

A MODEL DRAMATURGY FOR ARRESTING EXTREMIS IN ZAINABU JALLO'S STYLISTICS IN *ONIONS MAKE US CRY*

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Abstract

The paper examines the play, *Onions Make Us Cry* by Nigerian playwright, Zainabu Jallo, in search of a dramaturgy that provides a suitable stylistic model for playwriting that is reflective of the Covid-19 pandemic. Globally, the pandemic was a totally new experience for most societies. The onset of the outbreak signaled an apocalypse. Soon, it altered potentially forever the way human society conducts itself, especially in terms of inter-personal interaction. The present study focuses primarily on aspects of the stylistic representation of the situation of the protagonist in Jallo's play, Melinda Jindayi, looking at how the vehicle of language transmits her situation. This exploration aimed to uncover how Jallo's style can be utilized in dramatic rendering of characters in the Covid-19 period. The study finds that Jallo's stylistic psycho-graphic dramaturgy in *Onions Make Us Cry* richly arrests the frame of mind of individuals in a situation of extremis. Such a situation is characterized by angst, tension, and loss. Jallo's rendering of it presents an alternative approach to playwriting that can be gleaned into in composing drama capable of projecting the new-normal that is Covid-19. Through a content analysis of the play, the paper concludes that Jallo's play uses a stylistic approach that can be adapted to arrest the experience, especially in its stylization of isolation and loneliness.

Keywords: Covid-19, Stylistics, Extremis, Apocalypse, Playwriting.

Introduction

In a recent interview with Ainehi Edoro entitled "Giving the World a New Kind of Literature" which appeared in *Brittle Paper*, award-winning Nigerian novelist Ben Okri states that one of the truest tests of a literary classic is its ability to renew its relevance after the death of its author through the performance of what Okri calls "the feat of resurrection." Okri states that: literature begins with the dead. For that is when we can start to see the meanings of their works which may have been concealed from us when they were alive. Their body of work derives new authority from death. Then a literature begins to cohere. The books read us. They move from their fixed sphere of time and come alive in a new way in ours. They are no longer what we thought they were. Then the works really begin to speak. It is only now,

with many of the pioneers moving on to a higher sphere, that the literature moves to a higher sphere too. They take us up with them.

In complete agreement with Okri, this paper extends his position to a text's ability to reinvent its pertinence away from the life or initial motives of its author. In other words, regardless of whether an author is alive or dead, a great literary text can suddenly acquire a fresh implication in a context detached from the one its first readers, and probably the author, had confined it. This applies to Zainabu Jallo's play, *Onions Make Us Cry*, which immediately came to mind when reflecting upon how best to dramatize the age of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has been a prolonged moment of extremis for the whole world. Its outbreak sparked a global apocalyptic angst, and then neurosis ensued and continues to last. A *new normal* was created. To render this kind of reality in drama, an unconventional stylistic mode is required. The stylistics of drama continues to remain relatively unexplored, as asserted in the following assessment by Culpeper, Short and Verdonk:

If we compare them with poems and fictional prose, play-texts have in general received relatively little attention from both ... literary critics and stylisticians. Part of the problem may lie in the fact that spoken conversation has for many centuries been commonly seen as debased and unstable form of language, and thus plays, with all their affinities with speech, were liable to be undervalued. (3)

There is an assumption in certain quarters that dramatic texts cannot effectively be appreciated except when performed on stage, as J. L. Styan argues in a famous proclamation: "The fullness of music is only heard in performance, so it is with drama;" and Stanley Wells states that "the reading of plays is a necessarily incomplete experience" (Culpeper, Short and Verdonk 6). While these assertions may have some truth, the stylistics of a dramatic text can be understood in terms of its overall aura and atmosphere, the general attitude towards life that it manifests. This can be appreciated regardless of whether the drama is studied as a text or performance, and whether it is prototypical or not in its discourse structure (McIntyre 2-6). McIntyre also discusses a play's point of view on the plane of psychology, which refers to "the choices an author makes with regard to the various ways in which a story might be narrated" (41).

