

Yoruba Ritual Cosmology in Contemporary Streaming Media: Spiritual Obligation and Liminality in *Aníkúlápó: Rise of the Spectre*

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Received March 11, 2026; Accepted: April 23, 2026; Published: April 27, 2026

Abstract

Background: Nigerian popular television had increasingly engaged indigenous African cosmologies as narrative frameworks, yet scholarly analysis of how these systems were represented with cultural fidelity remained limited. Nollywood (the Nigerian film industry) productions centring Yoruba traditional belief offered a productive but underexamined site for interrogating the intersection of indigenous epistemology and postcolonial media practice. **Purpose:** This study examined *Aníkúlápó: Rise of the Spectre* (2024), a Nigerian Netflix series, as a cultural text engaging Yoruba cosmology, death rituals, and spiritual obligation. It investigated how the series constructed metaphysical order, moral accountability, and political authority, and whether these representations sustained or merely aestheticized African indigenous frameworks in postcolonial media production. **Method:** The study adopted a qualitative design employing cultural textual analysis across all six episodes. Three complementary strategies were applied. Narrative analysis traced how ritual elements structured character motivation and plot development. Semiotic analysis decoded the symbolic functions of key objects including a ritual amulet, palm wine, and cowries. Cultural criticism evaluated representational authenticity against Yoruba ethnographic scholarship. The framework drew on theories of ritual practice, liminality, gift exchange and reciprocal obligation, and postcolonial African cinema criticism. **Results:** The series effectively visualised Yoruba beliefs about the soul's journey after death, the moral weight of interfering with divinely ordained death, and the binding nature of spiritual obligations between the living and the dead. The protagonist functioned as a psychopomp, a figure who guided souls between realms, whose unresolved threshold existence drove the central conflict. However, the series failed to sustain its cosmological logic as spiritual debts were deferred without consequence, sacred objects were reduced to plot devices, and patriarchal structures constraining female characters were depicted without critical interrogation. **Conclusion:** The study demonstrated that the representation of African traditional religion in popular media required sustained engagement with the philosophical frameworks underlying ritual practice rather than visual spectacle alone. Cosmological coherence and critical depth proved essential accompaniments to aesthetic ambition for such productions to serve as meaningful vehicles of cultural transmission. **Contribution:** This study provided the first systematic thematic analysis of the series as both a ritual enactment and a postcolonial media text. It advanced scholarship on African cosmologies in popular media, indigenous ritual performance, and Nollywood's evolving role in cultural preservation, offering a replicable analytical model for examining ritual representation in African screen media.

Keywords: Culture; death rituals; spiritual obligation; liminality; tradition; Yoruba cosmology

Introduction

The emergence of African indigenous cosmologies as substantive narrative frameworks in popular television drama represents one of the most culturally significant developments in contemporary media. In Nigeria, this shift is most visibly embodied in Nollywood, an industry that has evolved from an output dominated by Christian-inflected moral narratives toward increasingly pluralistic engagements with the country's diverse religious and cultural heritage (Haynes, 2016). The six-episode Netflix series *Aníkúlápó: Rise of the Spectre* (Afolayan, 2024), a sequel to the critically received 2022 film *Aníkúlápó*, stands at the forefront of this evolution. Set against the pre-colonial Yoruba kingdoms of Ede and Oyo, the series centres on Saro, a protagonist bound by spiritual debts incurred through his interference with the boundary between life and death, and it draws deeply on Yoruba metaphysical thought to drive both its narrative logic and its moral universe. This engagement with indigenous belief is not incidental to the production's identity but constitutive of it. The series functions as what Wa Thiong'o (1986) terms a decolonised media text, one that centres African epistemological frameworks rather than relegating them to exotic backdrop or superstitious counterpoint to Western rationality. This matters not only aesthetically but politically. The decision to invest production resources in authentically representing Yoruba cosmology, including its rituals of death and transition, its hierarchies of spiritual obligation, and its traditions of court governance, constitutes a statement about whose knowledge systems deserve respectful portrayal and whose cultural frameworks merit preservation (Gaitenidis, 2025). At a broader level, productions that centre indigenous epistemologies represent what Sollors (2025) describes as productive cultural work, adapting inherited practices to contemporary circumstances so that tradition may be simultaneously preserved, interrogated, and transmitted to generations with limited direct experience of pre-colonial ritual life. Falola and Akinyemi (2016) document that this tendency reflects a measurable resurgence in Yoruba-centred artistic production across theatre, literature, and screen media since the early 2000s, a pattern whose cultural momentum the series both embodies and extends.

The scholarly literature on Yoruba cosmology provides a sophisticated foundation against which the series' representations can be assessed. Idowu (1962), Abimbola (1976), and Olupona (2011) document a metaphysical system of considerable internal precision, wherein existence traverses multiple realms, with death marking transition rather than termination. Central to Yoruba personhood is the soul, understood as the spiritual essence animating the body that must return to its divine source upon death and which is separable from bodily form and capable of independent existence, a principle directly engaged by the series' narrative of soul extraction and restoration. Drewal and Drewal (1983) establish that inadequate burial rituals may result in the deceased becoming a restless spirit unable to join the ancestors, while Peel (2016) demonstrates that deaths occurring before the fulfilment of a divinely ordained life purpose create cosmological disruptions requiring ritual resolution. Awolalu and Awolalu (1979) further distinguish between a good death in old age and a bad death through violence or premature departure, each carrying distinct eschatological consequences. The concept of spiritual debt governing the series' narrative premise is equally grounded in documented Yoruba thought. Abimbola (Abimbola, 1976) identifies the disruption of cosmic order as necessitating restorative action through sacrifice or compensatory ritual, while Parkin (1980) argues that across many African cosmologies, existence itself is conceptualised as indebtedness to ancestors, deities, and cosmic forces, with ritual performance representing ongoing repayment. Within this

economy of obligation, Mauss (2023, 2024) provides a structural framework, establishing that gifts are not freely given but create binding obligations compelling reciprocation, and that an inherent spirit within a gift compels its return. Extending this to African traditional religions, Mene (2023) and Whitehouse (2024) argue that sacrifices and ritual performances constitute humanity's side of a reciprocal exchange with spiritual beings, while Suter and Ramsøy (2024) supplies the vocabulary of balanced reciprocity, wherein goods and services of equivalent value are transacted within defined timeframes, to describe the mutual obligations between the protagonist and the souls he has displaced.

