THESIS

Juan Bobo, Postcoloniality and Frantz Fanon's Theory of Violence

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

JUAN BOBO, POSTCOLONIALITY AND FRANTZ FANON'S

THEORY OF VIOLENCE

In the postcolonial written adaptations of the oral tales and stories about Juan Bobo political violence is generated against the Jibaros by colonial, postcolonial and neocolonial discourses that are still perpetuated in Puerto Rico through unaltered colonial attitudes, political, socioeconomic structures, institutions and literatures that legitimize the negative perception of the Jibaros as the *Other*. After 1898, redactors of the written tales of Juan Bobo purged the tales of much of their overt anti-colonial, anti-elitist and subversive implications–the undisguised violence, lies, trickery and resistance to oppression that are so evident in the oral tales. With every subsequent version, Juan Bobo dwindles from trickster to mere tonto ("fool/noodlehead"), making Juan Bobo and the Jibaros he represents objects to laugh at or scorn. Colonial ideologies are evident and inscribed in the texts, in the fact that Juan Bobo seems to always be rescued, saved by a privileged and seemingly benevolent whiter, landowning, and more educated character. These redactions constitute a compromise and betrayal of the authentic Jibaro while deepening the split between Puerto Rico's elite class and the rural peasantry. They play right into colonialism's hands.

In his book, The Wretched of the Earth, Frantz Fanon argues that "The colonized man finds his freedom in and through violence" (86). In the children's tales of Juan Bobo, postcolonial writers have distorted or omitted altogether the complex linkages between colonial violence, Juan Bobo's use of lies and trickery as violent responses to it,

and the violations of the rights of Jibaros in the postcolonial nation-state. In the modern versions of the tales, Juan Bobo as representative of the Jibaros, has been stripped of his crucial tools of violence, the lies and trickery he once used to fight the tyranny of the Spanish colonizers and the postcolonial, neocolonial injustices committed against him by the island's socio-political and cultural elite. Postcolonial representation of Juan Bobo, and of the Jibaros in these modern texts is a form of epistemic violence to the extent that it involves immeasurable distortions and erasures of local cultural survival systems, such as the Jibaro's use of jaibería, natural Jibaro wisdom which included his use of trickery and other subversive strategies to better his life conditions. In the Tales of Juan Bobo, postcolonial representation aimed at the promotion of discourse about the Jibaro as *Other* and the suppression and omission of the *Other's* counter-discourse to colonial ideologies of conquest and domination provide adequate grounds for Puerto Rico's continued political, socio-economic violence against the Jibaros.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my son Billy, who taught me how to live, and to my daughter Menina who is still teaching me how to love. They are the best gifts of all and my greatest teachers.

1941

Cultivating tobacco on a farm near Barranquitas ■ Cultivando tabaco en una finca cerca de Barranquitas

INTRODUCTION

> Every generation must, with relatively clear vision, discover its mission and either fulfill or betray it.
> Frantz Fanon

My interest in the stories of Juan Bobo, the character of Juan Bobo and in the Jibaros that he represents started a long time ago. Very early in life, I became aware of the racism and elitism in Puerto Rican society and the urban elite's conflicted, often contradictory relationship with Puerto Rico's Jibaros. My own ideas and beliefs about the Jibaros have been interminably shaped by my family's ideas about Jibaros, their self-identification as Jibaros and their struggles to survive and thrive as marginalized people, the *Other,* in the face of the challenges present under Spanish colonial, Puerto Rican elite and U.S. imperial hegemonies. Of course, there are always more personal and more hidden reasons for what one does and writes about. There are many words used among Puerto Ricans to denote inferiority or degradation; the word bobo/a ("stupid, foolish," stems from the name Juan Bobo) and the word Jibaro/a are two popular epithets. In school, some teachers and other students who were middle class, who lived in the pueblo ("town/urban areas") and who represented more of the Spanish aspects of Puerto Rican culture and physical looks often used the words boba and Jibara to diminish and torment those who were not like them. I was often taunted by the lighter-skinned Puerto Rican children for my pelo grifo ("coarse, not straight hair") and my nariz chata ("squatty, non-Spaniard nose"). When I tried to straighten my hair and use makeup to lighten my skin and make

my nose appear thinner, I was told that I looked like la puerca de Juan Bobo ("Juan Bobo's pig"). When my mother and I were invited to the house of a Puerto Rican family who had more money or more education than ours did, she'd always remind me, no seas como Juan Bobo por su casa ("don't have poor manners like Juan Bobo"). My mother would scold me for looking too closely and smiling at a good looking Jibaro youth who had darker skin than I and who, in her estimation, still had la mancha del platano ("stain of the platano") on his hands. A field worker, like my own father and most of my ancestors, the youth was being identified by and denigrated for the stains that the plantains left on his clothing and on his hands and for being a Jibaro just like the majority of my immediate family. I was often ashamed of being the child of Jibaros.

Each year, on certain occasions, everyone on the island and in New York wanted to be a Jibaro. During Las Navidades ("Christmas"), Fiesta de los Reyes ("Feast of the Three Kings") and the town's Fiestas Patronales ("town's patron saint celebration") family, friends, neighbors would gather to eat rice and beans, drink rum, sing aguinaldos ("folk genre of Christmas music"), play the cuatros ("10 string guitar, unique to Puerto Rico") and congas and dance. In la plazita (town/city square), Jibaros and non-Jibaros came together to celebrate old Jibaro traditions and culture. These were the times when I was most proud of my Jibaro heritage.

It was difficult to know which variety of the Jibaro identity, the celebrated, the scorned or a combination of both, was a better fit for me. With each new encounter, I was forced to re-negotiate my identity and emotions to try to fit in and to belong. At once ashamed and proud of my Jibaro identity, I felt during my childhood, as a child of Jibaros, many ambiguities and contradictions. Even as a child, I began to question how

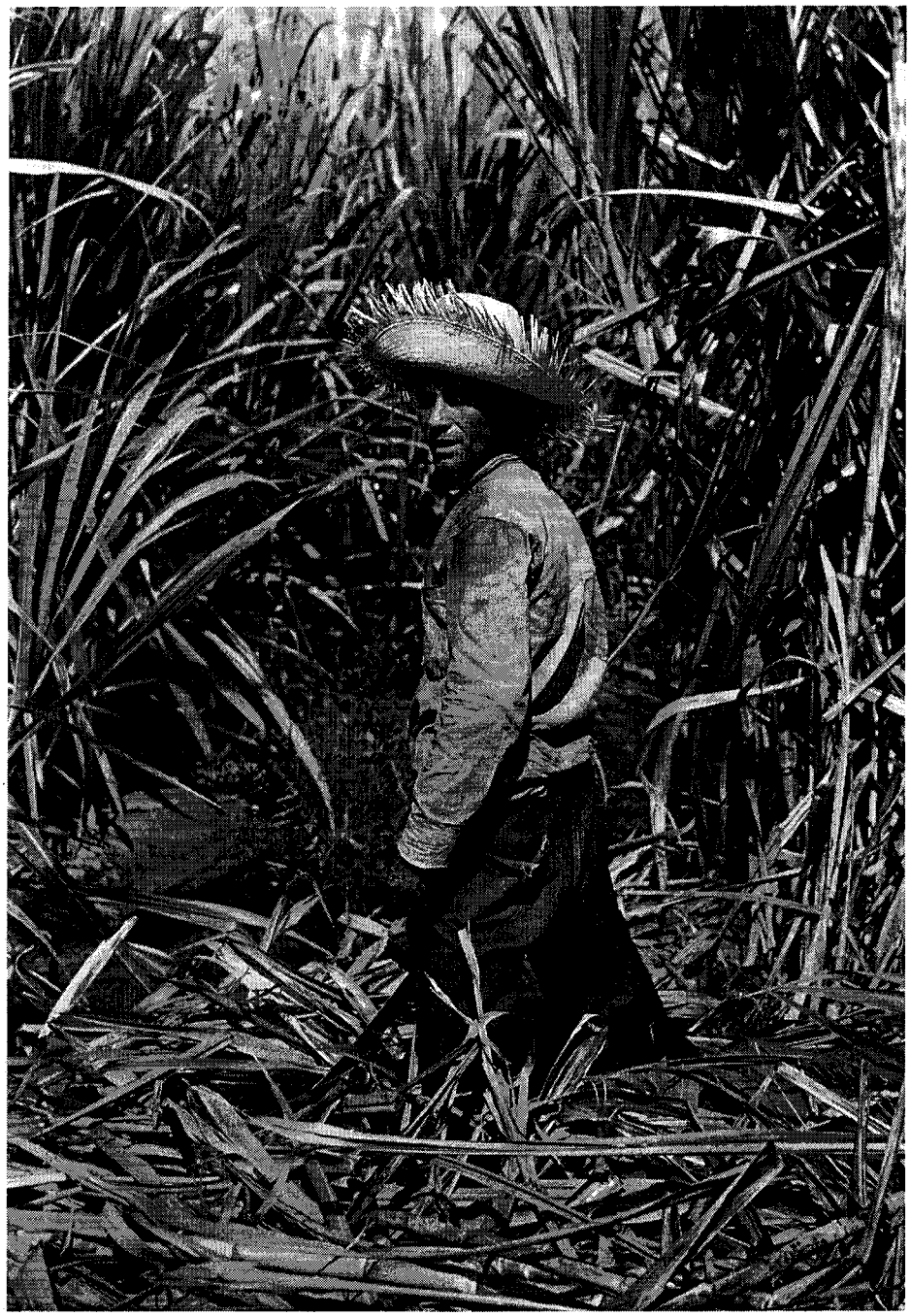
and why my family and other Puerto Ricans created such a contradiction-riddled and tortured environment in which to grow.

I was too often told hay que blanquear la raza ("you must always seek to whiten the race"), and I soon came to understand and accept that being too dark, or too poor, or unrefined, or a Jibaro, or a Juan Bobo was unacceptable and damaging for a Puerto Rican child. I grew up disliking the terms bobo/a and Jibaro/a and disliked hearing the stories of Juan Bobo in grade school (and even today) because they always brought back painful memories of an impoverished childhood. The tales brought up memories of being taunted for not being the right kind of Puerto Rican, my family's apparent struggles with self-loathing and my own struggles with the ambiguities and anxieties about my Jibara heritage.

In grade school, the teacher would preface her lesson by saying that the tales of Juan Bobo were part of an authentic Puerto Rican culture and part of the folklore about the island's Jibaros, but the Jibaros and Jibaro life represented in these texts were unrecognizable to me. I had come from a Jibaro family and yet I could see no semblance of me or my family in these stories and tales. My Jibaro family was not content with their poverty and circumstances as Juan Bobo appears to be. The Jibaros that I knew often and proudly resorted to aggression and violence to repair a damaged honor and establish self-respect. They were most certainly not tontos ("foolish, stupid") like Juan Bobo. They were uneducated but they were not stupid; they always used their jaibería ("natural Jibaro wisdom") and subversive trickery to better their life circumstances and to "put one over" on those in power, those with all the political, social and economic clout. Which version of Jibaros was I to believe and to accept? How was I to situate myself between these

discrepant ideologies about the Jibaros, these discrepant positions across colonial, nationalist, racial, cultural, social and economic axes of difference? How was I to understand the contradictory postcolonial narratives of the Jibaros in the texts of Juan Bobo that I read in school, and how would I represent myself as a child of rural peasants, of Jibaros? Postcolonial theories and ideas about lives and countries that have been influenced and shaped by colonialism helped me to begin to answer those questions and more. Theories about postcoloniality, the interplay between language, culture and literature, the development of postcolonial texts and the conscious efforts by writers to address within their work any of the cultural and political concerns of life in a decolonized nation helped me to understand the problematic processes of intertextuality (varying redactions of Juan Bobo) that came out of the different and diverse political-colonial scenarios in Puerto Rico after 1898.

Some of the postcolonial texts feature a Juan Bobo that is dark-skinned; others feature a much whiter Juan. Some texts include subversive dialogue and some do not. Why so many different versions of the same tale? Is Juan Bobo black, brown or white? Is he simply a tonto or is he really a con-artist? I began to question the writers' function and motivation for the creation of disparate versions of the same tales. Ambiguities about and distrust of the folklore and traditions surrounding the tales of Juan Bobo and the apparent contradictions in his portrayals as representative of the Jibaros have, throughout most of my life, unquietly occupied a prominent place in my consciousness of Puerto Rican culture and society and my understandings of the world around me and of my own identity. This research has helped me to begin to quiet the preoccupations and to begin to answer some of the major questions that I have had concerning la gran familia



1 9 4 6

Don Toli as a young man working in a sugarcane field near Guayanilla ■ Don Toli cuando joven trabajando en un cañaveral cerca de Guayanilla

Puertorriqueña ("the great Puerto Rican family"), Puerto Rico's national identity as it relates to the Jibaros, the authenticity of the character of Juan Bobo, my own identity and the function and motivation of the island's cultural elite or intelligentsia as writers of cultural history and literature after 1898.

Juan Bobo and Jibaros have been the backbone of Puerto Rican jokes and laughter for generations. Culturally authentic folktales about the stories of Juan Bobo and the Jibaros he represents are part of the rich Puerto Rican oral tradition and are often used in elementary school reading and multicultural literature instruction in Puerto Rico and in the United States mainland. After 1898, redactors of the Juan Bobo tales purged the tales of most of their overt anti-colonial, anti-elitist and subversive implications–the undisguised violence, lies, trickery and resistance to oppression that are so evident in the oral tales. With every subsequent version, Juan Bobo dwindled from trickster to mere tonto ("fool/noodlehead"), making Juan Bobo and Jibaros objects to laugh at or scorn. Colonial ideologies are evident and inscribed in the texts in the fact that Juan Bobo seems to always be rescued, saved, by a privileged and seemingly benevolent whiter, landowning and more educated character.

