The English Language Folk Tradition of Limón Province, Costa Rica
Author(s): HENRY COHEN
Source: *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (March 2000), pp. 1-23
Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd.
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40654110
Accessed: 16-02-2017 17:27 UTC

The English Language Folk Tradition of Limón Province, Costa Rica*

by

HENRY COHEN

Between 1989 and 1995, under the auspices of the Fundación Educativa San Judas Tadeo of San José, an international team of researchers carried out a systematic collection of folklore in all seven provinces of Costa Rica. Our aim was to gather and publish a representative body of songs and poems that exist in the popular oral tradition so that scholars might use it for a variety of purposes and so that the Costa Rican people might have a record of its rich cultural patrimony. We chose not to collect folktales, because to record and transcribe them along with the other material would have required more than the one month per year that we had available to carry out our research and to include them would have made our collection too long and expensive to easily publish.

We have been able to gather the largest representative collection of Costa Rican folklore ever assembled. It includes material in Spanish, English, and *Bri Bri,* the language of the Indians of the Talamanca Mountains in the Southeast. Since nearly all Costa Rican folklore researchers have been Spanish speakers who would have had trouble comprehending the English of the Caribbean, the oral folk tradition of Limón province has gone almost totally unrecorded. Add to this the Hispanic sector's feeling that its black population was not authentically Costa-Rican—a view sanctioned by law until the 1949 Constitution—and one can understand why this body of folklore has been largely ignored. There are, however, a few exceptions; some Anglophone scholars have collected stories from the oral tradition, but for some reason have never extended their research to poetry, songs, prayers and games.[1]

In May and June of 1995, ethnomusicologist Carlos Fernandez and I traveled to several towns and villages, from Guápiles, Roxana, Rita and Gudcimo in the west, through Siquirres, Matina and Estrada in the centre, to Limón, Cieneguita and Puerto Viejo on the Atlantic Coast, interviewing and recording Spanish and English speakers of different ages, professions and social classes. In this article, I am presenting essentially a field study of the Anglophone material that we found there, together with commentary. Significant variants, when they exist, follow each primary textual example. Certain items are easily recognizable as stemming from the English folk tradition, which black inhabitants of Jamaica and other Antillean British colonies readily absorbed into their own folkways, while others seem to be purely Caribbean inventions.

Before presenting the collected material, I will briefly trace the presence in Costa Rica of its Afro-Caribbean population in order to set the context for an analysis of the conditions that have favoured and worked against the preservation of its folklore in that country .

While a very small number of African slaves had been brought in the colonial era by the Spaniards to what is now known as Costa Rica, and although some Afro-Antilleans, either freedmen or people escaping slavery, had migrated between the late eighteenth century and 1825 to the eastern shore near Panama, where they had become self-sufficient turtle fishermen and coconut palm farmers, the vast majority of black immigrants went to the Atlantic Coast reglon between the 1870s and the 1930s drawn by economic opportunity. This second stage of the African diaspora in the Americas has been analyzed by Roy Simon Bryce-Laporte and Trevor Purcell:

> As the United States replaced its European predecessor as the dominant colonial force in Central America, it also introduced a second step in the black diaspora—the movement of black free labour to build and maintain plantations in lands alien both to them and to their white superordinate benefactors. (221)

In 1871, the North American Minor Keith, who would first construct the Atlantic Railroad and then, as head of the United Fruit Company, establish a string of banana plantations along it, was granted permission by the central government to import about a thousand construction workers from Jamaica. There, the sugar plantations had become so unproductive that there was not enough work to sustain the descendants of the British slaves who had been freed in 1833, so labourers migrated willingly to Central America. When the railroad was finished, these workers were obliged to move into banana production, principally because they could not afford to buy passage back to Jamaica as had been their original intent. Another 10,000 Jamaicans immigrated in the decade beginning in 1881, also under the monopolistic neocolonialist aegis of Keith, and subsequent waves of immigrants from various Caribbean islands, also fleeing poverty, arrived in the ensuing decades (Bourgeois 162; Seligson 64-65; Biesanz 66; Lefever 89). The national census shows a figure of 902 Jamaicans in Limón province in 1883, 839 in 1888, 734 in 1892, and 18,003 in 1927 (Jones 36, Bryce-Laporte and Purcell 223). It is difficult to know the exact Afro-Antillean population of the country in the early decades of its immigration. Philippe Bourgeois writes that many workers died of malaria, yellow fever and serpent bites during the very difficult initial stage of railroad construction (162). Bryce-Laporte and Purcell suppose that :

> "[t]here seems to have been considerable recurrent, temporary and nomadic migrations, in addi-

> tion to permanent removals, of Jamaicans from one Central American country to another according to the vicissitudes of labour demand and availability. This seems especially true of Costa Rica and Panama, and between these two and Jamaica itself" (223-24).

