



WE SHALL LIVE: THE EXPERIENCES AND RESPONSES OF WOMEN TO MARGINALITY IN THE ONGOING ALAVANYO - NKONYA LAND CONFLICT IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on how women deal with challenges of marginality in the Alavanyo and Nkonya land conflict in Ghana. Using ethnographic data, the paper examines the collective and specific experiences of women and how they negotiate and navigate the challenges of marginality. The study observes that while marginality has become an enduring quality defining how women navigate everyday life, it also remains a contingent historical construction that could be contested so that women's access to power, land, livelihoods and property may be negotiated in a way that may lead to the achievement of their social mobility aspirations and futures.

Key Words: Marginality, Women, Nkonya, Alavanyo, Land Conflict, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

Written and oral sources show that the Nkonya were in the area part of which is in dispute long before the Alavanyo arrived and were offered land by the Nkonya to farm and eat after customary rites of land acquisition by strangers or late comers had been met (Wiegrabe, 1963; Nyinanse, 1984; Dzathor, 1998; Gariba, 2015). Over many years, both communities intermarried and engaged in other social interactive activities including funerals, festivals and trade. Around the early 1900s, however, some Alavanyo farmers were alleged to have trespassed into farming lands belonging to the Nkonya, i.e., they took possession of the land without proper customary rites of land ownership. This is the major issue that started the land dispute which today, has become an intercommunity conflict (Penu & Essaw, 2019; Gariba, 2021). The disputed land is said to be fecund for agrarian activities, has good timber (which today has been depleted by the activities of chiefs, timber merchants and youth) and unsubstantiated deposits of gold and mercury (Gariba, 2017). Presently, however, the issues protracting the dispute have very little to do with a land boundary, but everything to do with targeted killings, ethnic politics, court verdicts, illicit marijuana farming among others (Yakohene, 2012; Azumah, 2017; Penu & Essaw, 2019).

In Ghana, as in other African societies, land is indispensable to everyday life of people. It forms the basis of identity, security, history, spirituality, economy and rootedness (Gariba, 2021).

In this way, the mis(appropriation) of land can generate intractable conflict with the potential to affect groups and individuals, especially women because of their dependence on men to help them till the land.

In the communities of Nkonya and Alavanyo, the people often say, we don't live on the land, but relate with the land (Nyinanse, 1984). The land is everything to them; which means when they are no longer able to access the land, their lives could be in danger. Additionally, because land is intergenerational, it tends to impact local tenure systems of land ownership especially in patriarchal societies where women's rights to freely own and use land to build, or to farm and eat is a challenge. In the colonial and post-colonial periods, local conflict resolution mechanisms, legal verdicts and state as well as international efforts through the UNDP were made to resolve the dispute but none has been successful so far (Gariba, 2021; Penu & Essaw, 2019). The continuing existence of the land conflict has marginalised livelihood and socioeconomic opportunities of the people, but especially women whose lives and futures have been greatly impacted (Gariba, 2017).

Scholars such as Wiegrabe, (1963), Nyinanse, (1984), Dzathor, (1998), Penu & Essaw, (2019), Yakohene, (2012), Azumah, (2017), and Gariba, (2017) have researched the Nkonya and Alavanyo land. However, the impact of the land conflict particularly on women and how they negotiate and navigate the challenges of everyday life is greatly under researched. This is the task of this paper which tries to offer a unique example of how women's difficulties with accessing the land, livelihoods, and power has marginalised their possibilities for social mobility, a meaningful life and a future. In spite of these challenges, the womenfolk through the queen mothers in the area, say 'we shall live', *mea nɔ agbe* or *abo yɔ*. In the unsteady terrain of the ongoing conflict, the expression 'we shall live' belongs to the daily vocabulary of women and denote their effort to access the land, livelihoods, power, property, to be married and have children and a future. In a word, 'we shall live, expresses the individual and collective agencies of women in the two communities to change the conditions of marginality and to improve their wellbeing as mothers and caregivers.

The Concept of Marginality

The literature on the concept marginality is quite varied and has been broadly well articulated in disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, politics, religion, economics and others (Ecks & Sax, 2005; Di Nunzio, 2017; Cullen & Pretes, 2000; Gatzweiler, 2011). For example, drawing on his work among youth in urban Addis Ababa, De Nunzio, (2017, p. 2), contends that, although marginality is an ambiguous word and not easy to define with certainty, it entails a lack of possibilities in achieving one's potential or a dwindling of pathways to group or individual social mobility and progress. He discovered that, in urban Addis Ababa, some youth have become poor, jobless and lack access to education because of negative and politicised state policies about youth needs. These challenges have marginalised the youth and rendered their futures opaque and unpredictable.

