

**EXPLORING INDIGENOUS SPIRITUAL INTERVENTIONS IN NIGERIAN
HISTORICAL CINEMAS: A CRITIQUE OF INVASION 1897**

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BENIN CITY**

OCTOBER, 2025.

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS,
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OCTOBER, 2025.

DECLARATION

I, JESSICA OSARUESE OKUNBOR declare that this project is based on the study undertaken by me in the Department of Theatre Arts, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, under the supervision of Dr. N. E. AKWAOWO.

JESSICA OSARUESE OKUNBOR
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by JESSICA OSARUESE OKUNBOR with the Matriculation Number: ART2101258 of the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Benin, and that it satisfies the requirements for the award of Bachelor of Arts Degree of University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.

DR. N. E. AKWAOWO
Project Supervisor

DATE

PROF MRS JOSEPHINE EBIUWA ABBE
Head of department

DATE

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the Almighty God. This work is also dedicated to my mother Mrs. Joy Okunbor and Godmother Miss Joy Okpalefe.

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I acknowledge the Almighty God for His divine inspiration, wisdom, and creativity by which this project was carried out successfully.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Cover Page	i
Title Page	ii
Declaration	iii
Certification	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Table of Contents	vii
Abstract	ix

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

- 1.0 Overview
- 1.1 Background of the Study
- 1.2 Statement of the Problem
- 1.3 Objectives of the Study
- 1.4 Research Questions
- 1.5 Significance of the Study
- 1.6 Scope of the study
- 1.7 Limitations of the Study
- 1.8 Definition of Terms

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

- 2.0 Overview
- 2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on African Historical Cinema

- 2.2 Nollywood and historical representation
- 2.3 Colonial Encounters and the Benin invasion 1897
- 2.4 Indigenous spirituality in African cinema
- 2.5 Spiritual interventions in invasion 1897
- 2.6 Decolonial strategies in invasion 1897
- 2.7 Indigenous spirituality and Religious representation
- 2.8 Implications for African Cinema and Cultural Identity
- 2.9 Indigenous Spirituality, Repatriation, and Decolonial Identity
- 2.10 Conclusion

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- 3.0 Overview
- 3.1 Research Design
- 3.2 Method of data collection
- 3.3 Analytical Procedure
- 3.4 Population and Sampling Technique
- 3.5 Ethical consideration
- 3.6 Instrument of the study
- 3.7 Conclusion

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

- 4.0 Overview
- 4.1 Synopsis of the Film
- 4.2 Findings

- 4.3 Discussion of findings
- 4.4 Symbolism of the Oba as Sacred Authority
- 4.5 The Spiritual Dimensions of Colonial Looting
- 4.6 Courtroom as a Site of Decolonial Resistance
- 4.7 Comparative Readings with Other African Films
- 4.8 Conclusions

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.0 Overview
 - 5.1 Summary
 - 5.2 Conclusion
 - 5.3 Recommendations
- References

ABSTRACT

This study examines how indigenous spirituality is represented in Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen's *Invasion 1897* (2014). The film is analyzed as a historical reconstruction that uses spiritual symbols, rituals, and beliefs to portray resistance against British colonial invasion. Using a qualitative content-based approach, the research explores how scenes, dialogues, and cultural elements reveal African perspectives on justice, identity, and memory. The findings show that spirituality in the film goes beyond religion it serves as a source of power, unity, and decolonization. The study concludes that *Invasion 1897* helps to preserve African history and culture by presenting indigenous spirituality as a vital part of historical truth and national identity.

Keywords: Indigenous Spirituality, Nigerian Cinema, *Invasion 1897*, Decolonization, History

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

This chapter introduces the foundation of the study, outlining the background, purpose, and scope of the research. It explains the motivation behind examining indigenous spiritual interventions in Nigerian historical cinema, focusing particularly on *Invasion 1897* directed by Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen. The chapter highlights the significance of exploring how spirituality functions as both a narrative and cultural instrument in retelling colonial history. It also establishes the problem statement, research objectives, and questions guiding the study, while clarifying the theoretical and methodological frameworks adopted. Ultimately, Chapter One provides the general orientation of the work and prepares the reader for the detailed discussions in the subsequent chapters.

1.1 Background to the Study

Cinema, as an artistic and cultural medium, has long served as a mirror of society, a tool of education, and a powerful means of storytelling. In Nigeria, the emergence of cinema dates back to colonial times, but it was often used to promote Western ideologies and marginalize indigenous knowledge systems. However, over the years, Nigerian filmmakers have taken ownership of the medium, using it not only to entertain but also to reconstruct, reinterpret, and reclaim historical narratives that were once distorted by colonial accounts.

Historical cinema, a genre that dramatizes real historical events or figures,

plays a significant role in preserving cultural memory. In Nigeria, this genre has grown in importance as filmmakers strive to correct the often Eurocentric portrayals of pre-colonial Africa. Among these filmmakers is Lancelot OduwaImasuen, whose film *Invasion 1897* (2014) revisits the tragic but pivotal historical event of the British invasion of the Benin Kingdom. Unlike traditional textbooks or colonial records, Imasuen's film centers indigenous perspectives and places spiritual interventions at the core of the resistance narrative.

