

Building Resilience and Interconnectedness among Humans and Nonhuman Entities: Aminatta Forna's *Happiness*

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Using the theoretical tools provided by the conceptualisations of resilience and interconnectedness, this article carries out a comprehensive analysis of Aminatta Fornas *Happiness* (2008). The starting hypothesis explored in this article is that *Happiness* represents the transformational process of suffering and/or psychological wounds through the reparative agency of interconnectedness among humans as well as between humans and animals. Accordingly, this article will first demonstrate how the novel represents the possibility of healing one's psychological wounds through the stories of Attila and Jean, the two protagonists falling in love after a chance encounter. It will then explore how the novel presents the necessity of establishing relationality between the self and the other in coping with adversities. Finally, it will elaborate on the indispensable coexistence between humans and animals in the novel, which provides the characters with the possibility for achieving the ecological self. In doing so, this article will demonstrate that *Happiness* succeeds in representing the need for an interdependent world and the impossibility of a sovereign self in order to achieve happiness in the contemporary age.

1. Introduction

'Trauma = suffering = change' . . . At the top of the paper he wrote: 'HAPPINESS' and underlined it with two dark strokes, and underneath he wrote the words: 'THE PARADOX'. (Forna 2018a, 292)

The paradox of happiness after trauma, as introduced in Aminatta Fornas latest novel *Happiness* (2018a), defines the starting premise of this article. To anyone relatively familiar with Fornas, the recurrent subject matter that comes to our minds

would probably be trauma and its after-effects. She focuses on the traumatic past of Sierra Leone through her nonconformist father's story in her memoir *The Devil that Danced on the Water* (2002), while she depicts the traumatic past of Sierra Leone in her first novel *Ancestor Stones* (2006) and her second novel *The Memory of Love* (2010). Similarly, she focuses on the traumatic episodes occurred in her third novel *The Hired Man* (2013) but in a different country, Croatia, in the 1990s. From a related perspective, her newest novel, *Happiness*, deals with traumatic affects but this time with a specific focus on resilience and healing through a transformational process of suffering and a reliance on the interconnectedness among human beings as well as the interdependence between humans and animals so as to overcome pain and trauma.

Happiness documents various moments of connections among disparate lives and temporal settings as well as between humans and animals following a chance encounter between Attila Asare, an eminent Ghanaian psychiatrist specialising on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and Jean Turane, an American urban wildlife biologist studying the rise of foxes in London. Attila has worked as a trauma specialist in conflict zones such as Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Iraq and Syria. He has recently lost his wife but he is able to transform his suffering and mourning into happy moments, especially when he eats at different restaurants, listens to music, or dances. At the time of the narration, he is in London to give a keynote address on trauma. At the same time, he wants to visit his friend's immigrant daughter, Ama, and her son, Tano. He soon learns that Ama has been missing after a crackdown on immigrants and nobody knows where Tano is. While Attila is in London for a short time, Jean has recently settled in London for her study of urban foxes, after having got divorced and left her life in America. Similar to the way Attila transforms his suffering into happy moments, Jean is able to forget about her unhappy life in America and find contentment instead while observing foxes outside at night. Besides this, she makes friends with hotel doormen, street cleaners, and migrant workers who give her information about the location of the foxes and awake in her some feelings of solidarity. She also becomes friends with Attila after, accidentally, colliding with him on a bridge in London and then she decides to help him find Tano with the help of her friends in the streets – an aspect that will be read as a telling example of the fruitful and powerful interconnectedness among vulnerable people. The narrative covers ten days in London in early February 2014 but, at the same time, it cycles through continents and distinct temporal settings and thus interlinks different layers of stories within each other. Moreover, the novel directs attention to the spatial and temporal intersections of people and animals. Thus, travelling between the past and the present as well as across continents, the novel underscores the multiplicity of subjectivities that provide the possibility of an interconnected world of happiness and love, which is also shown as very much dependent on inextricable connections between humans and animals.

