

Experimenting with Budgetary Minimalism in the Film Production of *Beyond the Badge* (2024)

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Abstract

This paper introduces and theorizes budgetary minimalism as a filmmaking methodology distinct from classical cinematic minimalism. While traditional minimalism emphasizes aesthetic reduction—limited sets, sparse dialogue, and minimal narrative scope—budgetary minimalism emerges from the constraints of resource-scarce film industries such as Nollywood. It describes a strategic, relational approach to production that leverages collaboration, reciprocity, and adaptive resource management to create high-quality films with minimal financial outlay. Using *Beyond the Badge* (2024) as a case study, the research adopts a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework to document the film’s production from concept development through post-production. The filmmaker-researcher outlines how institutional partnerships, deferred labour agreements, and hybrid crew structuring enabled the realization of a large-scale film project that would otherwise have been financially unfeasible. High-end equipment was acquired through service exchange; post-production was completed through goodwill editing agreements; and logistical costs were minimized through site-specific design and digital workflows. The paper aligns its analysis with the Ubuntu Collaborative Model, situating budgetary minimalism within broader African values of communal ownership, goodwill, and collective problem-solving. The findings challenge dominant assumptions that quality filmmaking is necessarily capital-intensive and show how Nollywood’s production culture redefines professionalism through trust-based economies and creative agility. Ultimately, budgetary minimalism is presented not as an austerity-driven fall-back but as a visionary, replicable framework for sustainable filmmaking—particularly in developing contexts where formal funding infrastructures are limited.

Keywords: Budgetary Minimalism, Nollywood, Participatory Action Research, Collaborative Filmmaking, Low-budget Cinema.

Introduction

Minimalism as an aesthetic, ideological, and practical movement emerged prominently in the mid-20th century, first in visual arts and music before permeating literature, theatre, and cinema. The term “minimalism” broadly refers to the deliberate reduction of form, content, or material, with an emphasis on clarity, economy, and the essential. According to Makhdoumzadeh, “from the mid-1960s onwards, the term, ‘Minimalism,’ was mainly concerned with plastic arts, painting, American sculpture, and avant-garde symphonic music”

(41). Its application in cinema evolved through the works of auteurs like Robert Bresson, Yasujiro Ozu, and Chantal Akerman, who emphasized sparse visual composition, limited character development, natural soundscapes, and understated narratives (McGrath 21; Lim 142). In filmmaking, minimalism came to signify both an aesthetic and a production strategy. Films made under minimalist principles often rely on static shots, natural lighting, unembellished settings, and non-professional actors to create an affective sense of realism or abstraction. As seen in Andy Warhol's *Sleep* (1963) and *Empire* (1964), or Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* (1975), these films communicate through silence, stillness, and a meticulous stripping down of cinematic elements. These creative choices are often driven by ideological motivations, such as resistance to commercial cinema, or to heighten the sensory or philosophical experience of time, space, and character.

However, minimalism has also evolved beyond its original artistic context. In emerging cinema cultures such as Nollywood – Nigeria's globally influential film industry – the concept has taken on new and pragmatic dimensions. Nollywood, born in the early 1990s during a period of economic hardship, grew by necessity on limited budgets, improvisational techniques, and grassroots distribution networks. The industry's exponential growth, now ranking among the top three globally by volume of production, has been achieved without reliance on state funding or extensive infrastructure. As such, minimalism in Nollywood is less an aesthetic commitment and more an economic strategy rooted in survival, adaptability, and ingenuity. This paper introduces and theorizes a novel conceptual model termed "budgetary minimalism" – a filmmaking ideology that prioritizes strategic resource management over formal minimalism, allowing filmmakers to produce complex, high-quality films within significant budget constraints. Unlike classical minimalist cinema, which may intentionally reduce technical and narrative complexity, budgetary minimalism seeks to retain narrative ambition and technical sophistication, while cutting costs through collaboration, goodwill, barter, and resource-sharing. It reflects a filmmaking culture defined not by austerity for its own sake, but by a creative response to financial limitations.

Drawing on the Ubuntu Collaborative Model (Iwowo et al.), which emphasizes shared ownership, communal labour, and reciprocal exchange in Nollywood's production culture, this study situates budgetary minimalism as an emergent sub-theory of African filmmaking practice. It is through this lens that the paper explores the making of *Beyond the Badge* (2024), a Nigerian feature film that was produced using budgetary minimalist principles. The film, directed and produced by the researcher, aimed to challenge dominant public narratives around the Nigerian Customs Service while navigating the real-world constraints of independent production in Nigeria. Methodologically, this research is grounded in Participatory Action Research (PAR), wherein the researcher assumes an active role in the phenomenon being studied. As producer and director of the film, the researcher engaged first-hand in the planning, budgeting, and execution of the project. The study is thus both auto-ethnographic and practical, offering a detailed case analysis of how budgetary minimalism was applied in pre-production, principal photography, and post-production. By documenting the creative problem-solving mechanisms employed throughout the process, the paper argues that budgetary minimalism provides a powerful framework for sustainable, high-impact filmmaking in resource-constrained environments. In doing so, it contributes to emerging discourse on alternative film economies, African media innovation, and the redefinition of cinematic value beyond traditional Western paradigms.

