

**DESECRATION OF RELIGIOUS ETHICS IN TANURE OJAIDE'S *GOD'S
NAKED CHILDREN***

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LITERATURE, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY,
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NOVEMBER 202

CERTIFICATION

I certify that this study was carried out by Chukwudebe Chinwendu in the department of English and Literature, University of Benin, under my supervision

PROF. A.P MAMUDU
(Project Supervisor)

Date

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to Almighty God, who has been my strength, guide, ever present help, backbone and shield throughout my undergraduate program. I do not know how far I would have come without your grace and love. I would also like to dedicate this research to my beloved Parents, Late Engr. Peter O. and Mrs. Franca C. Onichabor. You both are my driving force, my light at the end of the tunnel. Lastly, this project work is dedicated to my beloved siblings, whom I love in all existing worlds.

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ABSTRACT

The desecration of religious ethics is a pressing concern in contemporary society, where the manipulation and exploitation of faith for personal gain have become increasingly rampant. This project examines how religious ethics are being desecrated, focusing on the compromise of religious leaders, institutions, and adherents in perpetuating harm and injustice. Through a critical analysis of case studies and scholarly literature, this research reveals the complex dynamics of power, corruption, and moral decay that underlie the desecration of religious ethics. The project concludes by highlighting the need for a renewed commitment to ethical practices, accountability, to restore the integrity of religious traditions, and promote a more just and compassionate society.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Study

This project investigates immorality in religious practices in selected stories in Tanure Ojaide's *God's Naked Children*, focusing on how human desires can compromise moral principles. The study will explore the tension between sacred values and human passions, examining how these conflicts affect the integrity of religious ethics.

1.2. Scope of Study

This study highlights traces of desecration of religious ethics in “God’s Medicine Men”, “Under New Pastoral Management”, “The Priest’s Dog Falls in Love”, as well as evaluates them based on how they relate and affect the church and society. The short story is chosen because it deeply explores these themes.

1.3. Theoretical Background

Social Contract Theory

Social Contract Theory provides an important philosophical foundation for understanding the relationship between individuals, communities, and moral order in society. Originally developed by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau between the 17th and 18th centuries, the theory explains how humans, once living in a “state of nature,”

consented to form organized societies and governments to maintain peace, security, and justice (Friend, 2020). The theory emphasizes the existence of mutual agreements or “contracts” through which people surrender some personal freedoms in exchange for protection of life, liberty, property, and social stability.

In the context of religious desecration and moral ethics, Social Contract Theory provides a framework to understand why respect for sacred values and symbols is essential for the preservation of moral order. Since religion often plays a central role in shaping communal ethics, its desecration undermines the unwritten contract that holds society together. Violations of sacred values can therefore be understood not only as religious offenses but also as breaches of the moral and social contracts that bind individuals into a community.

Thomas Hobbes (1651/2010), writing in **Leviathan**, argued that life in the “state of nature” is characterized by fear, violence, and insecurity, where every person conflicts with others. To escape this condition, individuals agree to submit to an authority that can enforce laws and maintain order. Applied to religious desecration, Hobbes’ perspective suggests that acts which insult or damage religious symbols could destabilize peace by provoking violence or conflict among groups.

In pluralistic societies where different religions coexist, desecration can erode trust, incite retaliation, and bring society closer to the chaos of the “state of nature.” Therefore, under Hobbes’ framework, respect for religious boundaries becomes part of the obligation individuals owe to one another to ensure security and collective survival.

John Locke (1689/1980), in **Two Treatises of Government**, argued that humans possess natural rights to life, liberty, and property even before entering into political society. Governments exist primarily to protect these rights, and their legitimacy depends on consent. Desecration of religion, from Locke’s perspective, violates not just spiritual principles but also the natural rights of individuals who identify with those beliefs.

Since religious values often form an essential part of a person’s identity, their desecration can be interpreted as an attack on liberty and dignity. Locke also emphasized tolerance among religious groups, especially in his **Letter Concerning Toleration** (1689). In this sense, respecting sacred practices and symbols is consistent with the natural rights framework, while desecration undermines liberty, equality, and social trust.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762/2018), in **The Social Contract**, emphasized that legitimate political order comes not from coercion but from the “general will” of the people, such as the collective expression of shared values and common good.

Desecration of religion can be interpreted as a violation of the general will, particularly in societies where religion plays a foundational role in shaping morality. When individuals desecrate sacred spaces, rituals, or texts, they are not only disrespecting personal faith but also rejecting the collective values that hold society together. Rousseau's theory underscores that freedom and moral order can only thrive when individuals act in accordance with the laws and customs they have collectively endorsed. Desecration, therefore, disrupts the moral consensus, weakening both ethical and political unity.

In today's multicultural societies, religious desecration raises serious ethical dilemmas. On one hand, liberal societies uphold freedom of expression; on the other, they require respect for the moral contracts that safeguard harmony among different faith groups.

Religious hypocrisy is a significant issue that affects people's perception of Christianity, both inside and outside the church.

According to a Barna Research survey, hypocrisy is the top reason people question Christianity, citing past negative experiences with professed Christians and/or religious institutions. This survey found that both religious people and those with no faith were affected by religious hypocrisy, highlighting the widespread impact of this issue.

