



WOMEN'S BODIES AS BEARERS OF COMMUNAL GRIEF MEMORY: AN ASIAN POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST HERMENEUTIC OF *IKI PALEG* AND THE WAILING WOMEN IN JEREMIAH 9:17–22

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Abstract

Women's bodies can become sites through which communities mark and transmit memories of death, yet this memorial function contains a tension between women's authority as agents of remembrance and the burdening of grief upon their bodies. This article analyses that tension through a critical dialogue between the tradition of *Iki Paleg* in several Dani communities and the wailing women in Jeremiah 9:17–22. The study employs qualitative library research informed by Asian postcolonial feminist hermeneutics and contextual-intercultural dialogue. The analysis focuses on the interrelations among body, memory, voice, power relations, and intergenerational transmission. The findings show that *Iki Paleg* materialises loss through permanent bodily alteration, whereas Jeremiah 9:17–22 locates memory in lament, the hearing of the divine word, and teaching. Both contexts present women as subjects of knowledge, yet their authority remains ambivalent because the labour of remembering is also distributed along gendered lines. The article proposes the concept of “women's memory work” to account for the relationship among epistemic authority, relational agency, and memorial burden. As a constructive implication, a “pneumatology of remembering” understands the work of the Spirit as a presence that preserves testimony to woundedness, opens space for women's voices, and guides communities to remember without reproducing violence upon the body.

Keywords: *Iki Paleg*; Jeremiah 9:17–22; women's bodies; communal memory; lament; postcolonial feminist hermeneutics

INTRODUCTION

Not every loss is preserved in writing. Some losses endure in stories, songs, laments, rituals, gestures, and marks inscribed upon the body. In certain experiences, the body does more than express grief; it

becomes the site where loss takes a form that can be recognised and remembered. The tradition of *Iki Paleg* confronts this study with precisely such a problem: the death of a relative may be commemorated through permanent alteration of

women's bodies, bringing personal experience, kinship, communal memory, and woundedness together within the same locus.

The convergence of body and memory requires critical interpretation. Bodies can preserve forms of knowledge that are not fully retained in written archives, yet when women's bodies become media of remembrance, the question concerns not only how a community remembers but also whose bodies are required to bear the labour of remembering. *Iki Paleg* is therefore inadequately understood when treated as an exotic cultural object observed from outside. The practice must be situated within its historical and cultural location while attending to the meanings articulated by women who have undergone it and scrutinising the structures through which grief is distributed unequally.

Asian postcolonial feminist hermeneutics provides an orientation for such a reading. Kwok Pui-lan rejects "Asian women" as a singular, homogeneous category and stresses that women's experiences are always bound to colonial histories, social locations, and the politics of representation. Mary John Mananzan, in turn, identifies women's bodies as theological loci because concrete bodies are where suffering, violence, creativity, struggle, and the quest for wholeness take place. Taken together, these perspectives require bodily experience to be read not as a self-contained symbol but as knowledge that must be heard alongside questions of who speaks, who interprets, and who possesses the

authority to determine meaning (Kwok 2005, 29–31, 35–37; Mananzan 2016, 245–56).

The dimension of memory extends this problem further. Paul Connerton demonstrates that societies remember not only through texts and monuments but also through practices performed by bodies. Gesture, posture, recitation, rhythm, and ritual action bring the past into renewed presence within communal life. Nirmal Puwar sharpens this insight by understanding bodies as bearers of histories, voices, traumas, and relationships that are not always available in propositional language. Embodied memory is relational: it is activated through encounters with other bodies and voices and remains open to renegotiation as generations and contexts change. Women's bodies may therefore function as living archives, but the status of memory-bearer does not automatically entail freedom; the labour of remembering may confer authority while simultaneously imposing obligation (Connerton 1989, 70–76, 87–95; Puwar 2021, 18–25).

Voice constitutes another dimension of memory work. Lament, weeping, song, teaching, and even silence can transform private experience into knowledge recognised by a community. Anna Cho draws attention to the ambivalence of reiterated language: voice can create space for women's experience, while the same patterns of language can also reproduce structures of silencing. Accordingly, this study employs three interrelated

categories—body, memory, and voice—not as an autonomous theoretical framework but as analytical tools for assessing how women know, remember, articulate, transmit, and negotiate experiences of loss (Cho 2022, 1–8; Bui and Hien 2025, 69–73).

In this article, “women’s memory work” does not imply that women are naturally closer to grief or inherently more capable of remembering. The term refers to a social and ritual division of labour in which women are positioned as agents through whom loss becomes recognisable, shareable, and transmissible. The category holds two dimensions together. On the one hand, participation in ritual and lament can generate epistemic authority because women possess the language, gestures, relationships, and historical knowledge required for remembrance. On the other hand, such authority may coexist with obligations that are not equitably shared. Agency, therefore, cannot be measured merely by the presence or absence of direct coercion; it must be assessed according to the space available for women to name their experiences, interpret tradition, negotiate forms of participation, and refuse practices that wound them.

The remembering body subsequently opens onto the lamenting voice. When grief enters shared space through sound, personal experience becomes recognisable to the community and transmissible to subsequent generations. This nexus of body, memory, voice, and transmission provides the point of

dialogue with Jeremiah 9:17–22, a text that summons skilled women to lament, hear the word of YHWH, and teach lament to daughters and other women.

