

“I Am the Subject of the King of Congo”: African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution *

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SHORTLY after a body of rebellious slaves had sacked Le Cap Francois (now known as Cap Haitien) in June 1793 at the behest of the republican commissioners, their leader, known as Macaya, retreated to the hills and swore allegiance to the king of Spain, who had supported the rebellion for some time. When the commissioner Etienne Polverel tried to persuade him to return to the republic, Macaya wrote back: “I am the subject of three kings: of the King of Congo, master of all the blacks; of the King of France who represents my father; of the King of Spain who represents my mother. These three Kings are the descendants of those who, led by a star, came to adore God made Man.”¹

These sentiments, seconded by other revolutionary leaders from time to time, have led many analysts of the Haitian revolu-

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¹ Francois-Joseph-Pamphile de Lacroix, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la révolution de Saint-Domingue*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1819), 1:25, quoting original correspondence.

tion, from the venerable Thomas Madiou onward, to consider that the rebel slaves were inveterate royalists.² Some scholars have proposed that royalism was a product of the slaves' African background, where kings were the rule.³ Nor was this observation confined to modern historians: the same civil commissioners who were rebuffed by Macaya wrote to Pierrot, one of his associates, at about the same time begging him to consider "the lot which you are preparing for the blacks [*nègres*] who surround you. . . . They follow the banner of kings and therefore of slavery. Who sold you on the coast of Guinea? It was the kings." They continued, "Who is it that gives you freedom? It is the French nation . . . that has cut off the head of its king who sells slaves."⁴ A bit later they returned to the same theme: "You know our intentions, they are pure, they are favorable to the unfortunate ones whom the kings of Guinea sold to the white kings."⁵

In a larger context, Eugene Genovese has viewed slave revolts in the Americas in a similar way. Earlier revolts, he argues, were largely backward-looking and restorationist, seeking to recreate an African past in the Americas, including its kings. On the other hand, perhaps ignoring this piece of evidence, Genovese sees the Haitian revolution as ultimately the product of the dissemination of "bourgeois-capitalist" ideas diffusing from Europe and eventually reaching even the slaves.⁶ C. L. R. James, whose classic treatment of the revolution was fired by both republican and socialist thought, saw the royalism of the slaves as an inherent problem of their African background, from which heroes like Toussaint Louverture gradually and patiently weaned them.⁷ In both schol-

² Thomas Madiou, *Histoire d'Haiti* (Port-au-Prince, 1947), p. 104.

³ For similar discussions in another context, see Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca and London, 1982), pp. 109–10, 122–24; and more generally, Eugene Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge, 1979), both of whom see the royalism as archaic and backward-looking. Also see David Geggus, *Slavery, War and Revolution: The British Occupation of Saint-Domingue, 1793–1798* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 38–40, 182, 414 n.60, and 442 n.165, for speculations that the royalism was related to the African background and counterrevolutionary ideas.

⁴ Archives Nationales de France (hereafter cited as AN), section D-XXV, carton 43, dossier 415 (hereafter cited as AN, D-XXV, 43, 415), Civil Commissioners to Pierrot, 13 July 1793.

⁵ AN, D-XXV, 43, 415, Civil Commissioners to Pierrot, 17 July 1793.

⁶ Genovese, *Rebellion to Revolution*.

⁷ C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1963).

ars' view, backwards Africa confronted forward-looking Europe in the origins and ideology of the Haitian revolution.

However one views the Haitian revolution in its totality, there is no question that many of the revolutionary leaders expressed royalist sentiments, that their followers carried royalist banners and called themselves *gens du roi*, and that they even demanded the restoration of the monarchy.⁸ These as well as other elements of the slaves' outlook may well reflect their African background. It is worthy of consideration, after all, that perhaps as many as two-thirds of the slaves in Saint-Domingue (Haiti) on the eve of the revolution had been born, raised, and socialized in Africa.⁹ Attention to the ideological orientation of the mass of the slaves might be important even if many of their leaders were Creoles with no immediate African background, since they would still have to appeal to their followers in terms that resonated with their ideology. Taking this into consideration, Carolyn Fick, whose recent history of the revolution focuses on the mass participation of the slaves, proposes that much could be learned about the revolution and the slaves' background by studying the eighteenth-century Kongo, from which a large number ultimately hailed.¹⁰

THE AFRICAN BACKGROUND: KONGO IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

It is appropriate, as pick suggests, to start with the ideology of the kingdom of Kongo, the central African state to whom Macaya was referring in his celebrated reply to Polverel. Kongo is a particularly good starting point both because it is an extremely well-documented kingdom (including texts dealing with political philosophy) and because it provided thousands of slaves to the island colony of Saint-Domingue on the eve of the revolution. These slaves were exported in large measure as a result of civil war in the kingdom of Kongo. People enslaved through war or as a result

⁸ Jean-Philippe Garran de Coulon, *Rapport sur les troubles de Saint-Domingue, fait à now des Comités de Salut Public, de Législation et de Marine réunis*, 5 vols. (Paris, An V), 2:193 and 4:47-48; P. R. Roume, *Rapport de P. R. Roume sur sa mission à Saint-Domingue* (Paris, 1793), pp. 47-48.

⁹ Louis Médéric Elie Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'isle de Saint-Domingue* (Philadelphia, 1796), 3 vols., 1:44. For a modern variorum edition of this text and the original manuscript, see the reedition (Paris, 1959).

¹⁰ Carolyn Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Dominie Revolution from Below* (Knoxville, 1990), p. 321 n.103.

of the decline of public order created by constant warfare and resulting brigandage were sold to local merchants, who brought them to the coast for resale. French and English shippers who supplied Saint-Domingue bought slaves primarily along what they called the "coast of Angola," which included not only modern Angola, but also Zaire, Congo-Brazzaville, and southern Gabon. The region around the kingdom of Loango, north of the Zaire River, was the main base for operations, and after 1770 most of the coast north of the Portuguese colony of Angola was being visited by French shipping.¹¹ African merchants, known as *Mobires* (*Vili* in modern terminology), brought slaves to the northern ports of Cabinda, Malemba, or Loango from inland, many transporting them from Kongo where the civil wars made slaves plentiful. Perhaps more than half of the total exports from the area came from the kingdom of Kongo itself.¹² Certainly the wars had an impact in Kongo, since the exports were witnessed and denounced by the Portuguese missionary Rafael de Castello de Vide, who served in Kongo from 1780 to 1788 and who sought to persuade the king of Kongo to ban the sale of slaves outside the country.¹³

¹¹ For the general outlines of these operations, see Phyllis Martin, *The External Trade of the Loango Coast, 1570-1870* (London, 1972). For Portuguese reactions, see Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: The Angolan Slave Trade to Brazil, 1726-1826* (Madison, 1988).

¹² This total is suggested by the notes of the French slave trader Degranpré, who gives the approximate proportion of slaves coming to the ports of Loango, Malemba, and Cabinda during his time there in the late 1780s. See Louis Degranpré, *Voyage à la cote occidentales d'Afrique . . . 1786 et 1787*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1802), 2:12-13, 35, 27. Using sources from Kongo, I have estimated that some 62,000 (Kongolese were exported during the decade 1780-1790, or somewhat more than half the total of combined French-English Angola trade. See John Thornton, "The Kongo Civil Wars and the Slave Trade: Demography and History Revisited, 1718-1844," paper presented at the Canadian African Studies Association meeting, Montreal, 15-17 May 1992.

¹³ Academia das Ciencias (Lisbon) (hereafter cited as ACL), MS Vermelho 296, "Viagem do Congo do Missionario Fr. Raphael de Castello de Vide, hoje Bispo de S. Thomé," fols. 293-301. This manuscript is a collection of copies of four letter-reports (dated 16 July 1781, 25 September 1782, 29 November 1783, and 15 September 1788) that Castello de Vide submitted to superiors in Lisbon and Luanda. The original version of the first of these is found in Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (Lisbon), Angola, (hereafter cited as AHU), Caixa 64, documento 56 (hereafter cited as AHU, Cx. 64, doc. 56), and was printed in *Annes do conselho ultramarino* 2 (1859-61): 62-80. A complete Italian translation was published as "O Congo" in Marcellino da Civezza, *Storia universale delle missione francescane*, vol. 7 (1894).

Castello de Vide was particularly concerned to stop the sale of slaves to Dutch and English merchants, whom, as Protestants, he considered "heretics." His campaign was ordered by the bishop of Angola, whose motive was less pristine, being clearly related to an attempt to dominate the slave trade for Portugal as a Catholic country, although Catholic France was meant to be excluded as well. See AHU, Cx.

Slaves from this region made up the majority of those imported into Saint-Domingue for the last twenty years before the revolution.¹⁴ David Geggus has studied plantation inventories and concluded that in the 1780s “Congos” made up 60 percent of the slaves in North Province, where the revolution began, and about the same percentage in the south.¹⁵ They were common enough among the rebels that *Congo* became a generic term for the rank and file of the slave insurgents.¹⁶ That Macaya was a Kongolese¹⁷ might be inferred from his name, which can be attested as a personal name in Kongo from the late seventeenth century.¹⁸ It is further indicative of the role of Kongolese in the early stages of the revolution that the most popular early leader, Boukman Dutty, though certainly not a Kongolese himself, was still known by a Kikongo nickname, Zamba (probably *nzamba*, or “elephant,” from

70, doc. 23 (exchange of letters. King Afonso V of Kongo, Alexandre da Sagrada Familia, the bishop of Angola, and Rafael Castello de Vide, 19 July 1785), doc. 26 (“Relação dos officios,” 25 June 1785), doc. 28 (Barão de Mossamedes, 26 June 1785, a document that specifically includes the exclusion of French trade). For the general strategy, see Miller, *Way of Death*.

¹⁴ Imports calculated on the basis of Jean Fouchard’s careful study of arrivals of ships from colonial newspapers and checked by the fraction of Kongos reported in notices of runaways. See Fouchard, *The Haitian Maroons: Liberty or Death*, trans. A. Faulkner Watts (New York, 1981).

