After the forced transference of Africans to the Americas between the 15th and the 19th centuries, no instances survive of African languages as full systems and with usage across several domains of speech. But African languages still exert a presence, in ways which this essay attempts to outline.

For most of the 20th century, the prevailing opinion was that African languages had completely died out in the West due to the suppression of their use by the slave-owners, who deployed legal and coercive means to cow Africans into conformity with European cultural norms. This thesis of cultural erasure is no doubt a legacy of the abolitionist strategy of the late 18th and 19th centuries, meant to elicit sympathy for the plight of the enslaved by accentuating their dispossession. As DeCamp contextualized regarding the linguistic breakthrough represented by Lorenzo Turner’s work, “almost everyone [before then] believed that . . . whatever language and culture the slaves had brought with them from Africa had been totally obliterated on the plantations” (DeCamp in Turner 1974, vi).

Another reason generally cited for the loss of African languages was a deliberate policy on the part of slave-owners to ensure that their slave population on any one plantation represented Africans of diverse ethnicities; this policy was a means of thwarting anti-European conspiracies. However, examination of slave shipments reveals that boats often brought persons
from specific geographical locations in Africa; for instance, slave sale advertisements in newspapers read “choice Eboe” from Calabar or Bonny, or “choice Africans: Ashantee-Coromantee.” This meant that buyers were likely to acquire persons from the same or at least neighboring language groups, and indeed evidence from slave censuses does show that several Africans with the same ethnic ascription lived on any one estate. In addition, enslaved persons on neighboring plantations socialized at funerals, wakes, dances, and markets, and they carried goods and messages from one plantation to another. Slaves were also rented out by their owners to do job-work on other estates and on public projects. It therefore follows that persons would gravitate toward using a mutually intelligible African language among themselves. Indeed, in recent decades the revisiting of historical documents and slave narratives has revealed that the enslaved were not completely dominated by the orders of their masters and did exercise agency in some aspects of their lives (Mullin 1992, 22–31; Gomez 1998, 173–178; Warner-Lewis 2003, xxiv).

From the time the enslaved were captured, the need arose for communication between themselves and their captors. In addition, Africans involved in slave trading needed to negotiate with their African and European bosses and with their captives. In the Upper Guinea zone, Manding served as a lingua franca among the Mandingo, Malinke, Bambara, and Dyula (Lalla and D’Costa 1990, 18); Yoruba emerged as a lingua franca among the Yoruba, Fon, and lagoon peoples of the Slave Coast (Warner-Lewis 1996, 178–179); and Hausa dominated in the savanna lands of the Guinea Coast hinterland and served as a lingua franca among 18th- and 19th century West India Regiment recruits (Brereton 1981, 68; Warner-Lewis 2009, 256).

Other trade languages were Portuguese Pidgin and Guinea Coast Creole English. The former dates back to the 15th century and was spoken at trading posts stretching from Cape Verde off Senegambia to Elmina on the Gold Coast, and was no doubt used in Portuguese-dominated enclaves such as São Tomé, Luanda, Benguela, Goa, and Ceylon in the Indian Ocean, and further ports in the Pacific. A mid-18th-century English visitor to Upper Guinea “mentions Christian blacks and mulattoes who spoke English or Portuguese . . . local kings and traders who spoke some English . . . and whites who spoke local languages in their households as well as in their daily trading.” Such trading posts “typically consisted of a few Englishmen, their black or mulatto women, . . . African servants who hired themselves out to the whites,” in addition to “a varying number of slaves and . . . white sailors in port who might stay for a few days or a few months” (Lalla and D’Costa 1990, 21).
Clearly, trade and work demands and the need to understand orders and to communicate with Europeans and with Africans of diverse ethnicities meant that new languages were likely to arise in the new environments created by the internal and export trade in human beings. Both in the holding areas for captives known as forts and barracoons along the West African coastlines, offshore islands, and river courses, as well as aboard the slaving ships, trade languages proved useful. Some of these languages were called pidgins. These employed a limited lexicon of European and indigenous words in reduced grammatical formulations and were restricted to bargaining contexts. Languages which later developed with more elaborate syntactic structures came to be regarded as creoles. Creoles did not necessarily emerge out of pidgins. Early attempts by linguists to distinguish between pidgins and creoles focused not only on rigidity as against choice in grammatical structures, but also on generational use: pidgins were perceived to be the second language (L2) of Generation 1, whereas creoles became the first language (L1) of Generation 2. Given the fact that West African and Melanesian pidgins continue to be the second language of several generations of speakers, the classificatory criteria for distinguishing between the two language types have become blurred. A further doubt has arisen as to the justification for distinguishing between creoles and other languages considered orthodox or “normal.” Creoles, after all, do not employ structures singular to themselves, but are peculiar only by the fact that they have been formed within historical memory and in a specific socioeconomic context—that of the transatlantic African slave trade and its attendant plantation regimes.

