

A PARADIGM SHIFT IN IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION: AN EXPLORATION OF ZAYNAB ALKALI'S STYLE CHOICES WITH REGARDS TO CORRUPTION, SOCIO-POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND INSECURITY IN THE INITIATES

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ABSTRACT

Zaynab Alkali is a leading Nigerian feminist writer who has explored gender ethos as her main ideological concern. However, Alkali in her last fiction, *The Initiates*, deviates from the feminist ideology to the Marxist aesthetics, where corruption, socio-political instability and insecurity are the focal thematic concerns. This paper, therefore explores Alkali's paradigm shift in ideological viewpoint with emphasis on language and style. The eclectic approach is adopted as the theoretical framework where insights have been drawn from Systemic Functional Grammar, Formalism and Marxism. Extracts bearing style and language use have been analysed in the light of the themes of corruption, social instability and insecurity. The paper reveals that Alkali's experimentation with style in language use has resulted in her appropriation of stylistic devices such as: descriptive focus, code mixing and code switching, silence filler, figures of speech, anecdote, rhetorical questions, proverbs, local expressions, repetition, lexical choices, flashback,

morphological innovations, allusion, text incorporation, parallelism and graphological devices to encode her message.

Key Words: Feminist writers, Ideological perspective, style choices, corruption, socio-political instability and insecurity.

1.0 Introduction

Zaynab Alkali is one of the prolific female writers from the northern part of Nigeria that has championed the cause of female autonomy and identity through the prose genre. According to Oba (2011), Alkali is prominent on her treatment of issues related to the women folk in a male dominated society. Alkali's position is that the African woman should be liberated from the shackles of the male influence and dominance. Women, particularly in the Africa, have suffered a lot of incarceration in a patriarchal society; even within the domain of religion, be it Christianity or Islam (Umoren and Acholonu, 2008). The stereotyping of women, especially in the African culture, has spurred Alkali as well as other African female novelists to explore the medium of literature to express the experience of women in a society fashioned in the image of the man.

This feminist ideology is what features prominently in all of Alkali's works. As an ideology, feminism emerged as a response to the oppression and injustice suffered by women and their quest for self actualisation. In the words of Ezeigbo (1996), "it emerged as a response to the oppressive and unjust laws and attitudes arrayed against women"(p.1). Feminism is a socio-political and economic ideology that is aimed at bringing to lime light what women go through in a male dominated society. It seeks to empower the woman and make her independent economically, socially and politically. Based on the feminist ideology, the woman should strive to build and motivate herself to succeed and achieve in life not necessarily only within the confines of marriage and motherhood, but also in all other stations of life. It challenges and encourages women to work hard for their self emancipation and actualisation.

Alkali has authored four novels and a short story. These works are: *The Stillborn* (1984), *Cobwebs and other stories* (1986), *The Virtuous Woman* (1987), *The Descendants* (2005) and *The Initiates* (2007). These works of hers, particularly the first four have enjoyed a plethora of critical responses from scholars and notable critics. Some of such critical responses are: Okereke (1991), (1996), (2003); Ekpenyong (1991), Njoku (1994), Ohaeto (1996), Chukwuma (2000) and Sotunsa (2008). These scholars and their criticisms have bordered on ideological issues that dominate *The Stillborn* and *The Virtuous Woman*. *The Descendants* is yet to enjoy copious literary comments as it is one of her latest published works. However, Etim and Eko (2009) and Kachua and Bisong (2010) have explored this novel, still within the ambience of feminism and gender issues, as well as the females' quest for identity and recognition.

The Initiates, Alkali's latest work is quite remarkable, especially in the thematic focus, artistic vision, style and ideological concerns. Unlike *The Stillborn*, *The Virtuous Woman* and *The Descendants*, *The Initiates*, is a deviation from the feminist ideology. *The Initiates* reflects more of the Marxist sociological underpinnings. This is sequel to the fact that the novel depicts class conflict between two factions - the Initiates (the less wealthy and down-trodden) and the non-initiates (the rich and oppressive class). The initiates in the novel represent those who belief in high moral standards and values of living an upright life of honesty and integrity. The non-

initiates are those who wallow in corruption, causing social instability and insecurity; represented by the government of the day headed by Magogo.

