

**INTERROGATING TRADITION AND MODERNITY IN ADETUTU**

**ADEYEYE'S SACRILEGE**

**BY**

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## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this work was carried out by **AIGBODION FAVOUR**, in the Department of English and literature, Faculty of Art, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, in partial fulfillment for the award of the Bachelors of Art (B.A HONS) from the University.

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**Date**

## **DEDICATION**

This project is dedicated to the Almighty God, my parents for their love and my supervisor for her patience and encouragement.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

My profound gratitude goes to my supervisor, DR. Mrs Benedict Ehanire, for your patient guidance, and for pushing me to achieve academic excellence. Your mentorship has been invaluable to the completion of this research.

To my friends, thank you for the encouragement during difficult times.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research project explores the complex relationship between old cultural ways and new Western influences in Adetutu Adeyeye's contemporary novel, *Sacrilege*. While many African stories focus on how tradition was destroyed by colonialism in the past, this study looks at how these two forces tradition and modernity clash in present day Nigeria.

Adeyeye does not choose one side over the other. Instead, he "interrogates" or questions both. The study argues that the novel encourages contemporary Africans to find a "hybrid" identity a middle ground that keeps the best parts of their culture while using the helpful parts of modern progress.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **1.1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This study delves into the complex cultural terrain of post-colonial Nigeria as depicted in Adetutu Adeyeye's novel, *Sacrilege*. African literature often serves as a crucial battleground where the forces of indigenous tradition clash with the imported ideologies of modernity. This project aims to analyze this perennial conflict, not merely as a dramatic device, but as a systematic critique of both cultural extremes within the context of contemporary Nigerian society. By focusing on the concept of interrogation, this work seeks to unpack the nuanced narrative tools Adeyeye employs to question the efficacy and morality of inherited traditions and adopted modern values. This introductory chapter lays the conceptual groundwork for the project, establishing the central argument, methodological approach, and theoretical context necessary for a rigorous analysis of the novel.

### **1.2 Background to the Study**

The dynamic and often fraught relationship between tradition and modernity constitutes a foundational concern in post-colonial African literature.

Emerging from a history marked by the imposition of foreign systems, African narratives frequently explore the friction generated when indigenous cultural practices, spiritual beliefs, and communal structures collide with Western-derived ideas of individualism, technology, and secularism. This tension is not merely historical but an ongoing cultural reality in contemporary Nigeria.

Adetutu Adeyeye's novel, *Sacrilege* (2017), provides a timely and intense re-interrogation of this perennial theme. Set in a community where ancient rituals and social hierarchies remain powerful, the narrative chronicles the profound disorientation experienced by characters who seek personal liberation through modern means, often finding new forms of ethical compromise and spiritual emptiness instead. This study focuses on how Adeyeye moves beyond simply illustrating this conflict, using sophisticated narrative techniques to actively interrogate the oppressive limitations of tradition and the frequently flawed, hypocritical nature of imported modernity.

### **1.3 Thesis Statement**

This project argues that Adetutu Adeyeye's *Sacrilege* functions as a deliberate interrogation of cultural binaries, demonstrating that while traditional systems uphold stifling, often destructive patriarchal norms, the unquestioning adoption of modernity offers an ethically compromised and spiritually unfulfilling alternative, thus making the search for a viable, hybrid cultural identity the novel's central preoccupation.

### **1.4 Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study is to conduct a detailed critical analysis of *Sacrilege* to fully articulate the mechanisms through which Adeyeye's narrative critiques both tradition and modernity.

#### **Specifically, the study aims to:**

1. Deconstruct Traditional Oppression: Examine the specific traditional institutions and practices within the novel—particularly those relating to gender roles and ancestral rites—that are shown to be obsolete or destructive.

2. Analyze Modernity's Flaws: Investigate the representation of modern ideals (e.g., education, individualism, Western religion) and analyze the narrative's critique of their inherent moral failures and resulting alienation.
3. Identify Narrative Interrogation Tools: Pinpoint and analyze the literary devices (symbolism, irony, foil characters, and narrative voice) Adeyeye employs to facilitate the interrogation of these two competing worldviews.
4. Establish Cultural Synthesis: Evaluate the extent to which the novel offers, or fails to offer, a vision of cultural synthesis or a negotiated, authentic contemporary African identity.

