



ISSN: 2319-6505

Available Online at <http://journalijcar.org>

International Journal of Current Advanced Research  
Vol 5, Issue 3, pp 704-712, March 2016

International Journal  
of Current Advanced  
Research

ISSN: 2319 - 6475

RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE GBAGYI/GBARI: ORIGIN, IDENTITY AND IMPACT OF KNUNU (“TRADITION/ CULTURE”)

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2015  
Received in revised form 24<sup>th</sup>  
January, 2016  
Accepted 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2016  
Published online 28<sup>th</sup>  
March, 2016

Key words:

Gbagyi, Origin, Identity, Impact,  
Knnunu

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to examine the Gbagyi/Gbari: Origin, Identity and impact of Knnunu (“Tradition/Culture”) with a view to make recommendations towards further understanding of the Gbagyi/Gbari as an ethnic group, by an extensive review of literature on the origin, identity and impacts of *Knnunu* within the writing on the Gbagyi/Gbari people. The methodological strategy adopted for the study is Ethnography. The data sourced is from both primary and secondary. Participant observation and semi structured interviews were conducted with (30) Gbagyi/Gbarinatives and documents related to the origin, identity and impact were reviewed. The data was analysed using content and thematic analysis. The results show that the origins, identity and language are important socio-cultural distinctions that give the Gbagyi/Gbari their relevance and locate them within the larger Nigerian family as a separate ethnic group with exceptional uniqueness in the Middle Belt (central Nigeria) region. Based on the results obtained recommendations were made to assist in the academia, practice and policy.

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INTRODUCTION

This work examines the historical beginnings of the Gbagyi/Gbari and their identity. In seeking to understand Gbagyi/Gbari identity certain theories are explored. The exact meaning of Knnunu has been disputed. Some Gbagyi/Gbari scholars, like J. A. Shekwo and Mailafiya Aruwa Filaba, perceive Knnunu as connoting “culture” in a general sense.<sup>1</sup> This writing takes issue with Shekwo’s definition because the reality conveyed by the concept of Knnunu goes beyond “culture”, it implies the totality of Gbagyi/Gbari life, worldview, and identity and how the Gbagyi/Gbari relate to their environment. This work, therefore, argues that such an understanding of Knnunu as only culture oversimplifies the importance of Knnunu for the Gbagyi/Gbari. A central strand of the presentation is the argument that Knnunu is a special way of portraying the Gbagyi/Gbari worldview in its totality, concretized in the Gbagyi/Gbari way of life, rites of passage, rituals, religion, and indeed is a singular way of describing the entire personality of the Gbagyi/Gbari. A failure to grasp this all-embracing nature of Knnunu impact will always challenge any efforts towards the Gbagyi/Gbari. Early anthropologists such as Temple, Gunn and Connant recorded the cultural nuances of the Gbagyi/Gbari,<sup>2</sup> yet failed to notice fully the

tremendous implications of Knnunu in Gbagyi/Gbari attitudes and behaviours, not least during life-course ceremonies. It is thus logical to argue that the researchers on culture would have made a much more significant impact if they had been conscious of the implications of Knnunu among the Gbagyi/Gbari. Consequently, the dilemma of the continuity of the observance of Knnunu as a mark of identity among the Gbagyi/Gbari raises a thorny question. Why has Knnunu survived the strong influence of modernity among the Gbagyi/Gbari?

This brings me to the heart of the dilemma faced by contemporary Gbagyi/Gbari, as became apparent in the course of my research on them. As I confront each of them with the question, ‘Do you practice Knnunu?’ to which all replied ‘No.’ Yet, as each interview progressed it became clear that while they did not admit to practicing *ashan* – the sacrificial appeasement and explicit worship of Gbagyi/Gbari deities – nonetheless, they continued to be involved with other aspects of Knnunu. In the case of marriage, for example, such Knnunu elements would include the provision of animals and alcohol (or cash substitutes) traditionally used as – or to buy – sacrificial offerings and libations to the *azakwoyi*, the ancestors, to ensure their protection in the marriage. But Knnunu’s broad conceptual embrace would also include traditional courtship practices such as *Ynigwo sun wo*, the payment of bride price, and *fadobe*, ‘communal farming,’ by

1 See: J A. Shekwo *The Common Clusters* (Abuja: Garkida Press Ltd., 1988), p. 9. Also see Mailafiya A Filaba, *History of Rubochi* (Jimma, Ethiopia: Jimma University Press, 2007), p. 24.

2 See O. Temple and C. L. Temple, *Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria* (New York: Barnes & Nobles, Inc, 1967 edition),

p.121 f.; Harold D. Gunn and F. P. Conant, *Peoples of the Middle Niger Region Northern Nigeria* (London: International African Institute, 1960), p. 101 f.

which the prospective son-in-law and his friends provide farm labour three times per year for seven years (locally traditional). Whilst these last examples can be found in other traditional African marriage practices, what is significant here is the fact that they are conceived by the Gbagyi/Gbari within a unified and totalizing system, all of which is Knunu.

As stated earlier, Shekwo understood Knunu to mean “culture,”<sup>3</sup> focusing his understanding on the linguistic interpretation of Gbagyi/Gbari words. In contrast, Filaba expresses his understanding of Knunu not just as culture, but as manifest in the religious and material aspects of Gbagyi/Gbari life.<sup>4</sup> Whereas Filaba’s view succeeded in drawing attention to ancient Gbagyi/Gbari practices, it failed to clarify Knunu beyond cultural assimilation. To Filaba, Knunu is culture itemized in religious beliefs and such cultural nuance as farming, greetings and social life of the Gbagyi/Gbari. Therefore, while this writing agrees with Shekwo and Filaba’s understanding that Knunu embraced culture, it argues that Knunu is more than culture – it is intrinsic, pervasive and a necessary fabric of Gbagyi/Gbari personality, existence and identity. This work consequently explores the veracity of the argument that whereas the Gbagyi/Gbari deny any further involvement with Knunu, their sense of identity portrayed in their origins, cultural activities and ceremonies all suggest that they exhibit continued allegiance to Knunu practices.

