



## Research Article

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# Burial and Funeral Rituals of Elderly Persons among Nabdam of Frafra subgroupings in Northern Ghana

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**Abstract:** Cultural traditions at the end of life solidify societal members. Nabdam lineage members, from birth through puberty, marriage, maturity, old age, go through various rites of passage that bond them culturally and spiritually to others in society. People from the Nabdam subculture in Frafra are very concerned with planning funeral ceremonies, especially for the elderly. The goal of the study was to discover the many rituals involved with burial and funeral rituals of elderly persons among Nabdam of Frafra subgroupings in Northern Ghana. There are very few in-depth documented cases of Nabdam funerals of elderly persons both first stage and second state of the rituals. As a result, the same rituals and performances rely solely on discrepancies in oral narrations, which vary depending on who tells the story. This study employed a qualitative research approach, with ethnography serving as the research design. Data was gathered through stories, songs, wise-sayings, local narratives, interviews, observations, and documentary analysis. In this study, both purposeful and snowball sampling were used. The information was presented narratively and hybrid thematic method. According to the findings, the Nabdam are highly ritualistic people. The findings also indicated that these rituals do not occur by chance; the Nabdam have found them meaningful in the forms and positions in which they occur.

**Keywords:** Burial, Funeral Rituals, Nabdam, Elderly person, Frafra Subgrouping.

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## INTRODUCTION

Regardless of how or where we are born, what unites people of all cultures is that everyone eventually dies Gire (2014). However, cultures vary in how they conceptualize death and what happens when someone dies and death, among Africans, has remained an enigma that burial rituals and rites practiced many years ago, have resisted the wear and tear of both time and cross-cultural influences (Moyo, 2013). From an African perspective, death is a natural transition from the visible to the invisible spiritual ontology where the spirit, the essence of the person is not destroyed but moves to live in the spirit ancestors' realm, which is usually referred to as the dead (King, 2013).

Every social group in the world has specific cultural practices and beliefs (Fact Sheet, 2001; & Nabila, 2009). Traditional funeral rituals are among the cultural practices passed on from generation to generation and are rooted in their belief systems (Nyamadi, 2015).

Just like the other aspects of life and death, funeral and burial rites vary significantly across cultures, and are influenced by each culture's conceptions of death and dying. The rituals change the identity of the person from living to dead. That new identity may be as a spirit of an ancestor who remains with the family, or a soul that returns to its maker. That is why Nabdam are expected to perform certain rituals that include the remains of the deceased as a first step in moving on, otherwise the

survivors may not even accept that the deceased has died. The belief is that without performing the rituals, the deceased may be unable to proceed to heaven (Pollack, 2003).

Despite widespread Ghanaian modernization and urbanization, they continue to practice over a dozen distinct funeral rites for the dead in their rural heartland.

During my five months of investigation in Nabdam, I encountered eleven deaths and witnessed 20 different rites. To honor their ancestors, how do the Nabdam people traditionally perform funeral rites? Rituals vary in specifics for each deceased person, based on factors such as the deceased person's and the mourners' sex. Specific details about the manner of death, the deceased's good and bad actions, and the practices of the deceased and their ancestors all inform the ritual's execution. Some variations exist because of geographical variances.

### Main Objective

To study the Nabdam funeral rituals (first stage and second stage) are performance for elderly people who die.

## PERTINENT LITERATURE REVIEW

The Nabdam as a subgroup of the Frafra of northern Ghana are little documented in published

works, and their burial practices have never been discussed. Brief summaries of reports and research works on the Frafra subgroupings in northern Ghana which Nabdam is a subset are provided by (Atinga, 2006; Absi, 1995; Wedjong, 1970; Zwernemann, 1985; Zajaczkowski, 1967; Gagnon, 1956; Fortes, 1945, 1949, 1987; Cardinall, 1920; & Rattray, 1932).

### **Death**

Many different perspectives on death are held by authors, academics, individuals, and groups throughout cultures. According to Ugwu & Ugwueye (2004), death is the barrier between our material and ethereal realms. According to Goetz's (2005) interpretation, people have traditionally blamed evil forces or a "death god" for their own deaths.

Nwosu et al. (2017) study on socio-cultural context of death and mourning practices in rural Igbo communities of Nigeria asserted that there was a belief that some death is "good" while others are "bad". The "good" death includes death through sickness and accident. Death through suicide, drowning, thunder strikes and so on are regarded as "bad" death.

When a person has lived a long and fruitful life, the Akans consider death to be a good death and even celebrate it (Crentsil, 2007). This author has found that a good death is one in which the dying person and their loved ones are provided with physical comfort, acceptance, and social support, all of which contribute to lessen their emotional suffering in the final days of life. Age, social standing, and notable achievements are the primary indicators of a dignified passing (van der Geest, 2004). Those who have died a dignified death are elevated to the ranks of the ancestors (Ephirim-Donkor, 2016).