In a related development (Gatzweiler, Baumüller, von Braun, & Ladenburger, 2011) conceptualised marginality as “an involuntary position and condition of an individual or group at the margins of social, political, economic, ecological, and biophysical systems that prevent them from access to resources, assets, services, restraining freedom of choice, preventing the development of capabilities, and eventually causing extreme poverty” (2011, p. 3). The perspective of Gatzweiler et al., (2011) expresses the prevailing condition of life in Nkonya and Alavanyo and how the lack of access to resources such as land and financial capital have marginalised the locals, especially women in their effort to deal with social, economic, political and ecological deprivations. In a different body of research, Mitton & Abdallah, (2021) demonstrate that, marginality may freeze and indeed incapacitate people, but at the same time, the marginalised are capable of contesting their marginal condition through their own creativity and need for achievement in order to make ‘ends meet’.

Moreover, Cullen & Pretes (2000), argued that there are three types of marginality, namely, economic, social and legal marginality. Economic marginality is defined in relations to social groups in which groups or individuals such as the unemployed, the impoverished elderly and single- parent families are unable to attain the normal necessities of life in order to have adequate standard of living. Social marginality exists when the behaviour of certain social groups such as ethnic minorities and the physically disabled, is seen to threaten the living conditions and norms of the dominant social groups. Legal marginality deals with groups such as illegal immigrants and drug addicts whose activities lie outside the law (Cullen & Pretes, 2000, p. 220-221). Common to the three types of marginality is the politics of inclusion and exclusion of people from entitlements, as well as social and public spaces of merits because of a condition or norm that lie beyond their control. While the three dimensions of marginality developed by Cullen & Pretes (2000), are very important, the aspect of economic marginality resonates more with aspects of the daily struggles and anxieties of many people in Alavanyo and Nkonya, especially women.

The above perspectives on marginality, bring to the fore the salient reality that, marginality entails deprivation defined by conditions of conflict, power and/or institutional dynamics in a manner that reinforces poverty and uncertainty for those marginalised. At the same time, marginality, may also offer possibilities that may be exploited by the marginalised to change their story so to improve their lives and livelihoods. In other words, marginality may be a mode of life, but it is not by any means a fixed condition of life.

In relation to the ongoing conflict and inspired by the above perspectives, I conceptualise marginality as a process of deprivation in which a group or an individual is unable to access entitlements such land, power, rights and other livelihood opportunities. In this sense, to be marginalised is to be on the margins or to lack authority, and to live in a condition of deprivation, which means the bare minimum condition below which living becomes a great challenge (Ecks & Sax, 2005, p. 199-200). This said, for women in Nkonya and Alavanyo, while their marginal condition remains a great challenge, it does not mean a total lack of agency or possibilities to change things for the better and to live. Through the leadership of the queen mothers, the women have demonstrated great resilience in changing their condition as we shall later see in this paper.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is the result of ethnographic fieldwork carried out periodically between 2020, 2021 and 2022. The methodology is qualitative and is centred on participant observation with structured and semi-structured interviews. Archival materials were also consulted. While the research is focused broadly on the land conflict, this paper deals with aspects of the data that particularly relates to the experiences and contestations of the women arising from their marginalisation in the affairs of family and community life. The researcher interacted with the two paramount queen mothers and some of their subordinates, women whose family lands are in the disputed area and many other women during social interactive activities such as funerals, marriages and market days. These encounters gave the researcher a lot of information about how the women endeavour to successfully navigate their marginal condition emerging from the cultural and socioeconomic challenges of the land conflict. Themes of accessibility to land, livelihood opportunities, incomes, family life, education and the general wellbeing of women were explored. The researcher also spoke to the two paramount chiefs and their elders in the area, as well as youth leaders in order to gain their perspectives on the socioeconomic effects of the land conflict especially on women and how they could help end the conflict so that the fecund land may be explored for productive ends.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Women's Experiences of Marginality

Among the people of Nkonya and the Alavanyo, land is not only the basis of identity, spirituality, history, power and rootedness, but also the grounds of economic life of the people (Azumah, 2017; Gariba, 2021). The persistence of the land conflict, has however, shown that, the very land that is supposed to be the source of livelihood, economic sustainability and belonging has today, become the basis of marginality in the area, especially for women. This presents a unique challenge which exacerbates poverty and deprivation in the area, making marginality, a mode of living because local chiefs and the state have so far not been able to deal with matters that can end the conflict conclusively (Di Nunzio, 2017; Penu & Essaw, 2019).

