



# Exploring ecofeminism, ecocriticism, aquapoetics, and environmental humanities in Gabeba Baderoon's poetry

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## Exploring ecofeminism, ecocriticism, aquapoetics, and environmental humanities in Gabeba Baderoon's poetry


In this article I focus on Gabeba Baderoon's engagement with nature and the ecological nuances in her poetry. Baderoon is an accomplished South African poet with four poetry collections to date: *The Dream in the Next Body* (2005), *The Museum of Ordinary Life* (2005), *A hundred silences* (2006), and *The History of Intimacy* (2018). These poetry collections sustain Baderoon's ecofeminist sensibility as she engages with South Africa's eco-environmental challenges. In expanding the scope of how ecology impacts on poetry, I strive to illustrate how Baderoon's poetry is intimately bound up with the tropes of environmental humanities, ecofeminism, ecocriticism, and aquapoetics. I interrogate Baderoon's engagement with ecological concerns in South Africa. Previous critical works about her poetry often discount how her poetry creatively harnesses ecopoetic tropes to illustrate the problematics of ecological concerns, climate change, and environmental crises. Rather, they often fixate on the portrayal of racial politics of apartheid as it culminated in the poverty of black people in her poetry. Interestingly, Baderoon does not enforce a strict and total division between these thematic concerns in her poetry collections. I argue in this article that, within the framework of commitment to ecological values, Baderoon explores the relationship between human and non-human agencies in her poetry. Arguably, the conception of human relations with the environment enables Baderoon to advocate for the protection of plants, animals, and water resources for a sustainable ecosystem. **Keywords:** eco-feminist consciousness, aquapoetics, Gabeba Baderoon's poetry, South Africa, environmental humanities.

### Introduction

Gabeba Baderoon is a notable South African poet whose poetry encapsulates an eclectic musing on politics, intimacy, nature, environmental humanities, and historical tropes borne out of plurality of experiences. She is an accomplished poet with four poetry collections to date: *The Dream in the Next Body* (2005), *A hundred silences* (2005), *The Museum of Ordinary Life* (2005), and *The History of Intimacy* (2018), Baderoon persistently traverses South Africa's fragile political history to interrogate the link between past and present. Within an assemblage of post-apartheid South African writers, Baderoon stands out for her consistency in gathering collateral evidence of marginality of black people, Indians, and "Coloured" people as an indictment against apartheid South Africa. Circumstances of relentless persecution culminated in decades of subjugation of the black majority, Indians, and "Coloured" people, as referenced in Baderoon's poetry collections. In analysing apartheid South Africa's policies on racial issues, Kendrick Brown (198) indicates that "in general, South Africa utilizes four racial classifications—Asian, Black, Coloured, and White". Pursuing a clarification on racial classification further, Brown (198) argues that, officially, "Coloured" refers to any person of "mixed blood" and includes "children as well as descendants from Black-White, Black-Asian, White-Asian, and Black-Coloured unions". However, an inclusion of Sunni Arab and European Muslims in the so-called group complicates this designation. Shedding further light on who qualifies to be described as "Coloured", Mohamed Adhikari (1) avows that "in Southern Africa, the term 'coloured' has a specialised meaning in that it denotes a person of mixed racial ancestry rather than one who is black, as it does

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in most other parts of the world". Adhikari (35) further stresses that "[in]nearly all general histories of South Africa, coloured people have effectively been written out of the narrative and marginalised to a few throw-away comments scattered through the text".

Other literary works by South African writers like Alex La Guma's *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*; Dennis Brutus's *A Simple Lust*; and Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and *The Island* also bristle with details of the apartheid system's dehumanisation of members of non-white races. As the aforementioned constitute a few of the most visible anti-apartheid critics, these writers embed in their works imagery, symbols, and caricatures of violence, torture, and extra-judicial murders that abundantly confirm the accusations of subordination made against the atrocious system. What is fascinating is that these literary works present moving portrayals of harassment of the black majority, Indians, and "coloured" people as testimonies to the condescending treatment of these races.

Given a recurrent, straightforward engagement with the dehumanisation of the non-white races in apartheid South Africa, Baderoon provides an all-rounded representation of their plights in her poetry. A vivid illustration of this point draws from Baderoon's striking depiction of apartheid South Africa's policy on racial segregation that undermines the status of non-white races in *The History* (56):

In 1988 at Crawford train station, my brother and I find  
a blue plank hand-painted in yellow letters:  
"Non-Whites Only" on one side.  
"Whites Only" on the other.

