

The Story of Tora

Told by Dolsi-naa Abubakari Lunna, May 26 and June 3, 1989

Edited by David Locke

DL

Abubakari Lunna, Fusena Victoria Pagnaa Wombie, and David Locke are talking about Tora. Abu, tell me something about Tora. [At this time, AL had not accepted a title in drum chieftaincy; "Abu" is a nickname]. I don't know where it came from, how it started, or why Dagombas perform it.

AL

We usually say Tora is a funeral dance because it started against death. When Dagbon started, whenever our paramount chief died, his first son became the next chief. There came a time when a paramount chief died who had only bore a daughter; he hadn't bore a son.

DL

There was no one to become--

FW

--chief--

AL

--to become Yaa Naa. The kingmakers didn't obey our law. A woman became chief of
Dagombas.

DL

What!

AL

Yes. The kingmakers gave the duty of paramount chief to her. But then the junior
brother of the late chief announced that he wanted to be Yaa Naa. The kingmakers said
that they had already acted and could do nothing more. When we remove our paramount

chief, we face a lot of troubles. Once the kingmakers put the chief's things on someone, they don't call him by his real name again. This case shows why we don't remove our chief.

This man planned how to frighten that lady to make her run from the palace. Old men can see things before they happen. The Zohe-naa, one of the kingmakers, advised him, "Look. We know that you are eligible to be Yaa Naa. When we were preparing the chief's funeral, none of you princes came forward to say that you wanted to be a chief. We had no names to take to the soothsayers to see who would be a strong or weak chief. We had to give the go ahead to this woman. We didn't skin [install] her to be a full chief, but remember that she is wearing the smock of the Yaa Naa. Don't try anything. If you make this woman run away, you may become Yaa Naa, but you don't know how your chieftaincy will finish." The fellow pretended to agree, but really he refused. He took action.

In Dagbon, the young people used to make something with corn after harvest. They took the inside out of the corn stalk, put a stick through it, and tied it onto a rope. They swung

it around above their heads, "[mimes whirling a bull-roarer]." It would sound loud,

"[sound of bull-roarer]." These days, the youth don't do it.

DL

What do you call it in Dagbani?

AL

We call it "luu kpogu."

FW

It makes "woo, woo, woo."

AL

This man had a plan. He went to the new female chief. "I have consulted soothsayers.

They say something is going to happen in our land at night. If it happens, don't run away

and leave the palace. In our tradition, the chief never runs away from the palace. Don't

try it. You have to be acting like a man." One night, after everybody was sleeping, he

and plenty of his friends went to the backyard behind the palace bedroom. They used the
luu kpogu--

FW

--to threaten the queen mother.

AL

They shouted like ghosts, "ooo ooo," and then they started swinging the luu kpogu,
"[makes sound of bull-roarer]." They did it and then went away in secret. No one was
with the chief. She woke up. She couldn't sleep.

FW

She was afraid.

AL

They came back again several times. One or two of the men climbed over the wall into the house. They made noise inside the yard and then they jumped out again. The chief ran from the "piyo."

FW

She ran away.

AL

She went to the Zohe-naa's house. [Zohe-naa is a sub-chief in Yendi.] Early in the morning, the person who frightened the chief came to the palace. Nobody was there yet. When people started coming he said, "Yesterday, something happened in town. I have come to consult our chief, but she is not in the palace." Then people began talking, "How can the chief run away?" They started guarding the palace. When the Zohe-naa came, he told them, "The chief ran to my house." One of our customs started right there. Whenever we chose a new chief, we put him into the Katini [a house in palace

compound] and on the next morning, we send him to Zohe-naa's place for one week before he comes to the palace.

FW

Because this woman ran away to Zohe-naa, it has become a custom.

AL

After the junior brother succeeded in getting the chief to run from the palace, he said, "I want to be a Yaa Naa." The elders all came together. "The chief has gone against our tradition. She can no longer be paramount chief. In the custom, we don't remove our king. We will have a female king and a male king." This is why we have Gundo-naa, the woman's chief or queen mother for the Yaa Naa. This man's wives were happy because he was going to be chief. But the Zohe-naa called the chief's favorite wife and told her, "What your husband has done--wait and see what is going to happen."

FW

Wait and see the end of your husband's life.

AL

I will tell you the truth. These days, princes force themselves forward to say, "I want to be Yaa Naa," but in the olden days, if the kingmakers caught you to be the Yaa Naa, you were finished! No one liked it. Even for the first son, it was by force. That is why we went to soothsayers.

FW

Force--because in those days if you are not strong, you fear.

AL

Princes didn't like it when the kingmakers selected them. Listen to what was happening. Whenever a Yaa Naa died, the kingmakers considered members of the family and selected names on their own. They would go to soothsayers and ask, "If we give the chieftaincy to this man and an enemy comes to take our land, can he defeat them?" The

soothsayers had to answer before the kingmakers could chose, "We are looking at you.

You have to become Yaa Naa." Whether or not the person liked it, right there he had to

agree. Before Naa Nyaysi became chief, people didn't like to be Yaa Naa because

Dagombas were always fighting. If you were not strong, you couldn't be Yaa Naa. The

kingmakers hoped that after this lady died, things would change. They also thought that

our enemies would think twice before making war, "Now the Dagombas have female

chief. How can we fight with a woman?"

DL

Before we go on, let me try to get things clear. Which chief are you talking about?

AL

If I must answer that question, I have to be sure--I have to say his real name. In those

days, our paramount chiefs did not have Muslim names. They had god's names--

FW

--fetish names.

DL

This was so very long ago?

AL

Yes, so long ago.

DL

Maybe we can figure out the general time period. Could you tell me which chief this is before? It couldn't be before Gbewaa?

AL

Those old chiefs--we don't have their names on drumming rhythms. Our storytellers sing about them. Let me think. Maybe I can remember the name.

DL

During that time, was the paramount chief even called Yaa Naa?

AL

No. This was early in the history of Dagbon. Naa Nyaysi brought the Yaa Naa title.

Naa Gbewaa was how we called the Yaa Naa at that time.

DL

Tora is from many chiefs before Naa Nyaysi?

AL

The person we are talking about died before Tora started. His name is Naa Datorli. His time was very long ago. We don't play about those chiefs in Sambanluga [history drumming]. Gbewaa bore Sitobu and Sitobu bore Nyaysi. Maybe it is before Gbewaa. I think so.

DL

Perhaps it was so long ago that people don't keep the memory.

FW

Drummers keep it, but sometimes they don't want to call out the names.

DL

Does it matter to know which person we are talking?

AL

Yes. People will ask you. We keep the memory of all our chiefs' names. From the person who started Dagbon, Tohiɣɛ, right down to the present chief--we have all their names. I know the customary rites from Gbewaa up to the present chief. But from Gbewaa back to Tohiɣɛ--those are the difficult ones. After I go back home and remind myself, I will give you the names of the father who died and his daughter.

FW

The daughter who was threatened and sacked.

DL

Do we know the name of the man who threatened the woman who became chief?

AL

I called his name just now, Naa Datorli. He is the father of Dasambila. He is the senior brother of Shelimbana. The Tora started from his wife's crying.

DL

And the wife's name?

AL

The wife's name was Galiban. That was her title in the chief's house.

FW

We don't call our chiefs' wives by their real names. The wives say, "I am first," "I am second." They all have particular names in the palace.

AL

This wife claimed to be the chief's favorite wife. You know, every Yaa Naa chooses his favorite and gives her this lover's name. They think about how the woman acts to them.

DL

Does "Galiban" mean senior wife?

AL

No. The senior wives of the Yaa Naa are many. The chief can choose any one of them wives to be his favorite.

DL

I am surprised to hear that the kingmakers chose a woman to be Yaa Naa. Was that the only time?

AL

That was the only time. But we have had a women's chieftaincy.

