

JESÚS FUENTES GUERRA & ARMIN SCHWEGLER: *Lengua y ritos del Palo Monte Mayombe: dioses cubanos y sus fuentes africanas*. Madrid: Iberoamericana / Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert, 2005.

This study of the *lengua* or ritual language of Palo Monte Mayombe, an Afro-Cuban religious practice of western central African origin, reveals its Kikongo etymology. This finding is important as the “African” elements of the *lengua palera* were previously assumed to be a confluence or mixture of various Bantu languages. The authors of this book argue that, despite strategies of simplification, restructuring and phonetic accommodation prompted by Cuban Spanish, the *lengua palera* apparently contains no non-Kikongo African elements.

The first section of the work is a brief introduction to the Palo Monte belief system, outlining the ritual elements that associate it with the Bakongo world. A selection of ritual texts, including songs, invocations and ceremonial greetings, are reproduced here. These were recorded during the authors’ fieldwork in Cienfuegos, an important but hitherto under-researched area of Palo Monte practice in central Cuba. The texts are accompanied by Spanish translations and extensive notes.

The second section of the book examines linguistic data, specifically the names of a number of Palo Monte Mayombe deities obtained from several works by Lydia Cabrera. As the first consistent etymology of Afro-Cuban Palo vocabulary, this work is extremely valuable. It also summarizes recent research in the history and ethnography of practices that, until very recently, received far less scholarly attention than the Yoruba-based traditions. This is one reason why a number of erroneous assumptions persisted, one being that the early arrival in Cuba of Africans who became subsumed under the ‘Congo’ ethnonym, as well as the large diversity of Bantu ethnic subgroups, had worked against the successful transference of their cultural and religious forms.

Fuentes Guerra and Schwegler’s examination of the linguistic evidence counters this view. It reinforces the hypothesis presented by Fuentes Guerra in an earlier work (2002) that direct transmission of Kikongo forms was begun and maintained by Bakongo and their descendants in Cuba. He noted that large numbers of Bakongo arrived on the island during the mid-19th century sugar boom and traced their geographical origins to Lower Kongo, a relatively small area corresponding to the Cabinda province of present-day Angola. It includes the regions of Zaire, Uigi, Vili and the Mayombe forest, hence the derivation of the name Palo Monte *Mayombe* and also that of another Palo subgroup, Briyumba or Vriyumba, which the authors suggest probably originated in Vili.

Also referred to here is Thornton’s (1995) theory that exposure to Catholicism in the kingdom of Mbanza Congo from the 15th century resulted in a process of

adaptation between European and African elements. This apparently gave rise to a tendency to disregard theological contradictions between the religions which later became transferred to the diaspora. However, the early Christianization of the Bakongo has been used elsewhere to explain the intrusion of Christian prayers into Palo liturgy.

One important finding presented in this book is that, although Paleros have differing levels of mastery of the ritual language, some use *lengua* with surprising fluency when communicating about religious themes. The authors note that Paleros hold dialogues with each other to display their command of the *lengua*.

Fuentes Guerra and Schwegler refer to the way that Palo exists within a multi-religious environment. For example, the Palo deities or *mpungos* have assumed some of the qualities of the Yoruba *orishas* with which they became associated in Cuba. As Palmié notes in the Prologue, “even though a lexicon replete with Kikongo expressions is the hallmark of Palo Monte, the tradition is reproduced within a semantic framework that draws to a considerable extent on conceptions current in Regla de Ocha.” More discussion of the implications of this would have been useful in this book. Both Palmie (2002) and Brown (2003) have discussed the ideological and practical relationship between the practices of Kikongo and Yoruba origin, suggesting that this developed in the nineteenth century when large numbers from both groups were arriving on the island. Yet alongside these linkages, Palo evidently functions within a degree of linguistic isolation. Fuentes Guerra and Schwegler point out that *lengua* appears not to be permeated at the linguistic level by other Cuban African forms such as Yoruba-Lucumí, Arará or Abakuá. Also, and in contrast to the other Afro-Cuban practices, most Africanisms in Palo speech have not passed into everyday Cuban speech but remain circumscribed to the ceremonial world.

In their search for the African origins of the corpus derived from Cabrera, the authors drew on Kikongo dictionaries and information from Jean Nsondé, a specialist in western central and southern Bantu languages, as well as the testimony of Palo practitioners based mainly in Cienfuegos. The authors note that their informants did not recognize some of the names of the deities. In the light of this, more discussion of the implications of regional variations in Palo practice would have been welcome. Also, given their choice of data, there could have been more mention of the impact of linguistic erosion over time: Cabrera conducted her fieldwork in Havana in the first half of the twentieth century, when many of her Palero informants were second-generation Kikongo speakers.

This book is undoubtedly an important and much-needed addition to the growing number of works on the practices of western central African origin in Cuba. Although termed an exploratory study by its authors, it not only presents

a number of groundbreaking findings but also opens up further avenues for linguistic, ethnographic and historical research.

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STEPHEN G. RABE: *U.S. Intervention in British Guiana: A Cold War Story*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

U.S. Intervention in British Guiana, Stephen Rabe's most recent foray into mid-century U.S. relations with Latin America, offers nothing less than an insightful, and profoundly disturbing analysis of Anglo-American efforts through the 1960s to destabilize British Guiana. In addition to illuminating and illustrating the significance of one of the more egregious but less well-known Cold War intercessions, Rabe has woven a powerful narrative that balances the economic, strategic, bureaucratic, and military aspects of the "old" diplomatic history with the race and gender implications of the "new."

Relying heavily upon U.S. and British archival sources, Rabe traces the evolution of Guianese independence starting in the 1950s. Cheddi Jagan and his white, North American-born wife, Janet Rosenberg Jagan, represented the party of the Indo-Guianese majority, the PPP, while Forbes Burnham's PNC had the backing of the Afro-Guianese minority. The Jagans' leftist leanings perturbed the Eisenhower Administration, but terrified John F. Kennedy's. Kennedy, fearful that Jagan could become "another Castro" and begin a South American domino fall, therefore launched a concerted effort to coerce his British allies to prevent Jagan's accession. The British were to do this by withholding Guianese independence until power could "democratically" be handed to Burnham. Rabe illustrates, as well as currently declassified documents permit, how Kennedy, the CIA, and the AFL-CIO went much further, destabilizing the Guianese economy, exacerbating racial violence, suborning majority rule, and ultimately foisting the ruthless, despotic Burnham upon the new nation for the better part of the next thirty years. That Burnham eventually created a quasi-communist "kleptocracy" is only the final irony. (167)

There is much to recommend in this stinging indictment of the Kennedy Administration. As U.S. corporations had almost no interest in Guiana, it is almost impossible to question his thesis that a visceral, simplistic brand of anti-communism and hollow partisan politics motivated the Kennedy Administration's ill-informed, hypocritical, and unsavory approach. U.S. diplomats regularly denigrated Janet Jagan (who incidentally served as the leader of Guiana this year) with sexual innuendo and slanderous rumors, often accusing her of dominating