The Covid-19 outbreak which has affected all continents in the world, including Antarctica (Power and Dewar), has created what has been described as a 'new normal' by the World Health Organization, where virtually all aspects of human activities have been re-imagined and appropriate responses and measures introduced and implemented at global, regional, national, domestic and individual levels. While the scale of the pandemic differs

between countries (and in the case of Nigeria, between states), the disease rapidly propagates in the vast majority of situations, affecting an increasing number of people, mutating in its variations, and creating anxieties that are arguably unprecedented. As various fields adjust to the new realities of a Covid-19 world, and hopefully prepare for a post-Covid world, the fields of playwriting and drama criticism need to up their ante as well, so to say, by conducting a search for a stylistic approach that can succinctly and effectively arrest the Covid world.

There is need to look at our existing array of dramatic styles to consider which approach to playwriting can best represent the traumatic experiences of societies (and individuals) affected by the pandemic. This paper attempts such a task, critically examining Zainabu Jallo's play, *Onions Make Us Cry*, uncovering within it a stylistic approach that seems capable of lending us a creative model to adopt. Egwuda-Ugbeda and Ezeah state that in the play, "The playwright captures a fresh style which is hardly employed by most playwrights of this generation" (71). According to Egwuda-Ugbeda and Ezeah, their study has "established that as a psychograph and psychogram dramatist, Zainabu Jallo graphically and descriptively exposes the problems prevalent in not just contemporary Nigeria but the global community: Domestic Violence, Terrorism, Religious Crisis and other frustrating individual experiences" (70). It is important that we examine this stylistic approach in the light of the Covid-19 *new normal*, so that we may be able to draw conclusions as to the applicability of Jallo's style to the *frustrating experience* that Covid-19 no doubt is. The paper will firstly, examine the stylistic approach of Zainabu Jallo's *Onions Make Us Cry*; 2 secondly, explore the representational potentials of Zainabu Jallo's *Onions Make Us Cry* as an approach for representing extremis, and thirdly, discuss the implications of Jallo's dramaturgy for praxis and playwriting in the Covid-19 new normal.

About Zainabu Jallo and *Onions Make Us Cry*

Zainabu Jallo is a Nigerian-born scholar, playwright, and photographer. Jallo lives between Switzerland and Brazil. Her academic and creative works have been supported by fellowships at the Sundance Theatre Institute, Institute for World Literature, Harvard University, Institute for Cultural Diplomacy in Berlin, Residenz Theatre Munich, Chateau Lavigny, and House of Writers in Switzerland. She is a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, England, and UNESCO Coalition of Artists for the General History of Africa. She is author of award-winning plays *Saraya Dangana* (2008), *Onions Make Us Cry* (2011), *Holy Night* (2012), and *My Sultan is a Rockstar* (2015). Her other plays include *The Revolutionary Carrot* (2014), and *White Elephants* (2018). She is currently a Doctoral researcher at the Graduate School of Humanities,

University of Bern and the Department of Anthropology, University of São Paulo. Her scholarly interests include diaspora studies, iconic criticism, and Material Culture. Jallo was a winner of the 2018 Camargo Foundation's Cultural Diaspora residency alongside seven other black writers from Africa and the United States, among them Femi Osofisan.

As a participant in Contact Theatre's 'Contacting the World Project' held in Manchester in 2004, Jallo began to share her work with other writers from around the world. From 2007, she has been participating in the New Writing in Drama Project by the British Council and the Royal Court Theatre London where she developed *Saraya Dangana*. Similarly, *Onions Make Us Cry* was first created at The Royal Court Theatre London in August 2008, where she was a part of a residency for international playwrights. In 2009, she was offered a literary fellowship at the Global Arts Village, New Delhi where *Onions Make Us Cry* was first presented. Jallo facilitated master classes at the Port Harcourt Garden Literary Festival in December 2010 alongside Wole Soyinka and Helon Habila. She was also a nominee of the 2010 Future Awards for the Creative Artist of the Year. She continues to write abstract essays which she debuted with as a writer. *Onions Make Us Cry* has been described as "an absolutely fascinating unusual play" in which "the playwright dares to create a fresh style with poetic dialogues and a brilliant use of metaphors!" by Maestro's Media. For the play, Jallo was nominated for the 2010 edition of the Nigeria Prize for Literature sponsored by the NLNG. *Onions Make Us Cry* has been described as a play in which Jallo "uses her telescope to delve into the internal system of the society which projects whatever that is buried within the ambience of the society" (Egwuda-Ugbeda and Ezeah 75). The play was performed at the LARK, a festival of plays in New York in March 2011 and at various locations across Nigeria, the United Kingdom and the United States, according to Maestro's Media.

