

An Inclusive and Integrated Ecocritical Approach in Both Content and Style in Sinan Antoon's *The Book of Collateral Damage*

Halima Mohammad Bani-Mufrij*

Hallemahmfrij@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study offers ecocritical discussions of Sinan Antoon's *The Book of Collateral Damage* (2019), focusing on the author's ecoconsciousness and equitable treatment of all ecological entities. Through a close reading of the novel, this study examines how Antoon develops an inclusive project which traverses the spectrum from anthropocentric to biocentric to ecocentric values, giving value to humans, flora, fauna, air, water, soil, and even artificial environments. Furthermore, it demonstrates how Antoon enlarges his scope of awareness by creating an integrated ecocritical approach in both content and style in his novel. It concludes that Antoon's thoughtful depiction of an inclusive and integrated eco critical project deserves a place on eco-fiction lists.

Keywords: Anthropocentrism, Anthropomorphism, Biocentrism, Ecocentrism, Ecocriticism.

* Department of English Literature, University of Jordan.

Received: 1/1 /2023 .

Accepted: 9/10/2023.

© All rights reserved to Mutah University, Karak, The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 2024.

مشروع بيئي شامل ومتكامل في المحتوى والأسلوب لرواية سنان أنطون كتاب للأضرار الجانبية

حليمه محمد بني مفرج*

ملخص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تقديم قراءة نقدية بيئية لرواية سنان أنطون كتاب الأضرار (الجانبية، 2019) المبني على الوعي البيئي للمؤلف، والمعاملة العادلة لجميع مكونات الحياة البيئية. ومن خلال دراسة نقدية وقراءة دقيقة للنص، فإن هذا البحث يوضح كيف طور أنطون مشروعاً شاملاً متكاملًا يوسع فيه نطاق القيم البيئية ليشمل القيم البيئية البشرية والقيم البيئية للحيوان والنبات والقيم البيئية للطبيعة الفيزيائية، ويقدم فيه قيمة للإنسان والنبات والحيوان والهواء والماء والتربة وحتى البيئات الصناعية. علاوة على ذلك، يناقش هذا البحث كيف يوسع أنطون نطاق وعيه من خلال إنشاء نهجًا بيئيًا أكثر شمولية بخلق حالة من الانسجام والتوافق بين المحتوى والأسلوب في روايته. حيث لخصت الدراسة أن تصوير أنطون العميق لمشروع إيكولوجي شامل ومتكامل يستحق مكانًا في قوائم الخيال البيئي.

الكلمات الدالة: مركزية الإنسان، التجسيم، المركزية الحيوية، مركزية البيئة المادية، النقد البيئي.

* قسم الأدب الإنجليزي، الجامعة الأردنية.

تاريخ تقديم البحث: 1 / 1 / 2023م.

تاريخ قبول البحث: 9 / 10 / 2023م.

© جميع حقوق النشر محفوظة لجامعة مؤتة، الكرك، المملكة الأردنية الهاشمية، 2024 م.

Introduction: Ecocriticism and the US invasion of Iraq:

It is becoming increasingly clear that the environmental problems we face in the twenty-first century cannot be neglected and ignored. Since these problems are real and they are accelerating, ecocriticism has widely flourished. Ecocriticism is defined as “a broad way for literary and cultural scholars to investigate the global ecological crisis through the intersection of literature, culture, and the physical environment” (Gladwin, 2017: 50). It aims to increase awareness about these environmental problems.

In particular, ecocriticism, in this study, will be discussed in relation to war literature. Both ecocriticism and war literature have always shared a close and interconnected relationship since the heavy costs of war activities on humans and their ecosystems are also dominant narratives in war literature. This paper embodies an avenue of research within the realm of ecocriticism by focusing on the impacts of wars on ecosystems. The significance of such a study cannot be disregarded in the wake of what the present-day world confronts regarding large-scale environmental risks induced by military activities.

