

## AN ECOFEMINIST ANALYSIS OF FARTUMA KUSOW'S TALE OF A BOON'S WIFE

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### Abstract

This article examines the exploitation of women, nature, and certain other oppressed groups in Fartuma Kusow's novel, *Tale of a Boon's Wife* using an ecofeminist literary approach. The novel tackles a number of contemporary Somalia-related concerns. It addresses topics including sociocultural factors, the strongly ingrained patriarchal system, the effects of war and violence, the issues associated with environmental disasters, etc. Thus, exploring this novel from an ecofeminist perspective will show how the writer addressed gender injustice, environmental crises, and various types of dominance and exploitation rooted in their societies. To extract relevant data from the novel, a close reading was done. Then, a textual analysis was employed to analyze the extracted texts. Therefore, based on the analysis made, the novel significantly portrays the deep-rooted patriarchal system in Somalia. Women and girls are especially vulnerable to both domestic and public abuse. The novel also demonstrates that continued war and conflict, and drought have a direct and indirect impact on women, children, farmers, animals, and the natural environment. It also shows that war and instability create a good situation for those military officials and members to subjugate women and control vast amounts of fertile land for their own personal gain by displacing poor farmers. Furthermore, the novel has portrayed discrimination based on clan and class differences in its impact on women and other subordinate groups. On the other hand, it portrays Idil, the main character, resisting all these differences and giving value to all humans, animals, and the natural environment, including the land. Finally, the author has put all these unprivileged groups together: women, children, animals, farmers, and the natural environment, including the land, in one category to show how they are mistreated and exploited simultaneously by powerful men.

**Keywords:** Drought; Environment; Exploitation; Patriarchal System; War; Women

### Introduction

Globalisation, conflict resolution, ecological and environmental issues, human rights, and many other challenges are the main concerns of African literature today.<sup>1</sup> On top of that, the emergence of female writers has enabled them to mirror women's

issues and roles in their society. And the extraordinary entry of women has broadened the horizons of African literature, particularly novels<sup>2</sup>. Thus, gender issues and related subjects are other themes in African literature.

However, Stratton "in characterizing African literature, critics have ignored gender

<sup>1</sup> Tanure Ojaide, *Contemporary African Literature: New Approaches* (Carolina Academic Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Irele, F Abiola. *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

as asocial and analytic category”.<sup>3</sup> Besides, African literary criticism has limitations in addressing the relationship between nature and humans. This is because African literary criticism focuses only on human agents by excluding the non-human natural environment. Iheka asked a question that shows non-human beings were not the center of discussion in literary criticism in Africa as follows:

If human imbrication with nonhumans has always been a feature of African societies and the literary expressions that emerge from them, why then has African literary criticism not paid much attention to the interlinkages and their ecological significance? Why have human concerns remained at the heart of literary criticism on Africa?<sup>4</sup>

While this is a fact, the interlinkage between women and nature is a poorly addressed subject in African literature. However, Kenyan, Wangari Mathai, an environmental icon and particularly recognised as an African ecofeminist in theory and practice, affirmed that women are the change agents in healing a destructed natural environment. Wangari Maathai, the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner, founded the Green Belt Movement to plant trees throughout Kenya. She states that the Green Belt Movement as a grassroots non-governmental organisation (NGO) focuses on environmental conservation and development mainly through a nationwide grassroots tree-planting campaign as a core activity by mobilising women in many parts

of Kenya.<sup>5</sup> Thus, as an ecofeminist, she showed the world women’s concern for nature.

Ecofeminists for years have been expressing their concern for environmental crises and their impact on human and non-human beings, especially on women and others who are victimized on the basic class and race.

According to Phillips and Nick, since the advent of ecofeminism, injustice and exploitation have exacerbated environmental, economic, social, and political crises. Thus, they argue that the planet's carrying capacity is falling as our dominant economic and political ideologies intensify disaster. More than ever, the deployment of radical ideas, techniques, and politics that re-connect the human and more-than-human worlds is required.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Haraway emphasises the grave dangers of the Anthropocene and the current capitalism crisis to our planet. She claims that the Anthropocene and Capitalocene scandals of our time are the most recent and dangerous of these exterminating forces. Living and dying powerfully alongside each other in the “Chthulucene” can be a ferocious response against the mandates of both Anthropos and Capital.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, by acknowledging these global concerns, ecofeminism as a theory still strives to bring about an ecologically stable earth by ending all the oppressions and exploitations of nature, women, and other subordinate groups. Cudworth states that the most straightforward approach to defining

<sup>3</sup>Florence, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (Routledge, 2020), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Cajsetan Iheka, *Naturalizing Africa: Ecological Violence, Agency, and Postcolonial Resistance in African Literature* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 6.

<sup>5</sup> Wangari Maathai, *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the Approach and the Experience* (Lantern Books, 2003).

<sup>6</sup>Mary Phillips and Nick Rumens, “Introducing Contemporary Ecofeminism.” In *Contemporary Perspectives on Ecofeminism*, 1-16 (Routledge, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke University Press, 2016).

ecofeminism is a collection of viewpoints that take into account the connections between the social organisation of gender and how societies are structured in relation to "nature."<sup>8</sup>

Instead of being a "single-issue" movement, ecofeminism rests on the notion that the liberation of all oppressed groups must be addressed simultaneously. By documenting the poor quality of life for women, children, people in developing regions, animals, and the environment, ecofeminists are able to demonstrate that sexism, racism, classism, speciesism, and naturism (the oppression of nature) are mutually reinforcing systems of oppression.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, ecofeminism is a holistic value system. According to Birkeland core principles of ecofeminism include the fact that ecofeminists strive for fundamental social transformation and accept that everything in nature has intrinsic value.<sup>10</sup> She recommends that we have to reject our anthropocentric viewpoint, instrumentalist values, and mechanistic models and instead focus on a more biocentric view that can comprehend the interconnectedness of all life processes. Lastly, she notes that we cannot change the nature of the system by playing patriarchal "games".