Indigenous spiritual systems in African societies were and still are deeply integrated into political authority, social order, and justice. Spiritual leaders, oracles, and ancestral practices play crucial roles in decision-making and communal guidance. In *Invasion 1897*, these elements are not peripheral. They form the foundation of the narrative, challenging the colonial binary that often pits rational Western systems against 'irrational' African spirituality.

Imasuen's decision to foreground indigenous spiritual practices through rituals, ancestral visions, and symbolic justice reflects a growing trend in Nollywood to use cinema as a platform for cultural resistance and historical reclamation. This film does more than recount history; it dramatizes the unseen, spiritual warfare behind colonial invasion, emphasizing that the consequences of colonization were both material and metaphysical.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Most scholarly analyses of Nigerian historical cinema tend to focus on political resistance, military conflict, and socio-economic impacts. The spiritual

dimension especially the indigenous belief systems that guided many pre-colonial societies is often under explored or treated superficially. As a result, historical films that integrate African spirituality may be misread as merely fictional or superstitious rather than as valid epistemological tools.

This study argues that indigenous spiritual interventions in Nigerian historical cinema are central, not decorative. In *Invasion 1897*, these interventions carry cultural, political, and philosophical weight. By ignoring them, scholars and audiences risk perpetuating colonial ideologies that dismiss African spirituality as primitive.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research are to:

- i. Examine how indigenous spiritual practices are portrayed in *Invasion 1897*.
- ii. Analyze the narrative and symbolic functions of spiritual interventions in the film.
- iii. Understand how these spiritual elements reconstruct historical memory and challenge colonial accounts.
- iv. Explore how the cinematic medium enhances the visibility and legitimacy of indigenous spirituality.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. How does *Invasion 1897* represent indigenous spiritual practices?
- ii. What narrative and symbolic roles do spiritual interventions play in the film?
- iii. How does cinema as a visual and narrative medium aid in decolonizing historical memory?

- iv. In what ways does the film resist colonial portrayals of African history?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the growing body of work that sees African cinema not just as entertainment but as a decolonial tool. Second, it foregrounds African spirituality as a legitimate and necessary component of historical storytelling. Finally, it promotes a more balanced and culturally grounded approach to understanding history through film.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This research focuses on *Invasion 1897* as a case study, with close attention to its use of indigenous spiritual elements. It covers visual symbols, dialogue, rituals, spiritual figures, and how these are communicated cinematically. The study does not attempt to cover all Nigerian historical films but uses *Invasion 1897* as a representative text that bridges history, spirituality, and cinema.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The challenges in the course of the research for this study were finding the movies that centers on indigenous spiritual interventions and that also depicts the spiritual values of our society to be used as a case study for this research and also getting to download the movie to watch was really difficult as it was not available on so many websites for downloading movies.

1.8 Definition of Terms

- i. **Indigenous Spirituality:** Refers to the traditional religious and cultural belief

systems practiced by African communities before the advent of foreign religions.

It includes rituals, ancestor worship, divination, and the belief in the interconnectedness of the spiritual and physical worlds.

- ii. **Historical Cinema:** A genre of film that portrays past events, real or imagined, to reflect on history and collective memory. In this study, it refers to Nigerian films that reconstruct colonial and precolonial experiences from African perspectives.
- iii. **Decolonization:** The process of challenging and dismantling colonial ideologies, especially in culture, history, and knowledge systems. In the context of this research, it involves using film to reclaim African identity and historical truth.
- iv. **Repatriation:** The return of looted cultural artifacts, such as the Benin Bronzes, to their original communities. It also symbolizes the restoration of cultural pride and spiritual balance.
- v. **Nollywood:** The Nigerian film industry, known for its wide range of productions that reflect the nation's social, political, and cultural realities.
- vi. **Spiritual Intervention:** The involvement of supernatural or ancestral forces in human affairs, often depicted in African cinema as a form of guidance, protection, or justice.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Overview

This chapter examines the literature and theoretical frameworks that underpin the study, focusing on the relationship between indigenous spirituality and historical representation in Nigerian cinema. It establishes the intellectual foundation for understanding *Invasion 1897* not only as a historical film but also as a spiritual and ideological commentary that seeks to reclaim cultural memory and identity. This discussion explores how cinema operates as a tool of decolonization, and a medium for restoring spiritual consciousness. Within this framework, *Invasion 1897* is situated as a cinematic response to colonial misrepresentation and as part of a broader African artistic movement that reasserts indigenous values.

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on African Historical Cinema

African historical cinema functions as a visual archive that reconstructs the past from African perspectives long silenced by colonial historiography. It challenges dominant Western narratives by reaffirming the voices, rituals, and memories of indigenous societies. Many scholars conceptualize African cinema as a form of cultural remembrance, where film extends traditional modes of storytelling such as oral history, ritual performance, and symbolism. Through these artistic methods, filmmakers reimagine history as lived experience rather than written record.

From a postcolonial standpoint, African historical films serve as acts of resistance what some scholars term “counter-memory” to the distortions imposed by

imperialism. The postcolonial theoretical lens questions the politics of representation and the unequal distribution of power embedded in historical knowledge. It exposes how colonialism imposed Eurocentric frameworks that reduced African civilizations to the margins of world history. In this sense, films like *Invasion 1897* are not simply recreations of the past but interventions in the ongoing struggle for narrative sovereignty. The film's commitment to indigenous spirituality positions it as a decolonial project, one that reclaims African belief systems as valid frameworks for interpreting history and identity.