¹⁵ David Geggus, “Sugar and Coffee Cultivation in Saint Domingue and the Shaping of a Slave Labor Force,” in Ira Berlin and Philip Morgan, eds., *Cultivation and Culture: Work Process and the Shaping of Afro-American Culture in the Americas* (forthcoming); and Geggus, “The Composition of the French Slave Trade”, in P. Boucher, ed., *Proceedings of the 13th/14th Meetings of the French Colonial Historical Society* (Lanham, Md., 1990). I thank David Geggus for supplying me with these references.

¹⁶ The term was used derisively by Europeans and the upper classes of Haiti, for example, when Dessalines was referred to as a Congo by a French agent, writing to the Ministry of Marine about 1800: AN, AF-iv, 1212, quoted in Robert Heintz and Nancy Heintz, *Written in Blood: The Story of the Haitian People, 1492–1971* (New York, 1978), p. 95. It is unlikely that Dessalines was actually from Kongo.

¹⁷ Modern anthropologists use the term *Bakongo* to describe these people, a term I have abandoned in favor of *Kongolese* (but spelled with a *k* to distinguish them from citizens of the modern Republic of Congo, some but not all of whom are Bakongo). *Bakongo* refers to the entire group of people speaking various dialects of the Kikongo language, while my references are specifically to subjects of the king of Kongo, who controlled only a portion of this speech community.

¹⁸ It was, for example the name of the son of King Antonio I (d. 1665), Francisco de Menezes Nkanka Makaya (Canca Macaia), as recorded around 1695. See Marcellino d’Atri, “Giornate apostoliche fatta da me . . . nelle Missioni de Regni d’Angola e Congo . . .,” published with original pagination marked in Carlo Toso, ed., *L’anarchia Congolese nel secolo XVII: Le relanone inedite di Marcellino d’Atri* (Genoa, 1984), p. 55. Elsewhere, however, d’Atri calls him “Canca Macassa,” p. 37. The word *makaya* in Kikongo means “leaves.”

his large and powerful stature), perhaps because so many of his followers were Kongolese.¹⁹

Kongolese Political Ideology

The role of Kongo is also important because it can be seen as a source of revolutionary Haiti's ideology—not just its royalism, as an archaic throwback to obsolete political forms, but also its positive movement toward a better society. In this way, Kongo might be seen as a fount of revolutionary ideas as much as France was, even though the idiom of Kongolese ideology was royalist and, being alien to most researchers, has been overlooked.

Indeed, it was to political philosophy that Kongo owed its late eighteenth-century participation in the slave trade. The civil wars that punctuated most of the eighteenth century were fought at least in part to resolve constitutional issues and determine who was the king of Kongo and what were his powers. Many of those enslaved and eventually sent to Saint-Domingue had served in Kongo's civil wars or were caught up by them. The issues that shaped the civil wars in Kongo might well have shaped a different civil war in the Caribbean.

Civil war in Kongo can be analyzed through the two questions of who was to be king and what were the king's powers. The first issue, although of significance to partisans in Africa, is of less importance to those interested in Haiti than the second one, for ultimately it was the type of king (or government) rather than the specific person that would count. It is in the matter of the duties and role of kings that the ideological issues of leadership and political structure were shaped in Haiti.

Ever since the battle of Mbwila on 29 November 1665, the culmination of war with Portugal, Kongo had been torn by civil war. For much of the period the wars matched partisans of two great family-based alliances, the Kimpanzu and the Kimulaza. Although some kings, like Pedro IV in the early eighteenth century, managed to win general recognition,²⁰ the unity was fragile and

¹⁹ On Boukman's name, see Fick, *Making of Haiti*, pp. 92, 297 n.5. Pick also identifies his name as Kikongo, while choosing to change it to Samba either as a noun or a verb, but the names she proposes seem to me improbable either linguistically or practically. Nzamba, or "elephant," seems to me to reflect his general characteristics, as befits a nickname, and to be linguistically more probable.

²⁰ On the origin of the first civil wars and Pedro IV's restoration, see John Thornton, *The Kingdom of Kongo: Civil War and Transition, 1641–1718* (Madison, 1983).

often fell apart, as several families contended incessantly and generally indecisively for the royal title.²¹ A long and devastating round of these wars that began in 1779, first matching partisans of King Pedro V against those of Jose I (pre-1779–1781), and then breaking out again upon the death of José's successor and brother Afonso V (1785–94),²² contributed substantially to the export of Kongo slaves that fueled the surge of imports of Kongoleses into Saint-Domingue recorded in the same period.²³

If the Kongoleses could not agree on who was the king of Kongo, they also disagreed on his exact powers. It is generally true that African states were ruled by kings, or at least by executive figures who could be called kings, but this may not be a particularly helpful statement. African states possessed a bewildering variety of constitutions: monarchs might be hereditary or elected, and they might exercise direct and fairly untrammelled power or be seriously checked by a variety of other institutions. Kongo was no exception. Although it was always ruled by a king, his powers and the basis for his authority were never static or fixed.

In common with many other political systems, Kongo political philosophy alternated between two opposing concepts: an absolutist one that granted the king full powers and the right to manage all the affairs of the country (at least in theory), and a much more limited one that required the king to rule by consent of the governed and to make decisions only after consultation with at least some of those he governed.

Like eighteenth-century Europe, Kongo thus had both an "absolutist" and a "republican" tendency in its political thought. Which one prevailed depended very much on who exercised power, in both Africa and Europe, though at most times there was a dynamic tension between the two. The interplay of these ideas shaped ideological struggle in Africa as in Europe. Major turning points of European political history, such as the French revolu-

²¹ For a general chronicle-type survey, based closely on original documents, see Graziano Saccardo [da Leguzzano], *Congo e Angola con la storia del missione dei cappuccini*, 3 vols. (Venice, 1982–84). An analytical study of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is available in Susan H. Broadhead, "Beyond Decline: The Kingdom of Kongo in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 12 (1979): 615–50.

²² The first phase of these wars (until 1788), their development, and their relation to the slave trade are all explained in detail in the lengthy eyewitness report of the missionary Rafael de Castello de Vide, who resided in Kongo from 1780 to 1788. See ACL, MS Vermelho 296, Castello de Vide, "Viagem," passim.

²³ See sources cited in note 12 above.

tion, the Napoleonic empire, the Restoration, and the revolutions of 1830 or 1848, all were exercises in working out the contradictions of these opposed ideas. Ultimately, the triumph of republican forms of government and democracy resulted in the acceptance of one of these traditions, though even after this victory the authoritarian concept remained and resurfaced from time to time.

Kongo also possessed such opposed traditions, though there was no question of dispensing with kings, as European republicanism proposed. Rather, it was a question of the nature of the king's rule. Analysis based on an understanding of European ideology has difficulty comprehending this dynamic because its idiom was substantially different from that of Europe. It is necessary, therefore, to examine Kongolesse political philosophy in order to see how it might have contributed to the African side of the ideology of the Haitian revolution.

If political idiom was often different between Kongo and Europe, there was one point of contact: Christianity. Kongo had been a Christian kingdom since the late fifteenth century, when Portuguese missionaries had baptized King Nzinga a Nkuwu²⁴ as Joao I on 3 May 1491. By the eighteenth century, however, Kongolesse looked back not to Joao I but to his son Afonso I as the founder of the faith in Kongo.²⁵ Their judgment was not far wrong, for it was indeed Afonso who had institutionalized and financed the church organization, and whose son Henrique became Kongo's first bishop in 1518.²⁶ By the eighteenth century, Christianity was the source of Kongo identity, and virtually all the population participated in and knew its rites and tenets, though a

²⁴ In writing this name and other Kikongo words and phrases, I have adopted basically the Zairian orthography of Kikongo, which reflects the grammatical relationship rather than precisely how the words are pronounced. I have favored this orthography over that adopted officially in Angola or Congo-Brazzaville, more technical ones created by modern linguists, or the older orthographies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This name might be pronounced "Zingan kuwu."

²⁵ See the anonymous account of Kongo history, probably written by a royal clerk, "Memoria de como veio a nossa christianidade de Portugal. . . com o Principe do Congo D. Affonso, no anno de 1494," 1 January 1782, published from a copy made in 1844 by Francisco das Necessidades in the *Boletim official do Governo Geral da provincia de Angola*, no. 642 and 642 (16 and 23 January 1858), as "Factos memoraveis da História de Angola." The original manuscript was probably lost in the fire that destroyed Kongo's archives in 1890.

²⁶ For an interpretation of the role of the church in Kongo, see John Thornton, "The Development of an African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1491-1750," *Journal of African History* 25 (1984): 147-67.

shortage of clergy often hampered their partaking of the sacraments. In the absence of ordained priests (typically Europeans or Afro-Portuguese mesticos from Luanda), the role of religious education and elite literacy was provided by a strong lay church organization and network of schools.²⁷ Christianity shaped Kongo political ideology as, in one way or another, it shaped European ideology.

Thus, Macaya's elaborate description (quoted above) of the three kings he served as the descendants of the Magi was not as farfetched as it might first appear. Kongolese ideologues had reworked Christian concepts in a similar way for many years. For example, in the early eighteenth century, D. Beatriz Kimpa Vita (c. 1684–1706) had led a movement to end the civil wars and restore the kingdom by claiming that she was permanently possessed by Saint Anthony. In defining her position, she gave a version of Christian history whereby Jesus had been born in Kongo in the province of Nsundi (traditionally Afonso's original province), which she said was Bethlehem, and had been baptized in São Salvador (the capital of Kongo), which was Jerusalem.²⁸

These imported Christian ideas combined with central African concepts to form the dynamic of power in Kongo. Kongolese viewed kings in much the same way as English, Dutch, or northern European thinkers did: as necessary but as potentially limited in their powers, thus being compatible with republican and even democratic ideas. Kongolese looked back to the foundation stories of the kingdom to explain basic political philosophy, much as eighteenth-century Europeans looked back to republican or imperial Rome for their own ideas. As the Kongolese understood it, the character of the founder formed a charter for the proper governance of the state.

