

REFLECTIONS BENIN 2024

The response of the two trainees from Benin, Ladislav AYATOMEY and Sr Carole HOUNSOU: An account of the personal reflection exercise

RECENT WOUNDS

- 1- The health crisis at COVID 19.
- 2- The practice of widowhood in southern Benin.
- 3- Ethnic differences.
- 4- Polygamy.
5. The high cost of living

OLD WOUNDS

- ✓ The history of slavery and colonisation leading to the loss of values .
- ✓ Wounds of memory of the slave trade.
- ✓ The throes of the revolution where many were badly treated and tortured.

COUNTRY: Benin

Responses to the questionnaire

Team: Ladislav AYATOMEY – Sister Carole HOUNSOU

- Old wound relating to the community: WIDOWHOOD
- Recent wound relating to the country: The COVID 19 health crisis

– Old wound relating to the community: WIDOWHOOD

In any community, whatever the cause of death, the age or title of the deceased, widowhood rituals are unavoidable. In Africa in general and more particularly in Benin, widowhood in the south more precisely among the “FON” always happens in the same way with the exception of kings whose burial takes place on the day of the death. As a prelude to the woman's entry into widowhood, it is the guardian of worship or the leader of rituals (the Bokonon) who pricks the hair and thus orders the woman to shave in order to complete the separation from her deceased husband. and to be able to enter a new life. After the funeral or the day of mourning, he brings together at nightfall some members of the deceased husband's family. He asks permission from the ancestors and implores their intercession so that the woman may enter widowhood without falling ill or experiencing death. The rules and prohibitions vary according to the family branches. Generally, a loop is given to her and will serve as a protective belt throughout her widowhood. She has to abide by certain obligations:

- Wearing a black loincloth
- Sitting on a mat or on the floor
- Not shaking hands with visitors,

- Not washing at night because as they say, “the night belongs to the dead” (not washing with soap before the burial),
- Not combing or pricking her hair,
- Not engaging in sexual relations at the risk of causing irreparable misfortune,
- Sleeping with a little boy to avoid being disturbed by the late husband (case of the Fons d’Abomey) or with other women.
- In certain cases, sleeping with a knife under the mat or a small stick in hand to protect yourself against any attack from the deceased,
- Using plants such as “hissihissi” or “hyssop leaves” to keep the spirit of the deceased away from her,
- Staying on or next to the funeral bed before burial.

After three months, the widow can have her head shaved and cover herself with another loincloth. But the period of widowhood lasts up to at least six months and one year at most, a period at the end of which she can resume an ordinary social life if she is not bound by levirate customs (choice of 'another spouse in her husband's family).

It should also be added that widowhood is not a matter of free will but an obligation to respect tradition and so that the soul of the deceased rests in peace.

– **Recent injury relating to the country: The COVID 19 health crisis**

According to the information collected, this pandemic spread thanks to poor biological manipulation in the laboratory, primarily causing damage on the Asian continent which gradually spread across the entire planet; and unfortunately, our country is not the least. In the fight

against this virus, our country detected the first case linked to this disease in March 2020, which ultimately led the authorities at various levels to carry out a general confinement with the closure of all places where people would normally gather. All this resulted in:

- The closure of places of worship,
- The establishment of a sanitary cordon across the cities which suddenly reduced economic exchanges,
- The closure of borders (land, air, sea, etc.) resulting in the deterioration of the terms of trade,
- Quarantining patients in a specialized center for good medical monitoring,
- The death of patients, impacting many families, who were not even authorized to pay their last respects to the deceased before the burial,
- The temporary or even permanent closure of certain businesses and companies, thus plunging a large number of people into unprecedented unemployment, which is still the case.
- All this has weakened countries around the world in all areas of life, especially those where the pandemic has had a devastating impact, with a wide range of after-effects, as a result of which people are still struggling to start a new life.