PIERRE GWA – MPYEMÕ GUITARIST: HIS SONGS AND THEIR SOURCES – CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, 1966

by

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Early acoustic guitar styles in central Africa

As far as we can reconstruct, the acoustic guitar styles of central Africa sprang up and gained momentum shortly after World War II, first only in a few areas that can be pinpointed on a map (Kubik 1965). These were places of colonial economic activity; mining centres, urban areas, trading posts and so on. People from various parts of the region were attracted to these centres in search of work. The multi-ethnic background of such urban and semi-urban melting pots promoted the use of vehicular, or trade, languages. It was in such places that, besides other commodities, guitars became available in shops, and it was here that the need arose for entertainment in the workers' milieu using a lingua franca such as Lingala (in western parts of the present Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC], and across the river at Brazzaville) or Swahili in its Kingwana version (in Katanga), or Icibemba (on the Zambian side of the Copperbelt).

Kazadi wa Mukuna, who has made a major contribution to the study of the history of 20th-century musical developments in the two Congos, stressed the socio-economic aspects that played a role in the rise of the new music (Kazadi 1979-1980, 1992). On the Congo side of the Copperbelt, the Union Minière du Haut Katanga, later known as Gecamines (La Générale des Carrières et des Mines) was the major catalyst. Founded in 1906, its first productive year was in 1913. Gradually it attracted large numbers of migrant workers to the mines in the towns of Kolwezi, Lubumbashi (Elisabethville), Likasi (Jadotville) and elsewhere. In the milieu of these spotlights of economic exploitation something like a new contact culture emerged among township dwellers resulting from a combination of social forces, for example, township life-style, breakdown of ethnic barriers, use of a lingua franca, among others.

By the end of World War II there was considerable economic upswing in these areas combining with the introduction of new modes of communication. Broadcasting and the gramophone enhanced the spread of any new musical development that would appeal especially to the young people. This created a climate favourable to the rise of a new music that symbolised social progress, responding to circumstantial tastes of the rising working class. Within the post World War II economic boom, factory manufactured musical instruments such as accordions, guitars and others became generally available in local shops. In Katanga they were mostly imported from South Africa via what was then

Northern Rhodesia. The personal history of Katanga's most famous guitarist, Mwenda Jean Bosco (see Rycroft 1961, 1962; Low 1982; Kubik 1995, 1997) is a testimony to these developments. The new music was inter-ethnically communicable, and to "belong with it" allowed young people to publicly demonstrate their distance from the "tribal" culture of their parents.

Hugh Tracey was the first researcher who paid attention to the musical innovations of the 1950s in what was then the Belgian Congo. Apart from his discovery of Mwenda Jean Bosco (1930-1991) on 3 February 1952 in the town of Likasi (Jadotville), Hugh Tracey made invaluable recordings of many other guitarists in 1957. His recordings on the Kolwezi Copper Mine of Patrice Ilunga and Victor Misomba (see "Mama Josefine" and "Mamwana kufiki munda", AMA-TR-25, L3A-9 and L3B-7), or of Stephen Tsotsi Kisumali on the Nkana Mine (Northern Rhodesia, see "BaNakatekwe", AMA-TR-52, L2V-12) are among the surviving gems of Copperbelt guitar music of the 1950s. Tracey also caught a glimpse of some other centres of emerging guitar music, such as Stanleyville (Kisangani) where he recorded a somewhat different style in Lingala by Pascal Lifungula (see Decca LF 1170, *Guitars of Africa*).

During the same period the finger-guitar styles of rising guitarists in the western part of the Belgian Congo, particularly in Kinshasa (Leopoldville), including Antoine Kolosoy (Wendo), Paul Kamba, Leon Bukasa and others, were covered by a Greek-owned local record company, the Firme Jeronimidis, which published the NGOMA label.Wolfgang Bender of the African Music Archive, University of Mainz has worked on the legacy of the two Greek brothers, Nico and Alexandros Jéronimidis, and republished some of the early Ngoma 78 rpm records on a CD (Bender 1996).