The poem responds directly to the way individuals and groups were classified along racial lines that poised challenges which people of non-white races had to contend with daily. As explicated in her own words in her interview with Amatoritsero Ede, Baderoon gives a firsthand account of her experience of racism in apartheid South Africa: "[A]partheid aimed, like a religion, to shape everything in our lives. As a Black South African, Apartheid determined where I was born, where I went to school, who taught me, what I learned in history, what languages I learned to speak, where I lived, worked, married".

Baderoon, however, does not privilege the pursuit of racial politics over and above the theme of ecocriticism in her poetry. Even though Baderoon's poetry collections engage directly with South Africa's historical past, significant attention is given to the country's environmental concerns. Environmental humanities dictates that we understand environmental issues from the perspectives of humanities and the social sciences for the deconstruction of continued interactions between the human and non-human. In the past decades, environmental humanities have systematically generated global intellectual awareness to demand a relationship between the scientific, the technical disciplines, and the humanities all in attempt to solve critical crises created by the industrial society (Emmett and Nye 4). William Mallory and Paul Simpson-Housley comment on the back cover of the 1987-edition of their book on geography and literature that "literary landscapes are rooted in reality, and that the geographer's knowledge can help ground symbolic literary landscape". As such, Baderoon's first-hand identification with South Africa's environmental consciousness manifests in her literary mapping of the critical ecological issues the country needs to pay serious attention to. If global environmental crises require the deployment of new strategies that provide all-encompassing solutions, Baderoon's poetry seems to have conflated these strategies with the individual's voice of ecological advocacy to campaign for nature's preservation. Again, for a constructive interrogation, Baderoon harnesses the characteristics of environmental humanities to fashion a relationship between the human and non-human agencies that could shape ecological coexistence. The notion that humans are not exactly genetically programmed to associate with nature is vital to the reading of Baderoon's poetry (Cianchi 28). However, the climactic moments of flirtation with nature and environmental humanities in Baderoon's poetry are often marked by the eruptive, impulsive, candescent interventions that serve as a protective shield to counterbalance the roving poetics of politics and romance. For Baderoon, nature is to be nurtured for it to yield its abundance.

## **Baderoon's poetry within the context of environmental humanities, ecocriticism, ecopoetry, and aquapoetry**

In this paper I establish a conflation of ecocriticism, ecofeminism, environmental humanities, ecopoetics, and aquapoetics in Baderoon's poetry and harness this eclectic mix to explicate how her poetry is grounded in the phenomenology of environmental humanities.

Environmental humanities are described by Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino (4) as "building new environmental imaginaries, formulating new discursive practices, and marking changes in economic and political structures". Diana Davis and Edmund Burke (3) describe "environmental imaginary" as "the constellation of ideas that groups of humans develop about a given landscape, usually local or regional, that commonly includes assessments about that environment as well as how it came to be in its current state". In *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*, Richard Peet and Michael Watts (267–9) have essentially delineated what goes into the construction of narratives on social-environmental imaginaries. Establishing the relationship between environmental imaginary and environmental humanities, Diana Villanueva-Romero, Lorraine Kerslake, and Carmen Flys-Junquera (2) argue that artistic works like literature, fine arts, and music are "cultural ecosystems, creating awareness and interrelating ideas, visual and verbal linkages mixed with thought, values and traditions and lifestyles". These two possible points of intersection are usually appropriated for the promotion of ecocritical consciousness. Paralleling Davis and Burke's and Peet and Watts's contributions to the environmental imaginaries within the context of environmental humanities, Baderoon has interrogated the state of the environment in its current degradation stages in her works "On a Bench near the Glasshouse in the Botanical Garden" (*The Dream*, 42), "A hundred silences" (*A hundred silences*, 49), and "This is not my father's garden" (*A hundred silences*, 46). In the poems, Baderoon makes an impassioned argument in favour of why South African landscapes should be preserved. Environmental humanities therefore is a concept that creates the opportunity to engage with the environmental rhetoric and interrogate the narrative forms that foster environmentalist values and criticism. It is important to realise that environmental humanities incorporates various discreet disciplines like ecocriticism, environmental history, environmental philosophy, and ecopoetics (Rose *et al.* 5). Some ecocritical works also espouse the characteristics of environmental humanities in their advocacies (Becket and Gifford 7–8; Huggan 12). This is because in the past decades the world has not been spared disasters such as climate change, and this has triggered avalanches of dislocation and displacement of peoples from different parts of the world.