Jesus condemned the religious leaders of His day for their hypocrisy, defining it as pretending to be something one is not, and using religion to cover up sin. In His famous Mountain Message, Jesus criticized the Pharisees for their hypocritical behavior, pointing out that their prayers, charitable deeds, and fasting were all motivated by a desire to be seen by others, rather than a genuine desire to serve God.

Hypocrisy has to do with motive, intentionality, and the reason behind one's actions. It's about presenting a false image while hiding one's true nature. This can lead to a distorted view of Christianity, where people prioritize outward appearances over inner transformation. The Pharisees in Jesus' day were guilty of this, prioritizing meticulous rules and regulations over genuine love for God and others.

The consequences of hypocrisy are severe. It can defile one's character, damaging their internal integrity and honesty. It can blind them to true discipleship, causing them to follow a false version of Christianity that prioritizes outward showmanship over genuine faith. Additionally, hypocrisy can tarnish one's spiritual influence, sowing seeds of doubt and distrust among believers and non-believers alike.

The antidote to hypocrisy is genuine faithfulness and sincerity. It requires a good and honest heart, fueled by love for God and a heavenly hope. It involves acknowledging one's imperfections and weaknesses, and seeking to live a life of authenticity and

integrity. By prioritizing genuine faith and sincerity, Christians can avoid the pitfalls of hypocrisy and live a life that truly reflects the love and character of God.

Social Contract Theory helps balance these competing concerns by highlighting that absolute freedom must be limited when it threatens social peace or violates the dignity of others. Desecration of religion breaches the social contract because it undermines tolerance, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence, which are the very foundations of civic life.

From a moral ethics standpoint, the social contract requires citizens to practice restraint, civility, and respect for plural values.

Acts of desecration, therefore, represent not only individual disrespect but also collective harm, as they weaken trust, provoke conflict, and challenge the moral consensus necessary for society's survival. Thus, Social Contract Theory offers a compelling rationale for condemning religious desecration and reinforcing moral ethics as the backbone of communal stability.

Social Contract Theory provides a robust theoretical foundation for examining religious desecration in relation to moral ethics. Hobbes highlights the need for order and the prevention of violence; Locke emphasizes the protection of rights and tolerance; and

Rousseau stresses the importance of collective values and the general will. Together, these perspectives underscore that acts of religious desecration represent not only offenses against faith but also breaches of the social and moral contracts that sustain peace and justice in society. Respect for religious beliefs and symbols, therefore, is not just a matter of personal courtesy—it is a fundamental obligation that ensures the continued legitimacy, harmony, and ethical fabric of the social order.

1.4. Methodology

The study adopts the qualitative research approach, which entails a methodology that focuses on exploring and understanding religious beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and experiences through the collection and analysis of non-numerical data, such as text, video, or audio, to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. Qualitative research can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research. The primary data for the study are “God’s Medicine Men”, “Under New Pastoral Management”, “The Priest’s Dog Falls in Love”, in Tanure Ojaide’s *God’s Naked Children*. Secondary materials such as scholarly articles, journals, books, and commentaries written about the short story and in relation to Desecration of Religious Ethics and Syncretism as revealed in the novel, are employed in the discussion of

relevant topics in the study. Instances of the aforementioned in the novel are analyzed using theory.

The primary text will be analyzed through the lens of its thematic preoccupation.

1.5. Background To Study

African literature often explores the issues of societal norms and Spirituality. Tanure Ojaide's *God's Naked Children* is a notable example. Patrick Nwosu contends that some individuals have blended Western culture with Christianity to the extent that Western culture has become viewed as the true essence or standard of Christianity. The short story highlights how various religious ethics, religious terms have been desecrated.

Tanure Ojaide's portrays these with various characters whilst still making a clear point examining these themes.

1.6. Review Of Related Literature / Justification of Study

Several scholars have been drawn to the works of Tanure Ojaide, due to his profound reflection of society through his writings. He can make men question their actions as well as the actions of other around us, who we venerate as depicted in *God's Naked Children*.

Enajite E. Ojaruega carries out a study on Tanure Ojaide's works in an article titled, *The Signification of African Spirituality in Selected Short Stories of Tanure Ojaide*. He carries

out this study based on the idea that African Literature incorporate and interrogates the historical, spiritual and cultural worldview of people. Regarding Ojaide's style of writing, Ojaruega states that:

“The writer projects ideas around African spirituality, mainly through the relationship between the living and the dead, the importance of the final resting place for the dead, the existence and operations of supernatural forces capable of oppressive and sexual attacks, and the efficacy of bewitchment on the living” (Ojaruega 1/45).

He believes that Ojaide's constant linking of spirituality to his stories is a result of his ethnic background, as an Urhobo man. Ojaruega also states that, in Africa, being sick goes beyond a state of being physically unhealthy, but it could also be a state of “imbalance” in a person's psychological and spiritual life. All of this is backed up by the belief that Africans are still highly spiritual, even if they no longer serve their traditional gods.

