



# Burial Rites Among the Berom People: Focus on Gyel Traditional Burial System and Related Issues.

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## ABSTRACT

Burial is a final farewell to the mortal body and a transition to the metaphysical realm. In most African societies, the manner in which the deceased is buried impacts how he will be received in the afterlife. As a result, burial procedures are highly revered and properly honoured, based on the once-traditional idea that death in Africa is only the beginning of life, as one reincarnates into a new form after death. Several rituals, such as dawn, merriment, dramatic acts, music, and other activities, are regular parts of funerals, both sacred and secular, when a funeral is tailored to the individual who has died. This article discusses some of the ways specific acts and ceremonies at Berom funerals are used, based on data from research on Berom funeral practices. The research suggests some specific events and activities used in Berom traditional funerals, such as the procedure followed on or before the deceased is laid to rest, types of burials based on the course of death, generals' belief in life after death, widows' treatment, and the use of music and other acts in burials, among others. The researchers employ the descriptive study approach, gathering data from both primary and secondary sources and drawing clear conclusions on critical topics, particularly those that are still in use and those that have become extinct as a result of acculturation. Most importantly, the researchers revealed that, despite the introduction of a new religion, the Berom continued to practice some of their ancient burial rituals.

## INTRODUCTION

By nature, Africa is a mutual society. As a result, it is nearly challenging to survive without the succor of others, as every grief and delight is totaled as a group effort. People and interpersonal relationships are far more essential in Africa than nearly anything else. Programs, projects, plans, and schedules are valued less than human relationships on like the West that humans are autonomous of each other. Many things can be forgotten, but maintaining positive interpersonal interactions is decisive. (O'Donovan, 2001). When somebody arranges a feast, everyone donates a ration that will be shared and prepared all together; the meal and the win to be use for the feast are not left on the organizer's shoulders; the best the organizer can do is to offer a congenial environment for brethren to feast in delight, the better. In times of sorrow, no one is left to dirge alone, as this is the obligation of the all-inclusive municipal; nevertheless, no one wails louder than the bereaves, as this is the basic rule of existence. Africans' communal nature has been both a source of forte and paleness over the years; in essence, each one lives for each other as all are their brothers' keepers, and their decisions are guided by the collective wisdom of one another. Men and women who have shown to be an island are ostracized from society, with the majority being sold into slavery or send into exiled away from their native homeland. The golden rule remains the same: each person must stand up for another. To welcome a newly born, well-wishers brings gift items ranging from foodstuffs, cooking equipment, and animals to well come the newly born to the family. This is done in the notion that the mother needs a lot of food to have enough milk in her breast to suckle the newly born. As a child matures, he or she becomes the responsibility of the entire community, as stated in a common African proverb, "it takes the whole community to nurture a child." When the farming season arrives, young men and women, as well as the elderly, travel from farmland to farmland cultivating, weeding, harvesting, or threshing grains for one another that is done as a teamwork. When they all retire to their homes at night and the moonlight shines brightly in the sky, the men bring their one-tone flute made of bamboo or elephant grass and blow it in hocketed technique in succession to produce any music they desire, which is only possible when the pipes (Juu) are played in consonance with one another in polyphonic order. All of this is possible because of the communal nature of the society they leave in. The young ladies sing songs in call and response or response patterns with polyphonic harmony, all in consonance with each other; and the elderly sit each with a group of children, powering the ancient wisdom of folklore in the children.

Ceremonies in Africa serve a variety of reasons and bring people together, with burial being one of the most important ceremonies carried out by Africans. The

Berom people are not unique in that they have a variety of rites that they execute throughout their lives. Nigeria, namely central Nigeria, is home to the Berom people. They resisted external influence vigorously from the time of the Jihad, which swept the entire northern province of Nigeria, until the colonial masters' invasion of Gyel in 1902 in search of tin, that led to the dead of many Berom indigenous and British invaders died as a result of their tenacious resistance. The resulted invasion of the land, allowed other tribes such as the Hausa and Fulani to take advantage of their treaty with the colonial masters, allowing them to enter Berom territory. Regardless, the Berom did not abandon their customs.

The Berom language belongs to the Bantu family, which is a branch of the Niger-Congo family, and is thus closely linked to languages like Tiv, Katab, Jukun and others. Ironically, it contrasts with many of the Berom's neighboring neighbors' Hamit-Semitic language, such as the Ron, Sura, and Ngas (Gwom, 1992). As previously stated, the Berom people have a catalog of ceremonies that are heavily based on their cultural beliefs, albeit, some of these traditional beliefs have been completely altered or corrupted as a result of westernization, civilization, Christianity, and environmental changes.

Death is unavoidable; man has tried for a long time to conquer death but has always failed; as a result, he has developed a method of consoling himself by pretending to have a solution to the pains death brings; as a result, he has organized a series of events to commiserate with the bereaved family; this event gives the family hope that what has been lost can someday be found; this is why most people, especially Africans, believed in reincarnation. Burial is not left only on the shoulders of the bereaved family among the Berom people; it is a collective responsibility. Death rites are carried out in accordance with cultural ethics, as the rituals become extremely important not just to the bereaves family, but also to the entire society. One of the importance of these according to Metuh (1981), "is to ensure that the deceased gains entrance to the spirit land" (p. 114). This demonstrates that funeral ceremonies and rituals are required for the dead to join the spirit world, as the Berom people believed. The goals of death rites are to absolve the deceased of his transgressions and to remove any hurdles that would prevent him from entering the spirit world. Then, pray for the deceased to reincarnate and benefit the family even more. The spirit of the bereaved can arise and cause discontent in the community if an inappropriate burial is performed. If the ghost is not appeased, the town may be visited with a plaque, some of which may curse an uncommon death or serious illness. The elders of the community are performing a number of rites. The traditional religion of the Berom is centered solely on Bhakti marga, or belief in chit (strong belief in spirits). *Chit* are spirits with the ability to bless or curse anyone. They can be found in caves, rivers, mountains,

