

TEXTS

Sranan. Basja Pataka

- o. a ningi ningi ba busara,
ningi ningi ba busara,
how a how, ningi ningi ba busara-o.
a ningi ningi ba ningi ningi ba ningi ningi ba busara-o.
a how a how, ningi ningi ba busara.
di moni no de, s'sa Akuba lowe,
ma ningi ningi ba busara,
hej a hej, ningi ningi ba busara.
a ningi ningi ba busara,
ningi ningi ba busara,
how a how, ningi ningi ba busara-o.

1. Tje!

we i si, a tor disi, di i jere e singi de—"a ningi ningi ba busara, ningi ningi ba busara"—a no now a un w'wan uma e gowe libi man. 2. sens a fosi ten i be a wan basja, di e kari basja Pataka. 3. a pranasi kom broko now, na biro Kawna; now skowtupost kom dape de—a Kunofru.

4. We dape ben de a moro hogri presi, pe den ben e tjari srafu gowe go makti. 5. ef i de wan hogri srafu, dan den tja i gowe go makt a Kunofru. 6. uma den ben e poti ton a den mofo hari ken-pondo. 7. dat wan taki den e prej buriki fu hari ken-pondo.

8. We a ningi ningi ba busara.

9. We, a basja fu dape, hen nen ben de basja Pataka. 10. We basja Pataka—pataka a wan sani, a de a libi, ef i mek krapi nanga hen, a e bet tumsi takru. 11. a dede, tok a e beti. 12. biká, ef i ab a drej pataka, kabá i anu misi go na hen tifi sej, a sut i kabá.

13. j'e njam hen srefi, tok a e bet ju. 14. *dùs* pataka na wan hogri sani
15. *want* a man ben de wan hogri nengre, ne a tek hen nen fu pataka. 16.
dan a ben kon de basja. 17. dan ala suma e kar hen taki Basja Pataka.

18. we te a kon na oso, ala dej a mu njam dri sortu tonton. 19. den
tonton ben tan na ini baki ini. 20. wan sej weti kasaba tonton, wan sej
baana tonton, wan sej kokorí tonton.

21. dat wan taki: dri sortu tonton e de na a pikin baki fu hen, pe a e
njam 22. komki no ben de a ten dati: na ini bigi krabasi nanga krabasi
spun. 23. dan na okro brafu de na ini wan krabasi, dan a kap-kapu
jarabaka ede nanga katfisi, stimofo, bonjo-bonjo sowtu meti de na a wan
krabasi.

24. *dùs* ala dej s'sa Abeni, na hen ben e bor tonton. 25. ef a dej dia
kom, s'sa Abeni bor bana, a e kis s'sa Abeni, a e fom hen. 26. no fom hen
prej-prej fom-fom, a e fom hen bun fom-fom. 27. s'sa Abeni no kan tjar
hen go a fes-sej go kragi a granmasra, biká a gran-basja kabá.

28. we, s'sa Abeni no si wan fasi fu du, di a fom-fom kon sar hen skin.
29. ne s'sa Abeni tagi wan fu den trawan, a taki: "basja e fom mi tumusi!"

30. a tak: "we sisa fa j o du?"

31. a tak: "baja, mi no a wan weni, noso mi sa dede sref-srefi!"

32. we now, ala basja moni, a s'sa Abeni ben e hor hen. 33. ma nomo
basja tan te wan pisi.

34. ala sonde pagara ben e go pranasi. 35. now un jere a singi disi. 36.
den fosten suma ben e singi hen taki:

37. a kor mi-o, baja Kwami kor mi-o!
a kor mi, fa m baja Jaw kor mi!
a taki: Pagara kon, a e go baj wan koto,
pagara kon, a e go baj jaki!
now di pagara kon, m baja go a mangro.
a go a mangro, a go a mangro.
pagara kon, m baja go a mangro,
a go a mangro, a go a mangro,
pagara kon, m baja go a mangro.

38. ma basja Pataka dati no ben go a mangro. 39. dati wan tak a singi.
40. biká te den pramisi den uma den sani, tak te pagara kom. . .

41. biká ala sonde pagara ben e kon na ini pranasi. 42. krara e kon,
koto e kon, angisa e kon! 43. gowtu keti no ben de, buj no ben de. 44.
a krara ben e taj na anu—unge, sabi diri—na den krara dat ben de, a dat
den ben e taj na anu.

45. dosu te pagara kom, te a baja no man baj, dan a e gowe fu hen a
jur dati. 46. dan a sab tak pagara e kom, dan a e gwe fu hen a mangro,
tak a o kis krabu. 47. na hen na a singi.

48. We ma basja Pataka dati no ben go a mangro, leki . . .

49. a s'sa tagi wan fu den trawan, a taki: "baja, mi no kan man anga a fom-fom fu basja moro."

50. a tak: "we sisa, dan a gowe i mu gowe lib hen."