The port of Matadi in the DRC and PointeNoire (in the former French Congo), the terminal of a railway completed in 1926, were two entry points for guitars coming into the region between World Wars I and II. The frequent sight of guitar-playing Kru sailors from West Africa who cast anchor at the Atlantic ports inspired some young people to take up the guitar (Schmidt 1994:10). Gradually, early Congolese adaptations began to develop, first spreading among workers across the townships of Leopoldville, Matadi, Brazzaville and Pointe Noire. It was a process somewhat similar to that of the spread of the *likembe* box-resonated lamellophone a few decades earlier (*cf.* Kubik 1998a, 1999). However, accelerated proliferation of the new styles occurred only after World War II when the mass media gained momentum.

Secondary dispersal

By the mid-1950s the knowledge of new central African guitar styles had begun to spread to rural areas with returning migrant workers, gramophone records and radio broadcasts. As I showed in a map (Kubik 1965) there were two major dispersal centres for the new guitar music: the Katanga/Copperbelt mining area, and the twin cities of Leopoldville/Brazzaville (*cf.* Mukuna 1992). Soon there developed a perimeter of

influences that embraced even remote villages in the north of Congo-Brazzaville, for example, the village settlements along the upper Sangha river as far as the south- western corner of the Central African Republic. No doubt the establishment of a powerful radio transmitter in Brazzaville as well as the availability of NGOMA records played an important part.

The Sangha is a tributary of the Congo river and an ancient waterway cutting through the dense forests along the borders of three countries: the Central African Republic (CAR), Cameroon and the DRC. Upper Sangha young men had already become a reservoir of cheap migrant labour for Brazzaville in the 1920s when the railway line from Brazzaville to Pointe Noire was under construction. Even before World War I, home-coming migrant workers had introduced new musical instruments such as box-resonated lamellophones modelled on the Lower Congo *likembe* into the area of Nola, which was then part of German Kamerun. One of these instruments was collected by Hauptmann A.D. von Ramsey at the Kadei river (in present-day CAR; specimen no. III C 29925, Ethnological Museum, Berlin (*cf.* Kubik 1998:169).

It was only a matter of time until guitars became the next import. The ease of river transportation from the port of Salo (in CAR, south of Nola) via Gbayanga and Linjombo would promote considerable economic activity and also cause an influx of settlers, leading to an agglomeration of different peoples. From Salo to the south, plantations were established along the left bank of the Sangha, usually under a French "patron". Systematic deforestation began in the 1950s to the detriment of the indigenous pygmy hunters.

In the mid-1960s, during my own research in the Upper Sangha region, there were coffee plantations at Linjombo, near the southwestern-most point of the CAR. There was an enterprise owned by a Portuguese resident there. Such economic activities attracted people from villages and settlements all along the Sangha river to build their houses near those plantations. At Linjombo, the population of the mid-1960s included the long-established Pomo with their chief, and also migrants, mainly Mpyemõ, some Kata, and others. In the surrounding forests there were two pygmy groups: the Bangombe and Bambenjele (Djenda 1968).

The period of the mid-1960s could be called a time of consolidation for guitar music. By 1964 guitar music in both Congos had gone electric; the older acoustic guitar styles still survived in the rural areas. In 1964 I recorded several guitarists across the CAR who had either factory or home-made guitars. In 1966 and 1969 I made a documentary film of Upper Sangha guitarists, part of which is published (Kubik 1995).

By the mid-1960s the influence of the mass media had become so effective in the region that one could be sure that records obtained by radio stations would be known across central Africa within days after publication. To understand the effect this had on young people in the rural areas, however, one must also take into account the technical quality in which these sounds came to them. Clear reception of broadcasts was rare, and

the old hand-cranked gramophones did not produce a hi-fi sound either. This allowed for a broad margin of auditory reinterpretation.

