Concrescence: Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Research

Vol. 3, No. 3, 2026, E-ISSN: 1595-9287

# "We Are Here, Too": Indigenous Language Cinema and the Preservation of Endangered Minority Cultures in the Gbagyi Context

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***Abstract***

In recent years of knowledge production and dissemination in the field of cinema, indigenous language cinema is at the forefront. One reason could be the hope it offers to indigenous minorities around the world for self-expression and the preservation of their cultures amid dominant and sometimes competitive and oppositional, cultural forces. On the basis of this development, this study examines how indigenous language films serve as vehicles for preserving endangered cultural identities, focusing specifically on the Gbagyi ethnic minority in Central Nigeria. In the midst of the dominance of Nigeria's three major ethnic groups, the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa, within the Nollywood and Kannywood phenomenon, many minority cultures remain marginalized. This research addresses the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in Nigerian cinema and investigates how indigenous-language films can help safeguard these unique cultural expressions. The objective of this study is to critically assess the role of Gbagyi-language films in representing and preserving the Gbagyi culture, using the film *Zokwo Manayi* as a case study. This film captures the Gbagyi worldview, portraying elements such as their customs, folklore, festivals, and traditional knowledge. The study adopts a qualitative methodology, combining content analysis with interpretive approaches to unpack cultural themes and symbols within the film. The theoretical framework draws from Hall's Theory of Cultural Identity, which posits that cultural identity is dynamic and shaped by historical, social, and cultural contexts. Findings reveal that indigenous language films like *Zokwo Manayi* play a crucial role in reasserting the cultural identity of marginalized ethnic groups, offering an alternative narrative to the dominant ethnic portrayals in Nigerian cinema. The implications underscore the potential of indigenous language cinema to promote diversity within Nigeria's film industry, fostering greater cultural awareness and inclusivity.

**Keywords:** Indigenous Language Film, Cultural Preservation, Gbagyi, Minority Culture, Gbagyiwood, Endangered Culture.

## Introduction

In the globalized world, indigenous languages play an essential role in cultural preservation, especially for minority groups whose identities are often endangered by larger, dominant cultures. Across Africa, the use of indigenous languages in media, particularly film, has been instrumental in preserving and promoting ethnic identities. In Nigeria, a country of over 300 ethnic groups, indigenous language film industries such as Nollywood and Kannywood predominantly showcase the cultures of the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa, overshadowing the expressions of smaller ethnic minorities. Yet, within this diverse landscape, a movement is emerging among minority groups seeking to capture and celebrate their distinct cultures through film. This trend reflects a growing cultural renaissance in which minority ethnicities are reasserting their identities by creating films in their indigenous languages that reflect their unique worldviews, customs, and histories.

One such minority group, the Gbagyi people of Central Nigeria, has recently leveraged the medium of indigenous language film to assert and preserve its cultural heritage. The Gbagyi, known for their deep-rooted customs, distinct language, and unique cosmology, face the threat of cultural erosion due to the dominant Hausa culture, which serves as the lingua franca in Northern Nigeria. In response, Gbagyi filmmakers have begun producing films in their language, seeking to counterbalance the hegemony of Kannywood's Hausa-centric narratives. These Gbagyi-language films aim not only to entertain but to educate, preserving cultural knowledge and values for future generations, thus resisting the homogenizing force of dominant cultural narratives.

This paper examines the role of the Gbagyi-language film *Zokwo Manayi* as a case study in cultural preservation, exploring how it encapsulates the Gbagyi identity through various cultural elements such as folklore, traditional practices, and social values. Using *Zokwo Manayi* as an analytical lens, the study highlights how the film serves as a cultural archive that documents and transmits the Gbagyi way of life. Through this indigenous language film, the Gbagyi people can reclaim their voice, offering an authentic representation of their heritage that goes beyond stereotypical depictions often found in mainstream media. This effort aligns with Hall's Theory of Cultural Identity, which posits that cultural identity is not a fixed or essential characteristic but rather a fluid concept shaped by the experiences and environments of individuals and communities.

By analyzing *Zokwo Manayi*, this study contributes to the broader discourse on the role of indigenous language films in fostering cultural resilience among ethnic minorities. It underscores the significance of media in countering cultural loss, promoting diversity, and enhancing social cohesion. This exploration not only sheds light on the Gbagyi community's creative strategies for survival but also invites the Nigerian film industry to recognize and support the multiplicity of cultural identities within its borders. Ultimately, this paper argues that indigenous language films like those of Gbagyiwood are essential tools for cultural empowerment, enabling minority groups to declare, "We are here, too," and affirm their place within Nigeria's rich cultural mosaic.

## Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Hall's Theory of Cultural Identity. This theoretical framework posits that cultural identity is a dynamic, constructed phenomenon shaped by historical, social, and cultural contexts. It underscores the understanding that cultural identity is not a fixed or essential characteristic but rather a fluid concept that evolves with the experiences and environments of individuals and communities. Hall defines cultural identity as a complex interplay of social, political, and economic identities intertwined with cultural

aspects such as ideology and theoretical practice (Yang & Lu Liu, 2021, p. 177). This perspective is especially relevant for minority communities at risk of cultural erasure due to globalization or dominant cultural forces.

In societies where specific groups face the danger of losing their cultural identities, media, especially indigenous language media such as films, songs, and literature, emerge as a crucial tool for preserving and transmitting cultural practices, beliefs, and languages across generations. For instance, the Gbagyi people, a minority ethnic group in Nigeria, use their indigenous language films to document and share their distinctive customs, stories, and values with a wider audience. This reflects Hall's assertion that "Cultural identity reflects common historical traces and shares cultural experiences" (Yang & Lu Liu, 2021, p. 178). Films like *Zokwo Manayi* serve as archives of cultural memory and act as a form of resistance against cultural homogenization.

Moreover, Hall emphasizes that cultural identity provides a sense of belonging, which is particularly meaningful for minority communities. He argues that "Cultural identity is not fixed and forever unchanged in the past... it changes according to different living environments" (Yang & Lu Liu, 2021, p. 178). In the Gbagyi context, films produced in their native language serve as a rallying point, reaffirming their identity within Nigeria's multicultural landscape. These films symbolize resilience and foster solidarity among the Gbagyi people, instilling pride in their heritage. This is particularly significant in a media environment where the Hausa language and culture are often prioritized, marginalizing minority voices.

The preservation of endangered cultures through media resonates with Hall's concept that language is central to cultural identity. He notes that "History is a narrative form that people understand and remember" (Yang & Lu Liu, 2021, p. 180). For the Gbagyi, creating films in their language allows them to articulate their worldview authentically, safeguarding cultural elements that might otherwise be lost. This process ensures not only the retention of linguistic heritage but also the affirmation of a broader cultural identity that is deeply interwoven with their language. Hall's Theory of Cultural Identity highlights the importance of media in promoting intercultural understanding and appreciation. By exposing broader audiences to the lived experiences, challenges, and traditions of minority communities through film, intercultural dialogue is fostered.

Hall asserts that "cultural identity is a sense of community... building a sense of belonging and security" (Yang & Lu Liu, 2021, p. 180). By showcasing Gbagyi culture in film, Gbagyi filmmakers contribute to bridging cultural divides, allowing other Nigerians to recognize and appreciate the rich diversity within their nation. This paves the way for minority groups like the Gbagyi to actively participate in national conversations regarding identity and heritage, asserting their significance within the Nigerian cultural landscape. Indeed, Hall's Theory of Cultural Identity provides a critical lens for understanding the role of Gbagyi-language films. These films are essential not only for preserving endangered cultures but also for enriching national identity by including diverse voices.

## Methodological Approach

The study adopted a qualitative methodology, combining content analysis with interpretive approaches to unpack cultural themes and symbols within the film. The analysis of the Gbagyi-language film *Zokwo Manayi 1 & 2 (The Right Way) is conducted through a cultural and thematic lens*, examining the film as a cultural document that captures the intricacies of the Gbagyi community in central Nigeria. This involved delving into the film's narrative to illustrate the values, principles, rituals, and social norms embedded within Gbagyi heritage.

By dissecting the storyline, the analysis highlights the depiction of indigenous customs, traditional spirituality, and communal practices that define the Gbagyi cultural identity, thereby exploring the preservation and transformation of long-standing beliefs in the face of external influences, particularly Christianity.

Furthermore, the analytical framework scrutinizes the film's portrayal of cultural elements such as language, costume, architecture, cuisine, festivals, and folklore. This detailed examination allows for an understanding of how these components contribute to the Gbagyi's values, beliefs, and traditions, and how they are affected by the introduction of new religious narratives. The analysis also addresses the tension and cultural clashes that emerge, such as the conflict between traditional religious practices and the Christian faith, and the linguistic and sartorial differences between the missionaries and the villagers. The analysis thus focuses on how the film serves as a lens for understanding the complexities of cultural identity maintenance and adaptation for minority ethnic groups.

