

## RESEARCH NOTE: *New Perspectives on Kongo in Revolutionary Haiti*

On February 26, 1794, Louis Narcisse Baudry des Lozières arrived at the port of Norfolk, Virginia, from Le Havre on the coast of France. His journey had not been an easy one. Shortly after leaving France, the ship carrying Baudry, his wife, their 13-year-old daughter, and a Norman servant girl was caught in a terrible storm. The family endured a harrowing four-month Atlantic crossing, but they had experienced far worse. Just two years earlier, Baudry had discovered his wife and daughter “wandering in the woods” of St. Domingue, after rebels had forced them to abandon their home in the early days of the Haitian Revolution. Baudry, a distinguished French military officer, had himself been wounded fighting the insurgents near Léogane, and the majority of the soldiers under his command had been slaughtered. Fearing for his life, Baudry fled the colony in March 1792.<sup>1</sup> In Paris, he briefly reunited with his more famous brother-in-law, the lawyer and writer Médéric Louis Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry.<sup>2</sup> However, both were soon forced into exile, and he eventually settled in Philadelphia. There, Baudry worked as a clerk, bookseller, and editor. He also used his exile as an opportunity to travel North America, spending time with his wife and in-laws in New Orleans. Eventually, Baudry presented himself as an expert on the natural history of the French colonies, delivering lectures to the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia and publishing several articles on “scientific” topics.<sup>3</sup>

Among Baudry’s most famous works is a two-volume account of his “voyages” to Louisiana. The first volume, published in 1802, was such a success that

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1. For more on Baudry’s life as a soldier and political figure in St. Domingue, see Albert Depréaux, “Le Commandant Baudry des Lozières et la Phalange de Crête Dragons (Saint-Domingue, 1789-1792),” *Revue de L’Histoire des Colonies Françaises* 17 (1924): 1–42.

2. Moreau de Saint-Méry’s detailed study of colonial St. Domingue is the most authoritative and most frequently cited source on the history of Haiti prior to the Revolution. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l’Isle Saint-Domingue*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Chez l’auteur, 1797).

3. See for example Baudry, “A Memoir on Animal Cotton, or the Insect Fly,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 5 (1802): 150–159. For a brief treatment of Baudry’s life as a natural historian, see Christopher Iannini, *Fatal Revolutions: Natural History, West Indian Slavery, and the Routes of American Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 1–3, 7–8, 268–269.

he completed the much longer *Second Voyage* just a year later. Like the first volume, Baudry's *Second Voyage à la Louisiane* focuses neither on a voyage, nor very much on Louisiana, perhaps explaining why so little attention has been paid to it by scholars. Rather, the book is a natural history of St. Domingue, offering an eclectic mix of the biological, botanical, and medicinal knowledge of the island, alongside poetry, anecdotes, and political reflections. Baudry firmly believed that France would once again rule over its rebel colony. As such, the volume's true aim is stated in the first two sentences of the introduction: "We will without doubt reconquer the incomparable island of Saint Domingue. It is in this hope... that I decided to offer the Colonists the fruit of some of my observations on the peculiarities of this beautiful country."<sup>4</sup>

A significant portion of *Second Voyage* is devoted to African slavery—a description of the "Angola" coast, interactions between masters and slaves in St. Domingue, and most notably a 39-page "Dictionnaire ou Vocabulaire Congo." Baudry's intent was to educate planters on the operation of efficient, productive business enterprises. He believed that knowledge of Kikongo would aid masters in preventing the high mortality and other "inconveniences" frequently suffered by *bossal* ("raw," newly arrived) slaves. Indeed, Baudry viewed the treatment of slaves through much the same redemptionist prism as he saw the colony's "lost" natural history. For Baudry, communication with Africans was a "science": "As a farmer myself, I have felt the usefulness of this kind of science, and in my leisure moments . . . I have tried to learn enough to understand my *bossal* slaves and to be understood." According to Baudry, speaking to the *bossal* in his own language will "brighten him and inspire his confidence. His hope born, you soften in him the memory of his hut, his sad family, and soon he no longer sees you as a man superior to him, but as a benefactor who has snatched him from death, misery, and the degradation of man."<sup>5</sup>

A cynical reading of Baudry's account might conclude simply that he was calling for the manipulation of Africans to capitalize on their labor. Such a conclusion would not be wrong. Baudry was no champion for Africans nor, more generally, for people of color in St. Domingue, especially in the wake of the Revolution.<sup>6</sup> Yet, his writing does reveal a familiar, personal connection that emerged out of Kikongo conversations with his slaves. The "softening" elicited by the African's "memory of his hut" and "his sad family" required far more than a mechanical knowledge of word translation: it required a depth of cultural

4. Louis-Narcisse Baudry des Lozières, *Second voyage à Louisiane: faisant suite au premier de l'auteur de 1794 à 1798* (Paris: Charles, 1802), vol. 2, 1.

5. *Ibid.*, 72–73.

6. See for example Baudry's *Les égarements du nigrophilisme* (Paris, 1802), in which he argues for the restoration of slavery in the French colonies and the innate inferiority of Africans and people of color.

understanding that evoked real human intimacy. Even as Baudry claimed to be “softening” his slaves, so too was Baudry being “softened.” Regardless of his motives, Baudry was inexorably drawn into the social and intellectual worlds of the enslaved Africans on his plantation, and the vehicle for this social and intellectual transformation was the Kikongo language.

