

**Discursive Construction of the Ideological Self and Other in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's
The Last of the Strong Ones (1996)**

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ABSTRACT: *This paper investigates the linguistic resources deployed by Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo in *The Last of the Strong Ones* to construct group solidarity and social identity. Conducting critical discourse analysis, the paper explores the discourses of resistance of a typically black agrarian Umuga community to the domination of Kosiri's or the white settlers. The analysis reveal the use of the discursive strategies of membership categorization, referential nomination and agency in the construction of the in-group and out-group dichotomies of Us and Them. The black population in Umuga, which makes up the majority in the community, displays group solidarity based on their shared social representations and ideologies against the more powerful white settlers, who, by contrast, make up the minority. The narrator also indexes the domination and exclusion of Umuga people using agentless passive constructions. The significance of this study lies in showing that the reader's understanding of how textual resources index participants' social identity, their ideological attitudes and the power relations that underlie discursive interactions enhances text processing and interpretation.*

KEYWORDS: critical discourse analysis, ideology, self-presentation, discursive strategy, Nigerian literature.

INTRODUCTION

A large number of studies on Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones* (henceforth *The Last*) adopt various literary and sociological perspectives (e.g. Bhattacharji 2008, Shodipe 2008, Nweke 2008, Ladele 2009). In comparison, little attempt has been made at a linguistic interpretation of Adimora-Ezeigbo's novel. Notable among the existing studies are Obododinma Oha's (2008) examination of the patterns of linguistic onomastics in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *House of Symbols* and Temitope Abiodun Balogun's (2011) investigation of the roles of interrogative questions in Adimora-Ezeigbo's novels. The purpose of this paper is to explore the presentation of Self and Other in *The Last* in the context of the resistance to colonial dominance and repression. In addition, it will investigate the linguistic resources deployed to construct group identity and solidarity. In the focus of Adimora-Ezeigbo's novel are the white people, who are defined as the Other. In comparison, the local people of Umuga define their

collective identity in relation to the white settler in the context of their dehumanizing experience and the suppression of their traditional cultural values.¹ Such relational dynamic and the forms of identity that it engenders ultimately shape the reader's perception of the Igbo as presented in the novel. The extracts chosen in the analysis are interpreted in the light of two core ideas: the presentation of Self, i.e. the colonial subjects, and the presentation of Other, i.e. Kosiri or the colonial masters. This study shows that the reader's understanding of how textual resources index participants' social identity, their ideological attitudes and the power relations that underlie discursive interactions enhances text processing and interpretation.

The Last of the Strong Ones is an imaginative reconstruction of the history of the south eastern Umuga town in colonial Nigeria. Adimora Ezeigbo weaves the story around the lives and activities of four influential women, who alongside their male counterparts, assumed the leadership of Umuga in an attempt to build structures of group solidarity among their community members, and use the same structures to rally them against what they considered the negative and disruptive influence of British colonial domination on their tradition and social lives. The indirect rule system of government adopted by the British colonial administration had foisted on the community administrative heads known as warrant chiefs who assisting Kosiri, the white man, were made to oversee the affairs of Umuga. The repressive policies of the colonial administration fueled discontent and resistance among the locals whose voice resonated through the strong women, Ejimnaka, Onyekozuru, Chieme, and Chibuka, the representatives of the women of Umuga.

The author through this novel seems to reject the stereotypical classification of womanhood within the context of the Igbo culture. Like other women writers, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, who protested the relegation of the Igbo women in a patriarchal society in their works, e.g. Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), *Idu* (1968), and Emecheta's *The Bride Price* (1976), and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) respectively, Ezeigbo's work is a reaction to the deplorable socioeconomic situation of Igbo women in particular under colonial rule. This, perhaps, explains her portrayal of women in active leadership roles, and letting the readers into their experiences, pains and emotions as they resist, alongside their male counterparts the meddlesomeness of the colonialist.

As an historical text, *The Last of the Strong Ones* belongs to the tradition of Nigerian literature writers who "draw on the material of the conflicts ensuing from the colonialist invasion of the Nigerian space, psyche, traditions, mores and societies and ... have either used this same material or the more recent tragic event of the Nigerian Civil War as the backdrop for their fictional discourse" (Ladele, 2009: 76). Generally, literary works located within this postcolonial

¹ Social identity refers to a sense of group membership, hinged on some stable and shared goals and interests that are reproduced in discourse and through group interaction. Collective identities are defined through a construction and reproduction of shared understandings about a group's Self as well as through an opposition to an Other. On the one hand, the social identity of a group shapes the group's social practices, interaction and discourses. On the other hand, groups' discourses become the tools for acquiring, expressing, challenging and reproducing the social identity of the given collective (see van Dijk 1998, 2008, 2014).

