

# **The Story of Nakohi-waa, Dance-Drumming for Butchers**

Told by Dolsi-naa Abubakari Lunna, May 21, 1993

Edited by David Locke

DL

It is Friday, May 21, 1993 at 19 Sagamore Avenue, Medford, MA--David Locke and

Abubakari Lunna. Abu, tell me about Nakohi-waa.

AL

Just like our grandfather Bizun started the lunsu drumming, butchers in Dagbon started with one of our Yaa Naas. Naa Dimani is the first butcher. He is the grandfather of all the butcher families.

It happened that we had a traveler from Hausa land, which now is in Nigeria. During the olden days, if you are traveling and don't know anybody in the town, you go to chief's house. This man told the chief that he is a butcher. He started doing his work in Yendi. You know, we have what we call the "butchers' tree"--the place they sit and kill the cows.

Whenever this man went to work, several boys followed him, including one of the young princes [the young Naa Dimani]. The Hausa man used to cut the meat and put it on a plate for the boys to go around and sell. At first, people didn't know the name to call this man. No one knew the Hausa man's name, so they called him "Baaba." Baaba means father. He also was called "Naa Kōhiwa." "Naa" means chief; "kōhiwa" is trader. Because he was trading at the chief's house, they call him "Nakōhiwa," "the chief's trader."

The young prince and his friends started to know how to do the work. The Hausa man grew old in Dagbon. When the old man was preparing for death, he gathered all the tools, the knives and other things. He presented them to the boy and told him, "When I die, continue my work. Don't leave it." The boy accepted the tools. The boy became an adult man. He kept the tools, but was not using them to do the work. In our area, princes don't want to do jobs like that. When he became Yaa Naa, he started getting troubles.

DL

Can you talk about what kind of troubles Naa Dimani was having?

AL

If we are going to talk about Naa Dimani, we must make an animal sacrifice. We don't usually talk about all the details. For that question, I can just say that he started to be facing people coming forward to fight him. When he got the Yaa Naa title, people tried to fight against him. The whole area of Dagbon was involved.

DL

It was war--not sickness or problems conceiving children?

AL

Right. His brother, who we call Yenkana, wanted to be chief. When Naa Dimani got the Yendi skin, Yenkana became vexed and started to bring trouble. He took people from Dagbon and went to sit in the Gonja land--planning with Gonja people to come and fight. These people invaded Dagbon to fight and collect part of Naa Dimani's land. Naa Dimani got people to help, he succeeded, and then everything became cool.

DL

I thought there would be family matters involved. If people don't want to talk about it, then don't.

AL

Since you have put this question to me, when I go home I will sit with Alaasani'-kpema and the Tolon-naa to see if there will be problems if I talk about this matter. It is a nice, nice story. I never know which stories need sacrifices before I tell them. I have to ask.

DL

Even that amount of information is very helpful.

AL

Naa Dimani tried to find out where those troubles were coming from. He went to the elders and soothsayers. They told him, "You accepted somebody's tradition before the person died. You have not been doing it. That is why you have been getting these troubles." Naa Dimani asked the elders, "Now what am I going to do?" They said, "You have to make a blood sacrifice to the knives and then start doing the work. After that, the troubles will leave you." Naa Dimani said, "I will do the work."

Naa Dimani had gotten troubles from the chiefs of Dagbon. Because they had made him suffer, he decided to trouble them in return. He summoned the elders and told them, "I will not start the butcher work with a house cow. Bring me a yuinga, a wild animal from the bush. Go to Sunson and tell the Sunson-naa to get a yuinga for me to sacrifice for the butcher's knives." He wanted a live bush cow, but he didn't tell them exactly what he wanted. He talked in proverbs.

DL

Why do you suppose Naa Dimani was making it difficult for the people to know what he meant by yuinga?

