

## Environmental Education in Aliyu Kamal's *Fire in My Backyard*

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### Abstract

The environment is a vital foundation for human survival, yet in Northern Nigeria many human activities continue to threaten its health. While environmental crises are often examined through scientific and policy-based approaches, their literary representations have received limited scholarly attention, creating a gap in research. This paper examines environmental degradation in Aliyu Kamal's *Fire in My Backyard*, arguing that environmental education is essential for raising awareness about harmful attitudes towards nature and for promoting positive actions for its preservation. The novel has been selected because it depicts characters who actively educate communities on the need to desist from environmentally destructive practices. Using environmental justice ecocriticism as its theoretical framework, the study explores issues of ecological neglect and unequal exposure to environmental harm. The findings reveal that characters in the novel engage in sustained awareness creation to enlighten people about environmental preservation. The study concludes that environmental health is fundamental to human sustainability and that any action aimed at preserving the Earth is both necessary and worthwhile. This underscores the role of literature as a tool for social consciousness, advocacy, and behavioral change in addressing environmental problems in Northern Nigeria, and similar contexts across the developing world.

### Introduction

Environmental degradation has emerged as an urgent planetary concern, not only because it threatens the ecological foundations of human survival but also because it has become a terrain of inequality, power and social injustice. Across different regions of the world, ecological crisis are rarely neutral in their impact; rather, they disproportionately affect communities that are economically and politically marginalized. In sub-Saharan Africa, environmental challenges such as deforestation, desertification and climate variability have intensified existing vulnerabilities, undermining livelihoods, food security and social stability. Northern Nigeria represents a particularly critical site of this crisis, where advancing desertification and large-scale deforestation continue to erode the ecological and social fabric of everyday life.

In northern Nigeria, environmental degradation is driven by a combination of human and structural factors, including unsustainable land-use practices, dependence on fuel-wood, population pressure, agricultural expansion and weak environmental governance. The steady southward movement of the Sahara has resulted in the loss of arable land, shrinking water bodies, declining soil fertility, and increased competition over natural resources. These ecological disruptions have far-reaching consequences, ranging from food insecurity and rural poverty to displacement and communal conflict. While government and scientific discourses often frame desertification and deforestation as technical or climate problems, such approaches frequently neglect the lived experiences of those who bear the brunt of environmental decline and the unequal distribution of ecological harm.

At the global level, environmental sustainability has become central to policy and academic discourse, as reflected in frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which recognize the interdependence of ecological health and social well-being. Yet environmental problems are never purely ecological; they are deeply entangled with political economy, governance structures and social hierarchies.

Environmental justice scholarship draws attention to these intersections by emphasizing that marginalized populations often suffer disproportionate exposure to environmental risk while benefiting least from resource exploitation and development initiatives. This perspective is especially relevant to Northern Nigeria, where rural communities dependent on land, water, and forests, experience environmental loss as a direct threat to survival, dignity and cultural continuity. Despite the urgency of these challenges, literary representations of desertification and deforestation in northern Nigeria have received limited critical attention. African environmental literature has often focused on extractive economies such as oil exploration in the Niger Delta, while the slow, less spectacular violence of land degradation in the northern region remains comparatively unexplored. Yet, literature provides a vital space for articulating the human dimensions of environmental change, capturing how ecological degradation is perceived, narrated, and morally negotiated within everyday contexts. Through storytelling, fiction can expose forms of environmental injustice that remain obscured in official narratives and policy documents.

This paper situates Aliyu Kamal's *Fire in My Backyard* within this critical gap, reading the novel through the lens of environmental justice ecocriticism. Environmental justice ecocriticism expands traditional ecocritical concerns with nature by foregrounding questions of inequality, responsibility, and power in environmental discourse. It examines how environmental harm is unevenly distributed and how literary texts reveal the social, political, and institutional structures that sustain ecological neglect. In a postcolonial context such as Northern Nigeria, this framework is particularly productive, as it allows for an analysis of environmental degradation alongside issues of marginalization, governance failure, and socio-economic exclusion.