Despite this rich ethnographic and anthropological foundation, the systematic scholarly analysis of Yoruba cosmological representation within serialised television drama remains a critical gap in the literature. Existing Nollywood scholarship has engaged the industry primarily through the lens of genre formation (Offeyi, 2026), the political economy of transnational circulation (Diawara, 1992), and audience reception within diaspora communities. Where African traditional religion has appeared in media studies, analysis has typically concentrated on single films or has taken an ethnographic orientation toward documenting ritual practice, rather than critically interrogating how those practices are mediated, selectively adapted, or potentially distorted through the demands of popular screen entertainment. The interface between Yoruba cosmology as extensively theorised within religious studies and anthropology, and its representation in contemporary streaming drama, has received no sustained, theoretically grounded treatment. No published study, to the present authors' knowledge, has subjected a full season of Yoruba-themed serialised television to systematic analysis of its cosmological coherence, internal ritual logic, or epistemological fidelity. Previous scholarship has examined what Nollywood produces; this study examines what it faithfully represents and where it falls short. This gap is not a minor omission. As Bell (Bell, 1992) argues, rituals do not simply express pre-existing beliefs but actively constitute and reconstitute social realities through repeated performance, which means that when popular television depicts ritual practice, it exercises real cultural power, shaping how indigenous systems are understood, valued, and transmitted. Analysing whether that power is exercised with rigour or merely with spectacle is a question of genuine scholarly and social consequence.

This study is anchored in an interdisciplinary conceptual framework whose component theories are mutually reinforcing rather than independently applied. Bell's (Bell, 1992, 1997) practice-oriented theory of ritualisation provides the structural foundation, conceptualising ritual not as static tradition but as strategic action through which power, identity, and cosmological obligations are negotiated and contested. Bell's framework enables analysis of how the series differentiates sacred acts from everyday behaviour and how ritual legitimises both celestial authority and earthly hierarchy. Rappaport (Rappaport, 1999) complements Bell by distinguishing between the invariant formal structure of ritual sequences, including fixed invocations, prescribed gestures, and ordered proceedings, and the variable narrative content they carry. This distinction allows examination of how recurring motifs across the series, among them soul journeys, ancestral consultations, and object-mediated offerings, establish a recognisable cosmological grammar. Together, Bell and Rappaport supply the procedural lens through which ritual action in the series is read at the level of form and practice. Turner's (V. W. Turner, 1969) theory of liminality extends the analysis to the protagonist's threshold existence, interpreting his condition of being neither fully alive nor completely dead as generating both exceptional capacities and cosmological danger. Where Turner accounts for the protagonist's ambiguous position, Mauss's (2023, 2024) theory of gift exchange and the spirit of the gift supplies the moral economy that governs what liminal figures

owe and to whom, including the binding force of obligation, the consequences of deferral, and the logic of reciprocal transaction between the living and the dead. These four theories operate at the level of ritual structure and moral obligation. Schechner's (2003) performance theory extends analysis outward by situating the series' ritual enactments within a continuum of living cultural practice, viewing them as restored behaviours that blur the boundary between dramatic convention and lived reality. Diawara's (Diawara, 1992) postcolonial African cinema criticism then contextualises the entire enterprise within the global politics of indigenous representation, completing a framework that moves from micro-level ritual action through moral economy to the macro-level cultural politics of Nollywood as a postcolonial institution.

This study argues that *Aníkúlápó: Rise of the Spectre* represents a critically significant but structurally uneven engagement with Yoruba cosmological tradition. The series demonstrates genuine ambition in visualising indigenous metaphysical systems, particularly in its embodied representation of soul journeys, spiritual intermediary, and the binding force of cosmological obligation. Through high production values, careful attention to pre-colonial material culture, and the embedding of Yoruba narrative conventions within a globally accessible streaming format, it demonstrates that popular African television can function as a serious vehicle for cultural transmission. At the same time, the series fails to sustain the cosmological logic it invokes. Spiritual debts are indefinitely deferred without narrative consequence, sacred objects are reduced to plot devices rather than explored as culturally grounded artefacts, and female characters are constrained by patriarchal structures the series depicts without critically interrogating. These failures are not incidental to the entertainment context; they reflect broader tensions between the demands of serialised drama and the intellectual rigour required to represent a complex epistemological system with fidelity. Understanding where and why these tensions arise has implications for how Nollywood, and African popular television more broadly, might more fully realise its potential as a site of cultural knowledge and epistemological continuity.

This study aims to critically examine *Aníkúlápó: Rise of the Spectre* as a postcolonial streaming media text that represents Yoruba cosmology, death rituals, spiritual obligation, ritual authority, and liminal transformation. Specifically, it analyses how the series constructs the journey of the soul after death, the moral economy of spiritual debt, the symbolic function of ritual objects, and the protagonist's position between the world of the living and the dead. By doing so, the study assesses whether the series sustains the internal logic and epistemological coherence of Yoruba cosmology or merely aestheticizes indigenous ritual systems as visual spectacle for popular entertainment.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in cultural textual analysis. Treating *Aníkúlápó: Rise of the Spectre* as a cultural artefact, it adopts what McKee (2003) terms textual analysis, which is a systematic interpretive practice that examines how media texts produce, reflect, and contest meanings within specific cultural contexts. This design is well established in African media studies and ritual studies as the appropriate approach for investigating how indigenous knowledge systems are constructed through popular screen media (Diawara, 1992), enabling rigorous engagement with narrative, symbol, and performance as the primary carriers of cosmological meaning.

The study is situated within the contemporary Nigerian streaming media landscape,

specifically Nollywood productions migrating to global platforms such as Netflix. Nollywood has undergone a marked thematic transformation since the mid-2010s, with high-budget productions increasingly engaging pre-colonial African settings and Yoruba cosmological frameworks rather than the Christian-inflected moral narratives that had dominated the industry (Offeyi, 2026). The series under study, directed by Kunle Afolayan, a filmmaker publicly committed to representing Yoruba cultural heritage with ethnographic seriousness, is a direct sequel to the 2022 film *Anikulápó*, one of the most-watched African productions on Netflix at the time of its release (Osaji, 2022). It therefore represents an intentional, resourced attempt to render Yoruba cosmological thought accessible to local, diasporic, and international audiences simultaneously, making it a productive site for examining how complex indigenous epistemological systems are mediated through contemporary popular entertainment.

The data corpus comprises all six episodes of *Anikulápó: Rise of the Spectre* (Afolayan, 2024), constituting the complete available text of the production at the time of analysis. The series was selected because it offers the most substantively elaborated Yoruba cosmological narrative in Nollywood's streaming era and because no peer-reviewed study has subjected it to systematic analysis. A purposive, whole-corpus sampling strategy was adopted, as the research questions require analysis of cosmological coherence and narrative logic across the complete arc rather than within isolated episodes. Each episode runs between approximately 60 and 80 minutes, yielding a total viewing corpus of approximately six hours of audiovisual text. No episodes were excluded, as all six form an integrated seasonal narrative.

Data were collected through systematic repeated viewing of all six episodes, accessed via licensed subscription to Netflix. Each episode was viewed a minimum of three times following a structured protocol: an initial viewing to establish narrative orientation; a second analytical viewing with structured note-taking focused on ritual sequences, symbolic objects, spiritual dialogue, and visual representations of cosmological concepts; and a third verification viewing to confirm interpretations and dialogue accuracy. Scenes of particular analytical significance received additional targeted viewings to ensure interpretive precision.

