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SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE BEROM INDEGENOUS MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

There are growing concerns that many indigenous cultures, customs and traditions in developing countries such as Nigeria are at the verge of extinctions. The situation is further compounded by the complex advances and the corrosive influences of globalization and digital revolution through the internet and its various social/new media platforms. Aware of this worrisome trend, some societies have resolved to hold firm to their indigenous cultures, customs and traditions. Music remains one of the effective ways for identity and linguistic preservation. Thus, when a tribe loses touch with it ancestral music, it is feared that the cultural heritages and values, particularly its native language may be endangered and perhaps extinct. Though the social media offers a mixed grill of possibilities, opportunities, challenges and prospects it remains a double adged sword technological phenomenon that plays multiple roles in the life of many different cultures of the world. This is why it has become necessary to closely examine how Berom indigenous music can be promoted and preserved through social media platforms. To do this, a survey of the musical tradition of the Berom people will be attempted with regard to their history, social and cultural background, the classification of Berom traditional music, including types of Berom songs. The overall intention is to encourage the use of social media for the propagation and preservation of vulnerable rich cultural and musical heritages that are fast dying.

KEY WORDS:

Social Media, Berom, Indegenous Music

Introduction

The Berom people of Jos Plateau have a long historic civilization dating back to 900AD according to archaeological findings. Using thermos-luminescence testing as well as radiocarbon dating, archaeologists rated them among the first civilized Africans as some uncovered artefacts of human heads that were made between 500 Year BC and 200 Years AD and were uncovered in 1928 during mine excavation that was led by Lt. Colonial J. Dent-Young (Atwood, 2001). With this development it is expected that the Berom People should be a leading tribe to the modern African civilization, yet they appear to be lax in terms of championing the campaign for preserving their cultural heritages. Many societies, particularly developed countries of the world, are actively using the social media to propagate and popularized their cultures and in the process dominate and adulterate other residual cultures of the third world. In this regard, indigenous Berom language has

become vulnerable to the subjugating influences of globalization, popular cultures and the power of the social media.

The phenomenon globalization is the sensation and contention of the 21st Century and is rapidly transforming the world into digital and virtual village. Huge volume of information is made available, accessible, and comprehensible to multitude of people. While the internet effectively rules the universe, the social media is the technological tool that allows the creation, sharing and consumption of a wide range of information, including personal views and sharing of cultural belief as well. This process which is interactive in nature provides opportunities for instant feedback.

The social media serves a number of functions which include: to inform, to educate, to entertain, to connect people and to preserve information. Sharing information via the social media has proven to be fast, flexible, easy to operate as well as covering a larger audience than the traditional media such as radio, television, and the likes.

The Berom people speak Berom language which belongs to the large Niger-Congo linguistic groupings. They are not in any way related to Hausa language which belongs to the Afro-Asiatic Family. Interestingly, the Berom are more linguistically related to the Fulani and the Tarok people but because of religious and cultural beliefs, they see themselves as different entities but the fact remains that they both belong to the larger Niger-Congo linguistic family that have their roots in the Atlantic-Congo subfamily of the Niger-Congo Family. The Berom are, however the largest autochthonous ethnic group in Plateau State Nigeria (Celebrating Nzem Berom Festival, 2017).

They are well known for their strong cultural promotion which makes them a leading and pace setting minority tribe in northern Nigeria that vehemently opposed the establishment of the Islamic caliphate in their region. Instead, they wholeheartedly and overwhelmingly embraced Christianity as they also reluctantly submitted to British colonial authority which established tin mining activities all over Berom land. This contact with both Christian missionaries and British colonial authority drastically changed the course of history in the socio-political, economic and cultural life of Berom people. Consequently, Berom indigenous music became an endangered heritage which Christianity and colonialism desperately sought to suppress and or even totally annihilate. Since then, there had been relentless efforts aimed to recover, revive, develop, promote, propagate and preserve the residue of traditional Berom music which must not be allowed to die. There are at present hundreds of contemporary Berom musicians with only a few practitioners of indigenous music. Berom traditional music enjoys great appeal among all people as it offers entertainment to large audiences in

Plateau State. It is being performed live on several occasions, and is featured elsewhere through the electronic media which makes it a popular performative art form.