Climate change's complexity therefore impacts on the world's environmental imaginary in how it shapes the environment, socio-economic variables, and dynamics of world politics (Arnold 2). Baderoon's poetry clearly revolves around ecocriticism and ecofeminism as locating sites where language and empathy merge to raise concern about the impact of nature's degradations. Baderoon's empathy for a degraded nature resonates especially in "This is not my father's garden":

At the gate, the frangipani flowers  
have fallen into the letterbox again  
The roses have given up,  
only one lingers at the edge of the path.  
The hibiscus is gone  
from the centre of the grass,  
now wild as veld. (*A hundred silences*, 46)

Here it can be said that Baderoon's poetry essentially decentres the human subject to emphasise treatment of nature within a context of the polyphonic song of human others (Ergin 90).

Ecocriticism springs off a traditional, disciplinary-oriented plank of literary scholarship, which obviously delineates it primarily as an intersection of literary studies and literary criticism (Peterson 70). As such, ecocriticism as an interdisciplinary undertaking is often acknowledged for its efforts to include in its fold history, biology, geology, ecology, and other critical areas (Kerridge and Sammells). Deciphering the space of ecocriticism, Peter Childs and Roger Fowler (65) in *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* define ecocriticism as "[t]he study of literary texts with reference to the interaction between human activity and the vast range of 'natural' or non-human phenomena which bears upon human experience—encompassing (amongst many things) issues concerning fauna, flora, landscape, environment and weather". To a reasonable extent, ecocriticism could be described as part of a trend in academia that tries to find ways to address the new forms of environmental

concerns that have been coming to the fore in this decade (Peterson 70). Ecocriticism gives significant attention to and analysis of how nature, landscape, and environment are represented in literature. This representation manifests in Baderoon's poems such as "Promised Land":

Bird cry in the keys,  
gliding to a low ending.  
Hummingbird fingers quiver,  
dip, and still  
a note to almost nothing,  
then you begin again,  
training my heartbeat  
to follow. (*The History*, 18)

Emphasising advocacy of the harmony of nature in her collections, Baderoon tends to offer a critique and celebration of humans' relationship with agents of nature and environment like the landscape, water, animals, and the hills and valleys.

Arguably, debates on global environmental imaginaries have also shifted from the domains of science to engage broadly with the causes and effects of climate change as represented in literature through genres such as ecopoetics and aquapoetics. Ecofeminism encompasses strands of critical and theoretical concerns to resist the interrelated subordination of women and nature (Eaton and Lorentzen 1). Overall, ecofeminism explores struggles against militarism, capitalism, racism, colonialism, environmental destruction, and the commodification of nature in whatever guises. For the ecofeminists, the advocacy of environmental justice alongside social justice is one issue and not two disparate matters. This position is highlighted in Yawer Mir's (43) evaluation of the overlap between environmental exploitation and gender oppression when he stresses that "ecofeminism is a movement which discerns a bond between profiteering and abasing of the natural world and the denigration and persecution of women". This position is underlined in Carol Adams and Lori Gruen's claim that the domination of "nature" interlinks the domination of "women" and that "both dominations must be eradicated" (1). Ariel Salleh's view underscores the role of women in the pursuit of ecofeminist ideology when he asserts that "when an anti-nature, ecologically blind economic paradigm leads to the disappearance of forests and water, or spreads disease because of poisoned air and soil, it is women who waken society to the threat to life and survival" (15). Baderoon's ecofeminist consciousness reflects on this connection more explicitly in "Green Pincushion Proteas":

Now fervent with color, green blooms clamber  
over the rockery, but careless we,  
who did not know their beginnings, wrench them  
from their original rocks and move them  
to another part of the garden.  
They died, she recalls.  
They don't like their roots to be moved (*The History*, 13)

Baderoon foregrounds accountability towards nature's preservation in "Green Pincushion Proteas". Again, an appraisal of environmental considerations in the poem subsequently explicates how ecofeminism influences women's concerted efforts at integrating personal, ecological, and sociopolitical concerns into a composite preservation and conservation of nature.