While the context of their evolution is not in dispute, what remains a contentious issue is the timing and processes by which pidgins and creoles evolved (Baker 1995; Mufwene 1990). Did this involve innate and universal language programming? Or was there relexification of the Portuguese-lexified pidgins and creoles? Was the development of creoles an expansion from the earlier simple grammatical structures of pidgins? What has been the relative weighting of the African and European languages in contact? To what extent were mother-tongue African grammatical structures and semantic domains transferred to the new languages? Was there the predominant influence of an identifiable African demographic majority on the phonology and grammar of a creole? If so, was this necessarily the earliest African demographic majority in the location, or would it have been the latest? A striking instance of the imprint of a singular African language—Calabar-based Eastern Ijo/Ijaw—on the morphosyntax of a creole is the case of Berbice Dutch Creole, a now extinct language used in Guyana in northern South America (Robertson 1993; Kouwenberg 2012).
These new languages show aspects of the mutual exchange of language artifacts between African and European languages. Several terms from Portuguese and English were borrowed into the new pidgins and creoles. Among the Portuguese loanwords were personal names (Heywood 2002, 102). Pequeño ‘small’ morphed into pikanini/pikin/pikni ‘child/children’; palabra ‘word’ became palava ‘discussion, negotiation, dispute’; zapato ‘shoe’ became “sapata/sapat/sampata” ‘footwear’; saber ‘know’ became sabi/savi; penhorar ‘seize as a guarantee or security’ became panyar ‘seize/kidnap as a slave when someone has failed to honor an agreement’; das ‘(you) give a gift’ became dash ‘commission, gift, bribe.’ As the first Europeans to sail along the West African coast, the Portuguese stamped their imprimatur on place-names such as Sierra Leone, Elmina, Porto Novo, and Lagos.

On the other hand, European languages adopted names of food-crops such as yam, okro/okra, banana, ackee/aki, and kola and absorbed place-names like Loango, Luanda, Calabar, Badagry, and Whydah/Ouidah/Hueda. In addition, there were a host of African ethnonyms which entered European languages, among them Wolof, Bambara, Temne, Nago, and Mina. On the plantations, Akan day-names proved popular labels for slaves and were used by Europeans and non-Akan Africans alike, so much so that it is not safe to assume that a person was necessarily Akan or had been born in Africa simply because s/he bore an Akan day-name such as Kwaku, Kojo, Fibba, or Mimba. These names found acceptance because they were generally disyllabic and bore rhythmic consonant harmony, which made them easy to pronounce and to remember.

A term which became well established in Spanish colonial experience was conuco, designating a peasant farm. It was used of both Native American and slave cultivation plots, and can be traced to kunuka (Kikongo) ‘likely to be planted,’ from the verb stem kuna ‘to plant.’

The creation of new categories of trade goods and the significance of certain artifacts in slave and plantation culture prompted loanwords from Kikongo into Spanish and Portuguese. Kongo and Angola were intense areas of slave trading from the early 1500s until the late 19th century. Among the trade goods was tufia ‘rum’—the new alcohol derived from sugar cane. The term derived from Kikongo ntufia ‘fire,’ becoming tafia in Haiti and the Eastern Caribbean (Descourtiz 1935, 126; Joseph 2001, 18, 51). Marcas de carimbo or fierros de carimbar referred to the iron stamps with which the enslaved were branded to indicate the proprietor or shipping

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1. See Bentley 1887, 539–540, for Portuguese and English words borrowed into Kikongo.
2. Posited also by Pichardo 1976, 180.
agency which had bought them. Dimbu or rimbu ‘mark/brand made with red-hot iron’ was Kikongo while ka- was a southern Kikongo diminutive prefix. The popularity of tobacco-smoking among both Europeans and Africans helped give prominence to the Kimbundu word cachimbu ‘pipe.’ In the Caribbean and Latin America cachimbo or cachimba applied not only to smoking pipes but also to wells, as in Colombia, and charcoal pits, as in Puerto Rico, as well as to chimneys. Dunda—a word now limited to Jamaica to name the smelly effluent from rum manufacture—is traceable either to Kikongo ndondo ‘musty odor’ or to Kimbundu zunza/dunda ‘scum/slag left from metal purification’ (Warner-Lewis 2003, 323; 2004a, 31–32).

Bomba was another Kikongo term that passed into Iberian languages, and it can still be heard in the Mexican Spanish song “La Bamba”: “Pa da pa da la bamba, Yo no soy marinero, Soy capitán.” Bomba is now cryptic, but it may well be a reflex of bomba and designated the “tax collector, commercial intermediary and interpreter” who negotiated and organized the slaving business with Europeans on behalf of Kongo kings. The bomba’s position of leadership is being asserted in the song, which is why the singer protests that he is not a mere sailor but the captain. The song’s nonce words probably substitute for a now forgotten Kikongo phrase and suggest that the present song survives as a fragment of a more coherent original Kikongo lyric. Bomba was also used in the Danish and Dutch West Indies for an African in a supervisory position.