Home-made guitars

Thus the music of the famous Congo guitarists, acoustic and electric, reached village audiences in a distorted shape; not surprisingly, auditory gaps were then filled out with local imagination, stimulating further adaptation of the new music within local cultures. By the end of the 1950s young boys all over central African villages constructed their own guitars, imitating the mass-media music with a remarkable infusion of local wit. When Maurice Djenda and I carried out a systematic cultural survey of the Upper Sangha region in the CAR in 1966, it was rare to see a factory-made guitar in the hands of a young man. In spite of low incomes, local people usually possessed wireless sets – at least one could be found in every village; but for guitars the even poorer youngsters had no cash, and since there was no sizeable market (in contrast for example to Copperbelt townships) guitars were not seen in shops. So young people used to make them for themselves, and developed considerable expertise. At Kinjombo village on the Sangha River we recorded two young men with home-made guitars, and they used them to compete with each other for the attention of their peers.

One of them, whose songs will be considered in this article, was Pierre Gwa, a Kaka descendent, 21 years old when we met him. He lived a bachelor life in his mud house in Kinjombo, not far from the left bank of the Sangha river. For him, like any other young man, it was not only fashionable to play guitar, but also a demonstration of upward social mobility. In our field notes of May 1966 we reported that Pierre Gwa was born in 1945. He told us that he had migrated here with his parents, who were seeking work on the coffee plantations of the "patron" of Linjombo. Their original language, Kaka, is a Bantu language classified as C 13 (Guthrie 1948), that is, a language within Zone C, Group 10 of the Bantu languages. However, since Pierre had grown up in Linjombo among the dominant Mpyemõ-speaking groups, it was no surprise that his command of Mpyemõ – a related language within the same zone and group – was so excellent that no one would have noticed his ethnic origins.

He had made himself a 6-string guitar, and he normally played it in the evenings in front of his house. His soft voice, the sweet sound of his guitar music, and the texts, open to diverse interpretations, attracted the girls in the village. We soon noticed that the sessions normally ended shortly before sunset, when his girl of choice arrived at his house. Doors and windows were closed and the researchers were shut off from further documentation.

Pierre Gwa was one of the two guitarists in Linjombo operating under similar circumstances. The second one, Jérôme Akuni, 25, also played a guitar he had made and, like Pierre, was sometimes accompanied by two boys playing rattle and percussion bottle. Then the local youngsters would gather for a dance. This guitarist belonged to

the ethnic group of the resident Pomo people, whose chief had his assembly pavilion close to the river bank (see documentary film, Kubik 1995). Akuni rarely sang in his first language Pomo, but preferred to sing, like Gwa, in Mpyemõ or Lingala. This underlines that guitar music was an activity associated with immigrant workers employed by the "patron" of Linjombo rather than the original population. And yet Akuni emphasised that his "race" (French for "tribe") was Pomo (field notes Djenda/Kubik, May 1966).

In rural settings such as along the upper Sangha river most things were home-made. Akuni, for example, had not only carved his guitar but he was also an expert at canoe-making. Talking of home-made guitars, Maurice Djenda informed me three decades later about the materials both Pierre Gwa and Akuni had probably used (personal communication, 17 July 1994) he said that they were usually carved of one of the following woods for which he gave me the names in the local Mpyemõ language: 1) *lombo* (unidentified), 2) *kuli*, probably a kind of African teak. The same name is also used for the slit-drum made of this type of wood; or 3) *kombo* (in French, *le parasolier*). Djenda believes that Pierre Gwa's guitar was made of these kinds of wood, because they are easily hollowed out and are also generally used for carving out canoes.