Budgetary Minimalism in the Pre-Production Phase

This section introduces the pre-production phase of *Beyond the Badge*, detailing how budgetary minimalism was applied to script development, casting, location planning, and logistical coordination through strategic partnerships and collaborative resource management.

Concept Development and Theoretical Framing

The pre-production phase of a film is arguably the most critical in shaping the creative and logistical trajectory of the project. It is at this stage that the filmmaker defines the vision, assembles the core team, prepares the narrative, and evaluates available resources. For *Beyond*

the Badge (2024), this phase became a testing ground for the practical application of budgetary minimalism—a resource-conscious but creatively ambitious production model emerging from the economic realities of Nollywood. While classical film minimalism deliberately reduces narrative scope, visual complexity, and technical intervention to evoke a contemplative or existential aesthetic, budgetary minimalism, as proposed in this study, is an adaptive strategy that responds to infrastructural limitations without sacrificing cinematic ambition. The approach borrows selectively from traditional minimalism—such as the efficient use of space, location, and crew—but fundamentally departs from it by preserving narrative richness and thematic scope. In Nollywood, this model has grown out of necessity: filmmakers must continuously negotiate between expansive story ideas and constricted budgets.

The theoretical basis for budgetary minimalism can be situated within broader discussions of postcolonial media economies and pragmatic aesthetics. Nollywood operates within what Krings and Okome have described as a “shifting terrain of media entrepreneurship, informal distribution, and cultural urgency” (Krings & Okome, 2013). Here, filmmaking is often undertaken without access to formal funding, government grants, or stable studio systems. Despite these limitations, Nollywood has produced a significant number of successful, culturally resonant, and internationally recognized films—testament to the ingenuity and improvisation embedded in its production culture. This improvisational spirit is captured succinctly by Iwowo et al. in their theorization of the Ubuntu Collaborative Model (TUCM). The Ubuntu model, rooted in African communal values such as reciprocity, goodwill, and collective ownership, provides a culturally grounded framework for understanding how Nollywood filmmakers navigate financial constraints. According to Iwowo et al., “Nollywood, at its inaugural in 1992, (un)consciously mobilized Ubuntu communal traits including shared ownership, commonwealth, reciprocity, collective survival, and goodwill, to apprehend the prohibitive costs of filmmaking” (26). Budgetary minimalism can thus be seen as a cinematic expression of Ubuntu economics—one where the networked value of relationships replaces financial capital.

In the context of *Beyond the Badge*, this ideological framework was translated into a deliberate production methodology. The director-producer envisioned a feature film that would interrogate public perceptions of the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS), offering a more balanced, institutionally grounded narrative that highlighted both the organization’s contributions and its internal challenges. However, the conceptual ambition of the story—including multiple locations, a large ensemble cast, props such as helicopters and military-grade uniforms, and action-driven plot points—initially appeared incompatible with the available budget. It was precisely at this point of contradiction that the principle of budgetary minimalism was operationalized. Instead of scaling back the narrative to fit a minimalist format (e.g., one location, few characters, sparse dialogue), the filmmaker leaned into the Ubuntu model, initiating collaborative dialogues with stakeholders who could provide in-kind support. The Nigerian Customs Service, for instance, was approached not just as a subject of the film but as a strategic partner. The partnership enabled access to real-life officers, training facilities, costumes, and other institutional resources that would otherwise have been prohibitively expensive.

By integrating these real-world partnerships into the development process, the production began to align with what might be termed a hybrid aesthetic: formally expansive but logistically frugal. Script development, budgeting, casting, and location scouting were all executed under this dual lens—preserving the filmmaker’s creative vision while adapting flexibly to economic conditions. The Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework enabled the researcher to document and reflect upon these decisions from within, generating actionable insights into the practice of budgetary minimalism in a real-world production environment. In sum, this section establishes budgetary minimalism not as a restriction, but as a creative orientation—one that embraces collaboration, community, and strategic innovation to realise complex cinematic projects in contexts of limited funding. It reframes the conversation around minimalism in African cinema, not as an aesthetic derivative of Western avant-garde, but as a locally generated survivalist model that is redefining global understandings of low-budget filmmaking.