In this research note, I will examine a small portion of Baudry’s “Vocabulaire Congo” in order to extend scholarly calls for an intellectual history of the enslaved in the Atlantic world.<sup>7</sup> Haiti has long been hailed as the iconic example of slaves’ embrace of the revolutionary ideologies of the Atlantic world, yet we know very little about the ideas or inspirations of the majority of those slaves. Nearly two-thirds were Africans, half of whom had arrived in St. Domingue in the five years leading up to the Revolution. And the majority of those were from Kongo. French idioms of liberty, fraternity, and equality no doubt resonated with these Africans, but French was not their only language, nor, for that matter, the only language of their masters. By concentrating closely on the words and meanings imparted by Baudry’s “Vocabulaire Congo,” Kongolesé political ideologies begin to come into sharper focus, as tools employed not only by Africans, but also by their colonial masters. In this way, African intellectual histories became woven into the very fabric of the revolutionary Atlantic world.<sup>8</sup>

By the time the *Second Voyage* was published, Baudry was more than ten years removed from St. Domingue. He had endured flight, forced exile, and an itinerant existence in Paris, Philadelphia, and New Orleans. He claimed that when the Haitian Revolution started he had been working on a colonial encyclopedia for 18 years. This encyclopedia was to consist of “24 or 25 quarto volumes, which the brigands robbed me of during their insurrection.” Remarkably, using only a few notes salvaged from the ashes of his plantation, Baudry recreated from memory a French-Kikongo vocabulary consisting of more than 680 words and 120 phrases. Christina Mobley has demonstrated that Baudry’s vocabulary reflects linguistic patterns of a fairly small group of western Kikongo speakers who came from north of the Congo River.<sup>9</sup> These findings accord with what we know about the eighteenth-century French slave trade

7. See for example Laurent Dubois, “An Enslaved Enlightenment: Rethinking the Intellectual History of the French Atlantic,” *Social History* 31 (2006): 1–14. James Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

8. The argument laid out here builds on Sweet, *Domingos Álvares*. See also Sweet, “Reimagining the African-Atlantic Archive: Method, Concept, Epistemology, Ontology,” *Journal of African History* 55 (2014): 147–159.

9. Mobley argues that Yombe, Vili, and Woyo were the languages that most contributed to Baudry’s vocabulary. Christina Mobley, “The Kongolesé Atlantic: Central African Slavery & Culture from Mayombe to Haiti” (PhD diss.: Duke University, 2015). In chapter 5, 186–229, Mobley ingeniously combines contemporaneous eighteenth-century linguistic evidence from the Loango coast and St. Domingue to demonstrate the proliferation of Western Kikongo in revolutionary Haiti. The derivation of Baudry’s vocabulary from Western Kikongo is also confirmed by John Thornton, personal email, March 17, 2013, and Koen Bostoen, personal email, December 23, 2015. For more on the West-Kongo

along the Loango coast in west central Africa. Most of the trade derived from three ports: Cabinda, Malemba, and Loango. By the 1780s, French traders had become increasingly dissatisfied with trade at Loango and moved south to the ports of Soyo and Ambriz. This coastal area was only about 200 miles long. In his *Second Voyage*, Baudry provides short ethnographic and natural histories of each section of this coast, including nautical descriptions of the major ports, confirming their importance in the slave trade to the French colonies.

### WHAT IS A SLAVE?

By its very existence, Baudry's French-Kikongo vocabulary is an exceptional document, one of only a handful of surviving African-language vocabularies in the Americas, and the only known example from Haiti. That Baudry could recall such an extensive vocabulary ten years after leaving St. Domingue highlights just how conversant he was in Kikongo. Indeed, one wonders if Kikongo was much more than a simple "leisure" activity for Baudry; it appears that it might have been a lingua franca. A careful reading of Baudry's translation demonstrates just how deeply embedded in the world of Kikongo ideas some "French" colonizers had become.

At the most basic level, French words and their Kikongo translations illustrate the convoluted and confusing epistemological histories of the Atlantic world. For example, in Baudry's word list, his entry for 'France' is translated into Kikongo as *m'poutou*. We know that the term *m'poutou* is a corruption of 'Portugal,' a reference to the first European colonists to arrive in central Africa in the fifteenth century. For Kongolese speakers, all of Europe became *m'poutou*, regardless of national distinction.<sup>10</sup> Hence, Baudry's interpretation of France as *m'poutou* is technically correct, but the translation of France as Portugal (or Europe) reveals the ways that African homogenization of Europe elided difference in much the same way that the term 'Africa' did for Europeans. For Kongolese in St. Domingue, France and Portugal remained interchangeable as the imaginary collective homeland of all white people (*mondélé*), calling into question African understandings of the existence of 'France,' let alone the distinct principles of its revolution and their supposed influence on the Haitian uprising.

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subclade, see Koen Bostoen, Simon Branford, Rebecca Grollemund, and Gilles-Maurice de Schryver, "Introducing a State-of-the-Art Phylogenetic Classification of the Kikongo Language Cluster," *Africa Linguistica* 21 (2015): 87–162.

