IMAGE [&] NARRATIVE

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Rumba Lingala as Colonial Resistance

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Abstract (E): This article examines how Congolese Rumba Lingala musicians, with the creation of a new musical style in the late 1940s and 1950s, contested colonial authority and envisioned an independent future. At the height of colonial oppression, these artists stimulated their compatriots through song to rethink the meaning of being Congolese, a poetic and powerful aspect of the liberation struggle. Musical examples accompany the analysis.

Abstract (F): Cet article analyse la manière dont les musiciens du Rumba Lingala congolais ont contesté l'autorité coloniale et ouvert des nouvelles voies d'avenir en créant un nouveau style musical à la fin des années 1940 et dans les années 1950. Au faîte de l'oppression coloniale, les chansons de ces artistes ont su encourager leurs compatriotes à repenser leur identité congolaise. Elles constituaient ainsi un aspect poétique et puissant de la lutte de libération. L'analyse s'appuie sur de nombreux exemples musicaux.

keywords: Rumba, lingala, Congo, colonialism

Article

In the late 1930s and early 1940s in the countries now called the Republic of Congo (capital Brazzaville) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (capital Kinshasa), a sonic revolution took place that heralded the political revolution and ousting of colonial occupation in 1960. In the decades approaching independence, musicians created a music uniquely Congolese and fostered a radically different social-consciousness. This national music was not founded solely on Congolese musical forms, however; it "localized" foreign musical genres, especially from Cuba and other Caribbean countries. Yet, the Latin American styles imported into the Congos were not entirely foreign to them. The *rumba* and *son montuno,* for example, were founded to varying degrees on musical traditions transported from the Congo region across the Atlantic with the slaves. Twentieth century Congolese interest in musical styles from the Americas and Europe and their subsequent, selective re-indigenization created a new medium of artistic expression. This medium, together with the continual use of active, local music traditions, made audible the emergence of a reconceptualized nation. Embedded within the songs of this new genre, called Rumba Lingala, are blueprints to the construction of a new national identity. The construction of this identity played a central and crucial, albeit indirect, role in the successful struggle to overthrow the colonial government.

This article examines part of the history of Rumba Lingala, a style that emerged in the urban centers of the Belgian Congo and the French Middle Congo. The style's name is derived from musicians' passion for and assimilation of various Latin American styles, fascination with "rumba" as a musical, social and cultural complex, and the practice of singing in Lingala. The development of Rumba Lingala proceeded through several successive stages, all of which involved the fusion of diverse local and imported styles. Seen from afar, the greater politico-artistic

process involved both inclusion and exclusion; a close listening to the soundscape may reveal the changing degrees of assimilation and rejection of different styles, and allow a theorization of the power differential between the competing voices.

Rumba Lingala is also the product of a complex of encounters and negotiations between music traditions, and of the cycle of repetition, revival and radical departure, an early and documented example of the phenomenon that has come to be named "world music." For this analysis I shall focus on the period 1948-1960 and examine Rumba Lingala as performed on the main record labels by its primary practitioners. I have chosen 1948 as a starting point, because the first recordings of Congolese music available today were made that year. My analysis ends in 1960 with independence, a sea-change in almost all arenas of life that effected qualitative changes in musical production. [1]

Contesting colonial authority through song was was not, generally, the musicians' project, and Rumba Lingala cannot be considered revolutionary music in the same way as, for example, Chimurenga in Rhodesia in the 1970s. In the two decades prior to independence, however, Rumba Lingala, with the efflorescence of radio, record players, and recording technology, altered Congolese ideology by encouraging an expanded understanding of community along national rather than ethnic lines. In doing so against the backdrop of political unrest throughout the colonial world, it energized the minds and bodies of the Kuba, Luba, Kongo, Tetela, etc. and stimulated a feeling of community and shared destiny. Pius Ngandu Nkashama points language's role in arousing this sentiment:

In so far as these songs are performed almost exclusively in the four principal languages established as national languages (*Lingala* of the capital Kinshasa, but also *Kiswahili* spoken all over the east, *Ciluba* in the center, and *Kikongo* in the south) for an immense country with more than 350 different languages, the song should be considered like a privileged space where an historic conscience is affirmed. [2]:

I am interested in analyzing the Rumba Lingala song as a site where social crisis is voiced and collective redemption is sought, in dialogue with the "historical conscience." Listening with open ears and mind may reveal how Rumba Lingala songs "wrote" the Congolese nation. As an example of musical production at the height of colonial oppression this music may contribute to an analysis of music's socio-political potential in today's "post"-colonial world.

* * * * *

Thanks to 78s and the wind-up Edison, the 1930s heard the sounds of Cuban bands like Orquesta Aragon, Septeto Habanero and Septeto Nacional on both sides of the Congo River. [3] These and other steps became popular in the decades that followed: Dominican merengue, Haitian mering, Martinican beguine, Argentinean tango, Brazilian samba, and the Cuban cha-cha, bolero, and mambo. But the forms of Latin music that cut the widest swathe in the Congos were the Cuban son montuno and rumba, the latter being the rhythm most heavily influenced by African rhythms. [4]

Rumba Lingala emerged in the 1940s in the cities of Boma and Matadi in the Lower Congo region, and in Léopoldville and Brazzaville in the Stanley Pool region. The signal features of Rumba Lingala were the integration of Latin musical themes and the rise of a new type of dance band that supplanted earlier traditions. [5] The rumba's appearance at the 1932 Chicago World Fair and concerts in New York by Machito and his Afrocubans, Orquesta Broadway and Johnny Pacheco made the rumba (its ballroom version, anyway) fashionable and respectable as an exotic music to Europeans. This music reached the Congos on records and in person when

the colonial governments hired Cuban bands to entertain the colonial officers. Perhaps it was the African influence in the rumba that made it initially popular among the Congolese. Cuba and the Congos were anything but two "fully formed and mutually exclusive cultural communities" colliding. [6] The rumba itself sprang from the mixture of the folk musics of the Spanish slavers and the African captives brought to Cuba, seventy percent of whom were from the Congo River basin. [7]

In the Congos the name "rumba" seems to have been applied to any music with a clavé beat, even if it more closely resembled another rhythm. A reinterpretation of the name thus accompanied the assimilation of the music. Rumba Lingala's signature rhythm, according to my analysis, is a duple meter with a clavé beat most similar to that of Cuban *son* (itself similar to 12/8 bell patterns found in many parts of West and Central Africa) . It is articulated by percussion, guitar, horn, or organ. As I hear the clavé, the rest between the grouping of three and the grouping of two gives a feeling of a dragging, holding, then catching up. Variations in the Rumba Lingala rhythmic foundation include the reversing of the 3-2 groupings, and the infusion of a march-like squareness into the clavé. The latter nonetheless preserved the sliding, dragging feeling, which the right foot outlines at the top of the square in couples' version of Cuban rumba. The bass guitar emphasized the clavé beat and provided the harmonic framework, typically a I-(IV)-V-I progression.

