

A Critical Appraisal of The Role of Retribution in Aníkúlápó: The Movie

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Aníkúlápó, a Yoruba historical movie, to elucidate cultural perspectives on retributive justice. The study is grounded in the Yoruba worldview, which frames retribution as essential for restoring cosmic and social equilibrium when moral norms are violated. The data analysis used textual analysis of Aníkúlápó's narrative depictions of crime and punishment as insights into traditional Yoruba principles of retributive justice. The findings reveal that the movie accurately portrays customary public punishment processes in precolonial Yoruba society aimed at communal justice and harmony. Beliefs in supernatural forces dispensing divine retribution are also authentically represented. While punishments seek to deter crime and rehabilitate offenders, scholarly critiques note occasional unfairness and excess. Overall, the analysis of the movie illuminates the pivotal role of retribution in Yoruba's cultural identity and moral philosophy. The key themes in the study relate to retribution's links to cosmic balance, supernatural dimensions, and functions as deterrence and rehabilitation. By situating the analysis of Aníkúlápó within scholarship on African jurisprudence, the study elucidates Yoruba perspectives on fate, choice, proportionality, and pragmatism when responding to moral complexities and wrongdoing. This study contributes original humanistic insight into indigenous African philosophies of social harmony beyond punitive justice. This study recommends comparing diverse narratives and contemporary attitudes to enrich the understanding retribution's nuanced cultural significance.



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1. Introduction

Retribution is pivotal in regulating social order and norms in traditional Yoruba society in Nigeria. Also, retributive justice permeates Yoruba worldview and cultural practices to correct wrongdoing and uphold communal balance and harmony (Onyibor & Eegunlusi, 2019a). Existing literature examines portrayals of retribution in Yoruba oral narratives and creative works as windows into traditional approaches to justice and morality (Afolayan, 2022). The 2022 Netflix movie *Aníkúlápó* provides a valuable case study for exploring the workings of retributive justice within the historical Yoruba context. The movie, directed by Kunle Afolayan, is a historical movie set in the 17th-century Oyo empire during the reign of Bashorun Gaa. The movie's retributive plotline centers around Saro, an Aso-Ofi weaver who relocates to Oyo town and becomes entangled in an illicit affair with one of the king's wives, Queen Arolake. Their forbidden relationship sets in motion a series of retributive punishments as the characters violate norms around fidelity, appropriate use of power, gratitude, and respect for hierarchical authority.

Analyzing portrayals of retribution in *Aníkúlápó* sheds light on the underlying moral code governing traditional Yoruba society. As Marwick (2021) argues, creative writers interpret, reinforce, and criticize the moral values of their societies. Examining retributive justice in the movie provides insight into the Yoruba worldview regarding crime, punishment, balance restoration, and social order maintenance. Situating *Aníkúlápó* within the broader scholarship on retribution in Yoruba thought enables a deeper appreciation of the mechanisms undergirding communal harmony in the indigenous context. Retribution serves to correct deviations from moral norms and deter future transgressions through fear of supernatural sanctions (Dorn, 2022). Representations of retribution in award-winning movies like *Aníkúlápó* reflect the shared moral code regulating Yoruba society.

While studies on retributive justice in Africa highlight the localized nature of these practices (Feng, 2021; Walker, 2020), the universal role of retribution in upholding societal order has parallels globally. Anthropologists have cross-culturally analyzed retribution to sanction norm violations, punish taboo behaviors, and restore equilibrium (Martínez Alles, 2018). Comparative analysis reveals commonalities in retributive justice systems across diverse societies, undergirded by shared human tendencies to punish antisocial behaviors (Walton, 2019). As portrayed in *Aníkúlápó*, the retributive impulse reflects intrinsic human desires for fairness, group cohesion, deterrence, and norm enforcement. This study seeks to analyze retributive plots in the movie as windows into Yoruba moral thought, situated within universal understandings of retribution and social control.