10. Omer Massoumou and Ambroise Jean-Marc Queffélec, *Le français en République du Congo* (Paris: Archives contemporaines, 2007), 312.

Entries like *m'poutou* tell fascinating histories of entangled Atlantic (mis)translations, and there are similar examples dotted throughout Baudry's dictionnaire. While these words reveal important epistemological differences—or “dialogues of the deaf” as Wyatt MacGaffey once called them—more interesting still are those terms for which Baudry (and other Europeans like him in the diaspora) seemed to understand clearly the implications of their “mis”-translations.<sup>11</sup> Rather than simply confusing meanings or accommodating fields of African meaning that did not have European equivalents, Baudry in several instances appears to intentionally adopt Kongolese ways of being (ontologies) in his translations of European terms. In doing so, he provides us with a rare perspective on Kongolese histories of slavery, rebellion, and memory in Haiti. These histories not only provide new insights on the lives of Africans in Haiti but also demonstrate forcefully how specific Kongolese ideas shaped French understandings in St. Domingue. Ultimately, men like Baudry naturalized the world of Kongolese ideas just as readily as Kongolese naturalized French ideas. The impacts of these ideological transformations on slavery and revolution challenge us to view Haiti's history in new ways.

As one might expect, the word ‘*esclave*’ is found prominently in Baudry's vocabulary, but the Kikongo word that Baudry chooses to represent it is one that complicates our understandings of chattel slavery. For Baudry, *esclave* translated as *vika* in Kikongo. The ambiguity of this term begins to come into view when we also recognize that Baudry also translated *captif* as *m'vika*.<sup>12</sup> As we know, all slaves were captives, but not all captives were slaves. So which meaning should take precedence? The most effective way of understanding the field of meaning embedded in *vika* is through historical linguistics.

The term *vika* comes from the common Bantu root \**-pika*, which has long been misunderstood as a Western Bantu innovation that translated simply as ‘slave’. Brazilian historian Marcos Abreu Leitão de Almeida demonstrates that, in fact, the root \**-pika* (also, *-bika*, *-vika*) was a proto-sangha-kwa word that interior peoples transmitted to their proto-forest-Bantu descendants. Among these groups, the original vocabulary was retained only among Njila, Kongo-Nzebi, and some Western Savanna language speakers near Angola.<sup>13</sup> In short, the field of meaning encompassed by *pika*, *bika*, and *vika* migrated

11. Wyatt MacGaffey, “Dialogues of the Deaf: Europeans on the Atlantic Coast of Africa,” in *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters Between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, Stuart Schwartz, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 249–267.

12. In Kikongo, *vika* and *m'vika* are the same word. The “m” is simply the singular noun prefix for the root *-vika*. The fact that “*esclave*” and “*captif*” stand as separate entries in Baudry's dictionnaire—and both are “*vika*”—reveals the ambiguity of the term.

13. Marcos Abreu Leitão de Almeida, “Ladinos e boçais: o regime de línguas do contrabando de africanos (1831–c. 1850) (MA thesis: Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2012). See especially 129–152.

from the interior forests to the coast. Thus, the original meanings of *\*-pika* are to be found in the interior, with innovations moving from east to west. Moreover, the innovation of the /v/ sound in place of /p/ and /b/ is found only among Kongo-Nzebi speakers, precisely along the Loango coast and its immediate interior.

Even though *\*-vika* is commonly translated as ‘slave,’ we know that the latter term is itself an innovation, an addition to the linguistic field that represented the introduction of European forms of chattel slavery into the coastal region.<sup>14</sup> Baudry’s other translation for *vika*, ‘captive,’ comes closer to capturing the broader meaning of the term in Kikongo. Louis-Marie-Joseph de Grandpré, who worked as a slave trader and lived on the Loango coast in the 1780s, precisely the time that Baudry was speaking with his Kongoleses slaves in St. Domingue, wrote that the Kikongo term *bica* meant “to await someone, to abandon.”<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, Grandpré claimed that the term for slave was not *\*-pika* (*-bika*, *-vika*), but *montou*.<sup>16</sup>

### VIKA, EXTENDED

Baudry’s ‘captive’ and Grandpré’s ‘awaiting someone’ may appear to be contradictory, but both encompass a sense of social alienation and detachment. The archetypal form of alienation—and the epitome of *vika* status—was separation from one’s matriclan (*kanda*). To be *kanda*-less was to be a “despicable outcast, without money, without influence, without defense, exposed to all insults because nobody will stand up for him.”<sup>17</sup> The abjection of the kinless outsider could be ameliorated by building new protective social networks, but this process took time, and achieving full belonging was rare. Thought of differently, to be a *vika* was to be perpetually dependent, like a serf or vassal.<sup>18</sup>

14. See for example the explanation of Portuguese traveler Henrique Augusto Dias Carvalho, who traveled across West Central Africa in the late 1880s. He noted, “In these countries the slave, in the exact sense conveyed by the word in European languages, does not exist.” Prisoners of war who served invading armies were called *mubeka* or *mubika*, meaning “he who carries.” *Proceedings of the Royal Geographic Society* 11 (1889): 570.

15. L. de Grandpré, *Voyage à la Côte Occidentale d’Afrique fait dans les années 1786 et 1787* (Paris: Dentu, 1801), vol. 1, 161. For Grandpré, *bica* meant “attendre, laisser.”