In the realm of military history, destruction of the components of the country’s environment is essential to achieve military victory. Military decision-makers ignore the notion that the costs of war would be outweighed by the benefits wrought by victory. For instance, following a decade of US sanctions against Iraq, the U.S. military invaded Iraq with a force of 90,000 troops in 2003. US military interventions in Iraq were justified as actions for preventing terrorism and for promoting democracy. However, rather than becoming a place for freedom and peace, Iraq has become a theatre of horror and destruction. Considering the notion that US sanctions certainly brought much damage, the U.S. invasion of Iraq with its military activities is much more violent and destructive to humans and their environments. The effects of the U.S. invasion of Iraq are introduced by Pekka Haavisto, the Iraq task force chairman of the UN’s Environmental Program:

[M]ore than a decade of crushing sanctions have damaged the environment, including the Tigris and Euphrates rivers where most of Iraq’s sewage flows untreated. The situation became worse after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, in which depleted uranium munitions were used against Iraq for the second time and postwar looting and burning of the once formidable infrastructure caused massive spills and toxic plumes (Quoted in Organ, 2005, 10).

For this reason, war environmental issues in Iraq, which are politically ignored, inspire many literary authors to address the topic of war environmental destruction in their literary genres to raise ecoconsciousness.

The field of ecocriticism, which started as a western field of literary criticism, has become a global phenomenon since all members of the world community share the same planet and atmosphere with each other and other species. Thus, ecocriticism has begun to pay greater attention to the diversity of voices worldwide to enhance the global public interest in the environmental movement. Serpil Oppermann puts this notion in the introduction to her book *New International Voices in Ecocriticism* (2014) and posits that this “has been one of the primary motivations in recent ecocritical enterprise, as the field is more and more engaged with international contacts” (7) since “a diversity of voices’ [contributes] to the understanding of the human relationship to the planet, both within the United States and throughout the world” (ibid). The inclusive nature of ecocriticism provides a creative opportunity for literary authors and scholars around the world to mobilize international participation in global environmental concerns. In an article entitled *The Greening of Modern Arabic Literature: An Ecological Interpretation of Two Contemporary Arabic Novels*, Nadine A. Sinno provides evidence of how Arab voices engage in ecocritical studies. She has shown that Yahya Yakhliif 's *A Lake Beyond the Wind* and Ghada Samman's *Beirut Nightmares* lend themselves to ecological interpretation in which they create characters who are active participants in the natural environment. She aims to provide evidence that the greening of modern Arabic literature is a legitimate project, worthy of further investigation and integration into the growing ecocriticism (142).

Moreover, the diversity of voices comes not only from the variety of different national and cultural backgrounds but also from the variety of human and nonhuman voices since nonhuman entities are an integral part of ecological discussions. In his article *The Bakhtinian Road to Ecological Insight*, Michael McDowell acknowledges “the idea that all entities in the great web of nature deserve recognition and a voice, an ecological literary criticism might explore how authors have represented the interaction of both the human and nonhuman voices in the landscape” (372) to greatly enrich the lives of all those involved in the discussion.

In the same vein, since anthropocentrism is harshly criticized in ecocritical pedagogy, Sam Mickey, in his book *Whole Earth Thinking and Planetary Coexistence*, rejects the notion of marginalization or silencing of

nonhuman voices and aims to establish a sense of justice and equality among humans and nonhumans. He introduces an integrated and inclusive project, which seeks to coordinate anthropocentric(human-centered), biocentric (life-centered), and ecocentric (nature-centered) values “in order to implement comprehensive, effective, long-term solutions to the contemporary ecological problems” (52). Furthermore, his inclusive ecocritical project could reduce the intensity of criticism directed to the humans.

For this essay, I specifically selected Sinan Antoon’s *The Book of Collateral Damage*, in which he follows the same track of the diversity of voices in ecocriticism. He is aware of the effectiveness of Arab participation in initiating ecological awareness. He also provides a unique opportunity to hear the voices of the universe, the voices of the Earth, and all its multitude of living beings and nonliving factors to raise ecological awareness.