In any event, by the turn of the century, the Antillean black population was firmly and permanently established in the country. While their numbers dropped, according to the 1950 census, from about 18,000 to 13,749 (Bourgeois 163), by 1963 people of Jamaican descent residing in Limón had risen to roughly 24,000 (Meléndez and Duncan 75). Since that time, their numbers have increased considerably, and their economic status is rather good, because when banana production plummeted in the thirties and forties, and many left the country for Panama and the United States to seek work, other

> [b]lacks who stayed behind during the economic crisis, when employment on the plantation was no longer available, squatted on uncultivated lands and established themselves as subsistence farmers, often in abject poverty. Once the economy improved, these squatters were able to convert their subsistence plots into commercial cacao or banana farms ....
>
> In the mid-1950s, with the rise of cacao prices on the world market, these formerly marginal black farmer-squatters emerged as comfortable landowners. (Bourgeois 163)

In 1982, Richard Biesanz *et al.* estimated that around 35,000 West Indian immigrants and their descendants constituted about two percent of the total Costa Rican population and one third of that of Limón province.

Three main factors have contributed to the conservation of the Anglophone oral tradition in Limón. First among these is geograpical isolation. Black immigrants, who were not recognized as British subjects, were not accorded Costa Rican citizenship until after the 1948 democratic revolution led by Pepe Figueres. "They were the group most affected by the change of government.... From then on blacks began to enter politics, move to San José, attend public schools, and assimilate culturally" (Biesanz 67). Prior to that date, even when economic hard times hit, such as the severe drop in banana production due to diseases and nutrient depletion in the soil, and the decision by United Fruit to move production to the Pacific Coast after the Communist-led labour strikes in 1934, the Afro-Caribbeans were prohibited *de facto,* if not *de jure,* from traveling further west than

Siquirres on the railroad, which was the only practical means of transportation in that part of the country due to the presence of the Cordillera Central that bisects it from the Northwest to the Southeast. In fact, a contract made in 1934 between the government and United Fruit explicitly stated that no black labour would be used in Pacific Coast banana farming (Lefever 212). "President Ricardo Jiménez signed a law to that effect in 1935, arguing that relocation would upset the country's 'racial balance' and possibly cause 'civil commotion' (Biesanz 66). The real reasons for that segregation were politicians' pandering to white Costa Ricans' deep-seated racism and United Fruit's wish to more easily exploit agricultural workers by dividing them along racial lines.

Another cause of the cohesiveness of the Afro-Caribbean population, and thus of the persistence of their lore, was their profound feeling of cultural superiority vis-a-vis the poor Hispanics who migrated from the central highlands to Limón in search of work early in the century and also vis-a-vis the American banana company managers and foremen (Bryce-Laporte and Purcell 228). This sense of being better than the "Spaniards," as they called them, was partly based on their British cultural heritage, including their ability to speak English, which placed them in an advantageous position in the banana company whose foremen were North Americans, such that they generally held more higher level jobs in agriculture than did the Hispanic workers. "Even blacks who work side by side with Hispanics as day labourers on banana plantations consider their Hispanic fellow workers 'less civilized'," writes Bourgois. "They criticize them for being loud, violent, alcoholic, and abusive to their women" (167). Of the Afro-Caribbeans, Carlos Meléndez writes that *"muchos de ellos, aunque tenían muchos años de residir en Limón, seguían sintiéndose súbditos británicos, más que ciudadanos costarricenses"* (77) and, *"El negro se aferra a algunas de sus costumbres; mantiene a toda costa ciertas actitudes que en alguna forma lo definen. Ha fundado una colonia britanica, y quiere mantenerla"* (115-16).

On the other hand, Afro-Caribbeans have simultaneously been the generalized target of racial discrimination at the hands of the majority. "Ironically, one effect of the persistence of ethnic discrimination against blacks is the preservation of black culture. The obvious skin-colour difference between West Indians and the rest of the Costa Rican population has prevented the second and third generations of blacks from blending into Costa Rican society, even though they have risen in the local class structure" (Bourgeois 167). According to Harry Lefever, the two competing social tendencies, the implied promise of integration and the practices of social exclusion, have created a psychological identity crisis for black Costa Ricans that he likens to W.E.B. DuBois' notion of double-consciousness in African-North Americans. They are obliged to see themselves through the eyes of the majority population, a psychological condition that tears them apart internally (Lefever 217-18). This complex also places the issue of the preservation of folklore in the middle of conflicting desires of wanting to be accepted as truly Costa Rican,

including making Spanish one's primary tongue, and affirming one's self-worth in the face of scorn, including keeping up one's Anglophone cultural patrimony.

The new opportunities opened up for blacks have encouraged more and more Costa Rican Afro-Caribbeans to adopt Spanish as their main language, with all that that implies for the loss of the Antillean oral tradition. "Jamaicans could no longer resist 'Spanish' education in the post-plantation period as they did when their livelihood depended on the English-speaking plantation system. Spanish education, with all its cultural and ideological trappings, had become their passport to a better life" (Bryce-Laporte and Purcell 232). Success in the Hispanophone public school system can give blacks entry to good public sector jobs, to the university branch situated in the city of Limón, and even to higher education opportunities in the capital. There is now a two-thirds white majority population in the province, whose culture has therefore been Hispanized in large measure. We witnessed nearly all the bilingual children of Afro-Antillean extraction speaking Spanish with parents, teachers and friends. One reason for this is that it allows them to play with both white and black children at the same time, and white children do not have as great an opportunity to learn English as the black children do to learn Spanish.