DL

Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

AL

As I told you, Naa Datorli's older brother went to war and died in battle. None of the children of past chiefs helped him in the war. The kingmakers and the soothsayers would not choose any of them to be the next chief. They asked his daughter, a woman, to be acting as chief for the meantime. But they didn't fully make her the paramount chief. They didn't put her into the Katini. The ritual things we use to skin [install] our Yaa Naa--they gave her only the walking stick, the gown, and the hat. We have more things to make a person fully to be a Yaa Naa. Bolun̄ is a small, carved chair and gbewaa is a skin. That skin--we have a long skin that is supposed to be a lion skin. That animal is bad; it can defeat every animal in the bush. We call that skin "gbewaa." The kingmakers let the new chief sit on gbewaa and bolun̄ until daybreak; he must not sleep. These two are the serious things. They didn't give them to this woman.

Gushe-naa is the leader of the kingmakers. If the paramount chief dies, the Gushe-naa acts as our chief until we make a regent. After we get a regent, he acts together with Gushe-naa. The kingmakers chose the younger brother of the chief who died to be male regent and they made this woman to be something like female regent. In the old days, we didn't delay funerals like sometimes happens now. After seven days, there was supposed to be a new paramount. During those seven days, all the people who can ask to be Yaa Naa must declare themselves. But no one asked to be chief. They feared to come out to contest for the chieftaincy because of this man, Naa Datorli. You see?

DL

So, they let the chief's title stay with the woman?

AL

They gave it to the woman because no one came out to contest for the chieftaincy.

DL

I am interested to know--since that time has there been a woman's chieftaincy going along side the men's chieftaincy?

AL

Yes. Gundo-naa, chief of Gundogu, is for the Yaa Naa's daughters. From this time, we have had Gundo-naa. After they made this lady the first Gundo-naa, she said that she couldn't be the only woman among all the male chiefs. She said that they should make two or three more women's chiefs to assist her. Since then we have had Kpatu-naa and Yiwoɔyɛ-naa. If the Gundo-naa dies, they take over as female chiefs.

DL

Do the female chiefs stay in Yendi?

AL

No. They have their own towns, their own villages. Gundɔyɛ is not far from Yendi. It is not a small village; it is more than one hundred houses. Gundo-naa has her drummers.

When Gundo-naa is coming, they play Gingaani for her; we play Bimbieyu for her, also.

We respect her like the Yaa Naa; but the walking stick of Yaa Naa--she can't hold it.

DL

Do all the important towns in Dagbon have female chiefs?

AL

No only Yendi and Gushegu.

DL

Are these female chiefs supposed to look after the women's matters? Do they have special responsibilities or duties.

AL

Yes. They have special duties. During the old time, the female chiefs kept some of the things used to skin [install] the paramount chief. But because of what happened to Naa

Bimbiɛyɛ, the men took these duties away. The women acted big--over the men. The men got annoyed and took everything from them.

DL

What happened?

AL

The Gundo-naa and her assistants used to keep the smock and the hat for making the Yaa Naa. There came a time when we were making a new Yaa Naa. The regent made--

FW

--politics.

AL

After he had become regent, Naa Bimbiɛyɛ used to give these women meat and many other things. Every morning, he would go early to say "Good morning grandmother"--you know every regent calls the Gundo-naa "my grandmother"--and ask them what they

needed. Whatever thing they told him they needed, he managed to get it for them. One day, after he brought them the things, the Gundo-naa and the other women were sitting with him. Gundo-naa said, "Let us put the king's things on this our regent and see how he looks. He is not beautiful. Suppose they make him Yaa Naa. Will he look nice in the king's clothes? Lets try." When they put the costume on him, he started pretending to be king. They women were laughing and he was bluffing himself like he was the Yaa Naa.

FW

To see how he would look. [laughs]

AL

They were all old ladies and he was young and they were feeling happy. Then, he told them, "Let me go to sit on the place my father used to sit." They did not realize that he just wanted to get away from them.

FW

He was just going away with the costumes!

AL

He had heard from the elders that once the smock comes to your neck, you are chief.

You will be a real chief, even if your enemies soon find a palaver for you to die. So, he bossed the Gundo-naa and was able to go to where the Yaa Naa sits. He was pretending to be chief and the women cried "uu-luu-luu" [ululation to honor a chief].

FW

Oh. Then, no one can sack him.

AL

That day was Friday. You know, every morning our Akarima [atumpan player] drums at the palace. The Namo-naa [chief of Yaa Naa's lumsi] also has to be at the palace early every morning. The Namo-naa was just about to start his drumming when this man came out fully dressed with the chief's things.

FW

He just came out and sat on the Yaa Naa's seat.

AL

The Akarima said on the atumpan, "Chief has appeared, chief has appeared." Namo-naa looked at the regent. He was wearing the chief's things, so Namo-naa took his lunja and announced to the people, "We don't have a regent any more. Now we have a chief."

How the kingmakers became annoyed! They rushed to the palace. They saw him and asked him to explain, "Who made you look like this?" He didn't say anything. No matter how they tried, he wouldn't answer them.

FW

He kept quiet.

AL

One of the kingmakers said, "Let's go to the ladies and ask how he managed to get these costumes to wear?" Gundo-naa told them the truth, "We were playing with him. It isn't

that we intentionally did it. We wanted to see him looking like a chief. He looks so ugly. If the kingmakers selected him as a Yaa Naa, we wanted to see how he would look. Is he going to look nice, or just as ugly as usual? He bossed us and ran out. We couldn't chase him and stop him." Then, the elders announced, "It is the fault of Gundo-naa and her people." That very day was the late Yaa Naa's funeral--when they would chose the next chief. Gushe-naa said, "Since Gundo-naa has put the king's things on the regent, he must become king. Bimbiɛyu should go away from the palace. After we finish the funeral, he must come back to the Katini in the night." So, Naa Bimbiɛyu became Yaa Naa.

Female chiefs have entitlements. In every chief's house, we have fetish bowls that have to be taken care of by the female chiefs.

DL

Who was the chief you were just talking about?

AL

Naa Bimbiɛyu. We call him Naa Bimbiɛyu because he was ugly. His name was Jengli.

DL

You said that Naa Datorli and his people made noises like ghosts. Dagombas believe in ghosts, huh?

FW &AL

Yes!

FW

We believe that the dead threaten people.

DL

How does a human become a ghost? Does it depend if they are well buried. Who becomes a ghost? Are ghosts people who did wicked in life?

FW

We believe that ghosts can cause harm. When we hear any sound at midnight, we believe that it is a ghost and we become frightened. Whether it is a ghost or not, your mind will convince you that it is so.

AL

The little I know--it is from your attitude towards people when you are alive. If a person acts badly, we believe he can become a ghost. People who have strong medicine on them when they die can easily turn to be a ghost. I can tell you that we have many chiefs in Dagbon--they are dead, but up till now you can still see them. They have turned into animals.

FW

[laughs nervously]

AL

But before I call their names for you--

FW

Don't call them!

DL

I am not interested in you calling their names! I also want long life.

AL

It is very bad. One Yaa Naa has turned to be a crocodile. You can still see him. If you perform the customary rites for him and call his name, he will appear. You will see part of Yendi's royal skins things on him. Some chiefs turn into woyimahli, python snakes.

Others become tortoises. There are many, many chiefs who are ghosts.

DL

Is Jagbo related to this?

AL

No. Jagbo is a land god.

Let's get back to the story of Tora. It seems that Naa Datorli only wanted the title of chief--to be respected as chief. After the elders made him chief, Naa Datorli told the people, "When my grandfathers became chiefs, they sat at home while other people farmed for them. My grandfathers sent people to go for war and fight for them. I am not going to do that. I am a farmer. Everybody should work for himself. I am going to farm for my family and myself. If you don't see me at the palace, you should know that I am at the farm." So, every morning he went to farm. He didn't have many people in the household to help. He had only one son and one brother.

FW

--his younger brother.

DL

Did the people think he shouldn't have gone to farm?

AL

Once you become a Yaa Naa, you have to be always at the palace. You can go to your farm to give orders, but not to take a hoe to dig the ground. In fact, the Yaa Naa isn't supposed to walk in bare feet. Even up until now, the Yaa Naa cannot walk bare foot.

Without sandals, he cannot walk. During that time, no one wore boots to farm. We didn't know boots, other than our leather boots. When you went to farm, you would put your boots under some tree, remove everything down, and start weeding. Also, the sandals for a chief are very big. You couldn't wear them and farm.

DL

Is one of the reasons why people didn't want to be Yaa Naa because they would have to stay in the house all the time? They wanted the freedom of regular people?