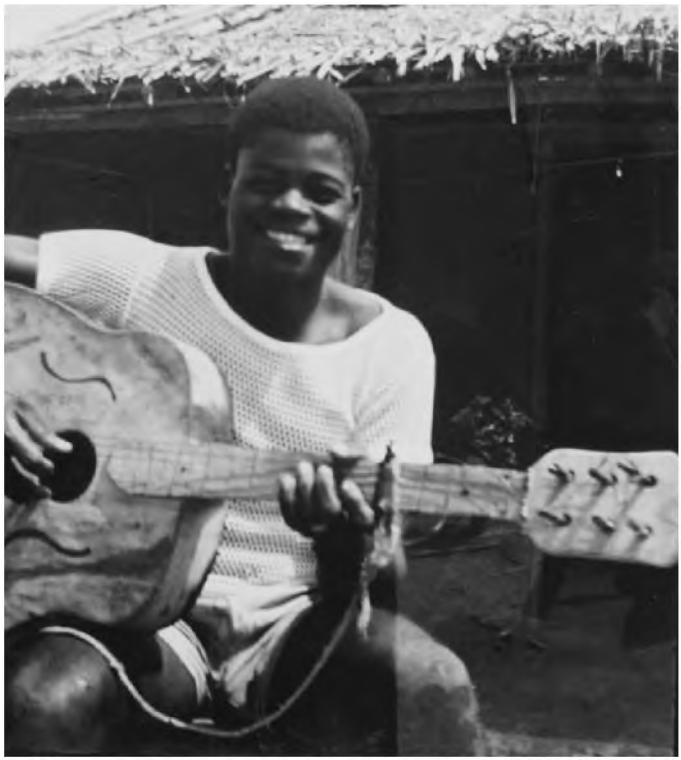

Figure 1. Pierre Gwa with his home-made and hand-decorated 6-string guitar (photo by author, Linjombo, May 1966).

The strings he used were of nylon fishing-line. Pierre not only had a musical bent, but he was also interested in decoration. The inside walls of his house had several "posters", papers upon which he drew agricultural plants and tools such as a hammer, in red and green. As can be seen in a close-up photo, there are coloured drawings on the sound-board of his guitar and some inscriptions, one being his name. Another reads *wanga*, which is the term for magic or witchcraft.

Figure 2. Pierre Gwa's 'poster' with his 'tree of life' (top left), some other plants and a hammer symbolizing hard work (photo by author, Linjombo, May 1966).

Pierre Gwa employed the standard guitar tuning and fingerings for the basic chords. This suggests that guitar music could not have been transmitted only through gramophone records and radio broadcasts to the Upper Sangha area, but at some stage at least one of these young men must have actually seen someone play a factory-made guitar. Probably earlier guitarists had learned the tuning and the basic chords from a relative or acquaintance who had been to the towns, then this knowledge was simply passed from one youngster to another. Unfortunately, in 1966 Djenda and I did not ask Pierre to tell us where and from whom he had learned, one of those lamentable omissions that can happen to fieldworkers.

During the first recordings we made, Pierre Gwa sat inside his house, with his drawings pasted on the walls and furniture consisting of a bed, a table and two chairs.

He had called two 10-year-old boys, Emanuel Ngama on the tin rattle, and Emanuel Njoki on the bottle, to accompany his playing. Like many other central African guitarists, he started his performance with what could be called an introductory "tuning check phrase". This is played in free rhythm, first playing the two notes, bass and treble, that form the tonic C chord, then continuing with a run in arpeggio style through what represents a descending F chord, then back to C, playing the C chord in arpeggio, and finally testing or alluding to a G chord.

He played this phrase before the start of many pieces, and on one occasion I filmed him, unfortunately too far away to make out the details (see Kubik 1995). The tuning check phrase served to discover any notes that were not in tune. When he detected any, he would stop, tune the (open) string accordingly, and check again.

The songs recorded

We recorded eight songs altogether from him. They give us a reasonable idea of his repertoire (original tape no. 92, Linjombo, May 1966, II/11-19, archived at the Ethnological Museum, Phonogrammarchiv, Berlin). These songs are listed in our field notes as follows:

1	Language:	Mpyemõ	"*Aba ri swala*"
2		Mpompo	Title unknown
3		Mpompo	Title unknown
4		Lingala	"*Babuti mwana lolo ya tembe*"
5		Mpyemõ	"*Ndiango*"
6		Mpyemõ	Title unknown
7		Mpyemõ	Title unknown
8		Lingala	"*Ikwela*"

I also filmed Pierre Gwa on another occasion when he was playing in front of his house. Some of these shots have been published (see Kubik 1995); they are close-ups I made for the purpose of frame-by-frame analysis.

Pierre could sing in many languages although, remarkably, no songs were in Kaka, his first language. Four of the songs we recorded were in Mpyemõ, two were in Mpompo, another Bantu language within the same group, spoken across the border in southeast Cameroon; and two were in Lingala, the trade language of the Republic of Congo and western parts of the DRC. His songs in the local languages were probably his own compositions, but the two in Lingala came from popular records that were available to him either directly or through radio broadcasts.