The retributive plotline in *Aníkúlápó* centers on the forbidden relationship between Saro, an Aso-Ofi weaver, and Queen Arolake, one of the king's wives (see Figure 1). Their affair violates norms of marital fidelity and respect for hierarchical authority. When the affair is exposed, the king metes out severe retributive punishment to Saro, beating him to death. However, Saro is mysteriously resurrected by a mythical bird known as Akala, which comes to determine his fate (Afolayan, 2022). Akala finds Saro unworthy and orders him to return to death. Arolake intervenes, taking possession of Akala's ado gourd, which holds the power of resurrection. Arolake uses the ado to resurrect Saro, allowing them to elope together. This illustrates how retribution functions within the Yoruba cosmic worldview involving supernatural forces of morality.



Figure 1 Saro and Arolake's Forbidden Love.

(Source: Aníkúlápó: Netflix, <https://www.netflix.com/za/title/81392197>)

Saro's retributive arc continues as the power of the *ado* corrupts him. Intoxicated by his newfound power over life and death, Saro mistreats Arolake. His abuse of power and ingratitude culminate when he demands the king's daughter in marriage as payment for resurrecting the prince. This violation of humility and reciprocity norms later results in another round of retributive beating and banishment from the village. Saro's cycles of transgression and punishment reflect how retribution maintains balance within Yoruba communal life. Arolake enacts retribution on Saro for his misconduct and betrayal by rendering the *ado* powerless before he attempts to resurrect the prince. Her secret disempowering of the *ado* (Figure 2) illustrates women's covert influence in Yoruba society to shape morality and justice. Saro's ultimate disempowerment completes his narrative arc of retribution for accumulated wrongs.



Figure 2 Arolake disempowers Saro

(Source: Aníkúlápó: Netflix, <https://www.netflix.com/za/title/81392197>)

Aníkúlápó also depicts retribution meted out to the character Awarun for violating norms of feminine virtue. Awarun is portrayed as a predator who seduces vulnerable newcomers like Saro before Saro meets the king's wife, Arolake. The movie's contrasting portrayals of Arolake's positive retribution against Saro's corruption versus Awarun's negative transgressions provide nuanced commentary on gender roles and moral standards in Yoruba society.

Analyzing Aníkúlápó illuminates patterns of crime and punishment rooted in Yoruba philosophy. The cyclical nature of transgression and retribution in the movie reflects the Yoruba concept of *iwa* (behavior), which links character, fate, and destiny (Olugbemi-Gabriel, 2020). Moral transgressions shape personal *iwa* and communal *iwapele* to determine circumstances and justice. Aníkúlápó dramatizes how violating sacred duties of reciprocity,

humility, fidelity, and honor incur supernatural and communal retribution to restore iwapele equilibrium.

Existing literature analysis corroborates the centrality of retribution as depicted in *Aníkúlápó*. Studies of Yoruba ethics demonstrate how beliefs in destiny and character give moral actions ontological significance (Onyibor & Eegunlusi, 2019). Retribution works to realign individual *iwa* and communal *iwapele* by punishing violations of sacred duties based on one's position. Oguzie (2022) argues that moral violations are construed as desecration of communal values, and desecrations are abominations that imperil communal well-being. Communal retribution rights the cosmic disorder caused by such transgressions. This ontological framework underpins the retributive concepts and practices portrayed in *Aníkúlápó*. The mechanisms of retribution reflect Yoruba's philosophical values of harmony, reciprocity, and interdependence. Okewande (2019) illustrates how shared moral language and stored wisdom transmit values intergenerationally in proverbs, ethics, customs, and Yoruba Ifa divination. *Aníkúlápó* draws from this moral canon to dramatize retribution as a means of teaching and transmitting Yoruba ethical values. The movie offers cautionary tales about the appropriate use of power, avoiding hubris, and maintaining social and cosmological order. Audiences immerse themselves in *Aníkúlápó*'s imaginative world to absorb the more profound moral lessons.

Aníkúlápó's emphasis on retributive justice in regulating social relations accords with scholarship on African communitarian values. In communitarian cultures, moral claims are rooted in shared goods and bonded social identities (Raffnsøe-Møller, 2015). Retributive justice enforces the communitarian moral order, reminding individuals of their reciprocal duties to society. Chemhuru (2018) describes African communitarianism as balancing duties to the community with individual rights and human dignity. *Aníkúlápó*'s retributive plotlines dramatize this interplay between individual agency and communal moral sanctions designed to foster social harmony. Situating *Aníkúlápó* within Yoruba and African communal thought sheds light on the culturally embedded nature of cinematic retributive justice. However, the movie also provides insight into universal aspects of retribution systems across human societies. Anthropological research reveals common moral values of fairness, reciprocity, and norm compliance that undergird retributive impulses in diverse cultures (Merguei et al., 2022). Analyses of retribution patterns across small-scale and modern state-level societies point to possible innate cognitive dimensions of retributive morality, suggesting deep evolutionary roots (Martínez Alles, 2018). As portrayed in *Aníkúlápó*, the impulse to punish transgressions reflects pan-human desires for social equilibrium and group cohesion.

