

The Story of Nanto Nimdi, Appellation of Naa Yakubu

Told by Abubakari Lunna, March 2 and 6, 2001

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DL

Dolsi-naa, we have been playing some appellations for many years. Today, I ask you for the story of why linsi play them. They include Naa Yakubu Nanto Nimdi, Naa Andani Naani Goo, Naa Abudulai Naybieyu, and Naa Alaasani Zim Taai Kulga--Tipariga. The earliest chief--Nanto Nimdi--isn't that where we should start?

Thank you for your willingness to talk about this. I am now giving you the microphone.

AL

How do you want it? Do you want the rhythms or the story?

DL

I want the story.

AL

Naa Yakubu was the greatest chief. He got help from his sister's son, Yelizoli-lana Idantoma.

DL

Why do people praise him as the "greatest?"

AL

During his chieftaincy it was very peaceful in Dagbon. He didn't go to war. When Naa Yakubu became chief he tried not to be "looking with only one eye," to be looking out for only one person. He cared for everybody. He took anybody who came to him like his brother or his son. That was how his rivals were able to get to him. Yes.

When Naa Kulunku died and the kingmakers met, they chose Naa Asumani to be Yaa Naa. Many lumsi call him Naa Zoli and many people say Naa Asuman' Zoli. On the day when they brought him out for the public, Yelizoli-lana Idantoma was present. Naa

Asuman' Zoli and Naa Yakubu were brothers; Idantoma's mother was Naa Yakubu's sister.

DL

One mother, one father?

AL

No--one father, Naa Andani Jenbariga. At that time, Yelizoli-lana Idantoma's mother was a ladies' chief, Kpatu-naa Lahimi.

Yelizol'-lan' Idantoma left Yendi--going to Yelizoli--and he had to pass Kpatuya.

Because one of his uncle's had become Yaa Naa, he thought his mother would be happy.

So, he went to greet his mother. He greeted her with happiness, "I have come to greet you. We have had good luck. Our family has a Yaa Naa again. Naa Asuman' Zoli, my uncle, is Yaa Naa."

The mother spit and said, "Chiligu." Which child is this? Go to my room and bring yesterday's food for Idantoma to chop and then go on his way." "Chiligu" means "shit."

"I am in shame. I suffered for nothing." Those were the words the mother gave to him.

"I gave my vagina to your father, who was just one of the Muslims and not a prince, and have given birth to you for nothing. Soothsayers told me that if I followed your father, we would have a child who would help me to become big. Do you think the Yendi skin is for Asumani? It is not for Asumani! It is for your real uncle, Yakubu. They refused to give to it to Yakubu and you are happy for that? Do you think Asumani will die before Yakubu?"

DL

In the lumsi knowledge of Dagomba history, do you go into details about how the mother came to marry the father, the Muslim? Did Andan' Jenbariga command her to marry him?

AL

The father of Idantoma was a Dagomba, but in drumming language we don't talk details about their marriage. If a mother's son does something, then you go into details. Many drummers know that Idantoma fought Naa Asumani, but they don't know why--what Naa Asumani had done to him. He is Idantoma's uncle so how can they fight? But some of us go deep--into people--and hear what the mother told Idantoma. We don't talk about how a chief's mother marries if it is not important to the chief's story. But when we are playing Sambanluḡa--the chiefs we can talk much about them--you have to know the details.

Idantoma said "Why do you abuse me in public like that? Do you think I, Idantoma, will eat yesterday's food? Oh mother, you didn't tell me early enough. If you had told me earlier, we would have found ways to make my uncle Yakubu Yaa Naa. If you think you are going to be ashamed, I will show you that I am somebody. I will go home and what you want--I will give it to you." He sent for one of his people and said, "Go back.

Before all the elders have left Yendi, go back and inform the new Yaa Naa and the elders

of Dagbon that I am coming to fight them because they refused to make my uncle

Yakubu to be the Yaa Naa." The man went.

The messenger told Zohe-naa and Zohe-naa told M-ba Duyu to bring the new Yaa Naa out. The Yaa Naa called all the elders and informed them, "Idantoma says he is coming to kill me and let you people put Yakubu to be Yaa Naa." When he said so, some of the chiefs said, "Can Idantoma do anything? What can Idantoma do?" The leading chief of the kingmakers, Gushe-naa, said, "If a blind man tells you, 'I will throw a stone at you,' don't say, 'He is blind--he can't have a stone.' Maybe he is stepping on that stone. Don't say that Idantoma cannot do anything. Everyone knows he is a strong person. We don't know the full reason why he is coming to fight us."

The messenger took Gushe-naa's words to Idantoma. He returned him to Yendi. "Go and tell them that I am not coming to fight the kingmakers. It is only the Yaa Naa whom I don't like. I know he is my uncle, but I don't want him to be there. I want Yakubu, my other uncle, to be Yaa Naa. The kingmakers should take their hands from this matter."

And Gushe-naa said, "We cannot take our hands from it because we are the ones to make

the Yaa Naa. That is our duty. If you are fighting the Yaa Naa, you are fighting us."