Berom people are predominantly hunters and farmers as such they have a catalogue of festivals and ceremonies strongly attached to their cultural beliefs (PIDAN, 2010). The Berom people possess a rich heritage and culture that is expressed through music, songs, dance and locomotion. The multiple festivals and ceremonies in Berom land have different type of songs attached to each festival, as such the song type and the festival share the same name e.g. Nzem Mandyeng (Mandyeng Festival), Lwele Mandyeng (Mandyeng Song). The pattern of music adopted for a festival relate to another as it is strongly believed that, songs are spiritually motivated with each carrying a mood and rhythms with which that festival is being celebrated. As such rhythms and melodic tunes should not be adulterated. Emphatically, some of these beliefs have been completely adulterated by Western civilization, Christianity and environmental changes, or have been drowned and diluted with other theories and values. Be that it may, the fragments can attract serious research work if exposed on the social media which is the easiest and flexible way of attracting world attention to study the various classes of Berom Music (Nengel, 2001, Fwatshak, 2002).

There are many festivals or ceremonies in Berom land and each festival is accompanied with some type of music that is only sung during that occasion. This is crucial to the preservation of the Berom identity. Unfortunately, the musical heritage of the Berom people is fast going into extinction because of lack of interest by the present generation of Berom musicians. Most of them started from pre colonial period with a few in postcolonial periods. The ancient pre-colonial festivals include the following:

1. **Mandyeng Festival**: it is usually performed in late March/early April before the beginning of the rainy season. It is to ensure a good farming season in terms of the rains and bumper harvest. It is not all Berom villages that perform the festival as some perform alternative festivals such as *Nshok* or *Badu.* The leading instruments in Mandyeng music are: the kundung xylophone, drum and one tone horn made from an antelope's tusk. This is played in-between the music. There is usually a constant guttering/ ululations by some individual that moves in concordances with the instruments that sends shiver, thereby creating a sympathetic sulk among its listeners. Other prominent instruments such as the *Ju, Nzing* and *Agoro the* replica of the Hausa *Kara busa, Algeta and Kakaki* are also played. The Mandyeng music is predominantly a non-verbal music with words playing a minute role and instruments taking dominance. The group which is meanly supposes to be a youth group, harbours some few middle aged and the aged that are skilled either in dancing or instrumentation. During the

performance, the men and women dance separately from each other with each dancing uniformly. Female folks dance behind the men with each blowing the one tone notch flute. Other instruments are the leg-rattle made from bamboo tree tied to both legs of the dancers, *Njwek* is the handy shakers and *Hwak* a percussion wood made from dry cactus with chopped edges to scrap. Other instruments that are sometime used include *Yom Shi,* a *two* string guitar tuned in perfect fifth apart with a calabash resonator; a five stringed harp tuned in pentatonic, and also zither made from elephant grass with keys that make the desired sound when played.

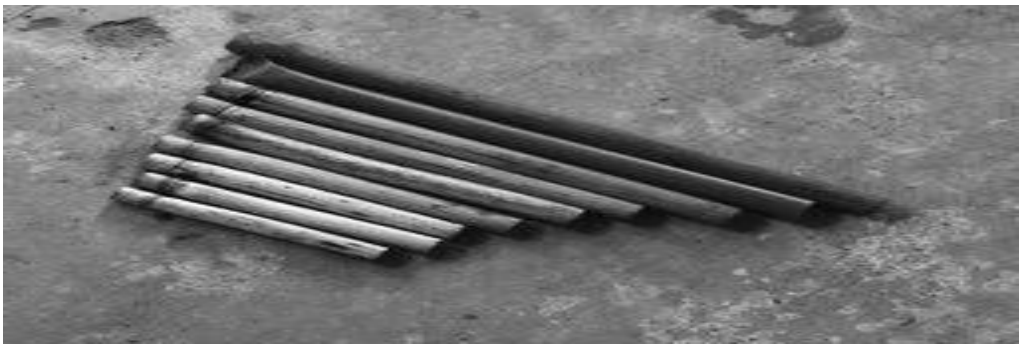


Cross section of the Madyeng Instrumentalist and Dancers

2. **Nshok/ Badu**: it is the same festival, with same rituals as the Mandyeng festival but they differ in terms of location as well as the variance in music type and instruments used. During *Nshok/Badu, Ju* is used which falls under the earophone family. *Ju* is an end-blown notch flute made from naturally bored material such as the bamboo, husk cane, or the stalk of mallet. The flute could be in two categories held and played horizontally or vertically. Also, they can also be open-ended with an approximate length of 18 inches and embouchure for finger holes bored across the body of the instrument. This type of flute though played in group can as well be played hocketly with ranges extended by technique of over-blowing. The other type of flute is the stopped-ended flute that can only produce a single tone while in hocket but if played in group it produces a full-scale.



