Intra-Sectarian Tensions in the Muslim Community in Nandom in the Upper West Region of Ghana: Dynamics and Actors

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ABSTRACT

This paper explored the dynamics and actors in the Imamship conflict in Nandom Zongo community. The study was approached qualitatively using a case study design. The researchers interacted with ten (10) participants. Data was drawn through in-depth interviews and observation and analyzed using thematic template analysis. The study unearthed that the ill-health of the Imam and his vice which created a vacancy of the office of Imam is the remote cause of the conflict. The conflict degenerated into fierce struggle over the Imamship and disagreement over a choice of replacement. A 'minority' and 'majority' rhetoric was introduced into the Imamship contest among the orthodox Muslims in the Nandom Zongo community. The study revealed that the conflict has strong socio-political, economic, security and religious implications on the Zongo community. Apart from the primary conflict parties, there were state actors, traditional actors, group actors and independent actors in the conflict. The dynamics of the conflict were informed by the grievances of the conflict parties, actor interaction and conflict parties' commitment to the conflict. The study contributes to the understanding of conflict dynamics and actor interaction in conflict processes.

Keywords: Conflict Dynamics, Actors, Nandom Zongo, Imamship, Upper West Region, Ghana

1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict has become part of our living as human beings, albeit some people may try to avoid it. Conflict is a shared consequence of our interactions, even if one may choose not to do so, especially in this era of interconnected and seemingly borderless world where things can easily cross geographies. Galtung (1996) observed that "conflict is a triadic construct" and manifests or unfolds as goals, behavior and attitude interact (p. 71). It could result from people's concerns or grievances not being addressed (Collier & Hoeffler, 2000; Gates et al., 2016; Collier & Hoeffler, 2002; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Doorn, 2013; Hoeffler, 2011; Majeedullah, 2015), or from discrepancy in what people deserve and what they get (Gurr, 1970) or "disparity between people's aspirations and achievement" (Murshed & Tadjoeddin, 2009, p. 11).

Every society in the world has experienced one conflict or the other. Conflict is thus a global and devastating phenomenon (Hegre, 2013; Malik-Kusi, 2012; Polachek & Sevastianova, 2010; Duker, 2018; Lund, 2003). Although conflicts are declining at the global level (Szayna et al., 2017; Einsiedel et al., 2017; Annan, 2014), low-scale violence are increasing and peaking at national levels (Annan, 2014; Duker, 2018). Previously stable states (such as Ghana) are now plagued with various forms of conflict (Annan, 2014). Social conflicts are thus unpleasant phenomena. There are developmental, professional, and practical concerns about social conflicts. Conflicts persist in Ghana. One such conflict is the Imamship conflict among the orthodox Muslim community in Nandom Zongo. In July 2015, confrontations and fighting ensued in the local mosque among the Zongo people of Nandom. A few interventions were made. The police beefed up security, patrol and protection in the township and the mosque (especially during Friday prayers). Peace Council attempted a resolution several times. Several community meetings and dialogues were held. The Paramount Chief of the Nandom Traditional Area also intervened. Calls also came from Members of Parliament and minister for the interior, Hon. Ambrose Dery, for the emerging factions in the Nandom Imamship struggle to conduct themselves non-violently and to address the issue in that regard (Quaye, 2017).

However, the conflict remains unresolved and in August 2018, violence ensued again between the various factions (Yeboah, 2018). Tensions heightened and people lived in fear. Avis (2019) indicated that when