The analytical exercise is extended to interpreting the film's symbolic representations and the thematic underpinnings of its narrative. For instance, the analysis connects the priest Sakoma's role and pronouncements to the spiritual centrality of the priesthood in Gbagyi society and the adherence to tradition in governance. The arrival of Christian missionaries and their supernatural contest of power with Sakoma is interpreted as a symbolic clash between folklore and new religious narratives. Ultimately, the analysis uses these various cultural and narrative components to highlight the resilience of Gbagyi identity, the complexities of cultural change, and the enduring significance of traditional elements even amidst spiritual shifts.

## Indigenous Language Films and Minority Groups in Nigeria

According to Abua (cited in McCain, 2013), the Nigerian National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) statistics indicate that Nigerian-language films comprised around 61% of films submitted to the board between 1994 and 2001, while English-language films were around 39% (p. 32). Furthermore, Gana (2004) reports that between 2002 and 2003, Nigerian-language films were approximately 54.5% and English-language films about 45.5% of films approved by the board (p. 174). Fast forward to 2010, Bala has it that the 2010 report from the NFVCB Verification Unit shows that 1,612 Nigerian films were submitted to the board in 2010, although only 1,114 were approved. Of the 1,114 films approved for release in 2010, only 133 (around 12%) were in English, while 582 (around 55%) were in Yoruba, 349 (around 29%) were in Hausa, and 44 (around 3.5%) were in Bini. Five Igbo films and one Efik film were also approved (Bala, 2010, 12). By 2011, Malgwi (cited in McCain 2013) reported that English films had risen to 279, around 25% of the films approved by the board, and 26% in 2012 (p. 33), but they remained a minority compared to Nigerian-language films (McCain 2013, p. 33).

McCain (2013) further reports that, in 2011, 434 Yoruba films at around 39% and 327 Hausa films at around 29% were approved. Bini (sic) films, with 73 accepted, had grown to around 6.5%. 4 Igbo films and 6 "others" were also reported. The statistics for 2010 and 2011 did not include films in Ebira, Esan, Etsako, Fulfulde, Gbagyi, Ibibio, Idoma, Igala, Itsekiri, Isoko, Nupe, Tiv, and Urhobo that I have heard elsewhere are being made (McCain, 2013, p. 33). According to McCain (2013, p. 33), English-language films accounted for approximately 26% of approved Nigerian films in 2012, while Yoruba, Hausa, and other indigenous-language films still constituted the majority. From 2013 to 2024, NFVCB statistics show a gradual transition from indigenous-language dominance toward English-language predominance in Nollywood. In 2014, for instance, monthly NFVCB approvals still

showed strong indigenous-language representation: out of 66 films approved in February, 34 were in English, 18 in Yoruba, 13 in Hausa, and 1 in Ibibio (Vanguard, 2014a), while September 2014 approvals recorded Yoruba films leading with 31 productions, followed by 20 English-language films, 16 Hausa films, and 2 Bini films (Vanguard, 2014b). Detailed NFVCB language statistics from 2015–2023 are limited, though available reports indicate a steady rise in English-language productions during the streaming era.

However, by 2024, English-language productions had become overwhelmingly dominant. NFVCB reported that of the 274 films classified between January and March 2024, 250 were English-language films, while Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and Hindi films accounted for the remainder (NFVCB, 2024). These figures indicate that although indigenous-language filmmaking remained active throughout the 2010s, English-language productions increasingly became the dominant mode of Nollywood production in the streaming and global-distribution era. It is crystal clear from these reports that the indigenous language film terrain in Nigeria has been dominated by the Yoruba and Hausa language film cultures, including the Igbo language film, over the years. This can be attributed to a number of factors, such as, but not limited to, educational background, early exposure to performance art forms, access to cinematic resources, and political, economic and socio-cultural advantages over the minority groups. As such, these schools of indigenous language film production have advanced, literally overshadowing the minority ethnic nationalities.

However, a keen observation of the current trends in Nigeria's cinematic ecology reveals that there is a surge of indigenous language film production among the minority ethnic lines. This is exactly what Egwemi and Salifu mean when they assert that, beyond the more popular indigenous movie industries from the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, the Nigerian movie Industry has witnessed the upsurge and establishment of more indigenous regional and ethnic movie industries. This development is born partly out of the desire of indigenous Nigerian ethnic groups to tell their own respective stories, an effort towards sustaining the diverse culture which together makes one Nigeria and promotes respective cultures globally (p. 261). Corroborating Egwemi and Salifu's position, Idyo (2025) asserts that:

> …aside the three dominant ethnic groups (Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo), in what seems to be a conscious and deliberate move and effort to state and assert their existence and identity, as well as promote and preserve their origins, cultural and artistic heritages—language, norms, values, dresses, foods, architecture, etc.; various minority groups in Nigeria have also launched into the business of filmmaking in their indigenous languages (pp. 423-424).