Crentsil (2007) observes that when the society shifts in response to external influences like Christianity and Western education, there appears to be a blurring of boundaries between good and terrible deaths. After death, Akans believe, a person's spirit travels to the hereafter, where he or she becomes a member of the ancestors and is assigned a special place at the feast where living relatives are always welcome (Arhin, 1994; de Witte, 2001). The burial ceremony chosen to usher the deceased into the next world has a significant impact on how welcoming the dead will be to the living. To have a funeral is more than only to bury a dead body. It is a final gesture of respect and farewell to the departed (Ephirim-Donkor, 2016; & de Witte, 2001). All Akan funerals are unique celebrations of the deceased's life. Each one reveals something unique about the deceased, the life he or she led, the esteem with which he or she was held by the community, the place he or she is thought to have in the afterlife, and the prestige of the family (Appiah, 2007; & Arhin, 1994).

Children typically plan a proper burial for their parent as a way to express gratitude for the love and support they had throughout their parent's lifetime. As a result, Akans put in the effort to ensure that the deceased has a fitting send-off that reflects his or her position and accomplishments in life.

### **Rituals**

Woodford & Jackson (2003) describe ritual, which comes from the Latin word *ritualis*, as a collection of established acts and occasionally words done periodically, especially as part of a ceremony. Ritual is defined similarly by Lechner (2004), who describes it as "the prescribed conventional manner of conducting and completing an act of worship or other solemn ceremonial." A ritual is an established or prescribed procedure for a religious or other rites, a system of religious or other rites, or the observance of set forms of public worship, as defined by Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language (1994), which agrees with Lechner's definition. For the sake of this investigation, the researcher will employ Lechner's definition.

### **Funeral Rituals or Ceremony or Rites for the Dead**

Many academics have tried to pin down the meaning of the term funeral, which comes from the Latin word *funeralis*. According to Tony (2002), a funeral has several aspects which must be considered: the physical disposal of the body, as well as social, spiritual, psychological, and economic factors. Tony (2002) describes a traditional funeral ritual as a rite of passage in which the task of the living is to assist the spiritual advancement of the dead. Gire (2014) argued that the funeral is a celebration of a rite of passage for both the deceased and the living. According to Pollack (2003), funeral and burial rites vary significantly across cultures and are influenced by each culture's conceptions of death and dying. The rituals change the identity of the person from living to dead.

In Onicha, Njoku (2010) stated that, this ceremony must be performed for a deceased person who had children and had attained the position of an elder, a titled man, or an *Amadu*. Other scholars like Thomas (1969) write about the funeral ceremony in other parts of Igbo land. He describes what happens in Nibo during the funeral ceremony. He states that "when the time comes for second burial (funeral), a gun is fired very early in the morning and the part of the wall over the door knocked down; four *Oglisi* (*Newbouldia laevis*) a replanted outside the door, a she-goat and cock sacrificed to them".. Farbod (2016), mentioned that one of the rites of passage is funeral and its Rituals. He defined a funeral as a ceremony for honoring, respecting, sanctifying, or remembering the life of a person who has died. He explains that Funerary customs comprise the complex of beliefs and practices used by a culture to remember the dead, from interment itself to various monuments, prayers, and rituals undertaken in their honor.

The process of funerals and their rituals accompanying the deaths process in the Ghanaian context has been studied by various authors. (Doggu, 2015; Woma, 2012; & Atinga, 2006).

Doggu (2015) studied among the Dagaaba ethnic group of Northern Ghana in West Africa, death rites and funeral performances are central and commonplace in the group's cosmology. The Dagaaba believe that the world of the living and the world of the dead are inextricably connected and that those alive are the *living-living*, whereas the dead are the *living dead*.

