

A Spectrum of the Ancestral World: Reflections on the functions of the *kasiyiriba* in Dagbaŋ

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Abstract

Death, although a dreaded event, is perceived among the Dagbamba as the beginning of communication between the visible and the invisible worlds. Thus, the goal of life for a Dagbana (singular for Dagbamba) is to become an ancestor after death. This is why every person who dies must be given a befitting burial accompanied by a well-deserved traditional funeral. If this is not done properly, the dead may become a wandering ghost unable to settle down in the ancestral world, and therefore a danger to the living. However, in the Dagbamba cultural milieu, the dead cannot get to the ancestors if he or she is buried by anyone other than a kasiyira. In this paper, we present the impact of the kasiyiriba (plural for kasiyira) on the social as well as the religious life of the people of Dagbaŋ. The paper established that a kasiyira is a person who is responsible for the confirmation of the death of a person, digging the grave, preparation of a corpse for interment, and placing the corpse in the tomb.

Key Words: Kasiyiriba, Dagbaŋ, Dagbamba, Deceased, Gravediggers, Burial

1. Introduction

In Dagbamba social setting, everybody belongs to at least one social group either voluntarily, or by birth (Mahama, 2004). Of course, the concept of belonging is a strong, or an inevitable feeling that exists in the human race. One need to belong to be identified. One of these social classes in the Dagbaŋ Kingdom is *kasiyiritali*. Members of this social class are referred to as *kasiyisiriba* (plural for *kasiyira*). This is a class of people whose traditional duty is to ascertain or certify the death of a person, dig his/her grave, prepare the corpse for entombment, and finally lay it to rest. The art of *kasiyiriba* is *kasiyiritali*. *Kasiyiritali* is demanding. It is also a sacrificial job that people voluntarily cling tenaciously to. It does not matter whether or not one's father was, or is a member of that social class; any hard working Dagbana (singular for Dagbamba) can be a member. It is also important to note that this social class is made up of only men of reputable characters. To be admitted into the group, one must be able to keep secrets in life. Secrecy is their core value, so every member is duty-bound to be close-lipped. Culturally, women are not allowed to the membership of this group. This is not surprising because in most African societies, it is seen as a taboo for women to visit the cemetery. Taboos and rituals constitute an important dimension of African religious and philosophical thought (Gyekye, 1987; Idowu, 1973; Mbiti, 1969; Ray, 1976).

A *kasiyira* should be someone who has taken the oath of secrecy in life. He should not be a person who discloses everything he sees concerning corpses. Therefore, a *kasiyira* is one who can keep secrets as demanded by their code of ethics. Also, to be initiated into the group, one should be over eighteen years old. At this time, his mind is developed and can be useful to the group. To a traditional Dagbana, the posture of a corpse has a telling glance to the ordinary person. When a person dies, a lot of things do happen and a *kasiyira* should not attempt to disclose what he sees to anybody as they are the closest to the corpse. It is believed that the ghost of the deceased can haunt a *kasiyira* for revealing his or her secret in public. Even if serious efforts are not made, that *kasiyira* is likely to lose his life. That is why the people believe that a *kasiyira* should be professional in his duties.

In the following few pages, we discuss the impact of the *kasiyiriba* on the social as well as the religious life of the people of Dagbaŋ.

2. Methodology

This narrative study combined empirically, both qualitative and quantitative research methods with greater emphasis on the qualitative method. The study was carried out in two traditional cities in Dagbaŋ: Yendi (the traditional capital of the kingdom), and Kumbungu (one of the oldest cities in the kingdom). A purposive non-probability sampling technique was adopted in this study, with the use of snowballing. The sample group was heterogeneous, made up of 75 *kasiyiriba* and 35 others. Participants for focus group discussions (FGD) were purposefully selected on the premise that they had a shared experience that is personal or through a close relative (i.e. lost a parent, or a family member) or had a close friend who is personally involved in *kasiyiriba* 'profession'. It needs emphasizing that participant observation also forms part of the study. Some of the information shared in this discussion is as a result of our personal experiences as natives of the kingdom.