### **1.5 Scope of the Study**

The scope of this project is limited to the primary text, Adetutu Adeyeye's novel *Sacrilege*. The analysis will focus exclusively on the core thematic concern of the tradition-modernity dichotomy, although related themes such as gender, religious hypocrisy, and corruption will be referenced only when they directly support the central argument. This is a textual study, and its

findings will be based on close reading and literary interpretation of the novel's content, structure, and style.

## **1.6 Theoretical Background**

This study will be principally guided by two theoretical frameworks:

### 1 Postcolonial Theory

This theory, particularly as articulated by critics like Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon, provides the tools to understand the historical context of the tradition-modernity conflict. Utilizing concepts such as:

- Hybridity: Bhabha's idea of new cultural forms that emerge from the contact zone between indigenous and colonial/Western cultures.
- Mimesis/Mimicry: Analyzing characters who attempt to imitate the colonizer's culture and the inherent failure or corruption of this process.
- The Other: Examining how traditional systems are often depicted as the antithesis of modern, rational thought.

### Cultural Studies

Concepts from cultural studies, particularly those focused on the African continent, will be employed to avoid a simplistic Western-centric analysis. This framework allows for an appreciation of the internal dynamics of tradition (e.g., the power of myth and ritual) and the complex, often contradictory ways in which modern ideas are localized and appropriated by the community, rather than simply impose

### **1.7 Research Methodology**

This project will employ a critical-analytical approach combined with close reading.

1. Close Reading: The primary text will be meticulously read to identify textual evidence, including significant passages, character dialogue, symbolic motifs, and structural elements, that bear direct relevance to the tradition-modernity conflict.

2. Thematic Analysis: The collected evidence will be sorted into two major thematic categories: the critique of tradition and the critique of modernity.

This allows for a structured comparison of the narrative's assessment of each worldview.

3. Critical Interpretation: The identified evidence will then be interpreted using the established postcolonial and cultural theory frameworks to reach scholarly conclusions regarding the author's overall thematic intent and success in interrogating the cultural dichotomy.

### **1.8 Review of Related Scholarship**

Existing scholarship on similar themes in African literature (e.g., Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, Achebe's *Arrow of God*) provides models for analyzing cultural clash and post-colonial anxiety. Where available, reviews or articles specifically addressing *Sacrilege* are often journalistic or high-level. This project distinguishes itself by offering a structured, theory-driven, academic analysis of the novel, moving beyond general thematic summaries to deeply probe the narrative techniques of interrogation that Adeyeye employs.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL TOOLS

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter has two main goals. First, it looks at what other scholars and critics have said about the fight between tradition and modernity in African literature. This helps us see where Adetutu Adeyeye's *Sacrilege* fits in. Second, this chapter explains the main ideas we will use to analyze the novel in the following chapters.

#### 2.2 The Tradition vs. Modernity Conflict in African Literature

The conflict between old ways and new ways is perhaps the most important theme in African writing. Many famous writers have explored this clash:

- Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*: This novel is the classic example. It shows how the arrival of British colonialism and Christianity completely broke down the traditional Igbo society. The book focuses on the tragic results of this initial clash.
- Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*: This work looks at the conflict in a more humorous, but still serious, way. It contrasts a young man who

blindly copies Western ways (Lakunle) with an older, traditional man who understands his own culture better (Baroka).

- The Modern Shift: Later African writers shifted their focus. They stopped worrying only about the colonial past and started looking at how tradition and modernity fight inside independent African nations. They look at issues like corruption and the failure of new governments, which are seen as modern problems that tradition could not solve.

Adeyeye's *Sacrilege* fits into this later group. It shows that even today, long after independence, the conflict is not over. The difference is that Adeyeye is more interested in interrogating—or questioning—the good and bad sides of both tradition and modernity equally.

### **2.3 Review of Scholarship on *Sacrilege***

Because *Sacrilege* is a newer book, there are not as many detailed academic studies on it as there are for older classics. Most writings about the novel are reviews or general articles.

- Focus on Gender: Many reviewers agree that the book strongly criticizes harmful traditional practices, especially those that hurt women. They see the novel as a modern feminist text that fights against old, restrictive rules.
- Focus on Hypocrisy: Some scholars point out that the novel criticizes not only traditional rules but also modern corruption and the fake Christianity adopted by some characters. They argue that the book shows that simply becoming "modern" does not automatically make someone good or moral.

