the objects or environments from which they proceed or to the subjects who experience them (114). Kaushik's memories of "the strong shaft of light that poured through the dome of the Pantheon" and "clusters of swallows like giant thumbprints swiping the sky" when visiting the city with his mother entail a sense of warmth and freedom, while the bodily experience of a gnat in his head when visited by the father suggests discomfort and an invasion of his private sphere. It is the combination of these two experiences, and the positive and negative emotions they generate that determine both Kaushik's attitude toward Rome and the atmosphere of the city, highlighting an inextricable link between emotions, bodily and lived experience, and atmosphere, and recalling Schmid, Sahr and Urry's assertion that "emotions are not private states of the inner world of the soul, but they are spatially extended atmospheres" (58), as well as Böhme's idea that the atmosphere of the city is mainly sensually perceived, and intrinsically, bodily felt since it is "scripted in emotional states of being" (Plesske 139).

Another aspect of Rome influencing Kaushik's emotional attitude and thwarting the possibility of forming an emotional attachment to it is the fact that "in Rome, in all of Europe, he was always regarded as an Indian first" (GA 311), alien and unbelonging. Thus, the metropolis turns

out to be a “liminal environment, at once reminiscent and distancing” (James 51). When Kaushik decides to move to Hong Kong for a job, it is pointed out that “[t]he thought of leaving the city, the streets he now navigated with ease, made him melancholy” (GA 308), a sense of sadness and loss he cannot explain since, as opposed to his mother, who no matter “where she was in the world, or whether or not she was dying; [...] had always given everything to make her homes beautiful, always drawn strength from her things, her walls,” he “never fully trusted the places he’d lived, never turned to them for refuge” and he “wanted to believe [...] in ten minutes he could be on his way to anywhere in the world. But he knew that it was impossible, wherever he landed, not to form attachments” (GA 309). The quotation reveals Kaushik’s difficulties in forming emotional attachment to places and people (due to his loss, much like Ruma’s father in “Unaccustomed Earth”) and his unwilling acceptance of the inevitability thereof, which may explain his melancholy and attempt to re-write this emotional geography through his brief affair with Hema (the climax of their almost lifelong acquaintance) and the trips they make together, mapping Italy and creating their own emotional geography of it. However, this shared experience is likewise imbued with a sense of loss, both that of his mother and foreshadowing the end of their relationship, indicating that “emotions experienced as if in the present moment are never free of the past but are instead always re-encountered” (Davidson et al. 12).

“Striking” roots

The impact of the past on present emotions “in ways that simultaneously evoke familiarity and freshness” (Davidson et al. 12) is something that the female protagonist of “Going Ashore” likewise experiences during her stay in Rome. Hema has been to Rome three times: first as a tourist, engaging in common tourist activities and creating an emotional relationship with the Italian capital through what John Urry calls “the pleasures of place,” derived “at least in part from the emotions involved in visual consumption of place” (82). For the second time, she went under “false pretenses” (GA 295), accompanying his married lover, which left her with unpleasant memories as the trip “was a heap of rubble that added up to nothing” (GA 296). For the third time, Hema stays in Rome before heading off to Calcutta for an arranged marriage – enjoying the last days of her ‘freedom,’ doing

research on Etruscan history, and making the following comparison: “Like Calcutta, which she’d visited throughout childhood, Rome was a city she knew on the one hand intimately and on the other hand not at all – a place that fully absorbed her and also kept her at bay” (GA 299). Hema’s words suggest the double status of the insider (a professor of Italian history) and outsider (a tourist), an ambivalent ontological and emotional relationship to the Italian capital, characterized by a deep interest in Rome which, however, resists her and denies her the opportunity to develop a sense of emotional attachment. This soon changes when she runs into and starts an affair with her childhood love interest, Kaushik. As both Hema and Kaushik connect Rome with people they have loved and lost, their unexpected surge of emotions, which nevertheless feels completely natural, as if predestined, as well as their positive experience of the city and its atmosphere underlines Kaushik’s claim of the impossibility of not forming emotional attachment to places and suggests that specific “environments have the capacity to transform people’s (emotional) lives” (Davidson et al. 8).

While Rome and the Italian countryside they discover together strengthen the emotional bond between the two lovers and help create memorable emotional geographies, Hema and Kaushik’s final trip to Volterra suggests a different relationship with place through unpleasant bodily experience and thus foreshadows the end of their love affair. The ancient Etruscan town is an “austere, forbidding, solitary place,” which feels “remote, impervious to tourists and time” (GA 318). As opposed to the familiar, warm atmosphere of Rome, which “had hidden them, enabled them, their affair one of thousands,” in Volterra Hema “felt singled out, exposed” (GA 318), sensing the indifference of the locals. In her experience “[i]t was a nearly silent place, apart from the sharp sound of their footsteps, the insistent coupled notes of the bells, the shriek of the wind. At that great height the wind was constant, striking their faces and agitating their hair” (GA 318). The phenomenological experience and atmosphere of coldness and distance signal the two diasporic subjects’ otherness and echo the couple’s irreconcilable differences in terms of their attitude to belonging and emotional attachment. Hema envies the locals as she feels she has “never belonged to any place that way” (GA 320), which may explain her decision to marry – a status she hopes to help her settle, strike roots, and have a sense of belonging. Therefore, she turns down Kaushik’s invitation to move to Hong Kong with him and chooses the reliable emotional attachment that her arranged marriage entails, while

the man continues traveling, opting for belonging in movement until he tragically dies in a tsunami on Thai shores. The memory of their love affair in Rome lives on in Hema as part of the emotional geographies of her life, illustrating how, through memory, “we all carry traces of past geographies, in ways that are always emotionally coloured” (Davidson et al. 12).