Ojaruega further discusses that African culture and spirituality is deeply embedded in daily life, fostering a sense of connection to the natural world and community. He adopts a practical approach to examine the author's consistent preoccupation with the place, representation, and implications of spirituality within his short stories. The study

highlights that modern African literature generally reflects the realities of the African condition, including indigenous belief systems and traditions. Ojaide, known to constantly reaffirm his identification with his Urhobo traditional heritage, utilizes the short story form to effectively interrogate the visible (physical) and invisible (spiritual) aspects of his people's lives through his fictional characters.

Ojaruega's analysis is drawn from selected stories across Ojaide's four collections of short fiction, namely: *God's Medicine-Men and Other Stories* (2004), *The Debt-Collector and Other Stories* (2009), and *God's Naked Children: Selected and New Stories* (2018).

Ojaruega focuses on four main ideas projected around African spirituality, centering on four key areas, which are: "the crucial relationship between the living and the dead, the importance of the final resting place for the deceased, the operation of supernatural forces that may manifest through oppressive or sexual attacks, and the actual efficacy of bewitchment on the living".

Ultimately, the research aims to explore the continued spirituality of Africans as it is expressed through both Christian beliefs and traditional mysticism.

Ojaruega further states that Ojaide's works have been examined for their philosophical themes, particularly how they apply natural law and virtue ethics to moral issues. His

stories, such as “The Priest’s Dog Falls in Love,” showcase characters dealing with the repercussions of their actions, highlighting the importance of ethics and communal values. While existing research has shed light on Ojaide’s moral themes, more exploration is needed to understand his narrative approach to moral accountability. Tanure Ojaide’s narratives delve into the moral complexities of postcolonial life, where traditional values clash with modern influences. His stories, such as “God’s Medicine Men,” expose the ethical challenges that arise from colonialism’s impact on societal norms. By exploring these tensions, Ojaide’s work sheds light on the ongoing effects of colonialism on contemporary morality and society

African philosophy and religion are characterized by a profound spiritual dimension. The African worldview recognizes the interplay between the physical and spiritual realms, the living and the dead, and the past and present. This intricate reality is a rich source of inspiration for African art and literature.

He also opines that Africans often maintain a deep-seated spirituality, even after adopting foreign religions. They believe that unseen forces shape their lives, bringing either prosperity or adversity. To navigate life’s challenges, many Africans turn to spiritual practices, seeking balance and protection from negative influences.

Henri Oripeloye, in his paper titled *Telling the Nation: A Postmodernist Reading of Tanure Ojaide's God's Medicine-Men and Other Stories*, presents a focused critique of contemporary Nigerian society as reflected in Ojaide's short story collection.

The article's central argument is that postmodernism, a shift from traditional viewpoints to an accelerated technological and capitalist terrain, has intensely worsened post-colonial tendencies in Nigeria. This cultural change leads to the dismantling of traditional values and the fragmentation of society, where life is reduced to a "continual flickering without any recognizable or perpetual presence" (1). Within this context, money emerges as the "chief signifier" and a recurrent motif, driving an obsession with cultural materialism that dominates human consciousness and social relations.

The stories reveal a nation undergoing a cultural movement where societal values are ruptured, resulting in a loss of moral certainties, no social stability, no authentic cultural values and no definite sense of reality.

Loewen James in his article, describes syncretism as the fusion of diverse cultural elements to form a new and unique cultural expression. This phenomenon is evident across multiple domains of human society, such as religion, art, and music. For instance, the modern celebration of Christmas in Europe and North America reflects a synthesis of ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern influences alongside northern European winter

solstice traditions. Similarly, in music, syncretism is exemplified in the development of jazz, which blends European instruments and musical notation with African rhythmic and stylistic traditions to produce a distinctly American genre. In the light of the short story, Tanure exposes how syncretism is a vice that desecrates religious ethics.

Ami Rokach and Sybil H. Chan view marital Infidelity through this lens. They opine that although infidelity has been widely studied, scholars still disagree on its exact definition. Generally, it refers to secret romantic, emotional, or sexual behavior that violates the exclusivity of a committed relationship.

Researchers identify four main types of infidelity, namely: sexual, emotional, combined, and internet infidelity. Sexual infidelity involves physical intimacy with someone outside the relationship, while emotional infidelity occurs when one forms deep emotional attachments with another person. Studies show that men tend to be more distressed by sexual infidelity, whereas women are more affected by emotional betrayal.

However, both forms can cause intense feelings of anger, jealousy, anxiety, guilt, and sadness.

From an evolutionary viewpoint, women are more threatened by emotional infidelity because it endangers their partner's commitment and resources, while men are more disturbed by sexual infidelity because of concerns about paternity.

Social-cognitive theorists, however, argue that jealousy and distress arise from complex emotional processes rather than purely biological instincts. Research also shows that women generally react more strongly to infidelity, both emotional and sexual, than men, regardless of sexual orientation.

Infidelity can be psychologically damaging, often resulting in depression, anxiety, and loss of trust, as explained by attachment theory. Victims may experience trauma similar to the pain of early attachment injuries, leading to insecurity and fear of abandonment. Overall, sexual infidelity provokes stronger anger and humiliation, while emotional infidelity tends to evoke anxiety and jealousy. Despite differences in definition and reaction, infidelity remains one of the most distressing violations of trust in romantic relationships.