The enslaved were categorized according to age and attitude. The Spanish used muleque [muleke] as a classification for a young boy. The word derived from Kikongo muleke, from mu- (prefix denoting ‘person’) + (n) leke ‘young brother, boy, child.’ Mulecón signified a teenaged boy, the suffix -ón in Spanish connoting sturdiness and bigger size than muleque. All recent captives were considered boçal (Portuguese) or bozal (Spanish) or bussale (French), a borrowing from Kikongo bosalala ‘overpowered, submissive.’ Matungo (Spanish) designated a middle-aged male, and derived from Kikongo ma- (plural prefix) + tunguzula ‘insubordinate, disdainful.’

The encounter of Africans and Europeans prompted inventions for new referents. Among the most enduring terms has been bakra/bukra to denote Europeans. It derives from Efik mbakara ‘white person, governor,’ just as beke ‘European’ in French Creole derives from the Efik interpretation of the

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3. The Trinidad Yoruba and Kikongo song corpora contain such macaronic compositions. See Warner-Lewis 1996, 177, 178; 2003, 275, 277. “La Bamba” emerged from Veracruz, through which, from the 15th century, the Spanish imported slaves to work on sugar cane plantations, and which, in the 16th century, had more slaves than any other state in Mexico.
surname of the Scottish explorer/administrator, William Balfour Baikie. Other new ethnic types spawned by the encounter also necessitated new terminology. *Crioulu* (Portuguese), *criollo* (Spanish) appears to be an Iberian formation on a probable noun *(n)kuulolo* ‘outsider, person excluded’ from *kuula* (Kikongo) ‘to be exiled, excluded,’ signifying the “creole” child’s alienation from its parents’ culture.4 *Curro* (Spanish) identified a free black or mulatto in Spain or its colonies, its root being *kuula* (Kikongo) ‘to ransom, liberate.’ *Mulato* (Portuguese, Spanish) may derive from *mu-* + *laatu* ‘licked by soot,’ from the noun *(n)latia* (Kikongo) ‘ceiling soot, darkened by smoke.’5 *Zambo/sambo* (Spanish) applied to the product by miscegenation between a Native American and an African in the Spanish colonies, and in the English colonies an African-mulatto mixture referred to as a “sambo,” darker in skin color than a mulatto and with silky hair. It seems a derivation from *nsambu/nsaamba* ‘path/sides of a path through grass,’ which metaphorically captured the dual nature of the human product.

Other loanwords from Central Africa included words with spiritual connotations. There was *jankunu/junkanu*, derived from *(n)za a nkunu* ‘world of the spirits,’ which was a masquerade band which processed through estates and communities to the music of kettle- and bass drums embellished by fluted melodies. This masquerade was practiced in North and South Carolina and throughout the Caribbean islands and the Bahamas (MacMillan 1926; Reid 1942; Bettelheim 1998).6 Although it presented itself publicly as a secular entertainment, its matrix was a commemoration of ancestral presences (Bilby 1999, 47–70). *Jumbi* and *zombi* ‘ghost,’ derived from Kimbundu *(n)zumbi*, became incorporated into French-lexified creoles. *Zombi* in Haiti applied to a revived human corpse controlled by a spirit manipulator. This idea corresponds to the Suriname concept of the *baku* who carry out the sinister commands of their owners in order to enrich their manipulators; the word is perhaps a contraction of Kikongo *bakulu* ‘ancestors.’

Spiritual terms derived from other African languages as well. *Obeah* [obya] is a long-standing Anglo-Caribbean word to reference mystical knowledge and rituals of communication with the spirit world. It derives mainly from Igbo and Efik *abia*, but has cognates in several other Kwa languages of West Africa (Handler and Bilby 2001). Another Igbo word widely

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4. For alternative etymologies, see Allen 2002, 47–63.
5. The etymological postulations regarding “mulato” have generally centered around associations with “mule.”
6. There was movement of estate owners and their slaves from the Caribbean to the United States for economic and political reasons.
disseminated in the Anglophone Caribbean is unu, used as the second person plural pronoun, thus distinguished from English you, used as second person singular.