Style in Drama: A Review

Short argues that dramatic texts are worthy of being studied seriously on their own. He points out that while performance is crucial and "as deserving of study as dramatic text" (7), the two are linked. Short first of all gives arguments in support of the self-sufficiency of reading play-texts, then points out that play texts give inferences that are inalienable to a good directorial or acting realization of a play as performance. Drawing instances from the TV series "Fawlty Towers", Short introduces useful frameworks by which useful inferences can be tapped from a play's dialogue (10). There is, he notes, what is usually called "the meaning between the lines", as well as stage directions which he describes as "how the play should be staged and performed" to guide both director and actor (9). Short's work gives a

compelling argument in favour of the stylistics of dramatic texts. His conclusions on how performance relies on text are crucial, stating:

I would want to claim (a) that what I have outlined in terms of performance is extremely likely, given the evidence, (b) that an alternative way of acting ... should be in principle supportable in a similar way, and (c) that much more about performance is specified by the text than many drama critics would have us believe. (Short 12)

The linguistic significance of the text, hence, as Short details, includes the fact that it gives background information through schema-oriented language, implicative/inference, politeness, turn-taking conventions, speech acts, socio-linguistic conventions, grammatical structure and lexical patterning (13). Herman explores how conversational analysis as propounded by ethno methodologists can be employed in the analysis of dramatic texts. Specifically, she takes a look at a conversational concept - "the turn" - which basically relates to how time is apportioned between speakers in discourse (19). When one speaks, one takes a turn at speech, and as the speech alternates, turns inadvertently alternate as well. According to Herman, dramatic dialogue is a multi-input form, and raises the problem of how to distribute and manage turns (20-23). She first takes a brief review of conversation analysis, then interrogates the implications of turn-taking to the appreciation of situation and character in dramatic texts. Taking a sample from John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, Herman examines how choice of speaker, length of speech, pauses and interruptions determine the way readers interpret a character's speech. Another important dialogic feature is silence, of which Herman claims that:

Gaps can stretch from initial non-responsiveness followed by a response to full-scale silence. In the former case, when initial silence occurs between turns, gaps may constitute switching pauses when it is unclear as to whether the silence should be attributed to the first or second speaker or both. An initial stretch of silence in response to another's speech can also be interpreted as caution, the speaker following the 'think before you speak' maxim. If nobody were selected or a potential next speaker does not self-select, the gap that follows can bring about closure. (21)

One other important dramatic-dialogic convention is the deployment and handing of odd talk, which Simpson elaborates in an essay of the title, with a curious sub-title: "Studying Discourses of Incongruity" (34). The significance of the essay to us partly rests upon the drive behind its curious sub-title, since Simpson's work explores the aberrant language that characterizes the Theatre of the Absurd. This is not far-fetched from our concern with the language of

extremis, which is significantly marked by deviation from the normal. "Odd talk" is one clear aspect of absurdity, says Simpson (35). Through excessive politeness, for instance, Simpson (42-3) demonstrates how the detective in Ionesco's *Victims of Duty* is able to soften up Monsieur Choubert, following this up with a sudden and savage cross-examination. The deviation which characterizes language in absurdist drama is also explored by Simpson, with example from the Monty Python's Flying Circus series. In respect to this, Culpeper et al note of a particular episode: absurdism is often linked with humour, and Simpson goes on to explore a small extract in the Monty Python's Flying Circus series where two men meet for the first time in a bar. Instead of the platonic talk which normally characterizes such first meetings, we observe one of the characters asking a series of highly personal questions of the other, generating considerable humour and the effect of absurdity at the same time (34).