These postcolonial texts perpetuate and promote stereotypes of the Puerto Rican Jibaros as merely tontos in the name of multiculturalism; they omit altogether or simply distort Juan Bobo's jaibería and subversive trickery. At best, these postcolonial narratives of Juan Bobo engage, only to marginalize, Puerto Rico's pluralistic history and the painful legacies left by centuries of colonial oppression. At worst, they perpetuate a social, economic and racial stigmatization against Jibaros, a considerable sector of Puerto Rico in 1898.

The book Wretched of the Earth and specifically Frantz Fanon's ideas about the development of a national culture during the period of decolonization and about the role of violence in fighting oppression and the rehabilitative role of violence in freeing a colonized person from his feelings of inferiority had a major influence on me, helping shape much of the language and my ideas about the differences I have found between the traditional oral tales and the written postcolonial tales of Juan Bobo. This perspective has helped me to deconstruct and understand the cultural heritage recovery projects initiated after 1898. Analyzing the clichés and jokes about Juan Bobo and the Jibaros, looking at postcoloniality, the problematic processes of interculturality that come into being out of the diverse political-colonial scenarios, and applying Frantz Fanon's theory of national culture building following a country's independence and his theory about violence, can provide some understanding of the different variables that intervene in their conceptualization. The confusions and misunderstandings about Juan Bobo and the Jibaros in the subsequent redactions can be better analyzed and understood if one considers the following variables: class relations, the power domain, the dynamics of colonialism and the effects of United States imperialism in Puerto Rico.

The word Jibaro as epithet refers to a hillbilly and is commonly used by city people to refer to and belittle rustics; it carries with it a connotation of contempt and superiority. Rural country folk use the more dignified word, campesino, when referring to themselves. They may use the word Jibaro on occasion to describe disparagingly one of their own family or even themselves.

Jibaro is a term that refers to Puerto Rican peasants and that reflects a whole way of life, now folklorized as that which is essentially Puerto Rican. Considering that the

agricultural economy that was its material basis is almost extinct in Puerto Rico, any discourse about the Jibaros is nearly impossible except in the literary world, where an agrarian Puerto Rico is still possible and can be preserved. Literary worlds do not free us from real world stereotypes and prejudices, and in my opinion literary stereotypes can never serve a good purpose. Many, if not most, of the written postcolonial tales of Juan Bobo have played and still do play a major role in creating and perpetuating negative stereotypes about Puerto Rico's Jibaros, and this constitutes a continuing political violence against them.

Photographs

The photographs included in this thesis are the property of Jack Delano. They are reproductions of photographs included in the book:

Delano, Jack. Puerto Rico Mio, Four Decades of Change, Cuatro Decadas de Cambio. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990.

CHAPTER ONE

The Jibaro as Myth, Cultural and Political Icon of Puerto Rico's Cultural Elite

> The future will have no pity for those who, possessing the exceptional privilege of being able to speak words of truth to their oppressors, have engaged in acts of passivity, mute indifference or even cold complicity.
>
> Frantz Fanon

In 1898, Puerto Rico's cultural elite, faced with the totalizing power of the new colonial master, the United States, scrambled for strategies to maintain their position in the face of the new challenges brought on by the change of power. Lillian Guerra, in her book Popular Expression and National Identity in Puerto Rico, argues:

> Complicitous in the political and economic domination of the island by foreigners, the island elite found that their interests as a class increasingly depended upon the continued imperial presence of the United States; but at the same time, they sensed that their values, customs, and sense of identity were inevitably being compromised by their collaboration. (46-47)

The island's elite, worried for their economic, social and cultural preservation, responded to their uncertain realities by recreating a national culture, creating an icon, a symbol of their own identity that would keep safe their interests, their place in society, and would perpetuate their visions for Puerto Rico. They needed to find a native symbol that would represent Puerto Rican-ness, its essence and its soul. They found that symbol in the margins of their society, in the forgotten spaces of Puerto Rican life. The Jibaro, historically forgotten and oppressed by the moneyed, culturally elevated and educated elite, became the symbol of Puerto Rican national identity, a warrior in the struggles

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1942

Son of a sugarcane worker, carrying his father's hot lunch in a *fiambrera*, near Río Piedras

Hijo de un trabajador de caña, llevando el almuerzo de su padre en una fiambrera, cerca de Río Piedras

against the Spanish and United States colonial powers that threatened the position of the island's cultural elite. As Guerra observes:

> In response to this situation, certain intellectuals turned to the margins of society, where they symbolically sought to locate a portion of themselves in the persons, habits and historical experiences of those Puerto Ricans who had never actively fomented colonialism of any kind—either Spanish or North American—but had resisted it. By strategically inserting themselves in the margins through a particular stream of nationalist discourse, these intellectuals sought to project an image of their class as less culpable in the fomentation of colonialism and more victimized by its extremes. (47)

In spite of the fact that the Jibaro was sickly, poorly educated, culturally deprived and a suspect character, the island's cultural elite was able to revise and re-create a Jibaro that was emblematic of Puerto Rican ideals and natural wisdom. Metaphors, icons, ideas about the Jibaro became an essential part of Puerto Rico's national symbolic, providing a sense of national identity. The Jibaro, as symbol of the Puerto Rican identity, gave Puerto Ricans a common national collective "imaginary" and a common language by which Puerto Ricans could see themselves as sharing similar goals, values and aspirations. This Jibaro represented a "contradiction in terms." As Guerra argues:

> Rooted in the legitimization of the Spanish colonial project but animated by a resentment of North American colonialism, the brand of nationalism espoused by Puerto Rico's elite in the early twentieth century represented a contradiction in terms. (46)

Although a combination of all three main heritages of the island, Taino, African and Spanish, the Jibaro had been transformed into a version that supposedly represented the authentic Puerto Rican, with roots in a distant past and the Spanish mother country. Depicted as white, the Jibaro became an essential element of what it meant to be Puerto Rican, in and outside of the island. "Everyone proclaims at the top of his lungs that he is

a jibaro. What yesterday was an insulting epithet has now become a title of honor" (Pedreira 10).

The Jibaro is intricately tied to Puerto Rico's economic, social and political evolution. Thus, we have Francisco Zeno, in 1923, describing the Jibaro as a "fundamental factor of Porto Rico's evolutionary progress" (739). The cultural elite of the island constructed a version of the Jibaro that was useful to them, useful for achieving their political ends, but that did not threaten their class status in Puerto Rican society. A Jibaro who was a docile peasant, living in isolation in the interior of the island, and politically inept and ignorant would not threaten their position, nor thwart their efforts to secure economic, social and cultural standing in the Puerto Rican class hierarchy.

Puerto Rico's culturally elite or intelligentsia went to the margins of society to appropriate the Jibaro, but their subsequent discourses about Jibaros did not capture the real situation for men and women in Puerto Rico's rural and mountain areas. Fanon observes,

> The native intellectual who comes back to his people by way of cultural achievements behaves in fact like a foreigner. Sometimes he has no hesitation in using a dialect in order to show his will to be as near as possible to the people; but the ideas that he expresses and the preoccupations he is taken up with have no common yardstick to measure the real situation which the men and women in his country know. The culture that the intellectual leans towards is often no more than a stock of particularisms. He wishes to attach himself to the people; but instead he only catches hold of their outer garments. And these outer garments are merely reflection of a hidden life, teeming and perpetually in motion. (222-23)

The archetypal myth of the Jibaro on which the Juan Bobo tales are based was formulated from this foreigner's perspective and on a select stock of particularisms as a part of a cultural recovery project initiated by the island's cultural elite after 1898.

CHAPTER TWO

Who Was the Jibaro?

To understand the position of Jibaros in present-day Puerto Rican discourses and literature, it is necessary to know and understand their past position in the Puerto Rican system. The following details about Puerto Rico's Jibaro, his origins, his existence as a jornalero, agregado ("landless peasant worker") and his realties are from Fernando Picó's article, "Cafetal Adentro, Una historia de los trabajadores agricolas en el Puerto Rico del siglo 19." Since the 16th century, these nomadic jornaleros, the island's Jibaro, lived in the mountainous interior of the island; they managed to survive their conditions through sheer luck, using their wit and wile to get what they needed to live. The jornalero population included the children and grandchildren of families who had previously owned land, poor landless peasants, children and grandchildren of African slaves who had paid for their freedom but who stayed on as workers for the landholding elite and descendants of peoples who had come to Puerto Rico from other countries. The history of Puerto Rico is inexorably tied to the sugar and coffee industry on the island. Even though sugar had been cultivated since the sixteenth century and coffee since the eighteenth century, major changes to both industries occurred in the nineteenth century. While African slaves made up a large portion of the workers in the large coffee-producing haciendas, jornaleros y agregados (" Jibaros, landless peasants") made up the majority of

the workers in the small and medium-sized, family-owned haciendas. On the hacienda, jornaleros were allowed to use a very small area of land around their bohio ("thatched hut") to grow a subsistence crop for themselves and their family. Typically, they were not allowed to own a cow nor plant coffee or fruit; they were forced to purchase food and other necessities on credit from the tienda de raya ("hacienda/company owned store"), located on the hacienda and typically owned by the master. The workers were often paid in fichas or vales ("non-monetary coins and vouchers") that could only be used for purchases at the tienda. This method of payment did not allow the jornalero to save any money and forced him to continue his servitude in the hacienda. Life was difficult; hard work, poor diet, crowded and unsanitary living conditions, sickness and little access to medicine caused many to die very young. Indebted to the master land owner, they lived in fear of losing their jobs and were forced to tolerate much abuse; alcoholism was rampant and violence was a constant in their lives. Women also worked on the coffee plantations, were paid less than the men and their wages went directly to the men, their husband or son, if the woman was a widow. Some women worked as servants for the rich land owner; their payment was often food or clothing or vouchers for provisions from the tienda. Children as young as three to four years old were forced to work to help their families. Education for Jibaro children was virtually nonexistent; peasant children did not have many opportunities to acquire any education and skills that could help them to change or improve their life circumstances. In 1887, less than 20% of the total population was literate, and as Pico observes, this period in Puerto Rico's history was characterized by an assassination of infancy, a debilitation of peasant intelligence and an atrophy of sensibilities. Self-respect and respect from others in their community were important to

1941

Sugarcane cutter working in a field that had been burned, near Guánica ■ Cortador de caña trabajando en un cañaveral quemado, cerca de Guánica

the jornaleros; many resorted to violence to secure that respect. Some workers who had experienced indignities and disrespect at the hands of the mayordomos ("work overseers") would often leave their work rather than experience another assault on their dignity. Some others would confront the mayordomos with machete in hand, even if it meant going to jail. The wealth of the Spanish colonizers and the island's elite was gained and maintained through the hard work of these jornaleros. In the 1800s, the social, economic and cultural realities for Puerto Rico's Jibaro, the island's majority population, were tragic and catastrophic. Their fortitude in adversity, native resourcefulness and insistence on their isolation from the urban centers of Puerto Rico and the radically changing world, promoted and shaped their solidarity as a Jibaro community. It is the gestalt of this Jibaro that made the Jibaro an ideal national heroic type and the basis for the identity of the new postcolonial man after 1898. With the advent of industrialization and the decline of agriculture, the Jibaros' traditional way of life was significantly altered. They were forced to abandon their land and migrate to San Juan, or the other large urban centers in the United States mainland.

CHAPTER THREE

Juan Bobo in Puerto Rican Folktales and Children's Literature (I)

Oral Tales: Juan Bobo as Trickster and the Tradition of Violence

> One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted—knowingly or unknowingly—in ourselves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives.
>
> Ben Okri

The Juan Bobo tales are part of the more than three hundred Puerto Rican folktales contained within four folklore collections composed during the first four decades of the twentieth century. The first and largest of these was collected by John Alden Mason and edited by Aurelio Espinosa (1914-1915), a second was collected by Puerto Rican folklorist Raphael Ramirez de Arellano (1926), a third was published in the Journal of American Folklore by Ralph Steele Boggs (1929) and a fourth collection, Raices de la Tierra (1941), was collected by Maria Cadilla de Martínez (Smith 3). John Alden Mason, in the introduction to his folktale collection published in the Journal of American Folklore, argues that the most popular group of folk tales known in Puerto Rico were part of the picaresque tradition and that within the category of tales with a foolish hero, the tales of Juan Bobo were the most common (3). Juan Bobo is the protagonist in more than seventy of the tales that Mason collected, and the character

seems to have its origin in the Juan Tonto tales of Spain (Espinosa 3:191-206). Juan Bobo, or Juan Tonto as he is called in Spain, while a major part of Puerto Rico's folktale tradition, did not have a significant role in the Spanish oral tradition. Pedro de Urdemalas, the Spanish trickster, is a far more popular character than Juan Bobo in the oral tradition of Spain. In the Puerto Rican tradition, Juan Bobo develops as a complex and contradictory character, acting both as fool and trickster. While some of his trickster behavior has been compared to similar behavior ascribed to the Spanish "picaro" Pedro de Urdemalas, also called Juan Animala, the character of Juan Bobo exhibits antisocial behaviors not present in any of the tales about Pedro de Urdemalas or Juan Animala. Juan Bobo's dual personality of trickster and fool, in addition to his antisocial behaviors, are key factors to understanding the role that these tales have played in Puerto Rican society (Smith 4). In the collections of Puerto Rican folktales and in some of the analysis of the tales of Juan Bobo by folklorists, the character of Juan Bobo "seems to be questionably presented as a representative of the [Puerto Rican] jibaro/campesino" (Cadilla de Martínez 27). The increases in literacy and decreases in the relative isolation of the rural areas resulted in a decline in the oral narrative tradition on the island. The figure of Juan Bobo is still a symbol within the popular culture of present-day Puerto Rico, although the telling of the tales about him has diminished.