context interrogate the historical, psychological, economic, and political complexities that result from the colonial experience which has forced “us to continually define ourselves in exclusively, relational and colonial terms” (Ladele, 2009:71). Ayo Kehinde (2010) argues that postcolonial African novelists use their novels to present a counter-narrative to the stereotypes previously mapped out in literary canonical texts about the African people and their traditions. Thus, the postcolonial literatures not only challenge the hegemonic boundaries and the structures of unequal power relations built on the principles of social identity that categorize people as Us and Them, White and Black, Coloniser and Colonised; it also points the way forward to emergent new identities for the African peoples.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The data in this paper consist of sentences and excerpts from Adimora-Ezeigbo’s *The Last*. The excerpts are subjected to qualitative analysis to examine how the social identities, beliefs and group solidarity of characters are expressed in the narrative. Adimora-Ezeigbo’s narrative is a fictional account of the colonial experience in Igboland, a region in southeast Nigeria. The representation, in the novel, of the historical experiences involves the employment of facts and beliefs, the construction of group identities, and the presentation of the dehumanization and suppression of Igbo cultural values. One way to approach *The Last* is to treat it as (a representation of) a discursive practice that shapes socially shared knowledge, such as attitudes and ideology². Critical discourse analysis, with its focus on language structures and strategies rather than just content, offers the tools suited to the investigation of the relation between dominant attitude and ideology (van Dijk 19938; Hammersley 2003; Carvalho 2008). According to van Dijk (1998), CDA reveals the discursive sources of dominance and inequality, and how these sources are engendered, maintained, reproduced and transformed in specific socio-economic, political and historical contexts. In other words, CDA provides the means for better understanding the choices made at the linguistic level in a particular text once the historical contexts of the given text is familiar.

Ideology, Discourse and the Representation of Identities

Ideologies represent knowledge constructs formed on the basis of group or class interests to serve as the yardstick with which the rightness or wrongness of social practices of out-groups are measured against those of in-groups. This implies that ideology comprises the ways of

² Ideology represents a shared system of beliefs that underline a group’s display of collective behaviors. This belief system is often shaped by group members’ cognitive disposition towards events (cultural, religious, political, economic) in society through which members’ interpersonal relationships are mediated. On the other hand, attitude is the expression of a favorable or unfavorable disposition toward a person, place, thing, or event. Individuals and groups often acquired the tendency to readily respond either in a positive or negative way on account of the dominant ideologies upon which society is organized. For instance, the belief system that perceived Kosiri as superior and oppressive was the basis for the defiant and insolent attitude of resistance among the Umuga people.

thinking and behaving (often narrowly defined by group interest) within a given society (Eagleton, 1991), and is at the root of the attitudes of social groups. For instance, the attitude of different groups of Nigerians to the relevant social issues of federalism, marginalization, gender, youth culture and religion in Nigeria stems from groups' organized opinions (beliefs) about the general social norms and values that approximate their goals and interests. This perhaps underscores the conception of ideology as the basis of the social representations (cognitive and attitudinal) shared by the members of a group (Dijk, 2006); and often connected with the relations of power and domination, i.e. class power and domination, and how these relations are maintained (Fairclough, 1995; Thompson, 1984). Discourse, on the other hand, refers to how social knowledge and experiences are represented and disseminated in text and talk. Dijk (2006) argues that discourse is the more material and observable form of ideology. In other words, the argument could be raised that ideologies find expression through a number of discursive structures and strategies (Fairclough, 1995:25) prompting the proposal that: 'to study ideology is, in some part and in some way, to study language in the social world' (Thompson, 1984:3). It will therefore take an understanding of the social practices surrounding the generation, dissemination, acquisition, review and criticism of knowledge (i.e. social discourses) to understand their underlying ideologies.

The relationship between ideology and discourse has received attention across various scholarly disciplines³. However, particularly important in this paper are the perspectives that link discourse to knowledge production and the representation of Self and Other. For instance, according to Stuart Hall, ideology represents "the mental frameworks - the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation - which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, figure out and render intelligible the way society works" (1996: 26). Taking his cue from Michel Foucault, Hall further notes that discourses "produce meaningful knowledge ... (that) influences social practices" (1992: 295). Put simply, discourse is constitutive of a group's mental frameworks that in turn determine the way we treat a subject more generally or – particularly relevant in this paper – group identities. In that sense, van Dijk (1998) is right to identify ideology as an immensely significant shaping force behind our social practices, one of whose possible effects is the production of group solidary and social identities.

³ Early works on what constitutes ideology and its language/discourse interface include; A. Gramsci's (1971) philosophical perspective of the Marxist notion of ideology; J.B Thompson's (1984) definition of ideology from the point of view of social communication; Simpson (1993) adopts a sociological approach defining ideology in terms of "assumptions, beliefs, value- systems which are shared collectively by social groups" (p,5); Teun van Dijk's (1998, 2006) multidisciplinary view of ideology introduced the concept of socio-cognition as the basis for classifying the "structures of ideologies and their discursive reproduction" (p, 116)

When we speak about discourse, we do not speak about true or false statements, but about a set of beliefs or ideology. These beliefs in turn serve group members to form, express, challenge and reproduce their social identities. Van Dijk argues that

discourse is the most crucial of these social practices, and the only one that is able to directly express and hence convey ideologies. A theory of ideology without a theory of discourse is therefore fundamentally incomplete. And conversely, to understand the role of discourse in society, we also need to know their fundamental role in the reproduction of social representations in general, and of ideologies in particular (1998: 88).