In some versions of the story, the founder was described as a conqueror. Such kings exercised absolute power and could not be

²⁷ ACL, MS Vermelho 296, Castello de Vide, "Viagem," *passim*. The recollections of the missionary provide excellent insight into the extent to which Kongolese accepted Christianity at a mass level.

²⁸ Bernardo da Gallo, "Relazione dell'ultime guerre civili. . ." (12 December 1712), fol. 305, reproduced (with the foliation of the original manuscript in the Archivio de Propaganda Fide, Rome, Scritture Originale in Congregazioni Generali, vol. 576) in Teobaldo Filesi, "Nazionalismo e religione nel Congo al inizio dei 1700," *Africa* (Rome) 9 (1971): 267–303, 463–508, 645–68. A French translation of the text appears in Louis Jadin, "Le Congo et la secte des Antoniens: Restauration du royaume sous Pedro IV et la 'Saint Antoine' congolaise (1694–1718)," *Bulletin de l'institut historique beige de Rome* 33 (1961): 411–615.

controlled by society; they could act with complete impunity. One symbolic statement of this sort of power appeared in tales of kings who killed people arbitrarily. According to one of the starkest versions of this story, recorded by the Capuchin priest Giovanni Cavazzi da Montecuccolo about 1665, the founder stabbed his pregnant aunt through the womb for refusing to pay a crossing toll, thus committing a double homicide. He went unpunished for this heinous crime, and was even admired; followers flocked to his standard, allowing him to conquer Kongo and establish his rule.²⁹

Not all foundation stories that emphasized the power and legal independence of the king were as bloody as this: a version presented to the Christian world through the Jesuit priest Mateus Cardoso presented the leader as a conqueror whose followers were slavishly subordinate but omitted the gory details of the other versions.³⁰ An early eighteenth-century version noted by Bernardo da Gallo had the conqueror undertake his seizure of Kongo to avenge his mother, who had been insulted by a ferryman for not being the mother of a king.³¹ What all the versions had in common, though, was the idea that the founder ruled through force and conquest, maintaining his control by violence, and was obeyed in the same way a military commander would be obeyed.

Such stories were appropriate to a highly centralized and autocratic kingdom, such as Kongo was from the time it first came into contact with Portugal in 1483 until the civil wars of the mid- to late seventeenth century. But in the civil war period, a new version of Kongo history began to emerge, especially as King Pedro IV (ruled 1694–1718) attempted to reunite the kingdom through a policy of reconciliation. Unlike the conqueror king of the centralized state, the new founder needed to be a more republican sort of ruler, one who recognized the rights of numerous families and

²⁹ Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi da Montecuccolo, *Istorica descimione de' tre regni Congo, Angola ed Matamba* (Bologna, 1687), book 2, para. 86; these references permit comparison with the modern Portuguese translation of Graziano Maria da Legguzzano, 2 vols. (Lisbon, 1965).

³⁰ Mateus Cardoso, *História do Reino de Congo* (1624), cap. 13, fols. 14r–v; available in a modern edition, ed. António Brásio (Lisbon, 1969), pp. 43–44. Foliation allows comparison with the French translation of Francois Bontinck, "Histoire du royaume de Congo (1624)," *Etudes d'histoire africaines* 4 (1972).

³¹ Bernardo da Gallo, "Conto della villicazione missionale . . ." (1712), *Archivio de Propaganda Fide, Scritture Originarie in Congregazioni Generali*, vol. 576, fols. 328r–v. A French translation (with original foliation) appears in Jadin, "Secte des Antoniens."

local powers and ruled by consensus and consent.³² Hence, the stories of Kongo's foundation told in Pedro's court presented the founder as a blacksmith king.

A memorial of about 1710 originating in Pedro IV's court described the royal family as descendants of a "wise and skillful blacksmith" who "gathered the Congolese People as their arbitrator of their differences and suits."³³ Modern anthropologists recognize the widespread central African image of the blacksmith as a conciliatory figure who resolves conflict and is gentle, generous, and unselfish.³⁴ To emphasize the gentleness of blacksmiths, they were associated with women. Furnaces were often decorated as women with breasts to heighten the imagery. It occurs in foundation stories from other places besides Kongo. The traditions of the kingdom of Ndongo, Kongo's southern neighbor, recorded in the mid-seventeenth century, also speak of a kind and generous blacksmith who is elected king by popular acclaim after relieving a famine from his personal stock of goods and settling disputes.³⁵ The Kongolese north of Zaire developed regional regulatory mechanisms using these principles in the healing cult of Lemba in the eighteenth century. This cult managed the affairs of the area through a decentralized system of adjudication.³⁶

The contrasting constitutional principles were cross-cut by larger moral ideas of political philosophy, which held that whatever powers kings might have, they should use them in the public interest. Thus, no matter how absolute his rule, a Kongolese king was expected to rule fairly and to share unselfishly in his wealth and power. This concept was well illustrated by a story told to the Capuchin priest Marcellino d'Atri by the Kongolese prince Francisco de Menezes Nkanka a Makaya in 1695.

³² On the politics of the restoration, see Thomson, *Kingdom of Kongo*, pp. 97–113.

³³ [Francesco da Pavia], "Memoria sopra alcune cose che domanda il Re del Congo," n. d. [c. 1710], Archivio de Propaganda Fide, Scritture riferite nel Congresso, Africa, Congo, vol. 1, fol. 141.

³⁴ Pierre de Maret, "Ce qui jouent avec le feu: La place du forgeron en Afrique centrale," *Africa* (London) 50 (1980): 263–79.

³⁵ MSS Araldi (documents in possession of the Araldi Family of Modena), Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi da Montecuccolo, "Missione evangelica al regno de Congo," vol. A, book 2, pp. 5–7; Antonio Gaeta da Napoli, *La Maravigliosa conversione alia Santa Fede di Cristo della regina Singa e del suo regno di Matamba nell'Africa Meridionale*, ed. Francesco Gioia da Napoli (Naples, 1669), pp. 134–36.

³⁶ John Janzen, *Lemba, 1650–1930: A Drum of Affliction in Africa and the New World* (New York, 1982), pp. 70–79.

De Menezes was the son of King António I. He had been captured by the Portuguese at the battle of Mbwila and raised in Luanda until he was in his twenties, when he returned to Kongo. But he could never be king, de Menezes told d'Atri, because he was too much like a Portuguese: he would only take for himself and never share, a characteristic of merchants like the Portuguese in Angola. "Because if he had a pig he would not divide it but keep it for a long time," such a one would "go about and *bingar* [beg or demand]³⁷ and eat by himself." De Menezes suggested that his countrymen would say, "How could we support laws so different from our own, since we are accustomed to eat everything we have in one day, without leaving any for tomorrow?" D'Atri went on to note that what the Kongolese prince told him was true, in that one could routinely see "truly Apostolic" generosity exhibited among the Kongolese, and it was indeed a virtue that was highly extolled.³⁸

Of course, not all Kongolese kings filled this ideal in any case, in spite of de Menezes's protestations. The issue of abuse of power, whether constitutionally centralized or not, often fell into the realm of witchcraft theory, which was important in Kongolese moral thought. In Kongolese thought it was individuals' intentions that made them witches rather than the specific spirits they invoked. While European witches were wicked largely because they worked with the Devil or his demons, even if they sought good ends, Kongolese witches were judged to be wicked because they sought to harm others or to use occult power for selfish ends, and not because they might have worked with an evil spirit.

Selfishness in private life was often seen as witchcraft, though only the individual witch or selfish person had to answer for it. But public greed or selfishness might be divinely punished by public disaster. Thus Kongolese sought to cope with such disasters by public measures to reaffirm social harmony. This is illustrated by the institution of *mbumba kindonga*, recorded by Luca da Caltanissetta, a Capuchin priest in Bwenze, eastern Kongo, in November 1697. The need for a *mbumba kindonga* occurred when a village "had much sickness or many died." A spirit medium (*nganga ngombo*) was consulted, who pronounced when possessed

³⁷ An Angolan Portuguese verb, *bingar*, from the Kikongo verb *vinga*, meaning "to request or solicit." See documents cited in Toso, ed., *L'anarchia congolese*, p. 215, n.427.

³⁸ Marcellino d'Atri, "Giornate apostoliche fatta da me . . ." (manuscript of c. 1706), in Toso, ed., *L'anarchia congolese*, fols. 438-39.

that the sickness or “universal mortality” came about because “someone had done wrong to someone else, or by the argument that such-and-such had with so-and-so”—in short, by social tension, arguments, and rampant selfishness. As a remedy each household “both of the living and the dead, [took] some item of ash or wood or other substance and all were put together and buried together.” Over all was raised a symbolic marker of cloth and seeds of the *mba*, a palm fruit.³⁹

Thus a collective sacrifice was needed to solve the problems of distress, death, and misfortune brought on by an excess of selfishness. In eighteenth-century Christian Kongo, the term *mbumba* is only attested in the *mbumba kindonga*, but an eighteenth-century dictionary of coastal Kikongo (Kisolongo) spoken outside the Christian kingdom defines *mbumba* as “rainbow”.⁴⁰ In non-Christian areas north of the Zaire, a cult of *mbumba* seems to have been a fertility cult, often represented by a rainbow or a snake, which involved this peaceful and harmonious dimension of life, although it might also punish the wicked with a special disease.⁴¹ In the Christian kingdom this cult of the snake, attested as early as 1491, was a regular part of the religious life of the people in the eighteenth century as well, especially on the coast.⁴²

³⁹ Luca da Caltanissetta, “Relatione della Missione fatta nel Regno di Congo per il Paclrc Fra’ Luca da Caltanissetta . . . sino alia fine del 1701,” fol. 39r–v, in Raimondo Rainero, ed., *Il Congo agli inizi del settecento nella relazione del P. Luca da Caltanissetta* (Florence, 1974). The original folio numbers are also marked in the French translation by Francois Bontinck, *Diarie congolaise (1690–1701) de P. Luca da Caltanissetta, OFM Cap.* (Louvain, 1970).