Data were recorded using structured analytical observation sheets designed to capture the following elements: episode number, category of ritual element, descriptive notation of visual and narrative content, symbolic context, and provisional interpretation aligned with the three analytical frameworks. The observation sheets functioned as a systematic record, ensuring consistent application of analytical categories across all six episodes and facilitating transparent documentation of the interpretive process. The observation sheet is provided in Appendix A, detailing the column headers and coding structure employed throughout the analysis.

To ensure the trustworthiness and reliability of textual interpretations, the study adopted multiple validity strategies consistent with qualitative research standards. First, systematic triangulation of secondary sources was employed: all cultural assessments were grounded in peer-reviewed Yoruba ethnographic scholarship (Blier, 2015; Drewal & Drewal, 1983), enabling cross-verification of representational claims against documented cultural knowledge. Second, reflexive engagement with the analytical process addressed potential researcher bias. Because the author occupies an insider position in relation to the cultural traditions represented in the series, being a member of the Yoruba community from which the source material draws, explicit acknowledgement of this positionality was maintained throughout. While this positionality offers interpretive advantages, including lived familiarity with cultural codes, linguistic

distinctions, and social context that may not be accessible to external analysts (Cowley & Kelliher, 2023), it also carries the risk of naturalising assumptions that deserve critical scrutiny. This limitation was addressed by sustaining reflexive awareness throughout the analysis, consistently treating the series as a creative interpretation rather than an ethnographic record, and by submitting interpretations to peer review before finalisation. Third, the iterative nature of the three analytical stages permitted internal peer debriefing, whereby findings from narrative analysis were cross-checked against semiotic insights and cultural criticism at each stage, allowing inconsistencies or oversights to be identified and resolved. Fourth, detailed description of the analytical process, including specific dialogue quotations and scene references, enables readers to assess the fidelity of interpretations and to determine whether findings are transferable to other Nollywood productions engaging African cosmological content.

Analysis proceeded through three complementary and iterative stages. First, narrative analysis examined how ritual elements function within plot structure and character motivation across the series arc (Oppermann & Spencer, 2022), mapping whether the cosmological logic of obligation and reciprocity drives coherent narrative consequence. Second, semiotic analysis investigated ritual objects including the amulet, palm wine, cowries, and heaven's gate as signifiers of deeper cosmological meanings (Travere, 2023), assessing how their deployment corresponds to, adapts, or departs from documented Yoruba cultural significance. Third, cultural criticism informed by Yoruba ethnographic scholarship evaluated representational authenticity and the ideological implications of particular choices (Washington, 2025). Findings from all three stages were synthesised thematically across the six analytical categories: death rituals, ritual objects, spiritual obligations, traditional governance, liminality, and Gender. Results were presented in the next sections (Results and Discussion).

This study analyses a publicly available commercial television series accessed through a licensed streaming platform. It involves no human participants, personal data, community fieldwork, or experimental intervention, and formal ethics committee approval was therefore not required under the applicable institutional research framework. All episode references and dialogue quotations are attributed to the source production in accordance with academic citation conventions.

Results

The following section presents the findings of the thematic analysis of *Anikulápó: Rise of the Spectre* across six analytical themes. Each theme reports what the series depicts in relation to Yoruba cosmological practice, identifying the specific textual evidence observed across the six-episode corpus. Interpretive and theoretical analysis of these findings is reserved for the Discussion section that follows.

1. Death Rituals and the Journey to the Afterlife

Episode 1 opens with Saro leading a group of souls (Figure 1) in silent procession toward heaven's architectural gate, where a gatekeeper figure (*Onibode orun*) halts the group. The gatekeeper demands that Saro repay a debt of twenty souls he improperly resurrected during his earthly life before being permitted entry. The gatekeeper presents Saro with an amulet (Figure 2) that enables soul extraction and instructs Saro to return to earth as an invisible spectre, visible only to the spiritually attuned, until the debt is settled. In Episode 1, Saro negotiates physical restoration with a blind woman who perceives his

invisible form and instructs him in the application of specific materials to his decomposing body. He subsequently encounters three wandering souls and negotiates a three-year deferment of his obligations to them, securing a source of supernatural palm wine in exchange for future guidance to the afterlife. By the conclusion of Episode 6, Saro has reclaimed only three of the required twenty souls through direct extraction. The remaining seventeen are not depicted returning to the afterlife or being extracted at any point in the narrative. Bashorun dies in Episode 5 and reappears in Episode 6 as leader of the undead; he possesses the amulet that Saro previously held, though the mechanism of the amulet's transfer is not shown. Saro disappears from the narrative in the final episode without confirmation of his ontological state or fate.



Figure 1. Saro, dressed in blue, leads a procession of souls toward the gate of Òrun. Screenshot from *Anikulápó: Rise of the Spectre*, Episode 1, Netflix/KAP Motion Pictures, 2024. Used for scholarly criticism and analysis; copyright remains with the original rights holder.



Figure 2. The gatekeeper of Òrun hands Saro an amulet used for soul retrieval. Screenshot from *Anikulápó: Rise of the Spectre*, Episode 1, Netflix/KAP Motion Pictures, 2024. Used for scholarly criticism and analysis; copyright remains with the original rights holder.

2. Ritual Objects and Spiritual Power

Three ritual objects function as primary vehicles of spiritual power across the series. The amulet, granted by the gatekeeper in Episode 1 (Figure 2), is a material object that Saro uses to extract souls throughout Episodes 1 through 5. He uses the amulet on multiple occasions to remove souls from bodies without causing physical death or injury; the bodies of those whose souls are extracted collapse but do not display wounds or external

trauma. The amulet is subsequently stolen or transferred to Bashorun, who possesses it in Episode 6. Palm wine materialises supernaturally in Saro's compound in Episode 2, sourced from the three wandering souls with whom he has negotiated a three-year exchange. The supply of palm wine enables his commercial success: Saro's compound becomes wealthy, his family is well-fed, and his social status in Ilu Aje town increases. The supply ceases in Episode 5 as his three-year deadline approaches, creating visible material scarcity in his household. Cowries appear in Episode 6 (Figure 4) as a pouch given to Queen Arolake by disfigured spirits in Episode 2 in exchange for ritual assistance. The pouch is inexhaustible; Queen Arolake can withdraw unlimited cowries from it indefinitely. The pouch transforms her material circumstances from vagrancy to wealth, enabling her to secure property and social position in the border territory. The blind woman functions throughout Episode 1 as an individual with specialised knowledge of restoration procedures; she instructs Saro verbally and through demonstration, supplying the specific materials required and overseeing their application to his decomposing body (Figure 3).