Ideology has also been conceptualized as implicit assumptions that underlie interaction with power relations (Fairclough 2001, Wodak 1996), and the fundamental beliefs of a group and its members (van Dijk 1998). According to Wodak (1996:18), ideology represents “particular ways of representing and constructing society, which reproduce unequal relations of power, relations of domination and exploitation.” The same system of beliefs that reproduces inequality of power and thus leads to domination and exploitation could have motivated van Dijk (2009) to define ideology as a belief system that sustains and legitimatizes opposition and resistance against domination and social inequality. It is a system of social inequality that pitches us against them. Ideologies, therefore, do not only provide an insight into the ways of understanding the world; they also constitute the basis for behavioral patterns that group members exhibit in response to their social condition and that find their expression in the linguistic choices of group members.

One crucial social practice influenced by ideology is the discursive use of language in social encounters. Akin Odebunmi (2008: 83) argues that, since language is “the site of ideological representations, language can be investigated to expose implicit stances, attitudes and political leanings of people.” The various levels of language structure and their respective elements may either be explicitly expressed or concealed in intonation, syntax, lexis and discourse (Fairclough 1995, 2001, Wodak 1996). At the level of discourse, there reside many aspects of meaning, such as topic, coherence, presuppositions, metaphors and argumentation. Identifying coherence as the key factor in the ideological constitution and reconstitution of subjects in discourse, Fairclough suggests that

A text ‘postulates’ a subject ‘capable’ of automatically linking together its potentially highly diverse and not explicitly linked elements to make sense of it (1995: 74).

Odebunmi (2010) also identifies tracking as a tool for showing implicit relations in texts. He states that bridging, esphora, homophora and anaphora are effective in presenting, presuming, possessing and comparing textual relations. Discursive relations of meaning at the sentential level are organized in propositions that express complete thought. Thus, the semantic meaning attached to a proposition resides in the lexical choices made by members of a group. These choices are often influenced by the group's ideological position and attitudes towards another group.

According to van Dijk (1998), the meaning potential could be found in the ideological variations of underlying context, events and social attitudes. He stresses that social identity and solidarity⁴ in a group may be defined in terms of membership criteria, typical activities, specific goals, norms, group relations and resources. These categories typically lead to people being defined in polarized terms. Group membership is determined, first, by who belongs and who does not belong to a group and, secondly, by how the given group distinguishes itself from other groups through particular actions, aims and norms, as well as the resources with which the group members dispose (Kohl 2011). Fundamental to the presentation of Self is what position we have relative to Others, i.e. whether we are in a dominant or dominated position, whether we are marginalized or integrated into the mainstream, or whether we are treated as belonging to the ethnic minority or the ethnic majority. In present-day Nigeria, for instance, socio-political and economic ideologies are influenced by the individual or group membership in religious, ethnic, political and class associations. This has led to the emergence of an influential, powerful and elite Nigerian version of colonial Kosiri, who oppresses, intimidates and takes advantage of the powerless among Nigerians.

A DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS OF *THE LAST OF THE STRONG ONES*

The discourse analytical approach provides an insight in discursive strategies that are located at different levels of linguistic organization and complexity in texts. The analytical orientation of this paper is designed to account for both content and its discursive presentation, following a general pattern that emphasizes the positive aspects of the Self and the negative aspects of the Other.

⁴ Generally, solidarity is based on common interests, objectives, standards, and sympathies. Group solidarity is often shaped by the commitments of collectivities to socially binding knowledge and practices, and the common opposition to the discourses of the Other. Social identity, on the other hand, refers to the forms of knowledge that are shared by the group and that become evident in the discourses of that group. Social identities that engender and reinforce social practices ultimately provide the foundation for group solidarity.

A positive presentation of the Self and a negative presentation of the Other are not only common traits of group interaction and triggers of group conflict. They also shape the naming and referencing of characters in fiction. What traits are attributed to characters? By means of what arguments and argumentation schemes do specific characters justify and legitimize the inclusion or exclusion of others? From what perspectives are these labels and arguments expressed? Such and similar questions form the basis of our categorization of the discursive strategies involved in the presentation of self and the other in *The Last*.

Table 1: Discursive strategies for positive self and negative other representation in *The Last*.

Strategy	Objectives	Devices
Referential nomination (agency)	Construction of in-groups and out-groups	Membership categorization Naming, description
Predication/Transitivity	Labeling the activities of social actors	Material process, passivization
Topicalization	Expressing involvement Positioning speaker's point of view	Rhetorical questions Reporting, description, narration or quotation of (discriminatory) events and utterances, use of proverbs

The table presents the analytical categories set up to account for the polarized social identities represented in *The Last*. The discourse strategies of referential nomination, specifically that of agency, transitivity and topicalization in column 1 relates to the objectives contained in column 2. Column 3 states the particular linguistic device associated with each discursive strategy.

