



EXPLORING CULTURAL IDENTITY AND TRADITIONS THROUGH COSTUME AND MAKEUP: UNPACKING THE NZEM BEROM FESTIVAL

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Abstract

This research work investigates the significance of traditional costumes in the Nzem Berom festival as a representation of Berom cultural identity. The research explores how these costumes embody symbolic meanings, differentiate the Berom people from other ethnic groups in Nigeria, and preserve Berom heritage and traditions. The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentary analysis. Data collection took place in Jos South metropolis, Plateau State, Nigeria, among Berom community members, elders, and festival participants. Findings reveal that traditional costumes worn during the Nzem Berom festival are imbued with symbolic meanings reflecting Berom history, mythology, and cultural values. These costumes distinguish the Berom people from other ethnic groups, highlighting their unique cultural practices and traditions. Moreover, costumes play a pivotal role in preserving Berom heritage and traditions. However, concerns surrounding commodification, commercialization, gender dynamics, sustainability, and inclusivity threaten the cultural significance of costumes. Addressing these challenges is crucial to preserving Berom cultural heritage. This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge on cultural identity, traditional costumes, and festival studies. Its findings provide valuable insights for cultural practitioners, policymakers, and researchers seeking to understand complex relationships between culture, identity, and tradition.

Key words: Culture, Identity, Traditions, Costume & makeup, Nzem Berom

Introduction

Culture is the sum of attitudes, costumes and beliefs that distinguishes one group of people from another, transmitted through language, materials, objects, rituals, institutions and arts, transferable from one generation to the next. Edward Taylor explained, culture as that complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, costume, music and dance and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society. (Holt Michael, 2002 P. 98).

According to, Ngugi, (2005 P. 107). Culture in its broadest sense, is a way of life fashioned by a people in their collective endeavor to live and come to terms with their total environment. It is the sum of their arts, their science and all the social institutions, including their system of beliefs and rituals. Such values are often expressed through the people's songs and rites. These varieties of artistic activities have come to symbolize the meaning of the word, culture.

According to Brockett, (2004 P. 42) the concept of culture has a long evolution, so dynamic in nature. Anthropologists have an assumption that culture is generally adaptive as it provides people with an adjustment to their physical and social environment, the basic or derived needs of individuals within the society, such as the need of nutrition, reproduction, comfort, safety, relaxation, clothing, shelter and growth. This simply means that culture is a learned behavior shared by a member of a society, which could be said to start when a child is born. It is culture that distinguishes human beings from other animals. Richardson Boyd looked at; culture as information capable of affecting individual's behavior that they acquire from other members of their space through teaching, imitation and other forms of social transmission. (Oghali, 2015 P. 74).

Costume and makeup play a vital role in representing a people's culture. The type of attire and adornment a group wears serves as an immediate visual identifier, distinguishing them from others. Beyond physical appearance, these elements hold deep cultural significance, serving as distinctive symbols of identity. As Julie Umuokoro (2002, p. 121) notes, and later cited by Tracie Ezeajugh (2007, p. 104), 'Nigerian traditional dress embodies cultural symbolism, consciously or unconsciously incorporating unique emblems that reflect its owner's heritage. Such emblems may be derived from common features in the environment. It may also be the persistent contact of an ethnic group with some other culture, borrowing some features, appropriated and seemingly endorsed by widespread acceptance and use as one of its ethnic symbols.

Brockett Oscar, (2004 P. 42) explains that costume and make up as symbolic carrier of information. It gives expressive and explanatory information about the wearers, it is an aid to characterization, enhances performance and speaks volume, even before the characters begin to express themselves. In any event or production, the costume and make up worn say so much about the people and the production they are involved in, it comprises the total visual appearance of the

character in any performance. It is a very important part of a character and stands as the strongest element in the visual sense of a production.

According to Gillette, (2001 P. 203), stage make up enhances the illusion that the actor has become the character. In almost every production. Some of the actors... do not facially resemble the challenge by providing actors with the means to change their appearance. This simply means that make up is very essential in performances, as it changes an actor into that desirable character in the world of the performance, (Merril, 2004 P. 86).

A costume is a set of clothes, accessories, and props worn to create a specific appearance or character. This is often for theatrical performances (plays, musicals, dance), film and television productions, historical reenactments, cultural or traditional events (festivals, ceremonies), cosplay (fan conventions, comic-cons), halloween or other themed parties, fashion shows or photo shoots. Costumes can represent a character's personality, social status, or occupation. It can indicate time period, location, or cultural context, convey emotions or mood, create illusion or fantasy and, pay homage to historical or cultural icons. Therefore costumes typically include clothing (dress, suit, uniform), accessories (hats, jewelry, props), makeup and hairstyles, footwear (shoes, boots) and, special effects (wigs, prosthetics). In the context of this research on "Costume and Makeup as a Means of Cultural Identity using Nzem Berom Festival as a Paradigm," costumes play a crucial role in

- i. Representing Berom cultural heritage.
- ii. Symbolizing tribal identity.
- iii. Conveying traditional values and costumes
- iv. Preserving historical and cultural significance

Costumes serve as a means of cultural identity. It is a multifaceted and deeply nuanced aspect of human expression. Across the globe, costumes serve as tangible manifestations of cultural heritage and individual identity. From traditional attires worn during ceremonies and rituals, to contemporary fashion statements, costumes play a pivotal role in defining and preserving cultural identities. In this discourse, we will delve into the significance of costumes in various cultural contexts, examining how it reflects historical legacies, social structures, and personal affiliations. Through a comprehensive exploration, we aim to unravel the intricate relationship between costume and cultural identity, elucidating its relevance in shaping perceptions, fostering inclusivity, and celebrating diversity. (Hall, 2014 P. 14).