Ecopoetry manifests when literature promotes a heightened awareness of nature's consciousness by interacting, associating, and bonding with ecology through poetry. In *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* J. Scott Bryson (5-6) asserts that ecopoetry is a "version of nature poetry generally marked by three primary characteristics"—"an emphasis on maintaining an ecocentric perspective", a recognition of "the interdependent nature of the world", and, thirdly, it leads to "a devotion to specific places and to the land itself, along with those creatures that share it with humankind". Leonard Scigaj illustrates that ecopoetry could be defined as poetry that persistently stresses human cooperation with nature conceived as a dynamic interrelated series of cyclic feedback systems (Scigaj qtd in Bryson, *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* 2). Scigaj further delineates ecopoetry from "environmental poetry" as a poetry preoccupied with nature but as having a divided attention to the environment as it often attends to environmental issues half-heartedly. Ecopoetry has been further described as the type of poetry that attends to traditional demands of nature as it takes on distinctively contemporary problems and ecological issues (Bryson,

*The West Side of Any Mountain: Place, Space and Ecopoetry* 20). In “The Forest” Baderoon acknowledges the possibility of narratives embedded in nature:

It starts with the sudden rustle of leaves,  
an opening in the forest.  
You step through the doorway of stories. (*The Dream*, 30)

As in most ecopoetry, Baderoon’s poetry identifies with place and space to interact with nature and environmental issues impacting on vegetation, animal, water, landscape, and other ecological concerns (Burton-Christie 77–8).

Aquapoetry refers to how the utilitarian qualities of water are often harnessed in poetry. These aquascape elements are utilised within the context of aquatic imaginaries to capture the aesthetics of water. Aquapoetics would always describe water’s natural beauty and the allures located in its organic constituents as manifested in different sizes of seas, lagoons, rivers, and lakes. As a genre, aquapoetry highlights the connection between earth, environment, and ecological biodiversity. It is exemplified in Baderoon’s “Winter Studies in Movement”:

I walk in a winter midnight  
and my coat catches  
snow like a spray of glass slivers.  
At the corner, water pipes melt  
a straight line of snow under the street.  
A frozen waterfall by the roadside stretches  
ice into taut strings. (*The Museum*, 22)

In the poem Baderoon contextualises a lifelong fascination with aquatic splendour that essentially delineates the indispensability of water to the planet earth in its materialistic range and the connections it makes between nature, environment, and human engagement.

### **Evaluating ecological concerns in Baderoon’s poetry**

Eve Nabulya (79) argues that a growing perception of the enormity of ecocritical worries signifies remarkably that the environmental challenges peculiar to Africa vary in dimensions from what happens elsewhere, especially in Euro-American spaces. This implies that while the majority of African countries struggle with deforestation, flooding, and desert encroachment, most industrialised countries in Europe are contending with other ecological issues such as pollution traceable to industrial wastes. This notion further reverberates in Caminero-Santangelo and Myer’s (7) delineation of African ecocriticism as being different from “the environmentalism of the affluent”. Placed in the context of peculiar African environmental challenges, Baderoon seemingly strives to bring to bear an eclectic mix of ecological issues in her poetry. Working within the framework of the intersection between nature and environmentalism, Baderoon hedges ecological consciousness in her poem “Time and Children” (25) to advocate for the recognition of the very important harmony between nature, human beings, and non-human:

In our watching and waiting  
was the beginning of recognition and loss,  
of apprehending something  
we didn’t even know we had (*The Museum*, 25)

The words “recognition and loss” serve as a double-edged remark in the poem that recalls nature’s beauty which was not acknowledged in the time past and to illustrate an uncomplicated childhood. References to the preceding part of the poem denote how Baderoon is filled with nostalgia for the memorable years she spent observing how her immediate family and grandfather often get crowded into cars on Sundays to visit relations who lived far away. The overarching signification of underlying environmental imaginaries embedded in the poem is teased out in the interaction between humans and nature. A journey through time, sometimes embarked upon in heavy rain and on narrow roads, tasks Baderoon to recall the order of Sunday afternoons in “Time and Children”. This recollection draws attention to the significance of the link between the human and the non-human during environmental cohabitation. Owing to a robust poetic interpretation of the relationship between the present and the future, Baderoon has ostensibly decoded how human beings’ continued existence on the planet earth is closely connected and bound to the enjoyment of the beauties of nature as encapsulated in her family navigating the “heavy rain” to visit relatives living in distant locations. As such, she advocates that human beings must find an equilibrium



between societal advancement and a critical conservation of nature's treasures for a sustenance of relative harmony in the world. It suffices to state that Baderoon's fleeting glimpse of her childhood strikingly recalls William Slaymaker's (129) submission that "nostalgia for nature and a passion for pastoral landscapes [are] linked to a writer's early memories of rural innocence to the land and its resources as a result of modernization, globalization of markets, urbanization and population growth". Therefore, "Watching and waiting" is emblematic of sensitivity that foregrounds her ecological awareness in the poem. "Watching" constitutes the leitmotif of consciousness.