Previous scholarship has rejected the treatment of the wailing women as merely decorative figures within a narrative of destruction. Claassens argues that feminist interpretation must expose readings that perpetuate marginalisation and gender-based violence while also attending to possibilities of voice, agency, resistance, and identity formation within the text. Okafo notes the movement in Jeremiah 9:17–22 from the command to summon wailing women to the direct address instructing them to hear and teach the divine word. Scalise goes further by describing them as transmitters of the prophetic word, since the lament they learn and teach carries YHWH’s message to contemporaries and future generations. These readings are significant, yet the relationship among women’s bodies, communal memory, intergenerational transmission, and the gendered burden of memory work still requires a more integrated formulation (Claassens 2024, 1–4, 14–18; Okafo 2025, 216–23; Scalise 2002, 417–18).

A significant lacuna remains in the relationship among women’s agency, communal memory, intergenerational transmission, and gendered burden when a biblical text is brought into dialogue with practices of mourning from an Asia-Pacific context. This article does not

equate *Iki Paleg* with the women's lament in Jeremiah 9:17–22. The two differ in history, systems of meaning, and ritual form: *Iki Paleg* leaves a permanent mark upon the body, whereas Jeremiah depicts weeping bodies and voices that teach lament. Their encounter is dialogical rather than identificatory.

The principal research question is how women's bodies and voices function as bearers of communal grief memory in the tradition of *Iki Paleg* and in Jeremiah 9:17–22, and what theological implications emerge from their dialogue. The article's contribution lies in the concept of "women's memory work," namely embodied and voiced practices that preserve and transmit communal memory while disclosing an ambivalence between epistemic authority and gendered burden. From these findings, the article develops a "pneumatology of remembering" as a theological construction that locates the work of the Spirit in preserving testimony to woundedness, opening space for women's voices, and transforming the ways communities remember without reproducing violence upon the body.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a non-empirical qualitative method based on library research, using Asian postcolonial feminist hermeneutics and contextual-intercultural dialogue. Sources on *Iki Paleg* include classical anthropological studies, contemporary sociological research,

and published testimonies of former practitioners. These materials are read with awareness that documentation concerning Dani communities derives from different locations, generations, and researcher positions. Accordingly, the study does not treat any single description as a comprehensive representation of all Dani people, nor does it generalise the experiences of a small number of informants as representative of all Papuan women. The analysis proceeds in four stages. First, the categories of body, memory, and voice are used to identify how loss is materialised, articulated, and transmitted. Second, *Iki Paleg* is examined in relation to kinship, the gendered distribution of mourning practices, women's testimonies, and intergenerational change. Third, Jeremiah 9:17–22 is analysed within the literary context of the book of Jeremiah and the lament practices of ancient Israel, with particular attention to women's movement from those who are "summoned" to hearers of the divine word and teachers of lament. Fourth, the two contexts are brought into dialogue in a manner that preserves their historical and cultural differences, following contextual and intercultural hermeneutical principles that resist the absorption of one context into another (Lee 2010, 175–81, 187–89; Pachau 2015, 13–15; West 2014, 2–4; López 2021, 2–3, 7).

The validity of the argument is maintained through cross-source comparison and by restricting claims to the scope of the available data. The analysis does not seek to judge

Dani culture as a whole from an external standpoint, nor does it employ the biblical text as an instrument for the direct legitimation or rejection of customary practice. Dialogue is used instead to generate reciprocal critical questions: *Iki Paleg* prompts a reading of Jeremiah to ask whose bodies bear communal memory, while Jeremiah enables reflection on *Iki Paleg* to imagine forms of remembrance through voice, story, and education without permanent bodily injury.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Remembering Body: *Iki Paleg*, Kinship, and Women's Burden of Grief

Iki Paleg is a mourning practice formerly observed in a number of Dani communities in the Papuan Highlands. Within the practice, the loss of a family member is expressed not only through weeping or speech but materialised through the amputation of part of a finger. Suripatty, Kudubun, and Utomo situate the practice within the strong kinship bonds of Dani communities in the Baliem Valley: a person's death is understood not merely as an individual loss but as an event that unsettles the family, clan, and wider community. *Iki Paleg* must therefore be read as a social practice in which body, kinship, and communal grief converge (Suripatty, Kudubun, and Utomo 2024, 7060–61).

The term "Dani society" must not suggest that the practice was uniform across all regions or historical periods. Suripatty, Kudubun, and Utomo primarily

discuss communities in the Baliem Valley, whereas Wonawai and colleagues conducted research in Sanoba Village, Nabire Regency. Gardner and Heider's documentation concerns the Dugum Dani community in the early 1960s. Differences in location, generation, and period of observation indicate that both the meaning and enactment of *Iki Paleg* could vary. This study therefore interprets the available testimonies and documentation rather than claiming to represent all Dani people (Suripatty, Kudubun, and Utomo 2024, 7060–62; Wonawai et al. 2024, 370–73; Gardner and Heider 1968, 20–53, 154–68).

These sources also emerge from different observational positions. Gardner and Heider documented Dugum Dani life at a time when the community was undergoing intensive encounters with foreign researchers, colonial administration, and missionaries. Their anthropological documentation has value as a historical record, but it is not an unmediated Dani voice. By contrast, Suripatty and colleagues include contemporary interviews with former practitioners and younger people, although their study involved only five informants. Narratives, photographs, interviews, and academic texts are always shaped by selection and by the researcher's interpretive framework; claims concerning women's experience must therefore remain appropriately circumscribed (Suripatty, Kudubun, and Utomo 2024, 7062).