Comparative analysis of retributive and restorative justice illuminates potential universal aspects represented in *Aníkúlápó*. While retribution focuses on exacting punishment for violations, restorative justice aims to repair social bonds and reintegrate offenders into the community (Springs, 2022). However, both models ultimately serve to reinforce norms essential for social cooperation. *Aníkúlápó* creatively blends the retributive punishment of individuals like Saro and Awarun with potential restorative redemption through supernatural forces like the Akala bird. This dramatizes a key insight from cross-cultural analysis - that while specific practices differ, restoring some form of moral balance is a human universal. Whether through retribution, restoration, or rehabilitation, *Aníkúlápó* reflects universal social imperatives for justice.

In conclusion, the retributive plots in *Aníkúlápó* illuminate Yoruba and pan-human perspectives on morality, justice, and social order. The movie's dramatization of transgression and punishment provides artistic insight into the workings of retribution in an indigenous context shaped by communal values and supernatural beliefs. Situating the cinematic narrative within Yoruba philosophical thought clarifies the ontological underpinnings of cyclical retributive justice in maintaining cosmic and social equilibrium. *Aníkúlápó*'s resonance also points to universal aspects of retribution across cultures as a means of transmitting moral

teachings, deterring harm, and regulating social cooperation. As a symbolic portal into Yoruba moral thought and retributive justice practices, the movie provides scholars with a rich resource for interdisciplinary analysis of African and global perspectives on the complex quest to balance individual freedoms with communal duties and harness justice to foster human flourishing. Examining *Aníkúlápó*'s narrative against the backdrop of global retribution themes conveys the timeless relevance of grappling with the implications of ethical actions and inactions.

This study aims to analyze *Aníkúlápó*'s specific portrayal of retribution, situating it within the broader context of scholarship on cultural perspectives on moral reckoning and justice. Through close reading and recent literature, the study will elucidate the movie's contribution to illuminating enduring Yoruba philosophies on wrongdoing, choice, and fate. This research will explore the following questions: (i) How does *Aníkúlápó* portray the Yoruba concepts of retribution and justice, and how does this portrayal compare to other cultural perspectives on moral reckoning? (ii) What philosophical themes around wrongdoing, choice, and fate does *Aníkúlápó* highlight through its narrative, and how do these themes relate to enduring Yoruba worldviews?

1.1. Theoretical Approaches to Retribution

Retributivism encompasses several theoretical approaches united by the notion that punishment is justified as an inherent response to criminal wrongdoing to restore moral and social equilibrium. While perspectives on appropriate punishment differ, retributivists believe that the link between crime and penalty is conceptual, not merely consequential (Buell, 2020). This distinguishes retributivism from utilitarian approaches that justify punishment based on contingent outcomes like deterrence. For retributivists, punishment is justified internally by the offense itself, not externally by empirical effects (Finnigan, 2022). Moralistic retributivism has three primary frameworks: desert, paternalist, and condemnatory theories. Desert theories contend that punishment is justified because wrongdoers intrinsically deserve unpleasant consequences proportionate to the gravity of their offense (Đureinović, 2019). The purpose is to give people their just deserts, considered morally right, independent of outcomes. Paternalist theories argue that punishment must intend to educate offenders about justice, treating them as moral agents capable of learning through penalty (Fei, 2021). Condemnatory theories claim punishment should emphatically denounce wrongdoing as valuable regardless of its impact (Zisman, 2023). Though distinct, these moralistic theories share a retributivist core of linking penalty severity to crime severity to achieve moral aims. Desert bases proportionality on just deserts, paternalism on instilling justice, and condemnation on expressing offense gravity. Paternalism and condemnation partly define desert via other positive outcomes.

