

Research Article

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22192/ijamr.2026.13.04.002>

Impact of Alienation From Nature And Migration In Aminatta Forna's Happiness

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Abstract

The paper examines the adaptive capacity between humans and animals as a result of ecosystem damage. Aminatta Forna's *Happiness* (208) focuses on the degradation of natural resources and the gloomy situation of people due to war, and migration, Forna points out the common reason for people's gloomy life style is due to the disconnection of nature. Aminatta Forna compares both the perspectives of humans and animals who have endured due to the annihilation of their homeland. The author evidently generated the idea that ecocide which occurs in society or a country is considered to be a misdeed because it affects the peaceful lifestyle of all living organisms on the earth. Destruction of the environment is the main causes of ecocide and migration. The author compares both the life style of humans and animals. Whereas individuals move from their native country to another land for a better future, on the other hand, animals come towards the city after the demolition of a forest. Eco- psychology deals mainly with the psychological alliance of living beings and the earth. Migrants have been profoundly impacted by the new environment, some embraced the nature of the change in life and moved on, and some have been incapable of accepting it and are isolated. Animals which have migrated to the city for shelter have been hunted. Destruction of the environment is the major reason for alternation of the usual behaviour of living organisms. The hardships that have occurred as a result of the demolition of nature and not accepting the nature of life by going far away from nature are experienced by certain fictitious characters and finally their reconciliation with nature is meant by eco-psychology.

Keywords

Animals,
Ecocide, Eco-
psychology,
Nature,
Reconciliation

1. Introduction

Nature is considered as the central sphere of every living organism on the earth. At first, people used to worship nature and had a deep emotional connection with it. As time changes, human's lifestyles change and they start to disconnect their relationship with the ecosystem. In the name of war, and development, humans used to demolish and corrupt natural resources. In the novel *Happiness* (2018) Aminatta Forna brings out the sufferings of people, especially women who have failed to connect their bond with nature. And the novel also gives awareness against the illegal animal hunting for money. The paper explores the various reasons for human beings' disconnection with nature and also to safeguard the rare animal species against the ecocide. It also connects and examines both the sufferings of humans and animals. The main aim of Eco-psychology is based on the real relationship between humans and nature. In the paper, it clearly explained how people started to connect their bond with nature after understanding the true value of life.

Aminatta Forna's novel *Happiness* (2018), deals with a one-week incident which was encountered by the protagonist, Dr. Attila Asare, a Ghanaian psychiatrist. He arrived in London to give a lecture about "Trauma" at Institute of Psychiatry. And also to meet his niece who had migrated from Ghana. The novel officially begins when Attila meets Jean Turane, a wildlife Biologist, on the Waterloo bridge while she is chasing the fox. Besides the protagonists and other minor characters, there are foxes, which play an important role.

2. Aim of the study

Environmental changes occur when human beings move far away from nature, which is considered to be an effective reason for ecocide. Eco-psychology, the premise, was originated by Theodore Roszak. Eco-psychology is considered to be an agony of living organisms due to the demolition of nature. Theodore Roszak says that the correlation of an individual with the new

environment can advance their social interrelationship and psychic prosperity. Each species, mind and spirit is connected with nature indirectly, but humans have forgotten to understand that and started to cut off connections with nature. The main aim of Eco-psychology is to make people understand how nature is important to their day to day life and also makes them to understand the terrible consequences of ecocide.

Jean, who is doing research on urban foxes, lives in the outskirts of London to learn more about them. As a biologist she believes that destruction of the forest affects the lifestyle of not only humans but also animals. In the novel, coyotes, a kind of wild dog can be compared with the fictional characters of Aminatta Forna. Coyotes are commonly seen in forest locations in London. Due to the destruction of forests, these coyotes enter the city in order to get shelter.

2.1 Ecocide: A Transgression

The paper proposes to analyse how the complex process of ecocide in London has been processed relatively and theoretically through the narrative representation in Aminatta Forna's *Happiness*. Jean, an American woman, settled in London for the sake of her research after her divorce. Jean's first encounter with the coyote happened ten years before, while she was in the camp with her son Luke and she catches it. Jean says that,

"A young male, fully furred out, with a pale undercoat, the covering of black hairs in the back.... Jean waited to take her shot: too soon and she risked missing, too long and he would be gone. The coyote's coat felt smooth and soft... Finally she laid her cheek against his chest and felt beating of his heart... The coyote had been Jean's first. She had never forgotten." (2018, pp. 47-48)

Illegal animal hunting is against nature. Animals are hunted for trading purposes, mostly for their skin. Because of this, many animal species have become rare. For example, the Amur leopard,

Hainan gibbon etc. In the novel, Jean fights against the illegal hunting of a vixen. It's a female fox, and also the other breeds of fox. After the destruction of the forest, some foxes come inside the city in search of food and shelter, which has become easy for the hunters. Jean is raising her voice against that she also gives awareness to people through radio programmes with the help of the mayor of the town. Jean feels very bad because local people are selling vixen illegally, to earn money.

