

## How I “discovered” Afro-Paraguayan Spanish

I had always wondered about the results of the African diaspora in Paraguay, a nation with a miniscule population of African origin. Josefina Pla’s book provided some historical facts, but it was not until I heard about the Kamba-Kuá community and its Afro-Paraguayan ballet group that I found a lead to follow in potential fieldwork. Kamba-Kuá (in Guaraní “agujero de los negros”) was a small settlement of free Afro-Uruguayan soldiers who had accompanied Artigas in exile around 1820. Since I was invited to teach a seminar at the national university in Montevideo, Uruguay in 2006, I asked my colleague Graciela Barrios for possible contacts in Paraguay, and she gave me the name of Nancy Benítez at the Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay (a Mennonite institution). I wrote to Nancy explaining my interest, and she invited me to give some lectures, a mechanism that would justify a visit to Paraguay. So I purchased an additional ticket Montevideo-Asunción. When the time came to travel to Paraguay, at the airport I discovered that Paraguay required a visa for entry (I had naively assumed that the days of entry visas for short visits were over). I rushed from the airport to the Paraguayan consulate, where through an immense act of kindness they expedited my visa the same day, allowing me to travel to Paraguay the next day.

In Asunción I obtained the phone number of Lázaro Medina, founder of the Kambua-Kuá folk ballet and the principal Afro-Paraguayan activist at the time. Lázaro welcomed my interest and told me how to reach Kambua Kuá, a tiny enclave on the outskirts of Asunción.



I took a city bus and got off at the Hospital Materno-Infantil, then walked back a block to a single road alongside the hospital grounds. After several land-grabs by the Stroessner dictatorship, Kambua Kuá was reduced to a couple of blocks along a poorly maintained road.





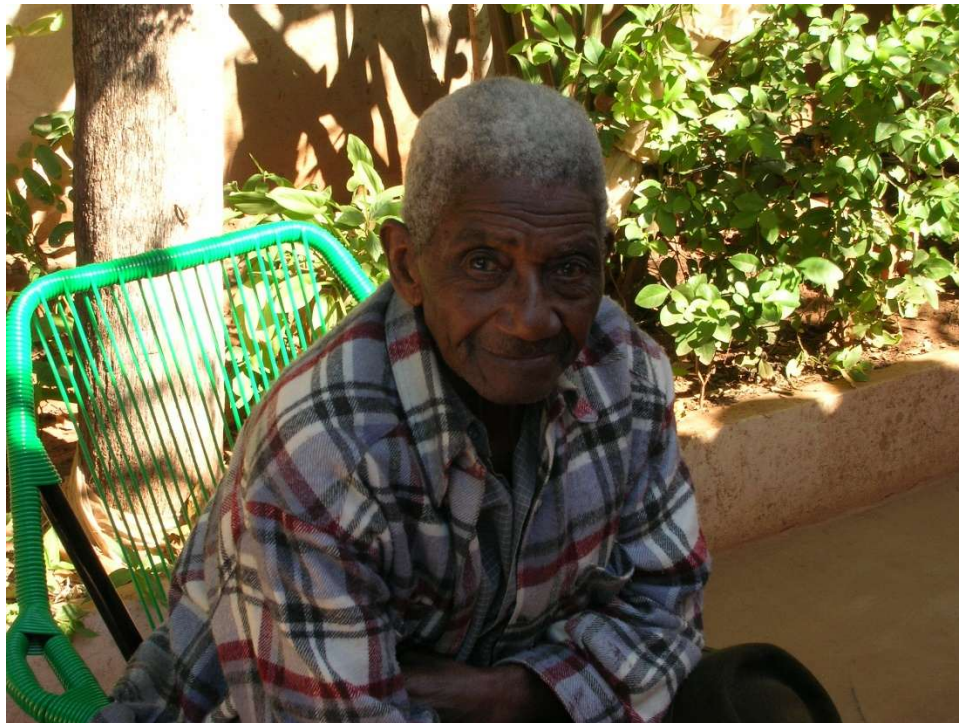


I met Lázaro and some other community members in a small building that served as a makeshift headquarters.





Lázaro accompanied me to visit other community members, including his grandfather, Santiago Medina, and his aunt, Eulalia “Laly” Medina.