Although very recently published, Forna's *Happiness* has received wide-ranging reviews from various sources. In *The New York Times*, Melanie Finn (2018, n.p.) argues that the characters in the novel 'try to navigate scorching everyday cruelties'

while in *The Washington Post*, Anna Mundow (2018, n.p.) describes them as connected ‘first by chance and ultimately by love’. From a related perspective, Ben East (2018, n.p.) argues that the novel ‘does ask what it means to be happy. Not in a gleeful, childlike way but the more profound, adult state of being’. Kate Webb (2018, n.p.) similarly argues that the novel ‘registers tectonic shifts taking place in the world and provokes us to think anew about war, and what we take for peace and happiness’. Although these reviews provide significant information about the themes of the novel, they do not highlight three salient points mentioned above: the representation of transformational process of suffering and/or wounds, the inherent power of coexistence among human beings, and the human reliance on a positive interdependent relationship with animals. In this article, I will first explore how *Happiness* presents the building of resilience in the aftermath of painful experiences, especially through Attila and Jean’s stories. In their journeys towards healing themselves, what helps them most is the interconnectedness they establish not only with each other but also with the world surrounding them. Hence, I will elaborate on the representation of the demise of a sovereign self and the rise of an interdependent world in the novel. I will then move onto explaining how the novel presents the indispensable function of animals in this imaginary world of coexistence. In doing so, I will try to show that *Happiness* aims at a representation of the act of going beyond traumatic experiences through one’s resilience and both human and animal interconnectedness, which paves the way for the possibility of constructing a world where love and happiness have a significant place.

2. Growing from Painful Experiences

It was after the return of US veterans from Vietnam with psychological wounds that the American Psychiatric Association officially acknowledged, in 1980, the notion of psychological trauma. In this definition, trauma basically refers to the reaction to an event that is ‘outside the range of human experience’ (American Psychiatric Association 1980, 236). Before being officially recognised as a psychological disorder in the 1980s, trauma had already been studied by various psychologists and therapists, the forerunner of whom is Sigmund Freud. According to Freud, the most salient aspect of the symptoms of trauma is its repression in the unconscious under normal circumstances (Freud 2001 [1895], 356). Traumatic experiences, however, do not determine one’s life forever, because there is the possibility of working through them, which Freud equates with his ideas on abreaction: ‘From a theoretical point of view one may correlate it [working through] with the “abreacting” of quotas of affect strangulated by repression’ (Freud 2001 [1914], 155–156). Therefore, what a traumatised patient needs is raising repressed traumatic affects from the unconscious to the conscious by putting them into words. Only through verbalising their traumatic memories, what he described as the ‘talking cure’, can the traumatised subjects gain the possibility of attenuating their traumatic affects.

After Freud's studies, working through traumatic affects has been considered as a resilient form of action by various philosophers, including Boris Cyrulnik, a renowned neuropsychiatrist who has influenced Forna's interest in the theory of resilience. What has formed the basis for Cyrulnik's lifelong interest in resilience after traumatic and excruciating experiences is losing his parents when they were deported to a concentration camp during the Holocaust. However, Cyrulnik's theory of resilience is not specific to trauma studies but has its roots in different fields, which are physics and social sciences. As defined in *Merriam Webster*, the word resilience in physics means 'the capability of a strained body to recover its size and shape after deformation caused by compressive stress' whereas in social sciences it underlines 'an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change' (*Merriam Webster* 2019). Drawing on his personal story of the Holocaust and working with children suffering from various kinds of trauma, such as institutional abuse and genocide, Cyrulnik approaches resilience as a social scientist. He defines resilience as 'an internal mechanism that allows us to cope with life's adversities' (Cyrulnik 2009, 47) especially after traumatic experiences. He suggests that trauma does not necessarily result in the destruction of one's psyche but rather results in the building of a working-through mechanism. Accordingly, he argues that resilience is a natural process:

what we are at any given moment obliges us to use our ecological, emotional and verbal environments to 'knit' ourselves. We might feel that, if a single stitch is dropped, everything will unravel, but in fact, if just one stitch holds, we can start all over again. (Cyrulnik 2009, 13)

Thus, underlining the possibility of a more positive result in the aftermath of traumatic experiences, Cyrulnik puts great emphasis on the traumatised subject's inherent power of going beyond his/her trauma and getting closer to healing him/herself or even the possibility of not being traumatised by a very destabilising event in one's life.