At this point, it is essential to state that this study is necessary to explain and unveil to the world the essence of Knunu in the Gbagyi/Gbari beliefs and to draw the attention of the Gbagyi/Gbari to the fact that they practice Knunu in their daily living despite their denial. The Gbagyi/Gbari is chosen by interest of the researcher as an insider, with the intent of not just research but appeal to lingering socio-cultural and moral issues. The primary reason for chosen the Gbagyi is the lack of depth in material literature amongst them, besides, it is to expose some of their cultural predisposition to the world. I begin with the discussion on their origin.

### *The Gbagyi/Gbari and their Origin*

A question that needs careful analysis is who are the Gbagyi/Gbari? Identity theory provides a useful tool to unravel and understand the background of the Gbagyi/Gbari in relation to their origin, vocation and language. In considering culture and people, identity is crucial, it matters both as a theoretical concept and a fact of contemporary life because individuals and groups determine personal and shared social category of membership that can be more or less inclusive. The word “identity” has a root from the Latin *identitas*, a word formed from the concept of *idem* meaning *same*, referring to three ideas of sameness, likeness, and oneness.<sup>5</sup> More precisely, identity means “the sameness of a person or thing at all times in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else.”<sup>6</sup>

It has acquired significant contemporary resonance both within the academic and social context. In its natural form it is consigned to either individual or a community. Essentially, identity according to Kathryn Woodward, presents an approach through which the relationship between our personal knowledge of the world and the cultural and historical background in which such knowledge formed is understood.<sup>7</sup> Thus, in light of Woodward’s explanation, the Gbagyi/Gbari proverb *a ta gyin Gbagyiza ya na yizhe n kwa zhin won* (“you can’t separate the Gbagyi/Gbari from the world that produce them”), becomes relevant to understanding the relation of Knunu to the Gbagyi/Gbari. Hence, I will be examining Gbagyi/Gbari origins, identity and language

### *Gbagyi Origins*

What importance does the story of the origins of the Gbagyi/Gbari play in understanding their identity? Patrick Darling an anthropologist, who worked among some minority tribes of the middle region of Nigeria, asserts historical data are preserved in culture, to tell the “unwritten or poorly recorded story of ordinary people and vanquished minority.”<sup>8</sup> Drawing from his statement therefore, I identify three stories of origin which clarify Gbagyi/Gbari identity and some discussion of how the Gbagyi/Gbari themselves speak of their origins, in myth or proverb. First, Darling argued that the Gbagyi/Gbari dialect antedated the Chadic people who settled in their midst over a period of a thousand years.<sup>9</sup> As his assertion that they settled over a thousand years contradicts his later suggestion of 1810 as the beginning of their existence, one may question the accuracy of his claim. Nevertheless, the corresponding record by Hugh Clapperton<sup>10</sup> who had an early contact with the Gbagyi/Gbari, suggests that they originated from Zamfara in 1810. This claim rather assists in giving them a historical date of origin than offering a clear expression of a distinct identity. In addition, Darlington’s perception may have been influenced by the view expressed by Bala Adamu Kuta that the Hausa/Fulani claim to have founded Gbagyi/Gbari towns,<sup>11</sup> thus, identifying the Gbagyi/Gbari as a separate ethnic group from others in the region.

Second, C. L. Temple asserts that the Gbagyi/Gbari originated from Bornu Empire as early as 1750<sup>12</sup> along with other identified group such as the Koro who were expelled with them<sup>13</sup> because of a conflict.<sup>14</sup> This not only identifies the Gbagyi/Gbari as a group, but also attests to their

3 Shekwo (1988), Op cit., p. 9

4 Mailafiya Aruwa Filaba, *History of Rubochi* (Jimma, Ethiopia: Jimma University Press, 2007), p. 24.

5 J. A. Simpson and E. S. Weiner. *The Oxford English dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Vol. VII (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 620

6 Robert M Strozier, *Foucault, Subjectivity, and Identity: Historical Constructions of Subject and Self* (Michingan: Wayne State University press, 2002), p. 214.

7 Kathryn Woodward, *Identity and Difference* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 1997), p. 301.

8 Patrick Darling, “Migrants, Millennialists and Mayhem: Kari-Kari, Ningi, Gwari, Kebbi, Kwatarkwashi, and Zuru ‘enclaves’ in Northern Nigeria” *Azania* Vol. 34 (2004), pp. 90–109. 91

9Ibid., p. 98.

10Ibid., p. 99. See Hugh Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa* (London: Frank Cass & Co. LTD, 1966), p. 155. He acknowledged that Gbagyi were sacked by Bello of Sokoto who subjected their scattered remnants to be governed by surrounding emirs.

11 Bala Adamu Kuta, *Minna as Gbagyi Land* (Minna: Abayi Resources Production, 2001), p. 1–2. See also Alhaji Ahmad Muazu, “Tarihin Kafuwar Garin Minna” *Tauraruwa* (March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2001), p. 8. The reference here is a Hausa edition of the Newline Newspaper published in Nigeria.

12 Temple (1967ed.), Op cit., p. 121.

13 Mallam Shuaibu Na’ibi and Alhaji Hassan Dalhatun Abuja, *Gwari, Gade and Koro Tribes* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1969), p. 2. See also J. A. Shekwo and M. A. Filaba, “The Declining and Beleaguered Gbagyi Nation and Culture” *Gbagyi Journal* Vol. 1. No. 2 (2002), pp. 19–32.