people feel excluded from power and opportunities, it creates conducive space for violence and antagonism. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission condemned the violence (Yeboah, 2018). Research has not properly documented the successfulness and unsuccessfulness of conflict resolution interventions in Africa (Tchombe, 2006). The Imamship conflict in Nandom is appearing to be complex and dynamic. It is argued that understanding of conflict dynamics is significant to ensuring effective management of conflict (Mahama & Longi, 2013; Penu & Osei-Kufuor, 2016; Mayer, n.d). Nieuwpoort (2016) noted that the dynamics of conflicts (especially, irregular armed conflicts) are not determined by a single factor. Conflict dynamics are "fluid and could be influenced by so many things" (Penu & Osei-Kufuor, 2016, p. 97). Thus, "local actors must define what forms part of the conflict system and what its specific characteristics are" (Körppen, 2006, p. 5). Grönberg et al. (2011) further argue that actors can be at various levels and playing varied roles. As such, Adzahlie-Mensah et al. (2016) argued that understanding the various identities, power relations and how they are interacting in the conflict are necessary and key for preventing, managing and resolving conflict. An understanding of the dynamics of the Imamship conflict in Nandom could be useful to resolving the conflict. Yet, the literature on conflict dynamics in Ghana (Penu, 2016; Gati, 2008; Ayee et al., 2011) are deficient in providing data to understand the dynamics of the Imamship conflict in Nandom. Therefore, the research that informed this paper was undertaken to understand the dynamics of the Nandom Imamship conflict. The paper contributes to the understanding of conflict dynamics and actor interaction in conflict processes.

1.1   Research Question

The research question that the study sought to answer was: *what are the dynamics of the Zongo Imamship conflict in Nandom*? The sub-questions were: What are the causes of the conflict? What are the effects of the conflict? What is the nature of the conflict? Who are the actors involved? What are their interests? Who are their allies?

1.2   Theoretical Framework: Dynamic Systems Theory

This research draws upon the Dynamic Systems Theory (The DST) to explain the dynamics, interactions, and changes in the Nandom Zongo conflict. DST is traceable to *General Systems Theory* by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (Schwaninger, 2005) with roots from mathematics, for instance, from the works of Henri Poincare´ and Isaac Newton (Schwaninger, 2005; Holmes, 2007; Cummins, 2012; Aubin & Dalmedico, 2002). According to Thelen and Smith (2005, p. 258), the DST grows directly from advances in understanding complex and nonlinear systems in physics and mathematics, but it also follows a long and rich tradition of systems thinking in biology and psychology. The term *dynamic systems,* in its most generic form, mean systems of elements that change over time.

However, the theory has found usage in the social sciences in recent times to understand the complex interactions and behaviors in humans and the consequences of those interactions. The application of theory to studying human development dates to the 1990s (Lunkenheimer, 2018). DST holds that, "systems operate and change within a larger environmental context [and] that systems are organized as hierarchies" (Lunkenheimer, 2018, p. 3). The theory also recognizes that there are variations and changes in conflict, in terms of actors, interactions and relationship, and treats those changes in the conflict as "potentially informative data" (Lunkenheimer, 2018, p. 3). This theory explains that a system is made up of several interacting elements (such as actions, feelings, emotions) which change over time, thereby creating a pattern of behavior (van Geert, 2011; Lunkenheimer, 2018; Thelen & Smith, 2005). The application of the theory is that a conflict that is dynamic is open, where there is continuous interaction with the "surrounding environment" thereby generating new conflict forms and patterns.

Thus, conflicts are not static; they change in degree, intensity, and scale. They involve various actors with varying interests and needs. The theory would help to understand the dynamism and complexities in the Zongo conflict and how they interact, influence each other and change as the conflict develops. DST is useful in studying nonlinear and complex processes (van Geert, 2011; Lunkenheimer, 2018). The theory acknowledges that small issues can impact conflicts hugely. The conflict system tends to form attractors, influencing behaviors in the conflict and makes the conflict to occur in particular ways that are complex. Thus, as the conflict develops and new issues are introduced, the attractors tend to change. Contemporary conflict research in Ghana has indicated the usefulness of DST in explaining and analyzing conflict dynamics. Penu (2016) employed the Dynamic Systems Theory to explain the dynamics in the Nkonya-Alavanyo conflict so that peace could be built and unearthed interesting dynamics that are relevant to understanding contemporary complexities associated with conflicts.

2.   METHODOLOGY

The study adopted interpretive qualitative approach. A case study design was used. Thus, the research studied the Imamship conflict in Nandom in the Upper West region of Ghana from within (Cohen et al., 2007; Cohen et al., 2018). The dynamics of the conflict were understood from the participants' own perspectives (Neville, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Cohen et al., 2018; Madill & Gough, 2008; Smith & Caddick, 2012; Adzahlie-Mensah et al., 2017). Data was drawn from ten purposively selected participants (elders and chiefs) using interviews and observation. The study observed what participants were saying and how they were saying it, their environment, activities, and body movements. The data was analyzed through thematic template analysis. The study observed all ethical issues; the confidentiality and anonymity of participants were ensured. The findings discussed in this paper are participants' views, experiences, and perspectives about the conflict.

