

# Ostentatious Funeral Expenses and Identity Reconstruction Among the Gouro Women of Gohitafla (Ivory Coast)

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Although the Gouro women producing foodstuffs in the department of Gohitafla claim to be in a double dynamics of precariousness and social weakening, they incur ostentatious expenses during funeral ceremonies. To understand this paradox, this text, based on interviews and participating observation, makes a detailed description of the financial involvement of these women in funeral practices in order to reveal its meaning. The results show that the ostentatious nature of female funeral expenses related to the transfer of the body, compensation and honorary practices are strategies for identity reconstruction and negotiation of political citizenship for those women.

*Keywords:* ostentatious spending, funerals, female identity, political citizenship, Gohitafla, Côte d'Ivoire

## Introduction

The social destiny of women and men is socially constructed, determined, and oriented. It is in this sense that Simone De Beauvoir (1949) maintains that one is not born a woman, but one becomes one. It means that there is no pre-established feminine nature. The status of woman and her existence as a woman is determined by society and therefore the masculine and the feminine are only social constructs. These socially constructed and organized relationships keep women in a position of deprivation of their legitimate rights (Gnapka, 2009), reclusion, and social uselessness. This fact limits their economic and social mobility and their access to all levels of social life. Clearly, women have always been considered dependent, vulnerable, fragile, and therefore people to be protected.

The Gouro society is not on the fringes of this social structuring of gender relations. Séhi bi (2012) sheds light on the Gouro context. He indicates that the non-representation of women in community governance atmosphere within Gouro group is linked to a phallocratic conception of power which, consequently, legitimizes the power relations of men at the expense of women. This phallocratic conception makes men the exclusive holders of traditional power to the detriment of the woman. He also notes that this is favored on the one hand by social representations, stereotypes, prejudices crystallized by myths, beliefs incorporated by both women and men. This social classification of sexist positions is consolidated within the political, economic, cultural, and matrimonial field.

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At the cultural level, specialists of social and human sciences of the funeral matter in Africa in general and particularly in Côte d'Ivoire report an ethnocultural analysis of funeral practices in connection with poverty. Funeral practices, according to them, are ostentatious and contribute to the impoverishment of individuals and social groups, even to underdevelopment (Barrau, 1987; Dédy, 1989; Yapi, 1990; Kipré, 1992; Yao Gnabéli, 1996; Noret, 2012; 2014; Yoro, Kpangni, & Ehui, 2016). Other authors, on the other hand, in their ethnocultural analysis, observe a gendered redistribution of tasks in funeral rites. It is related to the secondary roles of women in their realization, namely widowhood rites, preparation, and washing of the body, clothing of the body, etc. In fact, there is therefore a social downgrading of women in decision-making regarding the organization of funerals. This implies a vocation of male domination and the subordination of women during the organization of this cultural activity (Duvert, 1990; Kouassi, 2020; Vaulay, 2008; Evy, 2011).

Contrary to these theoretical data, we observed from the surveys two social situations that caught our attention. First, the analysis of the exploratory interviews shows that the Gouro women of the food crops in Adjamé are structured in several associative groups. Within these groups, we note the collection of tontine funds as a strategy for mobilizing financial resources. It is practiced every weekend. Most of it extends over a period of one or more years. The central objective that characterizes it is focused on the financing of economic activities with a view to combating poverty and the social precariousness of those women in the household. In other words, these associations have for economic vocation, the financing, the development, or the realization of an economic project, such as the building of a house or the purchase of building plot, the stability, or the durable maintenance of their commercial activity.

Secondly, from ethnographic observation undertaken in Abidjan at the Gouro market in Adjamé and in the center west of the Ivory Coast in the department of Gohitafla precisely. It comes out that women are increasingly creating a space for social visibility through ostentatious spending during funeral ceremonies. We have observed a tendency for Gouro food vendors to go beyond the prerogatives traditionally assigned to them in funeral practices. Indeed, they increasingly appropriate male cultural activities. From this viewpoint, the agnatic structures of funeral expenses perceive these uterine behaviors as a transgression of local norms. as evidenced by the following:

We cannot accept that women incur the expenses that are devolved to men, they often divert the money that their husbands give them to give to the brothers or the family, we no longer want to accept that. They are not allowed to attend funerals. This is why to prevent them, when they want to do so, we bring out the male Djè<sup>1</sup> mask to dissuade them... (interview with the radio culturalist in the department of Zuénoula, ethnographic survey data, November 20, 2020)

