

Bantu Survival in the Cuban “Lengua de Mayombe”

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It is a wellknown fact that Cuba received many African slaves during its colonial period, many of which arrived from both the Sudanic- and Bantu-speaking areas of western Africa. From the so-called Sudan strip (i.e., from the Senegambia in the North to the Cameroon) came mainly the Yoruba (*lucumí* or *anagó* in Cuba), the Efik (*carabalí* or *Ibibio*, also known as *abakuá* or *brícamos* in Cuba), and the Ewe/Fon (*arará* in Cuba).¹ From the Bantu-speaking territories (i.e., principally from the Cameroon south into Namibia) came mainly the kiKongo and the kiMbundu, found in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) and in Angola. It is from these Bantu folk that the *regla de mayombe* developed in Cuba and, despite the harsh odds brought about by slavery, survived as a religious cult, bringing with it an amazing amount of kiKongo derived words and expressions which are still used today by the practitioners of *mayombe*,

a word deriving from kiKongo *ma-yòmbé*, ‘magistrate, chief, prince, governor’²

In a brief note in the *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*,³ Armin Schwegler draws our attention to the fact of a possible homogeneous body of kiKongo derived words extant in the Cuban *lengua congo*, many of which are entirely transparent, some of which are partially transparent, and some without any apparent connection to this Bantu language, the latter group being a phenomenon which Schwegler explains as the result of misanalyzation of the data. Schwegler also brings home this point in his two-part study of etymologies of the Bantu ritual vocabulary as found in *El monte* and in the *Vocabulario congo* of Lydia Cabrera,⁴ as well as in two of his studies on Colombian *palenquero*.⁵ As Schwegler has said, the extraordinary amount of both transparent and partially transparent but virtually obvious kiKongo words found in the Cuban

lengua congo, in the lexicon of the Cuban *mayomberos*, and in Colombian *palenquero*, begs the question of the length of time (colonial and post-colonial) during which kiKongo may have been spoken relatively fluently among slaves of Bantu origin in the Caribbean, especially in Cuba. Some scholars have commented about the relatively large number of sub-Saharan words still found in Cuba, both of Sudanic and Bantu origins.⁶ In fact, these living remnants of African languages may very well rival those extant in Haiti and surpass the use of African-derived words in Afro-Brazilian religious cults.⁷

In his interview with the anonymous *Tata Kuyere Nkisi, rey de los espíritus*, Rigoberto González García⁸ recorded the *Tata's* speech as he heard it and published it in the journal *Caribe*, along with virtually the same text transformed into normative Spanish. According to González, this particular *Tata* is one of the most famous in Matanzas, Cuba, claiming to descend directly from the (as called in Cuba) Congo nation through his mother. Despite the secretive nature of the *lengua congo* or *lengua de mayombe*, González was able to conduct several interviews with *el rey* by creating a relaxed environment with the informant, thus gaining his confidence. Out of respect for the *Tata's* esteemed position in the community, González promised not to divulge his name. The substance of the interviews revolved around the practice of the *regla de mayombe*, which permitted González to obtain a more direct and personal description of the religious group than he would have if the informant had only repeated formulas, songs, and ritual expressions lifted directly from ceremonies. Here, the particular free-flowing and relaxed style of the interviewee parallels the author/narrator/participant point of view seen in many works of litera-

ture, which gives a dynamic edge to the material offered by the *Tata*, as well as a more precise indication of the amount of Bantu derived words which are actually still used by Cuban *mayomberos*, or at least by this *mayombero*.

González states in his preamble to the interview presentation that he attempted to obtain glossaries of *lengua palera* in order to double check the content of the interview material. While doing this, he consulted *libretas de palo* (booklets dealing with the *palo monte* cults), from which he was able to compile a large glossary of terms which, according to him, will be published sometime in the near future.⁹

The material found in this study is the product of several interviews conducted in 1994 with the Afro-Cuban informant. We are told by González that it is as close to the actual speech of the *Tata* as was possible for him to reproduce. In addition, González tells us that on occasion the *Tata* would appear to fall into some sort of trance which would come about, according to him, due to the arrival of a *nfumbe ebembo* (an African spirit) which the *mayombero* would imitate in voice and gestures.

Using the dictionaries compiled by Laman¹⁰ and by Silva Maia,¹¹ I was able to identify many of the Bantu derived words present in the interviews. A number of other glossaries were consulted for comparison.¹² A host of other dictionaries of African languages was also used for the non-transparent cases in an attempt to verify the absence or presence of other possible African sources, remembering, for example, that the Efik (*ñãñigo* or *brícamos* in Cuba) were relatively numerous in Cuba and were influential in the formation of the *abakuá* religious cult group, which may have had some cross fertilization with the mayombe group.

The format of the present study will be somewhat comparable to the Schwegler pattern of dividing the data into three sections, i.e., “entirely transparent etymologies”, “not entirely transparent etymologies,” and “words without any apparent connection to kiKongo sources”. It will vary slightly from this pattern due to the fact that some of the *mayombe* material extends into phrases of several words strung together which are not always glossed word-for-word in the Spanish interpretation (appearing to the right of the transcribed interview), thus making it difficult at times to know for certain the exact correspondences between the *mayombe* words and their Spanish counterparts. Also, some of the transparent *mayombe* words appear with non-transparent words in the same utterance or as part of one word which should have been analyzed as two, making it more difficult to etymologize these expressions. Also, it is interesting to note that several of the *mayombe* words are repeated various times during the interview. This could indicate a general limited number of *mayombe* words, requiring repetition rather than an expanded use of (perhaps) more appropriate terms for the occasions specified, or it could simply represent a repetitive style on the part of the *Tata*. In either case, it would be interesting to know just how extensive this *mayombe* lexicon is and how well (i.e., appropriate usage in the *regla de mayombe* with accurate semantic references) it is used among the *mayomberos* of Cuba. It is obviously more extensive than what we have in this particular interview, since other scholars (e.g., Schwegler, Perl, Fuentes and Gómez, Díaz Fabelo) have recorded different words (with some obvious overlaps) from the ones to be analyzed in this study.

