1. Description:

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Bwa (Ababua/Ngombe), Benge, Niger-Congo (Bantu)

- 1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): bww
- 1.3 Location: Northern areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo (Uele Region)
- 1.4 Brief history:

"Many years ago, according to a widespread tale, when all the Ngombe were living in the upper reaches of the Mongala River, a large group went out on a co-operative hunt. One of the hunters, Kulupa, was separated from his father and his brothers because he was called by his wife's kinsmen to aid them on the opposite perimeter of the circle of hunting net. After several hours of unsuccessful hunting, the brothers of Kulupa heard men shouting, "Kulupa died! We've killed Kulupa!" Believing their brother to have been killed by his affines (bokilo), they asked their father what should be done. Without hesitation the elder urged them to vengeance against those believed to have set upon and killed one of their lineage. Immediately they left their nets and attacked the opposite lineage, and in the midst of battle there was no time to explain that it was not Kulupa, the man, but one of the species of antelope Kulupa, that had been killed. Once the two lineages started to fight there was no cessation, and their hostility continued for years until the two groups separated, one moving southward across the Mongala to the Congo River and the other westward toward what is now Bosobolo near the Ubangi River. * Only by maintaining a great distance between them could they avoid conflicts costly to both sides. Eventually, the Ngbandi and Ngbaka peoples, moving in from the north, established themselves between the warring Ngombe factions, cutting them off from any further contact." (Wolfe 93)

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

Missionaries: "Roman Catholic missionaries have done considerable research on movements of the peoples of the Ubangi District, concluding that the earliest location known for the Ngombe, probably in the seventeenth century, is the Uele district to the northeast, from which they moved westward." (Wolfe 4)

"God is to be sought in another world, not here and now, does not conflict with Ngombe belief for those ancestors who are expected to aid materially are those who are close, while more distant ones enter only indirectly. Nevertheless, the Ngombe look upon the material wealth and standard of living of Europeans as a manifestation of the favor in which they must stand with their God. A result of this combination of factors is that most Gonji Ngombe express without hesitation their belief in the existence of the Christian God, even though their contact with missionaries has been limited, their villages being visited only briefly, once or twice a year." (Wolfe 77)

Government: The Congolese government puts certain restrictions on the farming and hunting practices of the Bwa. They are sometimes forced to grow a certain type of crop (usually grain) for the government, and are restricted from hunting certain endangered species (such as elephants).

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

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

Population size: 150,000 Bwa speakers (Ethnologue), 25,000 Benge specific speakers (Bwa Bloc Survey Report)

Mean village size: "The maximal lineage constituted by the descendants of Gonji has a population of approximately five thousand and a depth of at least seven generations." (Wolfe 36)

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

"The narrow strips provided under this rule were no doubt adequate for the small gardens of manioc, plantain, maize, and sugar cane desired by the Gonji Ngombe, but when the Belgian administration imposed upon each man the duty to raise dry rice on a plot fifty paces by one hundred paces, considerable overlapping was necessitated." (Wolfe 54)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

"The Moswea [specific Bwa group] subsist primarily on manioc roots and leaves, corn, plantain, peanuts, and other garden products, and also spend much of their time in their cotton fields, the entire product of which is sold to the government-licensed *Cotonco* corporation." (Wolfe 111)

In addition to those, the Bwa also consume/use:

-various types of fish

-palm oil

-wild game

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

Bwa warriors had an array of weapons including:

-shields

-bows

-spears

-knives

-after European contact, some villages used guns

2.4 Food storage:

2.5 Sexual division of production:

Warfare, hunting, and ironworking are reserved to men. The man's role in agriculture is limited essentially to clearing the fields, though he may aid his wife in planting, hoeing, and harvesting, which are traditionally the tasks of women. His increased participation has become a practical necessity in view of the government requirement for each family -- specifically, each man -- to cultivate a rice field in addition to the customary gardens. (Wolfe 54)

2.6 Land tenure:

"One may say, as a basic principle, that for the Ngombe all items in the natural environment are free goods until some labor has been applied to them. An animal running in the forest or a plant growing wild belongs to no one until it is bagged or collected. Exclusive rights to fish ponds derive from the construction of a weir. The building of a house may be regarded as the labor by which a man traditionally gained exclusive gardening rights." (Wolfe 54)

2.7 Ceramics:

"Pottery is obtained from the Riverine peoples in exchange for palm oil, palm wine, or manioc. Sewing machines, certain ironworking tools, muzzle-loading cap-lock guns, and transverse-blade hoes are probably the only innovations in capital equipment in many generations." (Wolfe 59)

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

Resources do not belong to anyone in a tribe until some sort of labor is put into the resource. For example, if someone builds a house on a plot of land, that land is considered theirs.

