

A Spitterow Analysis of the Nadowli Chieftaincy Conundrum in the Upper West Region of Ghana

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Abstract

This paper provides an analysis of the Nadowli chieftaincy conundrum using the SPITCEROW model. Using a qualitative case study, the study draws data from the chiefs, elders, community leaders and Tendaaba of Nadowli to understand the conflict and why it has remained unresolved. The analysis reveals that the conflict is non-violent. The conflict which is over twenty years old has changed from an initial struggle over the rightful traditional kingmakers of Nadowli into a succession dispute. The use of the law courts has been the main tactic employed by parties in the conflict. The resort to the law courts as a resolution tactic has rather contributed to prolonging the lifespan of the conflict. It is recommended that rather being stuck in court, stakeholders may wish to revert to the native mechanisms of resolving disputes in Nadowli.

Keywords: Spitterow, Analysis, Nadowli, Chieftaincy, Conundrum, Upper West, Ghana

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Introduction

Conflict remains one of the phenomena that have characterized world history. The horrors visited on populations by conflict have been traumatizing and destructive. Conflicts have generated development concerns (Bruck et al., 2017; Collier et al., 2003; Collier, 2004; Hegre, 2013). Africa records significant number of the conflicts in the world – Somalia, Uganda, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and others. In Ghana, conflicts have persisted since independence with some having their roots traceable to the pre-independence era. There seems to be a growing number of longstanding conflicts in Ghana. Their long-standing nature creates worries in the minds of Ghanaians (Tsikata & Seini, 2004; Jönsson, 2007). According to Bukari (2013), many conflicts in Ghana remain unresolved because of the kind of mechanisms employed to resolve them. The Nadowli chieftaincy conflict in the Upper West Region of Ghana is over twenty years. Finding lasting solution to the conflict has been difficult. The conflict remains in court. Thus, resolving the Nadowli chieftaincy conflict has become daunting. It is argued that conflict resolution should be informed by the analysis. Thus, this paper analyses the Nadowli chieftaincy conflict to understand it and to ascertain why it has been difficult to resolve. Providing such data would enable stakeholders in the conflict to re-strategize how the resolution of the Nadowli chieftaincy conflict should be approached and managed. The aim is to provide data that could be relevant to the understanding of the conflict and ensure its resolution. The analysis demonstrates that the Nadowli chieftaincy conflict transformed from a dispute over who the rightful kingmakers are into a succession dispute. This transformation was a result of the introduction of new issues into the conflict in its development process.

The SPITCEROW Model of Conflict Analysis

Conflict analysis is very essential in conflict resolution and management. The ability to analyse a conflict very well could lead to designing solutions to the conflict. Various frameworks of analysing conflicts exist. This study used the SPITCEROW model to analyse the Nadowli chieftaincy conflict. The SPITCEROW model of conflict analysis was developed by Christopher Mitchell in 1990. Mitchell (1990) used the SPITCEROW acronym to represent the *sources* of the conflict, *parties* in the conflict, *issues* in the conflict, *tactics* at play, *changes* in the conflict, *enlargement* of the conflict, *roles* parties play in the conflict, *outcomes* of the conflict and *Winners* of the conflict. Contemporary conflict analysis researchers in Ghana such as Adjei (2019) and Kuupiel (2019) have applied the SPITCEROW in analysing conflicts and provided data to aid the understanding of those conflict situations in clear manner. Thus, employing this model to analyse the Nadowli chieftaincy conflict has helped to provide clear and significant understanding of the Nadowli chieftaincy conflict and why it has remained unresolved.

Methodology

This study approached the study qualitatively, drawing upon case study as a design. The focus was on analysing the Nadowli chieftaincy conflict from the natives' own perspectives (Ary et al., 2010; Creswell, 2014). The rationale is that gaining an understanding of what meaning participants give to the conflict would be informative to the resolution processes and also bring the voices of the indigenous people to the fore. The study thus sought

to explore the sources, causes, parties, issues involved, tactics employed, changes in the conflict, roles people played in the conflict and the outcomes of the conflict. The study interacted with 15 participants (traditional leaders, chiefs, Tendaaba and community leaders). The data was collected through interviews and focus group discussions. Thus, the analysis in this paper is informed by the natives' own perspectives about the conflict.