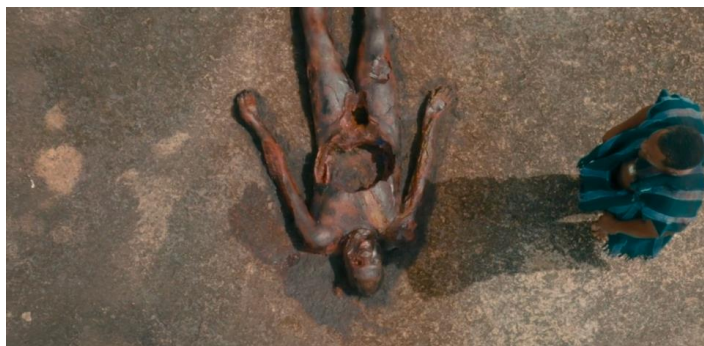


Figure 3. Saro's decomposing body before ritual restoration. Screenshot from *Anikulápó: Rise of the Spectre*, Episode 1, Netflix/KAP Motion Pictures, 2024. Used for scholarly criticism and analysis; copyright remains with the original rights holder.



Figure 4. Cowries (*owó eyọ*) as the source of Queen Arolake's supernatural wealth. Screenshot from *Anikulápó: Rise of the Spectre*, Episode 6, Netflix/KAP Motion Pictures, 2024. Used for scholarly criticism and analysis; copyright remains with the original rights holder.

3. Spiritual Obligations and Moral Economy

Saro's spiritual debt of twenty souls operates throughout the series as a form of cosmological accounting. The gatekeeper establishes this debt in Episode 1 through explicit pronouncement: Saro cannot enter the afterlife until the souls improperly resurrected during his earthly life have been returned. The debt remains actively enforced through the progressive withdrawal of supernatural support in Episodes 5 and 6, as the three-year deadline approaches, the supply of palm wine ceases, creating material deprivation in Saro's household. The three wandering souls engage in explicit negotiation with Saro in Episodes 1 and 2 (Figure 5), establishing the terms of their transaction, which is that, they provide palm wine in exchange for Saro's eventual guidance to the afterlife. When Saro delays in fulfilling this obligation, the three souls withdraw the wine supply, using it as leverage to enforce his compliance. Saro's narrative progression is structured by repeated deferment of cosmic settlement rather than repayment. In Episode 1, he negotiates a deal with the blind woman for physical restoration, postponing his engagement with the primary task of soul extraction. In Episodes 2 through 4, he establishes a family life and commercial success in Ilu Aje town, constructing social obligations and material interests that further postpone addressing his cosmic debt. In Episode 5, the attempted transfer of the amulet to Bashorun raises unresolved questions about the transferability of the associated obligation. Following his death in battle in Episode 6, Bashorun leads the undead (Figure 6), suggesting the amulet's power transcends mortality. It remains unclear whether the debt of twenty souls transfers with the amulet to Bashorun or remains binding on Saro.



Figure 5. The three wandering souls whose transition remains bound to Saro's spiritual obligation. Screenshot from *Anikulápó: Rise of the Spectre*, Episode 1, Netflix/KAP Motion Pictures, 2024. Used for scholarly criticism and analysis; copyright remains with the original rights holder.



Figure 6. Bashorun appears among the undead after his death. Screenshot from *Anikulápó: Rise of the Spectre*, Episode 6, Netflix/KAP Motion Pictures, 2024. Used for scholarly criticism and analysis; copyright remains with the original rights holder.

4. Traditional Governance and Ritual Authority

Episodes 2 through 6 depict the court of the Oyo empire as a ritualised political institution, governed by the Alaafin (Oyo king) and the *Oyomesi* (Oyo council of chiefs), within which all significant decisions are conducted through formalised ceremonial procedure (Figure 7). Court proceedings are structured according to explicit protocol, which include witnesses presenting evidence in designated order, the Alaafin pronouncing judgement in formal address, and challenges to his authority being heard within structured debate rather than private consultation. In Episode 3, the court hearing regarding Bashorun's military failure involves sequential testimony from multiple chiefs, with each speaker approaching the throne and bowing before stating their account. The king's determination of guilt or innocence is announced through formal proclamation, marking the boundary between investigation and resolution. Priest Fasogbon attends court sessions as a spiritual advisor, consulted before decisions affecting military and diplomatic undertakings. In Episode 4, when the Alaafin deliberates whether to permit the marriage alliance with Ede kingdom, Fasogbon performs a divination ritual within the throne room, producing cowrie shells and interpreting their arrangement before the assembled court. His spiritual pronouncement directly influences the king's decision to proceed. Military expeditions are preceded by sacrifice, which Fasogbon oversees. When Bashorun departs for a neighbouring territory without performing preliminary sacrifice, Fasogbon explicitly instructs the Bashorun (Figure 8) that this omission has rendered the mission cosmologically unprotected. Diplomatic marriage negotiations between the Oyo and Ede kingdoms follow formal protocols whereby the alliance is deliberated in court sessions, with ambassadors presenting the terms of the arrangement, and Princess Omowunmi is assigned to the union as a mechanism of interstate consolidation.



Figure 7. The Alaafin of Oyo presides over the Oyomesi in a ritualised court setting. Screenshot from *Anikulápó: Rise of the Spectre*, Episode 2, Netflix/KAP Motion Pictures, 2024. Used for scholarly criticism and analysis; copyright remains with the original rights holder.



Figure 8. Priest Fasogbon advises Bashorun on the ritual consequences of neglecting sacrifice. Screenshot from *Anikulápó: Rise of the Spectre*, Episode 2, Netflix/KAP Motion Pictures, 2024. Used for scholarly criticism and analysis; copyright remains with the original rights holder.

5. Liminality and Transformation

Saro occupies a sequence of distinct ontological states across the six episodes, beginning as a spirit awaiting entry to the afterlife, becoming an invisible wraith with sensory perception and agency, negotiating physical restoration through the blind woman, and establishing embodied social life in Ilu Aje town. However, none of these states achieves permanent resolution. Throughout the series, Saro remains tethered to the spirit realm through his obligation to the gatekeeper and through his continued engagement with the three wandering souls, who retain claims on his future. He inhabits simultaneously the social categories of mortal man with a family and economic interests in Ilu Aje, and subordinate spirit agent bound by supernatural debt. Prison in Episode 6 (Figure 9) functions as a secondary spatial marker of liminality whereby Saro and Queen Arolake, both imprisoned and facing execution, are stripped of their prior social identities and positions. The border territory between the Ede and Oyo kingdoms operates as a dangerous liminal zone during military confrontations, where normal rules of governance appear suspended. Prince Kuranga is temporarily reanimated when one of the wandering souls enters his body, creating a composite being whose animation originates externally

rather than internally. Upon the soul's departure, Kuranga dies immediately. Bashorun's death and reappearance as leader of the undead (Figure 6) in the final sequence represents a permanent transformation of ontological state, shifting him from human social actor to spirit realm authority. Multiple characters therefore occupy threshold conditions in which their categorical identity remains uncertain and unstable.