AL

No, not because of working. A Yaa Naa by all means can get people to serve him, but Naa Datorli had been acting badly. Everybody had already seen his character. He would

kill you for no reason. When he became chief, everybody tried to be drawing far away from him. When he saw that he had no people close to him, he decided to work for himself. His only helper was Shelimbana, his own brother. The brothers had the same mother and father, so whether Naa Datorli was good or bad, Shelimbana had to be with him.

FW

That means Shelimbana had become Naa Datorli's servant.

AL

--his everything! His younger brother was his farmer, he was taking care of his horses, and he was taking care of the house. If Naa Datorli wanted to send a message to any place, it was this man he would send.

One day Shelimbana had been in the fields cutting grass for Naa Datorli's horses. When he came home, he was very thirsty.

FW

--tired and thirsty.

AL

He reached the palace compound. He put the grass down. The horses saw him. They started making, "[sound of horse]."

FW

They wanted food. They were hungry.

AL

Dasambila was there--his brother's child was there.

FW

He was there.

AL

When Shelimbana was rushing into the house to drink water, the brother's child abused him, "You, Shelimbana, you come with grass to give to the horses. They see you. Can't you take the time to give them the grass before you go to the house? You leave the horses and are running into the house to see whether my mother has prepared food for you to eat."

FW

"Big fudiyan!"

AL

"Fudiyan like you."

DL

I don't understand what he was saying. The senior brother's son was abusing the uncle,

"Big. . .

AL

--fudiyān."

DL

What is "fudiyān"? Is that a word in Dagbani or Hausa or English?

FW

--English. One who can eat a lot of food. That is what we were taught in school.

"Fudiyān--he eats a lot of food."

DL

He eats too much? He likes food too much? He takes it for himself and doesn't share it?

Is that the idea?

AL

No. The senior brother's son only wanted to be making his uncle annoyed. You know, if you say to any Dagomba man, "Sabiye karli fudiyān," you are abusing him. If you are feeding him, he will never take food from your house again. Never say to any Dagomba

man that he is a fudiyan. He will never come near to you again. That is something we don't like at all. Every Dagomba man knows that abuse.

FW

Even if he is hungry, he will not come for food.

AL

He would rather die than for you to abuse him, "fudiyan." This boy knew very well that no one liked it.

FW

So, he used it on his uncle--

AL

--to make him annoyed.

DL

Let me ask you another question. The relationship between uncle and nephew--is that often a relationship where there is some trouble? Do you have to respect your uncle a great deal?

FW

Oh, you have to respect.

DL

It isn't one of your joking relationships?

FW

No, no, no. At all! At all!

AL

Let me tell you something. In our custom, how you respect your father--you have to respect your uncles more than your father.

FW

--more than your father!

AL

Right now, now, now I myself cannot give any of my daughters to a man for marriage. If some one wants to marry one of my daughters, they don't come to ask me. They will go to my senior brothers, Cedu, Zakaria or Alaasani. My brothers need not consult me at all. They can do whatever they like. If they like the man, they agree; if they don't like the man, they can say, "We don't like you."

DL

Do people live with their uncles?

AL

Yes. You have seen that some of my children are with my brothers and some of my brothers' children are living with me. My nephew has to respect me more than his mother, more than his father.

DL

So, when Dasambila abused Shelimbana, he put himself into big trouble, didn't he?

FW

--big trouble!

FW &AL

It meant he didn't show respect at all.

AL

Shelimbana was very tired. Despite being annoyed, he didn't say anything. He went into the palace. The mother was standing nearby, hearing what her child was telling her junior husband. The mother didn't tell the child anything. Shelimbana went into the house. He fetched water, he drank, and he came back outside. You know, after we bring grass from the bush, we cut it up with a heavy cleaver called "kpanga." Shelimbana had started cutting the grass into pieces and Dasambila came in again, "So, now he is cutting

grass for the horses?--after he goes to see what food my mother has prepared for him?

Look at the fudiyan. Fudiyan man like you." Shelimbana stopped and asked, "What did you say to me the first time?" Dasambila said, "What did you hear? It was so I said."

Shelimbana said, "I couldn't hear. If I had heard what you said, I would never ask you."

Dasambila said, "What you heard, it be so I told you." Shelimbana said, "Please, you'd better tell me what you said to me the first time. For this one--I hear it. But the first time--I didn't hear." The mother is there, seeing everything.

FW

Shelimbana just wanted to be sure that Dasambila's mother was hearing everything.

AL

Dasambila repeated his abuse, "I said, 'You--fudiyan man like you--you have come from the bush with grass. The horses need food, but you won't give it to them. You are going to see if my mother prepared food so that you can eat and be satisfied. Fudiyan like you.'" Then, Shelimbana spoke up, "So, I am a fudiyan? I am coming." He was preparing to whip his nephew. He only wanted to frighten and punish Dasambila. The

boy started running away. Shelimbana didn't intend to kill him. He was having the kpanga. He threw it. The heavy blade struck him--here--on the back of his head.

FW

It went into his brains.

AL

"Kan"--the kpanga cracked Dasambila's skull and he fell dead. Galiban cried, "Way-yi, way-yi." She ran to the farm to tell her husband, Naa Datorli. She confronted him, "You said you want to be a Yaa Naa. They made you Yaa Naa, but you refused to be sitting home looking after your family. We have gone to every place, you and I, but the soothsayers say we are not going to get any more child. Not one of your wives will bear children again. You have got your only child. Go home and see what happened. Your brother has killed your son." Naa Datorli got up from the farm. He went to the house. His brother had found a covering cloth and was standing there with the dead body. People had got together. The chief came inside the compound and asked the brother,

"What did my son do to you? Why did kill him?" Shelimbana only said, "Please, I cannot tell you. Ask your wife."

FW

"Ask your wife!"

AL

Naa Datorli turned to his wife, "What did the child do to my younger brother and then he killed him?" The wife also said, "I cannot tell you. Ask your brother." So, they were tossing the chief like that. He became annoyed.

DL

Why didn't Shelimbana just tell Naa Datorli what happened?

AL

When the child was abusing his uncle, it was the mother's duty to scold him, "Don't try it.

You are abusing your father, not your uncle." The mother should have said that, but she stood there laughing and that increased Shelimbana's annoyance.

FW

She didn't say anything, which meant that she was happy about what the son was doing.

DL

Naa Datorli and Galiban had only one boy. You say that they had been trying to get more children, but they couldn't succeed. They had gone everywhere and been told that Naa Datorli would have only one child in his life. I don't understand that part. Who were they going to?

FW

Soothsayers.

AL

Sometimes, if your wife takes a long time to conceive, you can't just sit down and be waiting. You have to go to soothsayers. Now we have Muslim soothsayers, but during the first time we didn't have Muslims. Our grandparents dealt with fetish. Some of the fetish people--you can go to them and--

FW

--they will possess and they see what will be happening in your life.

AL

They will tell you things that will be coming to you. They say, "Go and perform this custom. Do it before you will have your future." This chief had gone to so many places. They soothsayers had told him, "Until you die--this is the first child for you, this is the last child for you. No one has cursed you. This has come from god." Because of that, Naa Datorli never took risks with the child. He never used force on the child.

FW

The son could say anything or do anything he wanted.

DL

We say, "An only child is a spoiled child."

FW

I have a senior sister who is having an only child, a daughter. The girl can do anything she likes. My sister wouldn't--she can't just say anything.

AL

One of my friends has three wives. One wife is having only one child, a son. This lady has money more than my friend. My friend is a farmer and this woman is a trader. She has a big store in the market for selling things. Their son is not up to the age of marriage because he is having senior brothers who have not yet married. But because the mother is having money, he is having a wife now.

FW

She wants the child to be happy.

AL

He is having a motorcycle and when you go to that boy's living room, it is beautiful more than the father's room.

FW

She is rich and he is her only son.

AL

Now he goes to Accra to buy things for his mother's store. He will never sit on ground transport; every week, he takes a plane in and out from Tamale to Accra. Sometimes the father calls the mother and tells her, "Please you have to come down. I know he is your only son. We have been trying to get more children and haven't succeeded yet. But remember that your neighbors also have children."

FW

They don't have those opportunities.

