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NIGERIAN ENGLISH IN SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES:

LINGUISTIC AND LITERARY PARADIGMS

A Festschrift in Honour of

FUNṢO AKERE

Edited by:

OKO OKORO

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Introduction

In this paper, we undertake an analysis of an aspect of the linguistic signification of gender in war fiction by specifically examining the metaphorical depiction of women in Nigerian civil war fiction as systematically represented through established linguistic constructs. Focusing on Festus Iyayi's *Heroes* and Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*, two novels based on the experiences of the thirty-month Nigeria civil war of 1967 to 1970, as primary data, the paper studies how through language use the novels depict the peculiar nature of gender relations in a situation of crisis. The main concern of the paper is to unravel the forms and dimensions of gender and its realization in conflict situations as portrayed in Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty* and Festus Iyayi's *Heroes*. The analysis is conducted with emphasis on the use of language as key instrument that conveys and sustains through elaborate metaphorical projections specific gender significations. The idea of using language as the main device for interpreting the metaphorical projection of gender is based on the fact that language is the most fundamental element of literary creativity and that essence of literature largely depends on the art of language use.

The novels, set in parts of the defunct Mid-Western area (presently part of the Niger-Delta region) of Nigeria, a location which witnessed intimate encounters of the civil war, narrates significant first-hand accounts of the trauma and calamities of the war, showing how war situations subject human beings to intensely agonising degrees of violence and bestiality, and consequently affect the way men and women interact amidst the pervading situation of insecurity and suffering of war.

Because the Mid-Western area was at several times under the control of the Biafran and the Federal forces respectively, it experienced most of the

fiercest battles and gruesome acts that occurred during the civil war as the area was occupied and re-occupied by the two contending armies at different times. As a consequence of this, the people suffered tremendous hardship and humiliation as they were ultimately victimised and traumatised by the forces of both armies who defeated and took over control of their area on several occasions; a situation which made them bear severe cruelties and indignities of the war. Thus, this area serves as an apt metaphor of the totality of the realities, ugly and beautiful, of the Nigerian civil war, and therefore acts as a viable platform for examining the gender dimensions of the conflict.

Festus Iyayi's *Heroes* and Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty* engage in a constructive re-enactment of the experiences and ordeals of the men and women of Mid-Western Nigeria during the Nigeria civil war couched in distinct and conscious linguistically-sustained metaphorical paradigms.

Festus Iyayi's *Heroes* portrays the horrors and viciousness of the Nigerian civil war on the ordinary people in general and women in particular. Osime Iyere, a journalist, through whose encounters and experiences of the trauma of the war the novel reveals the callousness and bestiality of the war, lives through the socioeconomic and psychological disorientation of the people and the denigration of their cultural sensibilities. Initially, Osime Iyere's enthusiasm about the war is fired by patriotism signified as an ideological conquest and represented especially in the recapture of Benin City from the marauding rebel forces by the federal army. He hoped that the recapture of Benin will send away the rebel armies who have brutally upset the social and political pattern of life in the city. Like many other people, Osime expects that the return of the city to the Federal forces, signifying the reintegration of the city into the Nigerian nation, would lead to the re-establishment of federal authority in Benin and eventually the return of peace, law and order to the battered city. This is typified in the following extract which captures the situation in metaphorical terms:

> He saw her now, the water glittering in her hair and he remembered. He saw her in all her fairness, in all her slimness and he remembered, for if ever there was a beautiful woman, then Ndudi certainly was one. But love is also politics and the coming of the Biafrans had driven a wedge between them. To be more exact, he had converted the invasion of the state by the Biafrans into a wedge. Somehow, and for a reason he could not

> understand, he had felt that Ndudi's father had shown a certain amount of joy, in fact, had celebrated the coming of the Biafrans. He had resented it and the love he had had for Ndudi, still very young and vulnerable then, had flickered and then gone out, leaving nothing but an uneasy darkness. But now he knew that he loved her. (*Heroes*, p. 18)

In the novel, Osime and Ndudi represent apt semiotic constructs serving as indexical parallels of the Nigerian nation torn by a very compelling self-consuming conflict in which the state even acts against her own interests. Similarly, the self-generated tension between Ndudi and Osime has turned the blossoming relation into a love-hate affair dampening the glistering intimacy. This situation is captured here by these expressions and their intense metaphorical implications:

> ... love is also politics;
> ... the coming of the Biafrans had driven a wedge between them;
> ... And the love he had for Ndudi ... had flickered and then gone out, leaving nothing but an uneasy darkness

The semantic entailments of metaphorical parallels drawn between love and politics, War as a wedge to love, and the ultimate outcome of uneasy darkness in the novel are apt significations of the ugly impact of conflict on interpersonal relations, gender interactions, and the viciousness of war in general.