In the present study, then, we shall divide the African derived vocabulary into (1) “transparent” (at times without a perfect one-to-one correspondence, but close enough to satisfy our definition of “transparent”¹³), (2) “not entirely transparent”, and (3) no apparent connection or no gloss given in the transformed Spanish version. At times it will be necessary to combine two or three of these divisions given the compound nature of the examples. Words which are repeated in the recorded interview will not be repeated in this list. Rather, an asterisk will be placed after the words which are found more than once in the text. The glosses for the *mayombe* words given here are the ones appearing in the transformed Spanish text, which we have translated into English. In the case of the meanings found in the dictionaries, I have also translated from the original languages (i.e., French, Portuguese) into English.

1. The words and expressions found in the interview

1.1 “The transparent items”

1) **bakasala / emberekoto / eto** (should have been divided **baka sala / embere koto / eto**) ‘stone knife.’ KiKongo *baaka*¹⁴ (W = West), ‘a kind of knife used to clean palm trees.’ For **embere**, we found kiKongo *mbeele*, ‘knife, blade of a knife, dagger.’ The word **sala**, which is not transparent, could stem from kiKongo *sala* ‘to accomplish, employ, utilize’ (perhaps a reference to the initiation act in which the stone knife is used). Also, kiKongo *sala*, as an auxiliary verb, ‘the act of resting after accomplishing a task or after a series of tasks’; also ‘the act of removing oneself from the place where one has completed a task or an action.’

As for **kòto**, it could stem from kiKongo *kòto*, ‘handfull, palm of the hand,’ with reference to holding the knife.

Finally, **eto** may be from kiKongo *-éeto*, possessive pronoun, 1st person plural, ‘our,’ which is also used as an emphatic pronoun, as in *mwendo éeto*, ‘we leave.’ Umbundu also has *etu* ‘we’.

2) **nfumbe*** **ebembo*** ‘dead.’ KiKongo *na bembo*, ‘to split, to break, smash, shatter.’ KiKongo *mbembo* (S = South) ‘a death chant, death moan, wail.’

3) **kimbansa** ‘grasses.’ KiKongo *kimbanzya*, ‘a kind of grass.’

4) **kuenda*** ‘we went walking.’ KiKongo *kwenda*, ‘to go, to walk, to advance on foot.’

5) **lango** ‘water.’ KiKongo *nlangu* ‘water, liquid; anything watery.’ KiKongo *lángu* (E = East), ‘to flow, to overflow, to inundate.’ Cf. kiMbundu *nlangu*, ‘water.’

6) **lango chola** ‘river water.’ KiKongo (E) *sóla ~ tsóla*, ‘to flow, to leak.’ The word “chola,” with its initial alveopalatal affricate (a consonant that consists of the rapid and repeated articulation of an occlusive [a stop] and friction) no doubt came from the *tsola* variation, since there would be no reason for *sóla* to turn into “chola,” i.e., [s] > [‘ch’], whereas [ts] would have easily given [‘ch’].

7) **lango kalunga** ‘sea water.’ Angolan kiKongo (S) *kalunga*, ‘lake, sea, ocean.’

8) **lango sambe** ‘holy water.’ KiKongo (E) *nsambu*, ‘blessing.’

9) **lango kasusa** ‘river.’ KiKongo *kásu* (*dyantu*), ‘ribbon, cord, head band.’

10) **lemba** ‘to become dark’ (in the evening). KiKongo *lemba*, ‘nightfall.’

11) **malafu*** **sesé** ‘dry wine.’ KiKongo (E) *malafu*, ‘palm wine, alcohol, wine in general.’ For **sesé**, not transparent, kiKongo (N = North) *nzenze*, was found, meaning ‘salinity, sweetness, very spicy.’ We are probably witnessing a change in meaning here if, in

fact, *nzenze* is the source for *sesé*, which it may be, given the absence of /z/ in Spanish.¹⁵

12) **mambo** ‘song.’ KiKongo *mambu* (< *dyambu*) ‘words, speeches, matter, subject, theme.’ KiKongo also has an exclamation which is used at the end of a song: *E mambu e*.¹⁶ We may also note that KiKongo pluralizer *ma-* (a pluralizer is a minimal linguistic unit whose meaning modifies or completes the meaning of two lexemes) plus KiKongo *mbó* ‘exclamation of joy used when one receives something long waited for’ is used on special occasions. In addition, we may compare Efik (southern Nigeria) *mam*, an onomatopoeic expression used for imitating loud noises, plus Efik *bo*, ‘to speak,’ as a possible source which may have overlapped with the KiKongo expressions.

13) **masango** ‘straw from corn.’ KiKongo *masangu*, (plural) ‘corn.’ Interestingly, as happens in several instances, the word-final *-u* of the lending language transforms into *-o* as happened during the process of vulgar Latin becoming Spanish.

14) **matari** ‘with stone.’ KiKongo *matá-di*, ‘stones, rocks, reefs.’ Note the [d] > [r] change, common in many Bantu languages.

15) **mayombe*** ‘mayombe.’ According to Bolívar Aróstegui & González Díaz de Villegas,¹⁷ **mayombe** is ‘the intimate relation of the spirit of a dead person who, together with animals, water, minerals, earth, trees and grasses, make up the universe worshiped by the Cuban ancestors of the men and women who were brought from the kingdom of Manikongo.’ These authors also tell us that these peoples founded the **mayombe** religion in Pinar del Río, where there were many Manikongo slaves who subsequently escaped from their owners and fled into the bush. Those who were eventually caught and killed by the *rancheadores*¹⁸ became an essential part of the so-called *fundamentos*, *ngangas*,¹⁹ or

prendas (= *ngangas*)²⁰ of the contemporary *mayomberos*. Some of these present day *mayomberos* take the names of their deceased ancestors.