16. For *montou* as ‘enslave,’ see *ibid.*, 156. The use of *montou* for slave persisted into the nineteenth century on the Loango coast. See for example M. Turiault, “Le Congo, langage, mœurs, religion, gouvernement des peuplades de cette région de l’Afrique équatoriale.” *Bulletin de la Société Académique de Brest* 9 (1883-84): 27, 28.

17. Leo Bittremieux, *Mayombesch idioticon* (Ghent: Erasmus, 1922), 112. Thanks to Marcos Abreu Leitão de Almeida for pointing me toward Bittremieux’s expansive definition of *dikanda*.

18. Jan Vansina writes that *pika* meant “dependent” but was “glossed as slave.” The noun *pika* is an innovation from the root *-pik*, meaning “to arrive,” as in a “new settler” or “stranger.” Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 278.

According to Grandpré, vassals (“*filz de terre*”) were distinguished from “ordinary slaves” (*montou*), who were “purchased.”<sup>19</sup> Both vassals and slaves were at the service of Kongolese princes, but the “sons of the land” held higher status than the commodified *montou*. Grandpré clarified this distinction, explaining that among the servant class:

Many are slaves and subject to the whims of their master, who sells them at his will. There are many others who do not fear a similar fate, although the law would subject them as slaves; but whether their wealth gives them a consideration which protects them, or a long descent in the place of their residence, they are so naturalized that their master is afraid to sell them, or does not want to be deprived. . . . Although they say they are slaves, the master knows his rights, but never exercises them.<sup>20</sup>

As Wyatt MacGaffey has pointed out, “In Kongo, as in neighboring areas of Central Africa, everybody was “owned” by somebody; the difference between “free” and “slave” was that ownership of the free was more widely distributed.”<sup>21</sup> This subtle but important difference can be seen in Kikongo distinctions between *vika* (owned person) and various categories of “bought” persons.<sup>22</sup> By the late nineteenth century, these included *muntu wa nsumba* (bought person), *muntu a nzimbu* (person exchanged for cowry shells), and *muntu a mbongo* (person for whom one has paid much).<sup>23</sup> Presumably, Baudry’s Kikongo-speaking interlocutors in St. Domingue had *montou* and perhaps other terms at their disposal when they chose *vika* as their preferred term for slave. Baudry almost certainly chose *vika* in accordance with the demands and self-definitions of Kongolese “slaves” in St. Domingue, demands that converged around ideas of dependency, reciprocity, the “right” to run away from cruel masters, and even master exchange.

Drawing upon a range of ethnographic and oral traditions in West Central Africa, Almeida demonstrates that across the region captives could legally change masters through highly choreographed rituals. Indeed, he argues that

19. Grandpré, *Voyage a la Côte*, vol. 1, 186. The term *montou* (also *muntu*) is most often translated simply as ‘person,’ but it appears to have emerged as a shorthand for a broad field of “bought persons.”

20. Grandpré, *Voyage a la Côte*, vol. 1, 104–105.

21. Wyatt MacGaffey, “Kongo Slavery Remembered by Themselves: Texts from 1915,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 41 (2008): 55.

22. *Ibid.*, 60. Similarly, Vansina argues that *-pika* was “certainly not the only term for slave or slavelike status in the area, but it came to refer to the *traded* slave.” Vansina, “Deep Down Time: Political Tradition in Central Africa,” *History in Africa* 16 (1989): 352. See also map 3, for the distribution of ‘*pika*’ across coastal West Central Africa.

23. Karl Laman, *The Kongo* (Uppsala: Studia Ethnographica Upsaliensia VIII, 1957) vol. 2, 56. See also Manuel Alfredo de Morais Martins, *Contacto de culturas no Congo Português* (Lisbon: Junta da Investigação do Ultramar, 1958), 54. Revealingly, Martins notes that the opposite of “bought” people were those persons “belonging to the *kanda*,” or “*muntu a kanda*,” also known as *mfumu*.

\*-pika (-bika, -vika) did not imply chattel slavery at all: rather, the essence of these terms was “master exchange.” For example, in Benguela, a mistreated slave could flee his master, enter the property of his desired new master, and kill one of his cattle. After cooking and eating the cow, he would announce his crime for all to hear, offering himself as the “eternal slave” of his new master as restitution. More simply, the slave might run to his new master, rub a piece of his clothing, and declare, “*Ame pika yove*” (I am your slave).<sup>24</sup>

Almost the same process of master exchange applied further north in the Kikongo-speaking regions that produced most of St. Domingue’s slaves on the eve of the Haitian Revolution. According to Grandpré, princes along the Loango coast frequently tried to lure the vassals of other masters to their own lands by offering new privileges and freedoms.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, describing the coast of Loango in the 1770s, the French Catholic priest Liévin-Bonaventure Proyart wrote that “the slaves are not so mistreated in these states: the King and the Princes spare those who belong to them, in the fear that having nothing which attaches them to their homeland, they will pass to the service of foreign Princes who always readily seize the opportunity to augment their possessions, ensuring the fugitive slaves that they want to give them a better fate than they have left behind.”<sup>26</sup> The practice of changing masters endured in Loango. In 1909, British anthropologist John Weeks described in greater detail the mechanics of the master-switching ritual. Weeks’ account is worth quoting at length:

In connection with slaves there is a custom that somewhat ameliorates their condition by ensuring for them decent treatment and proper consideration. A slave badly treated by his master may run off to another, who will, he thinks, use him more kindly. On arrival before the selected chief he kneels before him and pays homage, saying “I have come to you because my master does many bad things to me. Will you accept me?” If the chief listens to him and decides to accept him, he kills a goat, and they eat a portion of it together. This is a token that the chief has agreed to accept him. Guns are fired and people shout “Nkombo! Nkombo!” (Goat! Goat!), and all the town is jubilant because of the event.