Script Development and Financial Strategy

Script development is a pivotal phase in filmmaking where the abstract story idea is translated into a structured narrative blueprint for production. In conventional film industries, this process often involves a team of professional screenwriters, researchers, and development consultants, accompanied by a substantial financial outlay. However, within the Nollywood context—and particularly under a budgetary minimalist framework—this process is approached through the lens of adaptive efficiency, creative flexibility, and collaborative exchange. In the case of *Beyond the Badge*, the original script concept was conceived by the director-producer himself, following preliminary research into public perceptions of the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS). The goal was to create a film that would shift the common narrative from one dominated by themes of corruption and confiscation to a more nuanced depiction of the Service's institutional contributions, internal tensions, and national impact. Early script treatments revealed that the story would require a significant range of locations, a large cast, intricate action sequences, and heavy production design. These factors suggested a prohibitively high development budget.

An initial proposal from a screenwriter and his five-person team estimated the cost of story development at ₦8,000,000. This included travel logistics for location-based research across multiple states in Nigeria, accommodation, per diems, and consulting fees. Such a budget would typically be reasonable for a commercial project of this scale, but within the constraints of independent Nigerian filmmaking, it proved unsustainable. Rather than reducing the scope of the narrative to fit the available funds—an approach aligned with classical minimalism—the production pivoted toward budgetary minimalism, which favours creative negotiation over aesthetic compromise. The director-producer activated the Ubuntu Collaborative Model (Iwowo et al.), approaching the NCS not only as a narrative subject but as a prospective research partner. The Service agreed to support the development phase by assigning four senior officers to serve as research collaborators. These officers provided institutional insights, access to archival materials, and first-hand experience on the structure, operations, and ethical dilemmas within the Customs Service.

This partnership enabled the production team to eliminate the need for two external researchers and significantly reduced travel and accommodation expenses. Additionally, the director, doubling as the story editor, absorbed some of the costs by assuming a creative supervisory role, narrowing the team down to the primary writer. These measures resulted in the total script development cost dropping to ₦3,000,000—less than half of the initial estimate. Crucially, this reduction did not result in a compromise of narrative depth or ambition. The final script included over 200 characters and scenes set in dynamic locations such as seaports, airports, warehouses, hospitals, and forest hideouts. The narrative complexity and spatial diversity directly contradict traditional minimalist storytelling techniques, which often advocate for simplified plots, few characters, and single-location settings (McGrath 2014). This deviation is what distinguishes budgetary minimalism as an economic model rather than an aesthetic commitment.

The use of collaborative partnerships in this phase reflects a non-monetary value system deeply embedded in Nollywood's informal production culture. Budgetary decisions are informed not only by cash flow but by the strategic mobilization of relationships, reputation, and trust. This mirrors what anthropologist Keith Hart refers to as the “informal economy of exchange,” where social capital and moral economies substitute for formal transactions (Hart 1973). In Nollywood, where formal grants and subsidies are scarce, such social economies have become the cornerstone of film production. Moreover, this phase demonstrated the benefit of cross-sector collaboration. By engaging the Nigerian Customs Service directly in the story development, the film ensured authenticity in its portrayal of institutional procedures, uniforms, and hierarchies. This kind of embedded research not only enhanced narrative credibility but also strengthened the film's appeal to a public audience accustomed to dramatized misrepresentations of state institutions. From a PAR perspective, it also provided the researcher with a unique opportunity to observe how institutional narratives can be ethically and accurately fictionalized through cooperative storytelling. In conclusion, the script development of *Beyond the Badge* exemplifies how budgetary minimalism operates not

through constraint, but through strategic reallocation of value—exchanging financial capital for social, institutional, and creative capital. It affirms that high-concept storytelling can coexist with low-budget realities, provided the filmmaker is willing to embrace collaboration, transparency, and innovation in the development process.

Casting, Locations, and Logistics

Once a screenplay is finalized, a critical part of pre-production involves translating the narrative into tangible production plans—casting actors, securing locations, assembling production crews, and organizing the logistical framework necessary for the shoot. In traditional filmmaking economies, this phase often involves extensive financial commitments. However, within the budgetary minimalist framework, as practiced in *Beyond the Badge*, cost-intensive tasks are approached through strategic partnerships, value engineering, and collaborative reciprocity.

The *Beyond the Badge* script featured over 200 characters, a number that would typically demand high casting and personnel management costs. Rather than engaging a conventional talent agency or conducting in-person auditions—which would require venue rental, travel reimbursements, and accommodation—the production opted for an entirely virtual casting process. Digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom, and Google Forms were utilized to circulate audition calls, collect audition tapes, and conduct preliminary screenings. This approach not only reduced direct costs but also democratized access, enabling actors from various parts of the country to participate without the financial burden of travel. It also exemplifies how digital infrastructure can be mobilized as part of minimalist logistics planning to reduce time, labour, and monetary expenditure. The final selection process maintained professional standards, with call-backs and chemistry reads conducted in hybrid format. The model also promoted transparency and inclusion, key ethical components of Participatory Action Research (PAR), where openness and accessibility are central to process design.