Woma (2012) also conducted a study among the Dagara, and in the survey, tradition holds that funeral rituals are the most important communal homage that the living can pay to their dead, and as such, occasions of funerals offer the opportunity for the people to make amends with their neighbors as well as their ancestors. Literature was also reviewed based on the study area within the Upper East Region of Ghana. Atinga (2006) conducted a funeral ritual among the Frafra of the Upper East of Ghana. The study found out that, for the Frafra, the ritual for the burial does not conclude the entire funeral rite. Their funeral ritual is in two parts; though a practice to dispose of the body, the burial ritual inaugurates the second part of the funeral, which is the post-burial celebration that must take place sometime after the burial. The second one is that the post-burial celebration is very important, and there is no way it can be abandoned.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was Anthropological (Ethnography) in nature, hence only qualitative methods were used to gather information. The community was the basic research unit. The study employed a purposive sampling strategy. For this research, six different localities were chosen. All the six communities was selected in Nabdham District. Ten Elders, five undertakers, five chiefs, and ten ladies, as well as five additional individuals with extensive expertise in the field, were purposively chosen from each of these communities. Therefore, there were a total of thirty-five people that took part in the research. Unstructured field observations and in-depth interviews were employed for data collection. All of the subjects were asked questions that reflected the focus of the research. Before any analysis could be done, the interviews had to be captured on tape, transcribed, and translated from Nabt to English. In this way, we got data by examining emic and etic viewpoints. This is an anthropological research, hence a combination of qualitative methods (Hybrid Thematic) was used for analysis.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Burial and Funeral Rituals of Elderly Persons among Nabdham of Frafra subgroupings in Northern Ghana

The Nadam people, like any other tribe in Northern Ghana, consider the funeral mentioned above (the married ones, especially the aged ones, are accorded full burial and funeral rites) as normal dead; hence it requires all the elaborate funeral rites accorded the dead by the living members of the family are meant to bid farewell to the deceased and prepare the deceased for a successful journey to the spirit world. The funeral rites are explained in two stages (Fresh funeral rituals and final funeral rituals and it is usually in different stages, the participants in the study developed the themes in elaborated detail below;

#### Fresh or Burial Funeral Rituals of Elderly Persons

Participants mentioned the following items as important during the fresh funeral rituals among Nabdham people some things are needed this which includes; cow horns ("**Naozuiklilia**") that will be placed at the refuse dump known as "**Tampoani**," very small calabash, big calabashes, locally waved pants ("**Kpliali**", "**Voeku**"), waved ropes, "**Zome**" (flour), guinea fowls, hens, goats, and sheep.

Together with the participants and my participant observation, the following themes and sub-themes were developed for stage one of the funeral rituals called fresh funeral rituals among the Nabdham Frafra subgroupings:

#### Theme 1: The ritual of Shaving and Bathing

Firstly, in the Nabdham people tradition, as soon as a man or woman is confirmed dead, the elders will inform the direct family members of the house. An elder and a senior undertaker explained that;

*".....We usually call the undertakers ("**Bayaah**") who dress the corpse by shaving the hair bath the corpse with warm water....."(Participant 1, 2022).*

Buttressing this observation, key informants and participants stressed that;

*"....We go to consult our gods thus, soothsaying. If the dead person says they want a house ("**yiri**") then we seek permission from the "**Teng – daan**" (those settled in the community and therefore own that town or village to dig the grave ("**Woug**")..." (Participant 2, 2022).*

During the participant observations and key informants' explanation, it was made clear that due to dead every house normally to one at least one undertaker well initiated for the purpose that if a person dies in the house, that undertaker will prepare the dead body very before they inform the clan family members.

Also, a senior undertaker concluded that;

*"....Undertakers ("**Bayaih**") bathe the corpse and preserve and keep it safe for burial. The ("**Bayahi**") bath the corpse, prepare and*

*maintain it, dig the grave and do the funeral....”*  
(Participant 3, 2022).

Other participants and key informants also mentioned that;

*“.....When the funeral is to be performed within chief judications, the family normally gives the chief a goat or sheep, coconut, and tobacco and informs the chief when the intent to start the funeral rituals....”* (Participant 1,2,3,4, 2022).

### **Theme 2: Announcement of Death**

After the deceased is laid in state, the next thing is to formally inform all the relatives far and near about the death. Among the many relatives who should be notified, the most important are the in-laws, the marital homes of the daughters of the deceased family. In the case of married women, the most important relatives to inform our members of her natal home. The natal family of a married woman plays a very important role at her funeral, son-in-laws, uncle's house, and all related family about the date set for the wake-keeping. Burial cannot take place without their presence and permission. They send some people to go and verify the death as they prepare to go for the wake-keeping ceremony.

If the deceased is a man, a message is sent to all relatives, including his uncle's house, sons-in-law, his wife's house, and all related to him. Participants explained that;

*It was delivered mainly through messengers, usually the young men in the family....”*  
(Participant 4, 5, 2022).

Another participant also narrated that;  
*“.....If the dowry has not been settled, the elders have to agree with the in-laws or transmit the part of the dowry that has not been given.....”*(Participant 6, 2022).

The woman's family plays a very important role in her funeral because, for the Frafra, a woman belongs to two families in birth and death, and this is why a woman traditionally neither has an inheritance in her father's house nor her husband's house. This resonated well with Musehane (2012), who chronicled the Venda burial rituals and had made similar observations that the sad news of death is announced by an elder.

