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## Changing Roles of Male And Female Characters in The Twenty First Century Women Writings: An Example of Zaynab Alkali's *The Initiates*

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### Abstract

*This paper examines the portrayal of both male and female characters in women's writings particularly Zaynab Alkali's *The Initiates* with a view to identify the transformation of her characters compared to her previous novels. Some women writers retain the traditional representation of successful radical female characters, who achieve liberation from whatever situation and perspective using role reversals to depict the male characters with negative roles. Writers like Alkali has defied the style and tradition adapted by early women writers like Nwapa and Emecheta in her *The Initiates* in order to depict the changing roles of both male and female characters which is in line with the changes in the modern society. The study uses postcolonial feminist theory because the theory stands resolutely in support of change and argues against generalization of women issues because of their diverse experiences. Using the selected novel, the paper argues that both male and female characters are assigned dignified roles with equal access to education and opportunities to display their capabilities. The study concludes that women writings, specifically Alkali's *The Initiates* have undergone transformation with little emphasis on gender issues, violence and oppression as typically found in most women writings.*

**Key words:** Social change, women writings, transformation, postcolonial feminism

### Introduction

Change concerns 'the transformation of society, whether gradual or rapid, over a given period of time. This alteration can be caused willingly, grudgingly or it can happen unconsciously' (Ekwierhoma, 2002, p.95). Within the society, change in the words of Wilmott (1985) is 'the alteration in the sources or organization of society or its component parts over time. It also concerns size, complexity, direction and functions' (p.174). Change on the other hand involves "pinpointing a before and after. This means in effect, that stages in the writing of a work,

or points of development noticed in comparing finished works, writing forms and even whole genres must be identified from the outside as it were: their points of stability and constancy must be fixed and identified so that contrasts, progressions and modifications can begin to be recognized (Daniel, 1980, p.275). This is important in identifying the progressions or modifications specifically, in the characterisation of both male and female characters in women writings.

The change in the representation of female began in the 1970's and





1980's. Mohammed (2007) indicates that 'the Nigerian civil war of 1966-1970 brought with it a wave of awareness to women and their representation in Nigerian Literature took a new form. This is exemplified in Nwapa's *Women at war* which describes the issue of war from the women's perspective. This new dimension given to the role of women in Nigerian literature as Mohammed puts gave second generation of Nigerian writers a better view of women. This is also indicated in Osofisan's *Morontodun* who "recreates the dynamism and resourcefulness of women like Moremi, 'woman of tremendous courage' (pp35-36). Women begin to play the role of characters that are courageous and hard working. These issues are also exemplified in Alkali's *The Descendants* where her major character is a woman who grapples with the challenges of her role as a woman and her new career.

The change in gender portrayal characterised by the emergence of the female writers in Nigerian literature further developed, especially in the 1980's with the upsurge of female writers. Early women writers started to write by rejecting the images of women projected by male writers and others try to glorify the roles played by women in society (Usman,2017,p.157). Early works written by women writers take radical steps in emancipating women and portray various kinds of oppression or subjugation women encounter in their lives. Hardships, betrayal, role reversals are the

distinctive features of women's writings. The writers aimed at bringing out the traditional constraints hindering women from succeeding in life. Female writers like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Ifoema Okoye, Akachi Udumora Ezigbo, Pheabian Ajibola Ogundipe Sefi Atta and Chimamanda Adichie among others. Likewise, from Northern Nigeria, we have female writers like Zaynab Alkali, Hauwa Ali, Halima Lawal Nana Aisha Ahmed Asabe Kabir and Razinat T. Muhammad. All these writers try to rewrite and depict the experiences of women from different perspectives.