But as the war rages, Osime realizes that the federal forces are just as dishonourable, inconsiderate and brutal as the rebels. This ironic twist settles on Osime as he is unjustifiably brutalized by soldiers of the federal army. His disgust and disenchantment is even further aggravated when he witnesses the cold-blooded murder of his girl friend's father. And as Osime travels further into the Mid-Western heartland and the major fronts of conflict in the war zone, he more than ever understands the full bestiality of the war as he experiences more horrifying incidents in the course of his travels; and the futility of war descend on him with each encounter he passes through. Moreover he witnesses directly the moral degeneracy, hypocrisy and exploitative tendency of the top echelons of the military. But the junior ranks, indoctrinated, humiliated and psychologically battered, take it out on the civilian population, women especially. In the entire narrative, the women are twice the victims of the mass suffering brought the entire people by the war.

> People are decent deep down and want to remain decent all their lives. But a bitter and spiteful war comes along and turns ordinary decent men into rapists, into animals, into something hateful even to themselves, into something repulsive and spiteful even to themselves. The war takes ordinary decent men and bends and twists them. It takes them and debases them and dehumanises them. The war takes them and pours its maggots into their souls, takes their decency and humanity and dignity away from them.
> (*Heroes*, p. 245)

The significant point here is the persistent use of animal imagery as semiotic entities to reconstruct the bestiality and inhumanity of war, and how a war could turn a section of the population against another, here the men and the women. The idea of the humiliating exploitation of the women as part of the execution of the war, in a manner that sounds like a within a war, is established through the idea of comparing men and women. This excerpt reveals a core notion of the gender significance of the war:

> 'What do you think of the war?' Osime asked.
> 'The war?' and the man laughed. 'The war is like a woman, deadly. We all suffer in this war.' (*Heroes*, p. 99)

Here, the metaphor of war is represented in womanhood. The female therefore is a victim of perception and the enraging conflict – a double tragedy in a sense.

Other Lexical items and constructions such as the ones below are quite indicative of the ugly and beastly nature of the war:

> ... a bitter and spiteful war;
> ... turns ordinary decent men into rapists, into animals;
> The war takes ordinary decent men and bends and twists them. It takes them and debases them and dehumanises them. The war takes them and pours its maggots into their souls.

The semantic import of words such as the adjectives: "bitter", "spiteful"; the nouns: "rapists", "animals", "maggots"; and the verbs: "bends", "twists", "debases", "dehumanises" which appear in these excerpts conveys the overwhelming feeling of disgust and the intense sense of unfairness of the situation of the women during the war that pervades the narratives of Iyayi's *Heroes* and Okpewho's *The Last Duty*.

Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty* reconstructs the civil war through six individuals whose experiences represent several facets of the war, metaphorically. The novel is peopled by complex human actors who embody and project diverse human foibles and significations: Ali, the military commander; Toje, a rubber merchant and wealthy business man; Odibo, Toje's cripple servant; Oshevire, detained due to the false and malicious claims of Toje; Aku, Oshevire's wife; and Oghenovo, the young son of Oshevire and Aku. These six individuals not only signify different aspects of the war; but also represent the accompanying tensions. A major aspect of the conflict centres on Aku, who is of 'secessionist background and heritage' but married to Oshevire whose homeland, falls on the federal side. Aku's husband, Oshevire, is detained by the federal forces on the malicious instigation of Toje who takes the opportunity to make amorous advances on her. Odibo, Toje's disabled, half-witted servant and middle-man whom he uses to run his amorous errands, eventually becomes Aku's sexual partner. Ali's recall of his conversation with Toje of the plight of Aku and her son, Oghenovo, aptly represents her tragic web of entanglement between the warring parties in which Aku is caught up and paints a vivid picture of the hopelessness of her condition.