From the linguistic standpoint, sentences can convey information about power relations. Who is conveyed as being in power and over whom? Who is portrayed as powerless and passive? Who exerts power and why? This property of the text referred to as agency operates largely at the surface syntactic level. Agency is constructed in two steps: first, through transitivity analysis that focuses on the material process and relates actors to action and the beneficiaries, and secondly, through elliptical constructions characterized by agentlessness, especially in passive constructions. This functional theory of language categories finds expression in Michael Alexander Kirkwood Halliday's (2004:29).

Theory of language metafunctions which affirms that "language provides a theory of human experience" often captured in the clause structure as message (textual), exchange (interpersonal) or representation (ideational). Related to the ideational function, language users present their world experience through the transitivity system of language. According to Halliday (1994:106),

language users' experience of reality "is made up of processes of going on, happening, doing, sensing, meaning, being and becoming." Transitivity therefore focuses on the participants (the actors and those acted upon) and the processes that are involved in each clause in the text.

Dichotomies and the Production of Polarized Social Identities

The self and other dichotomy in *The Last* manifests in narrative portrayal of the in-group and out-group through membership categorization that is conceived in terms of skin colour (white vs black), land ownership status (owners vs strangers/settlers), malevolent and benevolent actions and the co-existential dispositions of the principal actors in the unfolding struggle for the soul of Umuga. Generally, these dichotomies play out on a daily basis in the interaction between Kosiri, the white stranger, on the one side, and the Umuga people, the black landowners, on the other. The dichotomy not only shapes the nature of interactions usually fraught with a great deal of mutual suspicions, it equally determines the language of engagement employed by the major groups. It is such an atmosphere of tension between the white settlers and the black landowners that gives birth to discourses of resistance. Consequently, the unfolding scenario in the narrative projects the blacks as the oppressed and the whites as the oppressor. The skin colour dichotomies serve as the basis for the classification into and membership of social groups in the unfolding narrative of domination and resistance. While the black colour typifies the oppressed, the white colour represents the oppressor. Consequently, these polarized social identities not only fuel the discourses of resistance that become the hallmark of the various groups, they shape the ideological perceptions that echo through the entire narrative. These positions are expressed through a topicalization process that foregrounds persons, such as nominal references, pronominal referential ties and transitivity.

The ideological polarization in *The Last* hinges on the difference in skin color of the major actors: the blacks and the whites as represented by Umuga people and Kosiri respectively. The following extract gives a sense of the dichotomy as presented by the narrator:

Extract 1

"Yes, four heads of families compelled to fetch water like slaves! cried Chieme.
For what offence? They were accused of not attending, regularly, the Native Court at Awka, where the *white man* sits in judgement of the *black man*, applying his own senseless and strange laws." [emphasis mine] (pp. 8-9)

The blacks are projected as the victims, at the receiving end of the atrocities of the white men, who, rather than being grateful to their host, have turned a ferocious aggressor. The metaphorical association of black with oppression and white with aggression contains a subtle suggestion of

a repudiation of white and a pity for black. In a way, therefore, white portends evil and black good. This perception simultaneously determines and is determined by the choice of nominal references and processes employed in the narrative. This ideological perspective of black is good and white is bad becomes understandable when it is realized that *The Last of the Strong Ones* is situated within the context of Nigeria's postcolonial literary tradition.

The peace/war dichotomy is also rooted in the narrator's perception of participants' disposition to coexistence. This dichotomy is reinforced by the skin metaphor that associates white with belligerence and black with victimhood. In the novel, Umuga people interpret every action of the white man, whether rightly or wrongly, as a declaration of war. Such stance provides the prism through which to view every interaction between the whites and the blacks.

Extract 2

“If Umuga's wish was to *make peace* with the white man, then they had to obey Kosiri's orders and not cut palm trees to build houses and bridges; they should be prepared to dig latrines which everyone knew offended the dignity of Umuga people ... on the other hand, if Umuga *chose war*, they should also consider its consequences, the cost of guns and other arms and ammunition, the destruction of lives and property that might follow.” (p. 109)

From the perspective of Umuga citizens, peace has to be procured at the cost of their dignity and enslavement to the stranger. On the other hand, if war has to be chosen, it would be at the cost of their lives and property. The attendant consequences of either of these choices instruct the Umuga people to tread with caution in their dealings with the white stranger. This, probably, is why “all Umuga did was to defend its land and people” (p. 137) when it was obvious that “it was Kosiri who carried war to Umuga” (p. 138). In this case, “We shall not start a fight,” Okoroji cried, “but if the meddlers fire ten shots, we will reply with a hundred.” (p. 110) It was an unprovoked war that left Umuga squirming, “helpless like a cricket whose hole is invaded by a bigger creature.” (p. 153)

The benevolence/malevolence dichotomy presents a paradoxical twist in Umuga people's perception of the white settler who, at the same time, provides life-saving facilities, such as hospitals, and passes laws that oppress black people.