In spite of the unchanged thematic and narrative concerns in prose fiction by female writers, there has been a great improvement or development in terms of voice construction and characterization. This is because women in early African literature were not heard until they started writing their novels and depicting their plight. Secondly, they take various steps in emancipating or correcting the images earlier portrayed by the male writers and proving the capabilities of women. While some female writers depict men in negative ways as evident in Nwapa and Emecheta's works, others give complementarily roles to both male and female characters. In view of this Alkali (2012) states:

Flora Nwapa of Nigeria admitted that the imaging of male characters in her works was a deliberate attempt to reverse the roles credited to





women by men. She claimed to have explored the theme of moral laxity as a direct response to earlier novels written by men on the theme of prostitution. The Jagua's of Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana*, the Simi of Soyinka's *Interpreters* and the Wanja's of Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Petal's of Blood* are promptly replaced by male pimps and prostitutes...(p.14)

Similarly, Nnolim (2009) argues that 'Nwapa's each representation of men was done with the intention of constructing a more favourable voice for the women. He says "Flora normally renders the men of no consequence to allow her superior women occupy centre stage, Emecheta proceeds to paint grotesque repulsive pictures of men" (p.140). This indicates that even among the critics, early women writings were seen from different perspectives as virtually all the male critics considered the style of role reversals to be a harsh one.

Also, Emenyonu (2010) observes that:

...both Nawal El Saadawi and Zaynab Alkali depict in their fiction male characters who even when striding as macho men, are portrayed moral weaklings... with Alkali, the men are portrayed as inadequate in masculine tasks. They are wimpy, degenerate, retarded and emasculated. They live a zombie like type of existence, systematically becoming irrelevant in family

relationships until their roles are taken over by the women folks.(pp.220-221)

Emenyonu's view explains the nature of characterization in the previous novels of Zaynab Alkali. Similarly, women writers have now started accommodating changes in terms of thematic preoccupation and characterization in their works. Alkali's *The Initiates* for example is described as text that " does not suffer from the representational austerity of *The Stillborn* and *The Virtuous Woman*, nor does it get over stuffed with a plethora of characters-the sheer remembrance of which tasks the reader's attention at the expense of the message"(Giwa, 2016,p.311). Indeed, Alkali's recent texts are different because the society has changed. Gender issues are no longer the concern of the female writers even though the issue has not been completely removed from their writings.

It is against this background that this paper examines beyond the woman's traditional roles or the issue of gender to the changing roles of both male and female characters in order to see the transformation and the recent shift in terms of context and concern in the selected novel.

### **Background To The Text**

This is a different type of Alkali novel because of the issues portrayed. It is a novel that deals with the issues of power and power relations between men and women. The images of both men and women have undergone transformation in the worldview of Alkali as evident in the novel. Alkali



carefully chooses her characters in this text. She portrays few female characters and many strong male characters like Salvia, Samba, Musa Ture, Batancha and Brigadier Hashim. Alkali's concern in this novel has shifted from strictly on the issue of gender and women emancipation to wider issues of power. Giwa (2016) indicates:

Zaynab Alkali has finally cleared the path of other writers like Buchi Emecheta whose feminist stance, according to Udumukwu is "destructive, nihilistic or anarchic". It is remarkable that for the first time, men take the centre stage in her narrative...Alkali has demonstrated that a woman is perfectly capable of handling male characterization as successfully as a man can handle that of the woman (p.313).

### Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial Feminist theory emerged in response to the limitations of both traditional feminist theories and postcolonial studies aiming to create a more nuanced analysis of women's experiences in the context of colonial legacies. Key figures include Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Chakravorty. Spivak has contributed on how colonialism affects women's identities and roles in society. The theory emphasise the importance of considering cultural contexts and historical background when analyzing women's issues,

advocating for voices from diverse backgrounds to be included in feminist discourse. The theory critiqued the western-centric narratives that dominate mainstream feminism, arguing that they often overlook or misrepresent the realities of women in nonwestern contexts. It advocates for solidarity among women across different cultural backgrounds while also recognising the complexities and differences that exist within their experiences due to factors like race, class and geography. Lewis and Mills (2003) argue that "it was the feminist intervention in mainstream postcolonial theory that led to an examination of the process whereby femininity and female stereotyping is entangled with the process of constructing a nationalist anti-colonial symbolism, the female signifying the precolonial, the traditional and the untouched domestic space" (p.3).

