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**Navigating Tradition and Modernity in 'Seven Doors', a
Netflix's 2024 Nigerian series:
Exploring Religious Syncretism and Cultural Identity**

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Abstract

This paper examines the portrayal of religious syncretism in Netflix's 2024 Nigerian series *Seven Doors*, analyzing how the narrative represents the intersection between traditional Nigerian religious practices and modern faith systems. Through a qualitative content analysis of the six-episode series, this study explores the fictional representation of traditional religious elements, particularly the Ifa divination system and ancestral worship, as they interact with contemporary religious perspectives in modern Nigerian Yoruba storytelling. While acknowledging the limitations of using creative media as primary evidence for theoretical frameworks, the analysis investigates how the series employs religious syncretism as a narrative device that reflects broader cultural discourses in contemporary Nigeria. The study contextualizes the series' fictional portrayal within existing scholarship on religious syncretism, positioning *Seven Doors* as a cultural text that offers insights into popular perceptions and representations of

religious coexistence in Nigeria. By examining this media representation alongside established theoretical and empirical research on Nigerian religious practices, this paper contributes to the growing body of literature on religious representation in African media and explores how streaming platforms participate in cultural conversations about traditional African religious practices in modern contexts.

Keywords: *Religious syncretism, religion, identity, Ifa divination, cultural, faith, spirituality, African religion, tradition*

Introduction

Religious syncretism in Nigeria represents a complex negotiation between ancestral traditions and contemporary belief systems, fundamentally shaping cultural identity in a rapidly modernizing society (Ogbona & Agaba, 2021). This dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity finds compelling expression in *Seven Doors*, a 2024 Nigerian series that explores the tensions arising when traditional religious obligations intersect with contemporary values. Set in Ilara, Ondo state, the narrative centers on Adedunjoye, a modern Nigerian man whose ascension to traditional kingship forces him to confront the complex spiritual demands of his ancestral heritage, including the metaphorical "seven doors" representing seven wives required to atone for ancestral sins.

The series exemplifies what Frishkey (2021:70) identifies as the "neo-traditional turn" in African storytelling, where traditional religious practices are reexamined and recontextualized for contemporary audiences. Through its exquisite portrayal of the chief priest as a mediator between traditional spiritual realms and modern governance structures, *Seven Doors* illuminates what Van Rooyen (2019) suggests is an increasingly significant role in contemporary African societies navigating religious plurality. This portrayal provides rich material for examining how Nigerian cultural identity is negotiated through religious syncretism, the fusion of diverse religious beliefs and practices resulting in spiritual innovation (Chidozie & Orji, 2024).

Netflix, as a global streaming platform, serves as a significant medium through which this exploration of religious syncretism and cultural identity reaches both domestic and international audiences. The platform's emergence has created unprecedented opportunities for the preservation and examination of traditional religious practices through contemporary storytelling formats (Adejube et al., 2024). Where traditional Nigerian media has historically been characterized by what Devi (2018:44) terms

"cultural ambivalence" in its representation of traditional religious elements, streaming platforms have facilitated more intricate portrayals of religious complexity in African contexts (Noh, 2022).

Produced by veteran actor Femi Adebayo, who also stars as King Adedunjoye alongside Chioma Akpotha as Queen Amaka, *Seven Doors* features an ensemble cast bringing authenticity to the narrative of Ilara kingdom. The production includes distinguished performances by Royal Aziomaku (Tade), Ganiu Nofiu (Olojongbodu), Adebayo Salami (Otun), Jide Kosoko (Olukosi), Hafiz Oyetoro (Agbaakin), Muyiwa Ademola (Prince Adeoye), Dele Odule (Agunbiade), Aliu Gafar (Esusu), and Kolawole Ajeyemi (Oba Adejuwon). The series premiered on Netflix on December 13, 2023, quickly becoming the most-watched original Nigerian production on the platform, demonstrating what Donoghue (2014) describes as the growing global appetite for culturally specific religious narratives.

This research aims to analyze how *Seven Doors* represents and navigates the relationship between traditional Nigerian religious practices and modern faith systems as integral components of cultural identity. Specifically, it examines three key aspects: the role of the chief priest as a spiritual mediator, the symbolic significance of traditional rituals in modern contexts, and the series' approach to religious conflict resolution. Drawing on theories of religious syncretism (Gier, 1994) and cultural representation (Hall, 1989), this study contributes to our understanding of how Nigerian cultural identity is negotiated through the lens of religious syncretism in contemporary media.

The significance of this research lies in its examination of how cultural identity is maintained and transformed through religious syncretism in an increasingly globalized context. As Agana et al. (2024) argue, the representation of traditional religious practices has significant implications for cultural preservation and understanding. This study addresses a gap in current scholarship regarding the impact of religious syncretism on Nigerian cultural identity as portrayed in contemporary media, providing insights into how modern Nigerian society navigates the complex relationship between ancestral spiritual traditions and contemporary religious expressions.