In *Fire in My Backyard*, Kamal offers a compelling fictional portrayal of how deforestation and desert encroachment reshape domestic and communal spaces into sites of vulnerability and contestation, the novel depicts environmental degradation not as an abstract phenomenon but as an intimate presence that intrudes into homes, livelihoods, and social relations. Through its narrative, the text exposes the complicity of state institutions and economic practices in perpetuating ecological decline, while illustrating how ordinary people, especially rural and agrarian communities-disproportionately suffer the consequences of land depletion and resource scarcity. In doing so, the novel aligns with environmental justice ecocriticism's insistence on linking environmental harm to systemic inequality and social accountability.

Beyond its critical exposure of environmental injustice, *Fire in My Backyard* also performs an educative function. By foregrounding observation, dialogue and ethical reflection, the novel cultivates ecological consciousness and invites readers to consider the moral implications of environmental neglect. It connects environmental degradation to broader concerns of citizenship, communal responsibility, and sustainable coexistence with nature. This paper argues that Kamal's narrative demonstrates the capacity of literature to function as a form of environmental education, fostering awareness and encouraging community-based responses to ecological crises.

Ultimately, by examining *Fire in My Backyard* through the lens of environmental justice ecocriticism, this paper contributes to African environmental literary scholarship by centring Northern Nigeria as a significant ecological and cultural space. It proposes that literary narratives can challenge ecological marginalization, illuminate the human costs of desertification and deforestation, and imagine a more just and sustainable environmental futures.

Macaulay B. M., in a study titled: *Land Degradation in Northern Nigeria: The Impacts and Implications of Human-Related and Climatic Factors* opines that activities of humans like “agricultural expansion/intensification, pastoralism and fuel-wood extraction and climate/physical factors such as rainfall variability and land atmosphere feedback are the causes of land degradation in Northern Nigeria” (268). Similarly, in a study titled: *Social Realist Themes in Selected Novels of Adamu Kyuka Usman, Safiya Ismaila Yero* discussing the causes of environmental degradation, wrote that “In Nigeria however, environmental issues are many, diverse and caused by man’s interaction with nature (environment); both in the cities, where industrial activities predominate and rural areas where agriculture thrives” (34).

Furthermore, at the 25th Inaugural lecture of the University of Abuja, (2017) titled *Creative Writers, Climate Change and Eco-Activism: Implications for Food Security and Extinction of Species* by Effiok Bassey Uwatt, he stated that the causes of environmental degradation can be grouped into two broad categories which are; climate change and global warming. He goes on to state that climate change and global warming results from the activities of humans which contribute to degrading the environment. Commenting on environmental awareness, he is quoted thus; “The confirmation of climate warming which took meteorologists twenty to thirty years and the current stampede to climate summit to fashion out solutions, were already not only confirmed by writers in their creative works of about the same period, they had also raised alarm over it and had gone further to proffer solutions through both sensitization for attitudinal change and sociopolitical activism against environmental injustice... Many Nigerian writers through imaginative creations have expressed concern over ecological and environmental threats in two ways: Either through sensitization on environmental and ecological threats through attitudinal change or Eco-activism against environmental injustice and marginalization” (16).

He states further, “They used their novels, plays and poetry to sensitize the world that climate change results from excess carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses, automobile burning of fossil fuels, burning of wood and charcoal, methane from fermenting substances, anthills and logging of trees which constitute the carbon dioxide sinks. Nigerian writers also go beyond sensitization on causes and dangers of climate change to equally involve in eco-activist struggle to restore our lost Eden environment” (50).

The above analysis by these scholars aligns with this study as it portrays some of the causes and consequences of environmental degradation in northern Nigeria which are as a result of the activities of humans such as mining, farming, logging, industrialization, etc. It also depicts the situation that is obtainable, which has resulted in clashes between farmers and pastoralists in each group’s quest for environmental resources. In addition, Nigerian creative writers were at the forefront of creating awareness on climate crisis through their novels, plays and poetry while also being vanguards of environmental activism.

## Theoretical Framework

Ecocriticism as a theory plays an essential part in the examination of nature and human interaction. Recently, ecocriticism has attracted the attention of various academicians and indeed it has been an interesting field of investigation in literature. As literature lovers and readers, it becomes vital to humans to understand the theory as well as the different areas associated with it. The lives of humans cannot be separated from literature nor from the environment.

Ecocriticism focuses on the relationship between human life and the environment. The term ecocriticism was gotten from two Greek words – ‘*oikos*’ meaning household and ‘*kritis*’ meaning to judge. The actions of man are based on his social and cultural environment, as he is a social being. The reflection of man towards nature is in accordance to his cultural adaptations. The focus of ecocriticism is on the values and mistakes formulated by humans which are mirrored in numerous publications by diverse authors.