3.   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Dynamics Involved in the Conflict

To understand the dynamics of the Nandom Imamship conflict, the study asked participants what caused the conflict, the effects, the nature, and the actors involved. The results show multiple but complex and complicated dynamics in the conflict. The causes of the conflict are such that they produce rippling effects, and the effects of the conflict are such that they reinforce the cause of the conflict.

3.2 Causes of the Conflict

One of the major aspects explored to understand the dynamics involved in the Nandom Imamship conflict was the causes of the conflict. In so doing, the participants stated several reasons. Typical comments from all the participants were:

The conflict started as a conflict over Imam Duties. Everyone knows it has different dynamics now but the whole conflict was initially about who performs the functions of the Imam. The truth is that it has now gone beyond that. (Field interviews with participants, 2020)

...it is about the Imamship. I can say that any day. Yes! Yes! It is the Imamship. (Field interviews with participants, 2020)

From the comments, it seems there is some agreement that the conflict has roots in who performs the functions of the Imam at the mosque. Thus, it can be argued that the original cause of the Imamship conflict is a dispute over who performs the functions of the Imam. This issue is rooted in the illness of the Imam at some point as discussed in the following sub-section.

3.2.1 Illness of the Imam and the vice Imam

When the study explored the reasons why the participants insisted the origin of the conflict is traceable to the performance of imam duties, it realized the conflict was traced to the illness of both the Imam (Malam Haruna) and his vice (Alhaji Mohammed Saana) in 2013. A participant narrated:

...there was a particular time that Malam Haruna could not come to the Mosque because he was unwell. ...so he sent the sermon and there is always a staff which shows a symbol of authority, to the son to go and give to the assistant Imam to come and lead prayers. Unfortunately, he too was unwell... (Field interviews with participants, 2020)

The comment suggests that a different person had to lead prayers the day both Imams were unwell and could not come to mosque. The choice of someone to lead prayers during the period both the Imam and his vice were sick created confusion, tension and confrontation among the orthodox Muslim community in Nandom Zongo. It was realized in the interviews that there are two factions in the Imamship conflict in Nandom: the Moshi faction and the faction of the other six tribes (Wangara, Dagomba, Waala, Sisaala, Zabarma, and Fulani). Participants indicated in the interviews that the Imam who was sick told the Muslim community that any day he and his vice are unable to come to mosque and lead prayers, any person who preaches that particular day should lead prayers. However, the study realized in the interviews, that was not adhered to, as someone was allowed to lead prayers on a particular Friday that a different person was preaching. This created more tension resulting in confrontations. However, it seems that much of the conflict began to become more serious following the death of both the Imam and the Vice which created a vacancy. This is explained in the next sub-section.

3.2.2 Vacancy of the Imam position

From the interview, it became apparent that the conflict in the Zongo transformed into Imam succession dispute following the death of the Imam and the Vice. Some participants' statements illustrating this claim included that:

Our issue became a succession dispute when the vice and chief Imam who were sick died respectively thereby making their positions vacant. (Field interviews with participants, 2020)

...the assistant Imam passed away, but the Imam was still alive but unwell, so they needed someone to take charge to become the assistant Imam but that one was not concluded until the Imam too passed away. (Field interviews with participants, 2020)

Their death meant that the Imamship position was vacant. There was need for people to be selected to fill the vacant positions, to ensure effective continuity of Islamic activities. The vacancy of the Imamship position and people's quest to fill in the vacant Imamship position resulted in the conflict among the Muslim tribes in Nandom Zongo. The idea is that the conflict became manifest due to disagreement over choice of candidates for Imamship. The story was told that when the vice Imam first died, Aljaji Abdulai (Moshi tribesman), started acting as the vice Imam. Since his father was the Chief Imam, the Zongo community in Nandom were not happy with him acting as vice because the Imamship of the mosque is not inherited. A Chief indicated:

...no, you can't be the Imam and your son the assistant Imam. It is not a family thing, then that is where the tension started building up. (Field interviews with participants, 2020)

The study realized in the interviews that when the Imam himself died, the elders asked the person (Aljaji Abdulai) who was already acting as the vice Imam to step in as the chief Imam while they look for someone to assist him. Then the contest for the Imamship began. Tribal lenses were drawn into the contest. According to some participants, since the person who was acting and now made to step in as the main Imam is a Moshi, the vice should come from the other tribes. Thus, the other tribes (Wangara, Dagomba, Waala, Zabarma, Fulani and Sisaala) came together and nominated Alhaji Ibrahim (one who was preaching on a particular Friday and Alhaji Abdulai came and said he will rather lead the prayer that day) to be the assistant Imam. The nomination of Alhaji Ibrahim was disagreed on by Alhaji Abdulai who claims, according to participants, that the former does not respect him and refused to give him the state of accounts (since Alhaji Ibrahim was the mosque finance committee chairman) of the mosque when he (Alhaji Abdulai) requested for it. It was realized in the interviews that the Moshi supported the decision of Alhaji Abdulai (their tribesman) while the six other tribes insisted on their choice of Alhaji Ibrahim.

The study observed during the data collection that the voice tones, gestures, facial expression, and the way they referred to their opponents during the interviews showed that the various factions are not ready to agree to the others' demands. For instance, during one of the interviews with an elder of one of the factions, he shook his head continuously while saying that they will not agree to the nomination of the person from the other faction. However, the conflict became more serious when 'minority' versus 'majority' language, as presented next, was introduced into the matter.

3.2.3 Introduction of 'Majority' versus 'Minority' rhetoric into the Imamship contest

One other thing that caused the conflict which became apparent during the data collection, was the introduction of 'minority' versus 'majority' rhetoric into the Imamship contest. A Chief shared in the interview as follows:

Then they [the Moshis] *went to the Nandom chief's palace. That time the paramount chief was still alive, and they went and told him that in the Zongo they* [Moshis] *are the majority. That they are the majority, so what they will decide whatever they want, it must happen.* [And] *that we* [the six other tribes] *are minority.* (Field interviews with participants, 2020)

Thus, the Moshi argued that if you are to choose a chief for the community, the chief must come from the majority while the minority will be the subjects, hence the Imamship should come from their tribe. However, the six-tribe faction rejected their analogy and explained that they are rather the majority because they are made up of six different tribes. For them, six tribes (Wangara, Dagomba, Waala, Fulani, Sisaala and Zabarma) cannot agree on a candidate and then one tribe (Moshi) alone would say no and insist that what they (Moshi) say should be final. Having labelled each other as minority, the next thing was to rule over the other. The situation worsened further as people began to identify with their tribes thereby creating a polarized

and fragmented atmosphere in the community. People from each faction began to regard those from the other faction as threats to their identity and did not recognize them. The polarization of the community made tensions grow. According to participants, people from both factions treated each other as enemies leading to violence and attacks at certain points. Each side wants to produce the Imam so that they could self-assert themselves and be recognized.

The contestation of the conflict along ethnic or tribal lines further generated anger, hatred, and bitterness between the two factions. Each side took uncompromising stands, and none wanted to be 'taken for granted' by the other. Our experiences during the fieldwork highlighted the reality of the majority and minority rhetoric. During one of the observation exercises in the field, the researchers sat at a shop, where many of the Zongo people go to sit and chat. During our interactions with the shopkeeper, she introduced the 'minority' versus 'majority' language. She said:

*You see in the Zongo we have a lot of tribes, but we are the majority and the rest put together will still not be up to half of our number. ...the thing is they want the Imamship to come to their side and our people also said they will not agree, so the whole thing started (*Field interviews with participants, 2020).

