# Juan Bobo: A Folkloric Information System

#### SARAI LASTRA

#### Abstract

From 1916 through 1929, the Journal of American Folklore (JAF) published nine volumes containing various forms of Puerto Rican folklore which had been collected during the years of 1914 to 1915 by J. Alden Mason, an American anthropologist working under the supervision of Franz Boas. Notable Puerto Rican scholars (Manrique Cabrera, 1982; Rivera de Alvarez, 1983) have endorsed Mason's collection as being authentic and consider it today as the most complete example of the island's folklore. Yet Louise D. Dennis (1922) reviewed the Décimas, which are ten-line poems, collected by Mason as not being "truly representative of a folk-art" because they were "developed by means of simile and metaphor not characteristic of folk-poetry" (p. 100). This article is about the relationship between a collector, some of the artifacts in the collection, the informants, and elements that construct and authenticate a folkloric information system.

#### SITUATING THE PUERTO RICAN CULTURE

And they firmly thought that I, with those ships and people, came from heaven and, in that mindset, they received me in every corner, after they lost their fear. And this did not happen because they were ignorant, they are of subtle intelligence, and men which sail all those seas, it is marvelous the way they tell us about everything, except that they had never seen people dressed like us nor ships like ours.

—Cristobal Colón, 14931

Taino Indians saw Christopher Columbus as he arrived in Borinquen in 1493. But in 1898, when the U. S. troops arrived, the Tainos were absent from the welcoming celebrations. Spain's influence lingers, however. One hundred years have passed since the Hispanic-American war, and Spanish is still the island's main language. A preference toward certain kinds of food such as rice and beans, an ability to feel Latin musical beats, and family lore and political allegiances are considered, by many, as significant cultural identity markers. Unlike other Spanish-American ethnic groups migrating to the United States, Puerto Ricans do not process immigration papers since they are U.S. citizens. Literally speaking, the Atlantic Ocean is all that separates Puerto Rico from "America."

Although Spanish is the people's dominant language, English has been accepted by the government as one of its official languages. Latin music may reign on Caribbean airwaves, but English radio stations command their place, too. "Who do you feel is your *Mother* country, Spain or the United States?" is a question asked of some children in local schools. Many question the analogy by replying: "Well, if Spain is my mother, is the U.S.A. my father?" Jose Luis Gonzalez (1980) says the Puerto Rican cultural identity is a complicated matter, since the nation-state has been constructed on "four floors." Gonzalez's book, titled *El Pais de Cuatro Pisos* (The Country of Four Floors), describes the national identity as being composed of four others: Indians and blacks (floor one); European immigrants, specifically Spaniards (floor two); North Americans (floor three); and an urbanized racial mixture (floor four).

#### THE ORAL VOICES

I must add, however, that the inhabitants are very loyal to the King, and display an innocence and candor which I have neither seen nor heard of elsewhere in America. . . .In all the island, there are only two schools for children; outside of Puerto Rico [San Juan] and the villa of San Germán, few know how to read. They count time by epochs of government, hurricanes, visits of the Bishop, arrivals of ships, or funds from Mexico. (Alejandro O'Reilly, 1765, as cited in Wagenheim & Wagenheim, 1996, p. 31)

Following Gonzalez's metaphor, it is possible to argue that Puerto Rico's oral history is one that has been composed of unique, distinct and, in many cases, contradictory voices. A joke I heard when growing up in Puerto Rico was about a woman who had fallen in a river. As the townspeople ran to her husband yelling about the accident, the husband replied: "Let us look for her up-stream." "But, Sir, the river flows downward," the people replied. "Yes, I know. But my wife always goes *against* the flow." In a polyphonic society, nothing conveys contradictions better than its folklore.

When describing the essential quality of Puerto Rican folklore, scholars are usually at a loss for words since it is difficult to explain such cul-

tural richness, complexities, and tensions. For example, Tío Nazario de Figueroa (1967) says: "Puerto Ricans are great friends of dancing. The origin of their dances has been traced to the great Indian Areytos and the primitive rhythms of Congo and other regions of Africa. . . . However, we don't want to imply that all dances are Afro-Indian since we also have Spanish and Arabian influences" (pp. 27-28).<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly, Nazario de Figueroa's statement is footnoted with an editorial comment stating that Indian influences in Puerto Rican dances have not been verified, therefore, for possible origins, the reader should investigate the traditional dances from Spain. This narrative shows the difficulties encountered when trying to situate folklore based on blurred classifications. However, the blurred classifications are not consequences of attaching incorrect semantic labels, but the result of fluid margins because of the nature of this folklore community.

Nonetheless, it is possible to ascertain that Puerto Rican folkloric expressions, in one way or another, reflect influences or elements from Indian, black, and Spanish traditions (Manrique Cabrera, 1969, p. 408). Structurally, some of the popular oral modalities use complex lyrical forms such as: "decimas [which are] (10-stanza couplets) of the anonymous popular poets, who still improvise their chants and play the traditional instruments: the guiro, the cuatro, the tiple, and the guitar" (Babin, 1983, p. 320). In addition to the decimas, Rivera de Alvarez (1983) describes other types of oral expressions used in Puerto Rico, such as the romances and romancillos (short narratives or lyrical poems in octosyllable meters), coplas (ballads), cantos (songs), rimas infantiles (nursery rhymes), refranes (proverbs), adivinanzas (riddles), and cuentos (folktales) (pp. 59-91).

That the importance of oral history has been recognized in this culture can best be summed up by the words of Don Rafael Ramirez de Arellano (1926), a Puerto Rican educator-philosopher who collected samples of folklore eleven years after Mason completed his field project. Says Ramirez de Arellano: "the best preparation for the future is the complete and exact knowledge of the past" (p. 7).

#### FROM SPEAKERS TO READERS

We have profound consideration for your national ideas; you must treat our local ideas with a similar consideration.

—Luis Muñoz Rivera, 1916³

A slight detour into some history on Puerto Rican children's literature is necessary for locating the position of printed folktales within the educational system. A chronicle of Puerto Rican children's literature has been given most notably by Ester Feliciano Mendoza (1969), Carmen Bravo Villasante (1966), and Flor Piñeiro de Rivera (1987). Most chroniclers agree that a desire to provide Puerto Rican children with relevant literature

emerged in 1882 when an educator, Eugenio Maria de Hostos, wrote "El Libro de Mis Hijos" (The Book for My Children). De Hostos's short stories were recommended as valuable literature because children received "wise advice" while decoding the text. However, Feliciano Mendoza (1969) noted that the book should not be considered as initiating a children's literature publishing trend because its intended audience was not children (p. 444).

It was not until 1898, when the United States assumed control over the island's educational system and found books unavailable, that a new publishing trend was established. The directives from the federal educational officer were that if in three months locals could not produce suitable Spanish books for children, then all instruction would be switched to English. Feliciano Mendoza describes how Manuel Fernandez Juncos, a Spaniard living in Puerto Rico, "created the miracle" by translating the text of and composing Spanish songs for Sarah Louise Arnold and Charles B. Gilbert's book First Steps in English into a Spanish version titled, Los Primeros Pasos en Castellano, within the required time. Afterward, Fernandez Juncos compiled "Antologia Puertorriqueña" (Puerto Rican Anthology), which he described as stories written for a young adult audience. Subsequently, he wrote "Semblanzas Puertorriqueñas" (Biographical Sketches of Puerto Ricans), stories which presented prominent locals in a "delightful way" (Feliciano Mendoza, 1969, pp. 445-46). Other local authors followed Fernandez Juncos's lead, and Flor Piñeiro (1987, pp. 4-35) provides an extensive listing of children's titles and book awards received during the past 100 years.