So far, *The Book of Collateral Damage* has been examined from different perspectives. In *The Trauma of the Archive in Sinan Antoon’s Novel Fihris*” (2018), Sami Alkyam examines *The Book of Collateral Damage* from anthropocentric lenses focusing on the impacts of the US invasion of Iraq on human beings physically and psychologically. In another article entitled *An Ecocritical Perspective of Flora and Fauna under the 2003 Invasion of Iraq in American and Iraqi novels*, Bani-Mfrij and Al-Shetawi examined Antoon’s *The Book of Collateral Damage* from biocentric lenses focusing on the outrageous things that the US invasion has done to animals and plants. Previous studies have tended to focus either on the impacts of the US invasion of Iraq from anthropocentric lenses or on the impacts of the US invasion of Iraq from biocentric lenses in *The Book of Collateral Damage*. Previous studies have also never considered the notion of justice among humans and nonhumans. Consequently, examining only one side of the impact of the invasion would not comprehensively represent the true impact of the invasion. Thus, the present study will be more comprehensive; the ecological wisdom of this study lies in its emphasis on Antoon’s work as a creative work that enables the reader to take a fully comprehensive and inclusive ecoview that all human beings, animals, plants, air, water, soil, and even artificial environments are victims of war, calling for the idea of “the protection of the whole chain of ecosystems” (Barcz, 2017, 144). Hence, this study will examine how Antoon extends to include not only anthropocentric values but also biocentric and ecocentric values from an ecocritical perspective in *The Book of Collateral Damage*, calling for the health and well-being of all parts of the biosphere.

Furthermore, another ecological wisdom of this study lies in its emphasis on Antoon's style that enables the reader to take an integrated ecological model, one consistent in content and style to assert the notion of justice and equality among humans and nonhumans.

Sinan Antoon is an Iraqi poet and novelist. He left Iraq to the United States after the 1991 Gulf War where he obtained a doctorate in Arabic Literature in 2006. His novel *Fihris* is inspired by his personal experience of war. It was translated to English in 2019 by Jonathan Wright under the title *The Book of Collateral Damage*. The protagonist, Nameer, is a young Iraqi scholar earning his doctorate in the United States. He is hired by a film-making company to document the devastation resulting from the 2003 invasion of Iraq. In Baghdad, Nameer meets Wadood, an Iraqi bookseller, who is trying to catalog everything that has been destroyed in the war in a manuscript. After he returns to America, Nameer becomes captivated by Wadood's obsession to the point of neglecting his academic and social duties.

Antoon's integrated and inclusive ecological model is reflected through both content and style in *The Book of Collateral Damage*. His literary style is based on anthropomorphism which is defined as the attribution of human characteristics—behavior, emotions, expressivity—to non-human entities. Indeed, the anthropomorphic style, through an ecocritical lens, is distinctly predicated on the need to deconstruct the dualism between the human and nonhuman realms. For example, he intends to catalogue the cost of the war by employing excerpts narrated by animals, plants, and inanimate objects, like a bird, Ziziphus tree, Kashan carpet, the oud, the wall, and many others. Antoon is aware of the importance of giving voice to non-living creatures which are ignored by official and public sectors. He promotes environmental awareness through the use of characters who are almost exclusively anthropomorphized nonhumans, which are able to observe, explore, and criticize the world around them, to add force to the human voice. He indulges heavily in anthropomorphism, which tends to enlist the sympathy and imagination of the readers to reflect higher levels of eco-consciousness. He creates his protagonist, Nameer, who trained or allowed himself to listen to non-human voices. Nameer says, "I trained myself to listen to the tree first, and I succeeded. The tree says everything. After that I listened to the birds, and between the two of them I can hear everything" (242).

His style of anthropomorphism is combined with the content. Antoon's fiction clearly reflects his realization that victims of war are not only humans but also animals, plants, and inanimate things which is explicitly introduced in the novel while describing Wadood's project as:

[T]he project of a lifetime, an archive of the losses from war and destruction. But not soldiers and equipment. The losses that are never mentioned or seen. Not just people. Animals and plants and inanimate things and anything that can be destroyed. (46)

As the above quotation illustrates, he aims to provide a dialogue of reconciliation among environmental philosophies: anthropocentrism, biocentrism, ecocentrism.