Baderoon's ecocritical consciousness is further reflected upon in "A Season of Modesty":

Autumn here is rash. The insistent colours  
and supple light are fine but really, why add  
opaque mornings roused to ripeness by the late sun  
so the day swells like a purpled plum, or grape?  
And the light through leaves variegates the air.  
And the leaves! Do they have to attempt  
the butterfly's design? Everyone delights, I'm sure. (*The Dream*, 37)

In "A Season of Modesty" Baderoon meanders through the autumn's bounty of breathtaking changes that are grounded in these key words: "the insistent colours", "light through leaves", and "the butterfly's design" to appraise the wonders of nature. The discourse and locus of ecocriticism are appropriated in the poem to substantiate this appraisal as they are eloquently rooted in eco-friendship underpinned by a landscape steeped in a kaleidoscope of changing colours associated with autumn. I (Akingbe, "Mitigating Ecological Threats: Amplifying Environmental Activism in Gabebe Baderoon's Poetry" 188) argue that "as an eco-poet, Baderoon is also an environmentalist who is intensely involved in nature's advocacy. But she is reluctant to describe herself as an eco-warrior, since she considers such an appellation negatively connected to martial metaphors". Hence, the borderlines of nature in her poetry are exemplified in "The River Cities" (*The History*, 27), "Winter Studies in Movement" (*The Museum*, 22), "Two Autumns" (*The Museum*, 12), "Touch" (*A hundred silences*, 59), "A hundred silences" (*A hundred silences*, 49), "The Port Cities" (*The History*, 41), "Hangklip\*" (*The History*, 43), "A Season of Modesty" (*The Dream*, 37), and "Filming swans" (*A hundred silences*, 21). Correspondingly, Baderoon's environmental consciousness is legitimised in "Not You" (*The History*, 48), "Landscape is passing into language" (*A hundred silences*, 22), "This is not my father's garden" (*A hundred silences*, 46), and "How to Protect the House in a Hurricane" (*The Museum*, 18) to encapsulate how climate change affects the oceans, mountains, animals, and deforestation in South Africa. Most significantly, Baderoon's poetry is crowded with the images of landscape, the sea, animals, drought, desertification, and land's reclamation, reflective of her avowal of eco-friendship.

Baderoon's fidelity to nature within a persuasion of environmental humanities is seen in "On a Bench near the Glasshouse in the Botanical Gardens" (42):

I enter through the iron gates,  
one half always shut.  
Cars recede behind the sound of children  
and birdsong full of hunger and beauty.  
I go down six steps and pass a tree  
whose branches reach to the ground like a skirt.  
The garden is no longer a place of beginnings;  
branches bend with the weight of leaves. (*The Dream*, 42)

The poem highlights the role of ecopoetry in its articulation of the sorry state of biodiversity. This discontent is registered in a condemnation of the decline in the fortunes of the botanical garden. A tone of pessimism and despair is couched in a clear but concise deployment of language to reemphasise a neglect that manages to say more than enough on a poor state of the botanical garden in the poem. Now everything seems to have fallen into complete disarray as the garden has suffered from years of poor maintenance—evidence that implicates a downward revision of nature's preservation. A downgrade in a maintenance of the garden essentially undermines the importance of a botanical garden. Hence, a decrepit garden hypostasises a compromise of the essence of nature, and this is unquestionably decried in the poem. Baderoon's lamentation in the poem links with Lawrence Buell's (4) environmental sensitivity that draws attention to the global environmental degradation when he

writes: “awareness of the potential gravity of environmental degradation far surpasses the degree to which people effectively care about it”.