⁴⁰ *Bumba* was translated as “rainbow, partial rainbow or refraction creating a rainbow” (this term took class concords with *ki*, plural *i*, unlike another similar term with class *li*, plural *ma*, which meant “tomb,” as in “Li Bomba lia m’vombi”) in the Kisolongo (coastal dialect of Kikongo) dictionary of 1774, Biblioteca dei Cappuccini, Genoa, “Dictionaire Kikongo-Francais,” fol. 26.

⁴¹ See the numerous citations of seventeenth-century as well as modern evidence for what she calls the “mbumba dimension” of Kongo religion in Anne Hilton, *The Kingdom of Kongo* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 13–17.

⁴² For a detailed description of the snake cult made in the early eighteenth century, see the letters of Lorenzo da Luca in Archivio dei Cappuccini da Provincia da Toscana, Montughi Convent, Florence, Filippo Bernardi da Firenze, “Raguagliolo del Congo, cioè relazione . . .” (manuscript of 1714), vol. 2 [Letters of Lorenzo da Luca], pp. 160–62 (10 January 1705). This pagination is given in the French translation and edition of the text in Jean Cuvelier, *Relations sur le Congo du P. Laurent de Lucques* (Brussels, 1953). The use of a snake as an insignia in 1491 is found in Rui da Pina, *Chronica del Rey D. Joham* (manuscript of 1515, first published in Lisbon, 1792), cap. 58; for an extract based on published and unpublished versions, see António Brásio, ed., *Monumenta missionaria africana*, 1st ser., 15 vols. (Lisbon, 1952–88), 1:61.

The snake cult may also have been associated by Christians with Jesus and with feminine nurturing. An interesting spoon in the collection of Ernst Anspach, undated but perhaps carved in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century in Christian Kongo's coastal province of Soyo, displays Christ crucified on the handle while a snake moves from his body down the handle to the ladle.⁴³ Other brass and bronze crucifixes from about the same period made in many parts of Kongo show Christ, like the blacksmith's furnace, as a woman, sometimes even nursing a child.⁴⁴ Thus, both the snake and the feminine characteristics of the blacksmith were associated by Christian Kongolese with Christ and with decentralized and democratized power.

These principles, with their emphasis on the ruler's responsibility to be unselfish and to support the public interest, were difficult to maintain in a centralized, absolutist polity. Rulers of such polities might be seen as witches because of the behavior of the founders of the states, who had killed freely and without reproach. But they could still be seen as morally correct if they used the power that derived from their absolutist origins in the public interest. Kongolese were not anarchists who disapproved of authority, and thus the king's power to kill or use violence was seen abstractly as the state's power, which should be used in the public interest, specifically to counteract evil behavior and witchcraft. The idea of witchcraft could therefore be applied in the political realm only when kings or other political authorities used exploitation or corruption to pursue private wealth or power, and not simply because power was centralized.

The potential of social violence to be viewed as immoral is illustrated by the role of soldiers, whose violence, like that of the kings, might be close to witchcraft. This can be seen in the example of the Imbangala, mercenary soldiers who served mostly south of Kongo (in Mbundu areas) but who were occasionally involved in fighting in Kongo as well. The seventeenth-century Imbangala, who were dedicated to lives of pillage and service to

⁴³ Ernst Anspach Collection, New York, no. Te6 1236. According to Anspach, the spoon was collected by Mark Felix around 1989 in the territory of the old province of Soyo. On the basis of preliminary examination of the wooden spoon, Anspach suggested a late eighteenth- or nineteenth-century date. The spoon may have been used to hold water in baptisms, for priests are shown holding a spoon to baptize children around 1750 in a picture illustrating the "Missione in practica" manuscript now in Genoa. See Paolo Collo and Silvia Benso, eds., *Sogno Bamba, Oando, Pemba e adiacenti* (Milan, 1986).

⁴⁴ J. F. Thiel, *Kristliche Kunst in Afrika* (St. Augustin, 198-7), p. 91, pl. 87.

the highest bidder, were essentially amoral and selfish people. Their religious cult was dedicated to their ancestors, who had themselves been bloodthirsty people without much moral scruple and who demanded cannibalism and human sacrifice.⁴⁵ This behavior could readily be seen as witchcraft. Indeed, the Imbangala's actions were very close to those of witches, including defiance of the higher spiritual forces. When the army of the Imbangala leader Kasanje invaded the lands east of Ndongo, according to a local legend reported by Cavazzi in the 1660s, the deities of the area, who epitomized harmonious relations and moral conduct, were so frightened that they ran away and hid in the local rivers and watercourses; only after the Imbangala had abandoned some of their ways did they dare to return.⁴⁶ For the most part, however, the Imbangala remained faithful to the ancestors and neglected the cult of the deities.⁴⁷

Kongolese did not regard kings or soldiers as being intrinsically selfish or committed to useless war, even if some rulers or generals more or less surrendered to these ideas and adopted their religion accordingly. Kongolese political thought still accepted kings and accorded them the rights to kill and to rule. These powers were matched, however, by responsibilities to be generous and especially to show no signs of selfishness. Francisco de Menezes's stories about the ideal Kongo king as an unselfish leader who shares everything represented the merger of the power of the conqueror with the generosity of the blacksmith.

Ideology in the Kongo Civil Wars

Many of these ideas and the competition among them came to the fore in the confusion of the civil wars. The Antonian movement (1704–1706), led by Beatriz Kimpa Vita as an incarnation of Saint Anthony, sought to end the civil wars by forcing the candidates to make peace and to allow Saint Anthony to choose the next ruler. Beatriz believed that the troubles of the kingdom of Kongo were caused by the selfishness of the current rulers, which would have to end before Jesus would allow the restoration of the kingdom under her leadership—much as the local ritual of the *mbumba*

⁴⁵ Consider the laws of Ndumba Tembo, alleged founder of the Imbangala, as reported by Cavazzi, MSS Araldi, "Missione Evangelica," vol. A, Book 1, passim.

⁴⁶ Ibid., vol. A, Book 1, pp. 97–98.

⁴⁷ Ibid., vol. A, Book 1, pp. 83–86; and Cadomega, *História* 3:223–24.

kidonga required the assuaging of tensions and hostilities before famine or epidemic would end. One of her key ideological statements was the alteration of the traditional Christian prayer, the *Salve Regina* (Hail, Holy Queen), to stress what was required for divine protection or salvation. This alteration probably depended on the Kikongo verb *kanga*, which meant both "salvation" (as in the *Salve Regina*) and "protection and deliverance."⁴⁸ Beatriz repeatedly noted that the average Kongolese did not understand what *salve* and *kanga* really meant. She stated that it was the intention of the believer that counted, not the performance of sacraments, prayer, or good works, a point that emphasized the specifically Kongolese Christian ideas about witchcraft and ill-fortune stemming from one's intentions rather than one's actions. Finally she upheld the role of Saint Anthony as a peaceful mediator.⁴⁹

In the event, Pedro IV actually restored the kingdom and had Beatriz burned at the stake. But Pedro's restoration was not that of a conqueror king. It was in his court that the stories of the founder as a blacksmith originated, and his rule was characterized by compromise and negotiation, coupled with only minimal use of force. He seems to have agreed to an arrangement whereby power was shared alternately between the two most important contending families, the Kimulaza and Kimpanzu, with his own family, the Agua Rosada, withdrawing to the mountain fortress of Kibangu to serve as arbitrators.

This attempt to establish a rotational succession system in the mid-eighteenth century⁵⁰ failed in the early 1760s, when the Kimu-

⁴⁸ In the text—known only in an Italian translation by Bernardo da Gallo—salvation is stressed, as it was in the original Portuguese prayer. However, in Kikongo the term was almost certainly a form of the verb *kanga*, which meant as much "protection" or "deliverance from harm" as "salvation" in the sense of the soul's admission into heaven upon death. Thus, see the original text of the *Salve Regina* in the Kikongo catechism of 1624 (reprinted in 1661 and still widely in use in the eighteenth century), in Marcos Jorge, *Doutrina Christãa* (Lisbon, 1624). For a modern edition and French translation by Francois Bontinck and D. Ndembe Nsasi, see *Le catéchisme kikongo de 1624: Réédition critique* (Brussels, 1978), chap. 5, part 1, where "God save you" (O Deus te salve) is rendered "o Deos cucanga"; but in the Lord's Prayer, chap. 3, part 8, "Deliver us from evil" is "utucanga munâ üi," using the same verb.

⁴⁹ The movement has been frequently described; for a recent summary, see Thornton, *Kingdom of Kongo*, pp. 106–13. The original documentation has been reproduced in the original Italian in Filesi, "Nazionalismo e religione," and in French translation in Jadin, "Secte des Antoniens."

⁵⁰ On this system as it functioned in the 1760s, see Cherubino da Savona, "Congo 1755 [sic]. Breve Raggiuglio del Regno di Congo, e sue Mission! scritto dal . . ." (manuscript of 1775), fols. 41r–v, available in a modern edition by Carlo

laza king Alvaro XI overthrew the Kimpanzu ruler Pedro V, who continued war from a base at Mbamba Lubota, near the coast.⁵¹ Alvaro's successors sought to build a Kimulaza dynasty against the claims of the Kimpanzu and to reconstruct the kingdom, a feat they had come close to achieving by 1785. But the death of Jose I, followed by the death of his brother Afonso V in 1786, amid rumors that he had been poisoned through witchcraft, led to infighting among the Kimulaza and eventually resulted in the intervention of the Agua Rosada family, who sought to create a new balance.⁵² In this last period, three families, each of which claimed descent from the early sixteenth-century king Afonso I (ruled 1506–43), partitioned the country among themselves, raided each other, or intrigued against each other incessantly.⁵³

King Jose I (ruled c. 1779–85), the principal author of the Kimulaza attempt to recentralize the country, commissioned a history of Kongo to celebrate his coronation on 1 January 1782, after he had successfully stormed his rivals' headquarters and even scandalously refused to grant Christian burial to his opponents' casualties of the war.⁵⁴ In this story, Afonso orders his mother buried alive simply for refusing to part with a small idol which she kept around her neck—the type of behavior associated with a conqueror king.⁵⁵ The 1782 tradition now phrased these elements in Christian terms, displacing the non-Christian ancient founder of the seventeenth-century sources with Afonso and shrouding the events with Christian miracles. Still, this does not obscure the conqueror king imagery. Afonso was no less a conqueror because after killing his mother he struck a rock with his sword, and as an affirmation that God approved his actions, the sign of the cross was etched there.⁵⁶

But if these traditions represented the claims of the aggressive

Toso, "Relazioni inedite di P. Cherubino Cassinis da Savona sul 'Regno del Congo e sue Missioni,'" *L'Italia francescana* 45 (1974).

