

Women's Experiences of Prestige and Privilege amidst Vulnerabilities during the Ethnic Wars in Northern Ghana.

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Abstract

In this paper, we use the conflict-cohesion theory and gender role theory to analyse the lived experience of women who survived two of the most violent ethnic wars in Ghana's post-colonial history over land ownership. The accounts on conflicts in Africa are dominated by male-centric perspectives on conflicts. In the scanty literature which analyses gender in ethnic clashes, there is an oversimplification and/or stereotyping of the gendered dimensions of ethnic wars. Women's voices are seldom reflected, and their lived experiences of war are seldom captured in the Ghanaian context. Through personal interviews and focus group discussions, we collect retrospective data from fifteen women who experienced the Konkomba-Nanumba war of 1994/95 in Nawuerugu. While the dominant allusion of women's victimhood, passivity, and vulnerabilities were corroborated by our data, alternative evidence of privilege, resilience, agency, and prestige experienced by women caught in ethnic conflicts were also significant. We noted that just as the conflict deepened cohesion, cooperation, and interdependence among families, women's survival efforts employed cultural norms of femininity and corroborated their gender roles. Certain well-known gendered outcomes from conflict situations were defied in this context.