AL

When people started bringing the troubles toward him, not one chief came out to consult him and say, "This is happening. What are we going to do about it?" He himself had to call his elders, and only then did they go to the soothsayers. After he accepted what they told him, he said to himself, "Since the chiefs have made me suffer, then I will also make them suffer." The leader of the elders of Dagbon is the Gushe-naa. Naa Dimani called Gushe-naa and told him to tell all his elders that he wanted a yuinga. He didn't tell them, "I want bush cow." He told them, "I want yuinga," but nobody knew exactly what he meant. We have many animals in the bush. All the chiefs got together in Sunson.

DL

Where is Sunson in relation to Yendi?

AL

It is between Togo and Yendi. Before Naa Nyaysi became Yaa Naa, his uncle, Naa Nyaysi 's father junior brother, had started to sit on the Sunson skin. Because there are many animals, we say, "sul sɔŋ, sɔŋ ma," "help myself." There were seven or eight chiefs after Naa Nyaysi before Naa Dimani. This is not today's talk. It is a talk from long, long, long ago.

Dagbon didn't start in Ghana. We started in Mali, from Mali to Ivory Coast, and from Abidjan to the Wagadugu area. When Naa Nyaysi's father Sitobu was chief, our capital was at Biyem, near Bawku. Naa Nyaysi was a young boy like George [DL's son] and the father was old. Sitobu didn't want his brothers to kill Nyaysi and take the chieftaincy when he died, so he pushed his son away from him. It is not only these days that people started making kalabuli. [laughs] Naa Sitobu got the elders together--the kingmakers--talking to them about his plan, "This is what I want to do. What can I do for you to make you agree?" Because he did things for people, they didn't oppose his plan. The kingmakers said they couldn't do anything themselves, but that Naa Sitobu should do his best. So, Naa Sitobu's son Nyaysi traveled out from Biyem. We have three Yaa Naa's

graves there. The secondary school in the Bawku area is called Gbewaa Secondary School because of those graves.

Sunson is a big town with an important chieftaincy. The elders had brought their hunters to Sunson because that area has a great forest with big, big animals. The chief sent his hunters to the bush and they killed a bush cow. They brought it to Yendi. But Naa Dimani said, "This is not the yuinga I need." They said, "We thought you wanted a bush cow. We have brought it, but you refuse to accept it." Because he was the Yaa Naa they couldn't challenge him.

Then, the chiefs suffered. They tried many animals, but each time Naa Dimani said it was not what he needed. They brought what we call "kɔhu". He said, "No." They brought an elephant. He said, "No." They brought an antelope. He said, "No." They brought a deer. He said, "No." So, many animals! They killed so many animals and brought them to the Yaa Naa. He always said, "No." Finally they went back and were thinking, "Every time we go to bush and kill an animal, the chief refuses to accept it."



In Dagbon, we have guards and servants for the Yaa Naa whom we call the Naazoonima. [plural of "Naazoo"]. The Sunson-naa was the kind of person we call "too wise." He said, "Let us go to the Naazoos. Maybe they can get the chief to talk." He called one of Naazoos and made friends with him by promising him something, "I need to know what chief means by 'yuinga.' If I could learn something about it, I will do you a good deed. You are close to the chief. Please find out which yuinga he is calling for." One night, when the Naazoo was massaging the chief, he said, "As for you, you are wonderful! You have been calling for yuinga. Only you know the yuinga. No matter what animal, they bring you say, 'No, this is not the yuinga I need.' You are a nice friend to me, but I don't know what yuinga is. You haven't told me. Apart from you, nobody knows. What is yuinga at all?" Naa Dimani started laughing, "So, you don't know yuinga? A live bush cow--I want a live bush cow. I don't want a dead bush cow. People must get together and catch a bush cow alive. They must not kill it. That is my yuinga." The next day, this Naazoo brought out the information. He told what he had learned to the Zohe-naa, the leader of the Yaa Naa's servants. The Zohe-naa took it to Gushegu and told Gushe-naa. Gushe-naa told Sunson-naa. The Sunson-naa called his hunters and told them, "I know Naa Dimani's yuinga now. You must catch a bush cow alive.

