



## The gendered funeral rites and rituals of the Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic groups in upper regions of Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic groups in Upper Regions of Ghana (Upper East and Upper West Regions of Ghana) to examine the gendered aspects of mortuary and funeral rites. The study, anchored on the theoretical frameworks of Feminist Anthropology and Postcolonial theory, adopted qualitative approach by deploying Semi structure interview, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), Participant Observation in the data collection exercise. Bolgatanga, Bongo, Tongo, Navrongo, and Sandema in the Upper East Region and Jirapa, Lawra, Takpo, Diffiama, and Nandom in the Upper West Region were the 10 communities where fieldworks were carried out. Additionally, the researchers conducted ethnographic studies, spending two weeks in each of the studied location to get a thorough understanding of regional traditions and rituals. Data on the insights into how gender hierarchies are ingrained in cultural practices and the lasting impacts of colonialism on social structures and cultural norms were gathered. The study used these viewpoints to critically analyze how gender roles and power dynamics influenced burial rites in these areas. To ensure the inclusion of key participants into the study, a purposive sample technique was employed to choose participants who had direct engagement and substantial knowledge of mortuary and funeral activities. For the semi-structured interviews, a total of 30 participants were chosen, 15 from each region. Two traditional priests, one from each region, and seven males and seven females from each region were included to ensure gender balance. Additionally, separate Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 10–12 participants were held for male and female community members. The results showed that funeral rites were still heavily influenced by traditional gender norms, with men normally occupying authoritative positions in ritual leadership and decision-making and women being confined to emotional and practical duties. However, the study also found that initiatives to challenge long-standing gender hierarchies and larger social changes are driving a shift towards more inclusive practices. According to the research, even in the face of patriarchal norms, greater gender parity in funeral ceremonies could be fostered by targeted policy reforms and enhanced knowledge. In addition to offering greater insights into societal beliefs regarding gendered roles in these rituals, these conversations sought to document gendered viewpoints on funeral practices. The study has multiple implications for practice and policy in the future. In order to foster equal participation in funeral rites and increase inclusivity and respect for all genders, it promotes the adoption of gender-sensitive regulations. In postcolonial African societies, gendered power dynamics and colonial legacies continue to influence cultural practices. This research highlights the need for a more nuanced approach to the intersection of gender, tradition, and power in modern African contexts. Such a strategy could guide the development of policy frameworks that support social justice, gender equity, and the decolonization of regional cultural traditions.

**Keywords:** Cultural Practices, Dagaaba and Frafra Ethnic Groups, Feminist Anthropology, Funeral Rites, Gender Equity, Gender Roles, Postcolonial Theory

### I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, anthropological discourse has long emphasized the importance of mortuary practices as critical reflections of cultural expressions, societal structures, and values (Bartel, 1982). It must also be emphasized that funeral and mortuary rites are not just death-related rites or customs, but also significant social phenomena that express the dynamics of gender roles, identities, and community connections. To buttress this fact, the foundational frameworks such as Janusz and Walkiewicz (2018) rites of passage have been crucial in demonstrating how funerals

signify life-changing events for the deceased and the bereaved community as well. Throwing more light on this idea, Norwood (2013) highlighted the transitional stage of grief, during which social norms or conventions are momentarily suspended to allow for the redefining of individual and group identities.

It must be stressed that the picture is not different from the African context. Researchers like Bonsu and DeBerry (2008) emphasized the community aspect of funeral rites in Africa, stressing their function in promoting social continuity and cohesiveness. In the Ghanaian arena, the nation's diverse culture gives rise to a wide range of funeral customs among its various ethnic groups. For example, (Boateng & Anngela-Cole, 2016) investigate the cultural relevance of funerals, while Agyekum (2006) provides a perceptive analysis of their linguistic and cultural aspects.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Existing studies frequently emphasize the communal features of these behaviors at the expense of the gendered dimensions of these practices. The disregard of these gendered aspects restricts our comprehension of how mourning practices serve as a site of social negotiation, power relations, and the development of human identity in addition to reflecting cultural values. In other words, the absence of a study in this area creates a significant knowledge gap on how cultural norms particularly those related to gender influence funeral rites and grief in these areas. According to Krause (2019), this overlook is problematic since a lot of research ignores the significant influence that gender has on funeral customs and grief, especially in cultural settings where gender hierarchies are well defined and ingrained. In the view of some ethnographic studies (Ucko, 1969), gender roles have a considerable impact on how funeral rites are performed, but yet there are lack of thorough studies into the area.

This gap is profound in the Upper East and West Upper East regions of Ghana, where different cultural norms demand more in-depth exploration. Within these, the two ethnic groups (Frafra and Dagaaba) present a compelling case for exploring gendered mortuary practices. Preliminary ethnographic insights point to the crucial role that gender plays in shaping mourning expressions and rituals, yet there is lack of thorough exploration of these dynamics (Silverman et al., 2021). This is the gap the study seeks to fill.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To explore how gender influences the roles and expectations of men and women during funeral rites in the Dagaaba and Frafra ethnic groups.
- ii. To analyze how gendered cultural norms shape expressions of mourning and mourning rituals in these ethnic groups.
- iii. To explore the Cultural beliefs and spiritual significance of Dagaaba and Frafra ethnic groups funeral rites.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

The feminist anthropological and postcolonial theories served as the foundation for this study. The research was conducted through the lens of these theories.