If South Africa’s ecocritical studies have sought alternative outlets to engage with nature, environment, and climate change, Baderoon’s poetry undeniably positions itself to fulfil this task (Nkealah and Rakgope 110). Although Naomi Nkealah and Shumani Rakgope have referenced Baderoon’s ecological proclivity to reveal a range of her engagement with ecological concerns in South Africa, they did attempt to pursue an analysis of environmental humanities’ framework discourse or representation in her poetry. They fail to account for how the tenets of eco-activism are grounded in Baderoon’s poetry within the context of environmental humanities’ sensibilities. Since ecofeminists juxtapose the essence of nature with the treatment of women, Baderoon’s relationship with nature shows an ecofeminist sensibility that equates a degradation of nature to the patriarchal subjugation of women. The environmental humanities is situated in Baderoon’s poetry within a context of a desire to draw attention to the dangers of overflowed dams which destroy farmlands, an increase in annual rainfall which continually sweeps away villages, and people living in climates of hot temperatures who regularly suffer droughts and a threat of desertification which becomes obstructive to the smooth operation of the South Africa’s agrarian communities. Piet Swanepoel (1) argues that “the environmental disasters we experience today necessitate drastic measures to ensure sustainable development of our natural resources”. Within the context of interconnection between nature and women in terms of motherhood and the ability to give life, nature is constantly feminised, and women are being equated to nature. With the prevalence of oppressive patriarchal systems in many parts of the world, ecofeminism often pushes as its overriding philosophy a two-fold emancipation of women with environmental protection to achieve preservation of both females and nature. Noel Strugeon (9) has noted that ecofeminism as a term indicates “a double political intervention, of environmentalism into feminism and feminism into environmentalism”. Conflating environmental awareness and political ecology, this view reverberates with Baderoon’s ecofeminist sensibility as it connects to the rising temperatures in some parts of South Africa. Her poetry makes veiled references to Cape Town’s three-year drought between 2015 and 2017 in “Not You” (*The History*, 48):

Living in Cape Town in a three-year drought, I read  
of people on other continents trapped  
in a prison of rain.

Baderoon’s ecofeminist sensibility invokes Nondwe Mpuma’s *Peach Country* that references South Africa’s ecological crises. Painfully, Mpuma laments Mount Ayliff (eMaxesibeni)’s 1999 ecological disaster in “Tornadoes”, a poem cited below. This ecological disaster killed 25 people, injured over 500 people, and destroyed 95% of the homes in the area. Mpuma draws attention to tornadoes as a recurrent ecological disaster plaguing South Africa when she writes:

One late spring, in the morning of summer,  
a woman sees the tail of inkanyamba.

An orchestra of tins, pots, pans and drums  
play in the air,

small prayers that the unpainted roofs  
are not mistaken for iziziba. (*Peach Country*, 21)

The poem indicates that tornado as a perennial natural disaster does not occur in isolation but destroys a community when it occurs. It’s accrued devastating effects are often overwhelmingly felt across a geographical stretch that borders eMaxesibeni in the Eastern Cape’s rural areas of South Africa. The poetic lines of “an orchestra of tins, pots, pans and drums / play in the air” underpin a dramatic sketch of the tornado in the poem to initiate and nurture a negotiation of environmental humanities that foregrounds ecological consciousness. A tornado typifies an ecological disharmony and its representation as “*inkanyamba*” (the big snake) in the poem only underscores its awe-inspiring ferocity and negative portrayal.

### Viewing nature in Baderoon's poetry through the lenses of environmental humanities

The "environment" connotes the marketability of nature (Huggan and Tiffin 34). Nature as a sustainer of the continued human existence is largely interrogated within the purview of environmental humanities in Baderoon's "Nature":

To salt the earth  
is a term taken from warfare,  
a way of acting on time itself.

A rural people must be removed  
from the possibility of growing food  
and starved. They must watch.  
The taste of water fade.

Generals know it was the future  
they were killing  
by burning the farms (Baderoon 66-7)