We have something in Dagbon we call "zana," a trap. The hunters went into the bush and they set traps. Then, they found a herd of bush cows. During the olden times, they were plenty in the bush. The hunters were following them like they are going to shoot them-- pushing them toward the traps. A zana grabbed one bush cow. The hunters put rope on his head, ropes on its back legs, and rope on one front leg. There were people in front and in back. When the cow charged at a person in the front, the people in the rear pulled the ropes so that it would fall down. That was how they got the cow out of the bush. They brought it to Sunson. The Sunson-naa sent word to the Yaa Naa, "I am coming with your yuinga."

When they came to Yendi Naa Dimani asked, "How did you catch it? I want to know. How did you manage to bring a live bush cow to me?" Gushe-naa said, "[Dagbani]," "We got together and caught him." The Sunson-naa didn't want to tell him about the traps. He said, "Plenty of us got together and caught the yuinga." Naa Dimani said, "The yuinga didn't kill any one?" Sunson-naa said, "No one. Because we were many."

DL

Why didn't they want Naa Dimani to know that they used traps to catch the cow?

AL

They had brought many, many animals that he rejected. Maybe if they had said they used traps, he would have said, "I don't want a trapped cow." They were using their techniques so that he couldn't deny it for any reason.

Naa Dimani suspected that the Naazoo had revealed his secret. Naa Dimani asked, "Yi no wula," "How did you get to know yuinga?" Gushe-naa said, "A spirit bird cried out in the night while I was sleeping." "Buyli noonsi" are spirit birds. "The spirit bird told me."

DL

Does this mean Gushe-naa said that he learned about the yuinga in a dream?

AL

He was sleeping, so it is like a dream.

DL

Is there a deep meaning inside what Gushe-naa said about the god's bird?

AL

If he hadn't made up a story, Naa Dimani would have punished the Naazoo because nobody knew the secret except him. Gushe-naa didn't want to Naa Dimani to think badly toward the Naazoo so he said, "I was sleeping. The god's bird cried and told me."

Sunson-naa also spoke, "If you are with many people, you don't suffer too long. If you have friends, you will always come free from your troubles. Some of your friends will give you the right idea." At last, Naa Dimani accepted the bush cow they had brought.

DL

You said that the troubles had to do with civil war and that the Sunson-naa told Naa Dimani, "If you have friends you won't suffer. Your friend will tell you what you need to know." Is this part of the meaning of this story?

AL

Yes, the people of Dagbon should be united.

Naa Dimani sent for one of his boyhood friends who also had been helping Baaba, the Hausa butcher. The chief said, " I am Yaa Naa, but the soothsayers say I must be doing the job we learned from Baaba. I must continue doing that work so that my troubles will calm down. You know it as well as I do. I want to make you chief of the butchers."

DL

How did the friend respond?

AL

The Yaa Naa had spoken. He couldn't refuse. Naa Dimani said, "Look! I am going to make you Baaba. I am going to give you that name. Get people to do the work for me." Only instead of "Baaba" we say "Baba." Ever since that time, if you go to Yendi, Baba is

leader of butchers. That was the day Naa Dimani gave him the title Baba, the Yaa Naa's butcher.

Naa Dimani and Baba used that cow to start our Dagomba butchers' tradition. They killed it in the courtyard inside the palace, cut the meat, and put meat into a pan. Naa Dimani took the pan of meat around the palace compound to the doors of his wives' rooms. We call this kind of selling "pipihiya-pipihiya."

DL

What is pipihiya-pipihiya? Is it small trading?

AL

At that time, we used cowrie shells for money. Kobiga is one hundred, pihino is fifty, pipihiya is ten. That is why changing to British money was not hard for us. They did their money like we did. Naa Dimani started selling "pipihiya-pipihiya," "ten-ten."