While local authors were producing various remarkable works for adults and children (for a comprehensive history and chronology, see Rivera de Alvarez, 1983, 1970; Manrique Cabrera, 1982; Martinez Masdeu y Melón, 1970), local educators were dealing with a legacy of a Spanish-English rivalry that was converging on the public schools. Negrón de Montilla (1975) details early controversies spanning the years of 1900 through 1930 and notes that most of the initial misunderstandings stemmed from the first six U.S. Commissioners of Education basing their policy decisions on the following 1899 war report:

That this education should be in English we are clearly of opinion. Porto Rico is now and is henceforth to be a part of the American possessions and its people are to be American. . . . At present only one out of every ten persons on the island can read and write. . . . Why, therefore should we attempt to teach the other nine Spanish instead of English. The question of good citizenship and education can be more easily settled through the public schools than by any other method. (U. S. War Department, Division of Customs and Insular Affairs, 1899, as cited in Negrón Montilla, 1975, p. 36)

Within such an environment of cultural tensions and resistance, English was enforced as the medium for local instruction in 1909. (It is

possible to present below some of the reactions from local educators since Wagenheim and Wagenheim [1996] have made available in English a collection of Puerto Rican historical writings covering 500 years.) Glimpses into the recollections of Cayetano Col y Cuchi, who was a member of the Puerto Rican House of Delegates, show the children's involvement in the struggle for preserving their Spanish heritage:

This [language] struggle culminated in 1909. That year an effort was made to abolish the teaching of Spanish in the public schools. Our schoolmasters were ordered to give their instruction exclusively in English. . . . We knew perfectly well that the soul of a people is incarnated in its language. We would have preferred being without a country, to losing our native tongue. Upon this issue, we joined battle, and spontaneously my friends and I threw ourselves into the thickest of the fight. That was quite natural. But it was the children—children of six, seven, and ten years of age—who really started the revolt. They were the first to rebel. The men at the head of the government were first apprised of the resistance to substituting English for Spanish by a pupils' strike. Children refused to attend their classes unless they might be instructed in the language of their fathers and their country. . . . A resort to brutal measures followed. Children were expelled from the schools. Those who did not attend English classes, or who refused to be taught in that language were turned into the streets. They could not continue their studies; their future was ruined. (as cited in Wagenheim & Wagenheim, 1996, pp. 144-45)

Unfortunately, the language struggle was far from over in 1909, when even darker clouds covered the island. The U.S. Congress was considering granting citizenship to all Puerto Ricans while restricting local voting rights only to literate natives or to local taxpayers. This was a matter of great concern to islanders because they were already voting on insular matters under Spanish rule. Muñoz Rivera, the resident commissioner in Washington, debated against adopting such a measure before the U.S. House of Representatives. Some of his speech is presented below since it also describes the island's literacy problems during the times:

By means of this [voting] restriction 165,000 citizens who vote at present and who have been voting since the Spanish days would be barred from the polls. . . . Here are the facts: There exist at present 250,000 registered electors. Seventy percent of the electoral population is illiterate. There will remain, then, 75,000 registered electors. Adding 10,000 illiterate taxpayers, there will be a total of 85,000 citizens within the electoral register and 165,000 outside of it. I can not figure out, hard as I have tried, how those 165,000 Porto Ricans are considered incapable of participating in elections of their representatives in the legislature and municipalities, while on the other hand they are judged perfectly capable of possessing with dignity American citizenship. (as cited in Wagenheim & Wagenheim, 1996, p. 133) Among all these educational, political, and social uncertainties, J. Alden Mason arrived in 1914 with his mission to collect the lore of the Puerto Rican folk. The people, following a long-standing tradition of native hospitality coupled with a knack for spontaneous improvisation and a healthy dose of common sense, welcomed him. Mason's personal narratives validate this reception:

The year I stayed in Puerto Rico, from 1914 to 1915, has been one of the most pleasant and memorable of my life. In great measure it was due to the kindness of many friends that I made, and to the help they gave me. Evidence of this is the large volume of material that I was able to collect. Most of my time, I spent in Utuado and Loiza, which are considered good centers of the Jibaro's [peasants] and Black's folklore, but I also collected small samples of folklore in San Gérman, Coamo and many other places. (Translated from the Spanish Preface in Adivinanzas: Folklore Puertorriqueño, 1960, pp. 9-11)

## THE COLLECTION

Behind nearly every collection lies a tale of adventure and a testimony to the dedication of the collectors. (cited in Seeger & Spear, 1985, p. 3)

Table 1 summarizes the various folkloric genres collected by Mason in Puerto Rico. The material was gathered using three methods, which are listed below in ascending order of sub-collection size:

- 1. Mason's phonetic transcriptions of folktales, poems, riddles;
- 2. audio recordings of adult performers of ballads, folktales, poems; and
- 3. children's writings of folktales, which they collected from their illiterate parents

A basic assumption underlying this article is Bauman's (1977) argument that performance has an effect on the production and dissemination of folklore. Lord (1960) has shown that when a performer's audience is variable and unstable, then the performer or, using Lord's terminology, the "singer of tales," must also be considered a composer (p. 13). Rivera de Alvarez (1983, p. 91) says that, when modern entertainment media like television, movies, and radio were nonexistent in Puerto Rico, the most popular entertainment was storytelling using different types of oral expression. The impromptu locations for sharing folkloric stories could be in people's homes, velorios (funerals), peasant marketplaces, or nightly meetings in the batey (an Indian courtyard). From such customs emerge the now famous literary storytelling traditions called "Los Cuentos del Batey" (Stories from the Batey). Moreover, Rivera de Alvarez (1983) says that Puerto Rican folklore has roots in the epic performances of the Indian Areytos, where the oral expression was of "singing dances" that recorded the victories of war, customs and traditions, and historical memories of the communities (p. 11). In 1788, Fray Iñigo Abbad y Lasierra, a

Oral Form	Description	Influences and Comparative Notes	
Folktales	"Most abundant and best Spanish-American collection" (Espinosa, 1916, p. 423); printed in <i>Journal of American</i> Folklore's volumes 34, 35, 37.	"Many of those folk-tales are evidently versions of the old European riddle-tales; but a large number are new creations with traditional elements confused and mingled" (Espinosa, 1916, p. 424).	
Riddles	Second best collection of its kind in Spanish America; 800 riddles and 1,288 variants; Argentinean collection of Lehmann-Nitsche is first with 1,033 riddles (Espinosa, 1916, p. 423, 424).	More similar to the traditions of Spain than the Spanish collections from Argentina or Chile (Espinosa, 1916, p. 424).	
Décimas	"Some of the décimas and a few of the shorter aguinaldos show real inspiration, and many a Spanish poet has not written better poetry" (Espinosa, 1918, p. 293); 245 decimas.	May come in octosyllabic or hexasyllabic meters, "Hexasyllabic décimas dealing with love and adventure and especially with biblical traditions, many being beautiful Christmas carols called 'aguinaldos' all so abundant in the popular tradition of Porto Rico, are not well known in New Mexico" (Espinosa, 1918, p. 290).	
Coplas	"Octosyllabic quatrain in assonance"; 600+ (1918, p. 290)	Copla has a rival in the decima. "Everywhere [in Spanish America] the <i>copla</i> holds undisputed sway, with the single exception of Porto Rico" (Espinosa, 1918, p. 290).	