tries, and other locations, and only people with magical abilities known as *bes* can see or speak with them. The Berom people believe that after death, the spirit returns to the *Vu-vwel* (ancestors). Not every dead person qualifies to become an ancestor; the person must have kids who can give him a proper burial ceremony and conduct his full burial rites to help his transfer from the world of the dead to the world of the ancestors. The ancestor was seen actively participating in the daily business of the surviving members of the family, lineage, or community after fulfilling all of these prerequisites and becoming a *Vu-vwel*. They prayed for the family's living members before the spirits, gods, and Supreme Being. They defended the family's live members from their adversaries and punished wrongdoers. The *Vu-vwel*'s always mandated a code of conduct for the family's living members to follow. The Berom ancestor is a subset of the deceased who possessed magical abilities and were worshipped by their descendent. And in order to reach such a height, the deceased must have lived to a ripe old age, died naturally rather than as a sprinter, and be a fulfilled man with wisdom and other exceptional human attributes.

The *Cheng* spirit was another spirit that the Berom people believed in. They are the spirit that causes no good but evil, despite the fact that they are a weaker spirit when compared to other spirits such as the *Chit* (also known as the devil), who is a superior spirit capable of harming or blessing the entire community, whereas the *cheng* can only hurt an individual. The most paramount is that the Berom people venerate and revere *Dagwi* (Supreme God) beyond all other spirits. Long before the arrival of new faiths such as Christianity and others, the Berom believed in the existence of a supreme entity known as *Dagwi*, which means "Father of the Sun" or "Owner of the Skies" in English. *Dagwi*, they believed, is a superior deity who is more powerful than the *Chit* and *Cheng* Spirits. As a result, no spirit other than *Dagwi* should be revered, and spirits like the *Vu-vwel*, *Cheng*, and *Chit* all report to *Dagwi* and are nothing more than *Dagwi*'s messengers. The Berom are one of the few African tribes known to have no masquerade or worship of any other image but *Dagwi*, which is why the Berom bible translation could not come up with a better term to translate the name God into Berom than *Dagwi* (Chollom, 2007). Because the Berom people believe that spirits are directly responsible for giving or taking a life, blessing or cursing life, and above all, *Dagwi* is the supreme controller of life, the above background on the spirits the Berom people believe in becomes necessary because it has a transition to the world beyond (death).

In the Berom tradition, death is divided into two categories: natural death and unnatural death. A natural death is one in which the individual has lived to a ripe old age, has been married and has descendants, and has possessed wisdom or other outstanding qualities that are acceptable to the community, whereas an unnatural death is one in which the individual lacks one or more of the aforementioned qualities, particularly

those who die young without marriage or children, or those involved in witchcraft or other shady deals that lead to their untimely death. In the traditional Berom society, corpses are not disposed of in the same way. Witches are sometimes burned alive, and people who died of infectious diseases are buried in community utility land owned by the community, some of which is discarded and cannot be used for building or farming purposes, though some of the land preserved for such special purposes could also be used as a farm and some as buffer zoned areas for the collection of thatch; such land is also used for the burial of witches, sorcerers, and wizards, and many others who could not be buried in a cemetery. Persons who died from "impure" or "distaste" diseases like smallpox and leprosy, or natural calamities like thunder or flood, or people who fell from trees and died, or those who committed suicide, for example, were buried outside the communal land. The right to communal land was in jeopardy because it was always a source of controversy between neighboring villages, who would use whatever means necessary to gain control. Some areas of the common land were designated as shrines for religious rituals only. This is sometimes referred to as "spirit land." Enemies killed in battle have their heads thrown into a cave known as *Guvwum* or *Vwum*, and those who died from thunder strikes, as indicated earlier, have their bodies leaning in a sitting position, while those who died from plaques have their bodies thrown into a cave. Other unusual burials, such as those given to *Kot* (children who are believed to have animal counterparts), usually children born with abnormalities, for example with any form of deformity, are not left to die but rather are taken to a nearby river and left there until they die and their bodies decay. If they die before being taken to the river, their bodies are left beside the river for the water spirit to take them away or be buried in the community land at the outskirts of the community and this is because in the olden days, those convicted of witchcraft are either burned alive or slain and buried with some incantations and a chunk of their body buried with them to prevent their ghost from harassing the living.

The goal of the study is to make an attempt at diverse burials located in Berom area, as well as to compare burials from the past and current. Differences in grave designs will be investigated, and they will be kept even after the new religion is abolished. The treatment of widows and orphans after becoming victims in such a situation is also discussed in the research, as widows and orphans after becoming victims in such a situation, but in the traditional Berom setting, they appear to have favourable ways of dealing with such issues, which is again discussed in the thesis.

The study takes a quantitative approach, relying on data from both primary and secondary sources. Interviews were performed by the researchers, and special historic sites were also visited in order to acquire useful information for the study. The findings of the research were overwhelming, as the modern-day

Christian burial system in Berom land still respects some of the traditions, particularly given time for a family greeting from the deceased's paternal and maternal homes, burying deceased in family graveyards with the direction of the grave pointing to the deceased ancestral home, sharing of the deceased's properties at list one year after burials, and so on.