People were saying, "Our chief has started his butcher work." In the Yaa Naa's compound, some rooms have three or four wives. Everybody came for her share. Some women put real money down, but some just pretended to pay. This has become part of the butcher tradition. If you come to the butcher shop and say, "I want to get meat on credit," they won't deny you. Whether or not they know you, they will give meat to you. Butchers should give meat to anybody who comes to buy on credit. The wives of Naa Dimani left the pan empty. Then, Naa Dimani washed his hands, and dressed in his chief's clothes. It is against the tradition to say that our Yaa Naa did that sort of work, so when lunsig sing this story in Sambanluḡa, we give it to Baba. Baba took meat from the first yuinga outside and started selling it.

DL

The chief brought the yuinga into the palace, killed it, prepared the meat, put it into the pan, and went around to the wives' doors. Were people surprised to see the chief do something like that?

AL

Yes. A chief cannot sell things or make trading. That is why he did inside the palace. He sat down in front of one of his wife's rooms, pretending that he had come from outside, "Meat! I am selling meat," "Nimdi! Damiya nimdi." He was using a fan to sack the flies.

Baba asked for help from an old friend who also had been with Baaba. Baba took the friend to see Naa Dimani and said, "I have asked our old friend to help me." The chief asked, "He is older than you. Even though you are younger, you are going to be his senior. How are we going to call him?" Baba said, "Do you remember that when he had sold all the meat, he would come back and tell Baaba, 'O kōhi naai, 'I sell finish.'" Then, Naa Dimani said, "His title will be Nakōhi-naa, chief of kōhi naai, 'I have sold finish.'"



That was when the title Nakohi-naa started. Baba helped the chief before Nakohi-naa came into the job so in the house of the Yaa Naa, Baba is senior. In our land whoever starts first is senior.

DL

What about in other towns in Dagbon?

AL

If you go to Yendi, Baba is the leader of the butchers. In other towns the leader of butchers is called Nakohi-naa. You see, the butcher's family in Yendi became large. Many people knew the work and began moving to other towns. When our Yaa Naa starts doing something, it quickly spreads around Dagbon, but Dagomba people don't try to compare themselves to the Yaa Naa. They don't use the same titles in other towns. They call the senior butcher Nakohi-naa and call the second person Baba. In the other towns they made their Nakohi-naa before they made their Baba. In Yendi, Baba is the leader of butchers, but in every other place Baba follows Nakohi-naa.

DL

Before the butcher's family started, how were the people getting meat in Dagbon?

AL

Have you forgotten that the person who started Dagbon was a hunter? It is only nowadays that some people are not hunting. In the olden days, every family had hunters. Some people hunted with bows and arrow, some people hunted with traps, and some people hunted with guns. We didn't call them nakohi; we called them hunters. Every hunter sold meat. At first, when our population was small, we liked bush meat more than house meat. Now our population is too big--more than four million. Of all whole tribes in Ghana, if you want to get the largest population, come to the Northern Region.

DL

There are more Dagombas than Ashantis?

AL

If you are going to count Ashantis--

DL

[laughs] Oh no, I shouldn't have asked that question!

AL

I want to tell you. Eight tribes speak Twi. We have Ashanti, Fanti, Akwapim, Kwahu, Bunu, Akyim, Aha, and Laate. Eight people speak alike. If you group together Dagomba, Gonja, Nanumba, and Mamprussi, we in the North have the larger population.

DL

In the olden days, were butchers herders or did they buy from people who kept cows?

AL

Before we had butchers, we only hunted. If a man wanted his family to eat meat on festival days but didn't have a goat in the house, he had to go around and ask, "I want a goat to buy." Coming down from that time, when Dagombas became plenty, the butcher work became good. Butchers bought animals from people who kept cows. They started

going to people to buy cows, goats, and sheep. These are the animals we eat. Once butchers were doing their work, people started going to the market for meat. You didn't need to go search for it. Go to the butcher shop and, straightaway, you will get your meat.