Source: Journal of American Folklore, 1916; 1918.

chronicler of Puerto Rican history, described what could be loosely argued as customs exhibiting influences of Indian Areytos:

The favorite diversion of these *isleños* [islanders] is dancing: They organize a dance for no other reason than to pass the time.... When someone gives a dance, the news travels throughout the territory, and hundreds of persons come from everywhere, without being invited. Since the houses are small most guests stay outside... To begin the dance, the guests stand at the foot of the stairs... and sing a song honoring the owner of the house.... Those who grow tired go to sleep in the hammocks, or enter the inner room to rest... others retire to their homes, and return the next day, because these dances tend to last for a whole week. (cited in Wagenheim & Wagenheim, 1996, p. 35)

Clearly, a "singer of tales" would have ample opportunity to communicate stories on such occasions and, with Puerto Rican audiences "coming and going," it could be suggested that these audiences were similar to the Yugoslavian audiences studied by Lord, where the "instability of the audience require[d] a marked degree of concentration on the part of the singer in order that he may sing at all" (p. 16). The demanding audiences provided an avenue for oral expressions to flourish in both countries. Moreover, Lord (1960) also found that folkloric singers could "belong to any group in society. The oral singer in Yugoslavia is not marked by a class distinction; he is not an oral poet because he is a farmer or a shopkeeper or a bey. He can belong to the 'folk,' the merchant class, or the aristocracy" (p. 20). This classification can also be applied to Puerto Rican folklore creators. Aurelio Espinosa (1918), who was responsible for editing and organizing Mason's collection, commented on the influences and class distinctions of the oral poets who participated either directly or indirectly in the project:

The *poetas* or *cantadores*, as they are called, who compose or recite or sing them, are as a rule men of humble walks of life, who have no pretensions of any kind. I suspect, however, that in Porto Rico, and perhaps also in other countries, the *décima* is cultivated by more pretentious poets; and it is not unlikely that many compositions that have attracted our admiration and attention are the product of learned poets, who compose them for the people and abandoned them to their fate. A few of the *décimas* and so-called *aguinaldos* had the names of composers in the manuscript copies; but since much of the material was signed by the children of the schools, who collected a large part of the material, it was not thought wise to give the names of composers. (pp. 290-91)

It is possible to observe nuances in the verbal expressions and different grammatical styles of the performers because the Puerto Rican collection resides in printed text and audio format. Seeger and Spear (1985) explained that the audio component greatly benefited from cylinder recording technology that was invented in 1877 by Thomas Edison. Prior to

Edison's invention, collectors had to rely either on informants repeating the oral expression several times or on human memory. After Edison's recorder, for the first time, field workers were able to capture "objectively...[P]itch, rhythm, pronunciation, inflection, style and expression" and play back the recording to analyze the performance (Seeger & Spear, 1985, pp. 1-13). Since the technology was dependent on wax cylinders, it was fragile but highly adaptive to fieldwork by virtue of not requiring electricity. Consequently, many fieldworkers continued to use it "long after the cylinders had been replaced by flat discs" (p. 6). The recordings were conducted in the following way:

Cylinder recordings were made by literally inscribing sound waves into wax using a hard point fixed to the center of a flexible diaphram at the end of a horn. It was done mechanically, without the use of electricity. Performers would talk, shout, or sing into the recording horn, which increased the force of the sound. The intensified sound waves would press on the diaphram, and the hard point would cut more or less deeply into the wax. The spring driven recorder rotated the cylinder at between 80 and 200 times a minute. A tracking mechanism ensured that the stylus advanced steadlily along the length of the cylinder—usually four or six inches—cutting approximately 100 grooves per inch...To play back the cylinder, a somewhat lighter head with a needle affixed to the center of the diaphram rides on the grooves as the cylinder rotates. (Seeger & Spear, 1985, p. 5)

Mason was able to collect 174 cylinders (at 150 rpm) of funeral music, rumbas, singing games, folktales, tangos, *décimas*, coplas, *aguinaldos*, and love songs, to name a few. Most of this material was recorded by adult males from the towns of Utuado and Loiza. As Figure 1 shows, Utuado is a town in the mountains of Puerto Rico, whereas Loiza is a coastal town. There are other marked differences in the folklore traditions of these areas.

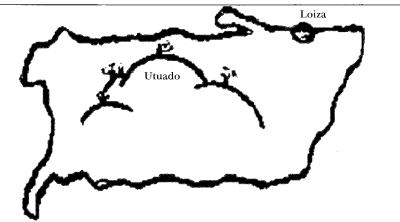


Figure 1. Locations of the Mason Collection.<sup>4</sup>

Utuado has always been a place where the people have been interested in preserving the Taino heritage. Today, Utuado houses the Indigenous Ceremonial Centre, which was built by Taino Indians 800 years ago, and this center is considered the most important archeological Taino site in the Antilles. The town's official Taino name is "El *Pueblo del Vivi*, a name derived from an Indian chief. Translating from Toro Sugrañes (1995), Utuado was incorporated in 1739, which makes it the oldest town of the Central Mountain Range (Cordillera Central). In 1828, the total population was 4,413 islanders of which 200 were slaves with a housing composition of 28 homes and 49 bohios (huts), while the rural area had 208 homes and 300 bohios. By 1870, Utuado had installed a telegraph; in 1892, a hospital; and in 1896, an electric power plant was built; and by the end of the nineteenth century, there were 194 students attending Utuado's public schools (Toro Sugrañes, 1995, pp. 395-97).

Loiza Aldea, on the other hand, is a coastal town "retaining one of the highest percentages of African descendants of all island towns" (http://www.toportorico.org/city/loiza.html). Toro Sugrañes notes that archeological studies have shown that Loiza was an important Taino territory. Loiza was incorporated in 1692, and by 1776 there were 1,146 inhabitants. In 1828, it had grown to a population of 4,198 which included 742 slaves. Because two of the largest rivers in Puerto Rico, Rios Grande de Lozia, run through the town's jurisdiction, it was an important commercial place during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During the first half of the twentieth century, sugarcane production was its main economic industry. The people of Loiza Aldea have always been interested in preserving their African-inspired traditions, and town festivities have consistently reflected a strong emphasis on black traditions with a mixture of Christian and Taino Indian customs (the preceding paragraph is a translation from Toro Sugrañes, 1995, pp. 247-49).

#### METHODOLOGY

Mason's survey project was directed by Franz Boas. Boas's methodology has been criticized in recent years. Among other criticisms, McNeil (1988) argues that Boas showed a preference for text while ignoring theory, with collections usually being printed with little discussion of the context surrounding the collection. "He had no intellectual interest in informants except as repositories of oral traditions, a lack of concern derived from his orientation toward the past" (p. 57). However, as McNeil also explains, there was "nothing wrong with the collection" because the Boasian model insisted on accuracy of data and on "finding the best informants" (pp. 55-57). These two arguments can be used to describe and criticize Mason's Puerto Rican collection: in general, it was printed with little theoretical discussion, exhibited a high accuracy of data, and

identified the best towns from which to collect representative samples of Puerto Rican folklore.