To understand the profound significance of costume in shaping cultural identity, it is essential to examine its historical roots. Throughout history, clothing has been more than just a utilitarian necessity; it has been a symbol of status, belonging, and cultural allegiance. Ancient civilizations such as the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans adorned themselves in garments that not only protected

their bodies but also conveyed their social standing and religious beliefs. For example, the elaborate robes worn by pharaohs in ancient Egypt symbolized their divine authority and connection to the gods, while the toga worn by Roman citizens signified their citizenship and participation in civic life (Hodge, 2013, P. 23).

As societies evolved, so did the symbolism embedded in their attire. In medieval Europe, clothing became a marker of feudal hierarchy, with sumptuary laws dictating who could wear what based on their social class. Kings and nobles displayed their wealth and power through opulent fabrics and embellishments, while peasants wore simple garments indicative of their lowly status. Similarly, in feudal Japan, the kimono served as a visual representation of one's social status, with variations in color, fabric, and design reflecting age, marital status, and occasion (Richard. 2017.P. 27).

The colonial era marked a significant shift in the cultural landscape, as indigenous attire collided with Western influence, resulting in hybridized forms of dress. Colonial powers imposed their sartorial norms upon colonized peoples, often suppressing indigenous clothing traditions in favor of Western styles perceived as more civilized. This cultural imposition led to the erosion of traditional costume practices in many regions, as indigenous populations were coerced into adopting the attire of their colonizers (Brockett, 2014. P. 114).

Indigenous attires serve as a testament to the enduring power of costume as a vehicle for cultural resilience and resistance. In countries such as India, Mexico, and Nigeria, traditional garments like the sari, huipil, and wrapper are worn proudly, symbolizing cultural pride and resistance against cultural homogenization (Oghalu, 2015. P. 65).

In the contemporary era, globalization has ushered in a new era of cultural exchange, where boundaries between nations blur and identities become increasingly fluid. As people migrate and interact across borders, costume serves as a visual marker of their cultural diversity, allowing individuals to express their heritage and affiliations in multicultural contexts. Diasporic communities, in particular, use clothing as a means of preserving their cultural identity in foreign lands, creating vibrant enclaves where traditional attire coexists with contemporary fashion trends (Hall, 2014. P. 14).

In addition to its socio-political implications, costume also plays a significant role in the realm of performance and entertainment, where the attire becomes a vehicle for storytelling and character portrayal. Whether it is the elaborate costumes of kabuki theater in Japan or the fantastical outfits of contemporary cosplay culture, clothing transcends its material form to embody characters and narratives, blurring the lines between reality and fiction. Through the act of dressing up, individuals have the opportunity to explore different facets of their identity, channeling their creativity and imagination into sartorial expression (Hall, 2014. P. 34).

Furthermore, costume design in film and television serves as a powerful tool for world-building and character development, shaping our perception of fictional universes and the individuals who inhabit them. From the iconic wardrobe of Audrey Hepburn in "Breakfast at Tiffany's" to the futuristic ensembles of "Blade Runner," costume designers play a crucial role in bringing cinematic worlds to life, infusing them with cultural references and historical context. Through meticulous attention to detail, costume designers evoke specific time periods, social milieus, and cultural identities, enriching the viewer's experience and deepening their engagement with the narrative (Ojah. 2005. P. 211).

Theoretical Framework: Habitus and Cultural Capital Taste

Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of habitus and cultural capital are central to understanding how individuals and groups express their identities through cultural practices. Habitus refers to the ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that individuals acquire through their socialization within a particular culture or society. Cultural capital, on the other hand, encompasses non-economic resources like education, knowledge, and cultural competence, which individuals use to maintain or improve their social standing. In the context of the Nzem Berom festival, costumes can be seen as forms of cultural capital that express and reinforce the cultural identity of the Berom people. These costumes, deeply embedded in the Berom habitus, are a physical manifestation of cultural knowledge and historical continuity, which are passed down through generations.

The traditional costumes worn during the Nzem Berom festival function as a form of cultural capital that symbolizes the Berom people's heritage, social values, and historical experiences. The intricate designs, materials, and colors of these costumes are not arbitrary; they are deeply symbolic, reflecting the cultural knowledge and artistic practices that are valued within the community. For example, certain patterns or colors in the costumes may denote social status, clan affiliations, or spiritual beliefs. Wearing these costumes during the festival communicates an individual's alignment with these cultural norms and values, asserting their identity as a member of the Berom community. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital helps to explain how these costumes serve as markers of identity and social distinction. For instance, individuals who possess a deeper understanding of the symbolic meanings embedded in the costumes are likely to be regarded as having greater cultural competence within the Berom community. This cultural competence may, in turn, afford them higher status or respect during the festival and within the broader social structure. Thus, the ability to wear and interpret these costumes is not just about cultural expression but also about maintaining or enhancing one's social standing within the Berom society. Bourdieu's notion of habitus further enriches our understanding of how costumes in the Nzem Berom festival function as a means of cultural identity. Habitus refers to the internalized norms, values, and behaviors that individuals acquire through their lived experiences within a particular cultural context. In the case of the Berom

people, the act of wearing traditional costumes during the Nzem festival is a reflection of their habitus the deeply ingrained cultural practices that define what it means to be Berom. From a young age, individuals in the Berom community are socialized into the cultural practices that surround the Nzem festival, including the meanings and significance of traditional costumes. As they grow older and participate in the festival, they internalize these practices, which become a natural part of their identity. Wearing the traditional costumes during the festival becomes an embodied practice, one that not only signifies their belonging to the Berom community but also reinforces the collective memory and cultural continuity of the group.

According to Bourdieu, cultural practices like costume-wearing play a crucial role in the process of social reproduction the way in which societies perpetuate social structures and identities across generations. In the Nzem Berom festival, the traditional costumes serve as tools for the transmission of cultural knowledge and values. By adhering to the traditional dress codes of the festival, younger generations of Berom people learn the cultural significance of these costumes and the social norms they represent. This process of cultural transmission ensures that the Berom cultural identity is not only preserved but also reproduced over time. The festival provides a space where the older generation passes down the cultural capital embodied in the costumes to the younger generation, thereby maintaining the cultural integrity of the Berom people in the face of external influences and modernization.