The comment is a testimony of the mentality driving the conflict. Thus, an Imamship conflict, transformed into a conflict driven by linguistic categories. The linguistic categories also established ethnic categories— the Moshi on the one side and the Sisaala, Waala, Wangara, Zabarma, Dagomba and Fulani on the other. Overall, the discussions here support the view that unaddressed grievances fuels conflict (Gates et al., 2016; Collier & Hoeffler, 2000; Collier & Hoeffler, 2002). Avis (2019) indicated that when people feel excluded from power and opportunities, it creates conducive space for violence and antagonism. Thus, persons excluded from leadership tend to mobilize people for violent rejection of those decisions that excluded them (GSDRC, 2014). Debrah et al. (2016) argued that it will be difficult for conflict not to occur so long as people continue to regard others as "minorities" and some as "majorities". Collier and Hoeffler (2000) indicated that when one group wants to exert dominance over others in a community or society where there are many ethnicities, the chances of conflict are high. The introduction of minority versus majority language in the conflict, as Galtung (2000, p. 1) argued, has "receded the root cause of the Nandom Imamship conflict [that is, unaddressed grievances] into the background." Thus, a conflict situation is created when people attack others, with or without provocation. At this stage, the conflict has changed in degree. The DST explains that conflicts are not static; they change in degree, intensity and scale as new things are introduced (Lunkenheimer, 2018).

3.3   Effects of the Conflict

3.3.1 Strained relationship and divisiveness

The study discovered that the conflict has marred the long healthy relationship that the different tribal groups in the Zongo community shared. People no longer interact freely with members of the other factions who they perceive as their enemies. The conflict has made it difficult for people who have friends from the other faction to interact even if they want to do so. A participant indicated:

So, there was some time as at this year, when we were celebrating the Eid-ul Adha, so the youth were trying to come together but some of the older people were still not agreeing. (Field interviews with participants, 2020)

There is now division, separation, and polarization in the Zongo community in Nandom. The two factions now perform or celebrate occasions separately. Each side now celebrates naming ceremony, wedding (Amariya), funerals, among others alone. The emergence of the conflict has marred the long years of intermarriage between the various ethnic groups in the Zongo community in Nandom. According to some participants, now people, especially women who are married to a tribe in the other faction are divided between supporting their husband's side or their father's side. Some marriages, according to some participants, are experiencing turbulence while others have broken. Also, the two factions now pray separately. While the Moshi faction prays in the central mosque the other tribes now use a mosque at the Nandom Senior High School (SHS) for their Friday prayers. Research has indicated that conflict situations soil or taint relationship between or among conflict parties (Gariba, 2015; Kpormasi, 2013; Adzahlie-Mensah, 2007; Adzahlie-Mensah & Benson, 2018; Mensah, 2013; Tsikata & Seini 2004). The findings thus support the literature that conflict affects the social spheres of conflict communities (Debrah et al., 2016). Conflicts impose worrying social consequences on people experiencing it (Brück et al. 2017; Asamoah, 2014).

3.3.2 Commercial activities between the two factions have declined

Before the two sides started contesting over the Imamship of Nandom, there used to be a healthy trade relation between them. Identity was not a basis for buying of goods and services among the Zongo community. It is noteworthy that majority of the Zongo people are into trading. Until the conflict there was good trade relation among the Zongo people of Nandom. However, the conflict has marred that good trade relationship that existed among the various tribes within the Zongo community in Nandom. Now, more than ever, people prefer buying things from their tribesmen. Some participants indicated in the interview that:

It is not only about greetings, but some will also not buy the other factions' goods. That one is there. (Field interviews with participants, 2020)

If I used to buy something from you, I won't buy again. If I used to eat from you, I won't eat from you again. Because the various sides sell food whether raw food or cooked food or transportation, farm inputs, now we don't trade again. So you see the effects. (Field interviews with participants, 2020)

Shockingly, it was realized in the interviews that some would travel to neighboring Hamile or as far as Wa (the regional capital) to buy things if they do not find them in their tribesmen's shops. Thus, the finding supports Brück et al. (2017) and Asamoah (2014) argument that, conflicts visit worrisome economic consequences on populations experiencing them. Identity has become a consideration in the buying of goods and services among the Zongo people in Nandom. This supports the literature that trade between conflicting groups tends to be daunting (Adzahlie-Mensah, 2007).