Literature Review

The examination of religious syncretism in *Seven Doors* necessitates a comprehensive review of existing literature across three key areas: religious syncretism in Nigerian media, traditional Nigerian religious practices, and

contemporary religious representation in African streaming content. This review establishes the theoretical foundation for analyzing how the series negotiates the complex intersection of traditional and modern faith systems.

Religious Syncretism in Nigerian Media

The representation of religious syncretism in Nigerian media has evolved significantly over the past decades, reflecting broader societal shifts in religious and cultural attitudes. Williams (2016) traces this evolution from early Nollywood's often antagonistic portrayal of traditional religion to more sophisticated contemporary representations, documenting how the industry's narrative approach has matured alongside changing social perspectives. According to Osa's (2023) study on Nigerian media, early films typically positioned traditional religious practices in opposition to modernity, often demonizing indigenous spiritual practices through stereotypical depictions of ritual practices and spiritual leaders as inherently malevolent or backward-looking. However, Olaniyan and Akpojivi (2021) note a significant shift in the past decade, with Nigerian media increasingly exploring the complementary relationship between traditional and modern religious practices. This transformation reflects a growing cultural confidence in indigenous spirituality and recognition of how traditional beliefs can meaningfully coexist with and enrich contemporary religious expression. The trend suggests a broader societal movement toward reconciling Nigeria's rich spiritual heritage with its modern religious landscape, challenging previous binary oppositions between tradition and progress.

The concept of religious syncretism itself has been extensively theorized in the African context, particularly through the lens of cultural resilience and adaptive spirituality. Ossai's (2024) study of Nigerian religious practices demonstrates how indigenous religions have historically adapted to and incorporated elements of other faith systems while maintaining their core principles. This dynamic process reveals a sophisticated theological flexibility that allows for integration without dissolution of fundamental beliefs. This adaptability, as Nneji (2018) argues, has enabled traditional religious practices to remain relevant in contemporary Nigerian society. The persistence of indigenous spiritual frameworks exemplifies a complex negotiation between preservation and evolution, where traditional practices actively engage with modern religious expressions rather than merely surviving alongside them. This theological

elasticity challenges simplistic narratives of religious displacement, suggesting instead a continual process of spiritual innovation and reinterpretation that strengthens rather than diminishes indigenous religious identity.

Research by Grimshaw (2018) identifies three primary approaches to representing religious syncretism: confrontational, integrative, and transformative. The confrontational approach emphasizes conflict between religious systems, highlighting tensions that arise when belief systems compete for dominance within a shared cultural space. This often manifests in power struggles over doctrine, ritual practices, and cultural authority. The integrative approach showcases peaceful coexistence, where different religious traditions maintain their distinct identities while finding common ground through shared values and mutual respect. In this model, communities develop mechanisms for collaborative dialogue and ceremonial participation. The transformative approach, which best describes *Seven Doors*, demonstrates how traditional and modern religious practices can evolve together to address contemporary challenges. This dynamic process involves the conscious adaptation of ancient wisdom to modern contexts, creating innovative spiritual frameworks that honor historical roots while responding to current social needs and cultural shifts.

Traditional Nigerian Religious Practices

Understanding the representation of traditional religious practices in *Seven Doors* requires examination of the Ifa divination system's role in Nigerian society, particularly its complex interweaving of spiritual authority and social governance. Sørensen's (2021) foundational work on rhetorics of divination provides crucial context for analyzing how the series depicts traditional religious authority, illuminating the sophisticated ways divination practices serve as both spiritual methodology and social framework. The role of the chief priest, as described by Oguntola-Laguda (2022), serves as both spiritual guide and community leader, a duality that *Seven Doors* explores through its narrative, highlighting how religious leadership extends beyond ritual performance into social mediation and cultural preservation.

The concept of ancestral worship and its implications for contemporary governance has been extensively studied by Aderibigbe (2015) and Adetunmibi (2017), who argue that traditional religious practices continue to influence modern leadership structures in Nigeria. Their research reveals how ancestral veneration shapes decision-making processes and leadership legitimacy in both traditional and contemporary

contexts. In fact, this relationship between spiritual authority and governance, as Aidelokhai (2022) notes, remains a crucial element in contemporary Nigerian society, despite increasing modernization. This persistence demonstrates the adaptability of traditional spiritual frameworks to address modern sociopolitical challenges while maintaining their essential cultural significance. The integration of ancestral wisdom in contemporary leadership structures illustrates how traditional religious practices evolve to meet current needs while preserving their fundamental principles.

Contemporary Religious Representation in African Media

The advent of global streaming platforms has introduced new dynamics in the representation of African religious practices, fundamentally transforming how traditional spirituality is portrayed and consumed across cultural boundaries. Usua and Ijah (2023) analyze how Netflix's entry into the African market has influenced the portrayal of traditional religious elements in contemporary content, documenting shifts from simplistic depictions to complex explorations of spiritual practices within their full sociocultural contexts. This influence, according to Pauley (2021), has led to more sophisticated treatments of religious themes that appeal to both local and global audiences, creating narratives that maintain cultural specificity while achieving cross-cultural resonance.