KiKongo *mayombe*, ‘magistrate, principal chief, prince, governor, honorary title.’ *Mayombe* is also ‘the name of a wooded country to the north of Boma, as well as a country to the south of Musaana in the French Congo and in some other places.’²¹

16) **mbele*** ‘machete.’ KiKongo *mbeele*, ‘knife, blade of a knife, dagger, sword.’

17) **menga** ‘blood.’ KiKongo *menga*, ‘blood; race, family.’

18) **mpaka** ‘sacred jar.’ KiKongo *Mpakala* (capitalized in the text), ‘idol, sacred object, name of all the *nkisi myansakulu*.’²²

19) **mpemba** *karire* ‘velas encendidas.’ KiKongo *mpembe*, ‘luminous.’ We could not find the word **karire** in the African language sources consulted, but believe it could stem from Spanish *candil*, which may have been rendered as *carire* (see below) by the black slaves, since paragogical vowels (vowels added to the end of words or syllables) were common in their form of Spanish during the colonial period.²³ The development **candile* > *cadile* > *carire* would have been expected, remembering also that [d, r, l] were easily interchanged in both Bantu and Romance languages.

20) **mpolo** ‘front’; ‘ash.’ KiKongo *ampolo*, ‘ash.’ KiMbundu *polo*, ‘front.’

21) **muinda** ‘candle.’ KiKongo *mwinda*, ‘anything luminous, lamp, candle, spark plug.’

22) **ndoque*** ‘witches.’ KiKongo *ndòki*, ‘witch, presumed author of witchcraft or malice.’

23) **Nduana*** (capitalized in the text) ‘battle.’ KiKongo *ndwana*, ‘battle, brawl, fight.’

24) **nfinda** ‘cemetery earth.’ KiKongo *finnda*, ‘to kill [stiff] dead’; ‘to apply the death blow.’ KiKongo *mfinda*, ‘place of the spirits of the dead (for the first time period).’ KiKongo *ku mfinda*, ‘in the tomb after death.’ Cf. KiKongo *mwissi mfinda* ‘spirit of the forests.’

25) **ngando*** ‘crocodile.’ KiKongo *ngându*, ‘crocodile.’

26) **ngó** ‘tiger.’ KiKongo *ngò*, ‘leopard, panther, tiger.’

27) **ngonda mbumba** ‘full moon.’ KiKongo *ngònda*, ‘moon’ (cf. KiMbundu *ngonde* ‘moon’). KiKongo *mbumba* (NE = North East) ‘a round piece of manioc; a round cassava cake made ready for sale by drying; a large round wooden drum.’

28) **nkandia** ‘skin, hide.’ KiKongo *nkania*, ‘skin, leather, hide, crust, bark.’

29) **nkisi*** ‘fetish, charm, magic, *prenda*, spirit of the dead’. KiKongo *nkisi*, ‘fetish, magic, sorcery, charm.’

30) **nkuni ndoki** ‘diabolical tree.’ KiKongo *nkúni* (plural of *lukúni*), ‘firewood.’ Cf. kiKongo *kúni* ‘ownership of fruit trees (*nsafu*), palm trees, banana trees, etc.’ For **ndoki**, kiKongo *ndoki*, ‘presumed author of a spell or charm, of evil; sorcerer or one who takes the life of another by magic or sorcery.’

31) **nkuto** ‘ears.’ KiKongo *kuto*, ‘ear.’

32) **nsunsu*** *yambake* ‘black rooster.’ KiKongo *ekoko dia nsusu*, *nsusu ia koko*, *nsusu ekoko*, *nsusu a mbakala*, ‘rooster.’ We were unable to find *yambake*.

33) **nto** ‘the dead of the *prenda*.’ KiKongo *ntó*, ‘cemetery.’

34) **ntoto** ‘the Devil’s earth.’ KiKongo *ntoto* ‘ash,’ also appears as part of the Spanish gloss in the **Menure . . .** utterance in 24, 1.3.

35) **Sambia** ‘God.’ KiKongo *sambila* (< *samba*, relative of ‘to pray, implore, invoke, to ask someone for help.’ Also,

kiKongo/kiMbundu *Nzambi*, ‘God.’ The expression “Padre Sambia” appears in a contemporary Afro-Cuban song transcribed in a work by Isabel Castellanos.²⁴ The word also occurs as *Zumbi* in Brazil²⁵ and as *sombi* in the Dominican Republic.²⁶ *Nzambi* is also the source of the English word *zombi*, borrowed from the French-speaking settlers in Louisiana, many of whom came from Haiti, the source of voodoo (*vodun*) < Ewe/Fon *vodu*, (open ‘o’) wherein we find the *zombies*.²⁷

36) **simba** ndoki (ndoque) ‘catch the devil.’ KiKongo *simba*, ‘to grasp, seize, grab, hold on to.’

37) **sunga*** ‘tobacco.’ KiKongo *súnga* (W), ‘tobacco.’

38) **tatandile*** *kuyere** (should have been divided as **tata*** **ndi le**) ‘the father king.’ KiKongo *táata* ‘father, uncle, aunt; chief, owner of a slave.’ KiMbundu *tata*, ‘father.’ Cf. Igbo (related to the Ibibio or Carabalí, who were also taken to Cuba) *ndi olu* (> **ndile** [?]), ‘people who dwell on the shores of the Niger River’. **Kuyere** is not all together transparent; however, we have found KiKongo *ku-* ‘you’ (familiar) and *yele*,²⁸ ‘to be intelligent; to honor, revere’ (as one honors one’s father or the king[?]).

39) **wanga** ‘witchcraft.’ KiMbundu *wanga*, ‘witchcraft.’ KiKongo *wánga* (fig.), ‘said of a wicked or naughty person.’

1.2 “Not entirely transparent items”

1) **balongo** ‘kettle, pot.’ KiKongo *longo* ‘bassinet’ + kiKongo *baa*, ‘pot cover, plate cover.’

2) **basimbi*** ‘reincarnated, reborn, risen from the dead.’ Yoruba *bási*, ‘why, how[?]’ + Yoruba *bí* ‘to bear a child.’ Nothing similar was found in kiKongo.