While most of the vocabulary treated above grew out of the crucible of slave capture and the slave trade, many other words used in the Americas reflect the retention of ideas and artifacts which the enslaved and their descendants have found useful to give accurate expression to their observations and feelings. Ideophones either borrowed from African languages or employing sound symbolism reminiscent of African phonologies prove useful in connoting size or disreputable behavior, for example bandulu (Jamaica) ‘underhand dealings’ from Kikongo bandululu ‘dirtied, distorted,’ Trinidad bubu ‘fool, ugly person’ from Kikongo ebubu ‘clown’ and buubu ‘ghost,’ Jamaican kukumkum ‘skeletal’ from Kikongo kukuma ‘lean as if to tumble over,’ and Kikongo and Jamaican kana na pol ‘Enough of the argument! Time for my opinion.’ Other vocabulary retentions range over several domains: flora and fauna, foods, anatomy, environment, and supernatural beings (Daeleman 1972, 1–44; Pessoa de Castro 1976; Dalby, 1971, 31–51; 1972, 170–186; Álvarez Nazario 1974, 116–240; Mazama 1991; Baker 1993, 123–155; Schwegler 1999; Farquharson 2012; Warner-Lewis 2015, 216–226). Among musical instruments which have crossed the Middle Passage are the kata stick percussion of the Congo, Cuba and Jamaica, the sanza of Angola and Trinidad, the Angolan berimbau of Brazil, the Akan abeng of the Jamaica Maroons, the Yoruba bata, bembe, mama ilu, and shekerere of Cuba, the madiumba or marimba xylophone of the Congo and early Cuban rumba, and the sìhun water drum of Dahomey and Curaçao.

Innovations and readaptations arise in the domains of food items and religious observance, for instance the cooptation in Trinidad Yoruba of obi ‘kolanut’ for ‘cacao,’ Hausa shinkafa > shinikafa ‘flour’ for ‘rice,’ and the formation in Trinidad of mamalawo as the female counterpart of Yoruba babalawo, ‘diviner,’ a male activity in the homeland. Loan translations from Yoruba are also evident in Trinidad expressions such as “god-horse,” i.e. praying mantis, from agemo, the divine creature which brought the first human to earth from heaven, “wood-slave” from omònle ‘gecko,’ which inhabits house rafters, literally ‘child/slave of the house,’ and “saint-horse” i.e. person “ridden”/possessed by a deity, from ċisin ọrìṣà ‘horse (of a) deity.’

Apart from the transfer of lexical items from Africa to its transatlantic diasporas, there has been the influence of African phonological features on European languages. Among these features is the modification of consonant-final English words to secure a more normative African (C) VCV (consonant + vowel) structure, thus rata ‘rat,’ futu ‘foot,’ wanti ‘want.’ Over time these changes have ceased to be operative. Consonant clusters
are also modified to reproduce the CVCV structure. Thus English [swi:t] becomes [suwit] in Jamaican Creole. Word-final -st, -ld, -nd, and -ng are reduced to [s], [l], and [n] respectively. For those Africans coming from languages without [v], this consonant would be replaced by [b], as in bery for ‘very.’ Phonological changes are also observed in several conservative dialects of Black American English, and in African realizations of Portuguese and Spanish.⁷

At the suprasegmental level, the staccato-like syllable timing of African languages in which syllabic tone plays a dominant role leads to a tendency in Caribbean English creoles to accord more or less equal prominence to word syllables, thus attenuating the stress prominence given to particular syllables in English pronunciation. In some Caribbean creoles, word-final syllables are given rather prominent pitch, a legacy of both the salience given to syllables in West African languages and the intonational upswing of word-final syllables in French.⁸

Beyond their impact on word-length utterance in the creole languages of the Americas, African languages have exerted their influence on expressive style, particularly as regards imagery. The following examples indicate some African sources, but these should not be regarded as exclusive, as similar images most likely occur in other African languages as well:

1. From mi yeye de a mi knee ‘from the time I was small’ (Jamaican Creole) occurs in Yoruba nígba tí ojú sí wà lórúnkùn ‘when eyes were still at [the height of] knees’
2. Take ‘way yourself ‘remove yourself from that person/situation’ (Jamaican Creole)—Yoruba kó/gbé arà ē kúrò ‘remove body your take away’
3. Stick break in your ears ‘you are being stubborn/disobedient’ (Caribbean Creoles)—Yoruba etí ē dì ’his ears are blocked’
4. Our eyes made four ‘we looked at each other at the same time’ (Jamaican and Trinidad Creole)—Yoruba ojú wa dì mèrìn ‘our eyes became four’
5. Kill the light, ‘turn off the switch/electricity’ (Jamaican Creole)—Yoruba pa’na ‘kill fire,’ i.e. ‘turn off the light’
6. Prop sorrow ‘place one’s chin in the palm of one’s hand, deep in thought’ (Eastern Caribbean Creole)—Kikongo fuumana ‘to be sad, melancholic, upset’