The plot revolves around Batanncha's family. Samba, Batanncha's son was involved in a military coup to overthrow the corrupt government. But the coup fails, resulting in tension and insecurity. Samba is arrested and the news gets to Batanncha, who with his friends – Bamusa and Batapchi, agrees to send Salvia, Bako and Baka on a mission to find out Samba's whereabouts in the city of Garpella. The city of Garpella is painted as a place of corruption; Salvia's going there is more like a night-mare because of his (Salvia's) drive for integrity.

However, at the end of the day Samba is released and comes back home maimed and disfigured as a result of the torment from those in government. Therefore, one sees how the two groups – the initiates and non-initiates war against each other. The corrupt practices of the government of the day affect the common citizens resulting in socio-political instability and insecurity. This occasionally drives Salvia into a state of unconsciousness. Alkali, through this novel demonstrates a shift in ideology, from feminism to Marxism. The Marxist ethos highlights the corrupt practices, social instability and national insecurity prevalent in modern day leadership, especially in Africa.

As earlier noted, *The Initiates* is Alkali's latest prose piece. Even though it shows a shift in ideological tenets of the writer, it is yet to attract copious literary commentary and criticism. The attempt made by Umoren and Acholonu (2008), emphasises gender issues. The woman folk is celebrated, represented by Mama Tata with strong moral and godly attributes. Language and style is not given priority, even though Alkali in this novel has experimented with these linguistic and literary concepts as style choices.

This paper therefore, sets out to explore how Alkali in *The Initiates* demonstrates a shift in ideological orientation from feminism to Marxism. This is done using linguistic and literary parameters as a depiction of the writer's style of communication. The stylistic approach to criticism is used against the background of the thematic concerns of the text to show corruption, socio-political instability and insecurity in *The Initiates*.

2.0 The Concept of Style and Stylistics

In a work of arts, language is carefully manipulated to communicate a writer's intended message. Language is the vehicle that drives the message in a work of literature from the writer to the reader. Thus, without language, literature would not be in existence. Language thus becomes a veritable tool in literature both for the writer who encodes and the critic who decodes. Osakwe (2012) echoes that language is the means by which we recount our experiences in the world. Through language, the human social system in relation to man in his environment is being articulated. This view is corroborated by Emama and Mede (2012), who assert that language is a complex communicative system that human daily activities are being expressed. Since literature dwells on human existence in relation to his environment, language cannot be divorced from literature.

The style of a writer is embedded in language. This paper examines some positions on style as they relate to language. Anyachonkeya (2003, p. 102) views style as being "unique to an individual", and is a mark of his or her "idiolect". This is evidenced in his remark that:

...style is unique to an individual and it marks his writing idiolect.

The features of style we find in literary text carry with them certain linguistic structures, since the style of a writer may not be discussed successfully in isolation of the language in which he writes. (Anyachonkeya, 2003, p. 102).

The features of style in a text are embedded in linguistic structures encoded in the language of the text. Thus, style becomes a creative writer's idiosyncrasy. This enables him to bare his or her mind to the reader.

Osgood (1960) views style as a device in the use of literary language. This is the manipulation of language to deviate from its norms of usage. When a language deviates from its accepted norm, it draws the reader's attention to the linguistic elements used in communication. A writer veers from the norms of language purposefully to achieve communication. Deviation from the norms of language makes the language of literature creative. Such deviations can be seen as a form of foregrounding. This is highlighting or making prominent certain linguistic elements to bring about meaning in a work of literature.

Agreeing with Osgood, Ogu (2003) views style from the point of view of deviation in language use. A writer's style is examined from the perspective of deviance. Thus, the linguistic stylistician is to account for the deviation of the literary language in a work and the effect of such a deviation in the work. Deviance according to Ogu brings about creativity in language use which is manifested at the syntactic, phonological and lexical level. Deviance brings about stylistic uniqueness in a text.

Reechoing this position, Lawal (1997) holds that style is a deviation from normal language use, but goes further to argue that style can also be viewed as the language habit of a person or group of persons to suit what they intend to communicate. Style here becomes the appropriateness of expression. That is, saying what is to be said in the appropriate manner in which it should be said.