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper is written within the framework of acculturation theories. The term acculturation was first coined by J.W Powel in 1880, and he defines acculturation as "the psychological changes induced by cross-cultural imitation. However, the earliest thought on acculturation can be traced back to Sumerian inscriptions from 2370 BC. The first Psychological theory of acculturation was proposed by W.I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki in 1918. According to Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936:149) cited in Berry (1997) "acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups". They first explained the widely used term of acculturation as "the phenomena which results when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first hand contact," (Mustapha, 2010). According to Berry (1997), the concept of *acculturation* is employed to refer to the cultural changes resulting from these group encounters. The theory of acculturation therefore includes learning a new language, immersion, assimilation, and integration, (Schwartz, *et al.* 2010). Mustapha (2010) therefore defines the acculturation theory as "the sociocultural changes that take place in the culture of a people, when they have come into contact with another culture and maintained that contact for a long time". A great way for new *kasiyira* to acculturate is to leave one's comfort zone to go and learn directly from the experienced *kasiyiriba*. When one immerses himself directly under the tutelage of the experienced *kasiyiriba*, one learns first-hand information of what *kasiyiritali* entails.

4. The Origin of *kasiyiriba*

It is believed that the person who started *kasiyiritali* in Dagbaŋ is Kpaligbaŋ. Nobody knows his race, ethnic group or the town he came from. But research has it that Kpaligbaŋ was a wanderer. He travelled all over the entire Dagbaŋ and that made it impossible for people to actually study him well. It is also reported that he was a very strong man who roamed about with his tools for grave-digging. That, anytime he got to a town and someone passed on, he first of all had to look for the immediate family members of the deceased who would tell him the place they wanted the deceased to be buried. When this was done, he would start digging the grave with his tools to find a resting place for the deceased. Initially, the *kasiyiriba* as we know them today were known in the entire Dagbaŋ as *bayahinima* (plural for *bayahi*). The people of Nmampurugu and Nanuŋ also referred to them as such. The *bayahi* for the overlord of Dagbaŋ, the YaanNaa is referred to as *Dubikahinaa*. He resides in Yendi.

Conventional narratives in Dagbaŋ have it that, before a person gets into a grave, he has to invoke the spirits. In the language, the verb invoke is, "ka" or kari, which can be a noun or imperfective form. Again anytime they are digging a grave and another *bayahi* arrives, he is also told to get down into the grave and see if it is dug properly. They say it in the language as "... ti siyi nya". By emerging the two sayings, thus bringing *ka* 'invoke' and ... *ti siyi nya* 'get down into the grave and see' together, we get a complex clause *ka nti siyi nya* 'invoke and get down into the grave and see'. The sequential marker *ti* can sometimes be realised as *nti*. When these utterances are merged to form a compound, we witness the deletion of the sequential marker *ti* or *nti* and *nya* 'see' as can be seen in (1) below. This complex clause is compounded to derive [kasiyi] which cannot be a noun without the agentive marker -da, or a verb, as there are no compound verbs in the language.

$$1. \quad ka + ti + siyi + nya \quad \Rightarrow \quad [kasiyi] + -ra]_N$$

To derive an agentive noun from, a verb –da (or any of its variants) is suffixed to the verb stem (see Olawsky, 1999 and Adam, 2007 for discussion of agentive nouns in the language). However, when verbs are compounded to derive a noun, the derivate does not required the suffixation of any agentive marker as demonstrated in (2) below.

2 a.	[dɔyi] V + [kana]V	=>	[dɔyikana]N
	deliver come		a woman who delivers and goes to the parents
b.	[kpi]V + [n-yi]V	=>	[kpiinyi]N
	die appear		walking dead
c.	[kana] V + [ko]V	=>	[kanako]N
	come cultivate		settler farmer

It is synthetic compounds which have agentive markers but the verbs are said to acquire the markers before compounding. For instance, compounds like *wawara* ‘dancer’ is made up of *waa* ‘dance’ which is a noun, and the deverbal element *wara* ‘one who dances’. Meanwhile, the deverbal noun *wara* consists of the verb *wa* ‘dance’ and the agentive marker –*ra*, a variant of –*da*. In compounds such as these, the noun *waa* ‘dance’ is said to be the argument of the verb *wa* ‘dance’. As *kasiyira* cannot be derived from any of the above processes, there could be another process, we strongly believe that *ka* might be an element of a noun which is an argument of the verb *siyi* ‘get down’. This may be so as most arguments delete their number markers in the process of compounding as we witness in synthetic compounds. Or *kasiyira* may be a prototypical noun and not a derived one. But now we are told by the *kasiyiriba* that the term *kasiyira* is derived from the saying *ka* ‘invoke’ on one hand and *ti siyi nya* ‘get down and see’ on the other hand to derive *kasiyira*, which now replaces *bayahi*.