While there is still a major English-language radio station in Limón and people of all ages listen to radio signals emanating from the Antilles, the adolescents and young people also listen to, sing and dance to Spanish-language music. There is no English-language newspaper. The private church schools in Limón, such as St. Mark's, still teach in English, but most children now probably attend the public schools, whose teachers, whether they be black or white, all speak Spanish. The main-line Protestant churches—Episcopal, Baptist, and Methodist, which the nineteenth-century immigrants had brought with them—still have their services in English, but the newer Evangelical churches conduct them in both Spanish and English, since they are aggressively trying to appeal to a wide consituency that they are trying hard to attract away from other faith groups.

The result is that much of the folklore that we collected, including children's games, resides in the memory of an ageing Afro-Caribbean population. The exception is the persistence of more modern children's games and ditties that have come from Jamaica, Panama or New York through recent personal contact with travelers or through travel to those destinations.

The first—and smallest—category is bedtime prayers. Of these, we collected only three, the last two of which are commonly found in the English-speaking world. We were surprised by this paucity of examples, because in our field research in the Hispanic areas we had found so many.

Pray, mama, pray, papa,
pray to God to bless me

and make me a good child.
(Leonora Sawyers Royal, 82, Limón)

Gentle Jesus meek and mild,
look upon a little child.
Pity my simplicity.
Hear my prayer, blessèd Lord
(Mavis Morris, 65, Estrada de Carandi)

This night when I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.
(Stanford Crawford, 82, Guácimo)

The second group of texts are assorted poems and songs from the popular oral tradition. The structure of the poem "Toady, toady, mind yourself", whose comic theme is "Don't count your chickens before they're hatched," is a causal and lexical concatenation. A poor peasant gets angry at a toad that is keeping him from pulling weeds, because at the end of a series of imagined causes and effects he already envisions himself as a rich man if only he can just manage that first step. The rhetorical figure that is used to express the illusion is anadiplosis, the repetition of the last part of each line at the beginning of the next. Intensive lexical duplication is thus used to represent the rapid and inevitable accumulation of material benefits.

Toady, toady, mind yourself;
Mind yourself, let me weed me grass;
Weed me grass and me plant me corn;
Ground me corn that will feed me horse;
Feed the horse that will win the race.
Gee, gee, gee, gee, gee, gee!
(Albert Guthrie, 80, Puerto Viejo)

Toady, toady, mind yourself;
Make a hoe me corn.
(Stanford Crawford, 82, Guácimo)

Anthropologist Walter Jekyll identifies this as a Jamaican work song used to maintain the rhythm of workers who are digging furrows and planting corn. The version that he collected early in this century is slightly different from ours, for the ultimate aim is not to buy a racehorse but to court a woman who might be acceptable to the farmer's mother (179-80).

"On a one Monday morning" is a call-and-response chant revolving around the theme of an everyday shopping experience, one part of which is successful and the other not. Because of its rhythmic regularity, its antiphonal interaction between an individual and a collective voice, and the fact that the latter calls a refrain found in many Caribbean songs, this seems also to be a work chant.

On a one Monday morning,
'ol' 'im, Joe
we went down to Heebee Town.
'ol' 'im, Joe
Me go buy a bunch o'plantane.
'ol' 'im ,Joe
Me wa' look me a beer car,
'ol' 'im Joe
An' a was an only beer car,
'ol' 'im, Joe
An' disappear me beer car,
' ol' 'im, Joe
I said to pick up the plantane.
' ol' 'im, Joe
(Cyril Alterano Sylvan, 63, and Ana Alterano Foster, 33, Cieneguita)

The tongue-twister "Rise an'cuma" is a series of imperative verbs arranged in mixed order. While the beginnings of the two lines are identical, the rest of each is an inverted form of the other. The result is an elaborate chiasmus, punctuated by the division-marking word "cuma," that is pleasing to the ear but challenging to the speaker who must pronounce it.

Rise an'cuma come you cuma go you cuma come;
Rise an'cuma go you cuma come you cuma go.
(Cyril Alterano Sylvan, 63, and Ana Alterano Foster, 33, Cieneguita)

The following variant of an English nursery rhyme has underdone significant changes as it has passed through the Jamaican oral tradition, principally the disappearance of the fourth line ("and she shall have music wherever she goes ") and its replacement by a repetition of the place name plus a series of cardinal numbers, all of which constitutes an obviously meaningless filler-line. "To see a great lady upon a white horse" has become "to see an old lady upon a great cross," and the English town Banbury has become Bombelly.

I'lla wan'ride a cock horse Bombelly Cross
To see an old lady upon a great cross.

Bell on her finger, ring on her toe,
Bombelly, Bombelly, one, two, three.
(Grace Stephenson, 39, Siquirres)

Mothers often sing songs to infants that encourage their motor development, teach them to recognize their own names, reinforce the reciprocal relationship between mother and child, and please them by shifting their physical position radically yet predictably.