Historical Evolution of Costumes

In early human history, clothing served primarily utilitarian purposes: protection from the elements and adaptation to environmental conditions. However, even in prehistoric times, clothing began to reflect social stratification and ritual significance. Early civilizations such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece used specific materials, colors, and adornments to signify status, religious roles, and cultural identity. In Ancient Egypt, for example, linen was the primary material, and the quality of linen one wore was a direct indicator of social standing. Elaborate jewelry and headdresses signified nobility and divine association, as seen in the costumes of pharaohs and priests. Egyptian clothing also carried symbolic meanings: white garments were associated with purity, while gold and blue represented the gods and the afterlife (Tortora & Eubank, P. 222). Similarly, the Greeks and Romans used draped garments like the chiton and toga, which became cultural markers of citizenship, gender, and class.

During the Middle Ages, European clothing became heavily influenced by the feudal system and the Christian Church. Nobility and royalty wore lavish, ornate garments made of silk, velvet, and fur, distinguishing themselves from the peasantry, who were limited to simpler woolen garments. The Catholic Church also exerted control over attire, dictating modesty standards, particularly for women

(Netherton & Owen-Crocker, 2008. P. 18). Ecclesiastical costumes, such as robes and vestments worn by clergy, became symbols of religious authority. Traditional costumes in non-Western regions also took on unique evolutions during this period. In China, during the Tang and Song dynasties, clothing reflected Confucian ideals of hierarchy, modesty, and propriety, with specific attire reserved for scholars, officials, and the imperial family. The Japanese kimono, emerging during the Heian period, developed as an iconic representation of both cultural identity and aesthetic sensibilities that emphasized simplicity, craftsmanship, and symbolism (Dalby, P. 91).

The Renaissance (14th to 17th centuries) in Europe saw a surge in elaborate fashion, driven by the increased wealth of the merchant class and the rise of individualism. Costume during this period reflected the growing emphasis on art, culture, and personal expression. Rich fabrics, intricate embroidery, and bold colors became symbols of social status, and fashion houses began to emerge, particularly in Italy and France. Sumptuary laws were enacted to regulate who could wear certain types of clothing, particularly to distinguish the nobility from the burgeoning middle class (Tortora & Eubank, 2010. P. 80). As European powers expanded through colonialism, they began to influence and appropriate traditional costumes from the regions they controlled. In many cases, local clothing styles were suppressed or adapted to fit European tastes. However, colonial subjects also used their traditional costumes as a means of resistance, asserting cultural identity in the face of oppression. This dynamic is evident in regions like India, where British colonizers introduced Western clothing styles, yet traditional garments like the sari and turban remained potent symbols of national pride and resistance (Tarlo, 1996. P. 96).

The Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries significantly altered clothing production, making mass-produced garments accessible to a wider population. Traditional costumes, once handmade and passed down through generations, began to be replaced by more standardized, factory-made clothing. However, this period also saw a resurgence of interest in folk costumes, particularly as a reaction against industrialization and urbanization. Nationalism played a role in this revival, as many countries sought to preserve their cultural heritage through traditional dress (Wilson, 2003. P. 23). In the 20th and 21st centuries, globalization has further transformed the evolution of costumes. While Western-style clothing has become dominant in many parts of the world, there has also been a renewed effort to preserve and promote traditional costumes. Cultural festivals, tourism, and fashion designers have contributed to the modern reinterpretation of traditional costumes, ensuring their survival in a rapidly changing world.

Costumes in Ritual and Ceremonies

Historically, costumes in rituals and ceremonies have been central to communal identity and continuity. In ancient societies, costumes often signified a connection to gods, ancestors, or natural

elements, functioning as both spiritual armor and as a means of transformation. For instance, in Ancient Egypt, high priests adorned specific ceremonial garb during religious rituals to evoke the presence of gods and ensure divine protection and favor. Similarly, in the Greco-Roman world, costumes in ritual theater were essential in honoring deities like Dionysus and in maintaining civic and religious duties. Across indigenous cultures, costumes have long been used in ceremonial dances to invoke spirits or to symbolize cosmological forces. In Native American tribes, for instance, intricate costumes made of feathers, animal skins, and beads are worn in powwows or healing rituals. These costumes are not merely decorative; they are imbued with spiritual significance, often symbolizing connections to totem animals, ancestors, or divine beings (Christopher 2012. P. 210).

Costumes serve as tangible expressions of spiritual beliefs, setting the stage for sacred practices. In Christianity, clerical vestments are worn during liturgical ceremonies to reflect the sanctity of the occasion. Different garments, such as the alb, stole, and chasuble, carry symbolic meanings, often linked to Christ's life or particular spiritual virtues like purity and humility. The Catholic Church, for example, uses a specific color scheme (white, red, green, purple, and black) in their vestments to align with the liturgical calendar, marking various seasons and celebrations. In Hinduism, costumes are a crucial element in festivals and rituals, often designed to honor specific gods. During religious festivals like Diwali or Holi, celebrants dress in traditional garments that reflect regional variations, including saris, kurtas, and dhotis. In more specific religious rituals, such as the worship of a deity in temples, priests don distinctive costumes (dhoti for men and sari for women) made from silk or cotton, symbolizing purity and a spiritual connection to the gods (Victor 1995. P. 143).