#### 2.1.1 Feminist Anthropology

Feminist Anthropology with its emphasis on gender as a central axis of social analysis has fundamentally changed the way that culture is studied. A male-centric perspective on social and cultural phenomena was reinforced by traditional anthropological paradigms, which frequently ignored or neglected women's perspectives. By highlighting how gender influences social institutions, cultural norms, and personal identities, Feminist Anthropologists attempt to counteract this androcentric bias (Krause, 2019). Feminist theory has shed light on the intricate relationships between gender and other social categories including class, race, and ethnicity by highlighting women's responsibilities in cultural practices (Moore & Kim 2022).

The criticism of universalism which has the notion that all cultures adhere to the same set of values and customs is one of the main pillars of feminist anthropology (Ucko, 1969). Feminist anthropologists, on the other hand, promote a more complex view of culture that considers the lived experiences of women and other oppressed genders. Examining funeral customs, where gender norms are frequently ingrained and ritualized, makes this viewpoint especially pertinent. For instance, women's involvement in funeral customs may be subservient in many civilizations, as patriarchal traditions severely limit their social positions and emotional displays (Hodgson, 2025). Therefore, Feminist Anthropology offers a crucial foundation and perspective for investigating how rituals such as funeral rites and grieving reflect and sustain gendered power structures.

Feminist Anthropological theory sheds light on the gendered aspects of funeral customs and the unequal power dynamics between men and women in Ghanaian culture. Feminist Anthropologists can critically examine how women's involvement in funeral and mourning customs both reflect and perpetuate larger gender hierarchies in Ghanaian society by concentrating on these practices (Krause, 2019). This theory also provides a framework for comprehending women's agency in these situations, examining how they could challenge or defy gendered norms by expressing their grief and grieving in different ways (Ucko, 1969).

### 2.1.2 Postcolonial Theory

Fundamentally, Postcolonial theory examines the ways in which colonialism shaped discourses on race, ethnicity, and power, frequently casting colonized people as "Other" in opposition to the colonizer. Long after colonialism officially ended, social and cultural dynamics are still shaped by this colonized dichotomy (Evang, 2022). A critique of colonialism and its lasting effects on the modern world gave rise to postcolonial theory. This theoretical framework looks at how colonized peoples' identities, cultures, and societies have been influenced by colonial power systems (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2023).

Postcolonial theory challenges anthropology's historical connections to colonialism and its function in perpetuating colonial myths. It draws attention to the necessity for a more critical analysis of the ways in which both indigenous customs and the upheavals of colonial encounters have influenced cultural practices like funeral rites. According to postcolonial anthropologists, colonialism changed the cultural and social norms of colonized nations in addition to imposing foreign political and economic institutions (Ashcroft et al., 2024).

Postcolonial theory serves a very strong foundation for analyzing the ways in which colonial history has shaped contemporary gender roles in funeral rites and customs in Ghana. Although Ghana's traditional funeral rites have their origins in indigenous cultural systems, gender relations changed during the colonial era, frequently making patriarchal systems worse. Postcolonial examination of funeral customs in areas such as Upper West and Upper East of Ghana can reveal how colonial legacies still influence gendered expectations in mourning, such as the marginalization of women's roles in public rituals or the upholding of male-dominated leadership in funeral preparation and ceremony (Silverman et al., 2021). Postcolonial theory also examines how these historical changes have affected contemporary society, raising concerns about how much colonial influence has changed gender roles and indigenous customs.

Additionally, Postcolonial theorists highlight the agency of colonized peoples and the importance of resistance. Through the lens of funeral customs, this viewpoint promotes an investigation into how indigenous communities including women resist or reinterpret colonial impositions in Ghana (Krause, 2023). In a nutshell, Postcolonial theory provides a framework for examining these relationships in order to comprehend how colonialism continues to influence modern gender and cultural norms.

## 2.2 Empirical Review

### 2.2.1 Gender Roles and Funeral Rites in the Global Perspective

It is important to note that the concept of burial customs and mortuary practices is not unique to Ghana alone, but also affects people all around the world including Africa (Atinga, 2006). The importance of funeral rituals as critical reflections of society values, institutions, and cultural manifestations has been emphasized by anthropological discourse on a global scale over time (Ankalibazuk, 2022).

In addition to being death-related customs, funeral and mortuary rites are significant social phenomena that expresses the dynamics of gender roles, identities, and community connections (Adjei et al., 2024). Fundamental frameworks, like Gennep's rites of passage, have been a cornerstone in demonstrating how funerals signify life-changing events for the grieving family and the community at large (Hazan & Gamlie, 2004). Kohrt (2015) expanded on this idea by emphasizing the liminal period of grieving, during which social conventions are momentarily suspended to allow for the renegotiation of individual and group identities.

According to available literature, in many societies around the world, men usually handle the funeral's logistics such as supervising the burial, conducting spiritual rites, and handling funeral costs, while women bear the emotional burden of mourning and express their sorrow through rituals like wailing, body preparation, and managing the deceased's care (Matsebula, 2021). Men concentrate on ceremonial tasks and upholding social order, while women are expected to openly express their feelings. This separation of roles between men and women is a reflection of a larger societal system.

It's also important to remember that this separation is ingrained in many cultures. In the Christian and Jewish traditions, for example, men carry out the more formal rituals of burial and funeral services, while women grieve and offer emotional support. In order for family members and the community at larger to express their grief, women frequently play a crucial role (Walter et al., 2012). On the other hand, in regions like the Middle East and Asia, men

typically perform rituals that help the departed transition to the afterlife, whereas women are usually left out of such holy duties (Halevi, 2004). The conventional belief that women carry out more private, nurturing duties while males hold public, leadership positions is the foundation of these gendered practices.