⁸ The complex interplay of syllabic stress, syllabic tone, sentence intonation, and vowel lengthening is treated in Carter 1993 and Devonish 2002.
Imagery is also a characteristic of most African proverbs, and since Caribbean proverbs are often calques of African ones, these images or comparable semantic categories are transferred from their African originals to their diasporic offshoots. Below are a few examples:

1. Better wata spill dan calabash bruk ‘it is better that water is spilled than the calabash/gourd gets broken’ (Jamaican Creole), i.e. even though a pregnancy has been lost, the womb is still intact (sentiment of consolation expressed to a grieving mother)—Fanti, Igbo, Yoruba
2. Dog sweat, but long hair cover it—‘it is not always possible to see someone else’s difficulty’—Igbo, Yoruba, Ashanti, Jamaica
3. God fan fly fi ’tumpa tail (stump-tailed) cow—‘God helps those with disadvantages’—Kutub, Igbo, Yoruba, Jamaica
4. Doh swop black dog for monkey—‘it makes no sense to exchange one thing for another that has the same qualities’—Yoruba, Trinidad, Jamaica
5. When jonkro wan’ (vulture want) go a (to) windward, he say is cool breeze blow him there—‘when someone wants an excuse to do what he wants, he finds an alibi’—Yoruba, Jamaica
6. When man dead, grass grow at ‘im (his) door—‘after someone dies, the living do as they please’—Yoruba, Jamaica, Trinidad
7. The higher monkey climb, the more his arse/tail expose—‘the more success someone has, the greater his faults appear’—Efik, Jamaica
8. Cow/jonkro must know how ‘im bottom stay (the size of his anus) before ‘im swallow abe (palmoil) seed—‘one must know one’s limitations’—Igbo, Jamaica
9. Chicken merry, hawk de near—‘when one is at the height of enjoyment, danger/trouble is not far away’—Akan, Jamaica

Apart from lexicon and idiom, syntax is a significant area which has been affected by African language structures. Serial verbs convey motion in African languages as well as in creoles. Jamaican Creole says “bring it come,” and a proverb comments on remote cause by signaling the long route that “water walk go a (to) pumpkin belly.” Instrumentality is also expressed by serial verbs in several West African languages; “he take knife

9. For further examples, see Thomas 1969; Allsopp 2004; Warner-Lewis 2004b; Parkvall and Baker 2012; Simmons-McDonald 2012.
10. In Aido 1979, 46, “The Message,” a Fanti child is described as her grandmother’s “only pot which had refused to get broken.” A Yoruba consolation is Omni ló dàntú; ort màà jágbé ì ì “It is the water that has spilled, Fate will not allow the calabash to break.”
“cut it” is a Caribbean calque of such a syntactic formulation. Another serial verb phrase occurs in West African languages expressing ideas of cognition such as ‘think,’ ‘know,’ ‘believe’: thus Jamaican Creole “Me know say ‘im a tief”—‘I know that he steals’; “Me tink say you sick”—‘I thought you were ill.’ Another transatlantic resemblance is the gender invariability of the third person singular pronoun reference: the creoles confine themselves to the masculine form. Meanwhile, the third person plural object pronoun (in English *them*, in French *eux*) is postposed to a noun to express noun plurality: Haitian and St. Lucia Creoles *kabwit yo* ‘the goats,’ Jamaican Creole *di buk dem* ‘the books,’ Trinidad Creole *di girl an’ dem* ‘the girls.’

One means of achieving emphasis is by focusing or fronting a verb, as in “is come she come,” or an adjective, as in “is sick she sick.” This syntactic formulation mimics the functional blurring between adjectives and verbs which characterizes some West African languages. Word reduplication, which occurs to lesser and greater degrees among West African languages, is also a feature of Caribbean Creoles: “quick-quick,” compare Yoruba *kia-kia*, and *basa-basa* (Twi) ‘confusion’ borrowed into Caribbean Creoles.11

But while African-language syntactic and idiomatic structures still inform West Atlantic language expression, communities employing fossilized African phraseology in speech and song are still to be found in the Americas. Such speech culture has retreated into enclaves which preserve a strong Africa-centered self-identity, such as Maroon communities in Jamaica, Surinam, and Colombia (Dalby 1971; Schwegler 2000). These enclaves harness African phrases as a marker of difference relative to their surrounding communities.

