

# **The Story of J̄erigu N-Dari O Salima, Appellation of Kar-naa Ziblim**

Told By Dolsi-naa Abubakari Lunna on March 15, 1999

Edited by David Locke

DL

It is Thursday evening, March 5th, 1999 at 19 Sagamore Avenue. Mike Fuerstein, David Locke and Abubakari Lunna are here. This is the eleventh and probably final session with Dolsi-naa Abubakari for students in my Tufts class, The Music of Africa. We are talking about a small selection of appellations of chiefs of Dagbon that are for riding horses.

Dolsi-naa Abubakari, we have heard that there is something in your country they call Jerigu N-Dari O Salima. We are asking you to inform us who is it for? What is its background?

AL

Jerigu N-Dari O Salima is for Kar-naa Ziblim. Kar-naa Ziblim's father bore plenty of children. Ziblim was junior, really junior.

DL

Was he what I have heard you call a "spoiled child," a youngest son?

AL

No. He was not the lastborn. His senior brothers were very big people--very rich. You know, in Africa, we love respect more than anything. If you have money and you make yourself proud, no one will come close to you. Even if you don't have money, but you think, "I am very big," and act proud, nobody will be your close friend. No one will respect a rich man who thinks, "I am a big man and proud of it," and does not move easily with other people. Ziblim was not like that. When he was young, Ziblim would go to participate whenever anything happened to a sub-chief under the chief of Karaga.

Whenever the chiefs close around Karaga had a family function like a naming ceremony or a funeral, he was there.

When his father, Kar-naa Mahami-bla, died, all his older brothers contested for the Kar-naa title. His senior brother was Kpigu-lana Alaasani. The second senior man was Son-lana Abulai. The third senior man was Zakpasi-lana Mahami. They were all rich men.

But Ziblim was just sitting back; he didn't contest for his father's chieftaincy. People visited him to give advice and asked, "Why? Your father's skin is down. You are qualified to contest for it." At that time, Ziblim was holding only a small chieftaincy.

Somebody had been made a sub-chief and that person had given Ziblim a chieftaincy. He was just a small chief, Taman-lana. When he said, "My chieftaincy is too small to contest for Karaga," people told him, "We are not concerned about that chieftaincy. Put your hand into the contest so that we can help you." When it came close to the week of his father Kar-naa's funeral, Ziblim sent his name to Yendi's elders. Everybody was surprised, "Why? Why? Why?"

When it came to the end of the funeral, the Karaga chiefs, the sons of the late Kar'-naa, went to Yendi to greet Yaa Naa Abudu Satan Korli. When they went, so also did Gushe-naa, Tugu-lana, Sunson-naa, Ga-naa, and others. According to my father, about seven big chiefs went to Yendi for this chieftaincy matter.

They all reached Yendi at the same time. Everyone sent his message to the Yaa Naa, telling him, "In the morning, we will come for greetings." You know, Gushe-naa is an important chief in Dagbon. So, in the early morning, the Yaa Naa sent a message to him, "Why have you come? What do you want? I didn't call you. I am not doing anything that requires you to be here. Is there any problem that you have come with many chiefs like this?" Gushe-naa sent his reply, "Yes. There is a problem. But first, please know that I came alone; I didn't bring any chiefs with me. Only after I arrived here did I hear that they all had come. I have come because of Taman-lana Ziblim. Among all of your children living in Karaga [sons of the dead Kar'-naa who are competing for the Karaga skin], he alone knows that I am Gushe-naa [is attentive to me, shows me respect]. If I am asleep, it is Ziblim who knows I am asleep, and if I am sick, it is Ziblim who knows I am

sick. Last week, I heard that he had sent his name to Yendi to ask for his father's skin. I have come to tell you that Ziblim is the one who has been taking care of me.

The Yaa Naa called for the Sunson-naa, "Come talk to me before I greet the Karaga contestants." The Sunson-naa went. Yaa Naa asked, "Why? Why are you here?" Sunson-naa said, "Father, I have come because of my younger brother Ziblim. I do nothing in my town of Sunson without Ziblim's participation. If I am crying, he will come sit and cry with me. If I am laughing, he will come sit and laugh with me. Last week we were in Karaga. He sent people to tell me that he has contested to become Karaga chief. I know that the title of Kar-naa is bigger than my title of Sunson-naa so maybe I should not talk, but I feel that if you give Karaga to Ziblim, it will be good. As you know, the towns of Karaga and Sunson share one line of defense. The way Ziblim respects me, he and I will be catching good things. We will have one plan for you. Our mouths will be one."