Aminatta Forna never failed to talk about the illegal hunting and trading which is against the environment in her works. Aminatta Forna's first novel *Ancestor Stones* (2006) deals with the illegal diamond mining. The novel depicts the real-life situations of people. As in history, the Sierra Leone civil war is an outcome of the private use of the mined diamonds by the heads of the state. The illegal trading to private sectors is a reason for the civil war in Sierra Leone. Like this, in the novel *Happiness*, she boldly speaks about illegal animal hunting for their skins which are traded illegally.

As time goes on, everything changes. The nature of people changes when they migrate from one place to another. Like this, the nature of the animals also changes when they migrate. Coyotes which mainly dwell near North America are seen in the outskirts of London. As a wildlife biologist, Jean identifies certain changes in the character of the vixen, she says that, "Since the foxes had moved into London their habits had changed. Once they were strictly nocturnal, now foxes could be seen walking down inner-city streets in mid-summer noon..." (2018, p. 52).

2.2 Issues of Disconnection with Nature

The Characters of women are very well portrayed in Aminatta Forna's novels. The novel *Happiness* deals with the major problems of women due to migration. Migration happens in a village or a country due to the demolition of land and environmental resources in the name of war. Most of the Africans migrate towards London and Europe with hope for better future. Ecocide due to

war and environmental destruction are the main reasons for human beings' migration.

There is a natural unwritten rule where women and nature are connected with each other, so when any disaster or demolition occurs to the environment it is most probably women who are affected at first. The suppression of the environment by humans can be compared with the lives of women, who are suppressed by society. The beauty of nature is demolished for selfish purposes like war and other illegal activities which affect living organisms. Like that, women's lives are also devastated.

Jean, after divorcing her husband Ray, moved to London from America. The reason for her failed marriage was her profession. Jean's husband Ray was feeling jealous of Jean's profession because of his academic status. Jean says that "He did not want to share her, not with another man (there was no other man), not with the members of the wildlife team, not with a pack of coyotes..." (2018, p.71). As a nature lover, Jean couldn't tolerate the illegal hunting and demolishment of forests. Because of this, she was stressed; in order to overcome this Jean had made a green house on the top of her apartment.

Ama, the niece of Dr. Attila, who had migrated from Ghana due to the civil war to London, and permanently settled in London, was unable to connect with the new environment, falls sick and also loses her son, Tano. Finally, Tano was recovered with the help of Jean and Attila. Here we can understand that both the attitude of people and animals are the same. Because of migration, they have lost their identity. The situation of Ama can be compared with the coyotes, which have entered the city without knowing how to tackle the consequences of a new environment.

Humans and animals are forced to leave their places in the name of war and ecocide. According to Jean's animal study survey, most of the foxes were killed by vehicles and almost variety of foxes is in endangered positions like Sierra Nevada red fox, Swift fox, Vixen etc. According to Jean's research, the female foxes named vixens

are becoming fewer in numbers. This makes a Jean worry a lot. Jean tells that,

As for Black Aggie, she'd just disappeared, Jean had no sighting of her for months. Black Aggie was the first fox Jean had seen in London.... In her professional opinion as a wildlife biologist, she knew the truth was likely to be different: most urban foxes were killed by vehicles, the rest by disease, a very few made it to old age. (2018, p.28)

Like this, most of the people are suffering to get their identity back in the new environment undergoes lots of struggle.

Dr. Attila's ex-girlfriend, Rose Lennox, is dying of amnesia. It's because of her psychological imbalance towards the nature of life. After breaking up with Attila, she suffered a severe depression due to the separation of her parents; this back-to-back catastrophe in her life had a profound effect on her. Instead of accepting the facts and moving on, Rose has stuck with the bad memories even though she is also psychiatrist she is unable to treat herself. The struggles women have endured have been based on social issues, environmental change and their least profound understanding of the nature of life. Nature teaches every woman the ways to cope with the overwhelming problems.

The women in the novel *Happiness* can be compared with Indian novelist, Anita Nair's novel *Ladies Coupe*(2001). The story of each women personality in the novel is noteworthy; the women undergo psychological problems. Margaret Shanti the chemistry teacher had married a man who did not recognize her needs. This is clearly compared with the life of Jean in the novel. The other women characters have different problems where some of them stay silent and rest fight for it. The women characters who were dumb in the novel *Happiness* are Rosie, Ama, and Adama Sheriff.