1. Anthropocentric Approach:

Since human is a vital part of a highly complex web of ecological systems, ecocriticism from an anthropocentric perspective is a human-centered perspective based on "the biological, mental, and moral superiority of humans over other living and non-living entities" (Rob, 2013: 11). In the context of war, humans are the main victims of war and its environmental degradation. Antoon represents the various public health and well-being challenges that humans have experienced during the period of the invasion and its aftermath. He exposes the dangers of direct military activities with the use of explosive weapons in powerful and drastic images in his fiction. Nameer becomes preoccupied with the shadow of death, injuries, and disabilities from direct weapons and battle. He ends the novel with the death of Wadood himself in an explosion while trying to catalog the effect of war on ecosystems. Nameer told the reader that "Wadood Abdul Karim, another name to be added to the thousands upon thousands of Iraqi dead marching into the twilight of oblivion and silence" (301).

Furthermore, Antoon's fiction is unique in that it chooses to represent the human cost of that war by employing excerpts from Wadood's manuscript throughout Nameer's narrative. These excerpts are narrated in the first-person point of view by inanimate objects throughout the novel, like a Kashan carpet, the oud, the wall, a camera film, a cassette tape, and many others. Writing in this voice tends to unleash one's imagination and reflects higher levels of eco-awareness. For example, a Kashan carpet poetically narrates how once it enjoyed the patter of children's feet, but a bomb dropped on the home, silencing all who had huddled together on the carpet (52). The oud narrates how it had a father who played and kissed it as it was his loved one, "but he hasn't been here for three days now" (126),

implying poetically the death of the owner of the oud under the invasion. The wall narrates that it wishes for a sword that kills its ability to see and hear because it is tired of carrying the burden of war. The wall also narrates the story of a mother who used to sing to and sleep with her son in the bed and how she suffered weaning him. Although the wall “didn’t suckle him or hug him or kiss him” (117), it “at least keep[s] watch over him all those years” (117). The wall ends the narrative that the last time it saw him was before that devastating winter that almost broke its back. Since then, his mother and the wall have been waiting for the mother’s son implying, metaphorically, his death. The eye narrates how it “saw the day when [its] only eye was knocked out by a piece of shrapnel and fell to the ground” (196). In these poetic narratives, Antoon depicts imaginative representations of the human costs of the invasion by anthropomorphizing inanimate objects. Rhetorically, Antoon utilizes prolific literary devices, dramatizing the indispensable and vital roles of human and non-human in the narration of human costs of war interacting altogether both aesthetically, ecologically, and politically.

Antoon also exposes the dangers of non-battle-related risks to human health associated with war environmental damage such as the lack of basic necessities resulting from the war. Nameer highlights how Iraqis use chemical tablets to stop the spread of infectious diseases caused by contaminated water when Nameer visited his aunt in Baghdad during the invasion (18). Antoon also aptly expresses his ecological anguish aesthetically through the colloquy of the fetus, depicting the fetus as aware of, or shares, its mother's affective state. The Fetus might “try to express [his mother’s state] and what went with it in the language it acquires in its early years. The language that will be the only, or maybe the clearest, way to convey everything...if it had been born” (159), “[b] ut much will remain buried and will come to the surface only in dreams and nightmares” (ibid) because “it wasn’t and won’t be born” (159). Even the fetus shows its fear of the environmental dangers on its health which can be fathomed from an anthropocentric perspective.

More importantly, the ecocritical theory is extended to “focus on the relation between violence, shock, and nature” (Donn, 2016: 552). Damaged or traumatized ecosystems traumatize humans in return, which is introduced into the public consciousness as a tool to respect the environment for the sake of human health, well-being, and prosperity. Within this context, Antoon’s protagonist, Nameer, visits his home country after the war and he

is traumatized by the hurt and damage he witnesses. He describes his visit to Baghdad as “it was disturbing and psychologically draining” (28). Nameer adds an additional example to the psychological consequences of war. This notion is clearly reflected when Nameer saw a homeless man in the USA who “didn’t take much care of his appearance” (132) and used to sit and sleep on the sidewalk. He “walked at a leisurely pace, speaking to himself in a low voice” (132) with “serene and mellow sadness” (131) in his eyes. Nameer’s friend told him that the homeless man was an American soldier who was traumatized by the destruction while fighting during the American invasion. Within the context, the ecocritical discourse employed in Antoon’s contemporary fiction is so out of touch with the official political discourse in which he exposes how hostile war environment outside can mirror the psychological damage inside as a tool to respect the environment for the sake of human health and well-being.