An articulation of these two observations leads to the following problem: Although the Gouro women producing foodstuffs in the department of Gohitafla claim to be in a double dynamic of precariousness and social weakening, they make ostentatious expenses during funeral ceremonies. The central question that arises from this paradoxical situation is the following: Why do the Gouro traders of the commune of Gohitafla mobilize ostentatious expenses during funeral practices? This central question is crowned by specific questions, namely: What are the ostentatious practices of funeral expenses indulged in by Gouro traders in the department of Zuénoula? What is the meaning attached to these different ostentatious practices?

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<sup>1</sup> The Djè mask in Gouro country is the sacred mask of men that comes out during funeral ceremonies, the accessibility of which is strictly prohibited for women.

From the inductive approach with an ethnographic tendency, this article therefore proposes to make a detailed description of the female ostentatious expenses for funeral practices in the commune of Gohitafla and to deduce the meaning attached to them.

## **Methodology**

### **Study Site**

The commune of Gohitafla is located about 410 km from the city of Abidjan. It is located in the center-west of Ivory Coast, 25 km from the town of Zuénoula, 15 km from the village of Maminigui, nine km from the village of Manfla, three km from the village of Flaya, and six km from the village of Djélafla. Based on the telling of the said village patriarchs, Gohitafla was created by a patriarch named Gohi Bi Ta. The latter and his family, not being in the odor of holiness with certain populations of the north from the Mandé group of the north, will seek a more welcoming land where life is good. This brought them west-central into an area already occupied by the Wan. Using strategies consisting of scaring the Wan people, they will succeed in scaring them away from the area without confronting them with conflicts. Gohi Bi Ta and his family will thus settle in this part of the center west. Gohitafla means the village of Gohibita. This site is chosen for two reasons. First, the majority of food crops women interviewed in Adjamé come from this region. Secondly, Gohitafla enjoys a dual institutional status. It is both a commune and a capital of a prefecture. In fact, 17 villages are under its domination.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

This study is part of a qualitative approach of ethnographic obedience. The explanatory routinization (Céfal, 2008), of funeral expenses centered on the monopoly of men and the absence of scientific production on the positioning of women in funeral of expenses, in particular, the emerging participation of Gouro food vendors in the expenses funerals in the commune of Gohitafla presided over the choice of the said approach. It aims to understand “the intentionality and meanings of actions” (Schwartz, 1993, quoted by Louvel, 2008) and to bring out new data through participating observation and the description of facts. With this in mind, the immersion technique has allowed us to implement prolonged interactions of more than two years between us and the women and their social environment in a context of production and detailed description of female funeral practices (De Sardan, 1995; Louvel, 2008).

We observed both women’s funeral practices and conducted everyday conversations in the village of Gohitafla and we continue the ethnographic interviews in the market spaces where food is sold, when those women are back in Abidjan. The ethnographic interview guide and the observation grid were used as data collection tools. The guide has been adapted according to the different stages of our research. The observation grid was built as a prelude to the participating observation on which our choice fell. The main elements of this grid were inspired by information collected on deviant practices, ostentatious expenditure, observation of the structure of expenditure by women in situations of funeral participation, public speaking by women during ceremonies, their relationship to men, the rites dedicated to funerals. In this respect, more than 30 women from the commune of Gohitafla were observed in a situation of funeral expenses. Also, we had recourse to two patriarchs of the village of Gohitafla, two agents of the socio-cultural service of the town council of Gohitafla. The mayor of Zuénoula and the sub-prefect of Zuénoula were asked as privileged witnesses. The sample is then structured around 36 people obtained according to the principle of saturation.

In addition, the field diary and the notebook initially allowed us to keep and save the traces of our observation in situ; however, they were the source of the data production. Another function of these data collection tools is to allow spontaneous (on-the-spot) analysis of observation situations. These are notes of a more theoretical nature. Their objective was to outline an interpretation of the observed phenomena.