Since the style of a writer is the raw material for the stylistician to work with, this paper examines some relevant literature on stylistics. Fowler (1979) and (1986), Banjo (1987) and Toolan (1990) view stylistics as a linguistic criticism of a text in a systematic, objective and comprehensive manner. Thus, with stylistic analysis, language elements are used to bring out the meaning of a literary work. This position is supported by Adegoke (1998) who clearly notes:

... Linguistic stylistics is concerned with both linguistic and literary factors ... linguistic stylistics seek to study the language used in literary texts with the aim of relating it to its artistic functions. Thus, linguistic stylistics does not simply focus on literary language for its own sake, it is also concerned with highlighting the thematic implications of the use of language in literary texts (1998, p. 181).

The field of linguistic stylistics is a recent phenomenon in literary studies that is aimed at enhancing the analysis and interpretation of a text. Thus, linguistic stylistics becomes the meeting ground of language and literature (Enkvist, Spencer, Gregory 1964, Hough 1972 and Widdowson 1991).

3.0 Theoretical Framework and Method of Textual Analysis

In this paper, we have adopted the eclectic approach, where insights have been drawn from Systemic Functional Grammar, Formalism and Marxism. The justification for the use of the systemic functional grammar is that it contains all the elements of language as an organised system functioning within a particular context (Bloor and Bloor, 1995, p. 3 and Ufot and

Thomas, 2016). According to Halliday (1977), language performs three meta-functions in textual analysis. These are: ideational, interpersonal and textual. Therefore, systemic functional grammar is applied in the analysis of language use in *The Initiates* as the style markers in this text are explored from the functional perspective within a particular social context.

Formalism as a theory is relevant in this study as it depicts how form is used to arrive at the message in the novel. Formalism in the views of Bennett (1979) and Bradford (1997), sees literature as an art form where linguistic features of a text create the textuality of such a text. Thus, for the formalist, literature should be examined from the linguistic point of view. Therefore, the isolation and analysis of linguistic style markers in *The Initiates* is foregrounded in formalism.

Because of the class struggle in the city of Garpella as presented by Alkali in the text under consideration, the Marxist theory is also adopted as a necessary facilitator of the framework of this study. Marx and Engels aver that every form of society is saddled with the oppressive activities of the oppressing class on the oppressed. This class difference is corroborated by William (1977), who maintains that in a civilised society, the struggle for economic and political space, without a defined framework, in most cases leads to conflict. Marxism as a literary theory fits in as a framework to explore the class identity between the initiates and non-initiates in the city of Garpella. This theory enables the study to capture and discuss the corruption and decay arising from the oppressive activities of the non-initiates, which result in a situation of social instability and insecurity in the novel. Without gain saying, Marxism as a literary theory shows Alkali's marked departure in her ideological leaning after over two decades as a feminist writer. However, the dominant theory in this paper is the systemic functional grammar because of its emphasis on the functions of language in a particular social context.

The method of textual analysis has been the examination of selected extracts that are related to thematic concerns of the novel. Also, extracts that language use shows the stylistic choice of Alkali in relation to the themes of corruption, socio-political instability and insecurity in the text have been selected and studied. The linguistic and literary stylistic markers in line with the aforementioned messages of corruption, socio-political instability and insecurity have been identified and discussed. The immediate and wider contexts are used to explore how language and style are variously applied to accommodate thoughts and messages in the text under study.

4.0 Textual Analysis of *The Initiates*

4.1 Descriptive Focus

Descriptive focus occurs 25 times and is basically used as style marker to describe, especially as it borders on the theme of the novel. For example,

The girl was painfully thin and skimpily dressed in faded jeans that barely covered her buttocks, a short blouse thrown on top that left her belly-button showing ... exposing young hairs which signified the beginning of manhood. (p. 63).

The extract above describes a young girl and a teenage boy who just came from the city. They are indecently dressed owing to the corrupt and morally bankrupt life they lived in the city. Alkali, through this descriptive focus, condemns this way of life as it was incompatible with the organised decent life in the village.