Dennis's (1922) criticism of Mason's collection did not focus on methodology but questioned the validity of the Décimas as representative samples of "true folk" verbal expressions. Her review of the Décimas addressed three major areas: the originality of the folkloristic expression, the authenticity of performer and performances, and the subject matter. The collection on the whole could not be an original one, Dennis (1922) argued, because it exhibited strong Spanish influences of style and language:

Other décimas are inspired by Spanish ballads. But the majority are distinctly of Porto-Rican origin, and reflect Porto-Rican thought and custom. Whether, however, these décimas come from the true folk, and not rather the lettered classes; and whether, therefore, they may be strictly classed as folk poetry,—is to be questioned. . . . Although there are several décimas in the collection which complain of Spain's treatment of Porto Rico, there is not one which expresses dissatisfaction with the United States Government, nor one which expresses the wish for independence. (pp. 99-100)

In responding to Dennis, Aurelio Espinosa (1922) questioned her definition of what should constitute folk poetry and argued that he believed "folk-poetry has most of the elements of learned poetry, and often in a more refined degree" (p. 102). Mason unquestionably maintained that the folklore collected came from true Puerto Rican folk. His argument captures the essence of a Puerto Rican "singer of tales":

The décima, despite the fact that it is a poetical vehicle of considerable artistic merit, comparing favorably in rigidity of form and general spirit with the English sonnet, appears to be the most popular form of poetical expression among the illiterate jibaros. At the velorios [funerals] and other social gatherings, according to my informants, it is the décima rather than the aguinaldo which is most sung. It was a source of great surprise to me to find these poems, many of them of not a little beauty, known and sung by illiterate moutain peasants. Quite a number of the décimas in the collection were written down by me in phonetic text from the dictation of jibaros in out-of-the-way country barrios. I believe that there are few adult jibaro men who have not memorized one or more décimas, which they sing, when called upon in turn, at social gatherings; and nearly every little country hamlet has its noted décima singer, who has dozens of them at his tongue's end. . . . I feel, therefore, that the décimas in the published collection are fully representative of the poetry of the jibaro. The sources, however, are various quite naturally. Many, as Espinosa pointed out, are traditional Spanish. Others give internal evidence of jibaro authorship...but the great majority, irrespective of their authorship, had been memorized by jibaro singers, and incorporated into peasant folk-lore. . . . As for the others, only years of persistent research in Porto Rico could elucidate their authorship or locality of origin. (Mason, 1922, pp. 102-04)

Years of Puerto Rican scholarship have validated Mason's collection. However, general arguments surrounding the methods of evaluating and validating fieldwork projects still provoke heated insider/outsider anthropological debates. Who has the authority to decide? Who are the true folk? Who gets asked and under what conditions? Who has the power to determine and enforce folkloric classifications? These questions are not easily answered, but Geertz (1983) has added insight into the methodological framework for investigating them and for inquiring into the complexities of what he calls "local knowledge." As Mason argued, irrespective of the authorship issue, the Décimas represented an observable performance of folklore, or, using Geertz's terminology, exhibited a sharing of a native's point of view. Dennis's arguments showed that her basis of folkloristic analysis circumscribed itself in the text, whereas Mason's reply showed that his analysis placed an importance on performance as an observable event which authenticated the oral expression. Ultimately, Bauman's (1977) performance-centered framework for exploring verbal expressions, with its emphasis on identifying "culture-specific constellations of communicative means that serve to key performance in particular communities" (p. 22), is most appropriate for shedding light on the debate surrounding the Mason collection. In order to focus more closely on the complexities of Puerto Rican folklore, a single group of tales, the Juan Bobo stories, will be examined throughout the remainder of this discussion. The underlying hypothesis concerns the importance of storytelling as an infrastructure that serves to create, transmit, and authenticate folklore. Using Geertz's model of local knowledge together with Bauman's performance-centered approach, this hypothesis will be investigated within a context of Puerto Rican children's literature. However, before the collection is contextualized, a close look at the text is in order.

### CLASSIFICATION OF FOLKTALES

When Dr. Mason returned from Porto Rico some six years ago with the abundant collection of folk-tales...the necessity of undertaking [a study on Spain's folktales] seemed imperative. (Espinosa, 1921, p. 129)

The folktales collected by Mason are complex stories wherein sometimes Juan Bobo is a trickster and other times a fool. These folktales are constructed using a mixture of Christian religion; African, Spanish, and Indian traditions; folkloric politics; and popular beliefs. The main character is a trickster who might appear under the names of Juan Bobo (Dumb John), Juan Animala (Animal John), Juan Simple (Simple John), Juan Cuchilla (Cutting John), and so on. Marrero (1967) explicates his first name as a key feature for positioning the tales since *Juan* brings to the collective memory of Spanish Americans notable writers such as "*Juan* Ruiz de Alarcón," legendary playboys such as "Don *Juan* Tenorio," or fearless

characters such as "Juan sin Miedo" (p. 127). Marrero also notes that Juan Bobo is usually described as physically unattractive—she emphasizes that he is "feo, muy feo [ugly, very ugly]," though not "a cuco [an ogre]" (p. 129). Bobo simply means foolish.

Unlike other Caribbean tricksters such as Anansi, Juan Bobo does not transform himself from human to animal or vice-versa. His transformations are more in the mental realm—e.g., changing from an ill-reared numskull to a "wantonly cruel" trickster within the same story. With a notable first name and a foolish last name, together with undesirable physical talents, the folktales situate Juan Bobo (or Animala or Simple or Cuchilla) within a marginalized group and reflect the problem of Otherness. The audience is keyed (Bauman, 1977) by a teller opening the story with something like "Once upon a time there was a woman who had a son, but her son was a fool." The italics indicate prompts that prepare the audience for what is to come.

#### MIGRATORY TALES

The Juan Bobo tales migrated from Spain in an oral tradition originally influenced by the Spanish picaresque novels and Wise Fool tales (Espinosa, 1921; Manrique Cabrera, 1982). Appropriately, Childers (1977) has developed a motif-index titled "Tales from Picaresque Novels" which describes the genre's influences:

[The picaresque novel] was a new genre of realistic fiction in which the rogue was the central character. It was usually a comic autobiography on an anti-hero who was a peripatetic character, moving about from job to job and from city to city. As the picaro (rogue) went from master to master, he satirized their personal faults and their trades and professions. The rogue and his tricks and the manners he satirized were two principal identification marks of the genre. Although the rogue and his tricks constitute the main interest in the novels, the satirical comments on various trades and professions give a wealth of information on the social, political, and religious background of. . . . Spain. (Childers, 1977, p. vi)

These literary influences reflected, in the *picaro*'s personality and tricks, the satirical commentaries implicitly contrived throughout the plot, and the master/slave power relationships can be analyzed using Aarne-Thompson's standard classification system of tale types and motifs. By definition, the "Type-Index deals with entire tales; the Motif-Index...deals with smaller elements of those tales. Thompson defines the motif as 'the smallest element that persists in tradition'; in actual practice this element can be a character, a formula, a concept, an activity, or any one of the multitude of details found in folktales" (Clarkson & Cross, 1980, p. 8).

Although there have been some efforts to study some of these Spanish American folktales using a cross-classification scheme for tale types, it was not possible to locate a comprehensive motif-index that included the

Juan Bobo tales. The first undertaking to classify Spanish folktales according to the Aarne-Thompson tale types was conducted by Boggs (1930, p. 6). He analyzed a few tales from the Mason-Espinosa collection. Afterward, Hansen (1957), building on Boggs's work, indexed the tale types for several folktales from Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and South America, with a few more of Mason's Wise Fools tales described and even some motifs delineated. More recently, MacDonald (1982) has indexed several of the printed Juan Bobo tales available for children's literature in English (for readers interested in Spanish folk literature, there is a motif-index created by Goldberg [1998] for "Medieval Folk Narratives" while Keller [1949] constructed one for "Spanish Exempla").