Ngozi Asadu and Miriam Egubuche write in their article "Effect of Marital Infidelity on the Family" that marital infidelity has become a major issue in modern society, often causing serious problems such as constant disagreements and loss of harmony in the home. It is seen as the breakdown of order and unity within the family, resulting from one

or both partners failing to fulfill their roles and responsibilities. This instability can lead to frequent quarrels, emotional distance, loss of affection, and even divorce.

Professor Adekunle Mamudu's *Spiritual opportunism in the African short story*, views Tanure Ojaide's artistic way of exposing the exploitation of vulnerable believers by deceitful spiritual leaders.

The story centers on Endurance, a twenty-one-year-old girl tormented by recurring dreams in which she engages in sexual acts with an unknown man, waking to find physical evidence that suggests the dreams are real. Seeking deliverance, she turns to Pastor Odele, a so-called man of God who disguises his traditional healing practices with Christian language to avoid criticism. Odele's ministry blends elements of African traditional religion and Christianity, giving him both influence and control over his followers.

Under the pretense of healing, Odele manipulates Endurance—first instructing her to bathe naked in a river as part of a ritual, an act that exposes her to his lustful gaze. He later inflicts her with a foul body odor that isolates her socially, forcing her to depend entirely on him for relief. When she returns for help, he exploits her sexually, resulting in pregnancy and an eventual coerced marriage. Endurance later concludes that Odele was

the same figure violating her in her dreams, confirming his spiritual and physical exploitation.

This narrative illustrates Ojaide's critique of the moral decay and hypocrisy among self-styled "Men of God" who exploit faith for personal gain. It underscores how syncretic religious practices and the misuse of spiritual authority become tools of manipulation, deception, and sexual abuse within contemporary religious contexts.

Mark Edwards in his article *Heresy: Early Development of the concept* captures that some modern scholars claim the early church allowed diverse teachings about Jesus, while others insist there has always been one unified, orthodox Church.

The writer rejects both extremes, arguing instead that from the beginning, Christians often defined their own beliefs by opposing others, yet there was never complete agreement among clergy or laypeople on what exactly counted as heresy or how to define true Christian belief.

Dylan Shulman published an article on Britannica titled "Spiritism." He writes that spiritism is a philosophy that sees humans as spirits on a journey beyond life and death.

We inhabit bodies, then our souls move to the spirit world, and later get reincarnated. The "perispirit" connects the physical and spirit worlds. He further states that Spiritism values

charity, self-growth, science, and respect for other beliefs. It shares many beliefs with Christianity, like one God and Jesus' sacrifice showing God's love.

Interestingly, Spiritism interprets the Bible as supporting reincarnation.

This study justifies that although several studies have been carried out on Tanure Ojaide's *Gods Naked Children* from the lenses of polytheism and everything that surrounds it, this project seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by linking the major themes as a societal flaw. Religious duality and desecration of religious ethics remain pressing issues in contemporary society.

By examining these issues in Tanure Ojaide's *God's Naked Children*, this study contributes to broader conversations on over religiosity, folly of blind followers, and effects of the desecration of religious ethics and values.

1.7. Thesis Statement

Tanure Ojaide's *God's Naked Children* exposes the desecration of religious ethics through marital infidelity, syncretism, stealing, heresy, and hypocrisy.

CHAPTER TWO

MARITAL INFIDELITY

2.1 Introduction

This chapter contains an analysis of marital infidelity in Tanure Ojaide's '*God's Naked Children*'. It explains the term marital infidelity, its types, its causes, and its contribution to the development of the topic 'desecration of religious ethics. Through its rich character portrayals and thematic depth, *God's Naked Children* invites readers to reflect on the tensions between spiritual aspirations and the harsh realities of human existence.

The term marital infidelity refers to a breach of trust and commitment, often understood as adultery or sexual relations outside marriage. It can also include emotional cheating, a deep emotional bond with someone else that replaces intimacy with one's spouse. Marital infidelity breaks the moral, religious, and social expectation that marriage partners pledge loyalty to each other.

In God's Naked Children, Tanure Ojaide paints a clear picture of the struggle with suppressed desires through the characters of Evangelist Peter and Magdalene, the wife of Elder James Ogbe. Evangelist Peter, a renowned minister in the Church of New Dawn, is celebrated as the chief shepherd, embodying holiness and divine calling.

However, Ojaide deliberately unveils the contradictions in his life, exposing the hypocrisy beneath his religious facade and his human weaknesses. The climax of his character comes when he engages in an illicit affair with Magdalene, a married woman. This act violates the commandment “Thou shalt not commit adultery” and desecrates the moral foundation of his ministry. He impregnates Magdalene and conspires with her to sell the church property, get married, and flee overseas, revealing the erosion of his spiritual ethics.

Ojaide had already created a space to reveal Evangelist Peter’s interpretations of marriage, including his views on “mature women like Mary Magdalene and Martha who did not get married but assisted Jesus in his mission.” On the surface, this sounds like a side thought, but it’s clear that he prefers devout women who exalt spiritual authority, like Magdalene, the leader of the women’s volunteering group. He even changes her name from Agnes to Magdalene, seeing it as befitting her Christian status. A symbolism of the woman who was one of Jesus’ most devout followers, who is argued to be a harlot or adultress. These scenarios hint at the game Evangelist Peter played.