According to Simpson, like other approaches to conducting stylistic analysis, exploring odd talk, "offers a valuable analytic and critical method for explaining text(s)" (35). He adds that "It has become an axiom in discourse stylistics that the study of non-routine patterns ... can inform the routine and unexceptional in interaction. A study of 'miscommunication' thus offers a vantage point for observing what is communicatively commonplace (35). Important to the study of dialogue in drama is the context of discourse, which according to Simpson covers three aspects: physical context, which relates to the actual environment of interaction; personal context, which relates to "the social and personal relationships of the interactants to one another", and cognitive context, which refers to "the shared and background knowledge held by participants in interaction" (37). Hence, odd talk is a "context-sensitive phenomenon and context becomes the first primary consideration in drawing up a model of talk" (Simpson 39). With specific regard to odd talk in drama, Simpson states:

It is a truism to say that drama dialogue differs from everyday speech. Drama dialogue clearly is fabricated interaction between fictional characters, mediated and controlled by playwrights in the first instance, and, in the case of dramatic performances, by directors and actors in the second ... So while everyday speech and drama discourse are not homologous modes of communication, they are none the less parallel, and expectations about well-formedness in everyday speech form the benchmark against which aberrant and incongruous discourse can be measured. (42)

Bennison explores how play-text readers are able to form judgments on personalities of characters through the medium of the words chosen by

playwrights. The essay demonstrates that it is possible to understand the process by utilizing discourse analytic and pragmatic frameworks. Through an investigation of the formation of the character of Anderson in Tom Stoppard's play *Professional Foul*, with focus on four major traits, Bennison first of all undertakes a discourse analysis (examining turn-taking, turn allocation, turn-length, topic control and topic-shift), then a pragmatic analysis (with focus on Grice's cooperative principles and politeness). Bennison reveals that changes in a character's conversational behaviour serve as guide to appreciating change in character trait. He argues that, in order to sufficiently capture the richness of a play character's personality, a plural approach to linguistic analysis that adopts variant framework is necessary. Central to Bennison's article, therefore, is the assumption that theatre-goers or play-text readers inevitably partake (more than anything else) in forming judgments relating to the characters in the dramatic story. After all, as Downes states, "A real person is a theoretical entity for his interpreters, to which they assign those intentions that make sense of what he does. A character in drama is an analogy of a person and is interpreted in the same way" (Quoted in Bennison 68).

Bennison's work aptly manifests the underlying significance of discourse analysis and pragmatics to the field of linguistic stylistics. This hence, supports the argument of Culpepper, Short and Verdonk that "to explain the dynamics of plays properly, we need much help from areas of linguistics - notably pragmatics and discourse analysis - which do not play a leading role in the analysis of poetry or prose" (3). Another important essay on the stylistics of drama is Culpepper, entitled "(Im)politeness in Dramatic Dialogue." The article is composed against the backdrop of the relevance of social cohesion to successful communication in discourse. Speakers try to remain polite to one another in order to sustain cohesion. Culpepper examines what roles impoliteness plays in the dialogue of the dramatic mode. Impoliteness enables plot to develop because it breaks down the harmony of the story-world and consequently enables action and reaction which create conflict. Culpepper's focus is on the film "Scent of a Women", in which he analyses three extracts from the dialogues of the characters Charlie and Colonel. The radical point of departure between Culpepper's essay and popular works in the area is that others have focused chiefly on politeness, while he argues that impoliteness is more crucial to drama than politeness, because it is impoliteness that initiates or heightens conflict (85-6). According to Culpepper:

In drama, impoliteness is not thrown in haphazardly for audience entertainment: it serves other purposes. Conflict in interaction appears either as a symptom, or as a cause of social disharmony, and where there are tensions between characters we are more likely to see development in character and plot. (86-7)

In "Three Models of Power in David Mamet's *Oleanna*" Jean Jacques Weber explores the social context (issues of power) and the cognitive context (the schemata) as well as how the two interact in drama. According to him, readers' appreciation of the cognitive words of characters as well as their dialogue relies on their own world-view and assumptions (123). The exploration of power relations between two characters in "*Oleanna*", a university professor and his female student, is apt, since the relationship typifies variation in stature between interactants, the power dynamics in which most readers would be familiar with. Weber's argument is that although the text attempts to tie the reader down to one specific conception of power, it remains possible for readers to free themselves from this assumption by interrogating it. Weber's emphasis on the significance of schemata to interpretation, pulls the essay into the realm of literary as opposed to linguistic stylistics.