What follows is the texts of four songs, two in Mpyemõ and two in Lingala. Maurice Djenda of the CAR, who shared this research with me in 1966, was kind enough to transcribe the songs in Mpyemõ and work with me on their translation and interpretation. For the songs in Lingala I had the invaluable help of the late Dr Kishilo w'Itunga,

DRC, who transcribed and translated them into French from my original recordings. I then retranslated them into English following the grammatical and syntactical structure of the original language.

For the songs in Mpyemõ we used the orthographic system which Maurice Djenda and I introduced for this language of the northwestern Bantu borderland (Djenda/ Kubik 1971). The phonemic system of Mpyemõ is adequately represented by the use of several phonetic symbols distinguishing open and closed vowels, and fricative and implosive consonants. Anyone consulting standard works on African phonetics, such as by Dietrich Westerman and Ida Ward (1966), will have no difficulty with the pronunciation. For Lingala, Kishilo w'Itunga used what appears to be the standard orthography.

Song 1: "*Aba ri kwala*"

Language: Mpyemõ, with some words in French or Lingala.
Transcription: M. Djenda; translation: M. Djenda / G. Kubik

1. *ooo aba ri ncyuG*	Ooo, marriage is something painful.
2. *ooo aba ri kwala bolingo mama*	Ooo, marriage equals love, *bongo*, mother!
3. *bolingo iamurio aba ri kwala ooo mama ooo*	*Bolingo* means 'amour',
4. *ooo mama aba ri ncyuGioo Maria*	Ooo, mother, marriage is something painful, oo, Maria!
5. *ooo mB syerio a_a ri ncyuGio*	Ooo, my darling something painful
[Spoken] *HBla guitare!*	[Spoken] Hola guitar!
Ici ca fait Gwa Pierre, 5 km de Salo	This is Pierre Gwa in action, 5 km from Salo!
6. *ooo mumao a_a ri ncyuGioo mama*	Ooo, mother, marriage is something painful, oo, mother!
7. *ooo mB syerio a_a ri kwala o mB muma*	Ooo, my darling, marriage equals love, oo, my mother!
Guitar variation	
8. *hooo amurio a_a ri ncyuGiBB*	Hooo, 'amour', marriage is painful, ooo
9. *_e_ele Matine gwome a_a ri ncyuGi*	Really, Martine, listen to me! Marriage is painful
10. *Bolingo manao a_a ri kwala bolingo mamao*	*Bolingo*, mother o, marriage equals love, mother!
11. *amuryB BBB a_a ri kwalaBB, ooo a_a ri ncyuGiB*	'Amour', ooo, marriage equals love, ooo marriage is something painful
12. *ooo a_a ri kwala mawae mamaa*	Ooo, marriage equals love, misery, mother

In this song Pierre Gwa warns about conflicting aspects of close human relationship. Marriage equals love, he says, but it also equals suffering. He refers to marriage in the widest sense of the word, including extra-marital relationships. In the tradition of central African guitarists, the song is interspersed with spoken remarks. "Five km from Salo" refers to Pierre's original home village Nkola near the town of Nola. It was inhabited mostly by Mpyemõ speakers and the so-called Sanga-Sanga (personal communication: Djenda, 28 July 1994).

Song 4: "*Babuti mwana lolo ya tembe*"
Language: Lingala, with some Kiluba-Shankadi elements.
Transcription: Kishilo w'Itunga; translation: Kishilo w'Itunga/G. Kubik

1. *Babuti mwana, babuti mwana lolo ya tembe*	The parents of the child, the parents of the courageous child-compatriot
2. *Babuti mwana lolo ya tembe*	The parents of the courageous child-compatriot
3. *Babuti mwana lolo o*	The parents of the child-compatriot oh!
4. *Mwana lolo aye mwana tembe ayee mwana*	The child-compatriot arrives, the courageous lolo ya child-compatriot arrives, child-compatriot come!
[Spoken] *Hola guitare!*	[Spoken] Hola guitar!
5. *Hooo mwana lolo, babuti mwana lolo ya tembe*	Hooo! The child-compatriot, the parents of the courageous child-compatriot
6. *Babuti mwana lolo*	The parents of the child-compatriot
[Spoken] *Hee babuti mwana lolo ya tembe!*	[Spoken] Hee! The parents of the courageous child-compatriot
Hola guitare! Operateur de six cordes!	Hola guitar! Six string operator!

