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Suti Solo do Bina Bane: A Version from the Domain of Ba'a

I met the blind poet Laazar Manoeain only once, in 1966. Most of the research during my first fieldwork in 1965–66 was carried out in the domain of Termanu and in Korbaffo to the east of Termanu. Old Manoeain lived in the domain of Ba'a to the west of Termanu. During my time on the island, I was frequently told of his great fluency as a poet and also of his power as a preacher. As was not uncommon at this time and in the past, Manoeain's reputation was based on his knowledge and abilities to recite traditional compositions and to use this knowledge and skill in his sermons as a minister (*pendeta*) in the main church in Ba'a. He was a member of a generation of Rotenese ministers, inspired by the Dutch missionary G. J. L. Le Grande, who urged the use of Rotenese ritual language, rather than Malay, in the preaching of Christianity. What made Old Manoeain's reputation particularly notable was the fact that although he had gone blind, he had continued in his two roles as preacher and poet—and, as most Rotenese would contend, his skills increased after he lost his sight.

On a short visit to Ba'a in 1966, I made an effort to meet him, walking to his house just outside the administrative town of Ba'a. I found him alone in his house. He welcomed me and told me that he had heard of my presence. What struck me most about him was the gentleness of his voice. He was then perhaps in his late 70s, probably slightly older than Old

Meno but of the same generation. We talked for a while and I explained to him that I wanted to record him on my tape recorder[1] but had not brought the machine with me.

His response was immediate. He had time and he would recite slowly so that I could write down his chanting as he went along. True to his word, he recited slowly, clearly and was willing to repeat lines to make things easy for me. As a result, Old Manoeain was the only poet whose recitations I transcribed directly and for which I have no sound recording.

We only recorded a couple of recitations, one of which was *Suti Solo do Bina Bane*, which I specially requested. His version of this chant came to only 117 lines. It is my suspicion that he shortened the telling of this version purposely to simplify my transcription of it. He may also have tried to cast his recitation in a kind of Termanu dialect because, when we met, he could tell that I only knew that dialect.

The domain of Ba'a is located between the domains of Dengka to its west and Termanu to its east and, in one or two features, its dialect appears to be a halfway house between the dialects of its larger neighbouring areas. This is particularly true of what is initial and medial 'p' in Termanu. In the dialect of Dengka, this is 'mb', whereas in Ba'a, this initial consonant sounds more like 'mp'. (However, this is variable for non-initial 'p'. In some words, Ba'a retains a 'p' like that in Termanu.) On the other hand, the 'ng' in Termanu becomes 'ngg' in Ba'a, which is closer to its neighbours to the west. In other respects, however, Manoeain's recitation more closely resembles recitations in Termanu than in other domains to the west.

Manoeain's version of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* has few of the revelatory features of an origin chant. He gives an origin to the shells, mentioning the loss of their 'father', Bane Aka//Solo Bane, but he does not elaborate on this genealogy. The shells are described as drifting to the shore but there is no mention of the place where they are encountered, nor any mention of a search for the ritual Dusu La'e//Tio Holu fish, nor any identification of the women who encounter the shells and initiate a dialogue with them.

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1   For all my recordings in 1965–66, I relied on a sturdy but somewhat bulky Uher spool tape recorder. Since I travelled almost everywhere on horseback, it was not always easy to carry my tape recorder. So when I knew that I would have the chance to record a poet, I would walk to a particular destination and carry the tape-recorder with me. On this particular trip to Ba'a, where I had gone for supplies, I had not brought my tape recorder.

The emphasis from the start of the composition is on being a widow and an orphan. The composition consists chiefly of four dialogue directives. These formulaic dialogues are interesting because each is different from those of Termanu. Finally, the return of the shells to the sea leads to their being transported to Timor, where they experience a demise that transforms them into distinct cultural objects.

Suti Solo do Bina Bane

A storm arises that carries Suti Solo do Bina Bane from the depths of the ocean to the shore.

The Storm and Arrival of Suti Solo and Bina Bane

1.	*Sanggu nala liun*	A storm strikes the ocean
2.	*Luli nala sain.*	A cyclone strikes the sea.
3.	*Neni Bane Aka Liun*	It carries away Bane Aka of the ocean
4.	*Ma Solo Bane Sain.*	And Solo Bane of the sea.
5.	*De la'o ela Suti Solo Bane*	They depart, leaving Suti Solo Bane
6.	*Ma Bina Bane Aka.*	And Bina Bane Aka.
7.	*Boe ma duas-sa bomu bina*	The two of them bob like *bina* wood
8.	*Ma ele mpiko.*	And drift like *mpiko* wood.
9.	*Leo soloka'ek ke haba-na mai*	Coming to where the sand is banded with gold braid
10.	*Ma tasi-oe mpesi lilon-na mai.*	And to where the sea is splashed with gold.