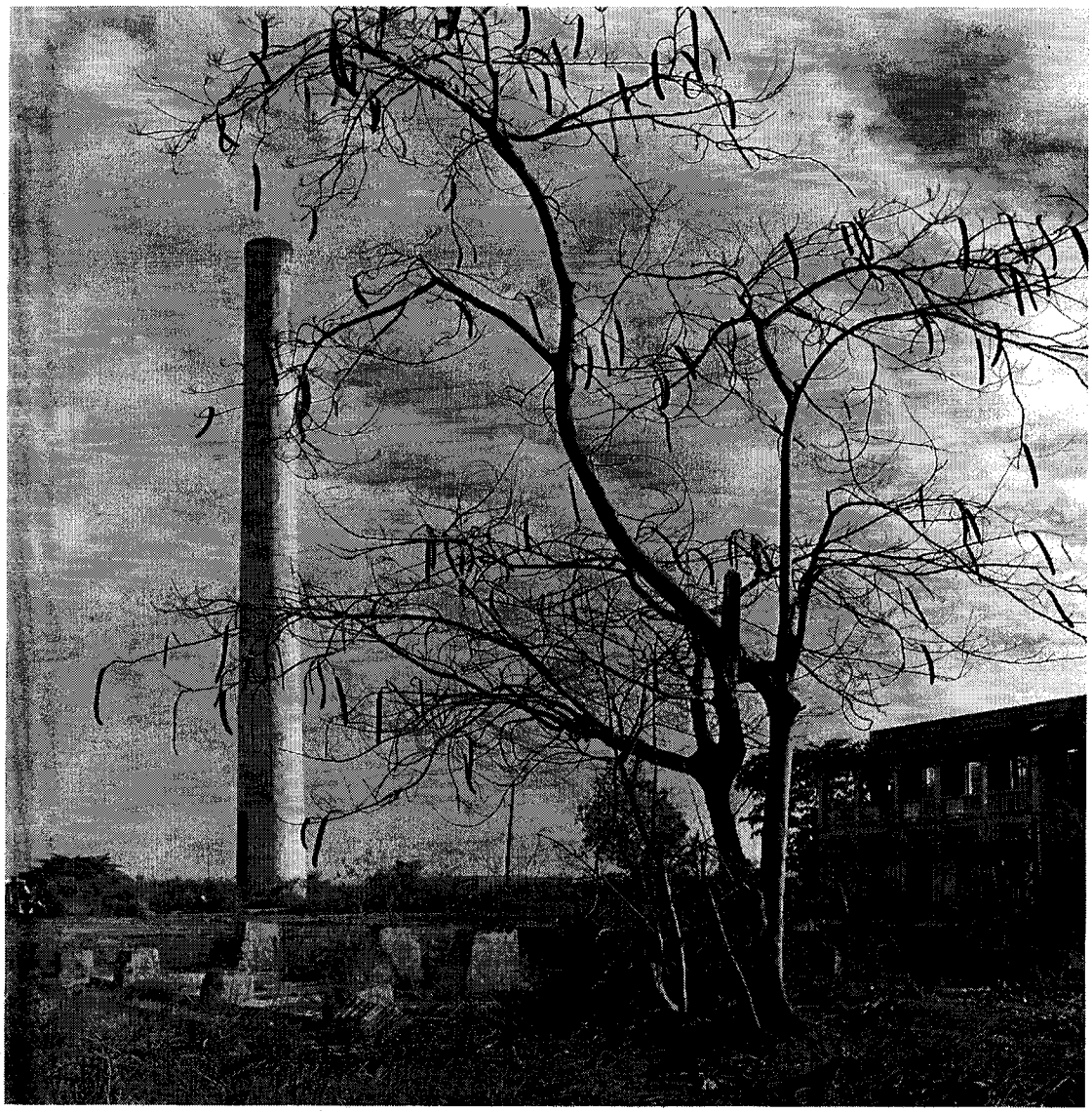
It took a very long time, many decades after the publication of the Alden Mason folk tale collection, for the tales of Juan Bobo and other oral narratives to become part of the reading materials for Puerto Rican children. A few of the Juan Bobo tales were included in Cuentos Folkloricos, written by Ricardo Alegria and published in 1967. In

Los Cuentos de Juan Bobo, published in 1979, author Maria Cadilla de Martínez revised and rewrote the tales for a juvenile audience.

While there is much controversy as to the origins of the Juan Bobo tales, most literary and historical experts agree that Juan Bobo is Puerto Rico. In her book, Tierra y Folklore (country and folklore), Carmen Marrero argues that Juan Bobo does not have boundaries, nor one specific island town as his birthplace. Juan Bobo lives in all that is Puerto Rico, a product of a collective exalted imagination that gave birth to his life and propagated his stories. His deeds are part of the popular discourse throughout the island; he is one of the favorite characters of the Puerto Rican children, who laugh when they hear about his antics, antics that reflect his ignorance and his ingenuity (129). There is also much controversy as to the appearance of Juan Bobo. Marrero posits that those who have drawn him and talked about him and who know his life and his deeds picture a Juan Bobo that is ugly, very ugly.

Narratives about tricksters are some of the world's oldest narratives in children's literature. In her book, Writing Tricksters: Mythic Gambols in American Ethnic Fiction, Jeanne Rosier Smith suggests "that the age old trickster has not lost relevance in the modern world; rather, the trickster has become a key figure for personal and cultural survival in twentieth century America" (2). She goes on to say:

> In virtually all cultures, tricksters are both folk heroes and wanderers on the edges of the community, at once marginal and central to the culture. Tricksters challenge the status quo and disrupt perceived boundaries. Whether foolishly, arrogantly, or bravely, tricksters face the monstrous, transforming the chaotic to create new worlds and new cultures... tricksters served to combat racial and sexual oppression and to affirm and create personal and cultural identity. Tricksters are not only characters, they are also rhetorical agents. They infused narrative structure with energy, humor, and polyvalence, producing a politically radical subtext in the narrative form itself. (2)



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Ruins of the Rufina sugar mill in Guayanilla ■ Ruinas de la Central Rufina en Guayanilla

The trickster Juan Bobo is the "superhero" in the oral traditions and cultural survival systems of the Jibaro. He plays a crucial role in the Jibaro's efforts for personal human survival, cultural survival and the survival of his community. The oral tales about Juan Bobo that Jibaro storytellers told helped them and their listeners to survive and to preserve and transform a culture, a way of life, a community that was threatened by colonial and postcolonial chaos and destructive forces. Sandra Zagarell argues that a community's stories "represent what gives the community its identity, what enables it to remain itself..." (520). Juan Bobo's "mask" as trickster, joker and the fool in the oral tradition played an important role in defining and preserving the Jibaro's connections to self, tradition and culture. Ralph Ellison, in Shadow and Act, points out that "we wear the mask for purposes of aggression, as well as for defense; when we are projecting the future and preserving the past. In short, the motives hidden behind a mask are as numerous as the ambiguities the mask conceals" (55).

The character of Juan Bobo grew out of a distinct, historically specific cultural landscape and tradition. His character developed under specific, constantly evolving cultural conditions. As Robert Pelton observes,

> The knotty logic of the trickster is best unraveled by keeping him firmly situated within the cultural context.... At the same time, looking clearly at the trickster on his home ground would unveil the common, though analogical, imaginative process that shapes him in each culture. (18)

Any approach to the Juan Bobo tales, to his use of violence and the deceptions inherent in the masks that he wears, that of trickster, fool and any analysis of these tales and the literary criticism of these texts must be accompanied by an analysis of the colonial and

postcolonial history, cultural landscape and traditions that gave them life and shaped them through time. For as Pelton observes, the trickster [like Juan Bobo]

> slipped out of our contemporary interpretive nets to thumb his nose at both scholarly and popular understanding of so-called primitive peoples. Yet these peoples too know their trickster as the very embodiment of elusiveness. (1)

I am mindful that Juan Bobo and the Jibaro are elusive characters and can never, finally, be defined and fully understood.

The character of Juan Bobo is fool and trickster, able to transform himself from the tonto ("numbskull, fool") into a person who is able to use his foolishness as a disguise, for his advantage. This ability to disguise himself as a means of achieving his ends reflects his jaibería, a trait often attributed to Puerto Rico's Jibaro. It is the natural ability of the Jibaro to feign (mask) dullness in order to throw off those around him, get out of doing something he doesn't want to do, or to get something he needs to live or make his life easier (Cabrera 62). This defensive weapon and its ultimate efficacy is part of Juan Bobo's strategy of "resistance" to the colonial and postcolonial demands on him. Many of the Juan Bobo stories involve and are written around the theme of revenge and his conspiring against the interests of the rich. Some ridicule accepted social mores; others ridicule the legitimacy of the island's cultural elite, religion, government and other societal institutions (Guerra 138). In most stories, Juan Bobo triumphs, tricking the land owner out of material possessions. Guerra refers to this as a social inversion of classes:

> Indeed, one can easily see Juan Bobo as the quintessential response of Puerto Rico's peasants-turned-rural-proletarians to the jibaro image constructed by the elite in the early twentieth century. The public mask of Juan as a subservient, obedient, vulnerable, and ignorant campesino is betrayed by the crudely political exploits he executes. By using the elite's expectations of him to his own advantage, Juan puts his betters to shame, forces them to endure humiliation, and occasionally even succeeds at

> taking their property and wealth away from them. Behind the facade of this "jibaro 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 experienced little of it in their real lives. (138)

In a measure for measure manner, Juan Bobo, in the original oral versions of the tales, often gets compensation by plotting revenge on his master, the land owner. Guerra refers to these stories as tales of revenge. In one of the stories, the master asks Juan Bobo to cut the weeds in one of the orchards. Juan cuts down all of the banana bushes, and then goes to sleep. Inspecting the work, the landlord finds Juan Bobo asleep and infers that Juan Bobo's act is deliberate. The landlord demands answers: "What have you done," he asks. Juan Bobo replies "Nothing, are you upset about that?" The landlord exclaims "No, I'm not upset, but you are going to leave me with nothing!" The next day, the master asks Juan Bobo to cut the poisonous grass of the field where the livestock graze. Instead of cutting the grass, Juan cuts off the goat's legs. The master and Juan Bobo repeat their conversation of the previous day. Finally, the master asks Juan Bobo to take the pigs to their pen. On the way Juan Bobo meets a man who offers to buy the pigs. Juan Bobo sells all the pigs, except for the largest, and cuts off the tails of the rest. He pockets the money and buries the remaining pig up to his neck and sticks the tails of the other sold pigs into the mud. Upon his return, Juan Bobo tells the master that the pigs are stuck in the mud. They return to the site of the burial, free the large pig, but are only able to remove the tails of the other pigs. Completely tricked by Juan Bobo, the master laments the loss of his material resources and exclaims "Juan Bobo, what have you done! I have ended up with nothing!" At the end of the story, the landlord frees the large pig, remains penniless, and is unaware that Juan Bobo has tricked him out of his money (Guerra, 138-39).

In today's terminology, the Juan Bobo in this oral story is a con-artist who makes his own luck, and according to Guerra, "Even today the humor, twists of fate, and mental agility of Juan in cheating all the powerful characters out of a fortune in gold is not lost on the reader" (Guerra 141). But I do not fully agree with this statement. The tales of Juan Bobo, as part of multicultural literature in the classroom, are typically reading material for grades two through five, for children ages seven through ten. These postcolonial written redactions feature a more homogenized version of Juan Bobo, and the subversive dialogue, if any, is clearly diluted and masked. It is questionable that children at this age and at this stage in their development as readers of literature could discern and recognize the power struggles in the tales and that Juan Bobo was in fact the more powerful character in the story. Most children could not recognize Juan Bobo's trickery and lies as a response, a reaction shaped and influenced by his jaibería, his natural wisdom as Jibaro to the violence, harsh injustice and exploitation of the Jibaro perpetrated by the rich landowners. How will children recognize the good guys, the bad guys and the victims and should they be allowed to make decisions about what is right and wrong and which side to take without an understanding of the historical and cultural dynamics involved in the relationships between Juan Bobo and the other characters in the story? In reference to taking sides, Guerra argues that

> The story transmits as many reasons for why one should identify with Juan as it does for why one should not identify with its rich characters. While Juan's cunning is mainly responsible for the profitability of each encounter with the other rich characters, they are not victims who fall prey to traps he intentionally sets. These are "bad guys" who simply get caught in a web of their own making.... (141)

Juan Bobo is forced to lie and cheat and his actions are excusable because the rich are immoral, unscrupulous and guilty of humiliating the humble peasant. They deserve what

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Coffee picker on a farm near Corozal ■ Recogedora de café en una finca cerca de Corozal

they get, and Juan Bobo gets what he deserves: a profit at the expense of an injust and exploitive rich landowner. At the end of the story, Juan Bobo tips the scales of justice, making them more balanced, and the burden of reality for the Jibaros is momentarily lifted for those who tell the story, as well as for those who hear it (142). Juan Bobo's victories over the master land owner would have been celebrated and admired by members of the Jibaro community. According to Guerra:

> Surely, a symbolic victory gained through the exploits of a fictive character was cause for celebration and admiration by all those whose real life battles were much tougher to wage, and whose resolutions, when favorable, were tiny triumphs by comparison. It is little wonder that many Puerto Rican parents should have passed stories like this on to their children: by doing so, they instilled in them confidence in their individual ability to surmount challenges as well as a sense of common cause with others who shared their experience. As the children of laborers, they would have needed both to survive. (141)

There are many levels of meaning in the oral tales of Juan Bobo: on one level, the stories can be seen as resistance by the Jibaros to the commonly accepted discourses about them promulgated by the island elite, and on the other hand, they can be understood as "exaggerated metaphors for the resistant modes of behavior many subalterns perceived as appropriate tactics for survival" (Guerra142). Guerra says that the political implications of the Juan Bobo stories cannot be overlooked or underestimated:

> the thinly veiled antielite bias built into the texture and plot development of Juan Bobo stories makes them the most illustrative of the kind of social priorities shaping the popular consciousness of subaltern Puerto Ricans. Among these, that of establishing common cause with people most like oneself in terms of class ranks highly. (142)

The character of Juan Bobo experiences a double colonization; he is the *Other's Other*. He, and the campesinos /Jibaros that he represents, have been dismissed in colonial times by the Spanish colonizers and by the island's elite. They continue to be

dismissed and stigmatized by the postcolonial, and some say, modern neocolonial cultural elite of the island. Puerto Rico's poor populations continue to struggle in the face of ancient challenges passed on from colonial days to the present and by the new challenges that resulted from postcolonial changes to the island's government, culture and language as a result of U.S. intervention and colonization of Puerto Rico after 1898. The Juan Bobo in the oral tales, the character who has no reservations about using tricks, lies and violence to secure justice and a better life circumstance may be the superhero that they need and want; his stories are their stories, and, according to Guerra,

> Stories of Juan Bobo evince evidence of the capacity of even the most vulnerable to overcome the obstacles arrayed before them; but equally well, they invoke recognition of the fact that often the most challenging obstacle one can face is that posed by what other people think. When Juan is allowed to prove himself, he inevitably does so. From start to finish, Juan's belief in himself defies the disbelief of others, and ultimately that is all that matters. But the manner in which Juan goes about rebelling against authorities while proving himself to his peers not only encourages support for examples of such individuals in real life, but also warns of the communal standards by which the worthiness of one's efforts might be judged. (142)

CHAPTER FOUR

Juan Bobo in Puerto Rican Folktales and Children's Literature (II)

Postcolonial Written Redactions of Two Tales: Movement from Trickster to Fool

> I ascribe a basic importance to the phenomenon of language....To speak means to be in a position to use certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization.
>
> Frantz Fanon

After 1898, redactors of the written texts of the Juan Bobo tales purged most of their overt anti-colonial, anti-elitist and subversive implications–the undisguised violence, lies, trickery and resistance to oppression that are so evident in the oral tales. With every subsequent version, Juan Bobo dwindles from trickster to mere tonto ("fool/noodlehead"), making him an object to laugh at or scorn. These redactions constitute a compromise and betrayal of the authentic Jibaro while deepening the split between Puerto Rico's elite class and the rural peasantry. They played right into colonialism's hands.