3) **bondo finda** ‘elephant hunter.’ KiKongo *bóndo*, ‘animal footprints. KiKongo *finnda*, ‘to kill stiff dead; to shoot a wounded animal, apply the death blow.’ According to Silva Maia, elephant in kiKongo is *bulu kia nfinda kiampuena-mpuena*.

4) **fiñe** ‘niños.’ KiKongo *finyénga* (E), ‘a very small thing.’

5) mbele **kimbo** ‘machete.’ See # 16 (1.1) for **mbele**. KiKongo *kimbono* (Be = Bembe) ‘stick.’

6) **ganga*** ‘*prenda*, pot in which the spirit resides.’ Kimbundu *nganga*, ‘magic.’ KiKongo *ngànga* ‘doctor, medic; teller of good fortune.’ According to Lydia Cabrera, *ganga* is “una cazuela de barro o hierro que contiene el ‘fundamento’ de toda su actividad mágica” [A clay or iron pot containing the *fundamento* of all its magic activity].

7) **kiako** ‘quiet, still.’ KiKongo *kyaku*, ‘a figurative expression of making loud noises with the mouth.’ It could have acquired the opposite meaning in Cuba.

8) **kinsiako** ‘sacred *prenda*.’ KiKongo *nkisi* + kiKongo *-áaku* ‘your’ (familiar) or *-áaku* ‘your’ (polite).

9) **lele** ‘egg.’ KiKongo *leledi* (NE), ‘crest on a chicken’s head.’

10) **Mackandeke** ‘a person.’ KiKongo *má-kánnda* (N), from the verb, ‘person of small stature,’ + kiKongo *Ndéeke*, ‘a proper name for a person who is too small or too young.’

11) nkisi **malongo***, no gloss given. KiKongo *malongo* ‘medicine.’ This source would fit semantically with the meaning of *nkisi* (see # 30, 1.1) in the context of the interview, i.e., ‘something potent.’

12) **Muna** ngonda mbele (see #s 27 & 16, 1.1) **diambo** ngó (see # 25, 1.1), **eki*** **menga** ngó **kuenda kunancheto*** mayombe (see # 15, 1.1) **Ngando** Congo (= Kongo).

Here we have chosen to present the entire utterance since the gloss does not correspond word for word to the *mayombe* statement. Taken as a whole, one can attempt to decipher general meanings within the utterance. The gloss given is: “Under the power of the moon the ritual knife will sacrifice the tiger to strengthen the receptacle of *mayombe* Battle Congo.”

The words in **bold** print were discovered as follows: KiKongo *muuna*, ‘here and there.’ **Diambo** ‘ritual,’ kiKongo *dyambu*, ‘process, message, action, event, act.’ **Eki menga** should have been parsed **e kimenga**, since *kimenga* is ‘sacrifice’ in kiKongo. The word *é* in kiKongo is a demonstrative particle used for emphasis or deixis, to point out something special. Also, we may note that **menga** ‘blood’ (= ‘sacrifice’[?]) perhaps from kiKongo *méenga* (not used very often) < *menguka* ‘to crush, break’, may have some connection to “sacrifice” (i.e., breaking = sacrificing). **Kuenda***, perhaps ‘to fortify,’ from kiKongo *kwenda*, an auxiliary verb used in certain expressions to relay the idea of something which will be produced immediately. **Kunancheto***, even though glossed in another part of the interview as ‘through the forest,’ here it seems to be glossed as ‘pan’ (*cazuela*); it may come from a combination of kiKongo *nkúna*, ‘ancestors, family, descendants’ and *-ncheto*. If the *cazuela* is a reference to the *nganga* or *prenda*, where the spirits of the ancestors live or come to visit, then the gloss makes sense. The *-ncheto* part of the expression remains a mystery. The closest word in kiKongo phonetically is *cyeto* [‘ch’je-to] ‘peanut, earthnut,’ which semantically has no relation that we know of to the context. *Ngánda* in kiKongo has several different meanings varying diatopically (geographically), none of which is ‘battle,’ as glossed here.

13) **mutambre*** ‘overseer or person of much confidence.’ KiKongo *mutambudi*, ‘tax collector.’

14) **ndondo lili** ‘palm.’ KiKongo *ndondo* ‘a climbing plant.’ KiKongo *lilia*, ‘lily’ (as in the *Bible*).

15) **ndoro** ‘men.’ KiKongo *ndodoto* (NE), ‘one certain person.’

16) **nfuiri*** ‘dead.’ KiKongo *fwidi*, ‘grease from coal or soot used in mourning; clothing or ointment used when mourning.’

17) **nfumbe*** **ebembo*** (see #2, 1.1) ‘dead, spirit.’ KiKongo *mfumbi* (NE), ‘albinos whose hair is used for *nkisi*.’

18) **ngando** ‘attributes.’ KiKongo *nkánda*, ‘honor, respect; respectable.’

19) **nkombo** ‘body.’ KiKongo *nkambu ia nitu ia antu*, ‘body.’

20) **npaka vititi mensu** ‘a jar used to see the invisible.’ KiKongo *mpàkala*, ‘idol, sacred object, name of all the *nkisi myansakulu*.’ KiKongo *bitiki*, ‘very visible’ (possible reversal of meaning or a reference to the invisible becoming visible[?]). Cf. Tshiluba (S.E. Zaire) *mesu* (open ‘e’), ‘to see.’

21) **Nsala** ‘cleanliness.’ KiKongo (W) has *nsaala*, ‘speckle’; (with reference to a pig) ‘spotted.’ This may be a case of opposite meaning transferred into Cuban *mayombe*.