Cross Section of Dancers Blowing the Ju flute at the Nshok Festival



Set of Ju flute

3. **Bwana or Vwana Festival**: This is another pre-colonial festival celebrated in the month of November. It is regarded as the first fruit festival performed simultaneously across Berom Land. Not all the Berom villages celebrate the B/Vwana festival. The festival can be said to be performed to thank the gods for protecting the crops and for bumper harvest. Bwana also comes with a special music and dances steps. The instrumentals and vocals sing in contrapuntal to the chief melody provided by the Kundung Xylophone. The music sang during the Vwana festivals are always prophetic, revealing, reconciling, poetic and above all, historical. Instruments such as the Kundung Xylophone, Harp, Zither, Membrane drum, shakers, horn are used in the music.

2. **Nzem Berom**: This is a contemporary grand festival which has now become the most important of all the festivals in Berom land. It started in 1981 as a unifying cultural festival of the Berom people centrally celebrated in Jos. Nzem Berom is held in April every year (Nzem Berom 2016, Nyam, 2005). However, the organization and staging of Nzem Berom over the years have suffered lots of setbacks which sometimes threatened its survival. Violent and communal clashes and a number of other security challenges have been blamed for the suspension of the celebration of the festival over eight years until in 2016 when it was

revived and staged again to the delight of cultural enthusiasts. Interestingly, the second revival edition of the Nzem Berom festival held in 2017, provided the basis for hope and optimism that the future survival, growth and development of Nzem Berom festival is a done deal.



Berom Musicians Playing the Kundung Xylophone During the Nzem Berom Festival



Berom Female Dancers

Other festivals such as the *Worongchung* rituals, is connected to farming*; Mado* and *Behwol* which are hunting festivals with special music attached to them, and the New year festival, a festival that breaks barriers in the type of music and dance that could be performed.

Unfortunately, in spite of the many indigenous musical compositions found in Berom land a good number of such rich musical traditions can hardly be found on the various social media platforms. Only a few Berom music of what some commentators describe as "adulterated" Berom tunes may have been uploaded on the internet. Such musical expressions have often been criticized for not representing the "original and authentic" traditional Berom musical flavour and taste.

Berom people are known for their ingenuity in the arts, entrepreneurship, science and technology which endeared them to colonial authorities particularly in the mining fields and camps. Such endowments may have also provoked needless rivalry and hostility between them and some of their migrant neighbours most of who came to settle in Berom land during the golden age of tin mining. The migrant mining workers/settlers brought along their cultural practices and traditions.

Most minority cultures of central Nigeria are described as endangered cultures because they are being gradually assimilated by major or dominant cultures that have overwhelming influence over them. Globalization, a new world order which is largely defined and shaped by the social media platforms is variously being used as an effective weapon to engage in a kind of cultural warfare in both the virtual and physical space. To a large extent, Africa, particularly Nigeria, has been subdued by powerful Western and European cultural might. The evidences are out there for all to see and are hardly contestible.

Every African ethnic group has a peculiar culture that can be morally accepted globally among different faiths and race. Hence minor tribes need to showcase and propagate their deposits of rich and cherished cultural resources through the dynamic power of the social media which remains relatively available, accessible, and affordable to the general public irrespective of their socio-political, religious, ethnic, racial and economic status. It is absolute that no culture is superior or inferior to another which should be the reason why the minority cultures should liaise with the social media platform to project and express their cultural views. According to Okolo and Ezegbe (2011), "Africa is one of the continents in the world with rich indigenous knowledge (Ik) that has assisted her to survive till today." The assertion on the African culture should be a proudful act that can be shared on the social media. Sometimes, the level of one's literacy on the use of the social media if effectively use can help a lot in popularizing his/her culture due to the wider networks range of coverage far more than any publicity media. The social media network service is a web application that people use to build interactive relationships with people and relations who shares common goals on the social network.