As impressive as Mason's collection is, it could be overlooked by potential motif-indexers because, to access it, one must know either the collector's name or remember to look under the old name "Porto Rico" when handling an index such as the *Journal of American Folklore Centennial Index*. In my case, it was a "Recommender System"—that is, an anthropology professor from the University of Illinois, Arlene Torres—who pointed me toward the existence of Mason's collection since my first pass using the centennial's index did not lead me toward it.

With the interest of establishing some classification for the folktales, Tables 2 and 3 were assembled drawing primarily from the classifications provided by Boggs (1930), Hansen (1957), and MacDonald (1982). The data in these tables should be seen as an exploratory analysis, not as a definite classification of tale types and motifs, since only a sample of folktales was included in this pilot project. Specifically, the folktales sampled were chosen based on whether they were indexed by Boggs, Hansen, or MacDonald, or highlighted a particular native element, or portrayed some trickster characteristic that could shed light on why Juan Bobo is considered a culture hero today. For Table 3, the books selected were those located in Champaign-Urbana or, most productively, in the Center for Children's Books at the University of Illinois. The printed versions of folktales were included as benchmarks for observing which tales have persisted in tradition and passed from oral into print formats.

By examining briefly the relationship between oral and printed versions of the Juan Bobo folktales, it may be possible to make some observations related to the infrastructure which validates and supports the dissemination of these folktales and to begin addressing some important questions. Which of the tales have been adapted for children's literature? Which are the elements that have persisted in popular expression? Are the localities of the Juan Bobo tales important? Is it possible to identify an archetypal sequence of motifs that keeps recurring?

Although Table 2 is only a portion of Mason's collection, the most apparent observation is the suitability of the Aarne-Thompson classification

Table 2. FOLKTALE TYPES FOR JUAN BOBO TALES COLLECTED BY J. ALDEN MASON

#### Jokes and Anecdotes 1200-1999

Туре	Description	Туре	Description
JAF, 34**13 self dead JAF other man ar 34 **1535 rasc man, later th JAF, 34 ** 1 fool. He exch who dies but money, JAF, 3 JAF, 34 **15 JAF, 34 **15 head, JAF, 34	taken to the roof to graze 13 man who thought him- 13, 34 **1534 fool kills an- 14 accuses policemen, JAF, 15 al in tree shows cheese to 15 rows a rock and kills him, 15 37 Lady fixes poison for 16 anges for husband's drink 17 later fool obtains hush 18 4 ** 1539 self-cooking pot, 18 sells one-legged chicken, 18 fool swats fly on mayor's 18 **1642 fool sells meat to 18 you have to the self-cooking fool 18 the self-cooking fool 18 the self-cooking fool 18 self-cooking	1881.1.  water in needle in asks mo and eats to bees; 34 **17 puts her down gr JAF, 34 34 note **1706 brother)	O races with 3-legged kettle (J. 1.3), JAF, 34 **1703 carries a basket, JAF, 34 **1703 loses a a basket, JAF, 34 **1703 fool where for bonbons for sweetheart as them himself **1704 sells honey stricks pin into baby's head, JAF, 704 disinters grandmother and in sun to get warm; forces food randmother's mouth with stick, **1704 sends pig to mass, JAF, : most famous Juan Bobo tale boils first thing he finds (little JAF, 34 **1706 bathes grandno boiling water. JAF, 34

\*\* means Aarne-Thompson folktale types and descriptions are from Hansen's tale type index (1957).

scheme for organizing folktales that were collected in the mountains and coasts of Puerto Rico during the early twentieth century. Most of the Juan Bobo tales from the Mason collection could, for example, be classified as "Jokes and Anecdotes," which are types 1200-1999, and other remaining tales might fall within ranges used for classifying "Ordinary Folktales." Ordinary Folktales would be classified between types 500-649 and could represent Juan Bobo using "Magic Objects" such as clubs to beat people or having "Supernatural Helpers."

As Table 2 shows, a famous tale wherein Juan Bobo "races" a threelegged kettle is type 1700 (motif J 1881.1.1.3), which means it falls within "The Stupid Man" tale type and "Three-legged pot sent to walk home" motif (Thompson, 1966, p. 159). Interestingly, Thompson (1966) explains that J motifs group tales of "Wisdom, Cleverness, Foolishness [where] the motivation is always mental," whereas in K motifs "the primary importance is given to action" (vol. 1, pp. 20, 21). This broad distinction between J and K motifs may serve to describe Juan Bobo's personality for, true to his trickster's nature, he adopts multiple voices awash in contradictions and absurdities, with plots being senseless, difficult to follow, and many times leaving the audience with an open question as to who is really the fool.

Table 3. Sample of Juan Bobo's Children's Folktales

532. Juan Bobo y el Caballo de Cuatro Colores/ Juan Bobo and the Horse with Four Colors. (picture book). Juan Bobo meets a magic horse that grants him seven wishes. He makes the princess laugh and the king bestows great honors on him. Juan Bobo dresses as a Spanish conquistador (one of his wishes). Jan Mike, 1997. Illus. by Charles Reasoner. Available in English or Spanish. Source code: S4

1700. The Three Wishes: A Collection of Puerto Rican Folktales. "Juan Bobo and the Caldron." Juan Bobo is sent to his grandmother's house to borrow a "big pot for cooking a stew of

chicken and rice." On the way home he refuses to carry the three-legged pot because it has more legs than he. Ricardo Alegría, 1969. Illus. by Lorenzo Homar. Available in English or Spanish Source code: S4 1700. Juan Bobo. (collection). Coming home, he loses a needle in a basket, some meat and cane-syrup to flies. "Ay, Juan sighed, his mother. You are more

foolish than fools!" He borrows a pot from his godmother and "races" the three-legged kettle home. Later, he denounces the flies to a judge for stealing the syrup, and goes to jail for killing a fly settled on the judge's bald head. Dorothy Sharp Carter, 1974. Illus. by Trina Schart Hyman. English text. Source code: S2 1704. Juan Bobo: Four Folktales from Puerto Rico. (collection)—"A Pig in Sunday Clothes"; "The Best Way to Carry Water"; "Do not Sneeze, Do not Scratch; Do not Eat"; "A Dime a Jug." Carmen T. Bernier-Grand, 1994. Illus. by Ernesto Ramos Nieves. English/Spanish text. Source Code: S4

1704. The Three Wishes: A Collection of Puerto Rican Folktales. "Juan Bobo, the Sow and the Chicks." (collection). Juan Bobo should take care of animals while his mother goes to church, but instead sends the pig to church, kills the chicks and gets in trouble. Ricardo Alegría, 1969. Illus. by Lorenzo Homar. English text. Source code: S4

**Source code** descriptions: **S1** means citation with contextualized information; **S2** means citation with cultural notes; **S3** means citation appears in fine-print as in CIP; **S4** means cultural background as source; **S5** means nonexistent source note with illustrator/author taking credit for the foltkale (for detailed descriptions, see Hearne, 1993).