When they sent the messenger back Idantoma said, "If that be the case--prepare. I am coming."

When you go to Yendi, Yelizoli is east--where the sun comes from. According to the elders, one Friday morning at the time everybody is getting up, people in that area saw plenty of monkeys walking through the town, sitting on horses, coming towards people--going. Dog and monkey don't get along, but no dogs came out; they all ran to their rooms. The monkeys walked through Yendi and stopped at the area of Yendi we call Konsufong. It is inside Yendi now, but at that time, according to my teachers, it was far from Yendi. So, the monkeys surrounded it--crying--shouting--up to night.

The Yaa Naa came out and told people, "What I saw today, I never saw before. No elder can tell me that a monkey has walked through town before. And today--plenty of monkeys! Where from them?" The people said, "Maybe they are Idantoma's people. We should prepare."

Coming to the next morning, they heard drumming. Idantoma sent a messenger to tell the Yaa Naa to leave the palace. "I don't want to come there because we never fight in the Yendi palace. If you are a man like me, come." So, the Yaa Naa came. In fact, Naa Asumani had helpers--he had helpers--and then they fought. Naa Asumani's forces took the Bimbila road and Idantoma followed him there. They fought across the Kulpini River. Idantoma covered the Yendi side and was pushing Naa Asumani back toward the Tamale side. They fought from morning up to sunset. By night, Idantoma had pushed Naa Asumani all the way to Mion. Then, they slept.

Naa Asumani sent for more helpers. "Dagomba people, if you don't help me, this man is going to defeat me." All his warriors came out--Gushe-naa, Kumbun-naa, Tolon-naa, Diari-lana--they all came. They were able to back cross Idantoma on one side and push him. He was trying to cover them and they were trying to cover him so that they could send Yaa Naa Asumani back inside Yendi. Together, they pushed Idantoma back to the Kulpuni River.

Coming close to Yendi--close to where Yendi airport is now--Idantoma was able to kill Naa Asumani. According to my teachers, no one knew the way and manner he passed Gushe-naa, Kumbun-naa, Tolon-naa, and Diari-lana. They had surrounded Naa Asumani and Idantoma didn't kill them--all these people! Before they saw anything, Naa Asumani was telling them, "Oh, people, Idantoma is killing me," and they saw him down off his horse. Idantoma said, "Dagbon elders, can you stop the fight? What I wanted, I have got it. Yaa Naa Asumani is no more. Whether you kill me or not, you have to select a new Yaa Naa. But I am telling you--None of you can kill me. I am going. If you finish the custom and don't make my uncle Yakubu to be Yaa Naa--I will be back."

They prepared to take Naa Asumani to the Yendi palace to bury him. According to my knowledge--according to my research--Naa Asumani refused. Yes, he refused. [DL looks skeptical.] Ask me why, because I also asked my teachers.

DL

How can a dead body refuse?

AL

Uh huh! You know, one person cannot carry a dead body. When they put him on the stretcher and tried to lift it from the ground--they couldn't. Many people took hold, but couldn't take him from the ground. They were there for more than a day and on the following day the elders said, "He doesn't want to go back to the palace. Let's bury him here." They buried him on the spot where they killed him. They made the funeral and built a room on his grave. The room is still there. When it needs repair, they fix it. At first, they didn't allow people to go, but I know the way to pass so that you can see the grave. It is still there.

After the funeral there was no way any prince would come and say, "I want to be Yaa Naa." Apart from Naa Yakubu no one came. They made Naa Yakubu the next Yaa Naa. When they brought him out Naa Yakubu said that he is nantoo. Nantoo means poison [anthrax]. He kills meat, but no one can eat it. Naa Yakubu said he is the princes' poison--[Dagbani] "I am a poison to princes." [Dagbani] "The prince who is strong, who has protection, can pass and be away from my poison. If you do not have proper protection, don't come near. You will die."

He said that because his nephew was a strong person. At the time of the war, he wasn't yet the Yelizoli-lana. He was just called Afa Idantoma, a Muslim like his father.

DL

Do people think that his Muslim knowledge was part of his strength?

AL

Yes. Even if I don't ask my teachers, I am sure. We have so many kinds of protection in the Koran. In my knowledge, a proper Muslim can consult many people--you will get help to do that.