When considering resilience in terms of the possibility of dealing with traumatic affects, it would not be wrong to argue that resilience is quite similar to the transformational processing of suffering. As Richard Whitehead and Glen Bates explain, 'transformational processing refers to the extent to which individuals openly explore, resolve, and personally grow from their life experiences so that these experiences become transformative' (Whitehead and Bates 2016, 1577). Whitehead and Bates (2016, 1579) argue that among one's life experiences are certain self-defining nuclear episodes that 'seek to provide continuity as well as change within the life story'. Two examples for such nuclear episodes which define an individual are 'peaks' and 'nadirs'. While peaks are mostly characterised by 'intense joy, wholeness and perfection' and refer to 'the greatest and most fulfilling moments in one's life', nadirs are 'the lowest points in a person's life and are often characterised by strong negative emotions such as disillusionment and despair' (Whitehead and Bates 2016, 1579). More importantly, an individual finds a way to deal with future experiences building on these moments, which contributes to 'stable traits within an individual's identity'

(Whitehead and Bates 2016, 1579). For example, if a person tends to be optimistic against adversities in life, having ‘positive psychological outcomes such as resilience’ is inevitable (Whitehead and Bates 2016, 1579). It is only through such a resilient attitude that one can reach eudaimonic well-being, which refers to ‘personal growth, meaning, purpose, and achieving one’s full potential’ (Whitehead and Bates 2016, 1578). In keeping with Cyrulnik’s arguments about resilience and Whitehead and Bates’ theorisation of transforming one’s suffering into more positive affects, it might be argued that an individual has the potential to cope with traumatic and/or nadir experiences and start from scratch instead of making suffering a defining characteristic of his/her identity. In short, an individual can learn from his past experiences and may gain the possibility to deal with possible future adversities.

In *Happiness*, Attila’s eudaimonic state after his nadir experience of losing his wife is a literary representation of transforming one’s suffering into self-realisation and happiness in the long run. Attila has been working as a trauma specialist on the effects of traumatic experiences in warzones and, as an expert witness on post-traumatic stress disorder, giving his official expert briefs during trials. For example, he witnesses the turmoil in Timbuktu where men wave machine guns and he watches the murder of nine young women by a gang in Nigeria. In addition to carrying the burden of witnessing with himself and trying to cope with such traumatic events, Attila has to go through his wife Maryse’s death when he is away from home for his work in Iraq. Although years pass after her death, he cannot give up on questioning his life. Accordingly, the external narrator describes him as someone ‘living with a grief that had become his quiet companion’ (Forna 2018a, 274). However, he creates happy moments for himself when he eats good food, listens to music and/or dances by himself. For instance, sitting at a Cuban restaurant in London, eating its delicious food, and having asked the waiter to play his favourite CD of an Ecuadorian singer, makes him really happy: ‘This was Attila at his happiest’ (Forna 2018a, 34). He not only listens to music to feel happy but also to attenuate the memory of his wife’s death: ‘he turned up the music until it smothered the sound of the dead woman weeping in his heart’ (Forna 2018a, 256). Obviously, losing his wife is a nadir experience, as formulated by Whitehead and Bates, and he has to live with her memory. At the same time, however, it has been observed that he finds a way to cope with his suffering, which is listening to music. His efforts to move beyond his suffering are a telling example of Cyrulnik’s ideas on resilience; music is the stitch that holds together his life and helps him to start things from scratch.

While Attila manages to deal with his suffering in some way, Adama Sherrif, a female Sierra-Leonean arsonist, seemingly cannot heal her so-called traumatic experience of losing her husband, Ibrahim, in a car accident. Adama, a seamstress, will be deported to her country if she is found guilty of setting her apartment on fire. Attila’s friend Kathleen asks him to analyse her case and give a report about her condition. Upon reading the case report, Attila learns that the arsonist ‘suffered an earlier traumatic episode when her husband was kidnapped and held for a period in Iraq’ (Forna 2018a, 157). Surprisingly, Attila has some connections with this kidnapping story because he was working in Iraq when Ibrahim was kidnapped and took an active

role in his handover and survival (Forna 2018a, 212). The case report on the arsonist's action refers to her husband's kidnapping as 'an additional early stressor' (Forna 2018a, 157). In addition, the report defines the sudden death of her husband in a car accident years later as 'a potential stressor for PTSD' (Forna 2018a, 157). After reading the case report, Attila decides that he should talk to the arsonist and see if there is any evidence for a possible case of PTSD, which would be an excuse for the crime and would prevent her from being deported.