Through the employment of anthropocentrism in the novel, Antoon exposes the human cost of the war. He is ecologically and critically aware enough to expose human challenges in the war that are introduced into the public consciousness through an ecocritical lens as a tool to respect humans and their ecological space for the sake of human health, well-being, and prosperity.

2. Biocentric Approach :

From a biocentric perspective, humans are not superior, and all-living species have an intrinsic value. Deep ecologists argue “that all living things are equal in value and possess the inherent right to grow and flourish” (Gottlieb, 1997: 299). Ecocriticism, with its biocentric view, is emerging as a way of taking the next step and extending to include living animals and plants. Robert Grant argues in his book *A Case Study in Thomistic Environmental Ethics: The Ecological Crisis in the Loess Hills of Iowa* (2007) that living animals and plants are considered “an appropriate subject of rights, equality, and moral considerability” (120), because of their vital role in environmental protection and in meeting human survival needs. In the same vein, Antoon’s *The Book of Collateral Damage* places attention on a war whose victims are not only humans but also animals and plants which are officially ignored calling to mind both ecoconsciousness and rejection of war.

Antoon is keen to dramatize Wadood’s biocentric sentiment that characterizes environmental ethics through giving voice to animals and plants. They are introduced as eloquent narrators endowed with various

anthropomorphic qualities, including being able to speak and communicate efficiently and being capable to show fear and anxiety about the outrageous things that the invasion has done to flora and fauna. The anthropomorphized bird created by Wadood aptly expresses his ecological anguish aesthetically through “the Colloquy of the Last Bird”, the bird narrates:

I’m afraid of the flocks of massive metal birds. They might come back, as they have done in the past. To hover over us and pursue us. Their roar is deafening. I don’t know how they can fly when they’re blind, and why do they excrete fire everywhere? The last thing my father said before we parted was that he had never seen so many of them or such big ones.

Where did my father go?

Where’s my mother?

And where are my siblings?

I’m still flying.

But I’m tired (297-298)

In the above quote, the bird criticizes war and emphasizes the harmful consequences of the invasion and its military aircraft on animals. For example, these military aircraft excrete fire everywhere causing the death of all members of its family that poignantly signals environmental destruction. Additionally, these military aircrafts arouse fear of being left alone in the bird’s psyche. The bird also describes the sensation of hearing loss caused by exposure to loud noises of the aircraft. The bird reflects how military activities have had a direct negative impact on animals both physically and psychologically, calling for proper care and respect for the animals during the war.

In addition to the physical and psychological suffering of animals in wartime, an allegorical implication of another notion of ecocritical discourse is found in the author’s development of the colloquy of the bird. At the beginning of the novel, the colloquy of the bird is entitled “The Colloquy of the Birds”, in which the birds live a wonderful life with their families. But at the end, the bird asks: “Where did my father go? Where’s my mother? And where are my siblings?” (298). This motif of the absence of the birds with its title “The Colloquy of the Last Bird” during wartime offers an ecocritical issue that war activities are responsible for pushing at-risk birds closer to extinction and reducing biodiversity. However, the moment of extinction is generally considered the death of the last individual of that species. The

notion of the last bird is to reflect that it is not completely extinct. He seems to reassure the audience that it is not too late and that action and change are possible. In other words, the last bird implies the necessity of doing something now to save animals from complete extinction for the future and to look for better alternatives.