### **Theme 3: Wake Keeping ("Kouri Nwoim" Or "Woogri")**

I attended so many funerals during my fieldwork that I lost count of them unless I referred to my notes; the wake-keeping ceremony is a preserve and a privilege for older people. The wake keeping is normally done around 2:00 Pm midnight; when midnight approaches, the family in charge of the funeral notifies the elders that it is time to begin the ceremonies. The first-born son of the deceased takes a bow and arrow, wear footwear made of cow skin, and plays a type of

traditional music called ("*Perrihi*") round the house three (3) times, and he will cry three (3) times and reaches the dead father or person name if a deceased person is a man and if woman four (4) times and the first-born daughter responses and drummers start to drum. A key informant narrated that;

*“.....They sing the funeral dirges during the procession together with war dances and traditional drumming and dancing.....”*(Participant 7, 2022).

Among the Frafra (which Nabdam is included), a funeral is usually handed over to another clan other than one's own that is related in a distant way to the clan of the family where the funeral is being performed. This clan is usually referred to as the "*sobia*", or "*Mmbabi*" which means father's son/child. The relation between these two clans is traditionally traced back to the great, great grandfather, or ancestor. Inter-marriage is forbidden between the two clans. All the materials for the funeral are usually handed over to them, and they take care of everything from the beginning of the funeral to the end. They decide when the individual rituals should be performed. They receive the ritual gifts from the family head where the funeral is being conducted and hand them over to the ritual personnel. In short, they do everything during the period of the funeral. They hand over the house to the family head only after the final rite (the rite of washing the house's gate) the rite of integration is performed.

### **Theme 4: Dressing the Dead for Burial ("Zong" Rites and "Soulug")**

In the study among the Nabdam people, older people, especially men who are head of the house of the clan, must pass through pen ("*zong*") for certain rituals to be performed on them before burial, and this is only done for men who is done in the head of the house or clan or Tindaan, and chief.

Among the people of Nabdam in the Frafra subgroupings ("*Sooluku*") is a critical process for the dead. Almost all the key informant and the participants in Nabdam for this study made it very clear that, when the person who died is a grown-up, married, and have children, they use a goatskin to do "*Soulug*," thus preparing and dressing the corpse for burial and if you do not have children they only use "*Kpalang*" type of traditional dress to dress the corpse for the funeral.

From the perspectives of the first participants and key informants, a section in Nabdam called the "*Zoolug*" group comprised of five communities (**Lorge, Damolug, Daglic, Zanlerigu and Pelung**). He stated that;

*“...Before the corpse is buried, the sisters "Pogyabilihi" to the deceased use a type of animal skin called Deer ("Walik gbong") and give to the undertakers to dress man named "Soulug" and for men who are not married or*

*have no children, we use a type of dress ("Kpalang") to dress for burial....." (Participant 8, 2022)*

Also holding similar views, Key informants from other sections in Nabdam, thus noted;

*"....They use goatskin to perform "Soulug" (to dress man) for burial, and also men who are not married and have children we do not perform "Soulug" but bury them like that....." (Participant 9, 2022)*

Corroborating this perspective, all the participants, key informants contacted, and in-depth interviews in the Nabdam area also expressed the views that;

*".....We use a type of cloth ("Moi – tann") for women to dress them for burial....." (Participant 10, 2022)*

### **Theme 5: The Traditional War Dance**

The Traditional war dance is a dance that usually occurs during the funerals of older people. They continue to sing the funeral dirges together with traditional war dances and traditional drumming and dancing during the process. Although there is no record of its origin and why it has become part of the funeral of older people, according to most of the elders and funeral ritualists I interviewed, they stated;

*".....It may be traced back to times of war and hunting. Stories abound, especially among older people, about the days of the war. Long before the colonialists came to Africa, inter-ethnic/inter-village wars were common. Villages were fighting for supremacy, and the slightest provocation was enough to spark a war between villages. The main implements of war were bows and arrows. Therefore, the war dance at funerals is a ritual reenactment of this period. ...." (Participant 8, 9, 10, 11, 2022)*

Another group of participants and informants explained that;

*".....It is also a challenge to the living to endeavor to live like this man or woman whose funeral is being performed. In addition, it is a*



*communication to the dead that the living progeny will also work hard to provide for and protect the family that remains on earth. It indicates that this person who has died was a responsible person who could protect and provide for the family's upkeep. ...." (Participant 11, 12, 13, 2022)*

Some participants also explain that;

*".....The Traditional war dance is a mock war with death that has come into the community. There are various traditional war dances in the communities, such as a war dance for elderly persons, family head, and clan head. Tindaan, Chiefs, and women. Normally people can organize war go to their aunt who married, a man is an uncle to a particular clan, and the essence of this dance wars is to tell that because God has taken their relative, but if it were to a human being, they are warriors, and they would have that person. The house of their relative will provide the war dance normally animals such as sheep, goat, and cow depending on the status of that person. ...." (Participant 13, 14, 2022)*