14 Gloria Thomas-Emeagwali, “Notes on the History of Abuja, Central Nigeria,” *African Study Monographs*, Vol. 9. No. 4 (1989), pp. 191–196. 193.

interrelationship with others. Besides, it is suggested that the conflict in Bornu responsible for their migration was because of their socio-cultural identity with Knunu, which led to the Gbagyi/Gbari resistance to conversion to Islam, rather than political, as it was portrayed by Muslim Jihadists. Thirdly, J. D. Gwamna, at variance with Clapperton and Temple, suggested that the Gbagyi/Gbari belonged to the Nok culture, which dates back to 2000 years.<sup>15</sup> Gwamna argued that the Gbagyi/Gbari being “autochthonous”<sup>16</sup> and “hermitic,” were not easily influenced from outside, could be regarded as a recognition locating their identity root. Accordingly, Gwamna’s opinion, at best explains the extent of the persistence of Knunu in the affairs and perception of the Gbagyi/Gbari.

In addition, some discussion of how the Gbagyi/Gbari themselves speak of their origins, in myth or proverb, is necessary at this point to understand how they see themselves within the larger view of myth. A Gbagyi/Gbari I interacted with explained that:

The Gbagyi/Gbari *ayni* (“world”) was a product of *Shekwoyi/Swashe* which was initially a part of seven worlds created by *Shekwoyi’skala* (“power”). At the formation of the *ayni*, both *akni* (“earth”) and *oshe* (“heavens”) were together. Among things created in the *ayni* were *oza/zagonchi* (“people”), animals and landscapes. The Gbagyi/Gbari were apportioned the responsibility of taking care of the *ayni* that harbours them.<sup>17</sup>

Also associated with Gbagyi/Gbari origin are the distinct cultural aspects of hunting and farming, which played a unique role in their migration accounts. The British Colonial records in Nigeria, portray the Gbagyi/Gbari as constantly on hunting expeditions, searching for arable land<sup>18</sup> and desirous of a “more secure and commodious site.”<sup>19</sup> Sustained engagement in farming and hunting,<sup>20</sup> perhaps suggest a people who had attained a means of livelihood through a vocation. Not only was a means of survival established, but the hill-country served as an important protection against dangerous animals and unexpected enemies like the Fulani/Hausa slave raiders. The presence of hills (a major feature in *ashan* worship) in Gbagyi/Gbari communities also serves as a visible link with the ancestors. Thus, while one may argue that it provided an abode to fortify and secure the Gbagyi/Gbari, the hill-country also became of religious importance. Filaba argued that the Gbagyi/Gbari developed

strong ties with their environment, sustained their common vocations and retained Knunu as their common identity.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, Sonia F. Graham<sup>22</sup> had observed farming to be an important aspect of Knunu. She drew from the reports of the CMS missionaries among the Gbagyi/Gbari to say the demand which required children to serve on the farm prevented them from converting because they would then be a great economic loss to their parents.<sup>23</sup> This agrees with Gunn’s and Conant’s explanations that among the Gbagyi/Gbari, *fako* (“family service”), *anugba* (“personal service”) and *fwapa* (“collective service”) were imperative as part of the expected farm work requirement of all Gbagyi/Gbari.<sup>24</sup> One can thus argue that the non-response to the CMS missionary overtures which Graham talked about was a direct influence of these aspects of Knunu. Another reason adduced by Graham why the Gbagyi/Gbari would not allow their children to go to school was the participation in the observance of market days in which the children help to trade goods, so allowing them to go to school would ultimately make them counterproductive to the wellbeing of the family.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, one can stress that the lack of understanding of this socio-economic aspect of Knunu, affected greatly the CMS work among the Gbagyi/Gbari.

Nonetheless, Gbagyi/Gbari identity within the Northern part of Nigeria was threatened in the British Colonial period. The British Colonial Administration’s (BCA) record affirmed the Gbagyi/Gbari were considered not to possess the institution of Chiefdom because of their independent and unsettled nature.<sup>26</sup> The potential future impact of this Colonial perspective is recognized also in Sam E. Oyovbaire’s statement affirming an “absence of state-power formations.”<sup>27</sup> Such claims by the BCA and Oyovbaire become doubtful when compared with Hugh Clapperton’s 1827 encounter with a Gbagyi/Gbari King. Clapperton gave a description of the house or castle of the Chief where he was lodged and given all the Gbagyi/Gbari hospitality.<sup>28</sup> Clapperton’s account appears to refute the suggestion that there was no chiefdom among the Gbagyi/Gbari whilst, unambiguously affirming the distinctiveness of their identity. In hospitality as he mentioned, lies a characteristic feature of Knunu practice. The aspect of hospitality in which every household among the Gbagyi/Gbari was required to care for strangers with deep concern and rigorous commitment<sup>29</sup> remains a strong identity marker of the Gbagyi/Gbari today.

<sup>15</sup>Gwamna, Dogara Je’adayibe, “Gbagyi Identity Crisis,” *Gbagyi Journal* Vol. 2. No. 2 (2005), pp. 1–27. <sup>3</sup> The Nok Culture is a West African civilization which flourished from about 500 B.C. till 200 A.D. It was a civilization focused in the place where the Benue and Niger rivers meet. The Nok culture produced the oldest sculptures so far discovered in Africa. Part of the sculptures discovered were mostly those of animals and humans. The name Nok represents the village where these sculptures were discovered. <sup>16</sup>Ibid. The idea here is drawn from an understanding of environmental concept emanating from Biology, Geology and physiology which gives the features of the earth as formed in the place where it is found thus relating the inhabitants of a particular place to the land where they currently resides.

<sup>17</sup> A Respondent traditional medicine man from Gabadna – Minna, Niger State, interviewed on 12/12/2011

<sup>18</sup> Na’ibi and Hassan, Op. cit., (nd), p. 10; See also Alhaji Hassan and Mallam Shuaibu Na’ibi, *A Chronicle of Abuja* Trans. Frank Heath (Lagos: African University Press Limited, 1962), p. 83.