Clap hands, clap hands 'til mama comes home.
Mama bring cake for [baby's name] alone.
[Baby's name] eat cake, no give mama none.
Mama get vexed and put [baby's name] on the floor.
(Leonora Sawyers Royal, 82, and Joyce Sawyers Royal, 54, Limón)

The following children's song is the only one that we collected that did not seem to be part of an interactive game. It is accompanied, though, by the type of body movement that is often found in ring games. The reference to a U.S. place name suggests a North American origin, which is very plausible, since so many residents of Limón province have migrated to New York and relatives and friends often travel back and forth.

I went to California
to see my friend.
I see a señorita
with a bottle on her head.
Shaky,shaky,shaky,
shaky,shaky,sha.
I love you.
(Shamara Brown, 13, and Cindy Patricia Barton, 9, Limón)

Typical of folk poetry are the *homoïteleutons* (enough sound resemblance at the end of corresponding lines of poetry for the ear to pick up without there actually being either consonant or assonant rhyme) that link "California" and "señorita" and "friend" and "head" respectively, the alternation of tonic stress on the penultimate syllable of the odd-numbered lines and on the final syllable of the even-numbered lines, and the recessive syllabic gradation at the end.

The American abolitionist John Brown planned to capture the U.S. military arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, distribute the arms to black slaves, organize his own army in the southern mountains, and put an end to slavery. His mission failed when Brown and his small band of followers were captured after a brief skirmish. Brown was hanged in 1859 and immediately became a symbolic figure in the

anti-slavery movement. This must account for the North American folksong "John Brown's Body" becoming known in Jamaica, where slavery had persisted until 1838 and where the memory of that institution was therefore still fresh.

John Brown's body lies a mourner in the grave,
and the truth goes marching on.

John Brown's body has a col' upon the chest, (ter
so he lyin'd it down chamber where he died.
(Cleveland Peters, 81, Siquirres)

One of the lines of the Siquirres version ("and the truth goes marching on") corresponds not to the abolitionist song, but rather to a refrain in the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" ("His truth goes marching on") which Julia Ward Howe composed to the same melody at around the same time. The first line of our version, "John Brown's body lies a mourner in the grave," which makes no literal sense but whose invention may be understood through the logical association of his baby's death, his subsequent burial, and the father's anguish, is probably a modification of "John Brown's body lies a moulderin' in the grave," which is a common U.S. variant. The second stanza of the Costa Rican version jumps immediately from the cause, the illness, to the effect, death, while the most common North American version speaks of the remedy after indicating the malady:

John Brown's baby had a cold upon his chest,
and they rubbed it down with camphorated oil.

By decree of the British Parliament, all Jamaican slaves were emancipated on 1 August, 1838. In the following poem, an emancipated Jamaican says that if any white man dares enter the area around his house, he will crack his head open, as he almost did to his neighbour's wife by mistake a few days earlier. Deep resentment and hostility underlie this folk poem composed in a dialect in which"first" and "bust" constitute a perfect rhyme but where "wife" and "fight" form an assonant rhyme reinforced by the alternately post positioned and pre positioned /f/. A "bakra man" is a white man,"'kull bust" means "skull busted," and "wen" signifies "was."

Good ma'ning, good ma'ning, ma dear boy.
De day a'August de fu'st.
No bakra man no com a fo' me ya'd
Unless him get him'kull bust.
'A hotha' day I run to me stick
an' me pull up on me neighbour wife.
Me t'ink he wen one bakra man.
Me laughin' will show 'im fight.
(Albert Guthrie, 80, Puerto Viejo)

The largest corpus of material that we found are one adult and several chidren's games. These were typically played by the moonlight in both rural villages and the citv of Limón before electrification. Before the advent of radio and television, communal life was heavily centred around game playing, story telling, and singing. Now these sorts of activities have largely disappeared, an unfortunate consequence of the accessiblity of the mass electronic media both for the preservation of the oral tradition and for the cohesiveness of social groups. All of our informants expressed a deeply nostalgic regret of these changes in the social and artistic life of Limón.

"There's a Brown Girl in the Ring" is a ring-game in which a boy in the circle chooses a dancing partner with whom he dances inside it. She next returns the boy to the circle and chooses another boy with whom to dance, and so on, with girls and boys alternating as choosers and chosen. In Jamaica, Jekyll collected this game ninety years ago (207-08), Beckwith attested its popularity in the 1920s (74-75), and as recently as 1979 John Barton Hopkin found that it was played "everywhere" in the island, although he furnished a rather truncated version of the song (36).

There's a brown girl in the ring, tra la la la la, (ter)
For she looks like a sugar in the plum, plum, plum.

Then you show me your motion, tra la la la la, (ter)
For she looks like a sugar in the plum, plum, plum.

Then you skip across the ocean, tra la la la la,(ter)
For she looks like a sugar in the plum, plum, plum.

Then you wheel and take your partner, tra la la la, (ter)
For she looks like a sugar in the Plum, Plum, Plum.
(Ruby Nicholson, 67, Limón)

.....

Then you wheel and show your partner, tra la la la la, (bis)
For she likes sugar and I like plum.
(Grace Stephenson, 39, Siquirres)

.....