Velerie Lowe's "Unhappy' Confessions in the *Crucible*" is hinged upon the revolutionary works of J.L Austin and John Searle, which transformed the view that language merely expresses into the realm of linguistic action. Lowe applies Austin's and Searls's speech act theories to the character Tituba's confession of witchcraft in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. Through incongruity between locutionary and illocutionary forces, Lowe shows that Tituba's confession is invalid since she herself does not believe herself to be a witch. First, because she is a slave, Tituba has no liberty to deny; second, she utilizes the confession to avoid being executed. It is important that Tituba's confession is interpreted differently by other characters on the one hand, and the audience on the other. According to Lowe: one of the advantages that fictional dialogue has over natural conversation ... is that we often have access to information that is denied to us in real-life situations, for example, an awareness of the truth or falsity of characters' utterances often allows us to judge their integrity with greater accuracy than that of our real life co-conversationalists (128).

Sikorska (1994) explores the nature of communication in drama, stating that "communication in drama is primarily concerned with characters expressing themselves by means of language" (196). Her essay, entitled "The Language of Entropy: A Pragma-dramatic Analysis of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*" explores the nature of Absurdist dramatic language. Centring her work on the assumptions that entropy is an inalienable concept in literary communication and the relationship between literary language and the real world, she argues that linguistic deviations are pertinent to the creation of the theatre of the absurd, hence her programmatic approach, given that deviation is at the core of pragmatics and style (206). Richardson reviews various methodological issues in the study of dialogue in film and television drama

(population drama). After exploring two preceding studies on dramatic dialogue style, one by McIntyre and another by Koloff, Richardson concludes by defending logocentric analyses. Richardson also recognizes the challenge posed by dialogue in popular drama, since screen plays are work-in-progress and transcriptions would almost give rise to completely separate works. Because popular drama productions are not made of works alone,... to take them seriously is to be willing to go beyond linguistic analysis" (382). The approach is useful for the present study, since *Onions Make Us Cry* is a play-text, and the problem of "poverty of data" (383) for stylistic analysis is arguably solved.

Stylistics of Extremis in *Onions Make Us Cry*

Elam has argued that in drama, characters are more than anything else "participants in speech events" (83). This highlights the supreme place of utterances in appreciating character. According to Egwuda-Ugbeda and Ezeah, in *Onions Make Us Cry* "The feelings, the psychological demeanour, the traumatic experience, the loss of ego, and the "destruction of womaness" in the three characters; Malinda Jandayi, Lola Gambari and Ellen are psychographically and psychogramatically enunciated and adequately dealt with" (75). One of the most stylistically successful aspects of *Onions Make Us Cry* in revealing the psyche of the protagonist, Malinda Jandayi, is the way the playwright allocates turn to her. Malinda always *dominates* conversation, and her turn-length is an important indication of her state of mind as well as her place in the drama - "the more important figures are seen (or heard) to speak throughout the drama" (Elam 83). But her length of speech also indicates aloneness: she speaks *alone*. In addition, her word-choices, as well as the near-absurd subjects she dwells upon in conversation are nearly all the time enhance our appreciation of her state of mind as an acutely depressed female. These techniques used by Jallo help the audience appreciate the state of a mind no longer *societal*, a mind basically in isolation. This approach helps to realise the dramatic element where "relationships between people are constructed and negotiated through what they say" (Thornborrow and Wareing 97).

The very opening of Situation One of the play is an important indicator of the state of mind of Malinda. In a monologue that lays out the setting of the play and helps us become familiar to the heroine, we see who Mrs Jandayi is, and at once, we begin to recognise that her language is not one of a normal woman. She states:

Ward six
The first room of ward six
Here I am for a fix.
(Looks about the room)

Quite impressive. The room
Reeking with doom.
Or it could be of a woman's ghost.
Or of ghosts of women?
My host.
A patient in ward six
The first ward of ward six
Today she is a ghost
And a host.
Here now is Malinda Jandayi
Wife of Daniel Jandayi
DJ
Chairman of PPJ
People's Party for Justice.
Whose justice?
What people
Not anymore
He isn't anything anymore
Doesn't occupy any material space
No space
In this space... is me, Malinda.
I chose to speak
My peak of indignation
For everything
(Looking about desperately)
Where is my ghost? Where is everybody?
My ghosts!
Psychotic psychiatrists. (Jallo 2-3)