## RELATED LITERATURE

"Death indicates a bodily severance of the individual from human beings," writes Mbiti (1975: 133). These rites and rituals for the deceased, which are major rites of passage in various African traditional beliefs, are ceremonies for the dead in several African societies that is supposed to be the final ritual that must be completed in order for someone to finish the transitional ritual stages from the mortal body to a metaphysical body. Death, however, is not the end of life for the Berom people and other African civilizations who have a similar viewpoint, as death is simply a transfer to another world (the land of the ancestors). When the time comes, one returns to his mortal home, where his spirit finds solace. Even though you are dead, as an ancestor, the living come to you for help with their problems, especially if there is a plaque or an untimely death of other family members, as certain rites are usually performed to placate the death in that case, the ancestors are consulted for solution. According to Ugwu and Ugwueye in Nwokoha (2020), "Death stands between the world of human beings and the world of the spirits, between the visible and the invisible as a transition from one state of existence to another" (p.58). When a person's breath of life has left him and he has been deemed dead, burial ceremonies are done to the dead body according to his status, and from the Berom cultural perspectives, death is a process and a passage from one life to another as Kunhiyop in Biwul (2014) points out that.

Death and the afterlife loom large in the African world view. At death, one moves into the presence of the ancestors, and so while living here on earth one is taught how to prepare to meet them... it is generally understood that a good life will result in being joined with the ancestors after death, while an evil life will result in total oblivion, the idea of which is utterly abhorrent to Africans (pgs. 22-23).

The physical body decays in the ground after death, but the indispensable person as the culture viewed, the spirit, lives on and returns to the ancestors at that time. In this perspective, a dead person is made up of two parts: body and soul (Quarcoopome, 1987) opposing to some religious believed that human is in three parts which are body, spirit and soul. When somebody died,

the bereaved family performs the finale rites which the burial. As the departed joins the ancestors, the acts serve as a parting event. However, as Mwadkon (2000) decorously points out, becoming an ancestor is reserved for those of dubious character.

Just like in many African societies, death alone does not qualify one to become an ancestor among the Berom. To this effect, the Berom had some requisite conditions that could enable dead persons to assume the status of ancestors. Firstly, the dead person must have lived a life according to the norms of society. He must have lived a dignified and moral life that was devoid of anomie. For example, he must be someone who had guarded and jealously protected taboos surrounding sacred spaces. The person must not be a quarrelsome person, a thief, a witch, or a wizard. Secondly, the person must have lived to a good ripe old age and died a good death. In other words, the person must not die as a youth and not die from a dreaded disease such as leprosy, epilepsy, smallpox, or being struck by thunder or lightning (p: 206).

Death rites, and rituals are chiefly vital among the Berom people because they let the deceased to enter the spirit world to become an ancestor when he had good deeds while alive, but when the person was bad before he died he or she is not permitted to become an ancestor but a wondering spirit. The Berom Burial rite and rituals for the dead are conducted for both the good, the bad, and the ugly in fact burial is a right not a privilege according to the Berom culture, but that is done in diverse ways, as it is appropriate to be enjoyed by all

## Announcement of Death

When a person died, the person dies, the proclamation of the dead is alerted swiftly with no delay, but wholly done to common herd, the dead is announce by a loud wild cry (*kun*); as the shout sends a signal, lamentation songs takes over thereafter. The dirge is sung in polyphonic style, as the mourners keeps the musical rhythm going, although the songs are mostly incidental because the circumstances of the death influence the musical lyrics and occasionally the turn.

When a warrior/hunter died, only his fellow warrior/hunter has the right to disclose such a death. In certain Berom settlements, like in Vwang district, the warrior's favourite son or his warrior companion of which either, may jaunt the deceased horse through the village multiple times in anguish. The villager quickly decode that the owner of the horse is dead.

In the case of a chief priest (*Gwom kwit*), His close associates must be certain that he has passed away before making the announcement; this is because it is thought that these individuals have the potential to resuscitate after passing away. The dead of such nobles are notified by the pounding of a drum in a certain fashion, which will transmit a signal of the death of a chief priest, once the death has been confirmed after several hours or days of waiting.

There are rites that only the King could carry out and no one else could since Berom thought that the King was a direct messenger of God (*Dagwi*). A king is said to be incapable of passing away as a commoner. Before the monarch's death is revealed, it takes at least a day or more of proper consultation, and only the elders who are close to the king can provide that. Because of this, regular people have a saying that "you cannot hear the death of a king in my mouth." When such tales are told, especially when the king enters a coma before awakening, commoners who earlier pronounce the death of the king are occasionally slaughtered for treason. Those who report his death are immediately beheaded. For this reason, rigorous verification is carried out before the public is informed of the king's passing and that is done by the king's council.

### Preparation of Body for Burial

A unique ritual of hair removal is performed on the dead body before it is conserved for burial by a barber who, most likely, had no unpleasant encounter with the deceased while the deceased was still alive. After the removal of the hair is done, the youngest child of the family, whether a boy or a girl, is first given a small amount of hair that has been removed from any hairy human part of the deceased for disposal. The reason for giving the child that responsibility is because a child is regarded as being completely innocent of all offenses. The hair is given to the child in a broken potsherd, and the child takes it and throws it away as the cactus edge, which is symbolic and denotes that the deceased has been separated from his past existence and has begun a new life. In other cases, the hair on the head is trimmed or shaved after the hair has been removed from various parts of the body.