### 2.2.2 Gender and Mourning Rituals in the African Perspective

In Africa, funeral rites and mortuary customs are closely linked to gender, religious, and cultural standards. Funeral ceremonies shed light on the intricate relationship between custom and social order. Many African communities have predominately gendered burial customs, with men required to carry out the more formal, ceremonial tasks while women are frequently allocated roles centered on caring for others and expressing emotions. By preparing the deceased, cleaning the body, and expressing their sorrow through singing, weeping, or ritual performances that require public mourning, women have historically been the main mourners (Afari-Twumasi, 2016). The societal view of women as nurturing and caring for houses and even for the deceased is emphasized by these duties.

On the part of Mbiti (1990), men typically play larger public roles in many African cultures, where they become responsible for supervising funeral ceremonies, leading sacrifices to ancestors, praying, and providing offerings). As communal guardians and spiritual leaders, the men's responsibilities in these rites reflect their status. However, women are expected to handle the emotionally draining parts of mourning, such as helping family members and neighbors get over their grief. Social and spiritual hierarchies play a major role in these distinctions, with men maintaining authority over ritual practices and public leadership while women are expected to uphold familial ties and handle emotional labor (Olupona, 2014).

Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that in recent years the gendered allocation of labour in burial rites has changed in many African countries as a result of globalization and the expansion of Christianity and Islam. Women may take part in traditionally male-dominated leadership roles, such as leading prayers or delivering eulogies, in urban areas or communities where Christianity and Islam have gained traction (Kharin, 2024). These modifications are a reflection of the larger societal shifts taking place throughout the continent, as movements for gender equality are questioning established discriminatory gender roles during funeral (Kharin, 2024).

It is also important to note that notwithstanding some progress made in addressing gender gaps in some areas, the gendered division of labour in funeral rites still exists in rural places where traditional African religions are still prevalent. Women still shoulder the emotional and physical weight of grieving, while men still predominately supervise spiritual rites like prayers for the departed and sacrifices to ancestors (Eyifa, 2012). Since funeral rites are a means of preserving cultural and spiritual continuity in the face of death, these customs reinforce gender differences within the society.

In the case of Africa, researchers like Bonsu and DeBerry-Spence (2008) have emphasized the community aspect of burial customs in Africa, stressing its function in promoting social continuity and cohesiveness. The analysis of the gendered components of these behaviors is still lacking in literature as previous studies have frequently placed more emphasis on the collective features of these rituals than on the experiences of individuals. Krause (2019) criticizes this mistake, pointing out that a lot of research ignore the significant influence of gender on funeral customs and mourning, especially in cultures with deeply ingrained gender hierarchies.

In summary, in the context of Africa, funeral and mortuary rites demonstrate how gender roles are influenced by both religious beliefs and cultural norms, with men performing ceremonial and ritualistic tasks and women typically handling emotional labor. While these traditional roles are gradually changing due to contemporary influences, gender differences still have a significant impact on how African communities deal with death and mourning customs (Mbiti, 1990; Olupona, 2014).

### 2.2.3 Cultural Norms and Expressions of Grief

Mortuary and burial customs in Ghana are essential components of many communities' cultural fabric and significantly shaped by gender. In Ghana, men and women are given distinct duties during the grieving periods in strongly gendered traditional burial customs. For instance, women are usually the main mourners among groups like the Akan's, Ewe's, Dagaaba's, and Frafra's. Among their duties are getting the deceased's body ready, cleaning, dressing, and publicly grieving. Additionally, women play essential roles in planning funeral ceremonies, particularly in managing the emotional facets of grieving (Eyifa 2012). Women are typically left to handle the emotional aspects of sorrow; their roles frequently involve leading prayers and offering sacrifices in remembrance of ancestors. This role divide is consistent with the larger cultural and societal structure, where women carry out emotional labour and are in charge of upholding ties to the family and the society. Males are frequently viewed as public figures in charge of leadership (Hadley & Moore, 2015). Men typically perform the most ceremonial and ritualistic elements of burial

ceremonies. Men supervise the funeral arrangements, conduct spiritual rites, conduct burials, and make sacrifices in many Ghanaian communities (Mbiti, 1990; Kharin, 2024).

This gendered division of labour highlights the traditional perception of women as the major caregivers, both during life and after death, in addition to reflecting societal expectations. Despite the gendered nature of these rituals, the impact of Islam and Christianity in Ghana has caused some changes in burial customs. For instance, men and women may now take turns organizing and conducting ceremonies at Christian funerals. Traditionally male-dominated roles, such as leading prayers, giving eulogies, and presiding over ceremonies, can now be performed by women (Maoilearca et al., 2024). This shift is indicative of how gender roles are changing in Ghana as a result of larger movements for gender equality in both the religious and cultural domains (Bosak et al., 2018)). Similar differences exist in Islam, which is popular in northern Ghana. While women are still significant participants in the emotional and social components of the grieving process, men usually conduct the burial and prayer ceremonies (Hadley & Moore, 2015).

However, in many rural areas in Ghana, where indigenous customs are still common, gender roles in funeral rites are still mostly traditional. Men continue to serve as spiritual leaders and overseers over the ceremonies, while women continue to suffer the brunt of the mourning process. A typical example is among the Akan, Ewes, and Gas, including many communities in Ghana (Maoilearca et al., 2024). Men's and women's duties are viewed as complimentary, with each making a culturally significant contribution to the funeral process. Men's involvement in the spiritual and ceremonial parts guarantees that the deceased is appropriately honoured and that the cultural and religious rites are performed, while women's primary role in caring for and grieving assures the emotional continuation of the family and the community.