In the very first line of this soliloquy, as if in answer to a question, Malinda reveals her location, therefore establishing the play's setting: "Ward six". As if in realisation that the line is not specific enough, she adds in the following line "The first room of room six." The reader is at once informed that they are dealing with an abnormal person, in this case, the victim of acute depression about to stand trial for the murder of her husband. After establishing her position, Malinda goes on to state her situation: "Here I am in a fix", she declares. Immediately after, she describes her condition nevertheless as "Quite impressive". We find ourselves at a loss almost instantly, for there appears to be, in a normal situation, nothing impressive about being in a fix. After all, she herself soon enough tells us that the room she is in reeks with doom. The room in fact, is soon again historicised, for the reek might not be

hers alone, but of the innumerable depressed women who had been driven to lunacy, and who had over the years been interned in the same room. This recalls at once the reek of old slave stations at the shores of the great Atlantic, where slaves were held until transportation was ready for their distribution to diverse camps and then plantations etc across the Western world. Carefully, and seemingly senselessly, the protagonist reveals her expressionist manifesto: she is out on a tell-tale to lament the agonies of womanhood.

Later in the same soliloquy, we hear that Malinda's husband, Daniel Jandayi, was a politician. His death is not directly told to us, yet, linguistic evidence exists that signals to the fact that he is no more. Malinda says that "Not anymore / he isn't anything anymore / Doesn't occupy any material space / No space / In this space ... is me Malinda" (3). Here, Jallo deliberately makes Malinda speak in stutters, not directly revealing her message, but as typical in a mind weakened by years of abuse (although paradoxically hardened thereby also), Malinda can only hint at the fact that she is her late husband's killer. Hence the fact that "space" belongs to her now: she has conquered, yet too wearied to celebrate. The recurrence of diverse negative words in the monologue can be an indication of depression, as earlier argued in the preceding chapter. These include: fix, reeking, doom, ghost, patient, anymore, indignation, desperately, psychotic, poky, etc. Addressing her nurse and soon to become friend, Lola, Malinda states later in the play:

Go ahead, pick up your note pad and write.

(Demonstrating)

Case number one, Mrs Malinda Jandayi

Age: 36

Room one of Ward six.

And might I add, in the critical cases ward.

Today being the sixteenth day of her mute mode

Speech is uttered that might crack into the Jandayi code.

She talks of a certain black cat

On some mat [sic] squashed by a fat man... so flat. I strongly suspect some form of unconscious conflict with these incoherent and disjointed talk.

It just could be the worst form of

depression, but that, I will have to

confirm through... *(To Lola)* what did you

call it again, a chit chat? Chic chat or a

cheap chat? (Jallo 6-7)

Malinda uses a meta-dramatic language here, mimicking medicalese and as well, dramatizing her state of mind. She shows us important information about her state through exploring medical records and conducting a kind of self-diagnosis. Rather than allocate these revelations to Lola the psychiatric nurse, Jallo leaves them to Malinda herself to assert, given that her depression is the result of years of abuse which have schooled her immensely. Malinda understands her condition, as the doctors would diagnose it to be, but here sarcastically tells us that their diagnosis would merely be abstract, removed from the hard realities that formed her condition. She allocates to her case a “number one” position, hinting that it is a most severe condition, intensifying the fact that she is in room one of ward one, “the critical cases ward”. She refers to her state of silence as something called “the Jandayi code”, suggesting that it is severe beyond existing medical knowledge, hence the ascription of a new term to it. The allusion to a mysterious “black cat” signifies terror, for the evil associated with blackness is a universal tenor. The character herself describes her talk as “incoherent and disjointed”, which could indicate “the worst form of depression” (7). In all, Jallo uses language to indicate the state of mind of a victim of violence whose wit has been sharpened by her condition and experience. Again, the recurrence of diverse negative words in the monologue can be an indication of depression, as earlier seen. These abound: case, critical cases, mute mode, crack, black cat, squashed, flat, suspect, unconscious conflict, incoherent, disjointed, worst, depression, etc.

