



# Library podcast

## Aminatta Forna discusses 'Happiness'

[00:00:05] Welcome to The Seattle Public Library's podcasts of author readings and library events. Library podcasts are brought to you by The Seattle Public Library and Foundation. To learn more about our programs and podcasts, visit our web site at [www.spl.org](http://www.spl.org). To learn how you can help the library foundation support The Seattle Public Library go to [foundation.spl.org](http://foundation.spl.org)

18\_03\_21\_Aminatta\_Forna.mp3

[00:00:05] Welcome to the Seattle Public Libraries. Podcasts of author readings and library events. Library podcasts are brought to you by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation. To learn more about our programs and podcasts. Visit our Web site at [WWW.spl.org](http://WWW.spl.org). To learn how you can help the library foundation support the Seattle Public Library GotU [foundation dot Haspiel](http://foundation.haspiel.org). Or

[00:00:35] Hi everybody. I'm Brandon. I'm the literature and humanities program manager here at the Seattle Public Library. Welcome to this evening's program with Aminatta Forna presented in partnership with Elliott Bay Book Company. I want to thank our authors series sponsor Gary Curtness and the Seattle Times for their generous promotional support of library programs. I also wanted to say that we are very grateful to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Now I'm delighted to welcome Karen Mayita Olman from Elliot maple company who's going to introduce tonight's program.

[00:01:08] Good evening and thanks for joining us. So today we're welcoming Aminatta Forna who's the Linnan foundation visiting chair and poetics at Georgetown University and professor of creative writing at Bath Spa University. She's a recipient of Yale University's Windom Campbell Award and her novel *The Memory Of Love*. Set in post-war Sierra Leone was shortlisted for the Orange Prize and the impact Dublin Literary World. It also won the Commonwealth Writers Best Book Award in 2011. She is a recipient of the Hurston Wright Legacy Award.

[00:01:46] The LeBaron ter price and the idea Snyder Book Prize for ancestor stones and she received an Obi in the Queen's New Year's honors in 2017. In 2003 Ahmann on a Forna established the bunko project which contributes toward building schools providing for adult literacy sanitation and maternal health in a village founded by the author's grandfather in Sierra Leone. And as you probably know she has roots both in Sierra Leone and also in Scotland. And we of course know her best from her writing and her novels include *The hired man*. *The memory of love* and *ancestor stones*. She's also the author of a memoir *The Devil that danced on the water* and the writing of which she recently revisited in the *New York Review of Books*. She's with us today as part of her book tour for her novel *happiness* recently published by Grove Atlantic Monthly Press the BBC The Guardian and the

millions have all listed this book as one of the best of 2018. She also just got a very nice review from David Calmy and the Seattle Times is a wonderful novel A Love Story and many on many levels including the love of family and also the love of the city and its people its creatures and its environment. And I suspect there's many of us here who also love that city as much so also a city very much of immigrants as is our city. The Financial Times recently wrote about this book. Happiness is one of a handful of contemporary novels that take both the human condition and the animal condition seriously entering for a sweeping universe where it transports you to a place that feels familiar but also totally feral and full of surprises. So Aminatta Forna will read for a bit and speak and also take some questions from us. We have copies of all of her books at the Elliott Bay Book Company table for purchase and also a few books with you I'm sure she would be delighted to sign them. So with that please help me welcome Aminatta Forna to the Seattle Public Library

[00:04:04] Thank you. Sometimes a small crowd is nicer.

[00:04:09] We have a good conversation when I finished talking to you about happiness. The last time I was in Seattle was 2013 with my last novel The Hard Man and any of you who know my work. Now that I spend a lot of time thinking about civil conflict and trauma and how people survive Chuba and at that time there was this great big conference of trauma surgeons and doctors in Seattle and every single hotel was packed out and a lot of them were staying at my hotel. So I got talking and of course I had a very particular interest in trauma surgeons. The memory of love had a trauma surgeon as one of the main characters and I'm one of those ghoulish people who can spend a lot of time in operating theatres so I was happy to allow them to regale me with their stories. Now happiness takes as its main character somebody who those of you who may have read the memory of love might remember

[00:05:14] A psychiatrist called Attila Asare and he appeared in the memory of love's a minor character. He ran into a psychiatrist who ran the hospital the mental hospital in Freetown and his world in the memory of love was really to really to help. One of the main characters Adrian finds his way through to understanding the country. He was an agent psychologist and a visitor from the UK and he'd gone to Sierra Leone in the wake of the war to try to help people who were affected. And he was struggling and Attila along with Kai Mansaray the surgeon were two of the people who really helped Adrian to open his eyes to the country and to understand that he couldn't just expect the country to explain itself to him that he had to try to understand the country on its own terms. Well over the years I wrote another book about the hard man that the character over till I never really left me.