The meaning of *Iki Paleg* is closely related to the place of family and kinship in Dani life. Suripatty and colleagues explain that family extends beyond the nuclear household to encompass wider kinship networks, clan, those sharing a honai, ancestors, language, and a common history. Putro and Nadira depict this relationality through the analogy of five fingers: each finger differs in form and size, yet all function as a single unit. Family members are thus understood as parts of a social body that sustain one another (Suripatty, Kudubun, and Utomo 2024, 7060–61; Putro and Nadira 2019, 161–62).

Within this framework, the death of a family member produces a condition of incompleteness. If the family is analogised to the fingers that constitute a hand, the loss of a relative is represented as the loss of one part of that unity. Finger amputation materialises the change experienced by the family: just as a hand is no longer the same after losing a finger, family life is no longer the same after the death of one of its members. The missing finger is therefore not merely a symbol of personal sorrow but a mark of rupture within a network of relationships (Putro and Nadira 2019, 160–62; Suripatty, Kudubun, and Utomo 2024, 7061).

Through *Iki Paleg*, an invisible experience of loss acquires material form upon the body. Inner grief is rendered as a permanent alteration that can be seen and recognised by the community. A mark on the hand becomes evidence that a person has lost a relative and

passed through a period of mourning. Physical pain is thus connected with emotional grief, while personal experience enters social space through a bodily sign (Wonawai et al. 2024, 370–71, 378–80; Medlama and Medlama 2025, 5–7).

Although death is experienced by the family as a whole, available documentation indicates that the physical burden of *Iki Paleg* fell predominantly upon women's bodies. Gardner and Heider record women and girls with amputated fingers in contexts of death and burial among the Dugum Dani. Drawing on Heider's documentation, Soukup likewise notes that hand mutilation was found primarily among women and girls, including those related to men who had died in warfare. These data reveal a gendered distribution of grief: loss concerns the community, but its enduring marks are disproportionately inscribed upon women's bodies (Gardner and Heider 1968, 154–68; Soukup 2018, 12–16).

The personal dimension of the practice appears in the testimonies of Natalia Wetipo and Welly Kobak collected by Suripatty and colleagues. Wetipo interprets finger amputation as a visible expression of sorrow, while Kobak associates it with love for and closeness to the deceased family member. These testimonies prevent women from being treated simply as passive objects of custom. The women are capable of naming their own actions through the language of love, relationship, and loss, even though the voices of two informants

cannot be generalised as representative of all Dani women (Suripatty, Kudubun, and Utomo 2024, 7062–63).

The remaining marks allow women's bodies to be read as living archives. Unlike written archives, which preserve events through documents, bodies retain loss through wounds, altered form, restricted movement, and memories of actions once endured. Medlama and Medlama describe older women with shortened fingers as bearers of traces from a practice that is now increasingly rare. Their bodies connect personal history, the deaths of relatives, and transformations in communal life (Medlama and Medlama 2025, 5–7).

Connerton's concept of incorporating practices helps illuminate this process. The past is remembered not merely through accounts of *Iki Paleg* but incorporated into a body that has been altered. As the hand remains visible and is used in social relationships, its marks can reactivate relationships with the deceased and memories of mourning practices once performed. This application does not imply that the body possesses a single, fixed meaning; the meaning of bodily marks may change as practitioners and later generations reinterpret the past from new circumstances (Connerton 1989, 72–76, 87–88).

Iki Paleg is also related to the continuing relationship between the living and the dead. Suripatty and colleagues state that the severed part of the finger was temporarily kept in

a honai and interpret this practice as symbolising the continued relationship between the deceased relative and the living family. Documentation summarised by Soukup records another interpretation, according to which the severed finger segment could be understood as an offering to the spirit of the deceased. These accounts are not entirely identical and should not be collapsed into a single universal explanation; taken together, they indicate only that death was understood within a relational framework that did not terminate immediately with biological death (Suripatty, Kudubun, and Utomo 2024, 7061, 7064; Soukup 2018, 12–16).

The healing period of the wound also gives bodily form to the temporality of grief. Suripatty and colleagues associate the recovery of the wound with a change in, or gradual easing of, the mourning period. Healing, however, does not erase memory, because bodily marks continue to carry the past into the present. Women's bodies become a site where woundedness, continuing relationship, healing, and memory converge, even though these dimensions do not necessarily move according to the same temporal rhythm (Suripatty, Kudubun, and Utomo 2024, 7061, 7064).

Contemporary testimonies reveal a tension between personal willingness and the force of communal norms. Former practitioners state that they were not always directly compelled by another individual. Yet the same research

describes *Iki Paleg* as a customary and collective moral obligation with binding force, while other studies record social consequences for those who refused. The absence of interpersonal coercion therefore does not by itself eliminate structural pressure. Personal decisions may be shaped by value systems that define particular actions as evidence of love and fidelity (Suripatty, Kudubun, and Utomo 2024, 7063–64; Wonawai et al. 2024, 379–80).