3.3.3 Uncertainty and fear

One lesson learned from the interviews was that the Imamship conflict in Nandom has created uncertainty and fear in people in the Zongo community. People from the two factions walk around unsure of what will happen in the next minute or hour. Everyone has become 'careful' when moving about in the community. A participant said:

It is because of the quarrel that now if you are a Moshi and you are walking in town you are a bit careful. If you are not a Moshi and you are in the other tribe and you are in town if you are entering the Moshi area you are also a bit careful. (Field interviews with participants, 2020)

Adzahlie-Mensah and Benson (2018) state that conflicts create fear, uncertainty, and panic in people. There is currently relative calmness in the Zongo community in Nandom, but some people are still not sure of their safety since the conflict has not been resolved.

3.3.4 Destruction of property and Injuries to people

The conflict has made some people to lose their property. The interviews revealed that when some people were attacked during the conflict, their properties were destroyed. Some participants said:

...one of them they went to one of my sisters here and fought there, the day they burnt my room, they also destroyed her things in the room, they ever went there to destroy things, their motorbikes. So, when that passed that this also happened. (Field interviews with participants, 2020)

...nobody died. It is only this person who got injured. The person they used the knife to cut. ...So, they picked both of them to hospital. (Field interviews with participants, 2020)

According to some participants, a room of one the contenders for the Imamship was burnt, destroying some properties including clothes, and other belongings which could be the equivalence thousands of Ghana cedis. Although the interviews reveal that no death has been recorded in the conflict, the violence and confrontation have left some people injured in the process.

3.3.5 'Bad' image

Some participants are of the view that the conflict is painting a bad picture of Nandom in the eyes of the rest of the country. Some participants stated that the conflict is 'spoiling' the name of Nandom and paints a bad picture of the community to the outside world. A chief said:

The [way the] conflict is happening I see it is destroying the society, it is spoiling the name of the land because some of the conflict does not even reach a particular stage, but they will tell lies that they fought,

shot guns and things. So when it happens like that our community's name is spoiling… (Field interviews with participants, 2020)

The idea is that people outside the Nandom municipality may view the community as a conflict zone and that it could prevent investors from coming into the community as well as damage the long-held view of Nandom as a peaceful district. Thus, people are concerned and worried that the Imamship conflict in Nandom could taint the image of Nandom as a peaceful community. This feeds into Tsikata and Seini (2004), Jönsson (2007) and Gati (2008) argument that conflicts are worrying issues to many Ghanaians.

3.3.6 'Self-restricted' movement

The conflict has also led to a situation where the Zongo people themselves are not comfortable moving about freely and exercising their right to freedom of movement as free human persons. Arising from the uncertainty of the future and the fear of being attacked by people from the other side, some people in the Zongo community have tended to restrict themselves from moving around the neighborhood of their opponents. A participant indicated:

…it is almost more than five years now and we still cannot cross. Previously you could see that you could go about your duties freely okay, you will move down to the Moshi area and come up here, everything was fine. …but now it is no longer like that. (Field interviews with participants, 2020)

The fear of being attacked is making some to self-restrict their movement. Our observation confirmed that people from each side do not feel comfortable going to the neighborhood of the other side. The study confirmed this when a gatekeeper from one of the tribes of the two factions was asked to accompany the researchers to a potential study participant from the other faction and he declined. His reason was that if his elders see him around the other side's area or with them, they may think that he is siding with their opponents and that would create a problem between him and his elders.

3.3.7 Lack of a substantive Imam

The study realized that the conflicting parties took uncompromising positions throughout the conflict. No one wants to yield to the demands of the other. As a result, there is currently no substantive Imam of Nandom to lead the Muslim community and perform their activities for them. A participant stated:

There is no substantive Imam … (Field interviews with participants, 2020)

Due to the contestation over the vice Imamship, the last Chief Imam did not have a deputy before his death. As a result, there is no Imam now in Nandom.

3.4   Nature of the Conflict

To understand the nature of the conflict, the study explored the length, frequency of occurrence, and patterns of the conflict. Further, the tactics employed by the conflict parties throughout the conflict process was also explored.