[00:06:13] I was quite struck by him. He was what I think covers an anti psychiatrist somebody who was a working psychiatrist but very much prepared to critique the methods practices and orthodoxies of his own profession. And so I wrote a couple of short stories in which he was the main character. And then. As time passed I decided that I wanted to give this person another outing.

[00:06:42] But what I really wanted to do with him was taken out of his milieu and bring him to a Western country to the United Kingdom to London specifically.

[00:06:54] I wanted to explore. I wanted to reverse the gaze and explore what an African psychiatrist might make of Western values. And I thought if I took you to London which is a city I know very well and London has an awful lot going for it. But the longer I'm away from it the more I miss it. But there is a wonderful city. But like whole cities it brings out the best and worst in people. And I often think that western cities are terribly tough places for everybody but the fittest that tough old people that tough kids are. I remember once not very long ago asking an audience in Britain when they last saw a child in central London. And most people couldn't remember the last time they saw a child in central London. Yes in the suburbs yes and the outlying areas but actually in the centre not so much. It's a tough place for all kinds of people undocumented people people who don't have rights. It's also a very tough place for the animal population. Like many of the cities Seattle for one for sure but every city in America London has a significant wildlife population. Yours of course is coyotes and they make an appearance in this book. Through one of the other characters who's called Jean is a wildlife biologist and she's working in London temporarily. But I'll come to her in a minute. His main four legged occupants other than dogs are foxes. We have thousands of foxes and I was inspired to write about the wildlife of the city partly by the fact that my office in London and our house in London overlooks the garden.

[00:08:47] And every year for the 18 years that we lived in that house. I sold fox cubs growing up in my garden. We had a resident vixen of accidents with over 18 years. It would have been more than one but we had arrested six of them and every year she would have her cubs and the Cubs who play on my lawn. I wrote whatever book I was working on. I mean I came to the states and I was teaching at Williams College and Williams is a small town in western Massachusetts. But in small towns we find a much greater collision between wild and human actions the wild and less wild inhabitants. But anyway I got curious and interested in what some people called human animal conflict and what other people prefer to call human animal coexistence like became fascinated him spoke to wildlife biologist urban wildlife biologist who spent their lives figuring out how the two parties could live together. So I had this idea What if what if a teller went to London and he has his own thing to do that he said he give a keynote speech on Chuma therapy. But also you know what if what he see in the way that people in London treated animals urban wildlife brings out a great conflict among the human population of a city as I'm sure you know some people love them.

[00:10:19] Where I live in DC it's the DIA a huge amount of debt. I don't mind that there I think they're perfectly charming other people find them extremely irritating and the same is true of Fox. The same is particularly true of coyotes. So Jean the person who a tale of encounters is somebody who has made her name or her reputation working with coyote populations in the state and she's come to London to try to help the London councils figure out what can and cannot be done to create more harmonious coexistence between London's human inhabitants and its inhabitants.

[00:11:05] So this is from the opening of the book chapter one and it is a terrorist arrival in London. London Sunday the second of February 2014 evening. At that time of day Waterloo Bridge is busy with shoppers and weekend workers who make their way on foot across the bridge to Waterloo Station. At that time of year to dusk comes during by four in the afternoon by five it is dark. The Fox wended its way through the pedestrians who for the most part paid no heed. But they could not so

easily be distracted from the fixity of purpose through the slanting sleet. Many people didn't see the fox. Those who did thought it was perhaps a loose dog. A few people had observed the fox on its journey upon the terrace of the National Theatre. A pair of smokers had spotted the fox watching them from behind the corner of a raised concrete flap that was filled with dead lavender.

[00:12:07] The smokers in the Fox looked to each other in stillness for several seconds then three things happened which caused the fox to post a passing cruiser on the river gave it a blast of its horn which in turn caused one of the smokers to after a high pitch of surprise. They started to Focht which backed off and might have done little more than run down the stairs to the next level. Had not heard a plastic bag dislodged from a tree branch by a sudden gust of wind blown suddenly down upon the terrorist moments before all this happened.

[00:12:42] Another smoker had emerged from the theater lobby and now stood with the heavy door propped upon one shoulder for use as a wooden shield while she lit a cigarette. The Fox escaping the threat of the carrier back dashed through the open door into the lobby where it joined the lava flow departing theatregoers down the stairs and through the crowd. When the fox and as it went it brushed against calves and knees causing people to hop exclaim and search the floor through the thicket of legs for the cause. Down on the ground floor the fox skittered across the hard stand on the on the ground level. The Fox scooted across the hard floor. A young man sat in programs through the evening pointed and cried there in a kind of outrage to a pair of security guards who with a jangle of keys lumbered into life. The Fox headed for the glass doors leading to the outside onlookers stopped to watch talks stalled to silence between the Bank of glass doors and the concrete walls of the building.