The purpose of these notes is in fact to initiate the analysis as soon as the data is collected so that the process of interpretation and understanding of the object takes place throughout the research and not only at the end of the field. (Martineau, 2005, p. 11)

## Results

### Performing Ostentation in Death Management of Death in the Gouro Group

Two main phases structure the organization of funeral ceremonies in Gouro community. There is the covering of death and the rituals symbolizing the passage of the dead from the terrestrial to the celestial world. The different phases are characterized by practices for which women resort to ostentatious spending. In the context of this first part, it is about analyzing the women's ostentatious expenditure of these women through the management of death by transfer, compensation, and honorary practices.

**The transfer of the body: A funerary neo-habitus causing ostentatious feminine practices.** The Gouro food vendors in the commune of Gohitafla are increasingly involved in paying for the dead. This covering takes into account both the transfer of the body to the morgue and the return of the body to the village for burial. In this respect, it should be said that, as soon as a death is confirmed, it is up to the head of the family to make the first announcements and then, in consultation with the agnatic group, they make the burial decisions.

A retrospective analysis of the old days' situation shows that the body was kept in a courtyard or in a special room under the supervision of a category of woman. They painted the body with traditional plants for three days for women and four days for men. Then the village proceeded to the burial. However, modernity through the development of morgues brings a social reconfiguration of traditional practices. It now requires the practices of transferring and returning the body to the village after a death. This process of transference has become socially incorporated into funerary practices. It becomes a neo habitus of valorization or devaluation of bereaved families.

The practice of body transference is a social norm that structures intercommunity relations. A bereaved family can even be socially downgraded within the village, if they are reluctant to transfer the body in favor of the old practice. Funeral practices are no longer characterized by simplicity in view of the spiritual dimension and the quality of the soul of the deceased, but rather by the quest for economic value and social exhibitionism. Considering this observation and in view of the households' social precariousness, we are witnessing the solicitation of women from the food crops in the management of that cultural practice. The women thus appropriate the social duty of transferring the body directly to the morgue and of ensuring the return to the village in the case of the agnatic structure withdrawal. They use local morgues, sometimes they are the morgues of Abidjan city, sometimes they are those of Bouaflé or the town of Zuénoula and Gohitafla. The keeping of the body can extend over one or several weeks or several months, the time to prepare for the worthy realization of the funeral especially of parents. After a long period of the body conservation in the morgue, the expenses of which can approach the bar of more than 1,000,000 CFA francs, the body is transferred to the village for burial. These ostentatious practices of women testify to their desire to uphold the honor of their family, that of the dead

and, in turn, to reconsider the social perception granted to the status of women in Gouro society. Women being socially constructed as the “weaker” sex fundamentally attached to the dependence of men.

As these food vendors from the Adjamé Gouro market (COMAGOA) so aptly point out,

When my mother died in Abidjan, my uncles decided to bring her body directly to the village, without her going to the morgue, because they said they had no money for it. I pledged to do it, they asked me if I could, I said watch me do it, I sent her body to the morgue, the body did a month there, I paid three hundred thousand (300,000) fcfa to get the body out. Afterwards I transferred the body to the village. In all, I have already spent eight hundred thousand (800,000) francs, not counting the coffin, food, etc. My mother was a food trader, it is her place that I currently occupy. I couldn't bury mum like “pecto” (sweet), or could I? (interview conducted with a food vendor at the Gouro market in Adjamé (Abidjan), ethnographic survey data, March 13, 2018)

**Compensation of the body: The valorization of uterine filiation and the symbolic repurchase of the body as ostentatious practices.** The cross-sectional analysis of the interviews shows that the relational framework in which the funeral organization takes place is a factor in the production of ostentatious expenses. The compensation of the body is a funerary practice that reveals power and domination relationships between the uterine and the agnatic groups. The uterine group being made up of maternal uncles and aunts, “nephews”, “nieces”, “cousins”, and the agnatic group made up of paternal uncles and aunts, “sons” and “daughters”. The following paragraphs situate these types of relationships.