He also creates an anthropomorphized Ziziphus tree to reflect the negative consequences of military activities on plants. The suffering of plants in wartime is found in the author's development of "The Colloquy of the Ziziphus". In the beginning, the Ziziphus tree extolls the beauties of life in the country and the idyllic existence without war, particularly among trees. It also extolls their role in meeting human and animal needs such as food, shade and shelter, and in maintaining environmental balance, it told the reader that:

Children born in the house grew up and started playing beneath me in the garden. When I was bearing fruit, from my third year on, they asked their father to shake me so that they could enjoy the fruit. They rubbed my bark and were surprised to see gum oozing from my trunk. In my shade they read and played.... The bees fed on the nectar of my flowers and sometimes birds nested in my branches (59).

But this idyllic image of peaceful coexistence becomes unrealistic. They feel depressed as they are affected by war activities. The Ziziphus narrates how the war with its explosive weapons is a devastating threat on plants:

Then a day came when I heard the sky splitting open and volcanic ash raining down. It was as if the bottom of hell had burst. A flame found its way into the remains of my heart and started a fire inside me (62).

The above poetical narrative ascertains the Ziziphus thorough functionalities of similes, aesthetically and ecologically in which it tries to capture the degradation of plants due to war activities. "[T]he sky splitting open and volcanic ash raining down" is an allegorical picture of violent political activities during the US invasion which cause fire and destroy trees. The Ziziphus tree screams out to break the silence against the cruel wars which destroy the world's innocent vegetation.

Reading Antoon's *The Book of Collateral Damage*, one can say that Antoon is consciously aware of changing human perceptions of the world of animals and plants. He challenges the hierarchical thinking and ideological boundaries between humans and non-human animals plus plants by giving

voice to animals and plants, as discussed previously. To add force to this notion, Antoon states that Nameer “saw [himself] living in a faraway country” (129) where humans “had all the rights and freedoms Even animals were respected and had rights” (ibid). He is aware that the costs of war are not only measured by the loss of humans, but also by the devastation of flora and fauna, calling for preventing war and saving plants and animals.

3. Ecocentric Approach:

From an ecocentric perspective, contemporary ecocritics extend their moral vision even to Earth’s physical environment or nonliving elements of the natural world (Keong, 2020: 288). They also call attention to the fact that Earth’s physical environments encompass not only natural physical environments but also artificial urban environments and that, thus, both nature and the urban environment justify ecocritical consideration (Buell, 2005: 22). From this environment-centered perspective, there exists an important role in assessing the harmful activities on physical natural and artificial environments. It is ethically responsible for minimizing the damage and preserving the natural balance. Hence, war with its military activities would be harmful because it does not ensure a healthy environment. In the same vein, Antoon extends his ecomoral mission and reflects the destabilizing impact of the invasion on natural and artificial environments. He reacts to water, air and soil contamination, as well as to what he sees as the damage of urban artificial space.

Experts point out that the use of chemical and biological weapons is a dangerous military trend. In addition to soil and groundwater contamination, experts are concerned with physical environments that may have been exposed to dangerous levels of toxic chemicals. From an ecocritical perspective, this scientific notion is aestheticized and allegorized by Antoon reflecting his ecological sorrow about the effect of Depleted Uranium (DU) on physical natural environments and on human health. Some theorists claim that poetry and science must remain separate because science is assigned to dealing with factual truths while poetry is aligned with emotion. Others argue that there can be no separation between poetry and science. Chris Andrews refers to scientific poetry as “a marginal literary genre” (1999: 1) because “it is not universally recognized by critics, and those who do recognize it generally regards its present existence as precarious or inchoate” (ibid). However, examining Antoon's “The Colloquy of the Munaddab, the Depleted” can be considered, par excellence, a great

scientific prose poem. It reveals his extreme endeavours to report the adverse effects related to DU radiation in a poetic sensibility. He allegorizes his sorrow and anguish about the effect of DU on Iraq's physical environments — air, soil, and water— and on human health. He introduces DU that is:

[D]esigned to penetrate steel, strayed off course as it fell from the AC 130 so it didn't penetrate any armor: it just lay in the sands of Iraq like a soldier lost in enemy territory. But a soldier that won't die or be captured. It'll keep breathing. What it exhales will settle in a lung or a womb. A kidney or a bone in some body. And it will live in the water and the air for four million years (271).

Do we breathe in order to live?