Another instance of descriptive focus that exposes corruption, social instability and insecurity is the extract describing the scene in the city where the political rally of the corrupt politicians holds:

They saw the grand pavilion like a lighted house in the middle of a sea and stood and watched it for a while. The movements were blurry. The crowd was great, close to a quarter of a million people. The hum and the buzz reached out and spread with the wind in the stillness of the night. (p. 95)

This scene is an arena where Salvia, Barka and Bako saw in the city while in search of Samba. The description is suggestive of some kind of religious cultism and political rally that characterised the government of the day, a government whose appointees sapped from the masses to enrich themselves.

4.2 Code mixing and Code switching

Code mixing and code switching occur 15 times and are mainly used for the purpose of “socio-ethnic affirmation” (Bassey, 2009, p. 86), as this adds some local colouration to the text. Some illustrations from the text are given in the table below.

Table 1

S/N	Code mixing and Code switching	Page	Function within the Text
1.	It would be nice to believe that, but as the Hausas would say, ‘ruwa bata tsa-min banza’ (It is not for nothing that the water is sour).	12	Expresses the uncertainty about the story that revolved around Samba in the city.
2.	‘Subona lai, Subona lai’, she exclaimed.	62	Expresses Mama Tata’s surprise for a boy and a girl from the city hugging and kissing publicly as man and wife when they are not. This shows disapproval for such act, thus depicting village life as having value for moral standards as opposed to the moral decadence that prevails in the city.

4.3 Silence Filler

Alkali also makes use of silence filler as a conversation strategy to build discourse in the novel. The estimated frequency of occurrence of this stylistic device in the text is in 5 places. Some examples for textual illustration are seen below:

‘Uhhh, uhhh’, he groaned as he gnashed at his teeth. (p. 4)

This device as illustrated in this extract expresses Batanncha's unhappiness over the arrest of Samba, his son in the city. Because of the uncertainty and the people's apprehension about the activity in the city, silence filler is also used to express fear and disapproval by the villagers of Salvia being sent to the city to search for his brother. This is expressed in the fact that Salvia's character of uprightness and integrity was not understood by those around him, who felt this might land him in trouble in the city. This is seen in the extract below:

'Strange family this is, and they think they are real clever, enh, enh, enh!' (p.42).

4.4 Figures of Speech

Figures of speech have been used by Alkali rhetorically as a stylistic stamp to drive home vital messages. Because they are quite many as they occur frequently, they shall be displayed in a tabular form to show their frequency of distribution.

Table 2

S/N	Figure of Speech	Frequency of Occurrence	Example	Page	Function
1.	Simile	25	Like a pus in a revered area, grief hung heavily in the air	150	Expresses the grief and unhappiness in Batancha's family over Samba's involvement in the coup.
2.	Metaphor	3	We are the nails that keep the structure of existence in place	120	Describing those who are not corrupt as the pillar of the society and source of security and social stability.
3.	Personification	3	As the light in the eyes of the Initiates grew dim, fear reared its head and took prominence, courage	121	Expresses the frustration that the pure and upright faced in a corrupt society, with socio-political

			failed and Hope fled.		instability and insecurity.
4.	Euphemism	2	The old man has not the slightest idea that the world is collapsing around his ears.	82	Expresses the fact all was not well in Batacha's family.
5.	Antithesis	4	As big and tall as he was, his voice was small and low.	110	Expressing contrast to show that corruption and the oppression of Magogo's government had silenced people up.
6.	Hyperbole	4	In her eyes he saw a multitude of emotions ...	159	Expressing relief and hope that Batanncha had people to rally round him during his trial period. Though his son may have been arrested in the city, all was not lost after all.

4.5 Anecdote:

The anecdotes on pages 6 and 7 emphasise the value of communal living as characterised by life in the village. This is in contrast with life in the city where corruption reigns and nobody cares what happens to his or her neighbor. This is evidenced in the story of Badu in the village, who died as a result of keeping to himself. Alkali condemns this kind of life style, while emphasising communal living.

4.6 Rhetorical Question

There is a preponderance of rhetorical questions as a stylistic device in this text. This will be displayed in a tabular form to show its frequency of occurrence as well as its stylistic relevance.