This is a war song. The enemy here refers to death that has killed one of their members. The performers of war dance in night rituals seek to locate and fight death physically and defeat death, but they cannot see death. It signifies bravery. The performance enables the deceased to reincarnate as somebody who will be brave and show that the dead was a brave man during his lifetime. Participants and key informants contacted in the Nabdam area also stated that;

*"....We do the war dance, and neighbors also come out to help do the war dance. Community members organize themselves and do the war dance, but the sons of the deceased also do war dance within the yard ("zanore") and kill fowls for the war dancers or goats or donkeys etc. ...." (Participant 13, 14, 15, 2022)*

This current study is similar to the ones found in the study by Adjei and Adongo (2016), among the Tongo people of the same region.



**Figure 1:** Traditional dance performance of Nabt people

Source: Researcher Field Study, 2022

### Theme 6: Killing of Animals for the Dead People ("Koulug").

When a death occurs among all the Frafra subgroups in Northern Ghana, Nabdam is a member; different animals such as cows, rams, goats, dogs, and fowls are slaughtered to bid the departed farewell the near world. In general, they feel that a person who has worked hard to acquire property, a wife, and children and died naturally should not just leave but with something new to start life, which is why certain animals must be killed for them or sent.

Participants and key informants stated;

*"....One can kill guinea fowl, goats, sheep, or a cow to do the "Koulug." The presentation of cows, goats, and other animals. ...."(Participant 14, 15, 16, 2022).*

### Theme 7: The Funeral Dirges ("Namorri")

A Cantor Leads Them, And Everybody Responds With The Chorus. The cantor sings the praises of the clan tracing the genealogy as far back as he can remember, mentioning the brave ones and their achievements in war. Certain famous war centers are mentioned. These centers are mentioned in the dirges to remind the people of how their ancestors fought to liberate them and protect them. That implies the village's very survival depended on the bravery of the ancestors.

In doing "*Namorri*" (incantations), this is done before the corpse leaves the house. Also, before you take the corpse out for burial, we go round the house three times if male but female four times with high fire from the kitchen to "*Sapakin*."

### Theme 8: The rituals of beating fowl for the Dead ("Noa – kgahi")

Among all the four Frafra subgroups, especially the Nabdam and Talensi people, it is always a norm that before they remove the dead body for burial, they do a ritual buy using a fowl to beat against a wall mention the deceased name they gave to him at birth here. No nicknames are called to make a statement that "if Yine today that you are going home if it your own going or our ancestor has called you or if someone has killed you then let it come out during the soothsaying session." Participants in the study explained that;

*"....Family heads, clan heads, Tengdaan, and Chief own is very different in a sense, during the funeral of this kind of persons mentioned they see it as normal dead so children will climb the pen ("Zong") and say I "when my father was alive from his childhood until his death, he age mate had never put him on the ground or beaten and among you here anybody father who has*

*ever done that then go for the fowl. ...."(Participant 15, 16, 17, 2022).*

### Theme 9: Digging New Grave for Burial of Older People ("Yibnbali", or "Yurpali").

Once again, among the Frafra subgroupings where Nabdam people form part, philosophy or worldview is not everybody died to need a new grave but certain people who died normal dead, certain age, a certain status in a society that demands a new tomb to dig for. Digging the grave ("*Wong*") is a collective responsibility, and no bereaved family member is allowed to explore the grave but sole responsibility for the undertakers in the community. Likewise, women are not allowed to dig graves. This is because women are not supposed to bury the dead among these people. The key informant explained the process as;

*"....If someone dies and needs to dig a fresh grave, we inform the Tindan to seek permission; otherwise, an old grave is used. To dig, the Tindan comes to mark the grave using a calabash for the undertakers ("Bagaahi")....." (Participant 18, 2022)*

Another senior undertaker and key informant also narrated that;

*"....In digging the grave ("Wong"), the Tindan sends someone to measure the grave using a bowl made of clay ("Laa-zie"); we slaughter a goat to sacrifice before we dig the grave. ...."(Participant 19, 2022)*

The majority of the participants stated that among the Nabdam, it is the Tindan who determines and give permission depending on the season for the new grave digging for the dead, for instance, some mentioned that;

*"....The undertakers ("Bayalihi") will send a red bowl made of clay ("Laa-zie"), fowl, and goat to the site where the clan buries their dead bodies to start digging the grave. "Ndaan – yiridem" will perform the sacrifices by using the fowl and be followed by slaughtering the goat. After digging, the undertakers ("Bayalihi") are given flour water ("Zoom ko'om"), groundnuts, and drinks. ...."(Participant 18,19,20, 2022)*

They also stated in Nabdam that the undertaker normally carries the dead body to the grave for a burial, the undertakers have the corpse with the corpse head behind them and the legs in front, which they gave the meaning when the person was alive, and he was using legs to walk.