Costumes in ceremonies are not limited to religious and spiritual contexts; they often serve as a means of expressing social, political, and cultural identities. For example, in the context of royal ceremonies or state events, the attire worn by participants is deeply symbolic. Royalty and nobility in various cultures often wear costumes that represent authority and continuity with the past. The coronation robes of British monarchs, adorned with intricate embroidery and symbols of the empire, convey political power and the ruler's divine right to govern. Similarly, in traditional African societies, costumes worn during initiation ceremonies or weddings express social hierarchy, gender roles, and communal unity. The Maasai people of Kenya, for instance, wear distinctive shukas (colorful garments) and beaded jewelry that not only signify the wearer's status within the tribe but also reflect cultural values and age-old traditions (Michael, 2012. P. 117).

In contemporary society, the role of costumes in ceremonies has expanded to incorporate both traditional and modern elements. With globalization, traditional costumes are often adapted to fit modern aesthetics or to communicate new social meanings. For example, in many parts of the world, traditional wedding attire has evolved, blending modern fashion with cultural symbolism. Indian

brides, who traditionally wore red saris, may now choose other colors and styles that still maintain their cultural significance but are customized to personal tastes. Similarly, in festivals like Carnival in Brazil, costumes have taken on a more globalized flavor, becoming elaborate, extravagant works of art that represent both individual creativity and collective cultural expression. Although Carnival has roots in religious celebrations tied to Lent, the festival's modern costumes have evolved to include a broader range of cultural and social commentaries, reflecting contemporary issues of identity, freedom, and cultural pride (David, 2019. P. 72).

Costumes as a Marker of Social Status

Throughout history, costume has served as a direct reflection of one's place within the social order. In ancient societies, clothing often communicated rank, occupation, and wealth. In Ancient Egypt, for instance, the pharaohs and upper classes wore elaborate garments made of fine linen, adorned with precious metals and jewelry, while the working class dressed in simpler, rougher fabrics. The colors and materials used in these costumes signified one's social rank, with white linen symbolizing purity and high status. Similarly, in Ancient Rome, togas were used as a distinct marker of social class. The toga, a garment worn by Roman citizens, varied based on status. Senators and magistrates wore the **toga praetexta** with a purple stripe, symbolizing their authority, while ordinary citizens wore simpler white togas. The ability to wear certain fabrics, colors, and accessories was tightly controlled by social costumes, and violations could be punished, reflecting the importance of maintaining visual distinctions between different social classes (Ichiro, 2014. P. 214).

In medieval Europe, sumptuary laws further institutionalized the relationship between costume and social status. These laws regulated what individuals could wear based on their social class, wealth, or occupation. For instance, during the reign of Edward III in England, laws were passed that restricted the wearing of luxurious fabrics like velvet, silk, and gold-threaded garments to the aristocracy. The aim was to maintain clear visual distinctions between the nobility, clergy, and commoners, ensuring that the lower classes could not emulate the elite. These sumptuary laws were also prevalent in Japan during the Edo period, where the shogunate regulated the dress of the samurai class, merchants, and peasants. The samurai, as the warrior class, wore elaborate garments that included silk kimonos, while peasants were confined to wearing simple cotton clothing. These laws reinforced social hierarchies and ensured that class distinctions were visually apparent at all times (Alan, 2013. P. 65).

Wealth has always played a pivotal role in determining the type of costume an individual can afford, making it a clear marker of social status. In the Renaissance era, European nobility displayed their wealth through extravagant clothing made from expensive fabrics such as silk, brocade, and velvet. The ability to afford dyes, especially rare colors like purple or deep blue, was another

significant status symbol. Royalty and aristocrats often had garments dyed with Tyrian purple, a dye made from sea snails, which was prohibitively expensive and thus reserved for the highest echelons of society. This distinction between the wealthy and the poor persisted into the 19th and 20th centuries, where industrialization allowed the middle classes to participate more broadly in fashion trends, although their clothing still could not match the luxury of the aristocracy. The rise of haute couture in the 19th century further distinguished the wealthy from the lower classes, as costume-made garments from designers like Charles Frederick Worth were reserved for the elite. These outfits, carefully tailored to the wearer, communicated refinement, affluence, and social power (Sebesta, 2001. P. 200).

In contemporary society, although rigid class distinctions have become less formal, costumes still function as indicators of social status. Designer brands, for instance, serve as modern markers of wealth and exclusivity. Luxury fashion houses like Gucci, Louis Vuitton, and Chanel cater to the upper classes, with their products signifying a high social standing. The prominence of logos, especially in "status symbols" like handbags or shoes, enables wearers to communicate their financial success and social position in an immediate, visible way. Workplace attire also reflects social stratification in modern times. In corporate environments, tailored suits and professional dress codes are often reserved for executives and high-level employees, whereas workers in more casual or manual labor positions might wear uniforms or less formal attire. This differentiation in dress underscores the hierarchy within professional environments, with those in higher-paying positions often having the resources to invest in high-quality, prestigious clothing (Manchip, 2002. P. 103).

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Overview of the Berom People and Nzem Berom Festival

The Berom Nation has historically exhibited the makings of an empire in every aspect. Verbal history reveals that the Beroms, who were naturally hunters and gatherers, began their journey in the early 13th century by following animal migratory patterns from North Africa. A renowned Berom historian, the late Da Nyam Kanang, who fought for the British Empire during World War II, posited that the Berom people originally started from Rome, moving southward into Africa in search of land

and glory. They were led by key animals such as the chwei (Leopard), Murum (Lion), Gbwin (Elephant), Kwaya (Hedgehog), Bogwom (Gorilla), Gwom (Python), Kangyang (Gazelle), Yop (Bushbaby), Tok (Fish), Bot (Frog), Tsok (Toad), and Gyang (Moose), among others (Berom Educational and Cultural Organisation; Nyam, 2005).

The Beroms had brief stopovers in the Kanem Borno territories and then spent a longer duration in Sokoto, which is why they referred to the Buzus as playmates. Eventually, they settled on the plains of the Jos Plateau. According to history, the Beroms traversed lands stretching from Jengre, where they had a shrine, through Jos (Jishe), Dogon Dutse (Chwel Nyapp, with another shrine there), Du, Foron, and Riyom, encountering a solitary neighbor to the east of Jishe—the Gwong or Anaguta, a small farming population content with their land (Nyam, 2005).