This in-group consciousness is also fostered in African-derived religious communities. In Cuba, there has existed at least since the 19th century a secret society based on the Ekpe society of Old Calabar in Nigeria, whose talisman is the leopard. This is Abakuá, a religious, political, and welfare society whose groupings harness an Efik-based vocabulary to distinguish their Spanish (Rodríguez Sosa 1982, 395–414; Matibag 1996). Similarly, adherents of Congo-related religious fraternities intercalate Kikongo phrases with Spanish ones to signal their in-group status. Examples of such inter-language are: *Va a kuna ntoto*, ‘She goes to earth,’ i.e. ‘She is going to the cemetery,’ *Ya fuiri, abajo entoto*, ‘Already he died, beneath earth’—‘He is already dead and buried’; *Endumba ta lulendo*, ‘Girl/woman

11. For the significance of reduplication in Creoles, see Kouwenberg, ed. 2003; Hosein 2012.
is [está] proud’—‘That woman is arrogant.’” These bilingual utterances display the use of fixed-form phrases, lexical compression, syntactic elision, disjuncture, and redundancy of a pidgin. Similar processes characterize the in-group language of the Kumina communities in Jamaica, where groups of adherents consider themselves a “banz” < Kikongo mbanza “community” (Stewart 2005, 154). They intercalate Jamaican Creole with Kikongo phrases: nini soso lango ‘to drink only water’—‘pure water for drinking’; Well, gwanks, ko dya mbolo, dya madya—‘Well, old man, not eat bread, eat food.’”

Where, in the 20th century, strings of monolingual African languages are spoken, these display signs of language decay, in that their second- and third-generation speakers consciously generate a vocabulary confined to the concrete rather than one which is kinship-related, administrative, or abstract. This is because first-generation 19th century Africans, living in alien environments, passed on utterances with a narrowing discursive range compared to the domains they would, as adults, have mastered in their homelands. Furthermore, many of those migrants were teenagers and even younger, and had not yet mastered the nuances and domain range of their native language. In any case, these mother tongues would now suffer restricted functionality in alien environments. Furthermore, such language skills as were passed on to succeeding generations were largely done informally and irregularly, and in large measure comprised instructions to perform domestic tasks. Residual Trinidad Kikongo therefore manifests limited knowledge of pronominal sets, avoidance of the complex prefixation and suffixation of Kikongo noun and verb formations, and reliance on infinitives and past perfect verb forms. Trinidad Yoruba also showed loss of Yoruba’s various personal pronoun paradigms. Discourse exhibited use of simple declarative sentences and relative clauses, but clause-conjoined sentences were noticeably avoided. In Trinidad Fon data, a periphrastic formulation substituted for a kinship term which was not known.

As with Fon from the former Dahomey, Yoruba as produced by Trinidadian speakers generally showed erosion of syllabic tonal differentiation and of

14. The persistence of Yoruba, Efik, Fon, Hausa, and Kikongo into the 20th and 21st centuries reflects the 19th century arrival of these speakers in the Caribbean. The demographic size of these groupings may be an additional factor, but not necessarily.
those tonal glides used as syntactic markers. Among those who observed
tonal differentiation, patterns were inconsistent. There was also irregular
application of vowel harmony rules. Since coarticulated stops do not occur
in European languages, in English-speaking Trinidad there was consistent
rounding segmentation of coarticulated stops, i.e. [gw] replaced [gb], and
aspirated [p] replaced [kp]. Cuban Yoruba also displays rounding where
these stops occur in the Yoruba originals, so [kp] becomes [kw] and [gb]
becomes [gw]. In addition, Yoruba [ʃ], which does not occur in Spanish, is
replaced by Spanish [ʃ].

The incipient development of koines is evident from the phonological
instability of several of the Trinidad Yoruba idiolects and the polysemy
noted in the Kumina language of Jamaica (Carter 1985, 4–6). Trinidad
Yoruba texts show individuals code-switching between phonologies char-
acteristic of the Ekiti and Ọyọ regional dialects in particular, with some
Egba elements (Warner-Lewis 1996, 178–181). Similarly, the several terms
for one referent among Kumina speakers probably reflect the lexical vari-
ation among Kikongo regional dialects. Despite these signs of dialect con-
vergence in the West, the pressure to accommodate to European languages
overtook the consolidation of African-language koines, a process which
may have succeeded in intergenerational Maroon communities such as in
Suriname.

But it is in the arena of religious practice that African languages still
retain functionality in the West Atlantic. Such texts take the form of prose,
poetry, and song; most are religious, some are dirges, but several are purely
for entertainment. But domain contraction for the use of secular litera-
ture has meant its absorption into the religious liturgy. The most vibrant
usage for this literary heritage can be witnessed in the Yoruba-related
religions of the Americas: santería, lucumí, or regla de ocha in Cuba; can-
domblé in Bahia, Brazil; macumba in Rio de Janeiro; and Orisha in Trinidad
and Tobago, Grenada, and the Ọyọtunji Village in South Carolina in the
United States (Clarke 2004). In these rituals, chants are intoned by a lead
singer or sung in responsorial fashion between leader and congregation.
Various recordings of these chants have been collected, and some have