When Attila talks to Adama, however, he identifies her case not as PTSD but as a natural reaction. He underlines the fact that nearly all adverse experiences such as losing a spouse are unnecessarily regarded as trauma but, in fact, 'the death of a spouse is a natural event and [...] response to it is wholly proportionate, requiring neither diagnosis nor treatment' (Forna 2018a, 257). He believes that Adama's reactions should not be defined as the symptoms of PTSD but simply as emotions following the loss of a beloved person. Otherwise, every feeling in the world would need to be 'identified, catalogued and marked for eradication' (Forna 2018a, 259). Moreover, he asks 'How do we become human except in the face of adversity?' (Forna 2018a, 229). In an interview with East, Forná reconsiders the tendency towards pathologising experiences such as the loss of a partner and notes that

[...]life is not perfect and things happen, but we've become over-protective and fearful of adversity because of what it might lead to. We need to approach life with a bit more fortitude. Personally, I don't know how you become fully human unless you have faced adversity. (In East 2018, n.p.)

Forna's statement as well as Attila's perspective resonate with Cyrulnik's theory of resilience: each individual has an internal and natural mechanism to fight against adversities in life.

In Adama's case, people, like her neighbours, stay away from facing adversities. Following the death of her husband, her clients stop coming to her. Once, one of her neighbours avoids her in the street but Adama cannot understand what is going on. Attila believes that the reason why her neighbours ignore her is that they are afraid of being close to her bereavement and suffering because they would be reminded of their transience in life:

The untouched [such as Adama's neighbours] who were raised under glass, who had never felt the rain or the wind, had never been caught in a storm, or run from the thunder and lightning, could not bear to be reminded of their own mortality. They lived in terror of what they could not control and in their terror they tried to control everything, to harness the wind [...]. No shadow could be allowed to darken their lives as they imagined them. They were terrified of the slightest hurt, afraid of fear itself. (Forna 2018a, 232)

Upon questioning about the night of the arson, Attila learns that Adama was so preoccupied with the distant and dismissive behaviour of her neighbours that she set on fire some sewing belonging to them. Therefore, he concludes that Adama was not suffering from PTSD but from 'the monstrous absence of empathy' (Forna 2018a, 260), which ultimately resulted in her anger, isolation from society and the

ensuing arson. In short, Adama is left to cope with the adversities in her life as a sovereign self with whom people are unable to establish an empathic relationship and as a subject who fails in interacting with the world around her. The novel, thus, insinuates the idea that she needs to live in a world of interconnections and interdependence instead of relying merely on her sovereign self in order to heal her wounds.

The Individual's Need for Relationality

The unavoidability of the demise of the sovereign self and the need for interdependencies and interconnections have been analysed by various critics including, but not limited to, Judith Butler, Virginia Held, Martha Nussbaum and Hakan Yılmaz. In her analysis of post 9/11-life in America, which she then applies to contemporary societies in more general terms, Butler underlines the common tendency towards realising that 'there are others out there on whom my life depends, people I do not know and may never know. This fundamental dependency on anonymous others is not a condition that I can will away' (Butler 2006, xii). Therefore, Butler argues that '[w]e are something other than "autonomous"' (Butler 2006, 27). Butler's emphasis on the deprivation of autonomy brings in the idea of a lack of sovereignty; the self is not always a self-governing being because 'we are social; we are comported toward a "you"; we are outside ourselves' (Butler 2006, 45). From a related perspective, Held finds the demise of individual sovereignty similar to the decline of traditional autonomy, which can be defined as 'self-sufficiency, non-interference, self-direction, rational control, and the like' (Held 2006, 55). Instead, she argues that '[w]e are all in fact thoroughly dependent as children and for periods of illness and deeply interdependent as inhabitants of modern societies [...] more self-sufficiency is not always better: Cooperative activity involves mutual dependence' (Held 2006, 55). Held's suggestion of mutual dependence is in sync with Nussbaum's argument about the inextricable connections between the self and the other. In her analysis of relationality, Nussbaum finds that an individual may be considered as similar to a young plant, 'growing in the world, fragile, in constant need of food from without' (Nussbaum 2001, 1). Just as a plant requires good nourishment and care, so an individual needs 'to stay clear of abrupt catastrophe, to develop confirming associations with other human beings' (Nussbaum 2001, 1). This happens mainly because of the unavoidable dependency 'on the external, upon resources and other persons, for possibilities of ongoing good activity' (Nussbaum 2001, 7). Such interdependency can also be viewed as relationality, as put forward by Hakan Yılmaz in his comments on Heidegger's *Dasein*. Yılmaz argues that 'a person's experiences gain meaning only through such involvement (*qua* existing) with the world, and by the same token, human beings make sense of themselves as well as their world only through being a part of such relations' (Yılmaz 2018, 823). In short, the self has to rely on what is outside, including external materials and other people, so as to sustain his/her life.