Or do we breathe to die? (271).

Allegorically and poetically, the quote above represents Wadood's ideologically functional personifications of the DU's ability to be stored in air, soil, and water and its ability to pollute or damage them. In addition, it represents the DU's ability to be stored in human bodies: lung, womb, kidney, or bone in addition to its ability to damage them leading to death. Antoon's utilization of allegory illustrates his ecocritical and political aestheticizations of DU; he likens DU in physical environments and in human body to a soldier lost in enemy territory who attempts to kill or damage everything in his path to survive calling to mind both environmental awareness and rejection of war.

Another eco-ethical discussion of the physical natural environment is introduced in Nameer's words: "The Tigris looked so pale on this visit. It no longer looked the way I remembered it" (12). The history of the Tigris is significant in this scene because the themes found amid literary representations of the river reflect earlier cultural and ecological issues. Prior to the US invasion period, the Tigris had been viewed positively as a natural symbol of Iraq's national identity, fertility, and prosperity throughout literary works. But during the invasion, the Tigris is portrayed negatively as sick and pale. Paleness could indicate an apathetic attitude towards this section of the river. Whilst it could also indicate that the Tigris is threatened with pollution and extinction, shutting down many important services. The same expression is repeated in Nameer's words while describing Baghdad during the invasion: "how pale and shabby Baghdad was" (39). He describes the oppressive effects of the invasion upon Iraqi

ecology. These negative images suggest in a way how war activities affect physical environments with a hope to bring more eco-awareness.

Antoon also offers a poetical warning about the effect of war on artificial environments which is narrated by human characters. For example, a child says:

A child. Me. A child sitting in the garden of our house, which is no longer a house. A gift from the sky turned it into an enormous pile of rubble. I pick up a piece of glass from a broken window. I feel the edge and it cuts me and draws a drop of blood. I feel a slight pain and watch the drop fall to the ground (192).

The above quote reflects the fact that the invasion and its political violence cause the most damage to the urban environment. The child aestheticizes his sorrow and anguish against the invasion, calling for an aesthetic rejection of wartime. This quotation is an ecological poeticism that institutionalizes a central theme of the effect political violence has on artificial environments.

The above sections have illustrated the harmful impact of war from anthropocentric, ecocentric, and biocentric values. However, it is difficult to draw a distinction among those perspectives since all living and nonliving components form a massively interrelated, interconnected, and interdependent ecological network. Antoon is also aware that living and nonliving within a system continually affect and are affected by each other. For example, while exposing the effect of DU on Iraq's physical environments, air, soil, and water, he continues to describe how the degradation of physical environments influences human health. He says: "What [DU] exhales will settle in a lung or a womb. A kidney or a bone in somebody. ... It will poison bodies with its stigma and go on living" (271). Thus, any major shift or degradation of any one component would adversely affect the system as a whole. These environments may become unbalanced or could even collapse with the loss of a function of any single component.

Reading the novel from an ecocentric perspective, one can also say that Antoon extends his moral vision even to natural physical environments and artificial urban environments. He makes the degradation of the natural and artificial environments as a cause of war readable with a curious anxiety in his fiction.

Bases on these grounds, Antoon supposes a holistic ecocritical approach according to which we must protect not only individual humans, but also plant, animal, physical and artificial environments as a whole. It, interestingly, extends the traditional approach of introducing evidence of anthropocentric harms to include biocentric and ecocentric harms which he expressed faithfully in both content and style. It can be considered as a complete description of justice and equality into ecocritical criticism which allows us to uncover a wide variety of harmful activities on humans and nonhuman species to be avoided, or mitigate in the future.

Conclusion

Since the denial of environmental problems is political policy and the interests of victory magnates matter more than human and nonhuman life, this paper embodied an avenue of research within the realm of ecocriticism by focusing on the impacts of war on ecosystems.

It has shown that Sinan Antoon's *The Book of Collateral Damage* not only is considered as a move towards pro-ecological writing forms but also it deserves a place on eco-fiction lists. He followed the same path of ecocriticism that the diversity of voices comes not only from various literary and cultural backgrounds, but also from the variety of human and nonhuman voices to develop his holistic project to reflect war environmental crimes. Furthermore, the uniformity of content and style in his novel would attest to a high degree of creativity in his environmental project.