Baderoon's engagement with the environmental humanities resonates in reminiscences which were painful to bear of the forceful relocation of the Black majority from their original habitations to the newly created Bantustans otherwise called "homelands". I ("Writing Against Tyranny: Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Burden of Ogoni Nation in *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary*" 23-4) argue that writers often create overlap between the actual historical occurrences and literary imagination to affirm the act of self-construct that vents personal frustrations. Hence, Baderoon recalls the scorch earth strategy adopted by the apartheid system in South Africa in its desperation to dispossess the Black majority of most of its arable land. Established by the apartheid government, homelands were areas to which majority of the black people were moved to prevent them from living in the urban areas of South Africa. In total, ten homelands were created in South Africa: Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, Venda, Gazankulu, KaNgwane, KwaNdebele, Kwazulu, Lebowa, and QwaQwa. Stricken with horror in the aftermath of this brazen act, in her interview with Ede (2005) Baderoon recalls the consequences of the displacement of the Black majority by the apartheid regime when she references "those famous photos of Sophiatown and District Six—places where Black people lived in mixed, vibrant communities—which were destroyed through 'removals' of Black people to locations, or labour reserves near the big cities, or Bantustans in the rural areas". The creation of these ethnically distinct homelands within the context of a rhetoric of "separate development" eventually led to a forceful relocation of 3.5 million black South African between 1960 and 1980 (Christopher 5; Simkins 497; Sharp and Spiegel 138). These homelands were created hastily to signify appropriation of the Black majority's land that paved the way for more White enclaves to be established in the urban areas from where the black people were removed. "Nature" is a reinterrogation of the transgression against the environment where a lot of farms owned by the Black populations forced into the homelands were set ablaze by soldiers. Revisiting this displacement, Evans (19-20) argues that "the relocation of millions of black South Africans to rural dumping grounds in the so-called 'homelands' was one of the defining and most brutal aspects of the racist apartheid regime [...] Those who arrived in the Bantustans during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s [...] were forcibly removed from a variety of places". Dwelling on the ramifications of environmental humanities, Baderoon condemns the destruction of the Black population's fields, villages, and farms in South Africa. This condemnation is encapsulated in "Nature":

Generals know it was the future  
they were killing  
by burning the farms" (67)

The destruction of Black-cultivated farms and fields in South Africa reverberates the plight of the Namibian victims of the "scorched earth" policy perpetrated in northern Namibia shortly after the end of the liberation war against apartheid South Africa. The Namibian casualties of this scorched earth policy suffered a displacement in their hitherto ancestral village farms (Kreike ix).

Of central concern to the scholars and activists within the field of environmental humanities are the incontrovertible facts that tend to warn the world of the impending dangers associated with nature's degradation which could explode into mass extinctions of both humans and non-humans. This concern is underscored in



Fainos Mangena's ecological advocacy (10) to reiterate a "philosophy that recognises the harmonious trinity of nature, society and the spirit world". For these scholars/activists, their convictions on the global threats emanating from environmental despoliations are not based on subjective observations but are only acting on the dictates of genuine reasons borne out of concerns for the world's safety. Therefore, a commitment to nature's preservation within the context of environmental humanities' prism in Baderoon's poetry reinforces an avowed pursuit of seriousness of purpose rooted in ecopoetry. Subsequently, a take from the environmentalist view canvassed in Baderoon's poetry, and regarding what is urgently required to save the planet earth as a necessity, is nothing but a commitment to the nurturing of nature in all ramifications. This urgency requires constant need to explain, interpret, and illustrate the threats and dangers to heed warnings about nature's deflation.

Literature has proven to be important in the narrativisation of global environmental imaginaries in its curiosity to bring into being through words "our ideas about catastrophic and long-term environmental challenges" (De Loughrey, Didur, and Carrigan 2). Global environmental challenges like ozone layer depletion, deforestation, a rise in sea levels, and overfishing—which are derivations of the burning of fossil fuels, air and water pollution, hazardous waste, release of substances that destroy stratospheric ozone, and production of toxic chemicals—are dividends of climate change that have often triggered global warming (Chasek, Downie, and Brown 1).

Bemoaning the limits of how long nature can be taken for granted, Baderoon continues to criticise the notion of nature as exploitable resource in her poetry. With a conviction that a continual depletion of nature's resources would only lead to unmitigated disaster, Baderoon argues in her poetry that nature's resources are vulnerable to degeneration. Essentially, a debasement of nature will aggravate global warming as the unmistakable symptom of a global environmental decline. This decline is further lamented in a loss of landscape in "Landscape is Passing into Language":

My grandfather was the first  
to build his house on this vlei,  
the call of frogs measuring the evening [...] except lemons and oranges,  
the soil already too acid  
for roses to grow.  
Now the sounds are gone  
and the landscape is passing into language.  
A cement canal directs the river. (*A hundred silences*, 22)