[00:13:46] The Fox had nowhere to go. On the other side of the glass a man painted top to toe in silver carrying a silver cane and wearing a silver bowed hat and who had spent eight hours standing motionless upon a box in freezing temperatures. The day approached the building with no idea of the commotion unfolding beyond just as the fox reached the last and the doors Silverman pulled open the fox ran out the security guard skidded to a stop.

[00:14:15] One nearly fell over the other uttered an exclamation in Yorba. Both laughed and adjusted their peak caps and kept his companion upon the shoulder. Some people broke into a scattering of applause and the silver man took a bow. Outside the Smetana was a river water and traffic. The fox ran up the stone steps to the bridge where it overtook a man carrying a bicycle.

[00:14:41] On the bridge the people walked unswervingly armed with bags defended by earphones looking neither right no left and acknowledged nothing and nobody. Those who did not walk with purpose meandered past rocks around which the Foster Lucus flowed past Kamerman taking a time lapse image of the river.

[00:15:01] The Fox moved at a metronomic trot with a line through them all a man so tall he appeared to be wading through the crowd was crossing the bridge in the opposite direction to the fox. The man's name the name his mother had given him as though she knew to what size her only son would

one day grow was Attila in his pocket a tailor carried a theater ticket. In addition he held a reservation one at a restaurant in which he had chosen the restaurant. After reading the menu displayed outside the entrance and now his reverie was half boiled Tafel spits and chopped chicken said it until it was newly arrived in the country by no more than a few hours and he relished for the moment the feet of wind and sleet on his face.

[00:15:48] He relished to the idea that soon he would sit alone in a dark place surrounded by strangers and nobody could find him. He moved slowly in the crowd letting people pass in the middle of the bridge. Just beyond the cameraman standing with his camera on a tripod Attila came to a stop and turned to admire the view of the houses of parliament. Somebody ran into him. The Coalition left Attallah unhurt a testament to his size and scale.

[00:16:19] By contrast the woman who had run into him was thrown to the ground and Attila promptly bent to help her up. He apologized in sympathy for aapc this could not be his vote. The woman accepted his hand stood up and brushed her backside.

[00:16:34] She wore jeans and a sweater and jacket old and black until it retrieved a black daypack from the ground and held it out to her. She left him holding it for some moments while she retired her hair into its ponytail as he waited to notice two things about the woman. First that her hair was a rather remarkable pale silver and hung to the middle of her back. Who would have done was she not already in the act of pushing it up inside a wooden hat. Secondly that she was tall for a woman. She needed reached his chin. The woman put her hand out. So a tenant might pass her bags swung it onto her shoulder and said I'm sorry about that.

[00:17:14] Excuse me in a way suggested that particular sorry with all attendant nodded. A moment later he watched her walk away a long stride. It could still feel the force of that collision the imprint of her body on his later in the theater. Drank a gin and tonic and forgot about the woman on the bridge. The show was a comedy and he laughed explosively at all the jokes until he had to wipe away the tears that rolled down his face. At the interval he bought himself vanilla ice cream. He came to London infrequently but regularly enough to form certain habits late morning till I had checked into his preferred hotel early part of the evening. He spent OKing in buying theatre tickets now from the terrace he searched the skyline for changes and identified two new skyscrapers to the right of St. Paul's Cathedral. One with a single sloped side the other a concave structure they'd been built since the time of his last visit to the city two years ago. In the middle of Waterloo Bridge engraved Plock of the skyline and the Tillet made a mental note to check it with the names of the newbuildings as he finished his ice cream the bell sounded returned with fresh anticipation to take his seat in the auditorium. On his way back across the bridge till it was driven by hunger who failed to check the clock. A few minutes later he was being shown to his seat by the maitre d of his chosen restaurant as he followed a Tillich glanced covertly at the plates of the other diners. He liked and at times even asked to be seated near the kitchen door. A request so unusual could always be accommodated this way he had cited the plates of food held aloft by the waiters as they emerged through the double doors. In places where he was known the waiters would sometimes pass by his table. Each dish wafted in front of his nose. Tagliani Ifeanyi Pacini freshie Seno steamed whole tilapia.

[00:19:18] Dr Asare today's prime age to put high stakes despite the late hour.

[00:19:25] The restaurant was full booths lined the walls in the center like waterlilies an array of small and large round tables covered in white tablecloths until it was shown to a corner booth. The maitre d pulled the table out a good way to allow him to slide on the banquette he said. Good evening to the people at the next table and picked up the menu to remind himself of the good things on offer. He wanted calf liver and bacon because both of these were hard to come by where he lived and the potted Brown shrimps.