Additionally, by identifying a name motif, it is possible to trace tales as they are being retold by Puerto Ricans, for the name Juan Bobo has emerged throughout the years as the apparent ruler among all trickster's names. Manrique Cabrera says this name is preferred by locals because it signifies the mentality of a *true* jibraro:

The character of Juan Bobo, under all its forms and costumes, seems to show, prima facie, an evolution in the stories where he is the main character. The simple fool transforms himself into a person that pretends to be a numskull using his foolishness as a disguise. This evolutionary slanting seems to reflect the assimilation of a trait attributed to the jibaro's psychic. It refers to what has been called "jaiberia," an attitude which feigns dullness to throw off those who come near. It is a defensive weapon whose ultimate efficacy is worth investigating. (Translated from Manrique Cabrera, 1982, p. 62)

Considering tale types within an anthropological framework, Guerra

(1998), for example, presents a socio-political interpretation of Juan Bobo in which she explores the tales' popularity as a way for locals to satirize the absurdities of life related to power, race, class, and gender politics. Her analysis classifies Juan Bobo into clusters of tales of revenge and reversal of fortune, folkloric politics, race, and gender problems, or morality-ofthe-poor dilemmas. These categories are put to use in examining the nature of national identity and are not intended as discrete classifications. She says of Juan Bobo: "Behind the façade of this 'jíbaro manso' lurks the mind of a Puerto Rican superhero whose wit, brilliance, thespian proclivities, and bravery in the face of danger make him the ideal seeker and defender of justice for those who experience little of it in their real lives" (p. 138).

For tales of revenge, for example, Guerra retells a story where Juan Bobo tricks his master out of all material possessions and thus effects what she calls a social inversion of classes. Juan Bobo is hired to cut the weeds of a local landlord but instead cuts down the banana bushes. "What have you done?" asks the master, and Juan Bobo replies, "Nothing! Do you worry about it?" But the landlord exclaims, "You are going to leave me penniless." The next day Juan Bobo is given the task of cutting the grass but instead he cuts the goats' legs. Again, the landlord exclaims, "For heavens sake, what have you done?" "Nada, Nada!" replies Juan Bobo. But when Juan Bobo is given the task of taking some pigs to their sty, on his way to the pen someone offers to buy the pigs and Juan Bobo quickly sells them, keeps the largest pig, but cuts off the tails of the ones he sold. He next proceeds to bury the pig and the tails in mud and runs to his master yelling, "Master, the pigs are stuck in the mud!" At the end of the story, the landlord has freed the large pig but remains penniless, unaware that Juan Bobo has tricked him out of his money (original tale in Mason, 1921; retelling in Guerra, 1998, pp. 138-39). This tale can also be identified as Aarne-Thompson's tale type 1004 Hogs in the Mud and Stith Thompson's motif K404.1 Tails in the Ground which, incidentally, Clarkson and Cross (1980) use to analyze a Mexican story about Pedro Urdemalas, who tricks a stranger into buying pig tails stuck in mud (pp. 293-97).

Table 3 presents several printed versions of folktales available in children's literature. (It should be noted that a complete list of the Juan Bobo tales examined for this article appears in Appendix A.) This table gives a brief description of tales, identifies the author and illustrator, the tale type (adopted from the classification given by Hansen), and a source note. If, after reading a printed version, one should be interested in locating an earlier version of the tale, a source note should provide such an access point. Specifically, the codes employed in Table 3 have been adapted from a rating scale developed by Hearne (1993) for verifying cultural sources in children's folktales. Hearne's scale discriminates from a 5 (least documented) to a 1 (most documented) where S5 is a "nonexistent source

note" with author/illustrator taking credit for folktale; S4 is a "background-as-a-source-note," where cultural observations are given with no source citation; S3 is "fine-print-source note," where source citation appears buried within the Cataloging in Publication (CIP) information; S2 is a "well-made source note," with source citation included with cultural notes; S1 is a "model source note" where source citation is contextualized with cultural lore.

Since, as Table 3 shows, only the version provided by Dorothy Sharp Carter and illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman provides a source citation (S2), which noted that the folktales had been originally collected by Ramirez de Arellano (1926), linking printed versions to original Juan Bobo tales seems laborious for readers, if not impossible. Obviously, for didactic reasons, the Juan Bobo character that mainly appears in children's literature is the fool whose cardinal flaw is stupidity, while the rogue who satirizes society, swindles others, or has amorous adventures lives primarily in oral traditions or scholarly publications. It seems that children learning about Juan Bobo through the printed versions of folktales included in Table 3 could perhaps acquire an impression of his being basically a numskull while failing to meet his many-sided trickster qualities. The overall finding exhibited in Table 3—i.e., unavailability of source citation in children's versions of the Juan Bobo tales—is an indication that for Puerto Rican children's folktales it might be time to adopt Hearne's (1993) advice "that we all start digging" (p. 25) for sources.

Moreover, authors of literary tales based on collections from oral traditions could provide source notes about geographic localities. It would be interesting to investigate, for instance, if oral versions of Juan Bobo tales collected in Northern coastal towns like Loiza Aldea stress trickster qualities (*K* motifs) whereas those collected in towns such as Utuado focus more on the numskull's misunderstandings (*J* motifs). It might even aide in studying the process of how folk adapt tales to share local knowledge.

#### REINVENTING FOLKLORE

So far I have tried to give a brief history on the Puerto Rican culture, present a folklore collection, and analyze the structure of the folktales within the collection. The analysis has primarily focused on a "historic-geographic approach" (Barrick, 1988, p. 16) which emphasizes classifying the collected text using standard cataloging systems. Specifically, in the case of the Juan Bobo tales, the Aarne-Thompson classification system has made it possible to observe not only the original European influences of the tales but also their African heritage through Hansen's use of the same scheme.

Since Muñoz Rivera (Wagenheim & Wagenheim, 1996, p. 133) documented the illiteracy rates during the turn of the century, it is possible to

ascertain that, at the time of Mason's visit to the island, the culture was primarily based on oral traditions (Wagenheim & Wagenheim, 1996, p. 133). As Mason (1922) commented, he was surprised that the oral expressions were, as Table 1 summarizes, of a sophisticated nature and of a substantial variety (pp. 102-04), yet he always maintained they were authentic. Years later, Mason explained that he probably would have collected even more samples of verbal lore, except that Franz Boas had arrived at the island with Herman K. Haeberlin and Robert T. Aiken and redirected the project toward collecting archeological artifacts (Mason, 1941, p. 210; 1960, p. 9).

Interestingly, Hutchins (1995) has argued that: "Culture is a process and the 'things' that appear on list-like definitions of culture are residua of the process" (p. 354). Given the prominence of oral expressions and in particular the Juan Bobo tales within the Puerto Rican culture, and given Hutchins's definition of culture, a question to address at this point is what cultural process are these folktales residua of? Guerra's (1998) analysis of the Juan Bobo tales as popular expressions for determining a national identity have highlighted some of the issues related to power, resistance, and master/slave relationships. But is it possible to make some assertions as to the underlying cognitive processes involved in the creation and dissemination of local knowledge through the Juan Bobo folktales? From the tale type and motif analysis, we know that the folktales are structured as Wise/Fool tales. Since Hutchins (1995) argues that the construction of culture is not defined by cultural products but rather by cultural processes, these tales reveal an aspect of local knowledge which the Puerto Ricans feel is important to develop, preserve, and transmit.