*Compensation as a strategy for promoting maternal aunts.* In the social organization of the Gouro people, it must be noted that the agnatic group exercises social power over the uterine group. Indeed, the structure of legitimization of the child's origin is the agnatic structure insofar as the inheritance system is of the patriarchal type. Uterine filiation is deconstructed because it is socially perceived as alien. The tradition creates a categorization, even a positional classification of the ascendants coming from the large family of the deceased, is called “son” or “daughter”, the children coming from the agnatic filiation. The positional classification legitimizes those of agnatic filiation because they are recognized as the “true” children of the descent. While the “nephews” or “nieces” are delegitimized because they are recognized as “foreigners” in the descendants, considering the status mobility of their mother. This one is considered as foreign because he/she is brought to marry and to integrate another family. Funerals are thus privileged social settings during which the uterine filiation regains social power over the agnatic group. They impose compensation costs on them. The ostentatious expenditure that underlies the compensation of the body of the deceased is practices of the uterine group valorization. The compensation of the body is a strategy of reappropriation of the child's legitimacy by the womb, that is to say the deceased.

In addition, the compensation is relating to one of the privileged stages of the traditional funeral among the Gouro from Gohitafla. It includes donations in cash and in kind granted to the uterine group by Gouro food vendors. At the funeral space, in front of the coffin and the mortuary room is installed the “Nimbounou” that is to say in local language, the mothers of the deceased. They are aged 45 years and over and come from different villages. They are constructed as the legitimate owners (mothers) of the deceased. These ones play a social role which consists in assisting the dead in a lamentation position. So, they hold a fly swatter as a tool for carrying out this task. The women of the agnatic group must therefore provide compensation for the work done. In this regard, they are supposed to dress the “Nimbounou” for the funeral, buying valuable loincloths, numbering 10 or 15 pieces, estimated at 80,000 FCFA or 100,000 FCFA. Several basins are placed in front of the “Nimbounou”. One contains those loincloths, another contains kitchen tureens, and another sheds light on

physical donations of money, symbolized by notes and coins. The whole thing is supported by the high level of scrutiny from the audience. The “you”, socially designated as maternal cousins, are also installed inside the room to whom compensation is provided in kind (Goat, drink, etc.) and in cash on a symbolic basis, to dig the grave and do the funeral.

*The symbolic repurchase of the body: An ostentatious practice of valuing maternal uncles.* Following the observations undertaken on certain funerary spaces in the commune of Gohitafla, we noticed that the places are symbolically marked. Some places are reserved for maternal uncles. The latter are treated as “princes”. The women of the paternal group are in their care. While we give the soft drink to the other guests, they are served with quality drinks such as brand name liqueurs. In the classification of statuses according to tradition, maternal uncles are socially designated as actors to whom the child is not recognized, he rather belongs to agnatic filiation. It is on the occasion of funeral ceremonies that tradition grants them the legitimacy to claim certain rights over the child, that is to say the deceased: among others, the claim for the symbolic repurchase of the body, to show that the real identity origin of the deceased would be that of the uterine group, also, to point out that the death of their son would be linked to the mistreatment of the agnatic group. This would reflect a great social loss, since they are no longer able to benefit from the financial and social support of the deceased. Therefore, if that filiation is not well treated during the funeral, it risks disrupting the smooth unfolding of the ceremony. This would bring the curse on the agnatic group. In doing so, the maternal uncles can claim a variable sum, between 100,000 CFA francs to 1,000,000 CFA francs in proportion to the dexterity of the negotiator. Once the negotiation is accepted, they agree to the burial.

When my mother died in 2015, three groups came to claim the money to pay for her body. On the maternal side, I paid one hundred and fifteen thousand (115,000 FCFA), my mother’s brothers (maternal and paternal side), I paid fifty thousand (50,000) and to the brothers of my mother’s village, I paid thirty thousand (30,000) FCFA. If I didn’t do that, they were going to block the body, we weren’t going to bury it. But before, we did not pay much like that. We only asked for fifteen (15) francs, then it became three hundred (300) francs, then it rose to three thousand (3,000), then seven thousand (7,000) francs. Today, they can even ask you for a million (1,000,000) CFA francs, (interview conducted with a food trader from Gohitafla at the Gouro market in Adjamé (Abidjan), ethnographic survey data, March 14, 2018) says a food trader in the town of Gohitafla.

**Honorary practices: A social construction of female ostentation.** We have observed in an ethnographic posture on the funerary field, a care of the dead marked by honorific practices. Honorary practices are ostentatious practices carried out by women with the aim of honoring the dead. These are practices relating to the purchase of coffins, the construction of graves, the rental of funeral accessories, and the reception area. Indeed, past times attest that after a keeping period of three or four days, the bodies were tied with a rope, covered with a mat, and exposed on a stretcher. It is made with the stems of trees cut in the forest for the final burial. Contrary to this traditional practice of the time, Gouro women are part of urban fashion. They therefore tend to impose the models conveyed by modern society on ancient practices.