⁵¹ Cherubino da Savona, "Breve Ragguglio," fol. 41.

⁵² ACL, MS Vermelho 296, Castello de Vide, "Viagem," pp. 260–62.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Segunda Relação, 25 September 1782, pp. 127, 131, 133, and passim. Castello de Vide called the factions "parcialidades." On the issue of descent, see the tradition quoted by Raimondo da Dicomano, missionary from 1791 to 1794, "Informação do Reino de Congo," fols. 107v, 108v, and 115 n.8. See also the letter of Garcia V to Governor of Angola, 6 July 1803, *Arquivos de Angola*, 2nd ser., 19, nos. 75–78 (1962):56.

⁵⁴ On the events leading to José's coronation, see ACL, MS Vermelho 296, Castello de Vide, "Viagem," fols. 90–121.

⁵⁵ "Memoria," in "Factos menaoraveis," no. 643, p. 3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

rulers who hoped to unite the country by force, there were surely opponents who still looked to the blacksmith image and hoped for a loosely structured Kongo. This was true especially in the turbulent 1780s, when factional struggle became intense. During this period, according to traditions collected about a century later by the Baptist missionary John Weeks, a movement led by two men named Besekele and Nkabi⁵⁷ sought to eliminate disorder and specifically witchcraft by destroying charms, and to end lawlessness through serious punishments. According to Weeks, this grass-roots movement was accepted by villages as a way of stopping the violence, and it became local law.⁵⁸ This movement, whose specific remedies had undoubtedly been modified by tradition over the intervening century, may have been a parallel to that of Beatriz Kimpa Vita.

In any case, the contemporary records note the intervention of the mediating Agua Rosadas in the 1780s; the accusations of witchcraft suggest that the struggle that followed Afonso V's death was being read in the light of a selfish attempt to gain power. In the event, the civil wars never came to a decisive conclusion, and the decentralized state was the norm in the eighteenth century.⁵⁹ The struggle over centralization, the power of the leader to command followers, and the role of harmony and witchcraft in political philosophy were no doubt critical in the minds of the many soldiers who fought in these wars and were encouraged or inspired by one or another vision of Kongo.

KONGOLESE IN SAINT-DOMINGUE

These ideas did not vanish when those unfortunate soldiers who served in the civil wars were captured and transported to Saint-Domingue, nor did they cease to operate when the conspiracy of 1791 resulted in the slave revolution in Saint-Domingue that eventually led to the independence of Haiti. In the environment of the New World, however, they combined with other ideas to constitute an ideological undercurrent of the revolution. The ideas did

⁵⁷ These seem to be Kikongo names, although the original men probably also had Christian saints' names. Weeks, like other Baptist missionaries, sought to minimize the role of Catholic Christianity in reports on the country, perhaps to stress the need for a total reformation of its religious life and to convince readers of its essential "paganness."

⁵⁸ John Weeks, *Among the Primitive Bakongo* (London, 1914), pp. 60–61.

⁵⁹ For eighteenth-century politics, see Broadhead, "Beyond Decline."

have to be translated to fit a new environment, since the social structure of Saint-Domingue was different from that of Kongo. There were, however, ideologically identifiable similarities between the two.

Political Power in the Slave Society

The original leaders of the conspiracy were probably not recently enslaved Kongolese from the civil wars, and indeed they may well have been moved as much by ideas of the French revolution as by those of the Kongo civil wars. According to testimony of the time, the original conspiracy was led by some 200 men, all of whom were *commandeurs d'atelier*, or the leaders of slave gangs.⁶⁰ Such men were privileged among slaves in Saint-Domingue, forming a distinct class in a highly unequal slave society, which the Swiss visitor Girod de Chantrons compared to the hierarchy of the Ottoman empire, a favorite absolutist analogy of the eighteenth century.⁶¹ According to occupational listings in estate inventories, over three-quarters of the occupations that either required high skill or involved supervision and personal service were held by Creoles.⁶² These slaves, born in the colony, were more in touch with the local and European ideological environment than with events in Africa. The official report on the revolt suggested that mulattos played a role in inspiring the revolt and that papers relating events in France were read in the meetings of the conspiracy.⁶³

These creole and mulatto supervisors and managers exercised authority in the society of prerevolutionary Saint-Domingue largely through the estate organization. Although they viewed the masters and the white overseers (*économés*) as opponents, much of the revolution from their point of view involved replacing leadership in the plantation, but not necessarily replacing the plantation system itself.

The slaves, especially the common field hands, while certainly required to obey the men their masters had appointed over them, did not necessarily confer legitimacy on them. Their goals cer-

⁶⁰ Garran de Coulon, *Rapport*, 2:211-12.

⁶¹ Justin Girod de Chantrons, *Voyage d'un suisse dans les colonies d'Amerique* [Neufchatel, 1785], 2nd ed., ed. Pierre Pluchon (Paris, 1980), p. 124.

⁶² David Geggus, "Sugar and Coffee Cultivation in Saint Domingue," table 11. I thank David Geggus for supplying me with a typescript of this article.

⁶³ Garran de Coulon, *Rapport*, 2:212.

tainly included the end of the plantation economy and forced labor, and thus they and the Creoles could not share the same ultimate vision for postrevolutionary society.

The newly arrived African field hands often looked to organizations formed by their "nation"—a loose grouping of people from the same part of Africa or the same ethnolinguistic group—to provide leadership and perform mutual aid functions. One way of maintaining leadership of nations was through the election of kings and queens.⁶⁴ These elections were widespread in the society of Afro-American slaves in all parts of the Americas. In Iberian America the annual elections were public events, while in other areas they were acknowledged if not recognized.⁶⁵ The elected officials certainly had democratic potential, for those in New England in the nineteenth century operated a shadow government and were subject to democratic restraints.⁶⁶ In Saint-Domingue, where colonial legislation made open ceremony by national leadership illegal in the interests of security, national leadership was vested in the heads of secret societies.⁶⁷ Moreau de Saint-Méry's description of the secret societies on the eve of the revolution notes that they were often nationally organized, while their leaders were selected on a religious basis but served both as oracles and as arbitrators of slave society.⁶⁸

These secret societies, with their kings and queens and their religious orientation, and perhaps also with their potential to form what people might have considered a legitimate government, had strong links to the ideology of African societies. They were also capable of organizing plots, since members of the same

⁶⁴ For a fuller discussion of the national organization as a mutual aid system and a vehicle for plotting against the masters, see John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 201–205 (for the earlier period); and, for later periods, Thornton, "African National Organizations and American Societies," paper presented at the conference "Transatlantic Encounters," Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, 8–10 October 1992.

⁶⁵ On the early history of these organizations and their kings, queens, and shadow governments, see John Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, pp. 202–205.

⁶⁶ William Pierson, *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-century New England* (Amherst, 1988), pp. 117–39.

⁶⁷ On the colonial legislation that made virtually all slave organizations illegal, see Pierre Pluchon, *Vaudou sorcieriers, empoisonneurs de Saint-Domingue à Haïti* (Paris, 1987), pp. 29–49.

⁶⁸ Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description*, 1:64–69. On the role of ethnicity in general, see two articles by David Geggus: "La cérémonie du Bois-Caïman," *Chemins critiques* 2 (1992): 71; and "The Bois Caiman Ceremony," *Journal of Caribbean History* 15 (1991): 50.

nation were typically scattered across many plantations and could be mobilized through the national element of the society. The closest Caribbean analogy to the Haitian revolution in terms of size and scale of mobilization, the Jamaica revolt of 1760, was organized through Akan (Coromanti) national organizations, including an elected king and queen.⁶⁹

Two principles therefore competed in the making of the revolution: the estates headed by creole leadership and relying on the hierarchical organization of plantations for authority, and the nation with a looser but more popular organization. But the two types of organization could not operate independently, for the creoles could not stage a revolt alone. They had to obtain the support of the masses of slaves, and any ideology had to take their beliefs into account. The interesting dual meeting, first between creoles and then among field hands, that started the Haitian revolution was but the first manifestation of the alliance and difficulties between the two groups.⁷⁰

Social Tension among Rebel Slaves

The common slaves had the numbers of people necessary to conduct the revolt. In addition, many were ex-soldiers and prisoners of war who had the military experience and skills to carry the revolution forward, attributes that creole *commandeurs d'atelier* often lacked.

The military experience of many slaves may well explain the striking military success the rebels enjoyed in the early days of the revolution.⁷¹ An overview of the first months by two American witnesses, Captain Bickford and Mr. Harrington, noted that within a short time the original confused bodies of slaves armed only with "their instruments of labor" had been organized in "regular bodies" and rearmed with muskets and swords.⁷² Similarly, their tactic of making numerous harassing attacks on their

⁶⁹ The revolt and its details are described fully in Edward Long, *History of Jamaica*, 3 vols. (London, 1774), 2:450–63. On the role of ethnicity in revolts in general, see Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, 1982).

⁷⁰ For a thorough examination of the two meetings, see Geggus, "Cérémonie," and "The Bois Caiman Ceremony."