Women's agency in *Iki Paleg* must consequently be understood relationally. Wetipo and Kobak demonstrate the capacity to interpret their own actions, yet those interpretations occur within a social order that more often places mourning marks upon women's bodies. Choice, obedience, love, pressure, and suffering can coexist. A postcolonial feminist reading must avoid two reductions: romanticising amputation as an act of loving sacrifice in a way that obscures gender inequality, or condemning the entire practice from outside in a way that silences how women and their communities understand death and kinship.

The critical issue is not to decide abstractly whether *Iki Paleg* is "voluntary" or "coerced." Such a binary is too narrow to explain action embedded within networks of kinship, moral obligation, affection, and social expectation. Testimonies of former practitioners indicate that love for relatives can be a meaning they genuinely affirm, while the fact that bodily marks fall primarily upon women still requires gender critique. An adequate interpretation must

therefore acknowledge internal meaning without allowing it to foreclose questions of inequality. Precisely because women are treated as subjects of knowledge, interpreters must recognise their capacity to preserve the values of solidarity and respect for the dead while transforming the medium through which remembrance is enacted.

Iki Paleg is not an unchanging tradition. Contemporary studies indicate that finger amputation has become increasingly rare and has been questioned through encounters with Christianity, education, medical knowledge, urban life, and new patterns of social relationship. Such change cannot be adequately explained as a simple collision between "tradition" and "modernity"; it constitutes an internal negotiation within Dani communities under changing historical conditions (Suripatty, Kudubun, and Utomo 2024, 7064–68; Merina and Muhaimin 2023, 48–51).

Intergenerational differences in attitude reveal the direction of this negotiation. Younger informants no longer consider finger amputation necessary as proof of love for the deceased. Wetipo and Kobak, despite having undergone the practice themselves, likewise state that subsequent generations need not repeat it. Critique therefore emerges not only from the state, churches, law, or outside researchers, but also from the reflections of former practitioners and younger Dani people (Suripatty, Kudubun, and Utomo 2024, 7065–66).

The cessation of amputation need not entail the loss of memory. One younger informant opens the possibility of preserving historical value through storytelling and media without perpetuating bodily cutting. Memory can migrate from one medium to another: from physical wounds to testimony, family narratives, documentation, cultural education, and other forms of mourning. Values of communal solidarity, respect for the dead, and kinship can be transmitted without reproducing wounds upon women's bodies (Suripatty, Kudubun, and Utomo 2024, 7065–66).

Even as the practice changes, the bodies of women who once underwent it continue to carry history. An amputated finger does not return when a community adopts new forms of mourning. The bodies of former practitioners therefore bear a double testimony: they remember the deaths of relatives while also recording the transformation of Dani society. Such bodies stand at the intersection of an embodied past, a present that reinterprets it, and a future searching for new media of remembrance (Medlama and Medlama 2025, 6–8).

The study of *Iki Paleg* thus yields two findings that must be held together. First, women's bodies function as media linking the deceased, family, and community through enduring marks of loss. Second, the distribution of such memorial labour is not free from power, because shared grief is more frequently marked upon women's bodies. Women should therefore be

understood neither solely as passive victims nor as wholly autonomous agents; they are subjects who interpret loss within social structures that simultaneously provide meaning and constrain choice. This finding generates a question with which to enter Jeremiah 9:17–22 without turning the biblical text into either a direct justification or a direct condemnation of *Iki Paleg*.

The Remembering Voice: Wailing Women and the Transmission of Memory in Jeremiah 9:17–22

Jeremiah 9:17–22 belongs to a sequence of poems concerning social corruption, threatened judgement, and the devastation of Judah's life. In Jeremiah 8:18–9:2, the voice of sorrow moves among the people, the prophet, and YHWH, and the boundaries between these voices are not always easy to determine. The lament continues alongside accusations of deceit, slander, and refusal to know YHWH in 9:3–9, followed by an account of the land becoming a ruin and the people being scattered in 9:10–16. The summoning of the wailing women therefore does not stand as an isolated funeral scene but as a response to the death of a social order and the threatened destruction of the nation (Scalise 2002, 415–18; Okafo 2025, 216–23).

Scalise shows that the call to mourn forms an important pattern within the book of Jeremiah. Commands to put on sackcloth, weep, or raise a lament occur in close proximity to announcements of attack and explanations of

judgement. Mourning means confronting a reality denied by proclamations of “peace” from other prophetic voices and acknowledging the gravity of the destruction already unfolding. In Jeremiah 9, skilled women are summoned because the community requires both a language and a practice through which such acknowledgement can become possible (Scalise 2002, 415–17).

Okafo reads this summons to mourning in relation to the possibility of repentance and escape from judgement. That emphasis represents Okafo’s particular theological thesis and should not be treated as the only possible interpretation, especially because verses 21–22 depict death with striking certainty and breadth. For the purposes of the present study, the more decisive issue is the function of lament: lament resists denial, gives form to devastation, and brings the community face to face with the consequences of its social disintegration (Okafo 2025, 8–9, 225–32).

Jeremiah 9:17–22 unfolds in four movements. Verses 17–18 contain YHWH’s command that skilled wailing women be summoned without delay to awaken communal weeping. Verse 19 introduces a lamenting voice from Zion concerning devastation, shame, the loss of land, and the loss of home. Verse 20 shifts to a direct address to the women, instructing them to hear the word of YHWH and teach lament to their daughters and to other women. Verses 21–22 then provide the content of the message they are to voice: death invades the spaces of

life, severs the future of the younger generation, and leaves bodies unburied (Okafo 2025, 216–23; Scalise 2002, 415–18).