Women's access to land and Marginality

I am Abla Edem, and a widow. In the early 2000s, I grew corn, yams and cassava on the land I got from my father. I was able to send two of my children to secondary school till they finished and are now doing some work in Accra. But, today, I cannot go to the land and no farm labourer is willing to do so because he may be shot. I was hoping the chiefs and government people will resolve the conflict and then I can resume my farming activities. But they are just talking and talking but doing nothing. Periodically, my children in Accra will send some little money, but it is never enough. The land conflict has turned things upside down for us, but we shall live.

The narrative of Madam Edem, expresses not only her condition, but that of many women in Nkonya and Alavanyo. The story brings to the fore the multi-layered character of how the protracted conflict has marginalised not only women's access to the fertile land, but also their livelihoods, social mobility and futures. Edem's expectation is that the conflict should end so that women can access the fecund land and regain their livelihoods. Rather, the land conflict has 'turned things upside down', but Edem still believes that in spite of this challenge they 'shall live'. In Alavanyo and Nkonya, the expression, the conflict has 'turned things upside down' is an inversion of one's "life chances" (Dahrendorf, 1981) aggravated by land ownership arrangements in the area.

In the two agrarian communities, which are largely patrilineal societies, women only have usufruct rights to land and may use same as long as they can for farming or building purposes, but they are unable to sell, give it out to their husbands, sons or transact it under any arrangement.¹ This is precisely because marriage is exogamous, and residence viri-local, and as such if women are allowed to own land, they would end up depriving their paternal homes of land meant for current and future generations (Gariba, 2017). Since, this is a cultural practice in the area, it makes women's access to and control of land for purposes determined by themselves a huge challenge and reinforces economic marginality while aggravating gender-based poverty, and lack of sustainable opportunities among the womenfolk. For example, Bonye & Kpieta (2012, p. 69) argue that, in northern Ghana, "although women supply 80% of labour in farm activities, women have limited access to and control over resources such as land (2012, p. 69)." Similar views are articulated by (Oduro, Baah-Boateng, & Boakyee-Yiadom, 2011) who demonstrate that, in most parts of Ghana, although women have rights to assets such as land, in reality they are unable to use these assets the way they want because they are controlled by men, or they cannot sell them. This practice marginalises and renders women vulnerable (Oduro et al, 2011). In fact, even in the so-called matrilineal societies, access and/or ownership of land by women by virtue of inheritance, gift or purchase is controlled or managed by men (Tsikata & Amanor-Wilks, 2009). This creates land insecurity for women (some of whom are breadwinners in the family) and deprives them of strong negotiating powers in land transactions (Awumbila and Tsikata, 2010). Drawn from the above, the researcher argues that, in Alavanyo and Nkonya and more broadly, in Ghana, land rights or ownership may appear to be determined more by power relations between men and women than by entitlements based on consanguine relations within families or clans.

In Alavanyo and Nkonya, the culturally appropriate practice is that families or parents take care of their children principally through working on the land. Over the years, however, the ongoing conflict led to the loss of many lives, especially of men, and has placed many women in the difficult situation of having to cater for fatherless children. While statistics of fatherless children are hard to come by, some of these women told the researcher during fieldwork that, the level of poverty and joblessness in the area, has pushed them into doing menial jobs such as making charcoal or selling firewood in order to meet daily needs of the home. If access to land is the primary means of the people's identity, economic sustenance and connectedness to their roots,

chiefs, the state and non-state organisations must make every effort to end the ongoing land dispute so that the locals may benefit from fruits of the fecund land.

Marginality and the Challenge of Livelihoods

Alice Dunya, a woman in her 60s shared during fieldwork that, in this area we depend on the land to build, farm and eat. In the past, I made money farming cash crops such as coffee and cola nuts. In our community, a woman is respected not only for her reproductive gifts, but also her ability to work to support the home. If you are not able to do this, you are seen as lazy and so not respected. But the problem is that, many of us are poor and there are no jobs in our area. This is particularly difficult for women who cannot access the land and have lost husbands to the conflict. We expected government authorities at the regional and district levels, to try and bring jobs to the area to help women who support the home a lot, but are now unable to do so because of the conflict. But we shall live.