> ... She and her son are very lonely now. The whole town has ostracised them, some in genuine horror at the act for which the man is being detained, and others of course out of fear of being implicated for association. Even his friends have deserted him. And every time there is an air raid by the rebels or guerrilla action around here, she has been very afraid that some people might take it all out on her and her child. So she has kept very much inside their house for fear of being attacked. You can imagine what a plight she is in – unable to trade to make a living for herself and her child, unable to even go to the market to even buy food. She once confessed to me that she was afraid they might poison the food they would sell to her. (*The Last Duty*, p. 50)

As the primary metaphoric instrument in Okpewho's *The Last Duty*, Aku experiences and ordeal comprehensively capture the trauma and tragedy of the war. These words and expressions in the excerpt above represent the situation she and her son encounter: "Ostracise", "genuine horror", "fear of

being implicated", "deserted", "very afraid", "take it all out on her and her child", "fear of being attacked". These utterances convey an overbearing impression of a haunted existence dominated by the fear of being hunted down by everybody.

Subsumed in these experiences and narratives of the Nigerian civil war depicted in Festus Iyayi's *Heroes* and Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty* are diverse encounters of gender in a conflict situation. The narratives of the various encounters and experiences of the war, particularly its impact on the relationship between men and women, are incidents which embody far-reaching metaphorical significations. Social vulnerabilities of various delineations are communicated in the projections of the complexities of the war situation through which other forms of social relations and practices are given expression in the novels which are themselves subtle depictions of the human condition of the time.

Theoretical Conception

Our consideration of issues of gender in Iyayi's *Heroes* and Okpewho's *The Last Duty* is carried out through a linguistic conceptualisation of metaphor.

Given that literature relies on language as its basic communicative and artistic tool, literary writings and portrayals often recreate reality through the creative deployment linguistic instruments by means of extended projections. Thus, the significations of gender are investigated using metaphoric instruments to analyse the nature and patterns of linguistic explication in the novels.

Metaphor

Abrams (1957: 61) describes the metaphor in its simplest conventional notion as an "...expression which ... denotes one kind of thing, quality or action is applied to another, in the form of a statement of identity ..."

The term, **Metaphor**, derives from the Greek word *metaphora*, which means "to carry over, to transfer" or "transference of a word to a new sense", refers to a complex way of structuring knowledge from an existing domain or field of reference (the source) onto another (the target) by [illegible] or mapping its concepts and relations from an existing domain that's already familiar" (Wales, 2001: 250; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980 as quoted in http://alumni.media.mit.edu).

Metaphor, largely conceived of as a trope based on similitude, dates back to Aristotle, around 335 BC, who defines it in *Poetics* as

> the application of a strange term either transferred from the genus and applied to the species or from the species and applied to the genus, or from the species to another or else by analogy" (Fyfe: 1932)

As language that directly compares seemingly unrelated subjects by describing a concept or subject as being or is equal to another concept or subject, Metaphor is a fundamental way of learning and structuring conceptual systems, mechanism for encoding knowledge; a process that can be used to group areas of experience, self consciousness, convey sensory expression and to describe learning. Thus, a metaphor is not merely a linguistic device designed for stylistic ornamentation or overlay; it conditions thought. In doing this, a metaphor would have different connotations that interact and shape the understanding of reality and project entailments that enable human beings organise experiences, uniquely express them and create necessary realities. As Lakoff et al (1980) and de Man (1979) note, metaphors constitute a core aspect of the fabric of language and thought in the sense that they do not simply express thoughts, they condition them.

As expressions of the unfamiliar by the familiar, Metaphors conceptualise experience in terms of the process of defamiliarisation through a method typically characterised by transiting from the concrete to the abstract such that abstract concepts are understood in terms of prototype concrete processes.

Structurally, metaphors are generally classified into two parts: the tenor – the subject to which attributes are ascribed, and the vehicle - the subject from which attributes are borrowed (I. A. Richards, 1936). This categorisation is quite aptly exemplified in this commonly quoted Shakespearean passage from *As You Like It*:

> All the world's a stage,
> And all the men and women merely players;
> They have their exits and their entrances;

Here, the metaphor is realised through drawing a comparison between "the world" and "a stage" as a way to describe the world by ascribing onto it noted features of the stage. In this instance, "the world" serves as the tenor and "the stage" is the vehicle while "men and women" function as secondary

tenor and "players" as the secondary vehicle. Other terms like, Ground and figure, are sometimes used as alternate concepts to tenor and vehicle just as the metaphor could be analysed in terms of the ground and the tension which serve as similarities between the tenor and the vehicle. In linguistic terms, target and source, are corresponding terms, which can be explained thus: target is source.

Other metaphorical categories include dead metaphor, extended metaphor or conceit, mixed metaphor, absolute metaphor and dying metaphor. Metaphors can occur in more extended ways and forms, across a passage or whole passages or an entire text, especially in literature.