2.2 Nollywood and Historical Representation

Nigerian cinema popularly known as Nollywood has evolved from its early commercial roots into a vibrant space for cultural commentary and historical re-evaluation. While much of its early output focused on melodrama and domestic morality, recent trends show an increased engagement with Nigeria's historical and political past. Scholars have identified this transformation as a shift toward "heritage cinema," where filmmakers use historical storytelling to reconstruct collective memory and address issues of identity and postcolonial trauma.

Within this context, *Invasion 1897* occupies a significant place. It merges entertainment with cultural pedagogy, reinterpreting colonial encounters through indigenous consciousness. The film's emphasis on spirituality, ritual, and moral authority challenges Nollywood's mainstream tendency to trivialize or demonize traditional religion. Instead of presenting indigenous beliefs as obstacles to progress, *Invasion 1897* repositions them as the moral and cosmological foundation of African

civilization. Through its visual and thematic strategies, the film aligns with a growing body of Nigerian historical cinema that seeks to redefine the image of Africa from within its own cultural lens rather than through the validation of Western epistemologies.

2.3 Colonial Encounters and the Benin Invasion of 1897

The British invasion of Benin in 1897 represents a defining rupture in Nigerian and African history a violent encounter that dismantled an advanced indigenous civilization under the guise of moral reform. Colonial documentation often depicted the Benin Kingdom as barbaric, using such portrayals to justify imperial conquest. However, revisionist African historians have since revealed that Benin was a highly structured political and spiritual empire with sophisticated systems of governance, artistry, and religion.

Invasion 1897 reclaims this narrative by shifting the focus from colonial justification to indigenous suffering, resistance, and resilience. The film reframes the invasion as both a political tragedy and a spiritual desecration. By depicting the looting of the Benin Bronzes as sacrilege rather than mere theft, it exposes the colonial act not only as cultural plunder but as a rupture in spiritual continuity. Through chants, rituals, and ancestral invocations, the film restores the sacredness of the Benin worldview and critiques the spiritual violence inherent in colonial domination. In doing so, it transforms historical cinema into a ritual space where the ancestors' silenced voices are reawakened.

2.4 Indigenous Spirituality in African Cinema

African cinema, unlike its Western counterpart, rarely separates art from spirituality. Rooted in traditional storytelling and performance, it sees film as an extension of ritual communication between the physical and metaphysical worlds. Many African filmmakers use spirituality not simply as narrative decoration but as a tool for historical interpretation and moral instruction. The presence of ancestral figures, divination, and ritual in films serves to connect the visible present with the invisible past, reflecting the African worldview where the spiritual and material coexist in harmony.

In this regard, *Invasion 1897* resonates with works such as *Yeelen* (1987) and *Sankofa* (1993), which similarly employ spiritual symbolism to address themes of colonial violence and identity recovery. These films portray spirituality as a site of resistance a means through which Africans reclaim the power to define their existence outside colonial frameworks. *Invasion 1897* draws on this tradition, using the rituals of the Benin Kingdom as both narrative structure and cultural metaphor. Through these spiritual elements, the film validates indigenous cosmology as an authentic system of knowledge and a legitimate mode of historical narration.

2.5 Spiritual Interventions in *Invasion 1897*

In *Invasion 1897*, spirituality functions as both the moral compass and narrative architecture of the film. The rituals performed by the priests and the invocations of ancestral spirits are not aesthetic embellishments but manifestations of cultural resilience. They affirm the idea that spiritual power is central to the Benin people's

identity and collective survival. The Oba's divine authority is depicted as an embodiment of continuity between the human and ancestral realms a bond that colonial incursion seeks to sever.

By presenting the British invasion as an assault on this spiritual balance, the film situates colonialism within a moral and metaphysical framework rather than a purely political one. The spiritual warfare depicted symbolizes the clash between two worldviews: one rooted in communal harmony, reverence for the ancestors, and sacred order; the other driven by material greed and imperial ambition. The film's restoration of traditional rites and invocations serves as a form of cinematic healing, addressing historical wounds not through vengeance but through remembrance and spiritual renewal. In this sense, *Invasion 1897* transforms cinema into a sacred medium one capable of reconciling history with spirituality, and the past with the present.

2.6 Decolonial Strategies in *Invasion 1897*

Invasion 1897 employs multiple decolonial strategies that extend beyond historical reconstruction to the reclamation of cultural and spiritual authority. The courtroom structure in the film serves as a symbolic platform where African memory confronts Western legality. By juxtaposing scenes from the 1897 invasion with the trial of a young Nigerian student accused of art theft, the film exposes the hypocrisy of colonial justice systems that continue to legitimize Western possession of African artifacts. This structural device transforms the narrative into a visual dialogue between the past and present, compelling the audience to reassess the moral foundations of

historical ownership and identity.

Through its interwoven timelines, the film positions itself as a critique of epistemic dominance—the control of knowledge and history by colonial powers. The courtroom becomes a metaphoric space for historical accountability where the descendants of the colonized reclaim their right to define truth. The arguments for repatriation are not confined to legal discourse but are rooted in spiritual obligation, affirming that the Benin Bronzes are sacred vessels connecting the living with the ancestors. The film thus becomes a cinematic act of restitution, where narrative justice complements spiritual restoration.