William Rueckert used the term ecocriticism in his essay titled *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*. Rueckert implied by this term “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature” (xix, 2009, Glotfelty). His definition was primarily concerned with the science of ecology and as such narrower in scope than all those who followed him. From that period till the 1990’s, the literary academic community had no record of any official movement. *The Environmental Imagination* by Lawrence Buell puts nature writings inside the range of canonical and mainstream American literature. Buell’s writings offer an in-depth as well as a thorough comprehension of nature writing. However, ecocriticism’s definition is attributed to Cheryll Glotfelty. Ecocriticism according to her is:

the relationship between literature and the physical environment.... Ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. Ecocritics and theorists ask questions like the following: How is nature represented in this sonnet? What role does the physical setting play in the plot of this novel? Are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? How can we characterize nature writing as a genre? In addition to race, class and gender, should place become a new critical category? (G and F, xvii - xix).

Ecocriticism’s definition by Glotfelty encompasses different social, cultural, and political opinions, and her questions follow a deductive order, starting with the most general and ending with the most specific. These assumptions clearly highlight the role of ecocriticism and its interconnectedness with other literary aspects. In his book *Writing the Environment*, Richard Kerridge came up with a similar definition to that of Glotfelty and added that:

The eco-critic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part concealed, in a great many cultural spaces. Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis. (Kerridge & Sammels, 1998: 5)

Although Kerridge's definition echoed Glotfelty's, it specifically highlighted the importance of responding to environmental crisis.

Michael P. Branch and the first president of ASLE, Scott Slovic, in the introduction to the ASLE Reader (1993-2003) define the term ecocriticism as:

The study of explicitly environmental texts by way of any scholarly approach or, conversely, the scrutiny of ecological implications and human nature relations in any literary text, even texts that seem, at first glance, oblivious of the non-human world. In other words, any conceivable style of scholarship becomes a form of ecocriticism if it is applied to certain kinds of literary works; and, on the other hand, not a single literary work anywhere utterly defies ecocritical interpretation, is off-limits to green reading. (Callicott & Frodeman, 2009: 225)

According to both definitions, ecocriticism is a broad field that applies the critical analysis to a wide range of areas, including formalism, structuralism and gender studies (225). Therefore, it is feasible to apply ecocritical principles within other theoretical frameworks, like feminism, marxism and historicism. The aforementioned ecocritics have defined ecocriticism utilizing various wordings, as a result, having meaning which is the same; that the ecosystem in which man is surrounded cannot be distinct from the identity of man himself. Humans have made progressive movement towards industrialization as well as modernization. However, his main personality resides only in existing with nature, worshiping, adoring it, together with being one alongside it. In simple terms, ecocriticism can be defined as man's relationship with his natural environment.

#### **Environmental Justice Ecocriticism:**

This approach looks at how literature and culture represent issues of environmental justice such as the unequal distribution of environmental benefits and burdens based on race, class and other factors. Environmental justice literary criticism is a literary criticism that "recognizes how social issues and environmental degradation are inextricably linked and sees literature as an effective tool in voicing multiple perspectives and concerns that are not restricted by place, time or reality is a much-discussed issue within the field of second wave of ecocriticism" (Buell, 8). People living in poor communities do less harm to the environment and are not least responsible for such human induced climate change issues as global warming. But unfortunately, these people are the first victims of climate change induced disasters. In this regard, *Environmental Justice Reader* (2002) is a landmark that has tried to direct the ecocritics' attention toward "a fusion of cultural constructionism and social justice concerns" (Buell, *Emerging Trends* 96). Buell gives so much emphasis on this feature of second wave ecocriticism that he goes on to say that "the environmental justice - the maldistribution of environmental benefits and hazards between white and non-white, rich and poor - is second wave ecocriticism's most distinctive activist edge, just as preservationist ecocriticism was for the first wave" (Buell 96). Social or environmental justice issues of second wave ecocriticism have been concerned with the endangered landscapes and "marginalized minority peoples and communities both at home and abroad - and with texts that engage such concerns, both from high art and from vernacular culture" (Buell 97). The attention to the writings of the non-white writers and concern for "the flight of racial minorities" of the second wave

ecocriticism gradually led itself to a fusion between ecocriticism and postcolonialism. As Buell says in *Ecocriticism: Some Emerging Trends* that “environmental justice ecocriticism’s investment in marginalized communities connects it with a second emergent initiative: postcolonial environmentalism” (98).