This movement links divine command, women’s voices, Zion’s lament, and the image of a wounded communal body. The women are first spoken about as those who must be summoned, then addressed directly as hearers of the divine word, and finally positioned as bearers of lament. The transition is important because it indicates that they do more than provide an emotional atmosphere for the prophet’s message. Their ritual expertise is incorporated into prophetic communication, so that weeping, teaching, and the divine word become mutually implicated.

Lament in ancient Israel was not merely an outpouring of individual emotion. It functioned as a social and ritual practice through which families and communities acknowledged death together. Bar-Ilan explains that the performance of lament at funerals deepened awareness of loss, intensified grief, and moved mourners to weep. Such practices were known among ancient peoples, including Israel, and could involve both men and women; women, however, appear prominently as skilled performers and leaders of lament (Bar-Ilan 2020, 53–54).

Women’s participation is not confined to Jeremiah 9. Judges 11:37–40 depicts the daughters of Israel annually commemorating Jephthah’s daughter; 2 Samuel 1:24 calls the daughters of Israel to weep for Saul; and 2 Chronicles 35:25

refers to male and female singers performing laments for Josiah that subsequently became customary in Israel. These texts do not prove the existence of one uniform ritual form, but they do demonstrate women's participation in the remembrance of both personal death and national loss through communal gathering and voice (Bar-Ilan 2020, 53–55; Okafo 2025, 216–23).

The description of the women as “skilled” or “wise” in Jeremiah 9:17 refers to competence rather than to an assumption that women are naturally more emotional. These women possessed the ability to compose or perform death songs, employ established expressions of grief, and lead groups in responsive patterns. Lament was practical knowledge embodied through words, voice, weeping, rhythm, and group coordination. Such expertise was socially recognised because it was needed both in personal bereavement and in moments of national crisis (Bar-Ilan 2020, 55–58).

There is no single historically certain answer to the question of why women occupied this role. Bar-Ilan himself acknowledges the difficulty of establishing the origin of such a division of ritual labour, and several proposed explanations remain hypothetical. The textual evidence permits only a limited conclusion: women possessed social spaces in which they gathered, sang, and led communal responses in contexts of both victory and death. Expertise cultivated within such spaces made them necessary when the community encountered forms of loss it could

not adequately articulate for itself (Bar-Ilan 2020, 55–58).

The imperatives in verses 17–18—“consider,” “call,” and “send for”—create a sense of urgency. The women are not instructed to wait until death has occurred but to raise a lament “for us” so that the eyes and eyelids of the community may flow with tears. Professional lament does not replace communal grief; rather, the women's expertise enables the wider community to participate in it. Scalise describes their ministry as a means by which the community is drawn into shared mourning (Scalise 2002, 417).

Verse 19 gives voice to Zion's lament: “How ruined we are! How great is our shame!” Loss is represented through the necessity of abandoning land and dwelling place. The object of lament therefore extends beyond individual death. What is mourned is the collapse of the spaces of life themselves: land, home, security, identity, and a shared future. Zion's voice transforms prophetic threat into a first-person plural confession. A community that could previously resist the announcement of destruction is now summoned to say “we” and recognise that catastrophe concerns the whole social body (Okafo 2025, 218–20; Scalise 2002, 417–18).

A significant transition occurs in verse 20. In verse 17 the women are spoken of as people who must be summoned; in verse 20 they are addressed directly: “Hear, O women, the word of the LORD, and let your ears receive the word of his mouth.” Okafo draws attention to the

plural feminine forms used in these commands. The change of address positions the women not merely as ritual performers but as hearers of the divine word. They must hear and receive before they can voice and transmit it (Okafo 2025, 220–22).

The command to teach lament to daughters shows that lament is not merely a spontaneous response. It is a form of knowledge that can be learned, practised, and transmitted. The transmission moves vertically, from women to the next generation of daughters, and horizontally, from one woman to another. Networks of women therefore become spaces in which the language of grief is preserved and extended (Bar-Ilan 2020, 53–55; Okafo 2025, 220–22).

Okafo summarises an interpretation according to which such teaching becomes necessary because the scale of the anticipated deaths is so vast that the existing number of mourners would be insufficient to respond to the casualties that would fill the community. This explanation is plausible as an inference from verses 21–22, although the text does not state it explicitly. What can be established is that lament must not remain confined to a small group of specialists. Both the divine word and the practice of grief are to be extended through wider networks of women and into the next generation (Okafo 2025, 221–23).

What is taught is more than a technique for producing tears. Scalise describes the women as bearers and transmitters of the prophetic word. Verse 20 names

what they hear as the word of YHWH, while the formula “Thus says the LORD” introduces the message in the following verse. By teaching it, the women disseminate the divine word among contemporaries and future generations. Their ritual expertise is not displaced by the prophetic word; it becomes the medium through which that word can be heard communally (Scalise 2002, 417–18).

The lament portrays death as a force that breaches the boundaries of living space: death climbs through the windows and enters palaces or dwellings. The house, which should provide protection, is no longer secure. The image then moves from domestic to public space: children are cut off from the streets and young people from the squares. Devastation thus encompasses home, city, and the succeeding generation. It is not only individuals who die; the network of communal life is deprived of its future (Okafo 2025, 222–26).