Geertz (1983) has argued that some aspects of local knowledge, especially common sense, can be interpreted as an information system composed of "a network of practical and moral conceptions woven about" each other (p. 81). Specifically, he argues that as a system, common sense is built on some assumptions and components, which he names "stylistic features" (p. 85). The three most applicable of his assumptions which could be adapted to the construction of Juan Bobo folktales are the following: Assumption 1: "the world is full of high-IQ morons" (Saul Bellow, as cited in Geertz, 1983, p. 76); Assumption 2: the common man [and woman] are "on top of things" (p. 80); Assumption 3: the people or things that are "unclassifiable" are disturbing (p. 83).

Geertz expands his common sense cultural model by laying out some functional requirements for the system. The first of his systems' components is "naturalness," which refers to what he says is "resultant" and "obvious" within a culture. It is measured with a standard of "of-courseness, [where] a sense of 'it figures' is cast over things" (pp. 85-87). The second component deals with "practicalness," which Geertz defines as being "obvious to the naked eye," where a person's behavior, for instance, will certainly lead to failure. This is measured by having to tell someone to "be sensible...wise up" (pp. 87-88). The third feature focuses on what he calls "thinness," by which he means "simpleness, literalness." He argues that some cultural beliefs, "however strange," must be taken literally (pp. 89-90). The fourth relates to "common sense wisdom [being] shamelessly and unapologetically ad hoc." This feature relates to "immethodicalness" of "life" and its contradictions (pp. 90-91). The fifth component is "accessibleness," which states that common sense is within the reach of "any person with faculties reasonably intact" (pp. 91-92). On the basis of the functional requirements, we can next apply Geertz's common sense cultural system to the Juan Bobo tales in the interest of examining how the five "stylistic features" can be used as cultural categories for indexing the Juan Bobo folktales.

The famous tale of Juan Bobo and the Pig, according to Geertz's cultural information system, could be classified as transmitting the local knowledge of "practicalness." In this story, he dresses the pig in his mother's best clothes and sends it to church, and he gets the spanking of his life when his mother comes home. However, one of the folktales in Mason's collection could also be classified as "immethodical," for, in this version, his mother kills him when she returns home and finds what her numskull son has done. Incidentally, most of the children's folktales, not surprisingly, would be classified under "practicalness."

In another story, which could be claimed to convey the "naturalness" quality of common sense, Juan Bobo is sent to town by his mother to sell a cow, but she instructs him, "Sell it to someone who doesn't talk too much." When Juan Bobo meets the first potential buyer, he asks him: "Would you like to buy my cow?" So the man responds, "How much are you asking for it?" And Juan Bobo replies, "I'm not selling it to you, you talk too much!" This scenario repeats itself with several other potential buyers until he enters a church and sees a religious statue representing a Catholic saint, and he asks, "Would you like to buy my cow?" Of course, the statue says nothing, so he sells the cow to the Catholic saint.

Now, Geertz says that another quality of common sense is "thinness" or "literalness," which fits the story where Juan Bobo sells meat to the flies, that is, to the famous "las señoritas del manto prieto." But he sells the meat to the flies on credit and when he returns to collect his money, the flies, most certainly, won't pay. So he takes them to court and the King says with a mocking tone, "When you see one of those *señoritas del manto prieto*, immediately, kill them!" But, immediately, Juan Bobo sees one of them on the King's head and, literally, swats his royal highness's head. In some versions, he is sent to jail for this, while in others the King decides to pay him so he won't hit the King again.

It is Geertz's functional requirement of "accessibleness" that fits the

folktales' strongest criticism and satirization of society. Access to wisdom, knowledge and common sense, or being an "insider" and acquiring "culture" is something society may never acknowledge Juan Bobo as having, no matter what he accomplishes or which obstacles he overcomes (Guerra, 1998, p. 142). He will, by implication of his name, never move out of the classification of being an "outsider," being "lower" than others. For example, the stories begin by placing him in a category of fools, and (almost all) end with Juan Bobo still being called a fool, even though in some folktales he marries the king's daughter or acquires some fortune. So Juan Bobo's name seems to suggest that some things never change. People will forever be classifying other people into Self and Other folkloric groups, with total acceptance into certain dominant groups being forbidden to those who belong to particular races, genders, or classes because they are inherently and/or genetically "different" from the insider's (or, here, colonizer's) folk group. Guerra (1998) describes the folktales' treatment of "Otherness" in this way:

Juan Bobo is frequently depicted as an outsider who is tolerated rather than accepted by his community; an Other who is himself "othered" by virtue of his difference. The appeal of Juan Bobo rested in the completeness of his Self-identification with the Other. While the rich expect, at best, to exploit his labor, no member of his cohort expects anything worthwhile to come of him. (p. 142)

Given the previous examples, I would conclude that Juan Bobo folktales are samples of lore that convey what Geertz has defined as "common sense as a cultural system" and would propose that, like the traditional tales, newer instances of Juan Bobo stories are being constructed using similar common sense premises and cultural modeling procedures. Furthermore, although the tales' origins may have been the Spanish picaresque novels and the tales themselves culturally based in the Spanish language and traditions, the preliminary motif analysis shows a predominance of the K motif documenting a pervasive influence from the African heritage. These folkloristic influences, which are exhibited in the tales' use of a trickster figure, Juan Bobo, as a "cultural hero," authenticate Espinosa's earlier comments that "[s]ome of the tales are probably of African origin, at least in part" (as cited in Mason, 1921, p. 143).

The production of local knowledge leads to tension between institutions of power and common folk, as revealed in oral tales versus printed versions. Thompson's approach to literary tales made vital contributions in the area of documenting the interaction between oral stories and printed formats of folktales (Barrick, 1988).

The production cycle depicted in Figure 2 is shown as an attempt to summarize an important association that exists between these two formats, which Thompson (1977) has clearly described:

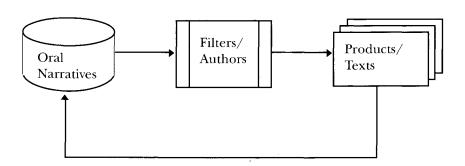


Figure 2. A Simplified Production Cycle for the Conversion of Oral Narratives into Printed Text.

If I use the term "folktale" to include such literary narratives . . . it can be justified on practical grounds if on no other, for it is impossible to make a complete separation of the written and the oral traditions. Often, indeed, their interrelation is so close and so inextricable as to present one of the most baffling problems the folklore scholar encounters. They differ somewhat in their behavior, it is true, but they are alike in their disregard of originality of plot and of pride of authorship....Nor is complete separation of these two kinds of narrative tradition by any means necessary for their understanding. The study of the oral tale. . .will be valid so long as we realize that stories have frequently been taken down from the lips of unlettered taletellers and have entered the great literary collections. . . . Frequently a story is taken from the people, recorded in a literary document, carried across continents or preserved through centuries, and then retold to a humble entertainer who adds it to his repertory. (p. 5)

Even Aurelio Espinosa (1918), when describing the learned and unlearned influences of the Puerto Rican "singer of tales," acknowledged the association by saying he was unsure: "Whether some of that [sic] the décimas and longer Christmas carols [had been] printed in Porto Rico in the local newspapers, or privately" (p. 291).