### **Environmental Degradation in *Fire in My Backyard***

Kamal in the novel depicts that two major challenges (desertification and deforestation) breed other problems such as unemployment, poverty, rural-urban migration among others. One of the impacts of environmental degradation on the populace in the novel is poor harvest. In Northern Nigeria, the major occupation of most rural dwellers is subsistence farming and over the years farmers have been experiencing poor harvest as confirmed by the Head Farmer of Rumbu in a conversation with Umar-Faruq;

“You all don’t know how to farm.”

“We’ve been farming here for generations,”

“And harvesting inadequate grains.”

“We reap what Allah gives us.”

“I am here to inform you, that you can harvest better yields, which would last you longer than the usual six months when you begin to experience the totally unnecessary phase called the famine season.” (p. 10-11)

Another impact highlighted by the Head Farmer is hunger and poverty which the people experience as quoted below:

It is regrettable for farmers to spend half the year without any grain in their family grain-stores. But how are you going to prevent what has been happening right from the days of our grandfathers? (p. 12)

Farmers in particular and the nation, in general, have been going through trying times for many years: when the farmer doesn’t have enough to eat, the whole nation goes hungry as well. (p. 13)

Describing the condition of the farmer and the threat they pose to the environment during the famine season, Umar-Faruq said: “...a man who, in collision with firewood tycoons, was retaliated by aiding the advancement of the degradation of the environment.” (p. 10)

He goes on to describe another;

Tala’s father was fatalistic. He produced little grain from his tiny farm and would remain poor forever so long as he refuses to change his vocation or his attitude to it. As a failed farmer, who would choose the easy option of woodcutter, he was a danger to the environment... (p. 95)

From the above, it is evident that year in year out, farmers have been tilling the soil but have not been experiencing good yields and they face difficulty and poverty as they are unable to farm during

the 6 months long dry season due to the nature of the soil and the lack of water. As a result of this trying times that the farmer goes through and the fact that for some months his farm doesn't produce any crops, he is placed in a desperate situation which makes him resort to other means of earning a livelihood, not caring about the consequences of his action on the populace and what happens to the environment. This is confirmed by Umar-Faruq in the following sentences:

Umar-Faruq could see the latter tree looking disfigured and knobbly where it tried to cover up its wounds with fresh growth even while further depredations were inflicted on other parts of the trunk. The tree suffers and man, in his effort to alleviate himself of his own suffering, as the culprit. (p. 64)

I want us to produce food, but I also want us to save our trees from rampant logging. The tree is the easy solution to the farmer's destitution during the dry season when there are no crops to tend, and when the farmer cuts trees down for fuel, and earns some money from sales to tide him until the return of the rains. (p. 13-14)

From the above, it is clear that farmers due to the hardship and poverty they face during the dry season, collaborate with loggers in degrading and contributing to deforestation in Northern Nigeria. Deforestation is a major environmental problem in the North as it poses great harm to humans, animals and properties. The harms of deforestation on humans as depicted in the text is portrayed below when Umar-Faruq pays a visit to Aunt Dija:

The house had changed. As he waited for her to emerge from what he assumed to be the loo, he surveyed the focus of change - a shallow hole in the centre of the cemented floor. The only tree in the house had been cut. The compound looked stark, bare, barren. It brought the thin eroded walls, the bulging roofs, letting in water during stormy weather, into sharp focus. What relief could the rooms offer the family during hot afternoons? (p. 25-26)

The above depicts the consequence of the cutting of one tree, what then can be said regarding the frequent logging that takes place in the forests? In describing his family and some individuals who were culprits of logging, he said:

How seriously he took his family - well, his opinion of them is this: they were burners of scarce woodland resources; they were selfish users of firewood who didn't care a fig about the people whose lives were endangered by the family's depredations to the environment; they were aiding the advancement of the Sahara Desert, enjoying in the meantime, the comfort of the ignorance of the catastrophe. (p. 3)

...other than what the environment, as it was turned barer, drier and starker by the minute had evidently shown as an urgent need for sustainable utilization. (p. 4)