<sup>19</sup> Archival Material from the Secretariat of Northern Province Hitherto referred to as SNP 10, Assessment Report on Niger Province–Kuta Division by J. W. O. Dyer, 1913, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Kolawale Aiyedun, “The Social and Cultural Habits of Hunters in Various Parts of Niger State: An Ethnoarchaeological Study” *Nyame Akuma: Bulletin of the Society of Africanist Archaeologists* Vol. 45 (June, 1996, pp. 1–7. 2.

<sup>21</sup>Filaba, op cit., p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Sonia F. Graham, *Government and Mission Education in Northern Nigeria 1900–1919* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1966)

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>24</sup> Gunn and Conant, Op. cit., p. 90; See also Hassan and Na’Ibi, Op. cit., (nd), p. 15 f.

<sup>25</sup> Graham, Op cit., p. 91.

<sup>26</sup> SNP 10, 517/2393/1913, Assessment Report dated 18<sup>th</sup> July 1913, Guni-District, Kuta Division, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Sam Egite Oyovbaire, “Structural Change and Political Process in Nigeria,” *African Affairs* Vol. 82, No. 326, (Jan., 1983), pp. 3–28.7 f. See also Temple, Op. cit., p. 120 f; Gunn & Conant, Op. cit., pp. 94 f.

<sup>28</sup> Clapperton, Op cit., p. 99. Clapperton recorded that the event took place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 1827 while he was travelling from Badagry to Maiduguri, when there was still serious suspicion between the Gbagyi and their neighbours especially due to the repeated raids by the Fulani jihadist.

<sup>29</sup>A Respondent from New Karu, Nassarawa state, interviewed on 22/01/2012, told me that one fundamental issue in Gbagyi/Gbari Knunu was being very hospitable to the point of inconveniencing oneself for another. He explained that value is attached to assisting persons in need to the point of parting with possessions to give comfort to a total stranger.

Finally, the origin of the Gbagyi/Gbari can also be identified with ethnicity, reflective of P Gleason suggestion that identity is rapidly becoming a cliché and therefore more difficult to understand.<sup>30</sup> Bala Adamu Kuta, a Gbagyi/Gbari indigenous writer, recounted an historical myth ascribing the origin of the Gbagyi/Gbari ethnic group to the consumption of *Gbayi* (“fruits of a fig tree”),<sup>31</sup> which was a common fruit for them in the early days. He explained that the Gbagyi/Gbari were accustomed to eating much of the fig fruit, so the identity recognition: *A Gbayi gyi* (“eaters of the fig fruit”) became their adopted name and identity.<sup>32</sup> In effect, understanding the Gbagyi/Gbari is better within the context of how they interpret their origin rather than the designations given by outsiders.

### Gbagyi/Gbari Identity

This section takes the discussion further by engaging with identity theory to explain the Gbagyi as a unique and distinctive group; it is this distinctiveness that determines their perceptions and thoughts, and their rejection of other influences around them. To achieve such understanding, this work investigated the Gbagyi/Gbari identity using scholarly arguments of Stuart Hall (1932–),<sup>33</sup> Anthony Elliot, Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005)<sup>34</sup> and Henri Tajfel (1919–1982)<sup>35</sup> and John Turner. Further insights to appreciating Gbagyi/Gbari identity is drawn from ethnographic interviews I conducted among them.

The scholars above have attributed a range of meaning to the term identity which goes beyond Woodward’s proposition earlier mentioned in introducing the Gbagyi/Gbari origin. For instance, Stuart Hall defined identity as “collective or true self hiding inside the many other, more superficial and artificially imposed ‘selves’ which a people with shared history and ancestry hold in common.”<sup>36</sup> The Gbagyi/Gbari according to a respondent, “are innately glued to their Knunu that it is very difficult to change them.”<sup>37</sup> Although the respondent could not substantiate his claim further, another respondent’s view that *Myezhiñ Gbagyiza nu, she a ma myi, zazaho ta mi wa shamyi don* (“I am a Gbagyi/Gbari inside-out as I think and live as Gbagyi/Gbari, therefore, I can’t be anyone else”),<sup>38</sup> seems to capture the Gbagyi/Gbari mind-set. Therefore, Hall’s concept of identity associated with the mental representations

people have permanently kept in their heads of all “sorts of objects, events and people,” explains the Gbagyi/Gbari situation. The hidden personality is the issue the respondent appears to be referring to. Such true-self is further reflected according to Hall in language representation through which concepts, ideas, and feelings of a people is expressed in their literature, music and philosophy.<sup>39</sup> Self-identity is reflected among the Gbagyi/Gbari in the mental appreciation of who they are as “persistent careers”<sup>40</sup> of Knunu through the eyes of their language and symbolic cultural artefacts. How do we ascertain the claim to mental conception and feelings adduced by Hall?

To answer the question above, it is beneficial to note that the Gbagyi/Gbari share common customs, traditions, historical experiences, and in some instances, geographical habitations. For instance, both Converts to other religions (Christianity and Islam) and non-converts are trapped in the web of production of the *pari* (“a traditional piece of white cloth”) and also (sometimes) use it during the birth of the first child. Significantly, when a child is wrapped in the *pari* cloth at birth, “it attracts ancestors’ protection enabled through a contact with it.”<sup>41</sup> The *pari* also has relevance during marriages as it is one item the prospective son in law is required to present, thus, every Gbagyi/Gbari is required to own a piece. The use of such material is overwhelming among both converts to other religions and non-converts alike affirming that Gbagyi/Gbari continue to imbibe Knunu ideals, as opposed to their continued denial; it is therefore adequate to locate their identity within Knunu. The importance that Gbagyi/Gbari continue to ascribe to the wearing of *agbagyije* (the traditional Gbagyi/Gbari cloth) during marriages, naming, burial ceremonies and of recent the renaissance of Gbagyiness especially in the FCT, portrays a strong evidence of the all-pervasive nature of Knunu. Emphasizing native dress not only indicates social identity and cultural relevance, but also serves as vehicle of sensitizing them to the aspirations of their family lineages. Besides, the *agbagyije* conveys a cultural nuance revitalized in ancestral rights, privileges, and unreserved protection, so when the Gbagyi/Gbari use it in the community, it is an affirmation of reliance on the *azakwoyi*. The statement of John E. Transue that “identity acceptance serves as proxies for effects of pre-existing attitudes,”<sup>42</sup> demonstrates that the Gbagyi/Gbari have assimilated Knunu in the reality in which they live.