AL

"So, you should take care of our son. Your actions will cause jealous people to hurt your child. I am not strong enough to protect him from their medicine." He used to call me to witness for him and to advise the wife. The wife respects me even more than her husband, because during the time she was suffering to conceive the child and thought to run away from him, I advised her against it. Now she has a child and has become rich. She often says that my advice was good.

FW

I think the woman cannot help it because she loves her son, her only child.

DL

Let's continue with the Tora story.

AL

Yes. Brother and wife were tossing Naa Datorli back and forth. Naa Datorli shouted, "Why did you kill my son?" Shelimbana also became annoyed. He vexed and disgraced his senior brother before the public, "Because I have killed your child, it is paining you? What about all the men, people's children, you have killed? Has anybody ever challenged you? Now that I have killed your child, you know the pain." You see, before Naa Datorli became chief, he had done that himself--going around killing people's children.

DL

He had killed people's children?

AL

Yes! That was why people didn't like him. When I say, "people's children," I mean grown up people, not young children. He was a bad man--the sort who can easily become a ghost. He didn't feel for people and sometimes he acted like a madman. Any bad thing that came to his mind--he just forced it on people.

DL

Was he using spiritual killing or weapons?

AL

--weapons. For example, if he heard a rumor that you were his enemy, he would never ask you directly, "What did I do to you before you talk against me?" If he met you on the road, he would just attack at once. Before you could think, "This man is going to shorten my life," he would stab you with a knife or a spear. That was his business.

When Shelimbana challenged him in public, Naa Datorli said, "OK. I am coming." He went into the palace. No one thought he was going to kill his junior brother. Naa Datorli prepared and came out. The people were not ready to stop him. You know, we don't shout on our paramount chief. He came with a spear. When Shelimbana saw him, he tried to run. Naa Datorli threw the spear. He had him; he fell down; Shelimbana died. There, the wife started crying again.

FW

Crying again.

AL

People were saying, "How can you kill a good person because of a bad person? Your brother, he is your only servant!"

FW

He is everything to you.

DL

I don't understand. Naa Datorli came from the farm. He asked Galiban what happened, but she didn't answer. Why?

AL

The wife had gone to the farm and told her husband that his brother had killed his son. He came from the farm with his wife. When the chief got to the palace, many people had

come together. A cloth was covering the body. He took the cloth like this. [mimes
looking at the corpse]

DL

But why didn't she say, "Your son abused your brother"?

FW

Oh, no. The crowd was there.

AL

Not the crowd. Sometimes a woman thinks that she is a man--that she can do anything
she likes. Galiban kept quiet to see what would happen.

FW

Oh, I see. [laughs]

AL

Maybe she was thinking, "My brother-in-law killed my child. Let me try to get my husband to kill him." Now, she was sorry, "I should have said it and saved this our junior houseman." She told him what happened. When the chief came to the palace, he didn't ask the wife first. He asked the people what happened. No one was answering.

DL

He asked the public?

AL

Three times. No one answered him. He came back to ask the brother, "My wife says that you killed my son. What happened?" The brother said, "She told you that I killed him, so she should know what happened. Ask her." Naa Datorli turned back and asked Galiban, "Now it is on you. You are able to tell me that Shelimbana killed my son. Shelimbana says that you were present and saw everything. Tell me what happened." The wife was crying--falling down--she didn't say anything. Remember also that Naa Datorli was bad. Looking at how his wife was crying, and how his only son was lying dead, he became mad. He shouted at the brother, "Can't you tell me what I am asking?"

You are looking at me like that! Tell me." Naa Datorli's shouting made Shelimbana think, "How I have been suffering for this my senior brother! But he treats me like this before the public!" That is why Shelimbana said, "You have been killing people's children. I am just copying you. You are my brother, so I should be doing your duties. Now that I have killed your son, it is paining you? I have just done part of your job."

[laughs] There Naa Datorli became angry and thought, "You killed my son. I will face you."

After Shelimbana died, Galiban said, "Shelimbana is everything to you. Because he has killed your child you have killed him? Who is going to serve you again? Who is going to look after us?" Naa Datorli turned and said, "What! Now that I have killed my brother, you are telling me why he killed my son? This is why my brother said that I should ask you what happened. It is you who bore the child. If Shelimbana killed Dasambila just because he didn't like him, you would have told me. I asked you. You didn't tell me the truth."

FW

You know, there was a crowd. They begin talking, "du, du, du." Everybody began to talk. The chief was ashamed.

AL

In our place, a chief cannot be ashamed. He was still holding the spear. In our tradition, we can't take weapons away from the chief. Before people realized that he might kill himself--[claps hands together]--by his stomach. He also died. So, it became three dead bodies. The child is there, the younger brother is there, and the chief himself is there. There the wife started crying seriously. Galiban's crying--that is the first song of Tora.

DL

Help me get this straight. The chief goes into the palace, the brother tries to run away, and the chief throws a spear and kills the brother. Who said, "How can you kill a good person because of a bad person"?

AL

When he killed the brother, people started talking, "This your good brother--you have killed him because of your bad son." People started saying it and then the wife become ashamed.

FW

She regretted.

AL

Then, she began crying to the husband, "Why have you killed your good server because of your bad child?" Other people feared Naa Datorli. They couldn't say it loud enough for him to hear.

DL

The wife said that even though she helped cause the palaver in the first place?

AL

Yes!

FW

She didn't know it would happen that way. [laughs]

AL

And when she said it, Naa Datorli regretted what he had done.

FW

He didn't know what to do.

AL

He thought to himself, "Now who is going to be my server. If I need a messenger, who am I going to send?" So, he took the spear--"pooo."

DL

I would think that the chief would have been annoyed at the wife and would have done some violence to her.

AL

Yes!

FW

Mm hmm--to the wife rather.

AL

But, he just let the wife be like that and he stabbed himself.

FW

He loved the wife.

AL

It is not that he loved the wife.

FW

[laughs]

AL

--not because he loved the wife. In the whole history of our chiefs' wars, I have never heard that a Dagomba man has fought with a woman. Men beat women, but never kill. You can never kill a woman. Women used to follow men to the fighting field. Any woman who died on the war field is by accident--they were trying to shoot a man and the arrow went towards a woman. If you are a man--your wife annoys you--you can kill yourself to be free. But when you kill your wife, people will abuse you.

FW

[laughs]

AL

That is why Naa Datorli didn't kill Galiban. The husband killed himself for the wife to suffer and know that what she did was wrong.

DL

Killing yourself--suicide--what is the feeling about suicide in your area? Is it ever considered honorable?

FW

No, it is not considered honorable

DL

Is it a good solution to a problem?

AL

Sometimes people kill themselves because of their problems. A person is facing problems he can't handle. Instead of facing the problems, he gets away from them by killing himself. It happens. Two years ago, one of our good lura drummers died at Sanarigo. Amidu was having children with two wives. This boy was good, but he was having problems. One night--it was our hot time of year--no one was sleeping in their room. He got up at midnight and called the wife, "I am going to travel early tomorrow. If you need something while I am away, sell my tape recorder and my bicycle. As you know, I am facing problems, so don't worry if I am gone a long time. Take care of yourselves until I come back." The wife lay down, but if your husband tells you something like that, you won't feel sleepy again. This boy got up and went outside. The

wife was thinking that he went for toilet. He never came back. He took a rope to the big mango tree just outside of Sanarigo town. He climbed the mango tree, tied the rope, and put it around his neck. He let himself down and he died.

The wife could not sleep--up to the call for first prayers. She went to her brother-in-law, "Stand up. Amidu went out at midnight and hasn't come back. He told me he would be traveling, but when he was going out, I didn't follow him. I don't know if he has traveled or what." The brother started preparing to go to mosque so that they could find out what is going on. He looked in his brother's room; all of Amidu's things were there. The brother thought, "He has just gone out and will soon come back. He didn't go far. If he traveled, he would take his clothes, he would carry his lujā--he can't go without a lujā."