You, Kumbo, are the burner of the very resources that I am planning to persuade people to use in a sustainable way;...a job you believe you will excel in by burning

plentiful wood in your bogus attempt to produce soups and broths the delicacy of which no woman would ever dream of preparing. (p. 294)  
...or in the likelihood of catching the culprits who were still bent on poisoning all the remaining population of trees. (p. 300)  
At Rumbu. The most devastating cutting is going on there. I want to stop all that...(p.305)

Moving on to describe the larger condition of the environment at Rumbu, he said:

Yet the sorry condition he found them in extinguished the cheer in which he came out this morning to continue with his project. Trees not growing in bush farms were not protected and fell victim to cut-and-burn agroforestry. The wanton exploiters took to the trees in the same manner the average Nigerian takes to government property - it is free; it doesn't belong to anyone; it is a legitimate object to plunder. (p. 123-124)

But the greater majority fell under the loggers' axe and ended up as that commodity whose over-exploitation could lead to the end of all the forest energy-resources, firewood.... he has at long last stepped on the fringes of a vast energy resources that the logger considered his piece of pegged ground, his area of operation, a place, idiomatically, where he could eat his cutlet of dog-meat without even bothering to boil it. (p. 125)

Unfortunately, the tree leafed only in dry weather - and so attracted the sticks of herdsmen who plucked the nutritious leaves as a supplement to the loss of carotene in dull, brown grass. (p.128)

...their concerns for sustenance prevented them from considering the harmful effects of their logging activities. They did them naturally on the side along with food production and presumed them to be "all right", "safe" and "as part of farming" for falling within their sphere of duties as toiling farmers. (p. 129-130)

Bush burning by farmers also results in desertification, farmers are known to light fires on vegetations while they wait idly for the rains as confirmed by the grassland ecologist.

As the subsistent farmers idly waited for the return of the rains, they doubled as amateur hunters and set the vegetation on fire, and catching the edible rats and rodents, reptiles and leftover ruminants fleeing from the scorching undergrowth. (p. 136)

At the Federal Government Reserved Area, the entire forest floor has been trashed. All green matter, as of grass, as of leaf cover, had been turned to sorry black. Only the ribbons of pathways retained some of the colour of the light soil in which they

lay as they criss-crossed pieces of wooden columns ruined to silence and bereft of all categories of feathery songsters. (p. 136-7)

Yet thorn bushes, their counterparts to the leftovers, energy resources of a soil spoilt of its nutrients by prolonged grass-fires was precursory to desertification.” (p. 145) Such acts result in “the loss of soil nutrients, the hardening and compaction of the soil, the escalation of the temperature and the likely side effects on the ozone layer... (p. 137)

Animals are also affected when bushes are burnt as their habitat is destroyed, farmers take time in “catching the edible rats and rodents, reptiles and leftover ruminants fleeing from the scorching undergrowth.” (p. 136)

“With most of the trees felled, the forest regime had more shrubbery than trees.” (p. 145) Deforestation results in desertification, land degradation, destruction of soil structure and exposes the soil to bush burning as depicted in the text. The author portraying the impact of desertification in the North highlights Umar-Faruq’s observation on his visit to Aunt Dija: “The house in the phraseology of the concerned scientist was a microcosm of Northern Nigeria, a sub-Saharan region facing disaster and ruin. Logging continued while the desert sands were creeping slowly towards the denuded fields.” (p. 26)

Another challenge posed by desertification in the North is shortage of water. This is portrayed in the following lines:

...as Umar-Faruq walked away to look at the well. There was at least some water in it, but the water-tap standing by the wall had dried up. A bucket had been placed under it for the negligible drops of water to collect therein. The reservoir supplying the city had either dried up, or there were too many mouths going for the few sips available.” (p. 26)

There were wells in some of the farm he sampled but they had either dried up or contained evil-smelling water... (p. 115)

Land expansion is yet another effect of environmental degradation discussed in the novel as depicted in the following lines:

To that end, he next embarked on a careful study of shrubland - a large area of vegetation between farmland and bush. He was surprised to find it interspersed with bush-farms, leading to the hypothesis that farmers who could not produce enough grain (enough for consumption and for trade) moved into the lands surrounding their farmlands to grow more food and fill up the deficit. (p. 123)