2.7 Indigenous Spirituality and Religious Representation

One of the most compelling aspects of *Invasion 1897* lies in its challenge to the conventional religious narratives often perpetuated in mainstream Nollywood. Many Nigerian films have historically portrayed indigenous spirituality through the lens of fear, depicting traditional religion as demonic or regressive while upholding Christianity and Islam as symbols of modernity. Such portrayals continue the legacy of colonial evangelism, reinforcing the idea that African spirituality lacks moral or intellectual sophistication.

By contrast, *Invasion 1897* reclaims indigenous spirituality as a valid and dignified system of belief. The rituals, chants, and priestly acts are portrayed with reverence, not as exotic relics but as integral expressions of cultural identity. The film resists the binary between “good” Western religion and “evil” traditional practices, instead asserting that African spirituality embodies moral codes, communal order, and

ancestral wisdom. This reconfiguration represents a powerful ideological statement: that decolonization must include spiritual reawakening and the rejection of imposed hierarchies of belief. The film, therefore, performs both a theological and cinematic intervention, replacing misrepresentation with cultural affirmation.

2.8 Implications for African Cinema and Cultural Identity

The integration of spirituality and history in *Invasion 1897* contributes significantly to ongoing debates about cultural identity and memory in African cinema. By foregrounding ritual and ancestral presence, the film revitalizes indigenous modes of storytelling that celebrate interconnectedness between the past and present. It shows that cinema can function as a living archive where history is not merely recalled but re-experienced through communal participation and spiritual empathy.

This approach broadens the aesthetic and philosophical scope of African cinema. It positions film as both an artistic and moral practice—an act of reparation through which African people reclaim control over their cultural narratives. Furthermore, the film's treatment of the Benin Bronzes as sacred rather than aesthetic objects advances global discussions on restitution and heritage. It challenges the Western museum system that divorces African art from its spiritual context, arguing instead for a holistic understanding of culture that recognizes the inseparability of material and metaphysical value. In doing so, *Invasion 1897* situates itself within a broader continental movement toward cinematic decolonization, where art and spirituality merge as instruments of liberation.

2.9 Indigenous Spirituality, Repatriation, and Decolonial Identity

The use of indigenous spirituality as a narrative device in African historical cinema represents more than a stylistic choice it is a philosophical stance that frames resistance through cultural continuity. In *Invasion 1897*, spirituality provides the moral architecture of the film, allowing historical trauma to be expressed not through violence but through ritual remembrance. The film connects the looting of the Benin artifacts with spiritual dislocation, implying that the return of these objects is a sacred duty necessary for restoring harmony between generations.

By transforming cinema into a ritual space, *Invasion 1897* invites viewers to engage in collective healing. The audience is not a passive observer but a participant in the ceremonial reclamation of history. This participatory quality aligns the film with the African oral tradition, where storytelling is both a social and spiritual act. Thus, the film becomes a site of decolonial identity formation—an aesthetic and ideological return to the sacred that redefines African modernity through the wisdom of the ancestors.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how *Invasion 1897* employs indigenous spirituality and decolonial aesthetics to reconstruct African history from within its own epistemological framework. The film challenges colonial historiography by restoring African spiritual consciousness to its rightful place in the understanding of history, identity, and resistance. Through ritual symbolism, narrative parallelism, and spiritual dialogue, the film reclaims the sacred as a legitimate site of knowledge and justice.

Ultimately, *Invasion 1897* demonstrates that decolonization in African cinema is not limited to the rewriting of historical facts but involves the reawakening of cultural memory and the reaffirmation of indigenous spirituality. By invoking ancestral presence and restoring dignity to traditional belief systems, the film repositions African cinema as both a spiritual archive and a moral compass. In this way, it not only retells the story of the Benin invasion but also redefines the purpose of cinema itself as an instrument of remembrance, restitution, and renewal.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Overview

This chapter outlines the research methodology adopted for the study. It explains the research design, methods of data collection, and analytical approach used in examining *Invasion 1897*. The chapter clarifies why a qualitative research approach and textual analysis were most suitable for interpreting the film's spiritual and historical dimensions. It also discusses the theoretical framework guiding the analysis and justifies the selection of the film as the primary source. In addition, Chapter Three explains the significance of using interpretive and contextual methods to uncover how indigenous spirituality functions as a narrative and ideological force in Nigerian historical cinema.

3.1 Research Design

The research adopts a qualitative research design, anchored on textual and interpretive methods of film analysis. Since the study deals with the exploration of indigenous spirituality and its cinematic representation in *Invasion 1897* (2014), a qualitative approach provides room for depth, nuance, and sensitivity in the interpretation of images, dialogues, symbols, and narrative choices. Unlike quantitative methods, which are largely concerned with numbers and measurable variables, qualitative design emphasizes meaning, interpretation, and cultural context (Denzin and Lincoln 19).