5. How do *kasiyiriba* train their members?

There clearly exists among the Dagbamba the conviction that, *kasiyiritali* is not an institution where recruits are formally required to produce certificates before they are taken. However, this does not mean that they do not have mechanisms of training young recruits. *Kasiyiriba* do not go about inviting people to join them. Anyone who has interest in what they do, can work with them anytime someone dies. This person will continue attending to them until such a time they find it fit to officially ask him if he wants to join them. If the answer is in the affirmative, then they will begin to informally offer him the necessary training required to fully understand the etiquette of the group. The training is often categorized into three stages. His assignment at the first stage is grave-digging, or standing at the entrance of the grave receiving the sand till it is fully dug. The duty of the *kasiyira-trainee* at the second stage is to observe how the deceased is being prepared for interment. One's ability to function well at stage two determines how fast he can move to the final stage.

In most cases, the *kasiyira-trainee* is made to stay longer in stage two to be able to mature well enough for the final stage. At the final stage, the *kasiyira-trainee* will have a feel of how corpses are buried. This is often difficult. On that fateful day, he is to bury a deceased unassisted. Mostly, women, infants, still-born children or miscarriages are used to test his readiness. The reason is quite telling. According to some of the *kasiyiriba*, it is not easy to bury such corpses. One has to be well prepared - both mentally and spiritually - to be able to deal with such corpses. After this, if such a *kasiyira-trainee* is able to sleep well without nightmares, it means he is graduated. He can be called a *kasiyira* afterwards and has the right to bury any dead body. However, if the *kasiyira-student* is unable to sleep at night because he is haunted by the deceased spirit, then he is to be refortified.

6. The Duties of *kasiyiriba*

In William Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*, the grave diggers' scene is one place where seriousness intermingles with comic element. Apart from serving as a comic relief in the rising tragic action of the play, the gravediggers' scene also deals with some other major and important themes of the play (William, 1991). In this part of the play, we are made to understand that there is no ancient gentleman but gravediggers, because they hold up Adam's profession. In what follows, we take a narrative look at what the *kasiyiriba* do when someone is presumed dead. Ordinarily, the *kasiyiriba* perform five major functions in the Dagbaŋ Kingdom: declaring someone dead, bathing the corpse, dressing the corpse for interment, digging the grave, and burying the dead.

6.1 Declaring someone dead

As part of the cultural norms of the Dagbamba, if a person expires to join the ancestors, he or she will not be considered dead until *kasiyiriba* are invited to ascertain whether or not the person is indeed dead. The belief is that some *kasiyiriba* in the past had the spiritual prowess to revive those who might be put to death by witches. They had special 'animal tails' which they used to mildly strike the person to determine his or her actual state. This was done three or four times depending on the gender of the person. To determine whether or not a person is actually dead, the leader of the group would place his hand on the ribs for a while to find out if the person still breathes. Also, they examine the eyes to determine the death of a person.

According to an informant, when a person dies, the eyes will become opaque and one will not see the pupil. Even at that time, the body will become stiff unless the family members of the deceased continue to massage the body. The *kasiyiriba* take all these into consideration before declaring one dead. When they consider all the factors and nothing shows that the person is still alive, they will go out and declare the person formally dead. In Dagban tradition, it is only the *kasiyiriba* who are supposed to pronounce someone dead. It is worth noting that a significant number of communities in Dagban no longer endorse this process because of the influence of Islam and Christianity on the traditional life of the people (Seidu, 1989). Islam was introduced into the kingdom towards the end of the 17th century, and it has exerted a strong influence on their customs (Ferguson, 1972; Römer, 2000). Though they still retain many of their pre-Islamic beliefs and practices, Islam is evident in the way they go about their cultural practices (Samwini, 2006; Weiss, 2004).