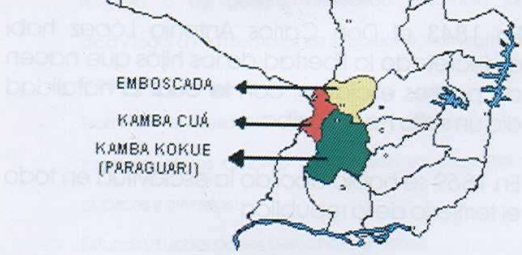

In my next visit (2008), Lázaro gave me a copy of the census that the Afro-Paraguayans had conducted (since the national census did not identify persons of African descent). In addition to Kamba-Kuá, the activists also “discovered” the tiny enclave of Kamba-Kokué at the edge of the

town of Paraguari. They also collected data in Emboscada, which had been founded by free Afro-descendants during the colonial period.



**ASOCIACIÓN AFROPARAGUAYA KAMBA CUÁ**  
Creada el 16 de Junio de 1999  
Personería Jurídica N° 189/01  
Entidad Sin Fines de Lucro  
E-mail: asocambacua@telesurf.com.py - Telefax: 00 595 21 675 379  
Cruzada de la Amistad N° 1211 c/ Avda. Mcal. López  
Fernando de la Mora - Paraguay

**1er Censo Afrodescendiente en Paraguay**

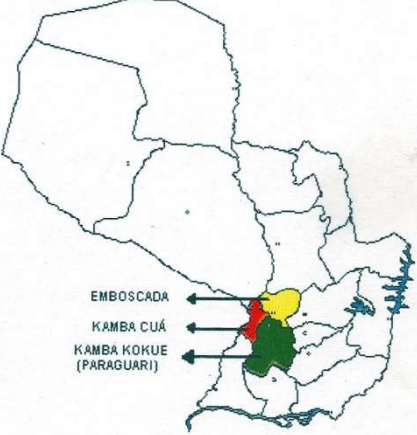


EMBOSCADA  
KAMBA CUÁ  
KAMBA KOKUE (PARAGUARI)

**CONOCIENDO A MI GENTE**




**CENSO DE POBLACIÓN Y VIVIENDAS DE TRES COMUNIDADES AFRO PARAGUAYA**

Resultados finales



EMBOSCADA  
KAMBA CUÁ  
KAMBA KOKUE (PARAGUARI)

Conociendo a mi gente



To date no accurate information on the origins of Kamba Kokué's Black community has come to light. I was able to travel by bus from Asunción to Paraguari, getting off at a gas station on the highway and walking through some rural terrain until I came to the enclave now known as Kambua Kokué ("finca de los negros"), although most residents of Paraguari had never heard this name (the official name is Barrio Virgen de Caacupé) The community consisted of scattered houses in a semi-rural setting.











I conducted several interviews and learned a lot about racial discrimination here and elsewhere in Paraguay.



At another time, I traveled to the small town of Emboscada, traditionally the home of Afro-Paraguayans but now indistinguishable from other small Paraguayan cities.



*Monseñor AGUSTIN BLUJAKI*

**PUEBLO  
DE PARDOS LIBRES**

**SAN AGUSTIN DE LA EMBOSCADA**

ASUNCION - PARAGUAY  
1980



The culturally identifiable Afro-Paraguayans were found in the community of Minas on the outskirts of Emboscada.











I had gone to Minas with no references, but stopping at the school I was able to get a few names, and I managed several very interesting interviews.





Back in Asunción, I wanted to track down a supposed Afro-Paraguayan enclave close to Kamba-Kuá, referred to in colonial documents as Laurelty. Evidently founded by the same Black soldiers who accompanied Artigas, Laurelty is mentioned in many documents, but sometimes with the suggestion that it was an alternative name for what is today Kamba-Kuá. However Lázaro was quick to point out that Laurelty was indeed a separate community, and immediately invited me and a cousin into his car and drove us about 15 minutes away to what was traditionally Laurelty (few today use the name, but local residents acknowledge it). Contemporary Laurelty does not have the activist cachet of Kamba Kuá, but I interview several residents who identify with Afro-Paraguayan history and culture.









Sadly, Lázaro Medina passed away in 2013 at a young age, just a few years after he had helped me to understand so much of Afro-Paraguayan culture and history. Other activists continue to struggle for recognition as Afro-Paraguayans