The Berom people have a long history of preserving their dead undamaged. After being buried, bodies are left to rot so that the deceased's spirit might meet up with their ancestors. When a young person passes away, the body is promptly buried because it is thought that the person passed away unnaturally, either due to witchcraft or a family curse. A person who reaches marriageable age but chooses not to get married, his corpse is buried at the cactus age at the farm periphery. This suggests that their tomb does not deserve to take up space in the heart of a farm when food may be cultivated there instead. The Berom people have a saying about how a dead spinster person should be buried as it goes as thus, "let us quickly bury a sprinter with his leg outside so that we can engage in

group farming". Other types of bodies that are not preserved include those that are swiftly buried after being killed in battle, by lightning, or by disease. The bodies of those who are thought to have passed away naturally, especially the elderly, are preserved and interred after two, three, or even seven days. The dead bodies are kept intact by nature. The days allotted for the burial of the body are given so that the grieving relative has time to make the necessary arrangements so that a disagreement over the deceased's death can be settled, or so that distant relatives can get together before the burial.

Sand from the riverbank is brought in and placed in a room in a tabular pattern that can accommodate a body to preserve it. Light garments or new leaves are spread on the salty sand, which has been dusted with water and salt. Once more, salt and water droplets are sprayed on the layers of fresh leaves or garments. To prevent rigor mortis, all the joints on the corpse's body that have become active owing to the unsteady flow of blood are gently twisted, occasionally snapped, in a process known as *rugut* or *rwagat vin*, before the corpse is laid on the salty sand.

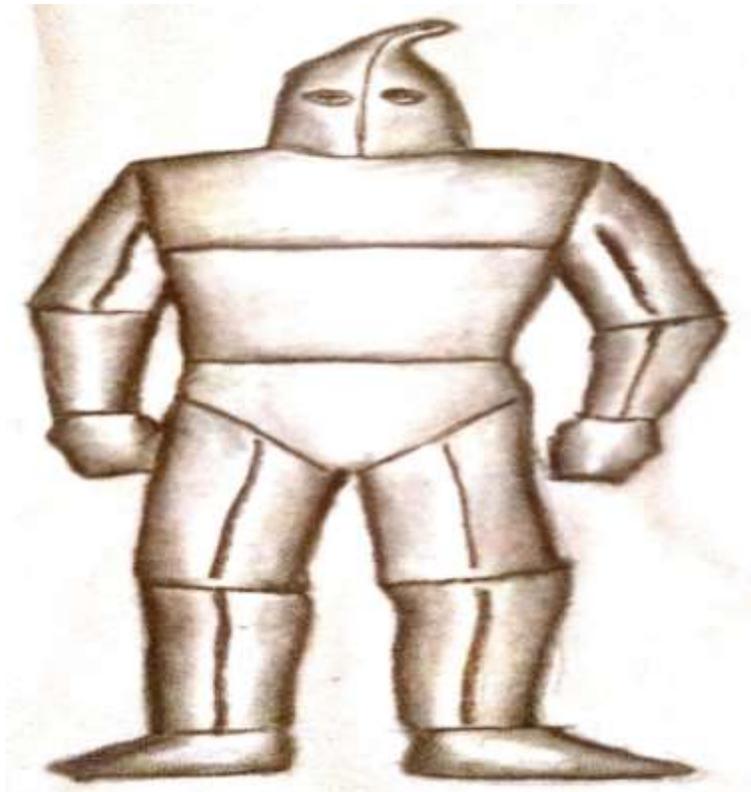
This is continued until the joints' sockets become twisted or flexible enough to bend backward and forward. The corpse is then spread out on the salty surface, covered with another soft fabric, salt put on the clothing, and water sprinkled on top of the clothing. The corpse will occasionally receive additional salt and repeated drips of whatever.

The elderly will be sleeping in the room with the corpse while burning fonio (Chun, Acha) incense and *rivang*, a shrub thought to ward off evil spirits. Some people think the fire will say the deceased farewell as he travels to the afterlife. The fire continues to burn as smoke fills the entire compound. The entire community works together to prepare the deceased's burial. There are many steps taken to prepare the body for burial, and unresolved issues are also resolved. The corpse is dressed in oil (olive oil) and ti before unresolved difficulties are resolved. If the deceased doesn't have any younger children, the deceased's children take care of it. If the deceased had no younger children, that may be done by their grandkids. The older women of the household frequently lead the kids to the corpse. The older woman ultimately assists the youngsters as they dip their fingers into the oil and begin anointing the corpse, beginning with the right arm. The corpse is then covered in oil. The fact that children perform the ceremony suggests that the deceased died with a clean heart, like those of children who harbor no resentments, as an impure heart can obstruct the deceased's path to the land of the ancestors.

The *gwot nu* rituals are carried out before the body is taken to the grave in order to settle any outstanding disputes with the departed before burial. Before the body is lowered to the ground, individuals who still have unresolved issues with the deceased are given the opportunity to do so at that time. When the animal hide has been put onto the corpse, it is taken

outside the property while the elderly people relax nearby. If someone is aware that they have unresolved issues with the deceased, they are urged to come forward and resolve them before the body is transported to the cemetery, the elders mumble softly. People come to the corpse to address their problems at that time, and difficulties are resolved. Some people will even get on their knees and whisper their request for pardon. The rites of forgiveness are carried out with a local beer in several Berom villages, such as Fwil village in the Vom area. People with unresolved issues with the deceased approach the corpse with a calabash-shaped spoon in hand. Each person then fetches beer, puts a bit into the calabash and stirs it with his index finger while offering words of reconciliation regarding the subject at hand. People who refuse to

make amends to the dead are frequently sick until they offer sacrifices at the grave of the person they are upset with. The Berom people occasionally view death as a chance to receive blessings from the dead. The demand season arrives. Young sprinters (girls) from the deceased's family descendants come with brooms and woven trays (*voro*) when the corpse is sewn up in the skin and ready for burial, as in some Berom communities like Zawan. The young ladies imitate sweeping motions away from the corpse, pleading for a bumper harvest of fonio and good seedlings of the crop from the deceased. In a sweeping motion with *Kumung* leaves, the elderly women also implore the deceased to graciously forgive anybody who has wronged him or her while he or she was living.