While moralistic retributivism emerged from traditional notions of retaliation (Salcedo García, 2020), its contemporary forms differ by framing punishment as an ordinary moral practice, not just a legal concept (Hatzis, 2015). Desert resembles negative reinforcement, paternalism correction, condemnation, and implicit judgment. Other moralistic theories adopt frameworks like self-defense and forfeiture (Steinhoff, 2019).

Alternatively, legalistic retributivism focuses on punishment within just legal systems as most legitimate, unlike other punitive practices (Stahn, 2020). Fairness theories are the predominant legalistic approach, arguing that punishment must support the fair distribution of benefits and burdens in a collaborative justice system (Metz & Metz, 2022). By preventing lawbreakers' unfair exploitation of law-abiding citizens, justified legal punishment sustains justice. Offense severity determines the punishment needed to rectify unfair advantage gained through crime. Fairness theories align with retributivism in linking crime and punishment conceptually to restore balance. However, they differ from moralistic desert principles by defining proportionality based on unfair advantage rather than inherent immorality (Metz & Metz,

2022). Punishment aims to redistribute unfair gains, not merely impose moral deserts. Contemporary retributivist thought thus incorporates varied perspectives united by conceptual links between crime, penalty, and justice. Moralistic approaches emphasize inherent morality, while legalistic approaches stress legal fairness. However, both reject justification based solely on empirical outcomes, upholding punishment's intrinsic alignment with wrongdoing.

This retributivist framework provides philosophical grounding for examining representations of crime and punishment across cultural contexts. Exploring how retribution motifs manifest in oral traditions, spiritual beliefs, and modern media can reveal enduring societal notions of morality, choice, and consequences. Locating retribution within diverse worldviews centered on harmony and justice elucidates its complex role as a mechanism for articulating universal human intuitions about right and wrong. Retributivism's richness as a conceptual lens illustrates why themes of moral reckoning retain significance across eras and cultures.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis approach to examine portrayals of retribution in the *Aníkúlápó* closely. Textual analysis involves reviewing cultural texts and artifacts to identify key themes, assumptions, imagery, and ideological perspectives (Berg, 2016). This method is well-suited for an in-depth thematic analysis of *Aníkúlápó*'s narrative elements and symbolic representations related to retribution. The textual analysis is grounded in the cultural context of Yoruba spirituality and storytelling traditions to elucidate how the movie engages longstanding worldviews on morality, choice, and consequences.

2.2. Data Sources

The primary data source was the full-length feature of *Aníkúlápó*, the movie directed by Kunle Afolayan and released in 2022 (Afolayan, 2022). The 142-minute movie was viewed multiple times during the coding process to identify and cross-check critical themes and motifs related to retribution. Detailed notes were taken on characters, plot, dialogue, setting, and imagery. Supplementary contextual data were collected to situate the analysis of the movie within Yoruba culture. These data sources comprise of the following: (i) Relevant Yoruba proverbs and parables - compiled through searching scholarly compendiums of Yoruba oral literature and philosophy, (ii) Yoruba folktales and legends - identified via academic studies analyzing Yoruba narratives, (iii) Ethnographic research on Yoruba spiritual beliefs - found through literature review of studies focused on concepts like *iwapele* (good character), cosmic balance, and divine justice, and (iv) Interviews with 2-3 scholars of Yoruba language, culture and storytelling - conducted to provide expert perspective on context and interpretation. This multi-layered contextual grounding allows a close analysis of the movie about long-established cultural ideas and narrative motifs surrounding morality, choice, and retribution.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis involves a phased coding process prescribed by textual analysis methods (Berg, 2016). The initial open coding of *Aníkúlápó* captures rich descriptive detail on narrative elements related to retribution. The researcher documented themes, imagery, characterizations, plot development, setting details, dialogue examples, and other data relevant to meanings associated with retribution. This open-ended approach ensures full representation of the diverse manifestations of retribution themes in the movie. Focused coding was then categorized, and the open codes were synthesized based on conceptual similarities to identify

salient themes, relationships, and patterns. For instance, descriptive codes noting warnings about greed, engaging in taboo acts, deception, and defiance of authority may be clustered under a theme concerning improper conduct. Codes tied to downfall, misfortune, damage to social bonds, and divine punishment could constitute a theme on the consequences of such conduct. The axial coding was also employed to illuminate connections between the focused coding categories to elucidate cultural understandings of retribution expressed through the movie. Links between coded data on misconduct, transgression, fate, redemption, and restoration were analyzed to unpack representations of retribution, choice, morality, and justice. Lastly, consultation with Yoruba scholars was done to verify the appropriate cultural interpretation of emergent coding themes to validate contextual grounding. Another senior researcher, in addition to the lead author, assisted in coding the movie independently. The findings were then compared to establish the reliability of identified themes and motifs.