Day broke. The people going to fetch water saw somebody hanging. In Africa, the first people who see something like that don't cry out. They come back quietly until many people see it. People began seeing, they started talking, and the elders got to know. In our area, if somebody kills himself in the bush, we have to perform customary rites before burying the person. They went to the chief's house. "We have got bad behavior in

our land. Someone has killed himself." The chief said they should go to the lun-naa's house. "Lun-naa should beat drum. Everybody should go to the mango tree. They say that somebody has hanged himself. Go and see from which house. Come and tell me." Amidu was from Lun-naa's house; he was the Lun-naa's nephew. People started talking, "It is Amidu from the Lun-naa's house." Lun-naa himself went to the mango tree and saw Amidu. He came back and announced it. There it is the wife cried.

DL

In Japan, they sometimes commit suicide by stabbing themselves in the stomach with a knife, especially a defeated warrior who doesn't want the enemy to capture him.

AL

Some of our chiefs also kill themselves like that. Tolon-naa Suleman'-kpema, our ancestor who bore our great-grandfathers, went to war and the Yaa Naa died. Our grandfather said, "It is shameful for me to go back home without my chief." He killed himself.

FW

What could he say when he went back home?

DL

What about women?

AL

Women do kill themselves. Fusena, remember Chelimi who poisoned herself this year?

When Galiban saw the three dead bodies she cried, "Woi!" [claps hands] "Ii-yee."

[intones with pitch]

FW

"Woi, woi, woi, woi." That is the crying.

AL

People started to take the dead bodies into the palace. Women were holding the child; the mother wanted to see his body; they didn't want her to see the child's face again.

FW

If she rushed to see the son, the woman bending down to pick up the corpse would push her with their buttocks. If she ran to see the husband, they pushed her away. If she ran to see the junior husband [brother-in-law], they pushed her back. This is why the dance has knocking together of buttocks. Anytime Galiban would remember the death of these people, she began to cry. The women would gather. She would sing that song out and then instead of knocking her, they turned their buttocks to knock each other. It became a dance.

AL

At that time, the dance hadn't started. Let me give you the full story.

During the olden days, we didn't delay funerals. When a Yaa Naa died, it took only fourteen days to get a new Yaa Naa because some enemy could meet to fight with us at any time. They only took seven days to finish the funeral, and another seven days to make the new Yaa Naa. In the old days when a Yaa Naa died, the next chief had to take care of the late chief's wives. Wives who were too old to re-marry lived with the new chief for some time before returning to their parents. In Dagbon if a man dies the widows' parents wait for three or four months to see if their daughters are not pregnant. Then, the parents will come and take the women to their homes.

After Naa Datorli's death the new chief, Briguyomda, was taking care of Galiban and the other women. In the old days, after they buried an elder or a chief, it was the duty of women and children to mourn. Every morning, ladies cry and remember the dead person. Drummers also go to the palace and play funeral drumming. When Naa Datorli died the women started their crying duty.

Galiban was saying, "[Dagbani]." The senior wife sang and the rest of the wives responded to her. We can't sing such things. At first, they used to sing those words, but

people started dieing so now we sing only the sound of the crying, "Yee yee yee . Oo ee yee ye yee ee yee." [sings and claps]

Every morning when they got up they would be crying and then the drummers would play. One of our old drummers was listening to Galiban's cry, "The elders told you that you shouldn't do it, but you refused and did it. Look at what is happened to us now. You are no more. What are we going to do?" Every morning she said that in her crying.

Whenever Galiban remembered the husband, her--[AL asks FW a question in Dagbani]

FW

--rivals--[co-wives]

AL

--rivals helped her to be crying in the house. Sometimes they cried at night after they had eaten. At times they refused food and just started crying. Briguyomda, the new chief, wanted them to stop. He called our drummers, "The women are not trying to forget their husband. Drummers should be giving us music every night." Our leading drummer,

Namo-naa, said, "I won't drum old rhythms. I hear what the women are saying. I know what we will drum. We will give rhythm for that crying." Every night after they finished eating our drummers took their drums and went to the palace.

DL

Is there any way of knowing who that drummer was?

AL

We can only say that Briguyomda's Namona is the person who composed the Tora drumming. According to my teachers, in those days every Yaa Naa had his favorite drummer, similar to how our late chief loved Adam more than any drummer in Dagbon. In those days there were no drum chiefs, no Lun-naa or Sampahi-naa. Namona had not yet become the title of the chief drummer in all of Dagbon. At that time, the best-loved drummer of the Yaa Naa was called Namona. Ever since we lunsis got our drum chieftaincy, the titles for the Yaa Naa's lunsis have been Namona and Sampahi-naa. Today the Yaa Naa doesn't have a lun-naa, only these two drum chiefs. Namona means "[Dagbani]," "He enjoys more of the chief's gifts."

FW

They put it in a proverb--"He sucks the breast of the chief." You know, a woman likes a child to suck her breast.

AL

At first, the lunsu didn't know how to answer the women when they were crying. The Namo-naa said, "How we can drum on this? Let me sit and listen to them." The woman started saying, "The elders told you not to frighten the woman. You refused and did it. See what has happened." Namo-naa composed a rhythm for the answer luja--"Bam bi yeli o, bam bi yeli o, bam bi yeli o." He composed a rhythm for the leading luja--"Bi yeli o, bi yeli o, ko bu wum. Bi yeli o, bi yeli o, no ko bu wum." He composed a rhythm for guṇ-gṇ--"To bi yeli o ko bu wum." In fact, at that time we weren't having guṇ-gṇ drums; big luja drums were playing "dan dan dan dahan dan den den dan dan." Now the guṇ-gṇ takes that part.

FW

"To bi yeli o ku saylsi ka nya."

AL

When the women started crying, Namo-naa said on his luṇa, "To bi yeli ya, bi yeli ya ka bu wum gba. Bi yeli o, bi yeli o, ko bu wum gba." That is the Tora leading luṇa part.

Namo-naa asked the supporting luṇas to answer, "Bam bi yeli o, bam bi yeli o." He asked the guṇ-guṇ people to be saying, "Bi yeli o ku saylsi ka nya. To to bi yeli o ku saylsi ka nya." The women were crying, "Oo ee yee." [claps Tora pattern and sings] In the beginning the women they clapped like this, "Oo yee ye ye iye, oo yee ye yee iye." [claps straight time-feel] They would be running--pushing each other, pushing each other. This Namo-naa created these drum parts to go with the song, "Bi yeli o, bi yeli o, ko bu wum gba" and "Bam bi yeli o" and "Bi yeli o ko bu wum ka nya."

FW

"Bi yeli o ku saylsi ka nya"

AL

The lead luṣa part, "Bi yeli o, bi yeli o, ko o bu wum gba" means "They have told him and he didn't care." If I say, "Davis, bi yeli o," I am saying, "I told Davis, Davis doesn't care." The supporting luṣas say, "Bam bi yeli o," "Who told him?--the elders." "The elders told Davis. Davis refused." Then, guṣ-guṣ comes in, "To bi yeli o ku saylsi ka nya." "They have told you, you refused, and you have seen it." That is the beginning of Tora.

At first, they only played Tora when the Yaa Naa was feeling bad or there was a function in the palace. The old Yaa Naas wouldn't agree to bring it out for all the people to know it. They thought it was too dangerous because when they started doing Tora with the original song people were dying.

FW

When they sang the proper song many people died.

DL

The words were powerful? Help me understand how singing the song could cause people to die.

AL

They repeated Zohe-naa's warning to let the woman stay on the skin [throne]. Naa Datorli heard Zohe-naa's advice, but refused to take it. He frightened the chief to run from the palace. He lacked patience in becoming Yaa Naa. Look at what happened! That is the song we don't like to sing. We can't say it. When they started doing Tora-- singing this song--Briguyomda didn't live for even three months. Don't forget that! That is why our grandfathers changed to be singing only the women's cry, "Oo ee yee." The only thing you can put in your book is that the elders told him, he refused the custom, and the custom defeated him. As for these, our chieftaincy reviews--some things--we don't have to review them.

DL

But you are talking about it here!

AL

We can talk about it, but we can't sing how they sang. They took that old man's words, calling the stool of Iyandi [Yendi], using gbewaa and bolun in making a song. You can't sing about those things. The leader would be naming the sacred stool things and the neighbors would answer, "Oo ee yee ye ye ee yee, Oo ee yee ye ye ee yee." [sings melody]

FW

They helped her mourn.