This song was learned by Pierre Gwa from a popular record in Lingala and he imitated the words phonetically. Kishilo was not able to interpret the song, and I cannot say for sure whether it has perhaps political overtones or not. The key term is *mwana lolo*, rendered by Kishilo as "child-compatriot".

A frame-by-frame analysis of Pierre Gwa's guitar-playing suggests that the original pattern as played on the Lingala record was probably reproduced faithfully. In this song his fingering is strikingly different from that in his Mpyemõ and Mpompo songs (*cf.* the close-ups in the video, Kubik 1995). There is a certain autonomy between left- and right-hand motional patterns forming the cycle. The right thumb acts in a duple rhythm 1–2..., where it always plays the sixth or fifth string on beat units 1 and 3 of the metrical scheme, and string 4 on beat-units 2 and 4. This movement pattern, in space, shows the thumb moving *towards* the player's chest before beat-units 1 and 3, and *away* from the chest before beat-units 2 and 4.

This pattern was common in some guitar music of Katanga during the late 1950s and early 1960s. John Low has called it the "alternating bass" fingerstyle (Low 1982:19). It can be seen in my film shots (Kubik 1995) how Pierre Gwa's right thumb carries out an elastic, swinging movement. Beat-units 2 and 4 appear accented, even visually by the directional path of the thumb away from the player's body.

In combination with this "alternating bass" the right index finger sets accents on the upper guitar strings. Simultaneously, the cycle of the finger movements and fingering positions of the left hand on the fretboard appears to be largely autonomous. It seems to constitute an independent motional pattern that *crosses* that of the right hand. Characteristically also, the cycle of the left hand chord positions includes an anticipation effect.

The tonal basis in this song is the F chord fingering; however this starts on beat unit 8. Thus the chord change from G to F is anticipated metrically by one beat-unit.

Song 5: "*Ndin_go*"

Language: Mpyemõ
Transcription: M. Djenda; translation: M. Djenda / G. Kubik

1. *haye Ndia_go yeyeye kala a_a ntBmye* — Haye Ndia_go yeyeye, a sister does not marry her brother
2. [repeat]
3. *ha yeelee yeye vekuli yamo kali a_a ntomye* — Ha yeelee yeye, my companions, a sister does not marry her brother
4. *me wunB si a_gwamjB vekuli yamo kali a_a Ntomye* — I have taken the oath in my youth, companions, that I will never marry an adult woman
5. *haye Ndia_go vekuli yamo kali a_a ntBmye* — Haye Ndia_go, my companions, a sister does not marry her brother

[Spoken] *Que ça c'est du Ndia_go! en langue Mpyemõ!* — Yes, this song is about Ndia_go! in Mpyemõ language!

6. *Haye Ndia_go yeyeye kali a_a ntBmye* — Haye, Ndia_go, yeyeye, a sister does not marry her brother
7. *Haye Ndia_go me wunB ri a_gwamjB maGB maGB _a silB e* — Haye, Ndiango, I have taken the oath that I will never marry an adult woman, when I am young.

Guitar

8. *Haye Ndia_go yeye kali a_a ntBmye* — Haye, Ndia_go, yeyeye, a sister does not marry her brother
9. *Haye Ndia_go vekuli yamo Kali a_a ntBmye yeye yeee yeyeye kali a_a ntBmye* — Haye, Ndia_go, yeyeye, my companions, a sister does not marry her brother
10. *Haye Ndia_go vekuli yamie kali a_a ntBye* — Haye, Ndia_go, my companions, a sister does not marry her brother.

Spoken

11. *Ici ça fait Gwa Pierre! Village Ngola!* — Pierre Gwa is acting here! Village Ngola!
12. *Haye Ndia_go vekuli yamB kali a_a ntBmye* — *Haye,* Ndia_go, my companions, a sister does not marry her brother.