[00:19:56] Because those two were a rare treat a carafe of re-offer completed his choices and as he waited for his meal to arrive he sipped wine and looked around. The other clientele with the exception of a couple seated at one of the waterlilies everyone in the restaurant was white. Attila watched the single black couple for a while.

[00:20:17] They were young and close in conversation. The woman wore fuchsia dress. The man was in a suit. An anniversary sorter and he looked away.

[00:20:29] Some minutes later it was a Tiller was eating brown shrimp. The man passed to this table and a few minutes later on his way back from the Gents he passed by again. This time it happened to look up and catch his eye. The man nodded. Think of the chain. Taylor nodded back and returned to his shrimp.

[00:20:48] The nod was something that was Xchange only in certain places. Moscow for example Perth Prague Sao Paolo. No Abana no Mumbai. Yes Rome and less often all of Poland. Much of England beyond the M twenty five Belfast.

[00:21:05] Yes in London already although we're not but might be exchanged in certain kinds of steps in this restaurant Attila drew no stairs but it was still a place not mine to caramel and chocolate pudding chocolate sponge dusted with icing sugar. It struck the sponge casing with the back of his spoon and come out from within.

[00:21:30] He might have been tired but he was not. There was no question Objet bag for there was no time difference between a Krahe and London but he'd flown overnight on the plane. He used the time to review the papers for the conference and details of his keynote speech which he delivered it often in the past few years nevertheless required updating Attila worked while other passengers slept or watched movies the same one it seemed from multiple small screens until I could see the same handsome actor grapple with the same.

[00:21:59] Armed men raced desperately to the same crowds and streets defused the same terrorist bomb over over until it possessed the gift of being able to choose when and where to sleep. One that had served him well on various tours of duty. When sleep was impossible and the environment was too hostile to the victims too many out to the field he put forefoot sleep two long days interviewing

assessing collecting data and then sleep for 14 strach. Back at the hotel he never waited to return to base to draft his report but began it there and then as soon as he could while the thoughts were fresh following dinner. When it was by then after midnight until briskly back in the direction of the bridge.

[00:22:46] Exercise and a little the things he needed now taxis passed him without slowing the brutal concrete to buildings and galleries on the opposite bank when blue and red. The plot was mounted on the balustrade at the apex of the bridge and faced east towards the river estuary the engraving was warm the lettering faded and it had been defaced by school graffiti.

[00:23:11] But the moon was good that night on the tele bent and traced the skyline with his forefinger. The two new buildings though had not yet been added he turned to walk back the way he had come tonight to sleep well in his mind was already planning the breakfast he would order in the hotel dining room while he was away in the places where he worked places lost the moral darkness.

[00:23:36] London seemed real and distant even street lighting struck him as an improbable luxury. Lights left burning so the population of a city could walk home without fear of injury or crime. When he was in London going to see plays and eating and fine restaurants the city itself began to feel like a stage set whose denizens enact their lives against expectant backdrop a theatre of delights where nothing surely could go wrong. And if it did or would be put right by the end of the third act he stepped up in it.

[00:24:12] He stepped up his pace and kept his hands as if in anticipation of what lay ahead. But in reality against the cold on the empty bridge an animal was trotting towards him shifting shape that sled slid in and out of the light and dark on the bridge. At first I thought it was a cat and a dog until finally the moving Sheck resolved into the form of a fox. The Fox passed the tiller carving a shadow arc around him as if merely observing the rules of personal space until he walked on and then stopped and turned around.

[00:24:48] At the same time Fox 2 stopped and glanced back over its shoulder and seemed to regard him till it pushed his hands into the pockets of his coat. The Fox held his gaze unblinkingly for a long moment and turned and trotted on.

[00:25:06] There is some there is a theory that the way there was a theory that criminal psychopathic you can spot a criminal psychopath early on because they have a predilection to cruelty towards animals.

[00:25:24] It's not a heavily contested theory I think it's fairly accepted and I'm you know I sort of extrapolate that out of that thought what does the way whole populations treat their animal animals. Tell us about about how values and I was prompted into a lot of as I wrote an essay for Granta Magazine about a vet in Sierra Leone somebody I knew. I'm a dog lover I don't know if this is obvious but anyway. And I grew up keeping a great many dogs in Freetown. We have an enormous stock population enormous street dog population is one of the first things people notice when they go to freetime the number of dogs on the street. And this man was just it was extraordinary. Just after the

war and even during the war just after the war he leapt off to the street dogs and he made it his business. At the end of the war the point when Freetown's city council prompted by some of the aid agencies had decided that they were going to kill the dogs they were going to terminate them and they would do this by having what's called a keep your dog at home where people would keep their own dog in sight than any dog that was on the street could be killed rounded up and killed.

[00:26:36] And this isn't how we keep dogs in West Africa.