⁷¹ For a fuller development of this theme, see John Thornton, "African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution," *Journal of Caribbean History* 25 (1991): 58–80.

⁷² "The San Domingue Disturbances," *Philadelphia General Advertiser*, no. 351, 14 November 1791. The report itself is dated 3 November 1791.

enemies followed by rapid retreats (described by James Perkins, an American witness, as “confused precipitation”)⁷³ was reminiscent of the tactics employed by many African armies in the late eighteenth century.⁷⁴ This military competence seems to have developed quite independently of the creole leadership, only a few of whom had military experience.

This rapid mobilization of forces independent of Creole leadership was seen by many of the Creoles as a problem. This was clearly noted in several letters from the early creole leaders of the revolt, Jean-Francois and Biassou, to French commissioners beginning in October 1791, just two months after the outbreak of the rebellion. They complained of not having complete control over their followers and hence of being unable to order them to obey orders to surrender.⁷⁵ They were “entirely subject to the general will, and what a will that is, of a multitude of nègres of the coast [of Africa] who for the most part can scarcely make out two words of French but who above all were accustomed to fighting [à guerroyer] in their country.”⁷⁶

Indeed, the formation of an effective military force required an uneasy cooperation between the “natural leaders” of the revolt, as Jean-Francois, Biassou, and other Creoles and *commandeurs d’atelier* regarded themselves, and the host of slaves able to carry battles. A good deal of the lower organization of the rebel army took the form of independent bands organized by local leaders who cooperated with the greater leaders in coordinating their activities but were quick to assert their own agenda. Jean-François and Biassou had reason to complain of “disbanded blacks” who lacked “leadership,” meaning that they did not obey the creoles who had set themselves above them.⁷⁷

Some idea of this local organization and its distrust of the leadership of the Creoles can be gleaned from the account of the

⁷³ Letter of James Perkins (9 September 1791), in the *Boston Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser* 23, no. 1199, 20 October 1791.

⁷⁴ For a fuller discussion of African military tactics at this time, see John Thornton, “African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution”; also Thornton, “African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion,” *American Historical Review* 96 (1991): 1101–13.

⁷⁵ AN, D-XXV, 1, 4, doc. 6, Jean-François and Biassou to Commissioners, 12 October 1791; and AN, D-XXV, 1, 4, doc. 10, same to same, 17 December 1791.

⁷⁶ AN, D-XXV, 1, 4, doc. 6, Jean-François and Biassou to Commissioners, 12 October 1791.

⁷⁷ AN, D-XXV, 1, 4, doc. 10, Jean-François and Biassou to Commissioners, 17 December 1791.

war by M. Gros, a French notary, who was forced to join with the rebel forces and who composed letters on behalf of the leaders.⁷⁸ Jean-François and Biassou, recognizing the problem inherent in this organization, believed that ultimately, with the help of the French troops, they could hunt down these independent bands whom they did not control, but who might cooperate with them in their operations.⁷⁹

Historians have only a vague idea of who commanded these bands, how they were recruited and organized, and how they operated. But it is likely that linkages made through the African nations provided some of the organization and leadership. According to the historian Thomas Madiou, who collected his research material in the mid-nineteenth century and could still obtain recollections of veterans of the old wars, many units were organized by African nationality.⁸⁰ Occasional contemporary reports mention such national units as well. One document mentions “Gold Coast” (Akan, probably introduced by English traders) rebels, whose “favorite passion in Guinea was war and pillage.”⁸¹ A newspaper report of 1793 mentions an attack on a “Nago” (Yoruba) camp,⁸² while other Nagos joined Republican forces that same year,⁸³ and in 1795 Toussaint Louverture reported fighting with another Nago camp.⁸⁴ At about the same time, another report mentions a “Moco” (Igbo) camp as well.

Macaya was a leader whose authority may have derived as much from his position in the national organization of Kongoleses as from any role he might have played in the plantation economy. From contemporary accounts, his following seems to have been a large one.⁸⁵ Macayo was probably himself from Kongo, and his

⁷⁸ *Isle de Saint-Domingue, Province du Nord. Précis historique* (Lille, 1793). See the English version, *An Historick Recital of the Different Occurrences in the Camps of Grande-Riviere, Dondon . . . from 26 October 1791 to the 24th of December of the same Year* (Baltimore, 1793), pp. 35–55.

⁷⁹ AN, D-XXV, 1, 4, doc. 6, Jean-François and Biassou to Commissioners, 12 October 1791; and AN, D-XXV, 1, 4, doc. A, same to same, 12 December 1791.

⁸⁰ Madiou, *Histoire d’Haïti*, p. 105.

⁸¹ Fick, *Making of Haiti*, p. 148, citing private documentation.

⁸² Report in *Moniteur Général de Saint-Domingue*, 23 January 1793.

⁸³ AN, D-XXV, 80, 786, Diary report of Commander of 18th Infantry to Comité de Surveillance [autumn, 1793].

⁸⁴ Procès-verbal of events of 1795 in Gerard M. Laurent, ed., *Toussaint Louverture à travers sa correspondance (1794–1798)* (Madrid, 1953), p. 152.

⁸⁵ AN, D-XXV, 23, 231, letters of Macaya, 4 September and 9 September 1793.

band may well have been composed entirely or largely of Kongo-
lese, as suggested by his swearing his allegiance to the king of
Kongo ahead of all others. His principal followers at least seem to
have been Kongolese, for in 1795 Louverture wrote to Etienne
Laveaux, his republican commander, that Macaya, after a brief
imprisonment, was preparing a revolt and was spending all day at
"the dances and assemblies of Africans of his nation."⁸⁶

National units might well have been commonplace since, as
Jean-Francois and Biassou noted in 1791, the average soldier did
not speak "two words of French," and thus communication within
the band would have had to take place in an African language. If,
as they implied, the units were indeed composed of veterans of
African wars, there may also have been common organizational
and tactical principles that members of the same nation would
understand in forming their bands, in addition to the solidarity
that probably went back to well before the revolution of cona-
tionals.

No doubt there were other organizations as well. Given the
role that *commandeurs d'atelier* played in the conspiracy, for
example, it would be surprising if many bands were not organized
by atelier or by the labor gang of the estate. A great many bands of
mulattos, of which one of the earliest commanders was Candi,
combined slaves, runaways, and mulattos in units under leader-
ship from the society of the slave system.⁸⁷ A group of Nago rebels
who had been serving at Sainte-Suzanne and who decided to join
republican forces in June 1793 were led by a mulatto, suggesting a
complicated set of alliances.⁸⁸ Still others might have recruited
their units from refugees or runaways from a variety of sources.

As the revolution continued the stronger leaders, especially
the Creoles and others whose claim to lead derived ultimately
from having been in authority before the revolution, collected
larger and larger units that owed direct loyalty to them. They
often trained their men in the European art of war using Euro-
pean and Euro-creole soldiers as instructors. Jean-François and
Biassou both built such armies, and Louverture was ultimately
the most successful in forging an army of considerable size that

⁸⁶ Toussaint Louverture to Étienne Laveaux, 3 Ventose, An 4, published in
Laurent, ed., *Toussaint Louverture*, p. 318.

⁸⁷ See AN, D-XXV, I, 4, doc. 28, Chavert to Commissioners, 7 January 1792; and
the descriptions in Gros, *Historick Recital*, pp. 62-63, 111.

⁸⁸ AN, D-XXV, 80, 786, Commander of 18th Regiment to Comité du Surveillance
[autumn, 1793].

answered only to him.⁸⁹ But in spite of these developments, the smaller band under its own, often national, leadership was critical, and even at the height of the revolution the majority of men under arms were probably still in the smaller bands.⁹⁰

These factors led to the development of a two-tiered military system, with larger forces under the personal supervision of the most important or successful leaders surrounded by loosely allied bands under autonomous commanders. Much of the politics of the revolution after 1793 involved negotiations with band leaders to win their often fickle loyalty.⁹¹ The larger armies and the leaders of these bands operated in a kind of close dependency, the higher armies and their commanders using the smaller bands for coordinated operations, and the smaller bands cooperating with the armies when it suited them or when they needed supplies. Documents concerning the leaders of the smaller bands in 1793 tell us something about them when the military situation in the north was more or less stabilized. For example, a Nago leader named Alaou irritated the higher military command to which he was supposed to be loyal by taking the title “commandeur générale.”⁹² Others made reports indicating that they drew supplies from the larger stores held by the higher level commanders.⁹³ Above all, they were undisciplined. Pierrot, one of the higher commanders, complained bitterly that his nominal subordinates were making war on the forces loyal to Jean-François and Biassou without authorization or common agreement.⁹⁴

Jean-François and Biassou had both sought to round up these bands, who controlled the mountains of the north even before Louverture came to power.⁹⁵ But even Louverture needed to deal with the leaders of the bands if he wished to win battles, so that one had always to be attentive to the ideology of these soldiers.

⁸⁹ For details, see Toussaint Louverture to Étienne Laveaux, 3 Thermidor, An 3 (1794), in Laurent, ed., *Toussaint Louverture*, pp. 206–208.

⁹⁰ The role of these bands was first underscored by Fouchard in *The Haitian Maroons* and has recently been reemphasized in Fick, *Making of Haiti*.

⁹¹ Well detailed in Geggus, *Slavery, War and Revolution*, pp. 100–118.

⁹² AN, D-XXV, 23, 232, Pierre Poulain to Sonothax, 25 February 1793.

⁹³ AN, D-XXV, 23, 231, Pierrot to Commander General, undated [about July–August 1793].

⁹⁴ AN, D-XXV, 23, 231, Pierrot to Pierre Cicile, 7 July 1793.

⁹⁵ BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE (PARIS), FONDS FRANÇAIS MS 12102, fols. 55–56v, Emigrés letter, 4 April 1794.