Guitar: Conclusion

This song explores two recurrent themes in Mpyemõ song lyrics: 1) the relatively wide net of incest prohibitions in this totemistic society and the grief this often causes to young people. Mpyemõ totemic clans are exogamous, which means that a couple cannot

marry if they belong to the same clan; and 2) the implications of the age barrier, in that a man is advised not to marry an older woman.

Maurice Djenda reconfirmed in 1994 that both themes occur frequently in Mpyemõ song texts, and not only those that are accompanied with guitar. Djenda himself used to play a guitar song with these words in French and Mpyemõ: *"Chérie m'a refusé o, elle me disait parentés."* ("My girl has refused me, she said we were related.") Brother-sister incest is abhorred, but the possibility is so remote that nobody is really anxious about it. What concerns young men and women is the hazard of discovering that they are somehow related and all their plans for marriage are destroyed. That may be extremely traumatic for those concerned and is therefore the subject of many songs.

Even more feared is the possibility of marriage between a young man and a much older woman. Maurice Djenda said, "She only abuses the man for nothing, unable to bear children." In a conversation we had on 28 July 1994, Djenda explained that Ndia_go, the woman in the song lyrics, could be fictitious or real. It could be that Pierre Gwa's song was inspired by a real event such as an older female relative making sexual advances towards him when he was still very young.

The music of this remarkable song also deserves comment with regard to Pierre Gwa's concept of tonality. The left-hand chord positions which he had probably learned from some other guitarist do not necessarily represent the three common chords. "Ndia_go", as seen in the film (Kubik 1995) is played by Pierre in the key of G, that is, with the G finger position as the tonal basis. However, he uses an F chord fingering to *represent* a D chord, that is, the dominant chord in the sequence. Only visually is it an F chord. The F chord in bar 6, written above D in Figure 3 below has the tinge or meaning of a D chord: it even seems to sound somewhere between the two.

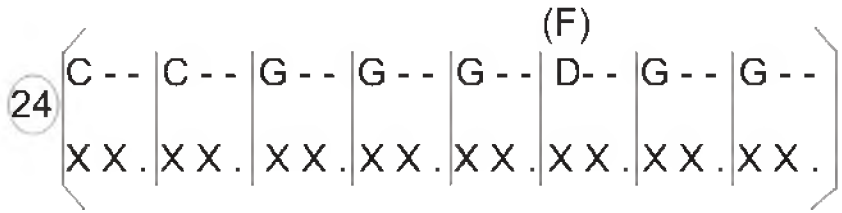

Figure 3. Pierre Gwa's chord clusters revealing his concept of tonality

Thus in Pierre Gwa's tonal-harmonic universe the left-hand finger positions cannot be considered rigidly associated with western functional-harmonic entities. Instead, the chord clusters arising from the left-hand fingerings seem to have *equal* status without any concept of subdominant and dominant. Each of the three chords, once learned from other guitarists with a more western conceptualisation, seem to have lost their western functional implications; they have been reinterpreted in that they are only nominally regarded as C, F and G. Each can become the basic chord of a song, in which case the

other two simply complete the idea of chord changes. So Pierre had a choice between three "modes", particularly in the Mpyemõ songs.

Although at some time he had most certainly learned those fingerings from someone, he had since reinterpreted their sonic content in terms of three harmonic columns that could be reshuffled ad lib, thus assuming variable and ambiguous sonic interrelationships. Melodically, the basic heptatonic nature of his people's music in the Upper Sangha region was retained.

I also have the impression that Pierre Gwa's harmonic sense was rooted ultimately in the harmonic mouth-bow patterns underlying multi-part singing in this region, regardless of the kind of music he was attempting to emulate - that of the Kinshasa/Brazzaville guitar bands or of local Mpyemõ songs. The Bakota and Bongili in northern Congo, with the Mpyemõ and others in this densely forested equatorial region, number among those central Africans using homophonic cluster harmony, usually in parallel thirds and fifths in a heptatonic system. The resulting triads can even be shifted by a semitone as I observed in *sya* story songs among the Mpyemõ in 1964 (*cf.* Kubik 1998b). Mouth-bow-derived harmonic columns in this region normally make use of the natural harmonics up to partial six over two, or more rarely three fundamentals. This sonic experience permeates the tonal-harmonic universe of music in equatorial west-central Africa.