Sweet like sugar and I like plum.
(Estela Smith, 95, Limón)

.....

For you like sugar and I like plum.
(Mavis Morris, 65, Estrada de Carandí)

In "Balimbo-Balimba-Balindo," inside a circle a boy dances with a girl whom he has chosen while the other children comment on her physical qualities and question him about his economic circumstances. They either approve or disapprove of the match. Sometimes the chorus asks the couple to kiss in order to judge whether they seem suited to one another. Jekyll collected this game in Jamaica, saying that the refrain-word "bahlimbo" meant any kind of inexpensive cloth (212-13). When Beckwith saw it played there, she found that a single "judge" called out all the longer lines while all the others called out the refrain - the couple wheeled around the inside of the ring (55-56).

Boy, you come, you come.
Yes, balindo
What you come about?
Yes, balindo
You come to court the girl.
Yes, balindo
All right, I say come in.
Yes, balindo
Walkin'through the ring.
Yes, balindo
Bring your lover, come.
Yes, balindo
Dat no pretty girl.
Yes, balindo
This no match at all.
Yes, balindo
Wheel and put her back.
Yes, balindo
Pick another one.
Yes, balindo
Boy, dis a girl you know?
Yes, balindo
This a pretty girl.
Yes, balindo
Boy, you love the girl?
Yes, balindo
Kiss and make me see.
Yes, balindo
So, you have your coffee work?
Yes, balindo
You have your dray and mule?

Yes, balindo
The cart cheaper town.
Yes, balindo
Ten cents a yeard.
Yes, balindo
You want to know my name?
Yes, balindo
My name is Tata Joe.
Yes, balindo
Right away to see.
Yes, balindo
Wheel and let her go.
Yes, balindo.
(Uriah Johnson Scott, 94, Siquirres)

Boy, you come, you come.
Yes, balindo.
What you come about?
Yes, balindo.
You come to court a girl?
Yes, balindo
You have you cocoa farm?
Yes, balindo
You have you house and land?
Yes, balindo
Walk and view the ring.
Yes, balindo
Pick the girl you choose,
Yes, balindo
Girl, you love the boy?
Yes, balindo
Kiss 'im, let me see.
Yes, balindo
(Linford Adolfín Lewis, 51, Siquirres)

In the following variant, "Manzanillo" is the name of a small village on the Talamanca Coast near the Panamanian border that lies just ten kilometres east of Puerto Viejo (called Old Harbour earlier in the century, before the post-war influx of Hispanics was accompanied by a wave of renaming of towns), where this version was furnished to us.

Who'll have a boy?
Dem no boy at all.

Manzanillo boy, dem not boy at all.
Guru from boy, de mighty boy.
(Albert Guthrie, 80, Puerto Viejo)

Y'all, you come, you come.
Yes, balimba.
Come to look a' man.
Yes, balimba.
Pick the one you like.
Yes, balimba
Me say, "Bring'im home to me."
Yes, balimba
Wheel 'im 'round the ring.
Yes, balimba
Wheel 'im 'n' put him back.
Yes, balimba
Dat no good at dat.
Yes, balimba
(Cyril Alterno Sylvan, 63, and Ana Alterno Foster,
33, Cieneguita)

Yet another ring song-and-dance game is "Under This Carpet," whose theme is once again the choice of a mate. In some versions, a funny little rhyme about Nebuchadnezzar is tacked on to the end without there being any obvious thematic link between the two texts. The short-lived nature of the marriage in this game allows for the continual recombination of new partners in the dance. Jekyll collected this game in the early twentieth century with the initial lines "On the carpet you must be/ Happy as the grass bird on the tree" (191). The five versions that Beckwith gathered between 1919 and 1925 vary in the opening lines: "Undah de carpet we mus' -go/ like a Jack's bird in de air," "Undah de carpet we mus' go/like a jasper in de sky," "Under de carpet we must go/ like a grasshopper in de ear," "Under the carpet we must go/ like a jackbird in the ring" (75-76). One of these versions contains the Nebuchadnezzar rhyme at the end, which marks that link as an earlier Jamaican amalgam rather than a later Costa Rican one. Hopkin also found this game in Jamaica with the verses referring to the king of Babylon at the end; he writes," The source of the Nebuchadnezzar material is a mystery" (21-22).

Under this carpet you must be
Like a grass bird in the fi'.
Rise and stand up on your legs
And choice the one that you love the best.

Sally, when you marrv I'll wish you joy,
First the boy and second the girl.

Seven days after, seven days ago,
Give 'a a kiss and send 'er out.

Then the Nebuchodnezer, the king of Babylon,
Spread his bed into sardine pan. (bis)
(Leonora Sawyers Royal, 82, Limón)

Under this carpi you must be
Like a grass bird in the field.
Rise and stand up on your legs
And pick the very one you love the best.