Verse 22 intensifies the image by depicting human bodies lying like dung upon the field and like sheaves behind the reaper with no one to gather them. In a culture in which proper burial was regarded as an important obligation, the absence of anyone to gather the dead signifies both the collapse of social order and the degradation of the deceased. The agricultural image of harvest is reversed into an image of mass death: human bodies are treated like abandoned residue (Okafo 2025, 223–27; Scalise 2002, 416–18).

At this point, body and voice converge. The bodies of victims are

threatened with being left ungathered and forgotten, yet the women's lament gives them a place within communal memory. The women do not restore the dead to life, but their voices resist the possibility that death might occur without acknowledgement. They name death's intrusion, the loss of children and young people, and the indignity of bodies left untreated. Lament becomes an act of witnessing what catastrophe seeks to erase.

Teaching daughters gives lament an intergenerational dimension. As lament is learned and performed again, the experience of devastation does not end with the first generation. Words, voices, rhythms, and tears carry memories of the dead, lost homes, expulsion from the land, and the destruction of shared life. In the analytical terminology of this study, lament becomes an incorporating practice: the divine word is not preserved only as text but enacted through bodies that hear, weep, speak, and teach. The designation "communal memory" here is a hermeneutical synthesis developed by this study rather than an explicit term in the text of Jeremiah (Connerton 1989, 72–76; Scalise 2002, 417–18).

The command also recognises women's knowledge. They know the language required to face death, can turn loss into collective weeping, and possess the capacity to teach such knowledge. Bar-Ilan regards lament as one of the social spaces in which women's verbal competence received recognition. In Jeremiah 9, this

competence acquires a prophetic dimension because women become hearers, transmitters, and teachers of the divine word concerning the condition of the community (Bar-Ilan 2020, 53–55).

The wailing women in Jeremiah therefore cannot be reduced to an emotional illustration appended to the prophecy of a male prophet. The structure of verses 17–22 assigns them a more specific function: they are summoned because they possess expertise, addressed so that they may hear the divine word, commanded to teach lament, and then situated within a portrayal of death that threatens every sphere of communal life. Their authority is practical and transmissive. They do not assume the office of prophet, yet the prophetic word becomes audible, affectively apprehensible, and transmissible through the labour of their voices. At the same time, a feminist reading must retain a critical question: why is the labour of confronting devastation and educating the next generation directed specifically to networks of women? Here the text both recognises women and reveals a gendered distribution of burden.

That recognition remains ambivalent. Women are authorised to hear, voice, and teach the divine word, yet the work of mourning is also handed on within networks of women. The text specifically names daughters and other women as recipients of the teaching. The transmission of lament may therefore be read simultaneously as recognition of women's epistemic

authority and as the continuation of emotional-ritual responsibility from one generation of women to another. Feminist interpretation must hold these two dimensions together without reducing women to victims or celebrating the task of lament as an uncomplicated form of liberation.

Jeremiah 9:17–22 ultimately portrays the wailing women as indispensable agents when a community must confront devastation. They are skilled women who lead communal weeping, hearers of the word of YHWH, bearers of prophetic language, and teachers of lament. Through weeping bodies and transmitted voices, loss takes a form that can be recognised and carried forward as communal memory. At the same time, the text places the burden of preserving the language of grief primarily upon women. This finding—authority accompanied by burden—concludes the independent reading of Jeremiah and provides the basis, rather than a mere prelude, for the critical dialogue with *Iki Paleg* developed in the following section.

Remembering without Reproducing Wounds: Critical Dialogue and a Pneumatology of Remembering

The preceding analyses reveal two forms of women's memory work. In *Iki Paleg*, loss is marked upon the body. In Jeremiah 9:17–22, loss is voiced through lament and teaching. The dialogue developed here is inspired by Archie C. C. Lee's con/textual approach. Lee places biblical texts and Asian sources in critical interaction. In the present

study, that approach is employed to bring a cultural practice and a prophetic text into dialogue while preserving the integrity of both contexts, attending to asymmetries of power, and recognising the knowledge of communities themselves (Lee 2010, 175–81, 187–89; Pachau 2015, 13–15; West 2014, 2–4; López 2021, 2–3, 7).

Iki Paleg is a mourning practice known through anthropological research and the testimonies of former practitioners. Its sources derive from different communities, locations, and historical periods. Jeremiah 9:17–22, by contrast, is a prophetic text from the world of ancient Judah. The two therefore differ in form, history, and authority. Their forms of grief also differ. *Iki Paleg* marks the death of a relative upon the body of a living family member. Jeremiah portrays national devastation: the loss of homes, the death of younger generations, and bodies left unburied. Yet both meet around one question: why do women's bodies and voices become bearers of communal grief (Gardner and Heider 1968, 154–68; Suripatty, Kudubun, and Utomo 2024, 7060–66; Wonawai et al. 2024, 370–80; Scalise 2002, 415–18; Okafo 2025, 216–27)?

In *Iki Paleg*, the amputated finger marks the incompleteness of the family. The woman's body links the deceased with the family that remembers. In Jeremiah, women's bodies appear through eyes that weep, ears that hear, and mouths that teach lament. Their voices bear witness to bodies destroyed by

catastrophe. The two contexts display different operations of memory. *Iki Paleg* preserves loss through bodily marks; Jeremiah preserves it through voices repeated and taught. Bodies may remember through permanent inscription as well as through reiterated action (Putro and Nadira 2019, 160–62; Suripatty, Kudubun, and Utomo 2024, 7060–64; Okafo 2025, 216–23; Scalise 2002, 417–18; Connerton 1989, 72–76, 87–95).