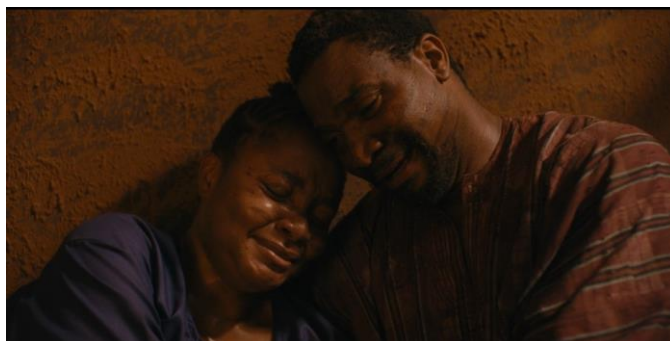


Figure 9. Saro and Queen Arolake encounter one another in prison as a liminal space before execution. Screenshot from *Anikulápó: Rise of the Spectre*, Episode 6, Netflix/KAP Motion Pictures, 2024. Used for scholarly criticism and analysis; copyright remains with the original rights holder.



Figure 10. The blind woman who perceives Saro's invisible form and guides his bodily restoration. Screenshot from *Anikulápó: Rise of the Spectre*, Episode 1, Netflix/KAP Motion Pictures, 2024. Used for scholarly criticism and analysis; copyright remains with the original rights holder.

6. Gender and Ritual Agency

Three female characters exercise significant activity within spiritual and material domains. The blind woman (Figure 10) appears in Episode 1 as an individual capable of perceiving Saro in his invisible form. She provides physical restoration of Saro's decomposing body by supplying specific materials and instructional guidance for their application. She engages in direct dialogue and negotiation with Saro, determining the terms of her participation in his restoration and extracting an explicit promise of future ritual obligation. She perceives spiritual realities that other characters cannot access,

demonstrating knowledge of invisible realms and the capacities of supernatural beings. Queen Arolake in Episode 2 encounters supernatural forces directly in a border location and negotiates an exchange of ritual assistance for material payment. In return, the disfigured spirits grant her an inexhaustible cowrie pouch. This material exchange produces visible wealth, transforming Queen Arolake's circumstances from displacement and vagabondage into possession of substantial resources. Princess Omowunmi's emotional preferences regarding marriage are articulated within court proceedings in Episode 3. Her stated preference for Prince Kuranga is acknowledged and recorded in formal deliberations by the Alaafin and the assembled court. Yet these same proceedings result in her reassignment to the Ede kingdom as part of the marriage alliance negotiation. The series therefore depicts female characters performing ritual actions, exercising spiritual perception, negotiating material exchange, and expressing emotional preference, while simultaneously depicting decisions about their placement and futures being conducted through institutions and procedures in which they do not participate.

Discussion

This discussion interprets the study's findings within the interdisciplinary theoretical framework established in the Introduction. The analysis revealed that the series demonstrates selective engagement with Yoruba cosmological principles, achieving coherence in isolated thematic domains while inadequately sustaining systemic consistency across the six-episode arc. This section addresses how the findings relate to existing Yoruba ethnographic scholarship, examines the methodological strengths and limitations of the study, and outlines implications for understanding cosmological representation in screen media.

The opening sequence's silent soul procession (Figure 1) and the architectural judgment gate constitute the series' most ethnographically coherent achievement, demonstrating sophisticated engagement with documented Yoruba metaphysical systems. The gatekeeper's insistence that Saro cannot enter heaven until settling his earthly debts broadly aligns with what Awolalu (1979) document as Yoruba belief in moral accountability extending beyond physical death. This concept finds additional theoretical grounding in Peel's (Peel, 2016) account of those who die before fulfilling their ordained purpose requiring special ritual mediation to achieve proper ancestral transition. What the series renders through visual narrative, Idowu (1962) documents through textual ethnography, presenting the soul as separable from and outlasting its bodily host, capable of independent journeying through intermediary realms. This model of the soul's autonomous agency positions death not as cessation but as transformation requiring structured guidance and cosmological alignment.

The amulet functions as a particularly effective ritual differentiator, enabling soul extraction whilst maintaining cosmological propriety. Bell (1992) identifies precisely this function of ritual objects as the differentiation of sacred action from mundane practice through material means. Saro's amulet (Figure 2) does not merely extract souls; it marks the extraction as cosmologically authorised and categorically distinct from ordinary killing, thus preserving the moral and spiritual order whilst accomplishing necessary transition. This distinction proves essential within Yoruba metaphysical frameworks where the manner and context of action fundamentally alter its cosmological consequence.

The series demonstrates notable complexity in addressing the sustained consequences of incomplete transitions. The seventeen souls that Saro cannot reclaim by

the season's end represent not merely narrative convenience but a cosmological consideration requiring theoretical accounting. Within documented Yoruba thought, those who die prematurely or whose *Àyànmó*, their divinely ordained destiny, remains interrupted before completion exist in a condition of ongoing spiritual disruption (Peel, 2016). Abimbola (1976) identifies such conditions of unresolved spiritual obligation as creating disturbances in the cosmic order of a kind that necessitates restorative action. Seventeen individuals prevented from completing their transition to ancestral status would collectively constitute a sustained rupture in cosmic equilibrium.

A dimension inviting deeper examination concerns how the narrative addresses these accumulated unresolved obligations. The series might be seen as raising, rather than resolving, significant theoretical questions about the nature of cosmological reciprocity and accountability. Rather than registering consequences through affliction among the living, disturbance in the spirit realm, or escalating pressure upon Saro beyond the palm wine withdrawal, the narrative permits a certain suspension of these obligations. This creates an intriguing tension, which is a cosmological framework built on strict reciprocity and non-negotiable accountability encounters the conceptual challenge of indefinitely suspended obligations without necessarily undermining its premises entirely. Instead, the series invites viewers toward more pro understanding of how moral and cosmological systems negotiate incompleteness, suggesting that contemporary narrative adaptation involves both fidelity to traditional frameworks and creative reimagining of their operative mechanisms. This productive tension warrants further scholarly attention.

The three primary ritual objects, the amulet, the palm wine, and the cowries (Figure 4), are all ethnographically grounded in documented Yoruba material culture. Ogundiran (2014) establishes cowries as conduits between material and spiritual realms within Yoruba ritual practice, carrying historical significance as both currency and sacred object, embodying the complex intersection of economic and cosmological value. MacGaffey (2008) demonstrates that spiritually potent materials across central African religious systems serve as repositories of power that facilitate exchange between human and supernatural domains, a principle equally applicable within the Yoruba context where material objects function as more than representational symbols but as active agents in ritual efficacy.

The palm wine economy in particular effectively renders Mauss's (2023) concept of the gift that compels reciprocity. The souls do not give wine freely but as one side of a binding transaction, and their strategic withdrawal of supply as Saro's deadline approaches demonstrates that they understand and operate within this logic of obligation and return. This economic dimension of ritual exchange reveals how material objects carry embedded social and spiritual contracts that extend beyond their immediate utility. The wine functions simultaneously as sustenance, as currency, and as mechanism for enforcing temporal urgency, layering multiple meanings onto a single material substance.