2.2. Forms Of Marital Infidelity

Marital infidelity is a severe and pressing issue with various forms. Often, these forms are not deemed as infidelity but seen as casual. They include emotional infidelity,

physical infidelity, sexual infidelity, micro-cheating, and gaslighting infidelity, among others. Tanure Ojaide's *God's Naked Children* highlights these types of Infidelity, one of which is emotional Infidelity, which refers to when one's partner forms a deep emotional connection with someone outside the marriage, often sharing intimate thoughts and feelings. In *God's Naked Children*, through characters like evangelist Peter and Magdalene, it is clear that infidelity follows a strategic process that includes emotions.

Magdalene, also known as Mrs. Ogbe, is a thirty-seven-year-old woman married to a man in his late fifties. She's one of the most devout members in the church, leading the women's volunteering group and known for her ritual of placing the flower vase on the altar. Her close working relationship with Evangelist Peter exposes her to a life of unspeakable closeness, fueled by shared projects and intimacy. The "miracle of proximity" draws them closer, making emotional infidelity a natural progression.

Magdalene's childlessness in her ten-year marriage leaves her vulnerable, seeking solace in the church and Evangelist Peter's guidance. Societal pressures and expectations intensify her emotional void, making her susceptible to his influence. As they bond over her struggles, their emotional connection deepens, illustrating how pain fuels passion, love fuels compromise, and desire defies rules. Ojaide masterfully illustrates this concept, showing how emotional connections can spark infidelity.

Through Magdalene and Evangelist Peter, Ojaide paints a clear picture of emotional infidelity, highlighting the complexities of human relationships and the blurred lines between trust, intimacy, and betrayal. Their story showcases how emotional infidelity can stem from unmet needs, vulnerability, and the desire for connection.

In the same light, physical infidelity is explained as when one's partner engages in physical intimacy (e.g., kissing, sex) with someone outside the marriage. This is the second road after emotional infidelity, and of course, Evangelist Peter and Magdalene took this route. They engaged in this action, breaching the trust of their vows that include Magdalene's marriage vows and Evangelist Peter's sacred pastoral vows.

It is obvious that this act was fueled by heightened emotions and possibly a way for Evangelist Peter to let go of stored-up loneliness and Magdalene to resolve her childlessness. At this phase, both parties disregarded the consequences, seeking their specific rewards.

Physical intimacy is a vital aspect of a healthy marriage, serving the purposes of pleasure and procreation. When a partner can't fulfill their marital duties, it can lead to sexual infidelity. Sexual infidelity, similar to physical infidelity, focuses on sexual activities outside the marriage.

Tanure suggests that Magdalene's sexual infidelity might stem from dissatisfaction and her husband's inability to meet her sexual needs, leading her to seek satisfaction elsewhere, and finding it in Evangelist Peter.

It could also be that Evangelist Peter convinced her that yielding to him would bring her a child, and in her desperation, she succumbed to his plea. Tanure highlights that this action was probably driven by desperation and the need to meet sexual desires.

Again, micro-cheating, often underestimated, can have significant consequences, leading to a breach of trust. This involves seemingly insignificant actions like flirting or hiding interactions, which can erode trust. In Magdalene and Evangelist Peter's case, their actions clearly crossed this path. Flirting, often undetected, can increase hope and create a space for accommodating a certain kind of sexual appeal through words and actions. They gradually found themselves entangled in infidelity, illustrating how micro-cheating can escalate into more significant breaches of trust.

Gaslighting infidelity, a subtle yet damaging form of marital infidelity, involves manipulating the truth or denying previous agreements, making the other partner question reality. In *God's Naked Children*, Elder Ogbe was a victim.

In a typical postcolonial African society, husbands are revered, protective, and seek respect at all costs. Elder Ogbe's egoistic nature likely contributed to Magdalene's distance. Tanure skillfully highlights this dynamic, inviting readers to ponder the situation. Magdalene's frequent mission trips and devotion to the church probably left her little time for her husband, creating disagreements. Elder Ogbe may have questioned his wife's closeness with Evangelist Peter, but his reverence likely prevented him from addressing it openly. He probably repeatedly asked Magdalene to stop attending mission trips, but she ignored his requests. He may have pressured her to have a child, given his advanced age and desire for a legacy.

Alternatively, Elder Ogbe's older age may have led him to treat Magdalene like a younger sister, listening to her every word to keep her happy, thereby allowing her to manipulate him. Ojaide masterfully presents a nuanced portrayal, showcasing the complexities of this marital issue. These loopholes likely pushed both partners away from each other.

Emotional infidelity, as seen in Magdalene and Evangelist Peter's deep emotional connection, sparked a chain reaction. Physical infidelity followed, breaching trust and fueled by heightened emotions. Sexual infidelity, driven by Magdalene's dissatisfaction, desperation and evangelist Peter's desire, further complicated the situation. Micro-

cheating eroded trust, while gaslighting infidelity involved manipulation and responses shaped by cultural expectations.