2.9 Food taboos:

No food taboos are documented, however there seems to be

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

Wolfe does not specifically describe any watercraft, however, there is frequent mention of much trade on the Ugandi and Mongala Rivers, which hints at the extensive use of boats/canoes.

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

No numbers given, according to Wolfe.

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

No numbers given either, but females are frequently described as smaller in stature but sometimes wider than males due to effects of bearing children. However, females are described as "not significantly" shorter than the male lending credit to a small difference between the heights of men and women.

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

"A girl and her mother often attempt to keep secret her first menstrual periods so that her father and father's brothers will not immediately arrange her marriage." (Wolfe 15)

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

Girls marry at age seventeen to eighteen, and birth is encouraged to follow soon after.

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

"This manifestation that the ancestors deem him worthy of continuing the lineage brings the father nearer to achieving some of the highest goals of Ngombe culture: that a man shall father a large family, that he shall be head of an extended family made up of his own children and the children of his sons, that his name shall live after him as the title of the lineage which he shaped, and that his spirit shall be the object of veneration of a significant company of descendants." (Wolfe 9)

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

Seventeen to Eighteen

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

No spe

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

No percentages are recorded, but Bwa society extolls polygyny and the procreation of many children by one man. From this, it can be inferred that polygyny would be very common in Bwa society.

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

Bridewealth is given to a woman's family when suitors wish to court her. However, when she actually marries, the woman's family gives a large dowry to the husband's family. (Wolfe 11)

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

"The power of a father over his family falls upon the eldest son at the death of the father, the implications of this being seen in the Ngombe saying that a man must fear his older brother as he fears his father." (Wolfe 19)

- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:
- Homosexuality is nonexistent or unrecorded.
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

"Of all Gonji Ngombe social groupings based on descent, two are of special significance to the Ngombe system of kinship and marriage: the exogamic lineage or etuka, and the economic lineage. The etuka includes all relatives in the patrilineal line among whom distinctions of generation are consistently made in the terminology of kinship: two men of the same maximal lineage, political lineage, or village lineage may call each other "brother," using the term in its broadest sense, regardless of generation; but two men from the same etuka use the term only if they are also in the same generation, for within this group they must be aware of seniority differences. The etuka is also the unit used by the Ngombe in defining the rules of exogamy. For any individual four bituka define the class of persons with whom marriage is prohibited: his own etuka, which is that of his father and his father's father; the etuka of his father's mother; the etuka of his mother, which is that of his mother's father; and the etuka of his mother. Though the etuka is important in these ways, the economic lineage unit is of primary importance in terms of economic rights and obligations associated with marriage and the birth of children." (Wolfe 41)

- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized? No, paternity is not partible. One child has one specific father.
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows") The mother can be considered a "vessel" in which the child is grown, as the child is always considered property or belonging to the father or the family of the father.
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?
- No, conception is not believe to be an incremental process.
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape:

No cases of rape found, although there seems to be frequent premarital sex, and in such societies, rape is generally present.

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin):

There is the normal preference for men with higher economic or social standing.

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

"At about the age of six a girl begins to learn the tasks of a woman, something not completed until after she has married and learned the idiosyncrasies of her husband. The distinction between child and adult is clearer in the case of a girl than of a boy, for after a girl menstruates, and when her breasts are developed to "the size of a man's forearm," she is considered a woman, and may sleep with her suitors." (Wolfe 15)

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

"During courtship, before eventual marriage is at all certain, a young man's family makes payments to the family of the girl in whom he is interested. When the girl has passed puberty, the man visits her periodically and sleeps with her in a hut provided by her family. Even this does not signify commitment, for the girl may, with the sanction of her parents, entertain other suitors who are also making preliminary bridewealth payments to her family. The decision as to which man she should marry is eventually made by the girl's father's brother, upon the advice of other men of the extended family who take cognizance of the feelings of the girl herself. Once this decision has been made, money and goods received from other suitors must be returned." (Wolfe 16) 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

The "true" parents of a child are the entire village. The death of a mother does not change this, as the child still has the village and its elders left to raise him/her.