Other scholars, such as Branca Telles Ribeiro and Marin Teresa Lopes Dantes described identity as a “composite of projected self or multiple alignments that one brings to an interaction.”<sup>43</sup> Although their views differ from that of Hall, identity according to them goes beyond just mental ideas,

30P. Gleason, “Identifying Identity: A Semantic History,” *Theories of ethnicity: A classical reader*, Werner Sollors ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 460–487. 465 f.

31 Bala Adamu Kuta, *Notes on some Aspects of Gbagyi History* (Minna: Abayi Resources Production, 2008), p. 4. See Shekwo, (1987), *Op. cit.*, p. 6. According to Shekwo the fig tree is spelt and known as *Gbai* and this agreed with Kuta’s view.

32 Ibid.

33 Stuart Hall grew up in Kinston Jamaica, studied at Oxford and emerged as one of British leading cultural theorist.

34 Paul Ricoeur’s interest in philosophy led to the coinage of the concept of Personal Identity Theory in an attempt to comprehend the nature of human self-consciousness. He was greatly influenced by Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973) whose philosophical quest into the “Mystery of Being” examined the existence of humans and their understanding of themselves, a theme largely seen in the works of Paul Ricoeur. See Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Beings I, Faith and Reality* (London: The Harvill Press Ltd, 1951), where Marcel discusses the question of being and the existence of being in Chapters 1 & 2, on pages 1–32.

35 Henri Tajfel was a British social psychologist who along with John C Turner introduced theory of Social identity a concept which explains intergroup behavior.

36 Stuart Hall, “Who Needs ‘Identity?’,” *Identity: A Reader*, Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman eds. (London: Sage Publications, 2000), pp. 15–30.17.

37A Respondent, a retired Headmaster in Nasarawa State was interviewed on 20/01/2012.

38A Respondent interviewed in Yelwa, Kogi state, on 04/02/2012.

39 Stuart Hall (ed), “The Work of Representation,” *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), p. 17 f.

40 Eli Hirsch, *The Concept of Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 7 f. He explains the concept as a symbolic representation of object which physically sustains continuity, this of course could be human or non-human, and in the case of the Gbagyi it is both.

41A Respondent interviewed at Gbadana – Minna, Niger State, on 12/12/2011.

42 John E. Transue, “Identity Saliency, Identity Acceptance, and Racial Policy Attitudes: American National Identity as a Unity Force,” *American Journal of political Science vol. 51, No. 1* (Jan., 2007), pp. 78 – 91. 86.

43 Branca Telles Ribeiro and Marin Teresa Lopes Dantes, “I’m Good. ‘I’m Nice.’ ‘I’m Beautiful.’ Idealization and Contradiction in Female Psychiatric Patients” *Discourse Identity Trouble: Critical Discourse and Contested Identities* Carman Rosa, Caldas Coulthard and Rick Iedema eds. (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 180–202.185.

instead it epitomizes the knowledge individuals have and share in social conversations and which capture their predisposition to each other in relation to issues. While Ribeiro and Dantes' views articulate the Gbagyi/Gbari self-concept involving an overwhelming acceptance of Knunu as inevitable component for their existence, merely considering it as a projection of the self, negates the Gbagyi/Gbari perception. Furthermore, upon reflection, the Gbagyi/Gbari practice of situating Knunu in every matter of life resonates with Robert M. Strozier's view of identity production. Strozier expressed that identity construction is an internal paradigm sharpened by individual identity, in which desires, feelings and self-relations,<sup>44</sup> as product makes the self-concept idea even clearer. By interiority Strozier refers to the inwardness, self-knowledge and self-consciousness that persons or groups get to form of themselves.<sup>45</sup> In such context, one can argue that Strozier has not only taken us beyond Hall's explanations but given a direction through which the Gbagyi/Gbari identity could be examined.

In line with the discussions above, two things emerge as key in understanding the concept of Gbagyi/Gbari identity: first, identity understood as a concept which deals with an individual understanding of the self in relation to existence, who they are, what they represent and how they are; and second, that which has to do with individual's relation to others - in other words, the identity of the self in relation to others. To understand these concepts in relation to the Gbagyi/Gbari, the following discussion will explain them better.

First, Anthony Elliot, a British social theorist, advanced the concept of the self to explain how everyday life and human situations effect the self-formation of a person. His argument reminisce the self as construed through a series of early cultural activities and influences that are foundational in the home and community.<sup>46</sup> The Gbagyi/Gbari perception of *ozha* ("person") in a respondent's view reflects the totality of what he/she represents including the daily chores:

Ozha ye kpe sai n a shi wo tnutnu wye n wo abe zhinzhin n Knunui bado, n jesun shewo la ozha tu. N lo nu ton, ata myi a kpe wo ye n shansun. ("Knowing a person is strictly measured by his/her attitude at work, society and value placed on tradition. The way in which Knunu is valued importantly by such a person determines the extent to which he/she could be known among the Gbagyi/Gbari").<sup>47</sup>

Such an understanding agrees with Elliot's self-identity in which the self is congruent as a central mechanism through which a persons' world intersect while the daily activities they involve in define their being and self.<sup>48</sup> Elliot's understanding explains more vividly the Gbagyi/Gbari conception of the self as that of an individual and the meanings they attach to their actions. In Elliot's argument on self, he was greatly influenced by the views of George

Herbert Mead (1863–1931), who had posited that the self exists only in relation to the existence of other selves and as such are intertwined in exchange of themselves within an interactive situation.<sup>49</sup>

Paul Ricoeur referred to the concept of self-identity as personal identity. Two ideas make up this concept, that of identity as sameness on the one hand, and identity as selfhood on the other.<sup>50</sup> Ricoeur argued that the concept is bound in the relation between the self and the other. Three converging themes explain his argument: an instinctive meditation on the self or subject; dialectic on the understanding of the word *mémé* ("same") in the sense of identification as in the comprehension of "one and the same" (ipse), or selfhood, and a discussion on the relation between the self and the other. However, while Ricoeur proposed that the "hermeneutics of the self is placed at an equal distance from apology of the *cigito* ("illusion" in the words of Decartes) and from its overthrow,"<sup>51</sup> he observed it remains an abstract, mediated in ideas, actions, works, institutions and monuments that objectify it.