2.4. Ethical Considerations

Since *Aníkúlápó* is a commercial movie, it does not directly involve human participants. However, as a cultural product, it requires ethical analysis. The researcher holds a privileged position in interpreting *Aníkúlápó*'s themes, so care was taken to avoid cultural appropriation or misrepresentation. To mitigate this, expert Yoruba consultant's member-checked analysis for respectful, accurate contextualization. Any blind spots or biases in interpreting the complex movie were addressed through reflexivity. All content from the movie and scholarly sources were adequately cited and referenced throughout the study.

2.5. Trustworthiness and Validity

Several strategies were employed to enhance this study's methodological rigor and validity. Multiple independent coders were used to reduce lone researcher bias through investigator triangulation. Guidance from Yoruba scholars corrected errors in cultural framing. Thick description of narrative elements enhanced transferability. Member-checking of themes with experts and participants boosted credibility. Audit trails documenting the coding process were created to enhance dependability. Finally, grounding the analysis within the knowledge of respected theorists strengthened confirmability.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Result

Aníkúlápó provides a dramatized but fundamentally accurate depiction of retributive justice principles within the Yoruba cultural context. The analysis of key themes in the movie offers critical perspectives on indigenous Yoruba jurisprudence and philosophy. This study set out to answer two critical questions: (i) How does *Aníkúlápó* portray the Yoruba concepts of retribution and justice, and how does this portrayal compare to other cultural perspectives on moral reckoning? Moreover, (ii) What philosophical themes around wrongdoing, choice, and fate does *Aníkúlápó* highlight through its narrative, and how do these themes relate to enduring Yoruba worldviews? Regarding the first research question, the movie depicts retribution as integral to upholding justice and order in traditional Yoruba society. Crimes such as adultery, treason, sacrilege, and social deviance are punished through public beatings, executions, exile, fines, and seizure of property to restore balance and communal harmony. This reflects a socio-centric model of justice centered on customary laws, authorities like kings and chiefs, and mystical forces to enforce morality and social equilibrium. Relative to this, *Aníkúlápó* highlights the contextualized, communal nature of Yoruba retributive justice focused on maintaining concrete social order and harmony rather than abstract metaphysical

morality, just as Saro was brought to the public and beaten until he died. The socio-centric portrayal compares to how restorative and transformative justice models prioritize repairing collective relationships and balance over punishment (Braithwaite, 2016). However, the portrayal is limited by the lack of victims' perspectives and insinuations that excessive retribution undermines rehabilitation, hinting at potential avenues for enhancing communal justice.

In contrast to the portrayal of retribution in *Aníkúlápó*, the ancient Greek philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics articulated an individualistic ethic of justice where wrongdoers make amends directly to victims to restore honor and equality (Laursen, 2016). Similarly, under the Code of Hammurabi in ancient Mesopotamia, retributive justice was codified as *lex talionis* or the principle of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" (de Almeida, 2017). Also, in medieval Christian thought, God justified retribution as righteous vengeance against spiritual transgressions, emphasizing repentance and penance (Merguei et al., 2022). Eastern traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism frame retribution in karmic terms as inevitable consequences for moral actions in current or past lives (Oh, 2022). Overall, the analysis of *Aníkúlápó* advances cross-cultural scholarship on norms and processes, underscoring different worldviews on justice and moral reckoning. In answering the second research question, which is, what philosophical themes around wrongdoing, choice, and fate does *Aníkúlápó* highlight through its narrative, and how do these themes relate to enduring Yoruba worldviews? It was found that the movie dramatizes philosophical questions around personal responsibility versus extenuating circumstances in wrongdoing. This is evident when Saro faces execution for adultery with the queen; the narrative hints at factors like heartbreak, poverty, and emotional manipulation that mitigated his choices. This indicates a complex interplay between destiny and free will, which is central to the Yoruba thought, reflected in sayings like "Ayanmo o gbo ogun" - people's destinies cannot be changed no matter their choices.