In fact, in the event of resistance from men due to the lack of means to deal with it, they decide to appropriate the economic cost of such an initiative. Under this leadership, they no longer accept the simplicity of coffins. They are carried on coffin types made according to the image of a specific object.

In the present case, the Gouro women of the food crops are looking for coffins made according to the model of mobile phones commonly called on the market “cellular coffin, coffin at sign, coffin France goodbye”. The price generally varies between 250,000 fcfa and more than 300,000 fcfa. This coffin is defined by these

women as “worthy” of the deceased. He is exposed in a mortuary room decorated with traditional loincloths or special sheets. It is an exhibitionist coffin. Exposed to the funeral space, it attracts all the eyes of the guests. The body, especially of the mother or father, is adorned with beautiful clothes, objects (necklaces), and luxurious loincloths. In addition, these women are increasingly involved in the construction of vaults or high standing tombs. These vaults and tombs built by the daughters of the deceased are perceived as tourist sites in the department of Zuénoula. These girls spend exorbitant sums for their construction in order to honor the memory of their mothers.

The speech of the mayor and the sub-prefect of Zuénoula confirm these ostentatious expenses:

We have had ministers here, but we have never had graves like those of the pioneers. These vaults built by these women have now become tourist sites in Zuénoula ... Did you see the tomb that was built at the entrance there? It is that of the pioneer of the COCOVICO<sup>2</sup> market, it did not cost less than ten million (10000000). It was a funeral worthy of a head of state. You understand well the magnitude of the Gouro funeral and the investment that is put into play here to honor the dead (Interviews carried out during the immersion with the mayor and the sub-prefect of Zuénoula, ethnographic survey data, November 21, 2020 in Zuénoula)

Apart from these expenses, they indulge in the expenses of renting chairs, tarpaulins, musical devices, and the invitation of Gouro artists, and traditional dances. These are renowned artists and the artistic and frenzied performance of the local Zaouli<sup>3</sup> mask. The cost of moving them varies between 300,000 fcfa and 800,000 fcfa. Women are also part of the public dumping of 500 or 1000 franc notes on these artists. These expenditures would not only lead to the permanent departure of the dead, but above all its welcome by the ancestors with felicitations. They would be, or a means of maintaining one’s earthly wealth or acquiring wealth in the kingdom of the dead.

Remarks supported by a president of a commercial food association in Adjamé:

When my father died, I spent three hundred and fifty (3,500,000) FCFA on funerals, and then I emptied my account at the bank, I had three million (3,000,000) there and I took credit 500,000 CFA francs, I built a house, paid tons of rice, I bought two (2) oxen for three hundred thousand (300,000) francs, I brought out four hundred and fifty thousand (450,000) CFA francs. I did all his expenses to honor my father. I made a big funeral for his honor. When I go to the village, they call me president. All that, I didn’t do for nothing, because when they get rich there. This is why, among us Gouro, we prefer death to caring for a sick person (Interview conducted with a food trader and president of the female the brotherly love association at the Gouro market in Adjamé (Abidjan), ethnographic survey data, September 10, 2018).

### **Conspicuous Spending as Identity Reconstruction Strategies**

The funeral expenses incurred by the Gouro food vendors of the commune of Gohitafla is a strategy developed with the aim of reconstructing their social identity. This is analyzed on the one hand, at the level of the reconfiguration of the perception of social status and on the other hand, at the level of the claim of political citizenship.

**Ostentatious spending: A statutory reconfiguration strategy.** Respective roles are socially assigned according to status and sex in Gouro country. Constructed as a phallogocratic ethnolinguistic group, the Gouro in its traditional structure makes man the exclusive holder of all decision-making power and all authority. In the social structure of the Gouro people, women are placed under the dependence of their husbands, eldest sons, or a son whatever his age and of their father. These are socially ranked at the bottom of the social hierarchy. First

<sup>2</sup> Cooperative of food traders of Cocody.