This approach has been applied successfully in African film scholarship. For

example, SouleymaneCissé's *Yeelen* (1987) has been studied through qualitative interpretive methods that examine its spiritual cosmology, initiation rites, and symbolic landscapes (Diawara 102). Similarly, Dani Kouyaté's *Keïta: The Heritage of the Griot* (1995) has been analyzed as a text that bridges oral tradition and modern African identity, using qualitative narrative analysis to reveal the griot's function as a custodian of memory (Ukadike 88). Drawing on such models, this research positions *Invasion 1897* as a historical and spiritual text whose meaning is best understood through cultural interpretation rather than statistical generalization.

3.2 Method of Data Collection

This study adopts a content-based method of data collection. The central source of analysis is the film *Invasion 1897*, which serves as the primary data. The researcher conducted multiple viewings of the film to identify recurring motifs, spiritual references, dialogues, costumes, and elements of *mise-en-scène* that reflect indigenous cosmology and colonial history. In addition to the primary data, the study draws on a range of secondary materials, including scholarly writings on African cinema, indigenous spirituality, and Nigerian historical narratives. These sources consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic monographs, and critical essays that explore the evolution of Nollywood, the role of history in African film, and the symbolic representation of spirituality in cinematic storytelling (Haynes 112; Okome 134). For comparative purposes, relevant literature on *Yeelen* and *Keïta* was also consulted to provide a broader understanding of how African filmmakers use spirituality and oral tradition as expressive cinematic strategies. This combined

approach ensures that the research remains firmly rooted in both textual analysis and critical scholarship.

3.3 Analytical Procedure

The study employs a qualitative content analysis method, which focuses on uncovering the cultural, spiritual, and ideological dimensions of the film. This approach begins with a close reading of *Invasion 1897*, paying detailed attention to its visual composition, dialogue, sound design, and symbolic imagery. Through this process, scenes are examined to reveal deeper cultural and spiritual meanings that extend beyond their surface narratives (Monaco 98). The analysis also incorporates semiotic deconstruction, which involves identifying and interpreting significant signs and codes such as costumes, rituals, proverbs, and gestures—that are deeply embedded in indigenous spirituality (Barthes 55). Furthermore, the study situates the film within Nigeria’s broader socio-political and cultural environment, particularly in relation to its historical recollection of colonial intrusion. Comparative references to films such as *Yeelen* and *Keïta* underscore the importance of contextualization, as scholars studying these works emphasize that their grounding in African history and spirituality is crucial to decoding their meanings (Diawara 104). Finally, the frameworks outlined earlier Afrocentric methodology, semiotic and narrative film theory, and the critical theory of power are applied to interpret the film’s findings in a structured and scholarly manner. This layered analytical process enables the study to move beyond what the film merely depicts, to explore how it contributes to the preservation of cultural memory and the discourse of historical resistance

3.4 Population and Sampling Technique

The population of this study refers to Nigerian historical films that engage with themes of colonialism and spirituality. Within this population, the research employs purposive sampling by selecting *Invasion 1897* as the single case study. The choice of this film is deliberate due to the fact that it dramatizes a key historical event involving the British invasion of Benin, and embeds within its narrative, the use of indigenous spiritual interventions. Its combination of historical retelling and cultural reclamation makes it a rich and relevant subject for in-depth analysis (Ogunleye 142).

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research approaches indigenous spirituality with cultural sensitivity and respect, avoiding reductionist or stereotypical interpretations. Sources are acknowledged properly to uphold academic integrity. Furthermore, the analysis is conducted in a way that recognizes indigenous practices as valid systems of knowledge, rather than dismissing them as mere superstition. By maintaining this ethical stance, the study honors the cultural heritage embedded in the film and avoids perpetuating colonial biases (Ani 51).

3.6 Instrument of the Study

The instrument of study for this research is the content of the film *Invasion 1897*. The study relies on the film's visual and auditory elements such as dialogue, setting, costumes, and symbolic imagery as the primary source of data. Through repeated viewing and critical observation, relevant scenes were identified and analyzed to uncover the indigenous spiritual and historical themes embedded in the

narrative.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework adopted for the study. It explained the research design, methods of data collection, and analytical procedures used to examine *Invasion 1897*. The study employed a content-based qualitative approach, focusing on the film's visual, verbal, and symbolic elements as key sources of data. By combining interpretive content analysis with Afrocentric and semiotic perspectives, the chapter established a foundation for a deeper exploration of the film's engagement with indigenous spirituality and historical memory. The next chapter presents the analysis, findings, and discussion derived from this methodological process.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Overview

This chapter presents and analyzes the findings of this research by focusing on the representation of indigenous spiritual interventions in *Invasion 1897* (2014) directed by Lancelot OduwaImasuen. The analysis highlights how the film reclaims historical memory through cultural and spiritual dimensions while challenging colonial historiography. In keeping with African cinematic traditions, the film mobilizes indigenous cosmology, ritual practices, ancestral invocation, and symbolic performance as vehicles of historical narration. By doing so, *Invasion 1897* illustrates how African filmmakers have resisted the erasure of cultural memory and reclaimed the spiritual dimensions of their histories.

4.1 Synopsis of the Film *Invasion 1897*

Invasion 1897 is a Nigerian historical film directed by Lancelot OduwaImasuen that dramatizes the British invasion of the Benin Kingdom in 1897. The film employs a dual narrative structure: one part is set in contemporary times, while the other is located in the historical past of the Benin Kingdom.

