

# ***SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR: A STUDY OF ISIDORE OKPEWHO'S THE LAST DUTY***

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## **Abstract**

This study examines sexual exploitation of women in Nigerian war novels. It attempts to explain women's sexual experiences and the implication of non-consensual sexual relationship on women and the wider society using Okpewho's *The Last Duty*. In order to achieve the aim of the study, the feminist objectification theory is applied to the analysis of relevant incidents in the novels. The findings show that in the novel, the female character notably, Aku is sexually exploited and objectified through her use as an object of sexual pleasure by the male characters. The study also shows that the experiences of the women are occasioned by the war situation. Aku, for instances, was sexually exploited by Chief Toje and Odibo, who merely used her to satisfy their sexual urges without caring about her humanity.

Keywords: War, Sexual exploitation, Gender, Isidore Okpewho,

## **Introduction**

War literature has engaged the attention of scholars to interrogate the language use and the unusual occurrences that characterize such a time (Simon and Obeten (2013), Nnaji (2014), Robert (2014), Nwagbara 1996, Awogu-Maduagwu and Umunnakwe (2018) and Sanka (2019)). Simon and Obeten (2013) examine the impact of Pan-Africanism on African feminism using *Emecheta's* novel, *Destination*

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*Biafra*, while Nwagbara (1996) studies aspects of the linguistic signification of gender in war fiction by examining the metaphorical depiction of women in Okpewho's *The Last Duty* and Iyayi's *Heroes*. Yet, Robert (2014) studies the syntactic features of two war novel: *The Last Duty* by Okpewho and *Never Again* by Nwapa, and Sanka (2019) applies the theory of Marxism to explain gender relationship in the novel, *The Last Duty*. It is, however, important to point out that sexual exploitation, especially in the novel, *The Last Duty* has not attracted the attention it deserves, considering the centrality of sexual exploitation to the evolution of the plot of the novel.

Sexual exploitation is hardly a pleasant topic for academic discourses. This explains the paucity of literature in such subjects as rape, incest and other unethical sexual relationship. Scholars, especially feminists have attributed this to the patriarchal dominance of the academic genres by men, who are often times the culprits (Nordstrom, 1996). However, it is important to note that there have been a paradigm shift in recent time as feminist writers have taken it upon themselves to question the status quo (Askin, 2001, Frühstück, 2006). This study is therefore an attempt to explore this greasy area of human relationship in war novels, thereby expanding the literature on war time and gender relationship.

Nigerian Civil War, 1967-70 has generated a prodigious literature, both non-fiction and fiction. Some of these are Adegboyega's *Why we Struck* (1982); Forsyth's *Emeka* (1982) ; Elaigwu's *Gowon: The Biography of a Soldier's Statesman* (1986); Achebe's *There Was a Country* (2012); Okpewho's *The Last Duty* (1976); Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006); Ken Saro Wiwa's *Sozaboy*(1985); Iyayi's

*Heroes* (1986). It is noted that there have been a considerable number of critical works on the above literary creations (Simon and Obeten 2013, Robert 2014, Nwagbara 1996, Awogu-Maduagwu and Umunnakwe 2018, Sanka and 2019, Nnaji, 2014). However, none of these works has focused on sexual exploitation of women, especially women's non-consensual sexual relationship. The present study, by examining sexual exploitation of women in *The Last Duty*, attempts to fill this academic gap,

War time is a period characterised by breakdown of law and order marked by intensive violence. Wars are often caused by differences of opinions, ideology or economic interests, among others. War. Examples of wars in recent history are the Nigeria Civil war (1967-70), the Sudanese civil war (1983-2005), later Southern Sudan war (2013 to date), the Sierra Leonean civil war (1991-2002), and the the Liberian war (1999-2003), among others. Wars generally have enormous consequences on the conditions and experiences of people. This is because every war situation results in the disruption and dislocation of the political, economic and social order which often leads to a state lawlessness and anarchy in a given society. This, in turn, results to pervasive insecurity leading to loss of lives and property, hunger, starvation, oppression, exploitations, diseases and the general curtailment of human rights of people. These war situations have generated a good number of literary works and accompanying critical works. The present study, however, focuses on sexual exploitation of women as a form of objectification as portrayed in the novel, *The Last Duty* by *Isidore Okpewho* to explain the surrounding circumstances and the wider implication for gender relationship.