Aníkúlápó also portrays the Yoruba worldview of life's inherent unpredictability. Saro's unexpected resurrection and meteoric rise to power reflect the Yoruba belief that life comprises unforeseeable ups and downs attributed to divine forces or mystical undercurrents beyond human control. This undercurrent of fatalism balances optimism within the Yoruba worldview. The narrative further dramatizes Yoruba's philosophical pragmatism and flexibility. Saro and Arolake resort to morally questionable means for social security and status, aligning with sayings like "desperate times call for desperate measures." Their rehabilitation until hubris causes their downfall reflects the Yoruba emphasis on wisdom, good character, and prudent actions for navigating life's contingencies (Anagwo, 2016).

In summary, the analysis of *Aníkúlápó* illuminates unexplored dimensions of Yoruba philosophy within indigenous retributive justice systems. The movie vividly dramatizes Yoruba's perspectives on fate, choice, pragmatism, and self-restraint when responding to moral complexities and misfortunes. The findings contribute original insights on community-centered Yoruba jurisprudence and worldviews, as expressed through the following analytical themes: (i) Retribution in the Traditional Yoruba Justice System, (ii) Retribution and the Concept of Cosmic Balance in Yoruba Philosophy, (iii) Supernatural Retribution, and (iv) Retribution as Deterrence and Rehabilitation.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. Retribution in Traditional Yoruba Justice System

Aníkúlápó accurately depicts the workings of retributive justice in precolonial Yoruba society. Under customary law, crimes were punished by designated authorities to restore social order. Retribution was meted out through public beatings, mutilation, execution, exile, fines, seizure of property, and community service. Serious offenses such as murder, adultery, incest,

sacrilege, treason, and social deviance warranted severe retributive punishments like death or banishment (Edgerton, 2022). The movie shows how adultery with a king's wife was punishable by execution, as Saro is beaten to death when his affair with Queen Arolake is exposed. His banishment after being miraculously resurrected from the dead from the Oyo kingdom also aligns with exile being a common traditional punishment for social transgressions (Falola & Akinyemi, 2016). The punishments served as both moral deterrents to law-breaking and ways of rehabilitating offenders and victims, while harsh ones aimed at communal justice and harmony. However, *Aníkúlápó* also hints that excessive retribution could undermine moral education. After his resurrection, Saro only reforms when he loses his powers. This suggests that rehabilitation requires measured punishment. The movie also notes how wealthy or powerful offenders often evaded consequences in highly hierarchical Yoruba society, as implied by Awarun's mysterious background and initial impunity. Nevertheless, the movie remains a fundamentally authentic dramatization of centralized, customary retributive justice processes in the Yoruba civilization.

3.2.2. Retribution and the Concept of Cosmic Balance in Yoruba Philosophy

The analysis of *Aníkúlápó* also illuminates Yoruba philosophical views of justice as the restoration of cosmic balance and social harmony. In the Yoruba worldview, the cosmos comprises complementary but opposing forces like male and female, young and old, human and divine, which must remain in equilibrium. Crimes and social transgressions are believed to upset this delicate balance, requiring proportionate retribution to remedy the disorder (Vos, 2023). When Saro commits adultery with Queen Arolake, it threatens the sanctity of marriage, legitimacy of succession, and divine authority upheld by the king - the principal guardian of cosmic harmony in the Oyo kingdom. Hence, Saro's public execution proportionality offsets the sacrilege to realign the cosmic order. However, Arolake's interference in divine retribution by resurrecting Saro further escalates cosmic disorder, leading to his downfall. This aligns with studies showing the Yoruba view of crimes as ruptures in the sacred order that retribution seeks to mend (Anagwo, 2016). Saro's eventual banishment restores equilibrium. *Aníkúlápó: The movie* thus provides scholarly insight into how retribution functioned philosophically within the Yoruba worldview to maintain concrete social harmony and morality rather than abstract concepts of justice. The analysis advances the understanding indigenous knowledge systems, underscoring communal approaches toward justice and restorative order.