**Fig. 1. Corpse Stitched with animal skin above.**

### **Burials rites in Berom land**

The Berom people generally perform burials in accordance with the status and personality class of the person that died. Old, middle-aged, and young graves are divided into three groups. The death of the young is regarded as profanity, whereas the death of the elderly, who may have lived to a ripe old age and had children and grandkids, is thought to be a natural death. Because it should never be the other way around; every old person has the right to be buried by their children (Gwom, 1992).

Influential people receive a more elaborate, traditional funeral. For instance, royalty, well-to-do families, or chieftains are buried with horses after their dead bodies are covered in goat skins sewn by well-wishers and relatives. Goats must be provided by the family members, in-laws, and associates of the deceased for the funeral rites. The deceased is dressed in goat skins that have been brought and placed in their grave alongside them. The corpse is then stitched together from head to toe with the eyes and animal story tangled, using a horse or bull skin as the sewing material.

The elderly and those who lead imperfect lives are the main targets demographic for the animal skin-covered corpses. Except for minors, who can occasionally be buried without any skin or animal necessity, adult bodies are covered with animal skins, particularly those of goats, horses, and dwarf bulls, for those with no one to donate a goat, a scrap of fabric covering might be used to cover the body. Adults, however, are required to accept the alternative since some people may choose to avoid being buried with any animals before passing away.

There are not many families in Berom who do not raise animals for household use, hence the majority of Berom residents are farmers, hunters, and headers. Animals are often kept by people also for burial. Most of the time, a person who is still living can identify an animal that has to be saved until after his or her demise, and the animals are murdered during his funeral for the skin to be used to sew their corpse. Some will even go so far as to save grains that will be used to prepare the neighborhood bear, known as *vwere rwii*, for death. After the burial is complete, the meat, known as *nama jinni*, is meticulously detached from the animal's hide and eaten by everyone who cares, with the exclusion of anyone who must have had a sexual experience with the deceased especially the wife of the deceased. The deceased's children and other families that donate animals skins for the burial take the animal hides and present it to the lying corpse before it is been use in sewing of the corpse. All the skin donors line up one by one and then acknowledge their efforts to the corpse. The majority will say, "I, together with my family, the family of your daughter, have brought a skin for your burial." Go in peace". Sometimes massages are occasionally given to the dead to carry to their loved ones after they have passed away as they would remark, "when you go there, tell... that his people are doing well, someday we will come to join them,". Families who attend the funeral, particularly the grieving children and grandchildren or close relatives who have been away when the deceased person died, they make effort to touch the body before it is buried to let the dead body know they are present at the burial. Some people will place their hands on the deceased's chest and say, "I've come for your burial." If the immediate family members are still young, the elderly will pull their hands to the deceased person's chest and say things like, "Your grandchild is here for your funeral, shower your blessings on them".

The deceased's body is transported to the cemetery for ultimate interment after being wrapped in an animal hide and having all necessary rites performed within the family land. Because there are so many skins sewed onto the corpse, the corpse becomes extremely heavy and is typically transported pick backward in a hurry. If the deceased had children, they would typically support the corpse; however, if the children were too young, the departed hand would be put on the back of the children by the elderly once saying, "Your child has backed you,". Then someone strong can continue from

there. Some people might have a strong wish before they died that they do not want to see someone which they most have had an unsettle grudges with not to attend their funeral, and that is highly honoured, and at the graveside, only men are permitted because burials must be performed in complete silence any noise might denied the deceased a smooth transition to the land of the ancestors and become a wandering spirit. Women tend to cry so easily, which is why they are not permitted at the graveside except for the women that are not too emotional.

### **The Roro Rituals and the Dramatic acts in Berom Burial.**

The funeral eve is jam-packed with performances as the mourners for the last sing-song ceremony for the bereaved and the grieving family and well-wishers sing songs of farewell. This custom which is strongly observed for greatest warriors and hunters (*Besuga*) and the top priest (*Begwom Kwit*) when they died, mourners who conduct the dirge sing the song, which serves as an example of the good deeds of the bereaved. Songs and dances are done to honour the accomplishments of the departed who, in accordance with Berom beliefs, have lived fruitful lives. The elders assemble to drink the local brew in memory of a deceased. *Roro rites* are dramatic performances done especially for the death to say goodbye to the departed is stage by the deceased family as a mark of farewell.

The deceased's family members carry out the *roro* ceremony. In performing the rituals, which is mostly perform before the burial but sometimes perform after the burial, someone whose facial likeness resembles the deceased, or occasionally close associates act like the decease through imitating the deceased while alive. In rare circumstances, the act can be performed by a single person in front of a group of responses as long as those present are compatible with the performance's primary goal of entertainment. As the person who would act as the deceased typically enters the grave to lay the corpse, certain Berom communities view the rites as cleansing and reconciliatory rituals because they believe that by doing so, the person also laid any unresolved difficulties the deceased had while still living. The practice, however, can be carried out whenever it is enjoyable or serves as a memorial relieve to the deceased family and by doing so, the corpse ultimately finds rest. The performer mimics the deceased's favourite music as well if there any. During the *roro* rituals which is more entertaining the actor mimics the way the deceased behaved, talked, and walked, all the set acts, are intended to relieve the bereaved family as they laugh their sorrows away as they duplicate and dramatize the deceased's actions when they were still living. At the gravesite, the young men are telling crude jokes while they dig the hole. When friends cracking jocks at one another, jokes are occasionally said for the enjoyment of others nearby, and other times, general life concerns are discussed.