AL

They kept it in the palace for a long time. Naa Zanjina is the Yaa Naa who allowed Tora to be performed at any grown person's funeral. His thinking was different because he was a Muslim and became Yaa Naa as young man. He changed many things in Dagbon. Naa Zangina said, "Play the rhythms, but leave those words." The women began composing songs. Instead of saying "Naa Gbewaa" or "Bayli-naa" they said, "Namowo

Bizuñ bia." They were talking about drummers not chiefs. They turned the song into a praise of the lunsì, "Namowo Bizuñ bia, neñbuñneñ wariba iyie, dañ nayili kundanzìya, n-yuri yie bañga bia." After Naa Zanjina directed them to cut the dangerous part away, the elders saw that the trouble was coming down. Naa Zangina said, "Now Tora doesn't have to be only in the palace. You can play it outside." He released it for people to be dancing. If they heard the sounds of Tora, people knew that there was funeral in that household.

FW

The women were praising the drummers.

AL

Today we do Tora when somebody dies and they are going to make the funeral. If you hear these rhythms, they are performing a funeral there. They will be doing it until the funeral finishes. Formerly they did it from the first day after the death until the seventh day. Now we have changed how we make funerals. If you cannot afford the funeral, you must make the custom immediately and then you are allowed to put the funeral down

until you have the money to do it. You start on a Friday and finish it the next Friday. On the head-shaving day, the children of the deceased will come together, find kola, and send it to the chief drummer's house to beg him, "We want you to send us your children to help make our funeral. Make us happy because we can't be make a funeral when the house is quiet." Our drummers will go there and be playing this old story. Every night you will hear the sound of Tora.

Few drummers know the real story of Tora. My father told me story of Tora, but I didn't go deep into it. I knew the story from my father and I knew a modern one. I wasn't sure which was true.

DL

There are other meanings for the Tora rhythms?

AL

Some people take Tora to be abuse drumming. They don't know the real meaning.

People hear the sound of the drums and compare it words that abuse women. It is very

bad to say. The answering lunja will say, "Kpem' sen pani," meaning "old lady's vagina."

You know we can't play drum like that, but all the young boys know it. When you are playing Tora, they do say it and some people will be laughing. They claim the gun-gon says, "[Dagbani]" meaning "turn yourself and knock your buttocks."

DL

That is what they see the people doing?

AL

Yes, they see what people are doing, but don't ask the lundaa player what the drum is saying. Many drum rhythms are like that. When we are playing Bangumanga, people don't know what the drums are saying. They say, "[Dagbani]," but that is not the story.

Bangumanga drumming is having deep talk.

DL

Is there a story for Tora Yelira too?

AL

Tora Yelira is inside this story. Tora and Tora Yelira have just one story. After dancing Tora when the women got excited--when they were feeling it--they started jumping. Our women--when they are crying--some of them start jumping. We call that one Tora Yelira, "Jumping Tora."

DL

Did they make up a modern talk for Tora Yelira also?

AL

When you play "ka ka ka ka" the youth think we are saying "Wo bolun ko sal se," meaning, "You call a young lady, she refuses." Those are not the words. That is the counterfeit talk for Tora Yelira.

In the palace they only did Tora and Tora Yelira. After Naa Nyaysi gave it out and many people started dancing it, they put Nyayboli inside. Now they dance Tora on many rhythms.

DL

Like way they put many things inside Takai?

AL

Yes.

FW

--dances like Nawuni Mali Pam, Nunda Nyuli, and so forth.

AL

Tora is the old dance. Nanton Lun-naa told me that Tora is older than Takai. Namo-naa said the same thing.

DL

Does the word "tora" mean anything?

FW

"Tobu" means "knocking," or "bumping."

AL

The word "tora" means "push." When they were carrying the dead bodies into the palace-

-[gets up]-I am holding the dead body like this. Fusena, rush to see the body.

FW

[mimes action] He will push me. [laughs]

AL

The person holding the body says, {Check Dagbani} "Damo, damo," and we make like

this. [blocks FW with his backside] That is why we say "tora"--pushing.

DL

And "yelira?"

FW

Tora Yelira? "Tora that jumps."

AL

[Dagbani to FW] "You jump."

AL

Nowadays, drummers don't start Tora the way they did at first. Today, when the lundaa player hears the women's singing, he calls their names, "Asanatu tom Tora, Mariama tom Tora, Fusena tom Tora, Fatimata tom Tora, Abiba tom Tora," [sings] and tells them to dance Tora. The guŋ-gɔŋ people will start at once. When we older drummers are on the Tora field and the women start singing, we play the rhythm, "das zen den, das zen den, das zen den di, das zen den deyan deyan den den dit." If you start luŋa like that now, the young guŋ-gɔŋ players won't know how to come in. They will play off unless you make it very fast. If you take it slow, they will come in late.

DL

There are counterfeit stories of Tora?

FW

You can hear a different story about Tora. I myself went to two drummers and they told me a different one altogether. I told it all to Abu and he said, "No!"

AL

When you wrote me that I should prepare for Tora I said, "What! This man Davis, what troubles is he trying to give me." Because you asked me for Tora's story, I killed four fowls before I came here.

FW

He is still having debts to pay when he goes back--a sheep plus two hens.

AL

When I received your letter I said, "Let me take my motorcycle and go for research." I wanted the true story.

FW

Abu went to an old man. It was three hours before the man started telling the story. He said he had to put blood down before he could start.

AL

I said, "I will do whatever is necessary for you to tell me Tora's story." I needed to know it for myself. I told him, "I am working with white people. They are trying to put our music into book. I don't want anyone to read my book and see mistakes. You are one of my teachers. If they see mistakes--

FW

--they will say it is what you taught me."

DL

Who were you talking to?

AL

Nanton Lun-naa--among all the drummers in Dagbon no one is older than him. No

drummer in the whole Dagbon can say, "I saw Nanton Lun-naa when he was young."

His hair is pure white like my shirt, but he still is standing straight. He is a great, great, great drummer.

Our old people like talking true, but sometimes when you tell the truth, you get trouble.

Nanton Lun-naa said, "As for the story of Tora, I won't tell until we have put blood down.

How am I going to do it? Will I have to buy the fowl?" I said, "I will buy the fowl." He

said, "Bring the fowl. We need a pure red one with no white feathers." I called one of his

brothers and sent him to town to find the fowl for me. He got big red one.

DL

I have never understood why some sacrifices need red fowls and others need white.

AL

Because of danger--we use red fowls or black fowls. If you want to get blessed you use white fowls, but if you sacrifice to clear yourself from bad things the fowl must be red or black.

Nanton Lun-naa said, "Now I will tell the story but, mind you, don't tell it to other people without doing the custom. You will die before reaching your time." I said, "I hear. But what if I say it and I perform the custom?" He said, "You can do it, but still you might not get your old age. You have to be careful." I said, "Thank you," and he started the story. I was recording on my big tape player. When he finished, he killed the fowl. He said, "We will make soup and eat the meat." The day was coming to noon and we had a big performance that day. I was rushing to get to Tamale before 4:00. I said, "Since you made the sacrifice allow me to go. I can't wait for the food." Not knowing I was going to suffer! Nanton Lun-naa said, "Go if that is your choice."

Five miles from the town--"cho, cho, cho, cho, cho" [sound of engine dying]--my motorcycle stops. I lose the plugs, I check the petrol--the oil was full, everything seemed correct. When I sparked the motorcycle it sounded good, but it died when I put it into gear. I said to myself, "What trouble is this?" I was there for more than one hour.

Another motorcycle rider stopped, "Can I help?" I said, "Yes. I have done my best, but I can't get it to go." He took over. When he sparked it the engine answered, but when he put it into gear the motorcycle wouldn't move. The man said, "You have to push. If I was going your way I would pull you, but I am not passing there." I started pushing the moto, "Maybe someone will be come and pull me to the house." [laughs] I pushed the motorcycle nine miles--nine miles! At three miles to Tamale a tipper truck stopped. Police people saw us putting the motorcycle into the truck. The policemen said, "Stop. Why?" They acted like we were stealing the moto. The truck driver said, "No, no, no. I wanted to help him. The motorcycle cannot move." The policeman tried the moto. It sparked. The policeman said, "OK, now we want to see your papers." I was having my driver's license, but my insurance and motorcycle papers were not with me. The policeman said, "Look. We are taking you and the motorcycle to police station. When we get to Tamale we will let you go to your house and bring the motorcycle papers. If

you can prove the vehicle is yours we will give it back. If not we will lock you in jail."