"Juan Bobo y Las Señoritas del Manto Prieto" ("Juan Bobo and the ladies with the dark mantles/flies") is a popular Juan Bobo tale. In his book, Folklore Puertorriqueño, Cuentos y Adivinanzas, Recogidos de la Tradición Oral, published in 1926, Puerto Rican writer, Rafael Ramirez de Arellano presents an earlier version of the tale (176). In this older, more violent version, Juan Bobo goes to town to buy honey. On his way home, he notices many señoritas del manto prieto whirling around the bottle of honey. No matter how much he tries to chase them away, they will not leave. He tells them that if they want

to buy the honey he will sell it to them. Having said this, he leaves the bottle of honey on the road. When he arrives home, and when his mother asks him for the honey, he tells her that he had sold it to the señoritas and that he will return another day to get his money. Angered, his mother sends him back to town to collect the money, but because the señoritas will not pay him, he goes to the town judge to denounce them. The judge recognizes Juan Bobo's ignorance, and tells him to kill the flies whenever and wherever he sees them. Death, the judge tells him, is the best punishment for the señoritas. Juan Bobo leaves to search for the ladies with the black mantles. One day, while at church service, he sees one of the señoritas on the crown, on the top of the head of the priest who is preaching the sermon. Juan Bobo takes a log and hits the priest on the head, but instead of killing the señorita, he kills the priest. Juan Bobo is put into jail and on the day of his sentencing he repeats what the judge had ordered him to do whenever, wherever he sees a señorita del manto prieto. Because Juan Bobo is a simpleton, a tonto, he is set free. In this earlier, 1926 version, Juan Bobo, as representative of the Jibaros, uses his crucial tools of violence, lies and trickery to fight the tyranny of the Spanish colonizers and their Catholic representatives, the priests. The role of the Catholic Church in island life was significant; under Spanish rule, the Catholic Church was central to Puerto Rican everyday life. In a parallel colonization process, many priests headed local schools and other institutions. The relationship between religion and colonialism and the role of Catholic priests and missionaries in the expansion and maintenance of Spanish colonialism in Puerto Rico helped shape the evolution of the cultural and historical events of the island, while creating situations of oppression and also providing occasions and resources for

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Children of a farmer near Corozal ■ Hijas de un agricultor cerca de Corozal

resistance. Fanon consistently maintains that freedom cannot be granted; it must be won (86). In this 1926 version of the tale, Juan Bobo wins his freedom by killing the priest.

In a less violent 1979 adaptation of the same tale, "Las Moscas Embrollonas" ("The embroiling/troublemaking flies"), by Puerto Rican writer José Ramírez Rivera in Los Cuentos de Juan Bobo, Collección de Maria Cedilla de Martínez (35-39), the comadres ("women of the barrio") convince Juan Bobo's mother that she is to blame for her son's nonsense and silliness and that she should let him go out into the world. She convinces her husband to allow Juan Bobo to set up his own small business selling melao ("sugary sweet cane syrup"). They buy some melao on credit from Don Crespín, a neighbor who is a trapiche malero ("wheeler dealer"), who sells cane syrup to people in the barrio and in town. In this version, Juan Bobo tries to collect his money from the señoritas, and angered by their refusal to pay, he swats them and loudly insults them until an officer of the law overhears the ruckus and brings Juan Bobo before the judge. The judge orders Juan Bobo to bring the señoritas to him so that he can arrest them for nonpayment. Juan Bobo accompanies the officer to the place where he has left the melao and shows him the culprits who are refusing to pay him. The officer cannot contain his laughter and returns Juan Bobo to the judge. The judge orders Juan Bobo to continue his attempts to get his money by swatting the señoritas whenever, wherever he sees them again. At that precise moment, a señorita lands on top of the judge's nose and Juan Bobo punches the judge. When the judge asks him why he has done this, Juan Bobo replies "because you had a fly on your nose, I was able to get compensated right away." The judge feels foolish for having given any credence to Juan Bobo's story and he is

embarrassed that all can see the black eye Juan has given him. He sends Juan Bobo away. Embarrassed, the judge also leaves the court.

Fanon observes that "At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self respect" (94). While not as violent as Arellano's version of the same tale, the Juan Bobo in this version demonstrates that his desire for justice and recognition from the police officer and the judge and his use of violence, less brutal than in Arellano's version, are his only options in order to "cleanse" his inferiority and free himself from his situation. Violence, according to Fanon, begins its dissolving impact by subjecting the colonial master to fear, and this fear suspends the master's assurance of his colonial power. The judge, unsure of his power, must leave the court. Fanon argues that once a colonized people connect themselves with the defense of their dignity as human beings, then their subsequent responses to injustice are less to convince themselves than to remove the oppressors. Juan Bobo has succeeded, at least temporarily, in removing the judge and his power from the court. In this version, Juan Bobo has won the struggle over injustice and the law by refusing to be defined by fixed attributes, that is, his stupidity and lack of learning. In causing injury to the judge, Juan Bobo transcends his label, showing his humanity, his willingness to rebel; in short, he shows himself as untamable. What is evident in this version, as in the 1926 version, is Juan Bobo's humanity as a colonized person, his struggle for recognition as a human being, the struggle for human rights, not for the recognition of difference or sameness. By including a participatory father figure in this 1979 version of the tale and ignoring the documented harsh realities of many children's lives during the 1890s, author Ramirez Rivera is further breaking with

the oral tradition. Pico observes, "In the decade of the 1890s, the number of children born out of wedlock accounted for more than half of all the births. There was hardly any legal protection for these children and the number of abandoned children and elderly persons increased" (34). A typical Jibaro family at this time would have been headed by a woman.

In a 1981 version of the tale, "Juan Bobo y Las Senoritas del Manto Prieto," by Puerto Rican writer Rosario Ferre and included in her book, Los Cuentos de Juan Bobo (7-10), the author injects dialogue that more readily and openly speaks to the injustices perpetrated against the poor Jibaro peasants but has significantly decreased Juan Bobo's use of violence. Juan Bobo's mother is concerned that their small-business of selling melao is in jeopardy if he does not collect the money from the señoritas. She is worried that the trapichero will shut their business down and not lend them any more money. In this version, Juan Bobo fights with the flies, demands his money, and yells "¡Ay Hijas de la Mala Madre, traidoras, embrollonas! Ojala se les vuelva veneno ese melao y se les atragante en el gaznate!" [Oh, daughters of the bad mother [Spain?], you traitors, troublemakers, I hope that this melao turns into poison, and gets stuck in your throat!] (10). The judge, after hearing the story, decides to get a laugh at Juan Bobo's expense. He tells Juan Bobo to be cautious with his words and his actions, so as not to be thrown in jail, and gives him the permission to use force, any time, anywhere to try to get his money from the señoritas. At that very moment, a fly lands on the tip of the judge's nose. Juan Bobo immediately punches the judge, who falls to the ground. The judge starts to scream and curse at Juan Bobo, but since there were witnesses to what he had ordered Juan to do, he is left with no other alternative but to mask his anger, compose himself and

pretend that he does not hear what Juan Bobo is murmuring: "¡Justicia, ni que justicia! Si ya se sabe que pal pobre no hay justicia!" [Justice! What justice! Everyone knows that there is no justice for the poor!] (10). After hearing Juan Bobo's comments to the judge, the comadres ("woman neighbors, residents of the barrio") in this version wonder if Juan Bobo is as dumb as he looks. With his words about the lack of justice for the poor, Juan Bobo is struggling against the negation of the Jibaro's soul by the Spanish colonists and the Puerto Rican elite neocolonials, the island's elite that operate in complicity with the colonial and imperial powers. Through his own violence, his "cleansing" revolutionary dialogue, he is fighting against their acts of violence, material and social, that seek to depersonalize him. The revolutionary reaction to and perception of the situation by the comadres is the response of all Jibaros, a collective violence among the downtrodden reacting to the direct acts of violence by those in power. Fanon argues that there is a risk involved in the perpetuation of the stereotyping of a people for their backwardness. The risk involves their ethnic, social, and economic isolation from the mainstream of society. The revolutionary dialogue and comments in Ferre's version of this tale fight against the label and challenges the commonly held notions of the Jibaro as a backward population.

Finally, in a 1994 version of the tale, "A Dime a Jug" retold by Puerto Rican writer Carmen T. Bernier–Grand and included in the children's book, Juan Bobo, Four Tales from Puerto Rico, Juan Bobo is stripped completely of his tools of violence, his weapons of defense against colonial and neocolonial injustices. In this version, Juan Bobo's mother asks him to sell the sugarcane syrup to the widows, who were in church attending the services. His mother adds that the widows "wear shiny black dresses and carry fans. They are small, and they speak softly" (46). On the way to the church, he sees

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Mother and daughter who lived in one of the company houses on a sugar plantation near Lajas

Madre e hija que vivían en una de las casas de la compañía azucarera en una hacienda cerca de Lajas

a handkerchief lying in the mud, picks it up, and out pop four dimes. He puts the dimes in his pocket, keeps walking, but takes the wrong path home. He comes to a sugar mill and believes that it is the church. "Syrup! Delicious syrup!" he yells and four flies fly out of the mill. He mistakes the flies for the widows (shiny black dresses, wings for fans) and offers them syrup for a dime a jug, but the flies pay no attention to him and just fly around and around the jugs. He offers to open one of the jugs and the flies fly inside the opening. He tells them to stop tasting the syrup unless they are going to pay for it, but the flies do not stop. He shakes the jug and the flies fly away. He starts to run after them, demanding that they pay for the syrup, but he trips and falls. The four dimes fall out of his pocket, and when Juan Bobo sees them on the ground, he assumes that the widows have paid. "Hey!" widows!," Juan Bobo calls out. "You forgot your syrup." The flies fly into the mill and Juan Bobo sits down and drinks all the syrup. When he gets home, he gives his mother the four dimes, and his mother hugs him and tells him that he can eat all he wants for dinner, because he has done such a good job of selling the syrup. Juan Bobo tells his mother that he is very full and ready for bed. In the final page of this children's picture book, Juan Bobo is in a hammock and his pet chicken is sleeping with him.

This last book is a level 3 reader for children in grades 2-4. It is typically used as text in a unit about teaching and using storytelling in the classroom. An introduction to this unit might include comments such as the following, from the classroom teacher:

> Students, today we going to learn how to write noodlehead stories. What is a noodlehead? A person who doesn't use his brains, a fool. There are stories about these fools, these noodleheads from many countries around the world. Today, we will read about Juan Bobo and the Flies. It is a story from Puerto Rico.