Brian Edwards described the situation at the time he left the island in 1793, when there was a mature two-tier system of military forces. Powerful armies had been raised by Louverture in the north and Rigaud in the south. But these were not the only "bodies of armed men," Edwards noted. Many others acted without any overall command in different parts of the island, according to the Englishman. These groups lived "by plunder," but perhaps this was as much a reaction to the reestablishment of forced labor and large plantations under Louverture's rural code as it was simple banditry. In any case, both Louverture and Rigaud defended the whites who were gradually being reestablished on their plantations against these bands.⁹⁶

African Ideology in the Revolution

In the complicated world of revolutionary Saint-Domingue, then, rival organizational principles as well as rival leaders from different social strata struggled for supremacy. But even among the independent bands of rebels and the inhabitants of the areas they controlled there was ideological ferment that matched the military maneuvering. While Macaya mentioned serving the king of Kongo, he did not say whether the king he served was a conqueror or a blacksmith. Indeed, a leader like Macaya might see the value of both in different contexts: to his followers perhaps he was a conqueror, but to those who would lead a united Haiti, he was an advocate of the blacksmith.

For Macaya and his Kongolese followers, as for other leaders of nationally organized groups, the revolution and its aftermath raised in a new context the same issues that had divided Kongolese in Africa. Was the new society to be an authoritarian state where the plantation economy continued with or without slavery? Or was it to be a more egalitarian society of smallholders where estates were broken up and redistributed? Clearly the Kongolese ideology of blacksmith versus conqueror kings and related ideas could serve in this context as well as republican or imperial ideas of Europe.

Although explicit evidence is lacking, there are hints that

⁹⁶ Brian Edwards, *An Historical Survey of the French Colony on the Island of St. Domingo*, vol. 4 of *The History Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (Philadelphia, 1806), pp. 231–33.

at least some of the generals and elite presented themselves as conqueror kings or leaders. These are found in the innumerable atrocity stories that fill whole cartons in the archives and were the stock in trade of travelers, journalists, and analysts of the time.⁹⁷ Of course, atrocities can have many explanations that have nothing to do with ideology or revolution. The brutality of the slave regime and the excesses of those suppressing it could easily create a cycle of increasingly bloody acts of revenge that fueled the atrocity stories. Such stories might even be made up to secure the sympathies of a French public that might be moved from its support for the rebels by revelations of their inhumanity.

Whether they were consciously invoking the conqueror king or not, many of the early leaders exercised an iron discipline over their troops and followers, often enforced by horrible atrocities.⁹⁸ Jeannot, one of the triumvirate who ran the rebels' affairs in 1791, displayed considerable paraphernalia of African religion in his camp and earned a fearsome reputation for atrocity, a reputation that eventually caused the other leaders to eliminate him.⁹⁹ For a time Macaya also advocated indiscriminate violence: in 1796 he and other band leaders proposed a general massacre of whites.¹⁰⁰ Although many of the writers who described these developments focused their attention on the victims who were Europeans or of European descent, there were clearly many who were fellow slaves. Such behavior may well have been most pronounced in camps and bands where Creole slaves, free blacks, or mulattos led units composed of ex-slaves. An example is the case of Jean Louis, a Creole slave who ran the camp of Dondon where Gros was held prisoner for a time, and who was hated by his followers.¹⁰¹

Military commanders, however, were not the only leaders created by the revolution. From the beginning kings and queens

⁹⁷ For example, *ibid.*, pp. 74, 79, and *passim*. Reports contain these tales as well: see, for example, AN, D-XXV, 62, 619, Rouvray to Blanchelande, 8 June 1792; 628, Assemblée Générale, 28 January 1792; 626, Commissioners of Assemblée Coloniale to Commissioners (1792); 627, Commissioners' letters, 28 January and 27 February 1792.

⁹⁸ AN, D-XXV, 56, doc. 555, Discours, cited in Pick, *Making of Haiti*, p. 111.

⁹⁹ Gros, *Historick Recital*, pp. 10–22.

¹⁰⁰ Bibliothèque Nationale, Fonds Français, MS 8986, Bessiere and Toussaint to Sonthonax, 12 and 29 Prumaire, An V.

¹⁰¹ Gros, *Historick Recital*, pp. 29–30. Gros was well treated at Dondon, though, and felt that Jean-Louis was trying to mitigate the other leaders' behavior, probably specifically that directed against Europeans.

were elected in various areas whenever the insurgents succeeded in gaining political control. These elections harked back to the older kings and queens of national organizations, which in Saint-Domingue had been the secret societies.

L'Acul, Macaya's original base of operations, seems to have been organized in just this way shortly after the outbreak of the revolution, perhaps by the Kongo nation. A detailed diary of a French militiaman from the start of the revolution noted that the rebels chose a king for each quarter that they had captured. He provided an account of the election conducted in L'Acul on 5 September 1791, shortly after its capture. "Yesterday, being Sunday," he wrote, "the negroes celebrated two marriages in the church at L'Acul. On the occasion they assumed titles, and the titled blacks were treated with great respect, and the ceremony was performed in great pomp. A Capuchin [whose name was Cajetan] retained among them, has been obliged to officiate. Their colours were consecrated and a king was elected. They have chosen one for each quarter."¹⁰² No mention is made of the nationality of the insurgents at L'Acul, but the Christian ceremony, especially one conducted by a Capuchin, suggests a Kongolese presence, for the Capuchin order was greatly honored and respected in Christian Kongo. That L'Acul may have been a specifically Kongolese base is suggested by Macaya's decision to escape to the area in 1795 after having been imprisoned by Louverture. There he met with his nation at their dances and assemblies, as Louverture believed, to plan further revolt.¹⁰³

The election of kings upon establishing their own government was not restricted to the rebels of the Plaine du Nord. In both the west and south, the situation was complicated by the fact that whites or mulattos had been responsible for arming the slaves in the early stages of the revolution and thus tended to control leadership according to their own programs. However, an elected king ruled over the runaway community at Les Platons in 1792, the only

¹⁰² "San Domingo Disturbances," published in the *Philadelphia General Advertiser*, no. 322, 11 October 1791, diary entry of 5 September. The diary was published in installments in nos. 321 (10 October 1791), 347 (9 November 1791), 348 (10 November 1791), 349 (11 November 1791), 350 (12 November 1791), and 351 (14 November 1791). The priest's name is given in the entry of 27 September (no. 349, n November 1791), and he was hanged by the colonial forces shortly after his capture: Letter of James Perkins, 9 November 1791, *Philadelphia General Advertiser*, no. 389, 28 December 1791.

¹⁰³ Toussaint to Laveaux, 3 Ventôse, An IV, in Laurent, ed., *Toussaint Louverture*, p. 318.

area in the south province where rebel slaves succeeded in establishing independent control.¹⁰⁴

The kings who were elected in this way were not necessarily Africans: Jean-Baptiste Cap, king of Limbé and Port Mangot until his capture on 1 September 1791, was apparently a creole and was said to own property worth 3,000 livres in Le Cap Francois when he was broken on the wheel on 4 September.¹⁰⁵ The king of Dondon quarter was named Jean-Louis le Parisien because he had lived for some time in Paris with his master.¹⁰⁶ In some cases they seem to have been selected separately from the military commander, for one report tells of “Barthelemy, nègre of M. Roeforts of Petit Anse who was the leader [chief] with Boukman, and . . . a king named Youé” in the quarter of Limbé.¹⁰⁷ This was not always the case, however, for when colonial forces captured George, commander of the cavalry of the insurgents, he was bearing a letter from “François king,” presumably Jean-François, one of the most powerful early leaders.¹⁰⁸ Likewise, Jeannot seems also to have had the title of king, at least in the eyes of his opponents, who so named him in passing after noting an engagement with his cavalry.¹⁰⁹ Certainly the kings, whether or not they were military leaders, participated in the war, for colonial troops found the body of one, richly dressed and wearing a crown, among the rebel casualties around the fortified rebel stronghold at Gallifet plantation.¹¹⁰

Their presence as elected leaders in the areas occupied in the early days of the revolution may represent a tentative movement in the direction of a local limited monarchy based on African ideological views, though surely tempered by the military necessities of the moment and the power this gave to more ruthless and less

¹⁰⁴ Pick, *Making of Haiti*, p. 151.

¹⁰⁵ “San Domingo Disturbances,” *Philadelphia General Advertiser*, no. 322, 11 October 1791, entries for 1 September and 4 September. On his full name, see Letter from Le Cap Francois, 2 September 1791 in the same issue (this letter is independent of the diary, but is printed in the midst of it).

¹⁰⁶ Gros, *Historick Recital*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁷ AN, D-XXV, 61, 609, no. 3, Extraits du journal du Camp des Mornets, entry of 8 September 1791.

¹⁰⁸ “San Domingo Disturbances,” *Philadelphia General Advertiser*, no. 348, 10 November 1791, entry of 19 September 1791. The letter authorized George to kill Paul Blin or Boukman “where ever he may meet with them.”

¹⁰⁹ “San Domingo Disturbances,” *Philadelphia General Advertiser*, no. 349, 11 November 1791, diary entry of 23 September 1791.

¹¹⁰ “San Domingo Disturbances,” *Philadelphia General Advertiser*, no. 350, 12 November 1791, entry of 26 September 1791.

democratic men, who seem to have often held or taken the title of king. Insofar as preexisting African nations played a role in the election and in organizing support, the ideas might have been less authoritarian, since such organizations lacked the capacity to enforce discipline that the plantation system gave to the creoles. The Kongolese rites of modern Voodoo may also reflect the decentralized nature of the rule of secret societies. John Janzen argues that elements of the Lemba cult, which managed political affairs in a decentralized manner in Kongolese societies north of the Zaire, were also transferred to Haiti.¹¹¹ Indeed, Haitian secret societies, no longer nationally specific, continue to rule rural life, adjudicate disputes, and even punish malefactors.¹¹²

That there may have been a tendency toward limited government or a democratic strain in the ideology of the national societies that favored Macaya and other such leaders is suggested by an important chant that was recorded on the eve of the revolution by Moreau de Saint-Méry. It was sung in Kikongo and thus provides a link to the ideological concepts of the Kongolese who made up such a large proportion of Saint-Domingue's society. The chant might have inspired a leader like Macaya:¹¹³

Eh! Eh! Bomba, hen! hen!
 Canga bafio té
 Canga mouné dé lé
 Canga doki la
 Canga li.