Similarly, the interconnectedness of geographies and emotions triggered by memories of the past is a vital part of how Ruma’s father in “Unaccustomed Earth” relates to the concept of home, roots, and belonging, as his visit brings back the long-forgotten memories of what ‘home’ and ‘taking roots’ meant for him. When he recalls the first years of immigration and how he “toiled in unfriendly soil” (UE 16) while creating the garden of his new home in his new country, he decides to do the same in his daughter’s backyard with the help of his 3-year-old grandson, Akash. Interestingly, this is where the title of the short story and the volume gains special significance: borrowed from Hawthorne’s preface to *The Scarlet Letter*, voicing the wish that his children “shall strike their roots into unaccustomed earth” (7), the phrase is used by Lahiri linked to horticulture as a symbol of diasporic subjects’ cultural displacement and endeavors to take roots and is manifested in Ruma’s father’s intentions to help Akash, “flourish in alien soil” (Hsin-Ju 176).

The shared experience helps create an emotional bond between Akash and his grandfather and, for a split second, makes the latter want to reconsider his choice of unbelonging: “The only temptation was the boy, but he knew that the boy would forget him. [...] Oddly, it was his grandson, who was only half-Bengali to begin with, who did not even have a Bengali surname, with whom he felt a direct biological connection, a sense of himself reconstituted in another” (UA 53-54). It is this sense of familiarity and of the continuation of his self that leads him to form a bond with Akash, an unplanned but much appreciated emotional attachment which, however, does not make him want to stay and be ‘at home’ again. Nevertheless, the metaphor of gardening may also reveal how emotional landscapes are created and cultivated through emotional bonds with people, and indicates that memory – in this case, the grandfather and the grandson’s shared memory of gardening – plays “a key, formative role in the construction of our ongoing emotional and imaginative geographies” (Jones 210).

Indirectly, Akash and his grandfather’s shared experience and emotional bond also aid Ruma in dealing with her growing sense of isolation and rootlessness in her new home in Seattle, described as follows:

“Though she was growing familiar with the roads, with the exits and the mountains and the quality of the light, she felt no connection to any of it, or to anyone” (UE 34). Watching her father and son plant in the garden, Ruma recognizes the importance of re-rooting and forming an emotional attachment to her new home and surroundings. Although he himself opts for non-attachment and unbelonging, the father offers a possibility for the further generations to grow in this soil and to re-connect with him (and the mother, represented by her favorite plant) at the level of memory and an emotional relationship with place, and shows his daughter the merits of “striking roots into unaccustomed earth.”

Conclusion

For Lahiri, as Leah Harte notes, “borders, boundaries, maps and geography in a broad sense are indicative of her characters in terms of personal spaces, narrative location, actual countries/nations and in relation to immigrant communities” (67-68). The three short stories analyzed here portray not only the spatiality of the diasporic experience but also reveal that “[l]ife is inherently spatial, and inherently emotional” (Jones 205), and that it always already involves creating emotional geographies, just as “a work of fiction [too] may function as an emotional geography” (Smith et al. 31).

These emotional geographies are developed through complex interconnections between individuals’ sense of place and affective relationships, manifested in attachment and detachment, belonging in place and in movement, concepts of home and roots, and are heavily influenced by memory. The unnamed narrator of “The Third and Final Continent” develops a sense of home and belonging through his gradually evolving emotional relationship with his landlady, who also indirectly aids him in creating an emotional attachment to his wife, and thereby a sense of belonging in the host country. For Ruma in “Unaccustomed Earth,” her new life and surroundings in Seattle become home through the relationship evolving between her son and her father, and her family achieves a sense of belonging by striking roots – both metaphorically and literally. Lahiri portrays emotional relationships and fond or painful memories as a vital part of the diasporic subject’s attachment to or detachment from places and people, of a sense of belonging and unbelonging. After his wife’s death and selling the family home, the primary place of memories, Ruma’s

father deliberately chooses the non-attachment of the tourist, engaging in a fleeting relationship with both places and people through his travels. Although he forms an emotional bond with his grandson during his short visit and helps Akash and Ruma create roots and a sense of belonging, he himself chooses belonging in movement. Likewise, having lost his mother, the most important emotional relationship in his life, as well as a sense of home after his father remarries, Kaushik in “Going Ashore” spends his adult life constantly traveling, inhabiting places temporarily in an attempt to avoid forming any emotional attachment, only to realize the impossibility thereof. His brief affair with Hema in Rome offers the possibility of re-writing his painful memories of the city with happy ones, of enjoying emotional attachment and a sense of belonging to a person – but not to place. He invites Hema to share his traveling lifestyle and belong in movement, an offer she declines for the sake of a traditional form of emotional attachment to place and people through marriage.

Although they differ in terms of their attitudes to relationships, attachment, and belonging, Lahiri’s characters analyzed here all make places an unalienable part of their own story through bodily and lived experience – the emotions and atmospheres bodily felt and the choices made –, thus creating their own emotional geographies of the places they inhabit, whether temporarily or permanently. As argued, their stories shed light on the link between forming affective relationships with people and places and the spatiality of memory on the one hand, and attachment, a sense of belonging, and emotional geographies on the other, in a way that the two processes intertwine, are mutually constructive and constantly changing.



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