16. In discussing the predominant dialect of one Cuban singer, Abimbọla (1997,
144) recognized the Ègbàdọ dialect, which is characterized by nasality and the realiza-
tion of Yoruba sh as ch. This latter feature may however be more generalized than
Abimbọla was aware, as it is more readily the result of phonological substitution for a
non-Spanish sound. The dominance in Cuba of Ọyọ deities and the specific recognition
of the Iyessa, i.e. Ijesha, subgroup of Yoruba are among indicators that the subeth-
nic profile of Cuban Yoruba immigrants is more varied than suggested by Abimbọla’s
comments.
been translated into European languages (de Carvalho 1993; Warner-Lewis 1994; Schwegler 1996). The fact that these texts can be translated demonstrates that the language in which they are couched has verifiable rather than glossolalic sources, and that despite occasional obscurities of phrase and phonology, they bear decoding. These translation exercises have therefore served to give meaning to these chants, which some of their singers could not accurately decode even if they knew the ritual junctures for their use. Additionally, the translations have helped raise the profile and credibility of these religions. The observations of the Nigerian Yoruba scholar-priest Wande Abimbọla are pertinent:

We have listened to chants and songs to many Òrìsà. . . . These are very ancient chants. Some of them are still remembered in Africa, some have been forgotten. . . . [T]he chants are clearer and more readily understandable Yoruba than the chants that one hears on Cuban records nowadays, of which some of the Yoruba cannot be deciphered; many people just chant nonsense syllables, thinking that it is Yoruba.

(Abimbọla 1997, 144)

And while shango members in Recife, Bahia, no longer speak Yoruba—“the last few” who did died in the 1940s—practitioners “are still able to perform all their rituals while singing and praying exclusively in that language” (de Carvalho and Segato 1992, 9). Kikongo-based texts are also utilized in the Cuban Palo Monte religion, and several are reproduced in Lydia Cabrera’s writings (Cabrera 1979, 1986).

It is obvious that on the island of Trinidad, there had been 19th century immigrants who purposefully taught their descendants to rehearse chants and prayers. For memorization, these texts were committed to writing, doubtless using idiosyncratic orthography. In Cuba, a tradition developed whereby members created libretas (notebooks) with Yoruba/Spanish and Spanish/Yoruba word-lists and sacred texts, including patakin or narratives about the orisha (León 1971; Martínez Furé 1986; Ayorinde 2004). The same practice holds for members of the Congo-based Palo Monte religion and of the Abakuá secret society. Such notebooks are still privately held today by religious adepts, and some are retained at the Cuban National Library in Havana.

In Trinidad during the 20th century several attempts were made by individuals to hold Yoruba language classes, but these attempts were

17. For sound recordings from Cuba, see Marks 2001a, b; for Trinidad, see Hill 1998; Andall 1999; 2002; 2004; and Gibbons and Sandiford 2005; for Haiti and Cuba, see Hart and Jabbour 1998.
short-lived, no doubt because of the nonfunctionality of the language for everyday purposes. However, the reinvigoration of the Orisha religion during the 1970s following the reawakening of Africa consciousness through the Black Power movement has led to a new urgency to engage with language classes. While most Orisha members still sing the chants “through imitation of sound rather than from the printed page,” newer adherents also make a conscious effort to learn and use Yoruba religious discourse. So that priests and priestesses of some shrines now include prayers in Yoruba as a means of minimizing the recital of Catholic prayers as part of their ceremonial (Henry 2003, 116).

Imitative learning resembles the situation affecting the “Kumina pidgin” used in Jamaica. Several people learned their African language at Kumina ceremonies “rather than from older members of their own families, though in each bands there is usually at least one person who has the knowledge traditionally, having learnt all or some of it as a child from ‘foreparents’ or other relatives. . . . As is not unusual in cults of this kind, where the language has assumed something of a sacred character, there are not wanting tales of magical or miraculous acquisition” (Carter 1985, 4).

With respect to Yoruba-based religions, a global network has developed in the last few decades of practitioners who correspond with each other and with savants in Nigeria through visits, consultations, pilgrimages, conferences, and social media (Matory 2000). This exchange has reinvigorated the use of the Yoruba language in ceremonial greetings and prayers, and not least in divination. The Ifa system of divination has been retained in Cuba, and from this center it has been disseminated to the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, the United States, and Canada. Ifa divination requires the priest to recite a number of verses for each throw of the chain of beads or cowrie shells or coconut segments onto the ọpọn (tray) covered with ashes or chalk on which the beads make their mark. Hundreds of verses have to be learned by rote, and their mastery therefore requires years of apprenticeship (Bascom 1969, 1980; Ayorinde 2004, 216–218). Cuban Ifa priests are of both African and European descent, and some of them make their living by training neophytes who travel to Cuba to undergo periods of study.