The foregoing perception of metaphor forms the conceptual basis of our interpretation of some of events and experiences depicted in these novels become more explicit and pungent.

Significations of Women in Festus Iyayi's *Heroes* and Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*

The character, Aku, as a metaphoric projection is an enlarged and comprehensive entity. She represents the battered and ravished conscience of the Nigerian nation, a product of the civil war, and embodies the full representation of the Nigerian society of that time. A Biafran by birth and Nigerian by marriage, she is caught up on the Nigerian side where she is regarded as an enemy. Her fate becomes that of the Nigerian society; one in conflict with itself, signified by the two sides to the war, which consequently rob her of her dignity and pride. The humiliation and denigration she suffers signify the downturn of the country's integrity and idealisms. Her experiences and subsequent fall ultimately reflects the nation's descent from glory.

Aku is also a metaphor of the nation's collective guilt and the conquest of her sexuality and her subsequent fall signal the demise of the country's social order. Initially when Aku was firm and consistent and orderly in mind so was there order in the Nigerian state. But as she grew sorrowful and depressed, so her esteem fell, like that of the Nigerian nation.

> Now it all seems very clear. The irony of my role has now come into clear focus. Little did I realise that I was all along clearing the ground for such a tragedy. It has all been a terrible mistake – a terrible mistake! *Wallahi-tallahi*. How could I have known that by giving the woman freedom and protection I was only

> exposing her to this sort of exploitation and making her the target of a rotten relationship? How could I have guessed that by trying to reassure the civilian population of this town – by keeping the state of crisis under control and making the town liveable within the limits of the emergency, by respecting the leadership here and making them feel that though there was a war on they should try to carry their on their lives as much as was possible under the circumstances – how could I have guessed that a man of Chief Toje's calibre, a man I continued to respect in spite of everything, was going to take advantage of the trust and respect that I had for him? Perhaps I should have known that a woman whose husband has been taken away and who was being looked upon all over the town as a rebel – perhaps I should have known that such a woman had too little a chance of living a normal life whatever assurances and protection I tried to give her. (*The Last Duty*, p. 218)

The conquest of Aku and its social implications such as her sexual exploitation are quite indicative of perverted social order during the war. Ali's thoughts and reflections on the plight of Aku in elaborate metaphors like "clearing the ground for such a tragedy" and "making her the target of a rotten relationship", which depict the delicate sensitivity of her condition and situation in the war. Whichever way events turned out, she would be victimised – the scapegoat of the war.

When Aku's sexuality becomes a target of self assertion and aggrandizement between Toje and Odibo, her significance and essence deteriorate, and having been subdued she degenerates. This also represents, in a sense, the conquest of self and the will. This the war did to everybody. Oshevire's action at the end of the novel confirms this. He says:

> But... there is something else to this. If there are any honest men left in this town, they should know that the dishonour brought upon my wife – on my household – was totally unjust. But then the stain remains! The smear is there, clear in the air as a hangman's rope, the noose through which the head must pass. And what kind of life will I be living in this town with my family, when we know that our days are haunted by an indelible shame?

In *Heroes* the flirtations of Salome, the officers, and other top members of the society as well as the sexual exploitation of women are pointers to the metaphoric degeneracy of the leadership. The directionless love affairs and multiple sexual relationships of the elite at the peak of the crisis were acts which connote their selfish and individualistic perception of national issues. While the ordinary soldiers drowned in the River Niger fighting to keep the country united, the military officers and senior officials of the state drowned in alcohol and immersed in excessive sexual pleasure.

The metaphorical projections of the historical incidents of the Nigerian civil war in *Heroes* and *The Last Duty* provide further insight into the nature of gender relationships in the novels. The unwholesome perception of women is revealed in the images that are used to describe them. A statement made by one of the soldiers in *Heroes* remarkably makes the point.

> This business requires intelligence and hard work. It takes much more to fire this gun and kill a moving man that it takes to sleep with your women. (*Heroes*, p. 119)

The message here is conveyed in the entailments signified by the idea that to fire a gun and kill a man requires more intelligence than "to sleep with your women".

A similar situation prevails in Okpewho's *The Last* Duty also. With Toje, women metaphorically represent articles of exchange for egoistic sexual pleasure and self aggrandizement. In his view, sex represents an item that can be traded for food in a sort of trade by barter kind of exchange. He says:

> It's only fair exchange. She needs food, clothing, maintenance and protection very badly ... I am in need of self-assurance... There's no question but that she needs a man. A woman who has known no man for over three years must be feeling the burning itch of desire, and she is too young to let her groin no small services; and she should be thankful to know that... (*The Last Duty*, p. 133)

In the town of Urukpe, Aku is stigmatised and ostracized because of her origin. The people see her as a 'rebel' and her husband's detention compounds her situation as she suffers loneliness.