Nebuchodnezer, the king of Babylon,
Spread his bed in a sardine pan.
When the sardine pan begin to rust,
Nebuchodnezer begin to cuss.
(Albert Guthrie, 80, Puerto Viejo)

.....
In a sorry you marry, you wish you joy,
First the boy and second the girl.
Seven days after, seven days ago,
Break fast, kiss and be done.
(Ruby Nicholson, 67, Limón)

Under this carpet you must be
Like a grass bird in a tree.
.....
(Hortense Campbell Beulah Smith, 81, Siquirres)

The game played to the old English tune "London Bridge Is Falling Down" involves two players' arms forming a bridge beneath which passes a continuously circulating line of children until the two lower their arms to capture one of them. When the verse about beheading is sung, the captors pretend to cut off their captive's head in a sawing motion. The captive then whispers into the ear of one of the children who form the bridge whether he prefers one of two colours, or fruits, or any other category designated by the two stationary players as the basis by which the captives will become members of one of their two teams. When all the mobile players have been caught and sent into lines that have formed behind the "bridge" persons, a tug-of-war ensues between the two groups. Especially interesting is the fact that in the Hispanic Costa Rican children's game "Ambo," the exact same method is used to divide the chosen children into two teams that will eventually engage in a tug-of-war. It appears that when Hispanics migrated to

Limón, children of Afro-Caribbean ancestry played with their friends who had come from the country's interior, assimilating their games, and that they introduced this particular element into "London Bridge," to which it became a permanent addition.

London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down,
London Bridge is falling down so merrily.

Then you call for the light to light up the 'ouse, light up the 'ouse, light up the 'ouse,
Call for the light to light up the'ouse so merrily.

In the following version, "Badjun" means "Barbadan."

Little Sally Water
Sprinkle in the saucer.
Rise, Sally, rise
And wipe your eyes.
And you turn to the east,
And you turn to the west ,
And you turn to the very one
You love the best.
Then you hug 'er up and kiss 'er up
And put her in the Badjun room, my darling.
Hug 'er up and kiss 'er up
And put her in the Badjun room.
(Leonora Sawyers Royal, 82, Limón)

Another ring game song of English origin, whose text clearly indicates when couples of children will pantomime certain actions, is "Jane and Louisa." Both Beckwith in the 1920s and Hopkin, fifty years later, found it widely played in Jamaica.

Jane and Louisa will
-soon come home, just will soon come home, (bis)
Jane and Louisa will soon come home into this beautiful garden?

My love, will you love me to walk with you, just to
walk with you, (bis)
My love, will you love me to walk with you into this beautiful garden?

My love, will you love me to waltz with you, just to waltz with you, (bis)
My love, will you love me to waltz with you into this beautiful garden?

My love, will you love me to pick a rose, just to pick a rose, (bis)
My love, will you love me to pick a rose into this beautiful garden?
(Mavis Morris, 65, Estrada de Carandi)

.....

My love, will you allow me to pick a rose, just to pick a rose? (bis)
(Hortense Campbell Beulah Smith, 81, Siquirres)

"Children, Children" is a call-and-response type interactive children's game. Another direct import from Jamaica, its presence there is attested by Beckwith (19) a half century ago and by Daryl C. Dance in 1978 (203). In Limón, as on the island, when one child asks, "Who is the dog?" "What is a dog?" the others all run away and he or she has to catch them. In fact, the Costa Rican texts and the two Jamaican ones are practically identical, despite the gaps in time and geography.

Then you call for the knife to cut off the neck, cut off the neck, cut off the neck,
Call for the knife to cut off the neck so merrily.
(Mavis Morris, 65, Estrada de Carandi)

....

London Bridge is falling down so 'eavily.
(Barzillah Gayle Barton, 71, Limón)

.....

Then you call for the broom, the broom of the house, so merrily.
(Ruby Nicholson, 67, Limón)

Jekyll, who collected "Little Sally Water" in Jamaica, calls it "perhaps the best-known and most widely-spread of all English singing games" and describes its practice in the Caribbean island just as it was explained to us by older Costa Ricans:

The boys and girls join hands and form a ring. One - the sex is immaterial - crouches in the middle and personates Sally Water. At the words "Rise,Sally, rise," he or she slowly rises to an erect position, brushing away imaginary tears, turns first one way and then the other, and chooses a partner out of the ring...They wheel - a rapid turning dance - and after the wheeling, the partner is left inside the ring and becomes Sally Water. (191)

Beckwith found two versions of this game in the same country and Mary Manning Carley found it in a form identical to the ones that we collected (143).

Little Sally Water
Sprinkle in the saucer. .
Rise, Sally, rise
And wipe your eyes.
Pick a partner;
Turn to the west
And turn to the east.
Put him in the dancing hall, my son.
Turn to the east
And turn to the west.
Turn to the west, my son.
(Albert Guthrie, 80, Puerto Viejo)

I come to see Janie, (ter)
And where is she now?
She's washing our clothes. (ter)
Will you call back again?
I come to see Janie, (ter)
Ans where is she now?
She's hironing. (ter)
Will you call back again?
I come to see Janie, (ter)
And where is she now?
She's sick. (ter)
Will you call back again?
I come to see Janie, (ter)
And where is she now?
She's dead!
(Barzillah Gayle Barton, 71, Limón)

"I Went to the River to Wash My Clothes" also involves calls and responses, and probably also handclapping, as several others surely must. Since it is not attested in Jamaican collections, it may well be a Costa Rican invention.