Idyo & Ademiju-Bepo (2025) equally re-echo the same fact as they state, "aside the three dominant ethnic groups, various minority groups in Nigeria have also launched into the business of filmmaking in their indigenous languages" (p 202). Following this line of thought, earlier studies have foregrounded this development and are worthy of mention. In adducing reasons for his position that, for over three decades now, Nollywood has experienced tremendous mutation and growth in both the professional and academic arenas, Omoera (2014) maintains that, "Firstly, other ethnic groups, besides the Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba, are beginning to enter the industry, with many indigenous language production sites across the country" (2014, p. 4). Iyorza (2018) equally shares these sentiments, affirming the evolution of regional movies (p. 3). For Ibagere (2019), these smaller indigenous woods are "…an African response to the invasion of its cultural ethos" (549).

Drawing from the foregoing analysis therefore, it is apparent that minority groups of the Middle Belt (politically recognized as North Central), like Tiv, Gbagyi, Berom, etc., have equally, in full force, commenced the production of video films in their indigenous languages. It is sort of like the minority ethnic tribes yelling, "We're here, too" with their cinematic offerings. This connotes that the minorities may have been seemingly dominated culturally, politically, economically, and even socially, but here they have found a platform to assert their identity, represent their culture, and preserve their heritage. This is a great development, we must say. However, as Idyo & Ademiju-Bepo (2025) cry out, "studies, research and scholarship on other emerging film cultures from minor ethnicities, such as Tiv, Efik, and Nupe, among others, have not been investigated, for the most part, except in the case of Benin video film that has enjoyed the research attention of Omoera Osakue recently" (p. 202).

They further argue that even the few researchers that this has received their attention have concentrated their efforts on indigenous language films based on the cultures of the three main ethnic groups of Nigeria, Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa (Idyo & Ademiju-Bepo, 2025, p. 202). Scholars such as Johnson, Chamo (2007, 2010), Adamu (2004–2010), Larkin (2004), Sani & Khalil (2014) and Chamo & Ibrahim (2018), amongst others, have written sufficiently on the Hausa language film industry. Studies by Akinsola (2015), Babalola (2014), Agboola (2022), Sesan (2004–2018), Elegbe and Fadipe (2010), Olúmúyìwà (2013), Ademuyiwa & Uwadinma-Idemudia (2020), and Olayiwola (2014), among others, have done scholarly justice to the Yoruba cinema. Researchers such as Mgbemere (2007), Uwah (2011), Hanmakyugh (2017), Onuzulike (2007), Ekwuazi (1991), and Nwike (2015), to mention a few, have captured Igbo-language films significantly.

But where are the numerous scholars who have written on the indigenous language films in Tiv, Ebira, Esan, Etsako, Fulfulde, Gbagyi, Ibibio, Idoma, Igala, Itsekiri, Isoko, Nupe, and Urhobo, who have record of having a film or two, but for some many? Where you find scholarship on any of these minority groups at all, it is a handful of random scholarly interrogation. It has become a matter of everyone singing their own song. Yet some minority groups are making concerted efforts, despite meagre resources, to produce movies that tell their stories, as part of the constituents of the nation of Nigeria. In other words, the Gbagyi people, too, just as the other minority groups, are here too and deserve scholarly attention.

## An Overview of Emerging Gbagyi-Language Film Culture

The Gbagyi people, also known as Gbari, are an indigenous ethnic group primarily located in the central region of Nigeria, particularly in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and neighboring states such as Niger and Kaduna. Despite being one of Nigeria's minority groups, the Gbagyi possess a rich cultural heritage characterized by unique customs, religious practices, social structures, and a distinct language (Ayuba, 2016, p. 704). Gbagyi belongs to the Nupoid sub-group of the Benue-Congo family (Blench, 2013, cited in Musa, 2020, p. 97). Gbagyi is widely spoken in the North Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria, particularly in states such as Nasarawa, Kaduna, Kogi, Niger, and the Federal Capital Territory. It is one of the Nigerian languages with a population of no less than 8,000,000 (Filaba, 2012, p. 1); supposedly one of the major Nigerian languages (after Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) (Musa, 2020, p. 97).

However, out of the three major categories of Nigerian languages, Gbagyi belongs to the third and last class, the lowest category, which is grossly inadequately researched on, under-documented and under-developed (Musa, 2020, p. 97). Thus, their culture and

language have increasingly faced threats from globalization, urbanization, and the dominance of larger ethnic groups, notably the Hausa, whose language and culture predominantly influence the northern Nigerian film industry known as Kannywood. In response to these challenges, the Gbagyi have turned to film as a means of asserting and preserving their cultural identity. The production of Gbagyi-language films provides a vital platform for documenting and celebrating their traditions, creating a cultural archive for future generations.