Extract 3

“We asked ourselves if the kosiri that made laws and oppressed the peoples of the surrounding towns and villages were brothers to the Kosiri who built hospitals and healed the sick ... They made laws that conflicted with our

traditions, took away the fruits of our labour and taught our people to abandon our gods and goddesses and worship their own instead... yet, the same Kosiri had built hospitals like the one in which Onyekozuru was receiving free treatment. (p. 118)

Despite the faceless identity of the white man, the people of Umuga still draw the line between the “younger, more fierce and impatient” (p. 124) Kosiri who takes charge of the political administration of the territory and the older, more compassionate kosiri (dibia) who works at the hospital. The white/black, peace/war and benevolence/malevolence dichotomies in *The Last* foreground the fictive reality of the contrasting social identities and their ideological persuasions represented by the self (Umuga people) and the other (Kosiri). It is the ideological differences between the two dominant groups that fuels discontent among the oppressed ‘land owners’ culminating in resistance to the ‘stranger’ who is the oppressor.

Nominal References as Ideological Markers

Nominal references serve as a clue to ideological perceptions of participants in any communicative event by focusing on the naming and linguistic referencing of persons. In *The Last*, names, nicknames, titles and other forms of address project the narrator’s ideological perception of the actors in the narrative. Consider the following example:

Extract 4

“Who in Umuga, has not heard the stories? Ejimnaka shrugged her shoulders. Ever since the day that *kosiri* and his escorts entered Umuga from Akwaihedi, and camped in the sacred forest of Agwazi, our water goddess, the stream had not been the same. Danger pervades the place and the life of anyone who goes there is threatened. Agwazi’s anger has remained unabated.” (p. 5)

The quoted extract illuminates the ideological polarization that pervades the narrative and that gives an insight into Umuga peoples’ perception of the white intruders. From the first reference to kosiri in the given excerpt, it is evident that a power structure in which the two warring sides are involved is presented with reference to a particular historical context. More specifically, the land and people of Umuga are pitched against ‘kosiri and his escorts’ in a seemingly one-sided battle that places Umuga at the mercy of Kosiri, whose uninvited entrance altered the socio-political and cultural landscape of Umuga. For instance, the narrator contrasts the 1st person plural possessive adjective ‘our’ (in our water goddess) with the 3rd person possessive adjective ‘his’ (in his god) to reveal the religious power tussle in which Kosiri have an upper-hand over the local population. This accentuates the polarization of Us and Them that characterizes the social representations and their underlying ideologies in *The Last*.

In the following excerpt, the narrator moves away from the perception of Kosiri as an individual to Kosiri as representative of a people whose skin color is synonymous with domination and oppression of the blacks.

Extract 5

“Yes, four heads of families compelled to fetch water like slaves! cried Chieme. For what offence? They were accused of not attending, regularly, the Native Court at Awka, where the *white man* sits in judgement of the *black man*, applying his own senseless and strange laws.” [emphasis mine] (pp. 8-9)

The contest between the two opposing parties for dominance and social relevance is further represented in the court. The Igbo display solidarity in opposition to what they perceive as the white man’s control of the Native Court at Awka. It is paradoxical that the native court has a foreigner who applies foreign laws to judge local cases. Kosiri laws applied in the dispensation of justice in the black man’s court bear the imprints of the white man’s culture and belief system that are substantially different from that of the Umuga people. The court scenario in Awka thus gives expression to the ideological tension that underlies Umuga’s negative perception of kosiri. An identical notion of white dominance and oppression of the blacks resounds in the following extract:

Extract 6

“Faced with *a people* whose sole ambition was to dominate and use *others* or destroy *them* if they resisted, *we* came, too late to the knowledge that *their* coming and *our* receiving them were the beginning of *our* undoing.” [emphasis mine] (p. 150)

The choice of ‘Kosiri’ (extract 4), ‘white man’ (extract 5) and ‘a people’ (extract 6) as nominal references to Kosiri is complemented by the choice of the pronominals ‘others’ and ‘them’ (excerpt 6) to project the self and other dichotomy. For instance, ‘a people’ (Kosiri) contrasts with ‘others/them’ (Umuga people) while the 3rd person plural ‘their’ and its 1st person counterpart ‘our’ (excerpt 6) reiterate the self-other dichotomy in the narrative. The conscious choice of names and descriptions in *The Last* is the narrator’s strategy to produce a positive picture of the self, who, even in the face of oppression, remains the peaceful custodian of positive traditional values. It also paints a negative picture of the other (kosiri being the one causing all the troubles). The following names and descriptions show the narrator’s ideological stance toward Kosiri:

- Extract 7 “They were *strangers* who acted as if they owned the land.” (p. 33)
Extract 8 “The *guest* who turns rude and aggressive.” (p. 6)
Extract 9 “He is a *wayfarer* venturing into strange lands and must stand on one foot...the *visitor* that (must) leave the homestead, not the landowner.” (p. 17)
Extract 10 “Kosiri is the *intruder*, the *alien*” (p. 7), ‘*meddler*’ (p. 13, 141)