As the Beroms established themselves, a part of their population moved further to occupy the territory known today as Kagoma in southern Kaduna. They were later joined by the Miango and Rukuba ethnic groups. Historically, each of these nationalities first presented themselves to the Berom ruler (Da Gwom Rwei) and demonstrated their spiritual powers. The Gwom Rwei would bless them and encourage them to use these powers for the protection and prosperity of the land (Beco.org.ng).

Due to their hunter-gatherer lifestyle, the Berom became closely attuned to nature, which also allowed them to connect with the spirit world. This spiritual connection gave rise to the KWIT culture (spiritism), where the spirits bestowed various abilities upon them, such as calling down rain and thunder (Mandieng) and excelling in hunting and warfare (Bi Toh). Their harmony with nature fostered coexistence rather than territorial expansion (Blench, 2021).

Even before the arrival of missionaries, the Berom people believed in a supreme being, DAGWEI, whom they regarded as the Father in the Sun. They typically did not swear by any entity but rather by their graves, saying "mi ha sag'o" (I am telling the truth), which signifies speaking from their grave. Some would invoke the name of God or thunder when asserting the truth, reflecting their belief that dishonesty would lead to divine punishment or natural retribution (Nyam, 2005).

The Berom Nation was fortified in its lands, never having been conquered in battle by aggressors. Traditional history narrates that whenever invading armies approached Beromland, the ground would open up to swallow them, while a drum would sound autonomously in the shrine, alerting the inhabitants of imminent danger. This practice prepared the fighting men and women for conflict, which seldom reached their city (Blench, 2021).

One notable story involves the Usman Dan Fodio Jihad, which could not penetrate Beromland. When Dan Fodio's forces reached the eastern edge of Jos from Bauchi, their marabouts attempted to destabilize the spiritual protection of the land. However, they were warned that any jihadist, including Dan Fodio, entering the territory would not survive. Upon receiving this warning, Dan Fodio retreated, although he later faced defeat in Benue State and returned to Sokoto (Beco.org.ng).

Among the ethnic groups on the Plateau, the Berom Nation is unique in that it does not possess a masquerade or Dodo. Their strong belief in Dagwei and the autonomy of the human spirit to connect with Him was evident in their initial attempts to reach God, which ultimately led to spiritism and, later, the acceptance of Christianity with the arrival of missionaries (Nyam, 2005).

As the Berom Nation expanded, their rich cultural heritage grew, culminating in the annual Nzem Berom cultural festival. Today, the Berom Nation encompasses four local government areas in Plateau State: Jos North, Jos South, Gwol (Barkin Ladi), and Riyom, presided over by His Majesty Da Jacob Gyang Buba, the Gbong Gwom Jos and head of the Plateau State Traditional Council (Nyam, 2005).

Nzem Berom Festival

The Nzem Berom festival is an annual cultural event celebrated by the Berom people, primarily in Plateau State, Nigeria. Its origins are deeply rooted in the customs, traditions, and historical experiences of the Berom community, serving as a platform to honor their ancestors and preserve cultural practices (Nzemberom.org; Nyam, 2005). Traditionally, the festival was centered around agricultural themes, particularly the celebration of harvests, the fertility of the land, and the relationship between the people and their environment (Beco.org.ng). Over the years, it has evolved to incorporate broader aspects of Berom identity, history, and unity (Nyam, 2005).

The Festival functioned as a way to bring together the various Berom clans to foster unity, settle disputes, and reaffirm communal bonds. During pre-colonial times, the festival symbolized the community's gratitude to the gods for bountiful harvests and protection, which later expanded to honor the resilience and heritage of the Berom people (Blench, 2021; Nyam, 2005).

Modern iterations of the festival continue to maintain these traditional elements while integrating contemporary cultural expressions, including music, dance, and artistic performances, to celebrate Berom identity. The festival has become a major event not only for cultural preservation but also for promoting the Berom people's cultural significance to Nigeria and the world. The Nzem Berom

festival now attracts visitors from across the country and beyond, showcasing the richness of Berom history, costumes, and heritage (Nzem Berom Cultural Festival).

Pre-Festival Rites of the Nzem Berom

The pre-festival rites of the Nzem Berom festival are a vital aspect of the overall celebration, laying the spiritual and cultural groundwork for the event. These rituals involve a series of sacred ceremonies aimed at invoking the blessings of the ancestors, ensuring protection, and fostering unity among the Berom people (Blench, 2021). The rites, led by cultural custodians and elders, emphasize the festival's role as a bridge between the past and the present, connecting the living to the spiritual realm of their forebears (Nyam, 2005).

Central to these pre-festival activities is the preparation of sacred spaces and shrines, where offerings and prayers are made to the ancestors. This is done to seek their guidance and to bless the festival with harmony and success. Ritual purification of participants, the community, and the festival grounds is also carried out to ensure that the celebration occurs in a spiritually cleansed environment. Such rites are often accompanied by specific chants, drumming, and other traditional practices meant to appease the ancestors and invoke their presence (Beco.org.ng).

Another key aspect of the pre-festival rites is the selection and preparation of masquerades, which will later serve as representations of the ancestral spirits during the festival. These masquerades are imbued with spiritual significance, symbolizing the ancestors' return to bless the community (Nyam, 2005).

Historically, the Berom people were divided into autonomous political groups until the colonial period, when the paramount chief, known as the Gbong Gwom, was established as the leader (Beco.org.ng).

The festival derives its name from "Orom," the progenitor of the Berom people, though some versions suggest it comes from the word "Berome," which translates to "they are chasing me," a phrase linked to historical migration stories (Nyam, 2005).