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

No data; although the existence of bridewealth suggests that there is an even or lesser ratio of females to males.

- 4.22 Evidence for couvades
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

There are none.

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

"The power of a father over his family falls upon the eldest son at the death of the father, the implications of this being seen in the Ngombe saying that a man must fear his older brother as he fears his father." (Wolfe 19)

- 4.24 Joking relationships?
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

"As all men of a local community of Gonji Ngombe hunters normally have a common patrilineal ancestor, a birth in their village is viewed favorably as a blessing for the entire lineage group. For the mother and her kinsmen the birth of a child is of importance for quite different reasons. The child is not a member of their lineage, nor will he spend much time with his maternal relatives, but his birth enhances the status of his mother, increases her value as a Ngombe wife, and permits her family to make larger requests for bridewealth from the husband and his family." (Wolfe 9)

4.26 Incest avoidance rules:

There are social taboos against incest. (Wolfe 51)

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

The closest thing to a formal marriage ceremony is the presenting of a dowry to the husband's family.

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? No name changes found.

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

There is no negativity against marrying outside of a community. It's very common for females to marry outside of their groups. 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

"A girl and her mother often attempt to keep secret her first menstrual periods so that her father and father's brothers will not immediately arrange her marriage." (Wolfe 15)

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

"Two other means of acquiring a wife are by "theft" and by levirate. The first is very common, and not regarded as entirely improper. Should a man not have the resources to make his preliminary payments, or if the woman of his choice is already married, he may induce her to leave her family or husband in order to take up residence with him. Usually this is arranged so as to appear that the woman has been abducted by her lover, but the woman's complicity is common knowledge. At some later date, her family will regularize the arrangement by demanding bridewealth. And although such a mating is not considered true marriage until the bridewealth is paid, the man considers his spouse's family his affinal relatives, and the relationship is publicly recognized. Finally, a man may marry the widow of his father, providing she is not his own mother, or acquire through the levirate, the widow of his father's brothers or of his own elder brothers. In any of these cases, further bridewealth payments must be made to the widow's family." (Wolfe 17)

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

No quantitative data is given. Warfare is said to be common, so a higher percentage is expected.

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

"As the village lineage is the unit in migration, so was it the unit in war. <u>*</u>Wars were fought between village lineages, and the cooperation among *bituka* thus necessitated was enhanced by the respect accorded the *elombe*, the warrior leader. His strength, courage, and invulnerability were assured by the lineage ancestors and by other mystical means. So much faith was put in these leaders that their injury or death in battle is said to have caused the men to assume their cause was lost, so that they would scatter in the forest to save themselves." (Wolfe 34)

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

Warfare was common, but so were trade and cordial relationships also.

4.18 Cannibalism?

Cannibalism is either not documented, or it is non-existent.

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): Mostly stationary; tribes and villages had control over territory in which they would stay.
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

5.4 Post marital residence:

"Following a social dance honoring the child, a spokesman for the mother's kin group, usually her father's brother, formally presents the child and the gifts to the patrilineal group represented officially by a spokesman, usually the brother of the father's father, who then makes the presentation of the bridewealth. With that ceremony the first-born child of a woman is returned to his proper home, which, in this patrilocal society, is the community of his paternal lineage." (Wolfe 12)

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

"The segments of a political lineage usually occupy contiguous land, though exceptions are observable. While some informants talk of a boundary, mweya, surrounding the land of a political lineage and defining the area within which all members share hunting and fishing rights prohibited to outsiders, this does not make it a corporate land-holding body, for control of land remains the responsibility of the local group, and transgression of territorial rights is seen as a threat to a village lineage rather than to the larger group. A village lineage, moreover, can grant outsiders permission to use its land without referring the question to the political lineage which, indeed, has no means of approving or disapproving such action, since it is without administrative head or council." (Wolfe 35)

- 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):
- 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: None
- 5.8 Village and house organization:
- 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): None
- 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? There are instances of both.
- 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