#### 2.2.4 Impact of Globalization

Furthermore, urbanization, globalization, and the emergence of gender equality movements have all contributed to an increasing trend of shifting gender roles in burials around the world. For example, women are increasingly taking the lead in planning funeral ceremonies, conducting memorial services, and even conducting burial rites in various Western societies (Kharin, 2024). Similar to this, women are starting to have more influence over funeral choices that have historically been made by men in many Asian nations (Maoilearca et al., 2024). These changes challenge long-standing conventions that rigidly regulated participation in death rites based on gender and indicate a growing acknowledgment of gender parity in spiritual and ritual duties.

Despite this change and development, many cultures continue to use highly gendered burial customs, with men and women playing separate but complementary roles. For example, gendered roles are frequently linked to spiritual responsibilities in indigenous cultures, where women handle the emotional and physical parts of mourning while males carry out the necessary rites that will make the departed pass into the afterlife (Klass, 2006). Each gender continues to play distinct, culturally relevant roles during times of loss, and these customs represent the enduring cultural values that define and influence gender expectations within funeral ceremonies.

As a result, the worldwide setting paints a nuanced picture of how gender stereotypes are both upheld and questioned during funeral ceremonies, highlighting the continuous interaction between custom, religion, and social change. The evolution of funeral rites is nevertheless influenced by changing societal expectations and the growing acceptance of gender equality, even though many societies still maintain a gendered division of labor in these ceremonies (Klass, 2006).

These rituals support the preservation of family and community identities, with males offering spiritual direction and women attending to the family's emotional needs (Eyifa 2012). Additionally, funerals in Ghana serve as platforms for social and political expression, allowing people to demonstrate their social standing and negotiate gender roles through their involvement and planning (Woma, 2012).

The greater social significance of funerals is also reflected in this gendered division of labour in Ghana, where dying is viewed as both a personal loss and a communal event that fosters social cohesion and cultural continuity. Funeral traditions in Ghana uphold gender norms by guaranteeing that men and women continue to fulfill their assigned responsibilities within the larger social and cultural framework.

While existing research provides significant insights into the gendered division of labour in mortuary and funeral rites globally and within Africa, specifically in Ghana, there are considerable gaps in literature. Studies examining gendered roles within certain ethnic groupings, such as the Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic groups, are scarce, which is one notable gap. A better understanding of the ways in which gender and culture interact in the context of death and grieving requires research that examines the complexities of these roles in Upper Regions of Ghana, taking into account both indigenous beliefs and the influence of Christianity and Islam.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Study Area

The study was carried out among the Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic groups in the Upper Regions (Upper East and Upper West Regions of Ghana). The rich cultural customs surrounding funeral and funeral rites in these areas, which actively incorporate gendered roles and obligations, led to their selection. In order to guarantee a varied representation of the cultures of the Frafra's and Dagaaba's, the data were gathered from five communities in each region. Data was gathered from the communities of Bolgatanga, Bongo, Tongo, Navrongo, and Sandema in the Upper East Region and Jirapa, Lawra, Takpo, Diffiama, and Nandom in the Upper West Region. After spending roughly two weeks in each region, the researchers were able to observe customary funeral customs and rites and gained a thorough grasp of regional cultural quirks.

#### 3.2 Research Design

The gendered aspects of mortuary and funeral customs among the Frafra and Dagaaba groups were investigated in this study using a qualitative research design. In order to gain a more profound comprehension of the cultural, social, and gendered factors that influence burial customs, a qualitative approach was selected. Because of the ethnographic research approach, the researchers were able to fully integrate into the communities by taking part in and seeing burial ceremonies. First-hand knowledge of the roles, customs, and interactions between men and women during funerals was made possible by the ethnographic method, which also clarified the ways in which gender shapes these customs.

#### 3.3 Target Population

Participants in the Frafra and Dagaaba communities who are deeply knowledgeable about mortuary and funeral customs were part of the study's target demographic. In addition to religious leaders who direct or influence the gendered aspects of funeral rites, the study also included community leaders and cultural elders who were familiar with traditional mortuary practices and gender roles, funeral organizers and ritual performers who are directly involved in funeral rites and ceremonies, and family members and mourners who have firsthand experience with funeral rituals and may be able to provide insights into the gendered experiences of mourning. Because of these varied participant groups, the study was able to document a wide range of experiences, gendered behaviors, and community dynamics related to funeral rites.

#### 3.4 Sampling and Sample Size

Participants who were directly involved in and knowledgeable about funeral practices were chosen using a purposive sampling technique. The inclusion of people with pertinent knowledge about gender roles and funeral traditions was guaranteed by this sample technique. Fifteen (15) participants each from Upper East Regions and the Upper West Regions made up the total of thirty (30) individuals were chosen for semi-structured interviews. Two traditional priests, one from each region, and seven males and seven females were chosen from each region to ensure gender parity.

Additionally, to investigate shared viewpoints on gender roles in burial ceremonies, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held separately for male and female community members. Ten (10) to twelve(12) participants' participated in each FGD, with one group for men and one for women, in order to promote gendered conversations and acquire a better understanding of societal perceptions on gendered behaviors.

#### 3.5 Data Collection

To guarantee a deep, thorough understanding of the gendered components of funeral rites, data were gathered utilizing a variety of qualitative techniques. These comprised documentary analysis, ethnographic fieldwork, FGDs, and semi-structured interviews.

The participants who were chosen for the Semi-Structured Interviews were interviewed in-depth. Individual experiences and opinions regarding gender roles in funeral rites were the main focus of the interviews. The purpose of the interview questions was to learn more about the participants' perspectives, experiences, and knowledge about the cultural significance of burial rites and how gender influences these customs.

To investigate collective views on gender roles in funeral practices, two focus groups were arranged: one for women and one for men. Common opinions, societal conventions, and gendered expectations related to burial customs were identified with the aid of these conversations. Additionally, this made it possible to compare how men and women perceive their roles in the burial process.