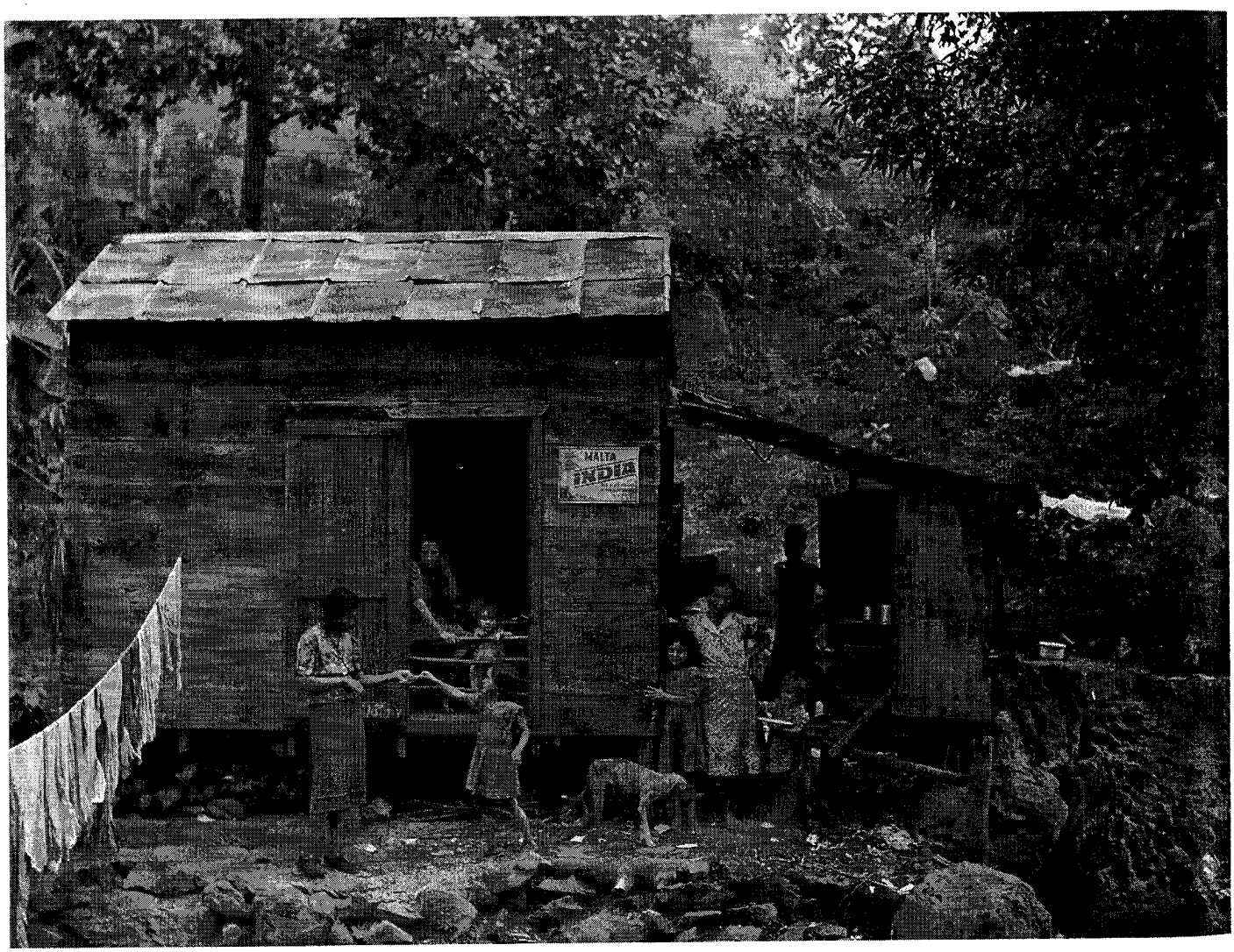
While many teachers may make the point that these stories are not told in the spirit of making fun of others but in the spirit of laughing at the noodlehead in all of us, I believe that without more preparation, giving more historical and cultural background about the Juan Bobo Tales and Puerto Rico's colonial and neocolonial history, the risk of these children stereotyping Puerto Rican children is high. The damage to the identity and self-esteem of the Puerto Rican child in the classroom cannot be overlooked. The issues are always complicated; teachers need more training on how to teach these kinds of multicultural and postcolonial literature. They need to know and teach the historical and social context of the stories.

Tales about Juan Bobo and his unrefined table and eating manners abound. In the 1981 version of the Juan Bobo tale, "Comer Sin Haber Comido" (To Eat Without Having Eaten), by Rosario Ferre, Juan Bobo is invited to a banquet at the home of a refined family. His mother tells him that since he is not used to associating with persons who have had a good upbringing and because he has bad manners he should pay attention to her cues for how to behave at the dinner table. Her instructions include: if you get the urge to sneeze, do not sneeze; if you get the urge to scratch, do not scratch; and above all, since you like to eat so much, and don't know when it is good manners to say you've had enough, when the maid offers you the platter to serve yourself food, I will tap you with the tip of my shoe to remind you that you have served yourself enough, and to tell the maid that you don't want any more. Juan Bobo assures his mother that he knows what he has to do. Juan Bobo dressed in his new cotton shirt, and his mother dressed in her best dress, they both set out to the banquet, which will be held in the house of the richest family of the town. As soon as they arrive, Juan Bobo is astonished by the display of fine

crystal and fine lace. The maids, dressed in fine hats and lace aprons, soon come out of the kitchen to serve the exquisite food. As soon as Juan Bobo smells the delicious aroma of their first course, shrimp stew, his mouth starts to water. The stew has been prepared with so much pepper that almost immediately he gets the urge to sneeze. In order to show that he is refined and has good manners, he puts the top back on the soup bowl and indicates with a nod of his head that he doesn't want any soup. When a maid offers him the second course, fish that has been prepared with much garlic, his mouth waters, but the garlic makes him itch. In order to show that he is refined, and has good manners, he indicates to the maid that he does not want any of the fish. Later, a maid returns to serve the turkey. Again, Juan Bobo's mouth waters, and he serves himself much turkey, but since he is unaccustomed to eating food with silver forks, these keep slipping through his fingers. Finally, after many attempts, he is able to stab a slice of turkey with the silver fork but unfortunately, the slice slips off the fork, slips down his new cotton shirt and lands on his shoe. The family dog jumps on him and starts to lick the turkey juices on his shirt. Once he gets the dog off, he tries again to serve himself some turkey, but in that moment, his mother taps his shoe to remind him that he has had enough to eat. Frustrated, Juan Bobo leaves the table, turns to the other guests and remarks: "¡Banquete ni que banquete*!* Si en casa e la gente rica el pobre tie que aprendel a sel tan fino que come sin habel comio, y encima lo obligan a decil no quiero mas, yo me voy pa mi casa y no me vuelvan a invital!" [Banquet! This is no banquet! And if in a rich person's house a poor person has to learn how to be so refined so as to eat but not eat and to be so refined as to say he's had enough to eat, when he has not then I'd rather go home and don't invite me again.] (16)

In this version, through his actions and his dialogue of resistance, Juan Bobo challenges the supremacy of the colonial and neocolonial elite based on the civilized/uncivilized dichotomy that has been and still is used by the elite to justify colonialism and the ill-treatment of the Jibaros. In this tale, refinement and table manners are visible markers of what is accepted as superior. Juan Bobo's deconstruction of refinement and proper table manners as signs of superiority and the celebration of difference is his act of rebellion, his act of violence against the colonial system that oppresses him and regards him as *Other*. On the individual level, decolonization and an articulation of resistance requires that one examine how one participates in one's own oppression, finding a way to become a new person, to not think of oneself as *Other*.

Fanon argues that "The colonial world is divided into compartments" (27), each not only divided by space but also by the process by which connotations are assigned to each. In this tale, Ferre drew the lines between the "compartments," between the refined person's house and dinner table and the unrefined Jibaro's house and table, and she also created a situation where Juan Bobo and the Jibaros he represents return to their own "compartment" because colonialism is more than an extreme order of separation and exclusion; it is also a system made palpably manifest in space. In this version, Juan Bobo as colonized subject has found the space where resistance can happen. For decades, the Puerto Rican Jibaros were conditioned to align their needs with those of the Spanish colonists and island neocolonial elite. In this story, Juan Bobo is unable and unwilling to align his need to eat, how he wants to eat his food (not with silver utensils) with the table niceties of the refined household. In naming and defining the problem Juan Bobo has



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Farm laborer's family in the hills near San German ■ Familia de un trabajador agrícola en los montes cerca de San German

begun to question the dichotomies that position him and the Jibaros as oppressed and marginalized.

In a 1994 version of the same tale, "Do Not Sneeze, Do Not Scratch...Do Not Eat!," retold by Carmen T. Bernier-Grand in her book, Juan Bobo, Four Folktales from PuertoRico, Juan Bobo and his mother have been invited to eat at Señora Soto's house. In this version, his mother gives him the same instructions about not sneezing, scratching himself at the table, eating too much or touching the food with his hands. She tells him that she will put her foot on his foot to remind him about good table manners. Instead of a three course meal, Señora Soto serves rice and beans, the typical meal for a Jibaro family. Juan Bobo takes a big sniff of this food and in doing so sniffs up two grains of rice into his nose. He covers his nose so as not to sneeze, shakes his head from side to side, the two grains of rice fall out and the sneeze goes away. Señora Soto thinks that he does not like her rice and beans and takes the plate away. When she returns, she offers a steak to Juan Bobo but when he tries to pick up the steak with a big spoon, the steak falls off the spoon and onto his lap. He remembers his mother's directions about not touching his food and so he leaves the steak on his lap. Señora Soto returns, and tells Juan Bobo that because he has eaten the whole steak, he can now have fried bananas. He loves fried bananas, but when Señora Soto passes the fried bananas, a mosquito bites his neck and he cries out "Ay, No," and Señora Soto thinks that he does not want the bananas because he is saving room for the ice cream. Juan Bobo forgets all about the steak, and when he opens his mouth to eat some ice cream, the steak falls on his foot. He thinks it is his mother's foot reminding him not to eat so much. Juan Bobo remarks calmly, "If good manners mean no eating, I have had enough good manners. I am going home!" In this

version, Señora Soto, another Jibaro, lives in a closer "compartment" to Juan Bobo's and his mother's "compartment"; the colonial context and space, economic realities and the inequality have been masked, lessened, omitted and distorted. Masked, omitted as well, and in comparison to Ferre's version, are the varying ways in which the elements of identity specific to each "compartment" interact with one another and form a new political discourse on identity. Juan Bobo's dialogue of resistance and anger has been omitted altogether and his words distorted. According to Fanon, the colonized cannot free themselves unless they learn to become daring and disrespectful. It is only when the colonized develop an irreverent attitude that they rise above all that oppresses them. Fanon argues that a colonized person can reach freedom if only he has struggled for his freedom. He cannot be free if someone else struggles for him and this freedom is achieved through his participating in directly using violence against those who oppress him. This particular redaction has not created a permissive space for Juan Bobo to decolonize the "space," assert his difference from the center of colonial structure and use his violence, his subversive trickery and lies. Fanon attributes to violence a therapeutic and creative value: it liberates the colonized from the inferiority complex and turns them into active makers of history. In the past and in the oral versions of the tales of Juan Bobo, the storytellers used the tradition as a form of resistance against colonial government institutions and practices in an effort to create a "space" where they as individuals and as part of a community could retain interpretive and discursive power, exercised in the oral tales. In this version, Juan Bobo does not have the opportunity or the "space" to be "daring or disrespectful" or to develop an "irreverent attitude" because the multiple binary concepts of differences, refinement vs. unrefinement and civilized

vs.uncivilized, between the "compartments" have been masked and eliminated from this postcolonial version.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion of the Juan Bobo Tales, Postcoloniality and Frantz Fanon's Theory of Violence

> A native culture is not a folklore...
> [It should] take its place at the very heart of the struggle for freedom.
>
> Frantz Fanon

Political independence frees a country from colonial imposition and oppression, but it is only the beginning step in the practice of freedom. The practice of postcolonial freedom includes a newly freed country's strategies to de-legitimize colonization, resisting and challenging colonial institutions and ideologies with projects to articulate a new identity and reclaiming the country's past in the face of that past's inevitable otherness. Counter-colonial hegemonic projects such as the preservation of cultural heritage and the creation of an identity for the new postcolonial man are critical epistemological projects for any society in the period following decolonization. These decolonizing projects have an anti-colonial potential to produce histories, epistemologies and literature that include all the people, all the narratives that were silenced or excluded during the colonial period, but this has not been the case in many of the freed colonies. Most often, discourse and the material conditions of production in these early postcolonial societies are in the hands of a dominant minority, emerging sociopolitical and economic elite and the intelligentsia, who lead and manage the affairs of their countries at independence, initiating their

1941

Thatched-roof hut of a farm laborer, near Barceloneta; this was the most common type of dwelling of poor farmers in the countryside

Casita con techo de paja, un bohio, cerca de Barceloneta; este era el tipo de vivienda mas común entre los campesinos pobres

simultaneous struggles and projects: to recreate the national culture that colonialism had systematically destroyed while also recreating and revisioning a national culture and identity that privileges their own class interests.

Their projects not only include efforts to preserve, continue and manage their version of the cultural heritage resources but also efforts to influence and shape the future evolution and continuation of the country's postcolonial culture, identity and representation. A recognition of cultural diversity, of all the *Others* in that society, has posed challenges to the development and construction of a postcolonial culture, identity and representation. The efforts in cultural heritage preservation initiated and led by elitist politics and practices of the dominant minority have often resulted in cultural discourses and representations that are not informed by the many voices that articulate the total cultural heritage of that society. Fanon argues that these projects are primarily "political approaches to decolonization," panicky moves by the colonized elite to save their positions of privilege because intellectuals and government benefit from colonialism and have a lot to lose if marginalized people have a voice and a place in the new decolonized state. For Fanon, these projects and their philosophy of political compromise betray the will of the marginalized majority, deepening the split between the urban middle class and the rural peasantry. These projects often play right into colonialism's hands, promoting a continued colonial violence against the marginalized populations, depriving them of land, food and dignity. Nationalist leaders who do not take into account these life-and-death consequences cannot positively and successfully guide a new nation through the process of decolonization. The new nation will be "An empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been" (148). In this new, "crude and fragile" society, violent forces

that were once used against colonial tyranny turn inward, and the new decolonized country is torn apart by an internal colonization that perpetuates political and socioeconomic injustice. In the case of Puerto Rico, after 1898, the United States has engaged the island in a neocolonial relationship, granting Puerto Rico nominal independence but keeping it in economic serfdom. This compromise and accommodation constitute a continued neocolonial violence against Puerto Rico, and neocolonialism is simply another word for colonialism. In today's Puerto Rico, where 44% of the population lives below the poverty line (2000 Census Data), features which are labeled typical Puertorriqueño continue to apply to the dominant groups that have had and still do have the means to perpetuate the Hispanic upper-class traditions and values, and/or to those who have and still do utilize education and other means of communication to their advantage. Lo Puertorriqueño ("all that is Puerto Rican") is still being shaped and influenced by a few who have an understanding of their position as it relates to Puerto Rico's society and the global society outside the island and who are in economic, social and political positions to maintain standards of living appropriate to those sets of values. In Puerto Rico today, the Jibaro is still excluded because class status is still a function of appearance, as it is of economic wealth. Puerto Ricans show their pedigree by attempting to look differently, dress differently, speak differently, act differently than the people from el campo ("the countryside") or the Jibaros, the country folk. Among most Puerto Ricans, being a Jibaro is still the epitome of low-class living and even the poorest Puerto Ricans think themselves socially and economically above the lowly Jibaro.