They allowed the tipper truck to go. Davis--me, the person who was running to a performance, did not get to Tamale until 6:00 in the evening.

FW

They had finished the performance. [laughs]

AL

How could I go for a performance? At the police station I had to find somebody to bail me so that I could go to my house. I reached my house at 7:00. I got the papers and was coming out when luckily I saw Yaya, the fitter who takes care of my moto. I stopped him. He said, "What? Anything?" I said, "Yes. I need you to take me to the police station. My motorcycle is there. It refused on the way. I was pushing and the police are saying I stole it. I am now taking the papers to show them and collect it back." Yaya took me on his moto. I showed my papers to the police. They saw my name, my motorcycle number, and my license number. They said, "Now we trust you, but we can't leave you to go."

FW

Mmm hmm! At least they will have to get something.

AL

They said, "For thinking to put the motorcycle in the tipper truck, you are going to pay.

You have to give us something." [laughs]

DL

--as for Ghana police--

FW

Oh no.

AL

[laughs] I gave them 400 cedis. They said, "What?" The Inspector himself said, "A big man like me? How can I make do with 400 cedis?"

AL

I said, "I don't have money." I didn't want to bring money from my pocket so I said to Yaya, "Can you give me 200 cedis in addition?" I gave them the 600 cedis. The Inspector said, "Are you sure you don't have money. Can I search you?" I held my arms out. He started laughing and threw me my keys. When we pushed the motorcycle outside Yaya sparked it, he raced the gas, he said, "The motorcycle isn't broken. The oil pump seized." I said, "What!" He said, "The oil is not coming. If you had forced to ride farther, your engine would have broken. You are lucky the engine didn't work." He just opened the oil pump, adjusted it with his hand, and then tightened it up with a screwdriver. He put it in gear and then my friend started moving. I said, "This small thing brought me all this suffering?"

Early the next morning when I was coming to town I met a man. He stopped and greeted me. He said, "As I was coming I passed through Nanton. One old man was walking on the road. He called my name and said, 'Do you know Luja Abubakari in Tamale-Lamesheyu? Greet him and tell him he should come at once. No matter what he is doing

tell him to leave it and come.'" Immediately I filled the motorcycle with petrol--paa--to Nanton. Nanton Lun-naa was lying down like this. [gestures reclining attitude] When he saw me he started laughing. He didn't greet me. He said, "Abu, on your way home what experience did you meet?"

FW

[laughs]

AL

I said, "I suffered. I suffered too much!" He said, "Yes! I wanted you to see from the beginning. I told you not to be telling this story. Do you think that the motorcycle made you suffer? It was the story of Tora. You should have waited to eat the meat, to make yourself free before you left. You didn't eat the meat. I knew you would suffer. I knew something would happen to you. When you left, do you know what I did? I begged my fathers [makes hand clapping gesture] to help you as you were going home. I told them that I would call you back to take the meat. Here is the meat. Take some, but leave a piece for me." [laughs] I ate the meat.

FW

[sighs and laughs knowingly]

DL

Do you have any idea what causes the suffering that you faced with the moto? Or are we not supposed to understand exactly how it happened.

AL

It is the spirit. The spirit of the real person is still doing those things. I am the person who brought the Tora matters out. I am the person who bought the fowl for the sacrifice. To clear myself from danger I should have eaten some of the food. I failed to eat the meat so the spirit was trying to punish me. My suffering meant that the danger was still on me. I made the sacrifice, but not eating the meat showed that I didn't respect what I learned, I didn't believe Nanton Lun-naa's warning. When Nanton Lun-naa heard my story he said, "You are very lucky the engine didn't work. If your motorcycle bike had

fallen down, you would be dead." I said "Thank you" to Nanton Lun-naa and came home.

I have another teacher, Namo-naa Issahaku, who I wanted to visit and ask about Tora. I left my motorcycle and took a bus to Yendi. When I met Namo-naa he said, "What! Tora? What do you want this story for?" I said, "I am a drummer. People let their children come ask me about drumming. Maybe someone will need it from me. I have been hearing people playing it and I know a little of what the luṇa is saying. But even a great drummer like me--I don't know what happened and we got Tora." He said, "You have to stay here over night. When everybody is sleeping I will tell you. Make sure you have a fowl ready."

On that day Adam also got to know the story. Adam has lived with him since his childhood, but Namo-naa never told him because Adam never asked. After I had finished greeting Namo-naa, I knew that Adam's room was where I would sleep. When the time came Adam went with me to Namo-naa's area. Namo-naa asked Adam, "What do you want?" [Everybody laughs] Adam said, "I also want to listen to what Abubakari wants."

Namo-naa said, "You are here from your childhood and Abu is go-and-come. He often comes and asks me about things you never have asked. Do you think I am going to tell you if you don't ask me?" We apologized for that before he started the talk.

As soon as we finished the story we killed the fowl. Namonaa didn't ask anyone to make food with the fowl. We killed the fowl, roasted it right there, and then we ate it. Early the next morning, Namonaa gave some of the meat to children as salaka [alms].

DL

You told Nanton Lun-naa that you wanted the story because of working with me. You told Namonaa Issahaku simply that you might be needing the story. Why?

AL

Namonaa is the kind of person who doesn't want our dangerous stories to be out. My teacher Namonaa still believes the old people's warnings. I call him a "typical Dagomba." He doesn't know that what we are doing now will help Dagombas. I think that if we write down our drumming talks exactly correct, it will help people do our

tradition in future. But when I went to him last year after my trip to America, Namo-naa asked me so many questions, "What did you do when you went there?" I said, "Professor is not acting like some other white people. He is writing about group dances and appellation rhythms. We are not going into the thick talks about Dagbon. We are learning Dagomba music not history. The history of the Dagombas is quite different than the appellations of the people." He said, "As for that one, you are correct. You can do it. But do it according to the lunsis' knowledge of what we say for the chiefs. Don't just give what untrained people think our drumming means."

DL

Your father also told you the story of Tora?

AL

Yes, the same one. I was having it, but I wanted to assure myself that I was exactly correct. My father always told, "Don't take one teacher's idea to be the correct meaning. Compare many people's ideas and see which is best." When I went to Nanton Lun-naa he said, "Why haven't you learned this from your father?" I told him, "I ran away from my

father and lived in South for a long time." He said, "You should have learned this before traveling, but I will tell you." Then, I went to my teacher Namo-naa. He said, "I never taught you this story because you didn't ask me. This is not a story we should be teaching if the student has not asked. I was thinking that my brother"--he called my father his brother [brother in drumming, so to speak]--"taught you and that is why you didn't ask me." He told me the same story. After he finished telling me I admitted, "My father taught me the same thing. I asked you to be sure of myself." He said, "Debiawula," "We did it."

Then, I said to myself, "I have become a drummer now. I know the full story of Tora. The first story was background, not the real story. Let me consult another one of our leading drummers to be sure." I went to Alaasani-kpema at Kumbungu; he also learned drumming from Nanton Lun-naa. Oh, Alaasani-kpema, he made me laugh too much. [laughs] He said, "I will not tell you the Tora story. I said it once, I won't say it twice." I said, "Why bro?" He said, "I told it once and my wife died. Never again." Fusena heard the story on my tape.

FW

Yes. "Me! I won't tell you. I did it once and my wife died."

AL

He said, "We made every sacrifice but despite all, my wife died. I am now left with only one wife so I will not tell you." Alaasani-kpema made me laugh. I said, "Yi, my brother, how can you fear? You are ready to die. You are up to the age for dying." He said, "What!"

FW

"If my one wife dies--"

AL

That day--come and see--I was laughing like crazy man. I was begging him like something, but he said no. I talk, talk, talk and finally he said, "You have your own house now? Go and prepare. I will sleep at Tamale and tell you. If we get trouble it will come to you. You have three wives in the house."

FW

"You have three wives! I will say it in your house so that the troubles come on you."