On the earliest recordings named "rumbas," compositions were played on two guitars and, often, a bottle with a knife. One guitarist would strum the rhythm and harmonic changes, while the other picked out the chords to support the voice that carried the melody. Not long after the Ngoma label began recording in 1948, bands began to fill out. Some of the early line-ups included: three guitars, clarinet, and "jazz," the name given to the scraper (Manuel d'Oliveira et les San Salvador, 1952); three guitars, bass, maracas and claves (Wendo, 1956); one guitar, bass, two clarinets, trumpet, maracas, "jazz" (Léon Bukasa, 1957). A publicity photo of the Ngoma house band, the Beguen Band, from around 1955 shows the group with banjo, upright bass, trumpet, euphonium, alto and tenor saxes, and drum kit (including snare, two tenors and kick drum, and sock and ride cymbals). A similar photo from around 1959 shows two hollow-bodied, amplified guitars, upright bass, trumpet, alto sax, possibly clarinet, "jazz," bongos, and maracas. Most of the songs also included a "tam-tam," most likely a single-headed, cylindrical drum. By the end of the decade, big bands, called "orchestres," had become the preferred format, using acoustic string bass, multiple electric guitars, conga drums, maracas, scraper, flute or clarinet, saxophones, and trumpet. Beginning in 1952, the bass, which may have been introduced by visiting European musicians, [8] assumed the role of providing the harmonic foundation, previously the work of the second guitar; the latter took to interacting polyrhythmically with the lead guitar, and strumming as a technique virtually disappeared.

The guitars were tuned D-G-D-G-B-D, called the "Hawaiian" open tuning. Musicians used a capo to change keys, and vibrations of the open strings against it produced a highly desirable buzzing effect. [9] Listening to early recordings today, the listener would likely note the following characteristics: Most singing is syllabic, with melismatic inflections at the end of lines, many of which use a rhetorical call of "mamá, é." The harmonies are usually thirds, though Congolese music scholar Kazadi wa Mukuna notes the occasional octave or fifth, used for special effect. [10]Three types of call and response recur: between singer and chorus; between singer and instrument; and between instruments of different sections. Pieces exhibit a combination of homophony and polyrhythm. Melodic interest is concentrated in a single part with subordinate accompaniment, but rhythmic texture is denser and more differentiated across the various instruments. Horns

often punctuate, interspersing with vocal lines, rather than carry the melodic line, except when used antiphonally with the lead singer or chorus. Improvisation generally consists of variations of a motif, often involving a third. (The lead guitarist of African Jazz, Dr. Nico, played in higher registers and often improvised by moving up and down the scale step-wise through arpeggios on a single string or parallel third movement on two. Franco of O.K. Jazz preferred intervals of thirds and sixths on the mid-range strings, and his improvisations, which especially in later years featured variations on a series of repeated riffs, exploited the guitar's rhythmic capabilities. In his hands it became a voice conversing with other instruments in the percussion section.) The songs typically remain in a single key throughout, and few change tempo.

Rumba Lingala songs were by and large composed with multiple sections. The first was an introduction, in which typically everyone sang and played. The second section was often a sort of solo portion, called the *sebene* , which in some ways resembled the *montuno* portion of the Cuban son montuno form. [11] During the sebene the dancers would try out new steps. Listeners familiar with Congolese music today would hear in early recordings something familiar: throughout songs, especially during the sebene, musicians shout slogans. They often refer to the particular rhythm and dance of the song. As the sebene developed , the special role of the *animateur* was created, whose job it was to incite the dancers with cries of "Kwassa kwassa!" (from the French "quoi ça?") "Kiri kiri!", "Moto!", "Zekete zekete!", etc., often designating the appropriate dance. During the early years, shouted slogans were signatures of a sort. For example, Edo Nganga of O.K. Jazz was known to shout "Baila!", Landot Rossignol, also of O.K. Jazz, "Caramba!", Joseph Kabasele, the leader of African Jazz, the era's biggest band, "Chauffez!", and Henri Bowane "Krr . . . wamoluka landa bango!" ("Krr . . . searchers, follow them!"). [12]

I hear the adherence to a single tonality, the preference for close harmonies, and the use of call and response as a desire for unity. Expressions of agreement are privileged over those of dissent, those of harmony over those of dissonance, of inclusion over exclusion. The characteristic sweetness of Rumba Lingala, even of Congolese music up to the present, achieved by singing in upper registers and falsettos, the rounded timbre of the amplified guitars, the tight harmonies and the limited improvisation, eschews conflict, encourages agreement. Musicians combined local musical characteristics, such as singing in thirds, polyrhythm and homophony, and foreign elements, such as instrumentation, harmonic progression and singing in Spanish and French, in order to syncretize the dissonant environments and resolve the existential tension of the two colliding world systems. The syncretism of the early Rumba Lingala era signals to me both a nostalgia for the familiarity of a prior time and an excitement for the less knowable present and future. Musicians and dancers sought to make a space where everyone could create, participate and identify. The sebene is the time for musicians to demonstrate their dexterity with the world around them and their role as its co-creators. It is the time to celebrate the new identity in the company of the group, for dancers to show that they belong. The *animateur* , soon a *de rigueur* member of Rumba Lingala bands, encouraged group identification by inciting dancers to join in, facilitating the collective process by enthusiastically shouting coded instructions as to how to dance. If later bands can offer clues as to the performance practices during the Rumba Lingala era, the musicians also danced, making even plainer the "steps to belonging."