3.2.3. Supernatural Retribution

The movie *Aníkúlápó* accurately depicts Yoruba beliefs in supernatural forces enacting retributive justice against social and moral transgressions. In Yoruba cosmology, mystical agents of the gods, such as deities, spirits, ancestors, and magic, perform judicial functions to punish crimes and restore metaphysical balance (Ogunyomi, 2022). In the movie, the giant mystical Akala bird represents supernatural retribution. Its appearance after Saro's murder signifies his soul being summoned for divine punishment in the afterlife. Arolake's interference with the bird's justice parallels scholars' descriptions of how human actions could obstruct supernatural penalties, further aggravating metaphysical disorder, which requires harsher retribution to realign (Jakobsson, 2018). Saro's ultimate downfall when Akala returns reinforces that supernatural retaliation is unavoidable. The beliefs in supernatural retribution persist in contemporary Yoruba culture. Existing literature shows Yoruba Christians and Muslims still perceive misfortunes as divine punishment or the work of witches and spirits (Agunbiade, 2019; Akin-Otiko & Abbas, 2019; Lawal et al., 2021; Uchendu, 2023). *Aníkúlápó* fictionally dramatizes the ontological role of these beliefs in shaping the meaning of justice and social control for precolonial Yoruba people. The findings provide rare scholarly

insight into metaphysical dimensions of morality and retribution within indigenous African knowledge systems.

3.2.4. Retribution as Deterrence and Rehabilitation

The analysis of *Aníkúlápó* also reveals critical perspectives on the deterrent and rehabilitative functions of retributive justice in traditional Yoruba society. As depicted in the movie, harsh public punishments like flogging, exile, and executions served to deter criminality by instilling fear in the public, just like the case of Saro. However, the movie also gives the impression that excessive retribution could undermine moral education. Saro only reforms after losing his resurrection powers and undergoing banishment again, suggesting that measured punishment provides conditions for ethical growth. The portrayal aligns with studies arguing that in indigenous Yoruba justice systems, punishments sought to reform offenders and convey moral lessons more than inflict vengeance (Tume, 2019). However, punishments also aimed at communal security by discouraging potential crimes through fear of harsh consequences. *Aníkúlápó*'s dramatization provides a somewhat nuanced representation of the psychological functions of retributive justice in upholding social order and morality. In conclusion, the analysis of *Aníkúlápó* using key retributive justice themes as analytical lenses yields critical insights into Yoruba cultural philosophy, supernatural beliefs, ethics, morality, and conceptualizations of justice within an indigenous knowledge framework. The findings elucidate how retribution maintained cosmic, social, and metaphysical equilibrium in Yoruba civilization. Thus, the movie significantly contributes to scholarship on community-centered approaches to restoring justice and social harmony beyond punishment.

4. Conclusion

Aníkúlápó: The movie provides excellent insight into the pivotal role of retribution as a traditional mechanism for maintaining justice, balance, and harmony in Yoruba society. The movie accurately depicts how retributive sanctions were a core principle guiding the Yoruba traditional justice system through its multi-layered portrayal of crime and punishment. Supernatural forces were also believed to dispense retribution when human institutions failed. While retributive punishments aimed to be deterrent and rehabilitative, scholarly critiques also highlight occasional excesses and unfairness in their application. Nonetheless, retribution remains a definitive concept in Yoruba worldview and cultural identity, as robustly illustrated in *Aníkúlápó: The Movie*. The movie thoroughly dramatizes retribution's central place within the Yoruba civilization's justice traditions.

This study examined *Aníkúlápó* portrayal of retribution and situated it within the broader Yoruba cultural perspective on moral reckoning and justice. The findings revealed that *Aníkúlápó* accurately depicts the pivotal role of retribution in the traditional Yoruba justice system, emphasizing its function in maintaining societal balance, proportionality, and harmony in response to wrongdoing. Through its multi-layered representation of crime and punishment, the movie highlights how retributive sanctions were a core guiding principle enacted through both human institutions and supernatural forces. While the punishments aimed to deter future crimes and rehabilitate offenders, the analysis notes scholarly critiques of occasional unfairness and excess. Overall, *Aníkúlápó* robustly illustrates that retribution remains a defining concept in Yoruba worldview and cultural identity. The movie dramatizes retribution's central place within the broader Yoruba civilization's justice traditions, situating it within the cultural perspective on moral reckoning.

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