That is meant to amuse both the people watching and the people digging the grave.

### Widow's Rights and Rituals Rites After the Death of Husband.

In several African communities, the treatment of widows has been the most terrifying nightmare that no woman would ever want to experience. In most cultures, the widow receives unfair treatment and is frequently charged with committing poison or witchcraft to murder her husband. When a woman is subject to such criticism in some cultures, such as some Igbo, she is compelled to make a promise not to be involved in her husband's demise. The widow's head is totally shaved, and occasionally the deceased's body is cleansed before being given water to drink as an oath. If she loses her mind or passes away, it proves she is guilty; if she lives, she is exonerated. Most widows are left penniless since the money their late husbands amassed was divided among his siblings, including the children. Sometimes the widow is made to live without anything, or compelled to marry a relative against her will.

The Berom people allows the woman, who is now a widow, to grieve her husband immediately after the husband passes away. Until her mourning period is over, the widow is not permitted to do any housework. In some circumstances, certain tasks such as feeding, bathing, and cleaning the anus after defecating are carried out for the widow during the period of mourning, and the lamentation could last seven (7) days or more before and after the deceased's burial. These are done to the widow as attempt suicide by harming themselves in such trying circumstances if they are not adequately observed, the widow's best friend performs all the duties stays as the widow stays at home under the observation of her best friend.

No one can grieve the bereaved more than the wife and the family of the bereaved, therefore even

when the widow is accused of having a hand in her husband's death, the concerns are put on hold until after the morning period is finished, when the widow must have calmed down. During the mourning period, some women choose to shave their hair throughout the grieving process, while others choose not to. Although it is entirely a matter of choice, for men and women who have lost loved ones frequently engage in the practice. Though the custom of shaving of one's head hair has spread throughout Berom communities and has acquired symbolic meaning, with people now interpreting it as a sign that they have recently lost a loved one. Thus, the scraping of hair assumes a metaphorical meaning.

The women who are bred in a Berom traditional environment are maintained and are not allowed to have a close relationship with any male unless the chief praise performs a procedure known as *pad beleng* (removal of *beleng* leaves). The traditional attire of the Berom woman was called *godo*, which is made of fresh leaves that have been gutted from a tree and is tied around the chest or waist. But on the day of burial, a certain tree leaf called *beleng* is tied into a cluster and used by the woman to cover her buttocks and virginal region. With two-finger grasp sticks that fit inside the headband close to their right ear, a headband made of animal hide is tied around the woman's head with two sticks of finger seize fit in it indicating that she is a widow and has not yet welcomed any men in an extramarital relationship. When someone picks interest on the widow, he uses a middle man, ideally a woman who will be used in the communication, whenever he wants to speak to the woman or give her a gift someone is send to her. The widow maintains her purity at that time until the top priest performs the cleaning rites on her then she is allow have someone that will inherit her as a concubine and the process is called *njem*.

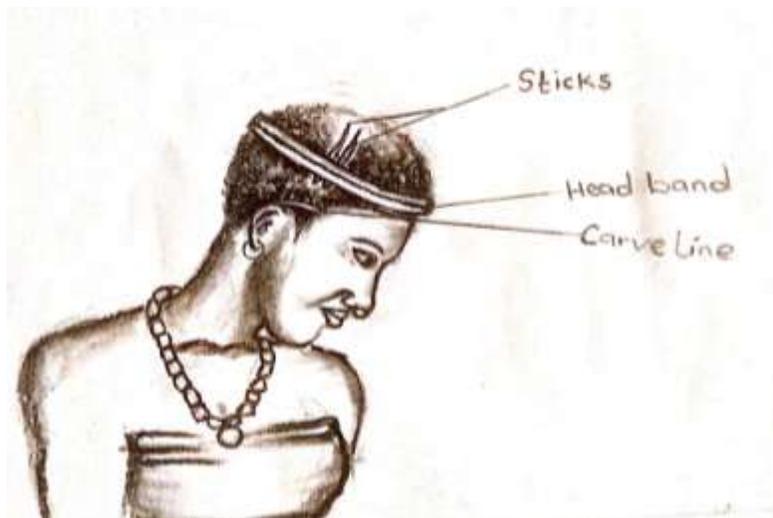


Fig. 2. view of a widow's head dressing above

After her husband passes away, the widow is almost always left with a choice, especially for those ladies who are still active and vibrant. The only choices left is to be inherited by a member of the deceased husband's immediate family in *njem* relationship; if she is unable to find a suitable match within the immediate family, she can search outside of the extended family or for any man of her choosing who will care for her and her children; any man she chose becomes her children's step-father and they can bear, not to bear the step-father's name but the deceased husband's name. that is done only when the widow is not married off is that practiced. Until the widow dies without having any male children to inherit her late husband's holdings, no one has the authority to send her away or make a claim to the late husband's property. The widow is invited to a meeting that the husband's family arranges, at which all the males in the home are assembled, and those who are interested in getting to know the widow attend. The widow cannot speak at this time; instead, she communicates her acceptance or unacceptance of the man by body language. The main priest conducts the marriage ritual by asking the new husband to take off the two sticks of finger seize attached to the widow's headband after she has accepted him as her *rwas-njem*. After the sticks are taken out, the man is