Anthropologists and sociologists have long established the connection between conflict and scarcity of livelihoods in communities wrapped in prolonged conflict. By livelihood, I mean how a group exploits natural resources such as land, and human resources (knowledge, machinery) at their disposal to cater for their socio-cultural and economic, happiness, and contentment needs in sustainable ways.² The story of Dunya demonstrates that the communities of Alavanyo and Nkonya do not lack the goodwill to till the land for productive ends. The major challenge, however, are issues of human security in the area and the neglect of local and/or state actors to provide financial support to aid especially women to maximise the benefits of the fecund land and other livelihood opportunities. Additionally, Dunya's story brings to the fore the interesting reality that, in the area, the respect and self-identity of a woman, and her ability to attract a suitor are defined in relation to her ability to work on the land, to bring forth offspring and to support the home. Through these actions, a woman demonstrates her social, economic and cultural relevance to her family and community. Today, however, most women are unable to meet these long held cultural expectations because they have been marginalised by the continuing existence of the conflict among other difficulties. In fact, during fieldwork, Gladys Anane, a young woman in her thirties shared a perspective; "because of the conflict, some of us are not gainfully employed so the men are not willing to marry us. They think we shall be a burden to them. They are just interested in dating us."³ This narrative is corroborated by Cassiman's (2022) work among women in Nima, a suburb of Accra, where she demonstrated that, a woman is marginalised and fails to attract a good suitor when she does not have the potential to contribute financially or materially to her future marital home. Culturally, in Alavanyo and Nkonya, a woman does not carry the burden of care for the home, it is a man's responsibility to fend for and defend his family. It is said that, it is an act

of shame and dishonour to a man who is unable to care for his home and leaves the responsibility to a woman. Indeed, during fieldwork, the paramount chief of Alavanyo shared; “today, the sad situation in our area is that, in some families, men who are supposed to be the breadwinners, *afedzikpolawo* have either died in the conflict or have left to urban centres leaving behind the women to take care of the home. The conflict has made life very difficult for us, but more for women”⁴. This narrative has however, become one of the dismal realities of family life in the area. At the same time, however, when I visited the area in 2022, I met Adwoa Ntoso whose personal story offers a different perspective:

generally, the ongoing conflict has ‘turned things upside down’ for many women, including myself. But, luckily, I got land from my family in an undisputed area, and so I was able to make rice and cassava farms that earned me money that enabled me to send my three children to schools in the city of Accra and Koforidua

Additionally, some women are also engaged in petty trade, hawking, and the breaking of boulders/rocks into smaller portions for building purposes



Figure 1: A simple kiosk with different goods, Gariba, 2021

The rock breaking is a demanding activity but both youth and women are engaged in it as means of surviving the harsh economic conditions in the area.



Figure 2: Youth and Women at stone breaking job, Gariba, 2021

These ‘survival jobs’ are just to help some women and youth to survive the demands of daily life, but not in the least a means of capital accumulation for future use. In other words, when people are economically and politically marginalised, they lack economic opportunities and so are forced to engage in enterprising behaviour i.e., seeking for creative and innovative ways to eke out a living (Acheampong, 2013; Mumuni, 2016).

During fieldwork, it also came to light that, for a long time, traditional authorities have been petitioning the state through local politicians, and the district assemblies in Hohoe and Biakoye to try and bring jobs to the area, but so far, their responses have not yielded the desired results. In Ghana, the growing rate of unemployment is a daunting challenge, not only for the communities of Alavanyo and Nkonya, but the nation at large. Over the years, successive governments have always claimed to have provided jobs, especially for the youth. But, the reality on the ground indicates that joblessness or unemployment is rather on the increase (Jumpah, Ampadu-Ameyaw, & Owusu-Arthur, 2020).