Dr. Attila was a psychiatrist who spent most of his lifetime in the war zone giving counselling to war survivors and soldiers. But here even Attila is also a war survivor and he was living his life

without any happiness and proper medication. From the protagonist mind set the reader can understand the role of war, which has played an important role. He used to reminisce about the terrible incidents in Sierra Leone during the time of war. He was really depressed after the death of his wife Maryse. Since then, he has been living an uninterested life without any attachments with others.

Aminatta Forna showed an interesting connection between her novels *Happiness* (2018) and *The Memory of Love* (2010). Dr. Attila is a side character in the novel *The Memory of Love* who is introduced as the chief doctor in Sierra Leone city hospital. As a doctor, he gave advice to the new psychiatrist Dr. Adrian from London that 99% of the population in Sierra Leone is affected by post-traumatic stress disorder. And the best treatment for these people is nothing other than hope. And in the novel *Happiness*, Attila is living with hope in his own imaginary world. Hope is connected with nature, which helps to move on to take the next step of the life, but like Rosie, Attila failed to maintain a connection with nature. So, to lead a happy life even after a disaster one should dedicate their life with the environmental surroundings which will help people to get rid of psychological impacts.

One can understand from the life incidents of Attila that connection with nature is not only mandatory for women, it also mandatory for men, which means it includes all human beings and other living organisms. Humans should connect their emotional bond with nature without any second thoughts and restrictions because the nature has a power to heal the wounds of human naturally without any medications, devoting towards nature is the only thing to escape from the emotional distress which used to make people to lead an unsophisticated life.

There is an incident in the novel where Attila used to admire the night life in London city. The author also had given a note about Waterloo Bridge by explaining its natural beauty. In the novel we can see the connection between the bridge and Attila. Attila encountered the fox and met Jean for a first

time on the Waterloo Bridge. At that moment, Attila and Jean didn't know that this meeting would last forever and he used to sit on the bench near the bridge and reminisce about his past terrific events. Here we can understand that his connection with the ecosystem fails due to his fear of losing after getting attached to something or someone. The Bridge connects the life of two people with two different thoughts.

The connection between humans and the environment is explored in the paper. Jean tells Attila that foxes which are wandering inside the city are harmless because they don't have any intention of attacking humans. The more encounters with the fox species were happening because they didn't have any place to go, like the migrants it needed to search for a way to survive. The situation can be compared with Canadian writer Yan Martel's booker prize winning novel *Life of Pi* (2001). The story revolves around Piscine Patel, who has lost his family while migrating. He was left all alone in the sea for 227 days in a life boat along with a tiger. The story revolves around Pi's connection towards the nature and his survival skills with the tiger.

Jean used to compare her lifestyle with wolves, and coyotes. Jean had some romantic affairs before her marriage, she considers herself as a male wolf which used to change its mate for different kind of physical pleasures. Jean tells that, "There were those pairs (domestic dogs for example) where the male abandoned the female as soon as the act of coitus was over..." (2018, p. 97). From this the author makes the reader to realize how Jean was connected with the nature because she was comparing her life with nature not with any other things such kind of relationship with nature only safeguarding Jean from various stress.

One of Jean's habitual habits other than researching on foxes are watching the birds who builds its nests on the top of the telegraph poles, it's because of the deforestation. The authorities used to send men regularly in order to remove the nest. Jean tells that, "A number of adult birds preached on the branches of a nearby tree and

watched the desecration of their nests" (2018,p.100). Jean also compares the lives of human with the birds that the birds are also like humans who have migrated due to the environmental destruction and lost their home and are also struggling to survive in the new society were half of the people have lost their connection with nature.

Aminatta Forna shared a real incident in the novel through the vision of Jean which happened in the year 1978. It's a James Bond movie 'Moonraker', at that time; the pinewood studio was designed and remodelled into a house of birds, Jean tells that, "yje plan being to create a rainforest for the film's jungle scenes....planted with trees and vegetation, water sprinklers fitted to the ceiling kept the plants moist and could create the effect of a rainstorm in seconds. Toucans, parrots, macaws, hookbills, egrets and flamingos were shipped by the boxload from nearby zoos..." (2018, p.101). And one day the man who was in charge of birds forgot to close the doors and within a fraction of second thousands of birds gone from the set. Jean explains the situation that, "Thousands of birds flew away into the London skies. The paradise birds perished with the onset of cold weather, but the green parakeets, for whatever reason, made it through that winter, and the next and the next" (2018, p.101).