<sup>3</sup> A mask that symbolizes the cultural identity of the Gouro people. It comes out during celebrations and funeral ceremonies.

there is the eldest of the brothers, the youngest, then come the women. This social hierarchy is reproduced in funerary spaces. Thus, man from a young age is empowered to preserve ancestral traditional values in funeral rites. He is the one who is responsible for making the decision relating to the organization of the funeral (honourary expenses, transfer of the body, etc.) and the one who must be honored by the brothers and sisters financially, material and symbolic. The young girl, for her part, is confined to domestic tasks, emotional or psychological roles (crying, lamenting, etc.), and symbolic rites (widowhood, female ritual dances). These practices occur by different categories of women (niece, daughter, sisters-in-law, mothers of the deceased) in the funeral space.

This gendered hierarchy of funerary tasks denotes a social imaginary associated with the status of women. Is she perceived as an outsider? This social cliché constructed and maintained by traditional institutions (patrilocality, virilocality, levirate) adopted by the Gouro society, participates in forging the social identity of the female Gouro junta. From these instrumentalizations and positional classifications arise the feeling of frustration and stigmatization felt by the Gouro woman. As a result, they resort to ostentatious spending during funeral ceremonies as a strategy for social repositioning. This can be seen in the reconfiguration of the management of death. Women have acquired economic independence through the marketing of food and associative leadership in sales areas. There is therefore a reinvestment of economic capital in agnatic funerary spaces. They activate budget-intensive expenditure on these spaces as resources for statutory reclassification. When they engage in ostentatious funeral expenses, they can circumvent the tasks assigned to valets by reclaiming the functions devolved to men and socially indicate their ability to do as much as them.

As the wife of one of the deputy mayors of Gohitafla points out in these terms:

Among us Gouro, the woman is considered as a child. She has no right to speak. Even if the men and women are together, she is not given the floor, because it is assumed that she has nothing to say, the women do not keep secrets. The proof is that there is a woman in our region who wanted to run for deputy or mayor here, they refused. Cock crowing affair, he does not sing, it's too much here. We are always excluded, even to be a village chief. They say it's for men. (Interview conducted with the wife of the former mayor's secretary of Gohitafla during an immersion in Bodianfla (Gohitafla), ethnographic survey data, July 22, 2019)

**Ostentuous spending: Between rebuilding local citizenship and claiming political citizenship.**

Cross-sectional analyses of data from the biographical interviews of women reveal that the reconstruction of local citizenship contributes to the feminization of funeral expenses. Local citizenship is understood as recognition of belonging to a social group through participation in social activities, respect for the values and principles that characterize this said group, mutual aid and intergroup solidarity. This citizenship, although naturally or biologically defined, can be socially constructed in the interactions between members. Food Gouro women, in their social trajectory, had to break with the socio-cultural realities of their group. In fact, through the rural exodus, they have shown an ambition for self-determination through the sale of food in Abidjan. They will migrate from their local space to urban spaces. They go through the food crop to create markets and cooperatives through which they build their associative leadership and management of social responsibilities. This state of affairs had as a corollary, a construction of social distance with the rural environment in this case, their social group to which they belong. Consequently, their local citizenship has been gradually deconstructed due to social competition, led by women who have remained in rural areas with their husbands and thus in strict respect of tradition.

In this perspective, the Gouro women of the city, haloed by the associative leadership try to rebuild this local citizenship undermined in their ability to return to the village and to register in the financing and/or the support of the cultural social activities of their locality. Funeral spaces therefore constitute a social framework for the reconstruction of this local citizenship. They participate actively through their economic resource in the statutory reconfiguration. They make themselves visible by claiming the pre-eminence of the organization of these ceremonies through ostentatious expenditure. In this sense, they attract the favors of the village community. From this position, they demonstrate their capability and ability to claim the management and leadership of certain political positions. As a result, the reconstruction of local citizenship is a good that could allow them to access a political citizenship jealously guarded by men. In this context, their investment in funeral expenses is a strategy for legitimizing their socially masked political ambition. According to them, it is the way of spending on the burial grounds that position you.