Queen Mothers and Local Politics

During fieldwork in 2021, Mamaga Ametor II, the paramount queen mother of Alavanyo and a university graduate, shared these sentiments;

The patriarchal structures in the area are too strong. Statements such as ‘a man does not marry a woman with big feet’ or ‘a woman does not stand shoulder to shoulder with a man’ are quite negative and prevent women from freely exercising their right and contributing to the development of the community. Here, when a woman is assertive, she is seen as arrogant and one who wants ‘to be a man’. When I managed to lobby some state institutions and NGOs to put up a maternity clinic, and wanted to commission it, I was told, I

could not, because I am just a queen mother. It is the chief who must see to the commissioning of the facility. I was not happy, but I could not do otherwise.

The politics of authority or power in local communities is an interesting area that has engaged anthropologists and sociologists since the colonial period because it offers a lens through which one may appreciate how power relations between male office holders and their female counterparts operate within local authority structures. Since postcolonial times, contestations over power or recognition within local authority structures privileges the authority or power of chiefs over queen mothers whose roles are said to be ceremonial in patrilineal societies, but well respected in matrilineal societies (Owusu-Mensah, 2015). Although, article 277 of the 1992 constitution of the Republic of Ghana recognises queen mothers as chiefs according to customary law, their actual capacity to exercise their chiefly duties is inhibited by local chiefs who see them as ceremonial actors because their position is not hereditary and they have no stool as the case may be in parts of southern Ghana or a skin in northern Ghana. In Nkonya and Alavanyo, this explains why the effort of queen mothers to exercise their role is often met with contestations or disagreements from the chiefs who see the queen mothers as their subordinates. In other words, there is a tenuous disconnect between what the constitution says and what is actually and culturally practiced on the ground. In the researcher's opinion, it is this disconnect that feeds into the many misunderstandings or tensions between queen mothers and chiefs in many local political systems in Ghana where chiefs and queen mothers are expected to work together to bring development to their people (Owusu-Mensah, 2015). In parts of southern Ghana, however, especially among the Akan matrilineal groups, queen mothers are very central to the local political system and are well respected. But, even here, the actual capacity of a queen mother to bring development to her community is challenged by the dominant actions of chiefs. Men tend to make most of the decisions and so there is unequal power relation between the chiefs, elders and the womenfolk (Steegstra, 2009). This said, in many local communities in Ghana, elderly women of advanced age with considerable experience and wisdom are more generally, consulted on matters such as funerals or marriages.

Now the researcher returns to the sentiments of Mamaga Ametor II expressed earlier. Obviously, she was disappointed that, in spite of her personal effort to draw on institutions and her social networks to help build a health facility for her community, she was not allowed to commission it because she is 'just a queen mother'. Her sentiments offer a good example of marginality in which most women in the two communities have been placed. While women like her through their own initiative and innovation try to improve the deplorable conditions in the area, especially of women's needs, they are perceived as 'trying to be men', i.e., trying to do what is culturally preserved for men.

In a related interview during fieldwork, the paramount queen mother of Nkonya Traditional area, Nana Otubia II also shared these sentiments;

In this area, because the queen mothers take instructions from the paramount chief and elders, when we want to take initiative to do

something to benefit not only women but the whole community, we are unable to do it until the chief sanctions what we want to do. This marginalises us, and makes us feel small and ineffective in deciding on matters affecting our wellbeing.

The sentiments of Nana Otubia II and those of Mamaga Ametor II are expressions of marginality emerging not only from the turbulence of the land conflict, but also from hegemonic practices privileging the rule of chiefs in community matters over those of queen mothers and women in general. In fact, during fieldwork, the researcher observed that, in Alavanyo and Nkonya, local discourses on gender relations involving political authority, land ownership as well as matters of inheritance, have more generally placed women in a marginalised position in relation to their male counterparts (Gariba, 2017, p. 196). Gadzekpo (2011) argues that, in Africa, women are marginalised in many areas of social life because, “received wisdom had insisted that African women were either not public actors, or that their public actions were inconsequential. At best they get a mention only in relation to male actors, or occasionally as deviants, or archetypes of good or of evil” (Gadzekpo, 2011, p. 673). Gadzekpo’s (2011) argument is reinforced by the perception in the public domain in Ghana that, women’s rights and their participation in local and national matters affecting their lives have been crowded out by male dominated discourses or actions. The work of (Mensah, Antwi, & Dauda, 2014) in the Akuapim North District of southern Ghana, however, provides a different perspective. In this area, the role of queen mothers is well respected and they have been very instrumental in supporting chiefs to bring development to their communities but especially women. The authors emphasised that factoring in the knowledge or contribution of queen mothers (who are seen as mothers), in community development matters is significant for its success and sustainability.

