

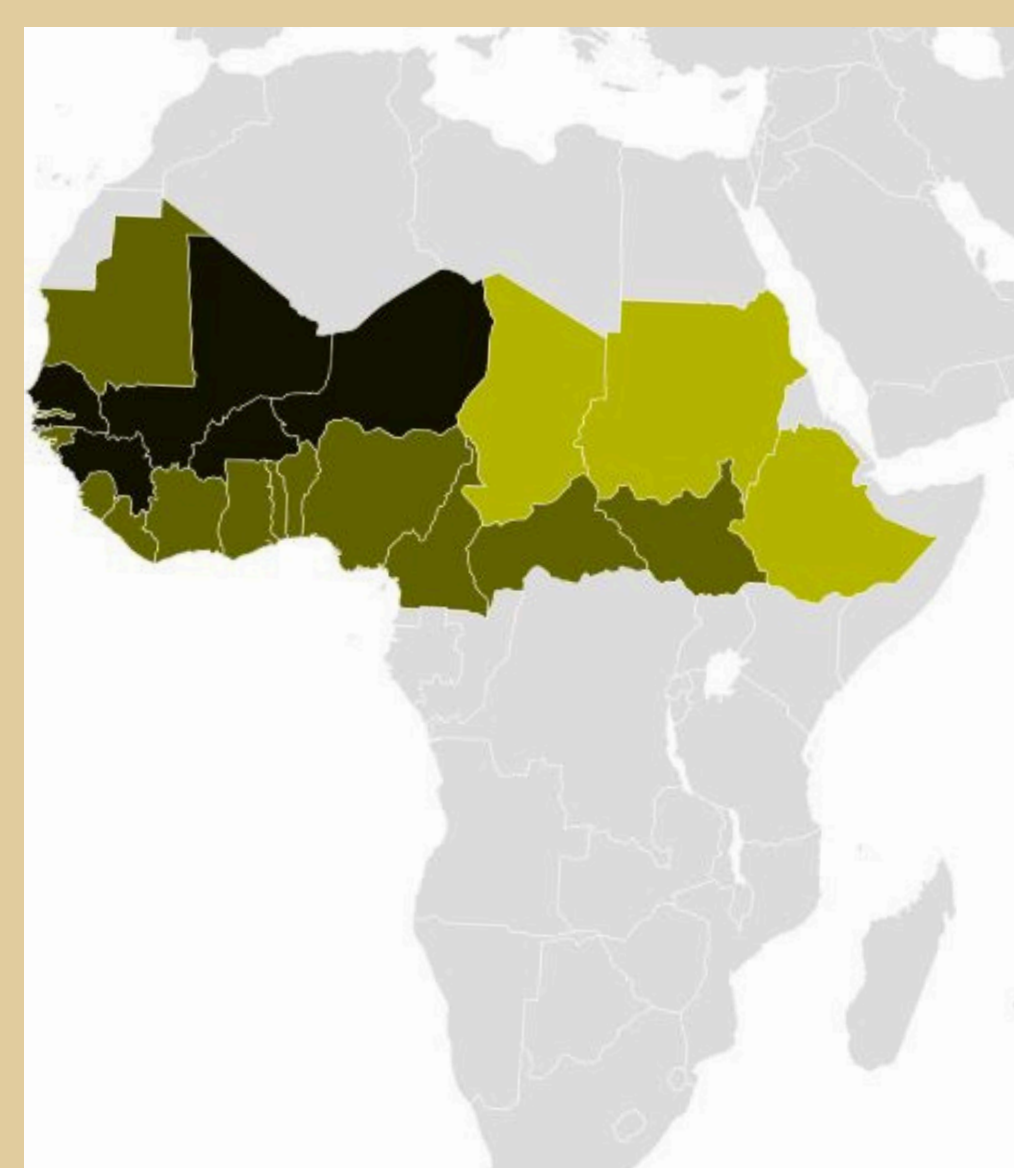
Fulbe Approaches to Human Rights & Sociopolitical Stigma in Greater Accra, Ghana