So, the Yaa Naa had heard from a second person. He sent for all the chiefs who had come to Yendi; each one said the same thing. Gushe-naa asked for permission to give an

idea to the Yaa Naa, "When the Karaga people come to greet you, tell the Karaga elders to go outside and then come back with the name of the person they want you to chose as Kar-naa." This Ziblim--all the Karaga sub-chiefs liked him because he respected them. He respected and he moved about. He didn't stay at home by himself. He didn't feel big just because his father was Kar-naa. When the Karaga delegation came, after the greetings the Yaa Naa said, " I am going inside to rest. Elders of Karaga, accompany the Karaga regent to his lodging house. When you come back again, bring me the name of the next Kar-naa." It was because all the people contesting were present that the Yaa Naa talked this way.

You know, the elders had the names of four contestants. Kpiri-lana Ziblim, the senior son, thought, "Because I am a big man they will chose me." Sona-lana Abulai felt they would chose him. Zaparsi-lana Mahami thought they would chose him. But Taman-lana Ziblim thought, "Oh. I have just made my father's funeral. Everyday the elders and I have been sitting together." It was at this point that the elders set their trap. The elders of Karaga sent two people to tell the Yaa Naa, "For us, we are only looking at one person. If our Yaa Naa will give us Taman-lana Ziblim, we will be happy." Yaa Naa said, "OK.

Go and tell this to Gushe-naa. Hear what he has to say. His talk is good." The Karaga elders went to greet Gushe-naa and told him, "We are looking at Taman-lana Ziblim as our next Kar'-naa." Gushe-naa was happy.

So, the Yaa Naa sent kola to Taman-lana Ziblim [as sign of being chosen]. The brothers got in a very, very bad mood. They thought, "We have a lot of things, but no one minds us. They have given the chieftaincy to our younger brother." Yes, they gave the Kar-naa title to Ziblim. According to drummers, the man liked to dance. The Yaa Naa sent for him after afternoon prayers. The Yendi elders put the Karaga chief's gown and red cap on him. He became very happy. For him, even before they had done everything, he gave his proverb. He stood up and told the drummers, " Jerigu n-dari o salima. Yendana n-dari o jilima." He himself said, " Jerigu n-dari o salima," and answered, "Yendana n-dari o jilima."

DL

He put the proverb to music by himself?

AL

By himself! Then, the drummers started polishing it. At first, they played exactly what he had said, "den den den diyan den den / den den den deyan dan dan." After they had left the chief's palace and were at home, the drummers started creating more. "Ashikul' dapala Jerigu n-dari o salima," "bidibi bi bidibi bidi." It sounded nice. The drummers told him, "Ziblim kasajisa, Ziblim kasajisa, Ziblim kasajisa." In Dagbani, "kasajisa" means "a person who never sits." They were telling him, "Ziblim, you never sit. That is why you get your respect." So, that was the day Jerigu N-Dari O Salima started.

So, this is the story of what brought Jerigu N-Dari O Salima. Ziblim's big brothers had money, but they never went to functions and showed respect. Because they were rich, they felt, "If something happens we can send money." Ziblim didn't have much money, but he gave respect. That is the meaning of Jerigu u N-Dari O Salima.

DL

Now, you have already explained to me what it means, but we haven't said the English translation of the proverb during this session yet.

AL

The English means, "A foolish man uses money buying gold. A wise man uses himself buying respect." I think you get that. It is a proverb. He doesn't mean that his brothers are fools, but if you know, "If I do this it will be good," and you don't do it, then you have fooled yourself. The brothers had money. If people in the community were doing something, they were able to go. They could even send people to participate in their name, but they never thought of that. Ziblim had been thinking, "Oh. My brothers are richer and older than me. Let me give myself to people. If not, when my father dies, how will I be able to challenge for his title? Let me give myself to people." So, he sold himself and they paid him respect.

DL

Then, can you say again how the proverb goes into the drum?

AL

The proverb comes on leading luja, "Ashikul' dapala jerigu n-dari o salima," and the other lunsu answer, "Yendan' n-dari o jilima."

Lead Luja

Jerigu n-dari o salima.  
Ziblim kasajisa.  
Salima jerigu n-dari o salima  
Gbunbiri lɛli m-bala la

Answer Drums

Yendan' n-dari o jilima.  
Yendan' n-dari o jilima.  
Yendan' n-dari o jilima.  
Yendan' n-dari o jilima.