One of the most financially daunting components of film production is the acquisition of shooting locations. The *Beyond the Badge* script required over 30 unique locations, including seaports, airports, customs offices, hospitals, and forest hideouts. Based on prevailing industry rates, renting and dressing these locations was projected to cost over ₦27,000,000. To address this, the production team again activated the principles of budgetary minimalism, grounded in the Ubuntu ethos of mutual benefit and shared resources. The Nigerian Customs Service, which had previously partnered in the research phase, extended further support by offering access to over 90% of the required locations. These included functional spaces such as airport tarmacs, customs checkpoints, warehouses, and administrative buildings—complete with real staff to serve as extras or technical guides. This level of institutional collaboration, while uncommon in many formalized industries, is increasingly characteristic of Nollywood's production ecosystem. The ability to negotiate access to such high-stakes locations without payment reflects not only the producer's negotiation skills and reputation, but also the strength of the project's civic and thematic relevance. It further illustrates the concept of "goodwill capital", which budgetary minimalism recognizes as a substitute for monetary capital. The total cost of location access was ultimately reduced to ₦640,000—less than 3% of the original estimate. This result confirms that institutional reciprocity can act as a structural solution to budget constraints, especially when thematic alignment between the film's purpose and the institution's public relations goals is present.

Film logistics—coordinating movement of crew and equipment, setting up catering, handling accommodation, and ensuring on-site safety—can significantly inflate production budgets. In *Beyond the Badge*, logistical operations were designed according to the principles of "lean production" (Womack and Jones, 1996), which advocate for the elimination of waste and the maximization of value at every step. For instance, instead of hiring private transport services for a three-day location recce involving key crew members (set designer, cinematographer, lighting director, props master, etc.), the team secured two buses from the Nigerian Customs Service. The only cost incurred was for fuel—₦125,000—compared to the original estimate of ₦850,000 for rentals. This substitution of institutional support for third-party contracts reflects

how minimalist logistics are built on relationship management and foresight, rather than on austerity alone. Similarly, location recce data was digitized and shared via cloud-based services to reduce the need for repeated site visits. Each department logged their visual and spatial requirements into a centralized digital production book, allowing design decisions to be made remotely. This strategy not only cut costs but also shortened the planning cycle and improved inter-departmental coordination.

The casting, location acquisition, and logistical planning processes in *Beyond the Badge* collectively demonstrate that budgetary minimalism does not equate to cost-cutting for its own sake. Rather, it represents a systemic philosophy of filmmaking, where resource management is optimized through partnerships, digital innovation, and communal exchange. It reflects the idea that the constraints of the local film economy—when met with creativity and collaboration—can give rise to efficient yet ambitious production ecosystems. By approaching institutions as collaborators rather than service providers, and by substituting financial transactions with shared purpose and negotiated reciprocity, the film was able to preserve narrative scope and production quality. This model not only reduces barriers to entry for independent filmmakers but also presents a compelling blueprint for sustainable filmmaking in under-resourced environments.

Set Design and Recce

Set design plays a central role in defining the visual tone and immersive credibility of a film. In traditional filmmaking contexts, elaborate sets are often constructed to simulate real environments or to artistically heighten the atmosphere of the narrative world. However, in resource-constrained industries like Nollywood—where access to large-scale studios and set construction budgets is limited—adaptive design strategies are critical. One such strategy, used in *Beyond the Badge*, is site-specific production design, which aligns closely with the core tenets of budgetary minimalism.

Rather than constructing bespoke sets, the production embraced a site-specific philosophy—a concept originally developed in performance art, which involves creating or adapting artistic work to a particular environment (Kaye, 2013). In cinema, this approach entails identifying real-world spaces that can stand in for scripted locations with minimal alteration. These spaces are chosen not only for their aesthetic suitability but also for their thematic resonance, physical accessibility, and logistical viability. For *Beyond the Badge*, this meant tailoring the narrative and visual aesthetics to fit real-life spaces already available through partnerships. The Nigerian Customs Service, which had already granted access to several of its operational sites, became a central enabler of this approach. Locations such as airport terminals, training facilities, warehouses, checkpoints, and administrative offices were integrated into the production design, not only saving the cost of constructing sets but also enhancing the film's realism and credibility. This use of organic environments allowed the film to harness the textures, imperfections, and dynamism of real institutional spaces—qualities that are often hard to replicate artificially. From a minimalist perspective, this represents a return to the fundamentals of spatial storytelling: using space not as spectacle, but as narrative infrastructure. Moreover, by aligning character movement, dialogue, and cinematography with the natural constraints of these spaces, the film maintained narrative fluidity without incurring the costs typically associated with professional set building. This technique reflects a broader Nollywood tradition of "shooting within lived environments", where creative control is balanced with logistical flexibility.