A woman and girl scoop-fishing in the sea find the shells, who are crying, and ask them what is wrong. They reply that they have lost their father and mother and are now left alone in the sea.

The Encounter and Initial Dialogue

11.	*Boe ma ina mana-seko meti-la*	A woman scooping in the tide
12.	*Ma feto mana-ndai tasi-la*	And a girl fishing in the sea
13.	*Ala mai nda Bina Bane no Suti Solo.*	They meet Bina Bane or Suti Solo.

14.	*Mpinu lama-tuda idu*	Snot falls from [their] nose
15.	*Ma lu lama-sasi mata.*	And tears pour from [their] eyes.
16.	*Boe-ma la-tane lae:*	They ask, saying:
17.	*'Te sala hata leo, hatak*	'What wrong like this
18.	*Ma singgo hata leo hatak*	And what mistake like this
19.	*De ei duang nge lu sasi mata*	That you two have tears pouring from the eyes
20.	*Ma mpinu tuda idu?'*	And snot falling from the nose?'
21.	*Boe ma lae:*	So they say:
22.	*'Sanggu nala liun*	'A storm struck the ocean
23.	*Ma luli nala sain.*	And cyclone struck the sea.
24.	*De neni ai amam ma ai inam,*	It carried away our father and our mother,
25.	*Bane Aka Liun*	Bane Aka of the ocean
26.	*Ma Solo Bane Sain.*	And Solo Bane of the sea.
27.	*De la'o ela ai dadi neu*	They departed, leaving us to become
28.	*Ana-ma manu ma kisa kapa.*	An orphan chicken and lone buffalo.
29.	*De ai ta hampu*	We have no one
30.	*Mana-fali oli*	Who will help us in the estuary
31.	*Ma mana-toa tasi.'*	And who will provide for us in the sea.'

The women propose that the shells go with 'creaking wood and scraping forest' to hide themselves in the forest. They reply that if a cyclone uproots the trees and liana of the forest, there will be no order or integrity there for them.

The First Dialogue Directive

32.	*Boe ma ina mana-seko meti-la*	The woman scooping in the tide
33.	*Ma feto mana-ndai tasi-la*	And the girl fishing in the sea
34.	*La-fada lae:*	Speak, saying:
35.	*'Meu mo nula kekek*	'Go with the creaking wood
36.	*Ma lasi nggio-nggiok*	And with the scraping forest
37.	*Fo nabi nula*	To hide yourself in the wood
38.	*Ma keke lasi.'*	And conceal yourself in the forest.'

39.	*Boe ma lae:*	So they say:
40.	*'Luli mai fafae*	'[If] a cyclone comes to shake
41.	*Ma sanggu mai fofoi*	And a storm comes to uproot
42.	*Na latuk ai do nula la*	Then the yellowed tree leaves of the wood
43.	*Monu mai hun-na*	Will fall to the foot of the tree
44.	*Ma hi'i po'o ai lasi la*	And the mouldy liana cords of the forest
45.	*Kono mai okan.*	Will drop to their roots.
46.	*De tetun ta ndia boe*	Order is not there then
47.	*Ma tema ta ndia boe.'*	And integrity is not there then.'

The women then propose that they go with the 'wild pig and forest monkey' to conceal themselves in caves and holes. They reply that if the pig were hunted and the monkey flushed out of their hiding place, there would again be no order or integrity for them.

The Second Dialogue Directive

48.	*Boe ma lae:*	So they say:
49.	*'Te nana meu mo bafi fui*	'Go, then, with the wild pig
50.	*Ma kode lasi*	And forest monkey
51.	*Fo keke nai leak*	To conceal yourself in caves
52.	*Ma nabi nai luak.'*	And hide yourself in holes.'
53.	*Boe ma lae:*	So they say:
54.	*'Tebe te mbu bafi nama-hana*	'True, but if the pig is hunted heatedly
55.	*Ma oka kode naka-doto.*	And the monkey is flushed noisily.
56.	*Na bafi fui sapu boe*	Then the wild pig will die too
57.	*Ma kode lasi lalo boe.*	And the forest monkey will perish too.
58.	*De tetun ta ndia boe*	Order is not there then
59.	*Ma teman ta ndia boe.'*	And integrity is not there then.'

The women then propose that the shells go with river shrimp and the grassland cuckoo to hide deep in the grass or deep in a waterhole. But they reply that if the river's water ceases to flow and the grass dries, there will once more be no order and integrity there.