In their recently published introduction to *Victimhood and Vulnerability in 21st Century Fiction*, Jean-Michel Ganteau and Susana Onega (2017) analyse how such

a world of relationality is represented in literary works written especially in the early twenty-first century. Drawing on *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* by Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman (2009), Ganteau and Onega underscore the emergence of ‘a literature of victimhood and other forms of vulnerability’ (Ganteau and Onega 2017, 1). They put forward the idea that ‘new ways of viewing and interpreting forms of human suffering that the old medical paradigms were unable to explain’ have emerged since the rise of psychoanalysis and other mental sciences in the 1990s (Ganteau and Onega 2017, 2). Accordingly, there has been a resurgence of interest in Trauma Studies and wounded subjects since the late twentieth century. However, Ganteau and Onega underline the paradigm shift in the early twenty-first century, from a paradigm of trauma towards ‘a politics of reparation’ (Ganteau and Onega 2017, 3) because ‘susceptibility to the wound, exposure, and victimhood as potentialities or general characteristics helping define what it is to be human’ have recently replaced trauma theory and criticism (Ganteau and Onega 2017, 7). Bringing in this idea of an exposure to the wound initiates the idea of ethical relation because the wound is the ‘trace of a relation, including a link to the other’s wound’ (Ganteau and Onega 2017, 5). Therefore, it is imperative that ‘attentiveness to and help of the other become the hallmarks of care as a practice that privileges the positive roles of emotions, responsiveness to the needs of the others, and susceptibility to vulnerability’ (Ganteau and Onega 2017, 6). As Ganteau and Onega’s excellent introduction suggests, vulnerable subjects and their unavoidable relationality to the outer world, including physical resources and other human beings, are represented in numerous literary works written in English in the early twenty-first century. Silvia Pellicer-Ortín’s recently published article (Pellicer-Ortín, 2017) is a telling example of how such interconnectedness is represented in contemporary narratives. In her analysis of some contemporary novels and liminal autobiographical works, such as Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (2007 [1987]), Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2001) and Anne Karpf’s *The War After: Living with the Holocaust* (2008 [1996]), Pellicer-Ortín (2017, 50) strongly demonstrates that ‘transnational and glocal mechanisms have drastically affected identity and memory formation processes; thus, very diverse memories regarding complex episodes of migration or trauma are currently regarded as connected through multidirectional and cross-cultural patterns’.

Forna’s *Happiness* is no exception to the formula of interconnectedness and relationality that has been put forward by the social and literary critics mentioned above. Upon learning that Tano has flown away following his mother Ama’s arrest as an illegal immigrant, Attila starts to track him down. Both Attila’s friends, including the kitchen staff and hotel workers, and Jean’s friends, made up of workers and cleaners, join Attila to find Tano. Thus, they establish a social network that helps ‘mapping the interconnectedness of things’ (Forna 2018a, 174; emphasis in original). In the novel, what deserves great attention is the solidarity among people as a result of their exposure to adversity, which leads them to build a world of connections. The first glimpse of such esprit de corps is between Attila and the doorman of the hotel in which he is staying. With other migrant workers from different countries, such as

Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone, the hotel doorman offers his help with an empathic stress: ‘That could be my son’ (Forna 2018a, 94), which means that the hotel doorman establishes an empathic bond with Attila. The hotel doorman’s feelings of connectedness to Attila conforms to Ganteau and Onega’s views on reparation; his ethical relation to Attila brings in the idea of the wound as a trace connecting people with each other (Ganteau and Onega 2017, 1–7).