Findings

Sources of the Nadowli chieftaincy conflict

The source of the Nadowli chieftaincy conflict was traced to the people's limited knowledge about the succession rights and processes to the Nadowli stool. The narration was given that chieftaincy in Nadowli started with one Naa Dassah and when he died his son Dapilaah took over. Participants indicated that Dapilaah later moved to Pisie. Since there was no chief at that moment, participants indicated that Dambaala (people of Dambaa) became interested in the chiefship. Then Dapilaah returned to take over again. According to participants, by custom, one cannot declare himself a chief of Nadowli without being installed by the Tendaaba (Kingmakers). The Tendaaba are the owners of the land and kingmakers with the sole prerogative to install chiefs in Nadowli. The office of the Tendaaba is a powerful and important institution within the traditional setup of the people of Nadowli. It was discovered that the people of Kalsegra are the Tendaaba of Nadowli.

The study found out that when a new chief is to be installed, the royal house or gate only nominates a candidate and the Tendaaba would install the person. This has been the practice since the inception of chieftaincy institution in Nadowli. Participants indicated that there are currently three royal gates that have the right of ascension to the stool of Nadowli. These include the Gbierung, Bigr and Gange gates. It was however pointed out that originally, there were four royal gates. The Dambaala constituted the fourth gate. The study discovered that the Dambaala were barred from presenting a candidate for the Nadowli chiefship because their forefather committed a sacrilege against the Tendaaba leading to his death. According to participants, the Dambaala were disqualified from presenting a candidate for the Nadowli chiefship due to the said sacrilege and could only be accepted back if they offered sacrifices to the gods through the Tendaaba.

Also, it was pointed out that no royal family could unilaterally and arbitrarily install a person as chief of Nadowli. Rather, the installation must be done by the Tendaaba. However, the study found out that at a particular point in the succession history of Nadowli, a royal family wanted to act as chiefs and Tendaaba at the same time by attempting to install a chief. This was the root cause of the Nadowli chieftaincy conflict. This anomaly in the traditional succession protocol was responsible for the eruption of the conflict in the Nadowli chieftaincy institution.

However, the conflict became manifest when about two decades ago there was a struggle over who had the right to install a chief in Nadowli. Participants narrated that it was when one Mwinkara was to be installed as the chief of Nadowli that the conflict became overt. According to participants, one person (a tendaana) attempted to install Mwinkara as the chief but in the history of Nadowli traditional matters one person cannot install a chief. Some of the community leaders the study interacted with indicated that during that installation, people who were not Tendaaba were invited to serve as observers. Thus, participants explained that the attempt by one person to install a chief and the invitation of non-Tendaaba to the occasion motivated the people of Dah and Kondomwini to also claim that they had the right to install chiefs in Nadowli. As such, a struggle ensued between the Tendaaba (people of Kalsegra) and the people of Dah and Kondomwini over who had the right to install chiefs in Nadowli. Participants indicated that when that happened the issue was litigated in court and the court ruled that the Kalsegra people are the rightful Kingmakers or Tendaaba of Nadowli. Thus, it can be argued that the Nadowli chieftaincy conflict came about because of a struggle over who the rightful kingmakers of Nadowli are.

The study also discovered that after tussle about the legitimacy of kingmakers of Nadowli was settled, the conflict transformed into a chieftaincy succession dispute and has persisted to date. There is currently a struggle over succession to the stool of Nadowli between the Gange gate, the Dambaala and the Nawuli gate. According to participants, the Nawuli and Dambaala have joined forces to contest the Gange gate. Accordingly, the Gange people are next in the line of succession to the Nadowli chiefship. However, as indicated earlier, according to the Tendaaba, for the Dambaala to qualify as a royal gate again, they must provide 'a cow and other materials' for sacrifices to pacify the gods and to cleanse them of the sacrilege their forefather committed. The struggle between the Dambaala and the Gange gate over succession to the Nadowli stool is responsible for the persistence of the conflict. Participants indicated that the case is currently with the House of Chiefs Court in Kumasi.

Parties in the conflict

The study discovered that the parties to the Nadowli chieftaincy conflict include the Tendaaba (Kingmakers), the people of Dah, the people of Kondomwini, the Nawuli, the Dambaala and the three current royal gates (Gange, Bigr, Gbierung). They are the primary parties in the conflict. The conflict started as a dispute between the Tendaaba (people of Kalsegra) and the Dah and Kondomwini people over who had the right to install chiefs in Nadowli. The two sides struggled over the 'Kingmaker-ship' rights of Nadowli until it was settled at the court

that the people of Kalsegra were the rightful kingmakers of Nadowli. However, when that was settled, the Dambaala and Nawuli developed interest in the chieftaincy and begun to contest the Gange gate (which participants pointed out to be the next gate to produce the chief of Nadowli). This posture of the Dah people transformed the conflict into a chieftaincy succession dispute.