In his *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*, Young (2003) sums up the essential objectives of Postcolonial Feminism:

At its most general, postcolonial Feminism involves any challenge to dominant patriarchal ideologies by women of the third world. Such political activism may consist of contesting local power structures, or it may be the question of challenging racist or Eurocentric views of men and women (including feminists) in the first world.



In the postcolonial state, Postcolonial feminism begins from the perception that its politics are framed by the active legacies of colonialism by the institutional infrastructures that were appropriated by the colonial powers to elite groups or appropriated by later elites. All women working for equality against the many obstacles embedded in such a framework engage with these kinds of realities in post colony (p.109).

The significance of choosing postcolonial feminism as a working tool for this paper is because Postcolonial feminists reject all encompassing statements, like “man is this” or “woman is that”, and assume there is no one way to be a feminist. Postcolonial feminism dissolves the universal subject and the possibility that women speak in a unified voice or that they can be universally addressed. It has the capacity to embrace the diversity of global political and social life. This is because the theory stands resolutely in support of change.

### Review of Related Works

Alkali's literary works have received critical attention from critics and reviewers. One of the first comprehensive work on Zaynab Alkali and her works is Ojinmah and Egya's (2005) critical work titled *The Writings of Zaynab Alkali*. The work touches on four of Alkali's works: *The Stillborn*, *The Virtuous Woman*, *The Cobwebs and Others* and *The*

*Descendants*. They examined Alkali's thoughts on various issues that affect women and society at large. Considering the nature of Alkali's character portrayal in her early writings, critics like Giwa (2014) argues that ‘those that receive the unkindest treatment are the males. To effectively portray the nature of female domination in the society, the male is shown as weak character that lacks strength to relate fairly with his female counter part’(p.199). Ahmed (2005, p.3) in Giwa (2014) observes that ‘Zaynab Alkali has adroitly handled the issue of women struggle in *The Stillborn* by pairing a set of female/male characters. The writer presents the female character as animating and resilient while the male characters are characterized as inept and villainous’ (p.202). This view is further justified in Joyce (2015) who “describes the dualistic perpetration of women's domination and oppression and found semblance in the binaries that manifest in the abusive tendencies on nature just like in the woman's mind”(p.16) Liman (2001) analyses Alkali's *The Initiates* as an active propaganda from on the state of affairs in the Nigerian nation from a woman's view point. He sees the writer as “a committed artist, who interrogates the society on national issues, such as social depravity, military dictatorship, corruption and greed all within the gendered relationships”(p.30).

Ekpe and Oben (2018) argue that “Alkali deviates from her feminist ideology to Marxist aesthetics, where corruption, socio political instability



and insecurity are the focal thematic concerns. They indicate that "*The Initiates*, Alkali's latest work is quite remarkable especially in the thematic focus, artistic vision, style and ideological concerns. Unlike in *The Stillborn*, *The Virtuous Woman* and *The Descendants*, *The Initiates* is a deviation from the feminist ideology (p.12). Just like Ekpe and Oben, Chinade (2016) also shares the same view as he argues that "unlike Alkali's previous novels which are solely feminist fictions; *The Initiates* combines feminist political concerns. The novel as Chinade puts is Alkali's attempt at crossing over the fence for the first time to explore the possibilities of political fiction combined with more accustomed concerns of her earlier discussions of the woman question. Hence, even though women actually feature in *The Initiates*, the central focus and major actions of the novel revolve around men" (30). Similarly, Oyewole (2016) argues that "Alkali does not allow her social status to blind her from her background. Therefore, her quest is not to profess ideologies that wage war against men as it is the common practice among the radical feminists" (p.79). This is true as Alkali does not portray her male characters as pessimistic in her recent works. She provides roles that are important to them and to which they appear equal to the task of performing. Also, the way Alkali portrays her female and male characters indicate change in *The Initiates* which is a key concern in this paper.

