

**Reconstructing Dagaaba History Through Verbal Art:
Doozeε of Nyimbali and Manlaala Resistance to
Sofa/ Zabogi(Zabarema) Invasion of Dagao in the 1870s'**

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The story you are about to read originates from a brief history Dr. Daniel Bagah (popularly known as Debagah) gave me sometime ago. From the bits of that remembered history of this great-great-grand father of Debagah, I have tried to weave an imaginative narrative for the sole purpose of creating a Dagaare culture hero. In the area of cultural production, we do not have enough of our literate artists expanding on the traditional oral repertoire. Some have tried, but because little interest has been shown for their work, they have fallen by the way side among empty pito pots, or are sandwiched and buried among fat books in musty libraries in the centres and outposts of former empires.

This hero lived between the 1840s - 1890s in Nyimbali, in the Kaleo traditional area. This was the time when the French and the English were conspiring against the liberation fighter, Samori Toure, whose forces had occupied the area. While Samori's forces were camping at Samatigu, there was another warlord Babatu, who had been invited by the Waala to help them discipline the democratic and anti-Waala Manlarla neighbours. This hero from Nyimbale was called Doozeε. He was indeed a great man of war and other deeds of good mention. He was not only a hero of the Manlarla, but of Dagaaba in our struggle to maintain our democratic institutions of separate but equal in unity. Doozeε was definitely not the only hero of that time. There were others in various traditional areas of Dagao. I have tried to be faithful to the dynamics of Dagaare oral poetics and performance aesthetics in this piece.

ƆƆƆƆƆof Nyimbali: Hero of the Manlarla_

They say the *koni* has no voice
 they say the *koni* has no voice
 the *koni* has no voice
 is it not a *koni* wailing?
 They say the *koni* has no voice
 they say the *koni* has no voice
 if the *koni* has no voice
 is it not Nyimbalee *koni* crying?
 Since you want to hear it
 I will pour it out to you
 but first let me praise my *suma*
 I am essence of eloquence

I am the dreamer's dream
 I am the seer's vision
 memory before deeds
 memory after deeds
 memory voice between sounds
 memory silence between sounds
 entrance to the world of lips
 I do not secret secrets
 armed with the silence of song
 I am self freeing meaning
 skins tout over hollow wood
 the drummer's mind is mine
 I am the poise between drum stick and drum
 my words are rain water
 dripping on seeds of knowing
 when my lips quiver
 only the aroma of truth
 pervades the airy ears
 II am the oasis of doubt
 in the desert of future
 so I creep toward your heart strings
 with words you do no know but feel

I am Yeli-ba-nigeng niana
 I am Yel-kongzoba niana
 I am Yel-kaawilaba niana
 I am Yel-kaataba niana
 I am Yel-balugro niana
 I am Yel-ka gaakye niana

my word is truth
 if not my word is truth
 it is Kuwabong's son that is singing
 It is Kriebaya's seed that calls to you
 It is Laung's great -grandseed talking to you
 It is Ngmweɛɛ's progeny beckoning to you
 It is Sugbal Bukyeo's son calling
 It is Sugbal Ngmaakpieong's child singing

When the news of the Sofa came
 when the news of the Ngmaakpɛɛ came
 tribes of birds danced across grey skies
 crying their path
 To the lands of trees
 when the Ekoɔla heard the news
 when the Emoɔla heard the news
 When the Etuolo heard the news
 when the Sunteɛla heard the news
 when the Ewaala heard the news
 when the Ekyiele heard the news
 when the Esuolo heard the dreaded news
 grass stood desolate in the bush
 dust liked the paths to rivers
 and the clansmen met to see
 from the Ekoɔla came
 Sugbal Ngmaakpieong and his sons
 Sugbal Bukyeo, Sugbal Ngmeɛɛ, Sugbal Laung
 Sugbal Batɛɛɛ, Sugbal Anoma, Sugbal Diayɛh
 and all the mighty men of war

From the Etuolo came Piiri Lankono
 with his sons Piiri Diambaala, Piiri Landi
 Piiri Naare and his brother Piiri Dɔɔzeɛ the mighty
 they came with all their mighty men of bow

Mighty men of bow they sat
 they emptied their quivers of arrows
 Into the boiling pot of death
 from strophanthus seed
 from fired toad skin
 from cobra's spittle
 from jaw sacs of viper
 from bile of crocodile

Dɔɔzeɛ mighty son of Danyagre

Dɔɔzeɛ taproot of Nyimbale

Dɔɔzeɛ whose footprints

frighten the elephant

Dɔɔzeɛ was not there

In the evening of the gathering of bows

Dɔɔzeɛ gathered his cudgels

He sent his son Gye-Neɛ

To tell the elders these words:

Nyimbale lies across the Zabarema path

Dɔɔzeɛ lies across the Zabarema path

Let the sofa come

As you do not see me

You will not see them

if you see the Sofa at Sankana

Dɔɔzeɛ will also be there

Dɔɔzeɛ will be on their left

Dɔɔzeɛ will be on their right

Dɔɔzeɛ will be in their front

Dɔɔzeɛ will be behind them

Dɔɔzeɛ will be in their midst

Dɔɔzeɛ will gather them like grass

they will leave no footprints

only their memory will remain

the moon was dark

the stars hid behind the clouds

Dɔɔzeɛ woo Dɔɔzeɛ Gandao

Dɔɔzeɛ took his bow

Dɔɔzeɛ took his quiver of ten thousand arrows

Dɔɔzeɛ woo woo, Dɔɔzeɛ Gandao Bie

Dɔɔzeɛ Kong-Diagaa

across his unbroken back he slung his quiver

and sat upon his roof

Dɔɔzeɛ the squirrel ear hunter

Dɔɔzeɛ the dog-nosed hunter

Dɔɔzeɛ arrow that splits elephant heads

Bury him with the dead

Dɔɔzeɛ waits at home for you

so the sofas came

so the Zabarema came

crawling through the night

Dɔɔzeɛ saw them coming

crunching the ground
 crunching the ground
 crunching the ground
 Dɔɔzeɛ did not wake up the young
 Dɔɔzeɛ did not wake up the women
 Dɔɔzeɛ did not blow his horn
 when he saw the Sofa of Saranchi
 led by Bajuuuri of the Waala

Bajuuuri of Dondoli
 Bajuuuri of Dondoli
 Baajuuri of Dondoli
 Baajuuri led the Ngmaakpɛɛ
 Baajuuri and Maman Fuo

led the Zaberama
 brought Sofa Saranchi
 brought Zaberama Babatu
 seeking skulls
 led Sofa against Manlarla
 Dɔɔzeɛ saw them and laughed
 Dɔɔzeɛ saw them and laughed softly to himself
 He put on wrist band
 he set his mighty bow taut
 he selected an arrow
 Dɔɔzeɛ selected an arrow of twelve heads
 arrow that brings out entrails
 that is Dɔɔzeɛ
 arrow that spills marrow
 that is Dɔɔzeɛ
 arrow that spills brains
 that is Dɔɔzeɛ of Nyimbale
 the sound of his *kpambere* was heard
 as far south as Wicheu
 where Tekulaa and the Mighty Wiile encricled the Kagbanye
 the sound of his *kpambere* was heard
 as far north as Baabili and Lawra
 Karbo, Yelpoe, and Gandaa ravaged the Zabarema
 the sound of his *kpambere* was heard
 as far west as La-Ngmaa
 where Laung was burning rivers of Sofas
 the sound of his *kpambere* was heard
 as far east as Issa
 where the Monyarla were marshing the Zaberama
 the flash of the arrow
 brightened the sky
 and Gbarni at Ombo knew the time had come
 and gathered his men from Kaleo and Loho
 and gathered his men from Wogu and Chaang

and gathered his men at Booduori
 the flight of his arrow split Mielong-Bao in two
 the heat from his arrow dried up Billi
 and found four hundred ready bellies
 four hundred bellies were torn open
 and marching Sofas were not sure
 Doozeε's arrow twirled around
 and wriggled through four hundred necks
 and four hundred mouths had no time to cry
 the arrow spun sideward and steamed through ribs
 four hundred hearts hung on its hooks
 the arrow whisked around and found targets
 eight hundred legs got entangled in blood
 the arrow shot upwards
 the arrow shot downward
 and many a cry was heard that night
 those mighty Sofas fled in panic
 those mighty Waala fled in panic
 Those mighty Zabarema fled in panic
 those mighty headhunters fled without their skulls

the arrow retired
 and lodged itself in this rock
 today at Lonkoro, if you look well
 you can see the arrow there
 Doozeε put his horn to lip
 the sound was heard far and wide
 to his west Laung responded
 to his east Gbarni responded
 to his northwest Gandaa of the Birifoala responded with twenty thousand men
 to the centre-north Ganaa of Jirabaa responded with twenty thousand men
 to the north of Birifor, the children of Kontol rose with twenty thousand men
 to his southwest Tekulaa rose with twenty thousand Wiile

Baajuuri saw this happening
 Baajuuri fled in panic
 Babatu saw this happening
 Babatu fled in panic
 Saranchi saw this happening
 Saranchi retreated in fear
 they all fled
 the trio fled and left their *suntaala* at Goore
 and fled to Chansa for refuge

where Babatu and the Kagbanye turned
 they turned in anger
 Wa was set on fire

today we sing the song:
sing galing ga yee, sing galeng ga (2x)
vu di w ɔɔ toori, sing galeng ga
te na gaa te nyɛ, sing galeng ga (2x)

ba ta nyɛ yee, ba ta nyɛ etc.
Baabatu ngma Sankana guo
kyɛ te ngma Waala

so when you hear the arrow with four hundred entrails
 that is Dɔɔzeɛ of Nyimbale

when you hear the arrow with four hundred heads
 that is Dɔɔzeɛ of Nyimbale
 Dɔɔzeɛ with one arrow put to flight
 the mighty sofas
 Dɔɔzeɛ with one arrow put to shame
 the mighty Zaberama
 Dɔɔzeɛ with one arrow put fear
 in the brave sons of Wa