Puerto Rico's elite groups started the nationalist movement by constructing a myth of national identity around a homogeneous idea of la gran familia puertorriqueña

("the great Puerto Rican family") that erased racial and ethnic differences and served to unify the population across socioeconomic classes. They were able to manipulate the formation of Puerto Rican national identity through their control of literary journals, newspaper articles, political machines, and cultural institutions (Duany 256). Their cultural materials and discourses helped continue colonial practices by negating societal realities and perpetuating social relations introduced by the colonizers and by the exclusion or erosion of the native cultural heritage and traditions. Present-day Puerto Rican society risks becoming haunted by what is excluded from its history, and the greater the exclusion, the greater the ghost, and the more threatening it is in some way to Puerto Rico's present and future. The voices that have been silenced and excluded are the ghosts in Puerto Rico's postcolonial cultural discourses and representations that threaten the present and the future of that society.

The struggle to preserve the authentic cultural heritage after decolonization must be an integral part of the struggle for a multilayered, all-inclusive national culture. For as Amilbar Cabral, poet and revolutionary, argues,

> In order for culture to play the important role, which falls to it in the framework of the liberation movement, the movement must be able to preserve the positive cultural values of every well defined social group, of every category, and to achieve the confluence of these values in the service of the struggle, giving it to a new dimension--the national dimension. Confronted with such a necessity, the liberation struggle is a struggle both for the preservation and survival of the cultural values of the people and for the harmonization and development of these values within a national framework. (48)

Cultural preservation projects are complex, power-laden processes through which postcolonial nations create, shape and influence their new identity. Part of this evolutionary process includes a postcolonial society coming to grips, or failing to come to

grips, with its violent past. Colonial societies were established and maintained through violence; consequently, the complex question of how to remember, or forget the violence is a major consideration of those who are responsible for the cultural heritage recovery project and the production of postcolonial discourses and materials. The question becomes even more complex when the colonial national community was made up of multiple sub- and transnational communities, each of which had its own unique culture within the national culture, and had its own experience of violence and ways to resist it. The fact that all of these experiences are intertwined makes the efforts of remembering history and culture all the more pressing and difficult. This thesis engages the concept and related notions of cultural hegemony, cultural erosion and cultural survival by arguing that the postcolonial written narratives of the tales of Juan Bobo constituted a form of epistemic violence against Puerto Rico's Jibaro to the extent that they involved immeasurable distortions and erasures of the Jibaro's cultural survival systems, promoted a discourse about the Jibaro as *Other* and suppressed and omitted the Jibaro's counter discourse to colonial ideologies of conquest and domination.

Production of a postcolonial literature constitutes a significant step in the decolonizing process; its genesis coincides with the phase of political independence in the newly freed country. The obvious functions of a literature produced in freedom should include ordering the world, making it intelligible, creating new understanding and opportunities for idealism, articulating the need to reclaim a country's epistemologies and giving voice to the subalternised, to the *Other*. These narratives should ideally be a postcolonial country's first significant written counter-narratives to the dominant narratives of colonialism, but this has not always been the case. Literature, as a tool for

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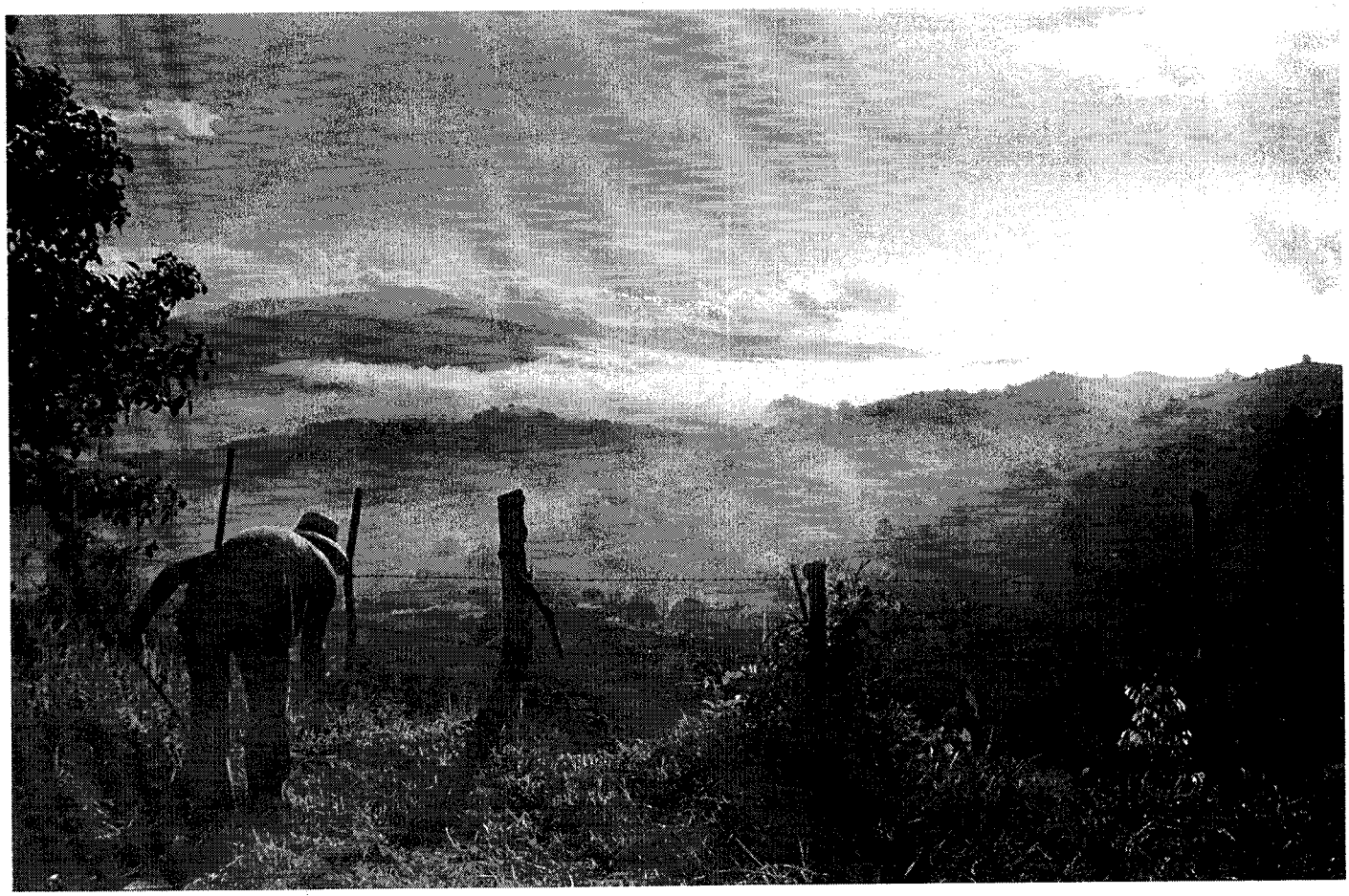


1981

Landscape near the town of Gurabo ■ Paisaje cerca del pueblo de Gurabo

conveying meaning and knowledge, has been and is still complicit in the violence against the *Other*. As Ralph Ellison observed:

> Perhaps the most insidious and least understood form of segregation is that of the word. And by this I mean, the word in all its complex formulations, from the proverb to the novel and stage play, the word with all its subtle power to suggest and foreshadow overt action while magically disguising the moral consequences of that action and providing it with symbolic and psychological justification. For if the word has the potency to revive and make us free, it has also the power to blind, imprison and destroy. (24)

A critical part of any revolution, of any effort by the *Other* to free themselves, has been to question, manipulate, combat, deny and invert the representations of themselves that are produced in the dominant discourse of their country or the society in which they live. These tales of Juan Bobo provide and justify a place of privilege for the cultural elite and dominant groups of Puerto Rico, and from this place of privilege, they can freely express and promulgate their official and false version of the Jibaro as national symbol of the postcolonial Puerto Rican identity and soul. The false representations of the Jibaro in these tales are produced from an elitist position, distorting or omitting altogether the complex linkages between colonial violence, Juan Bobo's use of lies and trickery as violent responses to it and violations of the rights of Jibaros and other marginalized people in the postcolonial nation-state. Violence, Fanon argues, is a "cleansing force," freeing the colonized from their inferiority complex, despair and inaction. It can restore self-respect and make them fearless (94). Violence is a necessary component in Fanon's concept of an anti-colonial freedom.

The original tales, those directly taken from the oral tradition, included violence: the lies and trickery Juan Bobo once used to fight the tyranny of the Spanish colonizers and the postcolonial, neocolonial injustices committed against him by the island's socio-

political and cultural elite. Juan Bobo's victories over tyranny and injustice were the victories of the island's Jibaros. The telling and retelling of these original tales helped Jibaros and their children learn that the apparently weak could outwit the strong. These tales of usurpation of power, and their inversion of the social classes, the weaker Jibaro triumphing over the stronger, landowning master, helped to bind Jibaro people and communities together. In Fanon's words,

> The practice of violence binds [colonized people] together as a whole, since each individual forms a link in a great chain, a part of the great organism of violence which has surged upwards in reaction to the settler's violence in the beginning.... [It] introduces into each man's consciousness the ideas of a common cause, of a national destiny, and of a collective history. (93)

Juan Bobo's lies and trickery, and those of the Jibaros he represents, were his defensive weapon, his most viable strategy of resistance to the colonial and postcolonial demands on him. Many of the Juan Bobo oral tales involved themes of violence and revenge and his conspiring against the interests of the rich. In most of the tales, Juan Bobo and the Jibaros triumph, tricking the land owner out of material possessions. Lillian Guerra, in her book, Popular Expression and National Identity in Puerto Rico, refers to this as a social inversion of classes and says:

> Indeed, one can easily see Juan Bobo as the quintessential response of Puerto Rico's peasants-turned-rural-proletarians to the jibaro image constructed by the elite in the early twentieth century. The public mask of Juan as a subservient, obedient, vulnerable, and ignorant campesino is betrayed by the crudely political exploits he executes. By using the elite's expectations of him to his own advantage, Juan puts his betters to shame, forces them to endure humiliation, and occasionally even succeeds at taking their property and wealth away from them. Behind the facade of this "jibaro 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 experienced little of it in their real lives. (138)

Fanon claimed that colonialism is violence and that it must be opposed by violence. He argues that violent confrontations can be liberating and rehabilitating, forcing the colonizer to respect the colonized and weakening the sense of inferiority felt by the colonized. These confrontations between colonized and colonizer turn into a struggle for recognition, for recognition of his human rights. Fanon argues that with every act of aggressive resistance against colonialism, the colonial subject is remaking himself in an autonomous and unrestricted way. Jean-Paul Sartre, in his preface to Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth, observes that Fanon argues in this book that

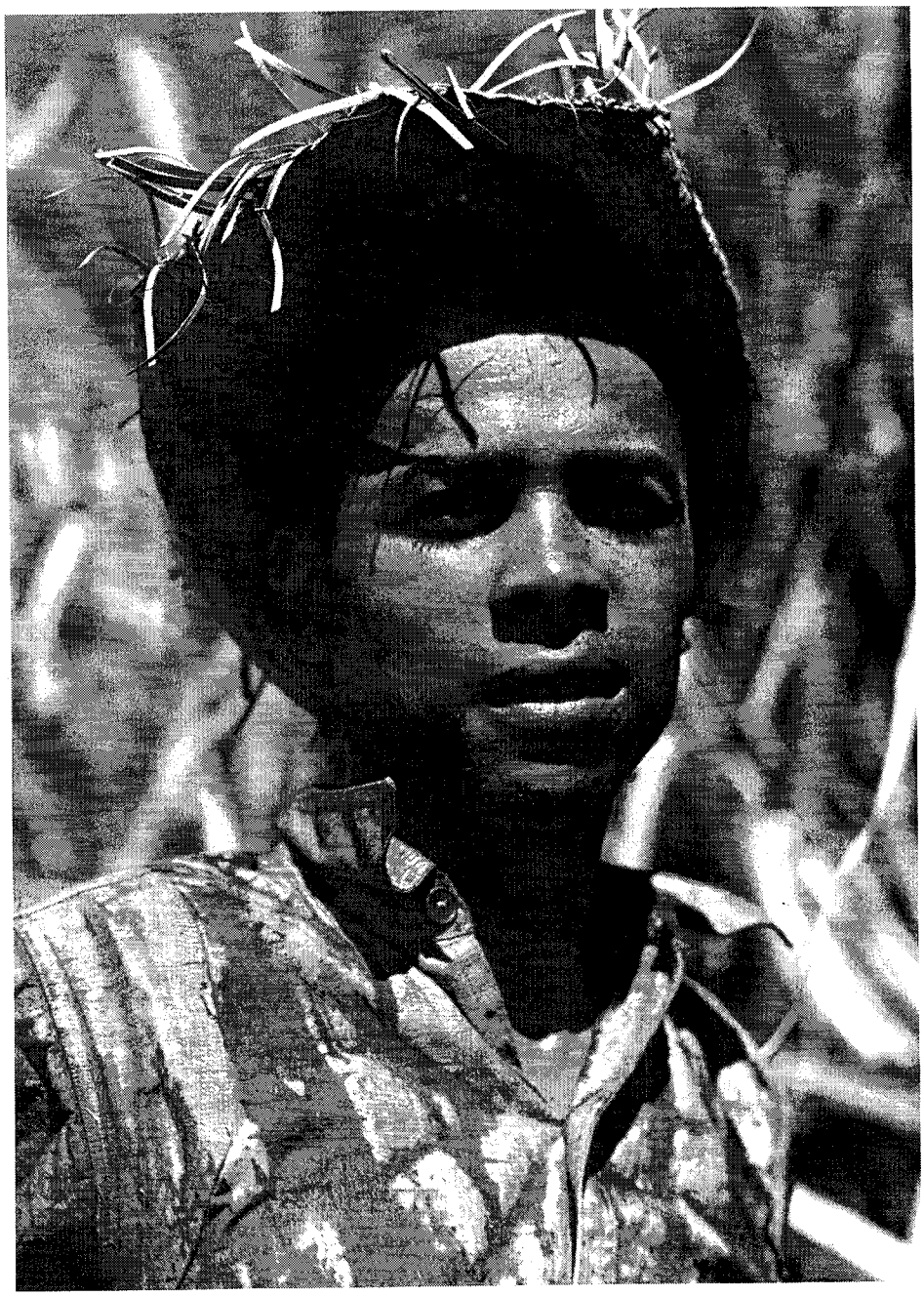
> violence is neither sound and fury, nor the resurrection of savage instincts, nor even the effect of resentment: it is a man re-creating himself. I think we understood this truth at one time, but we have forgotten it— that no gentleness can efface the marks of violence; only violence itself can destroy them. (21)

The violence in the oral tradition of the Juan Bobo tales was the "cleansing force" that the Jibaro peasants and their children needed to face the challenges of living under the tyranny of Spanish colonial oppression and the injustices committed against them by the Puerto Rican landowning masters. These tales helped them to free themselves from their inferiority complex, from despair and inaction. The telling and retelling of these tales helped the Jibaro and their children feel fearless, as if they could survive the challenges of living in a colonized state.