The treachery of men takes centre stage in another monologue by Malinda in Situation Two of the play text. She states, again addressing Lola:

Ellen is the name of the lady who stays in
 The next room, right? (*Lola nods*) well she
 Keeps yelling into my sleep at someone
 Called Joe, who lured her into believing
 They both will take on the role of man
 And wife. On her finger, he put a
 Diamond ring, in her head, crystal hopes.
 He is married to another. How do you
 Expect me to be alright, stuck in a
 Situation I do not want to be in. she talks [sic]
 Like Joe is sitting there with her, when she
 Begins to scream, I guess its
 Zipporah ... you know, the other lady Joe
 Ran off with – she sees. (Jallo 17)

The monologue is informative in its content, but the kind of linguistic choices made by Malinda enforces this. The fact that the lady next-door, Ellen,

was “lured” by a certain Joe, “into believing they both will take on the roles of man / and wife” explains why she cries out all the time in anguish. She, like Malinda, is a victim of male vice, in this case of deception. She is depressed because she was used and dumped. The structural delivery of the fact of the *case* is important. First we are told that Ellen yells. Then we are told she was deceived. Then we are taken to the specificities of the deception: she was in fact engaged. “On her finger, he put a / diamond ring, in her head, crystal hopes”. Then came the bombshell: “He is married to another” (17). That the name of the other woman is also mentioned is also important: Is Zipporah safe from Joe’s deceptions too? There are again negative words, based on context, in the monologue: yelling, lured, stuck, scream, ran off, etc. The most forceful stream of consciousness is delivered by Malinda in Situation Four of the play. Malinda states:

... In my
madness... (*Her voice becomes distant*)
In my madness, I’m saner than ever
In grand fear and high fever,
Lived in a lovely white house. Turned out to
be Hades.
One after the other, I raised my babies
With a broken tooth, bruised limbs, cracked
ribs, countless black eyes... shifted jaw
All these, against the law.
Smiled at them, “Daddy loves you” I’ll quiver
I had died many times but I carried on, a diva
Nobody, no one knew Malinda
I cannot boast of knowing her either
Not even DJ, whose eyes, bloodshot will
ask... beg for a scream, for a tear
Oh no, not for you anymore, not a tear, my dear.
....
Into pulp, I turned scores of times...
Malinda? Always the diva.
Beware what you envy, I think to the
obsequious eyes (Jallo 27-30)

Here, Jallo presents Malinda in self-exploration. In this stream of consciousness, probably, the most significant linguistic feature of the text is how Malinda is able to use the informal code to get into Lola’s psyche. Early on, she shocks us with the paradoxical declaration that “In my madness, I’m saner than ever” (28). There are diverse phrases that enforce the deranged state

of mind of the protagonist: madness is repeated twice in the monologue. Other phrases include: fear, high fever, Hades, broken tooth, bruised limbs, cracked ribs, countless black eyes, shifted jaw, quiver, bloodshot, scream, tear, pulp, guilt ridden gestures, loathe, desperately, dainty face, tons of pain, hate, disappointingly vulnerable, kill a lover, etc. The force of irony and sarcasm also permeate the utterances, and the brilliance of Malinda reveals itself once more in the monologue. That Malinda is allowed so long a turn in the discourse is evident of the significance of her revelations to the play's core. In all, everything Malinda utters signals an angry woman that is, as she herself says, at a place where she does not want to be.

Summary of Findings

The reading of Jallo's *Onions Make Us Cry* makes manifest various stylistic tools that can be utilized in dramatizing a moment of all-engulfing extremis, such as the age of the Covid-19, the pandemic that gripped the world in early 2020. Some of these are enunciated below.

1. **Dramatizing Loneliness and Isolation:** One of the most dreaded phenomena in human existence is being alone. Loneliness may have its merits, such as its promotion of meditation and reflection, sobriety and the exploration of intuition. But overall, it is rarely craved, not for long at least, and when we find ourselves in it, we become, to use the Nigerian parlance, 'something else.' One of the main lessons for the Covid-19 age in *Onions Make Us Cry* is its rich representation of the situation of loneliness. When alone, the human is in company of their demons, or with their buried angst and anguishes, the deepest trepidations that they seek to overcome. Zainabu Jallo presents for us a recipe for dramatically representing this situation. Isolation in Covid-19 means having to stay in hotels or other isolation centres while waiting to be allowed into a country, or being quarantined. In situations like this, reality trickles in through the news, through the walls, as Jallo creates (17). The psychiatric ward where Malinda and Ellen are housed is akin to the Covid isolation centres. The patients never meet, yet Malinda is able to discern Ellen's story – how Joe betrayed her – through the walls.