A recent study by Agana et al. (2024) examines how streaming platforms negotiate the balance between authenticity and accessibility in representing traditional African religious practices, revealing the complex decisions creators face when presenting indigenous spirituality to diverse audiences. This negotiation, as Altinkaya and Doğan (2024) argue, often results in hybrid representations that blend traditional elements with modern storytelling techniques. Their research illuminates how contemporary media creators navigate the delicate balance between preserving ritual authenticity and crafting engaging narratives that resonate across cultural boundaries.

The role of production values in religious representation has also received scholarly attention, highlighting the technological and aesthetic dimensions of spiritual portrayal. Poell et al. (2021) argue that higher production budgets have enabled more balanced and visually sophisticated portrayals of traditional religious practices, allowing for detailed attention to ceremonial aesthetics, symbolic elements, and ritual atmospheres. This technological advancement, combined with what Ford-Smith (2004:31)

terms "cultural authenticity" has created new possibilities for representing African spirituality in contemporary media. The convergence of advanced production capabilities with deep cultural understanding has enabled creators to craft representations that honor the complexity and dignity of traditional practices while engaging modern audiences through innovative storytelling approaches.

Research Gap

While existing literature provides valuable insights into religious syncretism and media representation, there remains a significant gap in understanding how contemporary streaming series negotiate the complexities of traditional religious practices within modern narratives. As Shankar (2024) notes, the increasing global visibility of Nigerian content necessitates new frameworks for analyzing religious representation in transnational contexts. This observation points to a critical need for theoretical approaches that can address both the local specificities of Nigerian spiritual practices and their translation into globally accessible media formats. The emergence of transnational viewing contexts demands scholarly frameworks that can account for how religious representations are interpreted across diverse cultural landscapes.

In addition, while scholars have extensively studied religious syncretism in traditional Nollywood films (Azuawusiefe, 2020; Onuzulike, 2018; Osa, 2023), less attention has been paid to how streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV, Disney+ and so on, are reshaping these representations. This study addresses this gap by examining how *Seven Doors* navigates these complexities within the specific context of a global streaming platform. The shift from traditional distribution channels to global streaming services represents not merely a technological evolution but a fundamental transformation in how religious narratives are constructed, consumed, and interpreted. This transformation necessitates new analytical approaches that can account for the unique affordances and constraints of streaming platforms in religious representation.

The literature review reveals the need for more focused analysis of how contemporary Nigerian series represent the intersection of traditional and modern religious practices, particularly in the context of global streaming platforms. This study builds upon existing scholarship while contributing new insights into how religious syncretism is negotiated in contemporary African media. This research aims to bridge crucial theoretical and methodological gaps by examining how new media formats influence the

portrayal of religious practices, while also considering the broader implications for cultural preservation and global understanding of Nigerian spirituality. The investigation provides a framework for understanding how modern media platforms can serve as vehicles for both preserving traditional religious knowledge and facilitating its evolution in response to contemporary social dynamics.

Methodology

The examination of religious syncretism as portrayed in *Seven Doors* requires a methodological approach that acknowledges both the value and limitations of analyzing fictional media representations. This study employs a qualitative research design that combines content analysis with textual analysis to examine how the series depicts the intersection of traditional and modern religious practices, while recognizing that such fictional portrayals cannot be considered authentic representations of lived religious experiences. Rather than claiming to extract authoritative findings about religious syncretism itself, this research positions the series as a cultural artifact that reflects and participates in broader societal discourses about religious practices in contemporary Nigeria. The analysis is therefore contextualized within existing ethnographic and theoretical literature on Nigerian religious syncretism, using this scholarly foundation to interpret the significance of the series' fictional representations. This approach allows for a critical examination of the series as a text that both draws from and contributes to cultural conversations about tradition, modernity, and religious identity in Nigeria.

The research design draws primarily from Krippendorff's (2022) framework for analyzing media content, while incorporating elements of Fairclough's (2013) critical discourse analysis to examine the cultural implications of religious representation. This combined approach enables a thorough investigation of both explicit religious content and implicit cultural meanings embedded within the series' narrative structure.

Data collection focused on all six episodes of *Seven Doors*, with particular attention paid to scenes featuring religious elements, rituals, and spiritual discussions. Following Rose's (2022) methodology for visual analysis in media studies, each episode underwent multiple viewings to ensure comprehensive data capture. The first viewing established familiarity with the content, while subsequent viewings enabled detailed scene analysis and documentation of specific religious elements, following Saldaña's (2024) coding methodology for qualitative research.