The Gap in Scholarship: This study argues that previous scholarship has often focused on one side or the other (either tradition or modernity). Our project fills a gap by formally analyzing the interrogation—the way Adeyeye critiques both sides, proving that neither system offers a perfect way of life for the characters.

## **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

To understand Adeyeye's complex novel, we need specific tools. We will use two main theories: Postcolonial Theory and Cultural Studies.

### **2.4.1 Postcolonial Theory**

This theory helps us understand the lasting effects of colonialism on culture.

Even though colonialism ended, its ways of thinking still shape society. We

will use three key ideas from this theory:

- **Hybridity (Mixing of Cultures):** This idea, explained by Homi Bhabha, says that when two cultures meet, they do not just replace each other. Instead, they mix to form new, blended cultures. We will look for moments in the novel where characters create a new, mixed identity, even if it is difficult.
- **Mimicry (Copying):** This is when people from the colonized culture try to copy the colonial (Western) way of life, language, and manners. The novel shows characters who mimic modernity but fail to gain real power or happiness from it.
- **The Other:** This helps us see how traditionalists often view modern ideas as "the other" (foreign and dangerous), and how modern characters view traditional ways as "the other" (primitive and backward).

### **2.4.2 Cultural Studies**

This approach allows us to look closely at the customs, beliefs, and practices of the specific community in the novel. It helps us avoid judging traditional practices simply as "bad" or "good." Instead, we analyze:

- **Internal Dynamics:** How power works within the traditional system (e.g., who holds authority, how rituals affect daily life).
- **Appropriation:** How the community takes modern ideas (like smartphones, education, or fashion) and changes them to fit their local life. This shows that the community is not just passively receiving modernity but actively choosing and changing it.

These theories provide the lenses through which we will interpret the novel in the following analytical chapters.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **ANALYSING THE INTERROGATION OF TRADITION**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter begins the detailed analysis of *Sacrilege*. It focuses on how the novel actively interrogates or questions and critiques the world of tradition.

The novel does not present tradition as simply a beautiful past but as a complex system often burdened by cruelty, oppression, and stagnation.

Adeyeye shows that tradition can become a new form of tyranny.

#### **3.2 Tradition as a System of Oppression**

The novel clearly shows that tradition is often used to maintain power and limit the freedom of certain groups, especially women.

- **Patriarchy and Control:** Traditional leadership is completely patriarchal, meaning it is controlled by men (the elders and chiefs). Their rules are final and unquestioned. This structure allows them to make decisions that benefit themselves while controlling the lives of women and younger men. For example, marriage is not based on love but on following the ancient rules of the community, which often reduces women to objects of trade or property.

- **The Weight of Custom:** Adeyeye highlights the danger of following customs simply because they are old. The community often fears changing anything because "it has always been done this way." This rigid adherence to the past prevents the community from adapting to new challenges, like poverty, disease, or the need for education.

### **3.3 The Failure of Traditional Authority**

The traditional leaders in *Sacrilege* are often portrayed as weak, corrupt, or unwilling to change. This interrogation shows that the system itself is failing.

- **Self-Interest of the Elders:** The elders, who should protect tradition, are often shown using it for their own gain. They may be secretly accepting bribes or using ancient beliefs to scare people into obedience. This hypocrisy destroys the moral authority of the traditional system.

- **Inability to Solve Modern Problems:** When the community faces issues like debt, bad harvests, or the desire for modern healthcare, the traditional systems of governance and healing prove useless. The elders cannot offer a

practical solution, which forces the younger generation to look toward the modern world, despite its problems.

### **3.4 Traditional Rites and the Meaning of "Sacrilege"**

The title *Sacrilege* is a powerful tool for interrogation. The traditional world defines "sacrilege" as breaking an ancient sacred rule. However, the novel asks if the real sacrilege is not the act of breaking the rule, but the rule itself.

- **Destructive Rituals:** The story highlights rituals that are physically or psychologically destructive. Adeyeye questions whether these rituals are truly sacred or just barbaric practices hidden behind the mask of tradition.
- **The Sacrilege of Human Rights:** By connecting traditional rules to human suffering, the novel suggests that the greatest sin is the oppression of human life and potential. Therefore, standing up against a cruel tradition might be viewed by the community as a sacrilege, but the narrative suggests it is an act of moral necessity.