instructed to go get *ti* a red ochre powder on a flat bench stone mixed with oil, the *ti* is crushed before being applied on the woman's head. The religious significance of the *ti*, which is frequently used in various religious rituals and prayers to the spirits, ancestors, and gods, cannot be overstated. Additionally, the *ti*, especially the one obtained from Mado shrine, which serves as a hunting ground for the Berom people and other tribes like the Afizere, Anarguta, Amo, and others, had other values needed by the people in, for example, the *ti* ritual. For instance, *ti* served as a platform for the coronation of chieftaincy, the exchange of vows, the creation of charms, the neutralizing of poison, the assumption of titles, the initiation of adults (both male and female), and the celebration of festivals. As the powder is combined with oil to be applied to the lesion, it can also be used for the burial of the umbilical cord and the treatment of circumcision wounds. As the dead are readied for burial, *ti* is put to their body. A moon-shaped line with a blade was carved beside the widow's right ear after a period of grieving and that is done by the chief priest by the time the widow whose hair was been chopped down must have grown, and the *rwas-njem* who the widow has accepted to be with, the man's hair at the back of his head was also clipped.



Fig. 3. *Rwas-Njem* hair-style on the day of their connubial vows with the widow to be inherited.

The woman is then instructed to only accept the one man she has identified. In the event that the lady is unable to accept a member of her husband's family, the same ceremony is carried out on an outsider. In this instance, a goat is offered to the family of the deceased husband family as a token of acceptance into the new family. At some cases, a woman can gesture to a young boy who will become her new man if she decides she doesn't want to stay with any grown up man, but wants to remain in her late husband's home without any man engaging her into concubinage, perhaps to take care of her young children. She points to a little boy who is not yet majoring into marriage to represent her husband. The act only serves as formality to complete the rites and enable her to mingle freely among people. In that case, the woman cannot engage in sexual relations with a young boy nor with anyone outside. For instance, the widow's grandkids are granted the authority to remove the leaves that are tied around her waist when she is elderly and unable to be given to any man also to enable her assimilated into the society (Interview granted to Da Dalyop Zongo, 4th April 2022).

### Berom Traditional Graves

There are two accounts of the Berom traditional grave-making style, the "L", which could sometimes be an inverted "L," and ".". Villages such as Gyel, Shen, Rafan, Tapan, Ban, Tatu, Chit, Rakuk, Shonong, Jol, Lwa, Rahoss, Vwang, Jol, Fwil, Rakuk, Lobiring, Nkyam-Fanzat, Kuzen use the "L" shape grave design. The villages that use the inverted shape "L" "J" are Du, Kuru, Riyom, Tahoss, Sopp, Kassa, Ron, Kamang, Wereh, Sho, Kassa, Jok. The "L" shaped grave design can best be described as the tunnel grave format. The grave's is designed opening allow a standing body to enter. A human body will be set out a short distance from the tunnel entrance after being shrunk down to human size a few meters inside a tube. The "I" grave style, often known as the bottle-shaped grave, is the second type of grave design commonly found among the Berom people. The grave's entrance is small enough for a person to fit through, but as it descends, it widens further (Nyam, 2005). In the burial chambers for each grave, it was designed to make it challenging for scavengers to tamper with the dead. Due to the quantity of skins that notable people like monarchs, warriors/hunter, etc. will be buried with, their tombs typically have deeper openings because of the number of skins they are expected to be buried with. During the burial, a person enters the grave, retrieves the body from the outside, and places the corpse such that the deceased's back lays to the ground with face facing up. The inside of the grave where the body lay is smoothing with Clay which is use to plaster the inside of the grave and this is to make the grave very strong, so it could be used another time for another corpse. A flat stone is then used to cover the grave's mouth before then sealed with moist clay. The grave cover acts as a

bridge between life and death when a trouble strikes, the opening is opened a sacrifices are made to the ancestor for dead were constantly used as social control models by the Berom ancestors since they had the power to harm or benefit the family's living members.

Primarily, ancestors troubled their descendants if they felt their graves had been incorrectly prepared, if not enough goat or horse hides had been used in proportion to their position, or if their preferences for their burial had not been honoured (Jacobs: 20). The skins of the animals are required for a proper burial of the deceased because when such a thing occurs, the ancestors must be placated for peace to reign. A family consults the head priest/diviner when calamity strikes them. Rituals were carried out to pacify the ancestor if they were thought to be the source of the disaster. After repeated incantations and pleadings from the recipient of the scarify, who must be an elderly member of the family, the grave's cover is opened, and the goat skin is placed inside. After that, a chicken is killed, and its blood is sprinkled over the grave. Undoubtedly, the family's life returns to normal.

### Retentive factors in modern Burial

Because the Berom people have embraced the new religion, burial has taken on a new meaning and the ancient burial system is no longer commonly used, with the exception of those who continue to use the traditional warship method that might demand to be buried in ancient way. Going the traditional route for burial appears forbidden because the Berom people are primarily Christians with just a few as Muslims. Instead of being wrapped in animal skin as was the custom, bodies are now interred in wooden boxes for burial. Contrary to the original Berom grave, which is dug in a tunnel where the corpse lies needlessly, graves today are dug in the shape of triangular pits, with some people even going so far as to shade them with pillars and decks made of cement and concrete.