Through these depictions, Tanure Ojaide highlights the complexities of human relationships, trust, and intimacy, showcasing the consequences of marital infidelity. Ojaide's portrayal invites readers to ponder the intricacies of relationships, revealing the blurred lines between trust, intimacy, and betrayal. These forms of marital infidelity, depicted in *God's Naked Children*, serve as a poignant reminder of the fragility of relationships and the importance of nurturing trust and intimacy.

In conclusion, *God's Naked Children* masterfully depicts various forms of marital infidelity, including emotional infidelity, physical infidelity, sexual infidelity, micro-cheating, and gaslighting infidelity.

2.3. Causes Of Marital Infidelity

Research has shown that marital infidelity often stems from humanity's insatiability.

Tanure Ojaide exposes how unmet desires and cravings can lead to defiance of moral principles. Factors like discontentment, emotional void, desperation, and lack of love contribute to marital infidelity.

In *God's Naked Children*, Magdalene's marriage with Elder Ogbe is portrayed as dissatisfying due to childlessness and emotional stress. Societal expectations in postcolonial Nigeria exacerbate the situation, making Magdalene's childlessness a source of ridicule. Her discontentment and desperation for a child and emotional connection drive her towards Evangelist Peter. Also, the age gap between Magdalene and Elder Ogbe may have created an emotional disconnect, deepening their space and leaving them vulnerable.

Desperation speaks louder than faith, and Magdalene's desires, unmet by her husband, were fulfilled by Evangelist Peter.

Ojaide crafts this narrative to expose human fragility and the complexities of relationships. He highlights personality traits that fuel cheating, without justifying or excusing it. Marital infidelity is portrayed as a violation of religious ethics, demonstrating a lack of self-control and contradicting teachings on self-discipline.

Tanure depicts marital infidelity as a desecration of religious ethics, criticizing perpetrators while exposing human weakness. The two sides of the coin are flipped, revealing the underlying reasons for these actions. He proves that marital infidelity taints the whole idea of marriage as an institution while satirizing how religion in postcolonial

Nigeria has been corrupted by greed, lust, and moral compromise, using Evangelist Peter's hypocrisy as a prime example.

CHAPTER THREE

SYNCRETISM AND STEALING

3.1. Introduction

This chapter contains an analysis of syncretism and stealing in Tanure Ojaide's *God's Naked Children*. It explains the terms syncretism and stealing, their causes, and their contribution to the development of the topic of "desecration of religious ethics".

Through rich characterization and thematic depth, *God's Naked Children* invites readers to reflect on the tensions between spiritual yearning and the stern realities of human existence.

3.2. Syncretism

The term syncretism refers to the blending or merging of different beliefs, cultures, or practices into something new. It is understood as mixing things to create a hybrid. In *God's naked children*, this idea is embodied by characters like Pastor Odele, Pastor Jeremiah Efe, Mrs. Theresa Ede, and Pastor Emmanuel.

Firstly, Pastor Odele is described as a short man in his mid-forties who presents himself as a devout man of God.

He is often with a small pocket Bible, which symbolizes his supposed spirituality.

However, despite his religious facade, Odele's character is riddled with hypocrisy, deceit, and moral corruption. Odele embodies the fusion and confusion between Christianity and Traditional religion. He frequently invokes both Jesus and Olokun to perform miracles. This blending of Christian and traditional religious practices exposes the conflict of divided faith, stance, conviction, and the inability of some individuals to remain true to one belief system. By mixing both religions for personal gain, Odele symbolizes the desecration of religious ethics, where spiritual practices lose their sanctity and become tools for manipulation.

Furthermore, Ojaide mirrors Odele as an epitome of syncretism. As a religious leader, he straddles two incompatible worlds. He professes Christianity while maintaining deep connections with African traditional religion. He lives with his mother, who is a devout traditionalist; her house is described as a big shrine decked with mirrors, sculptures of god-like figures, animal skulls, and white and red feathers. This painted picture shows how Odele contradicts the Bible injunction that "light and darkness have no fellowship".

Ojaide also exposes his internalized belief of this merge when he utters, "that everything on earth is made by God and that we must fight battles with whatever arms we can muster". However, it depicts the sole cause of syncretism as a lack of knowledge.

It is without doubt that God knows the world has forces to fight, so he gives authority through the name of Jesus, which all powers submit to. However, Pastor Odele seems to lack this understanding and doesn't fully grasp the bible he references, proving that his double allegiance is as a result of ignorance and his behavior underscores how sometimes religious leaders seek power and security in both traditions, thereby undermining the moral boundaries that define true faith. Through Odele, Ojaide critiques the spiritual instability that arises when religion becomes an instrument of convenience rather than conviction.

On the other hand is Pastor Emmanuel, a man with two sides of a coin. He goes to a medicine man to acquire a charm of persuasion. His tongue is poked with a needle by the traditional leader, and a medicine is applied while he chants an esoteric invocation. On a surface level, this seems like a one-time act and doesn't capture the idea of syncretism, but it does because spiritual things often run on renewal. He violates the core of Christianity and unashamedly goes against the Christian commandment, "You shall serve no other god except Me." He further justifies his actions with his belief, "To fight the devil, I had to use all means necessary, including devilish techniques." These words show his lack of remorse, lack of understanding of the Bible, lack of conviction, and poor knowledge of God.