On the next market day the chief takes the one he has accepted and shows him at the market, making it known that he has eaten his goat and is no longer a slave. The old master must accept the ordinary market value of his slave, and he is not allowed to take him again, or buy him for any amount of money. His former slave takes a new name from the ceremony of eating the goat, and is henceforth called

24. Almeida, “Ladinos e boçais,” 145, as quoted from Ladislau Magyar, *Viagens no interior da África Austral nos anos 1849 a 1857*, manuscript, chapt. 7.

25. Grandpré, *Voyage a la Côte*, vol. 1, 115. For a more detailed description of this practice, see Mobley, “The Kongolese Atlantic,” 152–156.

26. M. l’Abbé Proyart, *Histoire de Loango, Kakongo, et autres royaumes d’Afrique* (Paris: C.P. Berton and N. Crapart, 1776), 121.

“Nkombo” (Goat). Nor is he the slave of the man who gave him the goat— rather he is practically a free man. These “goats” are very highly appreciated by chiefs, as they generally become very faithful followers of those with whom they have eaten the goat. Some chiefs buy costly charms for the purposes of attracting these “goats” to them.<sup>27</sup>

Clearly, Europeans recognized that “slaves” demanded some modicum of fair treatment in Kikongo-speaking regions of West Central Africa, lest they offer themselves as “goats” to other masters. But how might the concept of “goat slaves” have been transmitted to colonial St. Domingue? Along with Baudry’s entries of *vika* and *m’vika* for ‘slave’ and ‘captive’ respectively, he also included the Kikongo word *bika* for the French *quitter* (to leave or part) and *lâcher* (to drop, to let go of, to release, to set free).<sup>28</sup> These definitions recall Grandpré’s *bica*, with its sense of “to wait for someone, to abandon” (*attendre, laisser*). In St. Domingue at least, the Kikongo words *vika*, *m’vika*, and *bika* operated side-by-side, opening onto a field of meaning that might explain the prevalence of *petit marronage* and French colonists’ seeming tolerance of slave gatherings at markets, provision grounds, and weekend festivals.<sup>29</sup> If slaves in St. Domingue understood slavery through the optic of dependency and reciprocity, the demands they put upon masters for “freedoms” within the institution of slavery must be understood as claims staked by dependents.

For Kongolese, these “freedoms” apparently included broad patronage networks, master switching, and even marronage metaphors related to cattle. For example, some St. Domingue runaways, after being away from their master’s property for a short period, sought to negotiate their return to the plantation through “an older woman in the planter’s family or a neighbor, with slaves promising to return if they were spared punishment.”<sup>30</sup> Other runaway slaves like the “Congos” Julien and Cupidon, each fled back to the plantations of their previous masters in the hopes that these more benevolent patrons would reclaim them.<sup>31</sup> Finally, three Congo runaways, each in different parts of the colony, allegedly walked around with bridles in their hands claiming that they

27. John H. Weeks, *Among the Primitive Bakongo* (London: J.B. Lippincott, 1914), 72–73. During roughly the same period, Karl Laman recorded similar descriptions of slaves escaping to other masters. See MacGaffey, “Kongo Slavery Remembered by Themselves,” 69–71.

28. For the French *quitter* as ‘*bika*’, see Baudry, *Second voyage à Louisiane*, vol. 2, 140. For *lâcher* as *bika*, see 130.

29. Moreau de Saint-Méry, for example, wrote that the Cap Français market drew up to 15,000 slaves every week. Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique*, vol. 1, 441.

30. Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 52–53.

31. *Affiches américaines*, January 30, 1773 (Cupidon); March 28, 1780 (Julien). *Le marronage à Saint-Domingue (Haïti): histoire, mémoire, technologie*: [www.marronage.info/fr/index.html](http://www.marronage.info/fr/index.html), accessed February 19, 2015.

were “searching for their master’s cattle.”<sup>32</sup> These three Congos, who appeared in separate runaway ads over a period of four months in 1782, are the only runaways found among the more than 10,000 runaway advertisements in St. Domingue between 1766 and 1791 who feigned searching for cattle. Perhaps this is only a coincidence. Or, perhaps rather than searching for cattle, these Congos carried the bridles as symbols of their dependent status as runaway *vika* looking to attach themselves to new masters. Whatever the case, they exemplified the full field of meanings associated with *vika* and *bika*—they were “slaves” who had “left or parted,” or “abandoned,” and were now “waiting for someone” who might serve as a new protector/patron.