According to my teachers, after they made Naa Yakubu the Yaa Naa, Idantoma became very strong. He alone wanted to have every chieftaincy in Dagbon. When some drummers sing for Idantoma's family, they put him to more than twenty chieftaincies. But what my teachers told me--he covered seven gates--seven chiefs--for him alone. Idantoma asked Naa Yakubu, "Uncle, can you make me a chief because people just call

me Afa Idantoma." Naa Yakubu put him to be the Gbunbaliga chief. Then, the Kpatinga chief died and Idantoma told his uncle, "I want to be Kpatin-lana." Naa Yakubu said, "What about Gbunbaliga?" Idantoma said, "Don't give Gbungbaliga to anyone. I want to occupy Kpatin-lana and Gbungbaliga." Then, the Nesa chief died. When Idantoma was fighting, the Nesa chief was very strong. Idantoma told his uncle, "I want to be Nesa-lana." Naa Yakubu said, "Nesa-lana is small chieftaincy. It is smaller than the chieftaincies you have now." Idantoma said, "Yes, but I want to take care of those people." Naa Yakubu gave it to him. After Nesa, the Pigu-lana died. Idantoma said, "I want to be Pigu-lana," and the uncle gave it. After Pigu--Zabzugu-lana died and Idantoma said, "I want to be Zabzugu-lana." After Zabzugu, then Yelizoli-lana died. He said, "I want to be Yelizoli-lana." They gave him Yelizoli.

DL

The way Idantoma wanted to get so many gates for himself--had that ever happened before in Dagbon?

AL

Yes. I know stories of many chiefs who did it. Drummers often say that Naa Gariba occupied all the skins--all the cities of Dagbon. But according to my knowledge from my teachers, he occupied nine chieftaincies. Another chief, Naa Luro--Naa Luro occupied seven chieftaincies--seven gates including Yendi. If drummers want to prolong the story, they put more than more than fifty into him. Many chiefs did it.

DL

Do people think it is bad when a person tries to have many gates?

AL

They think it is bad, but if the person is strong--

DL

--what can you do?

AL

Yes.

When Naa Yakubu gave Yelizoli to Idantoma, the elders of Dagbon got together and said, "Princes of Yendi, we are telling you that if Idantoma is alive when Naa Yakubu dies, he will break our custom. He will want to be Yaa Naa. A grandson of a Yaa Naa has never been Yaa Naa before. People--don't sleep!"

Right after they said that, Naa Yakubu became a crazy man. As for that, my teacher said that he could not say exactly how. He said that the Yendi princes--they can't kill the Yaa Naa so they spoiled him. They made Naa Yakubu become a madman. Then, he began doing bad things. He didn't kill his own sons, but he killed other people's sons. He was going through towns, burning people's houses. When he was passing by a house with a big entry hall, he would say, "Whose house is this?" If they didn't say, "Oh, it is your own son's house," he would burn it. If he saw some child who was looking nice, he said, "Whose child is that?" If they didn't say, "Oh, it is your son," he would kill him.

DL

Before Yakubu became Yaa Naa was he known to be a killer?

AL

No. After he became a chief--when he lost his mind--then he become a child killer.

Naa Yakubu was made to be a madman. When a crazy man is doing bad things, we put him in handcuffs. But they cannot put a Yaa Naa in handcuffs. It is against our custom.

They found wise people who could quickly tell him something to confuse him. And they sent strong people--if he was going to burn a house, they could take control of him without actually fighting him. That is what they did to Naa Yakubu after he became mad.

DL

In one of the history books I read, it said that they put a silver chain on Yakubu--that they chained him in the market. Do some drummers say that? Is that part of your story? I am asking about something I read.

AL

They are telling lies. We don't handcuff a chief. They guarded Naa Yakubu with strong people who could keep him safe without hurting him. That is why some drummers say, "silver chain." In my knowledge--I say, "my knowledge"--according to my teachers, that is why people say, "silver chain." How can you use silver to make a chain? They never chained him.

DL

Then, I would say it is the author's fault because he didn't have the patience to ask enough people before he wrote it in the book. Was Naa Yakubu on the skin for some years before he became crazy?

AL

Yes. So, many years--according to people he was Yaa Naa for more than eighteen to nineteen years or twenty years. The crazy time--he stayed like that only for four to five years.

The Yaa Naa princes and grandchildren didn't want Idantoma to be alive when Naa Yakubu died. From what I heard from my teachers, nobody would have been able to tell him, "You are not going to be Yaa Naa. No grandson has ever become Yaa Naa." One day they grouped together and said they were going to fight Idantoma. They fought him after Naa Yakubu was a madman because the chiefs who helped fight Idantoma would not have gone if he hadn't become crazy. Naa Yakubu would have called to talk to them. But he wasn't having his mind and didn't know anything that was happening.

So, they tried. They fought him and he was beating them. [laughs] Idantoma fought them through Tamale--coming back--they followed him back toward Yendi. Coming on the Yendi road, they killed him. After they killed Idantoma, sometime passed--I didn't ask how many years--and then Naa Yakubu also died. No one killed him. We drummers say, "His time has come for death."

That is the story I know about Naa Yakubu. The elders--no, the princes of Dagbon, grouped together and fought Idantoma and they killed him. We call that war Naabi Kura, Yaa Naa's children's war--uh huh--Naabi Kura.

DL

Did Naa Andani and Naa Abudu fight in that war?

AL

Yes. Everybody was involved. The people who fought Idantoma were Naa Yakubu's children--elder chiefs' children. You know, people supported Idantoma and only he knew the way he got them. You remember that one day there were monkeys? Idantoma turned animals into people to fight against them.

END