Pi, pi, clock, clock. (bis)
I went to the river to wash my clothes.
'time I come back, the clock was slow.
Ol'man, ol'man,'ow much o'clock?

One o'clock!

Pi, pi, clock, clock. (bis), etc.
Two!
.....
(Joyce Sawyers Royal, 54, Limón)

In "Who Stole the Cookie from the Cookie Jar?" each child is given a number except for the initiator of a series of accusations done by number rather than by name. When accused, players deny their guilt and then accuse another by number. The one who fails to remember his number and does not respond immediately is expelled, and the game continues until one wins by process of elimination. Hopkin (24-25) and Dance (193-94) found the game in Jamaica in the late 1970s.

Children ! children !
Yes, mama?
Where'ave you been to?
To see grandmama.
What'ave she given you?
Bread and cheese.
Where's my share?
It's up in the air.
How can I reach it?
Climb on a broken chair.
Who teach you dat manners?
Dog.
Who it's a dog?
You!
(Barzillah Gayle Barton, 71, Limón)

A similar game, called "Post," in which rapid responses in a set pattern are accompanied by the players' placing their fists one atop the other, begins like a Jamaican version collected by Beckwith but then becomes contaminated by "Children, children" because they both contain the response "Bread and cheese."

What is that?
Post.
Take it off and kiss it.
What is that?
Post.
What's in there?
Bread and cheese.
How can I reach it?

Climb on a chair?
Suppose I fall.
I do not care.
Who teach yo dat manners?
The dog.
Who is the dog?
You!
(Ruby Nicholson, 67, Limón)

In yet another highly cadenced dialogic game, "I Come to See Janie," one child lies on the ground motionless while two lines of children stand on either side of her, one chanting questions and the other answering. When one arrives at the response "She's dead," she leaps to her feet and chases her playmates, trying to catch them. The version collected in Jamaica by Beckwith, who calls it "one of the most wide-spread of all folk games" (45), contains the same triple repetition of the first line of each question and each response as the one we found in Limón,

Who stole the cookie from the cookie jar?
Number one stole the cookie from the cookie jar.
Who, me?
Yes, you.
Couldn't be!
And then a who?,etc.
(Ghiselle Benjamin, 38, Limón)

"Rhythm" is a handclapping game in which the players in turn have to supply a word in a given category as they move through the alphabet. The clapping beats give the children time to think of their next item. When a person misses his turn, he is expelled to the rythmic spelling of O-U-T.

(clap, clap, clap) Rhythm! (bis)
(clap, clap, clap) A!
(clap,clap, clap) Albert!
(clap clap, clap) B!
(clap, clap, clap) Benjamin!

clap, clap, clap) C!
(clap, clap, clap) Carlos!, etc.
.....

(clap, clap, clap) O!
(clap, clap, clap) U!
(clap, clap, clap) T!
(clap, clap, clap) Out!

(Ghiselle Benjamin, 38, and Joyce Sawyers Royal, 54, Limón)

"Down Emanuel Road" was a game played in Costa Rica exclusively by adults by the light of the moon, including during breaks in the evening "Nine Night" religious services when people sang hymns and prayed for a deceased relative, friend or neighbour. On her trips to the Caribbean in the early 1920s, Beckwith learned that "[t]he Jamaica Negroes believe that for nine nights after death the ghost rises out of the grave and returns to its familiar haunts ....

During this period every relative and friend gathers at the house of the dead to entertain the ghost, welcome his return. and speed him back to the grave"(Lefever 169). This custom was transported to Limón province, where another practice, according to Mavis Morris of Estrada, was the removal of the dead person's bed from her house so that the spirit would not return to sleep in it and bother the remaining inhabitants. Paula Palmer describes in considerable detail "Nine Night" as she found it on the southern coast of the province in the 1970s (219-24). An informant of hers from Cahulta attested the practice of people staying up all night drinking and engaging in amusing pastimes such as telling Anansi stories, riddles and jokes, but what we find curious is that she does not report the playing of games, a custom that we found to have been prevalent in Limón city and some towns further inland.

A group of people would form a circle; in front of each player was a stone heavy enough to inflict damage on the fingers of he who was not nimble enough to keep the rhythm. When each line of the song was sung, the players shifted the stone to the person to her or his left at a speed that was set by the increasing pace of the song. This game has been a custom in Jamaica throughout this century, as is proven by examples collected by Beckwith, who found it played by adults at wakes (90-92), Jekyll, who witnessed children playing it (199), and Dance, who also colleced it as a children's game (189-90). In this first version, "gal' am' ba' " means "girls and boys," "fi go" means "I am going to," and "we a play" signifies "we are playing."