The series demonstrates considerable sophistication in depicting these objects as vectors of power yet invites deeper examination regarding their wider cultural networks. Osadola (2026) identifies the constitutive role of such networks in determining cultural significance, suggesting that ritual objects derive meaning not merely from intrinsic properties but from their embeddedness within systems of knowledge, protocol, and cosmological understanding. The origin of the amulet, the ritual protocols governing its use, and the conditions under which its authority transfers remain unexplained throughout the narrative. This represents an area where the series might engage more substantially with ethnographic specificity, as such procedural knowledge would anchor the objects more firmly within documented Yoruba practice.

The body whose restoration underpins the entire series appears in its most vulnerable state in Figure 3, yet the ritual mechanics enabling that restoration remain largely obscured. The narrative presents the outcome of ritual action without illuminating the processes through which restoration occurs, creating a gap between visual representation and cosmological explanation. The spiritual origin of the cowries is established through a single encounter with the disfigured spirits and subsequently receives limited narrative attention, despite their apparent centrality to the transaction framework governing soul exchange.

Ritual objects in the series accumulate considerable symbolic resonance through visual prominence and thematic repetition, functioning effectively as markers of the sacred and the supernatural. However, the series presents these objects somewhat apart from the procedural complexity that would situate them more firmly within documented ethnographic contexts. The objects invite further interrogation regarding how their culturally specific meanings inform and constrain the actions they facilitate, suggesting an area where deeper integration of material culture studies could enhance the series' ethnographic coherence and theoretical depth.

The moral economy of spiritual debt constitutes the series' most theoretically productive theme while simultaneously presenting areas inviting deeper theoretical development. Mauss's (2023, 2024) framework illuminates the narrative's organising logic with considerable precision, as the twenty resurrected souls constitute gifts of life that generate non-negotiable obligations compelling reciprocation. The spirit within those gifts, the *hau*, pursues Saro through the agency of the wandering souls themselves, embedding relational obligation within the very substance of resurrection. The behaviour of the souls across the series, offering material support, enforcing deadlines, and ultimately pursuing Saro rather than releasing him (Figure 5), embodies exactly the dynamic Mauss identifies within gift economies where the gift itself possesses agency and intention.

Griffiths' (2022) taxonomy of reciprocity further enriches this analysis. The arrangement between Saro and the three wandering souls demonstrates paradigmatically balanced reciprocity, involving goods and services of equivalent value and palm wine with commercial sustenance exchanged for eventual spiritual guidance within a defined timeframe of three years. The souls' withdrawal of supply as that timeframe expires enacts the mechanism whereby balanced reciprocity transforms into negative reciprocity when one party encounters difficulty honouring the agreement, revealing the underlying structure of obligation that sustains their interaction.

The series' treatment of Saro's existential tension between personal aspiration and cosmic obligation demonstrates considerable resonance with documented African cosmological frameworks. This tension, specifically the conceptualisation of existence as indebtedness to ancestors, deities, and cosmic forces with ritual performance as ongoing repayment, comprises precisely what Parkin (1980) identifies as a structuring principle of African cosmological thought. Abimbola (1976) likewise accounts for this through his discussion of *Ìwà*, the character and essence whose disruption necessitates restoration regardless of individual intention or circumstance. These frameworks prove particularly apt for understanding Saro's predicament, illuminating how personal aspiration encounters cosmic requirement.

The series presents Saro's three-year extension sympathetically, a narrative choice possessing cosmological significance. Turner's (1969) liminality framework predicts that threshold beings possess creative agency precisely because they occupy positions outside established social categories, enabling negotiation that a fully incorporated social person

could not attempt. This creative possibility emerges directly from Saro's liminal position, suggesting that his negotiation reflects genuine cosmological principle rather than narrative convenience.

Bashorun's acquisition of the amulet in the final episodes represents the series' most intriguing analytical possibility and area requiring extended examination. Mauss's (2024) concept of *hau* establishes that the spirit within a gift bind not only the original recipient but potentially all subsequent possessors. If the amulet carries the obligation of Saro's debt, Bashorun's acquisition and eventual theft may have transferred not merely the instrument of soul extraction, but the cosmological liability attached to it. The closing image of Bashorun leading the undead with the amulet in his possession (Figure 6) remains consistent with this understanding. Yet the series provides limited framework for understanding whether this transfer accords with documented Yoruba cosmological logic, whether the transfer occurs through accident or as retributive consequence, and whether the seventeen unreclaimed souls now fall under Bashorun's inherited obligation. This represents precisely the level of cosmological precision the series invokes throughout its narrative, and which suggests an opportunity for deeper theoretical integration and sustained engagement with the frameworks it establishes.

The series' representation of traditional governance gains analytical coherence when read through Bell's (1992) theory of ritualisation rather than simply as political drama. Bell argues that ritualised action does not merely express authority but constitutes it, differentiating certain acts from everyday practice through formalised procedures that generate social meaning and legitimise hierarchical relations. The Oyo court proceedings (Figure 7) function precisely in this manner. The formal arrangement of ministers, the sequential presentation of testimony, the king's pronouncements as juridically binding speech acts, and the public staging of truth telling are all ritualised practices through which political authority is continually reproduced rather than simply exercised. These ceremonial structures embed power within prescribed forms that transcend individual personalities and decisions.

Rappaport (1999) reinforces this understanding by establishing that invariant ceremonial forms, fixed proceedings, prescribed spatial arrangements, and authorised roles constitute the mechanism through which political institutions acquire and maintain their sanctioned character. The regularity of form itself generates legitimacy, creating continuity between past governance and present performance. When the court convenes, ritual protocols operate independently of circumstantial variation, embedding political authority within cosmologically grounded procedure.

In this framework, the Alaafin's decision to suppress personal anger and continue court proceedings after deception is revealed demonstrates far more than admirable restraint. It represents a ritually necessary act, demonstrating that the authority of the court transcends individual feeling and that governance is constitutively ceremonial rather than merely procedurally efficient. The king's capacity to subordinate personal grievance to institutional obligation illuminates how ritual frameworks constrain and shape the actions of even the most powerful individuals, suggesting that authority functions through disciplined adherence to prescribed form.

Priest Fasogbon's institutional position (Figure 8) merits particular attention within this analytical framework. His explanation of Bashorun's military humiliation as the consequence of a failure to offer sacrifice before his taskforce departure articulates rather than deviates from political logic. This interpretation articulates the Yoruba cosmological principle that governance and ritual obligation constitute not separate domains but interwoven dimensions of a unified system. Political actors must maintain proper

relationships with supernatural forces precisely because the authority they exercise is itself cosmologically grounded (Kustermans, Svensson, Costa Lopez, Blasenheim, & Hoffmann, 2022). The priest functions not as superstitious counterweight to rational administration but as interpreter of the cosmic conditions upon which legitimate political authority depends.