In order to get a better understanding of the evolution of mortuary practices and gender roles within the Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic groups, the researchers conducted two weeks of ethnographic fieldwork in each region, attending funerals and observing the customs and rituals. This allowed the researchers to document gendered behaviors, roles, and interactions in real-time, providing invaluable context for understanding the social dynamics of funeral rites through participant observation, which was recorded and analyzed to supplement interview and focus group discussions (FGD) data.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to find themes and patterns in the data that was gathered. There were multiple steps in the thematic analysis. All fieldwork observations, FGs, and interviews were transcribed by the researchers in this step. After that, researchers studied the data several times to become acquainted with it and gained a general understanding of its contents. Following that, the data was classified by grouping responses and actions into categories based on important themes pertaining to social dynamics, gender roles, and ritual practices. Field notes, FGDs, and interview transcripts were all subjected to thematic categorization. Overarching themes were found by analyzing the coded data. These topics included the impact of colonial history on gender roles, the performance of rituals, the influence of traditional beliefs, and gendered feelings of bereavement. To guarantee accuracy and consistency, the researchers double-checked the themes that emerged from fieldwork observations, interviews, and focus group discussions. This procedure made sure that the results represented the wide range of viewpoints and experiences held by the research participants. The thematic analysis was guided by the theoretical frameworks of feminist anthropology and postcolonial theory, which provided a lens through which to interpret gendered roles and colonial legacies in funeral practices.

### 3.7 Validity and Reliability

Triangulation, which uses various data sources (interviews, focus group discussions, and ethnographic observations) to validate findings and support study conclusions, was one of the strategies utilized in the study to improve the validity and dependability of findings. In order to make sure that the research participants' viewpoints were fairly reflected, we also employed a member checker, in which a few key research participants were invited to examine and validate the accuracy of recorded data and interpretations. In order to guarantee objectivity and coherence in interpretation, peer review was also taken into consideration when evaluating the data and early findings. This qualitative methodology allowed for a thorough examination of the gendered aspects of mortuary and funeral rites, offering important insights into the cultural and social significance of these practices among the Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic groups in the Upper East and Upper West Regions of Ghana. Additionally, the researchers spent much time in each community, which allowed them to establish rapport with participants and obtain genuine insights into cultural practices.

### 3.8 Ethical Consideration

It is the basic duty of researchers to shield study participants from any threats, humiliation, or bodily injury that might occur. Furthermore, regardless of a participant's gender, religion, tribe, or social standing, Creswell and Creswell stress the significance of maintaining the values of integrity and social justice.

At every step of the research procedure, ethical considerations were closely monitored in accordance with Creswell & Creswell's (2017) recommendations. This commitment to ethical rigour underscores the critical role of respecting participants' rights and ensuring their protection, which is essential for obtaining culturally sensitive knowledge and generating valid constructs from the data collected. Informed consent was obtained, ensuring that participation was entirely voluntary. Participants were also assured of the confidentiality of the information provided, with explicit guarantees that their identities would remain anonymous throughout the study.

## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Findings

#### 4.1.1 Gender Roles and Funeral Rites within the Dagaaba and Frafra Ethnic Groups

The study revealed that gender-based responsibilities are clearly defined during mortuary and burial ceremonies among the Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic groups in Upper East and Upper West regions of Ghana. The findings offer a nuanced picture on how social and gender norms allocate roles and obligations to men and women during mortuary and funeral rites. According to many of the key participants from the studied locations, men are mostly in control of funeral finances and logistical planning while women primarily concentrate on hospitality tasks such as food preparation and service. Men are viewed as leaders in ritualistic portions of the funeral rites and take on

tasks such as the preparation of the dead body for burry, digging graves, consulting soothsayers to determine the cause of death, pouring libations to ancestors, covering the financial costs of burials and funerals, and playing musical instruments. Women's roles are limited to supporting duties, demonstrating a gendered division of labour.

As one of the key participants from the Bongo traditional area of the Upper East Region remarked:

*Men hold decision-making power regarding funeral arrangements, burial sites, and inheritance, while women's voices may be marginalized or overlooked. The men are tasked with digging the grave and pouring libations while the women take care of food preparations, wailing, consolation, and domestic-related chores. On the part of the women, they have limited control over funeral planning.* (Key Informant, 2024).

Participants in a FGD in Sadema, Upper East Region, also demonstrated this gender-based division:

*Men make decisions regarding everything about the funeral while women implement these decisions. Men lead in decision-making, dirges, grave digging, and burying the dead. Women sing dirges to welcome visitors and serve refreshments* (FGD, Sadema, Upper East Region, 2024).

This phrase emphasizes how men are primarily given the ability to make decisions and are supposed to show strength and leadership when planning the ceremonial and logistical aspects of funerals. Participants in a different FGD from Jirapa, Upper West Region, reaffirmed this viewpoint, pointing out:

*Men hold decision-making power regarding funeral arrangements, burial sites, and inheritance, while women's voices are often marginalized or overlooked. Women have limited control over funeral planning. Traditionally, men are expected to be strong and are assigned physically demanding tasks, while women, viewed as nurturers, take on consolatory roles.* (FGD, Jirapa, Upper West Region, 2024).

The participants in this study exposed the hierarchical system wherein men perform physically taxing work and make important decisions, while women's roles are viewed as subordinate and restricted to supportive and grieving positions.

Additionally, the results showed that funeral planning sessions are primarily headed by men. Many attendees underlined that, despite their unique knowledge or ideas that could help the process, women are rarely invited to such events. This is consistent with literature that argues that this role division is consistent with the larger cultural and social structure, where women carry out the emotional work and are in charge of upholding ties to the family and the community, while men are frequently viewed as public figures who must exercise leadership (Hadley & Moore, 2015). As an example, one participant noted that:

*Men exercise considerable power over funeral arrangements and inheritance matters, men control significant resources and decisions that affect the community's social and economic fabric.* (Key Informant, 2024).