The Berom people have enjoyed a lot of privileges educationally due to the exploitation of the land through tin mining; perhaps, one may be tempted to say, the Berom nation is one among the few region of the North-Central Nigeria that has enjoyed the presence of federal institution than other region. Berom land which became the headquarters of tin mining and also with its friendly weather has been a home for foreigners since the colonial era as well as the centre of tourism nationwide yet; no tangible socio-cultural documentation has been done about the people by the people themselves. Rather, a number of Berom scholars and researchers have tended to find pleasure in writing about other people's

traditions and culture because of the easy accessibility of secondary materials already available about those cultures rather than devote time and attention to the exploitation of the virgin history of the Berom people and its culture. This fact is glarring because of the few materials that have been written about the Berom people and its culture. A people that ignore and neglect the preservation of its cultural heritage may end up being emasculated and eventually swallowed up by other cultural heavy weights in the ever contested cultural space where everyone is desperately seeking protection, recognition and patronage. Undoubtedly, the social media has become a cultural pride and bride which many are eagerly yearning to embrace and use to promote their cultural values, ideals and interests. According to Nzewi in Onyeji (2011):

> *Any truly African literary musician of modern musical specialization who does not approach his or her thoughts on and practice of, such a disciplinary specialization from essentially original local research perspective is irrelevant to the development of African music studies and practices. This position recommends that the modern African literary musician needs to derive the philosophical directions and creative rationalization which gives him or her credibility primarily from material riches of traditional sources (p. 10)*

It is rather pathetic that the reportage and the publicity of the Berom cultural activities are not much on the social media platform because of the laxity of the Berom scholars due to under-utility of the social media to showcase and promote aspects of their cultural heritage in the various areas of their professional endeavour, particularly indigenous Berom music practitioners, promoters and entrepreneurs.

Traditional Berom Musical Repertoire

Berom people are endowed with diverse repertoire of rich traditional music which has been used over the years for different purposes on different occasions. Generally, music in Africa is practised by societies that in the past functioned as sovereign political and cultural units; societies that observed their own musical customs and did not seek treaty with others on turning system or any aspect of musical exercise. To most non-Africans, particularly Europeans, in the days of colonial rule, the music of Africans appeared to be a strange and weird phenomenon. To such racial bigots, African music sounded discordant and lacked the basic component of melodic, rhythmic and harmonic structure. These myopic and erroneous notions that sought to downgrade and destroy African cultural heritages have long been debunked. The reality is that, African musical forms are comprehensible and have been globally practiced, accepted, and appreciated. Just like in most African societies, Berom people are highly gifted and talented people in the arts and science of musical creativity and productivity.

Traditional Berom music was used in daily activities and special occasions in the communities. The music was organised at social events, with public performances taking place on diverse occasions such as ceremonies, cleaning of the bush paths, village squares, hunting expeditions, and rituals. The community and the members of the same clans who live communal life based on common local traditions, common institute, and common values and belief patterns, had local musicians, group and solo musicians who travelled, to other neighbouring communities, singing and playing on special occasions or when invited. Those performers individually or in group gained insusceptibility because they were easily recognised by their musical instruments. Apart from the popularity and immunity enjoyed by musicians, they get the most beautiful women in the community especially great dancers and instrumentalist they also enjoyed the company of the high-class personalities in the community. In dry season, musicians move from village to village performing music expeditions that enable them the opportunity of sharing in creative experience as well as using their music as an avenue for expression of group sentiment and correcting the social ills in the society Pwajok (1995) reiterate on Berom Music thus.

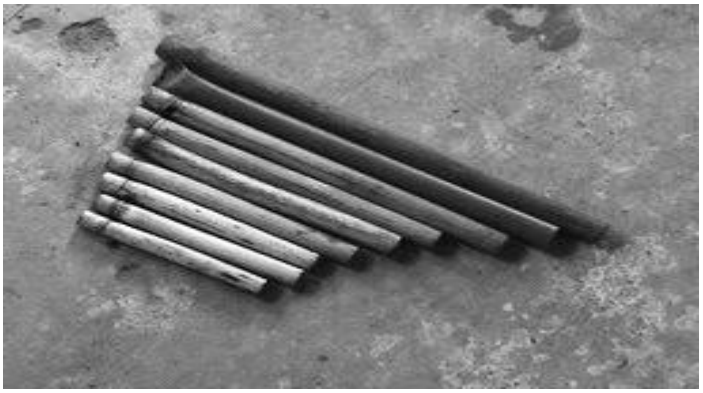
> *Berom Society, like most African societies has a variety of work songs, or encouraged the use of songs as an accompaniment of domestic and farming activities. Grinding songs, pounding songs accompany group activities. In other words, music could also be used as source of private individual amusement by both young and old especially when it relates to personal life or individual economic activities. Music can be performed by children, individual adults, mothers, domestic servant and so on. Different categories of musical instruments accompanied diverse songs for particular occasions such as the Mandyeng, Worongchun, Vwana, Nshok, Badu, the Peme rituals and so on. It is important to note that, although there exist a diversity of musical tradition throughout Berom land, the lack of early sources of information on music is painfully obvious…. (pg: 168-169)*