Also, the study found out that since the conflict erupted, the Courts of Ghana have been resorted to for settlement. As such, the Court has been a secondary party in the Nadowli chieftaincy conflict. Currently, the issue is still in court. Meanwhile, participants indicate that there have not been tertiary parties in conflict.

Issues in the conflict

The study discovered that there are two main issues in the conflict. The first was about the legitimacy of the kingmakers in Nadowli. When the conflict started, there was a struggle between the Tendaaba, the Dah and the Kondomwini people over who has the right to enskin or install a chief. The Tendaaba felt the Dah and Kondomwini people were trying to take over a role that is solely their preserve and thus considered their action illegal and intrusive. Also, because of the ‘mistake’ that participants claimed was made during the instalment of the last chief, where one person from the Tendaaba attempted to install the chief, interviewees indicated that the Dah and Kondomwini people felt they could also install a chief and thus sought to be recognized as Tendaaba. Thus, the issue of recognition has been key in the conflict. The Tendaaba want to continue to be recognized as the kingmakers of Nadowli and the Dah and Kondomwini people on the other hand were also seeking to be recognized as people who can install a chief. Currently, succession to the chiefship of Nadowli is being contested between the Gange gate on one hand and the Dambaala and Nawuli on the other. Both sides are seeking control over the people and the resources of Nadowli. Based on the rotational system of the Nadowli chieftaincy institution, the Gange gate felt it was their turn to produce the chief of Nadowli. However, the Dambaala, who participants in the interviews claimed were ‘disqualified’ from becoming chiefs of Nadowli because of the sins committed by their forefather have allied with the Nawuli to contest the Gange gate over the Nadowli chiefship. That is, the Dambaala wanted to be recognized as part of the royal house again and qualify to produce a successor to the throne.

From the interactions with the chiefs and elders in Nadowli, the study discovered that the Dambaala are still ‘disqualified’ to ascend the stool of Nadowli unless they offer sacrifices to pacify the gods and to atone for the sins committed by their forefather. What this means is that if the Dambaala decide to offer sacrifices to the gods through the Tendaaba to cleanse and forgive them of the sins or abomination their forefather committed, then they will reclaim their place as the fourth royal gate in Nadowli.

Tactics at play in the Nadowli chieftaincy conflict

The parties in the conflict have resorted to several ways to demonstrate their positions and interests to make their perceived opponents to yield. From the interactions with participants in the interviews it became apparent that parties in the conflict have blamed each other for causing the conflict. Some participants indicate that if the Dah and Kondomwini people had not tried to intrude into the duties of the Tendaaba that the conflict would not have occurred. Also, the study found out that since the conflict started the conflict parties have always resorted to the Courts for settlement. Thus, one of the major tactics that is being used by the conflict parties in the Nadowli chieftaincy dispute is the use of the law courts to get their way through.

Changes in the conflict

The study found out that the conflict started as a dispute over who has the right to install chiefs in Nadowli but later transformed into a chieftaincy succession dispute. Thus, the conflict has become a succession dispute between a royal gate that is next on the succession line and others who have been ‘disqualified’ from chieftaincy in Nadowli due to an abomination that participants claimed their forefather committed. Also, the conflict that started with inflaming anger, bitterness and blurred relationship has changed now with parties interacting cordially. Participants indicate in the interviews that they are relating friendly now than when the conflict first began. One of the elders shared in the interviews as follows.

When the conflict started the Dah and Kondomwini people wanted to take over as Tendaaba but that did not work for them. The issue went to court and it was settled that we are the rightful people to install chiefs. But now the royal house is now fighting over who to succeed. The Gange are the next in line to succeed but the Dambaala said they also want to be chiefs and they are now having the dispute. Oh when the conflict started it was not easy. We were not seeing and talking to each other. At that time when they see me they pass a different direction. We used not to greet each other. That time it was not easy. But now things are normal again. We talk to each other, drink together even after attending a court hearing on the issue. Oh the other time one of our opponents picked me with his motorbike home. He saw me going home from the market and offered to pick me home and he brought me to my house and went back. Now we relate well but previously it was not easy to see us together or talking. (Field

Interview, 2021)

Thus, it can be argued that the conflict has transformed from a struggle over who the rightful kingmakers of Nadowli are to a chieftaincy succession dispute. It has also changed from animosity to cordial interactions.