"That Ngombe terms do not distinguish in any precise way the various levels of the segmentary structure is consistent with the people's view of the system as an on-going process, not a structure consisting of different kinds of groups. Libota, probably best translated as a group which is composed of the descendants of a given person, is applied to any patrilineal group regardless of size or depth of generation. The term ngando is applied to a libota when it has a definite geographical locus, as all libota have at the lower levels of the social structure. Thus, the agnatic core of an extended family is called ngando or libota, as is that of a section of a village, or that of a whole village. ngando is used when the aspect of locality is stressed. Etuka is the term the Ngombe use when referring to a libota in the sense of an exogamous group, and the term applies most specifically to the lineage segment that includes the agnatic cores of several extended families and forms the base for one local section of a village. Thus, of the three Ngombe terms most directly applicable to descent groups -- libota, ngando, and etuka -- one is primarily relevant to descent, another to locality, the third to marriage. Each is a descent group, libota; most form the basis for a local group, ngando; and one is the largest exogamous group, etuka proper." (Wolfe 23)

5.12 Trade:

"Pottery and iron bars, two items of common usage, were traditionally obtained from riverine peoples, fishermen of the Congo and Mongala Rivers, in exchange for manioc, palm oil, and plantain. The manner in which such trade was conducted in pre-European times was not recorded by contemporary observers, but the Ngombe say they avoided wars with these people for fear that their supply of pottery and iron would be cut off." (Wolfe 66)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

In Ngombe culture, you are as good as your worth to the community.

"To such a man as this the ancestors grant the rewards of Ngombe culture: success in hunting and in warfare; a position of responsibility in the community as chief, judge, warrior leader, or ironsmith; and, most important of all, a body of descendants who look upon him as their founder. None of these affords more leisure or material possessions, for where generosity is the primary virtue, the man of status is he who works diligently that others may benefit. A successful hunter will retain the smallest portion when the game he bags is divided among his lineage brothers; a village chief or an ironsmith must work harder than the common man in order to demonstrate the generosity his position demands; the largest part of bridewealth received when a daughter marries goes not to her father but to her father's brother. Seniority is highly important to the Ngombe, and with few exceptions the oldest man in the senior generation of any lineage group is its leader, exercising the sanction of the ancestors, from whom he derives the power to bless or curse his juniors. The power of a father over his family falls upon the eldest son at the death of the father, the implications of this being seen

in the Ngombe saying that a man must fear his older brother as he fears his father. The prestige of a woman, on the other hand, is at its maximum when she has the care of growing children. When she has passed child-bearing age, and when her children are grown to adulthood, her function has been fulfilled and her worth to the community begins to decrease. As mentioned previously, her relationship with her husband may increase in warmth, approaching that of sisterhood or motherhood, but the barrier of lineage is never bridged. Should her husband precede her in death, she is often suspected of having hastened this magically." (Wolfe 19)

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

Important persons in a tribe/village dedicate much of their time to RCR, but the average villager does not.

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

There are no shamans in Ngombe society. The chiefs act as wisemen and medicine makers. (Wolfe 17)

6.2 Stimulants: None.

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

"Birth occurs in the hut of the prospective parents and is attended by many villagers, relatives of the father, and sometimes by members of the mother's family as well. The woman in labor is seated on a mat on the floor with her head and shoulders supported in the lap of a woman on a stool behind her. Another assistant, usually the mother-in-law or some other experienced kinswoman of the husband, busies herself with inspecting the vaginal canal, washing the abdominal region with a bark and leaf medicine designed to stimulate the child to activity, massaging the leg muscles of the patient, and, if labor has been unduly long, massaging the abdomen in an attempt to force parturition." (Wolfe 9)

6.4 Other rituals:

The next special ceremony occurs within a few days, when the survivors acquire, usually by purchase, several dogs to be executed in a ritual called ligbeti. Dogs are a modern substitute for the "slaves," prisoners of war which were traditionally executed in this fashion. A man chosen as executioner in the ligbeti ceremony is highly honored, and henceforth has the status of a warrior who has killed, a position of high prestige. During several hours of excited dancing, each warrior who had at some time killed a man is honored by a special rhythm on the drums as he dances into the center of the circle, singing out the name of his victim and the circumstances of his feat. Then the executioner is escorted by experienced warriors to the dance area where the dog is held, his body stretched taut over a wall of plantain stems as human victims once were held. (Wolfe 21)