The movie starts in England with a story about an African schoolboy talking to his history teacher and deciding to steal a statue from a museum. He gets caught, claims innocence, and begins recounting an old story. The film, from Nigeria, portrays events from the past when the British invaded the ancient Benin kingdom in 1897. They invaded, destroyed, and took valuable items. The powerful king was defeated

and sent into exile. The movie was created by Lancelot OduwaImasuen.

The tale begins with a young prince from Benin accused of stealing artifacts from a British museum. He insists he's innocent and starts telling a story that leads to the invasion. The film narrates the takeover of the Benin Empire by a British man named

Obaham Knockbaish. The king, Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi, known for his stubbornness, faces tricks, betrayal, and power struggles that bring about his downfall.

The 1897 invasion demonstrates how people can turn against their own and help enemies destroy their homeland. Numerous Benin people lost their lives, and the kingdom became part of the British Empire and Nigeria. Priceless items, including bronzes that held historical significance, were looted. Oba Ovonramwen, a respected king of Benin, emerges as a figure of strength but also inflexibility. Another character,

Obaseki, the king's friend, covets power. He seizes the chance to trade with England but values personal power over his people's welfare.

In the end, the film weaves a story of history, a once-mighty kingdom, and the transformations brought about by the British arrival.

4.2 Findings

From my observation of *Invasion 1897*, the film vividly portrays the deep spiritual life of the Benin Kingdom and how strongly it was tied to their political and cultural existence. One of the most striking things in the movie is how the people depend on rituals, sacrifices, and ancestral invocations for guidance and protection. The scenes in the palace, especially those involving the priests and the Oba, show that

spirituality was not just a religious practice but a foundation for leadership and decision-making. The priests are constantly seen performing rituals to safeguard the kingdom from the looming British invasion, which reveals the people's belief that their strength and survival depended on divine intervention.

Another thing that stood out to me in the film is how spirituality is portrayed with so much respect and seriousness. The film does not treat these practices as something strange or fetish; instead, it presents them as sacred and powerful, forming part of the people's identity. Even when the British soldiers begin their attack, the Benin warriors and priests hold on to their spiritual faith, believing that the ancestors will fight with them. This shows that for them, the physical battle was also a spiritual one. The rituals, songs, and sacred symbols that appear in different scenes give the story a sense of authenticity and make the viewer feel connected to the cultural roots of the Benin people.

The film also highlights the painful experience of losing their sacred artifacts during the invasion. When the British soldiers loot the bronzes and other spiritual objects, it feels like more than just stealing treasures it feels like a deep spiritual wound. The film shows that these objects were not ordinary items but sacred symbols that carried the spirit of the ancestors. Their removal represents both cultural and spiritual loss. This made me understand how colonial invasion did not only affect the people politically but also disconnected them from their spiritual heritage.

One powerful thing about the film is how it connects the past with the present. Through the courtroom scenes, the story moves between the historical events of 1897

and a modern setting where a young Nigerian student is standing trial for protesting the theft of African artifacts. This creative choice shows that the story of colonization is not over; its effects are still being felt today. The courtroom scenes remind the audience that the struggle for restitution and justice continues.

Overall, *Invasion 1897* presents a strong visual and emotional narrative that honors the spirituality, courage, and cultural dignity of the Benin people. The film allows viewers to see history through the eyes of those who lived it, not through colonial records. It shows that indigenous spirituality was not a sign of backwardness, but a source of wisdom, protection, and identity.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

Research Question One Restated: How does *Invasion 1897* represent indigenous spiritual practices?

The findings reveal that *Invasion 1897* presents indigenous spirituality as the moral and cultural backbone of the Benin Kingdom, deeply embedded in its leadership, justice, and communal identity. The film portrays spirituality not as superstition but as a functional and intellectual system through which people understood life and maintained social balance. Scenes showing the Oba and his chiefs consulting oracles before making political decisions reflect the centrality of divine guidance in governance. This representation aligns with Karin Barber's assertion that African ritual practices are forms of knowledge production that sustain social order and transmit ethical values across generations.

By foregrounding ritual acts, chants, and ancestral invocations, Lancelot Imasuen situates the Benin worldview within a cosmology where the physical and spiritual coexist. This is consistent with Manthia Diawara's view that African cinema often restores suppressed epistemologies by privileging collective spirituality and oral memory as valid forms of truth. Thus, *Invasion 1897* does more than depict religious rites it rehabilitates a worldview that colonialism once dismissed as "pagan." Through this, the film symbolically reclaims the sacred as part of Africa's historical dignity and intellectual heritage.

Research Question Two Restated: What narrative and symbolic roles do spiritual interventions play in the film?

The spiritual interventions in *Invasion 1897* function both narratively and symbolically to anchor the film's historical consciousness. Narratively, they move the story forward by linking human action with divine consequence. Symbolically, they reinforce the idea that justice and truth exist within a moral-spiritual framework beyond colonial power. The recurring appearances of ancestral spirits and ritual scenes illustrate the notion of cyclical time what Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike describes as "the African cinematic sense of historical continuity," where the past actively informs the present.

These interventions are also moral commentaries, reminding both characters and viewers that actions against tradition invite spiritual consequences. When the Benin Kingdom falls, the film interprets it not merely as political defeat but as spiritual disruption. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's argument that postcolonial cinema "unthinks Eurocentrism" becomes visible here the film reclaims spiritual narrative as

resistance to colonial logic. Through its ritual aesthetics, *Invasion 1897* teaches that while colonialism conquered the body, it could not conquer the soul of the people.