With an attentiveness to Attila’s search, not only do the hotel doorman and his friends but also Jean and her migrant friends privilege the constructive roles of emotions and the need for caring for the other. After learning about Tano, Jean eases up on Attila and volunteers to help him. Moreover, she dedicates herself to finding him, although she usually prefers ‘to be alone in emptiness’ (Forna 2018a, 97). She cannot help thinking about Tano and waiting for a signal from his whereabouts: ‘Out there, Jean thought, a child is trying to find his mother’ (Forna 2018a, 95). Although she does not literally run away like Tano, Jean’s story might also be recognised as an escape from her life in America. On the one hand, she had an unhappy childhood and suffered from the broken relationship between her mother and father, as she explains: ‘I used to want to run away and live among the bears. I thought I was born into the wrong family’ (Forna 2018a, 87). On the other hand, she was disillusioned with her marriage and finally got divorced, as a result of which she had to live away from her son Luke. Thus, when considering Jean’s previous life in Massachusetts, it might be argued that since she is vulnerable and she has been wounded by her family relationships, she is affected by and gets involved in others’ – in this case Tano’s – wounds. Such an interdependent relationship with another’s wound echoes the idea of the subject as a relational being (Butler 2006; Onega and Ganteau 2017). No matter how much Jean likes being alone, she cannot remain silent to the other’s wound. Therefore, when compared with Adama’s case, it is necessary to underline the fact that the self needs to embrace coexistence in order to go beyond his/her personal suffering and have a good life instead. It is only through sustaining oneself through interconnectedness and ethical relationality that the vulnerable subject can move beyond physical and/or psychological adversities, as has been presented in the map of interconnectedness drawn by Attila and Jean.

Coexistence with the Animals

Happiness presents moments of connections not only among people but also between people and animals, especially foxes, parakeets and coyotes. In her interview with East, Forna underlines the proximity of everybody and everything in London: ‘The most powerful live next to those with no rights. Immigrants work in the places where people who rule the whole country live their lives. Richest and poorest, animals and humans, side by side’ (in East 2018, n.p.). Forna’s emphasis on the unavoidability of coexistence with one another and with animals resonates with Belgian philosopher and mathematician Marc Luyckx Ghisi’s arguments about achieving individual and spiritual wholeness through an awareness of and attentiveness to the existence of other beings in the world, including animals: ‘[T]he urgent

scope of life is to care together for our survival [...] Animals and plants are respected because they are, like us, part of the cosmos' (Luyckx Ghisi 2010, 41). Enrique Dussel similarly underlines the necessity of learning to live together and caring for the Mother Nature:

Eurocentrism has refused to accept that its civilizing project is leading us to the destruction of the ecology of the planet along with the annihilation of humankind. Hence, the only way out is to seek, in the world's societies including Europe, a capacity to live with otherness or difference. (Dussel 2006, 490)

Although different in their fields of study, the arguments put forward by Fornasari, Luyckx Ghisi and Dussel imply the demise of both a sovereign self and the necessary interconnectedness between the people and the animals in our transnational and modern era.

Moreover, the inextricable connections between the animals and the people outlined above echo Arne Naess's philosophy of deep ecology, which has triggered the following arguments about our social responsibility towards nonhuman beings. According to Naess, deep ecology is a 'rejection of the man-in-environment image in favour of *the relational total-field image*' (Naess 1989, 28; emphasis in original). Naess formulates his ideas on deep ecology by comparing it to the shallow ecology movement, which is solely interested in environmental problems when they leave negative effects on the lives of human beings (Naess 1989, 28). In contrast, he argues that deep ecology underlines the need for ecological self-realisation which 'embraces all the life forms on the planet' (Naess 1995a, 80). Naess takes his arguments one step further when he states that for the maturity of the self, nature should be included into the developmental stages of the ego as well as the evolution of the social and metaphysical self:

Our immediate environment, our home (where we belong as children), and the identification with nonhuman living beings, are largely ignored. Therefore, I tentatively introduce, perhaps for the very first time, the concept of *ecological self*. We may be said to be in, and of, Nature from the very beginning of our selves. (Naess 1995b, 226; emphasis in original)

Therefore, as Gülşah Dindar rightfully notes, Naess's formula of self-realisation is mainly concerned with 'human beings' unification and identification with their natural environment, and their constitution of individual ecological selves' (Dindar 2011, 163). In Naess's words, it is only through such identification with the natural environment and nonhuman beings that 'diversity and symbiosis' can be achieved (Naess 1995a, 80). Robert E. Goodin similarly underlines the importance of our social responsibilities for the protection of vulnerable nonhuman beings, in addition to the circle of our close community: 'the principle of protecting the vulnerable gives rise not only to standard responsibilities (to our families, friends, clients, etc.) but also to strictly analogous, special responsibilities towards vulnerable compatriots, foreigners, future generations, animals, natural environments' (Goodin 1986, 186). Therefore, it could be asserted that the ethical relationality is not confined to the connection between the self and the other but advocates a sense of responsibility towards nonhuman beings including animals.