Another characteristic of Rumba Lingala is the high degree of repetition in compositions. Short phrases in horn, guitar, percussion and vocal parts are repeated many times. As technological advances enabled longer recordings,

repetition increased. This feature lends itself well to dancing, as a stable base is needed to work the choreography and is characteristic of many of the rural music traditions in the Congos. I hear more than the simple transfer of a musical practice, however: Repetition can be a form of hyperbole. Motifs, introduced then repeated with variations, building and amassing significance, express on the surface musical tendencies, and below the surface ideological tendencies. The exaggeration of repetition is what Max Paddison calls a "stylistic device employed to highlight these tendencies and bring them vividly into consciousness." [13] As repetition (either within a single song, or between songs of a single style) entices dancers out onto the dance floor, it is a call to the group, for members to swell and solidify its ranks. Heard in the context of the political oppression of the period, it is an effort to wear down the opposition, erode the system, break free of colonialism.

The rubric Rumba Lingala was inclusive, for most musicians of the Rumba Lingala era played variations on several different Latin rhythms, responding to the changing times by incorporating new rhythms and dances into their repertoire. For example, the cha-cha became quite popular towards the end of the 1950s, prompting Wendo to re-record his 1948 hit "Marie-Louise" in 1958 as a cha-cha backed by the Beguen Band. [14] Collections of recordings from the late 1940s through 1960 show bands performing rumbas, boleros, cha-chas, merengues, polka piqués, biguines [15] and a variety of others. Some recordings called "rumbas" by the record labels exhibit other rhythms; Kazadi suggests that studios labeled songs "rumbas" because of the word's commercial appeal. [16] Each rhythm had its specific use: the cha-cha was the preferred form for treating joyous or celebratory subjects [17], the merengue for light entertainment, and the bolero for songs of elegy. The "rumba," however, predominated; it was an all-purpose rhythm, often used for stories of love, as well as social messages.

Early Rumba Lingala works were sometimes covers of Latin classics, such as the *son-pregón* "El Manisero," an early staple of the new bands. Bokalanga's rumba "Mazole Vanga Sanga," recorded on Loningisa 1953-1954, begins with "Mani-i-i-i-i-i-i-i-i-i-i-i-i," a quote from the famous original. [18] When not in Lingala, the lyrics of early cha-chas, boleros, pachangas and merengues were sung in French, English, or pidgin Spanish, copied from the recordings. Occasionally, singers playfully mixed languages. Even in original compositions singers would often insert Spanish. In an interview with Kazadi wa Mukuna, Franco of Le Tout Puissant O.K. Jazz said, "Well, nobody understood Spanish. Nevertheless, we took a dictionary and searched for words that would sound good and we used them regardless of their true meaning." [19] "Maria Antonia," recorded by Pholidor and Bana Loningisa 1955-56, called a "Rumba Española" by the label, is sung in an untranslatable "Spangala." [20] The use of Spanish diminished in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Comhaire-Sylvain offers an "ear-witness" account of the early days of Rumba Lingala:

"Many recordings were being sold in Kinshasa in 1945. Those with success were dance music. Contrary to Spirituals which were not being sold, American jazz tunes were very much appreciated and often imitated by Congolese bands. Local composers sometimes adapted Lingala words to tunes which were enjoyed the most by the population. South American and Afro-Cuban music were also popular and several Congolese singers adorned their own works with Spanish words." [21]

One can infer the importance of linguistic play, as bands both familiarized the other and exoticized the familiar. The song "Ménagère," recorded by Pauline Lisanga's ensemble 1953-1954, [22] shows an astute awareness of the contrasting significance of different rhythms. The title is a term borrowed from French (meaning "housewife") and used in the Congo to designate a European man's

African mistress. Loningisa called it a "polka piké." The song begins with a polka piqué, one of the favorite rhythms of the early 1950s in the *villes indigènes* , played on guitar, accordion, snare with cymbal, saxophone and possibly kazoo. A third of the way into the 2:51 song, everything but the snare and accordion drops out. With a shout of "Tango! Recommended by doctors!" a slow tango ensues. [23] The word used for "doctors" is polyvalent: *Banganga* may refer to both European-trained physicians and traditional healers. The tango was at that time in vogue among the Europeans and *immatriculés* , a class of privileged Congolese with identification cards and the freedom to drink alcohol and stay out after the nine-o'clock curfew. [24] I read this as the band's testament that their music heals, and theirs is good for everyone: whether they are the type to visit just one kind of doctor or both, as would many Congolese, especially if the European treatment did not have the desired effect. The dose of tango is small -- just about a minute. The polka piqué then resumes. This song shows more clearly than most the phase of musical transition between European- and Latin-oriented sounds. It reveals the playful ambiguity of identity in living between two worlds, African and European. It also speaks to a belief in music's ability to heal.

The first band in either of the Congos to play Latin American music was Orchestre Congo-Rumba, started in 1934 in Brazzaville by Jean Réal, a French man from Martinique. [25] Ensembles followed the "Haitian model" of guitar, cornet, sax, patenge (a square frame drum) and two singers. [26]The first African-led bands to incorporate rumba [27] into their repertoire were established in 1942: In Léopoldville, Américain, Martinique, Odeon and Victoria Léo; in Brazzaville, Melo-Congo and Victoria Brazza. [28] Other groups from the mid-1940s include the Congo Bar's house band Kin Jazz and Jean Lopongo's Mabokoji Group. These bands, along with Excelsior, are regarded as the first *orchestres* , or dance bands. Typically these ensembles played for mourning ceremonies, births, baptisms, family parties, marriages, and for popular amusement.[29] The Congolese music scholar Lonoh Malangi Bokelenge tells us that before the arrival of Europeans to the Congo, dance bands such as these did not exist; local musical organizations were the norm.[30] The newly structured ensembles sometimes changed their names to reflect their "modernization." L'Harmonie Kinoise, for instance, became La Joie Kinoise in 1949. La Joie Kinoise, under the leadership of singer, interpreter and composer Joseph Kabasele Tshamala, changed its name again to African Jazz for its first official appearance in Kinshasa in 1953. [31] Musicians also Latinized their names to demonstrate their "hipness." François and Francis became "Franco," Edward "Edo," Nicolas "Nico," and Balozi "Baroza." [32]