The chant can be translated as follows:

Eh! Eh! Mbomba [Rainbow] hen! hen!
 Hold back the black men¹¹⁴
 Hold back the white man¹¹⁵
 Hold back that witch
 Hold them.

Contemporary observers, as well as many modern historians, who did not know the language of the chant (which is clearly

¹¹¹ Janzen, *Lemba*, pp. 273–92.

¹¹² Wade Davis, *Passage of Darkness: The Ethnobotany of the Haitian Zombie* (Chapel Hill, 1988), pp. 241–84.

¹¹³ Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description*, 1:67.

¹¹⁴ The word is plural.

¹¹⁵ This term is singular; the plural was *mindele*.

Kikongo)¹¹⁶ proposed fanciful translations, most of which echoed their understanding that as a revolutionary anthem, it must involve killing the whites.¹¹⁷

In fact, translating the chant is not an easy task, for much of its vocabulary has multiple interpretations, depending on context and dialect. In 1946 Monsignor Jean Cuvelier, an expert in Kikongo and the history of Kongo, proposed the translation given here, but some students of the Haitian revolution, notably R. Bourgeois, felt that such a text did not convey a message that was sufficiently revolutionary to warrant its place as the anthem of the Haitian rebels.¹¹⁸

Although many commentators have sought to provide the chant with revolutionary content by changing its translation, others, notably Pierre Pluchon and David Geggus, have taken the translation as given and sought to deprive it of revolutionary content. They have argued that in fact the chant was not particularly revolutionary; rather, it was simply a part of initiation into a Voodoo society in which the sectarian hoped to find personal protection against the witchcraft, often worked by fellow slaves, that was rampant in prerevolutionary Haiti. Moreover, they question its role as some sort of anthem, suggesting that later writers, who had read Moreau de Saint-Mery, assumed its application by the revolutionary leaders.¹¹⁹

Much of the ambiguity in the text and the debate among

¹¹⁶ It is not clear, however, which dialect of Kikongo it is. There are diagnostic differences in phonology and word choice between the Solongo and Zombo dialects, both of which can be documented in the eighteenth century. This text, however, is not sufficiently linguistically sophisticated or long enough to warrant speculation about the dialect.

¹¹⁷ The history of the translation of the text is provided in Geggus, "Haitian Voodoo in the Eighteenth Century: Language, Culture, Resistance," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas* 28 (1991): 24–32.

¹¹⁸ Jean Cuvelier, *L'ancien royaume du Congo* (Brussels, 1946), p. 290. Aimé Césaire subsequently popularized it in his history of the revolution, *Toussaint L'Ouverture: La révolution française et la question coloniale* (Paris, 1971), p. 178, only to have it questioned by R. Bourgeois, "Lettre à Aimé Césaire," *Présence africaine* 70 (1969): 207–209. On the other hand, Bourgeois's attempt at a new translation using an informant who spoke the Yombe dialect, in which the key verb *kanga* was made to mean both "open minds of the blacks" and "exterminate the whites/exterminate the witches," cannot really stand a linguistic investigation. See the critique in Geggus, "Haitian Voodoo," pp. 25, 30.

¹¹⁹ Geggus, "Haitian Voodoo," pp. 42–50; Pluchon, *Vaudou*, pp. 89, 112–16. Fick and Geggus disagree on its use as a revolutionary hymn specifically with regard to its quotation in a modern account that claims to use nonextant documentation and puts it in the mouths of rebels in 1791.

would-be translators revolves around the correct translation of *kanga*,¹²⁰ a verb that has multiple meanings in different dialects. Certainly the eighteenth-century meaning of the word was “to stop or bind” in all dialects,¹²¹ although among Christians from Kongo, paradoxically, it might also mean “to save, protect, or deliver” in a Christian religious sense.¹²²

Although salvation, protection, and prevention might stress personal meaning, African political ideology used this sort of idiom in a public as well as a private sense. *Kanga*, also had, as we have seen, great significance in the Antonian movement, and thus

¹²⁰ Fick, *Making of Haiti*, p. 58, working with Kikongo-speaking anthropologist John Janzen, has sought to alter the meaning not through the verb *kanga* but by redefining *bafioté* from a general term meaning “black people” to one meaning only those slave-dealing Africans who lived on the coast of Angola—a term that was used for the inhabitants north of the Zaire by the end of the nineteenth century. In fact, this definition is less successful if one considers the history of the term, beginning with its eighteenth-century Solongo definition in *Biblioteca dei Cappuccini da Genova*, Dictionary of 1774, which has “Africain U m’fiote pl. bafioté” (p. 28), while in translating *mundele* (white person) it gives as an example of usage, “i mindele i li somba ba fiote. Les Européens achatent les Nègres” (the Europeans buy nègres, p. 140). This must mean quite specifically black slaves. *Bafioté* is not readily recognizable as an ethnonym, and the term *fiote* also meant, then as it does now, “a little bit”: “fiote un peu. fiote fin fi kio très peu” (p. 45; the diminutive, implied in all nouns in the class beginning with *fi*, perhaps implies the low status of slaves). By 1880, however, the word seems to have meant simply “an African” in the coastal Vili and Kabinda dialects, and it was so translated in H. Holman Bentley’s *Dictionary and Grammar of the Kongo Language* (London, 1887), pp. 143 (English to Kikongo), 348 (Kikongo to English). It was applied as an ethnonym by missionaries and then by anthropologists in that time to the people of the coast north of the Zaire River.

¹²¹ The Dictionary of 1774, *Biblioteca dei Cappuccini da Genova*, using the Solongo dialect from north of the Zaire (a non-Christian area) gives “*kanga*, *kangezi* [the perfect form] attacher” and adds that “*kanga zita*” meant “faire un noeud” (p. 68). Geggus adds a longer commentary on the word, noting that it has special meaning in witchcraft terminology of the north bank of the Zaire in the early twentieth century: “Haitian Voodoo.” pp. 28–29. Geggus concludes: “Thus, in the chant in question ‘canga’ doubtless does mean ‘stop’ but with the particular connotation of ‘rendering harmless by supernatural means.’” Its meaning as “to tie” or “to bind” in the Zombo or Sao Salvador dialect of Christians is attested since the seventeenth century in the Dictionary of 1652, *Biblioteca Nazionale da Roma*, Vittorio Emmanuele, 1896, MS Varia 274, “Vocabularium latinum, hispanicum et congense . . .,” fol. 51v: *ligo as atar* (Latin “to tie”) is *cucanga*; and fol. 116v, *vinculo as entregar en cadenas* (Latin “to tie up” or Spanish “to tie in boxes”) is *cucanga quiconi* among other definitions. Bernardo da Cannicati (Cannecattim), missionary at Bengo from 1779 to 1800, who had information from both the Solongo and Sao Salvador dialects, gives *cánga* as the meaning of *atar*: *Diccionario abbreviado da Lingua Conqueza . . .* (Lisbon, 1805), p. 164.

¹²² See note 47 above. Jesus was also known in Kikongo as Mucangui or Savior. This specific meaning was still retained in the late eighteenth century, for Cannecattim gives Gánga (probably a misprint for *cánga*) as the Kikongo for *livrar* in his *Diccionario*, p. 191.

a tradition of political weight. This was connected to the idea that salvation and protection would be granted as a result of the believer's intentions, and by extension, that the ruler's relation to the ruled would be measured against the same standard.

This chant therefore needs to be seen in terms of the political meaning of witchcraft, rather than the personal one, if we are to respect the belief of the colonists that the chant had revolutionary overtones even if they could not translate it. Its general terms of address, to blacks (*bafioté*) and whites (*mundele*) alike, and the invocation of *Mbumba* suggest that it had a social as much as a personal significance. Furthermore, the invocation of *Mbumba* also suggests that it expressed the spirit of harmony and peace as an alternative to personal greed and witchcraft that was rampant in prerevolutionary Haiti. As such it could serve as a sort of shorthand expression of a particular revolutionary creed that sought to restore justice and harmony to all, as expressed in Kongo politico-religious ideology. The fact that the verb *kanga* can mean to save and deliver, combined with the Christian context of the verb in Kikongo, might mean that it had a more universalistic message than simply one of murder or revenge. As such it stood in contrast to the conqueror king, the exploiting plantation owner, or the ambitious *commandeur d'atelier* who dominated the revolution and attempted restoration of forced labor.

It is interesting to note, finally, that among the leaders who strongly resisted the restoration of forced labor by Louverture and Dessalines were the Kongolese, such as Sans Souci, Scylla, and the inevitable Macaya.¹²³ This may well explain the creole leaders' hostility to the national organizations, which they often did not control and which may have expressed ideological ideas contrary to their own.¹²⁴

The present investigation has focused on Kongo ideas about monarchy, but Kongolese were not the only Africans in Saint-Domingue, nor were they the only African group to have ideas of tempered monarchy, nor the only ones among whom disputes and struggle over the powers of kings took place. The larger Yoruba-Aja group of people in Lower Guinea (modern Benin, Togo, and Nigeria) had strong traditions of limiting monarchical power, over which they eventually became involved in civil war. The

¹²³ For a discussion of this last phase of the war, see Claude B. Auguste and Marcel B. Auguste, *L'expédition Leclerc, 1801-1803* (Port-au-Prince, 1986).

¹²⁴ Pluchon, *Vaudou*, pp. 116-39.

Yoruba civil wars in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, like their equivalents in Kongo, concerned constitutional issues and fueled the slave trade.¹²⁵ Careful study of ideological issues in other parts of Africa may well add further texture to the ideas presented here, for both the Old World and the New.

¹²⁵ On constitutional issues in Yoruba areas, see Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire, 1600–1822* (Oxford, 1977).