6.5 Myths (Creation):

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

"By far the most important aspect of the institution is the dancing: each evening during the *lingondo* season the fifteen or twenty girls seat themselves according to decreasing size in a row ranked from left to right. Men or boys drum while the girls, led by one of their number, sing and mark rhythm with body movement and the clapping of a small shell alternately on the left palm and left thigh. Singly, or sometimes in pairs, they stand between the line and the drums to dance briefly; subtle movements of the hips and abdomen are exaggerated by the motion of the hoop which balances lightly on the hips. A girl who does not dance well is criticized and ridiculed so that she sometimes weeps and runs away. When a girl has reached marriageable age, ten or more years of experience in the *lingondo* make her a lithe and supple dancer whose movements charm and excite the audience. In addition to its purpose of promoting maturation of the girls, *lingondo* has also the function of placing the girls where men and boys will take notice of them and perhaps be inclined to consider one of them for marriage." (Wolfe 16)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

There is female involvement in RCR, but only men are able to be chiefs (spiritual leaders).

6.8 Missionary effect:

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

"The incorporeal and immortal aspect of man, which distinguishes him from the other animals, is inseparable from his body during life. The Ngombe do not speak of a man's "soul" as distinct from his body prior to death; after death, the spirit is designated by the name the individual used in life. According to Ngombe belief, all spirits are human spirits. (Wolfe 70)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

None found.

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

Yes, it is frequent.

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

There is:

-ancestor worship

-belief in magic (witches)

-animism

"Spirits are normally invisible, but on rare occasions they appear in a garden, on a path, or in the forest. While essentially human in form, spirits have been variously described by observers: some have no heads, others no bodies; some are dark, others light in color; some have eyes in back of their heads; still others are complete, normal, individuals whose identity is recognizable. The important thing to a Ngombe is not how spirits look, but what they may do for him or to him. As previously indicated, ancestral spirits provide game, offspring, and success to their descendants when they are properly supplicated by the elders. On the other hand, they may deny aid to their descendants upon the signal of a lineage elder, a *kumu*, or a *noko*. Ancestral spirits are thus seen to retain certain faculties of sensation and rationality permitting them to receive messages, make and implement decisions." (Wolfe 70-71)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

Seldomly used, except on bodies of warriors (Ceyssens)

7.2 Piercings:

- Body piercings on the ears, nose, belly, and mouth were seen in pictures. (Wolfe)
- 7.3 Haircut:
- Pictures indicate that important males were allowed to grow their hair, while commoners shaved. (Wolfe)
- 7.4 Scarification:
- None found
- 7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):
- 7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: Warfare masks
- 7.7 Sex differences in adornment:
- Male dress is different from female dress during ceremonies.
- 7.8 Missionary effect:
- None found
- 7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: None found
- None found

8. Kinship systems

- 8.1 Sibling classification system:
- 8.2 Sororate, levirate:

-"Mwaliombi and mokiombi are the two terms which cover all affinal relatives of a man, the first referring to his wife and the second to all other relatives by marriage. The term for wife is sometimes applied to potential wives through the sororate and levirate patterns. Thus, instead of mokiombi, a man may call his wife's younger sister mwaliombi for in the event of his wife's death he might marry her, though he could never marry an older sister, who is "like a mother" to the man's wife and thus to him always mokiombi. Likewise, a man may address or refer to the wife of his own elder brother as mwaliombi instead of mokiombi for she might become his wife in the event of his brother's death." (Wolfe 44)

-"Two other means of acquiring a wife are by "theft" and by levirate. The first is very common, and not regarded as entirely improper. Should a man not have the resources to make his preliminary payments, or if the woman of his choice is already married, he may induce her to leave her family or husband in order to take up residence with him. Usually this is arranged so as to appear that the woman has been abducted by her lover, but the woman's complicity is common knowledge. At some later date, her family will regularize the arrangement by demanding bridewealth. And although such a mating is not considered true marriage until the bridewealth is paid, the man considers his spouse's family his affinal relatives, and the relationship is publicly recognized. Finally, a man may marry the widow of his father, provÇiding she is not s own mother, or acquire through the levirate, the widow of his father's brothers or of his own elder brothers. In any of these cases, further bridewealth payments must be made to the widow's family." (Wolfe 17)

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Bwa men use war masks: "Only the Bwa are said to wear wooden masks during battle and even then not all of them: In war, the military foremen or medicine men (*feticheurs*) wear carved wooden masks, but on the right bank of the M'Bima they do not use them." (Ceyssens)

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