Location recce (reconnaissance) is a critical pre-production process in which filmmakers assess potential shooting sites for suitability in terms of lighting, access, power supply, acoustics, and overall production logistics. In high-budget productions, recces can involve multiple trips, dedicated scouts, and detailed technical assessments using advanced equipment. In contrast, the recce for *Beyond the Badge* was conducted using a streamlined, interdisciplinary team and was guided by the principles of minimalist coordination. The recce team included key department heads: the director, cinematographer, production designer, props master, lighting director, sound designer, and location manager. The objective was to make comprehensive visual and logistical assessments within a three-day window using minimal resources. Instead

of hiring external vehicles or equipment, the production team leveraged transportation provided by the Nigerian Customs Service, bringing down the total cost to ₦125,000, compared to the initial estimate of ₦850,000. Crucially, the team used smartphones and compact digital devices to capture detailed photos, environmental audio samples, and lighting tests. This information was then organised into a cloud-based production bible, accessible to all departments. This digitized recce protocol not only minimized the need for repeat visits but also supported real-time updates and remote decision-making—practices that are increasingly common in low-budget but tech-savvy film cultures. The emphasis on cross-functional collaboration during the recce also fostered stronger alignment between departments. For instance, the set designer could immediately adapt staging plans based on camera angles preferred by the cinematographer, or the lighting team could pre-plan power needs based on the space's electrical layout. This proactive integration helped reduce the likelihood of on-set delays or improvisation—common budget-draining problems in independent film production.

Perhaps the most profound effect of minimalist set and location strategy was the influence it had on the script's spatial logic. Instead of forcing locations to conform to the narrative, the narrative was subtly adapted to the spaces available—a reciprocal relationship between environment and story. This flexible, responsive approach exemplifies what McGrath (2014) calls "spatial narrative efficiency," where story progression is intimately tied to the functional capacities of real-world settings. This approach not only conserved resources but also made the production more agile in responding to logistical disruptions. When a planned shoot at a port facility was delayed due to clearance issues, the production was able to pivot to another approved customs location without sacrificing story integrity, thanks to the modular, environment-responsive design of the script and shot list.

The set design and recce process in *Beyond the Badge* illustrate how space itself becomes a collaborator in budgetary minimalist filmmaking. Through site-specific design, digitized scouting, and cross-departmental planning, the film achieved high production value without constructing a single artificial set. Rather than treating limited budgets as a creative hindrance, the production used its constraints as a stimulus for innovation, flexibility, and realism. By reframing institutional access and public infrastructure as artistic resources rather than external rentals, budgetary minimalism redefines how value is understood in film production. In this way, Nollywood continues to offer globally significant lessons in resourceful, community-oriented cinema—proving that ambitious stories can be told with limited means, provided the filmmaker is willing to adapt, negotiate, and collaborate with their environment.

Principal Photography and Post-Production

This section explores the implementation of budgetary minimalism during principal photography and post-production, highlighting how equipment, labour, and technical services were secured through reciprocal exchanges, goodwill, and informal networks.

Equipment and Production Partnerships

Principal photography, the core phase of any film production, is typically the most resource-intensive. This is the stage where all previously abstract elements—narrative, visual style, performance, sound, and design—converge into actual footage. In most professional filmmaking contexts, this requires a substantial deployment of capital for equipment rental, technical labour, transportation, insurance, and contingency management. However, in *Beyond the Badge*, the implementation of budgetary minimalism during this phase represented a powerful demonstration of how strategic partnerships and reciprocal exchanges can serve as functional alternatives to direct funding.

The nature and scale of *Beyond the Badge* demanded an extensive array of filmmaking tools, including high-end cinema cameras, lenses, professional lighting kits, grip and rigging gear, sound recording systems, and on-site generators to power all of this across remote and institutional locations. The estimated rental cost for these items over the planned 18-day shoot

was approximately ₦56,000,000. For most Nollywood productions, especially independently financed ones, this figure is significantly beyond reach. Nollywood's film economy continues to suffer from structural underfinancing, where access to grants, insurance, or state-supported infrastructure is nearly non-existent. According to Ojieson (2017), one of the core challenges facing indigenous Nigerian filmmakers is the lack of sustainable financing mechanisms. He emphasizes the need for “synergy between independent producers and corporate production outfits” as a key solution to the persistent breakdown of production capacity (1). This insight is not theoretical for Nollywood practitioners—it is the operational reality.

In response to the funding shortfall, the producer-director of *Beyond the Badge* leveraged long-standing industry relationships to secure a production partnership with Native Media TV, a well-established production house in Nigeria. Rather than seeking a conventional co-production deal or equipment loan that might require future revenue-sharing or equity, the partnership was structured on the basis of reciprocal service exchange. Under the agreement, Native Media TV provided approximately 90% of the required equipment for principal photography at no cost. In exchange, the producer agreed to serve as a story consultant on a forthcoming 79-episode television series scheduled to begin pre-production shortly after *Beyond the Badge* wrapped. This barter model not only preserved the producer's ownership and creative autonomy over the film but also ensured access to industrial-grade equipment without immediate financial expenditure. This form of exchange embodies what Iwowo et al. (2023) term the Ubuntu Collaborative Model (TUCM)—a system grounded in African communal ethics such as mutual respect, collective survival, and shared benefit. Within TUCM, value is not exclusively measured by financial input but by the functional equivalence of contributions, such as labour, expertise, or institutional access. This is a defining feature of budgetary minimalism, where traditional monetary transactions are reimaged through networks of trust and collaborative leverage.