[00:26:41] We don't keep them as pets. They either live in the yard or they live in the street. But actually if you go through Freetown at night at dusk you'll see people going out to feed their dogs. So this man good as JATO when the ordinance was declared went round with the big truck and started putting all the street dogs in the back. And when people when ordinary people the poor people poor people of the city discovered what he was doing they too began to grab these unsuspecting dogs and throw them into the back of the truck.

[00:27:12] And in the end he gathered up 600 dogs and kept them for several days. His wife I interviewed his wife and she said that night it was a full moon.

[00:27:29] Anyway he managed to get in. He testifies on the part of the dogs and he manages to get this ordinance overturned and anyway I was I was moved to write that story really because I was so struck I had a dog that was hit by a car and people were unbelievably crying just the poorest people helped.

[00:27:50] They picked out the gas and they brought her to my house I took it to her to him and we went off to a little cottage hospital which was the only place I was an X-ray machine and all the people in the Scottish hospital really showed so much concern for this dog even though we had all they had in particular suffered so much in the war. And it well I wrote the piece I wrote it because it gave me so much hope. I thought if you can go through ten years of civil war lose tens of thousands of people in this awful way and still care about the life of the dog at the end of it.

[00:28:21] This really does give me some hope now and I've already talked about how wild animals create such conflict and in Western cities.

[00:28:33] And some people love them some people feed them some people dislike them some people hate them. And I've always been very confused by the strength of feeling the anger towards these animals because it does. You know when I talk to people I it and I have talked to very many people about them people can cite all sorts of information but they never actually know anyone this has happened to and it has never happened to them. And there are much greater threats out there. And I began to wonder if it wasn't really about control. That was really about actually control of the environment and the collective frustration that these creatures would not be controlled.



[00:29:15] Said this is Jean who has just just bumped into a teller chasing a fox and these two will over the course of the book encounter each other and become friendly fish in Massachusetts but I'm not going to attempt the Axum Gene Touraine yes we're ready for you.

[00:29:38] Jeanne stood up and followed the research. The young woman waved her part at the security guard. They entered the revolving glass door where they stood squeezed uncomfortably together while the doors inched around. In the studio Jean was ushered into the seat opposite the host whose name was Eddie Hoppa Eddie Hoppa was reading a link leaning into the microphone and waving his arms around. When he had finished he took his earphones off and extended the hand across the hexagonal desk to Jean.

[00:30:06] The Fox lady. Am I right. I guess so said Jean.

[00:30:11] Oh the folks here Lady Jeanne said nothing the host but as events back home shuffled scripts and conduct a conversation with this produces of which gene could only hear his side. After a few minutes he lit up at her 30 seconds. He said and began his introduction. Oh that too many foxes in the city. Before he knew it he'd come to her. I'm joined in the studio by Miss Jean to radar. Why don't you explain to our listeners what it is you do. I'm a wildlife biologist said Jean specifically. Urban Wildlife biologist I study animals in the city and human animal coexistence. And you're here to study off foxes he fix his eyebrows up and down at her in a way that seemed vaguely improper. I ask who's paying for this. The studies been conducted on behalf of the Council in conjunction with the European Commission. There are animal populations in the urban settings of most Western countries including the United States. There's a lot of information we can share in the U.S. we have considerations about deer raccoon skunk. There's even been the occasional moose in a shopping mall. He interrupted to said this is what the European Commission is spending our money on. Why am I not surprised. And what is it we need to know about foxes that we don't already. We need to know how to manage them and in order to do that we need data where they concentrated what their habits are how many foxes they're off for instance. What's the answer. Always of the first questions. Jean began to explain how it's hard to get a fix from the number of foxes that were in any area. These are wild animals not even herd animals who could be rounded up and counted. But solitary nocturnal creatures you couldn't just call the sensors but he lost interest.

[00:32:02] So the answer is you don't know. But we're talking thousands right maybe even tens of thousands too many that depends on how many people can tolerate. If the foxes are then they pretty much leave you alone. Foxes leave that crap on your on my lawn. There are controls you can use for pedants he looked at her as though she was demented. So you're telling me it's my problem. You could try putting up signs said Jean. But the animals and animals don't follow rules. Absolutely right. My friend they raid dustbins and scatter litter all over the streets. They defecate wherever they please and carry on and carry disease. And let's not talk about the late night screaming because this is a family show. It's all a mash of correctly managing them said Jean. Don't leave your she remembered say rubbish instead of garbage rubbish bags out on the street and that wouldn't happen. For disease. The most common disease foxes carry is mange and the greatest victim of them are dactylic mangers the fox population itself. What about household Patsie interrupted. Excuse me said Jean dogs caps.