In the quoted sentences, nominal references that either carry negative connotations or are complemented by another nominal expression that produces a negative image are used to refer to the white man. For instance, ‘strangers’ is not ordinarily derogatory but in connection with the relative clause ‘who acted as if they owned the land,’ it assumes a negative value. Similarly, a ‘guest’ in collocation with ‘rude and aggressive’ becomes an unwanted guest who has overstayed his welcome. The negative presentation of the Other is reiterated in extract 10, where kosiri is seen as an ‘intruder’ (an impostor or a trespasser) and as a ‘meddler’ (a pest or nuisance). The use of nominal references defines a particular notion of kosiri as Other and the attendant consequence of this process is the production of a positive notion of Self. The following excerpt captures the narrator’s only attempt at identifying more proper names of the kosiri:

Extract 11

“At this point we were told that there were two Kosiri, in particular, who were causing all the troubles in the surrounding towns. One was in Awka; he was the *District Officer* called *Lotom*. The other lived in Onucha. His name was *Gadina* and he was the *Resident*.” [emphasis mine] (pp. 16-17)

In the colonial times, the District Officer represented the administrative and political head of the local government territory. By the nature of their offices, these two Kosiri in Awka and Onucha implement policies on behalf of the British Home government in these territories. Incidentally, the policies of taxation and the suspension of some traditional practices of the people did not go down well with the locals, who unfortunately could not openly confront the authority of the Kosiri. It was therefore on account of the hardships and transgression of aspects of their cultural practices due to Kosiri’s policies that the locals resolved to hold Kosiri responsible for all the oppression of Umuga people and the desecration of the Umuga land.

Kosiri is also known to have black agents who are saddled with the implementation of the white man’s orders, which prompts the narrator to declare that “Kosiri and their agents (others) are the enemy and our [self] anger should be directed at them.” (p. 14) These black “accursed servants of the meddlers” (p. 36) or “men of death” (p. 36) committed atrocities against their own people in order to please their masters. This fact is corroborated by extract 12.

Extract 12

“The meddlers’ presence is seen and felt everywhere, sometimes in the antics of their dull-witted but vicious followers and agents. Who said these dark-skinned ‘white-men’ have no power? They loot, demand awufu and steal. Is there any vice they have not indulged in? They are the true heirs of Kosiri.” (p.150)

The focus on these ‘dark-skinned white men’ introduces a different dimension of power relation that redefines ‘otherness’ within the narrative. Against the general white/black dichotomy, the categorization and membership of the power group is no longer on the basis of skin colour, but now depends on the access to privilege enjoyed by a small group of Umuga people. For instance, the rhetorical question, “Who said these dark-skinned ‘white-men’ have no power?” is a clear acknowledgement of the influence and power of Kosiri’s black agents, who incidentally are natives of Umuga. Expectedly, the black-on-black oppression further aggravates the frustration and the hopelessness of the majority black population whose sense of vulnerability is echoed in, “They are the true heirs of Kosiri.” (p.150) Rather than having to contend with the white man alone, the struggle would now have to reckon with black collaborators. For instance, these collaborators often “confronted the men and women who were selling dead goats and sheep” (p. 36) as their only way of making a living. In response, Umuda⁵ urges the meat sellers “to carry their protest to Awka if these men of death set foot in the market again” (p. 36). The outcome of the protest is entirely unexpected and it further strains the relationship between the stranger and the Umuga people. In the final analysis, the people of Umuga have to conclude, philosophically though regretfully, that:

Extract 13

“Our people say that it is the traveler who must make the return journey and not the owner of the land. The power of the intruders is to be compared to the evening rays of the sun, its intensity declines with the hour and soon passes away. Yes, kosiri will depart one day.” (p. 1)

Extract 13 further underscores the dichotomy between the landowners ‘our people’ and Kosiri, ‘traveler, intruders’. Though it admits the power of the intruders over the landowners, it nevertheless reinforces the general belief among the people of Umuga that, through resistance, the exercise of such powers will ultimately (one day) be brought to an end.

Pronominal Referential Ties

⁵ Umuda, the highest decision-making body in Umuga land, has the overall duty of providing leadership. The body is also responsible for mediating in conflicts between individuals and groups in the land.

Pronouns establish referential ties that achieve cohesion in a text. The instances of pronominal reference in *The Last* reinforce the Self vs Other dichotomy through anaphoric and cataphoric cohesive ties. Consider the following extract:

Extract 14

“Kosiri has brought *us* nothing but trouble... kosiri put an obstacle across the path of our life and *we* shall not rest until *we* clear it (p. 6)
Kosiri and their agents are the enemy and *our* anger should be directed at *them*.” [emphasis mine] (p. 14)

In the given extract, the identity of the characters constructed as Us and Them attests to the ideological divide between the people of Umuga and Kosiri: Because ‘they’ (Kosiri and his agents) are the enemy, ‘we’ (the Umuga people) shall not rest and ‘our’ anger must be against the enemy. Such referential ties occur between ‘they’ and ‘us,’ and their subsequent mentions as possessives: their laws, their gods; our traditions, our labour; our gods and goddesses, our identity.