51. a tak: "we a somen ten di mi tan katibo gi basja, tek somen fom-fom.

52. dan basja abi somen moni."

53. a tak: "we sisa, dan i mu e begi hen hala juru, mek a e baj wan sani gi ju. 54. dan te a moni kabá, dan i mu gowé!"

55. a tak: "haj! i gi mi wan bun laj!"

56. basja prit hen skin. 57. a jur di basja lib hen, hen ati kowru, a tak: 58. "basja, mi wan begi ju, te pagara kom, i no kan baj tu dobrusten koto gi mi?"

59. a tak: "aj, mi sa baj gi ju."

60. a so ala juru a e begi wan tra sani. 61. ma a no e kis fom-fom moro, biká a e fom a tonton now ala dej. 62. a no e tak hen gowé, te ala a moni fu basja kabá.

63. nomo a pak-pak ala den san fu hen na ini hen pagara, a floisi a go a wan tra pranasi.

64. a jur di basja komopo kom na oso, a o si a oso drej. 65. ne basja kon a mofo doro, ne basja bigin taki a tori. 66. dan ala suma fu pranasi sabi, tak s'sa Abeni gowé:

67. "baja, fa fu s'sa Abeni?"

68. ne basja no man taki. 69. ne basja taki bari:

70. a ningi ningi ba busara,
ningi ningi ba busara,
hej a how, ningi ningi ba busara.
moni no de, na uma lowé,
ma ningi ningi ba busara,
a how a how, a ningi ningi ba busara-o.
a ningi ningi ba busara-o,
a ningi ningi ba busara,
a hej a how, ningi ningi ba busara.
moni kabá, na uma lowé,
ma ningi ningi ba busara,
hej a hej, ningi ningi ba busara-o.

71. dosu lowé fu uma nanga takru du fu umasuma, a no now a ben de, a kon. 72. sensi grontapu-seti a ben de.

(told by Alex de Drie)

Translation. Basha Pataka

o. [The much repeated "ningi ningi ba busara" is thought to mean "Negroes are ungrateful," but only the sixth line is in straightforward language, meaning "When there was no money, Sis(ter) Akuba ran away."]

1. Listen!

Well, you see, this story that you just now heard being sung—a *ningi ningi ba busara, ningi ningi ba busara*—it is not just nowadays or only among us that women go away and leave men. 2. There was, long since, an overseer called Pataka. 3. The plantation, on the lower Commewyn, is now in ruin; now it's a police station—Kunofru.

4. Well, that was the worst place, where they took slaves to be tamed.

5. If you were a bad slave, then they took you to be tamed at Kunofru.

6. With women, they used to put a bit in their mouth to haul the sugarcane pontoons. 7. That means they served as donkeys to haul the cane pontoons.

8. Well, that is *ningi ningi ba busara*.

9. Well, the overseer there was called Basha [overseer] Pataka. 10. Well, Basha Pataka—*pataka* is something, if it is alive and you are careless with it, it'll bite you very badly. 11. And if it's dead, it still bites you. 12. Because, if you take a dried *pataka*, your hand has no sooner chanced to go near his teeth than he has already stabbed you.

13. Even when you eat him he will bite you. 14. So *pataka* is a bad thing.

15. Because the man was a bad negro, that is why he took his name from the *pataka*. 16. And then he became overseer. 17. Then everybody called him Basha Pataka.

18. Well, when he came home, every day he must have three kinds of *tonton* to eat. 19. These were placed on a tray. 20. On one side was *tonton* of sweet manioc, on another was *tonton* of plantain, and on yet another was *tonton* of bitter manioc meal.

21. That means there were three kinds of *tonton* on the little tray from which he ate 22. (bowls did not exist at that time), in big calabashes with a calabash spoon. 23. Then the okra was in one calabash, and the chopped *yarabaka* heads, together with catfish, tidbits, and salted meat with bones in another.

24. And so every day Sis' Abeni, it was she who made *tonton*. 25. If one day when he came home, Sis' Abeni had cooked plantains, he would take hold of Sis' Abeni and beat her. 26. Not beat her playfully, but give her a sound thrashing. 27. Sis' Abeni could not take him to the front side and make a complaint to the owner, because he was already the head overseer.

28. Well, Sis' Abeni didn't see what she could do when the beatings became more than she could bear. 29. So Sis' Abeni said to one of the others, she said: "Basha beats me too much!"

30. He said: "Well, sister, what are you going to do?"

31. She said: "Friend, I see no way out until I myself shall be dead."

32. Well, now, all the overseer's money, it was Sis' Abeni who took care of it. 33. But no more about the overseer for a while.

34. Every Sunday a huckster used to visit the plantation. 35. Now listen to this song. 36. The old-time people used to sing it like this:

37. He cheated me, friend Kwami cheated me!
 He cheated me, and how friend Yao cheated me!
 He said: When the huckster comes he'll buy [me] a skirt,
 when the huckster comes, he'll buy a jacket.
 Now when the huckster came, my friend went to the mangrove
 swamp,
 He went to the mangrove, he went to the mangrove.
 The huckster came, my friend went to the mangrove swamp,
 he went to the mangrove, he went to the mangrove,
 the huckster came, my friend went to the swamp.