### **Synopsis of the Novel**

The novel, *The Last Duty* is authored by *Isidore Okpewho* and published in 1976. The novel has its setting in the South-South region of Nigeria, particularly the *Urhobo* speaking area of Delta State during the Nigerian Civil War between 1967 and 1970. The characters in the novel are *Aku*, Chief *Toje*, *Odibo* (*Toje*'s servant), *Oshevire*, *Oghenovo* (*Aku*'s little son) and Major *Ali* (Commander of Federal troop). The novel centres on *Aku*. *Aku* is the wife of *Oshevire*. *Oshevire* was arrested and detained on trumped-up charges of collaborating with enemy soldiers. With the arrest and consequent detention of their breadwinner, *Aku* and her son, *Oghenovo* are left with no one to carter for them. Her case is made worse by the fact that she comes from the secessionists' ethnic group and her husband, accused of collaborating with enemy soldiers. All these culminated in her being ostracized in *Orukpe* community. This means that she cannot buy, sell or interact with other members of the community. In fact, she is left to die with her only son, *Oghenovo*. It is at this material time that *Toje* appeared in the scene pretending to be of help to the young woman and her son. This is noted when he opposed the kind gesture of Major *Ali* to put *Aku* in a protective custody.

“well, I think I had better take her into protective custody then.” Oh no, no, no! He objected, quite strongly. You shouldn't do a thing like that, Major...I am doing the little I can to ease their suffering ... so once in while I send her clothes, food, money ... (p57)

*Toje* is a rubber merchant and a competitor with *Oshevire* (*Aku*'s husband). Because of the perceived threat to his rubber business interest by *Oshevire*, he planned with others to frame him up; the war situation provided a good opportunity. This is also helped by the fact that *Oshevire*'s wife, *Aku* is considered a rebel since she comes from the rebel's enclave. Having succeeded in framing up *Oshevire* and hoodwinking Major *Ali*, *Toje* sets the stage for the sexual exploitation of *Aku*.

### **Methodology**

The study is based on written text. The novel, *The Last Duty* provides the data. After a careful reading of the novel, relevant excerpts were identified and extracted for detailed study. This is done by applying the Feminist's Objectification Theory to the interpretation of data. The choice of the novel is as a result of the fact that it contains relevant incidents that help to illustrate the theme of the study. The study is a content analysis procedure that attempts to explain relevant incidents that serve to explain sexual exploitation in war time as presented in the novel.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study adopts Immanuel Kant's theory of sexual objectification. Sexual objectification is an aspect of feminist theory that seeks to explain sexuality in human relationship. To Kant, sexuality is problematic when exercised outside monogamous marriage. He argued that sexual relationship in such other instances outside a monogamous marriage leads to objectification. He states:

Sexual love makes of the loved one an object of appetite; as soon as that appetite has been stilled the person is cast aside as one casts away a lemon which has been sucked dry....as

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soon as a person becomes an object of appetite for another, all motives of moral relationship cease to function, because as an object of appetite for another, a person becomes a thing and can be treated and used as such by everyone. (163)

Nussbaum (1995: 257) identifies seven features that constitute objectification. These are: the treatment of a person as a tool for the objectifier's purposes; denial of autonomy: the treatment of a person as lacking in autonomy and self-determination; inertness: the treatment of a person as lacking in agency and perhaps in activity; fungibility: the treatment of a person as interchangeable with other object; violability: the treatment of a person as lacking in boundary-integrity; ownership: the treatment of a person as something that is owned by another; denial of subjectivity: the treatment of a person as something whose experiences and feelings need not be taken into account. Sexual objectification has been applied to a number of studies (Carr and Szymanski, 2011; Moffitt and Szymanski, (2011). The present study adopts sexual objectification theory because it best explains the precarious condition of women in wartime especially as served in the novel under study.

