

## 1. Description

### 1.1 Name of society, language, and language family

- Bongili (Bongiri, Bungili, Bungiri, Bokiba), Bantu

### 1.2 ISO 639-3: bui

### 1.3 Location :

- 0° 18' N 15° 30' E (Sangha region, Sangha River area, southeast of Ouesso, to Pikounda area; southwest of Ouesso, Liouesso area.) Republic of the Congo

### 1.4 Brief history:

- “The Republic of the Congo was first settled by the illusive Pygmies. They were followed by the Bakongo, Bateke and Sanga peoples in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. Once the coastal areas were discovered and explored by the Portuguese, the natives (making friends quickly) began to cooperate with the Europeans, and soon, the slave trade flourished. In fact, the coastal area was a major source for the transatlantic slave trade. Over many decades, an assortment of European traders searched for additional economic opportunities here, and then, in 1891, this resource-rich land was colonized by the French, and named the French Congo – later the Middle Congo. Subsequently, the Congo’s population suffered through forced labor, and country’s valuable rubber and ivory resources were exploited. Independence from French control was achieved in 1960, however, over the decades that followed the Republic of the Congo suffered through Marxism, a bloody civil war, on-going political instability, and ethnic unrest. The Republic of the Congo has significant underdeveloped economic potential, a poor infrastructure and inadequate health care. On the positive side, it’s one of Africa’s largest petroleum producers. Its relatively sparse population is concentrated in the southwestern portion of the country, between the capital city of Brazzaville and the coastal city of Point Noire, leaving the vast areas of tropical jungle in the north virtually uninhabited.” (5)

### 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

- “Catholic missionaries arrived around 1922 and began setting up Catholic schools.” (6p48)
- “1910 Middle Congo, as the country was then known, became a colony of French Equatorial Africa. (3)
- “1960 Congo became independent with a catholic priest, Abbe Fulbert Youlou, as president.” (3)

### 1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

- “A dense, humid forest spreads over the vast central part of Africa.” (2p203)
- “The vegetation includes fields and their fallows along the roads connecting villages. The second is the marsh forest of the flooded zone. The last is the semi-deciduous forest in an interfluvial zone. The latter two are primary forests.” (2p205)

### 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density:

- 4000

## 2. Economy

### 2.1 Main carbohydrate staples(s):

- "...plantains, cassava, yams, groundnuts, manioc, potatoes, wheat, maize, beans and paddy rice." (3p340)

#### 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

- domestic animals and "game meat, especially elephant and pig" (1p220)

#### 2.6 Land tenure:

- "Farmer communities, like other colonists arriving in the Central African forests, have divided up areas of forest between themselves." (1p248)

### **4. Life History, mating, marriage**

#### 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

- The Bilo have a tradition of bridewealth payments (1p243)

#### 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

- "...Bilo men only marry Yaka women, never letting their own women marry Yaka men." (1p59)
- "Luma women quite often marry low-status Bilo men..." (1p59)

### **Warfare/homicide**

#### 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

- "Other Mbendjele, from the same clans, have maintained relations with Bongili Bilo for five generations. This suggests they began establishing their relations around 125 years ago, just prior to the colonial penetration." (1p35)

### **5. Socio-Political organization and interaction**

#### 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

- "Ikelemba is a Sangha-Sangha Lino village, shared with some Bongili. The population of the village was around 160 people ... " (1p15)

#### 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality)

- "Although growing urban populations are also called Bilo, typical Bilo are village dwelling, agriculturalists, and fishing or trapping peoples, who speak Bantu or Ubangian languages. (1p208)

#### 5.12 Trade:

- "...among the Bilo was Kibino, a Lino-Bongili from Ikelemba. He was a commercial bushmeat trader at the time..." (1p21)
- "Hunter or trader participating in the regional bushmeat trade, Regional trader in non-meat products, Village trader in small goods" (1p44, Table 2)

### **6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)**

#### 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

- "*Ejengi* plays a crucial role in the lifting of mourning, or commemoration ceremony, for Bilo or Mbendjele who have died. Most ethnic groups in the region practice this ceremony. It requires the participation of *Ejengi* to dance and end the ceremony by taking the bereaved down to water to be purified from their sorrow. Mbendjele dance *Ejengi* for Bilo funerals because Bilo will provide food and drink in abundance. Bilo want *Ejengi* to dance for them in order to remove the pollution of death. These different

objectives do not clash, but are well integrated by *Ejengi* and have in effect expanded *Ejengi's* role. When Mbendjele dance *Ejengi* to end the commemoration ceremony after someone has died, they emphasise abundance. If the dead person was still hanging around, they might stop people finding food. The ability to get sufficient goods for the commemoration ceremony is the sign that they are allowing the living to continue finding food, and therefore the bereaved can now cut their hair and dress in nice clothes again without causing their dead relative to become jealous.” (1p185)

- “...all the neighbouring Bilo groups depend entirely on the Mbendjele to perform their major rites. In the cultural traditions of all the non-Yaka people of northern Congo the most elaborate public rituals tend to occur around key moments in the life cycle of a person – events such as birth, circumcision, marriage and death.” (1p126)

#### 6.4 Other rituals:

- “The Bongili Bilo dance called *bedio* (the ancestors) was described by some Mbendjele as similar to a *mokondi massana*. I think that this was because the dance is structured similarly to *mokondi massana*.” (1p29)
- “...Structural uniformity is evident in the organization of ritual associations (...*mokondi massana* in Mbendjele).” (1p30)

#### 6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

- “Christian, Animist, others” (5)

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