As in their approach to the new urban music genres, instrumentation and their own stage names, musicians were fond of using foreign elements in their bands' names. Some examples are Orchestre Machina Loca[33] , Beguen Band, San Salvador, Likembes Geantes, Novelty, and African Soul Quintet. The term "jazz" occurred frequently in bands' names. It did not signify that the band played jazz music; instead, it was a symbol of modernity. Some examples are African Jazz, O.K. Jazz, Kin Jazz, Dynamic Jazz, Vedette Jazz, Negro Jazz, Mysterieux Jazz, Ry-Co Jazz, Mexico Jazz, Congo Jazz, Bantous Jazz, Cercul Jazz, O.D. Jazz, Jazz Vénus, Jazz Beguen, and Jazz Mango. Musicians' propensity to use "jazz" in their bands' names and the use of the moniker to designate the scraper, or *mkwakwa* , may have stemmed from positive impressions of African-American soldiers stationed in Congolese cities.[34] Certainly, Congolese musicians were aware of American jazz; Louis Armstrong's visit to Kinshasa, where he gave a public concert, was much fêted. He was transported to the stadium like a chief, in a chair carried by porters and preceded by dancers and musicians.[35] Why musicians were not drawn to more closely imitate American jazz is a question that was asked even in 1950. Jean

Welle, a writer for the periodical *Congopresse* , wrote:

"I have never heard Congolese musicians play jazz -- I mean true jazz, in the manner of the North Americans. I have been told when they listen to records from across the Atlantic they react with indifference. As regards their dancing, they are fond of the sounds from a pick-up [a turntable], that is, romantic recordings, and slow-fox or slow waltz melodies. . . .

"But if the blacks of Harlem surrender to the rolling of nickel-plated drums, to the frenetic dances whose names evoke the ancestral jungle -- their brothers in the Congo, when they are not dancing the rumba to the sounds of their dance bands, they would prefer without hesitation the tender voice of Tino Rossi to the trumpet of Louis Armstrong." [36]

The contrast between his observation that jazz tunes were met with "indifference" and Comhaire-Sylvain's that "jazz tunes were very much appreciated" from five years earlier indicates a significant change in taste during the period that Rumba Lingala was coalescing as a style and beginning to be heard widely on radios, as well as a few turntables [Images of Technology]. The writer's observations of Congolese listening and dancing habits in 1950 are interesting; I interpret the semiotic and aesthetic choices of resignifying the word "jazz," to designate something non-musical, as a desire to maintain contact with a group of people (Americans, or perhaps black Americans specifically) who the Congolese perceived to be living as they wanted to; as an effort to appropriate the power that the Congolese themselves projected onto them; and a desire to affiliate with, to belong in spirit to, a world non-European, non-colonial. The juxtaposition of local and foreign words in ensembles' names signaled a looking inward and outward, part of the syncretizing effort to create a "third space" – a "best of both worlds" place they as the forgers of a new nation in a modern world could own.

The appropriation of the label "jazz" parallels that of the label "rumba." Both appellations issued from a people seething under oppression. Cuban rumba and American jazz were practiced primarily by the sectors of society most marginalized. Race, another face of the cultural Black Atlantic, was a factor in the ruling parties' economic and political policies in all three regions (the Congos, Cuba, U.S.A.). "Jazz" and "rumba" signified artistic statements of self-esteem and group identification from Afro-Cubans and African-Americans and, as such, were strong symbols from peoples with a shared history. Connecting -- indeed identifying -- with those across the Atlantic through "rumba" and "jazz" enlarged the Congolese world. Furthermore, "jazz" connoted resistance, virility and power over oppression, as shown by the following excerpt from the poem "Pleure, O Noir Frère Bien-Aimé" ("Weep, O Beloved Black Brother"). The poem was written eight months before independence by Patrice Lumumba, the leader of the pan-Congolese party Mouvement National Congolais and the first prime minister of the independent DRC, who was later assassinated in a CIA-backed plot in February 1961.[37]

". . . And it is there that it gushes forth, magnificent,

Sensuous and virile like a voice of bronze

Born of your sadness, your powerful music,

Jazz, today admired throughout the world

In forcing the respect of the white man,

In telling him most loudly that henceforth,

This country is his no more, as before,

Thus you have granted your brothers in race

The happy future that promises deliverance." [38]

Why should they, though, not care for jazz music itself, but prefer "the tender voice of Tino Rossi" (the Corsican singer was much in vogue at the turn of the 1950s), [39] even though it "force[d] the respect of the white man" and voiced the very opposition to European rule that the Congolese were feeling? It is difficult to account for cultural preferences, but I find it significant in light of the brutality the Congolese suffered at the hands of the French and Belgians: I think that sweetness in music provides an antidote to the harshness of the outside world, and it allows the listener to *accommodate* difficulties by both relaxing and reinvigorating the body and mind for another day. Direct challenge to colonial rule was not countenanced, as musician Adou Elenga discovered in 1955.[40] Rumba Lingala – not jazz, nor the music of any other people – was the music with which Congolese as an emergent nation enunciated their opposition to colonization.

According to Comhaire-Sylvain,

"The most common subjects treated in the period after recordings were made (from 1948) were love and relationships between the sexes, difficulties of urban life (living in a colonial state), ethics, death, and dancing. Frequently musicians were contracted to advertise a particular product. Later politics and music interfaced directly as politicians exploited the popularity of particular bands and individual personalities to improve their election chances or endear themselves to the public. This overt relationship between music and politics was not a feature of pre-independence music."[41]

Here are three examples of early Rumba Lingala songs whose lyrics provide a window into the social and political reality of the period.

1. "Noko Akomi Mobali," by Adikwa

>> Click here to open music player in a new window (requires Flash plug-in).

The rumba "Noko Akomi Mobali" ("The Uncle Becomes the Boyfriend"), recorded by Adikwa on Loningisa 1953-1954 is typical of the miniature soap operas of the 78 rpm era, in which love, frustration and moralizing were all covered. It features two guitars, a snare drum, maracas, and at least three singers. The following exchange scene transpires in the song:

> **Him**: You lied to me when you settled this rendez-vous with me. Do you think a little girl like you can cheat an old dog like me? I waited for you, but now it's your turn to wait!
>
> **Her**: Set your mind at ease, darling. There are many other days. Today I just didn't have the time.
>
> **Him**: *(Aside)* As for me, I don't have much time left! *(To her)* You cheated me because of the beer, but from now on it's you and me till death do us part. *(Aside)* Even if I must pay her a taxi to Kitambo, what I will lose on one side I will gain on the other! *(To her)* You asked me to buy you four beers and to take you to the movies and you promised to take me home after. Now you show me this guy pretending he's your uncle. Suddenly the uncle becomes your boyfriend! *(To the uncle)* Did you see what that girl has done to me?
>
> **Uncle**: Yes, those girls are always like that.
>
> **Him**: Doesn't she ever stay at home?
>
> **Uncle**: Leave her alone!