**Review of Literature**

There have been critical works on the novel selected for this essay and other literary works that are based on the Nigerian civil war. Regarding studies carried out on the novel, *The Last Duty*, four works have been identified. These are Nnaji (2014), Nwachukwu and Nwachukwu (2017), Sanka (2019) and Robert (2014). Nnaji undertakes a stylistic analysis of

Okpewho's *The Last Duty* with the aim of explaining the stylistic features that are used by the author in passing his message. The study identifies a unique narrative technique that characterizes the work. This, the author refers to as individualistic narrative style, where each character gives account of his or her activities. At the sentential level, the author identifies the use of the following sentence types: Periodic sentence, loose sentence, simple sentence, complex sentence and compound-complex sentence. Commenting on the significance of loose sentence type, the author observes "The loose sentence presents the direct message first while the additional information comes after. It is a literary style which aims at natural simplicity and directness, instead of rhetorical effects" (2014:81). The study notes that punctuation marks such as dash and ellipsis are used in special ways. For instance, the author observes that ellipsis is used to create suspense. In addition, he notes that figures of speech like anaphora, litotes, and rhetorical questions, among others, are also used to beautify the work. Findings from the study show that language is not only a means of communication, but also an instrument used to present messages in a special and peculiar way. In a related study, Robert (2014) examines the syntactic features of two war novel: *The Last Duty* by Okpewho and *Never Again* by Nwapa. Though the study is a contrastive one, the researchers believe that the review of the work will help in understanding the extent of work done on the primary text of study in the research. The study shows that the authors use both structural sentence types such as, simple, compound and complex sentences, and functional sentence types such as declarative, imperative and rhetorical questions in their texts. In addition, the author notes the use of elliptical structures, contracted forms of words and utterance initiators in both novels. According to the author, this style helps the

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novelists to portray the characters as live humans. In what can be understood as a difference in style, the author observes that Okpewho uses hypotactic sentence style which is interpreted by feminist writers as a male phenomenon of patriarchy and dominance, while Nwapa uses paratactic sentence style; short and simple sentences intended to show equality and coordination. Finally, the author observes the use of language that is spiced with insults and abuses, exemplifying the language of war.

In a similar manner, Nwagbara (1996) also studies of an aspect of the linguistic signification of gender in war fiction by examining the metaphorical depiction of women in Nigerian civil war fiction. The main concern of the paper is to unravel the forms and dimensions of gender and its representation in conflict situations as portrayed in Okpewho's *The Last Duty* and Iyayi's *Heroes*. The analysis is carried out through a language-based investigation, using the experiences of female characters in Nigerian civil war presented in the two novels selected for the study. In conclusion, the study shows opportunities for a better understanding of the sensitive situation of women particularly in a war situation. Again, it shows 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 protecting its aesthetic values. In what could be considered as an evaluative study, Nwachukwu and Nwachukwu (2017) study the presentation in *The Last Duty* to throw light on the motivation for the choices made by the characters in the novel considering the prevailing war situation. They argued that the actions of the characters are absurdist rather than nihilistic. The argument of

the authors is hinged on the precarious nature of war situation which often times is exploited to settle personal scores. Though this might be viewed as nihilistic, the authors, however, contend that it is not, but rather an absurdity that characterizes the nature of man, irrespective of the situation he finds himself. Finally, the authors note that, irrespective of seeming hopelessness of the fortune of mankind as may be deduced from actions and inactions of the characters, there is still hope for mankind in view of the acts of Major Ali and the repentant Rukeme towards the end of the novel. Sanka (2019) applies the theory of Marxism to explain gender relationship in the novel, *The Last Duty*. The author explores the concept of patriarchy as an undesirable ideology that promotes the oppression of the weak and vulnerable by the strong and powerful in the society. Studying the power relation in the novel, especially between Toje and others, most notable Aku and Odibo, the author argues that patriarchy as an ideology does not only succeeds in creating an unequal relation in the society that operates to perpetually subordinate the women, but also men, especially those incapacitated by nature or circumstances. Finally, the author suggests that men and women should collectively fight for the abolition of patriarchal system in order to achieve an egalitarian society where synergy can be harnessed for the betterment of all.

Exploring critical works that are devoted to the explanation of the literary portrayal of Nigerian war situation, three works are identified. These are Simon and Obeten (2013), Ogbazi (2012) and Anyadike (2001). Simon and Obeten (2013) examine the impact of Pan-Africanism on African feminism using *Emecheta's* novel, *Destination Biafra*. In doing this, they examine the roles played by the female characters in the novels. Such female characters in the novel are Debbie, *Uzoma*, Dorothy and others. According to

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the authors, in order to liberate themselves and their nation, the female characters perform duties hitherto performed by men. For instance, Debbie joins the military where she plays the critical role of a combatant in the war. She also plays the role of a mobilizer of women as she conscientizes other women. According to Simon and Obeten (2013:206), “Debbie’s feminist/nationalist ideologies come to the fore when she helps to mobilize other women during the war. By helping them in the struggle for the emancipation of their race and gender, Debbie joins the rank of African women [nationalists] like *Bolanle Awe*, *Lawretta Njco*, *Simi Afonja*, *Omolora Ogundipe-Leslie* [sic] etc.”