The Gbagyi/Gbari concept of *Gbagyiza/Gbariza* ("Gbagyi/Gbari person") mirrors the idea expressed by Ricoeur in which a person is not completely free from relating to the members of their immediate families. Such conception is echoed in Mbiti's view of self-identity within African traditional religious thoughts conveyed as "I am, because we are: and since we are, therefore I am," meaning the community gives the individual his/her identity.<sup>52</sup> An example is reflected in the Gbagyi/Gbari concept of *tokun ye* ("ancestral name"), which resonates in their belief that the ancestors continue to influence the identity of those given their names.<sup>53</sup> The impact of *tokunye* is conveyed when the Gbagyi/Gbari questions the behaviour of individuals who are unable to exhibit the traits of the ancestor or the living personality whose names they bear. The concept of self-identity, if viewed from the concept of *tokunye*, presents the Gbagyi/Gbari converts (to Christianity and Islam) as persons exhibiting a dual identity that requires them to be subject to both the world of their ancestors and to their personal convictions as believers in any of the two religions. The challenge for the Gbagyi/Gbari lies in Edi Pucci's observation that identity should not only be a general philosophical concept but should reflect the local and isolated identity which project and protect the heritage to which it belongs and shield it from violent infiltrations.<sup>54</sup>

The underlying logic of self-identity of Elliot and the personal identity of Ricoeur gives credence to Martin Sokefeld's disposition that identity is a self-emphasis which demands

44 Strozier, Op cit., p. 209.

45 Ibid., p. 214.

46 Anthony Elliot, *Concept of the Self*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), p. 28 f.

47A Respondent, a female *Ashigbedai* interviewed at Kujama- Kaduna state on 17/12/2011, gave this important information on the perception of the person by the Gbagyi.

48 Elliot, op.cit., p. 30.

49 See George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1934 (1974)), p. 164.

50 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* Translated by Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago press Ltd, 1992), p. 116.

51 Ibid., p. 4.

52 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Limited, (1969)1977), p. 108.

53 CAPRO Research Office, *Kingdoms at War: An ethnic Survey of Niger, Kebbi states and the FCT* (Jos: CAPRO Media, 1995), p. 15. The document affirms that names are given by a masquerade representing the ancestors. This is done by divination to ascertain which of the family members has returned through the child, thus retaining ancestral practice which appears so influential in Knunu.

54 Edi Pucci, "History and the Question of Identity: Kant, Arendt, Ricoeur," *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, Richard Kearney ed. (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 1996), pp. 125–134.133.

“attention to a personal or individual identity.”<sup>55</sup> However, David Rasmussen argued that Ricoeur’s discourse focuses particularly on the perception of the self as personal identity, but is fundamentally limited by its inability to conceive the self as an entity liable to change over time.<sup>56</sup> On the one hand the idea of the self in identity may carry a cultural connotation yet it can be distinguished by a subject identity as a product of the individual self-influenced by the environment. On the other hand, the self within a paradigmatic conceptualization of the “western self,” falls short of the cultural interpretation of self in relation to cultural context. Therefore, the self for the Gbagyi/Gbari locates the person as Gbagyiza/Gbariza and also in relation to *azakwoyi*, and largely the family. The saying *Gbagyiza to bei ka-don* (“A Gbagyi/Gbari is connected to the others irrespective of where they come from”), is significantly a concept hidden in self-identity. Again, the idea expressed in Gbagyi/Gbari as *emiyna n gbo nyi ynai* (“mine is different from ours”), mirrors the personal identity of an individual which is not influenced by any other.

Another important perception of identity relevant to the Gbagyi/Gbari is social identity theory developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979.<sup>57</sup> Central to this theory is the role played by the shared group interest which permeates the ideas of self-concept within a group setting.<sup>58</sup> For instance, the Gbagyi/Gbari concept of *yeyi fa* (“betrothal farming”) though an individual self-concept and interest, is only realized through a corporate identity. Through the individual’s participation in age group farming, a suitor is able to fulfil the requirement of working on an in-laws’ farm three times a year assisted by the social group to which he belongs. Such gives the person not only self-recognition before the in-laws, but also identify him with his social group. Tajfel had defined social identity as that part of the individual’s self-concept which is derived from the knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups), together with the values and emotion significantly attached to that membership.<sup>59</sup> Social identity deals with a person’s sense of who they are drawn from belonging to a specified group membership. Tajfel and Turner proposed that groups to which people belong were an important source of pride and self-esteem.

Additionally, Tajfel and Turner identified categorization, social identification and social comparison as three necessary identity marks in inter-group relation. By groups people are classified into “us” or “them,” based strictly on social categorization as either in-group or out-group drawn from social identity driven by a perception imbedded in discrimination.<sup>60</sup> Hassan and Na’Ibi stated that the

Gbagyi/Gbari of Abuja in 1952 were the larger population of “pagan tribes” dominated by the Hausa/Fulani settlers from the kingdom of Zauzau,<sup>61</sup> whose condition led them to develop consciousness of a group identity. One can argue therefore that such political suppression of the Gbagyi/Gbari ignited their perception of themselves as an in-group in contrast to the Hausa/Fulani whom they regarded as an out-group. Tajfel and Turner’s explanation of social identity is recognized in the Gbagyi/Gbari sensitivity to the political subjugation by the out-group (“Hausa/Fulani”) and their subsequent reactions influenced by a strongly distinct ethnic self-perception confirm it. Thus, social categorization is informed by the circumstances and particular social environment that produced them.