Regan also states that the fundamental tenets of ecofeminism can be moulded into the following: The first is that there is a causal link between the exploitation of

<sup>8</sup> Erika Cudworth, *Developing Ecofeminist Theory: The Complexity of Difference* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Greta Gaard, "Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature: *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*." In *Ecofeminism Women, Animals, Nature*, edited by Greta Gaard, 1-12. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 5.

<sup>10</sup> Janis Birkeland, "Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice." In *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, edited by Greta Gaard, 13-59 (PHILADELPHIA: Temple University Press, 1993), 19.

marginalised populations and the exploitation of the natural world. The second is that we need to adopt a care ethic in place of our dominant culture. Thirdly, all types of oppression are unacceptable and linked to one another. The fourth argument is that fair transformation requires an understanding of these relationships. The final one is that the movement must be led by the people who would be most negatively impacted by environmental catastrophe.<sup>11</sup>

Besides, according to Lorentzen and Eaton,<sup>12</sup> and Elizabeth,<sup>13</sup> the analyses of critical links between militarism, sexism, classism, racism, and environmental destruction have become central to ecofeminist thought and action. Even if these are prevalent issues in African literature, there is still a restriction in addressing them simultaneously. Nwankwo adds, "The impact of war on the human condition in African literature and society has not been taken as seriously as it deserves."<sup>14</sup> On top of this, while women and other common people are mainly affected by war,<sup>15</sup> as Plümper and Neumayer explain, African literature and

<sup>11</sup> Sarah Regan "What Is Ecofeminism? Understanding the Intersection of Gender & the Environment." mbgplant, Updated June 20, 2020, accessed 25, 2022, <https://www.mindbodygreen.com/articles/ecofeminism-history-and-principles/>.

<sup>12</sup> Lois Ann Lorentzen, and Heather Eaton, "Ecofeminism: An Overview." Paper presented at the The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth , Adrienne "Rhetoric, Rape, and Ecowarfare in the Persian Gulf." Chap. Fifteen In *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, edited by Karen J Warren, 239-59. United States of America: Indiana University Press, 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Chimalum Nwankwo, "The Muted Index of War in African Literature and Society." In *War in African Literature Today*, edited by Ernest N. Emenyonu, 1-14 (HEBN Publishers Plc, 2008), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Plümper and Eric Neumayer, "The Unequal Burden of War: The Effect of Armed Conflict on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy." International organization 60, no. 3 (2006): 723-54.

literary criticism still have a gap in discovering how the impact affects them.

Thus, this research investigates how women, the natural environment, animals, and other subordinate groups are represented in Fartuma Kusow's *Tale of a Boon's Wife*.<sup>16</sup> Besides, it explores how the impact of war and drought on these subjects are addressed in the novel.

The reason this novel has been chosen is that its setting is in Somalia, which as a country has experienced a prolonged war from colonialism to the recent civil war that made the country unstable for years. Moreover, Somalia, as part of the Eastern African region, is known for famine and is always hit by a severe drought that causes the destruction of the natural environment and the lives of human and non-human animals.

Moreover, although being a single novel, *Tale of Boon's Wife* has addressed a wide range of contemporary African topics. The novel is filled with African difficulties due to the war, drought, the deeply established patriarchal system, clan and class inequalities, the burden of women and girls, the challenges for farmers, the brutality of military leaders, and many more. As previously stated, analysing this novel using ecofeminism could also bring a new depth to ecofeminism literature, and it also symbolizes the hard situations that women, nature, and some other subordinate groups experience in general.

In order to investigate these issues, the novel was taken as a primary source, though some other secondary sources were taken as references. A close reading was conducted to obtain and extract the necessary data from the novel. Next, the extracted texts were analysed using the content analysis method. As a result, the ecofeminist issues

<sup>16</sup> Fartuma Kusow, *Tale of a Boon's Wife*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2017).

portrayed in the novel have been detailed below.

### **Patriarchal Exploitation and Women's Subordination**

The patriarchal system is the major reason for the exploitation and subordination of women in any society. As Ingiriis and Hoehne stated, "Somali society can be characterized as patriarchal to the bone".<sup>17</sup> The novel has also extensively portrayed this fact. For that reason, as it is often claimed that women's abuse inevitably emanates from patriarchy.<sup>18</sup> in Kusow's *Tale of a Boon's Wife*, patriarchal domination and exploitation of women and girls have been reflected in many ways.

Another reason that women and girls are exploited and abused is related to war and its impact. During the Somali civil war, military members of the government and opposition militants preyed on women, farmers' land and livestock, and children. Women, in particular, bore the various forms of burdens and exploitations which face them daily. Thus, the novel, in general, discloses domestic violence; sexual violence, such as rape; sexual harassment; and emotional/psychological violence against women, children, and other subordinate groups.