Furthermore, he joins two worlds to create a balance in his ministry, making God an option depending on the circumstance. He claims to do God's work but refuses to do it God's way. He blends his persuasion charm with his pastoral life, using it to convince his members to worship at his church and make a good gain from the church he has newly acquired. Through pastor Emmanuel, Ojaide explains that syncretism doesn't happen out of choice rather it runs on the fuel of desperation and ignorance.

In addition, Ojaide explains syncretism in a form painted as desperation. He exposes the effect of turning a blind eye to its visible consequences through Mrs. Theresa Ede.

Mrs. Theresa Ede is a fairly young widow and a regular member of the church, and losing her husband of only eight years was a jolting blow to her. She's a devout teacher in an elementary school and a devout church member. With time, she begins to develop romantic feelings for Father Daniel, which is quite understandable and doesn't call for so much judgment, as love isn't one to know faces. She decides to seek help from a medicine man to make Father Daniel fall crazy in love with her, which, in turn, backfired, and his dog took the fall.

The picture Ojaide painted wasn't one about love or lust but the lengths desperate times call for. She decided to merge the two worlds to support her desperation, trying to make right with two wrongs. He explains that creating a hybrid doesn't start when one

doesn't already have existing knowledge of the other party. For example, Mrs. Theresa wanted to make a man fall in love with her, and her only source of help was from a medicine man; this shows that there are other times when she needed vindication and she definitely ran to the medicine man without hesitation. Her actions don't just counter her faith but show her lack of knowledge and conviction about the faith she professes.

3.3. Stealing

The term stealing is the act of taking someone else's property without their permission, usually with the intention of keeping it for oneself. It can involve physical objects, money, ideas, or even someone's identity. Stealing is generally considered wrong because it violates the rights of others, damages trust, and can cause harm to individuals or communities.

In *God's Naked Children*, Ojaide shows how pastor Odele's moral bankruptcy becomes more visible when he steals pastor Jeremiah Efe's silver goblets, which clearly violates the Christian commandment "thou shalt not steal". This act not only undermines his credibility as a religious leader but also exposes the hypocrisy that pervades modern religious institutions. Odele's theft exposes how greed has eaten deeply into the sacred space of the church, leading to the degradation of moral standards.

In the same light, Odele's greed sojourns beyond stealing silver goblets; it also lies in his need to appease his human desires, afflicting the most beautiful girl, Endurance, stealing her innocence, and exploiting ignorance under the guise of healing and deliverance. This act of cruelty shows how he uses his spiritual power as a weapon of control and lust rather than as a means of healing or salvation.

Through this, Odele embodies the corruption of religious authority that uses faith as a means of dominance instead of upliftment.

In conclusion, Ojaide explains that syncretism or stealing isn't a thought-through action but one born out of ignorance or desperation. Nonetheless, they are stones thrown at religious ethics.

CHAPTER FOUR

HYPOCRISY AND HERESY

4.1. Introduction

This chapter contains an analysis of hypocrisy and heresy as tools of desecration in Tanure Ojaide *God's Naked Children*.

However, some of these vices are well-explained in the short story through each character.

The term hypocrisy refers to when someone pretends to be something they're not, or pretends to hold certain beliefs or values that they don't actually practice in their own life. It's like saying one thing but doing another.

Heresy, on the other hand, refers to a belief or opinion that goes against the traditional or established doctrine of a particular religion, church, or institution. In the story context, it is clear that characters are exhibiting both heresy (by blending Christianity with traditional practices) and hypocrisy (by pretending to be devout Christians while engaging in practices that go against their faith).

4.2 Hypocrisy

Hypocrisy refers to when someone pretends to be something they're not, or pretends to hold certain beliefs or values that they don't actually practice in their own life. It's like saying one thing but doing another.

Ojaide uses Pastor Jeremiah Efe to explain the term and how the actions desecrate religious ethics. Pastor Jeremiah Efe is revered in the Anglican church, yet he holds a red thread with hypocrisy.

Pastor Jeremiah Efe is regarded as a model of moral uprightness, good parenting, and spiritual leadership.

Within his parish, he has built a strong reputation among his congregation and even the white Bishop, but behind this beautiful facade is a man who wants more than reputation or being a Jerusalem Pilgrim. Pastor Efe's spiritual weakness becomes more evident when he turns to Pastor Odele, who is more of a medicine man at heart than a pastor, for help in a moment of desperation. Despite his vast knowledge of scripture and theology, he fails to rely on divine faith and instead seeks assistance from a man who openly mixes Christianity with African traditional religion. Pastor Emmanuel, out of desperation, agrees to go with his wife and daughter to see Pastor Odele under the guise of a miracle.

He wanted a promotion, a high-paying salary, and less arguing with his wife, so he does all the things Pastor Odele asks him to do, which are rubbing and licking two wrapped things before going to bed and before preaching. This act, which he follows judiciously, is the very act that his Bible criticizes, making him a modern-day Pharisee and Sadducee.