In Jeremiah, women teach lament to daughters and other women, becoming bearers of the prophetic word to the next generation. In *Iki Paleg*, bodily marks, family stories, and testimonies of former practitioners transmit memories of the dead. In both contexts, memory is sustained through networks of women. Yet authority is accompanied by burden. In *Iki Paleg*, permanent marks are borne disproportionately by women and girls. In Jeremiah, women receive authority to transmit the divine word but also the task of perpetuating the labour of grief. Women may therefore become subjects of remembrance while simultaneously bearing the community's memory upon their bodies and voices (Bar-Ilan 2020, 53–55; Scalise 2002, 417–18; Okafo 2025, 220–23; Gardner and Heider 1968, 154–68; Soukup 2018, 12–15).

A postcolonial feminist reading does not position women solely as victims or as entirely free agents. The question is whether they can name loss, interpret tradition, and determine the terms of their

participation. Kwok stresses the importance of listening to women's own representations of experience. Claassens likewise demonstrates that lament can function as a form of agency even when it takes place within structures that constrain women (Kwok 2005, 29–31, 35–37; Claassens 2024, 14–18).

Restorative remembrance does not erase the dead, but neither must it reproduce wounds. Younger generations and former practitioners of *Iki Paleg* open the possibility of transmitting memory through stories, testimony, documentation, and cultural education. Jeremiah, for its part, demonstrates that loss must be voiced so that hope is not built upon denial (Suripatty, Kudubun, and Utomo 2024, 7065–68; Merina and Muhaimin 2023, 48–51; Scalise 2002, 415–22).

The dialogue between the two contexts produces an important shift from the question, “Is this tradition right or wrong?” to the question, “How can a community remember faithfully without making women's wounded bodies a condition of fidelity?” This shift does not eliminate ethical judgement but situates it after the work of listening and understanding. The memory a community needs is not one that freezes a single ritual form; it is a memory that preserves relationships, the names of the dead, histories of suffering, and intergenerational solidarity. Transformation of the medium of remembrance therefore need not constitute betrayal of ancestors. Family narratives, lament,

documentation, liturgy, cultural education, and women's testimonies may provide alternative means of maintaining continuity. The ethical criterion is whether a form of remembrance grants women authority to interpret their own experience, protects bodily integrity, and enables a community to carry the past toward a more just form of shared life.

Conceptually, "women's memory work" goes beyond the idea of the body as archive. An archive explains where traces of the past are stored, whereas memory work directs attention to who performs, activates, teaches, and negotiates remembrance. Focusing on labour renders power relations visible: women do not merely bear marks of grief but also perform the social work that enables a community to continue recognising the dead and interpreting loss. The concept also resists two simplifications. Women are not reduced to passive victims whose actions are wholly determined by custom, nor are they celebrated as unrestricted free agents. Their epistemic authority must be read together with kinship structures, moral obligations, access to spaces of speech, and their actual capacity to transform the medium of remembrance.

The dialogue between *Iki Paleg* and Jeremiah 9:17–22 demonstrates that communal grief is sustained through body, voice, and teaching. Yet it also exposes a fundamental ambivalence: women acquire roles as bearers of memory, while their bodies and voices are simultaneously burdened with

carrying the community's loss. The subsequent theological question is therefore how memory can be preserved without reproducing injury upon women's bodies. This question leads to a pneumatology of remembering, a reflection on the work of the Spirit amid memories of suffering, practices of lament, and the search for restorative forms of communal life.

The term "pneumatology of remembering" is a theological construction developed in this article rather than a concept explicitly present in Jeremiah 9:17–22. The passage does not refer to the Holy Spirit. Pneumatology is therefore not used to replace the results of exegesis but is formulated only after *Iki Paleg* and Jeremiah have been interpreted within their respective contexts. The construction emerges from the encounter between the witness of both contexts, the analytical nexus of body-memory-voice, and Christian reflection on the work of the Spirit among lives that remain wounded.

Shelly Rambo helps explain the presence of the Spirit within lives that continue to bear the traces of loss. In her account, trauma does not always become a completed past. Death can remain present within life, leaving survivors suspended between a death that has occurred and a new life that has not yet fully appeared. Under such conditions, the Spirit is present not first as the one who removes the wound, but as the witness who "remains" with those who live in the aftermath of loss (Rambo 2008, 229–36).

This insight prevents a pneumatology of remembering from becoming a theology that moves too quickly from grief to victory. The Spirit does not compel a community to forget the dead or silence lament with premature consolation. The Spirit accompanies unfinished memory and enables the community to endure as a community of witness. Remembering in the Spirit therefore means making room for loss to be acknowledged without allowing loss to become the sole determinant of the community's future.

The relationship between the Spirit and lament is articulated more directly by Mingus Minarto Pranoto. Lament is a response of faith that enables a person to come before God not only in joy but also in sorrow. In grief, the Spirit stands in solidarity with those who mourn and assists in articulating experiences that resist ordinary language. Lament is therefore not evidence of faith's absence but a space in which God, the self, and the world may be perceived with greater honesty (Pranoto 2021, 288–90).