Again, participants also explained that before the dead body is taken to the final place for burial, that is the grave, and if they area older person in the house, the

undertakers round with the body roundhouse for three times if a man and round with body for four times in the case of woman. One reason for taking it round is the belief that the corpse needs to say goodbye also to its once place of habitation and the other reason is to confuse the spirit. If the soul seeks to come back to torment the living, it should not find its way back. The above rites and customs are meant for persons who have died a good death.

The findings of this study also agree with Cole (1998), who said that the people of Madagascar use tombs to bury their dead bodies. Artisans, including familial proclamations, well decorate Betsileo tombs. Upon death, the living enshrouds and inters their deceased relatives in a provisional burial or the family tomb.

#### **Theme 10: A Visit to Grave Yard before Burial (Yuukalligalii)**

Normally, elders of the family members and the deceased's children take a last glance into the new grave to see if their relative is properly buried according to custom. They then permit the undertakers to close the entrance to the tomb and put a pile of gravel on it.

#### **Theme 11: Nature and Direction of Burial of Dead Persons**

Among the Nabdam people in terms of the nature and direction of burial of a dead person, there are just like the four Frafra subgroupings in the Upper East of Ghana. A group of senior undertakers and participants in this study narrated that;

*"....A man is put in the grave facing the sunrise, signifying that he looks at the sunset to commence farming activities, and a woman faces the sun to suggest that she prepares around that time to cook supper. - A man faces the sunrise. - A woman faces the sunset...."(Participant 19, 20, 21, 2022)*

The findings of this current study totally agreed with Abasi (1993), study among the Kasina, which concluded that even though they clothe the dead, they are not buried with the clothes on. They remove the woman's customary clothing, while the man's triangle pant is undone, symbolizing that he, too, would be buried naked.

#### **Final Funeral Rituals of Elderly Persons**

The Nabt people believe that when a human being dies, their soul wanders in the physical world until it is sent to the ancestors by performing the final funeral rites. If all this has not been done, the dead person is believed to sulk because the living would have shown no concern for them or their wealth or the things they left behind. They are also believed to be still dark (unclean, black) because no cleansing has been made yet. The living that would have lost the relative is also said to be still black (dirty) if they have not brought back their dead person.

Final funeral rituals among Nabt are normally performed for the dead within three (3) and seven (7) days, depending on the person's section or clan and age and gender. For instance, the Kongo clan in the Nabdam area use seven (7) days for the final funeral rites for married people and have children, but if you do not have children, they use three (3) days to finish. Except a child zero to two to three. From the literature reviewed, Mkhize (2018), concluded that mourning does not end with the first phase of funeral, there are traditional customs and rituals that need to be performed even after the burial and there is a stipulated mourning period.

#### **Theme 1: Announcement of Funeral**

After the soothsayer consultation during the fresh or burial funeral rituals, the deceased person's family will inform their clan elders to come to the house and inform that they read to perform the final funeral of their relatives. Normally the funeral process is given to different clans close to the deceased family called in Nabt language as "*sinzorro*". They select young men to go around and inform all their close relatives far near, in-laws and tell them the date set for the wake-keeping process. Another elder will also inform the community chief that they will perform their relative funeral. If the dead person is a woman, the husband's house, especially her first son, will visit the woman home to inform her god ("*Sheli*") that she is dead and then later go back to inform them that day funeral will dry. This is because, in a woman's funeral, it is her father house people who are having power and if they do not come, you cannot bury anything with regards to the funeral rituals.

A key informant and elder from the Kongo area explained that;

*"....They use seven (7) days performing the rites of a person who has children but three (3) days for a person who has no children, even if you are a wife and older person. ...."(Participant 22, 2022)*

A key informant from the section in Nabdam called the "Zoolug" group comprises five communities (**Lorge, Damolug, Daglic, Zanlerigu, and Pelung**). He stated that;

*"....They use three (3) days performing the final funeral rites for a dead person in our communities. ...."(Participant 22, 2022)*

#### **Theme 2: Wake Keeping**

In the evening of the wake keeping everybody relations to the funeral will start arriving for the people. Close relations like the clan members, uncles, in-laws will gather at the funeral house, waiting for the funeral to start. At midnight around 3: 00pm, they will ask everybody to stop making noise. One key informant explains that;