The emergence of Gbagyi-language films is part of a broader trend among minority ethnic groups in Nigeria reclaiming their narratives through cinema. Film is recognized as a powerful tool for minorities to resist cultural erasure by publicly representing their unique identities. The Gbagyi have understood the potential of film as a vehicle for cultural preservation and as a counter to the predominance of Hausa language and culture in mainstream Northern Nigerian cinema. Through their films, Gbagyi filmmakers can portray aspects of their daily lives, festivals, folklore, and traditional practices often ignored or misrepresented in dominant cinematic narratives. These films not only highlight the Gbagyi language but also present a more comprehensive picture of the community's spiritual and social realities (Akinsola, 2020, p. 40).

A key film in this movement is *Zokwo Manayi*, which presents an immersive depiction of Gbagyi cosmology, celebrating the community's rich oral traditions, folklore, and rituals. This film, among the few Gbagyi films to gain recognition, illustrates the Gbagyi people's ability to produce their own cultural narratives through film. The film reflects the community's values, capturing family structures and the significance of traditional ceremonies. Such films provide a counter-narrative to the widespread portrayals of Northern Nigeria through the lens of Hausa culture, thus contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the region's diversity (Ayuba, 2016, p. 711). By telling their stories on their own terms, the Gbagyi are reasserting their unique identity while also embracing the diversification of Nigerian cinema.

The Gbagyi's engagement with film art also serves as a critical tool for preserving their language. Language holds intrinsic ties to cultural identity, and the Gbagyi utilize their films to keep the Gbagyi language alive amidst external pressures, including the prevalence of Hausa as a lingua franca. Language serves as the carrier of culture; thus, preserving it through media ensures the survival of the worldview, history, and philosophies encoded within it (McCain, 2013, p. 12). In *Zokwo Manayi* and other Gbagyi films, language transcends mere dialogue; it serves as a conduit for transmitting cultural knowledge, proverbs, and wisdom (Nnabuife et al., 2023, p. 301). This active maintenance of the Gbagyi language helps ensure its vitality and relevance for future generations while affirming its status as a central aspect of the community's cultural heritage.

Beyond their linguistic and cultural significance, Gbagyi films have the potential to foster greater inter-ethnic understanding and recognition within Nigeria. By communicating their stories in their native language, Gbagyi filmmakers challenge the national narrative that predominantly features major ethnic groups, presenting a richer and more inclusive picture of Nigerian society. Film has the power to bridge cultural gaps, enabling minority groups to share their unique contributions to national identity (Dupré, 2022, p. 79; Ikyer & Tsegbah, 2014, p. 213). As Gbagyi films gain recognition, they promote greater awareness and appreciation of the cultural diversity that exists within Nigeria, providing much-needed visibility for the Gbagyi and other minority groups.

Overall, the Gbagyi people's engagement with film art represents a critical step in the preservation and promotion of their endangered culture. Through Gbagyi-language films such as *Zokwo Manayi*, the Gbagyi assert their cultural identity, document their histories, and resist the cultural dominance of larger ethnic groups. The use of film to preserve and promote their language guarantees that future generations can access the cultural knowledge embedded in the Gbagyi way of life. Consequently, Gbagyi-language cinema serves not only as a tool for cultural preservation but also as a medium for fostering national cohesion, emphasizing the importance of cultural diversity within Nigeria's national identity.

## Synopsis of *Zokwo Manayi 1&2 (The Right Way)*

*Zokwo Manayi 1 & 2* is a 2015 film by Samson, S. & Barde, I.S., produced under the umbrella of Barde Gospel Film Ministry. In this Gbagyi-language film, the story unfolds in the village of Kpobwa, which is beset by an unusual drought. Sakoma, the village priest, warns the villagers that while rain falls in neighboring villages, Kpobwa remains dry. He insists that this curse will only be lifted when the king makes a sacrifice, urging him to act swiftly. Meanwhile, a scandal erupts as Machi, a prominent young man, engages in an adulterous affair with Pada's wife, stirring discontent and division among the villagers. The turmoil intensifies when, after reigning for ten years, the king dies. However, according to tradition, his son cannot inherit the throne because he is unmarried. Two chiefs, eager to see Machi crowned, push for him as the new king, while Pada staunchly opposes this choice. The villagers are left divided, and eventually Machi is crowned king, on the condition that he will mature and then return to the village of Azada to fulfill his kingly duties.