Such land expansion by farmers have resulted in clashes between farmers and herders in various states within the North and in other parts of the country. One other effect of environmental degradation on the populace is rural-urban migration which leads to over population of the cities as

stated by Umar-Faruq “Idle farm-hands deserting their villages and going to towns in search of jobs is another instance of culturalism. Many never make the return journey; they over populate cities and, like the forest vegetation set alight, put them to waste... My concern is to draw the exiles back to the village where and persuade them to leave our arboreal treasures alone.” (p. 228)

### **Environmental Education in *Fire in my Backyard***

Environmental Education refers to a systematic process of teaching individuals about the functioning of natural environments and how humans can live in harmony with them. Environmental education is a process that helps people become aware of their surroundings. They learn about their environment, develop positive attitudes towards it, acquire skills to protect it, and gain the motivation to take action. This includes all efforts to educate the public and other audiences, such as printed materials, websites, media campaigns, etc. The act of promoting awareness on environmental education was undertaken by Kamal, first, through the writing of this novel. As the story not only serves as a means of entertainment and creating awareness, but serves the purpose of educating readers about the dangers and consequences of environmental degradation.

In the novel *Fire in My Backyard*, Umar-Faruq an environmental campaigner uses his knowledge of grassland ecology to educate the people of Kano (Rumbu village in particular) on the dangers of tree felling and how to improve poor farm yields. Below are some instances from the novel depicting his environmental education campaign.

The facts he would divulge he had been collecting and was still amassing. It was his civic duty to reveal his research findings piecemeal, as it were, to the leader of a group of people whom he looked forward to working with, in the immediate future, in an effort to avert what could be a catastrophe of the greatest proportions. (p. 2)

Umar-Faruq was aware that Sadiq had tried, in his phrase, to make the family see reason. (p. 3)

I come to enlist you in a global concern. (p. 8)

I want to interest you in an environmental project. (p. 9)

I have been conducting research on plant ecology and animal husbandry. It is my intention to share the research findings with you in an effort to improve the worsening food situation, on the one hand and the degradation of the environment, on the other. (p. 12)

The above conversation was between Umar-Faruq and the Head Farmer of Rumbu, whom the former visited to enlighten him about the dangers of incessant logging carried out by farmers during the dry season when farmers experience famine. Umar-Faruq goes on to educate the Head Farmer on the reasons why they are experiencing poor harvest and how to improve their harvest and farming practices. He also suggests alternative fuel that can be used instead of wood. Umar-Faruq went further to “Rumbu”, the Head of the village to enlighten him about environmental education on trees. He is quoted saying:

My aim is to share with you my knowledge of the dangers inherent in the over-exploitation of wood, and of the rewards of controlled logging. I come to conduct some work on farmland, on shrubland and on woodland, and see how doing one thing than another will help us to know much more about the environment and the best way to safeguard it. (p. 71-72)

Speaking about the importance of trees, Umar-Faruq said;

Trees, the grassland ecologist, as the bus approached Rumbu, concluded, whether in fiction or in real life, were a refuge to man. In the imaginary world, the tree, in its hollowed trunk, offers protection either to lovers fleeing from monsters or to footsore travellers from wild animals. In the natural world, it provides a clubhouse for social gatherings and petty-trading, a cornucopia of delicacies and a cure for any ailment arising, in especial, from that common foible, indulgence. (p. 66)

When the Umar-Faruq visited the ruler of Rumbu community to enlighten him about his purpose and mission in the community and to dissuade them from constant logging, he is told by Rumbu's aide that;

But, surprisingly, no one has ever come to us talking about trees unless they want to cut down some..... Even the government has not forbidden cutting down trees. (p.71)

This indicates that the government in connection with some individual connive in engaging in deforestation to the detriment of the masses.