Him: And why should I pay a taxi for her? *(Aside)* It's a shame, my friends![42]

This hilarious scenario satirizes several characteristics of life in the big city in the 1950s. Firstly, it spoofs the stereotype of gross age difference between the man and the woman with "old dog" and "little girl," the aside "As for me, I don't have much time to wait," and the possibility that her lover could pass for her uncle. Secondly, it also addresses the changing rituals of courtship: the beer and movie are commodities with arguably no use-value that virtually any man is able to present a woman. However, colonial control over the flow of capital diminished a man's ability to provide for a woman, thereby threatening to emasculate him. Thirdly, it comments on the place of women in urban society. Rural responsibilities were replaced by a reduced ability to contribute positively to society. Angling for the best man was a means of survival. Lastly, the line "What I will lose on one side I will gain on the other" summarizes a life-philosophy, one that has particular applicability when coping with colonial society. The rules were constantly changing, conspiring to keep the Congolese entangled in a web of obedience, transgression and punishment. Avoiding trouble with the authorities was, apparently, a daily challenge: Antoine Mundanda's "Njila ya Ndolo" ("The Road to Prison"), a rumba recorded for Ngoma in 1954,[43] and Dewayon's biguine "Nalekaki na Nzela" ("I Was on my Way"), issued by Loningisa 1953-1954,[44] both describe the ease with which a young man might find himself spending a night (or more) in jail. Franco's "La Rumba O.K.," released by Loningisa 1955-1956, describes Franco's arrest and four nights behind bars, apparently for the way he had piloted his Vespa scooter.[45] The ability to see balance, as the disgruntled suitor in the above example shows, increased one's chances for survival.

2. "Margarine Fina," by Tino Mab

>> Click here to open music player in a new window (requires Flash plug-in).

Songs were also used as advertisements for certain products. An example is "Margarine Fina" by Tino Mab, recorded for Loningisa in 1953-1954. It is a biguine for two guitars, maracas, wood block and bass drum. Before the song starts we hear the following skit, which provides an example of music as propaganda – not just for a product, but for European domination itself:

Woman: "Mmm."

"Mmm."

Man: "Nde. Boni solo kitoko mpo na ndako?"

"What smells so delicious in the house?

Woman: "Nakalingaki ngombe na mafuta ya mindele."

"I fried meat in the oil used by the whites."

Man: "Nini? 'Margarine Fina'?"

"Which one? 'Fina Margarine'?"

Woman: "Ehn?"

(Disbelief)

Man: "Mekisa ngai moke."

"Let me try a little."

Woman: "Mma."

(Signals him to open his mouth)

Man: “Mmm. Ya solo. Elengi, eh?”

“Mmm. Really good, no?”[46]

The leader and chorus then sing about how delicious and useful Magarine Fina is. The phrase “used by the whites” is provocative; in contrast to Lumumba's poem “Pleure, O Noir Frère Bien-Aimé” cited above, “Margarina Fina” speaks to the assimilationist, mirroring aspect of the complex white-black, European-African, colonizer-colonized relationship. Like “jazz” and “rumba,” margarine – a foreign commodity – is portrayed as a porter of value, modernity and power.[47] It is not surprising that advertisers and studio owners should seek to “butter up” colonial officials by playing to their need for control over the minds and bodies of the Congolese. Ads like this helped to reinforce colonial values and to strengthen the administration's grip on power.

3. “Marie-Louise,” by Wendo

>> Click here to open music player (requires Flash plug-in).

The first recorded version of "Marie-Louise" by Wendo, a rumba, was captured onto acetate in 1948.[48] It was flown to Bruxelles where the pressing master was molded and released the following year on 78 rpm shellac as Ngoma 23.[49] The version I have heard comes from a CD mastered from the re-released 45 rpm EP single Ngoma 1011. Its sound quality is tinny, scratchy, much like hearing a song over a telephone. The mid-range frequencies dominate; the upper and lower strings of the guitars often lose out to the middle. Overall their sound takes on a muddy, “nasal” quality. It sounds as if the upper string(s) are slightly flat. The voices come through strongly and clearly, and the lyrics are easy to understand. The singers utilize their natural range, without going into falsetto as many later signers would do.

On the surface "Marie-Louise" is a man's plea to a woman to marry him. He begs her to come to him. He talks of the resistance her family has put up to the marriage, but, he argues, their love is true and must be consecrated. It is self-referential: Wendo identifies himself as the suitor and a musician, and Bowane is named a musician and his brother-in-law. Bowane sings a verse, where he tells Wendo that he has nothing to complain about -- they have a car, guitars, their voices. He says they should run away with her to Kingabwa (presumably a town).

Wendo :

Marie-Louise solo ngai na yo

Marie-Louise, I am truly yours

Wapi nkombo Louise

Where is the one named Louise?

Lobela ngai ntina wapi, Louise.

Tell me why, Louise.

Louise, nakobala te.

Louise, I will not get married.

5 Louise, nakozila yo, bokilo alobi, Louise.

Louise, I will wait for you, as bokilo [see below] *said, Louise.*

Solo mpenza ngai nakobala, Louise.

It is so true that I want to marry you, Louise.

Bokilo aboyi ngai na yo nde libala.

Bokilo *has refused you and me the marriage.*

Ngai na yo tolingani.

You and I love each other.

Libala na ngai na yo, mama Louise.

Marriage is for you and me, [mama] Louise

10 Wapi Louise?

Where are you Louise?

Yoka sebene.

Listen to the sebene.

Bokilo alobeli ngai makanisa ya motema.

Bokilo *has revealed the thoughts of his heart to me.*

Kofinga ngai na mayele, kotongo ngai na mayele

He insults me mischievously, discredits me craftily

Likolo na mwana nde Louise.

Because of the girl Louise.

15 Ngai nakobala nde Louise.

I will marry only Louise.

Bokilo, bofinga ngai mpo Louise.

Bokilo, *you insult me because of Louise.*

Oyebaka te Bowane bokilo wa yo.

Don't forget Bowane is your bokilo.

Wapi Louise?

Where is Louise?

Wendo alingi komona mama Louise

Wendo wants to see [mama] Louise

20 Bongo apesa na Bowane

So he can show her to Bowane

Wapi Louise?

Where are you Louise?

Solo Bowane bola guitare kombo lindanda mpe likembe wa ngai.