Moreover, the novel reveals that women have many responsibilities as mothers, wives, and home managers. They carry out all household tasks including feeding the family, keeping the house clean, and, most importantly, childrearing.<sup>19</sup> They

<sup>17</sup> Mohamed Ingiriis and Markus Hoehne, "The Impact of Civil War and State Collapse on the Roles of Somali Women: A Blessing in Disguise." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, no. 2 (2013): 314-33.

<sup>18</sup> Solomon Olusola Ademiluka, "Patriarchy and Women Abuse: Perspectives from Ancient Israel and Africa." *Old Testament Essays* 31, no. 2 (2018): 339-62, 339.

<sup>19</sup> Rirhandzu Lillian Machaba, "The Portrayal of Women in Xitsonga Literature with Special Reference

only are often responsible for raising children. They care for everything associated with them. On the other hand, mothers are held responsible if their children become unclean and filthy. Besides, they are the ones who take care of the home in general. Every family - related issue is a woman's responsibility. They are like guardian angels and the providers of anything that the family wants. While they do these, they must treat their husbands and children as much as possible, unless they are the ones who are first blamed by their husbands and by society as well.

Husbands, on the other hand, do not care about the issues related to raising their kids. They only take part when they want to make a decision. In the following extract, Kusow presents this fact. "Did you see her children, so poorly dressed and unfed? No one can blame a man for leaving filth. The women shared a unanimous sigh in Muna's condemnation. I walk the other way when I see her at the market."<sup>20</sup>

Women in many parts of Africa are dominated and exploited by their men partners. So, due to this male dominance, "African women face gross subordination and suppression, and this is the reality, on the ground today"<sup>21</sup>. As a result, in the novel, though women carry a variety of burdens of their families' issues, they do not have the authority to make decisions about them. Father is the head of the family and he can make decisions on what he wants to do. Whatever he does, the blame goes to the

mother. Even if he makes a mistake, the blame goes to the woman. In the novel, a husband can leave his wife and go to another woman if he is interested in her. While he does this, it is the women who are criticized. For one thing, the legitimate wife is blamed for allowing her husband to marry another woman. In this society, it is believed that it was her weakness and sluggishness that let him see another woman. On the other hand, the second wife may be held responsible for stealing the husband from the previous wife.

All of this demonstrates Somalia's deeply established patriarchal system and its impact on women. Male partners physically and mentally abuse their female companions. They are exposed to economic dependency, domestic violence, and are overlooked in family and even personal decision-making.

In addition, to the degree of her burden, the novel depicts a man who divorced his wife because she soiled her children. He left her because she did not properly care for the children. This demonstrates that it is entirely a woman's responsibility to look after and care for her children, not her husband's. Besides, it shows that husbands don't look after their children. They only want to be involved in their children's affairs when they think that they are disgraced and ashamed of their children, like what Idil's father did when she decided to marry into the Boon family clan. Thus, in the following, the women were gossiping that Muna's husband left because she did not keep her children properly. "Mother's comments reminded me of the gossip I'd heard—that Muna's husband had left her because of dirty children."<sup>22</sup>

Forced marriage is another issue raised in the novel. Cousins points out that the forms and meaning of marriage have changed in most African societies in the post-colonial

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to South African Novels, Poems and Proverbs." (UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA, 2011)

<sup>20</sup> Fartumo Kusow, *Tale of a Boon's Wife*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2017), 16

<sup>21</sup> Justine Bakuuro, "The Monster in Patriarchy. A Thematic Review of Novels of Three Female African, European Centre for Research Training and Development Uk." *Journal of English Linguistics* 5, no. 6 (2017): 28-38, 28.

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<sup>22</sup> Fartumo Kusow, *Tale of a Boon's Wife*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2017), 16.

era, and contemporary African novelists are using their writing to interrogate and explore what marriage means for African women today.<sup>23</sup> Thus, she states that there are writers who compare slavery and marriage to show the vicious victimization of women by their husbands. Women are forced by their relatives into arranged marriages. They are forced to marry a person chosen by their family members (father or brother) rather than by their own preference. At the same time, they may forbid them from marrying the person they love because of class, clan, and religious differences.

Therefore, the novel, *Tale of a Boon's Wife*, is about Idil and her tragic life, caused by her family after she married a Boon tribe man, Sidow, by refusing the marriage they arranged for her. Her family arranged for a man of their choice who is a member of the same Bliss clan. This is because marriage to the Boons was a disgrace and a shame. The Boons are thought to be slaves, ugly, backward, and to have small brains in comparison to others. The Bliss believes that the Boons, who have wide noses, large lips, and darker skin, are the first cousins of the African apes. Her grandfather, like Idil's mother, used to own a Boon slave, and they were thought to be stupid and degenerate. By combining all of these negative images and narratives, the whole family was against Idil when she informed them, she was going to marry Sidow.

Not just Idil alone, but Hawa and Rhodo were also victims of forced marriage. Rhodo herself married Omar while still having feelings for another boy. It was her parents who made her marry Omar because they thought that Idil could not marry Jamac. Jamac himself says that "Rhoda agreed to marry Omar because of me. She didn't care

<sup>23</sup> Helen Cousins, "'Submit or Kill Yourself... Your Two Choices': Options for Wives in African Women's Fiction." (2004).

for Omar, and she liked another boy in our village".<sup>24</sup> This shows how women are powerless and victims of men's ambition.