Extract 15

“Victory belonged to Kosiri and all meddlers; yet not one of them was seen in battle; not one of them fired a shot against anyone in this war! They used us against us. And from the look of things, they would use us, again and again, against us.” (p. 141)

Extract 16

“Idemmiri, our great Mother, how could we explain the way of the meddlers? They *made* laws which conflicted with our traditions, *took away* the fruits of our labour and *taught* our people to abandon our gods and goddesses and worship *their* own instead. All this amounted to *destroying* our traditions, *taking away* our identity and *robbing* and *impoverishing* our land.” (p. 118)
[emphasis mine]

The above discussion shows that pronominal reference serves as a strategic tool in agency analysis for establishing propositional ties within the text. The use of the pronouns ‘us/them’ and the possessives ‘our/their’ emphasizes the sense of selfness and otherness rooted in the dichotomy between the black landowners and the white settlers upon which the narrative is built. For instance, if ‘us’ is pointing at the Umuga people (represented as self), then ‘they’ refers to ‘Kosiri and their agents’ (portrayed as other).

Construction of polarized identities through transitivity

From the linguistic standpoint, agency is constructed in two steps: first, through transitivity analysis that focuses on the material process and relates actors to action and the beneficiaries, and secondly, through elliptical constructions characterized by agentlessness, especially in passive constructions.

Transitivity analysis in *The Last* therefore focuses on the material process of transitivity which relates the verbal action, typified as the process, to participants often regarded as the actor or the recipient/beneficiary of the verbal action. It is a process of doing or happening and consists of the actor, the goal and the recipient or beneficiary of the action. The analysis reveals how the actor and the beneficiary stand against each other in a diametrically opposed power configuration. The ideological posturing of the Umuga people as the oppressed (direct beneficiary of the material process) and the Kosiri as the oppressor (actor) is indexed by the choices of verbs *desecrate, cram, forced, destroying, impoverishing, robbing, neutralized, had driven away* etc. These verbs indicate that the actor takes actions that produce negative effects on both the goal and the beneficiary. The following examples elucidate this point:

Extract 17 “The strangers [actor] desecrate [process] our home and our land [goal]”. (p. 5)

Extract 18 “Kosiri [actor] cram [process] unfamiliar food [goal] into our mouth [beneficiary]”

(p. 7)

Extract 19 “The alien intruders [actor] neutralized [process] every activity or ritual that was not in their interest [goal].” (p. 149)

These examples reveal (i) a power configuration that is skewed in favor of the actor, (ii) the actions that are executed against the will of the recipient, (iii) the affected goals that constitute an integral part of the characters’ socio-cultural life, and (iv) a subservient beneficiary whose powerlessness is evidenced by their inability to resist the actions. The implication is that Kosiri is in the position to dominate and oppress the Umuga people because of his assumed superior political, military and intellectual power. The ideological claim to superiority over the Umuga people provides the grounds for the opposition by the Umuga people to Kosiri’s authority. Furthermore, the vulnerability of the people of Umuga in the face of Kosiri’s domination of all facets of their lives triggers their attempts to present themselves in positive terms and Kosiri in negative terms. The following Table 2 gives a summary of the verbal choices that reveal a material process.

Table 2: Material process that shows Kosiri as the aggressor

Actor	Material	Goal	Beneficiary
The strangers	<i>desecrate/steal</i>	our home/our land (p. 5)	
Kosiri	<i>cram</i>	<i>unfamiliar food</i>	into our mouths (p. 7)
(Whenever) he	sneezes		the people wet their loincloths with urine (p. 16)
Kosiri	<i>meant to interfere</i>	in every aspect	of our lives (p. 36)
The strangers	<i>forced</i>	our suffering people (p. 152)	
The alien intruders	<i>neutralized</i>	every activity or ritual that was not in their interest (p. 149)	
Kosiri	have brought		us nothing but trouble
These strangers	have <i>put fear</i>		into the hearts of the surrounding towns
The visitor	had driven away		the landowner and taken over his homestead (p. 151)
They	<i>took away</i>	the fruits of our labor	
	<i>destroying</i>	our traditions	
	<i>taking away</i>	our identity	
	<i>robbing and impoverishing</i>	our land (p. 118)	
They	<i>sought to kill</i>	a hunger for our tradition	in our people (p. 149)

Omission of Information/Passive Construction

The omission of information about the agents of power, most often achieved through nominalisation and the use of passive verbs, highlights the victim and the effect rather than the aggressor and the cause. This is the case in the following examples:

Extract 20 “The desecration of the land brought us more troubles.” (p. 152)

Extract 21 “Trees are bare and farmlands stripped naked” (p. 152)

Extract 22 “We, watchers and listeners, saw in the events of the past months the total enslavement of not only our people but also the people of the surrounding towns and beyond.” (p. 141)

In extract 20, the use of the nominal form ‘desecration’ points to an action by an unstated agent and the resulting effect of ‘more troubles’ for the beneficiary. The second sentence equally omits the agent responsible for the situation of the trees and the farmlands; instead, the use of the passive form of ‘make’ and ‘stripe’ foregrounds the consequences of the action. In the third sentence, a thematic foregrounding of the victims conveys agentlessness: ‘we’ as opposed to the silent ‘they’ that are responsible for the enslavement of the people of Umuga. This in turn ultimately projects Kosiri as the aggressor whose arrival in Umuga is likened to ‘when a viper creeps into a house, the household is thrown into panic’ (p. 153).