Crucially, this small sample of “goat slaves” emerged in St. Domingue in the 1770s and early 1780s. During the 1780s and the years immediately leading up to the revolution, more than 230,000 Africans disembarked in the colony, nearly half of them from west central Africa.<sup>33</sup> This represented the height of the slave trade to St. Domingue. As labor demands increased and the number of Africans rapidly increased, abuses on plantations mounted. Africans were overworked, underfed, and punished in graphic fashion. The French crown tried to curb planter terror with a series of royal ordinances in 1784 and 1785, but to little avail.<sup>34</sup> Not surprisingly, slaves abandoned the plantations in droves. Of the 10,000 runaway slave ads published in St. Domingue’s most prominent colonial newspaper between 1766 and 1791, half appeared between 1783 and 1790.<sup>35</sup> But the expansion of the plantation economy, especially into St. Domingue’s mountainous regions, meant that runaways had few places to hide, and no benevolent patrons left to take up their cause. However, the revolution would present runaway slaves with new opportunities.

Evidence suggests that St. Domingue’s slaves fled to the earliest rebel camps, presenting themselves to their leaders much as Kongolese presented themselves to African chiefs—as “goats,” swearing allegiance to a new master. Kongolese slaves fled to a variety of military bands led by “kings.”<sup>36</sup> Viewed through this

32. *Affiches américaines*, April, 13, 1782 (“Une nègre, nation Congo . . . age de 15 à 16,” Port-au-Prince); August 19, 1782 (“Un jeune Nègre, nommé, Mathieu, Congo,” Saint-Marc); August 21, 1782 (“Un negre Congo, nommé Jean-Baptiste, dit Pharaon,” Fonds-Blancs). *Le marronnage à Saint-Domingue (Haïti): histoire, mémoire, technologie*: [www.marronnage.info/fr/index.html](http://www.marronnage.info/fr/index.html), accessed November 9, 2016.

33. Between 1781 and 1790, 236,848 Africans arrived at St. Domingue; of these, 112,667 were from Kongo/Angola. These figures are roughly the same as those for the previous 20 years combined. *Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*. [www.slavevoyages.org](http://www.slavevoyages.org), accessed February 19, 2015.

34. Carolyn Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The St. Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 33–37.

35. *Affiches américaines*. Altogether, the database includes 10,773 runaway advertisements. Of these, 5,381 appeared between 1783 and 1790.

36. For a careful and provocative reading of the meanings of Kongolese kingship and military service in St. Domingue, see John Thornton, “I Am the Subject of the King of Congo”: African Political Ideology and the Haitian

lens, it is no coincidence that in the earliest stages of the Haitian Revolution in places like Grand-Rivière and Les Platons, even after overwhelming military victories, insurgents did not demand the outright abolition of slavery. Rather, they tried to negotiate the freedom of their leaders, the introduction of a three-day work week, and the abolition of the whip.<sup>37</sup> Being a *vika* was not intolerable, so long as there were patrons to protect slaves' reciprocal interests.<sup>38</sup> In exchange for these concessions, leaders like Jean François, Biassou, and Gilles Bénech promised the slaves peaceful return to their plantations; however, St. Domingue's Colonial Assembly refused to negotiate with the rebels. In this way, St. Domingue slave masters simultaneously crushed the customary rights of the *maroon* (from the Spanish *cimarrón*, "wild, untamed"; often associated with cattle) and the *vika*, asserting that the "goats" and "cows" could no longer be allowed to roam freely. Rather, they had to be confined to their own corrals, laboring non-stop to satisfy their masters' voracious appetites for wealth.

Baudry's use of the term *vika* to translate *esclave* suggests how Kongolese ways of being impressed themselves on French planters in St. Domingue. Though the term *vika* was multi-valent and admittedly ambiguous, slave masters apparently acted in accordance with the broad meanings of the term, recognizing the reciprocal demands of their slaves, at least until shortly before the Revolution. Evidence suggests that the curtailing of these concessions helped spark and ultimately sustain the uprising. If, as David Geggus has argued, "marronage was primarily an alternative to rebellion, a safety valve that helps explain the remarkable absence of slave revolts in eighteenth-century Saint Domingue," then the strict curtailing of those freedoms in the immediate years leading up to the revolution marked a violation of the masters' reciprocal obligations to their slaves.<sup>39</sup> The failure of this social contract was a license to rebellion.

If the term *vika* provides us with alternate, Kongolese insights into how French masters *might* have understood slavery in colonial St. Domingue, other terms leave no room for doubting the extent to which some slave masters became etched in Kongolese ontologies. Throughout Baudry's *Second Voyage*, he uses the term '*brigand*' to describe the Haitian rebels. Recall, for example, that

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Revolution," *Journal of World History* 4 (1993): 181–214. Crucially, Thornton notes that St. Domingue's "kings" did not have to be African-born to command allegiance.

37. Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 114–117, 137–156.

38. On the notion of seeking protection from intermediary patrons, or "tough guys," in Kongo, see MacGaffey, "Kongo Slavery Remembered by Themselves," 70.