Nyanta, Ankrah, and Kwasi in their study in three African novels revealed that "cultural practices such as polygamy, female genital mutilation and sexual abuse facilitate the abuse, subjugation and oppression of women."<sup>25</sup> The same is true, in the novel *Tale of a Boon's Wife* women are suppressed and exploited by men. Women are sexually abused and exploited. For example, the main character, Idil, was raped after they killed her husband, Sidow. She asked Jamac about her husband as she followed the situation in detail. "Did Omar kill Sidow?" "I asked, as a sharp pain shot from my wrist up to my shoulder".<sup>26</sup> Jamac confirmed that it was these individuals who killed Sidow in order to arrange her marriage to Jamac. Jamac told her that "The Boon is no longer alive, and his family can keep the children." "You are mine." "Everyone wins".<sup>27</sup> Knowing her husband was murdered by her family was so painful for her. Thus, even if they killed Sidow to arrange a marriage for Jamac, she would not want to marry him. She fought to free herself from Jamac, but he raped her mercilessly, as she states.

I ran for the door, but before I could open it, he grabbed me from behind and dragged me back to the bed. "Not just yet." He ripped viciously at my dress.... I screamed, but Jamac

<sup>24</sup> Fartumo Kusow, *Tale of a Boon's Wife*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2017), 195.

<sup>25</sup> Doris Nyanta, Gabriel Kwame Ankrah, and Opoku Kwasi, "Culture: A Vessel for Female Subordination in Three African Novels." *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies* (2017).

<sup>26</sup> Fartumo Kusow. *Tale of a Boon's Wife*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2017), 196.

<sup>27</sup> Fartumo Kusow. *Tale of a Boon's Wife*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2017), 196

covered my mouth with the scarf and muffled the sound.<sup>28</sup>

Women suffer and reach rock bottom in their lives because of their husbands. Based on the novel, they were exploited mentally and physically to satisfy their husbands. For example, a man named Ahmed orders his wife to do what he wants. He marries as many women as he possibly can. That was the reason Layla and Maryan were his wives. As a result, they describe their agony in the following excerpt.

“Not compared to my nightmare. Fire was burning all around us, but it wasn’t hot. It was ice-cold, and we were freezing.” Maryan glared sharply at Layla. “That dream was a message for me—for us. You know as well as I do that disobeying your husband is a sin,” she scolded.<sup>29</sup>

Child abduction and forced marriage are other issues stated in the novel. Child marriage is regarded to be significantly influenced by conflict and instability, particularly for females. In fact, there is some evidence to suggest that girls are particularly susceptible to child marriage in areas of armed conflict, humanitarian crises, and unstable states.<sup>30</sup> Exploiting grown women is common. What makes it worse is that young girls like Amina are also meant to quench the sexually ravenous minds of men like Ahmed. In the novel, there are several polygamists. They marry several women by force. While this is a fact, men like Ahmed were so shameless that they wanted to marry young girls like Amina. He said that she was old enough to marry him. This shows how a

patriarchal society exploits women, especially in a society that never gives place to women. Ahmed sent his child soldiers to persuade Amin’s family to marry her. Thus, the following dialogue shows that they bargained with the girl. “‘Nine years old,’ my mother-in-law lied to put Amina below the age she considered old enough to marry. And Ahmed replied, ‘She is a grown woman. Surely, we can see that’”.<sup>31</sup>

The novel portrayed misogyny as another subject. Women beyond their exploitation and domination were disguised by some male characters. The following excerpt depicts Omar's reaction after discovering that a man had only daughters, not even a son.

“The other family had only girls.”

Omar forgot his grievance. “All girls? How many?”

“Six.”

He lowered his head to give condolences to a family he didn’t know. “Six girls and no boys.” It saddened him to hear a family stuck with such an abomination.<sup>32</sup>

Idris was the other individual who objected to having only daughters. He didn't have any boys, which made him unhappy. Because all of his children were girls, he felt unlucky. He claimed that because all of his children were girls and could not be left alone in the city, he was not as fortunate as Sidow's father. This individual believes that women are dependent on men. He thinks that women are shielded from harm because they lack the strength and forbearance to defend themselves. As a result of their inability to defend themselves against any threat, the guy is ashamed of his children. He needs to look

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 222

<sup>30</sup> Dyan Mazurana, Anastasia Marshak, and Kinsey Spears. "Child Marriage in Armed Conflict." *International Review of the Red Cross* 101, no. 911 (2019): 575-601.

<sup>31</sup> Fartumo Kusow, *Tale of a Boon's Wife*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2017), 126.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 36.

out for them. This reveals a skewed perception of these male characters.

### The Impact of War on Women, Farmers, Children, and Nature

War affects both human and non-human natural beings. The natural environment, animals, families, society, and individuals are all impacted by war. In particular, civil war destroys families and fractures societies. The most affected groups in this situation are women, children, and some other subordinate groups. They are terrified by the happenings around them, and they can fall victim to a battle that engulfs them. In the novel, a character called Layla asks, "Is this not a living hell?"<sup>33</sup> Kusow describes the peril and adversity of war.

By the same token, civil war makes women's lives miserable for a very long time as stated in the novel. For instance, as indicated in the following excerpt, while women from the victorious side celebrate their pleasure, the women from the losing side prepare for funerals. This is Sidow's observation on how the war affected the communities in Somalia.