[Everyone laughs]

AL

I said, "OK. I am prepared for that," and I went home. The next day was Tamale market day. True, he came to the house. I told him that I didn't know anything about Tora and wanted to know the story from him. He told me what Nanton Lun-naa and Namo-naa had said--exactly the same thing.

When Alaasani-kpema had finished we made a sacrifice with a fowl. After he left I took another fowl and called my father and grandparents, "What I am learning--I am not going to sell it. I am learning for myself. My ancestors, stand at my back and protect me from the bad things. Help me travel to America and come back safely." Namo-naa and Lun-naa have asked me to kill a sheep when I get back to Dagbon. This morning before we started this talk, I went outside with water to pour libation. I called them to help us make

it successfully. I promised to I pay them their debts if I reach home. By force--when I go back I must visit all these people. I have to greet them and ask, "I am going to make the sacrifice on this day. Am I free to make it then?" They will give me the go ahead and they will give me the words I have to use before I call their names.

DL

When you made the sacrifice to your father, you said that you were not learning to sell the story. Isn't that what we are doing?

AL

No. We are not selling it. You are my student. What I am telling you now--you can't pay me for it. Telling it to you does not mean that I am selling it

DL

Should we be concerned about writing this story in a book?

AL

I have taken out the most dangerous part so everyone is free to listen to the story or read about it. No one will face the songs that name gbewaa and bolun. That is the danger we don't like.

DL

You heard the Tora story from four people, Lun-naa Wumbee, Nanton Lun-naa, Namo-naa Issahaku and Alaasani-kpema. Did each of them change some small details of the story?

AL

Change it? My father taught me that before they call you a proper storyteller you should know the exact thing--to check and see if a person talks slightly different from the truth.

If Alaasani-kpema was different from Nanton Lun-naa and Namo-naa, I wouldn't take his story seriously. Everything has to be the same. If the person who is learning can't remember what he has been taught, he has to ask again. That is why I used my tape recorder when I went to Nanton Lun-naa. I couldn't keep the whole story in my head. If

I hadn't been able to remind myself from my tape, I would have had to go different teacher. I could not go back to go back to Nanton Lun-naa. No one would ever teach that story twice.

DL

It is a deep story, huh?

AL

Tora, Tora, Tora--

FW

It has problems.

[FW leaves the room]

DL

It began as a serious matter, but when I have seen Tora in Dagbon, it looked like a dance of happiness. In Dagbon today, what do the young Dagbamba think about Tora? Has it changed?

AL

Yes. Now it is the modern time. Formerly, when the old people were doing something, the youth stood behind to watch. Now, the youth do it too, which means they don't have deep respect for the old people. They force to do what the old people should be doing. In my father's time, if people came to discuss matters with him, I couldn't put my mouth inside their talk. I had to be quiet until one of them asked me, "Abu do you know what we are saying?" Then, I could talk. I had to respect them. Even if I knew more than them, I couldn't say anything. But these days? No. For example, this Tora story we are talking--Fusena won't take her time for me to explain it. She will just take it. At first, it was not like that. That is why we don't teach our youth.

DL

She keeps rather quiet.

AL

Before you arranged for us both to come here, I told her the meaning of Tora. If not for coming here with me, she would never know the meaning of Tora. In her whole life--she wouldn't know it. She won't ask me and I won't teach her. Being here with you and me is chance for her to learn so many things from me. But the way she should learn--she should take her time while I lead. Whenever I cannot explain myself, she can make it clear. Before we came here, I told her that you wanted the background on Tora and I told the story to her. She should be listening to me, but now she wants to make it more than what I am saying.

DL

So, the reason you don't bring things out is because younger people will be bluffing like they know it?

AL

We keep dangerous things secret because young people will just say them plainly. They don't care what might happen. They act like they don't believe us when we tell them about the danger. Some of them don't believe. That is another reason we don't bring knowledge out too freely.

DL

Yes.

AL

As a drummer, I have to respect the custom. When the elders say, "If you do this, this will happen to you," I have to respect their advice and do what they tell me. Namo-naa warned me, "Look--Tora is hard. Anyone who asks you for the Tora story--please--if the person cannot face the problems--don't say it."

[FW returns]

Let me tell you another story. One day, our Tamale drumming group was traveling to Yendi for some funerals. We heard that drummers from many different towns were going to meet. If you are a good drummer, you have to protect yourself well. They said that we would be leaving early in the morning, so before I left my house, I put on the smock with my talismans underneath my clothes. I reached the bus station and learned that they changed the departure time because we would be sleeping there for two days. We all went back to Alhaji's house to put our things down. I was feeling to go to toilet. Some of the things I put on my body--I don't take them into a toilet--so I went to Alhaji's room and removed them. Alhaji went in and saw my talismans. He called people to see.

FW

"Look! Look at this!"

AL

He called some of the drummers, "Hey come and see. Abu wears all these things on his body and he still he can drum!" When I came back, one of the drummers call me aside, "Why did you put all these things in Alhaji's room? He has made everybody here know

what charms are with you." I said, "No one can do anything. They don't know the name of the things."

FW

So, how can they spoil your protection medicine?

AL

No one knew how I managed to put those things on my body. You don't know what I say before I put them on my body, so how can you spoil my medicine? I came out and told him, "You, Alhaji, you will die. I will be here."

FW

Mmm hmm. [laughs]

AL

Our company of Tamale drummers doesn't push itself to the front, but when we go to any performing ground the other drummers will not get the crowd of people that gathers

around us. So, sometimes the other drummers tie us with juju so that we can't perform well.

FW

Or they can break their drums with magic.

AL

--all our drums. That day--how Yendi drummers played wicked on us! We were preparing to go to the drumming ground. Dagorli, one of my best lundaa players asked me, "Bro, test my luṅa. I just repaired it for this performance. Whenever I put new skins on my luṅa, I don't hear the sounds properly by myself." I took the luṅa, put it on my shoulder, and made one hit--"kaai"--something like nyɔhi came from inside.

FW

Smoke!

AL

I said, "Oh yes, Yendi people have used their juju. Let me go back home." [laughs] I told Dagorli, "Today you have to be prepared." He said, "What?" That day--my uncle, Fuseni Jableŋ, couldn't drum. May God bless him.

FW

May he rest in peace.

AL

I was shouting at him, but he didn't drum well. They tied him with juju when he tried to play his guŋ-gɔŋ

FW

All the dancers were sleepwalking. When Cedu, {Check Dagbani} Dohi-naa and others came out to dance, they failed. [laughs]

AL

I did my best in drumming, Dagorli was singing but--[laughs]

FW

Our women were sleeping. Oh! [laughs]

AL

I vexed and told Yaya Iddi that we should close. Among all the groups, we stopped first.

We went to where we were lodging. I said, "In the night we are going to Namo-naa's house." After we finished eating, I told Dagorli to get up, "You and Alhaji, let's go." I talked to Namo-naa Issahaku as if he is not my teacher. "You are my teacher. I have come to your town. You are the leading drummer of the whole Dagbon--not just in this town. People are calling my name all over Dagbon and I have come to Yendi to play for your town folk to know that you taught me properly. But you have let your people--

FW

--disgrace us."

AL

I said, "It seems that you are disgracing yourself, not me. I am your student. If I do bad--in your name; if I do good--in your name." Namo-naa was lying back in his chair. He started laughing, "Thank you, I hear. Get patience. Everything will get better. I didn't know. Go and drum tonight." That night--come and see--every place we passed in Yendi people were saying, "Go and see the Tamale people." We were showing ourselves.

So, that is what I can tell you about Tora. We drummers have created so many rhythms. Some of them are creative, but the real things are there. You have to mix things together and make the dancers sweet. I usually say "baɲsim" [traditional knowledge] and "gɔlsigu" [personal style]. We have baɲsim and then we have gɔlsigu.

DL

Well, thank you very much for all your trouble to get the information and thank you for these interviews.

AL

Your welcome. Our old men are still there. They know the things, only we don't ask. If you hadn't asked me for Tora, I would never know it this well. Just the other day, I told one of my lunsu friends that you make me learn so much in my drumming. I think of you and I learn deep talks--thinking that you may need them. Yes, you make me ask for the things I didn't think to ask about. I go for them now.

DL

We are helping each other.

AL

It is very nice. Thank you.

END