Dɔɔzeɛ's victory stunned us all
 the Manlarla warriors were angry
 so they went into a council of war
 they went into council in the morning
 they entered council in the noon
 they entered council in the evening too
 and always sent for Dɔɔzeɛ
 Dɔɔzeɛ did not come to them
 morning came
 Dɔɔzeɛ came
 they questioned him in the morning
 they questioned him in the noon
 they questioned him in the evening
 Dɔɔzeɛ was like earth

then Dɔɔzeɛ arose in their midst
 he rose like a midst before them
 and walked to the kraal of Lang-jimbu

the father of mighty Tengsaanbo
 great farmer on whose back birds took a bath
 and took a heifer
 he took a heifer and killed it
 he opened its chest and pulled out the heart
 he took out the heart and roasted it
 he roasted the heart and ate it
 he ate the heart and walked away

not a sound rose from the gathered lips
 not a quiver crawled to the gathered lips

the sun came out at cock-crow
 the council selected ten stalwarts
 stalwarts from every clan
 to go and bring Dɔɔzeɛ back:
 from the Etuolo rose the mighty Diambaala
 from the Ekoɔla rose the mighty Batɛrɛɛ

from the Emoɔla rose the mighty Kangtung-yɛ
 from the Ewaala rose the mighty Luginaah
 from the Sunteɛɛ rose the mighty Bio
 from the Ekyiele rose the mighty Danbambo
 from the Esuolo rose the mighty Gbaalaazaa
 they and other mighty men of war rose
 Dalani of Kanyini
 Mankumah of Nator
 Kpieongmoorɛɛ of Takpo
 to Nyimbale they came and said:
 we have come to take you
 Dɔɔzeɛ son of mighty Danyagre
 in the morning we have come to take you
 we have come to take you
 they told Dɔɔzeɛ in the noon
 we have come to take you
 they told Dɔɔzeɛ in the evening
 Dɔɔzeɛ stretched his ten feet up
 Dɔɔzeɛ got up and sat in a bier
 Dɔɔzeɛ lay in a bier and strapped himself
 Dɔɔzeɛ asked them to carry him to Papu
 Papu behind the rocks of Kyaoung
 where the council sat in waiting
 between Nyimbale and Samatigu

Doozeε sat up in the bier
 Doozeε sat up and ask for their leader
 it was Dalani of Kanyini
 mighty son of Kong-yeli
 Doozeε looked at him and said:

“Doozeε did not win a victory
 Doozeε won because they won
 Doozeε will go to Papu
 if Doozeε wants to go to Papu
 say Doozeε of Nyimbale
 son of Danyagre
 was here before they came
 tell them Doozeε of Nyimbale
 will be here after they go”

when he finished saying this
 he jumped down from the bier
 Doozeε jumped down from the bier
 Doozeε pulled off his right thumb
 and gave it to Dalani of Kanyini
 tell them to judge the thumb as they want
 and Doozeε walked into the bush of thorns
 no-one ever saw Doozeε of Nyimbale again
 some say he walked into the baobab
 standing at the narrow forge
 dividing Nyimbale, Goore, Samatigu, Perentobo, Kyarile, and Gyili.

In this narrative, I have tried to demonstrate how I have used Dagaare traditional orature techniques to tell a story of one man's single exploit, which not only brings back the man to life, but also contextualizes the exploit in our history. Similar to the role of the griots of the Senegambia region, who through poetry and song maintain the history of the Soninke, the Manding, and the Songhay peoples, my vision aims toward a recreation of precolonial history of the Kaleo traditional area somewhere in the 1800s-1910s. The present day Upper West Region encompasses Dagao and is also the area most affected by the Sofa and Zabarema invasions in the 1800s. Obviously then, it was not only the Manlarla who stood up against the Sofa and the Zabarema. Oral history tells us of the Monyarla, the Issaala, The Kusiele, the Waala, the Jirabaala, and other Dagaaba communities fought bravely to stop these invaders. There are references to how other Dagaaba communities resisted these invasions, but more researc needs to be done to come out with their versions. This is part of my long term project.

Doozeε's bravery is tied in with the historical resistance of the Manlarla in particular and Dagaaba in general to foreign invasions. The story underscores the Dagaare philosophy of "Ng taang be mang be," while seeking to dramatise some of the roots of the traditional mistrust that exist between the Waala and the Dagaaba of the Manlarla kingdom up to date.

What I have tried to do is what every storyteller, popularly known as historian, has been doing for ages. Mixing historical memory, legend and imaginative perceptions, one is able to create meta-history that guides us all toward individual and group truths. For further references to the history of the area at this time in which Doozeɛ's story is supposed to have taken place, you may want to consult books by Tuurey, Douga, Wilks, and oral sources at Kaleo, Sankana, Nyimbali, Dorimon, Wecheu, Nadawli, Issah, Nanville, and Wa.

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