39. David Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 74. Debate over the role of runaway slaves in sparking the Haitian Revolution has been robust. Gabriel Debien and David Geggus, among others, have argued that the role of runaways was minimal, while Carolyn Fick sees much greater continuity between *marronage* and the abandonment of the plantations and the growth of the guerrilla armies of the revolution. Viewed through the Kongo optic presented here, it is clear that maroons played a crucial role in the revolution, albeit one that remained relatively conservative until all options for compromise and reciprocity had been exhausted.

the “brigands” burned Baudry’s plantation, destroying his 24-volume colonial encyclopedia. In French, the etymology of the term *brigand* dates back to around 1400 and refers to irregular “foot soldiers.” Today, the term is best defined as “robber” or “bandit,” pointing to the blurry distinction between paid mercenary soldiers and armed criminal gangs. Yet, Baudry’s Kikongo translation of *brigand*—the same term he used to describe Haiti’s revolutionary Africans—was *n’doki*. Technically, *n’doki* means other-worldly “power” that can be used for good or evil, but the ability to harness this power was always considered dangerous. Thus, its associations have nearly always translated as “witch” or “witchcraft.”

The fact that Baudry chose the socially loaded term *n’doki* to define ‘brigand’ was no error. On the contrary, Baudry almost certainly understood the Haitian rebels as “witches” and the revolution itself as an act of witchcraft. How else to explain such an “unthinkable” catastrophe, one that Baudry himself had clearly not yet reconciled, even ten years later:<sup>40</sup> What makes this reference truly important, however, is the field of knowledge from which it emanates. Baudry likely had at his disposal any number of other terms to describe *brigands*.<sup>41</sup> His choice of *n’doki* utterly failed to convey the French meaning of brigand, but it captured perfectly the French perspective on the inexplicable social ruptures, death, and destruction wrought by the Haitian Revolution. For the French, all of the “nonwhite rebels of St. Domingue” were brigands.<sup>42</sup> As a mirror to the witchcraft implied by chattel “slave” and “slavery,” Baudry translated “brigand” and “brigandage” in a way that only someone embedded in the social and cultural worlds of Kongo peoples in St. Domingue could possibly understand. In this way, Haiti became the ground for an intellectual contest over the meaning of “witchcraft,” one that implicated French and Kongolese alike.

## SWAMP GRASS AND SLAVES

Even as the French were caught up in the epistemological webs of Kongolese “witchcraft” during the Haitian Revolution, memories of Kongolese slavery, witchcraft, and violence have lived on in Haiti’s post-revolutionary history,

40. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 70–107.

41. For example, Bentley uses the term ‘*kimpumbulu*’ to describe “one who is wild, wicked, turbulent, unreliable, passionate, dissolute, rash, reckless, lawless, dissipated, loose, bad, or licentious; a vicious person, a scamp, a rascal.” W. Holman Bentley, *Dictionary and Grammar of the Kongo Language* (London: Baptist Missionary Society, 1887), 298.

42. Ada Ferrer, *Freedom’s Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 70. Ferrer convincingly demonstrates that the French reduced Haiti’s rebels to “brigands” throughout the revolution. In addition to the quotation above, see 86, 87, 91, 193.

often in plain sight. Most historians, and even casual observers, of Haiti's twentieth-century history have heard of the *tontons macoutes*, the feared henchmen who unleashed murder and mayhem under Papa Doc Duvalier beginning in the 1960s. In Haitian oral tradition, Uncle Knapsack was "a terrifying bogeyman who put disobedient children in his bag and carried them off to slavery."<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, tracing the lineage of this story to any time earlier than the period of the Duvalier regime is a challenge. In the late nineteenth century, the American lawyer John Bigelow seemingly captured a hint of this myth when he described the Haitian knapsack, or *macoute*. Bigelow wrote, "The *macoute* is a sort of knapsack or saddle-bag made of flag or swamp grass, and which the Haytian peasant throws across the back of his donkey; and in it he carries everything, from a baby to a piece of pork, from a bunch of sugar cane to a sack of flour."<sup>44</sup> Bigelow's reference to the baby in the knapsack may be a simple coincidence, though his gendering of the "Haytian peasant" as male and his lumping of the baby with consumable commodities does raise suspicions.

Regardless, Bigelow's reference to the *macoute* being made from swamp grass draws us definitively toward its Kongolese etymology and meaning. The proto-Bantu root \**-kút* means "to bind, wrap up."<sup>45</sup> Reflecting on his journey to the Congo coast in the 1780s, Grandpré noted that *macoute* was a "word of the country that means fabric of straw."<sup>46</sup> Ten years earlier, the French priest Proyard described how the Kongolese made these "*macoutes*":

The weavers make their cloths of a grass about two feet high, which grows untilld in the desert plains, and needs no preparation to be put to work.... This cloth is woven like ours; but they make it on their knees, without shuttle or loom having the patience to pass the wool through the threads with their fingers, in the same way that our basket-makers weave their hurdles.... Their little pieces, which we call *macoutes*, serve as the current money of the country.<sup>47</sup>

If the cloth work known as *macoute* operated as currency, its most obvious purchasing power was in slaves.<sup>48</sup> No greater an authority than Baudry points to the chilling exchange of *macoutes* for slaves at the port of Ambriz. In the

43. Ed Cray, "Haitian Bogeyman," *Western Folklore* 24 (1965): 121.

44. John Bigelow, *The Wit and Wisdom of the Haytians* (New York: Scribner and Armstrong, 1877), 70.

45. As a derivative, the root \**-kútù* means "bag." *Bantu lexical reconstructions 3 / Reconstructions lexicales bantous* 3, Yvonne Bastin, André Coupez, Evariste Mumba, and Thilo C. Schadeberg, eds. (Tervuren, 2002), [www.africamuseum.be/collections/browsecollections/humansciences/blr](http://www.africamuseum.be/collections/browsecollections/humansciences/blr), accessed November 9, 2016.