Down Emanuel Road, gal' am' ba',
Fi go broke rock stone. (bis)
Broke them one by one, gal' am' ba',
Broke them tow by two, gal' am' ba',
Broke them three by three, gal'am'ba';
Finga' mash', no cry, gal' am' ba';
'memba play we a' play, gal' am' ba'.
(Ghiselle Benjamin, 38, Joyce Sawyers Royal, 54, Limón)

.....
Go down to Emanuel Road, girl and boy. (bis)
.....
Mash your finger, no cry.
(Dudley White, 76, Puerto Viejo)

.....
Come me go down Emanuel Road, girl and boy.
.....
'memba play with a play.
(Lindford Adolfin Lewis, 51, Siquirres)
.....
There's a broke rock stone, girl and boy.
.....
Bash yo' 'and, no cry, boy and girl.
(Uriah Johnson Scott, 94, Siquirres)

Go 'round Emanuel Road, girl and boy,
Make you broke rock stone, girl and boy.
.....
(Mavis Morris, 65, Estrada de Carandí)

.....
Took a broke rock stone.
Took them one by one, girl and boy.
.....
(Ruby Nicholson, 67, John Edwards, 70, Limón)

We can see that the Anglophone folklore of the Costa Rican Atlantic Coast region has been reasonably well preserved and that it comes principally from the Jamaican tradition. It is no wonder that such a significant portion of the whole is made up of children's games since, as Hopkin writes, "[t]he conventional wisdom concerning children's lore is that children are culturally conservative; they will always try to reproduce something exactly as they heard it, simply because that's how it goes" (5). Now that the Atlantic Coast is fast becoming culturally integrated into the preponderantly Hispanic portion of the country for the reasons specified in the first part of this article, it remains to be seen to what degree and how long the Afro-Antillean oral tradition will survive. If children are the most culturally conservative sector of a population's folklore, if Spanish is the dominant language of the public schools, and if the black and Hispanic children play together more and more, may we assume that Anglophone juvenile lore will either gradually disappear or be combined with the Hispanic juvenile tradition? Indeed, most of the versions of

children's— as well as adults'— songs, poems, prayers and games were furnished to us by people in their fifties through their nineties. It may well be, given recent migration patterns, that the United States will eventually supplant Jamaica— a Jamaica that is clearly an extension of British folk culture— as the main source of English-language cultural importations, just as Mexico and Colombia long ago surpassed Spain as the major influences on Costa Rican folk song and poetry.

NOTES

* This article was originally published in *Voices:The Wisconsin Review of African Literature*, Issue 2, Fall, 1999, pp.25-48

I. Harry Lefever, in his ethnographic study of Tortuguero, furnishes complete texts of some of the Anansi tales that originated in W'est Africa and that are found in all the languages and islands of the Caribbean, as well as some other folktales. He cites examples of those same tales that were discovered in Jamaica, the Bahamas, the Virgin Islands, Barbados, Trinidad, Surinam, Brazil and the United States (182-93), but for some reason he does not include in his survey the Domincan Republic, Guadeloupe, Martinique and Haiti, where they are also both well preserved and profuse. Paula Palmer, in her "folk-history of the Talamanca Coast," also provides several wonderful Anansi tales (224-42). Quince Duncan, in an article entitled "La tradición oral del afrocostarricense"- but which does not include any of the genres that we found in Limon province except tales - also furnishes a pair of Anansi stories that he translates into Spanish (177-82).

REFERENCES

Beckwith, Martha Warren. *Jamaica Folk-Lore. New York: American Folk-Lore Society, G.F,Stechert, 1928.*

Blesanz, Richard, Karen Zubris Biesanz, and Mavis Hiltunen Biesanz. *The Costa Ricans,* Englewood Cliffs (NJ); Prentice-Hall, 1982

Bourgeois, Philippe. "Blacks in Costa Rica;Upward Mobility and Ethnic Discrimination." *The Costa Rica Reader.* Ed. Marc Edelman and Joanne Kenen. New York: Grove. Weidenfeld, 1989. 161-69,

Bryce-Laporte, Roy Simon and Trevor Purcell, "A Lesser-Known Chapter of the African Diaspora: West Indians in Costa Rica, Central America," *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora.* Ed. Joseph E. Harris. Washington., Howard U P, 1982, 219-39.

Carley, Mary Manning. *Jamaica: The Old and the New.* New York: Frederick A. Prager, 1963.

Dance, Daryl C[umber]. *Folklore from Contemporary Jamaicans.* Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1985.

Hopkin, John Barton. "Jamaican Children's Songs." *Ethnomusicology* 28.1 (1984): 1-36.

Jekyll, Walter. *Jamaican Song and Story: Anancy Stories, Digging Siriging, Ring Tunes, and Dancing Tunes,* London Folklore Society,1907, New York, Dover, 1966.

Jones, Choster Lloyd. Costa Rica and Civilization in the Caribbean, New York: Russell and Russell, 1935.

Lefever, Harry G. *Turtle Bogue: Afro-Caribbean Life and Culture in a Costa Rican Village.*Selinsgrove: Susquehanna UP; London: Associated U Presses, 1992.

Melélndez, Carlos and Quince Duncan, eds. *El negro en Costa Rica.* San José: Editorial Costa Rica, 1972.

Palmer, Paula. *"What Happen". A Folk-History of Costa Rica's Talamanca Coast.* San José: Ecodesarrollos, 1977.

Seigson, Mitchell A, *Peasants of Costa Rica and the Development of agrarian Capitalism.* Madison; U of Wisconsin P, 1980.