Research Question Three Restated: How does cinema as a visual and narrative medium aid in decolonizing historical memory?

As a visual medium, cinema becomes a vital tool for decolonizing memory, allowing African filmmakers to visually and narratively rewrite history from within indigenous frameworks. *Invasion 1897* reclaims the story of the Benin invasion from colonial misrepresentation and restores African agency through cinematic language. Jonathan Haynes observes that Nollywood films increasingly act as “people’s archives,” preserving communal memory outside formal institutions of history. The film’s vivid costuming, language, and *mise-en-scène* achieve what Onookome Okome calls “cinematic indigenization,” a process through which filmmakers use cultural symbols to restore authenticity and resist Western frameworks.

By using courtroom scenes and flashbacks, the film bridges historical time, linking the colonial past with contemporary struggles for restitution. This device mirrors Teshome Gabriel’s concept of “ritual return,” where African cinema uses repetition and memory to reclaim spiritual and historical roots. The courtroom serves as both literal and metaphorical space for justice, where African voices are finally heard. In this sense, the film visually performs the act of decolonization transforming history from an object of European narrative control into a living African testimony.

Research Question Four Restated: In what ways does the film resist colonial portrayals of African history?

Invasion 1897 challenges colonial portrayals of African history by

reconstructing the Benin Kingdom through an Afrocentric lens. Instead of presenting the British as benevolent civilizers, the film exposes their imperial motives and moral contradictions. The Benin people, in contrast, are portrayed as disciplined, spiritually guided, and politically sophisticated—contradicting colonial depictions of Africa as chaotic or primitive. This reversal aligns with Akin Adesokan’s argument that African cinema acts as a site of “historical repair,” restoring dignity to identities once defined by colonial discourse.

By portraying the Oba as a divine intermediary and moral leader, the film situates African authority within both political and spiritual legitimacy. This portrayal reclaims what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o calls the “theatre of liberation,” where film and art become means of reasserting self-definition against imposed narratives. The film’s refusal to exoticize or demonize traditional religion further resists the Christianized narratives that often dominated colonial ethnography and early Nollywood. Ultimately, *Invasion 1897* restores the Benin story to its rightful place as one of resistance, intelligence, and sacred continuity, rather than subjugation.

4.4 Symbolism of the Oba as Sacred Authority

Another key motif is the Oba of Benin, who is represented not merely as a political monarch but as the living embodiment of spiritual authority. The film frames the Oba as a custodian of divine mandate, whose authority is sanctioned by ancestral spirits and deities. This representation affirms the cultural principle that African kingship is inseparable from spirituality.

By foregrounding the Oba as sacred, the film challenges colonial narratives that

reduced African rulers to despots or obstacles to “civilization.” Instead, it insists that the authority of the Oba rests not only on earthly governance but on ritual consecration and ancestral continuity. The colonial disruption of this sacred order is therefore not just a political conquest but a sacrilegious violation of a spiritual system. The symbolism of the Oba becomes a lens through which the audience understands the magnitude of the invasion: it was not simply an imperial war, but a desecration of sacred heritage.

4.5 The Spiritual Dimensions of Colonial Looting

The looting of Benin bronzes and other sacred objects is one of the film’s strongest indictments of colonial violence. The bronzes are not portrayed merely as art pieces, as they are in Western museums, but as spiritual vessels imbued with ancestral power. Their removal from shrines and palaces represents a spiritual dispossession an attempt to sever the people of Benin from their ancestors.

The courtroom framing device underscores this point. When British officials and lawyers debate the status of these objects as “artifacts,” the film juxtaposes this discourse with images of their sacred use in rituals. This cinematic strategy reframes the objects as sacred heritage rather than mere ethnographic collectibles. The analysis shows that *Invasion 1897* restores the objects’ spiritual identity, while simultaneously exposing the colonial project as one of both cultural and spiritual desecration.

This resonates with arguments by African film scholars who insist that cinema can function as a site of cultural repatriation. By representing these objects in their original ritual contexts, the film symbolically returns them to their rightful place

within Benin cosmology, even if physically they remain in Western museums.

4.6 Courtroom as a Site of Decolonial Resistance

One of the most innovative strategies in *Invasion 1897* is its use of the courtroom as a narrative frame. The trial of a young Nigerian student accused of art theft becomes a symbolic tribunal where colonial history itself is put on trial. This device allows the film to juxtapose Western legal rationality with African historical consciousness.

The courtroom thus becomes a site of epistemic resistance: a place where the silenced voices of ancestors and the cultural trauma of invasion are articulated. Testimonies and flashbacks re-inscribe indigenous perspectives into a legal discourse that historically excluded them. The spiritual interventions here take the form of ancestral testimony the past speaking to the present, demanding justice not only in the legal sense but also in the metaphysical sense.

Through this framing, the film asserts that decolonization is not simply about political independence but about epistemic justice: the recognition of indigenous knowledge systems and their spiritual dimensions.