### **Changing Roles of Men and Women in *The Initiates***

This is a novel that was published in 2007 and is a different type of Alkali's fiction. This is because it is her first novel that depicts the issue of power between men and women and also doesn't strictly emphasise on gender issues. Ekpe (2016) describes Alkali's *The Initiates* as 'a novel where Alkali has moved from exploring gender issues to examining the city and its attendant problems on man and the environment...[it] is a marked departure from her dwelling on the feminist ideology (p.84). *The Initiates* is the first novel of Alkali to deviate from feminist issues. Alkali carefully chooses her characters in this novel. She portrays few strong female characters like Avi Dayyan and many strong male characters like Salvia, Samba, Batancha, Musa Ture and Brigadier Hashim. This is not the case in some women's writings in their novels as indicated in Atta's *Everything Good will Come* which captures many strong female characters like Sheri, Enitan, Grace Ameh and male characters like Debayo, Brigadier Hussain, Niyi among others. Their depiction is quite different because the story revolves around women and their problems in the society. Atta's *Everything Good will Come* and *The Bead Collector* are examples of novels written by a woman writer who belong to the same generation with Alkali but with a different thematic concern. In *Everything Good will Come* for instance, the story revolve around a woman and there are many female characters who are



victims of abuse, patriarchy and divorce. The strong ones in the novel are the male characters like Niyi, Sunny, and Brigadier Hassan among other characters. Atta's style suggests continuity in line with early women writings while Alkali's *The Initiates* specifically indicates the new changes in women's writings. Alkali's artistic creativity has transformed through her ability to depict the issues of power and leadership in the society.

This particular trend in Alkali's writing is in line with Postcolonial feminists' arguments that are against universalizing the problems of women particularly third world women. The two styles of characterization expose the different categories and situation of women writers in the society because their concerns vary. This is because many factors have contributed to the changes in women's writings among which are modernity and the rise of modern woman. This equally reflects how the modern woman can survive and cope with the various challenges in the modern world as Avi Dayyan does in *The Initiates*.

Alkali's changes begin with the cover designs of her novels. The cover designs of most of her novels specifically *The Stillborn*, *The Virtuous Woman* and *The Descendants* shows photographs of women suggestive of the major characters like Li, Nana Ai and Umma Seytu respectively. However, the cover design of *The Initiates* contains the photograph of a man holding a stick which virtually suggests that

the novel contains issues related to men. This is as a result of Alkali's depiction of straight forward titles and cover designs that are not ambiguous. This announces the limit of what Alkali's texts portray and it signifies the change in her style of writing. This is evident as Ali (2017) indicates that covers present titles, image clues, and symbolic signs within the story plot usually.

Alkali's depiction of both female and male characters is quite different as she presents only one strong female character that is educated and is given the opportunity to work and cater for her family. This is in response to the negative depiction of women by men and western feminist depiction of the third world women in their works. This is evident as Mohanty (1991) argue that "contemporary western Feminist depicts third world women as poor, uneducated in contrast to educated modern woman. Mohanty further argues that third world women have been reduced into a single collective other"(p.56). That is why female writers like Alkali depict strong female characters in line with the changes in the modern society and the representation of women in western discourses. Avi Dayyan is portrayed as a successful and hopeful character though she is not married. She has passion for children and takes care of them. Avi Dayyan picks abandoned babies from the gutters and brings them up by herself. Alkali has not forgotten her focus where the female characters are always in a position to achieve





the best in life. Alkali describes Avi Dayyan as follows:

Avi Dayyan was Batancha's spitting image. The toad like face, the large scrutinizing eyes especially when she squinted the big flat nose and a sizeable forehead. Unlike Yelwa's sense of humour and gentle feminist; Dayyan was though looking and serious most of the time (p.72).

There is superiority over her twin brother, Salvia in the eyes of her father. As indicated in the novel, Salvia wonders why he could not sit and talk to his father the way Avi Dayyan does. Salvia felt a hallow feeling of alienation. The old man never looked at him that way. He still treats him like a child (p.70). This indicates that Alkali creates room for her female characters in the family if they work hard. For instance, Salvia father never discusses serious issues with him. By doing so, Alkali has constructed a voice for the woman and elevates the status of Avi Dayyan from doing household activities to other active roles. This is exemplified in Avi Dayyan's effort to combine the duty of a mother with her formal activities in the office. She is also given the opportunity to search for her brother Samba.