6.2 Bathing the corpse

There are many ways of 'bathing' the corpse by the *kasiyiriba*. This depends on the status of the deceased in the society. If the deceased is a man, the process of 'bathing' the corpse is different from that of a woman. They pour water in a calabash and send to the room in which the deceased is. The deceased is made to sit on a stool, and his hand dipped three times in the calabash containing the water, wiping the face with each dip. They do same four times to a woman after which they start the actual 'bathing'. We need to state here that not all corpses are made to sit on the stool; only chiefs or title holders and elderly people are made to do so. That is, if the deceased is an adult, he will be bathed by *kasiyiriba* while seated on a stool; after which he will be laid on a native mat.

If the deceased was a title holder or chief, the *kasiyiriba* will use warm water to 'bathe' the corpse. First of all they look for a locally made pot, and fill it with water.

They will erect a hearth and place the pot on it in the compound. After this the *kasiyiriba* will select one of the granddaughters of the deceased (if there is any), and add her to two *kasiyiriba* making the number three. At this stage, grass is fetched and put under the pot. They will set fire on the grass under the pot and pass it on to each other in turns, until it is finished burning. This is done to depict the heating of the water. After this, the lady is given twigs of the *dawadawa* tree to whip the opening of the pot three times if the deceased is a male. The *dawadawa* twigs signifies *nam* (chieftaincy aspect of the Dagbamba custom). The reason is that when a chief is enskinned, he does not own any other tree except the *dawadawa* tree. She then ululates with sorrow, and says that so and so water is heated. If the deceased was a title holder or chief, she mentions his maiden name and not the title. *Kasiyiriba* only use *kulikuli chibo* (locally made soap for bathing) and not any other soap. The *kulikuli chibo* is used to 'bathe' elderly people and corpses with wounds. The reason is that, this soap is native to the people since time immemorial, so they do not want to depart from tradition.

6.3 Dressing the corpse for burial

Unlike the caskets, shrouds are not sewn in anticipation for someone to die. The *kasiyiriba* sew the shroud only on the burial day. This also depends on the social status of the person. For instance, if the deceased is a male adult, they sew a pant and a shirt for him; but if she is an elderly woman, they sew a skirt and a blouse. After sewing the shroud, they put it on the cover of a raffia basket (known in Dagbani as *kpanjɔyu liɲa*) if the deceased is an elderly person or a chief or title holder. The reason being that boxes and wardrobes are alien to the tradition of the people. They used to keep their cloths in raffia baskets. Currently when it comes to traditional issues, they prefer *kpanjɔyu* (raffia basket) to a box or bag. Besides *kpanjɔyu liɲa*, a plate made from raffia known as *pɔŋ* is also used. The shrouds are sewn in the hall (*zɔŋ ni*) and sent to the room where the deceased is placed. If the deceased is lower in social status, he or she will not be accorded the same respect. An overall is sewn and a separate design for the head is made. Customarily, the white materials for sewing shrouds are locally woven by the *kpalua* (a local weaver).

6.4 Digging the grave

Among the Dagbamba, it is the *kasiyiriba* who are duty bound to dig graves. However, the general public can assist them during the digging. It is only women who are culturally barred from the grave site. Grave-digging often requires energy and experience.

Traditionally, they have to perform certain rites at the spot before they commence the digging. First of all, they will overturn a calabash on the spot where the grave is to be dug. Then, one of them will dig around the overturned calabash using a pickaxe, axe or *gaa* (a hoe used for weeding). Then they take the overturned calabash away and select three or four people depending on the gender of the deceased. Each of the selected will use their left hands to hold the calabash with their right hands fetching the sand that has been dug; together the three or four people swing the calabash round the spot. They will throw some of the sand in their right hands into the calabash and later each will throw some of the sand at their backs. They will do these three or four times depending on the gender of the deceased. The motive is to cast away all the bad things associated with the deceased so that a final resting place will be provided to enable him or her journey to the land of the ancestors in peace. The *kasiyiriba* refer to this as *karigu* (black magic that drives away ghosts). It is intended to drive away all negativities associated with the deceased.