Contract made. Yes but Jean said. Next you're going to tell me that if my dog gets mange it's my fault. Healthy pet dog is not any serious for us. But what you would call serious. He spent the last word with an invisible inverted commas around it might not be the same as our Petronas out there. After all you are on the side of the foxes. I'm a scientist said Gene. I didn't take sides. We need to take a realistic view of the situation. Everyone wants an easy answer but maybe just maybe there isn't one. Gene was handling the interview badly.

[00:33:49] The more she talked about Fox's the harder it seemed to become to her it was all so obvious. Only one party in the Fox vs human battle was capable of changing its behavior. You could wish for Christmas to come in May or you liked they wanted London cleared Fox's for the next ten minutes. Jean sat in the radio studio and took calls from the public people accusing Fox News of stealing children's Wellington boots from outside the back door. Digging up plants one quarter came the fox had attacked his staffie. The first two were likely the last extremely unlikely. Fox wouldn't get into a fight with a large animal unless it was cornered. The Corda seem to want the fox arrested. Somebody should do something he said before hanging up and there were the callers who fed Fox's putting food out for them at night. They thought Jean should lose. The efforts were annoyed when she didn't. One caller was convinced a fox had made it with his Labrador. I doubt that very much. Jeanne what makes you say sir said he Hoppa. Yeah how would you know. Said the caller there's been no verified case of cross species mating between foxes and domestic dogs but wolves and dogs make said Eddie Hopper. Yes Jean exhaled. But I'm afraid you can't use one example of cross species mating. As proof of another what we're talking about here is evidence. As for dogs and wolves humans and chimpanzees don't mate. Even though they are our closest genetic cousin that's disgusting. The color of your Labrador Walp species called the zoo they'll be very interested Gene told him the host through her look. But Gene ignored him. And the closing minutes of the segment came the inevitable. What about our children. What about them. Asked Jean what happened to the fox attacks the child. Are you going to be responsible Jean began to rehearse the amount of wild animal attacks on children the figures of which were extremely low. Your neighbor your car your own pet dog and it's shit.

[00:35:56] These risks were all a thousand times higher Eddie Harpreet interrupted Can I ask he said Are you a mother. She should refuse to answer the question. Instead she replied wearily. Well then you should know better spot the cooler.

[00:36:16] The people who heard this were Gene and Eddie Hopper because the producer on the other side of the glass was already fading out the call. Gene didn't listen to Eddie hop around off the phone. She was already removing her head from I found it interesting the way in which the conversation about and actually if you look at the headlines the conversations about. Any population that is unwanted anywhere

[00:36:43] Attracts remarkably similar kinds of headlines and the way in which occupations it is portrayed. As holding responsibility for any number of unwanted behaviors or actions I was thinking and these groups polarize people. And I was thinking very much about who in a city is affected most by that kind of portrayal. And it is the immigrant population and I started really comparing the

headlines in the way that these two groups were the inaccuracies and the the feelings that was stirred.

[00:37:34] I thought it was remarkably similar or not and so I began to think it really was about control it really was about saying who has the right to be here and who doesn't who belongs and who doesn't.

[00:37:45] We're live in London. In southeast London where happiness is set as a great big African population and Brazilian population but mostly West African. And actually what happened was I went to live there in the late 90s and in the early 2000s when the war in Sierra Leone reached its height an awful lot of refugees came over to Britain.

[00:38:10] And for reasons I didn't know they decided to move to South East London I suppose because they moved there. So it was night. So I did. The property was cheap and they moved to southeast London. I found myself surrounded by people who whose language and customs and food culture I knew. I mean actually some of whom I need personally my mother's hairdresser pitched up and opened a shop so that made life easier.

[00:38:33] My mum for a bit. So a lot and I

[00:38:38] You know I really also moving to the states not things like this on a tour like this. I would come across the same populations in West Africans. I didn't know where the Seattle has a significant West African population but D.C. for example 80 dollars and Atlanta really does and Los Angeles really does and New York really does. And people would recognize my name recognized me as being from the same part of the world as they were and what I was I was very moved by the way in which they would extend to me small courtesies and kindnesses.

[00:39:11] As I moved through the country you know if they worked in the kitchens they would keep the kitchen open for me. When I returned from a reading like this too late to get room service they would help me with taxis and all kinds of things. Let me an umbrella I was always on the basis that we will join together in this way as as the outsiders in this city and a funny thing happened. Actually William I

[00:39:38] In D.C. where there are so many West Africans be excited and preparation big here Nigerian preparation based on a population they occupy certain kinds of jobs doormen Uber drivers taxi drivers in Britain very much the traffic wardens in London and just a few weeks ago I was called a taxi. It's quite like midnight to 1:00 in the morning I've been out with a friend to a bar and he hailed a taxi to help me home and I got into the taxi and I said I'm was going right into Addington and he said I know I know who you are you are.