Scene analysis parameters were developed using Mayring's (2003) approach to qualitative content analysis, focusing on religious dialogue, visual symbolism, character interactions during ceremonies, and the narrative treatment of spiritual elements. This framework enabled the identification of patterns in how the series represents the intersection of traditional and modern religious practices.

The study acknowledges several methodological limitations that may impact the analysis. First, the reliance on English subtitles for Yoruba dialogue may affect the precise interpretation of cultural elements, as noted by Meuleman (2012) in his work on cross-cultural media analysis. Second, the analysis is necessarily confined to the six episodes of the series, limiting the scope of observable religious representations. Third, the researcher's positionality, while informed by academic training in religious studies and media analysis, may influence interpretative frameworks.

To address these limitations, the study employed multiple verification strategies, including repeated viewings, cross-referencing of religious references with scholarly sources on Nigerian religious practices, and consultation with cultural texts on Yoruba spiritual traditions. This approach aligns with Flick's (2022) recommendations for ensuring rigor in qualitative media analysis.

Data interpretation followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic analysis framework, allowing for the identification of primary themes (traditional practices, modern faith, syncretistic elements) and secondary themes (authority, conflict, resolution) within the series' treatment of religious content. This interpretative framework enables analysis of how *Seven Doors* depicts the complex relationship between traditional Nigerian religious practices and contemporary faith systems.

Analysis of Findings

Life at the crossroads of tradition and modernity forms the heart of the Nigerian series *Seven Doors*. This analysis delves into how the series weaves African spirituality with contemporary religious expression, revealing truths about faith, belonging, and cultural identity. Through exploration of rituals, beliefs, and human relationships, the series offers insights into how ancient wisdom continues to guide our modern world. By examining the series' treatment of spiritual traditions alongside present-day faith perspectives, we uncover the dance between preserving cherished customs and embracing necessary change. This tension between tradition and modernity echoes Grimshaw's (2018) "transformative approach" to religious syncretism, where the series demonstrates how traditional Yoruba religious

practices, and contemporary values evolve together to address modern challenges. The narrative approach aligns with Olaniyan and Akpojivi's (2021) observation of the growing trend in Nigerian media that explores complementary relationships between traditional and modern religious practices, moving beyond the antagonistic portrayals noted by Williams (2016) in earlier Nollywood productions.

Seven Doors is a six-episode Nigerian drama that explores the intersection of tradition, leadership, and sacrifice within the framework of Yoruba society. Each episode builds on the narrative of King Adedunjoye's reluctant ascension to the throne and turmoil that unfolds in Ilara Kingdom, blending cultural symbolism with themes of duty, identity, and redemption. The series opens with Episode 1: "Door Threshold," introducing Adedunjoye as a family man who refuses the kingship thrust upon him. However, after persuasion from his wife Amaka, he accepts, setting the stage for conflicts with corrupt chiefs and rival claimants. This initial resistance establishes a central argument of personal struggle against societal expectations.

In Episode 2: "Door Jamb," viewers witness Adedunjoye's early days as king, where he implements strict reforms aimed at restoring integrity to the Ilara Kingdom. His efforts, however, anger powerful figures like Otun and his allies, who had long exploited the kingdom for personal gain. This episode highlights the tension between progressive leadership and entrenched interests, illustrating the challenges faced by those who seek to enact change. Episode 3: "Door Frame" reveals the kingdom's descent into misfortune following Adedunjoye's ascension. The tragic death of his daughter serves as a catalyst for reflection on the sins of his forefathers, particularly Oba Adejuwon, whose actions have cursed their lineage. This episode deepens the narrative by introducing premises of generational accountability and the weight of ancestral legacy.

In Episode 4: "Door Lock," King Adedunjoye grapples with the Chief Priest's advice to marry six additional wives to appease the gods and lift the curse affecting his family. Queen Amaka's resistance and despair highlight the emotional toll this demand places on their marriage. The conflict between personal desires and communal obligations becomes increasingly pronounced, illustrating the complexities of navigating tradition in a modern context. Episode 5: "Door Swivel" portrays King Adedunjoye succumbing to societal pressure and marrying six new wives. However, their cruelty toward Amaka culminates in a shocking act of sabotage that leads King Adedunjoye to expel them from the palace in defiance of tradition. This pivotal moment underscores the subject of individual

agency against collective expectations and sets up a confrontation between personal values and cultural norms.

The series concludes with Episode 6: "Door Peephole," where divine wrath escalates as Tade, Adedunjoye's only son, is attacked by Esusu. The Chief Priest advises a direct confrontation with Esusu to break the curse, forcing Adedunjoye into a climactic moment of reckoning with his ancestral legacy. This final episode encapsulates the series' exploration of redemption and reconciliation as characters confront their pasts to forge a better future.