#### Conclusion

I selected the Puerto Rican collection for this study because it is a part of my culture and I believe it serves as a way to inquire into aspects important in the creation, preservation, and transmission of local knowledge. One fundamental issue in anthropology is the interpretation of culture as applied to the concept of the "Other" (Geertz, 1973; Clifford, 1986). Prominent social scientists have noted that cultural analysis should

be reflexive, descriptive, sensitive, and above all respectful of those being studied. Yet, to accomplish a truthful interpretation of folklore is forever elusive because two people from the same folk group may witness the same event, concurrently, and arrive at different interpretations based on their own perceived practices and belief systems. Nonetheless, what is so difficult to study and describe regarding the inherent variability, differences, sameness, conflict, and tension forever embedded in human experience is ubiquitously shared by common folk through a network of storytelling. Thus, "otherness" and common sense may be difficult concepts to describe but, as Juan Bobo folktales show, easy to share through folklore.

With respect to the preservation of local knowledge and the Mason/Dennis authenticity controversy, the real question is not whether the Puerto Rican collection was or was not an authentic expression of folk wisdom—since the performance proved, as Mason always contended, that it was true folklore. Rather, the interesting question is how Mason, an outsider, a representative of the Anthropological Academy, a member of the colonizer's group—a country that was involved in deconstructing some cultural markers that had served islanders for 400 years as boundaries of a national identity—was able to collect such a valuable folkloric "knowledge base." As Cayetano Cuchi Col noted, when English was made the medium of instruction in the public schools, the locals said: "We would have preferred being without a country, to losing our native tongue" (cited in Wagenheim & Wagenheim, 1996, p. 144).<sup>5</sup> It was in the middle of all this cultural and political tension that Mason arrived to do his fieldwork, which he accomplished successfully.

From the Journal of American Folklore's obituaries, we learn that, although Mason was an outstanding linguist, he also had a "speech problem." As Mary Butler (1969) pondered on his research successes, she concluded: "Perhaps his own speech problem helped turn his attention toward linguistics when he chose anthropology as his field" (p. 266). In retrospect, perhaps it was his experiences and first-hand knowledge of feeling "Othered" that helped contribute to his success as a folklore collector of oral history from Puerto Ricans.

As I've tried to demonstrate by making use of Gonzáles' (1980) analogy, Puerto Rico is a "country with four floors." It is a transnational culture where language and racial differences exist even within the same families. Aurora Levins Morales (1997), a "Russian-Jewish-American-Puerto Rican" raised in Puerto Rico and the United States, shares her experiences in an essay titled "Immigrants":

My father was the First American Boy: the young genius, the honors student, the Ph.D. scientist. . . . First generation. *And what am I?* The immigrant child of returned immigrants who repeated the journey in the second generation. Born on the island with firsthand love

and stories of my parents' Old Country—New York; and behind those, the secondhand stories of my mother's father, of the hill town of his long-ago childhood. Layer upon layer of travel and leaving behind, an overlay of landscapes, so that I dream of all the beloved and hated places, and endlessly of trains and paths and roads and ships docking and leaving port and a multitude of borders and officials waiting for my little piece of paper. (pp. 36-37)

Esmeralda Santiago (1993) also shares her experiences of feeling the influences deconstructing traditional cultural markers:

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"Papi?[Father]"
"Yes."
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"If we eat all that American food they give us at the *centro communal*, will we become *Americanos?*" He banged a nail hard into the wall then turned to me, and, with a broad smile on his face said, "Only if you like it better than our Puerto Rican food." (p. 74)

Even if traditional markers that have served in the past to establish cultural boundaries are deconstructed, old and new stories coexist and are transmitted through a folkloric network, serving as shifting boundaries that outline a cultural identity. The Puerto Rican economy, the literacy rates—currently, 90 percent (from http://www.eb.com)—and the social and cultural context are different today, yet the process of creating "Puerto Ricanness" seems based (as it was in the past) on a folkloric infrastructure that upholds and preserves its oral expressions.

#### FUTURE RESEARCH

This article has presented initial findings from a pilot project conducted with Puerto Rican folktales published from an oral collection. The preliminary findings suggest a need for future work spanning questions in several areas, including the electronic classification of Spanish folktales, the analysis of the performance act of the Puerto Rican "singer of tales" that is preserved in 174 audio cylinders collected by Mason, and the significance of storytelling for contemporary children.

Specifically, the research on storytelling will focus on combining Bauman's (1977) performance framework (interpreting the speech act as a performance act) with findings from Miller et al. (1989, 1990, 1996) on the significance of storytelling while children are in the process of developing their "social construction of self" (1990, p. 293). Applying Miller's findings to Puerto Rican children's folktales, it will be interesting to observe whether those children who are given opportunities for participating in first-hand, active, authentic storytelling activities develop a more defined sense of identity—whether they are narrating in Spanish, English, or code-switching between the two—bearing in mind that in any language our stories define who we are.

## **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Translated by A. Lastra from original text located in Pané (1980, pp. 87-88).
- <sup>2</sup> Loose translation. Original Spanish text in Esencia del Folklore Puertorriqueño, 1967, p. 27-28.
- From a speech given by Luis Muñoz Rivera in the U.S. House of Representatives concerning the Jones Act. As cited in Wagenheim and Wagenheim, 1996, p.132.
- <sup>4</sup> Map created by Guillermo Santiago (1998), a bilingual high school student born and raised in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico.
- Spanish was reinstituted as the medium of instruction in Puerto Rico by the Commissioner of Education, Mariano Villaronga, in 1948 (see Carrión, 1983, p. 335).

#### APPENDIX

Sample of Juan Bobo's Children's Folktales (Continues Table 3)\*

1704. Juan Bobo and the Pig. (picture book) Juan Bobo dresses the pig with "Mami's" best clothes and sends it to church. Felix Pitre, 1993. Illus. by Christy Hale. English/Spanish text. SC: S4 1704. Juan Bobo and the Pig. (collection). Juan Bobo loses the pig by sending it to mass but sells his mother's duck to make up for the pig. Pura Belpré, 1965. Illus. by Tommie de Paola. English text. SC: S4 1704. Juan Bobo and The Pig: a Puerto Rican Folktale Retold. (picture book). The pig is sent to church and Juan Bobo gets in trouble. Bernice Chardiet, 1973. Illus. by Hope Meryman. English text. SC: S5 1704. Juan Bobo. (collection). Juan Bobo stays home taking care of house and pig while his rich mother goes to mass. The pig's grunting surely means it wants to go to church, so Juan Bobo dresses it in his mother's finest clothes and sends it to church. M.A. Jagendorf,

1957. Illus. by Shane Miller. English text. SC: S4 851. The Three Wishes: A Collection of Puerto Rican Folktales. "Juan Bobo and the Princess who Answered Riddles." (collection). The king offers his daughter in marriage to whoever provides a riddle she can't solve. Juan Bobo is the victor, marries the princess, and later becomes king. Ricardo Alegría, 1969. Illus.by L. Homar. English text. SC: S4 1704. Juan Bobo: Four Folktales from **Puerto Rico.** (collection)—"The Best Way to Carry Water"—Juan Bobo carries water in a basket; "Do not Sneeze, Do not Scratch; Do not Eat"—I. Bobo is invited for dinner but, confused with proper eating etiquette, ends up not eating anything; "A Dime a Jug"—Juan Bobo sells melao to flies. Carmen T. Bernier-Grand, 1994. Illus. by Ernesto Ramos Nieves. English and Spanish text. SC: S4

\*SC means source code where S1 is a "model source note"; S2 is a "well made source note"; S3 is a "fine-print-source note"; S4 is a "background as source note"; S5 is a "nonexistent source note" (Source codes as described by Hearne, 1993).

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