Whenever people come the Yaa Naa's palace for Friday greetings, drummers are there.

When greetings are over and we lunsu are going back to our homes, our chief, Namo-naa, will go to the butcher's tree. He will drum for the butchers to get meat for his family.

Namo-naa will tell them, "I also want to take meat home because I am the first wife of Yaa Naa." Lunsu are regarded like the chief's wives.

DL

You say that lunsu are like the first wife of the chief. Where do the butchers fit in?

AL

We don't call butchers chiefs' wives. We call them chiefs' traders.

Drummers will be playing until the butchers have prepared all the meat for sale. They will be cutting meat and every butcher will take some and put it into a pan for the drummers. After they finish, the chief butcher will cut his meat and then he will add some money on top. He will give it to the drummers and say, "Please go home and prepare food." After they finish selling meat, the butchers will go home to bath and eat. Then, in the afternoon, they would come back, sit down, and we lunsì come to play their dance for them. In the olden days, on every Friday afternoon lunsì went to the butchers and performed.

Baba and Nakohi-naa started selling cow meat in the chief's name. That is how we got the name for butchers, "Nakohiwa"--"trader for the chief." Whenever they butchered a cow, they had to take some meat from the thigh--we say "boligu"--and present it to the chief. Yes, they would take meat and send it to the chief's house. When they came to the palace drummers would announce, "Naa kōhiwa ne ti zana," which means, "The chief's trader has come." That is the first appellation we lunsì play for butchers.

AL

The first music for butchers is called Nakohiwa Nim' So Chendi--the butchers' walking rhythm of butchers. "So Chendi"--like we have "Damba So Chendi," Damba walking music. Early in the morning on festival days, the drummers go to the slaughterhouse and drum this the rhythm, "[Dagbani singing]." The leading lūṇa sounds, "[vocables]." Guṇ-guṇ sounds, "[vocables]," and the lūṇas answer like this, "[vocables]." The leading drum is saying, "The person who prepared the cow, the person who prepared the cow," and the answer drummers are saying, "It is the chief butcher who prepared the cow." Lunsi don't say, "nayu" [cow]. We say, "yuinga," because of how Naa Dimani started our tradition. We say, "[Dagbani]," "Who prepared the yuinga?" and the answer drummers say, "[Dagbani]," "the Nakohi-naa prepared it."

DL

So, Nakohi Nim So Chendi is different from Nakohi-waa, the Butcher's Dance?

AL

Yes. When we are going to play for the dance, the leading drummer will say, "Ma ti naa

ᲗᲟ Ჟ ᲚᲓᲙ ᲛᲓᲉ ᲚᲓ," "It is our chief who started. It is our chief who started who started it."

The answer ᲚᲗᲗᲗᲗ will come in, "Naa nye Diman'," "Our chief Dimani."

AL

ᲒᲗᲗ-ᲒᲗᲗ first says, "ka ki, ka ka ka ki," "ᲗᲗᲗ ᲚᲓᲙ' ᲧᲟ ᲧᲓ ᲚᲗᲗ ᲗᲟ. ᲗᲗᲗ ᲚᲓ Კ-bala ᲧᲟ ᲧᲓ ᲚᲗᲗ

ᲗᲟ." ᲒᲗᲗ-ᲒᲗᲗ is saying, "To ti naa ᲗᲟ ᲗᲗᲗ ᲚᲓ Კ-bala," "It is our chief. He is the person,"

"ka ka ka ki, ka ki." After playing that for a long time, the ᲗᲗᲗ-ᲒᲗᲗ will change to "ka ka

ka ki ka ka ka," "Ka pa naa ᲗᲟ ka ᲗᲗᲗ ᲚᲓ," "If not chief, who? If it is not our chief, then

who?" "Ka pi tin naa ᲗᲟ ka ᲗᲗᲗ ᲚᲓ." Then, the ᲗᲗᲗ-ᲒᲗᲗ says, "ka ka ka ki ki ka,"

"NakᲟᲗᲓ-naa Ჟ ᲚᲓᲙ ᲗᲗᲚᲓ ᲧᲓ," or "NakᲟᲗᲓ-naa Ჟ ᲚᲓᲙ ᲧᲓ ᲚᲓ." We can put the Dagbani in

two ways.