> However, hard I try; I can never keep my mind from dwelling on these sorrows. For what else can I feed on, imprisoned as I

> am for so long in a solitude that seems to have no end? When the federal troops liberated this town over three years ago, and two members of my tribe ran away because it seemed the only sensible thing to do at the time, I was sure I was doing the right thing by staying behind... I was sticking with my man because couldn't conceive of any kind of existence other than with him. Of course, after a short while the glamour of my decision dulled in my eyes... Now three years after they took him away into detention I do not feel so secure any more. (*The Last Duty*, pp. 11-12)

Both novels, Iyayi's *Heroes* and Okpewho's *The Last Duty*, in depicting the war situation, picture the relationship between men and women in that environment of crisis and show how they survive the severity, austerity and turbulence of the war. Given that the social climate of the war is one of fear, anxiety, uncertainty and distrust, inter-personal and group relationships become very tense and sensitive, almost virtually non-existent in many instances, or at best minimal. The individual is always the worse for it. The Nigerian civil war typified all of these, and the poor state of human interaction has wide implications on gender relations.

A major impact of the war in the societies depicted in *Heroes* and *The Last Duty* is the disruption and dislocation of basic social order and institutions. The energy and efforts of men are directed mostly towards winning the war. The men are drafted into the army and other defence related services. The women run the family and the larger society. The male-heads of the families are detached and made passive or totally removed from immediate contact. Oshevire is detained and returns only towards the end of the war while in Heroes, Mr. Ohiali is murdered by soldiers. In both families the wives become heads of the families. Given the crisis of the war, the women's positions become precarious. The state of uncertainty and insecurity is made more complex by the fact that the war exposes women to grave forms of harassment as soldiers and other influential members of society exploit the vulnerability of this situation to their advantage. But it also introduces a new order in which women become managers of the social system who not only contain the upheaval of the war but also sustain the social order. In metaphorical terms, women become the hope of the country as they demonstrate unfettered resilience, patience and survival.

Aku in *The Last Duty* is left with her little son to contend with the scorn, humiliation and hatred of her host society which treats her as an enemy. Toje exploits her predicament to make his illicit amorous advances and to test the potency of his failing sexuality. Aku turns a tool in the schemes and intrigues of this disorderly social set-up. She is ostracized, exploited and manipulated by the various facets of the war skirmishes. Her fall becomes the tragic pronouncement or indictment of the war. This is how Toje puts it:

> That is why I have not hesitated to recommend a citizen here for detention on charge of collaboration with the rebels, and then suborned another citizen to draw up the details of the indictment. For I felt that Mukoro Oshevire stood in my way. And that again is why I have not hesitated to seek carnal pleasure with his forlorn wife now that I feel my manhood flawed, my potency questioned. (*The Last Duty*, p. 5)

On the other hand Salome, in Iyayi's *Heroes* Brigadier Otunshi's wife and a former girl friend of Osime Iyere treats the men disrespectfully. Her commitment to her marriage is compromised as she attempts to renew her love affair with Osime Iyere. Also, as she indicates her interest in Brigadier Otunshi bothers more on financial and political benefits other than love. Like her husband, most men who encounter her succumb to her beauty and charm. And she manipulates and exploits those who fall prey to her radiance and charm to her advantage. Her most successful scheme is her acquisition of power and influence through her marriage to Otunshi.

Generally, the novel depicts the lowered social status of the women in the Nigerian civil war mainly because of the perverted social conditions of the war and its lopsided priorities. The immediate need of the war being defence and security, an almost entirely male preserve, tends to confer on men elevated social rating and women who did not engage in such services come off down-graded. This tendency results in the undermining of women's contributions to war efforts in other non-military sectors.

In *Heroes* also, Ohiali's family is disoriented and emotionally ravished by the war. Ohiali, upon the capture of Benin by the federal army becomes confused, intimated and overwhelmed psychologically. When he is brutally murdered his family experiences a very deep sense of torture. The wife has to cater for the family and even decide where her husband will be buried. In spite of the risk involved, she decides that his body has to be taken home.

Mrs Ohiali had to play the dual role of father and mother at the height of the crisis of the war.