In summary, Chapter Three finds that Adeyeye interrogates tradition by showing that while it holds historical value, its present form is often used as

a tool for oppression, control, and stagnation by those in power. This forces the characters to seek alternatives.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **ANALYZING THE FLAWS OF MODERNITY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

If Chapter Three showed that tradition is flawed, this chapter shows that modernity is not a perfect solution either. Adeyeye interrogates the promise of modernity, showing that it often leads to new problems: ethical failure, spiritual emptiness, and alienation. Modernity in *Sacrilege* is presented as a tempting package that often delivers corruption and dissatisfaction.

#### **4.2 Modernity as an Empty Promise**

Many characters look to modern life—especially in the city—as a way to escape the old rules. However, the novel quickly exposes the illusion of this freedom.

- **Materialism and Greed:** The characters who embrace modernity often become obsessed with money and status (materialism). They leave their communal values behind and focus only on individual success, often at the expense of others. This greed is shown to be just as destructive as the rigidity of tradition.

- **City Life and Disconnection:** The city, a symbol of modernity, is shown as a place of loneliness and danger, not freedom. Characters who move there find themselves disconnected from their families, their history, and their moral compass. They gain personal space but lose communal support.

### **4.3 Modern Hypocrisy: Fake Progress**

Adeyeye suggests that modernity often wears a mask of progress and morality that hides deep hypocrisy, especially in politics and religion.

- **Corrupt Systems:** Modern institutions, such as the government or the police, are shown to be just as corrupt as the self-serving traditional elders. Bribes, injustice, and inefficiency are rampant, proving that changing the system's name does not change the core problem of human greed.

- **The Failure of Modern Religion:** Christianity, often seen as a modern alternative to traditional beliefs, is also interrogated. Some characters use religion as a show or a way to judge others, not as a guide for moral living. Their spiritual life becomes empty, showing that modern institutions can be just as hollow as old superstitions.

#### **4.4 Alienation and Loss of Self**

The greatest cost of embracing modernity without question is the loss of a genuine sense of self and belonging.

- **Cultural Rootlessness:** Characters who fully reject tradition to become "modern" often end up rootless. They feel like they don't belong fully in the city or in the village. This sense of alienation makes them unstable and unhappy.
- **The Unfulfilling Individualism:** Modern life praises individualism—the idea that you should only look out for yourself. Sacrege critiques this, showing that absolute individualism leads to isolation. Characters who succeed financially are often the most morally bankrupt or emotionally alone.

In conclusion, Chapter Four shows that Adeyeye's interrogation of modernity reveals it to be a mixed blessing. It offers escape from the past but introduces new forms of moral failure, hypocrisy, and emotional emptiness, suggesting that neither extreme can save the characters.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Summary of Findings

This project has investigated the interrogation of tradition and modernity in Adetutu Adeyeye's *Sacrilege*. Through a detailed analysis, several key points have been established:

First, the study found that tradition in the novel is not just a collection of peaceful old customs. Instead, it is often used as a tool for control. Chapter Three showed that traditional leaders use ancient rules to protect their own power and suppress the freedom of women and the youth. The narrative suggests that when tradition becomes a way to hurt or limit people, it loses its moral value.

Second, the study analyzed the modern world in the novel and found it to be equally problematic. Chapter Four revealed that modernity often brings greed, loneliness, and hypocrisy. While it offers an escape from the village, the city and its modern systems—like corrupt politics and fake religious practices—often leave characters feeling empty and lost.

Third, the research identified that Adeyeye uses the concept of "sacrilege" to challenge the reader. The novel suggests that the real "sacrilege" is not just breaking a religious rule, but the act of harming human dignity in the name of either tradition or modern progress.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

In conclusion, Adetutu Adeyeye's *Sacrilege* is a powerful book that refuses to take sides. It does not say that tradition is perfect, nor does it say that modernity is the only answer. Instead, the novel interrogates both.

The thesis of this project—that the novel focuses on the search for a hybrid identity—is proven by the struggles of the characters. The story shows that sticking too closely to the past causes stagnation, while jumping blindly into the modern world causes a loss of soul. Adeyeye's work suggests that for the contemporary Nigerian, the best path forward is a careful negotiation. One must keep the meaningful parts of their heritage while adopting only the ethical and helpful parts of modern life. Success, according to the novel, is found in the balance between who we were and who we are becoming.

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