22) **Sambianpungo** ‘the great power of God.’ We have already identified **Sambi** as from kiKongo *Nzámbi*. The other parts of this expression were found as: kiKongo *-ana* (N) form of the verb “to be”, equal to *-eti*; *ana* (S) adv. ‘thus, in this way, as’; *ana* adv., conj. ‘then, hence, so’; *ana*, a particle or explicative word used especially in familiar language and having no particular meaning, but serving to avoid a hiatus or an undesirable liaison within the utterance. Stapleton²⁹ informs us that the Bantu prefix *a-* is used to show possession and occurs before the noun. Here, this is probably not the source (even

though it seems tempting to suggest that it is, given the meaning of the utterance) since the *a-* does not occur before the possessor noun, i.e., **Sambi**, but rather after it. **Pungo** may be from kiKongo *mpungu*, ‘the highest, the greatest, the most distinguished; supreme,’ which fits well semantically.

1.3 “Items unable to identify”

1) **arafa** ‘knife.’ ‘Knife’ in kiKongo is *ndaaka* (W), ‘knife for cutting grasses.’ (E) ‘sword.’

2) **beró** ‘pure.’ Perhaps from Spanish *verdadero* with haplology[?].

3) **briyumba***, no gloss given. KiKongo *biri* (Bembe), ‘cola nut.’ KiKongo *yumba*, ‘to pile up in a heap.’ In the context, it would appear that **briyumba** is a place name. Derivative **briyumbero**.

4) **cheché**, no gloss given. In nagó *cheché ere cheché ere!* is translated as ‘se refiere a los muñecos de palo que preparados por el agugú (brujo), caminan de noche por las calles y campos’³⁰ [a reference to the stick dolls which, prepared by the *agugú*, walk at night through the streets and the countryside].

5) Eki menga **kutunga congo kiguana**, **kiguana**, ‘the sacrificial blood of the new Congo horse runs, runs.’ As mentioned (#12, 1.2), the first two words (*eki menga*) should have been parsed as **E kimenga**, since *kimenga* in kiKongo is ‘sacrifice.’ According to the context, **kutunga** should mean ‘horse,’ but no equivalent word was found in the African sources consulted. The word **kiguana** ‘run’ could be a shortened form of kiKongo *kingwangula* (N) ‘swiftness.’ The **congo** here might be from kiKongo *kongo* ‘a false idol’ or ‘a great *nkisi*’ or ‘something which is great or grand,’ with reference to the sacrificial blood.

6) **guato kisambe** ‘as your stick’[?] ([?] = unsure gloss). No source found.

7) **güiringando** ‘adornments, decorations.’ Perhaps from kiKongo *nkwindi* ~ *nkwiti*, ‘grandeur,’ + kiKongo *nkádu*, ‘honor, respect.’

8) **kakosuma** ‘cleanliness’[?]. No source found.

9) **kandengue** ‘Devil.’ KiKongo *ka* ‘to be’ + kiKongo *ndenge*, ‘recién nacido’[?].

10) **kangome** ‘bones.’ No source found.

11) **kikiani yosi kindembo dian** *kunancheto*[?], ‘Which was the first African shaman pot[?]’. Found was kiKongo *kiki*, ‘that which,’ kiKongo *ándi* (emphatic), ‘he, she’; kiKongo *nkí*[?], ‘which?’; kiMbundu *inani*, ‘who,’ kiKongo *nani?*, ‘who?’, kiKongo *kikanhi* ([kinañi]), ‘what[?]’ (acoustic equivalence?). KiKongo *emosi*, ‘first.’ KiKongo *kindembo*, ‘a secret language.’ KiKongo *dyanu*, conjunctive adverb, ‘thus, this is the reason, therefore.’

12) **kindemo*** ~ **kindembo** ‘pot, kettle.’ No source found.

13) **kirikutu kirindinga guisa mambo mu mboa** ‘abre bien las entendederas’ (‘open wide the understandings’) KiKongo *kiri* (Bembe) = *kidi*, auxiliary verb; *kidi* conj. ‘that, about which’; KiKongo *nkutu*, adv. ‘completely, all, absolutely, all done, totally.’ Perhaps this would equal the “bien”[?] For **ndinga**, kiKongo *ndinga* < *ninga*, ‘voice, word, sound, cry; language, dialect, discourse.’ Could this equal *entendederas*? **Guisa** could be from Spanish *guisa* ‘manner’ (*a guisa de*). For **mambo**, we found kiKongo *mambu*, ‘words, affairs, palaver, discourse, proceedings (law).’ Also, cf. Efik *mam*, an onomatopoeic expression imitating a loud sound + Efik *bo*, ‘to speak.’ The idea of “speaking” could also equal the *entendederas* of the Spanish gloss. The word **mu** was found in kiKongo as ‘personal prefix which is

often added to a noun to express (1) an inhabitant or visitor of a certain locality (by his/her name), for example, *mumboma* ‘traveler from Mboma’; (2) the person who carries out the action indicated by the main word, for example, *mungozi* ‘snorer,’ from *ngozi*, ‘snoring.’ **mu mboa** = *mumboma*[?].

14) **kisenga**, no gloss given. KiKongo *ki*, prefix for diminutive singular + kiKongo *senga* (Vili), ‘sand’[?].

15) **kiyiso***, no gloss given. KiKongo *kiinyi*, ‘face, countenance.’ KiKongo *na só*, ‘figurative in the sense of to fall, such as a drop of water.’

16) **kriyumba** ‘cranium, skull.’ Probably originally *kiriyumba*. No source found.

17) **kuame** ‘rest.’ From kiKongo *kwa*, ‘to die’ (= ‘to rest’[?]) + *me*[?].

18) **kuenda** ‘bones.’ No source found for this meaning. See #4, 1.1.

19) **kuní**, no gloss given. KiKongo *kúni*, ‘palms, banana trees, pineapple.’

20) **kutanga** congo kuenda ganga **kiriko** *cuadrilla nfui*, glossed as ‘The new horse is in the *prenda* with the troupe of spirits.’ Found were, for **kutanga**, kiKongo *kutana* ‘to gather together and be near one another,’ which might connect with ‘troupe of spirits’; also, kiKongo *nkutana* ‘assembly.’ For **congo** see # 5, 1.3. For **kuenda** see #4, 1.1. For **ganga** see #6, 1.2. We found only kiKongo *kiri-ki* (Bembe), ‘a certain person’ and *nkidiku*, ‘a *nkisi* tree’ for **kiriko**, neither of which fits the context.

