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► **To cite this version:**

Emmanuelle Olivier. Individual career paths and multiple connections. Portraits of three arrangers and sound engineers in Abidjan (Ivory Coast). *Universitas (Taipei): monthly review of philosophy and culture*, 2022. hal-03508702

HAL Id: hal-03508702

<https://hal.science/hal-03508702v1>

Submitted on 3 Jan 2022

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Individual career paths and multiple connections.

Portraits of three arrangers and sound engineers in Abidjan (Ivory Coast)

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Abstract

This paper examines the career paths and the connections of three arrangers and sound engineers of popular music in Abidjan (Ivory Coast). Through their family history, the multiple skills they have acquired in the music and sound professions, and the professional opportunities they have been able to seize, we will see how their artistic identity is constructed at the crossroads of a territorial attachment and an experience of the world. The paper starts with a portrait of these three 'makers of Ivorian music', before examining their multiculturalism through the prism of an Ivorian history pulled in the opposite directions of cosmopolitanism and ethno-nationalism. Finally, we will show how their individual trajectories and creative resources embody a series of geographical and artistic *shifts*, that are characteristic of a *situated multiculturalism*.

Keywords : Situated multiculturalism; Cosmopolitanism; Ethnonationalism; Popular Music; Recording Studios; Ivory Coast.

Introduction

Abidjan, 7 March 2020: I am on my way to the Abidjan Market for Performing Arts (MASA) located in the Palais de la Culture in the working class district of Treichville, on the banks of the lagoon. Created in 1990 in Liège (Belgium) during the second Conference of Ministers of Culture and Francophonie, MASA aims at "strengthening the capacities of African professionals in the performing arts (music, theatre, dance) and allow access to the international market for African productions and their artists".¹ It also facilitates "the circulation of artists and their production in Africa and in the world", and contributes to "the professional training of artists and operators of the production chain of shows". On its website, MASA prides itself of having become "a showcase for contemporary creation in

¹ The history of MASA is recounted on its website at: <http://www.fr.masa.ci/information-generale/>

Africa", to have encouraged "the concluding of numerous contracts between presenters and artistic groups", and to have succeeded in reaching out to a large international audience, thanks to more than 200 shows featured on each edition.

In 2020, musicians from many French- and English-speaking African countries participated, alongside artists from North America, the Antilles and the Maghreb. The Ballets de Guinée performed side by side with the Franco-Malian duet Ballaké Cissoko (kora) and Vincent Ségala (cello). Artists from English-speaking Africa (Ghana, Uganda, Zimbabwe) shared the Street Art stage with Ivorian Coupé-décalé artists and Malian rappers. MASA thus seems to be exemplary in embodying the cosmopolitanism of Abidjan advertized by the media and politicians to donors and sponsors, and in reviving the Ivorian capital as a hub of the West African music industry, leaving behind the memory of a major political crisis that split up the country (Losh 2000; Banégas and Marshall-Fratani 2003²).

Several objectives accounted for my presence at MASA: firstly, to meet Eliezer Oubda³, a Burkinabe sound engineer whom I started working with in Ouagadougou as part of the AFRINUM "Digital Cultures in West Africa: Music, Youth, Mediation" project supported by the French Agence Nationale de la Recherche.⁴ My aim was to observe Eliezer at work, as a sound engineer for one of the two Street Art stages at MASA, and also while recording the latest album of the Malian kora player Toumani Diabaté at Universal's recently established recording studio in Abidjan. Secondly, I intended to carry out an ethnography of recording studios, which are the new loci of musical creation in a digital regime (Meintjes 2003; Bates 2020; Olivier 2021⁵). Indeed, today almost all musicians, whether they live in urban or rural areas, make use of the many recording studios in Ivory Coast not only to record, but also to compose their songs and to collaborate with an arranger and a sound engineer. This is because musicians' fame is primarily based on their "visibility" (Heinich 2012⁶) in a media regime.