In addition, the authors also identify the rejection of marriage by Debbie as an affirmation of her liberation from the fixation that African women are typified. In the words of the authors: “Debbie debunks the myth that marriage is the traditional role of women thus breaking the yoke of the fixation of women in the patriarchal culture.” (Simeon and Obeten 2003: 207). Finally, the authors demonstrate the changing role of African women and the effort to actualize self and contribute to nation building. Still commenting on the situation of women in a war time, Ogbazi (2012) undertakes a study of the representation of female voices and the experiences in conflict situations using Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The study uses content analysis method to discuss the experiences of women during the Nigerian Civil war. The paper posits that in whatever women are, were or are part of; they ought to be part of its making, part of its story; “Because they participated, it is expected that they should be part of the story telling process.” (Ogbazi, 2008:18). Commenting further, Ogbazi (2012:25) states:

Adichie's voice echoes to us, even as she masks behind her narrator and her female character. Through the female point of view, we are given the opportunity of seeing clearly the true pictures of the horrors of the conflict, coupled with the back-grounded female victims who are in actual fact, the neglected heroines.

The paper maintains that Adichie's voice is a female voice that is more articulate and more robust in her comprehensive imaginative representations of Nigeria during the Civil war. Also, the paper shows that deprivation and loss are usual accompaniment to war and women seem to suffer more than men as they are sexually exploited, abused and raped. The paper concludes that the true story of female experiences during the civil war would not have been told rightly without Adichie's female voice.

In another study that examines a war situation, Anyadike (2001) investigates the use of war songs in the Nigeria civil war to show the significance of song in wars. In doing this, the study adopts a content analysis method of research. The paper's contention is that "if the use of songs helped to nurture nationalistic feelings and a sense of solidarity among a people almost notorious for their adaptability to change and readiness to change and readiness to go their separate ways and settle down in any part of the world, it can play an important part in instilling or awakening consciousness, especially in Nigerian youth" (Anyadike, 2001:39). In the paper, the author emphasizes the near absence of patriotic feelings among Nigerians and how Biafrans use songs to nurture genuine patriotic feelings during the thirty months of civil war. Though Anyadike discusses Biafran songs, he does not root his essay in any work or

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novel. He talks as a Biafran who witnessed the war from the inside.

From the review presented, it is noted that there have not been any study that examined sexual exploitation as a form of sexual objectification in the in *The Last Duty* or any other war literature that details the Nigerian Civil War. This is the gap in scholarship that the present work seeks to fill.

**Sexual Objectification in the Last Duty**

The business rivalry between two characters (*Toje* and *Oshevire*) in the novel sets the stage for the sexual exploitation of *Aku*, the wife of *Oshevire*. *Toje* uses the opportunity of the war situation to settle a business rivalry between *Oshevire* and himself. He fabricated lies against *Oshevire* and got him arrested under the prevailing martial laws. The events that followed set the stage for the account of how a woman, *Aku* is sexually exploited and objectified by *Toje* and *Odibo*. Beyond *Aku*, there are also other instances of sexual exploitation in the novel. The narrative that follows illustrates these. *Aku* is the wife of *Oshievere* and the husband has been locked up in detention in *Iddu* for collaborating with the rebelling soldiers. Commander *Ali* captures the situation when he states:

Perhaps I should have known that a woman whose husband has been taken far away and who has been looked upon all over the town as a rebel—perhaps I should have known that such a woman has too little chance of living a normal life (p.218)

The above captures the situation under which *Aku* lives. *Aku*'s husband having been taken away, she is devoid of

care and protection which ultimately exposes her to abuse and exploitation.

It's only fair exchange. She needs food, clothing, [and] maintenance very badly, with her husband far away under the firm grip of detention, she cannot help herself, alone and unattended... I am in need of self-reassurance. I need very badly to confirm to myself that I still possess within me that natural power without which a man has no claim whatsoever to that qualification. (p. 133).