21) **lucena** ‘head.’ Perhaps from kiKongo *luse*, ‘forehead, countenance,’ + Mende [Mende here ?] *na*, ‘that which.’

22) **lumbó** ‘to remain quiet.’ Perhaps from kiKongo *lembama*, ‘quiet,’ or kiKongo *lulembamu*, ‘quietness.’

23) **mambroso** ‘sacramental drink’ [?]. No source found.

24) **Menure ntoto** ‘the Devil’s earth.’ **Menure** (which appears capitalized in the text) was described by González García as a ‘mezcla de tierra del diablo.’ We were not able to find anything similar in any of the African language dictionaries consulted. Nonetheless, **ntoto** may be from kiKongo *ntotoo*, ‘black, humid earth; muddy, slimy dirt.’

The phrase **Menure ntoto** ... is the first part of a long utterance that reads as follows: “Menure ntoto, mpolo nto kiyiso, patimbolo ngundo, ntoto campo nfinda y ajo.” The translation given reads as follows: “... de muerto, huesos de la frente de los muertos de la prenda, hechos polvo, cenizas de diferentes palos, tierra de cementerio y ajo.” [Eng.: ‘of the dead, bones of the forehead of the dead of the *prenda*, become dust, ashes from different *palos*, dirt of the cemetery and garlic’].

25) **munanso** ‘fundamento, nganga, prenda.’ No source found.

26) **nani** ‘to flee.’ No source found.

27) **ndoqui** ‘dead.’ Cf. # 22, 1.1.

28) **Ngando** (capitalized in the text) ‘battle.’ No source found.

29) **ngeyo*** ‘newly born’; ‘initiate.’ KiKongo *ngéngo*, ‘torch, flame, light’ [?]. Also, **ngeyo** as ‘initiate.’ KiKongo *ngeye*, ‘you.’ No source found.

30) **ngundo**, no gloss given. KiKongo *ngúndi*, ‘mound of earth.’

31) *nkisi malongo*, no gloss given. We found kiKongo *malongo*, ‘medicine.’

32) **ntango** ‘to become dark.’ KiKongo *ntángu*, ‘sun, time, present time, hour, occasion, favorable time, precise time.’

33) **ntualo** ‘cat.’ No source found.

34) **ntufi** ‘that which is bad.’ KiKongo *ntuvi*, ‘excess in eating, drinking, etc.’ Also, kiKongo *tùvi*, ‘excrement, dung’[?], KiKongo *tùfi*, *tùufi* (E), ‘dung, manure.’

35) **ntufo** ‘dirty.’ No source found.

36) **nyora** ‘wounds.’ No source found.

37) **osereké** ‘laurel.’ No source found.

38) palo **yaya** had no gloss. We found kiKongo *yaaya* (S), ‘reputed, famous.’ A reduplication of kiKongo *yá*, ‘palm’ might fit due to **yaya**’s combination with Spanish *palo* ‘tree.’³¹

39) **patimbolo**, no gloss given. KiKongo *mbòlolo*, ‘enclosure, burial place put aside by the chiefs.’

40) **piango piango** ‘little by little.’ KiKongo *phyangu* (W), ‘nautical stay, support.’

41) *cueva de Sibirikú*. No gloss given. No source found.

42) **susundamba** ‘owl.’ No source found.

43) **yaya** ‘dark dead.’ KiKongo *yaya* or *yá-yá*, ‘to cry out in terror.’ (E) ‘to feel the pain of anxiety or stress.’

Of the 105 words in these interviews which have or appear to have sub-Saharan roots, thirty-nine were classified as “transparent,” having readily identifiable African (mostly kiKongo) sources, twenty-two were “not entirely transparent,” but very suspicious as having African sources, while forty-two were completely “unidentifiable” as to source. The “not entirely transparent” items may be the result of misanalysis, as Schwegler has proposed or, in some cases, they may be the result of phonological, morphological and/or semantic changes which occurred with the passage of time as the slaves were relocated from Africa, taken to the new environments of the Americas and, in many cases, mixed with the colonial European and creole (in the sense of offspring of Europeans born in the New World) peoples who influenced their language habits. It is obvious, given the number of times that only very rough “translations” can be given by the informant, that the true orig-

inal meanings have been blurred over time. Yet it is amazing at the same time how much of the sub-Saharan material has survived over the centuries and has not mixed with the Kwa languages (i.e., Yoruba, Ewe-Fon) which inundated the island during the XIX century and are the main source for the Cuban *santería* ceremonies, which have retained many words and expressions in Anagó (i.e., Yoruba³²) and/or Ewe-Fon.³³ The Bantu examples (i.e., kiKongo and some kiMbundu) seem to prove that these languages, which were taken to Cuba in the mouths of slaves from the beginning of the Caribbean slave trade in the XVI century and relatively steadily throughout the entire colonial period, survived in part, at least among *mayomberos* and their disciples, probably aided by the constant arrival over the colonial period of Bantu *bozal* slaves, who spoke either only their native languages or a combination of some kind of European-based pidgin and their native languages, which would increase the possibility of retention of African items since they were constantly being reintroduced into the country. Unlike a country such as Venezuela, for example, where there was little renovation of sub-Saharan influences due to the purchase of slaves from local markets (the slaves’ offspring became the source of new workforces) and from other Caribbean countries, Cuba experienced a constant influx of new arrivals from Bantu Africa which helped to impede the process of de-Africanization—the process which occurred in Venezuela.³⁴ The fact that virtually all of the “transparent” lexical items in this corpus stem from kiKongo probably means that most of the members of the *regla de mayombe* came from kiKongo speaking areas of south-central eastern Africa (i.e., Zaire [now the Democratic Republic of the Congo],

Angola). This finding coincides with the data collected by González García & Valdés Acosta³⁵ for their article on Bantu traces in Cuba, where they found “la gran mayoría” of the lexical elements to be of kiKongo origin.³⁶ In our study, the one totally “transparent” example of kiMbundu, i.e., *wanga* ‘witchcraft,’ and the other “transparent” kiMbundu examples, which also have kiKongo sources, prove that the kiMbundu were also present and accounted for even though they may not have been numerically dominant. The few examples of non Bantu words as possible sources may be the result of recent mixing or some kind of cross-fertilization between the *regla de mayombe* people and the *santería* people. One would have to conduct in-depth interviews with the members of both organizations to discover the answer.