In each period of Puerto Rican history, discourse has produced forms of knowledge, objects, subjects and practices of knowledge different from the periods before and after. One cannot analyze the Juan Bobo tales without analyzing the particular cultural and oral traditions from which Puerto Rican's postcolonial writers drew their discourses, plots, styles and metaphors and the revisions they made to them after 1898.

During Puerto Rico's early post-colonization and neocolonization period, after the change of government from Spanish rule to U.S. intervention and takeover, the island's elite controlled the publication and the educational context of books for children. Puerto Rican children, Jibaro children, were forced to read texts, specifically those that included and were about the Juan Bobo tales, which propagated the colonial condition by depicting negative, stereotypical images of the Jibaro. This process, from orality to text, helped separate Puerto Rican children from their own authentic history, culture and tradition because the promulgation of an authentic history, culture and tradition now relied solely on the learning of their own heritage that was still shared at home and in their community. This process and these texts helped put the lives of Puerto Rican children more firmly in the control of the island's postcolonial elite. This process and these texts continued a postcolonial political violence against the Jibaros.

There is a Hopi saying that "the one who tells the stories rules the world." After 1898, lacking political sovereignty, the Puerto Rican nation required a new way of telling its story, understanding and legitimizing its culture. The island elite recruited intellectuals who helped tell that story, define and imagine a unified nation in their literary production as a way to institutionalize culture. This new national identity was built primarily upon the symbol of the Jibaro, representing the new postcolonial Puerto Rican that could exist within the confines of institutionalized culture through the texts that these writers and artists could create and re-create in the printed word and visual images. Their tasks involved purifying the Jibaro, literally and figuratively, making him less morally suspect, more hard-working, docile, patriotic, loyal to a land and landscape, and whiter. The resulting texts, their dialogue and images, required a selection of the purest and most



1942

A sugarcane worker near Guánica ■ Un cortador de caña cerca de Guánica

essential characteristics of rural life, which were deemed to be most worthy of representing the new white Puerto Rican identity. The island elite created and reproduced an ideology, a discourse about a Puerto Rican national identity that proclaimed the white Jibaro as the new prototype for the postcolonial nation state. Inherent in this ideology, this literary discourse,is the belief in the inferiority of a Jibaro of mixed cultural ancestry: Spanish, African and Taino. In this imagination of the Puertorriqueñidad, there was no place and there is still no place for the real Jibaro; he remains permanently in the margins of Puerto Rican society. The Jibaro is not simply invisible; rather, the new ideological and illustrated construction of him renders him as Puerto Rico's ultimate *Other.* It is this type of literary violence that allows a postcolonial power structure, specifically Puerto Rico, and its writers to use racism and stereotyping as instruments of domination, part of an ideology and discourse whose main purpose is to further the interests of those in control. Even well-intentioned postcolonial authors have used the "word" as tool, wittingly and unwittingly promulgating and thus legitimizing a continued violence, exploitation and oppression of many of society's *Others.*

Cultural erosion of oral texts has been a major tool of violence used by these postcolonial writers; their texts have progressively deculturized the colonized, marginalized peoples, often presenting the colonial state and the colonizer positively while presenting a distorted and inaccurate picture of the colonized. The *Others* are subjected to cultural erosion through the misrepresentation, distortions and omissions of their own cultural patterns and traditions. A positive picture of the colonial and postcolonial condition, in this case of Puerto Rico, is developed concurrently with this revised text. Through assertion of a negative ideology and discourse, omission, and

distortion, the *Others* are often forced to internalize as positive the forces which are perpetually exploiting them. This negative ideology and discourse are major tools used by the ruling minority to continue and justify their position of power over the majority, the marginalized classes. The deculturation and positive portrayal of subordination in these texts go hand-in-hand with the continuous violence against the *Other*. The printed word in postcolonial Puerto Rico, specifically in the tales of Juan Bobo, has become a vehicle for reinforcing a prevailing concept of the Jibaro as an inferior class. In his article "The Oppressive Function of Values, Concepts and Images in Children's Books," Luis Nieves Falcon observes:

> Hence the dominating group's need to prepare the children of dominated parentage so that they, in turn, become a generation of dominated people. Again, early socialization plays a major role since the psychology of the dominated people is transmitted to their offspring. But this is reinforced through children's books, designed from the standpoint of the ruling classes and in which the dominated people are tied to the subservient roles ascribed to them. The printed word, considered quasi-sacred in most societies, in fact, becomes a tool for transmitting to the children of dominated parentage the notion of their insufficiency and their natural inferiority. (Preiswerk 6)

The tales of Juan Bobo have reflected the values of Puerto Rican society and their negative discourse about the island Jibaro and the uses of these texts in classrooms, in and out of the island, have served to disseminate, perpetuate and reinforce those values and those discourses. The racism against the Jibaro found in the postcolonial tales of Juan Bobo is a reflection of the institutionalized racism that pervades every facet of present-day neocolonial Puerto Rican society. Efforts at cultural liberation must include efforts to eliminate racism in children's books and reveal distortions and omissions of historical and cultural realities in these texts. In the tales of Juan Bobo, the Jibaro and his history have been misrepresented, and according to Falcon, in his article "The Ideology of

Racism in Puerto Rican Children's Books": "This misrepresentation of the people's real history is supplemented by manipulation of language to downplay the concepts of 'freedom' and 'independence' and other liberating linguistic terms" (Preiswerk 55). In the revised tales of Juan Bobo, the Jibaro and Juan Bobo were stripped of their cultural survival systems and their crucial tools of violence, the lies and trickery they once used to fight the tyranny of the Spanish colonizers and the postcolonial, neocolonial injustices committed against them by the island's socio-political and cultural elite. These revised discourses and images of the Jibaro laid the groundwork for a cultural naturalism which affirmed the distinctness of Puerto Rican culture without challenging the legal and economic power relationships that marked Puerto Rico as unmistakably colonial. As Falcon points out, "The fight for changes in the ideological content of children's books is an integral part of the general struggle against colonialism and racism. The fight against oppression in Puerto Rico is the fight against oppression in the world" (Preiswerk 60).

In his book, Birds of Heaven, Ben Okri, Nigerian storyteller, argues that

> Nations and peoples are largely the stories they feed themselves. If they tell themselves stories that are lies, they will suffer the future consequences of those lies. If they tell themselves stories that face their own truths, they will free their histories for future flowerings. (21)

Postcolonial representations of Juan Bobo and of the Jibaros in modern texts are forms of "lies," inauthentic and inaccurate, and are a form of epistemic violence against the Jibaro. In these revised tales of Juan Bobo, postcolonial representation was aimed at the promotion of discourse about the Jibaro as *Other* and the suppression and omission of the *Other's* counter discourse to colonial ideologies of conquest and domination. The consequences of the false representation, omissions and distortions in the tales of Juan

Bobo help justify Puerto Rico's continued political, socio-economic violence against the Jibaro.

Writers, part of the island's cultural elite-intelligentsia, after 1898, were tied inexorably to Puerto Rico's colonial past, social culture, legal, economic and institutional systems that circumscribed, determined and articulated the prominent societal discourses. Their discourses about Puerto Rico's culture and history, past and present were circulated throughout the society and helped shape and influence future discourses, producing not only their own work, but the possibility of the rules of formation of other discourses, other texts. Children's books, specifically those that included the folktales about Juan Bobo, were produced by Puerto Rico's culturally elite in a response to the educational needs of children, after the fall of Spanish colonialism and the United States intervention and influence on the island's government and other cultural and educational institutions. Puerto Rican writers produced literatures that included adaptations of the myths and folktales of Puerto Rico's rich oral tradition. This adapted literature was supposed to reflect the original visions, rhythms, forms and aesthetics of a proud people and their history. The development of these materials, specifically their adaptations of the tales of Juan Bobo, was a result of their nationalist mission: to reflect and promote a united Puerto Rican nation and identity by reinventing and revitalizing the Jibaro, the once despised, disempowered and disenfranchised colonial peasant. The ideology, the discourse about the Jibaro in these texts, excludes them as an active and integral part of Puerto Rican society, featuring and highlighting a prejudice against the Jibaro and his total cultural contribution. These ambiguous versions of the Jibaro and Puerto Rican

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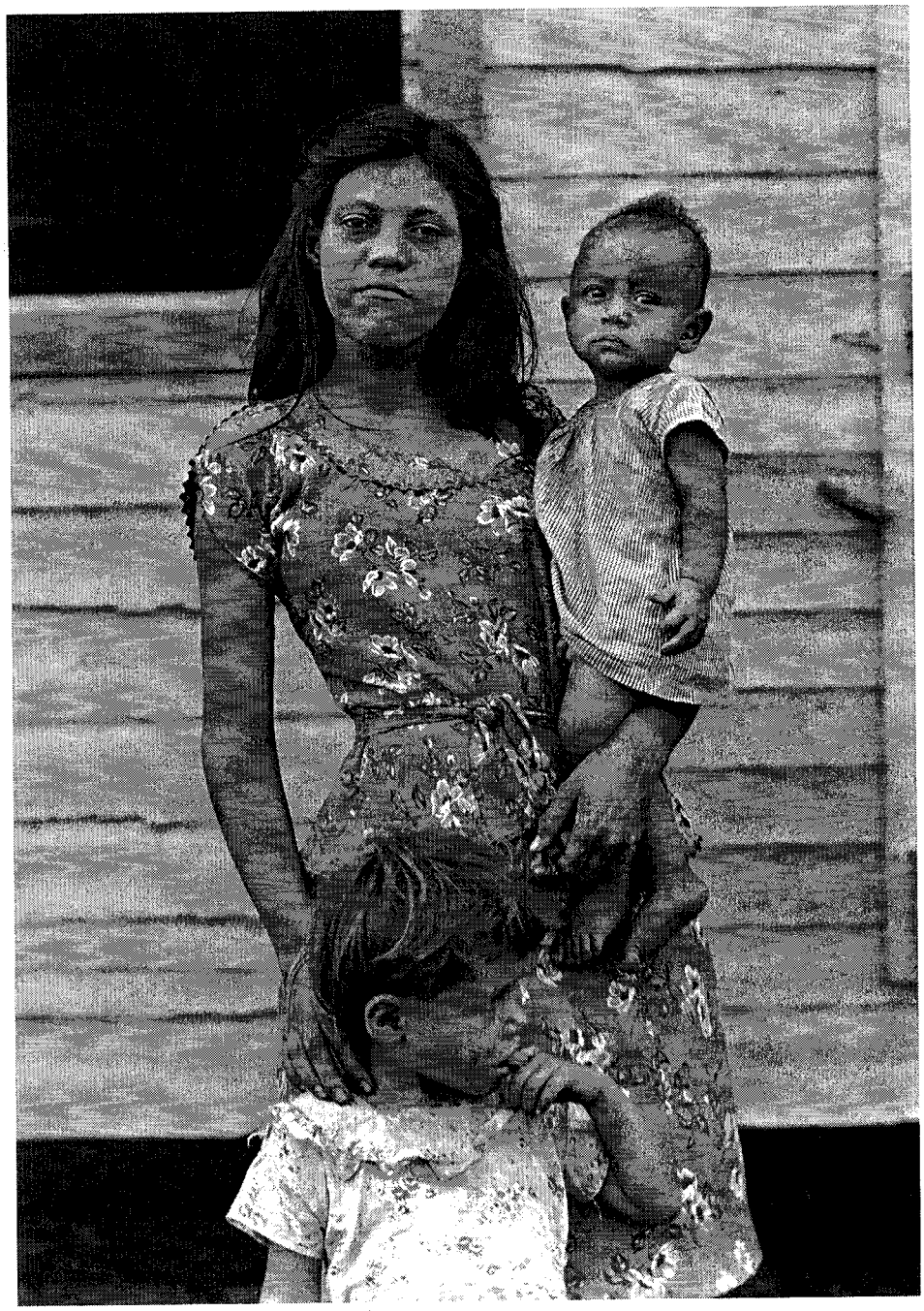

1946

Children of a farm laborer living in a community of company houses on a sugar plantation near Lajas

Hijos de un trabajador de caña que vivían en una comunidad de casas de la compañía azucarera cerca de Lajas

history, their conflicting and confusing images, dispersed and fragmented, were and are still integral parts of the island's school curriculum.

The struggle to construct a Puerto Rican identity in postcolonial and neocolonial Puerto Rico continues to reflect the disparate imaginations and visions of the island's cultural elite and the expectations of the marginalized masses, who were and are often still denied sociopolitical and economic equality, and cultural inclusion in the cultural recovery project for a Puerto Rican symbolic that was initiated by and is still supervised by a postcolonial cultural elite. The voices and realities of the Jibaro were given mediated articulation by the cultural elite of the island; they played a crucial role in the imagination and invention of a postcolonial Jibaro and Juan Bobo. The future of Puerto Rico was and still is in the hands of a few cultural elite and intelligentsia that understood and still understand the implications and complexities of nationbuilding.