Forna's *Happiness* is replete with images that draw similarities between the animals and the people represented, which exemplifies the inseparable connections mentioned by the critics mentioned above. The novel opens with a journeyman hunter's story of shooting a wolf supposedly killing farmers' sheep in Greenhampton, Massachusetts, in 1834. After this short introduction of seven pages, we hear the story of urban foxes that are seen as a source of trouble in London, 2014. Despite the temporal and spatial distance, what unites these two episodes is the story of different animals going through difficult times. The foxes are everywhere out in the streets in London. Some Londoners merely pay no attention to their existence while some others classify them as a nuisance and believe that they should be killed, a case similar to that of wolves in Massachusetts in the nineteenth century. Through such multidirectional connections between past and present as well as between Europe and America, the novel insinuates that vulnerable animals are potentially connected no matter how far they live from each other.

Together with this, the fragile situation of the foxes is indirectly related to the vulnerability of the immigrant communities in London. Similar to the foxes exposed to the exclusionary politics of some of the Londoners who see them as a nuisance, the immigrants are vulnerable to crackdowns, which leads to their suffering from physical and psychological problems. This is best seen in the parallel between Tano's escape and the foxes' survival in nature, as described by Jean:

'Foxes stake out an area and then they stay in it. Why? Because that's how they sustain themselves, they know where to hunt, where to find food, water, shelter, where they feel safe from predators. The boy is no different, he's going to stay where he feels most secure. I'm guessing an area roughly this size,' and she drew a loose circle around the X where she had marked the position of the flat, overlapping several fox territories. (Forna 2018a, 84)

Not surprisingly, Attila and Jean later find out that Tano takes refuge where Jean thinks he might go. It seems that foxes and people in this novel have common strategies of survival in nature. Not only foxes but also coyotes display tendencies towards anthropomorphism; they reproduce in order to adapt to the changing conditions around them. In one of her talks about coyotes, Jean explains that coyotes have the potential to continue their lineage in case of a decrease in their numbers, just as human beings would do in the event of a disaster like wars: '*They'd [coyotes] reproduce at a faster rate [. . .]. Humans do it after a war [. . .]. It's the way a species survives*' (Forna 2018a, 178; italics in original). In both examples, the emphasis on animal tendencies towards anthropomorphism and the existing mutuality between people and animals are reminiscent of Fornà's awareness of their proximity in their existence. At the same time, the novel strongly reminds the readers of the fact that animals are an inevitable part of the cosmos, a position that conforms to the arguments of Luyckx Ghisi.

At the same time, however, *Happiness* also touches on a very delicate subject; animals are exposed to ignorance, vulnerable and risky situations, and even occasionally abuse. For instance, Jean attributes the increase in the number of foxes to excessive consumerism: 'Fast food. Fried chicken, burgers, kebabs – the sidewalks have turned into an "all you can eat" buffet for foxes' (Forna 2018a, 64). She also

explains that increasing urbanisation together with the increase in human population have displaced natural flora with man-made buildings and roads: ‘*These changes in environmental structure and function may lead to changes in species distribution [. . .]. Many species cannot cope with the changes brought on by urbanisation and become extirpated locally*’ (Forna 2018a, 174; italics in original). In keeping with Dussel’s arguments about the detrimental effects of civilising projects, it might be argued that *Happiness* presents how the ecology of the planet is totally destroyed. In this case, foxes start to live in the city centre because of over-consumerism. In addition, the novel depicts how animals are unfortunately exposed to abuse although they are an essential part of the cosmos. For example, Jean realises that ‘*some people hated coyotes for being what they were, and what they were was beyond the control of humans*’ and ‘*a coyote had no rights. Not even the right to its own existence*’ (Forna 2018a, 177; italics in original). In one of her essays, entitled ‘Wilder things: modern life among the foxes and coyotes’, Fornas (2018b) reconsiders such hatred towards animals and states that humans are fearful of animals because they may not be controlled at all times:

We love a controlled environment and there is none more so than the city. Here we are protected from the elements by concrete, brick, glass and steel [. . .]. The great metropolises represent humanity’s domination over whatever in nature might cause us harm or discomfort. In Western nations we have lived this way so long we have become fearful of what is chaotic, the uncontrolled and uncontrollable. We do not care to be reminded that we are living beings, for that is to remember that we are vulnerable. (Forna 2018b, n.p.)