As concerns the *mayombe* language in the context of the interviews conducted by González García, we may immediately note that this language has been “reduced” to a series of utterances which do not correspond entirely to the original Bantu language structure which was transported to Cuba in the colonial period by the *bozal* slaves. There are only remnants of Bantu structure, some of which González García and Valdés Acosta³⁷ have already given us a small synthesis with regard to the phonetic, morphosyntactic, and lexical features present in the central region of Cuba. Although we do not have access to the oral renditions of González García’s interviews, we may note some parallels in the findings of these interviews with the phonetic traits mentioned in the 1978 study. For example, the persistence of word-initial prenasalized consonants (i.e., mp-, np, nt-, nk-, mb-, nd-, ng-, nf-, ns-, ny- is no doubt [ñ]) is a definite sub-Saharan trait which other scholars have noted in past

research, especially regarding the *palenquero* creole language of Colombia, also heavily influenced by kiKongo.³⁸

Regarding the morphosyntax of central Cuban “Bantu,” alternate forms of words with and without prenasalization were found in the 1978 study, as in the *tata kuyere nkisi* interviews, which purportedly points to the loss of the original Bantu meaning of word-initial [N-]. In addition, pluralizing Bantu prefixes (e.g., *mu-*, *ma-*) have lost their meaning (as in *palenquero* creole *mangombe*, for example, the plural of ‘cow’). Two prefixes, *kuna-* and *muna-*, ‘toward’ in Bantu languages, were found in central Cuba, but only *muna-* appears in the *tata* data, twice, without the correct gloss in one instance and with no gloss in the other example. Also, examples of words of kiKongo origin with opposite meanings of the African kiKongo words were found in both sets of data. This phenomenon is, of course, linguistically universal in diachronic settings (e.g., Germanic *selig* ‘blessed’ > English *silly*).

González García & Valdés Acosta³⁹ point to the phenomenon of fossilization of words at the semantic level, whereby in combinations of two words forming a compound one of the words has lost its meaning, e.g., *malafo* ‘liquor,’ and *malafo mayuma*, *malafo mamputo*, also ‘liquor.’ *Malafo* appears in the *tata* data, but not the other two expressions. In fact, in the one case where we find compound expressions of two words, we do not have fossilization, since the accompanying word does supply additional meaning, i.e., *lango* ‘water,’ *lango chola* ‘river water,’ *lango kalunga* ‘sea water,’ *lango sambe* ‘holy water,’ and *lango kasusa* ‘river.’

Another Bantu trait mentioned in the 1978 article involves two suffixes, *-ame* and *-aku*, ‘my’ and ‘your,’ respectively. In the *tata* interviews, we find *kiako* ‘quiet, still,’

kinsiako ‘sacred *prenda*,’ and **kuame** ‘rest.’ As we have noted, **kinsiako** may come from a combination of morphemes one of which may be the *-aku* suffix mentioned here. **Kuame** could be a yet unidentified *ku* plus *-ame*, although we have no proof. KiKongo does have *kú* ‘to die (= rest[?]) suddenly’ in the phrase *na kú* or *fwa na kú*.

From these observations and a few comparisons with the González García / Valdés Acosta article, we may note that the *lengua congo* or *lengua mayombe* of Cuba has survived to a point, having undergone some major changes while retaining certain words virtually as they appear in kiKongo (or kiMbundu) as well as a few morphemes, albeit without their original meanings, as fossilized utterances. Future studies should concentrate on comparisons of Bantu materials in data collected from other areas in Latin America where pockets of Bantu data remain alive and well. Such studies should yield valuable information regarding the slave trade and its linguistic and socio-religious impacts on certain Latin American societies.

Notes:

1. Hippolyte Brice Sogbossi published an interesting book on the Ewe/Fon tradition in Cuba, *La tradición Ewélfon en Cuba* (Alcalá de Henares: Fundación Fernando Ortiz, 1988), which contains a well documented account of the *arará* oral traditions and a good analysis of examples of songs and prayers from Benin.
2. Laman, K.E. *Dictionnaire kikongo-français* (Brussels: Librairie Falk fils., 1936): 514.
3. Schwegler, Armin. “On the (sensational) survival of Kikongo in 20th-century Cuba.” *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages* 15:1 (2000): 159-165.
4. Cabrera, Lydia. *El monte* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1975).
5. Schwegler, Armin. *Chi ma nkongo: Lengua y rito ancestrales en El Palenque de San Basilio (Colombia)*. 2 vols (Frankfurt/Madrid: Vervuert Verlag, 1996); Schwegler, Armin. “El vocabulario africano de Palenque (Colombia). Segunda Parte: compendio de palabras (con etimologías),” in L. Ortiz (ed.) *El Caribe hispánico: perspectivas lingüísticas actuales* [Homenaje a Manuel Álvarez Nazario] (Frankfurt/Madrid: Vervuert Verlag, 1999): 171-253.
6. Granda, Germán de. “Materiales para el estudio sociohistórico de los elementos lingüísticos afroamericanos en el área hispánica.” *Thesaurus* XXIII: 3 (1968): 547-73; Granda, Germán de. “Materiales léxicos para la determinación de la matriz africana de la «lengua congo» de Cuba.” *Revista española de lingüística* 3:1 (1988): 55-79; Granda, Germán de. *Lingüística e historia* (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 1988); González García, José and Gema Valdés Acosta. “Restos de lenguas bantúes en la región central de Cuba.” *Islas* 59 (1978): 3-50; Fuentes, Jesús and Grisel Gómez. *Cultos afrocubanos: un estudio etnolingüístico* (Buenos Aires: Pinos Nuevos, 1994).
7. Megenney, William. *A Bahian Heritage* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978).
8. González García, Rigoberto. “Tata kuyere nkisi, el rey de los espíritus.” *Del Caribe* 33 (2000): 110-116.
9. To my knowledge, this glossary has not been published. It has not appeared in any of the issues of *Del Caribe* subsequent to Number 33, 2000.
10. Laman, K.E. Op. Cit.
11. Silva Maia, Padre António da. *Dicionário complementar português-kiMbundu-kiKongo (línguas nativas do centro e norte de Angola)* (Vila da Feira (Portugal): Empresa Gráfica Feirense, Lda., 1964).
12. Bolívar Aróstegui, Natalia and Carmen González Díaz de Villegas. *Ta Makuende Yaya y las reglas de Palo Monte* (Havana: Ediciones Unión, 1988).