*"...In the process, the first son of the dead person will wear cow feet on one of his legs*

*“Naoh – donn”) in Nabt language and go round the house three (3) times (“Yaahiaa”) in the case of man cry three (3) times and the first daughter will also respond by crying three (3). In the case of women, it is four (4) times they will do it four (4) times before the local drum, local dancing troops, traditional war, and funeral dirges (“Banakanamoi”) will be going on till the next day (“Korogelka”). Also, in killing cows for the deceased women, they normally lay in the house's compound, and in the case of a man, the cow will be lying on the refuse dump (“Tampoare”). In the case where they kill two cows, one will be lying in the animal yard (“Spark”) of the house while the other one will be lying outside or in front of the house that is the refuse dump (“Tampoare”). The cow in the animal yard belongs to only the dead family members and the one outside belongs to the whole community and is shared according to the clans. ....”(Participant 20,21,22,23, 2022)*

A participant also narrated that the next day; *“...They will well organize traditional war dancers from different clans coming to display at the funeral grounds and late in the day, normal around 3:00pm, they will kill a cow for the deceased if they can afford even some family can kill up to two or three cows for the deceased (“Banaklinaoh”) and the cow will lay till the next day before they will share the meat according to the clans in the community. And some part of the meat will be given to the deceased sisters. ....”(Participant 24, 2022)*

Another key informant from a different clan also explained that;

*“.....War dancers and funeral dirges (“Namolikpali”) perform through the night. We kill a goat for the traditional war dances and funeral dirges cantors. This is the day we do “Koale” rituals, killing goats, sheep, and cows for the dead persons during the funeral rituals performance; we give part of the meat to the deceased sister, known in the Nabt language as “Poaymeagaa.” ....”(Participant 25, 2022)*

### **Theme 3: Traditional War Dance**

In terms of older persons dead among Nabt people, they perform traditional war dance during the fresh or burial funeral, and it is still be repeated in the final funeral rituals stage again.

Participants and key informants explained that during the war dancing, the people are mentioning important places and how their grandparents were enabled to overcome certain tribes and clans in the area. They gave examples as; this is where we will say our

great grandparents and inform them that their son or daughter-in-law is on their way to them.

### **Theme 4: “Badonwu” Ritual**

After sharing the cow millet in Nabt tradition and customs, they normally perform a called know in the Nabt language as **“Badonwu” ritual**.

A group of undertakers and other key informants explained the meaning of the **“Badonwu” ritual**. It is a ritual where we provide the **“Poaymeagaa”** with guinea fowl for them to go a distance from the funeral house to where two paths are meeting to prepare T.Z. There this T.Z is eaten by only two undertakers in the community. And after that, they wash their cooking bows and pots, fetch that fire to the house, and cross where they want to start the pito process and set the fire there.

The next thing is if the dead person ever gave birth to twins (**“Banavedataara”**), then they will hold or stop the funeral rituals for three (3) days before they resume the process, but if they do has never given birth to twins before, then the brewing of the pito starts.

### **Theme 5: Pouring or Gathering of Malt Millet**

This is the process where the funeral owner will bring his malt millet outside in front of the compound, and the elders in each clan within the communities will also bring their own to add to the main malt millet. The elders will then call the **“Poyameagaa”** and handle them to start the pito process's brewing.

### **Theme 6: Dryer / Sieving Of Pito (“Damgbenn”)**

The process of preparing the pito for drinking the next day, and the elders in the community will inform the clan in charge of the funeral to go and bring the soothsayer to the funeral house to keep for the next day to consult at the funeral.

Participants and key informants explained that; *“....This day is full of activities that will carry out; they select a person far from their community to look for a soothsayer and bring to the house, be consulted the next day, and fetch some of the pito water to drink. On the same day that all the in-laws will visit with beans, Bambara beans, and neighbors as well do so. The women will prepare the Bambara beans for the night. ....”(Participant 23,24,25,26, 2022)*

Another group of participants and key informants also narrated that;

*“...At the final funeral rites, the in-law visit with beans, Bambara beans, and neighbors as well do so. The foodstuff is cooked at the “Damgbenn” behind the house at night. In the night, the in-laws will prepare T.Z. by killing sheep, goats, and guinea fowls in their homes and bring to the funeral house. They will bring*

*the meat and the T.Z to a stop near the house. The "Boasannah" will come to inform the elders that one of the daughter's houses people has come with T.Z and either sheep or goat, and they will select people to go and see what they bought to the house. ...."*(Participant 24,25,26,27, 2022).

#### **Theme 7: Soothsaying ("Bakoloboa") Day**

Among the Nabt people, like any other African worldview, no death is seen as normal hence there is the need to consult a soothsayer to find out the causes of a person in the community, and because all of their belief in the soothsayer, whatever they say they take it like that.