38. But as for Basha Pataka, he didn't go to the mangrove swamp. 39. That's the meaning of the song. 40. Because when they promise women things, when the huckster comes, . . .

41. Because every Sunday the huckster used to come to the plantation. 42. He brought beads, he brought skirts, he brought kerchiefs. 43. He did not bring gold chains, he did not bring bracelets. 44. Beads were tied around the arm—[those called] *unge, sabi diri*—whatever beads there might be were tied on the arm.

45. So, when the huckster came and the boyfriend couldn't buy, then he would go away at that time. 46. Since he knew that the huckster was coming, he would go to the mangrove swamp and say that he was going to catch crabs. 47. That is the song.

48. But as for Basha Pataka, he didn't go to the swamp, like . . .

49. Sis' said to one of the others, she said: "Friend, I can't put up with Basha's beatings any more."

50. He said: "Well, Sister, then you'll just have to leave him."

51. She said: "Well, I've been slaving for Basha so long, and taken so many beatings. 52. Besides, Basha has so much money."

53. He said: "Well, Sister, then you must be at him all the time for him to buy something for you. 54. Then when the money is finished, then you must go away!"

55. She said: "Fine! You've given me good advice!"

56. Basha gave her a hiding. 57. When Basha left her and had cooled down, she said: 58. "Basha, I want to ask you, when the huckster comes, won't you buy two diced skirts for me?"

59. He said: "Yes, I'll buy them for you."

60. And so all the time she kept asking for something or other. 61. But she didn't get beaten any more, because now she pounded tonton every day. 62. She says nothing about going away until all Basha's money is finished.

63. Then she packed all her things in her basket and flitted to another plantation.

64. When Basha quit work and came home, he finds the house empty.
65. So Basha comes to his doorstep and begins his lamentation. 66. Then all the plantation knew that Sis' Abeni had gone:

67. "Friend, how is Sis' Abeni?"

68. So Basha cannot answer. 69. So Basha shouted:

70. *a ningi ningi ba busara,*
ningi ningi ba busara,
hey a how, ningi ningi ba busara.
There's no money, the woman's run away,
but *ningi ningi ba busara,*
a how a how, a ningi ningi ba busara-o.
a ningi ningi ba busara-o,
a ningi ningi ba busara,
a hey a how, ningi ningi ba busara.
The money has finished, the woman has run away,
but *ningi ningi ba busara,*
hey a hey, ningi ningi ba busara-o.

71. And so women's running away and women's misdeeds are not something that has come about in our own time. 72. They have existed since the world came into being.

Commentary

This story probably dates from the time shortly before or shortly after the abolition of slavery in Surinam (1863), for its heroine, Sister Abeni, apparently was free to leave one plantation for another.

The word *basha* comes from Eng. *overseer*, to which the Jamaican equivalent, *obasia*, is one step nearer. The *pataka* is a fish resembling the snook, with very sharp teeth.

One of the traditional openings in telling a story is by the formula *Cric! Crac!*; another is the singing of a song, the meaning of whose words is sometimes, as here, quite obscure.

The words *dùs* 'thus; so' (14, 24) and *want* 'because' (15) have been italicized in the text because they are unassimilated Dutch loanwords. Elsewhere in the same text we find their Sranan equivalents, *dosu* (45) and *biká* (passim).

Some words have been left untranslated. Thus, *tonton* (18 and passim) is a dish made by boiling, then pounding, green plantains, breadfruit, etc.; *yarabaka* (23) and *pataka* (passim) are species of fish; *unge* and *sabi diri* (lit., "knowledge is precious") are names given to different kinds of beads. SN *baja*, here rendered 'friend', may come from Ptg. *compai*.

The word *pagara* is a Karina loanword which refers primarily to a type of Amerindian basket widely used for storing and transporting clothes,

etc. Here it refers to the huckster with his pagara full of things he hopes to sell on the plantations; and I have therefore translated it by 'the huckster', except in 63, where the word 'basket' is applicable. In 27, "the front side" refers to that part of the plantation where the owner or director lives. In translating *floisi* 'to change dwelling place' (63), I have employed the Yorkshire term 'flit', but 'move' would do just as well. The meaning of *weni* in 31 (*mi no a wan weni* 'I haven't one X') is doubtful, but probably is 'refuge' or 'way out (of a difficulty)'.

Finally, the word *stimofo* in 23 deserves some explanation. It is a contraction of *switi mofo*, literally "sweet mouth," but referring to anything to eat that is especially agreeable to the taste. It is interesting to note that CC *sjwit* (from Eng. *sweet*) and LA *du* (from Fr. *doux*) are also employed with this meaning ('agreeable to the taste').