The discourse of building a Puerto Rican nation, after 1898, rested on and raised larger cultural and societal issues, the issues of what constituted a true Puerto Rican identity and finding a national symbol that would embody and represent that identity. The Jibaro was pulled from the margins of society to represent that identity, because he could be, once purified, a symbol of the nature of the land and the landscape and represent the authentic and pristine values of a people with a long history and proud culture. The elite, who led the project for cultural recovery for a unified and shared Puerto Rican identity that was in opposition to Spanish and United States identity, articulated an ideological discourse of the Jibaro that was sometimes complementary and sometimes conflicting, inaccurate and inauthentic. The same elite, who had marginalized and ostracized the Jibaro during colonial times, were forced to produce the educational texts of postcolonial

Puerto Rico, gathering ancient histories and compiling oral traditions. Thus, in the creative hands of the cultural elite, a Puerto Rican national symbolic was invented.

CONCLUSION

The tales of Juan Bobo and the character of Juan Bobo are today widely accepted as representative of a Puerto Rican colonial and postcolonial children's literature that reflects the Puerto Rican essence and national pride, but these stories have for the most part been diluted, the main character silenced, and they can no longer be seen as reactions against the cultural pressures of colonial Spain and United States, nor as a critique of internal sources of social and racial injustices. The more authentic, more closely following the oral tradition, did reflect a truer Puerto Rican-ness, and Juan Bobo could be seen as an iconic resistor to the colonizing influences and practices of Spain and the United States. After 1898, redactors of the Juan Bobo tales purged the tales of their anti-colonial, anti-elitist and subversive implications–the overt violence, lies, trickery and resistance to oppression that are so evident in the oral tales. With every subsequent version, Juan Bobo dwindles from trickster to mere tonto ("fool/noodlehead"), making Juan Bobo an object to laugh at or scorn. These redactions constitute a compromise and betrayal of the cultural survival systems of the Jibaro, deepening the split between Puerto Rico's elite class and the rural peasantry. Today, the distorted and diluted images in the tales and the "modern" Juan Bobo can no longer serve as simultaneous icons of representation and resistance in the postcolonial literature of Puerto Rico.

The written stories of the tales of Juan Bobo developed from the popular culture of the oral tradition about the tales of Juan Bobo; this oral tradition centered upon folk

tales that had been absorbed into and created by the Puerto Rican collective imagination. These oral tales were purified and made more suitable for children, and then were added to the canon of Puerto Rican children's literature. The development of the tales of Juan Bobo as children's literature parallels Puerto Rico's history and movement from colonial to neo-colonial status. Colonization in Puerto Rico, past and present, has been conducted in and through textuality, from the imposition of English as a national language and through the use of negative discourses to promote and maintain the injustices of the colonial experience. In 20th-century Puerto Rican society, as in the stories of Juan Bobo, it is possible to see representations of events and characters that inscribe ideologies similar to the ideologies present during colonial times. There exists in that society and in these tales a pervasive undercurrent of legitimacy for the imperial project, a legitimacy based on the marginalization of Puerto Rican Jibaros that started with the Spanish colonial project and has continued well past the imperial intervention and takeover by the United States government after1898. These texts promulgate the imperialist project by their negative representation of the Jibaro as inferior, destined to yield to a superior class of people, Spaniards, the island cultural elite, and the white Americanos. These texts, their dialogue and illustrations, can tragically lead to the stereotypical argument that Jibaros were and still are too stupid and unworthy to share in the island's wealth. These colonial ideologies are evident and inscribed in the texts, in the fact that Juan Bobo seems to always be rescued, saved, by a privileged and seemingly benevolent whiter, landowning, and more educated character.

Illustrations of Juan Bobo and the discursive and narrative strategies utilized by the authors constitute the Jibaro as *Other*, exemplifying the superiority of the whiter more

Spaniard/European island elite over the primitive Jibaro. Juan Bobo and the Jibaros that he represents are invalidated, incorporated into a textual discourse whose main imperative is its insistence on peasant inferiority. The representation of the Jibaro child, Juan Bobo, appears as backward, illiterate, uncultured, and uncivilized, a common strategy in colonial discourse. The illustrations and dialogue of these texts carry out the ideological work of the imperial project; the Jibaro is seen as primitive as manifested by his appearance and his rural and impoverished lifestyle, powerful reminders of his place in the colonial landscape. The characterization and metanarratives of the Juan Bobo tales build and highlight the boundaries between the white and culturally elite Puerto Rican and the Jibaro, claiming on behalf of the white minority ownership in and victory over the indigenous narrative. According to Ben Okri, "Stories are always a form of resistance"(34). He further argues that

> To poison a nation, poison its stories. A demoralized nation tells a demoralized story to itself. Beware of the storytellers, who are not fully conscious of the importance of their gifts, and who are irresponsible in the application of their art: they could unwittingly help along the psychic destruction of their people. (17)

The authors and illustrators of modern written versions of the Juan Bobo tales must begin to reflect on their responsibility in the application of their art, their role in the "poisoning of the stories" and on the real truth about Jibaros. In owning those truths, they will free Puerto Rico's history for future "flowerings."

1941

Little girl, daughter of a farm laborer, near Caguas ■ Niña, hija de un trabajador agrícola, cerca de Caguas

APPENDIX:

Doña Susana / Jibara Storyteller

and the Rehabilitative Properties of Violence in Her Stories

> In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself.
>
> Frantz Fanon

The oral storyteller changes the story with every telling, shaping and being shaped by the world while the written tale is static. It cannot be changed and is limited in how it can change the world. The act of writing a tale transforms it. Once a tale is written down, it tends to be more fixed in form, and even the people who tell it change it less. The teller of the tale shapes the folktales. Each storyteller places his or her emphasis in the areas he or she feels will create the best response or best deliver the important message. Oral storytellers shape the tale according to the way they feel and in response to the manner in which their audience is reacting. The storyteller's very sense of identity is embedded in every story.

Doña Susana is the oldest Jibaro storyteller in my family. Her stories and folktales invited interpretation. The more times that I heard her stories, the more things I would find. They were full of philosophy and symbols and offered a lesson in every telling. They were stories about the old and accepted customs, traditions for burial, marriage, family relationships and socially correct behavior for girls and women. She had a phenomenal memory, no written materials to refer to; she relied on memory to store all

the information she gathered. Her diasporic narratives told the stories of her life, her language, and her experiences that had been altered by the paradigms of life under colonial rule, American occupation and the rupture of geographic dislocation. Doña Susana is my mother. She was born in Puerto Rico around 1900, a few years after the American occupation of Puerto Rico. Her stories were shaped by colonial rule under the Spanish and the events following 1898. The stories she told were haunted by her fragmented self and a fragmented Puerto Rico and reflected her eagerness to come to terms with this dividedness. It was as if, in telling her stories, she was trying to understand her condition, accept it and explain it to others. She resorted to the act of narration as an expression of her hybridity within Puerto Rican society; her expression represented an act of self-preservation capable of bringing together, in a coherent and meaningful reformulation, the missing pieces within her memories.

Postcolonial inquiries have been concerned with retrieving the missing parts of memory, exposing the violent circumstances of their erasure, citing voices that have been forced into exile, and in an unspoken role of interaction between storyteller and listener, I as listener was responsible for producing multiple interpretations of the same story, uncovering the many layers of circumstantial and forgotten memories, and for trying to hear the silent voices of the *Others* in her stories. Doña Susana's storytelling was not all fun and laughter; some stories were very serious as she passed on her knowledge to me and to the generations that followed me. Some stories were angry ones, full of rancor, violence and disruption, but I understood the lessons of those stories as well. Retaining what I had learned was just as important as the learning process. Through learning and retaining what I had learned through memory, I too became an expert in surviving diverse

environments. From the stories I heard in Puerto Rico to the stories she told in New York, I learned the art of survival. Her oral tradition and memory retention enabled her and me to become self-reliant in a postcolonial land where one mistake could cost us our lives. From an early age, I learned the art of listening and remembering and surviving. She told hundreds of family stories to me and to countless others. When I was younger, I didn't always listen. Sometimes I'd listen too much, but I came to appreciate the messages that she wanted to pass along. Were her stories true? I've come to an understanding that truth in her stories was immutable and the facts were flexible.

How did she choose her stories? Her choice of stories to tell depended on where we were living at the time, Puerto Rico or New York, and on the season of the year. She preferred the summer and almost never told me stories on rainy days. A lot of her stories dealt with specific changes in the world that she saw around her. As the listener, I witnessed repeatedly that through her stories she was teaching me how to live and how to understand and to believe that her stories could change the world. She told me that all her stories were true and I believed that they were true and that they could, in fact, change the world. Her stories changed and grew with each new audience. The story about the shoes was one of her favorite stories to tell and it was also one of the saddest stories of her life. It is the story that I think of most, and I know its every detail. This story is a good example of Jibaro violence against colonial and neocolonial injustice implying a legitimate case of self-defense.

> It was a rainy day and all good people die on rainy days. My mother died in my arms; I was only seven years old. It was the headaches that killed her, but I think she died because she was tired of living. She had a hard life, worked too hard; she was only thirty seven years old, too young to die. I was only seven years old, too young to be an orphan. My father, like most of the other Jibaro field workers, was away, working for another

> hacendado. He came home very little, but with enough time to beat mother and give her more headaches. My little brother was only three at the time, and it was up to me, from then on, to take care of him. I had to leave school and had barely learned to read and write. Of all the sad things that have happened to me, the saddest one was not being able to go back to school. I loved school, the pencils, the paper, and all the books. I had always worked at my mother's side in the fields but la señora ("rich landowner's wife") de la casa grande ("rich landowner's house") took pity on me, and brought me to work for her. Not just anyone could work in la casa grande. I think it was my light skin, and green eyes that made me more acceptable to her and made it all right for me to wash the family's clothes and help take care of her children. She would slap my face every time that I did something that angered her, like dropping an article of clothing on the floor, or ironing a crooked crease in her husband's pants. She had too little patience with me. I don't know what she expected from me; I was only seven years old. She paid me tres chavitos prietos ("three pennies") for each article of clothing that I washed and ironed and she allowed my little brother to help me. I wasn't allowed to sleep in la casa grande, and since I had no parents to work for the rent, I could not return to the little house where I had lived and where my mother had died. Most nights, we'd sleep on the sands under las palmas (palm trees) at the water's edge. Some nights we'd sleep outside, in the yard of some Jibaro's house, with the pigs and the chickens, but it was better, safer than sleeping by the river's edge. Sometimes, la señora gave me a little food instead of money but most days I would walk from house to house, sometimes to a distant cousin's house and beg for the fregao ("scraps of food") that people gave their pigs to eat. I had no shoes to wear and every year la señora promised that she would give me a pair of shoes for Christmas but every year she gave me a pair of white socks. For five Christmases, I waited, expecting to get the shoes but never got them. I got tired of waiting for the shoes and finally understood that la señora had no intention of giving them to me. I would never get them, and so one day, when I was twelve, I decided to quit working for la señora who had lied to me but before I left, I took every pair of shoes in the house and threw them in the river. Let them try to walk around without shoes!

At 12 years old, my mother and her little brother were once again homeless and penniless. They slept on the sands that night and so did a handsome mayordomo ("field work overseer"). He took her one night, and she gave birth, one year later, to my oldest brother, but that is another story.

I would tell my friends the story of the shoes, and I told it with verve, flair and passion. This happened because the story had become part of me. It had become part of my own sense of identity, as part of her family. I never changed a word of that story because I believed that to tell that story in a different way was a kind of violence to my mother's already fragile identity. It was the truth in her story that gave it a sense of urgency, and I felt an urgent need to tell and retell that story.

What makes a colonized person resort to violence? Fanon implies that when the colonial violence and injustice have become too excessive, it pushes the demoralized colonists to the breaking point and to counter action. Five years of working for la señora became so excessive that twelve- year- old Susana had to retaliate, but she could not free herself unless she learned to become daring and disrespectful. It was her development of an irreverent attitude that allowed her to throw the shoes into the river and rise, temporarily, above all which oppressed her. Her act of violence against the elitist Señora had a therapeutic and creative value for her: it liberated her temporarily from her inferiority complex and turned her into an active maker of her own history.

Fanon suggests that violence can bring a needed physical release to those colonized, whose physical energy has been blocked or channeled negatively by the colonial situation. The colonized person, without a release, would resemble a patient suffering from neurosis or hysteria manifesting itself through physical symptoms (Fanon for Beginners109).When my mother felt most in control of her environment and her life and felt most empowered, most healthy in mind and body in the face of the injustice, her stories did not include the violent acts. During these periods, the story of the shoes had a different ending; twelve- year- old Susana merely takes her gift of socks and walks away.

The inclusion or exclusion of violence in her stories seemed to have been largely related to external events and circumstances in her life. She seemed to include the acts of violence into her stories when she lacked a stable or meaningful sense of self-identity. Perhaps, the violence became a way of expressing frustration and uncertainty–a misguided way to establish a stable sense of self-identity. Economic circumstances, such as poverty, when we lived on public assistance, inequality and unemployment seemed to be some of the primary reasons for inclusion of violent acts in her stories. When she could not meet the challenges, when she felt most socially and economically disenfranchised from Puerto Rican and American societies, her stories did include the violence. The violence in her stories was widely accepted and legitimized by her audience of other marginalized Puerto Ricans. They applauded, as I did, her bravado in the face of injustice. In retrospect, it is apparent to me now, that the violence in her stories and the audience acceptance and the loud applause for the violence could be explained by examining the interaction between power relations and the abuse of power at the institutional level with social service workers, factory bosses, others and at the community level with slumlords, street gangs and the factors such as feelings of deprivation, and a crisis of group and personal identity. The main issues for my mother and other residents of the barrios were not only poverty or relative deprivation, but rather the denial of a particular form of justice, the denial of a justice of humanity, compassion and fairness. The applause for my mother's stories and the violence in them was an applause and approval for a violence that was not criminal in nature but political in the minds of the storyteller and her audience. Needless to say, many of the children of the

barrio were also victims, accessible targets for parents who were living with feelings of anger, futility, hopelessness and fear in the barrios–America's internal colonies.

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