Today, scholars writing on gender issues have questioned discourses that have marginalised women in local and national matters and are mainstreaming a ‘new normal’ narrative that gives attention and respect to the contribution of women in many aspects of society affecting their identities and lives (Appiah, 2015). In a neoliberal world, where respect for equality and human liberties are salient qualities, the control of power by chiefs and elders, and the near exclusion of women from local authority systems as the case in Alavanyo and Nkonya attests, is unproductive because it only reinforces marginality. The researcher tends to believe that, the marginality of women in the communities of Nkonya and Alavanyo is sustained not only through the resilience of the conflict, but also through the resilience of the actions of local actors such as chiefs and elders who are supposed to help mitigate the effects of marginality but have themselves become sources of marginality.

In what follows, the researcher examines the collective and individual ways, women in Alavanyo and Nkonya have demonstrated that, marginality may have incapacitated them, but it has not entirely frozen their agency to live and to find their own answers to improve living conditions in the home and for their futures (Mitton & Abdallah, 2021; Abbink & Kessel, 2005). In doing so, the researcher, draws on two individual stories and three efforts championed by queen

mothers to elucidate how women are responding constructively to their marginal condition in order to live.

We Shall Live: Women's Responses to Marginality

I am Abena Ntriwaa, and I am 45 years of age. I was not able to complete basic school because of the challenges of the conflict. Later, I got married, but my husband was shot dead in 2013 when we were returning from the farm. Since that time, my life has not been stable, I don't know what I am doing on this earth. I cannot go to the land where we used to farm, because I am afraid, I will be shot. Today, what I am doing is to sell small, small, fish at the village market so that my two children and I can live.

One way, women in Alavanyo and Nkonya have responded to conditions of marginality is through what Abbink & Kessel (2005), call the 'agency' response which emphasizes the active role of women in constructing their own answers to the challenges they face, and so having them shape their own lives and destinies (2005, p. 8). This strongly comes to the fore the individual story of Ntriwaa. Her story reveals how over time, the conflict has impacted women's agency in exploiting the fruits of the fecund land and other livelihood opportunities to care for their subsistence needs. When the researcher spoke with Ntriwaa, it was obvious she does not make much to cater for her needs and those of her two children. But she was resolute in her effort to get her children through their education with her little trade at the village market square.

Moreover, in the community of Nkonya-Ntsumuru, Madam Ofeibie, a philanthropist from the area established a clinic to provide health services to the people, but especially women and children.⁵ This clinic has become a safe haven for the women folk attracting women from different communities in the area. Thus, these individual efforts show that, though the uncertainties of the ongoing conflict may have marginalised women, it has not entirely eroded their collective and individual agencies to finding ways to live.

The researcher now looks at the responses of women to marginality at the collective level. Firstly, during fieldwork, in two separate interviews with the paramount queen mothers of both communities, they indicated that in 2003, when the conflict escalated with a lot of violence and killings, it was the Queen Mothers Association comprising Queen mothers from the two communities, that petitioned central government and NGOs to intervene in the conflict and stop the violence and hostilities (Ghanaian Times, 06/12/2003). The queen mothers argued, they sought after government intervention because every effort to get chiefs, elders and youth to talk so to end the conflict had broken down. Their intervention "led to the provision of financial and logistic support to the women from the UNDP office in Accra, that also made a contribution to the [now collapsed] mediation committee to sensitise the people about the need to live in peace" (Gariba, 2017, p. 205). While the effort of the queen mothers brought some needed support from

government and NGOs, the move did not sit well with some chiefs in the area who saw the action of the queen mothers as profiling them as weak leaders which they consider an act of disrespect and a reversal of their power or authority.

In the researcher's opinion however, the action of the queen mothers expresses the fact that, while the turbulence of the conflict has weakened the authority of chiefs and elders, it has opened up possibilities for them to demonstrate what they can do when given the needed political and social space or support. The women were simply tired and needed to do something to change the culture of violence, targeted killings among other ills impacting negatively on everyday life in the area (Azumah, 2017).