Bodies of the dead littered the page as the battle raged. Victorious clan members stood in the middle of the field, holding their weapons aloft. In the distance, on the side of the winning tribe, he drew a line of women advancing toward the men with open arms. On the losing side, women held white sheets, to prepare for the funerals.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, Arieff states that "civilians in Africa's conflict zones, particularly women and children, but also men, are often vulnerable to sexual violence, including rape, sexual assault, mutilation, forced prostitution,

sexual slavery, and other abuses."<sup>35</sup> As a result, Marks asserts that in the study of civil conflict in Africa, rape and sexual violence are prominent topics.<sup>36</sup>

In this case, the novel, *Tale of the Boons Wife* portrays military officials sexually assaulting and exploiting women and girls. For example, they kidnapped the daughter of a man who was speaking at a farmer's meeting. They took her and harassed her. Nobody knew what was going on with her. After her father knew she was taken, he collapsed unconsciously. Her father said that "They took my daughter," a man named Enow told us. He tried to stand in front of all the farmers and relay his loss, but collapsed into his chair and sobbed".<sup>37</sup> This shows a lot about how women and girls are vulnerable to danger during war. They are the ones who are being exploited terribly.

Sexual exploitation, sexual humiliation, sexual assault, sexual mutilation, rape, sexual enslavement, forced prostitution, forced sterilization, and other inhumane sexual actions performed by combatants and civilians during armed conflict are examples of sexual violence against minors.<sup>38</sup> In this novel, militants are forced to marry any woman or girl they want, regardless of their interests. And they can be tortured and killed if they refuse. In the novel, a military leader, Ahmed, for example, had more than four wives, and he tortured and oppressed them harshly. Finally, he may murder them tyrannically. Hawa 'Idil's family's housemaid,

<sup>35</sup> Alexis Arieff, "Sexual Violence in African Conflicts." (Library of Congress Washington DC, 2011), 1.

<sup>36</sup> Zoe Marks, "Sexual Violence in Sierra Leone's Civil War: 'Virgination', Rape, and Marriage." *African Affairs* 113, no. 450 (2014): 67-87.

<sup>37</sup> Fartumo Kusow. *Tale of a Boon's Wife*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2017), 153.

<sup>38</sup> Dyan Mazurana, Anastasia Marshak, and Kinsey Spears. "Child Marriage in Armed Conflict." *International Review of the Red Cross* 101, no. 911 (2019): 575-601.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 222.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 49.



was married to Ahmed. She was a victim and finally died at his hands after he suffered from her for a long time. As a result, their families were left in terrible anguish. Hawa's mother says that "I know he killed her".<sup>39</sup> She adds that he was the cruelest man. He persecuted her for a long period. Thus, her death could have been from the pain he caused her. She informed me:

He beat her more than he fed her because she wouldn't follow his rules. She told me herself. Last week was the worst. He'd beat her after she visited me. And now my daughter is dead, and he wouldn't even show me her body.<sup>40</sup>

It is obvious that war causes destruction of the natural environment. Soldiers, on one hand, and weapons, on the other hand, destroy the natural environment aggressively and affect society in many ways. Worse, they have the potential to affect the natural elements and kill animals. Soldiers, especially, wreak havoc on their society for no apparent reason. As in the novel, they abduct innocent farmers and persecute them. Furthermore, they destroy their crops and animals. The following extract is an indicator of how much nature, humans, and animals are being hit by the impact of the war. Idil explains the soldiers' violence as follows:

After that day, soldiers raided and looted one farm after another and took herds of sheep, goats, and cows to be slaughtered and cooked for their consumption. It was not if but when we would get hit. A month after the president and his soldiers came, it was our turn to suffer. Men in military

uniforms showed up just before dawn. Guns aloft, they opened the gate to the sheep and goat barns.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, farmers are victims of the civil war even though they are not active participants in any issue in their country. Based on the novel, while the government planes were destroying villages and the villagers, they were also annihilating the farmers. When this happened, other farmers were talking about the devastation and destruction of villages as follows: "The military planes have bombed two villages near Hiraay." "They are pounding the villagers into submission," another man said. Idil asks, "What would they get from destroying the country?".<sup>42</sup> Thus, it shows that farmers were not taking part in the war because government officials were destroying them.

According to the narrator, the nation was in a critical crisis, and farmers lacked access to food and other necessities. They threaten that the war may prevent them from receiving their daily rations. Thus, food and agriculture were frequent topics of discourse between them. No matter what the government was doing, all they cared about was how to survive.

However, later on, the soldiers raided and looted all the farms and took the sheep, goats, and cows to be slaughtered. This demonstrates how authoritarians take advantage of underprivileged farmers. Military leaders such as General Hussein led these militants. The impoverished and helpless farmers, their wives, daughters, livestock, and land were being taken advantage of by these officials' men, who also sent them to work in these farmers' fields.

<sup>39</sup> Fartumo Kusow, *Tale of a Boon's Wife*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2017), 161.

<sup>40</sup> Fartumo Kusow, *Tale of a Boon's Wife*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2017), 161.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>42</sup> Fartumo Kusow, *Tale of a Boon's Wife*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2017), 151

Therefore, these show how the people were harmed by the conflict and its consequences.

Because the soldiers were so oppressive, they seized the young men and forced them to slaughter their goats, lambs, and cows. This was yet another disaster for the farmers. As a result, farmers and their livestock become the victim of war and conflict. In one way, the area where warriors engage in combat harms both people and animals as well as the surrounding ecosystem. Weapons burn Mother Earth to ashes. Additionally, all domestic and wild animals are ruthlessly butchered for human nourishment, and some are even used as transportation between battlefronts.