Through symbolism and character-driven storytelling, *Seven Doors* invites viewers to engage with themes of sacrifice, redemption, and the dance between tradition and modernity. Each scene propels plot forward and deepens exploration of cultural identity and moral dilemmas. The narrative structure of *Seven Doors*, with its progression through symbolic doors, exemplifies what Wade (2016:42) describes as the "theological flexibility" of indigenous religions that adapt while maintaining core principles. The series' treatment of King Adedunjoye's journey reflects the negotiation between preservation and evolution that Nneji (2018) identifies as central to the relevance of traditional religious practices in contemporary Nigerian society.

Theme 1: The Role of the Chief Priest

In *Seven Doors*, the Chief Priest, Olojongbodu, portrayed by Ganiu Nofiu, serves as a complex spiritual authority whose influence spans both the physical and metaphysical realms. His character embodies the essence of traditional African spirituality, acting as a crucial link between ancestral wisdom and the contemporary dilemmas faced by the characters. The Chief Priest's guidance to King Adedunjoye (Femi Adebayo) who had just ascended the throne (Figure 1) to appease the gods by opening seven symbolic doors—a metaphor for confronting and resolving generational curses—highlights his pivotal role as both custodian of cultural heritage and mediator of divine will. This portrayal directly connects to Sørensen's (2021) conceptualization of divination as both spiritual methodology and social framework, as discussed in the literature review. The Chief Priest's character embodies what Oguntola-Laguda (2022) describes as the dual role of spiritual guide and community leader, serving as an intermediary between the physical and metaphysical realms.



Figure 1: *The Chief Priest (Olojongbodu) consulting Ifa to guide King Adedunjoye, who has just ascended the throne. This scene reflects the role of spiritual consultation in royal succession in traditional Yoruba society.*

Source: *Seven Doors, Episode 2, Door Jamb.*

In a narrative rich with conflicts between heritage and progress, the Chief Priest serves as a bridge connecting these two realms. His insistence on adhering to Ifa divination, despite skepticism from modern characters like Queen Amaka (Chioma Akpotha), underscores his role as a guardian of tradition. This dynamic mirrors themes discussed in literature about the tension between modernity and tradition in African societies, where figures like priests often serve as custodians of cultural identity (Thomas, 2015). The Chief Priest's position as a guardian of tradition amid modernizing forces aligns with Aidelokhai's (2022) observations on how traditional spiritual authority continues to influence contemporary Nigerian society despite increasing modernization. His character demonstrates the adaptability of traditional spiritual frameworks to address modern sociopolitical challenges while maintaining cultural significance.

The Chief Priest's character not only emphasizes the resilience of Yoruba traditional knowledge but also serves as an educational conduit for the audience. Through his rituals (Figure 2), chants, and interpretations of sacred symbols, he illuminates the cosmological foundations of Ifa. As noted by Shotunde et al. (2016), Ifa divination is not merely a means of predicting the future but a holistic approach to understanding one's place within a broader cosmic order. By embodying this role, *Seven Doors* preserves oral traditions and epistemologies central to Yoruba culture, reaffirming their relevance in

contemporary discourse. The educational function of the Chief Priest parallels what Usua and Ijah (2023) describe as the evolution in depicting traditional religious elements in contemporary content, moving from simplistic representations to complex explorations that contextualize spiritual practices within their full sociocultural framework. This approach reflects the shift that Pauley (2021) identified toward more sophisticated treatments of religious themes that appeal to both local and global audiences.



Figure 2: *The Chief Priest making a ritual offering of a live chicken to the gods, in an appeal for divine intervention after King Adedunjoye and Queen Amaka tragically lost their daughter, Fola.*

Source: *Seven Doors, Episode 3, Door Frame.*

Moreover, the Chief Priest's interventions are integral to the story's progression. His counsel, whether advising the King to marry additional wives or guiding him through symbolic doors, acts as a catalyst for key events that shape the narrative's exploration of syncretism. The allegorical weight carried in his exchanges with King Adedunjoye and Queen Amaka nudges both characters and viewers toward introspection on faith, identity, and cultural continuity. The allegorical significance of the Chief Priest's guidance through the seven doors connects to Agana et al.'s (2024) analysis of how streaming platforms negotiate the balance between authenticity and accessibility when representing traditional African religious practices. The series employs what Altinkaya and Doğan (2024) term "hybrid representations" that blend traditional elements with modern storytelling techniques, creating a narrative that honors cultural specificity while achieving cross-cultural resonance.

Theme 2: Traditional Religious Elements

The series meticulously portrays divination scenes led by the Chief Priest, showcasing the casting of Opele (divination chain) and recitation of sacred verses that highlight the precision and sanctity inherent in Ifa rituals. These scenes serve as crucial narrative devices that unveil hidden truths about generational curses afflicting the kingdom while exposing moral failings within its ancestry. Ancestral curses are intricately woven into *Seven Doors*, symbolizing unresolved moral debts from past generations. King Adedunjoye's struggles with these inherited curses from his forefather, Oba Adejuwon, which resulted in the death of King Adedunjoye's first daughter, Fola (Figure 3), form the crux of the narrative's exploration of justice and accountability. This theme resonates with Achebe's (1989) discussions on how unresolved historical injustices can haunt subsequent generations, manifesting in personal and communal crises. The portrayal of ancestral curses connects directly to Aderibigbe's (2015) and Adetunmibi's (2017) studies on ancestral worship and its implications for contemporary governance structures. The series' exploration of how past transgressions shape present realities illustrates their finding that ancestral veneration continues to influence decision-making processes and leadership legitimacy in both traditional and contemporary contexts.