However, the crown brings with it a new tragedy. Soon after Machi's coronation, a death occurs in the royal family. Azada, the rightful heir to the throne, is accused of the death and is promptly judged to be banished. As the village wrestles with this upheaval, Christian missionaries arrive in Kpobwa after a long and challenging journey. Initially, three, only two reach the village to spread the message of Christianity, encountering resistance from Sakoma, the chief priest. A supernatural contest of power ensues between Sakoma and the missionaries, ending in the priest's death as a result of the overwhelming power of God displayed by the missionaries. During these events, Machi, under the divine influence of the missionaries' power, is forced into a confession: he admits to killing the former king and poisoning Azada.

However, it is revealed that Azada, fortunately, did not consume the poisoned food; Machi's wife, unknowingly, ate it instead and tragically died. This revelation exposes Machi's misdeeds and demonstrates a visible victory of Christian faith over the village's traditional practices. Inspired by these events, the entire village turns to Christianity. Azada is reinstated as king and renounces the village's traditional gods, embracing Christianity as the true way. The missionaries present him with a Bible as a symbol of his new faith, praying for him and the village. This marks a new beginning for Kpobwa, as the people embrace a transformed way of life, turning away from the old beliefs and traditions and following what they now believe is "the right way."

## A Cultural Analysis of *Zokwo Manayi 1&2* (The Right Way)

The Gbagyi-language film *Zokwo Manayi* (The Right Way) offers a profound exploration of cultural preservation and religious change within the Gbagyi community of central Nigeria. Set against the backdrop of indigenous customs, the film presents the Gbagyi's traditional lifestyle, spirituality, and communal practices that define their cultural identity. Through its rich narrative and characters, the film illustrates the values and principles embedded in

Gbagyi heritage, from rituals to social norms. However, as Christianity gradually enters the community, a cultural tension emerges, inviting questions about the continuity and transformation of long-standing beliefs. Released in two parts, the film not only entertains but also serves as a cultural document, capturing both the beauty and the challenges of Gbagyi traditions. This is in alignment with Zakari and Jagaba (2019), who emphasize that Gbagyi indigenous belief systems function as a unified moral and spiritual order through which communal life is interpreted, regulated, and sustained.

In depicting this clash between tradition and modernity, *Zokwo Manayi* captures the complexities that minority ethnic groups face in maintaining cultural authenticity while adapting to external influences. The film's storyline underscores the dilemma of embracing a new religion without erasing one's cultural roots. This delicate balance between preservation and adaptation is reflective of the Gbagyi's broader struggle to uphold their heritage in a world where globalization and major ethnic influences dominate. Ayuba (2016) similarly argues that Gbagyi "Knunu" (tradition) operates as a living cultural framework that continues to shape identity even under pressures of Christianity and modernization. Thus, through its portrayal of indigenous religious beliefs and practices, the film sheds light on the underrepresented Gbagyi culture, offering audiences an intimate understanding of their values and identity.

The film *Zokwo Manayi 1&2 (The Right Way)* provides a rich tableau of Gbagyi cultural elements that interweave language, costume, architecture, cuisine, festivals, and folklore, offering insights into the community's values, beliefs, and traditions. By portraying the traditional life of the Gbagyi people, the film underscores the complexities of cultural identity and the transformative impact of external influences, particularly through the arrival of Christian missionaries. Through these key elements, *Zokwo Manayi* preserves and celebrates Gbagyi heritage, while also exploring the tensions that arise when tradition meets change. Dalhatu (2020) reinforces this perspective by noting that language and naming systems among the Gbagyi serve as key markers of identity, even as they undergo gradual transformation under external cultural pressures.

The film presents a vibrant display of Gbagyi cultural elements, showcasing both the communal and spiritual aspects of life in Kpobwa village. Central to the narrative is the priest, Sakoma, who mediates between the people and their deities. His pronouncement that the drought is a divine punishment, solvable only through sacrifice, demonstrates the spiritual centrality of the priesthood in maintaining order within Gbagyi society. Zakari and Jagaba (2019) similarly highlight that spiritual authority among the Gbagyi is deeply embedded in ritual leadership and communal obligation to maintain cosmic and social balance. Relatedly, in the film, the adherence to tradition is evident in the response to Sakoma's warnings; rather than searching for a scientific explanation, the villagers believe in appeasing the gods. This reliance on traditional practices becomes a focal point of cultural identity, which the missionaries' arrival later challenges. Additionally, the adherence to marriage customs highlights the importance of tradition in governance: the king's son is prohibited from ascending to the throne until he marries, underscoring how family and social structure are tightly regulated by cultural rules.