The use of social categories such as *agbagyiza* (“proper Gbagyi/Gbari”) and *akniyida* (“original owners of the land”) among the Gbagyi/Gbari today in Abuja differentiate them from other groups and gives them a social identity. However, Blake E. Ashforth and Fred Mael warned that identification should not be associated with any particular behavioural pattern but an individual self-perception.<sup>62</sup> Again, Tajfel and Turner argued that while social identification draws on emotional attachments to improve group membership bond, it does also generate social comparison with other existing groups.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, I argue that the Gbagyi/Gbari group identification is their personal response to real life situation based on their circumstantial experiences. So, Turner’s observation that identifying things about others based on the group to which they belong,<sup>64</sup> is appropriate in the Gbagyi/Gbari context. Nevertheless, Ashforth and Mael caution that values held by a group may be superimposed by unforeseen situations not agreeably acceptable to all group members.<sup>65</sup>

What was at issue in the discussions so far has been the nature of identity of the Gbagyi/Gbari. I maintained that a relationship exists between personal identity and social identity among them prompting a consciousness of identity. To promote the union between self and the others, the Gbagyi/Gbari employ ethnological speech patterns and gestures to promote the authenticity of Knunu. For example, *Fadobe* (“communal farming”) serves as a cohesive factor that assigns social identity to the community. As earlier mentioned in discussing the *yeyi fa* concept, *Fadobe* gives the entire community the idea of group classification, categorization and identification. On the one hand, *fadobe* is a reflection of social identity because, it locates the Gbagyi/Gbari within an identity framework of a dynamic group drawn together for the purpose of communal farming. On the other hand, it explains *fadobe* as an aspect of Knunu which accounts for the Gbagyi/Gbari treasured binding principles and values. Appropriately, identity in the foregoing discussions has a double implication. First, it is a reference to the Gbagyi/Gbari individual’s self-respect or dignity as well as

55 Martin Sokefeld, “Debating Self, Identity and Culture in Anthropology,” *Current Anthropology* Vol. 40, No. 4 (Aug–Oct, 1999), pp.417–448:418.

56 David Rasmussen, “Rethinking subjectivity: narrative Identity and the Self,” *Paul Ricoeur: The Hermeneutics of Action*, Richard Kearney ed. (London: sage Publications Ltd, 1996), pp. 159–172:161.

57 Henri Tajfel and J. Turner, “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup relations,” *The Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, S. Worchel, & W. G. Austin Eds. (Monterey, CA: Brooks-Cole, 1979), pp. 33–47. 35.

58 John C Turner and Richard Y. Bourhis, “Social identity, Interdependence and the Social Group: A Reply to Rabbies et al.,” *Social Groups and Identities: Developing the Legacy of Henri Tajfel* by Peter Robinson ed. (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1996), pp. 25–63. 57 f.

59 Henri Tajfel (ed), *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 2.

60 Henri Tajfel and Colin Fraser (ed), *Introducing Social Psychology: An Analysis of Individual and Response* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 443. See also Henri Tajfel (1982). *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 259.

61 Alhaji Hassan and Mallam Shuaibu Na’Ibi, *A Chronicle of Abuja* translated and arranged from the Hausa by Frank heath (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1952), p. 4–5.

62 Blake E Ashforth and Fred Mael, “Social Identity Theory and the Organization,” *The Academy of Management Review*, vol. 4, No. 1, (Jan., 1989), pp. 20–39:22 f.

63 Tajfel and Turner (1979), p. 34.

64 John C Turner, “Towards a Cognitive redefinition of Social Group,” *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, Henri Tajfel ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000 reprint), pp.15–40:21.

65 Ashforth and Mael, Op cit., p. 22

social categorization relevantly reflected in group dynamics. Secondly, it is an orientation to personal characteristics or attributes among the Gbagyi/Gbari that cannot naturally be expressed in terms of a social, cultural and religious contexts. Nonetheless, Gbagyi/Gbari identity in its present manifestation reveals and suggests an idea that transcends cultural explanations. But, notwithstanding, social categories are bound up with both the bases of an individual's self-respect and those of the group they belong. The dynamism and importance of Gbagyi/Gbari identity is derived from the implicit linkage of the ideas expressed above.

### **The Gbagyi/Gbari Language**

The Gbagyi/Gbari language as a factor of distinctiveness is a strong marker in the formation of their identity. It does not only unite them as a cohesive group but categorizes and recognize them as separate in terms of uniqueness and the knowledge of who they are. The group cohesion here is suggestive of the positive emotional attachment that Gbagyi/Gbari have with other members of their group with whom they are bonded through use of the Gbagyi/Gbari language. Charles Stangor clarify the idea of cohesive group membership to mean when all members "feel that they are part of the group, want to stay in the group, and find the group important to them."<sup>66</sup> The Gbagyi/Gbari valuation of themselves in the light of Stangor's opinion, illuminates cohesion in the significant role it plays in allowing various linguistic differences among them to cohere and to regard themselves as distinct. Nevertheless, studies have shown that groups that enjoy strong group norms and a desire to maintain their norms have the tendency to be more cohesive in sustaining that which they hold so dearly.<sup>67</sup>

A Nigerian writer Akinwumi Isola, agrees with that assertion in observing that language plays a role in the processes that provokes the recording and preservation of the knowledge about people. Through language knowledge is "nurtured, kept alive and healthy;" otherwise it may degenerate and die.<sup>68</sup> The view expressed by Isola resonates in Mark O. Attah's observation that the Gbagyi/Gbari language was only spoken at local level and not national.<sup>69</sup> Although Attah was reacting to the dominance of the Hausa language over other minority languages of Central Nigeria, it is unsatisfactory to have equated the presumed spoken larger languages like Hausa with the Gbagyi/Gbari Language. While he acknowledges that each language group has a link that "bind its speakers together as a group" and unequivocally connect them as "the 'carrier' of the past and the 'expresser' of the present and the future attitudes and aspirations of a people,"<sup>70</sup> he failed to emphasize and project the Gbagyi/Gbari language as central to Knunu. Possibly, his interest was not a critical engagement with the

Gbagyi/Gbari language as reflected in his work, yet the fact that it was spoken at all, helps to maintain the cohesiveness of the Gbagyi/Gbari as a linguistic group.