Enlargement of the conflict

The conflict has enlarged. As indicated earlier, it started as a struggle over the right of king making in Nadowli. However, it later included issues of succession to the throne of Nadowli. The Nawuli people have been included in the conflict due to their perceived alignment with the Dambaala to contest the Gange gate for the stool. Thus, when one of the elders was asked in the interview about whether the conflict has enlarged, he answered:

Yes! Yes! it has enlarged, it has enlarged. You know at first it was only about who is the installer of chiefs in Nadowli but when that was settled other issues were added. The Dambaala said they also want to be chiefs but it is also the turn of the Gange gate to produce a chief. So that is where the issue is now at. (Field Interview, 2021)

Thus, although the conflict started as a struggle between the Tendaaba, the Dah and the Kondomwini people over who the rightful kingmakers of Nadowli were, it became enlarged when the Dambaala and Nawuli began to contest the Gange gate for the throne.

Roles others played in the conflict

Participants indicated that since the conflict started that they have not engaged in open confrontation or violence. They claimed in the interviews that because the conflict is non-violent that other people have played little roles in it. Participants said the security service has not been involved since the conflict started. Some elders and community leaders however indicated in the interviews that the National Peace Council tried to come in at a point to help address the issue. Also, the Courts have played significant roles in the conflict since it started. The conflict parties have resorted to and continue to resort to the courts to address their grievances.

Outcomes of the Nadowli chieftaincy conflict

The conflict of the chiefship of Nadowli is still being contested in the court. As such, Nadowli is without a substantive paramount chief to man the affairs of the traditional area. When the conflict first started there was bitterness and unfriendly relationship among the conflict parties. Social ties were strained. However, it appears that has changed. Participants claimed they now relate well. The study also found out that no life has been lost since the start of the conflict. Participants explained that is because the conflict has not been characterized by violence. However, some elders claimed many lives have been lost spiritually. When the elders made this remark, I asked what they meant by many lives have been lost spiritually. Then one of them explained as follows.

There are certain things you can do and the gods will take your life. When you dare the gods they will show you or pull your ears. All those who were at the forefront of the struggle over who has the right to install chiefs with the Tendaaba have died mysteriously. Because what they were engaged in was an abomination, the gods decided to teach them a lesson. So now because of what they did their people are supposed to come to us (Tendaaba) and offer sacrifices to appease the gods, but they are afraid. You cannot challenge what our ancestors have instituted and go free like that. Some people have died but not from physical violence. (Field Interview, 2021)

The Nadowli chieftaincy conflict remains unresolved. The conflict is over two decades yet the conflict parties seem not to be compromising in their demands and interests. Participants in the interview believed that the persistence of the conflict is because it remains in the court. They think the courts are rather prolonging the dispute. According to participants, the conflict would have been resolved if they had withdrawn it from the courts and allowed them to employ their natives' mechanisms to address it. Participants indicated that they have mechanisms within their local setting for dealing with or managing such issues but because the case is in the court, they cannot go against the court rules to engage in any resolution exercise. Thus, it can be argued that the Nadowli chieftaincy conflict could be resolved if it is withdrawn from the courts and subjected to the native approaches of resolving conflicts in Nadowli.

Winners

When I asked participants about who the winner of the conflict was, they indicated that no one has won. Thus, the study found out that there is no winner in the Nadowli chieftaincy dispute. There are only variation of losers. The issue remains in the court and a ruling is yet to be given. Participants lamented that the whole traditional area is suffering from the struggle over the stool of Nadowli. They indicated that the continuous struggle for the chieftaincy stool has made the community to be without a paramount chief for the past twenty years. Given the significant roles chiefs play in bringing development and investment to their communities, participants are worried that progress could elude them if the conflict is not laid to rest in the shortest possible time.

Conclusion and recommendations

The Nadowli chieftaincy conflict is non-violent although resolving it has been difficult over the past twenty years. The conflict has witnessed transformation and changes. The conflict started as a dispute over who the rightful kingmakers of Nadowli are. However, it later changed into chieftaincy succession dispute. The court has been the main tactic employed by the conflict parties to advance their positions and interests. There are issues of succession, recognition, power, and the legitimacy of the kingmakers playing out in the Nadowli chieftaincy conundrum. Resolution of the conflict has been difficult due to the involvement of the courts. Allowing the case to remain in the court may prolong the conflict and deny the Nadowli traditional area of leadership and development. The study therefore recommends that the conflict parties should show goodwill in their search for peace, withdraw the case from the court and resort to their native ways of resolving disputes to address the conflict to bring lasting peace and harmony to the Nadowli chieftaincy institution. Future research could explore the native approaches of resolving conflicts in Nadowli to help us understand how that could be employed to address the chieftaincy dispute.

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