The bodies of corpses buried in the current Berom system are embalmed with modern chemicals or kept in a cool room for days prior to burial. As announcements for the dead are broadcast on radio and television, posters with the bereaved person's photo are put up on wall and social media platforms. As a sign of respect for the husband, since the *pad bileng* rituals are no longer practiced, with the exception of the ritual for caring for the departed wife, which is still done, albeit primarily in secret because the church is vehemently opposed to the practice. As neighbours deliver food to the bereaved home in the morning, the bereaved family is not permitted in any way to kindle a fire for cooking until the period of mourning is finished. The custom is gradually disappearing as the grieving family also sets fire to the food they had cooked for those who had come to mourn with them, particularly on the funeral day, which has now been transformed into a

formal feast where people are given food to eat and take the rest home for their satisfaction. To amuse the mourners during the wake, DJs are brought to the locations and play music unrelated to the burial.

According to Biwul (2014), despite the drastic change in culture to church view, there were some retentive elements that modern burial still shares with the olden day burial style. The African traditional worldview of burying the dead in the land of their ancestry has no doubt impaired the spirit of Christian conviction and commitment. This is so because the church, for some reason, has either partially or fully submitted to this cultural demand, or it has been silent on the matter (p. 27).

Additionally, both at the church service and the graveside funeral, the motherly family of the deceased is given a unique opportunity to speak. The grave's orientation is highly meaningful. The Berom tomb, where the head is pointed toward its lineage, which most Berom people think comes from Riyom, must be essential, just as Mecca is important in Muslim devotion, in which all prayers are directed toward Mecca. Even though the church still observes these customs, perhaps because the gravediggers are young men from the deceased family, this practice has always been done in accordance with their traditional belief that all spirits return to the maker after death and are kept with their ancestors. These spirits undoubtedly reincarnate when they find a suitable family within their lineage to return to.

Because the Berom worldview is based on a circle of life, the Berom people strongly believed in reincarnation. As a result, significant festivals that mark cycles of life, such as birth, initiation into adulthood, initiation into secret cults, dead rites, and cycles of the passage of time from planting to harvest, were all linked to these nature gods and spirits. The Berom also had a strong belief in reincarnation (Mwadkon, 2011). Because the deceased may reincarnate, the Berom people held that life had no definitive end. The circle of affluent existence was perpetually repeated. If you die as a good man, your family accepts you back as a decent man, but if you die as a bad man, your family rejects you and you become a wandering spirit.

## FINDINGS

In fact, the Berom people's modern burial rituals have evolved from their traditional counterparts. The church has taken over the role of the old burial system, therefore the customs are no longer followed. The few Muslims among the Berom people carefully adhere to the Islamic method of burial, dispensing with the

customary method and its associated rites. The use of animal skins, consumption of the meat (*nama jinii*) from the animals killed for the burial, and drinking of alcohol (*vwere rwi*) are all major aspects of burial rituals but are now been forgotten in totality. Because widows are no longer seen as relevant, the traditional approach of inheriting widows has been distorted because of the new religious order. Traditionally, widows were given complete control over their late husbands' assets and were formally inherited by a man of their choosing when they had children the late husband still has custody of the children even when they are biologically given birth to by the man that inherited the widow. But because of avarice and acculturation, this custom has all but disappeared, as some widows are forced to leave their dead husband's house immediately, leaving them with nothing, unless they had male offspring that could guarantee their stay in their late husband's house.

It has been noted that traditional salt preservation is nearly extinct and that people hardly ever use the old technique of corps preservation unless individuals who insist on not being carried to the mortuary are left at home to be buried right away. Nowadays, people create jingles and posters to broadcast the passing of their loved ones on radio and television.

The conventional method of creating graves is no longer used as people have resulted in the pit grave style abandoning the "L" and "I" shape grave styles. The recollection of how it was built is only retained by a small number of people. Except for those who specifically request to be buried in the traditional grave system, the architectural tunnel grave style is no longer in use. Even though religion has taken control, especially in funerals, there is still some traditional worship that has persisted, such as the order of service at the graveyard when the deceased person's motherly family is given the chance to deliver testimony. Since the beginning of time, such has been the custom. More so, graves in Berom territory point to the bereaved's ancestral home because the bereaved's head is typically facing Riyom, which most Berom people believe to be their ancestral home, and the bereaved's face is facing north because it is historical fact that the Berom people originally came from the north of the country—more specifically, the Sokoto region—during the migration period.

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

It is clear that the Berom people and another important historical tribe in the world—the Jews—have a great deal in common when it comes to religious practices, particularly burial. Only one tribe in Africa, the Berom, is known not to have a masquerade nor worship any other gods or god images but the supreme God *Dagwi*. Unlike other tribes, the Berom do not wear or have tribal markings. This makes the Berom burial very straightforward, and the treatment given to the

bereaves family is recommendable and ought to be an item of recommendation globally. Their burial technique is based on the situation in which the person dies and is buried accordingly, as indicated above.

Because one tomb may be utilized multiple times and thus reduce land devastation, their architectural grave design is eco-friendly. People are buried according to their deeds, so their method of burial is admirable. Good people receive burials that are deserving of imitation. When someone is buried, it provides them the strength to help others and the ability to get a proper funeral when they pass away. Because it educates individuals to do good deeds while they are still living, the traditional burial system, particularly that of the Berom people, is solely educational. The practical character of the act (burial) should be restructured from a cultural perspective to fit modern society, equal educational opportunities for women should be made available, and facilities for skill training should be made available to empower women. The government should also create regulations that permit equal rights in inheritance, particularly in regard to land. Equal chances for participation in a variety of social activities should be provided for women, together with equal rights and power in decision-making.

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