From this incident Jean keeps up the point that freedom is really important in everyone's life, which is provided by nature for all living organisms. It's in our hands to choose the decision of our life. If we choose a bond with nature, then our life will be free from any psychological disasters, but if we neglect nature, then it's our responsibility to live inside a cage, considering this is life. The novel revolves around the importance of connection between nature and humans, because due to humans disconnection it's the animals and birds suffer a lot.

2.3 Assimilation with the Nature (environment) of Life

After Attila befriending Jean, he understood that living a happy life is the one thing which is really

needed rather than mourning for past events. Attila was in a great depression because of not being with his wife Maryse at the time of her death, he was working in the war zone at Iraq as a psychiatric doctor giving counselling to the soldiers. After her death, in order to forget about the terrible incident, he travelled to all the war areas without any hesitation and witnessed the destruction.

Like Rose, Attila was also unable to come out of past events. Atilla's thought was written by Aminatta Forna that, "He wished Maryse back into life, in the dreams which he could not control. He imagined, what if, what if, he had never gone to Iraq?... All of this passed with the years, though the dreams continued. Attila was not unhappy, he was simply living with a grief that had become his companion" (2018, p.274). Attila never wanted to leave Rose alone during her last days, because he didn't want to do the same abandoned thing which he did to his wife Maryse. So, he stayed with Rosie till her last breath, which made him feel better.

Jean took everything in a positive way, even though she was divorced and separated from her son; she had the guts to move on with life. Because in Jean's life it was nature which helped her to overcome these problems, nature acted as a medic to Jean and she balanced both the major changes that had happened in her life and the ecosystem. While seeing the life of Adama Sheriff Dr. Attila's patient, she was arrested for killing her own husband due to post-traumatic stress disorder. These two women in the novel were really disturbed psychologically but they both chose different paths to balance them.

The paper focuses on the characters of some people who are searching for happiness by ignoring nature. Nature is something which is connected with everyone and helps with the strengthening of life. The relation between animals and humans is very well portrayed by Aminatta Forna. Salman Rushdie, an Indian-born British-American novelist in Grove Press opines, "Aminatta Forna expertly weaves her characters, stories, past and present, in and out of the larger

story of London, which becomes as a rich character as the human beings and, indeed, the foxes; and she makes us care deeply about them all, the foxes, the people and the city. A terrific novel".

3. Conclusion

At the beginning of the novel, Attila was afraid of seeing the fox, but after a few days, when he again encountered the fox, he understood that its aim is not to attack him. Attila understood the fact that the fox was searching for shelter like him who was searching for happiness. Eco-psychology is considered as a bridge which connects humans with nature. The paper shares the backdrop of environmental changes and demolition, which probably affects women easily. Migration, which is considered to be a common part in the war zone, affects people psychologically. It makes them feel that they have lost their identity. Rather than war, the disconnection of humans with nature is another severe cause of damage. Like humans, the imbalance in the ecosystem affects the animals

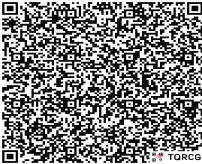
The novel begins with two individuals leading their lives without happiness, but in the end it clearly pictures how the nature of life leads them to find their own happiness. The novel *Happiness*, it shows the struggles of both animals and humans due to the change in the environment. Nature gives a remedy to the inner pain of people. Dr. Attila, who was mourning with his past events and living an unpleasant life, decided to share the rest of his life with Jean. Like the fox which had accepted the new environment. So accepting the change which nature brought us can lead to happiness by overcoming psychological wounds

The paper explores the connection between living organisms and the environment. It also further encompasses the impact of ignoring and destroying nature. The different issues of women are brought out due to migration and personal issues. Ecocide is the major concern of the novel. As a writer, Aminatta Forna brought out the sufferings of both animals and humans clearly

because of the destruction of the environment. Diana Evans in *Love in the urban wilderness* opines, “Sprawling yet composed, worldly yet intimate, it is a tender evocation of the kaleidoscopic nature of the urban wilderness, as well as a challenge to the imposed centrality of the human animal”.

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	Website: www.ijarm.com
	Subject: Novel Study
Quick Response Code	
DOI: 10.22192/ijamr.2026.13.04.002	

How to cite this article:

Monisha K, Dr. S. Sreelatha. (2026). Impact of Alienation From Nature And Migration In Aminatta Forna’s Happiness. *Int. J. Adv. Multidiscip. Res.* 13(4): 15-21.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22192/ijamr.2026.13.04.002>