Despite the unconventional means of equipment acquisition, the technical and artistic standards during principal photography were not compromised. The film employed cinema-grade RED and Sony cameras, portable HMI and LED lighting rigs, sliders, jibs, audio mixers, boom kits, and backup power sources—all operated by trained professionals. The shooting schedule was adhered to strictly due to meticulous pre-planning and the professional capacity of the gear and crew involved. The success of this arrangement further highlights the importance of reputation and social capital in Nollywood's production ecology. The producer's history of industry collaboration, reliability, and delivery enabled trust-based agreements that would be nearly impossible to negotiate in purely commercial environments. Here, social capital becomes a form of economic currency—fluid, convertible, and context-sensitive. Moreover, the technical crew's familiarity with the equipment, coupled with a flexible production structure, allowed the team to shoot in multiple locations within compressed timeframes. This agility is not accidental but designed: it is a hallmark of production efficiency under budgetary minimalism, where every tool and human asset is optimized for both creative and operational gain.

Rather than viewing the absence of direct funding as a liability, the team reframed it as a condition for innovation. This reflects what Amartya Sen refers to as a “capability approach” to development—one that emphasizes the conversion of available resources into functional achievements (Sen, 1999). In *Beyond the Badge*, the team's capabilities—trust networks, institutional access, and professional versatility—became the enabling tools of production, more so than cash flow. This reframing is particularly relevant in the African context, where informal economies and relational exchanges often outperform formal financial systems in creative sectors. Budgetary minimalism thus emerges not as an aesthetic fall-back but as a developmental strategy, where the film set becomes a site of collaborative innovation rather than hierarchical transaction.

The principal photography of *Beyond the Badge* exemplifies how budgetary minimalism can achieve industry-grade production outcomes without traditional financial inputs. By trading future consultancy for present technical capacity, the production secured high-end equipment while maintaining creative and legal independence. This reciprocity-based model foregrounds a shift in how production capital is defined and deployed in contemporary African cinema.

Rather than being limited by cash budgets, Nollywood filmmakers working under budgetary minimalist frameworks expand the definition of what constitutes viable capital—encompassing expertise, goodwill, partnerships, and reputation. These intangible assets, when effectively mobilized, can generate tangible outcomes that rival more resource-rich productions.

Accommodation, Feeding, and Crew Structuring

The logistics of accommodation, catering, and human resource management during principal photography can account for a substantial portion of a film's production budget. These costs are typically viewed as fixed and non-negotiable, especially for shoots requiring long periods on location with large teams. However, within the budgetary minimalist framework, these logistical domains are treated as creative opportunities for cost optimization, value reengineering, and collaborative problem-solving. In *Beyond the Badge*, the scope and duration of the principal photography demanded intensive planning in these areas. The production had a total of 40 key crew members who needed on-site accommodation and meals over 20 continuous shooting days. Initial cost estimates placed accommodation at ₦20,000,000 and catering at ₦16,535,000—figures that, while standard in many film industries, were clearly beyond the reach of this independently financed Nollywood project.

Housing a crew of 40 in a mid-range hotel for nearly three weeks typically entails significant financial strain. However, the producer utilized a strategy emblematic of budgetary minimalism: transforming social relationships into production assets. A personal contact—an entrepreneur who owned a hotel and supported local creative industries—offered the property to the production team at a massively reduced rate of ₦5,000,000, just 25% of the projected cost. This exchange was not simply a favor but an expression of communal investment in cultural production, which resonates with the Ubuntu philosophy underpinning Nollywood's collaborative ecosystem. The hotel benefited from indirect publicity and professional networking, while the production gained an affordable, secure, and centralized base of operations. In this way, accommodation became more than a logistical necessity; it became a site of community engagement, reinforcing the notion that African film production often extends beyond the screen into the domain of everyday partnerships and localized resource sharing.

Catering is often outsourced to vendors who charge per-head, per-day rates. For a 40-member crew over 20 days, the quote from the selected vendor was ₦16,535,000, including three meals daily, beverages, and late-night snacks. Rather than accept this offer, the producer implemented an in-house catering system, hiring three professional chefs directly and purchasing all food supplies through production assistants using open-air markets, wholesalers, and local distributors. A kitchen was set up at the accommodation facility using portable gas stoves and communal dining spaces. Utensils were rented at minimal cost, and a rotating schedule was developed to ensure efficiency and hygiene. This localized food system not only reduced the final cost to ₦10,011,000—a savings of over ₦6 million—but also improved meal consistency, eliminated vendor delays, and created a more cohesive production environment. This decision illustrates a critical tenet of budgetary minimalism: breaking the outsourcing loop where possible. By taking ownership of the production process—whether in catering, costume, or transport—filmmakers reclaim control over quality, timing, and expenditure.

