

# **The Story of Suligu, Appellation of Diari-lan' Bukali**

Told by Dolsi-naa Abubakari Lunna, March 29, 2002

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AL

The rhythm we call "Suligu" in Dagbani is an appellation of a chief of Diari. The proper name they gave to him was Diari-lan' Bukali. Because of this appellation, if you ask today's young drummers in Dagbon for which person we play Suligu, they will not know the real name. They will say "Diari-lan' Suligu." [laughs] That man was a very, very strong warrior of the Yaa Naa. Diari-lan' Bukali had a very nice drummer who composed this song because of his chief's behavior.

In Dagbani "Suligu" means "hawk." Any place Diari-lana Bukali would pass, he would kill many people. "[Dagbani; see below]"

lead luṇa call

to to to

to zam buyli dapala

Son of Naa Zanjina

mani mini mini ηuni kpuri

I am thinking he takes

mani mini mini ni buyli noo

I am thinking he takes the god's fowl

The drummer is saying, "As for my chief, he even can take the property of dead people and give it to fetish,"--you know, we call land god "buyli"--or, "He can take the fetish's property and give it to dead people." How do you say "dead bodies" in English?

DL

Ghosts?

AL

Not ghosts. When you dream about somebody who has died, how do you call that?

DL

You are trying to say "ancestors."

AL

Ancestors! The appellation says, "He can take property of a land god and give it to ancestors." After his leading drummer composed this song, Diari-lan' Bukali cooled down a bit. This man was a chief during the time of Naa Zanjina. That is why we play "To zam buyli dapala." "Zam buyli" is one of appellations of Naa Zanjina. The appellation goes, "[AL vocalizes the leading luṅa part; see below]," and then the answer luṅa people play, "[AL vocalizes the answer luṅa part; see below]." You see? "[AL vocalizes more lead luṅa and answer luṅa drumming; see below.]"

answer luṅa response

Mani mini o n-kpoi

I think he took

Hoi

Hey

Buyli noo ku o kpoi

He took and killed the god's fowl

Zami kpemba la

It is for the ancestors.

lead luṅa fill [during response]

Kaya buni, kaya buni

Property of a weak person

lead luṣa verse

Mani mini mini ṣuni ku o ku gba

I am thinking it is he who killed the gods'  
fowl

lead luṣa verse

Mani mini-mini ṣuni po

I am thinking he took it

Mani mini-mini

I am thinking

Ti buyli noo ku o ku gba

He killed the gods' fowl

lead luṣa verse

Bi yeri ma jọyujọy

People gossip a lot about me

Ku kari ma

That cannot sack me

Tiṣ ni ka m-beni

I will be there in town

Diari-lan' Bukali took a fowl belonging to a land god and the people asked him why. He said, "I will give it to the dead people. You are keeping it to give to your fetish, but I give to the ancestors. They are all the same."

DL

I thought Suligu had something to do with a hawk taking a dog's bone? Is that a different appellation?

AL

That is a different appellation. It isn't like Suligu at all. We play that one for a chief of Kumbungu.

DL

OK, good. You were saying that this Suligu chief killed a lot of people?

AL

A lot of people.

DL

Dagomba people? Other people? Was he like Naa Yakubu?

AL

He was not like Naa Yakubu. You know, during that time, we didn't have as many things as we do now. The main wealth was cows and people. If I was alive back then, people would think of me as a very rich man. I would be a rich man! Right now, in the whole of Tamale, there is only one house that can challenge mine in drummers. When I need a drumming group, I don't need anybody's son to come and help me to make my music complete. In my own house, I have people who can play guŋ-gɔŋ, people who can play leading luŋa, and I have people who can sing. If somebody wants to disturb my mind, he would come close to people in my family and destroy some of them. That would make me be bad, you see. In the olden days, if you had plenty of cows, your enemy would just come and kill you, take all your property, and leave your family.

These are the things Diari-lan' Bukali had been doing. Diari-lan' Bukali did not eat alone.

He sent loot to the paramount chief. Imagine the Yaa Naa in his palace, when one day

Diari-lan' Bukali would bring something to him. Or, instead of going himself, Diari-lan'

Bukali would tell one of his men, "Take this property to Yaa Naa." You see? Even if he

thought Diari-lan' Bukali had stolen it, the Yaa Naa would not ask, "Where did you get

this?" As for a chief, whenever someone gives him something, he takes it with no

questions asked. So, that is what Diari-lan' Bukali was like.