The circumstances of the war completely tears apart social relations and structure. Fellow-feeling and love are often ignored. The love-hate affair which exists before Osime Iyere and Ndudi arises because they both hail from conflicting sides of the war. Osime Iyere is on the federal side while Ndudi comes from the 'rebel' side.

> But love is also politics and the coming of the Biafrans had driven wedge between them. To be more exact, he had converted the invasion of the state by the Biafrans into a wedge. Somehow, and for a reason he does not understand, he had felt that Ndudi's father had shown a certain amount of joy, in fact, had celebrated the coming of the Biafrans. He had resented it and the love he had flickered and then gone out, leaving nothing but an uneasy darkness. (*Heroes*, p. 18)

The disorientation and disintegration of the family unit, the assumption and dominance of social governance by the military are some indications of the disruptive impact of the war on the social system.

The depiction of sex and sexual interaction in the novels especially the reckless sexual behaviour and indulgences of characters provide another insight into gender relations in wars times. In the circumstance, even sex represents one of the weapons in the war arsenal. When an army takes over a place, the troops embark on vengeful sexual abuse of the women, or perhaps as a celebration of gallantry or heroism as sex apparently becomes one of the booties or spoils of war. For instance, when the federal troops re-take Oganza, Iyayi captures the mood of the situation as Ndudi laments the way she has been repeatedly raped by different soldiers.

> But she kept weeping bitterly, "They raped me again". They raped me! They raped me again! (*Heroes*, p.244)

Ndudi told them that she had been raped twice on that same morning, first by the departing Biafran soldiers and second by the incoming federal soldiers. And each time, she had been raped by two men.

Prostitution and carefree sexual indulgence become widespread and accepted behaviour in the war set up. The journalists, officers and contractors pre-occupy themselves in this kind of conduct. Sex becomes a game in which

partners are constantly changed or switched freely. Perverted sexual practices and habits become fashionable, especially in the top echelons of society. The incident in which the army private shoots a sergeant and a girl who befriends them both in *The Last Duty* is an instance. The women from defeated section of the war are often the worse for it as they are constantly abused sexually by the army of the victorious.

Another obvious aspect of gender signification in the novels is the mutual disregard for integrity and dignity of the sexes. The men treat the women in a manner devoid of respect, care and tact as the instance in which Toje questions his wife over his failing sexual power.

> ...woman, here's what's happened to me, do you think that it could by chance have anything to do with you?
> 'What are you asking me?' she broke out, eyes gleaming as though she would split my head in two and spill my brains that very minute. 'Toje, what are you saying?'
> 'Be calm, woman, no need to shout about it. It's only between you and me. All I ask is, could it by any, accident be –'
> 'Accident?' She was up on her feet, glowering down on me now – *me*! –like an oversized serpent. 'Accident? What kind of accident?" (*The Last Duty*, pp. 24 – 25)

Toje's humiliating and condescending attitude towards women is aptly shown in the despicable amorous advances he makes at Aku.

In Iyayi's *Heroes* there is an instance of a kind of reversal of the situation in which the men are equally exploited by Salome, who has no regards for the men and uses them to her own advantage, though this is just one example of this in the midst of many instances of male exploitation of the female. For Salome, men are tools to be used and exploited for whatever purpose they can serve. In this case, her beauty is constructed as a metaphor of power. Through her manipulation of the men, Salome is able to gain access to power and wealth. She marries Brigadier Otunshi for his position and financial benefits, but loves Osime. Her beauty becomes her asset and source of power as well as a trap for the men who get attracted by her beauty.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to examine the significations of gender in war fiction through a linguistic analysis of the portrayal of women and their experiences in Festus Iyayi's *Heroes* and Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*. Using the experiences of mainly the female characters in Nigerian civil war presented in these novels, we analyse the nature and patterns of gender relations in a crisis situation. Our analysis has been carried out is through a language-based investigation of Metaphor in the Iyayi's *Heroes* and Okpewho's *The Last Duty* as the analytic construct. Based on the understanding that gender entails the qualitative and interdependent character of women's and men's position in society and its realisation in terms of the relations of power and dominance that structure the life choices of women and men [Ostergaard, 1992/96], we have demonstrated in the novels under study, the various dimensions and ramifications of gender in a war setting. It is hoped that study has revealed opportunities for a better understanding of the sensitive situation of women particularly in a war. The paper has also revealed the literary dimensions of the depiction of gender relations as a form of social reality in the Nigerian civil war drawing from the assumption that Literature being a linguistic facility has implications for reconstructing social reality while still projecting its aesthetic values.

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