The festival is the pinnacle of Berom cultural expression, celebrating the community's identity, traditions, and historical legacy. The festival begins with an opening ceremony, led by traditional rulers and elders, who offer prayers and blessings for a successful event. These acts are rooted in thanksgiving to the ancestors and emphasize the community's commitment to harmony, unity, and cultural pride (Beco.org.ng).

One of the festival's most notable aspects is the procession of masquerades and traditional dances. Masquerades symbolize ancestral spirits, believed to bring blessings and wisdom to the community. Each masquerade, adorned in intricate costumes and masks made from natural materials, performs dances that narrate Berom history, values, and spiritual beliefs (Nyam, 2005).

Music and drumming form an integral part of the festival. Traditional instruments provide rhythmic accompaniment to the dances, which are rich in symbolism. Each dance movement, fabric choice, and color has specific meanings—such as bravery, resilience, or unity—adding depth to the performances (Blench, 2021). Throughout the festival, competitions such as wrestling matches and agricultural displays showcase the skills and contributions of the Berom people. These activities foster unity among community members, strengthening ties between families, clans, and neighboring groups.

At the end of the Nzem Berom festival, the community experiences a renewed sense of pride and connection to their ancestral roots. The festival remains a living tradition that continues to evolve while staying firmly anchored in the customs of the Berom people (Beco.org.ng).

Activities Marking the End of the Festival

The Nzem Berom festival concludes with key activities that celebrate unity, reflection, and prayer. A prayer session is held, seeking blessings from the Almighty for health, prosperity, and cultural resilience (Blench, 2021). The Festival Declaration, known as the "MOG," made by the Gbong Gwom Jos, serves as a formal closure, reinforcing the festival's spiritual and cultural importance.

Additionally, exhibitions of traditional arts, crafts, and historical artifacts take place, celebrating the heritage of the Berom people. The event ends with a Carnival Procession, bringing the community together for music, dance, and entertainment. These final activities not only highlight the Berom identity but also ensure the transmission of traditions to future generations (Beco.org.ng).

Cultural Symbolism and Identity

The Nzem Berom festival, celebrated by the Berom people of Plateau State, Nigeria, provides a vivid example of how traditional costumes and makeup serve as a significant vehicle for cultural symbolism and the reinforcement of identity. Costumes and makeup used in the festival are not mere decorative elements but are deeply tied to the Berom people's history, mythology, and spiritual beliefs. Each element of the festival's attire embodies a symbolic meaning that reinforces community values, heritage, and social distinctions within the Berom culture.



Pic. 1: Berom People (Hunters Costume, Men Costume, Women Costume)

Cultural Representation in Traditional Attire

The traditional costumes worn during the Nzem Berom festival reflect a wide range of cultural attributes. For instance, animal skins and feathers, commonly used in the costumes, symbolize strength and the wearer's connection to the spiritual realm. This use of natural elements serves to communicate the Berom people's reverence for nature and their ancestors, who are believed to have strong spiritual connections with these animals. Feathers are particularly significant, representing spiritual guidance and protection from ancestors during festival rituals Chung Fellix (2019). According to Nyam (2005), the use of animal motifs in Berom attire also harkens back to their pre-colonial traditions of hunting and warrior culture, highlighting attributes such as bravery, skill, and a close bond with the natural world Da Tiri (2010).



Pic. 2: Guards Costume, Men Costume, Women Costume

Moreover, the festival's intricate costume designs, like the use of leopard skins and lion hides, are symbolic of specific ancestral figures, particularly warriors and leaders, who were considered both protectors of the community and mediators between the physical and spiritual realms. Wearing these materials during the Nzem Berom festival underscores the importance of ancestors and the community's spiritual guardians.

Symbolism in Accessories: Beads and Cowry Shells

Beyond the use of animal skins and feathers, accessories such as beads and cowry shells hold deep cultural significance in Berom attire. Beads, often worn around the neck, wrists, and ankles, are symbols of wealth and social status. The use of specific bead colors and patterns can indicate the wearer's lineage, achievements, or position within the community hierarchy. Red beads, for example, might be associated with leadership and bravery, while white beads could signify purity and spiritual connection Nyam, S. D. (2005). The symbolic meanings of these colors are important in reinforcing not just individual identity but collective identity as members of the Berom people.



Pic. 3: Beads in varieties and Tee

Cowry shells, which are sometimes embedded in the costumes or worn as jewelry, symbolize prosperity and fertility. Historically used as a form of currency in West Africa, cowry shells represent wealth and status. Their inclusion in festival costumes underscores the importance of material wealth, fertility, and prosperity within the Berom culture, and highlights how the people value economic stability and social recognition. Furthermore, these shells are believed to have protective properties and are worn during the Nzem Berom festival to shield the wearer from spiritual harm.



Pic. 4: Cowry Shells in varieties

Spiritual Significance and Transmission of Heritage

Costumes and makeup at the Nzem Berom festival also serve as vehicles for transmitting spiritual and cultural heritage across generations. The process of creating and wearing these costumes is itself a ritual that connects participants with their ancestors. By donning traditional attire, the wearers symbolically take on the role of their forebears, embodying their virtues, wisdom, and spiritual power. According to Brockett (2004), costume, in such cultural festivals, functions as an extension of the self, where the person wearing it assumes not just the appearance but also the spirit of the ancestral figure it represents Blench, R. (2021).

The festival is a cultural marker through which the Berom people reassert their collective identity, reminding the younger generation of their unique heritage. The symbolic importance of the costumes thus plays a crucial role in educating younger community members about their cultural history, ensuring that these traditions are not lost despite the pressures of modernization and globalization. As Nyam (2005) notes, festivals like Nzem Berom are critical in sustaining cultural continuity, as they create opportunities for the transmission of collective memories through ritual dress and performance Brockett, O. G. (2004).