Grave-digging has several stages. The first is when they dig a grave whose depth is about knee level. The grave is narrowed, leaving a step at the right hand side so that someone can step on it. The *kasiyiriba* refer to this as *beebu*. The reason is that when the body is placed in the grave, it is on this *beebu* that those in the grave will step on as they do not want to step on the corpse. This will enable them to place the body well in the grave. This is also to show to some extent that *kasiyiriba* revere dead bodies in Dagbani. It must be noted that traditionally, dead bodies are not buried in coffins in Dagbani. However, some Dagbamba Christians are buried in coffins, or according to their religious beliefs.

After providing the *beebu*, they will then dig deep and later focus their attention on where the head will be laid. This is what the *kasiyiriba* refer to as *tɔbu*. When they are satisfied with the *tɔbu*, they will concentrate on what is referred to as *zimsim* or *tabilibu* dressing. This is a chamber or cavernous depth or nook inside the grave where corpses are put since they do not want sand to touch them. After this, their attention will shift to where the feet will be (referred to as *sampana*). *Sampana* is a carved piece of wood used for beating the floor. A dead person's feet are referred to as such because it cannot function anymore. The *kasiyiriba* refer to where the feet will be placed in the grave as *sampana dooshee*, (a place for the feet). When digging the grave, the *kasiyiriba* are very conscious of the width or length of the body as the body may not fit a grave due to either of these two factors. Anytime they are digging, they constantly visit the corpse to measure the size and length of it. They use a reed known in the language as *gbuygbani*, but *kasiyiriba* refer to it as *mua*, to measure the length and size of a corpse. An extra length and width are often added which are considered 'stolen' in the view point of a *kasiyira*. This is to avoid any last minute disappointment regarding the length or size of the deceased. Those bodies whose lengths and widths are constantly checked are adults and elderly people. However, presently, some *kasiyiriba* do not measure the bodies again. They find one of them whose height and length are similar to the body. The person will lie by the side of the corpse to ascertain its true size and length. This person will determine if some areas of the grave need to be widened or lengthened.

6.5 Burying the dead

Burying a corpse is a tedious task for the *kasiyiriba*. This is so because the manner of death determines the way the corpse should be buried. Culturally, the Dagbamba have categorized deaths into two main types: normal and bad deaths. If death occurs and is not considered as a bad one, the burial takes the normal process. After dressing the corpse, the *kasiyiriba* will take the body from the room where it was laid for bathing and dressing. The legs go out first before the head. The belief is that whenever one is entering or leaving the room by himself or herself, the legs always lead the way before the head. From here, they move straight to the grave. Even before the bearers of the corpse leave the room, two or more *kasiyiriba* who are to bury the deceased are already in the boneyard waiting for the corpse. They receive the body and untie the turban around the head, and place it well in the grave. If the deceased is an elderly person, his male children will begin going into the grave one after the other to see the way their father is laid. This is to bid him farewell. When any of the sons gets inside the grave to bid good bye to his deceased father, he bends down and with his two hands caress the body from head to the toes. This is done three times. The eldest son will be the last to enter.

When he enters, he does the same and finally they will remove the ring or bangle the deceased is wearing and put it on him. This is an indication that the eldest son now bears the responsibility of the family after the father. Just before the final interment, the eldest son prays and pleads on behalf of all the other children. Then they will place him well in the grave. Inside the grave, the deceased will face the east.

After this, they will start building a wall to close him in the chamber called *tɔbu* or *tabilishee*; then they will fill the grave with the sand. When the grave is filled half way, the mat on which the deceased laid will also be added and buried. They will wash their hands and feet to mark the end of the burial.

7. Bad death

As indicated above, in Dagban, certain deaths are considered bad while others are seen as good. The circumstances surrounding a person's death is often examined by the *kasiyiriba* and categorized as either good or bad. A death will be considered as bad if any of the following non-exhaustive situations is established as the cause of death.

1. If a person commits suicide.
2. If a person is drowned.
3. If a person dies through arson.
4. If a person falls from a tree and dies.
5. If a pregnant woman dies.
6. If someone dies through lightning.
7. If someone is poisoned to death.

If someone dies through any of the above situations, the *kasiyiriba* will regard the death as bad. Personal belongings of persons deemed to have died through any of the above conditions cannot be inherited by family members. Everything is given to the *kasiyiriba*. This is done to ensure that the family does not witness the reoccurrence of such death in the future.