**Plate 1&2: Preparing and Eating a Local Cuisine in Gbagyi (Source: *Zokwo Manayi 1)***

The use of the Gbagyi language is significant in the film, as it adds authenticity to the setting and allows for a deeper connection with the culture being depicted. By choosing Gbagyi over a more widely spoken Nigerian language, the filmmakers make a statement about the importance of preserving indigenous languages and the nuances they carry. Language, in this context, acts as both a narrative tool and a cultural artifact. The use of Gbagyi not only enriches the story by grounding it in the community's linguistic heritage but also reveals subtle cultural expressions and idioms unique to the Gbagyi people. Furthermore, the language barrier faced by the missionaries symbolizes the initial cultural distance between the villagers and the new religion they bring. This linguistic divide highlights the challenges of cross-cultural understanding and the role of language in mediating one's worldview. The eventual acceptance of Christianity could also symbolize how the Gbagyi people, despite embracing new religious beliefs, retain their linguistic identity as a core aspect of their cultural selfhood. Dalhatu (2020) supports this view by stressing that language shift among the Gbagyi is gradual and does not immediately erase cultural identity but instead reconfigures it.

Costuming in *Zokwo Manayi* plays a key role in visually representing the Gbagyi identity. In this regard, Evwierhoma (2024), in her study, highlights that performance culture among the Gbagyi is deeply embodied, with visual aesthetics, such as dress, functioning as cultural signifiers in communal expression. Hence, in the film, traditional attire is prominently featured, particularly in the scenes involving rituals and community gatherings. The village priest Zhiba and other elders are depicted in distinct clothing that signifies their spiritual and social roles. These costumes often include earth-toned fabrics, beadwork, and natural materials that reflect a close relationship with the environment. The emphasis on traditional dress demonstrates respect for Gbagyi values, in which clothing not only fulfills practical needs but also communicates status, occupation, and alignment with cultural traditions. The contrast between the villagers' attire and that of the missionaries visually marks the cultural clash in the film. The missionaries, likely in Western-style clothes, stand out as symbols of external influence, emphasizing the divide between the community's indigenous practices and the new faith being introduced. Thus, costuming enhances the thematic exploration of tradition versus change, underscoring how identity is often reflected in what people wear.



**Plate 3&4: Gbagyi Dancers, King & Chiefs in Cultural Attire (Source: *Zokwo Manayi 1*)**

The film's portrayal of traditional Gbagyi architecture offers insight into the community's relationship with its environment. Gbagyi houses are typically circular or rectangular structures with thatched roofs made from locally sourced materials like mud, wood, and straw. This architectural style, which likely appears in the film, reflects not only a sustainable way of living but also an intimate connection to the land. Homes are designed for functionality, comfort, and harmony with the natural surroundings. Ugwuanyi (2024) notes that Gbagyi spatial organization and ritual landscapes reflect an environmental ethic rooted in communal balance and sacred relationship with land. In *Zokwo Manayi*, the physical layout of Kpobwa, including the king's palace and religious structures, reflects a cultural hierarchy and the centrality of communal spaces. The architecture conveys values of resilience, communal cooperation, and environmental harmony, contrasting with the modern structures associated with Western influences. This architectural heritage is integral to the film's cultural landscape, embodying Gbagyi identity and offering a visual counterpoint to the ideological transformations presented in the plot.






**Plate 5&6: Youth on the Farm and Taking Palmwine at Night (Source: *Zokwo Manayi 1*)**

Food and cuisine in *Zokwo Manayi* likely reflect Gbagyi dietary customs, often based on agriculture and locally available ingredients such as millet, yams, and vegetables. Shared meals are a cornerstone of communal life in Gbagyi society, reinforcing bonds and serving as a platform for social interaction. The preparation and consumption of traditional dishes might appear during festivals or family gatherings within the film, emphasizing food's role as both sustenance and a cultural symbol. Cuisines in this context represent continuity and preservation; despite the changing religious landscape, traditional foods remain a steadfast part of the community's daily life and heritage. By depicting traditional Gbagyi foods, *Zokwo Manayi* also underscores the significance of culinary practices in maintaining cultural identity, even in the face of spiritual and ideological shifts. This analysis resonates with the discourse of Zakari and Jagaba (2019), who emphasize that communal sharing practices in Gbagyi society reinforce social cohesion and spiritual unity. Hence, sharing of meals is therefore not just for aesthetic function but a reflection of the culture of the people.