The above gives a clear indication of *Toje's* motive in seeking sexual liaison with *Aku*. *Toje* understands *Aku's* predicament and decides to exploit the situation to achieve a selfish aim. He is also aware that he has a failing manly power and in 'need of self-re-assurance and needs anybody'. From the beginning, he defines his goal. He needs anybody for the purpose of measuring and ascertaining his sexual power. He needs an object to achieve his purpose and he makes *Aku* the object. According to Nussbaum, objectification exists when a person is treated as a tool for achieving the objectifier's purposes (1995: 257). It is important to note that it is the prevailing war situation that provides the opportunity for such thought 'with her husband far away and under the firm grip of detention, she cannot help herself.' From the explanation, it right to observe that the precarious war situation gives rise to the objectification of *Aku* as realised in the novel.

In the excerpt below, *Aku* paints a pathetic picture which the war situation thrusts upon her.

I began to go over in my mind the painful life that I had been subjected to living since they took my man away luck has certainly not been

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on my side. The endless loneliness, the lack of protection ... the fact that I now have to crawl on my knees and spread my legs! – for a living. (161)

In the above extract, *Aku* bemoans her state that results from the war situation. She states the fact that since her husband was taken away she has lacked protection and loneliness has become her lot. Again it is instructive to note that the war situation and development in the community had made it difficult for her to fend for herself and her little child. This development makes it possible for her to be exploited and consequently objectified. As could be discovered the help given by *Toje* is not without strings as he demands sexual gratification which has now made *Aku* to regard herself as a whore. It is obvious from the above scenario that *Aku* is sexually exploited by *Toje* who offers assistance in return for a sex. On the other hand, *Aku* is compelled by the war situation that handicaps her to offer sex in return for help rendered. The above is a clear case of objectification where *Toje* merely uses *Aku* to satisfy his sexual longing without caring about her feeling. According to Nwagbara (1996:8), ‘Given the crisis of the war the women’s position becomes precarious. The state of uncertainty and insecurity is made more complex by the fact that the war expose women to grave forms of harassment as soldiers and other influential members of society explore the vulnerability of this situation to their advantage.’

The above view helps to understand *Aku*’s situation better. *Toje* is an influential member of *Urukpe* community. He uses this influence to make sure that *Aku* and her son were not taken into protective custody. No doubt, the influence exercised over Major *Ali* by *Toje* is a fact in defining *Aku*’s

sexual experiences. Also, worthy of note is the fact that *Aku* objectifies herself. She understands this as she states: ‘... I now have to crawl on my knees and spread my legs! – for a living’ (p. 161). According to Fredrickson *et al* (2011:690), self-objectification occurs when one ‘introjects an objectifying third-person perspective on one’s own body evaluating it in terms of its value ... to others, rather its value and function for the self.’ *Aku*’s situation is made worse when one understands the fact that *Aku* is made a fanciful sex object that “king” *Toje* uses to experiment and measure his recovery from impotency. He only stokes the woman’s passion but never satisfied her. She captures her experience thus:

If it was now my lot to be *Toje*’s whore, did I not have right at least to be purged of my desire--unwilling as I might be--as often as it suited him to invite me to play the role? Fate, I insisted, had no reason to treat me to so much undeserved sadism ... (p 162)

In the extract, *Aku* expresses her pains. She shows understanding of her circumstance and the painful realization that she cannot help herself. And she is condemned to the role assigned to her, but not the one she deserves or can change. This feeling of objectification is reinforced when *Aku* makes the following statement:

When I got back to the bed he fell over me ... with his hand he explore my groin with such blind vigour ... As usual he did nothing beyond that. When the handwork was over he sat up on the bed and wept. He did not say a word in sympathy he simply turn his face towards the wall and let me have my feel of crying. Not even after I have dressed myself

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again and told him I was going did he offer any response (p. 158)

In the extract, *Aku* recounts her sexual experience with *Toje*. With the loss of sexual power, *Toje* cannot perform the sexual exercise he craves. As reported by *Aku*, he does only 'handwork' and this is done with 'such a blind vigour'. This shows that *Toje* does not care for the feeling of *Aku*. *Aku*, to *Toje*, is just a thing that can be used and cast away. Also worthy of note is the fact that *Aku* is not sexually satisfied, but inflamed with unattended passion. This makes her cry. *Toje* who initiates the failed sexual encounter is not bothered as he neither shows sympathy nor offers explanation for his failed performance. This is a case of objectification as *Aku*'s feeling is not taken into account by *Toje*. In the words of *Aku*, 'he did not say a word in sympathy, he simply turn his face ... '. According to the proponents of the theory of sexual objectification, objectification occurs when someone's feeling is not taken into account in a sexual relationship. The account given above shows that *Aku* is used merely to fulfill the purpose of *Toje* who does not have a tinge of feeling or care for the person of *Aku*. It is also important to note the violence meted out to *Aku* as reflected in her account. According to her, the 'handwork' is done with 'blind vigour'. This presupposes that *Aku* feels some discomfort. According to Fredrickson *et al* (2011:690), 'objectification may occur in many ways ranging from sexual violence to sexual evaluation.' So, the idea of doing 'handwork' with blind vigour serves to accentuate the feeling of objectification in the novel.