The Third Dialogue Directive

60.	*Boe ma lae:*	So they say:
61.	*'Te nana meu mo mpoe le*	'But go, then, with the river shrimp
62.	*Ma meu mo koko na'u*	And go with grassland cuckoo
63.	*Fo nabi nai na'u dale*	To hide yourself deep in the grass
64.	*Ma keke nai lifu dale.'*	And conceal yourself deep in a water hole.'
65.	*Boe ma lae:*	So they say:
66.	*'Tebe te le lama-ketu meti*	'True, but when the river ceases its ebb
67.	*Na mpoe le lai aon*	Then the river shrimp pities itself
68.	*Ma na'u lama-tu tongo*	And the grass dries on the blade
69.	*Na koko na'u sue aon.*	Then the grassland cuckoo sorrows for itself.
70.	*De tetun ta ndia boe*	Order is not there then
71.	*Ma teman ta ndia boe.'*	And integrity is not there then.'

The women then propose that the shells enter the surf and plunge into the waves and make their way to 'Helok and Sonobai'. These are names for the islands of Semau and Timor based on terms for the major populations on these islands. Semau is seen as populated by the Helong people while Timor is identified with the once great ruler of the Atoni population, Sonbait. Taken together, these names define a place to the east of Rote. The shells follow this advice and are carried to the shore of Helok//Sonobai.

The Fourth Dialogue Directive

72.	*Boe ma lae:*	So they say:
73.	*'Te nana sida li fo meu*	'But, then, shear through the surf to go
74.	*Ma susi nafa fo meu*	And plunge through the waves to go
75.	*Leo Helok Sonobai meu.*	To Helong and Sonobai.
76.	*Te dae sodak nai ndia*	For the land of well-being is there
77.	*Ma oe molek nai na.'*	And the waters of peace are there.'
78.	*Boe ma Bina Bane*	So Bina Bane
79.	*Ma Suti Solo*	And Suti Solo
80.	*Ala sida li*	They shear through the surf
81.	*Ma susi nafa.*	And plunge through the waves.

82.	*De leu Helok Sonobai,*	They go to Helong and Sonobai,
83.	*Leo losa solokaek ke haba-na*	To where the sand is banded with gold braid
84.	*Tasi-oe mpesi lilo na.*	And where the sea is splashed with gold.

There the woman of Helong and the girl of Sonobai encounter them, as they cry along the shore. They ask them what is wrong and the shells tell them that they have lost their mother and father in a great storm. They are alone and looking for someone to help them.

The Encounter on Timor: Suti Solo and Bina Bane's Lament

85.	*Boe ma ina Helok-ka mai nda duas*	A woman of Helong meets the two
86.	*Ma fetok Sonobai mai tonggo duas-sa.*	And a girl of Sonobai encounters the two.
87.	*Lu la-sasi mata*	Tears pour from [their] eyes
88.	*Ma pinu la-tuda idu.*	And snot falls from [their] nose.
89.	*Boe ma lae:*	So they say:
90.	*'Sala hata leo hatak*	'What wrong like this
91.	*Ma singgo hata leo hatak?*	And what mistake like this?
92.	*De ei mpinu idu*	This snot from your nose
93.	*Ma lu mata.'*	These tears from your eyes.'
94.	*Boe ma lae:*	So they say:
95.	*'Ai dadi neu kisa kampa*	'We have become a lone buffalo
96.	*Ma ana-ma manu,*	And an orphan chicken,
97.	*Hu sanggu neni ai amam*	Because a storm has carried away our father
98.	*Ma luli neni ai inam.*	And a cyclone has carried away our mother.
99.	*De se fali oli ai*	Who in the estuary will help us
100.	*Ma toa tasi ai.'*	Who in the sea will provide for us.'

The woman of Sonobai and the girl of Helong invite them to their house. When they arrive, the women carve them to make haircombs and file them to make earrings. This is done badly and they perish.

The Demise of Suti Solo and Bina Bane

101.	*Boe ma ina Sonobai*	So the woman of Sonobai
102.	*Ma feto Helok-ka lae:*	And the girl of Helong say:
103.	*'Tungga ai leo uma teu*	'Follow us to our house
104.	*Ma lo teu.'*	And to our home.'
105.	*Boe ma Bina Bane*	So Bina Bane
106.	*No Suti Solo tungga.*	Or Suti Solo follow [them].
107.	*De losa.*	They arrive there.
108.	*Boe ma ina Sonobai*	So the woman Sonobai
109.	*No feto Helok-ka*	Or the girl Helong
110.	*Hai lala Bina Bane*	Pick up Bina Bane
111.	*De ala sein neu sua*	They cut incisions in him to make hair combs
112.	*Ma hai lala Suti Solo*	And pick up Suti Solo
113.	*De folan neu falo.*	They file him to make earrings.
114.	*De fola falo la salan*	They file the earrings badly
115.	*Ma se sua la singgon*	And they incise the hair combs inexactly
116.	*Boe ma Bina Bane sapu*	So Bina Bane dies
117.	*Ma Suti Solo lalo.*	And Suti Solo perishes.