3.4.1 Length of the conflict

From the interviews, it was realized that the conflict is about a decade old. The conflict was traced to the illness of the Chief Imam and his vice in 2013. When I asked one of the elders of the Nandom Zongo community about how long the conflict has been in existence he said that:

Today I can say it may be up to ten years. Because it is 2012 that they gave us the district, but the conflict started before we became a district (Field interviews with participants, 2020).

The comment suggests that the Imamship conflict in Nandom is not more than a decade old.

3.4.2 Frequency of the conflict

The interviews revealed that the Imamship conflict in Nandom used to be quite frequent. Participants indicated that attacks and confrontations were frequent. A participant indicated in the interview as follows:

Oh yes, it used to be very frequent like within two three like sometimes every Friday when you are going to mosque you are prepared you know that anything can happen.…the last event happened in 2018. (Field interviews with participants, 2020)

Thus, it can be argued that the Imamship conflict was quite frequent, and the factions are always tended to confront each other during Friday prayers in the central mosque.

3.4.3 Patterns of the conflict

The Imamship conflict in Nandom appears quite predictable. Some participants indicated that one could easily detect that there was going to be a confrontation before 2018. Participants indicated that considering the behavior, utterances, and actions of the Zongo people in Nandom especially the youth, it was not difficult for one to predict that there was going to be some form of confrontation either in the mosque or outside it. When a participant was asked if the conflict was predictable, he answered that:

Yes. Their behavior will show first [and] *their young men utterances will let you know that they will fight.* (Field interviews with participants, 2020)

The interviews revealed also that anytime a resolution is attempted the conflict tended to occur again. Thus, participants indicated that they tend to 'expect' a reoccurrence of the conflict anytime people came to resolve it. That is, anytime a third party says it is coming to sit with both sides and resolve the conflict people begin to expect that confrontation will ensue again. Some participants explained that tempers, hatred and bitterness are still within many people and as such when a third party comes to sit with the parties in the conflict confrontations normally ensue again. This confirms why during one of the observation moments in the field a community member indicated that they no longer tolerate anyone who claimed to be coming to resolve the conflict. According to him, their elders were initially hesitant to respond to the interviews because they thought the researchers were coming to resolve the conflict.

3.4.4 Tactics Employed by Conflict Parties

The study revealed that the two factions blamed each other for causing the conflict. The Moshi tribe indicated that if the other tribes had presented a different person rather than the one whom they view as 'disrespectful' towards the Chief Imam at the time that the conflict would not have occurred. On the other hand, the six tribes that have bonded together as one, have also blamed the Moshi for causing the conflict when the Moshi rejected their candidate for the vice Imamship position. Also, the two factions were using threats as a weapon to make the other party to capitulate. Both sides have threatened each other openly and sometimes before intervening bodies or authorities. The factions were also labelling each other. Each side has labeled the other as minority and regarded themselves as majority. The conflict was also characterized by insults, attacks, and confrontations. Again, the interviews revealed that the two sides were making irrevocable comments. That is, the two factions were committed to continuing to behave antagonistically.

3.5   Actors in the Conflict

The interviews revealed that there was a mosaic of actors in the conflict. Apart from the two main individuals contesting over the Imamship, there were also state actors, traditional actors, independent as well as group actors in the conflict. In terms of group actors, the various ethnic groups (Moshi, Sisaala, Waala, Wangara, Zabarma, Dagomba and Fulani) in the Zongo community were at the forefront in the conflict. Also, the native youth of Nandom got implicated in the conflict when they demonstrated against it. In terms of traditional actors, some chiefs and elders in the Nandom traditional area got implicated in the conflict when they attempted to resolve it.

Few state institutions and functionaries got caught up in the conflict. Peace Council attempted to resolve the conflict several times but failed. The police and the military were occasionally deployed to ensure calm. Government functionaries have in various capacities tried to ensure calm between the two factions. Some individuals in Nandom also engaged the two sides separately to ensure a resolution. Unfortunately, their efforts were unsuccessful. Meanwhile, it was realized in the interviews that the conflict parties accused some of these actors of supporting their opponents. Grönberg et al. (2011) affirmed that states, organizations, or individuals could serve as actors in various capacities in a conflict. This supports the literature that some conflict actors could be opposing or supporting the conflict (Grönberg et al., 2011; Adzahlie-Mensah et al., 2016). Grönberg et al. (2011) explained that while people outside the conflict society may view an actor as opposed to the conflict, those within the conflict society could see the actor as supportive of the conflict.