Additionally, the Gbagyi/Gbari as other African language groups have preserved their language in proverbs and wise sayings, a clear contrast to Attah's insinuation that it may become extinct. As a force for cohesion, the Gbagyi/Gbari rely on *ayinbesisi* ("proverbs") to maximise the impact of their spoken language. The frequent use of *ayinbesisi*, positively communicate and express not only Gbagyi/Gbari trust in each other, but the value of their language. The reason may be compared to R. Finnegan's suggestion that proverbs are incisive metaphorical statements of the folk, distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth they express in their formulations.<sup>71</sup> While Finnegan's assertion explains Gbagyi/Gbari possible use of *ayinbesisi*, insights from O. Owomoyela, a Nigerian scholar may be appropriate. Owomoyela has argued that proverbs among the Yoruba are formed from observing and reflecting on life, life forms, habits, environments and natural phenomenon.<sup>72</sup> Hence, competency and knowledge of the Gbagyi/Gbari language is required. P. Riley's argued that possessing the knowledge of a proverb and displaying it is often indicative of a speaker's identity<sup>73</sup> becomes relevant within the Gbagyi/Gbari language usage context.

A respondent affirmed that adequate and appropriate use of *ayinbesisi* requires some proficiency and familiarity with the Gbagyi/Gbari kingship system, values, attitudes, and oral tradition.<sup>74</sup> In Knunu, oral traditions are not only known within the concept of proverbs but historically as observed Ogundele in another context, assist in locating and identifying a group of people.<sup>75</sup> *Ayinbesisi* among the Gbagyi/Gbari expresses societal truth and wisdom and serve as oil with which *bada* ("words") are garnished for consumption. Owomoyela and W. Bascom listed several uses of proverbs, among which are to exact authority,<sup>76</sup> to appraise behaviours, to express social approval and to warn against deviants, and to counsel.<sup>77</sup> Consequently, Isola and Attah's views reinforce the argument that the persistence of the Gbagyi/Gbari language is an overreaching influence in the preservation and perseverance of Knunu.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is imperative at this point to draw the fact that origins, identity and language are important socio-cultural distinctions that give the Gbagyi/Gbari their relevance and locate them

66 Charles Stangor, *Social Groups in Action and Interaction* (New York and Hove: Psychology Press, 2004), pp. 24–25.

67Ibid, See also K. W. Back, "Influence through Social Communication," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, Vol. 46 (1951), pp. 9–23 and J. E. McGrath, *Groups: Interaction and Performance* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984).

68 Akinwumi Isola, *Making Culture Memorable: Essays on language, Culture and Development* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Hope publications Ltd, 2010), p. 119, who has examined the concept of culture from linguistic perspective.

69 Mark O. Attah, "The National Language Problem in Nigeria" *Canadian Journal of African Studies* Vol. 21, No. 3 (1987), pp. 393–401.394. See also Oluwoye S. Oyetade, "Language Planning in a Multi-Ethnic State: The majority/Minority Dichotomy in Nigeria" *Nordic Journal of African Studies* Vol. 12, No. 1 (2003), pp. 105–117.

70 *ibid.*, p. 398.

71R. Finnegan, "Proverbs in Africa," *The Wisdom of Many: Essays on the Proverbs*, A.W. Dundes and Mieder Madison eds. (Burlington, MA: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), pp. 10–42.14 & 20.

72 O. Owomoyela, *Yoruba Proverbs* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), p. 12.

73P. Riley, "Language, Culture and Identity: An Ethnolinguistic Perspective," *Advances in Sociolinguistics*, S. Johnson ed. (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 97.

74A Respondent interviewed at Kajuru – Kaduna on 17/12/2011, see also Bassey Ebenso, Gbenga Adeyemi, et al "Using Indigenous Proverbs to Understand Social knowledge and Attitudes to Leprosy among the Yoruba of southwest Nigeria," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* (2012), pp. 1–15.4.

75 Samuel Oluwole Ogundele, "Prospect and Challenges of Oral Traditions and Ethnography for Archaeological Reconstructions: A Case of Tivland, Nigeria," *Anistoriton Journal*, vol. 10 (2006), pp. 1–13.4.

76Owomoyela, *Op cit.*, p. 12.

77 W. Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1984), p. 98.

within the larger Nigerian family as a separate ethnic group with exceptional uniqueness in the Middle Belt (central Nigeria) region. Thus, their identity distinguishes them from other social groups raising their ethnic solidarity, treasured strongly in the attachment to birthplace and emphasis on communal wellbeing. From the above discussions, I have asserted that apart from being exclusively distinct, the Gbagyi/Gbarye engaged in the battle for recognition of both themselves and by an appeal to the larger Nigerian context. Thus, it is vital to acknowledge, that identity crisis will continue to be a problem to the perceived oppressed groups in Nigeria more so when there is an evident sensitivity that the minorities are being muscled out by the larger groups. I would understand Knunu therefore, to mean those peculiar and particular practices, behavioural pattern, customs and practices of the social group known as Gbagyi/Gbarye which has evolved and crystallized over time and has served to give them that identity that makes them conspicuously different from the Hausa/Fulani who had oppressed them for a very long time. Finally, I will advocate commissioned studies on the Gbagyi/Gbarye tribe so that intellectual discourses arising from this little attempt could be developed for further research.

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