Festivals in Gbagyi culture are vibrant expressions of collective identity, often tied to the agricultural calendar or spiritual beliefs. Although the film focuses on the dramatic aspects of religious transition, festivals likely play a background role in illustrating the cultural richness of Kpobwa. Festivals would traditionally involve dances, music, and rituals, symbolizing the community's connection to their ancestors and deities. The arrival of the missionaries and their challenge to the village's religious beliefs introduces a tension that likely affects these celebratory customs. However, the festivals serve as a backdrop to highlight the depth of Gbagyi spirituality and the social cohesion that these events foster. Even as the villagers gradually convert to Christianity, the underlying cultural significance of these festivals persists, serving as a reminder of their historical identity. Ugwuanyi (2024) similarly argues that Gbagyi festivals function as both spiritual and ecological performances that reinforce communal identity and environmental consciousness.



**Plate 7&8: Masquerades Performing at the Festival (Source: *Zokwo Manayi 1*)**

Folklore and oral tradition are foundational to Gbagyi culture, preserving wisdom and values across generations. *Zokwo Manayi* incorporates elements of Gbagyi folklore, particularly through its portrayal of the village priest and the villagers' belief in supernatural forces that control natural phenomena, such as rain. These beliefs are evident in Sakoma's pronouncement about the drought and the perceived need for a sacrifice to appease the gods. The folklore of Gbagyi culture is a powerful means of explaining and controlling the world, helping the community navigate life's challenges. In this regard, Evwierhoma (2024) in her study notes that oral performance traditions among the Gbagyi function as repositories of ecological knowledge, ethics, and communal memory. Thus, through the characters' interactions with spiritual figures and deities, the film underscores the importance of folklore as a tool for imparting cultural knowledge and moral lessons. The contest of power between the Christian missionaries and the village's priest, Sakoma, serves as a symbolic clash between folklore and a new religious narrative, marking a shift in the community's ideological landscape.

It is glaring in *Zokwo Manayi 1&2* that, as the villagers embrace Christianity, Gbagyi folklore transforms, blending traditional and Christian beliefs in ways that preserve cultural continuity amid spiritual change. Putting it all together, *Zokwo Manayi 1&2* can be said to serve as a cultural artifact that preserves and highlights the richness of Gbagyi life, even as it addresses the inevitable encounter with external beliefs. The use of the Gbagyi language, traditional costumes, architecture, cuisine, festivals, and folklore collectively underscore the resilience of the Gbagyi identity and the complexities of cultural change. The film demonstrates that while religious beliefs may shift, cultural elements like language, food, dress, and communal practices remain pivotal in maintaining a connection to heritage, ultimately portraying a nuanced narrative of cultural endurance and adaptation. As a reinforcement of this conclusion, Ayuba (2016) argues that Gbagyi cultural identity persists through adaptive transformation rather than disappearance under modern religious and social pressures.

## Conclusion

This study has illuminated the vital role of indigenous language films, particularly those created by the Gbagyi minority in Central Nigeria, as potent tools for cultural preservation

and expression. Through an in-depth analysis of the film *Zokwo Manayi*, the research has demonstrated how indigenous language cinema serves as a cultural archive that preserves traditional narratives, customs, and languages at risk of erosion. Amid the prevailing dominance of larger ethnic groups in the Nigerian film landscape, Gbagyi filmmakers are harnessing the power of film not only to entertain but also to educate and empower their communities. The film encapsulates essential facets of Gbagyi identity, including folklore, spiritual beliefs, and social structures, thereby providing a platform through which the community can reclaim its narrative and assert its cultural presence.

The findings of this study align with Hall's Theory of Cultural Identity, highlighting how indigenous language films act as dynamic mediums for sustaining a shared sense of identity and continuity. By producing *Zokwo Manayi* in the Gbagyi language, the filmmakers not only uphold their linguistic heritage but also use it as a vehicle to communicate their worldview to a broader audience. This commitment to cultural representation fosters pride and unity within the Gbagyi community while challenging the monolithic narratives perpetuated by the mainstream film industries of Kannywood, Yoruwood and Igbowood. Moreover, the film opens avenues for intercultural dialogue, showcasing the richness of Gbagyi culture and enhancing understanding among Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups.

The implications of this study extend beyond the Gbagyi community, calling for a reevaluation of the Nigerian film industry's approach to cultural representation and inclusivity. As *Zokwo Manayi* exemplifies, investing in minority indigenous language films can enrich the national cinematic landscape, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of Nigeria's multicultural identity. This exploration of Gbagyi-language cinema serves as an essential reminder that in an increasingly globalized world, safeguarding cultural diversity is paramount, and film can play a pivotal role in this endeavor. It is a testament to the resilience of marginalized communities, who assert, "We are here, too," reminding society of the richness and vibrancy that exist within Nigeria's cultural mosaic. Future research should continue to explore the potential of other minority languages and cultures within the realm of Nigerian cinema, creating a more robust narrative that includes all voices in the nation's storytelling repertoire.

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