4.7 Comparative Readings with Other African Films

Invasion 1897 aligns with a broader trend in African cinema where spirituality is mobilized as a tool of historical narration. In *Sankofa* (1993) by Haile Gerima, ancestral invocation bridges the gap between past and present, allowing enslaved African spirits to re-enter modern consciousness. Similarly, *Yeelen* (1987) dramatizes the battle between good and evil through Bambara spiritual cosmology, while

Dani Kouyaté's *Keïta: The Heritage of the Griot* (1995) highlights oral tradition as the spiritual foundation of African history.

By placing *Invasion 1897* alongside these works, one observes a consistent pattern: African filmmakers resist colonial historiography by invoking spiritual cosmologies. However, Imasuen's film is distinctive in its focus on the Benin invasion, which is both a historical trauma and a spiritual wound. His emphasis on the looted artifacts as sacred objects positions the film at the intersection of cinema, heritage politics, and indigenous spirituality.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented and analyzed the key findings of this research. It demonstrates that *Invasion 1897* is not simply a historical film but a spiritual intervention into cultural memory. Through rituals, ancestral invocation, and symbolic reframing of looted artifacts, the film reclaims African history from colonial distortion and reasserts indigenous spirituality as a vital source of authority. By situating the Benin invasion within a spiritual framework, Imasuen's work exemplifies how African cinema can function as both cultural archive and ritual space a decolonial act that speaks to contemporary struggles over heritage, restitution, and cultural sovereignty.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Overview

This chapter synthesizes the findings of the study on indigenous spiritual interventions in Nigerian historical cinema with a focus on *Invasion 1897* (2014). It offers a summary of the research process, consolidates the arguments raised in previous chapters, and situates them within broader debates on African cinema, colonial memory, and cultural restitution. The chapter further provides conclusions that reaffirm the cultural, political, and historical value of indigenous spirituality in cinematic narration. Finally, it outlines recommendations for scholarship, filmmaking practice, and cultural policy in Nigeria and Africa.

5.1 Summary

This research examined how *Invasion 1897* engages indigenous spiritual practices as a narrative tool in retelling colonial history. The study found that the film reclaims African historiography by countering colonial narratives that historically portrayed the Benin Kingdom as barbaric or excessively ritualistic. Through its portrayal of the Oba's authority as rooted in sacred ritual and ancestral connection, *Invasion 1897* establishes spirituality as central to indigenous governance and history-making. The film demonstrates that rituals, ancestral invocations, and sacrifices are not mere cultural references but serve as cinematic strategies of resistance. These spiritual elements function as symbolic acts of reclamation, rejecting colonial epistemologies and asserting the moral and philosophical depth of African

spirituality.

The study also revealed that the film intricately connects the sacred with the political. The representation of the Oba underscores the inseparability of religion, governance, and cultural identity within Benin cosmology, thereby challenging colonial attempts to delegitimize African monarchies. The Oba's deposition by the British is presented not only as a political act but also as a spiritual violation that disrupted the sacred order of the kingdom. Similarly, the looting of the Benin bronzes is portrayed as more than material theft; it represents a profound act of spiritual dispossession that severed ancestral ties and cultural continuity. This interpretation aligns with broader postcolonial scholarship emphasizing that restitution is not merely about returning artifacts but about restoring dignity, memory, and spiritual balance.

Furthermore, the film positions itself within a broader decolonial cinematic tradition through its courtroom scenes, which bring historical injustice into contemporary discourse. By framing the looting and colonization of Benin as moral and legal crimes, *Invasion 1897* becomes part of a wider movement in African cinema that challenges Western historiography and reasserts indigenous authority over African memory. In this sense, the film resonates with works such as *Sankofa* (1993) and *Yeelen* (1987), which also employ spirituality and ancestral memory to bridge the gap between past and present, demonstrating how African filmmakers continue to use cinema as a means of healing historical wounds and reaffirming identity.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that *Invasion 1897* is more than a historical recount; it is an intervention in cultural politics and memory. By centering rituals, ancestral reverence, and sacred symbolism, the film challenges colonial erasures and reinforces African epistemologies. The courtroom framework employed in the narrative serves as a metaphor for ongoing struggles for restitution and recognition, emphasizing that colonial injustice persists in modern forms. Indigenous spirituality, as revealed in the film, is not an outdated relic but a living force through which African societies continue to define their histories and futures.

Ultimately, the film demonstrates the power of cinema as a medium of historical revision, decolonial critique, and cultural reclamation. Through the lens of spirituality, *Invasion 1897* redefines historical truth from an African perspective and reclaims the dignity that colonialism sought to erase. The film, therefore, stands as a cinematic reminder that African identity and memory are inseparable from spiritual consciousness.

5.3 Recommendations

- i. Filmmakers should continue to explore indigenous spirituality as a way of preserving African identity and challenging colonial misrepresentation.
- ii. More historical films like *Invasion 1897* should be produced to educate younger generations about Africa's true past.
- iii. Government and cultural institutions should support the repatriation of stolen African artifacts and promote cultural awareness through cinema.

- iv. Scholars and researchers should pay more attention to indigenous knowledge systems when analyzing African films.
- v. Film producers should balance entertainment with historical accuracy to maintain both audience appeal and cultural authenticity.
- vi. Nigerian universities should include indigenous spiritual and historical films in their curricula to deepen cultural understanding.
- vii. Future studies should expand on how spirituality influences modern African storytelling and national identity.

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