Another point that is stated in the novel is how militants oppress the farmers. They take farmers' farms, animals, and homes by force. In the following extract, a young boy who was not more than twelve years old told Sidow's family that their farm and home were not theirs anymore. A militant took their land after they returned from town. As a result, the boy informed them that they didn't have land or a place to live in the area. Idil summarised the situation as follows:

It was just after the midday meal when we arrived at our farm. A boy, not much older than twelve, stood at the front gate. ...

"This farm belonged to us for hundreds of years, son." My mother-in-law tried to appeal to his respect for elders.

The boy took the rifle off his shoulder and leaned it against the wooden post. "I am not your son, and this here isn't your farm. You better leave before it is too late."<sup>43</sup>

Everyone is obviously harmed in wartime, but as was repeatedly noted above, children are the most severely impacted. According to Albertyn et al, "there is no

<sup>43</sup>Ibid, 213.

doubt that the effects of war extend to the most vulnerable members of society, including children."<sup>44</sup> As a result, Children experience the effects of the war in the novel, *Tale of the Boon's Wife*. Miserably, children were slain and harassed. Besides, they were victims of physical exploitation by the militants. However, the worst thing is that they were killed and kidnapped by the militants. For example, while a woman was walking with her child, an explosion occurred and then killed her child. This incident was the scariest and most terrible moment for all the people who were with her. The mother kept the remaining body of her child to take it home, and Idil described the situation as follows. "They 'reminded her she could do it in the morning when she reached her family. Keeping the body would only prolong her sorrow and distract her from her living children, but she wouldn't listen"<sup>45</sup>.

Every mother felt tremendous suffering, which is highly upsetting for anyone. It was so horrifying that a mother held the body of her dead kid as her clothes were stained with blood. Idil describes the incident as follows:

She held the child's remains close to her chest, the fresh crimson blood streaking her dress. "I did not see my husband's body. I will take my baby in one piece and bury her properly." She got up, went to the truck, and resumed her seat. No one could argue against her<sup>46</sup>

The baby was the cutest; her mother said that "My husband came back to take

<sup>44</sup> Rene Albertyn, Stephen W Bickler, Arjan Bastiaan van As, Alastair John Ward Millar, and Heinz Rode, "The Effects of War on Children in Africa." *Pediatric surgery international* 19, no. 4 (2003): 227-32, 227.

<sup>45</sup> Fartumo Kusow, *Tale of a Boon's Wife*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2017), 211.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

her". "He loved her so much more than one human being should love another".<sup>47</sup> If her father loves her this much, imagine how much grief he will go through once he learns of her death. This, in short, shows the destruction of a family and their grief. In Somalia, countless explosions destroy many people day after day. This demonstrates the danger of war to the common people.

In addition, the novel depicts the annihilation of Mother Earth and the demise of both humans and animals, as was already said. The vacant inns and the desolate, gloomy countryside in the following excerpt are used to illustrate the effects of war and drought. In the novel, the burned earth and deserted homes are described. Some locations resemble ghost towns, complete with their structures, jewelry relics, grain merchants' offices, and occupants.

One alley led to another through a Bledley much different from the one we left. The log cabin inns along the road to the market were deserted. The dry, dark landscape made it hard to recognize the town so ravaged by war, hunger, and drought. The buildings that housed the jewelry and clothing stores and cattle and grain merchant offices appeared as dry and ashen as the people within them.<sup>48</sup>

Besides, the militants destroyed everything. Even trees were uprooted. As Idil mentions, there was no rain, as if the peace had left the area. The place was dry. The land of the farms was merged, and the farm was destroyed. As Sidow's mother said, they had been living there for hundreds of years. Thus, they have been taking care of their farm for

all these years. They had been growing fruits like lemons, but all were cut down by the militants. The militants invaded the farmers' houses and farms and controlled every piece of land by evacuating the farmers. This is common in many African countries.

Warlords are always the ones who take control of large and fertile areas by evacuating farmers who have farmed them for years. Thus, when Idil and the other family members came and saw the farm, they were very angry and desperate. But they couldn't do it against the militants because it was too difficult for them. When they saw the land, Idil described their confrontation with the child soldiers. In her opinion, the area was deserted, empty, and lifeless because everything was destroyed. There were no farmers, no animals, or trees, which I already knew weren't there.

My eyes followed the retreating boys, and I saw the fallen lemon trees that once marked the property lines. Without the markers, our farm merged into the other properties on both the northern and southern boundaries. The uprooted trees lay rotting on the ground. Rain, like peace, had deserted Bledley, leaving the land forsaken, mutilated, and bare.<sup>49</sup>

Lastly, war causes disastrous incidents for individuals, and it can also create an opportunity for rebels to attack innocent people. Rebels or violent groups may loot poor people anywhere. As a result, women, children, and some other individuals are most vulnerable. In the following extract, Idil discloses how a man attacked the bus while they were leaving their village. In this incident, Layla, who was one of Ahmed's spouses, escaped. She died while attempting to flee her husband's tyrannical actions; thus,

<sup>47</sup> Fartumo Kusow, *Tale of a Boon's Wife*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2017), 211

<sup>48</sup>Ibid, 224.