The series presents considerable intricacy in depicting the ritual nature of governance and the cosmological grounding of political authority. Areas inviting further development concern the deeper exploration of sacrifice as a structuring principle. Sacrifice appears predominantly as episodic plot detail, emerging when specific conflicts require resolution, rather than as a continuous structural principle governing the relationship between earthly power and cosmic order. A more sustained engagement with sacrifice as the ongoing mechanism through which political actors maintain their cosmological standing would enrich the series' treatment of governance, positioning ritual obligation not as supplementary to political action but as its constitutive foundation.

Liminality is the series' most analytically sustained achievement. Turner's (1969) tripartite structure of rites of passage, encompassing separation, transition, and incorporation, maps onto Saro's condition with unusual precision across all six episodes. His death and arrival at heaven's gate constitutes separation from mortal existence, a radical disjunction from the social roles, temporal coordinates, and material anchors that previously defined his personhood. His assignment as psychopomp and return to earth as a wraith constitutes the liminal transition period, a condition characterised by categorical ambiguity in which he belongs neither fully to the living world nor to the realm of the dead. His bodily restoration and establishment in Ilu Aje appear as incorporation, the final phase in which the threshold state resolves and the transformed individual returns to structured society with a new status. Yet that incorporation is structurally incomplete and temporary, perpetually deferred rather than achieved. The three wandering souls tether Saro to the spirit realm, preventing the closure that incorporation requires, while his outstanding debt to the gatekeeper forecloses any permanent settlement or final stabilisation. The series thus creates what Turner (1983) identifies as the most generative and most dangerous condition available to a social being, namely sustained liminality, in which the threshold state grants exceptional capacities while simultaneously marking its occupant as a threat to established cosmic order. Those in liminal condition possess knowledge and perspective unavailable to those firmly positioned within structured society, rendering them simultaneously powerful and destabilising. Prison in Episode 6 functions as a secondary but analytically rich liminal space (Figure 9), a bounded enclosure in which ordinary social operations are suspended and new forms of relatedness become possible.

When Saro and Queen Arolake, each stripped of their prior social identities and facing execution, reconstitute their relationship within the shared condition of imminent death, they enact Turner's (1969) *communitas*, which is the spontaneous bond of equality and mutual recognition that emerges among those in equivalent threshold conditions. The hierarchies of queen and commoner, benefactor and beneficiary, that structured their prior relationship dissolve because those hierarchies are maintained by the social categories that liminal space suspends. In the liminal prison space, both figures become generically human rather than socially differentiated persons, encountering each other across the evacuation of institutional status. This encounter's emotional force derives precisely from the dissolution of structures that previously mediated their interaction, revealing a form of connection that institutional arrangements ordinarily obscure.

Kuranga's temporary reanimation by a wandering soul introduces the analytically

complex figure of the composite liminal being. This figure comprises a body and an animating consciousness of separate origin whose integration is necessarily provisional and whose dissolution is cosmologically inevitable. Within this single form reside the ontological contradictions that define threshold states. The body's return to death following the soul's departure renders explicit what sustained liminality elsewhere obscures. The threshold condition cannot be permanent, for forces pull in opposed directions with inexorable pressure. Kuranga's brevity of consciousness mirrors the fundamental instability of composite being, suggesting that the integration of disparate elements persists only through extraordinary circumstance rather than natural or cosmological order. The series therefore demonstrates sustained engagement with how liminality simultaneously enables transformation and guarantees its own eventual collapse.

The series' treatment of gender and ritual agency, while acknowledging female cosmological authority through its depiction of the blind woman and Queen Arolake, operates within notable analytical constraints. Documented Yoruba precedent establishes robust frameworks for understanding such authority that the series engages with but does not fully interrogate. The Drewal (1983) research tradition establishes that female-centred ritual institutions in Yoruba contexts comprise women's masquerade societies, female divination orders, and women's ownership of specific shrines. These constitute structural features of cosmological life rather than exceptional achievements. These institutional forms grant women autonomous ritual authority that operates independently of patriarchal governance systems. The series depicts female ritual knowledge and agency through the blind woman's (Figure 10) perception of spiritual states and Queen Arolake's direct supernatural transaction yet fails to position these within institutional contexts or recognise them as structurally significant rather than individually exceptional. Consequently, when the series shows Queen Arolake's wealth being treated as suspicious rather than legitimate, or Princess Omowunmi being transacted across borders without recourse, these become depictions of constraint rather than analytical critiques of how patriarchal logic systematically subordinates female cosmological power.

Morrison (2025), in her analysis of pre-colonial African political systems, specifically identifies this representational gap. She notes that societies which accorded women substantial political and spiritual authority could simultaneously enforce systematic subordination of that authority. The series reproduces this historical dynamic without interrogating it. Had the series articulated what Oyewumi (1997) establishes as the fundamentally non-gendered structure of Yoruba cosmological categories, it could have positioned female authority within a framework of indigenous gender logic rather than through Western patriarchal constraints. Instead, the series presents observation without argument and documentation without analysis.

This analytical restraint shapes the series' broader representation. When Princess Omowunmi is systematically excluded from meaningful participation in the court's ritualised proceedings, or when Queen Arolake's autonomous access to wealth provokes suspicion rather than legitimacy, the series depicts structures of constraint but provides no framework for recognising these as the product of patriarchal logic applied to cosmological domains rather than as inevitable features of Yoruba culture. The seeming oversight to interrogate these dynamics becomes particularly significant when considered alongside contemporary scholarship demonstrating that pre-colonial Yoruba women held substantial ritual roles. The masquerade traditions that Drewal documents reveal complex negotiations of gender within performance and sacred authority. Female diviners operated within recognised institutional structures that granted them legitimate cosmological

knowledge. Women's ownership of shrines represented genuine ownership rather than delegated responsibility. The series' silence on these institutional dimensions leaves viewers unable to distinguish between authentic Yoruba gender dynamics and patriarchal distortions imposed during or after colonial periods.

The series' gender dynamics therefore risk normalising gendered constraints rather than critically examining how female ritual authority is structured within Yoruba cosmological frameworks. Yoruba gender thought cannot be reduced to a simple patriarchal binary, since Yoruba language, culture, and religious categories have been described as offering more fluid and less rigidly gendered understandings of social identity than many Western frameworks (Case, 2016). Similarly, Ifá-related indigenous jurisprudence emphasises complementarity and balance between masculine and feminine principles, even though gender hierarchies and exclusions may still appear within particular ritual systems (Adegbite, 2025; Adekoya, 2021). At the same time, Yoruba religious traditions have long positioned women as active ritual participants, sustaining agents of religious practice, and interpreters of spiritual authority, including in Yoruba Christianity and Yoruba-derived religious traditions in Africa and the African diaspora (James, 2018; Olademo, 2024; Olajubu, 2008). From this perspective, the blind woman's spiritual perception and Queen Arolake's supernatural transaction should not be read merely as exceptional narrative devices, but as signs of a wider indigenous framework in which female ritual knowledge can operate as an authoritative cosmological force. However, because the series does not connect these women's powers to institutionalised forms of Yoruba female ritual authority, it leaves their agency vulnerable to the broader cinematic pattern in which African screen narratives acknowledge women's symbolic or spiritual power while still containing them within patriarchal social arrangements (Awelewa & Epochi-Olise, 2026; Bisschoff & Van de Peer, 2019; Omoera & Okwuowulu, 2021). A more developed analytical approach would have situated female character agency within indigenous Yoruba frameworks for gender and cosmological participation, thereby enabling a more rigorous critique of how contemporary patriarchal logics distort, suppress, or selectively appropriate those frameworks.