7.1 Bad death burial

We have already listed the kind of deaths the traditional Dagbana considers as bad death. Formerly, the *kasiyiriba* had a lot of responsibilities on their shoulders when someone's death was considered a bad one. The reason was that, where the death occurred was the place the deceased had to be buried. Customarily, they were not allowed to transport the corpse to the house or any other place. The deceased would be buried where the death occurred. People who suffered bad deaths were not shrouded either. Thus, if someone committed suicide, or was drowned, the corpse would not be shrouded. Our interaction with the *kasiyiriba* revealed that when someone hung himself, the *kasiyiriba* would not touch the corpse. They would come and dig the grave directly under the corpse. How the body fell into the grave would determine how it was to be buried. However, due to the influence of Islam and Christianity, most cultural practices in Dagbon have changed (Abdallah, 2015). People who died through what is considered as bad deaths are no longer buried without the necessary rituals though their dead could still be considered as bad.

8. Driving away the spirit of the deceased

The tasks of *kasiyiriba* are daunting, and they often get insurmountable challenges to deal with. It is not uncommon for the *kasiyiriba* to be attacked by the deceased after interment. This attack will compel the individual *kasiyira* concerned to confront the deceased in an isolated spiritual battle to redeem him (Munholland, 2013). In some narratives, the attack could be a malevolent plot contrived by adversaries of the *kasiyira* in the spiritual realm to bring him face-to-face with the dead. This is meant to test the spiritual prowess of the *kasiyira*. In view of this, the *kasiyiriba* often require magical powers to aid them in their work. These magical powers are generally referred to as *kari* (invocation). They often invoke the powers on someone whose ghost is haunting them. The particular *kari* most *kasiyiriba* have is "what wrong have I done to you?" This is what they use to question the ghost of the deceased if the ghost is haunting them after burial. If it happens that the *kasiyira* has nothing against the deceased, but he is only being haunted for providing a resting place for him or her, the *kasiyira* will have to invoke the ghost of the deceased and question it as follows:

Taali bɔ m-be m mini a sunsuuni? M bola dooshee n-ti a ka a doli ma? Tɔ, di yi nyela n daa tum a la taali sheli, nyini niɲmi a ni kana sheli zuɣu maa. Ka di yi pala taali sheli ka n tum a, nyini chami nti dɔni ka che ka n nya gom gbihi.

“What offences have marred our relationship? I have given you a resting place and you are haunting me? Alright, if I have done something against you, then do to me as you have intended? However, if I have done nothing against you, go and lie down and let me sleep in peace!”

After this, if the *kasiyira* did not offend the deceased in any way, the ghost will never visit the *kasiyira* again. On the other hand, if it happens that the *kasiyira* offended the deceased and kept mute about it, the ghost will finally kill the *kasiyira* unless the offence is made public for the necessary rituals to be performed. These are some of the offences that could trigger reactions from the deceased:

1. If one is a party to the deceased cause of death;
2. If one secretly cuts the shroud for any purpose;
3. If one exposes the nature of death of the deceased to the public;
4. If one cuts any part of the deceased and/or anything that the deceased had not entrusted to him/her.

9. Magic *kasiyiriba* usually acquire

The work of the *kasiyiriba* is spiritually challenging. Because of this, they acquire magical powers to aid them in their work. The types of magic used by most *kasiyiriba* varied from person to person, and from village to village.

9.1 *Puhi yi* (reappear somewhere)

This is one of the magical powers *kasiyiriba* acquire to help them in their work. There are times the *kasiyiriba* will have to battle it out with a deceased who refuses to settle down at the burial site. This is often seen as a demonstration of the magical powers of the deceased. It is an open secret among the Dagbamba that most people (especially title holders) would still showcase their spiritual prowess even after their death. In instances like this, they look for the leader of the *kasiyiriba* or anyone among them who trusts his spiritual powers to handle the deceased. They will then put the deceased and the *kasiyira* together in the same grave. Before they arrive at the house of the leader of the *kasiyiriba* after the burial, this person will be there waiting for them. It is the belief of the people that the 'buried' *kasiyira* 'reincarnates' through a magical pit either in his bedroom or bathhouse. This is the function of *puhi yi* in assisting the *kasiyiriba* to deal with very difficult deceased. However, before the *kasiyira* is allowed to be buried with the deceased under this circumstance, they have to be sure that he is spiritually more powerful than the deceased.