<sup>49</sup> Fartumo Kusow, *Tale of a Boon's Wife*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2017), 215.

in one way or another, women are victims of war and its atrocities. "The blast had lifted the floorboard under her and folded it around her thighs. A trace of blood ran from her knees to her feet. I took Layla's hand. She opened her eyes again and smiled".<sup>50</sup>

While Layla knew that she was going to die, she was smiling. She told Idil that she was going to die peacefully. What is strange is that her life with Ahmed was bitterer than death. The pain she went through as a spouse was unbearable, and that's why she was overjoyed when she learned of her own death. This reveals how much women are exploited by male partners. This shows the degree to which women are exploited. Idil mentioned the situation as follows:

"Thank you for taking me out of that house so I could die in peace. For two years, I never smiled as much as I have smiled since you came." She took a deep breath and closed her eyes. They never opened again, and I knew she was gone.<sup>51</sup>

### **The Impact of Draught on Women, Farmers, Children and Nature**

A balanced ecosystem and the natural environment are essential to our survival. If nature fails to give us what we need, with no doubt, there is a serious crisis that destroys everything. Humans, animals, forests, and other natural elements are all at risk because of the drought's effects. Droughts have far-reaching effects on a country's ecology, people, and economy in Sub-Saharan Africa in general.<sup>52</sup> And East Africa is one of the most vulnerable regions to drought. Roba

pointed out that 20 million people are battling to survive a hot drought in the Horn of Africa. They are victims of the climate problem as well as the failure of governments and aid organizations to learn from past catastrophes.<sup>53</sup> Thus, Fartumo Kusow has explored the impact of drought clearly since this is a common phenomenon in the Horn of Africa. While drought affects all, women, nature, and children are indeed the most venerable things.

Consequently, based on the novel, everyone is negatively impacted by drought, but the most vulnerable groups include women, children, animals, and underprivileged populations in general. Previous studies like Fisher's work stated that in Mozambique, the El Nio-induced drought has had a significant impact on women and adolescent girls in particular.<sup>54</sup> Thus, in the novel, one of the numerous challenges is that it is difficult for a pregnant woman. This indicates that pregnant women find it harder to tolerate hardship since drought causes starvation and related risks. Drought also contributes to infant malnutrition and some other problems. So, in that difficult situation, Sidow asked Idil if she was expecting a child. He emphasises that being pregnant before they recovered from the drought would be extremely dangerous. "I thought we agreed we would stop until we recovered from the last drought".<sup>55</sup> This suggests the impact of drought on the poor family, especially on Idil as a woman.

Shiferaw et al. state that drought has both direct and indirect economic and environmental impacts. "These may include

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 227

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 227.

<sup>52</sup> Shenelle Lottering, Paramu Mafongoya, and Romano Lottering, "Drought and Its Impacts on Small-Scale Farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Review." *South African Geographical Journal* 103, no. 3 (2021): 319-41.

<sup>53</sup> Guyo Malicha Roba, "Drought: We Know What to Do, Why Don't We Do It?". *New Humanitarian* (2022).

<sup>54</sup> Amy Fisher, "Hope Dries Up? Women and Girls Coping with Drought and Climate Change in Mozambique." *Care International* (2016).

<sup>55</sup> Fartumo Kusow, *Tale of a Boon's Wife*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2017), 215.

productivity loss in crops, rangelands, and forests; increased fire hazards; reduced water levels; increased livestock and wildlife mortality rates; and damage to wildlife and fish habitats (loss of biodiversity).<sup>56</sup> Consequently, poor farmers, including Idil and her new family, were affected by the drought in many ways. She explains that they suffered through a long drought. "We suffered through a year-long drought two years after Adam was born. Sidow paid close attention to our farm, traveled far and wide to choose the right seed, and attended different meetings to discuss pricing and seed and crop-sharing".<sup>57</sup> She describes it here as the worst time, and they have suffered a lot. At this time, Sidow was the head of the family and was working hard to protect his family. But things were not easy for the family to resist the famine.

Even though this is true, her family had advised her to break up with Sidow because she shouldn't be a farmer like him. However, both of them were working quite hard. And Idil was not an ordinary farmer, but a fantastic farmer, which is why Sidow respected her. He says to her: "You are not a farmer. You are an obsessed farmer".<sup>58</sup> This demonstrates that women are still excellent farmers who can combat starvation.

Drought has an impact on livestock animals as well. In the novel, during the dry season, the livestock animals were suffering from an unknown sickness. As a result, the farmers were losing them day after day, and they were dismal about the situation. Based

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<sup>56</sup> Bekele Shiferaw, Kindie Tesfaye, Menale Kassie, Tsedeke Abate, BM Prasanna, and Abebe Menkir, "Managing Vulnerability to Drought and Enhancing Livelihood Resilience in Sub-Saharan Africa: Technological, Institutional and Policy Options." *Weather climate extremes* 3 (2014): 67-79, 70.

<sup>57</sup> Fartumo Kusow, *Tale of a Boon's Wife*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2017), 148.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

on the narrator: "...farmers slaughtered sick animals, sold some meat, or shared it with others in exchange for grain or milk. But quickly the problem grew beyond one or two head of cattle".<sup>59</sup> Idil said that after the death of many cows, someone shouted across the hall: "What do we do? Now we are losing herds of sheep, goats, and cows".<sup>60</sup> This suggests the depth of the crisis because of the death of livestock.