[00:40:21] I mean I've driven you before you want I mean Atta from Sierra Leone with the Scottish mother. I am Abdool from Senegal. Does your husband know you're out with that man. Anyway I

[00:40:34] I thought about who would you turn to for help if anybody in the city would be the first people you turn to help.

[00:40:39] And so I thought probably it would be the but the population from from the world you knew and the Tele is in London to give his keynote but also looks up his niece whenever he's there and he discovers that she has been she has called home for a while. So her parents are getting anxious and he discovers that she has been although she's not an illegal immigrant. She's been called in and an immigration clampdown she's been accused of being an illegal immigrant.

[00:41:11] And in the meantime have some has gone missing her son was put into social care and he's gone missing. So he starts to look for the son with the help of some of the men and women from West Africa who Jean is also connected to because in ways that I Wake's may not find out that part of they help her with her survey I met Jean in the underpass below the IMAX by Waterloo Bridge.

[00:41:41] There was no sign of a homeless man or his dog had been wonderful Gina arrived accompanied by Abdoul and Attila came with the hotel doorman who having been on duty since dawn had been about to take his break and offered to come along until he realised he didn't know the man's name James said the doorman as they introduced themselves. The person who claimed to have had sight of the child was a traffic warden whose speech covered the inserting streets. The man arrived recognizable by his uniform as the hotel room and rightly predicted. It came from Sierra Leone. He spoke with a stammer and whenever he stumbled over word he blinked and thrust out his lower jaw out and then down to one side and then the other like an opera singer during warm up exercises. His name was comba. He'd seen the boy near Stamford Street a lot of people overstay the meetings on the slick roads down to the ground. He explained he'd been checking the tickets in the car windscreens.

[00:42:45] He saw the boy watching him and wondered if the boy was acting as a lookout for somebody. People did that.

[00:42:51] That children with the car in case the traffic warden came by Kubicek the ticket. Some were just about to run out of time. He decide to take a look at the cars on the road on the other side of the bridge and came back in a few minutes. By the time he did the boy was gone. So he was with one of the drivers you're saying off James that Dorman traffic wardens shook his head. A short time later I saw the same boy again this time Kombo was woken with another warden. The boy was standing by the river watching one of the performers. One of those who makes money by standing in the same position all day the boy was gazing at the living statue of a man in a silver suit and a silver bowler hat carrying a silver cane. So a child one Fullwood with a coin given her by her parents the child dropped the coin in the hat at the feet of the statue began to move. What about the boy. Was a Attila cumbered blinked. That that was the only other time. As I say I noticed him because I had seen him before. That was the reason nothing more. I had no purpose to talk to him. The new man Abdul sent us his picture. He pulled out his phone and brought up his picture Attila showed him another photograph of the boy taken to a different angle.

[00:44:08] Yes nodded Is there anything else you can tell us how his had to except that there are always boys like him around here sometimes that they're looking for something to do but maybe they have no homes. Or maybe they don't want to go home. The skate park is one place they like to go. How did he seem to you. Genos comba regarded Jean. I see a lot of people without homes to go tomorrow all over this city. They are dead. It's not easy but also they have a look in their faces or else they look at nothing but the ground all the time.

[00:44:47] The boy was not the same. It was watchful he was alone. He kept himself to himself was not okay but also okay you understand. Abdul thanked him and headed back to work.

[00:45:01] Let's have a look at the skateparks that gene they passed behind the theater and James stopped and introduced them to two of the security guards both Europa's who stood up from where they were sitting and remove their caps to be formally introduced. These are some of my boys said James the proprietorial then the Fortinet Gene Abdul and James walked down the side of the building towards the riverfront back said Jean. She pointed to the man in a silver suit and a boat. Standing on a metal bucket they gathered around him a tilt at his great height was practically level with the performers nose excuse me. We need to talk to you he said. The man's face Silverman did not reply nor did he move. He was steeled against people who tried to interrupt his act. He had performed an graps Munich Prague in Bruges. Nowhere as bad as this in those places killed kids pulled faces in front of him or posed for selfies next to him. That dropping so much as a euro in his hat. Here he had stood immobile before drunks mooning buttocks endure the coarse laughter of women on a head night who flashed their breasts to see if they could make something else move day after day to be Sawston directions holding their maps up to his face as though he'd been placed there by the mayor's office. The the man fixed his gaze on the far off point of the bridge allowed his expression to glaze over with an effort of will it trained himself into faded out all nearby sounds. Jean frowned. Let's just go and check out the skate park. No on. Attila pressed buttons on his phone until he found the picture of Tanner and held it in the silver man's face. Have you seen this boy without visibly adjusting a muscle in his face. SILVERMAN redirected his gaze by infinitesimal fraction. What is this man's problem. Doesn't he know how to talk. Asked Abdul outraged. You would allow me sir.