Bowane plays guitar harmoniously and my likembe

Bowane:

Wendo, yokoloba pamba

Wendo, you talk for nothing

Biso tozali na voiture

We have our car

25 Biso tozali na baguitares na biso

We have our guitars

Biso tozali na mingongo ya biso

We have our voices

Tokokima na ye nzela Kingabwa mama

We will run away with her to Kingabwa [mama]

Wendo:

Solo mpenza nayoki nde lolaka

I hear only the music

Oyo bakonzemba ngai, bakotuna ngai, Wendosor.

That they will sing for me, what they will ask me, Wendosor.

30 Catalogue akonzemba mpe ngai, Marie-Louise.

Catalogue also sings for me, Marie-Louise.

Solo mpenza nakobola guitare.

Yes, I am playing guitar.

Nabola mpe likembe na ngai mpe na violon.

And I play my likembe and my violin.

Wapi Louise na ngai mama?

Where is my Louise [mama]?

Bola guitare lindanda!

Play guitar harmoniously!

35 Solo mpenza bino bakonzemba Louise

Yes, you who will sing for Louise

Baninga ba ngai yoka Bowane akonzemba mpe na lindanda

My friends, listen to Bowane, he will sing, and how sweetly

Solo ngai Wendosor mama. . . .

It is really me Wendosor [mama]. . . . [50]

My expanded reading reveals this song to be allegorical and quietly confrontational. Wendo and Bowane, two of the most famous and widely recorded musicians in their day (Wendo released a new album in 1995; Bowane's last, as far as I know, came in 1976 during his days in Ghana), sing about an object of desire that is beyond their reach. They want a different life, one where they are treated as equals, free to go wherever they want, with whomever and whenever. They recognize the perks of their status, the power of celebrity, but recognize that its rewards are material only. They invoke the pride of their rural, familial, ancestral heritage and sublimate that force into the institutionalized captivity of the urban recording musician. Combined with the power of new technology they attempt to break out.

A different life is beyond their reach at the moment, for a certain "bokilo" will not marry them. The authority figure is ambiguously portrayed as "bokilo," which in Lingala can mean father-in-law, mother-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, or, colloquially, friend. Here the problem is most likely between Wendo and his potential father-in-law. All in-laws would play various roles even before marriage, even before they had legally become in-laws, and would impact the married couple's lives ever after. I see "bokilo" – a force outside the nucleus of the marriage yet intimately and inextricably bound to the daily affairs of one's family – as an allusion to colonial power, whose various agents impacted every aspect of Congolese life. Here the colonizer seeks to thwart Wendo's efforts by "not marrying him" to his object of desire – freedom (line 7). Instead Wendo is criticized and

insulted, rebuked for trying to achieve something outside his mandated position in colonial society (lines 13-4). Wendo's response is to remind his listeners that Bowane is on his side, and once he shows Bowane what it is he wants, Bowane will help him. (lines 17, 20, 22). Bowane needs to be convinced: He tells Wendo that he should not complain, not seek more than he already has (line 23). Not only have they been given material luxuries, but they have not yet been silenced (lines 24-6). Here Bowane shifts to supporting Wendo: Yes, they do have their voices and guitars, their instruments of power. Let them go forth together and take "her" (line 27). With that vote of confidence, Wendo hears the sounds of victory, the music they will play at his marriage (lines 28-9). He shows that he has more support. Catalogue (could be a friend, or the fashion pamphlets of the time that "were a source of reference and inspiration to the chic young people of Kinshasa" [51]) and other friends want it, too (line 30). It is true . . . they will succeed.

Wendo comments on the confluence of the streams of urban colonized life: the guitar – the symbol of modernization accessible to regular folk, enabling them to bridge the gulf between the African and European conditions; the likembe – the symbol of rural music, traditional patterns of life, and the "changing same"; and the violin – the symbol of European culture held beyond the reach of most Africans. These intersecting spheres of society make up the very matrix from which Wendo's song and the whole genre sprang. It is in the negotiating of this uneven terrain that the Congolese become dexterous and are eventually able to throw the colonizer off balance and defeat him.

The allegorical style was probably chosen to reduce the likelihood of retribution. Wendo even comments on this choice in "Marie-Louise." He tells Bowane to play harmoniously and sing sweetly, so as not to appear confrontational (lines 22, 34, 36). Allegory's strength lies in its sly, slow-but-sure approach. It requires patience, a trust that better times will come. It is also more appropriate in situations where power is oppressive and vigilant, striking down any resistance. Music's strength lies in its open-endedness. If the lyrics are allegorical, they become nearly impossible to impugn. Nor can ambiguous messages be easily co-opted. Wendo reveals his awareness of music's power: He focuses his listeners not only on the lyrics, but also on the music, in the multiple references to instruments, voices and the sebene.

* * * * *

Though its influence can still at times be recognized, especially in recent years' return to the “classic era” of Afropop, Latin music's influence declined in the period after independence. But during the three decades of its reign as the most popular of foreign musics, Rumba Lingala emerged, both as a popular form of entertainment and as a powerful force in the reorganization of Congolese society's attitudes towards colonial occupation. The incorporation of the terms “jazz” and “rumba” into the musical vocabulary heralded a significant shift in Congolese cultural politics. These two terms responded to political marginalization and racial oppression with an alternative vision. Like “black” in Britain, these terms “came to provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance, amongst groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities.”[52] The diversity of subject positions and social experiences drawn into Congolese identity could be accommodated through the appropriation of these terms, charged as they were with an intrinsic rebelliousness. These terms, the Latin influence on the music, orchestration and musicians' names, the preference for Westerns and the choice to sing in Lingala all signaled the reorientation of the Congolese gaze away from Europe to the Americas and to a newly envisioned Congo.

As a mode of representation Rumba Lingala assumed a radically different position and displaced earlier politico-cultural strategies. It recentered the world with a generalized local and diasporic African experience at the nexus. The spatial model of home and abroad acted as a temporal model, too. Through analogy, the musical melding of the past with the present and the local with the foreign created a constellation of subject possibilities and identity options, all "Congolese." This new unifying framework, which countered ethnic divisions exploited by colonial policy, was "based on the building up of identity across ethnic and cultural difference between different communities [and] became 'hegemonic' over other . . . identities -- though the latter did not, of course, disappear."[53] In service of a national unity, other, competing identities were outdetermined. Its wide appeal, which by the 1960s would reach beyond the Congos into other African countries, was due in large part to its inherent hybridity. Though other early musical styles were certainly to varying degrees hybrid creations, the complexities of Congolese society in late colonialism could be truthfully referenced only by a musical style as intertextually constituted as Rumba Lingala.