13. In some cases the correspondence will be perfect except for some phonotactic changes (e.g., paragoge, apocope, etc.) or in cases of substitutions of phonemes of the same subclassification (e.g., liquids) or of overlapping distinctive features.
14. The diacritic marks over the African words, which in the sub-Saharan orthographies represent tones, have been omitted due to type setting difficulties. The only diacritic appearing here is the acute, which equals high tone. Also, the alveopalatal affricate has been designated as 'ch.'
15. /s/ in Spanish may be realized as [z] variably only before a nasal consonant.
16. Laman, K.E. Op. Cit. 490.
17. Bolívar Aróstegui, Natalia. Op Cit. 39.
18. For a good description of the perils brought about by the *ranchadores* or *ranchadores*, see Pedro José Morillas' novel *El ranchador* (1856). Francisco Calcagno, in his *Romualdo, uno de tantos*, also gives us a trustworthy picture of the physical and psychological torments of the maroon communities in Cuba during the colonial period.
19. According to Fuentes & Gómez (Op. Cit. 14, 15, 25) the term *nganga* comes from the proto Bantu *nyanga*, which means 'horn.' African doctors (*yerberos*) are in the habit of using receptacles made from the horns of cervids; they are used to store medicinal powders, drinks, ointments, etc. Another name for the *nganga* in Cuba is *prenda*. Bolívar Aróstegui & Díaz de Villegas (Op. Cit. 166) describe *nganga* as "prenda, nfunbe, cazuela habitáculo de un espíritu."
20. See Díaz Fabelo, Teodoro. *Diccionario de la lengua conga residual en Cuba* (Santiago de Cuba: Universidad de Alcalá de Henares & La Casa del Caribe, 1998): 114-123, for definitions of *ngana* and its derivatives, *nganga mundumba*, *ngangulero*.
21. Laman, K.E. Op. Cit. 514.
22. The word *nkisi* is 'fetish, sorcery, magic force, charm, some malady attributed to witchcraft.' The word *myansakulu*, which appears in the Laman dictionary as *nkisi myansakulu*, is not defined or explained.
23. Lipski, John M. "Golden Age 'black Spanish': existence and coexistence." *Afro-Hispanic Review* 5: 1-2 (1968): 7-12.
24. Castellanos, Isabel. *Eleguá quiere tambó: cosmovisión religiosa afrocubana en las canciones populares* (Cali, Colombia: Universidad del Valle (Pliegos), 1983): 30.
25. Megenney, William. *A Bahian Heritage* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978): 156.
26. Megenney, William. *África en Santo Domingo: su herencia lingüística* (Santo Domingo: Editorial Tiempo (Museo del Hombre Dominicano & Academia de Ciencias de la República Dominicana), 1990): 204.
27. Coachy, Lucien Georges. *Vodú, brujería y folklore en Haití* (México: Costa-Amic Editores, S.A., 1989): 134-139.
28. The liquids ([r] and [l]) are often interchanged freely in many Bantu languages, being either archiphonemes or allophones of the same phoneme.
29. Stapleton, Walter. *Comparative handbook of Congo languages* (Yakusu, Congo: Stanley Falls, 1903): 94.
30. Cabrera, Lydia. *Anagó: vocabulario lucumí* (Miami: Chiherekú, 1970): 90.
31. The word *palo* meaning 'tree,' used mostly in Caribbean Spanish, is a calque of expressions in several African languages and owes its usage to this sub-Saharan influence.
32. Cabrera, Lydia. 1970, Op. Cit.
33. Sogbossi, Hippolyte Brice. Op. Cit.
34. Even so, there are sub-Saharan retentions in Venezuela today, especially in the area called Barlovento, as well as the south-eastern part of Lake Maracaibo, in and around the town of Bobures (see Megenney, William. *Aspectos del lenguaje afronegroide en Venezuela* (Madrid: Vervuert Iberoamericana, 1999).
35. González García, José and Gema Valdés Acosta. Op. cit: 16
36. Germán de Granda, in several of his studies on Bantu influences in the Americas, including the one mentioned by González García & Valdés Acosta (Op. Cit. 8) (Granda 1968, Op. Cit. 571-3), also emphasizes the relatively large number of kiKongo words present in sociolinguistic nuclei of Afro-Latin-Americans. Schwegler, as we have mentioned, also remarks about this phenomenon.
37. González García, José and Gema Valdés Acosta. Op. Cit. 3-50
38. Schwegler, Armin. 1996. Op. Cit. 234; Granda, Germán de. "Retenciones africanas en el nivel fonético del criollo palenquero," in *Español de América, español de África y hablas criollas hispánicas* (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1994): 402-403.
39. González García, José and Gema Valdés Acosta. Op. Cit. 26.

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- Schwegler, Armin. "El vocabulario (ritual) bantú de Cuba (Parte II: Apéndices 1-2)." Manuscrito. (No date).
- Williamson, Kay (ed.) *Igbo-English Dictionary, based on the Onitsha dialect* (Benin City, Nigeria: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 1972).