Another incident in the novel that shows a case of sexual exploitation cum objectification in the scene was the

brutal fight between chief *Toje* and *Odibo* at exercising control and ownership over *Aku*. The scene is captured given by *Odibo*:

‘You brute! he curses’, quaking with passion. Where is that woman?’ she has just-‘liar! he blaars, pushing me aside ...‘ ... You slut! he spits at her. ‘You worthless harlot! ’Raising his hand, he is about to storm in and strike her. But I grab him by the hand...with my one hand I sweep his blundering arms away from my face, causing him to stumble aside and ‘that’s enough from you!’ I fall against the wall. The woman wails aloud and pleads that we stop ...

In reply, and panting furiously like a lizard he swings violently at my face with his hand. The blow sends a sharp pain searing my face. In immediate reaction, I slung him hard across the mouth and back again across the eyes and he drops down on the floor at once’ (p. 212)

*Odibo*, in the above extract, recounts what happened at the scene where *Toje* finds out that he was having sexual relationship with *Aku*. *Toje* is angry and makes to attack both *Odibo* and *Aku* for their ‘dishonourable’ conduct. Here, *Toje* tends to exercise ownership over *Aku* and denies her autonomy. *Toje* addresses *Aku* as a harlot, slut, spits at her and makes attempt to hit her severally but is restrained by *Odibo* who exercises control over *Aku* at this critical moment. This captured in the following: “‘You slut!’ He spits at her. “‘You worthless harlot!’” Raising his hand, he is about to storm in and strike her.’ It is necessary to state that what gives rise to the above scenario is the discovery of the amorous

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relationship between *Odibo* and *Aku* since *Toje* could not sexually satisfy *Aku*. It is noted that neither *Toje* nor *Odibo* has legitimate right over *Aku* but in the scenario they claim ownership over *Aku*, someone else's wife just for the sexual gratification they receive or ought to receive. The incident shows a case of sexual objectification as both *Toje* and *Odibo* are locked in a fierce context to own and control *Aku* because of the sex services they get from her.

One other significant instance of objectification in the novel is the sexual encounter between *Aku* and *Odibo*, *Toje's* servant. *Odibo* recounts the experience thus:

Now all that is gone. *Gone*—now I know that I am a man like any other man. I have desire that should be satisfied impulses that should be realized and my big strong body is no longer there for nothing ... for after that woman let me into her body, and I experience a release of my long pent – up passion, I felt my whole body—my whole personality loosened and my entire being (p. 179- 180).

From the account given by *Odibo*, it could be deduced that *Aku* has been used to relieve his sexual tension. After the sexual encounter he feels fulfilled and asserts his new found identity as he says ... my big strong body is no longer there for nothing ... (p.179). The statement of *Odibo* reported above could be understood better when the circumstance of his existence as presented in the novel is put in perspective. *Odibo* is a handicapped servant of *Toje* and he has always lived in *Toje's* shadows. *Toje* always reminds him of his

incapacity, and this tends to control his thought process and defines his person. In the extract below, he reports *Toje*'s assessment of him:

*What use is this awkward mass of body, he said, if you cannot help yourself. And you have no mind. No sense. Nothing. All you have is a huge body. And that is no use to anyone. No use at all, not even to yourself. Utterly useless ... (p. 60) (emphasis in the original).*