With this article I have attempted to lay the groundwork for an analysis of how Rumba Lingala redefined what it meant to be "Congolese" in an era of fomenting unrest. It did not only reflect the heterogeneous social reality that made its invention possible; it also played a procreative, proactive role, as it redefined "Congolese" along new, inter-ethnic, hybridized lines. It became a sonic meeting place for diverse audiences, a rallying point for liberationist sentiments, a mobilizing force for proto-nationalist ideologies, and a new sound for a new nation.

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Notes

[1]Rumba Lingala's antecedents, including *agbaya* and *maringa* , played important roles in its development both as a style and a politico-artistic movement. Unfortunately, there is not space in the present article to give these two styles their due.

[2]Nkashama, p. 64. Original text reads: "Dans la mesure où ces chansons s'exécutent presque exclusivement dans les quatre langues principales érigées en langues nationales (le *lingala* de la capitale Kinshasa, mais aussi le *swahili* parlé dans tout l'Est, le *ciluba* du Centre, et le *kikongo* du Sud) pour un pays immense

qui compte plus de trois cent cinquante langues différentes, la chanson peut être considerée comme un espace privilégié où s'affirme une conscience historique." [Translation mine].

[3]Martin 1995, p. 135.

[4]Jerzy Bartz, "Afro-Latin Connection," *Jazz Forum* 119 (1989), p. 40.

[5]including the marching-type bands, called fanfares. Kanza 1972, p. 40.

[6]Gilroy, p. 7.

[7]Al Angeloro, "Back-to-Africa: The 'Reverse' Transculturation of Salsa/Cuban Popular Music," in Vernon W. Boggs, ed., *Salsiology: Afro-Cuban Music and the Evolution of Salsa in New York City* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), p. 303.

[8] Stewart, p. 41.

[9]Kenis 1991, p. 6. This buzzing timbre is found in many parts of Africa; in the Congo region the keys of likembes are fitted with bits of metal, which buzz when the keys are plucked. The square wave, or signal distortion, of amplified guitars, which Rumba Lingala musicians began experimenting with in the early 1950s, produces a similar timbre.

[10]Kazadi 1980, p. 660.

[11]The sebene apparently derived its name from the English "seven," due, according to Pwono (84), to musicians' habit of featuring the seventh chord, a technique learned from Coastmen. In my listening, however, I could identify no such habitual technique. Later compositions took on two or three distinct sections. The first was an introduction, where the lyrical and melodic motifs were presented in a slow to medium tempo. The sebene would begin with an obvious increase in tempo and perhaps a change in key. Singing might or might not continue. If so, a third, purely instrumental section could close out the song. The sebene grew longer and became the highly anticipated portion of a composition. In the early days of Rumba Lingala, however, the songs usually had a formal organization of A-B-A, where the sebene (B) differed very little in tempo or melody from the A sections.

[12]Dewayon was known to call out words and phrases in Indoubil, a slang combining Congolese and European languages. The very word "Indoubil," derived from "Hindu" and "Bill" (for Buffalo Bill) in homage to Hindi films and American Westerns, demonstrates what 1950s Congolese youth admired – none of it European. Vincent Kenis, et al., *Roots of Rumba Rock 2,* Zaïre Classics vol. 2, 1954-1955 (Crammed Discs CRAW 10, 1995), p. 11.

[13]Paddison, p. 204.

[14]*Ngoma, The Early Years, 1948-1960.*

[15]This spelling was used by the Congolese record labels (as opposed to "béguine," which is preferred in Europe and the Americas.

[16]Kazadi 1998, p. 386.

[17]African Jazz's "Indépendance Cha-Cha" is probably the best example of this.

[18]*Roots of Rumba Rock,* Zaïre Classics vol. 1, 1953-1954 (Crammed Discs CRAW 4, 1991).

[19]Kazadi 1992, p. 79.

[20]*Roots of O.K. Jazz,* Zaïre Classics vol. 3, 1955-1956 (Crammed Discs CRAW 7, 1993).

[21]Comhaire-Sylvain 1968, p. 36. [Translation by Kazadi (1992, p. 79)].

[22]*Roots of Rumba Rock,* Zaïre Classics vol. 1, 1953-1954 (Crammed Discs CRAW 4, 1991) .

[23]Original lyrics: "Tango! Eponi banganga!" [Translation mine].

[24]Kenis 1991, p. 8.

[25]Martin 1995, p. 136.

[26]This term, though I do not know its origin, is used by Tchebwa, p. 155.

[27] Again, the ballroom version.

[28]Tchebwa, p. 48; Bemba 1984, p. 70.

[29]Lonoh 1969, p. 23

[30]Lonoh 1969, p. 56.

[31]Kazadi 1992, p. 75.

[32]Kazadi 1998, p. 387.

[33] When I met Papa Noël, the guitarist who led this band, in 1999, he jumped for joy when I showed him the CD with several of his earliest recordings. "See!" he shouted to Sam Mangwana and the others in the band, "I used this name first!" He was referring to Ricardo Lemvo's contemporary band Makina Loka. I gave Papa Noël the CD; unfortunately I have not found another copy.

[34]See Martin 1995.

[35]Bemba 1984, p. 96

[36]Excerpted from Jean Welle's "Rumbas congolaises et jazz américain," *Congopresse* 57 (January 15, 1950), pp. 1072-3. I discovered a reprint (untranslated) in *African Music* 1/5 (June 1952), pp. 42-3. The latter credits *La revue colonie belge* 143 (September 1951), which I was unable to consult. Original text reads: "[J]e n'ai jamais entendu des musicians congolais jouer du jazz -- j'entends du vrai jazz, à la façon des noirs américains. On m'a même prétendu que l'audition de disques d'outr'Atlantique [sic] les laissaient [sic] insensibles. Et de fait lorsqu'ils dansent aux sons d'un pick-up, ce sont des enregistrements de romances, airs de slow-fox ou valse lente, que les congolais [sic] affectionnent. . . . Mais si les noirs d'Harlem se livrent, au roulement de batteries nickelées, à des dances frénétiques dont les titres évoquent la jungle ancestrale -- leur frères du Congo, lorsqu'ils ne dansent pas la rumba aux sons de leurs orchestres, préfèrent sans hésitation la voix tendre de Tino Rossi à la trompette de Louis Armstrong. . . ." [Translation mine].