When the soothsayer person comes to the house ready to perform and has not finished at the funeral ground, he has to wait for some time, but he does not talk to anybody or drink water in the house.

Participants and key informants explained that; *"....The soothsayer consultation in the funeral is mainly to find out the causes of the dead in the family whether it is the person have reached, it some particular gods or someone has a hand in the dead. ...."*(Participant 25,26,27,28, 2022)

#### **Theme 8: Breaking of the Funeral of the Dead ("Waligoca")**

Per Nabt, people as human beings when dying this the rituals they use to say goodbye you have departure from this physical world to the spiritual world due to they must break all belong and be enable to inherit your properties and your wife in the case of a man funeral. A group of participants explained that;

*"...During the breaking rituals of a funeral, they normally enter a room to make sacrifices on a small pot and calabash, and the one performing the funeral or funeral breaker will in front holding the bow and arrow go too far from the to where two paths are crossing each other. All the children of the deceased and the funeral breaker, "Poaymeagaa," will go round the items three (3) times in the case of man and four (4) times for a woman, and they use the stone to break all the items, and at that, all they will be paying drummers for the all the children to dance the deceased is gone. ...."*(Participant 26,27,28,29, 2022)

Another important ritual participants also narrated was that;

*".....The first son of the dead person will wear his father dress and hang his bag because but the Nabt people tradition or culture, a son does not wear his father dress and hang his bag and he is not supposed to see his father ban ("Bouur") when he is alive. They send him to look into the father ban and look inside his*

*father's bag for the first time. ...."*(Participant 27,28,29,30, 2022)

#### **Theme 9: Cleaning of the Gate ("Zenornpulre" or "Taanipuliheal")**

This is the last ritual for the final funeral rituals performed for the house. All the Nabt people observe these rituals, both those who are performing the final funeral rituals for three (3) and those for seven (7) days.

Participants and key informants explained that; *".....They will get up early in the morning and pick the sand ("kumtaarni") or part of the wall used for the funeral with the blood and send it to a far distance and throw it away. They will wash the wall stained with blood and clean all the pots used for brewing the pito. So the funeral has ended for both those who perform their final rituals for three (3) days and those who perform for seven (7) days. ...."*(Participant 15, 16,30, 2022).

This confirmed Onu and Solomon-Etefia (2019) study that concluded that Funeral rituals are forms of expressions and connections performed by individuals, groups of people or communities in communication with the living dead.

Thomas, N. W. (1969). Anthropological report on the Ibo-speaking peoples (6 vols.). New York: Negro Universities Press.

This lends credence to Thomas (1969) that the funeral ceremony in other parts of Igbo land. He describes what happens in Nibo during the funeral ceremony. He states that "when the time comes for second burial (funeral), a gun is fired very early in the morning and the part of the wall over the door knocked down; four Oglisi (*Newbouldia laevis*) a replanted outside the door, a she-goat and cock sacrificed to them".

This concurs with the viewpoint of Setsiba (2012) some traditional African cultures also participate in pre- and post-burial cleansing rituals, which are consistent with this. This study findings agreed with Awolalu and Dopamu (1979), as cited in Nwokoha (2017), stated that there two important kinds of burial ceremonies for every adult who dies a good death in Igbo land.

## **CONCLUSION**

First and foremost, the people examined to have a particularly strong childlike bond with their ancestors until they seem inseparable. The living would prefer that the relationship they had with their parents continue even after their parents were physically removed from them by death. Such bodily isolation is regarded as unnatural and fleeting. Funeral practices among the people of Nabdam are very elaborate for older persons. Men are buried facing east, while women face west, according to the depictions. Males are facing toward the rising sun, while

females face toward the setting sun. The ceremonies allow the living to demonstrate their appreciation for the dead by bringing them food and performing dances. Despite their little resources, they make every effort to provide funeral feasts frequently. This recent study have also shown that the arrival of modernity, Islam, and Christianity have all had both beneficial and bad effects on the practice of traditional burial rites and rituals among the Nabdam people.

### Recommendation

Ritual functionaries (those who are the custodians of funeral rituals) should desist from including non -traditional or foreign items into the cultural rituals' performances. This inclusion contributes to unbearable costs for families, and distorts the culture of the people.

### Contribution to New Knowledge

While most academic studies of funerals have relied on observation, this study instead sought the perspectives of persons who have attended a funeral for a close friend or family member or who are native to the culture where funerals are common. Those who have attended a funeral or who are part of the culture in which funerals are commonplace provided more accurate assessments than observers from outside the community. For reasons including personal experience with funerals in one's community or among one's relatives, an insider's perspective may be more objective than an outsider's.

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