The grassland ecologist continued in his task wherever he went in the village of Rumbu in enlightening the people about environmental education. Below is an excerpt when he accompanied the youth leader, Jarmai to the house of Iya, an old woman. He said: "I come to do a lot of things to do with farmlands, grasslands and trees." (p. 83)

Also, Umar-Faruq took his campaign further by publishing environmental educative articles in *The Ecologist*. The author described it thus:

He had at this stage of the research initiative written a number of scholarly articles and was busy putting finishing touches to "The girth-size spectra of *Adansonia digitata*. (p. 147)

Furthermore, Umar-Faruq while educating a young lady (Dela, who was in love with him but did not reciprocate her love) about the environment said: "I have only talked about my work, about trees." (p. 152) Umar-Faruq also detailed his beloved (Saudat) about environmental education to which she said: "Indeed it is. You must tell me all about it even if it will take the whole night." (p. 228)

Umar-Faruq's environmental education campaign was also felt at home as he took his campaign to his father, who is a fuelwood energy tycoon. In a conversation with his father, he is quoted as saying:

There are many cases of different forms of environmental degradation the world over. Concerned citizens have come together, sometimes with the help of governments to solve the problem. In our own case, here in Kano, there is the risk of all the land being smothered by the Sahara Desert. I intend to persuade people to change their ways, and to work along with me to make the environment a better, safer and healthier place to live and work in. (p. 257)

A final instance in the novel is portrayed where, the grassland ecologist educated the attendees of the party organized by Kumbo and Dela which turned sour. He is depicted as saying: "...so that you can continue with your evil deeds to the detriment of planet Earth and to the detriment of all the populace, women and men." (p. 295)

The grassland ecologist through his knowledge was able to identify the environmental degradation in his community, create awareness on environmental education and this education yielded positive results in Rumbu community and back home, as the people of the community and his brother and father became vanguards of positive change. Below are excerpts depicting the efforts of Umar-Faruq and his eventual success.

That the young man, in an effort at the conservation of trees the Hausa had been burning ever since the discovery of the triple-stone cooking-stone, would henceforth try to deprive the family of their only means of livelihood. (p. 5)

The task for the young scientist was to persuade the local farmer to desist from all the rampant logging, to let the forests regenerate, to slow down the advancement of the desert sands and to spare the biosphere of the danger and the degradation as to which it had all but succumbed. (p. 66)

He had, the grassland ecologist, succeeded, as he chose to phrase it, in killing two birds with one stone. He could now in similar vein thank his stars for the accomplishment of the rehabilitation of Tala and Tanko, which former was used to be known and called Dela, and which latter, Kumbo. (p. 298)

It was in anticipation of that charitable deed that the grassland ecologist, when he finally arrived at his brother's residence, at Hotoro, unraveled his plans and not only succeeded in persuading the dread-locked "cyberite" to think again....but also to have him to agree to serve as the technical partner responsible for the research and the development of the hardware for Umar-Faruq to use in his campaign to spread the message of environmentalism in Rumbu and beyond. (p.301)

I am a grassland ecologist. I want to persuade people to use our woodland resources in a sustainable way. I went to the Rumbu bush and conducted a five-year research on energy resources and now want to build my headquarters to serve as the centre

of operations. Sadiq has agreed to be my technical partner, he is good with engines. He can build suitable machines for use in the fields by farmers, or in the kitchens by women - all in the effort to prevent waste of our resources. (p. 305)

I want to stop all that. I want to experiment with grass which Sadiq can help me to mould for use as fodder and into briquettes for use as kindling. In this way, we can save the trees from extinction. (p.305)

I have from today given up the firewood trade. (p. 307)

## Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Aliyu Kamal's *Fire in My Backyard* offers a compelling literary intervention into contemporary environmental discourse by foregrounding the interconnectedness of ecological degradation and educational responsibility. Through an ecological lens, the text exposes how human negligence, poor environmental ethics and inadequate ecological awareness exacerbate environmental crisis within the community it portrays. Kamal's narrative does not merely lament environmental destruction; rather, it underscores education as a transformative tool capable of reshaping human-nature relationships and fostering sustainable consciousness.

By situating environmental degradation within socio-cultural and pedagogical contexts, the novel challenges readers to reconsider the role of education beyond formal instruction, presenting it as a moral and civic responsibility essential for environmental stewardship. The findings of this study reveal that Kamal positions education as both a means of resistance against ecological abuse and a pathway towards environmental regeneration. Consequently, *Fire in My Backyard* emerges as a significant contribution to African ecocritical literature, reinforcing the argument that literary texts can function as powerful sites for environmental advocacy and social reorientation.

Finally, this study affirms that ecocritical readings of African literature remain vital for understanding localized environmental challenges while contributing to global environmental debates. By intertwining literature, environment and pedagogy, Kamal's work calls for a renewed commitment to ecological awareness, ethical education, and collective responsibility in addressing the pressing environmental crises of our time.

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