Figure 3: *Queen Amaka yelling and holding King Adedunjoye's dead daughter, Fola, after she is struck by Esusu as a payment for the sin of Oba Adejuwon, King Adedunjoye's forefather.*

Source: *Seven Doors, Episode 2, Door Jamb.*

The titular seven doors symbolize spiritual thresholds and moral challenges that King Adedunjoye must metaphorically "knock on," representing steps toward atoning for his ancestors' transgressions. This motif delves into themes of leadership, sacrifice, and the tension between duty and personal desires. The significance of these doors is amplified by the Chief Priest's insistence on their necessity for restoring balance to the kingdom. This symbolic representation exemplifies Ford-Smith's (2004:31) concept of "cultural authenticity" in media portrayal of traditional practices. The series employs what Poell et al. (2021) identify as high production values to create visually sophisticated portrayals of traditional religious elements, paying detailed attention to ceremonial aesthetics and symbolic elements that honor the complexity of Yoruba spiritual traditions.

Moreover, rituals in *Seven Doors* transcend mere plot devices. They are integral to its cultural authenticity. From libations offered to appease ancestors to elaborate ceremonies surrounding royal marriages, these rituals vividly portray Yoruba spirituality while standing in contrast to characters' modern sensibilities. This juxtaposition highlights how traditions remain vital in helping people navigate life's deeper challenges. Turner's (1969:96) concept of "communitas" illuminates this dynamic, showing how rituals foster a profound sense of connection that transcends social hierarchies. Through shared ritual experiences, people find common ground and mutual understanding—creating bonds that Turner argues are fundamental to society's very existence. This approach to ritual portrayal addresses the research gap identified by Shankar (2024) regarding the need for new frameworks in analyzing religious representation in transnational contexts. *Seven Doors* demonstrates how streaming platforms can develop theoretical approaches that address both the local specificities of Nigerian spiritual practices and their translation into globally accessible media formats, creating narratives that resonate across diverse cultural landscapes while maintaining their cultural integrity.

Theme 3: Modern Faith Perspectives

The series examines how characters navigate traditional practices within a modernizing society, particularly through Queen Amaka's response to the Chief Priest's counsel regarding her husband's proposed marriage to six additional wives. Her initial resistance reflects contemporary skepticism toward traditional practices, while her eventual acceptance, reached through an emotionally charged dialogue with the King where she weeps openly (Figure 4), demonstrates the complex negotiation between personal

beliefs and communal duties. This dynamic exemplifies what Bhabha (2012:162) terms "transcultural negotiation" where individuals shape their identities amid competing values. Similarly, Appiah's (1994) concept of cosmopolitanism provides a framework for understanding how Queen Amaka maintains her cultural roots while incorporating modern perspectives. Her tear-filled acquiescence in *Seven Doors* illustrates how individuals can synthesize diverse cultural influences while preserving traditional connections, even when that synthesis comes at great personal cost.



Figure 4: *Queen Amaka in tears during her negotiation with King Adedunjoye regarding his decision to take six more wives.*

Source: *Seven Doors, Episode 4, Door Lock.*

Younger characters such as Tade, the King's only remaining son, represent a generational shift that underscores the tensions between tradition and modernity. This dynamic reflects broader societal challenges in preserving cultural heritage while navigating rapid social changes. Tade's character embodies the aspirations of a younger generation striving for autonomy and progress while remaining tethered to ancestral legacies. This tension is reminiscent of Oy w m i's (1997) analysis of African societies, where generational transitions often bring about shifts in the interpretation and application of cultural norms, particularly in contexts of leadership and identity.

The clash between contemporary beliefs and traditional practices is vividly illustrated through King Adedunjoye's reluctance to marry additional wives despite the Chief Priest's insistence. This conflict underscores the difficulty of reconciling personal convictions with communal expectations, a theme that resonates with Mbiti's (1990) discussion on African religions and philosophy. Mbiti highlights how African societies are deeply rooted in communalism, where individual decisions are often subordinated to collective well-being. In *Seven Doors*, King Adedunjoye's internal struggle reflects this tension, as he grapples with fulfilling his role as a custodian of tradition while maintaining his personal integrity.