A key strength of this study lies in its systematic analysis of a complete television season, which enables assessment of cosmological coherence and narrative logic across the full arc of the series rather than through isolated scenes alone. This whole-corpus approach is important because audiovisual meaning is produced through the interaction of narrative structure, visual codes, sound, performance, editing, and symbolic repetition, not merely through dialogue or plot summary (Jimenez, 2020; Kotan, 2025). The adoption of triangulated analytical frameworks, namely narrative analysis, semiotic analysis, and cultural criticism, permits a multi-layered interpretation of how ritual objects, spiritual debts, gendered bodies, and liminal spaces accumulate meaning across the series. The use of peer-reviewed Yoruba ethnographic scholarship as a referential standard further strengthens the analysis by preventing visual spectacle from being mistaken for cultural coherence. In this respect, the study is able to examine not only whether the series looks culturally authentic, but whether its ritual system functions with internal cosmological intelligibility.

However, the analysis also carries significant limitations. First, the study relies exclusively on the produced audiovisual text, without access to production documentation, director's statements, writers' room materials, cultural advisory records, or consultation processes. This limitation is important because film and streaming texts are shaped not only by artistic intention but also by production systems, industrial constraints, technical decisions, platform expectations, and market pressures (Cañas-Bajo

& Karjalainen, 2025; Cárdenas, 2017). Textual analysis can evaluate what appears on screen, but it cannot fully explain why certain representational choices were made or whether cosmological inconsistencies resulted from deliberate creative adaptation, production constraints, or insufficient cultural consultation. Second, the study cannot determine how Yoruba audiences, Nigerian viewers, or diasporic audiences interpreted these representations. Audience reception matters because viewers' cultural backgrounds, viewing contexts, and prior knowledge shape how screen texts are understood, accepted, resisted, or reinterpreted (Craig, Greene, & Douglas, 2005; Fröber & Thomaschke, 2021). Third, because the series is a commercially inflected streaming adaptation of Yoruba cosmology, the findings may not be fully transferable to documentary, community-based, ritual, or ethnographic productions, although the analytical model may still be useful for examining other African screen media that engage indigenous religious systems.

This study demonstrates that screen adaptations of African cosmological traditions require sustained analytical coherence across narrative arcs if they are to function as meaningful cultural representation rather than visual spectacle. Three implications follow from these findings. First, commercially inflected adaptations can achieve ethnographic plausibility in isolated scenes, such as the soul procession and the ritualised court procedures, while still failing to maintain cosmological consistency across episodes. This suggests that entertainment value and cultural fidelity may operate under different production logics unless cultural coherence is treated as a narrative requirement from the beginning. Second, female cosmological authority, when represented without connection to indigenous institutional frameworks and analytical critique, risks being absorbed into patriarchal screen conventions that present women's ritual power as exceptional rather than structural. Future productions should therefore consult Yoruba women scholars, ritual practitioners, and cultural knowledge holders when representing gendered spiritual authority. Such consultation is consistent with broader discussions on Indigenous media production, where cultural protocols, accountability, and the involvement of knowledge keepers are considered crucial to ethical and accurate representation (Montoya, Baca, Martinez-Chavez, & Ramones, 2023; Townsend, 2019). Third, the series' failure to sustain the moral economy of spiritual obligation across six episodes raises broader questions about whether streaming narratives can adequately represent cosmological systems built on reciprocity, consequence, and closure. Future research should examine how production timelines, platform pressures, seasonal uncertainty, and creative decision-making affect the representation of indigenous knowledge systems that require narrative completion and cosmological accountability.

Conclusion

This study concludes that *Aníkúlápó: Rise of the Spectre* represents a significant but uneven attempt to translate Yoruba cosmology into contemporary postcolonial streaming media. The series succeeds most strongly in visualising death as transition rather than termination, presenting Saro's journey through Òrun, his obligation to reclaim displaced souls, and his liminal position between the living and the dead as central elements of its narrative structure. It also demonstrates meaningful engagement with Yoruba ritual authority through the use of sacred objects, spiritual debt, court ritual, sacrifice, and priestly mediation. These elements show that African popular television can function not merely as entertainment, but also as a medium for transmitting indigenous metaphysical ideas, ritual memory, and cultural knowledge to contemporary audiences.

At the same time, the study finds that the series does not consistently sustain the cosmological logic it invokes. The unresolved status of the seventeen unreclaimed souls,

the unclear transfer of the amulet to Bashorun, the limited explanation of ritual procedures, and the absence of full liminal incorporation weaken the internal coherence of the narrative. The series also depicts female spiritual agency through the blind woman and Queen Arolake, yet it does not sufficiently connect this agency to broader Yoruba frameworks of female ritual authority. As a result, women's cosmological power appears visible but not structurally developed, leaving patriarchal constraints largely unexamined. These findings indicate that the series operates simultaneously as a culturally meaningful representation of Yoruba cosmology and as a popular visual spectacle whose serialised narrative demands sometimes reduce the epistemological depth of the ritual systems it portrays.

The main contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that cosmological coherence can be used as an analytical criterion for evaluating the representation of indigenous religious systems in screen media. By combining narrative analysis, semiotic analysis, and cultural criticism across the complete six-episode season, the study offers a model for examining how ritual practices, sacred objects, spiritual obligations, gendered agency, and liminal transformations are mediated in African popular television. However, the study is limited by its reliance on the produced audiovisual text alone. It does not include production documents, cultural advisory records, director interviews, or audience reception data. Future research should therefore examine how Yoruba audiences, cultural practitioners, filmmakers, and streaming production teams understand these representations. Further studies should also investigate how cultural consultation, narrative planning, and indigenous knowledge keepers can help future African screen productions balance dramatic storytelling with epistemological fidelity.

Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges Netflix, KAP Motion Pictures, and the respective rights holders of *Anikúlápó: Rise of the Spectre*, which was accessed through a licensed streaming platform for scholarly analysis. All screenshots used in this article are included solely for academic criticism and analysis. Copyright in these images remains with the original rights holders, and they are not covered by the Creative Commons license applied to this article. This study was conducted independently and was not sponsored, authorised, endorsed, or reviewed by Netflix, KAP Motion Pictures, or any associated rights holder.

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