2. **The Consequence of Women in Domesticity - With Men:** The idea of women being the fortress of the home front is probably universal. But the image that comes to mind of a woman minding the home brings with it the image of an absent or barely-present man. We think that is normal, even if sometimes unfair, until a pandemic strikes and men are tied to the home front in domesticity: conflict erupts. Studies have shown that during the lockdown period, domestic violence peaked across Nigeria. We see from *Onions Make Us Cry* a model way to render the increased rate of domestic violence widely documented during the Covid-19 lockdown period, as captured in Thomas et

al's *The Gendered Contagion: Perspectives on Domestic Violence during Covid-19*. The refusal of Jallo to allocate voice to men in the play is one such style: because they are already guilty, or speak even when silent, the play totally leaves out the men's point of view in the dramatic voice.

3. **Newness of Society after Lockdown:** In the period following the lockdown, having become accustomed to loneliness or extremely limited socializing, humans begin to relearn how to socialize. This newness, even strangeness, that comes in the workplace and school presents a unique experience not witnessed for a long time globally, and possibly never before in some societies. The sense of shock in re-meeting is represented in Jallo's dramaturgy, as we see Lola and Melinda 'meet' for the first time in Situation One of the play.

4. **Representation of Art Therapy as a Coping Mechanism:** Throughout Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, a lot of the world had no choice but to resort to art as a source of therapy, as a mechanism for receiving mental health and psycho-social support. This process of course occurred both consciously and unconsciously. For example, Netflix viewership spiked during the lockdown. Jallo presents a sense of this in *Onions Make Us Cry*, with Melinda's persistent request to Lola to get her good music of a global nature to help her attain wellness.

5. **Turn Management:** In typical drama, utterances are of four kinds: dialogue, monologue, aside, and soliloquy. Interior monologue which mainly characterizes prose, is occasionally whisked in. Dialogue is of course by far the most prevalent, and is mainly characterized by turn-taking between two or more characters present in a scene. Turn-taking shows power relations, reflects democracy, and so on. In Jallo's dramaturgy, there's a unique technique that I don't recall seeing in another play: one character taking double turns before another character speaks. The technique seems perfect for a locked down character, characters generally in an incoherent world.

6. **Absence-Presencing:** Covid-19 has deepened an emergent modern phenomenon, one that may be called a state of *absence-presence*, where people are able to be where they are not. By this, we are talking about the rampant use of electronic media platforms for communication, sophisticated aspects of Web 2.0 and indeed, Web 3.0, including meeting applications like Trello, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and the like which enable people to be where they are not. One is now able to attend a conference in Dubai, Singapore, New York, Delhi or Johannesburg while doing a big job in their toilet in Abakaliki. A woman can conduct an interview for hopeful job applicants scattered around various parts of the world while she receives a befitting hair styling in a saloon in Gombe. How to transport (teleport) this into drama could be tasking, but Zainabu Jallo comes to the rescue yet again (13). Despite the walls being soundproof in the

hospital, Melinda Jindayi is able to hear what goes on in the next room in her Ward (17). This is telling of the Covid-19 age: a girl in India forgets she is on a zoom meeting and she picks a friend's call, and the participants of the meeting are able to hear intimate details of her conversation with her friend, which manage to leak and go viral. Although in a room, away from everyone physically, she's not alone thanks to walls that literally have ears.

Conclusion

The paper examined *Onions Make Us Cry* by Zainabu Jallo. The primary concern of the analysis was to identify the stylistic relevance of Jallo's dramaturgy for the task for creative writing in the context of the Covid-19 global pandemic. The study finds that Jallo's play uses a stylistic approach that can be utilized to arrest the experience, especially in its stylization of isolation and loneliness, turn management in dialogue, domestic violence arising from co-gender domesticity, and so on. In light of the findings of the project in the diverse sections of the play text that have been analysed, the study concludes that Jallo's dramaturgy contains broad elements that help in enabling a rich understanding of the theme of psycho-social crisis, personal and communal depression, and given the application of creative techniques to the text, it shows that dramatic texts can indeed be put to use in representing the Covid-19 global extremis using the model. The implication of the findings of the present study is that dramatic texts continue to renew their meanings as social reality of the audience change. Similarly, the praxis of the field of drama and theatre criticism as well as creative writing, asserts its dynamic nature. There can never be just one single interpretation to a dramatic text.

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