Also, at Diffiama, one of the studied locations in Upper West Region, one of the key participants corroborated this during a semi-structured interview:

*Men take on leadership roles in funeral planning and execution while women engage in preparing and serving food and drinks to the mourners. The men bring the dead body home from the mortuary. The men are tasked with digging the grave and pouring libations while the women take care of food preparations, wailing, consolation, and other such domestic-related chores.* (Key Informant, 2024).

Majority of the key participants at the separate FGDs of the studied locations of the two Regions shared similar views that men play important and varied roles in burial ceremonies, which are steeped in history and have a great deal of cultural significance. According to the participants men are largely in charge of the deceased's preparation. The deceased is honoured and ready for the journey to the ancestral house or realm during this preparation phase, which is considered a sacred obligation.

Notwithstanding the above findings above, another interesting revelation that emerged from the finding is that while the participants of the entire study areas of the Upper East Region agreed that men absolutely take in charge of burials and funerals and women playing complementary roles, some of the participants from the studied locations in the Upper West Regions expressed contrarily opinion. According to them, in some of the communities in Upper West Region women played a key role in in bathing their colleague woman who have passed on and prepare the body for the burial.

*For the women: if the deceased is a female, the women prepare the body for burial. They also prepare food and drinks for the mourners. Women prepare the body for viewing, dressing, and applying makeup, and they emotionally support and comfort the bereaved family. They also perform religious rituals like singing hymns and reciting prayers.* (Key Informant, 2024).

This is a reflection of the sacred trust and communal obligation that women wield within these rites. This result is consistent with what other researchers have found (Mbiti, 1990; Kharin, 2024). These two scholars claim that

in many African communities, men are in charge of the burial, carrying out spiritual rites, making sacrifices, and organizing the logistics for funerals.

Our anthropological observations supported the aforementioned conclusion. It became clear that when a woman dies, women in some of the Dagaaba communities in the Upper West Region take on the responsibility of getting the body ready for burial.

This result is consistent with previous research (Kharin, 2024). Klass (2006) came to the conclusion that gender roles in burial ceremonies are shifting globally. According to this scholar, modernization, globalization, and the growth of movements for gender equality are all factors in this. For example, women are increasingly taking the lead in planning funeral ceremonies, conducting memorial services, and even conducting burial rites in various Western societies (Kharin, 2024).

Adding to this, a study by Halevi (2004) found that women are starting to have more influence over funeral choices that have historically been made by men in many Asian nations. These researchers contend that these changes challenge long-standing norms that severely regulated participation in death rites based on gender and represent a growing acceptance of gender parity in spiritual and ritual duties.

Beyond bodily preparation of the dead, women have a crucial support role in upholding the social and emotional cohesion of the burial. In keeping with the cultural focus on presenting the departed with dignity and grace, women not only wash and dress the body but also add personal touches like makeup to get them ready for the last viewing. Since female family members and friends frequently gather to encourage one another and pay respect to the departed, this act of care is both private and public.

In addition to these face-to-face encounters with the dead, women take on important roles in providing care for the living. They play an important part in promoting communal togetherness and providing sustenance to those who come together to honour the deceased by preparing food and beverages for the mourners. Women's responsibility in preserving the social ties within the community is shown in this gesture of hospitality, which highlights a sense of group support during difficult times. Additionally, women are essential in planning the funeral ceremonies, particularly in managing the emotional facets of grieving (Afari-Twumasi, 2016).

Participants in the studied locations in the Upper East Region mentioned that drumming which is played during funeral ceremonies to evoke solemnity and introspection is played by men. According to the participants these musical components are seen as essential components of the ceremonial ambiance of the funeral ceremonies, serving to connect the spiritual and physical worlds. They are not just background noise. In the case of the Upper West Region, the participants mentioned that the xylophone is commonly played by men at these ceremonies, which is a cultural expression that gives the grieving process a rhythmic and spiritual element.

This finding is consistent with literature that claims that in some regions of the world, such as the Middle East and Asia, men typically perform rituals that help the departed pass on to the afterlife, whereas women are usually left out of some holy duties (Halevi, 2004). According to literature, these gendered behaviors are ingrained in the conventional wisdom that maintains that women carry out more solitary, caring responsibilities while men occupy leadership positions (Halevi, 2004). The findings, once more, are consistent with those of Mbiti, 1990; Kharin, 2024, who found that men typically handle the more ceremonial and ritualistic elements of funeral rites. This confirms that in many Ghanaian ethnic groups, particularly the Dagaaba and Frafra ethnic groups, men supervise the burial, carry out spiritual rites, make sacrifices, and handle funeral logistics.

#### 4.1.2 Gendered Cultural Norms and Mourning Rituals

The study reveals long-standing barriers that limit women's ability and participation in funeral preparation and traditions, highlighting larger trends of gender inequality in the community. Because women are expected to perform only domestic tasks, their contributions are often overlooked and underappreciated. The suppression of women's voices in both public and private settings is a common occurrence that reflects systemic gender inequity.

The strict commitment to traditional roles presents challenges for women who wish to take part more fully in funeral rites. Their relegation to supporting positions may limit their agency and influence during these significant social events.

Other participants from the Navrongo traditional areas of the Upper East Region remarked:

*Cultures and beliefs do not encourage women to participate in mortuary rites for fear of breaking down or collapsing since women have soft hearts. Funeral rites prioritize patriarchal roles while relegating women to the background.* (Key Informant, 2024).