It is obvious that Berom people have various types of music that can add to the knowledge of African music but lack researchers that can help document the various musical activities of the people. Aside the singing aspect the ingenuity of the Berom people lies their craftsmanship which is also seen in the musical instruments. The Berom people construct their musical instruments by the use of available locally sourced materials within their environment. The Berom people still make use of their traditional musical instruments except for some few that have now been inculcated into the Berom traditional music especially the *kundung* xylophone and harp which was borrowed from migrant Chadians who came and settled in Berom land during the tin mining exploration in Jos during the late 19th century. These instruments have now become key instruments in Berom

traditional music. Instruments which could be made with local materials were readily adapted for local used e.g the *gwak* Made from cactus, *kundung* Xylophone made from, cow horns, cobwep shell, and hard wood, *ju* the one tone flute made from elephant grass, the *sharuwa* made from the hollow bamboo etc. However, a lot of other local and traditional musical instruments have gone into extinction.

Some of the widely played Berom musical instruments include:

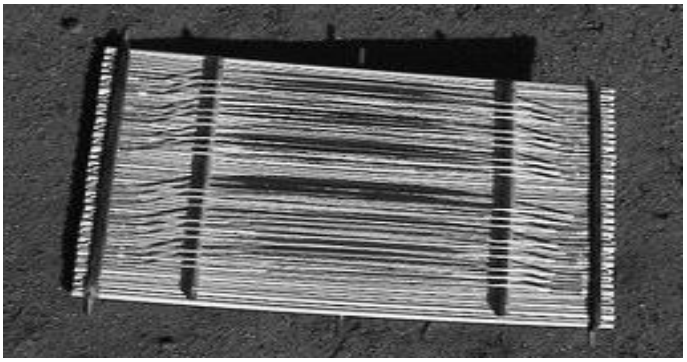
1. Ju (Flute) there are basically two types of Ju (a) *Ju yeyo* (Big Flute)
   (b) *Ju shelo* (small flute) see picture below.



2. *Durum/bwo nyama* (Horn and trumpet)



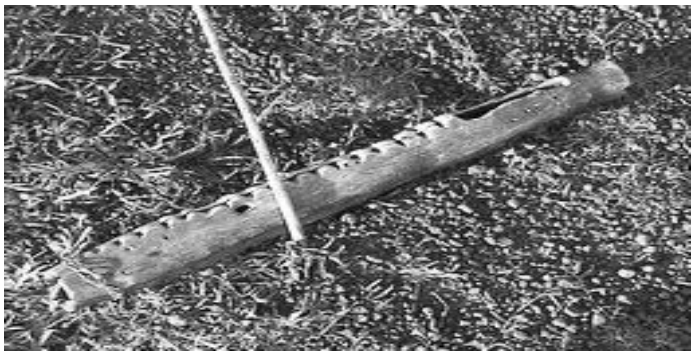
3. Yom (zither)



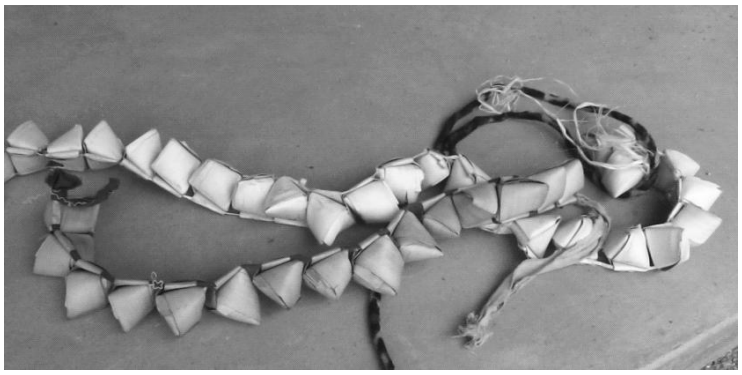
4. Kundung or Yom Bitok (Xylophone)