We can be appreciative of the genius of Antoon and can be read alongside international writers in an ecological sense, calling for further interests among Arab writers and scholars to conduct further research on environmental issues. Furthermore, his ecological wisdom lies in his emphasis on the importance of an extended harm principle where harms are not only studied from anthropocentric perspectives; the impact of war transcends these artificial borders. His ecological vision lies in his emphasis on an “integral approach [which] seeks to coordinate anthropocentric, biocentric, and ecocentric values” (Mickey, 2015: 52) in both content and style as an attempt to depict the living things, human, plant and animal, and non-living things or physical environments, air, soil, water, and even artificial environments as victims of war; he propagates the idea of the “protection of [the] whole chain of ecosystems” (Barcz, 2017,144). His inclusive ecocritical project “[facilitate] the convergence of contrasting perspectives in order to take practical actions” (Mickey, 2015: 52). The

equity and inclusion mindset in his novel can develop an inclusive space where all ecological entities are valued, respected, and engaged.

It is hoped that eventually, warfare needs to be clearly seen as unlimited violence and the most important hazard to species, with several unmanageable side-effects and harm to humans, animals, plants and physical environments. Consequently, the possible damage to the environment deserves urgent ecomoral consideration before any decision for war is taken.

References

- Alkinani, G. (2019). *American and Iraqi Prose Fiction of the Iraq War: Traumas of the Self, Traumas of the Nation*. University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. Google Books
- Alkyam, S. (2018). The Trauma of the Archive in Sinan Antoon's Novel *Fihris*. University of Nebraska Press: *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies*, Volume 7.
DOI:<https://doi.org/10.1353/jlt.2018.0002>
- Andrews, C. (1999). *Poetry and Cosmogony: Science in the Writing of Queneau and Ponge*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Antoon, S. (2019). *The Book of Collateral Damage*. Trans. Wright, J. London: Yale University Press.
- Bani-Mfrij, H & Al-Shetawi, F, M. (2021). An Ecocritical Perspective of Flora and Fauna under the 2003 Invasion of Iraq in American and Iraqi novels. *Adab Al-Kufa journal*, 2(49), 505-530. <https://www.iasj.net/iasj/article/212763>
- Barcz, A. (2017). *Animal Narratives and Culture: Vulnerable Realism*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Buell, L. (2005). *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Donn, K. (2016). *Beyond the Wasteland: An Ecocritical Reading of Modernist Trauma Literature*. Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology. Ed. Hubert Zapf. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter.
- Gladwin, D. (2017). *Ecological Exile: Spatial Injustice and Environmental Humanities*. Routledge.
- Gottlieb, R. (ed.) (1997). *The Ecological Community: Environmental Challenges for Philosophy, Politics and Morality*. London: Routledge.
- Grant, R. (2007). *A Case Study in Thomistic Environmental Ethics: The Ecological Crisis in the Loess Hills of Iowa*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press. Google Books
- Keong, C. (2020). *Global Environmental Sustainability: Case Studies and Analysis of the United Nations' Journey Toward Sustainable Development*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Elsevier. Google Books.

- McDowell, M. (1996). *The Bakhtinian Road to Ecological Insight*. The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Mickey, S. (2015). *Whole Earth Thinking and Planetary Coexistence: Ecological Wisdom at the Intersection of Religion, Ecology, and Philosophy*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Oppermann, S. (ed.) (2014). *New International Voices in Ecocriticism*. New York and London: Lexington Books.
- Organ, H. (2005). The Ecological Implications of the Iraq War. *Capitalism Nature Socialism journal*, 16(4), 7-17, DOI: 10.1080/10455750500375984
- Sinno, N . (2013). The Greening of Modern Arabic Literature: An Ecological Interpretation of Two Contemporary Arabic Novels. *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* 20(1), 125-142.
- White, R. (2013). *Crimes Against Nature: Environmental Criminology and Ecological Justice*. New York: Routledge.