The original crew design featured 75 individuals, based on the scope of the film's technical needs. However, the producer adopted a hybrid staffing model that combined professional heads of departments with a large number of interns and early-career assistants. This decision had both economic and pedagogical motivations. Interns, recruited through virtual calls and selected via remote interviews, accounted for 60% of the final crew. They received modest stipends and mentoring from experienced professionals, who in turn were contracted at reduced rates. This arrangement brought the total personnel cost down from ₦21,000,000 to ₦8,400,000. This model aligns with the "learning-by-doing" pedagogy central to Nollywood's informal apprenticeship culture. According to Haynes (2011), Nollywood's training system is rooted in practice, with "knowledge passed down through hands-on experience rather than formal institutions" (p. 32). By integrating interns into every department—lighting, continuity, art direction, and camera—the production also fulfilled a broader social function: skills

transfer and workforce development in a country where youth unemployment remains high. Moreover, this human resource strategy supports the core logic of budgetary minimalism: that films can be made affordably when efficiency, education, and equity are embedded into the crew structure.

The successful management of accommodation, catering, and personnel in *Beyond the Badge* reveals that logistical domains are not merely sites of expense—they are sites of innovation, negotiation, and value creation. By leveraging social goodwill, decentralizing service provision, and reimagining labour structures, the production saved over ₦20 million while maintaining a professional standard across departments. These decisions reflect the adaptability and resourcefulness that define Nollywood's informal film economy, where relationships often outweigh contracts, and reputation stands in for collateral. More importantly, they show that logistics, often considered the backstage of filmmaking, can become a central arena for applying budgetary minimalist principles.

Post-Production Collaboration and Deferred Exchange

Post-production is the phase in which raw footage is transformed into a coherent, polished cinematic experience. It encompasses editing, sound design, scoring, colour correction, visual effects (VFX), subtitling, and mastering—all of which require specialized equipment, skilled personnel, and substantial financial input. In most industrial film settings, this stage often commands between 15–30% of the total production budget. For *Beyond the Badge*, however, post-production costs were reimagined through the framework of budgetary minimalism, with the use of reciprocal labour agreements, institutional collaboration, and deferred compensation strategies.

Based on the scope of the film—including multiple action sequences, complex soundscapes, uniformed cast interactions, and institutional interiors—the projected cost for a full post-production package was ₦12,000,000. This quote, sourced from a Lagos-based editing studio, included the standard services of rough cut, fine cut, sound design, ADR (automated dialogue replacement), music scoring, colour grading, and final delivery in cinema- and VoD-ready formats. However, this figure far exceeded the production's available resources at the conclusion of principal photography. Rather than truncate post-production services—thereby compromising quality—or postpone release indefinitely, the producer-director activated existing industry relationships to broker a deferred exchange agreement with Native Media TV, which had also supported the production with equipment during principal photography. Under this agreement, the post-production team affiliated with Native Media completed the project for a 95% discount, on the condition that the director would offer his services on an upcoming film project as a contracted director for hire. This deferred labour trade, while informal in structure, was governed by mutual trust, prior collaborations, and the expectation of reciprocity over time, a recurring theme in Nollywood's informal creative economy. This arrangement embodies a defining characteristic of budgetary minimalism: converting human capital into transactional value without direct financial expenditure. As with prior elements of the production process, value in this phase was not annihilated by a lack of money—it was reconstituted through relationships, trust, and future commitments.

The post-production team entered the project with full creative control over their assigned roles. Rather than functioning as mere service providers, the editors, colourists, and sound engineers were treated as collaborators with intellectual ownership stakes in the film's success. This shift from hierarchical outsourcing to horizontal collaboration reflects a deeper ideological position within budgetary minimalism: that value is co-produced, and when all contributors have a sense of ownership, the quality of work improves—even in low-cash-flow environments. From a Participatory Action Research (PAR) perspective, this model of shared labour reinforces ethical production principles by ensuring that all parties are engaged as stakeholders, not just vendors. It also allowed the director to be involved throughout the post-production process, facilitating a more unified creative outcome.

Technical infrastructure was another potential barrier during post-production. Access to high-end editing suites, audio mixing rooms, and grading monitors would typically necessitate costly studio time. However, the team adopted a “distributed post-production workflow”, using remote cloud-sharing tools and staggered in-studio sessions to reduce both overhead and turnaround time. The editor worked from his home-based suite for offline editing, while sound mixing and grading were scheduled in blocks during studio off-peak hours, taking advantage of discounted rates. This adaptive infrastructure aligns with flexible production models theorized by Tunde Kelani and other veteran Nollywood practitioners, who argue that “the industry must innovate within its limitations rather than waiting for institutional change” (Kelani, 2020). It also reflects a decentralized, modular approach to post-production, increasingly common in emerging media industries where internet access and personal equipment replace traditional studio dependence. Furthermore, the trust-based nature of the agreement meant that no formal contract was signed—yet all parties followed through on their commitments. This is a hallmark of Nollywood's “reputation economy”, in which accountability is socially enforced and future opportunities are contingent on present performance. Here, professionalism is not maintained by legal threat but by the expectation of ongoing, mutual benefit within a tightly knit creative network.