On the other hand, farmers depend on livestock and crops and losing their animals was hard for them. Sidow's mother stated that "Two of the milking cows are sick," Sidow's mother returned from the cowshed with the milking pail half full. "I couldn't even get enough for us, let alone some to sell".<sup>61</sup>

In short, the sickness and death of the animals show the severity of the drought for the animals. The disease was annihilating the animals, and it was the most disastrous time. And, as Idil describes, "Soon the animals were too sick for us to eat, and carcasses continued on the streets and alleyways for days, rotting and emitting putrid smells that made people sick".<sup>62</sup>

The death of animals was extremely hazardous; their decay polluted the environment, and people were vulnerable to diseases like cholera. Thus, many people started to die, and people started calling Bledley the City of Death. The Idil described the incident: "It didn't take long for cholera to spread from infected groundwater to humans. People died by the dozens, and Bledley earned the nickname 'the City of Death'.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 161.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> <sup>62</sup> Fartumo Kusow, *Tale of a Boon's Wife*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2017), 162.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

As a result, it was difficult to survive for the people who lived in Bledley. The farmers started to sell their crops, and they were buying things, all of which were very expensive and overpriced. Idil says: "Two years after the start of the civil war, we were left without a single animal." Silos empty, all that continued were a few bushels of grain, maize, and sorghum".<sup>64</sup> This suggests how the drought affected every farmer in the village. They were out of food, and they lost all their animals. They became poorer and poorer after a time. Furthermore, they were to die if they didn't leave. They were finally forced to leave their home. Idil explains the event as follows:

For Idil, living in a fragile country with a lot of violence and destruction was so scary and horrifying. It was unbelievable that people were living miserable lives. She states that: "The smell of burning wood reminded me of the beautiful memories of this household, but not for long. One glance at the desolation outside, and I was back in our present horror".<sup>65</sup> This is how much war affects the lives of farmers.

Drought and civil war are the most common incidents in the novel. Farmers lose their wealth and migrate, while mothers and children suffer because of famine and war. Thus, people are migrating from war-torn villages looking for a better life. As a result, people were impoverished and lived in deplorable conditions. Idil describes the situation that she saw in the filthy market.

In short, both war and drought lead to severe catastrophes for people, the environment, and animals. They ruin the ecological system and have a detrimental effect on all lives. As a result, the author shows throughout the book how drought and conflict influence society as a whole and

farmers in particular. Farmers who depend on agriculture have been devastated by both the drought and the conflict between the government and the militia. The narrator discusses the farmers' worries about not having the crops they want. The government sent crops to places suffering from drought, but after a time, the civil war made it difficult to get to villages suffering from starvation. This demonstrates that drought is not the only issue but also war.

### Conclusion

Based on the analysis made, the writer, Fartuma Kusow, has represented marginalisation based on gender, class, and clan and its impact on women, children, and other poor individuals. Besides, the author reveals the exploitation and suppression of women, girls, and farmers in many ways. In addition, she has portrayed the images of war and drought and their impact on human and non-human beings, and the natural environment. Concomitantly, Fartuma has portrayed the strong interconnection between human and nonhuman animals. Finally, she showed that the impact of war and drought have a homologous impact on women, the natural environment, children, farmers, and animals. This signifies one of the features of ecofeminism perspectives in African literature.

Idil is an incredible woman who challenged many of the cultural, social, political, and economic trends in Somalia that are shaped to benefit the patriarchal system as in the novel. She fought for her rights and the rights of others vigorously. She fought against the old system in Somalia in many ways that were rooted in priorities for men. She fought against tribalism, class differences, and gender discrimination to bring equality and interconnectedness, and all-inclusiveness to people, whatever their backgrounds. She confronted the negative outlook and practise that subjugates and demeans women. Her

<sup>64</sup> Fartuma Kusow, *Tale of a Boon's Wife*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2017), 162.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 221.

deviation from what her tribe formed as a rule-her father's arrogance, her conservative mother's warning, and the entire relatives' threats, such as Rhoda's, devastated her life and caused her severe pain. With all the violence her family had inflicted on her, it appeared that the entire world was against her-except for her husband and his family.

Though she knew what the cultural system in her society dictated, she did not give up fighting for the truth. The misconceptions about tribalism, gender differences, and class differences didn't stop her from realising her own dream. Thus, to break all the old rules, she suffered a lot. She was subjected to torture and punishment. Her family ignored her, particularly when her father told her that she was already dead from the day she married Sidow. On top of that, she lost her husband and she was devastated. In short, life was not easy for her. Her family, except her younger brother, tortured her.

Therefore, standing for the truth and equality among all human beings, Idil fought her family and the whole dogma and biased perceptions of her society in many ways. From the moment she fell in love with Sidow until the day she left for Canada, she fought to persuade her family because they still believed that marrying Boon was a waste of time. She confirmed and showed that the Boons, like the Bliss, are human beings; she stated that she had no objections to the Boons and Bliss marrying; it was backward for her to think that one tribe was better than the other. She believed that Sidow was the best man, even compared to her own tribe and her brother, Omar. When things started to get tough, she was fighting to save the lives of her children and Sidow's family. She fought the world to change her family's lives and eventually became free of all oppression and exploitation.

Idil's life was full of ups and downs. She suffered a lot and fought against the many challenges that surrounded her. However, she didn't reveal her sadness to people. She was pretending to be a happy person. And by defying her father and her whole family and leaving a rich lifestyle, she became a farmer, and she was great at that. Thus, her interconnectedness with her fellow human beings, regardless of their clan, class, and background, makes her a great woman. In addition, she showed her connection to the earth and animals, as a farmer.

Finally, the story is quite profound and covers a wide range of topics about the Somali people, including social, political, and economic elements. As a result, there is plenty of room for additional investigation of the novel in relation to different theories or perspectives.

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