It is quite interesting to note that the status of Avi Dayyan in *The Initiates* does not in any way render the male characters to be inferior as seen in the case of other women writers in their writings like Enitan in Atta's

*Everything Good will Come*; Seytu in Alkali's *The Descendants* and Zarah in Mohammed's *Travails of a First Wife*. This is evident as Kachua and Bisong(2010) notes:

In Alkali's *The Descendants*, she clearly comes out as an indisputable feminist author in her assertiveness.... Alkali creates the male characters of a woman's dream. She shocks the female aesthetic with a whole new configuration of male characters usually emphatic with and credible to the female cause in the world of professor Zaki, Engineer Abbas and Professor Kayes (p.23).

The depiction of strong female character in *The Initiates* brings out the importance of certain male characters. For instance, Alkali describes how Avi Dayyan's father, Batancha gives her priority over her twin brother. She states: 'the old man inclined his head towards Avi Dayyan and listened attentively. Often nodding or shaking his head appropriately, his eyes gleamed with pride and respect (p.70). This particular quality indicates that Batancha values his female child. Batancha is depicted as a proud father of three children with two wives and is respected in the Debro community. Alkali describes him as a 'toad like looking man otherwise affectionately called Gaji, is five feet tall, a pit height for a man' (p.3).



Batancha basically, is a successful man who takes care of his family without any form of maltreatment to his wives or children. He allows Avi Dayyan to study just like her two brothers. Batancha's ability to allow his children to be educated without any form of discrimination indicates the new role assigned by Alkali for the male parents and the transformation in terms of equal access to education.

Alkali depicts Batancha in order to create awareness on the benefit of education to both male and female children. In view of this, Umoren (2013) states that 'education helps the woman, the girl child to acquire a different world view with its liberalizing influence'(p.89). This helps her to overcome the inhibitive cultural and social issues. Education is thus for consciousness raising and perception changing. This is also evident as Fadare (2021) argues:

In Zaynab Alkali's novels *The Stillborn* and *The Virtuous Woman*, the novelist presents female characters that acquire western education and contribute meaningfully to the development of the families and societies. Li in *The Stillborn* and Nana Ai in *The Virtuous Woman* are two of such enviable characters are the representations of the new identities of African women projected as the harbinger of positive

change in the two texts by the author. (p.104)

Similarly, the advantages of education are clearly indicated in the *The Initiates* as it makes Batancha to be famous and proud because his children have studied and are working in the city. The role of Batancha in *The Initiates* is different from Baba in *The Stillborn* as Chinade (2019) indicates: 'Baba, Li's father is having mad obsession with discipline and he is never tired of playing god with his children' (p.24). Unlike Batancha, Baba discriminate among his children as seen in the case of Awa who gets beaten whenever she misbehaves; the case is not with Sule, the only male child in the family.

Alkali's depiction of Yamusa and Yelwa clearly indicates that they have no other roles apart from being housewives irrespective of their children's achievements. Yamusa is the eldest wife of Batancha and the mother of Samba. She is proud of her position in Batancha's house simply because she considers herself a mother of a successful son. Alkali describes Yamusa as follows:

Mother of a successful son, she pulled a weed and turning there among the massive flower garden in front of the building. She looked around her proudly; hers was the biggest compound in the entire village and its neighborhoods. Many thanks to her son Samba. Samba had made proud not only to his parents but



Yelwa and her two  
unsettled children (p.30).

Yamusa sees Samba as the only son who is capable of taking care of the family. She says 'one needs to see the changes Batancha goes through whenever Samba goes to town... when he comes, my son drives the biggest car you ever see (p.32). This clearly indicates that Yamusa is totally in control in Batancha's house. She considers herself a lucky mother who has a son that is capable of succeeding. This makes her to consider Yamusa's children as 'useless' or 'inferior'. Yelwa is the second wife of Batancha and the mother of Avi Dayyan and Salvia. She is beautiful because even at 'forty five she could still catch eyes much younger than her husband' (p.57). Despite the fact that Yamusa takes charge of everything in the house, Yelwa is loved by her husband. Alkali describes Yelwa's laugh as 'a laugh one of a special attributes an asset that held a special place in Batancha's heart'. With a good burst of laughter, Yelwa could lift a seemingly unlettable mood (p.58). Yamusa and Yelwa's roles in the novel are solely restricted to taking care of the family. However, they believe in formal western education and they did not in any way push Yelwa's only daughter into early marriage. Their roles are similar to the role of Magira Mili in *The Descendants* who believes in formal western education. Alkali describes Mili as follows:

Magira mili may be a yesterday's woman but she was a wise one not blind to changes in the society... she is a good listener who constantly tunes on her transistor radio... she knew education is the master key to opportunities but she wants these options for her grandchildren (p.13).

This indicates Mili is a woman that wants the best for her grandchildren. She encourages her grandchildren to work hard because she wants Seytu particularly to compete with other doctors at Makulpo (p.vi). This suggests a kind of continuity in the lives of the female characters in Alkali's novels. The women and men believe in education and they do not in any way discriminate among their children concerning the issue of education. This is evident as Mbutaktu and Tikkus (2023) indicates that "Zaynab Alkali... has re-focus attention rather than continue to mourn women's subjection in society to actually depicting them as strong actively to overcome such subjection and oppression...education for the woman is presented as tool for personal freedom from 'choicelessness' a tool for personal freedom from ignorance and superstitious primitivism"(pp.6-7).

Similarly, Alkali's depiction of strong male characters that are educated and successful signifies the resistance to early women's tradition of writing where men are depicted in negative light. Characters like Samba,





Salvia, Batancha, Hussein and Musa Ture are all assigned positive roles and are given important tasks in the novel. Alkali has depicted Salvia to be a character with special qualities and these traits are not found among many people in the society. Batancha describes how he observes his son in three different occasions:

He had observed that his son is different since he was a toddler. One day, Salvia at 3yrs cried the whole day when a man briefly visited them. The next day, the man was reported dead... Batancha knew that his son was a seer and warned him to keep his mouth shut whenever he sees anything strange. (p.152-153).

Salvia has another feature which is his deep aversion to crowd whenever he found himself in a crowd; he fell into a trance (p.153). Even though the twins (Salvia and Avi Dayyan) were given birth on different dates and in different places, their personalities are special. Both characters are depicted as successful characters whose roles are those of contributing to the community. Salvia "had recruited fifty youths from the neighboring villages and had formed a union called Youths Vagabond. They had made proposals to build culverts, fill potholes on the road that linked the village, rebuilt one of the burnt markets, dig at least three bore holes. (p.40). While Salvia formed an

NGO for the development of his Debro community, Avi Dayyan picks abandoned babies and take care of them. This indicates that both characters have common goals towards helping their community and their roles signify change in Alkali's writings. This is because both characters are depicted as responsible people with dignified roles. This type of character depiction is unique even among women writings. This because not much importance is attached to the female child as depicted in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Mohammed's *Habiba* Atta's *Everything Good will Come*. For instance, it is the search of a male child that makes Baba Enitan to have a son outside their marriage in *Everything Good will Come*. Instead of uplifting the character of Enitan to a higher position or privilege position like Alkali does with Avi Dayyan, Enitan is left at the silent space or marginal position. Even though Enitan is given the opportunity to be educated and become a lawyer, her position is not clearly defined as that of Avi Dayyan in *The Initiates*.

Also, another new trend in Alkali's writing in this novel is the way she elevates the status of her male characters before the end of her story. This type of characters includes Sergeant Musa Ture who was known in the village as 'Saji Mbalma' the drunk.' He is depicted as a character that was devastated by the government's inability to pay his pension. As a result, he takes alcohol to calm his situation. However, Musa Ture is given the opportunity to search for Samba in the city and the