The costumes and makeup worn during the Nzem Berom festival are not only outward expressions of individual identity but are also deeply rooted in the Berom people's collective identity, history, and spiritual practices. Through the use of animal skins, feathers, beads, and cowry shells, the costumes carry symbolic meanings that reflect the Berom people's values, social structure, and spiritual beliefs. These visual elements are integral to preserving the community's heritage and reinforcing the cultural bonds that define the Berom people, ensuring that the younger generation maintains a connection to their ancestors and cultural traditions. The Nzem Berom festival, therefore, remains a powerful tool for cultural education and the continuity of Berom identity in an evolving world.

Preservation of Tradition and Heritage

The preservation of Berom cultural heritage is a central aspect of the Nzem Berom festival, with costume and makeup playing a crucial role in this process. The festival acts as a living cultural repository where the customs, stories, and values of the Berom people are transmitted from generation to generation. Traditional attire becomes more than just clothing during this festival—it serves as a powerful symbol of identity, representing the Berom people's historical continuity and connection to their ancestors.

The visual elements of traditional costumes, such as specific colors, patterns, and fabrics, are imbued with meanings that have been passed down through generations. These costumes serve as tangible links between the past and the present, ensuring that the cultural knowledge embedded in them is preserved despite the pressures of modernity. By wearing these traditional outfits, participants in the festival reaffirm their identity and their commitment to preserving Berom heritage.

Transmission of Cultural Knowledge

One of the key ways that the Nzem Berom festival preserves cultural heritage is through the transmission of knowledge from elders to younger generations. Elders play an integral role in the preparation of costumes, explaining the significance of each element and the stories they represent. For example, specific designs and materials may symbolize historical events, spiritual beliefs, or social structures. Through hands-on participation in costume-making and storytelling, younger Berom members learn about their cultural identity and history, ensuring that these traditions continue. The festival serves as an educational platform, where cultural knowledge is passed down in an experiential way. Instead of simply learning about their culture in abstract terms, younger generations engage directly with their heritage through the act of wearing and creating traditional costumes Samuel Dung (2005).

Ceremonial Use of Costumes

The ceremonial use of costumes is another vital aspect of heritage preservation in the Nzem Berom festival. Traditional attire is worn during specific rituals that mark important cultural milestones, reinforcing the connection between the Berom people and their ancestors. Rituals, such as dances and spiritual ceremonies, require participants to wear costumes that have symbolic meanings tied to the community's spiritual beliefs. For instance, warriors wear garments that represent their role as protectors of the community, while leaders don specific attire to signify their authority Aliyu Alhaji; Ochefu (2002).



Pic. 4: Bwong Gwom (King) and the Council Members

These ceremonies provide an opportunity to maintain the continuity of ancestral practices. The act of donning traditional attire for these rituals strengthens the communal identity and reinforces the idea that cultural heritage is an ongoing process that links the past to the present. The visual elements of the costumes become a shared language through which the Berom people express their unity and shared values Yakubu A. (2002). In conclusion, the Nzem Berom festival plays a pivotal role in the preservation of Berom traditions and heritage. The festival's traditional costumes serve as cultural artifacts that transmit knowledge from elders to younger generations, while also maintaining continuity with ancestral practices.

Resistance to Modernization and Commercialization in the Nzem Berom Festival

The theme of resistance to modernization and commercialization in the Nzem Berom festival reflects the complex tensions between preserving cultural authenticity and adapting to the pressures of a globalized world. As traditional festivals like Nzem Berom gain visibility beyond their local communities, they face challenges that stem from the growing influence of tourism, global beauty standards, and economic considerations. This theme explores how the Berom people are striving to protect the integrity of their cultural practices, particularly in terms of costumes and makeup, while simultaneously navigating the pressures to modernize and commercialize.

The cross road of Cultural Authenticity and Modernization

The Nzem Berom festival, a celebration deeply embedded in the traditions of the Berom people, showcases the community's rich history through costumes, makeup, music, and dance. However, the growing influence of globalization has brought about a tension between maintaining the cultural significance of these elements and adapting to modern influences. For example, the traditional costumes, which once symbolized specific roles, statuses, and historical narratives, are increasingly being altered to meet modern aesthetic standards or appeal to tourists.

One prominent concern is the use of synthetic materials in place of traditional fabrics. Historically, the Berom costumes were made from locally sourced materials, carefully chosen for their symbolic meaning and cultural significance (Nyam, 2005). However, the pressures of commercialization have led to the incorporation of cheaper, mass-produced synthetic fabrics that lack the traditional meaning and craftsmanship. This shift is viewed by many within the community as a dilution of cultural authenticity, where the costumes are reduced to mere visual spectacles, disconnected from their deeper cultural meanings (Nzemberom.org; Blench, 2021).



Pic. 5: Berom Soldier

While the influx of tourism can bring economic benefits to the community, it can also lead to the commodification of cultural practices. As costumes and makeup become commercialized, they risk losing their cultural significance. For example, costume modifications that cater to tourist preferences may strip away the symbolic meanings tied to specific roles or statuses within the community. What was once a representation of a warrior's bravery or a leader's authority may now be seen as simply a colorful outfit for entertainment (Nzem Berom Cultural Festival; Nyam, 2005).



Pic. 5: Berom Soldier

Social context Through Costumes

In the Nzem Berom festival, the costumes worn by participants play a central role in distinguishing social roles and status within the community. Specific costumes are reserved for different groups, such as leaders, warriors, and other participants. For instance, warriors often wear elaborate, traditional garments designed to signify their bravery and protective role in the community. These costumes not only highlight the wearers' roles during the festival but also reflect the broader social hierarchies that structure Berom society. The festival becomes a platform where community members can visually express and reinforce their positions in the social order.

The types of costumes worn also indicate an individual's role in the festival. Leaders, for example, may don regal attire, symbolizing their authority and guiding role in the community. Warriors, meanwhile, wear more rugged costumes that emphasize their strength and readiness for battle, signifying their importance in protecting the Berom people. These distinct costumes serve as markers

of status, communicating the wearers' societal roles to the broader community (Nyam, 2005; Beco.org.ng).