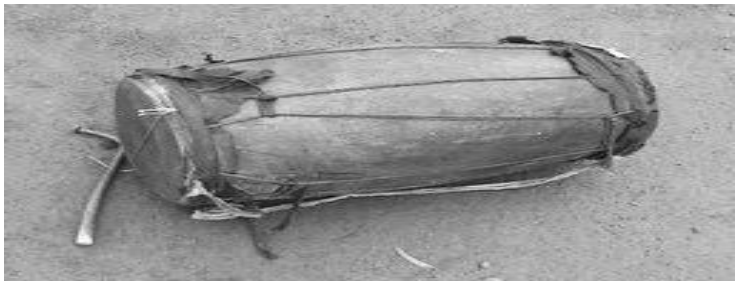
5. Hwak or Ngwak (rattle made from dry cactus)



6. Waga (Leg Rattle)



7. Bin (Drum)



Types of Berom Music and Songs

Berom traditional music is largely a seasonal affair. For instance, every festival in Berom land was mainly to appease the gods. As the worship of the ancient gods/ancestors ceased, due to the incursion of Christianity and Western civilization, the music associated with them similarly faded out of use. The post-colonial music style of the Berom people has seriously been adulterated due to acculturation although some fragments of the traditional Berom music such as the cradle/lullaby song, work songs, folk songs or general song, minstrels or historical praise chants songs and the dirge can still be found.

Cradle Song

The remark of Reverend Suffill in his book *The Birom a Primitive People in Northern Nigeria* (no date) captures the attachment Berom people to music. According to him, the Berom '... people love their children and take great care of them as far as their knowledge permit' with that a Berom woman can spend the whole day singing lullabies for a baby just to calm the child down. As practice in other African communities, others and nursemaid lull the child when the child is crying until the child falls asleep.

The Berom lulls perform an ecstatic magic in calming down a child especially when the child's mother is away to the farm. Sometime if the nursemaid or mother singing the lullulaby is not careful they often fall asleep while singing. Music is also used in the up-bringing of a child. Aside the comfort role songs played in a child, every Berom mother uses songs and patting rhythms to train up a child to become aware of the environment by whispering nonsensical/verbal sound into the psyche of the child (Okafor, 2005). See example below

Work Songs

The Berom are predominantly hunters and farmers. While hunting, they blow horns and yodelling sound that sometimes make the animals falls asleep. Sometimes with bear hands, the hunters catch the animals with no stress as the songs sedated them. The Berom traditional music often couriers part of its practical character in a related work as most of the work songs use accompaniment of the implement used in the harvest and; even while grinding the grinding-stone and the grains provide the rhythms; while farming or weeding, the big and the small hoe is used by the farmer to produce the rhythm while the farmer (s) sing in consonance to the rhythm and it could be in group or solo. There are some forms of Berom work songs that are sung by a combination of both men and women such as the *Lwele Jab* (the farm song) and *Lwele Dag Pye* (threshing song), yet *Lwele hwong'o* (grinding songs) is basically incomplete. Working in group, the singers sing polyphonic or in counterpoint with one another with the implements producing an interlocking rhythm. The aged use work songs as a catalyst in

motivating the young while farming; there are basically three kinds of works songs, whose sources are the exact job that is being undertaken here. They are as follows:

1. *Lwele Jab* (the farm song) It is sung while tilling the land, in Which case the drums, the big or small hoe provide the rhythm. The hoe keeps a steady rhythmic pattern while the virtuoso drummer (s) plays adlibitum to the rhythms provided by the farmers.
2. *Lwele Dag Pye* (threshing song) The Berom have some major food crops that are so important to them such as (a) *chun* (fonia), (b) *Ngai* (millet) and (c) *Pwana* (sorghum) they sing threshing these crops.
3. *Lwele hwong'o* (grinding songs): This type of music is often incidental music solely performed by women and mostly in solo pattern as well.

Work songs were communally performed because the traditional Berom society was largely communal in organization where the people are dependent on one another.

General Songs

These are music with philosophical and religious themes that are used to correct societal ills. Such songs were used to address specific problems of man's daily existence and sometimes used as invocation and prayers that are sometimes addressed to the spirit or the supreme deity. All the major festivals in Berom land as mentioned above fall under this category. There was also the Married song *(Lwele Hasa be Gwel).* Which were songs sung to new brides with the accompaniment of the drum beats and, dance performed by the girls while spinsters watched in admiration. During the dance, the boys watched closely on their spouses to protect them from potential kidnappers. Kidnapping is a type of Berom marriage by elopement. Girls were forced into marriage with people they had not even met in life.