news comes as a surprise: 'Dogo in the novel announced: you did not send the best, Batapchi. Seargent Musa Ture will go Dogo said, without hesitation' (p.147). This encourages Musa Ture and signifies a new dawn in his life. He 'ceased to be Saji Mbalma the drunk as he completely abandoned his lover Tambal the brewer and her beer parlour. Instead, he became one of the most respected and disciplined men in town (p.173). Even though one of the characters Samba suffers in the novel, he is able to overcome the pains at the end of the novel. This kind of depiction is different from other women writing where the male characters would be left without hope to the end of the novel. Alkali describes Samba as the favourite of Debro, a model son, the type any parent need to be proud of when he breezed into the village with five or six cars accompanying him (p.22). Samba is a man who is committed in serving his country. He also represents an example of the Initiates which can be seen from the perspective of the military which is at war with the civilians. Samba in his own attempt to plot a coup against the government was betrayed. Though Samba as Giwa (2016) puts 'is not physically seen in the novel, but his presence is all pervading. Through him also, issues are raised that not only affect the wellbeing of people in the village of Debro but that of the Nigerian society at the whole (p.316). Alkali uses Samba to depict the damaging negative effect of corruption and coup de tat. Even though he commits a crime in the novel, Alkali gives him

another opportunity to live with his people. Samba has been greatly damaged to the extent that his identity has changed. Sargent Ture reports the damages Samba had as follows:

He had been shot in the head and that had shattered one of his eyes...he has also received a bullet in his left leg and his hip bone. One of the legs, therefore, is inevitably shorter than the other (p.180).

This explains the level of damages Samba received as a result of the coup de tat. Samba and Salvia are two characters with different qualities. Their roles are juxtaposed and Alkali describes Samba as a 'young man...thoroughly clear, polite and hardworking unlike Samba who always put Debro on fire (p.144). Although, Salvia and Samba are characters with different qualities, Samba is loved by the people:

[He is] lively, flamboyant, outgoing and outspoken, he had courted the praises of the people of Debro. He always had something for someone and had touched the lives of Debro people on a personal level with personalized gifts, a bag of rice or salt, a tin of cooking oil, clothes and shoes for the orphans and the money for the windows. (p.182).



However, the moment Samba breezes out, the smiles died and the light switched off, for Samba was a kind who lived only in the moment. He had no vision for the Debro community leave alone Ramta Rahi state (p.183). This quality is different when compared to Salvia because “he had the vision and the keys for the development and growth of Ramta Rahi state” (p.183). That is why he formed an NGO for the development of his Debro community.

Also, the character of Samba and Salvia in *The Initiates* encourages hard work as seen in the role of Salvia who sacrifice and perform enormous task for the benefit of his community. While Samba on the other hand represent the leaders who are not concern with the well-being of their people in the society. At the end, the damages Samba had signify the consequences of greed and corruption. Not only that, the roles assigned to Yamusa and Yelwa in *The Initiates* also signified continuity in the lives of the women. Their roles as housewives and other domestic roles are not different with the previous works of Alkali. This is evident in the roles of Mama in *The Stillborn* and Magira Mili in *The Descendants*.

In an interview with Alkali, Umaisha (2007) as cited by Danzomo (2018,p.143) indicates the reasons for the changes in Alkali’s subsequent works when compared to *The Stillborn* and *The Virtuous Woman* which are her early works. Alkali states:

We have a lot of progress where women are covered, most women are now educated and many are occupying positions in politics, the civil service and so on, and I am sure Li had taken a lot of steps from where I left her (p.2).

This clearly explains the reasons behind the changes in *The Initiates*. This also suggests that Alkali has accommodated various changes in terms of male and female characterisation as well as thematic preoccupation. Indeed, “Alkali has moved forward from her first debates as a literary writer to where she has made progress to now view life and society at different perspective” (Danzomo, 2018,p.165).

## Conclusion

The paper highlighted the recent transformation in Alkali’s novel in terms of her characterization. Alkali depicts strong male characters that are given opportunity to perform enormous tasks from different perspectives. Her portrayal of successful male and female characters suggests change or modification when compared to characterisation in early women writings where the male characters are portrayed from the negative perspective. The change in the characterization of Alkali in *The Initiates* suggests a new trend or dimension in women writings and also the possibility of having women’s writings that are not strictly concerned with gender issues.



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