Furthermore, a participant from the Tongu traditional area in the Upper East Region mentioned:

*Traditionally, men are not allowed to bathe and perform certain rites on the dead body of a woman, likewise the men. The women have limited roles as against their counterpart males in terms of planning and decision-making.* (Key Informant, 2024).

According to a participant from Daffiam: in the Upper West Region:

*The tradition and social norms have spelled out roles to be performed by men and women as far as funerals are concerned, and that is the guiding concept at the funeral grounds. (Key Informant, 2024)*

This demonstrates how women's responsibilities are far more limited and sheds light on the many restrictions placed on both sexes. Cultural norms dictate that men should be in charge of crucial areas of planning and decision-making, while women are restricted to supportive roles that usually lack agency. In other words, these views of the participants portray how traditional expectations define roles that restrict women's participation and decision-making power. Strict adherence to these roles not only requires participation in certain tasks but also maintains a hierarchical structure that prioritizes men in decision-making. This conclusion is in line with Epstein's (2007) research, which showed that this role division is consistent with the broader cultural and social framework, where women are responsible for maintaining relationships within the family and the community and men are often perceived as public figures in charge of leadership.

At Frafra and Dagaaba funerals, both sexes are well aware of their assigned duties; yet, women often face financial difficulties that hinder their capacity to carry out these duties. For instance, some gifts are traditionally given to males rather than women at funeral homes, which further entrenches economic disparity.

In contrast, in the Upper East Region, women are not allowed to bury their colleague deceased, unlike in the Upper West Region where this is observed. It is men who are in charge of burying both men and women in the Upper East Region. Supporting women's economic empowerment is crucial to resolving these problems. The establishment of burial funds is one project that could provide local women with the resources to assume more important roles in planning and decision-making. Encouragement of males to support their spouses financially is another strategy to alter the dynamics of funeral program participation.

These observations point to a widespread belief in gendered roles that not only reduce the value of women's contributions toward development but also dictate participation. By recognizing these obstacles, we can gain a deeper comprehension of the factors that sustain gender inequality and endeavor to promote more inclusive decision-making procedures in funerary and larger community settings. In the end, fostering an atmosphere where women's opinions are respected and their responsibilities are increased might result in more socially cohesive and equitable community behaviors.

#### 4.1.3 Cultural beliefs and spiritual significance in Frafra and Dagaaba funeral rites

Funerals for the Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic groups is not only meant for social event, but also have deep cultural and spiritual meanings and implications. These kinds of expressions are not just about celebrating life or expressing loss. They act as holy ceremonies that support the deceased's spiritual journey while strengthening ties to the community and maintaining cultural continuity. This result is consistent with research that emphasized the community aspect of funeral customs and their function in promoting social continuity and cohesiveness (Bonsu & DeBerry, 2008).

The mourning process is infused with the representation of men as strong and women as caring, which reflects larger cultural narratives of gender roles and relationships. Thus, the rituals and ceremonies serve as a potent platform for the active expression and preservation of cultural values, emphasizing the crucial interaction between gender, tradition, and spirituality in these communities. These rich culture and traditions are woven into the very fabric of collective identity and preservation for future generations.

The theme of "Cultural Beliefs and Spiritual Significance in Frafra and Dagaaba Funeral Rites," which builds on the insights from important participants, is vividly shown by first-hand stories that highlight the communities' enduring customs.

For instance, one of the key participants from Bolgatanga in the Upper East Region highlighted the importance of traditional dance and music, saying that they are crucial to the Frafra funeral because they arouse feelings. It honours and facilitates the deceased's transition into the afterlife. This testimony demonstrates how music plays a crucial role in the deceased's spiritual journey in addition to serving as a symbol of a collective expression of celebration and mourning.

Simultaneously, a participant from Nandom in the Upper West Region emphasized the Dagaaba's belief in an afterlife, saying that the Dagaaba believe in a spiritual realm where the deceased still lives on. As expressed by the participants:

*This idea influences how we view death, emphasizing the individual's passage to the afterlife. Funeral rites' emotional tone and organization are influenced by this belief system, which holds that death is a transition to an ancestor's life rather than its conclusion.*

Funerals are important expression of both collective and personal faith in life beyond death because the Frafra and Dagaaba communities use these customs and rituals to strengthen the spiritual and cultural ties that define their identities. One of the key participants from Sandema of the Upper East Region's said:

*Traditional music and dance are central to the Buli funeral with music evoking emotions. It celebrates and effects the passage of the dead into the ancestral world.* (Key Informant, 2024).

Another participant from Nandom of the Upper West Region stated:

*We the Dagaaba believe in spiritual realm where the deceased continue to dwell or exist. These beliefs shape our understanding of death with a focus on ensuring the person transit to the next world.*" (Key Informant, 2024).

## 4.2 Discussion

The study focuses on the roles that men and women play in the traditional burial customs of the Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic groups. These positions frequently serve to uphold conventional gender norms, with women performing more ceremonial and supportive responsibilities while men playing the major duties such as digging and burial. This interplay demonstrates how gendered expectations are still present in these two ethnic groups during funeral rites and ceremonies.

The results showed that the Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic groups in Upper East and Upper West Regions of Ghana have distinctive burial customs that are strongly influenced and impacted by gender roles and represent larger African cultural norms. Men and women in the Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic groups are given different roles according to their social obligations. The chief mourners are women, who frequently perform the ceremonies that call for emotional outpouring. This could involve wailing, singing, and carrying out group activities that signify the time of grief (Atinga, 2006). Conversely, men tend to play larger public roles and are frequently in charge of the funeral's administrative details, such as planning the burial procession and handling funeral costs.