Negotiating religious identity is central to *Seven Doors*, with characters wrestling to reconcile dual allegiances to tradition and modernity. King Adedunjoye's journey from reluctance to reluctant acceptance of his ancestral duties epitomizes this struggle. The series portrays identity as fluid and evolving, shaped by both societal pressures and individual convictions. This aligns with Gyekye's (1997:218) concept of "modern African identity" which emphasizes the coexistence of traditional values with modern influences in shaping personal and collective identities.

Spiritual conflicts within the narrative often resolve through syncretism, where characters integrate traditional and modern elements into their practices. The climactic confrontation between King Adedunjoye and Esusu serves as a cathartic moment symbolizing reconciliation over division. Such resolutions highlight an optimistic view of syncretism as a pathway toward spiritual and communal harmony, echoing Wiredu's (1980) argument that African traditions possess an inherent flexibility that allows them to adapt to changing circumstances without losing their essence.

The character arcs in *Seven Doors* illustrate how negotiating identity can lead to profound personal growth. King Adedunjoye's transformation from a hesitant leader to one who embraces his responsibilities underscores the potential for reconciliation between past legacies and contemporary realities. Similarly, characters like Queen Amaka and Tade evolve throughout the series, embodying the resilience of cultural traditions when reimagined for modern contexts. These portrayals resonate with international audiences by offering universal themes of identity, duty, and transformation grounded in authentic cultural narratives.

Theme 4: Syncretistic Elements

Seven Doors skillfully illustrates the blending of traditional belief systems with modern perspectives, a phenomenon often referred to as syncretism.

Rituals in the series are reinterpreted through contemporary lenses, while characters like Queen Amaka embody a synthesis of old and new values. This blending enriches the narrative, offering a sophisticated exploration of faith evolution in response to societal change. The depiction of syncretism aligns with Olupona's (2000) assertion that African spirituality is inherently dynamic and capable of adapting to changing cultural landscapes without losing its essence.

Traditional practices in *Seven Doors* evolve and adapt to modern contexts while maintaining their core significance, as seen in King Adedunjoye's eventual acceptance of the Chief Priest's advice (Figures 6 & 7). This adaptation process illustrates how ancient customs can remain relevant in contemporary society, aligning with Falola's (2013:40) concept of "cultural hybridity" which describes the merging of traditional and modern elements to form a fluid cultural identity that bridges the past and present. However, the King's initial hesitance is evident when he marries six wives but later dismisses them due to their disrespect toward his first wife, Queen Amaka. Their conniving behavior culminates in a physical assault, where they pour cooking oil (palm oil) on Queen Amaka (Figure 5) to prevent her from accompanying the King on an outing, further highlighting the complexities of navigating tradition and personal values.



Figure 5: *The six wives physically assaulting Queen Amaka in the presence of King Adedunjoye.*

Source: *Seven Doors, Episode 5, Door Swive.*



Figure 6: King Adedunjoye's additional six wives paying obeisance to him after being accepted back into the palace.

Source: *Seven Doors, Episode 6, Door Peepholes.*



Figure 7: King Adedunjoye having a meal with all seven of his wives in the palace, with palace wards serving them.

Source: *Seven Doors, Episode 6, Door Peepholes.*

Ancient customs are also reimagined in *Seven Doors* to align with contemporary values, providing characters with innovative ways to engage with their heritage. The narrative emphasizes critical engagement with

tradition as a living entity capable of renewal and revitalization. For instance, the symbolic act of opening seven doors, a reference to marrying additional wives, serves as both a literal and metaphorical exploration of leadership, sacrifice, and reconciliation with ancestral legacies. This reinterpretation reflects the adaptability of cultural practices, as described by Turner et al. (2017), who argued that rituals are not static but evolve to meet the needs of their practitioners.

The interplay between belief systems profoundly shapes character development throughout the series. King Adedunjoye's transformation from reluctance to reconciliation underscores the personal growth that often accompanies syncretism. Similarly, characters like Queen Amaka and Tade evolve as they navigate the tensions between tradition and modernity, illustrating *Seven Doors'* celebration of spiritual and cultural hybridity. This dynamic mirrors Abimbola's (1976) perspective on Yoruba spirituality, which emphasizes its ability to integrate diverse influences while preserving its foundational principles.

Discussion

The exploration of identity within *Seven Doors* reveals a rich embroidery of cultural negotiation that resonates deeply with contemporary global discussions about tradition and modernity. Through the character of Tade, the King's only son, the series captures the essence of a younger generation grappling with the dual pressures of honoring ancestral legacies while forging their own paths in an increasingly interconnected world. This mirrors the findings of Ugor and Mawuko-Yevugah (2016), who argue that young Africans are often at the forefront of redefining cultural narratives, blending traditional values with modern aspirations to create new identities that reflect both heritage and contemporary realities. This intergenerational negotiation of identity resonates with Nyamnjoh's (2017) insights on African cultural hybridity, where youth act as dynamic agents in reshaping tradition amidst globalization. Nyamnjoh emphasizes that such processes are not merely about adaptation but involve active reinterpretation and rearticulation of cultural belonging, enabling young people to assert new forms of identity that honor their heritage while engaging confidently with global modernity.