The work of the Spirit also does not confine lament to verbal language. Weeping, song, groaning, cries, and bodily movement can become forms through which grief is expressed. Lament creates space for pain, protest, and questions concerning divine justice. The Spirit does not negate suffering but prevents hope from becoming triumphalist in ways that close down the reality of wounds. From this perspective, the voices of wailing women may be understood as

testimony that resists the silencing of communal loss (Pranoto 2021, 291–95).

Faith Van Horne extends the relationship between Spirit and body through the concept of somatic pneumatology. The concept begins with embodied, affective, and social experiences of encounter with Christ through the Spirit. Such experiences are subsequently narrated by individuals and communities as sources for theological reflection. The body, accordingly, is not merely a passive container for the Spirit's work but a space in which experience, knowledge, and transformation occur (Van Horne 2024, 39–40).

This approach accords with the earlier treatment of women's bodies as loci of knowledge. Van Horne shows that movement, voice, dance, song, and embodied practice can create spaces in which women gain courage to speak and act. Embodied experience, however, must not automatically be described as liberative. Women's own testimonies and concrete transformations in social relations remain indispensable criteria. A pneumatology that disregards women's voices may simply reproduce the marginalisation it seeks to criticise (Van Horne 2024, 46–50).

A pneumatology of remembering must also be constructed from the historical and cultural contexts of Asia. Joseph Cheah argues that Asian pneumatology does not begin solely with doctrinal formulation but with

tracing the Spirit's work within the histories, cultures, religions, and everyday lives of Asian peoples. Such an approach positions the church as a community that listens and learns, rather than merely as an agent that instructs other cultures (Cheah 2020, 6–8).

This approach does not mean that every cultural element can immediately be identified as the work of the Spirit. In relation to *Iki Paleg*, the experiences of Dani women must first be heard on their own contextual terms. Values of solidarity, respect for the dead, and the preservation of communal bonds may be appreciated, while bodily injury and gendered burden remain subject to critical examination. Contextual pneumatology is not the sanctification of an entire tradition but a process of discerning what sustains life and what wounds the body.

Kärkkäinen likewise demonstrates that reflection on the Spirit in Asian contexts is inseparable from everyday life, suffering, and the histories of Asian peoples. His discussion of *han* and *dan* emphasises that suffering produced by injustice cannot simply be remembered; the chains that perpetuate suffering must be broken through the restoration of justice. The Spirit works amid Asian women and men as they rebuild life in the face of suffering, devastation, and death (Kärkkäinen 2010, 417–23, 425–26, 428).

A feminist perspective is necessary because language about the Spirit may be liberating while also being deployed to sustain

subordination. Rosinah Gabaitse demonstrates this ambivalence within Pentecostal communities. Women may be recognised as recipients of spiritual gifts and authorised to speak through the Spirit, yet their authority can still be restricted by patriarchal interpretation. Spiritual experience, therefore, does not in itself produce equality (Gabaitse 2015, 1–3).

Gabaitse presents the Spirit as a principle that critiques interpretations and structures that marginalise women. The work of the Spirit is liberative insofar as it contests unjust burdens, opens space for women's voices, and transforms power relations that consign them to the margins. In the present study, discernment of the Spirit's work must therefore ask whether a form of remembrance safeguards bodily dignity, enables women to interpret their own experience, and transforms inequitable distributions of the labour of grief (Gabaitse 2015, 9–11).

On the basis of the preceding analysis, a pneumatology of remembering may be formulated as reflection on the work of the Spirit who accompanies communities in confronting the past truthfully, preserving the memory of the dead, and opening space for women's bodies and voices as bearers of knowledge. The Spirit neither erases wounds nor demands premature reconciliation. The Spirit remains present within lament, sustains testimony, and directs memory toward solidarity and restoration.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study demonstrates that women's bodies and voices are not supplementary elements within mourning practices but media through which loss becomes recognisable, preserved, and transmitted as communal memory. The body-memory-voice nexus shows that remembrance is always embodied, relational, and political: it produces knowledge while being shaped by distributions of power that determine who is required to remember and who is authorised to interpret the meaning of loss.

The study of *Iki Paleg* and Jeremiah 9:17–22 identifies two distinct forms of memory work. *Iki Paleg* materialises loss through permanent bodily alteration, particularly upon the bodies of women and girls; Jeremiah articulates devastation through weeping bodies, voiced lament, the hearing of the divine word, and intergenerational teaching. Their dialogue does not collapse the two contexts into one but reveals a comparable ambivalence: women may become subjects of knowledge and transmitters of memory, while their bodies and voices may also be burdened with carrying the grief of the community.

The concept of “women's memory work” formulates this ambivalence through the relationship among epistemic authority, relational agency, intergenerational transmission, and gendered burden. From this, a “pneumatology of remembering” is developed as a

theological construction that locates the work of the Spirit in the courage to confront the past, the preservation of lament and testimony, the recognition of women's bodies and voices, and the transformation of the media through which memory is carried. Remembering in the Spirit means neither erasing wounds nor glorifying suffering; it means preserving the truth of loss while refusing the repetition of violence as a condition of communal fidelity.

Because this study is based on library research, future work should involve participatory field research with women from communities that carry a history of *Iki Paleg*, including both generations who underwent the practice and younger generations who reinterpret it. Such an approach is necessary so that the concepts of women's memory work and a pneumatology of remembering do not remain solely constructions of the interpreter but are tested and reshaped through the voices, choices, and theological language of the communities themselves.

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