Gender Roles in Costume Design

Gender plays a significant role in the costume design of the Nzem Berom festival. Men and women are often expected to wear different types of traditional attire that reflect their gender-specific roles within Berom society. For instance, men may wear more elaborate warrior costumes, symbolizing strength and leadership, while women's costumes often emphasize femininity and domesticity. These gendered expectations reinforce traditional societal roles and can limit the extent to which men and women participate equally in the cultural expression of the festival.



***Pic. 7:** L: Women and Men Special Berom Costume, R: King's guard who blows a special kind of flute to announce the coming of a king or demise in the palace (Daju).*

The distinctiveness of gendered costumes also raises important questions about inclusivity. While these costumes maintain cultural traditions, they may also restrict broader participation by reinforcing rigid gender norms. This aspect of the festival reflects the traditional division of labor and roles within Berom society, where men often occupy public and warrior roles, while women play more private, domestic roles (Nyam, 2005).

Inclusivity and Economic Barriers

Inclusivity is another critical issue when examining the Nzem Berom festival, particularly in terms of who has the financial ability to participate fully. Traditional costumes can be expensive, and not

all members of the community may be able to afford them. This economic barrier raises questions about whether all Berom people have equal access to participate in the festival. Wealthier individuals or families may have the resources to purchase elaborate costumes, while poorer community members might be excluded from full participation due to financial constraints (Nzemberom.org; [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nzem_Berom_festival)).

In this context, the festival can reflect existing social inequalities. Those who can afford traditional attire may participate more fully, while others may be marginalized due to economic factors. This highlights the tension between preserving cultural traditions and ensuring inclusivity in community events. In a broader sense, these dynamics serve as a microcosm of evolving social norms within Berom society, where access to cultural expression may be tied to one's socio-economic status.

Evolving Social Norms and Inclusivity

While the Nzem Berom festival is deeply rooted in tradition, it also provides an opportunity to observe evolving social norms within the Berom community. As societal attitudes toward gender roles and inclusivity change, the festival can serve as an indicator of how these shifts are being reflected in cultural practices. For instance, the participation of women in roles traditionally reserved for men, or the inclusion of marginalized community members, can signal broader societal changes toward gender equality and social inclusion (Blench, 2021; Nzemberom.org).

The festival's ability to adapt to these changing norms, while maintaining its cultural significance, reflects the dynamic nature of Berom society. As the community grapples with issues of gender roles, economic disparity, and inclusivity, the Nzem Berom festival provides a cultural space where these tensions can be negotiated and expressed. The Nzem Berom festival offers a window into the ways social differentiation and inclusivity are navigated within the Berom community. Costumes and makeup play a central role in expressing social roles, status, and gender, reinforcing traditional societal structures while also highlighting issues of inclusivity. As the festival continues to evolve, it can serve as a reflection of broader changes in Berom society, particularly in terms of how gender roles and economic disparities are being addressed. Understanding these dynamics allows for a deeper appreciation of the cultural and social complexities embedded in the Nzem Berom festival.

The cultural significance of costumes in the Nzem Berom festival is under threat from factors such as commercialization, commodification, gender dynamics, sustainability concerns, and inclusivity issues, which jeopardize the rich cultural heritage of the Berom people in Jos south local government.

This research investigate the role of costumes in shaping and preserving Berom cultural identity within the context of the Nzem Berom festival. Specifically, it examines how costumes represent and

embody Berom cultural values, exploring their symbolic meanings, distinctive features, and contributions to heritage preservation, amidst pressing concerns around commercialization, social dynamics, and cultural sustainability.

This study has extensively examined the significance of costumes in the Nzem Berom festival as a means of cultural identity. Through a comprehensive analysis, the research has demonstrated that traditional costumes play a vital role in representing and preserving Berom cultural heritage.

The findings of this research reveal that traditional costumes used during the Nzem Berom festival are imbued with symbolic meanings that reflect the Berom people's history, mythology, and cultural values. These costumes serve as a visual representation of Berom identity, distinguishing them from other ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Moreover, the study has shown that costumes worn during the Nzem Berom festival differentiate the Berom people from other ethnic groups in Nigeria, highlighting their unique cultural practices and traditions. This distinction is crucial in maintaining the Berom cultural identity and promoting cross-cultural understanding.

Furthermore, this has established that costumes play a pivotal role in preserving the heritage and traditions of the Berom people during the Nzem festival. The intricate designs, patterns, and materials used in these costumes embody Berom cultural knowledge, myths, and legends, ensuring their continuation from generation to generation.

However, this also highlights concerns surrounding commodification, commercialization, gender dynamics, sustainability, and inclusivity, which threaten the cultural significance of costumes in the Nzem Berom festival. Addressing these challenges is crucial to preserving Berom cultural heritage. These are the recommendation:

- i. Documentation and preservation of traditional Berom costumes and their symbolic meanings.
- ii. Community-based initiatives promoting cultural education and awareness.
- iii. Inclusive and sustainable costume production and distribution practices.
- iv. Collaborations between Berom cultural stakeholders and external organizations to promote cross-cultural understanding.

The research contributes to the existing body of knowledge on cultural identity, traditional costumes, and festival studies. Its findings provide valuable insights for cultural practitioners, policymakers, and researchers seeking to understand the complex relationships between culture, identity, and tradition. Ultimately, this study underscores the significance of costumes in the Nzem Berom festival

as a vibrant expression of Berom cultural identity. By preserving and promoting these traditional costumes, we can ensure the continued vitality of Berom cultural heritage.

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Interviews

Nyam S.D aged 67 – Custodian

Da. Bitrus C. Pamfey – aged 57 – Damanjei Gurazot Kwang

Da. Toma Pam Barren – Aged 50 – Damanjei Lwa, Bachit