Using Social Media to Safeguard Indigenous Berom Music

Culture, which is a behavioural pattern of living and thinking that help distinguish one human group from the other, is its major transmitting argent or teacher of the parents (family), as well as the community. That has long lost ground since the emergence of the social media. Danah and Nicole (2008:221) defined social network sites as web-based movement that allow individuals that are bound within the conferred of the system share a connection, view and traverse their list of ideas and events to people within the system. The personality and catalogue of these links may vary from site to site.

There are numerous advantages and disadvantages played by the social media, among the advantages of the Social media is globalisation, by making the world a

global village that materials and information can be easily assessed with the click of the button. The social media also help in reaching a much wider, sharply targeted audience, who are bound to be interested in what you have to offer to them. But the greatest disadvantage is that, it encourage piracy.

It has been estimated that 78% of the U.S.A has a social media profile, and worldwide social media users reaching 1.96 billion with an expected growth of 2.5 billion people in 2018. With such a remarkable population, no media covers such a wide audience and so using these platforms as a means of cultural preservation will trigger interest group in documenting more on that culture.

The indigenous musical heritage of the Berom people is fast going into extinction because of the influx of alien cultural influences and most importantly because of the inability of the people to showcase and preserve their culture through the conventional social media. African is a culturally sensitive society. Okafor (2005:1) puts it thus, 'a cultural expression, determined, moulded, interpreted and dressed or coloured by cultural environment of the people'. Just within a decade the undiluted Berom cultural music has literally turned to a fairy-tale. When one meets a cultural group that plays traditional instrument and its music, one is likely to find that the language or the costumes have been totally replaced. Similarly, the traditional folktales are in books with songs accompanying the song written like poems with no idea of how the songs originally sounded. In other words, such songs might have compromised their originality and authenticity. Work songs that were used as motivational tunes for example, can now hardly be remembered by those within the ages of 60 and below. However, a few of these songs may still be rolling on tapes and LPs but most likely with none uploaded on the internet and the social media. In the traditional Berom cultural music, songs incorporate to enable children to learn based on the style of his culture, just as he leaned to speak the language. Many prefer to use inherited colonial songs which the children can easily imbibe based on the Western and European life patterns which have been copiously made available, accessible and affordable on the social media.

According to Nielsen's report of social media in Margiotta (2012), “nearly 80% of active internet users visit social network and blog... Social media is an umbrella term that includes social networking sites, creativity work sharing sites, blogs, and forums”. Communities can easily use the influence of the social media in promoting their culture even though they are novices in that field as the case may be with the Berom people. Musical materials when shared on the social media give scholars easy access to write on that culture. It is obvious that social media as perceived is a more trusted source of information than the conventional sources of

information. This is so because social media enjoys the advantages of speed, wider coverage and access than any other means of mass and distant communication.

Conclusion

It is obvious that limited recourse personnel on the field of music are a factor that has contributed to the lax attitude of the Berom people toward the promotion of its culture on the social media. Be that as it may, uploading footages on the social media can inspire, challenge and attract stakeholders from other parts of world to research or invest in to the development of traditional Berom music for proper documentation and posterity. Traditional Berom people have interesting investigative topics that could trigger a global debate being one of the only ethnic group in Africa that has no masquerade tradition. The study of music among the Berom people is still in its unadulterated stage. Despite the complex advances in Information Communication technology, particularly, the internet and its allied social media platforms, it is worrisome that, Berom traditional music is hardly available on the internet.

On the whole, the Berom people have different musical genres and traditions capable of endangerings healthy scholarly debates that can redefine the course of research, studies and practices in African music. Documenting and preserving Berom music means saving another endangered African musical tradition from going into avoidable extinction. Thus, while all hands need to be on deck, indigenous Berom music practitioners and audience should take the initiative by simply uploading undistorted footages of their traditional musical materials on social media or reporting events on the social media which will serve as a motivation for the teaming social media users, particularly scholars and researchers with interest in indigenous African music. In spite the daunting challenges; the social media remains one of the most effective platforms that would make traditional Berom music available, accessible, affordable and researchable to a globalized world in the 21st Century when arts and culture have become catalysts to economic development.

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