The poem highlights a compromise of the interconnectedness of ecological biodiversity to unmask the undermining of nature. Akingbe and Onanuga (3) emphasise that "the role of a literary writer extends beyond reducing thoughts to writing. Writers act as the conscience of society, as they draw attention to existing social ills". This artistic role is further pursued when Baderoon chooses her words diligently within the vocabulary context of environmental humanities and aquapoetics, Baderoon has spoken to the sacred language of nature. This notion is a reflective affirmation of the view that being familiar with a particular language of an object amounts to possessing a "recursive procedure" (Belletti and Rizzi 3). The metaphor of the vile abjection of the landscape in the poem assertively captures nature's fragmentation, where a wetland bristling initially with frogs whose voices measured the timing of the evenings are no more heard. Even the luxuriant soil yielding its abundance previously is now being corrupted so that it has become acidic, and the once voluptuous river flowing with ease is now receding irretrievably, because it has been hurt terribly through a reclamation. The river is now narrowed in length as a cement canal has been constructed on it. This ecological stalemate negates the notion of mutual dependence between nature and humans as embedded in the words of William Rueckert (108) when he argues that "everything is connected to everything else". Hence, the poem strikes up sensitivity to ecocatastrophe as it re-establishes the necessity to preserve nature. Finally, the pessimistic closure sets the tone for "Landscape is passing into Language" to possibly recontextualise Baderoon's commitment to the fidelity of nature's preservation.

Baderoon further moves away from the exclusive highlighting of the dissipation of the fortunes of the wetland to reference the effects of climate change as it affected Cape Town in a three-year drought. Arguably, a strong and passionate focus on global warming in the poem "Not you" is anchored on the established emphasis on the effects of climate change in "Landscape is passing into Language". By invoking the notion of a disruption of nature in both poems, Baderoon initiates an illustration of the relationship between rupture and continuity to echo Cajetan

Iheka's (2) remonstrance with the need to pay attention to "varieties of agency functioning between human beings and other environmental actors". Undercutting the privileging of human hegemony over non-humans, Arne Naess (112) argues that the "[s]o-called simple, lower, or primitive species of plants and animals contribute essentially to the richness and diversity of life. They have value in themselves and are not merely steps toward the so-called higher or rational life-forms". By overtly identifying with nature in both "Nature" and "Landscape is passing into Language", Baderoon has distanced herself from the anthropocentric egocentrism of humans that tends to subordinate non-humans. Such distancing arguably situates Baderoon's ecofeminist consciousness within the context of what David Robinson (7) has described as the "Deep Ecology position". Baderoon's take on ecological consciousness aligns with that of Alan Drengson (6):

Deep ecology supporters appreciate the inherent value of all beings and of diversity. Therefore, research and communication should be inclusive and nonviolent. The ecological crisis, as driven by the Modern model of industrial progress and human population growth, threatens the integrity of planetary ecosystems with their accumulated wealth of diverse forms of life, cultures, and worldviews.

In "Not You", Baderoon draws on the continuing problem of environmental crisis to stress the overlapping connection between the drought in Cape Town and the devastating effect of climate change captured most poignantly in another example of floods caused by monsoons which swept away many villages and wreaked havoc in countries in Asia. Aquapoetics imaginary is deployed here to evaluate how the monsoon rains were escalated by the heat of summer when the temperatures in South Asia increased for months, thereby causing waves of precipitation that caused riverbeds, lakes, and irrigation canals to swell uncontrollably, causing floods (Hill 3–4). These consequences of climate change are mentioned in "Not You" in contrast to the drought in Cape Town (*The History*, 61). Recent records of droughts in Africa and Europe have pointed to the fact that it left these continents devastated with a myriad of ecological gaps as they have serious implications for food security (Hassan vii). The heavy premium placed on climate change as a harbinger of the three-year drought in Cape Town and a deluge of floods caused by summer monsoons in Asia is an affirmation of Baderoon's sensitivity within a context of ecocritical awareness. A takeaway from "Not you" dwells on imbalances of desire for a pristine, blissful state of comfort and an obstructive catalogue of calamitous events as the aftermath of environmental compromise.

## Conclusion

Making reference to four poetry collections grounded in the simulacra of ecocriticism, ecofeminism, ecopoetics, and environmental humanities, I have established the inexorable theme of environmental commitment in Baderoon's poetry in the past years. I have illustrated how Baderoon engaged nature within a context of the ecology of language lucidly grounded within the structure of environmental humanities. It becomes apparent how she has demonstrated how fates of the human and non-human have been intertwined to the extent that neither can exist in isolation in pursuit of a better planet earth. Running through Baderoon's collections of poetry is a ubiquitous leitmotif which delineates a conviction that the past erupts into the present and points to the relationship between humans and nature. Within a context of this interdependency, the intersection of humans and the environment brings about life, sustainability, and continuity of the universe.

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