Thus, Pierre Gwa's Mpyemõ and Mpompo guitar songs make us aware of an aspect of acoustic fingerstyle guitar music in central Africa that has remained virtually unnoticed by researchers working in urban areas, where guitars have factory-set frets: sonic reinterpretation of the western "common chords" in terms of ambiguous and relativistic African harmonic relationships. Home-made guitars with frets set by eye allow for variant behaviour leading musicians away from standard western tonal-harmonic concepts.

Song 8: "*Ikwela*"

Language: Lingala.

Transcription Kishilo w'Itunga, translation Kishilo w'Itunga / G. Kubik

1. *Baninga boniwe, ikwela*	What's going on, comrades? – Marriage.
2. *Ikwela kuna Mariana*	Over there, Mariana is going to marry!
3. *Baninga boniwe Suzana o bamona o bamona*	What's going on, comrades, with Suzana? – Oh,the lucky ones, oh, the lucky ones
Guitar	
[Spoken] *Ho la guitare!*	Ho la guitar!
4. Baninga boniwe, ikwela, ikwela kuna Suzana	What's going on, comrades? Marriage. Over there, Suzana is going to marry
5. *Suzana, bonio Mariana, o bamona o bamona o bam!*	Suzana, and what about Mariana, oh the lucky ones, oh the lucky ones!
[Spoken] *Opérateur de six cordes!*	Six string operator!
Guitar variation	
6. *Baninga boniwe, ikwela, ikwela kuna Suzana,*	What's going on, comrades? Marriage. Over there, Suzana is going to marry.

7. *Baninga boniwe, ikwela*	What's going on, comrades? – Marriage
8. *Heya tata, heya mama*	Oh father, oh mother!
[Spoken] *Ho la guitare!*	Ho la guitar!

In the 1950s several record companies were operating in Kinshasa, but most of the output came on a red label called NGOMA launched by Jeronisidis, a Greek-owned firm. One of their popular records was *"Ikwela"*, by Mavula Baudeor with two guitars and bass, sung in Lingala (Ngoma no. 1796, 78 rpm). I was familiar with this record in July 1960, when visiting the newly independent (ex-Belgian) Congo. Both guitarists at Kinjombo, Pierre Gwa and Jérôme Akuni (original tape no. 90) had picked up this song in Lingala, although neither spoke the language. They reproduced the words faithfully in their phonetics with a certain margin of error. But a Lingala-speaker can understand what they sing, and many people still remember this song.

Conclusion

Unfortunately Pierre Gwa is no longer alive. Maurice Djenda informed me in July 1994 that he had died years previously, apparently in a car or a work accident. No details are available, but we know that from the late 1970s timber companies operating from Nola have intensified their merciless exploitation of the tropical forests in the area. This has affected everybody. Work accidents are rife and often not accounted for. Maurice Djenda (*cf* Djenda 1996) told me that the landscape around his home village Bigene and elsewhere has changed beyond recognition. Most of the older musical traditions are now lost, and not only so-called traditional instruments but also the kind of home-made guitars Pierre Gwa and others used to play.

Pierre Gwa's guitar songs symbolise an important period in the history of guitar styles in central Africa during the 20th century. Although by 1964 Congolese guitar music had long become electric and Lingala prevailed as the "official" language of mass-media music (at the expense of Kingwana and other languages), guitarists in the rural areas with home-made instruments continued to compose songs in their first languages. This had considerable feed-back upon the dominant orchestras in Kinshasa and Brazzaville whose leaders regularly picked the brains of unknown rural composers, commercialising their ideas and then coming up with a "new dance". This happened particularly during the period when then president Mobutu Sese Seko began his drive for "authenticity" and audiences began to turn away from the earlier Cuban orchestral styles. Leaders of the famous orchestras then increasingly borrowed/stole ideas and dance patterns from unknown village singers and instrumentalists.

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