Secondly, in 2004 when the now collapsed clergy-led mediation committee meant to bring peace to the area was formed, it included youth, religious leaders, chiefs and lawyers among other actors, but women were left out until they insisted, they must be represented. Those who became part of the committee brought to the negotiating table, from a gender perspective, the ways and means of how women's issues may be handled and how the land dispute may be resolved conclusively. What the queen mothers in the area have demonstrated, is to show their capacity to contribute substantially in dealing not only with women issues, but also helping to resolve the land dispute which has marginalized their agency to access the fertile land, marry, improve their livelihoods and to contribute to the welfare of their homes and society.

Thirdly, during fieldwork, the queen mothers argued that a major path to reducing poverty and marginality of women in the family and society, is for the state and local authorities to help improve and expand education in the area. In Ghana, while the girl-child education has improved greatly, the situation in local communities is nothing to be proud of.

In spite of this challenge, the paramount queen mother of Alavanyo-Deme, Mamaga Awanyo I, related her personal effort to improve education in the area;

In the late 2000s when the conflict was intense, and teachers left the communities, I went to Hohoe, the district capital where Alavanyo belong, and lobbied the district education officer and got teachers to the community to teach the children and stabilise education in the area. These teachers were paid from personal money and funds I raised through friends and individuals who were sympathetic to the good cause of children and women in the area.

In Ghana, more generally, education provides the avenue for many youth including women to access jobs, social mobility and other livelihood opportunities. But women are very much underrepresented not only in the area of education, but also in the sectors of politics, industry, science and technology. They are however, seen in the informal sector where their business activities are impacting positively on the overall economic growth of families and the state (Baah-Enummh & Adom-Asamoah, 2012).

In 2022 when the researcher visited the communities of Alavanyo and Nkonya, it came to light that, educational standards have fallen so low due to poverty and other socioeconomic factors,

thus raising serious concerns among locals and even those outside the locality about the prospects of education in the two communities (Morgan et al. 2023)

In addition to the above efforts, the queen mothers periodically, invited women (and sometimes men) with different professional competencies to offer workshops on issues such as marriage and family life, the avoidance of hate speech, psychological and emotional maturity, basic practices of good health and creative ways to make money with little capital (Acheampong, 2013). In these efforts, the queen mothers and generality of the womenfolk have demonstrated that, the conditions of marginality, weak local authority and state apathy cannot obliterate their agency to find their own answers to the unpredictable challenges confronting them daily in the ongoing conflict.

The collective and individual agencies of the women constitute in my opinion what (Scheper-Hughes, 2008) calls 'tactics of resilience' i.e., the show of toughness and hardiness by the women in dealing with marginality which has limited their opportunities for accessing the fertile land, livelihoods, representation and living meaningful lives.

CONCLUSION

The study has demonstrated how marginality remains a complex phenomenon with varying degrees of impact/effect on individuals and groups. Marginality in the study however emerges as not necessarily a fixed condition, but rather a process that also offers pathways for navigating one's way out of marginality. While women in Alavanyo and Nkonya have been undermined by challenges of marginality, they have also endured using creative ways and by sheer fortitude exploited social networks of friends as well as agencies and institutions to challenge and respond to dismal narrative of women's condition in the area. This effort, in many ways, demonstrates how women in the two communities have drawn on neoliberal ideologies such as equality, toleration, human liberty and economy to forcefully find creative ways to resist and redefine the impact of marginality on them.

Additionally, the study has demonstrated that the causes of marginality are manifold, but the most disruptive condition following the protraction of the land dispute are the socioeconomic conditions in the area. For instance, today, many women are unable to access the fecund land and other livelihood possibilities. This has weakened women's agency to aspire to higher levels of social recognition and to gain the economic sufficiency that will allow them to play their culturally expected roles as home managers and caretakers. Women in Alavanyo and Nkonya have been marginalized by a wide range of sociocultural conditions that define the terms of their being inside society, but they are inevitably part of the society. These insights offer local authorities and the State newer ideas on how to deliberately create conditions that can reinforce their integration and inclusion in the affairs of the communities. What this means is that, to demarginalized the conditions of marginality, exclusion and poverty in the two communities, especially those related women's life and futures, local authorities and state actors at the local and national level need to continue to cooperate to ensure the end of the conflict. This will help improve the rights of women to land, livelihood opportunities, education, health and food security.

While marginality has become an enduring reality defining how women navigate everyday life, it also remains a contingent historical construction that must be challenged by questioning cultural and social practices that produce and reproduce marginality. In this way, women's access to power, land and property could propel them to achieve upward social mobility, including improved access and utilisation of the fecund land of Alavanyo and Nkonya.

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