Also, his joy became full when everything stopped turning south, but at a cost: he didn't speak up for his daughter, who got pregnant out of wedlock with Pastor Odele, because he felt indebted to him. Ojaide, through Pastor Emmanuel, exposes that one is as wise as the knowledge they have and execute. For example, Pastor Emmanuel, who is well-acquainted with the Bible and theology, didn't know where to fix his gaze during his rainy days. He turned to a medicine man for help, even though he said that he believed in miracles; deep down, he knew that he wasn't going to a pastor for a miracle because when he thanked Pastor Odele for all he had done for him, Pastor Odele replied, "Thank my mother," the same mother whom they all knew was a faithful traditionalist. This shows that Pastor Emmanuel is a believer in "desperate times call for desperate measures," and his desperation led him to do the very thing his Bible says a bold No to!

Again, Ojaide uses pastor Efe to show the hypocrisy within the church and the fragility of human faith. Though Efe is educated and respected, his life lacks the

transformative power of the word he preaches. He becomes a representation of the spiritual decay that occurs when knowledge is not matched by moral integrity.

His impatience and greed override his faith in God's timing, reflecting a society where religious leaders prioritize status and material success over spiritual purity.

Shifting focus to Evangelist Peter, who is portrayed as a renowned minister in the church of New Dawn, celebrated for his charismatic preaching, spiritual authority, and reputation as a healer of infirmities. To the public, he embodies the image of holiness and divine calling, serving as a symbol of moral uprightness within the Christian community.

However, Tanure Ojaide deliberately unveils the hidden contradictions in his life, exposing the hypocrisy that lies beneath his religious facade. Evangelist Peter's hypocrisy is seen when he involves himself in an illicit affair with one of his married church members, Magdalene. This act not only violates the Christian commandment "thou shalt not commit adultery" but also desecrates the moral foundation upon which his ministry stands. Tanure Ojaide, exposes through evangelist Peter how one can compromise and forgo their spiritual and moral belief in the face of desire.

In conclusion, hypocrisy is proven to be a leech on the flesh of religious leaders; they speak things, encourage others, judge others for their wrong actions, yet do the very thing that they and their religious books criticize.

4.3. Heresy

The term heresy as stated earlier, refers to a belief or opinion that goes against the traditional or established doctrine of a particular religion, church, or institution. In Christianity, for example, heresy is a deviation from the accepted teachings of the Bible or the church.

In *God's Naked Children*, evangelist Peter is an embodiment of this action. His teachings justify wrongdoings instead of condemning them because he believes that “only God the Father is the judge”.

He chooses the path of painting the Christian journey as convenient because it adds more members to the church instead of teaching on what it means to take up the cross. He preaches that his church will guarantee the salvation of the people; he paints pictures in the hearts of his followers to always expect only good from God. He taught that “there’s nothing a good Christian wants that God will not give the person; through prayers, the human and the divine can dialogue”.

In all his teachings, he forsakes the basic core of Christianity: God's timing, stabilizing a good relationship with God, and believing in God not just for the good times but also in the bad times. His heretical teachings did more harm than good to his followers, as they were solely dependent on him for protection and unknowingly made him an idol in their hearts.

In essence, he represents modern-day religious leaders who would rather say things to please the people to get fat tithes and huge offerings instead of calling out wrongdoings to protect the integrity of the body of Christ.

Ojaide poses that heresy or hypocrisy is not born out of ignorance but out of a willingness to please another existing factor different from the original. In a case like Pastor Emmanuel, his hypocrisy was not born out of ignorance because he was well-acquainted with his beliefs, but his hypocrisy was born out of desperation and the need to feel fulfilled in his chosen space, while Evangelist Peter's hypocrisy was born out of his desire and lust, and his heretical teachings were born out of his selfish gain.

In conclusion, Ojaide exposes throughout God's Naked Children that heresy taints the originality of a belief, creating an imbalance and false knowledge.

Hypocrisy, on the other hand, is forged from the fire of personal desires and materialism that ruin and desecrate the ethical and spiritual core of religion.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study has successfully explored the desecration of religious ethics in Tanure Ojaide's *God's Naked Children*, revealing the mirror held up to society, reflecting the contradictions between actions and professed beliefs. Through a critical analysis of the text, this research highlights the devastating consequences of marital infidelity, the dangers of syncretism and stealing, and the harsh effects of heresy and hypocrisy.

The analysis in Chapter Two highlights the destructive consequences of marital infidelity, a pervasive theme in the story, while Chapter Three examines the causes and effects of syncretism and stealing, showcasing their detrimental impact on religious practices. Chapter four's examination of heresy and hypocrisy serves as a severe critique of these actions, citing examples from the text to underscore their influence.

The findings of this study underscore the significance of African writers engaging with societal and religious issues, promoting introspection and encouraging readers to uphold their beliefs without compromise. Tanure Ojaide's *God's Naked Children* serves as a poignant example of literature's power to reflect and critique the world around us, urging readers to confront the uncomfortable realities of religious desecration in both fiction and reality.

Ultimately, *God's Naked Children* is a stark reminder that the desecration of religious ethics is not confined to the pages of a book but a pressing reality that demands attention and action. Ojaide's work challenges readers to confront these issues head-on, sparking a necessary conversation about the role of faith and morality in our lives.

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