Diari-lan' Bukali also is part of the story of the wars between the Dagombas and the

Gonjas. He is one of the people who were with Naa Andani Siyli for his battle with

Kumpatia (see History Story of Naa Zangina, and History Story of Dɔyɔ). That was our

last war with the Gonjas. After Naa Siyli's fight with Kumpatia, the Gonjas never

thought to challenge us Dagombas again. Diari-lan' Bukali was one of the main warriors

with Naa Siyli.

DL

So, during Sambanluḡa, when drummers tell the story of that war between the Dagombas and the Gonjas--

AL

--this man is among Naa Siḡli's warriors. Even, he should be there if I am playing the history of Naa Zanjina, because it is Naa Zanjina who was Yaa Naa when Kumpatia started to come into Dagbon to try and collect back the land we had taken from the Gonjas.

At that time, Naa Zanjina wasn't living in Yendi. He was across the river in Togo, in Sabali. When Naa Zanjina heard that Kumpatia's army was coming towards him, he crossed the river back to Yendi. At Yendi, Naa Zanjina consulted the elders. His senior brothers each said, "No! I won't come to your aid. You are supposed to be very wise. After all, that is why you became Yaa Naa ahead of us. Now use your wisdom. Fight and get back our land from the Gonjas." Do you see that none of his brothers would help!

There remained one person to ask, a man who did not have the same father. It was his uncle's son, Naa Andani Siyli. So, Naa Zanjina started sending elders to Naa Siyli.

Elders went one-by-one to ask him to help Naa Zanjina. After an elder finished talking, Naa Siyli would act annoyed and be shouting. Then, the elder would become afraid and change his message, saying, "I haven't come to ask you to fight Kumpatia. I have come to you because I don't want to die. I will remain here."

Naa Zanjina asked Diari-lana to go to Naa Siyli. Naa Zanjina said, "Go and tell Andani that I have been calling for his help, but he is not bothering with me. Tell him that if the time comes when he is looking for the chief's hat, he should look in borla [see below]. If he is coming to look for the chief's walking stick, he will find it in borla. If he is coming to look for the chief's gown, he should find it in borla."

DL

What is "borla?"

AL

"Borla" means "the place they throw garbage."

DL

Why did Naa Zanjina say that? I don't understand.

AL

Naa Zanjina meant that Kumpatia was going to kill him and throw all the Yaa Naa regalia in the garbage if Naa Siyli refused to help.

DL

I see. Kumpatia was closing in on Yendi?

AL

Kumpatia's army was getting closer and closer to Yendi, but Naa Siyli had seized all the Dagomba sub-chiefs who were supposed to fight. If the Gonjas captured the palace of our paramount chief, how could Naa Siyli ever find the things he needed to become Yaa Naa?

DL

Right! I see.

AL

Diari-lana Bukali had no fear. [laughs] Straightaway, he rode his horse to Naa Andani Siyli's town. He got down. Before he gave Naa Zanjina's message, he swore an oath on Naa Siyli's father and mother. He said, "If you refuse the matter I am going to tell you, your father should kill you. If you don't listen to what I am going to say to you, your mother should kill you. Listen to my words and join us in battle. If you don't see me at your front and you see me at your back, then take my head."

Diari-lana Bukali told Naa Siyli, "Naa Zanjina said that I should tell you to remember the day you were in Mampurugu to compose your appellation. Remember that the Mampurugu chief told you, 'The small child who has a good hand kills an old man's goat and eats all the best meat--leaving only the inside meat for the old man. But the old man will not vex.' Naa Zanjina says to you, 'Take my sandals. If I die, you can be Yaa Naa.'

So, today I am telling you--if the time comes when you are coming to look for the chief's sandals, look in the borla. That is what Naa Zanjina says to you, 'If I die and you want the chief's walking stick, find it in borla.'"

Diari-lana Bukali told all this to Naa Siyli. Naa Siyli smiled. He laughed. The chief drummer for Naa Siyli spoke up, "My lord, all these years that I have been with you, I have never seen you smile. Now you hear these matters and you are smiling! Why?" Then, Naa Siyli told his drummer, "A man should never get annoyed when he hears about death. A man laughs if someone tells him, 'I am coming to kill you.' If something is troubling you, you have to laugh at it. A man never laughs over happiness. A man laughs at trouble." Then, Naa Siyli told all the people, "Today, because of you Diari-lana, I will go to fight for our Yaa Naa."

That is some of the story about Diari-lana Bukali.

DL

So, Suligu praises him because he is so strong.

AL

--so strong.

DL

Many appellations have to do with how a person became chief, but this one is about his character. It is not so much about the troubles he faced in order to become chief.

AL

Yes. Some appellations start from a person's behavior before he became a chief. Others start from the man's behavior after he becomes a chief. Suligu is about Diari-lana Bukali's character. He doesn't fear anything.

END