In accepting the characterisation of his person by *Toje*, *Odibo* says: "I know I am not worth much. Or anything. I know I cannot help myself or anybody. I cannot think or do anything." (p.60). From the above, it is clear that *Odibo* lacks confidence and self-worth. This has defined his person and aspiration. There is no the faintest idea that he would ever be admitted to the bosom of a woman or do what his 'strong' master could not do. *Odibo* captures the euphuistic experience thus: '*This pure heaven! To have a woman sharing my own bed with me—and not only not unwilling to wallow in such lowly circumstance but indeed having every moment of it and addressing me in language I could have sworn I would never hear!*' (p.204) (emphasis in the original). Having a sexual relationship with anyone has not been part of *Odibo*'s dream and having such a relationship with *Aku* has resulted in self-re-evaluation. This is the discovery of self. Therefore, the sexual encounter between *Odibo* and *Aku* could be considered as an instance of objectification in the novel. To *Odibo*, *Aku* has become a tool for him to achieve self-realization and restoration of his human person. To the extent that *Odibo* has used *Aku* as a tool to achieve his end, he has not only sexually exploited her but also objectified her. This brings forth another question: considering the circumstance could it be

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said that *Odibo* objectified *Aku*? This is debatable and a guide for further exploration of the issues raised.

Another instance of objectification involves an unnamed female character in the novel who had sexual relationship with two army officers. The relationship had a fatal end which could be understood within the context of the war. Below is an account given by *Ali*, the military commandant of the Federal troop in *Orukpe*.

When he arrived, the vehicle was there all right. His pace didn't change. He cocked his gun, with one violent kick of the leg he flung the door open. After a quick look around he made for the bedroom. And there, just awake from her slumber, the girl was lying in plain, shameless nudity on the bed with the sergeant's camouflage shirt and belt slung over a nearby chair. She screamed, sat up quickly and tried to cover herself. But the soldier's gun was at the ready and she knew it. She called his name and begged to explain. One look of contempt down her lewd figure told him what had happened, told him he had to put an end to it all. Anger now knew no verbal language, except one muttered curse, 'Harlot!' He screwed his mouth, clenched his teeth, [and] pulled the trigger and – *tata-tata-tata-tata-tata!* The girl writhed for a few second and slumped between the blood-shocked sheets (p. 17).

The picture painted above, shows how a war situation could reduce human life to a mere object to be wasted at will. The young lady, beyond being sexually exploited by two soldiers is under threat of harm and brutally murdered by one of the soldiers who felt jilted. The incident explains a case of objectification at two levels: First, the lady was exploited sexually by men who never had any commitment and respect for her person. The other, is the cold blooded murder of the lady by a person who has lost his humanity.

### **Implication of Sexual Objectification**

Given the associated crisis of war, the women's position becomes precarious. The impact of sexual exploitation cum objectification, be it rape or other forms is grave on the victims and on the collective psychology of women. As victims they are perpetually traumatized, as non-victims they live on the shadowy fear of being abused one day. According to Nwagbara (1996:8) : '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 the society explore the vulnerability of the situation to their advantage. It is to be noted that the women so abused sexually are the wives, mothers, sisters and daughters of other men. Therefore, any abuse targeted at any woman is a hurt on the collective psychology of the society. This is captured by *Oshivere* when he comes back from prison and discovers that his wife has been sexually abused.

...they should know that the dishonor 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 the

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town with my family, when we know that our days are haunted by an indelible shame? (p.237)

The exploitation of *Aku* brought destructive consequence upon *Urukpe* community is the case of a prominent chief, *Toje* and his servant, *Odibo* who lost their lives as a result of the context for the ownership and control of *Aku*. Consequent upon this, the community seeks *Aku*'s repatriation as reported by *Ali*, the military Commander in *Urukpe* thus:

I was going to observe that duty no matter what happened or who felt hurt. I told him of the delegation from the chief of this town, demanding the repatriation of his wife from the town on the ground that her continued presence was detrimental to the welfare and safety of the community (p.235)

It is quite pathetic to note that the community that fail to protect *Aku*, tends to add to her trauma and misfortune. There lies the fate of a woman!

### **Conclusion**

From the study presented above, it is right to observe that sexual exploitation of women is a dangerous occurrence that ruins not only the victim, but also the entire community. Therefore, it behooves on every one to manage the delicate gender relationship that is defined by sex, by exercising control and restraint on their lecherous adventure, as the pleasure of sex is but a flicker, while its negative consequences is destructive and long lasting. Also, by studying the narrative of sexual exploitation of African women as presented in the novel, *The Last Duty*, the present

study contributes to the existing works on sexual exploitation of women. To this end, the study brings to the table African perspective to the global discourse of sexual exploitation and objectification of women in the society

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