Despite the non-monetized nature of the post-production deal, the final output of *Beyond the Badge* was technically sophisticated, featuring seamless editing, professionally mixed audio, and dynamic colour grading. This outcome reinforces the core thesis of budgetary minimalism: financial scarcity need not result in creative austerity, provided filmmakers are willing to think relationally, not transactionally. The film’s post-production quality enabled it to pass the vetting standards of cinema chains and video-on-demand (VoD) platforms, which typically require DCP-compliant formatting and Dolby sound. As of late 2025, the film had already premiered in four major Nigerian cities and was preparing for digital distribution on regional and international platforms—a trajectory made possible by invisible labour, shared vision, and informal trust contracts.

The post-production of *Beyond the Badge* is a compelling case study in how budgetary minimalism extends beyond shooting days and into the final technical phases of filmmaking. Through reciprocal labour, goodwill editing, and flexible infrastructure use, the production achieved results that rival higher-budget films without conventional financing. This model exemplifies what Deuze and Witschge (2020) refer to as “liquid professionalism” – where roles, relationships, and production standards are fluid, negotiated, and sustained through trust rather than rigid institutional frameworks. In Nollywood, this liquidity is not a weakness; it is a strength—allowing creatives to adapt, barter, and survive in a volatile media economy. In conclusion, deferred exchange in post-production demonstrates that creative ecosystems can be both sustainable and professional, even when they are informal. In the context of Nollywood and similar industries, budgetary minimalism is not a constraint—it is an adaptive infrastructure, one that transforms limitation into innovation, and scarcity into success.

Conclusion

This study has explored the concept of budgetary minimalism as a distinct and contextually grounded filmmaking model within the Nigerian film industry, popularly known as Nollywood. Through an in-depth documentation and reflection on the production of *Beyond the Badge* (2024), the research demonstrated how Nollywood filmmakers continue to innovate around scarcity, challenging dominant assumptions that equate low budgets with low quality or diminished creative ambition. Unlike classical cinematic minimalism—which reduces narrative, aesthetic, or technical complexity for conceptual purposes—budgetary minimalism, as theorized in this paper, reimagines production not as an act of reduction, but of optimization. It is a strategic, relationship-based, and problem-solving-oriented practice that leverages social capital, institutional partnerships, reciprocal labour, and digital infrastructure to achieve professional results without conventional funding.

The film *Beyond the Badge* exemplifies this model across every stage of its production lifecycle:

During pre-production, the integration of institutional stakeholders (notably the Nigerian Customs Service) helped reduce research, location, and costume costs while maintaining authenticity and narrative richness.

During principal photography, industry-grade equipment was secured through reciprocal exchange, accommodations were subsidized via goodwill partnerships, and a lean crew model enabled a blend of professional expertise and mentorship for early-career filmmakers.

In post-production, collaborative labour agreements and a decentralized editing workflow ensured that technical quality was achieved on a near-zero financial budget.

These practices, while economically efficient, are not merely reactive measures to financial limitations. Rather, they reflect a philosophy of collective creativity, grounded in the Ubuntu Collaborative Model (Iwowo et al.), where filmmaking becomes a communal act of shared risk, responsibility, and reward. Importantly, the study situates these strategies within the broader framework of Participatory Action Research (PAR), where the researcher is both an active participant and a reflective observer. This dual role allowed for a nuanced understanding of how decisions were made, negotiated, and adapted in real-time, offering a rare insider perspective on the mechanics of sustainable filmmaking in a developing economy.

From a theoretical standpoint, budgetary minimalism adds a new dimension to contemporary film studies by offering an indigenous African production logic that resists both dependency on external financing and the hegemony of Western production paradigms. It validates the idea that value in film production is not singularly defined by money, but also by creativity, collaboration, credibility, and context. Practically, the success of *Beyond the Badge*—measured not only in cost efficiency but also in audience reception, multi-city premieres, and VoD acquisition interest—affirms that African filmmakers are redefining what it means to be resourceful, professional, and globally competitive. This model can serve as a replicable template for other filmmakers across the Global South and diaspora contexts where structural funding limitations persist. In conclusion, this research advocates for a broader recognition of budgetary minimalism as both an economic and ideological framework. It is an approach that does not demand that filmmakers “do less with less,” but that they rethink how value is produced, shared, and sustained. By foregrounding trust, community, and creative reciprocity, Nollywood continues to chart a future in which limitations are not obstacles—but pathways to innovation.

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