[00:46:59] James took a coin from his pocket reached past the tiller and dropped the coin into the hat on the ground in front of the bucket.

[00:47:06] The silver man came to life and rigid hands shot forward and snatched it to the telephone out of his hand so fast that it had no time to react. Silverman's hands swung like a marionette.

[00:47:17] His head bombed as if as if it was bound some type of spring he cupped his head right and then he cupped a tiller tended to save his patients when he needed it. Said Stop that Silverman's shoulders slumped. He switched his gaze on to a tiddlers big mouth pulled down on either side in an elaborate expression of sadness. Poor Man's Peter.

[00:47:41] He raised his other hand which held his cane and threw the cane into the hand holding the phone and back again the actions seemed designed to provoke other perhaps I should slap him said

Abdool in his vexed tone of patience. Everybody please said James he nodded to the statue. With a series of robotic movements the silver man raised the camera up to his face rolled his eyes like a doll and switched his gaze upon the image. Seconds passed. SILVERMAN blinked slowly once twice his whole body seemed to mount and his limbs reconstitute themselves from Tinta flesh as he climbed down from his bucket he handed the phone back to a tenant and asked who is he. My nephew earlier today here the runaway how do you mean after. Close when the face washed we understand. SILVERMAN nodded. How long two days now. Said Attila all the time. I think I'm going to be that bad and yeah I'm going to leave but that I'd be really happy. Take any questions.

[00:49:01] Happiness was going to be called Waterloo Bridge. And then I discovered that there were several novels called Waterloo Bridge and it there is ash I discover it a book called happiness. It's almost impossible to find a completely original title but the it is ultimately an exploration of first of all trauma and then how one recovers from trauma and finds happiness again and said This is a journey that Attila goes on and on. I suppose I was moved to two different ways.

[00:49:39] One is all the thinking and writing that I've done about Chuma and a book and a psychiatrist could pursue Olmec who I came across. Around the time I was writing the memory of love and Verismo and it was a French psychiatrist is still alive actually is in fact psychiatrists and psychologists and he was a specialist in trauma and he was one of the people who developed the idea of Brazilian's embarrassed Similac had survived on the streets of Paris during the war. He's Jewish and his family were killed in the death camps and later on he became a runner for the resistance. As a child and later on became a mental health professional and he specialized in people who'd gone the worst kinds of traumas and he began to notice a couple of things. One was that they were unhappy as they were. And it was thought they were it ape's people who hadn't been through the traumas imagine that these people would be would have their lives ruined by it and what Boston at Aldgate and continued to argue was that trauma that a traumatic potentially traumatic experience. I mean the trouble with these words is that they are slightly interchangeable but that say a potentially traumatic experience a very painful very difficult violent experience in arguably caused pain and caused suffering but it didn't always cause long term damage.

[00:51:09] Yes in some people it does cause long term damage but actually an awful lot of people could come through it and so Solnik try to figure out who and why. And he noticed that some of the Holocaust many of the Holocaust survivors he was dealing with were actually quite contented people. So he did he really developed was that a feud was mainly about narrative. There were some things Armley structures or support structures societal attitudes. It's huge whether the society tells you you're damaged or not. But also whether people had control of their own narrative how they shake their narrative they didn't take a narrative that was deliberate to them. So I was thinking about all of that and the sorts of people that until it was working with this population this immigrant population in London. But also I found this fascinating parallel between urban wildlife and these ideas of resilience which is that actually that the more that you're trying to destroy foxes and coyotes the stronger they become the more resilient they become. So I said that was a kind of Allegri that I found quite interesting but it came down to happiness because I moved countries I was in Britain writing half of

the book and then I moved to the states and I came to and I had put the book down moved house country and everything else.

[00:52:41] And then book back up again. But I found myself in a country whose stated contract was happiness like no other country in the world has happiness the pursuit of happiness as a stated project. So I became quite fascinated because it forgive me but you don't seem any happier than anywhere else. So I thought how interesting that this is the state product of a country and yet there was this dissonance between how people felt and what the country's goal was. So I began to think about what actually was happiness. Were we mistaking ideas of happiness for something that was really unachievable. Something that amounted to a kind of permanent state of Glee. It probably couldn't be achieved without a great deal of chemical input. And that actually when you talk to people about happiness and great fear of of negative experiences it's because we equate happiness with the feelings of childhood with innocence with being untouched by anything negative in the world. And so we work households in into a state where we believe that is something negative happens to us.

[00:53:52] We are going to be damaged by it and therefore we will never be happy. And that's the idea that I once will have. Right Kate thanks very much indeed.

[00:54:05] Thank you.

[00:54:11] This podcast was presented by The Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to The Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.