Comparisons with Termanu

For someone from Termanu, there is nothing in this composition that would be unintelligible or even difficult to understand, yet it would be recognised as a composition that was not from Termanu. Putting aside the pronunciation of a few words, there are other subtle differences in this composition that mark it as 'not from Termanu'. Some are notable and do not relate to the composition's dyadic form. Thus, for example, the two-word phrase *tebe te* in lines 54 and 66, which means 'true, indeed', would probably not occur in a Termanu dialect text. The equivalent would be '*te'ek*'. Similarly, the use of pronominal terms in Ba'a dialect identifies this recitation—thus, for example, the pronominal *ai*, meaning 'we, us', occurs where Termanu would use *ami*.

Most significant is the fact that this version of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* has been given no genealogical foundation. Poets in Termanu and elsewhere may differ in the genealogical foundations that they offer in support of the authority of their recitations but all of them insist on providing some kind of genealogical basis for their recitations. This lack of a genealogical foundation may be an artefact of the way I collected this chant: with Manoeain on his own and without any demanding Rotenese audience who might have insisted on such basic background.

Equally different are the various directives proposed to the shells. None of these is the familiar directive (of Termanu) that proposes to locate the shells within the house or in the surrounding fields.

1) *nula kekek//lasi nggio-nggiok*   'creaking wood'//'scraping forest'

2) *bafi fui//kode lasi*   'wild pig'//'forest monkey'

3) *mpoe le//koko na'u*   'river shrimp'//'grassland cuckoo'

4) *Helok//Sonobai*   Helong//Sonobai

Pig and Monkey, for example, form a familiar set in other versions of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* but these creatures always appear as the marauders and destroyers of gardens and fields. The common expression in Termanu is *Kode ketu betek//Bafi na'a pelak* ('The monkey plucks the millet and the pig eats the maize'). Neither monkey nor pig is ever proposed as a companion for the shells.

Intriguingly in this version of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane*, there occur formulaic lines that resonate with Termanu's traditions. These lines (42–45), formed around the formulaic pair *latu ai do//hi'i po'o ai*, are as follows:

Na latuk ai do nula la	Then the yellowed tree leaves of the wood
Monu mai hun-na	Will fall to the foot of the tree
Ma hi'i po'o ai lasi la	And the mouldy liana cords of the forest
Kono mai okan.	Will drop to their roots.

In Termanu, the somewhat similar formulaic set is used exclusively as a name, Latu Kai Do//Po'o Pau Ai, for the woman in the ocean whom Suti Solo do Bina Bane reject and with whom they refuse to dance.

An Analysis of Laazar Manoeain's Use of Ritual Language

This recitation with its 117 lines is composed of some 49 dyadic sets. As in all of the other recitations, the majority of the dyadic sets used in the composition are the same as those that occur elsewhere throughout the island. Among these basic dyadic sets, which are identical to those in Termanu, are the following: 1) *bafi//kode* ('pig'//'monkey'); 2) *dae//oe* ('earth'//'water'); 3) *haba//lilo* ('braided gold'//'gold'); 4) *hu//oka* ('trunk'//'root'); 5) *idu//mata* ('nose'//'eye'); 6) *kono//monu* ('to fall down'//'to fall off'); 7) *lasi//nula* ('forest'//'wood'); 8) *lo//uma* ('home'//'house'). To these may be added sets, also shared with Termanu, that are marked by the sound change p > mp: 1) *lu//mpinu* ('tears'//'snot'); 2) *ke//mpesi* ('braided, banded'//'splashed, thrown together'); 3) *koko na'u//mpoe le* ('grassland cuckoo'//'river shrimp').

This version of *Suti Solo do Bina Bane* uses various complex formulaic sets that are like those in Termanu: *soloka'ek ke haba-na//tasi-oe mpesi lilon-na* ('the sand banded with gold braid'//'the water of the sea splashed with gold'), *lu sasi mata//mpinu tuda idu* ('tears pouring from the eyes'//'snot falling from the nose') or *ana-ma manu ma kisa kapa* ('an orphan chicken and lone buffalo'). However, there are other usages that are distinctive and unlike the formulaic expressions in Termanu or other dialect areas. Instead of the familiar *bonu boa//ele piko* ('bob like *boa* wood'//'drift like *piko* wood'), this version has a variant form: *bomu bina//ele mpiko* ('bob like *bina* wood'//'drift like *mpiko* wood'). In Termanu, the set meaning to hunt by shouting or flushing out animals is *pu//oku*; here it is *mpu//oka*. In Termanu, *latu* forms a set with *po'o*, meaning 'ripe, mouldy'; in Ba'a, this set is *hi'i//latu*. These slight variations in form are what distinguish one dialect's recitation from another.