S/N	Examples	Page	Frequency of Occurrence in text	Function
1.	Should he live in fear of losing yet another son, when that son may perchance turn out to be the other's saviour, and the pride of the entire village?	21 & 22	31	Expressing why Salvia should not be sent to the city owing to the terrible things that the city in the context of the novel is associated with.
2.	How come it took him so long to recognize them, his blood brothers and sisters?	110	23	Expressing relief on Salvia's part to see some upright and people of integrity in the city despite the fact that corruption prevailed.

4.7 Proverbs

There is also a preponderance of proverbs to drive home certain messages in the novel. Specifically, proverbs occur in 13 places in *The Initiates*. This expresses Alkali's socio-linguistic and ethnic affinity with the thought pattern within the African milieu. The extract below is used as an illustration:

As they say, "the water does not turn sour for nothing." Our ears are wide open in this village; our noses, keen, we shall wait patiently until it rots (p. 42).

The extract above expresses the fact that it was unbelievable for one to be decent in a corrupt society in the person of Salvia. Corruption so much pervaded the society depicted in the novel that not being corrupt was quite unusual.

4.8 Parallelism

Parallelism is another style marker employed by Alkali in *The Initiates* to drive home the menace of corruption and the quest for social stability. This stylistic device is used 15 times which makes it quite striking and draws the reader's attention to its import in the text. In showing that revolution is the tool needed to fight the corruption perpetrated by the rich, Alkali employs the stylistic tool of parallelism. For example,

‘We must fight, ... We must unite and fight together. We must not surrender now ...’ ‘I have tried, but I have failed. (pp. 110-111).

This extract is a call from the leader of the initiates in the city calling for a fight against the corrupt government of Magogo. The pool of short and simple sentences above is call for a united force, strong and determined to fight the war against the corrupt leaders in government. The parallelism drives the message home. Also, Salvia’s rejection of corruption is expressed in the parallelism: ‘I can’t, I can’t and I can’t’, he repeated hopelessly’ (p. 122). The personal pronoun ‘I’ and the contracted negation verb ‘can’t’, express the fact that the fight against corruption is personal and demands some self will act of discipline.

4.9 Repetition:

In line with the quest for social stability, security and the fight against corruption, Alkali reiterates certain words as a stylistic way of emphasising their importance in relation to the thematic concerns of the novel earlier mentioned. The word ‘city’ occurs in pages 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26, 34, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 56, 64, 76, 77, 83, 89, 92, 93, 119, 121, 122, 137, 139, 140, 144, 145, 151, 153, 171, 172, 181, 184, 187 and 188. By the preponderance of ‘city’ as observed in the pages above, Alkali foregrounds the word and implies that the city is the seat of distraction, corruption and vice. This is why Salvia, the symbol of integrity found it unpopular to go there. Besides, it is in the city that Magogo’s government resides, nurturing and fertilizing crimes, vices and looting.

In addition, the word ‘stage’ is equally fore grounded through its occurrence so many times in the text. Pages 98, 99, 102, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 116, 118, 121, 124, 125, 140, 141, 142 are where this word occurs. The reason for this repetition lies in the fact that the word ‘stage’ in the text is a metaphor to depict the world of corruption. Similarly, ‘Magogo’ is repeated severally in page 107 to show its representation of the corrupt elite and government of the day.

4.10 Graphology

The common graphological devices found in *The Initiates* are mainly the use of italics and capitalisation. Italicised expressions are found in pages 12, 20, 24, 25, 62, 65 and 83. For example, the italicised expression “*Talk of sending the pure to the city...*” (p. 25) foregrounds Bantanncha and Batapchi’s reluctance to send Bako to the city. As earlier noted in this paper, the city is a metaphor for corruption and other myriad of social maladies that result in socio-political instability and insecurity. Sending Bako, a symbol of honesty and integrity becomes worrisome, perturbing and a thing of concern. Another striking instance of Alkali’s appropriation of italicised expression is “*khimandee, ya khimandee*” (p. 83). This expression, which is also an instance of code switching is an expression of Batanncha’s worried state over the condition of Samba, his son, in the city who is indicted of a coup attempt to overthrow the government of the day. The news of Samba’s welfare in the city causes psychological instability in Batanncha, which gave rise to the code switching that Alkali italicises. Capitalised expressions are seen on the first page of each chapter beginning as the title of such a chapter. Besides the use of capitalised and italicised expressions, there is the use of the bold print as seen in p113; in the word ‘*Initiates*’. These graphological devices add beauty to the style of the text.