Therefore, just as some of Adama’s neighbours stay away from her because they are afraid of her wound, so are some humans frightened of animals since they remind them of their own vulnerability and mortality.

Happiness advocates the idea that the relationality between animals and people is the only way towards achieving an ecological self. As part of her research studies in London, Jean explores why, although wild animals resist close contact with humans, humans crave to get in contact with wild animals through different ways, such as swimming with dolphins, going on safaris and to zoos and even climbing into the enclosed areas at zoos. She concludes that this yearning comes from ‘[s]omething missing in human society or some other more basic drive towards the remnant of what was once wild, not in the animal, but in us’ (Forna 2018a, 277). In a similar vein, although Jean herself is not engaged in such leisure activities, she establishes a close contact with wild animals by unconsciously identifying herself with them, especially with one of the foxes she is studying, named Light Bright. Jean focuses on Light Bright’s attempts at finding a territory for herself: ‘If Jean was right the little vixen [Light Bright] was out laying claim to a small territory she could call her own. And then in the next few weeks she’d begin the search for a mate’ (Forna 2018a, 21). In his analysis of the human–animal coexistence in *Happiness*, Ernest Dominic Cole states that the parallels between Jean and Light Bright are ‘territorial claim and the search for a mate’ because Jean is also trying to establish a territory for herself in London where she could be considered as searching for somebody for herself

(Cole 2018, 302). Cole explains that ‘these anthropomorphic connections between human and animal desires further amplify Forna’s claim not only to a sense of shared space but also of a shared existence’ (Cole 2018, 302). Although valid, the criticism has yet to consider how the novel favours the relationality between animals and humans with an emphasis on embracing nonhuman life forms, which conforms to Naess’s formula of deep ecology. By highlighting the humans’ need for unification and identification with wild animals, the novel insinuates the idea that the ecological self needs to be incorporated into the social and metaphysical self in order to protect diversity and achieve self-realisation.

3. Conclusion

As the epigraph to this article suggests, Attila’s conclusions about the paradoxical relationship between trauma and happiness provides *Happiness* with the narrative material necessary for the analysis of resilience and interconnectedness following one’s exposure to suffering and/or wounds. With a multi-layered plot spanning centuries and continents, the novel documents the human and animal potential to grow from painful experiences by drawing on the solidarity gained through relationality to the other as well as to the nonhuman world, mainly animals. Instead of being confined to one’s wounds and becoming dependent on the agencies of a sovereign self, the novel thematises resilience and interconnectedness with other beings.

Accordingly, as the narrative draws to a close, Jean and Attila transform from lonely and sovereign single adults suffering from their traumatic and vulnerable experiences into happy and interconnected lovers with the potential to start everything from scratch. Drawing on the intimate connection between nature and the human condition, the narrative opens with spring snow like porcelain bowls but ends with spring regeneration. Thus, the ending symbolises the rebirth of nature and promises hope for future generations: ‘The air remains glassy and cold, but more often now the cloud lifts and the sun touches the city. The buds of flowers in Jean’s roof garden are beginning to emerge’ (Forna 2018a, 307). The hopeful atmosphere of the final setting is in keeping with Jean’s optimism about her relationship with Attila. She contemplates what she would tell him the next time they meet: ‘[S]he would tell him about the disappearance of Light Bright and her mate, whom Jean hopes have moved to a new territory and are raising a litter of cubs, and she would tell him of the dead tree she could see from her garden, how it now houses a small colony of parakeets’ (Forna 2018a, 308). She thinks that the parakeets flying away are sure to come back at dusk, too. As Cole states, ‘Attila’s return to Jean is symbolically predicted’ through the return of the parakeets (Cole 2018, 299). Similarly, Forna uses animals in order to present Attila’s hopefulness and happiness. Although away from her, Attila is reminded of Jean by any living creature around him, including a gecko and an ant. Thus, the novel closes with Attila’s and Jean’s present love and possible future happiness in sync with the themes of resilience after painful experiences and interconnectedness not only between people but also between humans and animals.

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