King Adedunjoye's internal struggle regarding his marital obligations serves as a microcosm for broader societal dilemmas faced by many individuals navigating cultural expectations. His reluctance to embrace polygamy, despite the Chief Priest's insistence, highlights a critical tension

between personal agency and communal duty. This conflict is emblematic of what Daenekindt and Roose (2014:82) describe as the "cultural dissonance" experienced by individuals caught between traditional norms and modern ideals. Such dissonance is not merely a personal struggle but a reflection of collective challenges within many African societies as they confront the implications of globalization and changing social dynamics. This tension reflects Nwobodo's (2022) analysis of African dramatic narratives, which often portray marriage and familial obligations as sites where personal autonomy collides with communal expectations. Nwobodo argues that such portrayals reveal deeper societal negotiations around evolving gender roles and individual rights, highlighting how cultural dissonance serves as a narrative device to explore broader questions of identity and social change.

The negotiation of religious identity in *Seven Doors* further emphasizes the flexibility of cultural practices. Characters are depicted as actively engaging with their spiritual heritage, adapting rituals to fit contemporary contexts while still maintaining their core significance. This adaptability aligns with the works of Paris (1995) and White (2025), who posit that African spirituality is inherently dynamic, allowing for reinterpretation and integration of new influences without losing its foundational essence. The series illustrates this through its portrayal of syncretism, where traditional beliefs are harmoniously woven into modern practices, fostering a sense of community and continuity. This fluid blending of spiritual traditions aligns with Chitando's (2016) scholarship on African religious creativity, which underscores how syncretism functions as a revitalizing force that sustains indigenous spirituality. Chitando contends that such adaptive practices do not dilute tradition but rather enable its renewal and relevance, ensuring that spiritual heritage remains a living, evolving resource for communities navigating contemporary realities.

Moreover, the climactic confrontation between King Adedunjoye and Esusu symbolizes more than just personal reconciliation; it represents a broader societal desire for unity amidst diversity. This moment echoes the principles of Ubuntu, which emphasize interconnectedness and mutual responsibility within communities. A recent study by Mupedziswa et al. (2019) highlights how Ubuntu philosophy can serve as a guiding framework for addressing contemporary social issues in Africa, promoting inclusivity and collective well-being over individualism. Complementing this, Mbiti (2015) emphasizes that reconciliation and communal harmony are foundational to African worldviews, where restoring relationships is central to social order. The climactic reconciliation in *Seven Doors* thus embodies this ethos, illustrating how narratives of unity and mutual

responsibility are essential mechanisms for healing and sustaining social cohesion in African societies.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the narrative confines of *Seven Doors*. They invite international audiences to engage with the complexities of African identity in a globalized context. The series challenges stereotypes by presenting a sophisticated perspective of African societies as vibrant, adaptable, and capable of integrating diverse influences while remaining rooted in tradition. This perspective is crucial for fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation in an increasingly multicultural world. Garritano (2013) similarly argues that African media productions that foreground complex identity negotiations play a pivotal role in contesting reductive stereotypes. By presenting African societies as multifaceted and evolving, such narratives contribute to a more nuanced global discourse, fostering intercultural dialogue and challenging monolithic perceptions of cultural modernity.

Finally, *Seven Doors* serves as a compelling narrative that encapsulates the ongoing dialogue about identity formation in contemporary African societies. By weaving together themes of generational conflict, cultural negotiation, and spiritual syncretism, the series not only reflects the realities faced by many individuals today but also contributes to broader conversations about resilience and transformation in an ever-evolving global landscape. As such, it stands as a testament to the enduring relevance of African narratives in shaping our understanding of culture and identity in a complex world.

Conclusion

This analysis of *Seven Doors* reveals how the series portrays religious syncretism through its characters and narrative elements. While acknowledging the limitations of fictional representation, this examination highlights how the series depicts interactions between traditional practices and modern perspectives through characters like the Chief Priest, ritual portrayals, and contemporary faith negotiations. These representations reflect broader cultural conversations about redemption, courage, and accountability within Nigerian society.

The series' narrative choices illustrate one artistic interpretation of how traditional elements might remain relevant while adapting to contemporary contexts. Rather than presenting theoretical conclusions about religious syncretism itself, *Seven Doors* offers a creative exploration of cultural and spiritual hybridity as imagined by its creators. This creative portrayal

contributes to media representations of Yoruba cultural narratives and invites audiences to consider questions of identity formation in contexts where traditional and modern influences converge.

By analyzing how this fictional work engages with themes of tradition and modernity, we gain insights not into religious syncretism as a theoretical framework, but into how contemporary Nigerian media represents and interprets these cultural dynamics. This study thus contributes to our understanding of media representation of cultural practices, while recognizing that fictional portrayals should be distinguished from ethnographic or theoretical studies of lived religious experiences.

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