DL

What is that meaning?

AL

"The chief butcher who accepted it. The chief butcher is doing it." "Nakohi-naa o nim sayli di," or "Nakohi-naa o nim tum li."

I criticize answer luṇa drummers who play, "da deyan de dit dit." They are playing the same thing as supporting guṇ-gṇ, "Ten naa ṇṇ, to ten naa ṇṇ," "ka ka te te." Some luṇa people they don't play, "Naa nye Dimani." They copy the guṇ-gṇ talk, you see?

These are the rhythms we know from our grandfathers—first, "ka ka ka ki, ka ki," second, "ka ka ka ki ka ka ka," and third, "ka ka ka ki ki ka." The youth created the other things that we play. In fact, we took the talks we learned from our forefathers and then made them even better. At first, the old people played, "ka ki ka ka ki," "Nakohi ṇṇ o sayi ya." We put it, "Nakohi-naa [switches to vocables] ka ka ka ki [switches back to Dagbani] Nakohi-naa ṇṇ [taps rhythm and talks]."

DL



When you say that the youth made the drumming better, who are you talking about? Do you mean the youth from long ago?

AL

I mean our forefathers from long, long ago, not us. When you go to some villages in Dagbon, lumsi still are playing Nakohi-waa the way it started in the beginning. The gun-gun drummer will be playing, "kao ki, kao ka ki."

DL

Iddrisu was playing that on the Legon Botanical Gardens recording. [See book and CD *Drum Damba*.]

AL

Yes, that is the original way of playing. But our fathers wanted the dance to be clear, so they doubled the stick to say, "Nakohi-naa ɲɔ" instead of "Naa kohi" [taps rhythm, then vocables]. At first, they shortened the talk and the rhythm came that way. Then, the gun-

gɔŋ drummers started polishing it, polishing it, and they began calling the proper name,

"Nakohi-naa."

DL

Do you have any idea of when that change happened?

AL

I think long ago. This is what we met from our fathers. All what we play now was started by Fuseni Alaasani when he was young. It is Fuseni who started and then every guŋ-gɔŋ drummer followed.

DL

Putting gɔlsigu inside--the sweet hand? Im-pro-vi-sa-tion!

AL

Yes, to play it nicely. We can't talk on that. But sometimes I will play many other talks.

If you have a sweet hand, you can fix somebody's appellation inside the music, you see?

[Recites luŋa vocables, then sings the Dagbani.] "Ma di mini" is a person's appellation.

If you know the house appellation of somebody who is dancing, you can put it into your music. On the tape recordings, you will hear me play some of the chief butchers' appellations. As a leading lundaa player, you want to make your drumming to be nice so that the dancer will feel it.

DL

On the day that Naa Dimani started the butcher tradition, were lunsɛ present? Is that where these rhythms started?

AL

They didn't create the rhythms right then, but the drummers were there on that day.

When the drummers were planning to make the butchers' rhythms, they talked to the drummers who saw what had happened. That is how the lunsɛ got ideas for the talks I am telling you about.

DL

Can every butcher family trace their grandfathers back to these people? Each person can say whose son--

AL

--is this man--

DL

--and son and son and son and son?

AL

--son after son. This story is where we drummers start every butcher family. We start from Naa Dimani. When you finish Naa Dimani, you start on Baba, and then to Naa Kohina.

DL

I have asked my questions. Thank you.

END