The negative impacts of Kosiri’s invasion of Umuga extend to the spiritual realm. In Extracts 23 and 24, the narrator laments the seeming impotence of the guardian spirit of the land, Idemiri, whose earlier warning against receiving Kosiri into the land had been ignored. In a more painful lamentation, the narrator suggests:

Extract 23 “The spirit bird sang a warning to our deafened ears. No one listened. We have known no peace since that evil season we let the strangers in.” (p. 150)

Extract 24 “Idemiri, when had it ever happened in Umuga that healthy and strong men were herded and taken away like sheep?” (p. 152)

The foregoing transitivity analysis reveals the Umuga people as the oppressed (direct beneficiary of the material process) and the Kosiri as the oppressor (actor). This is evidenced in the use of verbs, such as desecrate, cram, forced, destroying, impoverishing, robbing, neutralized to show the actions of Kosiri and its impacts on the Umuga people, and the thematic foregrounding of ‘we’ and ‘they’ as victims and oppressors respectively. Relating the actions and the beneficiaries of the actions in this way, reinforces *The Last’s* presentation of the ideologically opposed power configuration that shapes the discourses of power and resistance chronicled in the text.

Rhetorical Questions

Rhetorical questions are negatively formulated sentences that contain the propositional content to be ratified. The anticipation of a consensus between the participants over the propositional content necessitates that attention be drawn to the participant’s affirmative attitude towards the propositional content and to the narrator’s expectation of ratification by the reader. Generally, the removal of the q-element leaves the rhetorical questions as statements.

In *The Last*, rhetorical questions show the reactions of the dominated-Self to the dominant-Other, as can be seen in the extracts provided in Table 3.

Table 3

	Rhetorical question	Proposition	Context
25	Why could they not leave us alone? (p. 36)	They did not leave us alone	Helplessness/ powerlessness
26	Were we their slaves or their people? (p. 36)	We are neither their slaves nor their people	Frustration
27	Who had thought they would ever come back? (p. 33)	They came back (unexpectedly)	Amazement
28	How could we explain the way of the meddlers?	We cannot explain the way of the meddlers	Frustration

The above quoted rhetorical questions invite the reader, not just to see the anguish and frustration that the dominant Self experiences, but also to agree with that proposition. The various nuances of frustration, powerlessness and hopelessness of the people of Umuga are sustained when the rhetorical questions are processed against the contextual information that engenders those questions. For instance, the rhetorical question in example 25 is a form of protest against Kosiri's interference in every aspect of Umuga people's lives. The Umuga people cannot understand why they are prevented from eating "the meat or flesh of dead animals that had died of illness or a disease" because they "had always eaten goats and sheep and chickens that died of diarrhoea" (p. 36). The obvious conflict here lies in the different belief systems of Kosiri and the people of Umuga. If, however, one belief system imposes itself on the other, it is expected, as is evident in *The Last*, that the dominated people will protest and thus express their helplessness and frustration. This justifies the narrator's question: "Did we ever hear that people died after eating such meat?" (p. 36) It thus appears that Kosiri's insistence not to allow the sale and consumption of dead meat by Umuga people is seen as meddling.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of Self and Other in Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last* has revealed that nominal and pronominal references serve as textual resources for indexing social identity and the ideological stance. Pronouns are not only used as resources for establishing referential ties, they reinforce the Self vs Other dichotomy in *The Last* through anaphoric and cataphoric cohesive ties. In addition, the agency analysis has demonstrated that the strategies of sentence construction that focuses on the transitivity material process relating principal actors (Kosiri and the Umuga people) to their actions, and the beneficiaries, and that of elliptical constructions characterized

by agentlessness, especially in passive constructions convey important information about the unequal power relations between predominantly oppressed black Umuga population and the powerful white minority in the narrative. This is further enhanced by the use of elliptical constructions marked by the grammatical feature of agentlessness, and which by implication projects the Other as anonymous and faceless, hence the ideological and social distance between the participants. The use of rhetorical questions accentuates the sense of loss and disappointment that attends the obvious imposition of one belief system (in religion, law, governance structure and culture) on the other; a reaction that shows the utter helplessness of the dominated-Self in the hands of the all-powerful dominant-Other. It becomes evident that the dichotomous power configuration that pitched the dominant narrative characters against each other shapes the discursive construction of their identities and ideological positions in *The Last*, much in the same way many other postcolonial African literary texts are constructed. Such literatures explore the pervasive cultural, psychological and political impact of colonisation on the colonial subjects during and after the period of colonial oppression. For example, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* (1980), Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) belong to the best tradition of African postcolonial literature which attempt to write back chronicling, on the one hand, the suppressive impact of colonialism on the colonial subjects and their cultural values, and on the other hand, the neo-colonial experiences of the newly independent nations of Africa. Incidentally, sometimes the new leaders, who hitherto were among the subjugated subjects under colonialism, put in place structures of governance that are perceived to be more vicious than that of the colonial masters. *The Last of the Strong Ones* belongs to the former tradition of postcolonial literature which tries to redefine the role of women within a male dominated pre-independent Igbo community in colonial Nigeria.

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