Charlotte Stuart-Tilley and Dr. Joseph Hellweg

Department of Religion

Background

- Fulbe (also known as Fulani, Fula, or Peul) people are an indigenous, historically nomadic ethnic group who live across West Africa. While many Fulbe have settled in stationary communities, cattle herding and livestock remain an important source of income for 30% of Fulbe (Kendrick and Sanders, 2024).
- Fulbe people adhere to a code of conduct called *pulaaku*, meaning “responsibility.”
- Fulbe people experience discrimination and community violence in many of the regions where they have settled. In Ghana, the government routinely denies Fulbe citizenship and has historically implemented programs to physically expel Fulbe herders from the country. Ghanaian media often stereotype Fulbe as criminals or as undesirable, and many Fulbe experience discrimination and violence on a day-to-day basis within their communities.
- This project asks two main questions: “How do Fulbe understand the discrimination and violence they face, in the context of *pulaaku*?” and “What words, phrases, and ideas do Fulbe use to describe the notion of human rights?”
- I hypothesized that when describing their experiences of oppression and their ideal future, Fulbe interviewees would use words like *pulaaku* and *seemtende* (a word meaning “shame” or “shyness”) to describe their experiences.



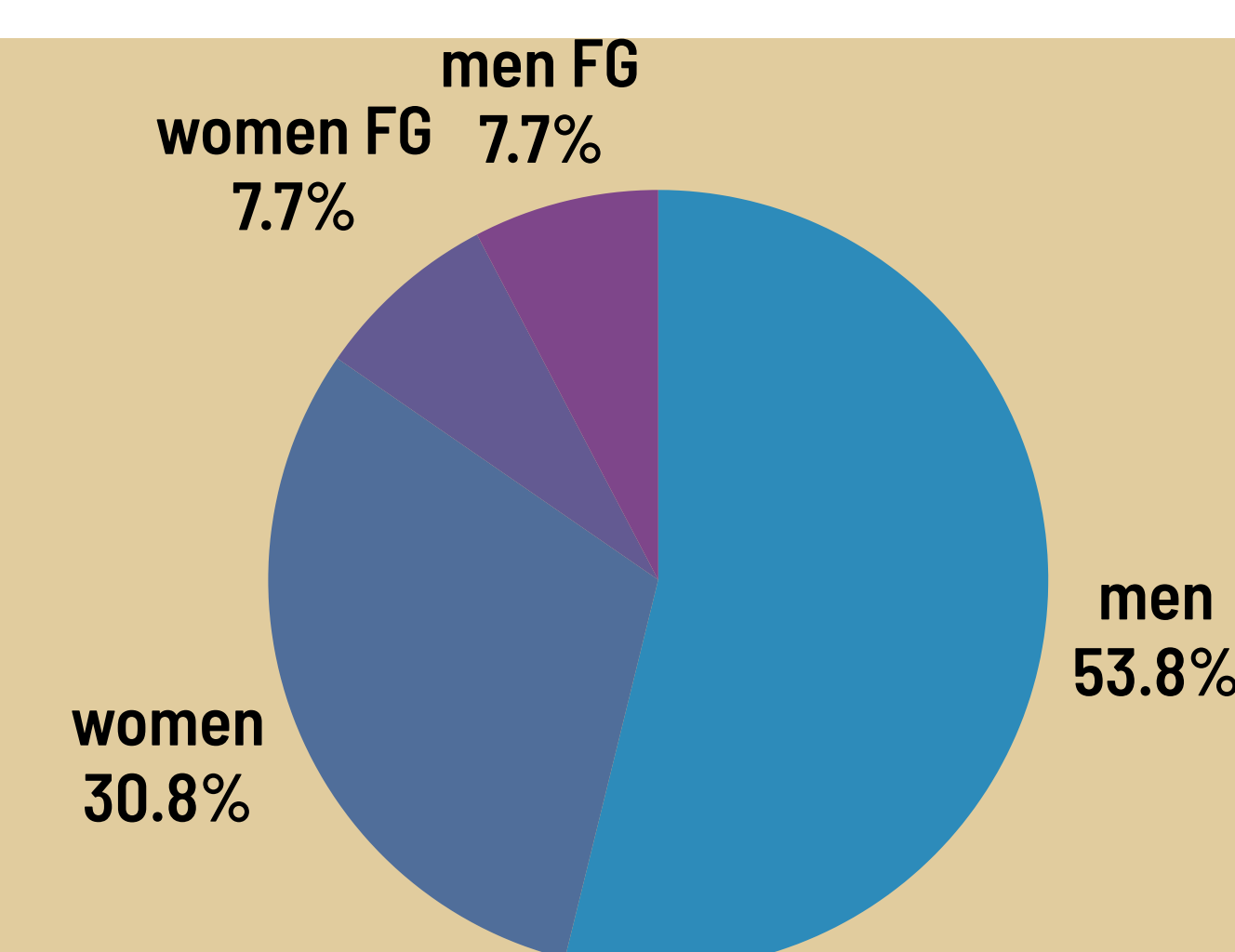
Map of the distribution of Fulbe people across Africa.
(*Wikimedia Commons*)