[37] See Roberts 1965.

[38]Quoted in *Indépendance* , October 2, 1959, p. 3. Original text reads: "Et c'est là que jaillit, magnifique,/Sensuelle et virile comme une voix d'airain/Issue de ta douleur, ta puissante musique,/Le Jazz, aujourd'hui admiré dans le monde/En forçant le respect de l'homme blanc,/En lui disant tout haut que dorénavant,/Ce pays n'est plus le sien, comme aux vieux temps,/Tu as permis ainsi à tes frères de race/L'avenir heureux que promet la déliverance." [Translation mine].

[39] Stewart, p. 39.

[40] His career ended in 1955 due to "lack of instruments." In fact, he had just released a song entitled "Ata Ndele" ("Eventually"), in which he sang "Hold your guitar in your hand and make her tremble so that the world will tremble. The world will change – sooner or later the white man will give up. . . ." The record was snatched off the market and not heard widely until years later. Gretz in Bender and Gretz, p. 25.

[41]Quoted in Kazadi 1992, p. 79. [Source not cited].

[42]*Roots of Rumba Rock,* Zaïre Classics vol. 1, 1953-1954 . [Translation by Dizzy Mandjeku].

[43]*Ngoma, The Early Years, 1948-1960* . [Translation by Sylvain Konko].

[44]*Roots of Rumba Rock,* Zaïre Classics vol. 1, 1953-1954.

[45]*Roots of O.K. Jazz,* Zaïre Classics vol. 3, 1955-1956. [Translation by Dizzy Mandjeku].

[46]*Roots of Rumba Rock,* Zaïre Classics vol. 1, 1953-1954. [Translation mine].

[47] One does not know who scripted the skit, or if the author was a beneficiary of white domination.

[48]*Ngoma, The Early Years, 1948-1960.*

[49]Gretz in Bender and Gretz, p. 12.

[50]*Ngoma, The Early Years, 1948-1960.* [Translation by Sylvain Konko and Jesse Samba Wheeler].

[51]Kenis 1995, p. 10.

[52]Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 223.

[53]Hall 1995, p. 223.

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IMAGE [&] NARRATIVE
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Explanation page on Rumba Lingala as Colonial Resistance

Author: Jesse Samba Wheeler
Published: February 2005

Abstract (E): This article examines how Congolese Rumba Lingala musicians, with the creation of a new musical style in the late 1940s and 1950s, contested colonial authority and envisioned an independent future. At the height of colonial oppression, these artists stimulated their compatriots through song to rethink the meaning of being Congolese, a poetic and powerful aspect of the liberation struggle. Musical examples accompany the analysis.

Abstract (F): Cet article analyse la manire dont les musiciens du Rumba Lingala congolais ont contest l'autorit coloniale et ouvert des nouvelles voies d'avenir en crant un nouveau style musical la fin des annes 1940 et dans les annes 1950. Au fate de l'oppression coloniale, les chansons de ces artistes ont su encourager leurs compatriotes repenser leur identit congolaise. Elles constituaient ainsi un aspect potique et puissant de la lutte de libration. L'analyse s'appuie sur de nombreux exemples musicaux.

keywords: Rumba, lingala, Congo, colonialism

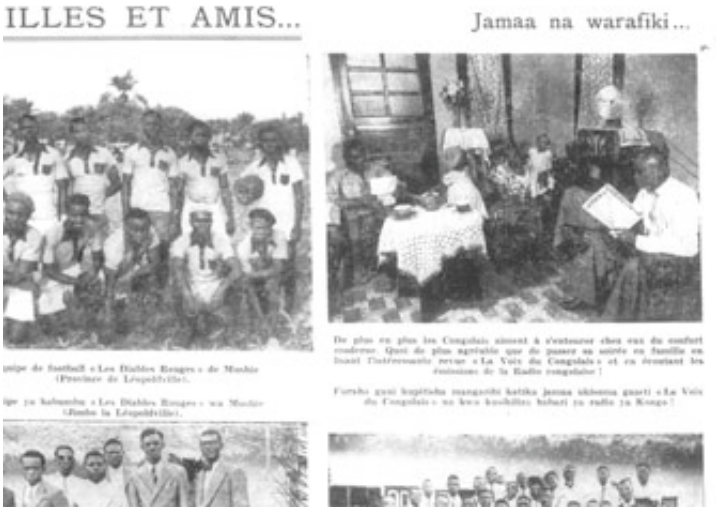
Images of Technology

Rumba Lingala reached people through radio broadcasts, 78 recordings and live performances. The presence of radios in Congolese homes is recorded in the pages of *Nos Images* , a weekly magazine printed in French and the four major languages of Congo Belge (Lingala, Kiswahili, Kikongo and Ciluba). Photographs showing the family gathered around the radio abound. One from 1952 shows a well dressed family enjoying a program on their modern radio, on top of which sits a modern electric fan. The man of the house sits in a sofa chair in the foreground reading the radio publication, *La Voix du Congolais* . [1] [illustration 1]

ill. 1

In 1954 *Nos Images* featured a two-page photo spread celebrating five years of the African Program on Radio Congo Belge pour les Indigènes (RCBI). Photographs show a crowd gathered around a loudspeaker erected outside; a man and woman at home enjoying their radio; the inside of RCBI's music library, where some 3,000 discs were stored; a wall of photographs sent in by listeners along with letters, of which 17,000 were received in 1953; and several studio shots, including one with the first female voice on RCBI, Mlle. Pauline Lisanga, a famous singer of the new Congolese music. The photo shows her reading a list over the air, and the caption indicates she was charged with handling music requests. [2] [illustration 2 and 3]

ill.2



ill.3

One of my favorite images is of two men who submitted their photograph for inclusion in the section of *Nos Images* devoted to subscribers. Whereas most photographs in this section show a man alone or with his family in front of his house, this one

shows two men *shaking hands over a phonograph* . They are facing the camera, and each has a leg up on a rung of the chair between them used to elevate the phonograph. [3] [illustration 4]

M. André Msisiankatu, chauffeur à Kenge dans le Kwango.

M. André Msisiankatu, dereva pa Kenge, katika Kwango.

[1]*Nos Images* 50 (August 15, 1952), p. 12.

[2]*Nos Images* 81 (February 10, 1954), pp. 2-3.

[3]*Nos Images* 127 (January 1, 1956), p. 15.