I forgot that last one. The drummers told him, "You are now going to sit like a lion. You are now going to sit in a lion's place." The drummers answered, "den den den diyan dan dan."

DL

Could I ask you just to sing the Dagbani on the answering luja one more time?

AL

The leading lunja comes, "[Dagbani, then vocables]" and the other drummers answer,

"[vocables]." If a chief who knows how to ride is on horseback, the horse will be

displaying. Or, if he is walking, you will see him moving himself like he is dancing.

Yes, people dance on this one. It is very good for dancing. You will like it when

someone who dresses well dances to this appellation--who knows how to turn his body

and who knows how to pick up his feet to the rhythm.

DL

Mike, I will briefly retell you the story to make sure you understood what Dolsi-naa said.

Karaga is one of the major towns in Dagbon, a leading town like Tolon. There was a

chief of Karaga who had a very large family with many sons. Ziblim, the person whose

praise name we are talking about, was one of his younger sons. The elder brothers were

prosperous and gained prominent chieftaincy positions underneath the main chief. The

younger boy just was a relatively minor sub-chief, but his personal character was very energetic, very interested and compassionate towards others. Whenever there was a problem or a celebration--something good happened, something bad happened--he would be with the people. He was a man-of-the-people type.

Eventually it came to pass that his father died. In Dagbon, when a chief dies, a son who is eligible and interested sends his name to the Yaa Naa, the paramount chief, to inform him that he is interested in being considered as a candidate for the vacant chieftaincy.

The Yaa Naa decides whom to appoint. The story went that the younger man, Ziblim, at first didn't put his name in the running, but towards the last minute, he put his name in.

So, decision time came. Many chiefs from other important towns went to Yendi to advise the Yaa Naa to chose Ziblim. They advised the Yaa Naa that he should consider giving Ziblim the Karaga chieftaincy because of his character, personality, and behavior.

The Yaa Naa gave the elders of Karaga, the inner circle or council of elders that advise the Kar-naa, the opportunity to say who they wanted. They also recommended that the junior man be given the chieftaincy rather than the older brothers. And it came to pass

that the Yaa Naa indeed gave the position to the younger man, the one everybody advised was the right choice.

The time came to announce the Yaa Naa's choice. This sort of communication happens in a formal area at the palace. When Ziblim was told, he rose up in front of everybody and started to musically relate the proverb, "A foolish man uses money to buy gold. A wise man sells himself and buys respect." The musicians took his words and put them into drumming form. This became the appellation that is affiliated to his name when he rides on horse.

Dolsi-naa, does that sound like the correct story to you?

AL

Yes. That is what I said.

DL

Mike now is the time for your questions. Is there anything you were thinking to ask about this story?

MF

Thank you. Is this appellation played only for the descendants of that chief?

AL

It is played for everybody. Every chief has loving supporters. Every chief's appellation not only is for him. Anyone who loves him can ask a drummer, "Play this chief's appellation for me."

MF

So, that extends to his descendants as well?

AL

Yes, drummers can also play the appellation for them. If I myself am going to tell stories of the Yaa Naas, do you know what I do to make people feel like I am a good drummer?

Let's say I have selected Naa Abudu Satan Korli. When I am talking his history, I tell the audience, "During his reign, the Naa Abudu put Ziblim as chief at Karaga." Then, I will add more, telling about other sub-chiefs. But a typical drummer from Karaga will just

talk about the Karaga chief's house, telling who helped the different Yaa Naas in war, who never helped to fight, but came for the chieftaincy anyway. For each Kar'-naa, the drummer will name him, talk about how he became chief--who helped him become chief,

did he suffer before he become Naa, and, after he became Naa, was there anything dangerous that attacked him. Then, the drummer will count the years after he became

Naa until he died and then name his children, saying, "When he became Kar-naa and died, how many children were left?" For that question, his brother's sons and daughters

don't count--only his own children. If it was three, the drummer must say, "He bore three children, two women--one man," or if it was twenty, you say, "He bore twenty children."

You have to know all the children's names. If some of them became sub-chiefs, you have to know. If they did not become sub-chiefs, you have to say only his personal name.

After counting his children, you ask, "After this chief died, who followed him on the skin?" You call the name and ask again, "What happened to make this man chief??"