Since the cessation of the slave trade, both legal and covert, in the late 19th century and the voluntary and enforced return of Africans to their mother continent, 18 there has been comparatively little contact involving

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18. Although the British Parliament outlawed the slave trade in 1807, the trade continued for the rest of the century. This was mainly because the institution of slavery and therefore the demand for enslaved labor continued in several of the territories of
peoples across the Atlantic divide. The arrival in 1800 at Freetown, Sierra Leone, of 550 of the Jamaican Maroons who had earlier been deported to Nova Scotia, Canada, would have consolidated some of the English-lexified creole features already being established among the British “Black Poor” relocated to Freetown and forming the community called “Krio.” It is therefore not surprising that Jamaican Creole and Krio share certain lexical and syntactic characteristics (Alleyne 1980; Holm 1993).

Other than this, we may note that various teachers and missionaries from the Caribbean have worked in West and West Central Africa since the mid-19th century. There was the Anglican (Episcopalian) Diocese of Freetown, Sierra Leone, and its outreach to the Rio Pongas Mission in present-day Guinea. Here, in the 1860s, John Duport of St. Kitts worked on translating parts of the Bible into Susu and preparing a grammar and vocabulary of that language. By the 1870s, Philip Henry Douglin of Barbados had completed the New Testament and the Morning Order of Service in Susu. Another Anglican center of West Indian missionary activity was in central Nigeria. Here, in the 1910s, Walter A. Thompson and Thomas Edson Douglas of Jamaica, with the Briton Dr. Miller, completed “the great work of translating the Bible and Prayer Book into the Nupe and Hausa languages” (Evans 1975, 112).

There were other West Indians who, in their missionary service as teachers and artisans, learned to speak and understand African languages. In 1844 the Basel Mission at Akropong in the Gold Coast—which later morphed into the Ghanaian Presbyterian Church—received 22 Jamaicans and one Kittitian who, apart from proselytizing, came to teach academic subjects and manual skills. They established primary schools and a seminary, and one of them, W. W. Clerk, became known as Sukumansere ’schoolmaster’ (Reynolds, 1985, 36).

Language exchange also took place at Calabar in eastern Nigeria, where West Indians played seminal roles in establishing the Presbyterian denomination and teaching at the Hope Waddell Institute. Great emphasis was placed on teaching in English, which the Kalabari found useful “to keep accounts of their trade with the English, write letters, and read English books” (Cooke 2013, 314–315). Jamaican teachers, carpenters, the Americas. In British territories, slavery was abolished between 1834 and 1838; in French and Danish colonies it continued until 1848, in the Dutch West Indies till 1863, in the United States until 1865, in Cuba until 1880, and in Brazil until 1888. Even after the abolition of slavery in various jurisdictions, clandestine operations of the trade continued. Regarding the return of ex-slaves to Africa, see Sarracino 1988; Boadi-Siaw 1993; Law 2004; Warner-Lewis 2009, 256–258.
and agriculturalists who were members of the mission, however, learned to communicate in Efik.\(^{19}\) Meanwhile, at the island of Fernando Po and at Bimbia on the Cameroon mainland, Joseph Merrick, a Jamaican missionary in the 1840s, formed “churches and schools . . . A gifted linguist, he soon was able to preach in both [Isubu and Duala] tongues.” He “print[ed] school lessons and books in Isubu, as well as a hymn book; a second-class book in the tongue of Fernando Po; gospels of Matthew and John, a large part of Mark and sections of both Old and New Testaments. He also printed a dictionary in Isubu,” along with another dictionary comparing several of the regional dialects of Isubu (Cooke 2013, 265).

Within historical times, therefore, African languages have been in contact with European languages for some six hundred years. “By the end of the fourteenth century and during the fifteenth, black slaves had been brought into Spain and Portugal from North Africa . . . [through] the trans-Saharan trade.” Then the “Portuguese gained direct access to African labour from the Upper Guinea Coast as of 1441. . . . Its first Central African slaves arrived from the Kongo kingdom in 1513” (Warner-Lewis, 1997, 84).\(^{20}\) Over the centuries, the contact has catalyzed new language formations on both sides of the Atlantic. African languages have in the process left their mark on lexica, semantics, syntax, morphosyntax, and the phonology and idioms of these new languages. Though not still extant as evolving systems, rote-learned African language discourse and religious chants still exist in esoteric ritual spaces in the Americas. Furthermore, African verbal strings and melodic phrases may still be heard in traditional folk songs and in fragments of ever-evolving secular song types distinctive to Caribbean and Latin American musics.

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\(^{19}\) Information from oral interviews conducted in Kingston, Jamaica by Maureen Warner-Lewis with Marie Foster, widow of missionary Frederick Foster, 1978, and with Joyce Balfour, daughter of missionary Norman Sinclair, 1993.

\(^{20}\) Based on deGranda 1966; Pike 1972; Saunders 1982.


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