The words, respectively, of a sage from the region of zuénoula and a woman leader of an association of a Gouro market in new Goudron in Abidjan are most evocative:

You saw that woman, what she does is more than a boy. She does a lot for the village during funerals even in other villages. His name is everywhere. If she had gone to school, we would choose her as a deputy in our village. ... Me that you see there, I am of a very authoritarian nature. Today thanks to my economic activity, every time you want to decide, it's me, you refer first to my family. The family takes me as the head of the family although I have brothers there. You have to fight to be a leader. We women, our parents and the politicians of Marahoué have seen that where women go, men cannot go there. Today because of what I do in my village, the people of my village want to position me as a village chief. I told them, for the moment I have political ambitions. (Interview conducted with a patriarch of the village of a food trader and creator of the Gouro new tar market in Abidjan, ethnographic survey data, April 16, 2020)

## Discussion

### **Feminine Ostentatious Spending Practices: A Reappropriation of Male Funeral Spaces**

The results of this work show that in addition to the practices that are socially devolved to them, Gouro women incur ostentatious expenditure thanks to their economic resource. They make excessive investments in the management of death. In doing so, they reclaim male funerary spaces. In comparison to the work carried out by these authors (Nagognime, 1977; Duvert, 1990; Kouassi, 2005; Vaulay, 2008; Evy, 2011), this first result goes beyond the extant literature. In fact, in their ethnocultural analysis of funeral practices, the above authors reveal the secondary roles of women in the redistribution of funeral tasks. These ones are generally roles of domestication, psychological and symbolic rituals (dances, traditional songs, body treatment: washing, clothing, monitoring of the body). Moreover, they did not mention the ostentatious nature of these forms of expenditure that women carry out. Even though, Joseph Tonda (2000) in the context of Brazzaville raises it, according to him, women do it through the male gender.

### **Ostentatious Spending and Strategy for Reconstructing Female Identity**

This second result indicates that women perform ostentatious spending on funeral spaces as a resource for status reclassification. They are part of the recomposition of the roles and tasks assigned to men. The assumption of ostentatious funeral expenses implies a revaluation of the uterine filiation. The said result is in line with several works carried out in different but unanimous contexts on the repositioning of women in different sectors of activity (Sabot, 2005; Adjamagbo, Antoine, Beguy, & Dial, 2006; Preiswerk, 1997; Thollembeck, 2010; Oriza & Paul, 2014; Fontier, 2015). Indeed, these authors emphasize the dynamic nature of

social relations between the sexes. They do argue that we are witnessing a form of reconfiguration or destandardization of sexual relations. That reconfiguration of sex relations is for some (Sabot, 2005; Thollembeck, 2010), feminist struggles and for others (Adjamagbo et al, 2006; Flintan, 2008; Preiswerk, 1997; Oriza & Paul, 2014; Fontier, 2015), the decline of male authority due to economic precariousness and the economic emancipation of women.

In this context, their investment in funeral expenses is a strategy for legitimizing their socially masked political ambition. Women use the funeral spaces to demonstrate their competence in the management of local activities and their assumption of responsibility in the social organization of the village. It gives them social power over the male sex. This very observation reinforces the work of Kafui (2013). According to him, politics in Africa still remains a domain of male domination. That is why, for the quest for equality, the participation of women in political decision-making is one of the priority issues and a requirement of development. These constraints to the progress of women in politics, he says, would be both structural, that is to say cultural, social, historical, legislative, and cyclical. Indeed, he notes that the awareness and determination of women to integrate political sphere are constantly accompanied by the low participation of women in decision-making area, marginalization, and social discrimination. In this perspective, our result shows that women use strategies to exercise political power. Indeed, they invest massively in funeral spaces by means of which, they will prevail their dexterity and skill in the management of human resources. They use funeral spaces to show their ability to manage village political power, if the opportunity is provided.

### Conclusion

This article highlights the ostentatious expenses during the funeral practices of the Gouro food vendors of the Gohitafla commune and the meaning attached to it. In this context, participating observation was mobilized to detail these ostentatious feminine practices and to deduce their meaning. In addition, based on ethnographic interviews, field conversations, and observations in situ, used as collection strategies, the results first show that women now take on with the advent of modernism, the commitment to cover in charge of death from the transfer of the body, compensations, and honorary practices. These ostentatious expenses are strategies of identity reconstruction and negotiation of political citizenship on funerary spaces. A deepening of the involvement of women in these said expenditures will demonstrate their investment in the rituals of passing the dead from the terrestrial world to the celestial one through feminine rituals and the informal sponsorship of masculine rituals.

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