Then, you have to start the beginning of that person's story, saying, "When the chief died, these are the men who went to Yendi to contest for the position. This was the man who had the luck to get it." Or, "These are the people who came to help him get it."

DL

Dolsi-naa has been telling me that when chiefs are riding on horses, they use drum rhythms to make the horse riding full of display and artistic happiness. The drummers play the rhythms in sequence according to the history. At a certain point, this rhythm will be played. Whether its a Karaga chief riding the horse or not, if drummers are recounting the chiefs--

AL

--big chiefs--

DL

--the time for this praise name will come.

AL

Whenever lumsi are drumming a person may ask for this rhythm.

MF

Thank you.

DL

I have a question. Dolsi-naa, you have said that this is a sensible proverb that many people like. Is Jerigu N-Dari O Salima the appellation for many people? How does the drum talk go differently when you play it for a different person? How does the lun-daa change?

AL

Yes, many people think the proverb is good. Jerigu N-Dari O Salima is not only for Karaga. People have it in many areas of Dagbon. The drum talk doesn't change. The leading luŋa still plays "Jerigu n-dari o salima," but you can add the home title of the particular person for whom you are playing. The leading luŋa can be giving the praises of Kar'-naa Ziblim while the vocalist sings about the person's own house.

DL

Did Jerigu N-Dari O Salima exist before Kar-naa Ziblim, or was he the first person to have it?

AL

I think Kar-naa Ziblim was the first important chief who took it as his name. It is the praise of another chief, but drummers don't play that appellation--we just sing it, just talk the story.

DL

Another question--Do good guṅ-gṅ players improvise on this rhythm? Could you sing a how it might go?

AL

Yes, we improvise. But I want drummers in action before I show you. As for improvisation, if the rhythm is not going, you cannot improvise nicely. You have to be listening to the music, thinking how the timing of your improvisation should fit for someone to feel it nicely. If there is no music, improvisation will never sound good.

What you call "improvisation" is what we call "golsigu." You say, "Music without talk" and I say "Nonsense music." For me, if we are drumming together—please--drum the proper talk. If you improvise, play something to make your hand good, but it should go with the talk. If there is no talk, I will get mad at you because you are disturbing my mind.

DL

Let me make life difficult by asking another question. In Jerigu N-dari O Salima the guṅ-gṅ plays "koko ki ko koko ki ko." How does that say, "Yendan' n-dari o jilima"? To me, the language is being forced onto the guṅ-gṅ because I don't hear that "koko ki ko koko ki ko" comes close to "Yendan' n-dari o jilima." This is something in between improvisation and talk, something like " gṅlsigu talk."

AL

The guṅ-gṅ is saying, "Yendan' n-dari o jilima." Because he can't squeeze the drum to get the melody, he has to play "koko ki ko koko ki ko." For me, I hear it because I understand how guṅ-gṅ talks. Guṅ-gṅ is not a proper talking drum; it answers the leading luṅa's talk with "hitting stick" and "tossing stick" technique. It is not gṅlsigu. You have to toss the stick according to the talk.

DL

[beats guṅ-gṅ part on leg]

AL

That is "Yendan' n-dari o jilima." Do you remember yesterday when your students were playing "dedede de diyan dan deyan" on luḡa? I said, "No. You are copying guḡ-gḡ. Guḡ-gḡ cannot talk properly, which is why the drummer tosses the stick to get the sound. But those who had the luḡa drums, which can talk correctly for somebody to understand, were making the language badly. Instead of "Yendan' n-dari o jilima," they were saying, "dededen." The talk is not "Yenadana."

DL

Yes. But that is how I hear the guḡ-gḡ. It is mixing up the thing to make it musically enjoyable. To me, guḡ-gḡ is making the thing sound musically happy.

AL

[laughs] No. I am saying that guḡ-gḡ should be answering. If I am listening to it, I need to hear the proper talk. Yesterday, the way the student took his stick down from the chahira didn't make the talk complete.

DL

But why doesn't the guṅ-gṅ play, "kṵ kṵ kṵ kik kṵ kṵ?"

AL

If you play " kṵ kṵ kṵ kik kṵ kṵ," it is the same thing, but it can't be--

DL

Are you saying that if answer luṅa and guṅ-gṅ play the same rhythm is it boring because it is just a one-way sound?

AL

It is boring. It is a one-way sound.

DL

And "koko ko koko ti ko" is a more happy sound?

AL

Ah hah.

END