4.11 Local Expressions

Through the use of local expressions, Alkali creates local colour with the English language, to give it some African flavor considering that the novel is Africa based. This is found

on pages 14 and 64: 'In my days, such things were done under the cover of darkness, (p. 64). This extract refers to a particular time that something ought to be done. This shows that those in the village were conscious of how and when things ought to be done than those in the city.

4.12 Lexical Choices

Lexical sets in line with certain subject areas are being deployed in *The Initiates*. On pages 36, 45 and 46, lexical choices associated with the military and suffering are being portrayed. This is sequel to the fact that the novel dwells more on issues pertaining to the corrupt and insecure regimes of the military that brought untold hardship and suffering to the people. Words and expressions such as 'senior military officers', 'executed', 'coup', 'arrested', 'General', 'tried' 'attempted coup', 'prisons' 'tortured', 'death', 'escaped', 'open borders', etc are being used. Also, lexical sets that expresses suffering, thus showing Alkali's shift in ideological focus is express on page 99. Some examples are shown thus: '... so thin ...', 'lips are parched ...', '... they look as if they are starving ...' 'My throat is dry ... 'my stomach rumbles with hunger.' (p. 99).

4.13 Flashback

In order to show that Alkali in this novel echoes the historical past of the nation Nigeria, there is the use of flashback as a stylistic choice to link the present corruption and socio-political instability as well as insecurity in the nation with some historical antecedents. This is evidenced in pages 47 to 48. This flashback continues up to page 55, where Salvia's birth is described. This is quite symbolic in the sense that although Salvia was born during the boom of corrupt leaders into a corrupt society, he is different. Alkali's message here exemplifies the fact that in a perverse society, one could still stand out and be upright. This is backed up by the flashback in pages 89, 90, 91 and 92, where corruption is condemned and high moral values upheld.

4.14 Morphological Innovations

The most common morphological innovations found in *The Initiates* are acronymy and borrowing. In page 86, the acronymy 'SSS', which implies State Security Service, indicates the group that was sent to arrest Samba after the coup. An instance of borrowing is seen in page 143 in the words 'Halleluya' and 'Amen'. These are words borrowed from the Christian religious lexicon expressing the praises showered on Magogo's government by the ignorant masses. This shows the need to create some form of awareness on the evil of corruption in our society.

4.15 Allusion and Text Incorporation

The story from the Bible of Peter walking on the surface of the water is alluded to by Alkali in pages 93 and 94 as a text incorporation. It stresses the need for some divine assistance from the voice of a living conscience. This is a metaphor for Salvia being the only one who refuses to be corrupt in the society. The patch of land symbolises Salvia and his virtue of uprightness. The vast mass of water symbolises the majority who are corrupt. The figure on the surface of the water signifies the call to integrity and uprightness.

This dream by Salvia is an instance of allusion and text incorporation from the Biblical story of Peter walking on the surface of the water to meet Jesus. Under normal circumstances, it is impossible to work on the water, but with Jesus' presence, it was possible for Peter. Thus, for Salvia, it is possible to stay incorrupt when he listens to the voice of his conscience.

5.0 Conclusion

For over two decades, Alkali has dwelt on the feminist ideology in her various works, particularly the early ones. However, as a mark departure, she deviates from gender issues to the Marxist philosophy in her last novel, *The Initiate*. Alkali in exploring the Marxist ethos within the literary corpus of the prose genre has explored with style in language use in *The Initiates*.

Style markers have been explored in the realisation of the theme of corruption, socio-political instability and insecurity within the confines of the novel studied in this paper. Therefore, it can be said that her shift in ideological perspective is a deliberate attempt to address a common trend that bedevils modern civil society. This is the issue of moral decadence, decay and insecurity prevalent in most African nations, and Nigeria in particular.

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