9.2 *Karigu*

Karigu is yet one of the most effective magical powers the *kasiyiriba* employ to help them under difficult situations. This one works where the spirit of the deceased is haunting the *kasiyiriba* after interment. The *karigu* is used to chase the ghost away forever. The *kasiyiriba* can also use the *karigu* to help people who have terrible nightmares after losing their loved ones.

10. The taboo of the *kasiyiriba*

A taboo is variously defined as a prohibition of a social or religious act based on the belief that such an action is sacred, in order to keep peace and harmony, and to avoid supernatural punishment, such as sickness and famine (Holden, 2000; Scanlan, 2003). Taboo, for Steiner (1956), is concerned with four things, (1) with social mechanisms of obedience having ritual significance, (2) specific restrictive behaviour in situations that are deemed dangerous, (3) with the protection of individuals exposed to such danger, and (4) the protection of society at large from those of its members who are both endangered by taboo violations and therefore, in turn, dangerous. Hence Steiner's general definition that 'taboo is an element of all those situations in which attitudes to values are expressed in terms of dangerous behaviour'.

The work of *kasiyiriba* in Dagbon is directly or indirectly affected by cultural norms and taboos. Thus, there are certain things they consider as taboo for their members. Some of the things they regard as taboo are categorized into two. The first category focuses on what they do at the graveyard: (1) during the digging of the grave, it is a taboo for any *kasiyira* to use his right hand to collect the sand into the calabash, (2) they are not supposed to speak on issues that are not related to the funeral when they are digging the grave; but when speaking becomes necessary, they are to talk to each other in low tone, (3) they are also forbidden to throw anything to anyone at the grave side. Aside from the grave side specific taboos, they are other culturally inclined taboos they have to obey: (a) a *kasiyira* does not eat new yam until the rites pertaining to new yams are performed. This taboo is not peculiar to the *kasiyiriba*.

They are other groups and individuals in Dagbanj who, according to tradition, are not allowed to taste new yams until certain rites and/or rituals are observed. (b) Again, it is a taboo for a *kasiyira* to step on sweepings at the entrance of a room. (c) They do not eat any food fetched from fire with a knife. It is worth acknowledging that, apart from the collective taboos, there are others that are only associated with some individual *kasiyiriba*.

11. Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined how the *kasiyiriba* evolved since the era of Kpaligbanj - the person believed to have started the whole concept of *kasiyiritaliin* Dagbanj. Most narratives in the kingdom have it that Kpaligbanj was a wanderer who visited the entire Dagbanj Kingdom digging graves for a living. It is also reported that he was a very strong man who roamed about with his tools for grave-digging. That, anytime he got to a town and someone passed on, he first of all had to look for the immediate family members of the deceased who would tell him the place they wanted the deceased to be buried. When this was done, he would start digging the grave with his tools to find a resting place for the deceased. We also examined in greater detail the linguistic origin of the term *kasiyira*. We are told by the *kasiyiriba* that the term *kasiyira* is derived from the saying *ka* ('invoke') on one hand, and *ti siyi nya* ('get down and see') on the other hand, to form the nomenclature *kasiyira*.

During the course of the discussion, we highlighted the functions of the *kasiyiriba*, and who qualified to be part of the voluntary croup. A *kasiyira* should be someone who has taken the oath of secrecy for life. He should not be a person who discloses everything he sees concerning corpses. Therefore, a *kasiyira* is one who can keep secrets as demanded by their code of ethics. Also, to be initiated into the group, one should be over eighteen years old. At this time his mind is developed and can be useful to the group. To a traditional Dagbana, the posture of a corpse has a telling glance to the ordinary person. When a person dies, a lot of things do happen and a *kasiyira* should not attempt to disclose what he sees to anybody as they are the closest to the corpse. It is believed that the ghost of the deceased can haunt a *kasiyira* for revealing his or her secret in public. The paper also established that a *kasiyira* is a person who is responsible for the confirmation of the death of a person, digging the grave, preparation of a corpse for interment, and placing the corpse in the tomb.

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