A Fulbe herder's cattle in Dodowa, Ghana.

Preliminary Conclusions

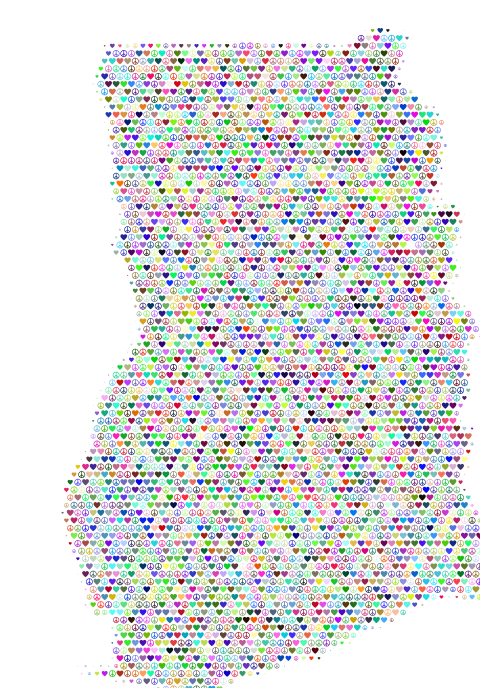
- Most Fulbe interviewees described experiences of discrimination and community violence.
- In particular, many spoke about their inability to receive a GhanaCard (a national identity card) that would grant them access to various programs and services. Some had applied to receive the card, and despite being born in Ghana, Ghanaian authorities had denied them the card because they did not look “Ghanaian enough.”
- During the preliminary research stage, I hypothesized that Fulbe would think more in terms of capabilities than “rights” (Nussbaum 2003). Interviewees repeated their desire to have access to the same programs and services that other Ghanaians had. I argue that the use of the term “access” to opportunities and services by respondents to describe the ideal world for Fulbe people reflects the notion of “capabilities.”
- Many Fulbe people referenced the desire to live in “peaceful coexistence” with other communities in Ghana.
- By understanding alternative notions of human rights, we can improve global objectives to make human rights more accessible and relevant to marginalized populations, especially those in the Global South.



Gender Demographics of Fulbe Interviewees.



QR Code for References



Methods

- To recruit potential respondents, I used expert, convenience, purposive, and network/snowball sampling methods.
- I completed eleven semi-structured interviews with adult Fulbe people of different occupations, educational backgrounds, income levels, marital statuses, ages, and sexes.
- I held three focus groups: one of Fulbe men from a neighborhood in Dodowa, another of Fulbe women from the same neighborhood, and finally, one with non-Fulbe Ghanaian students from the University of Ghana.
- I asked interviewees questions about experiences of discrimination and violence, relationships to non-Fulbe Ghanaians, and perspectives on notions of Fulbe identity, *pulaaku*, *seemtende*, and human rights.
- A Fulfulde-speaking translator will translate each interview, and I will qualitatively code them by theme.
- I will establish a lexicon of words and phrases used by interviewees.

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