46. Grandpré, *Voyage a la Côte*, vol. 1, 71.

47. M. l'Abbé Proyard, *Histoire de Loango*, 108.

48. In French understandings, the *macoute* was the standard currency of the Loango coast, with slaves being the baseline commodity for measuring its value. According to Bazinghen, a slave was worth 3,500 *macoutes* in 1764. François André Abot de Bazinghen, *Traité des monnoies et de la juridiction de la Cour des monnoies en forme de dictionnaire* (Paris: Guillyn, 1764), vols. 2, 3.

introduction to his Kikongo vocabulary, he explains that fishermen in Ambriz no longer sold their fish directly to local villagers: “These fishermen do not bother to sell their fish. They send their representatives to carry their fish to land. We [the French] give them in return a currency made of straw known as makoute. They collect these makoutes. When they have a sufficient quantity, they exchange them for captives, which they sell to the slavers. These captives provide them with goods, and when they have enough to survive they leave fishing altogether.”<sup>49</sup>

In this way local fishermen literally turned fish into macoutes into slaves. Thus, the little pieces of straw cloth used to weave baskets and bags now “tied and bound” human beings to perpetual bondage in the Americas. For contemporary Haitians, the macoute may be a simple sack, but memories of kidnapping, violence, and slavery are etched onto it in inescapable ways. Uncle Knapsack is no myth; the tontons macoutes were indeed slave traders. Haitians may not have access to this history as everyday knowledge, but it is a part of their collective memoryscape. Such memories came flooding back into the explanatory realm of terror and power when Haitians faced one of the twentieth century’s most menacing dictators.<sup>50</sup>

Using Baudry’s dictionnaire, I have considered just four Kikongo words—*mpoutou*, *mvika*, *ndoki*, and *macoute*. Admittedly, this analysis is more suggestive than it is exhaustive, and I confess that I am no expert on Haitian history. However, I hope that others can see the potential in the kinds of methodological interventions and close conceptual readings that I am suggesting here. Kongolese ideas and ways of being shaped slavery, revolution, and memory in ways that have scarcely been noticed by historians of Haiti.<sup>51</sup> These ideas penetrated into the very fabric of eighteenth-century St. Domingue society, reaching even French planters like Baudry, Moreau de Saint-Méry, and others.

## KIKONGO ONTOLOGY IN HAITI’S HISTORY

Given the predominance of west central Africans in St. Domingue on the eve of the Revolution, the presence of Kongolese ideas should come as no

49. Baudry, *Second voyage à Louisiane*, vol. 2, 83.

50. Here I draw liberally from the ideas of Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). See especially chapter 2, “Spirit Memoryscape.”

51. There are important exceptions. See for example John Thornton, Terry Rey, and most recently, Christina Mobley.

surprise.<sup>52</sup> Yet scholars continue to be deeply skeptical of inquiries such as this one. Most recognize that African ideas mattered, but those ideas are somehow set aside as inscrutable. David Geggus warns against the “twin perils of exoticizing or occidentalizing... the attitudes and beliefs” of Africans in the Haitian Revolution.<sup>53</sup> Meanwhile, Laurent DuBois asks, “Would we recognize an ‘African’ political ideology if we saw one?”<sup>54</sup> French men like Baudry clearly knew Kongolese ideas when they saw them. And they sometimes tried to co-opt those ideas into their collective service, much as Africans did with ideas like “liberty” and “freedom.”

To shrug our shoulders and concede to the futility of excavating African ideas in the Haitian Revolution is to reify those European intellectual strands that are familiar and accessible. Such a move forecloses *any* African intellectual history of the Haitian Revolution and leaves us with the same old “Enlightenment” and “Age of Revolution” approaches that are far more ahistorical (and essentialist) than those that try to center on the majority-African rebels. Bringing the Africanist’s methodological toolbox to bear on Haitian sources challenges the way we understand “slavery” and “revolution” in Haitian history and memory. A capacious methodological approach that utilizes historical linguistics and early ethnography, alongside archival sources, suggests a more complicated history of the Revolution and its aftermaths.<sup>55</sup>

Africans surely embraced European ideas, but the opposite was also true. Ultimately, I endorse DuBois’s argument that “to begin truly to grasp the intellectual history of the eighteenth-century Caribbean we must understand the layering transformations and translations, rooted in Africa, Europe, and the Americas, that produced it.”<sup>56</sup> We already understand the European roots pretty well. If we desire to understand the fields of knowledge and ways of being of the largest group of African slaves in St. Domingue during the revolution, we must find new ways of accessing their ideas. The sources for Kongolese translations and transformations exist. We just have to ask them the right questions.

52. Kongos made up at least half the slave population on coffee plantations in the northern and western Provinces. In the sugar-producing regions of the north, they comprised 40 percent of the slaves. Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 42.

53. David Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 42.

54. Dubois, “An Enslaved Enlightenment,” 13.

55. As far as I am aware, the only scholar currently employing such broad, cross-cutting methodologies for Haitian history is Christina Mobley. See Mobley, “The Kongolese Atlantic.”

56. Dubois, “Enslaved Enlightenment,” 14.