3.6   Interest(s) of the Actors

The study realized that the conflict parties and their tribes were interested in the Imamship of Nandom. Each faction wanted to produce the Imam. Although third-party interveners were perceived to be interested in resolving the conflict, the study realized that some of them were accused of being biased and supportive of one faction or the other. The dynamics of the Zongo conflict in Nandom show that there were many elements

such as emotions, actors, interests, and needs that are interacting. This interaction has created a pattern of behavior where conflict parties no longer trust intervening parties and their ability to resolve the conflict. DST explains that a system made up of several interacting elements changes over time and creates a pattern of behavior (van Geert, 2011; Lunkenheimer, 2018; Thelen & Smith, 2005).

3.7   Allies in the Conflict

While Alhaji Muhammed Saana was supported by his Moshi tribesmen, Alhaji Ibrahim is being supported by his Wangara tribe. The interviews revealed that the Waala, Dagomba, Zabarma, Fulani and Sisaala tribes rallied behind and supported the Wangara tribe and Alhaji Ibrahim for the Imamship. Also, the study found out that the Moshi faction accused some elders at the Nandom chief's palace of supporting the other faction. On the other hand, the faction of the six tribes also accused some chiefs and politicians in Nandom of supporting the Moshi. The study realized from the interviews that an Imam from Wa attempted to install one of the contenders for the Imamship of Nandom as the Imam. Interestingly, both factions have tended to deny these accusations with counter accusations to reinforce their entrenched positions in the Imanship conflict.

4.   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nandom Imamship conflict is a contest over who becomes the Imam of Nandom. The conflict is beyond a simple disagreement between tribal groups in the Nandom Zongo community. First and foremost, the conflict has to do with a divergence of views among a religious sect (Orthodox Muslims) of the Muslim community in Nandom. Additionally, the conflict is rooted in unresolved grievances. Thus, a first step towards the resolution of the Imamship conflict in Nandom lies in addressing the conflict parties' grievances.

In summary, the Nandom Imamship conflict has different dynamics. It cuts across religious, ethnic, linguistic, and political lines. The dynamics of the conflict were informed by the grievances of the conflict parties, actor interactions, and the conflict parties' deep commitment to the conflict. The Nandom Imamship conflict is complex and highly nuanced. Addressing the underlying grievances of the conflict parties may be the pathway towards securing a resolution and lasting peace in the Zongo community. There is to date some degree of animosity between the two factions in the Imamship conflict in Nandom. Inerrantly, there is a climate of negative peace in the Nandom Zongo community. To turn the tide of the conflict and avoid grooming the younger generations into it, concerted efforts need to be made to resolve the conflict as soon as possible because "a stitch in time saves nine." It is also recommended that third parties seeking resolution of the Zongo conflict should first analyze and understand the dynamics of the conflict. Third party interveners should allow their understanding to be informed by the meanings the Zongo people ascribed to their lived experiences of the conflict. It is also helpful that conflict resolution analysts who seek to understand the Nandom Imamship conflict should adopt a model that addresses the magnitude of the complexity of the conflict issues from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, there maybe some stakeholders in the Nandom Imamship conflict whose voices have not been sufficiently included in the resolution processes and are consequently not involved in making decisions that affect their lives (Nangwele, 2013). If this gap is not bridged, attempts to resolve the Nandom Imamship conflict will be short lived. Preferably, it is recommended that peace advocates call for the creation of an inter-tribal mediation committee tasked to design an integrated dispute resolution mechanism based on the interests of all stakeholders, rather than on power (Nangwele, 2013). This approach may probably ensure a productive dialogue which is crucial to the resolution of the Nandom Imamship conflict.

Finally, stakeholders (District Assembly, traditional authority, religious leaders, security agencies, youth groups, and citizens of Nandom) must consider the Zongo conflict as a common concern and its resolution a shared responsibility. The conflict should not be treated solely as a Zongo problem.

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