In addition to being functional, the gendered roles in Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic groups' funeral ceremonies are also profoundly spiritual. In order to guarantee the deceased's safe transition to the afterlife, men perform specific spiritual rites, such as pouring libations to the ancestors (Ankalibazuk, 2022). On the other hand, women's duties are more emotionally focused, emphasizing the need to meet the community's emotional needs and establish a familial connection with the departed. It is believed that the community's collective sorrow and closure depend on women's public displays of grief (Afari-Twumasi, 2016). These positions mirror traditional gender roles in African societies, where women are seen as the emotional caregivers and males as the defenders and spiritual guides.

From the aforementioned discussion, it could be observed that men and women perform complementary responsibilities in the highly gendered funeral rites of the Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic group. Men are in charge of the funeral's spiritual and leadership elements, while women's duties are mostly focused on caring for and grieving. Notwithstanding this gendered role, these behaviors are starting to change as a result of changes in gender relations brought about by contemporary movements and organizations. In the studied locations, gendered funeral duties are being impacted by modernization and religious shifts. Gender roles in burial customs are beginning to change where Islam or Christianity are practiced. According to Kharin (2024), Christian burial traditions, for example, permit both men and women to participate in conducting prayers and planning the funeral. In spite of this positive move, traditional gendered roles are frequently upheld, especially in rural areas where the Frafra and Dagaaba populations are more inclined to continue with their old practices.

In general terms, the burial ceremonies of the Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic groups in Upper East and Upper West Regions of Ghana continue to have a strong gendered framework, with men and women playing different but complementary roles. While men's leadership is essential to ensuring that spiritual and communal obligations are met, women's emotional labour is essential to the grieving process. These roles emphasize how crucial gender is to preserving social and cultural order during grieving periods.

In addition to the aforementioned, the findings from the studied areas demonstrate how conventional gendered norms might impede women's empowerment by limiting their duties to ritual and emotional support. This restriction on public engagement highlights a larger social system that prioritizes the contributions of men above those of women, mirroring greater gender disparities in these communities. Women's frustrations with their limited roles point to the need for community-driven dialogues and advocacy initiatives that could support and broaden the roles that women play in funeral customs. Gender equality and traditional norms can be reconciled through educational programmes, community workshops, and inclusive policy changes.

Aside the above, the semi-structured interviews showed indications of change, particularly when gender equality is becoming more widely recognized. There is hope among participants that enhanced woman empowerment and conversation would result in more inclusive funeral customs. People who are younger and better educated in the society are more likely to embrace customs that promote greater gender parity in funeral duties. Given that both men



and women participate in funeral customs, maintaining gender norms is viewed as a way to promote societal cohesiveness. But this system also makes gender equality difficult, especially when younger generations start to question established positions.

The study promotes a balanced strategy where gender equality and traditional roles can coexist while honouring cultural traditions. This strategy guarantees that both men and women make meaningful contributions to these culturally significant rituals while encouraging a move toward inclusivity and supporting cultural preservation. In summary, the study "Gendered Mortuary and Funeral Rites among the Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic groups in Upper East and Upper West Regions of Ghana", emphasizes the profound influence of gender roles on funeral customs and makes the case that embracing inclusivity may result in more equitable participation, promoting social cohesion and gender equality in these communities.

The study employed the Feminist Anthropological Framework and Postcolonial Theory for the research. In light of the results of this study, the researchers thoroughly examined how these theoretical frameworks relate to the setting of gendered mortuary and funeral ceremonies among the Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic groups in Upper East and Upper West Regions of Ghana. The Feminist Anthropological Framework, draws from the seminal works of Moore (2013), provided a foundation for the researchers to explore how power dynamics and gender constructs influence cultural practices in the Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic groups. Using this perspective, the themes that arose from the findings such as the Division of Labour in funeral rites were examined to reveal how traditional gender norms determine the duties that are assigned roles to men and women at funerals. This is indicative of larger societal norms that value male authority. This viewpoint emphasizes how these divisions either support or contradict the community's established power systems.

By incorporating these theoretical viewpoints into the study of gendered burial and mortuary customs among the Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic groups in the areas under study, our study offers a thorough grasp of the intricacies of gender dynamics in these customs. It draws attention to the fact that funeral ceremonies serve as both places of grieving and settings for the performance, negotiation, and contestation of gender roles. The results showed that these ceremonies provide chances for resistance and identity redefinition while simultaneously reflecting society norms and power dynamics. This comprehensive method enhances gender studies and anthropology in Upper Regions of Ghana (Upper East and Upper West Regions of Ghana) by fostering a better comprehension of the cultural relevance of gender in relation to death and grieving.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, the study of gendered mortuary and funeral rites of the Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic groups in the Upper East and Upper West Regions of Ghana reveals a complex interplay between tradition and the evolving push for gender equality. Customary funeral customs, which provide men and women different duties, uphold ingrained gender stereotypes and promote societal cohesiveness. But these roles also restrict women's empowerment and engagement, which reflects larger gender disparities in the community.

Despite this persistence, there is evidence of a slow progress brought about by growing awareness of gender equality. More educated people and younger generations are willing to redefine traditional positions, enabling a more inclusive strategy that promotes gender balance and honors cultural history. Women's dissatisfaction with their restricted positions highlights the necessity of continued discussion, lobbying, and community involvement in order to increase their contributions within these ceremonies.

### 5.2 Recommendations

The research emphasizes the significance of striking a balance between programmes that support diversity and empowerment and observance of local customs. Greater gender equity and coherence in culturally significant rituals could be facilitated by the Frafra and Dagaaba ethnic groups establishing burial customs that honour both men and women equally through community-driven initiatives and policy assistance.

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