² Bruno Losh, "Introduction au thème La Côte d'Ivoire en quête d'un nouveau projet national," *Politique africaine* 78(2000): 5-25; Richard Banégas and Ruth Marshall-Fratani, "Côte d'Ivoire, un conflit régional ?," *Politique africaine* 89(2003): 5-11.

³ Eliezer Oubda was the resident sound engineer at the famous Bogolan recording studio in Bamako between 2006 and 2011, where he recorded most of the most prominent Malian musicians and many international artists who came to the studio. He then founded his own "Hope Studio" in Ouagadougou, while maintaining strong links with Mali where he has been the sound engineer for the Festival on the Niger and where he has trained several sound technicians. He is the sound engineer for many other West African festivals and events, while recording many internationally renowned artists (Toumani and Sidiki Diabaté, Oumou Sangaré, etc.).

⁴ For a presentation of the AFRINUM programme, see its blog at: <https://afrinum.hypotheses.org/>

⁵ Louise Meintjes, *Sound of Africa! Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003); Eliot Bates, "Agency and Contemporary Recording Production," in N. Donin (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Creative Process in Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Emmanuelle Olivier, "Ethnomusicology of the creative process," in N. Donin (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Creative Process in Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

⁶ Nathalie Heinich, *De la visibilité. Excellence et singularité en régime médiatique* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012).

The audience accesses new songs through audio recordings and videoclips posted on social networks, streaming platforms, radio networks or television channels. And live performances are meant to play the songs as they were recorded in the studio, which is what the audience primarily expects. Thus, there emerges a new dialectic between recorded music and stage.

I am particularly interested in the figures of the arranger and the sound engineer, who have largely remained outside the scope of African popular music studies. At the same time, this allows me to challenge the notion of the almighty composer/creator, which is far too culturally situated (Olivier 2014⁷). These arrangers, whom the Ivorian press readily describes as "star makers",⁸ or even "geniuses in the shadows",⁹ occupy a central place in the music making, to the point of often being credited as "composers" on albums they work on. In fact, far from being confined to the role of technician, they compose the instrumental parts of the songs, often contribute to the lyrics and vocals, and form a particular style to the song. Some of them also do the mixing, thus combining the roles of arranger and sound engineer. But many recording studios prefer to use the services of specific sound engineers whose mixing and possibly mastering work are expected to provide the music with a specific 'shade', as well as a sound balance that conforms to international standards, thus ensuring the largest possible distribution of the music.

When I reached MASA, Eliezer had almost completed setting up the sound system for the Street Art stage. He was talking to Adolphe Yacé, a musician, arranger, sound engineer and teacher at the Institut National Supérieur des Arts et de l'Action Culturelle (INSAAC) in Abidjan. I have come along Fatoma Diarra, an Ivorian keyboard player whose family is originally from Burkina Faso, and whom I met in Bamako, where he used to accompany Islamic pop music singers during the annual Mawlid festival.¹⁰ Thanks to Eliezer, I could talk to Adolphe Yacé, who turned out to be an eminent figure in the Ivorian music scene. Fatoma Diarra introduced me to arrangers and sound engineers who are part of his professional network and circle of friends, including Doyoh Théodore Cyriaque Djé, a.k.a. Patché, and Gabriel Adjé.

From this visit to MASA in Abidjan and the encounters I made, I will in this paper draw the portraits of Adolphe Yacé, Patché and Gabriel Adjé, who made a particular impression on me,

⁷ Emmanuelle Olivier, "Introduction : Composer avec le monde," *Volume. La revue des musiques populaires* 10/2(2014): 7-27.

⁸ See: <https://news.abidjan.net/articles/324097/showbiz-ces-faiseurs-de-starsdans-lombre>.

⁹ See: <https://www.fratmat.info/article/209808/culture/musique/musique-ivoiriennearrangeurs-ces-genies-de-lombre-qui-font-des-stars>.

¹⁰ A festival commemorating the birth and naming of the Prophet Muhammad.

by examining their trajectory and their "connections" (Amselle 2001¹¹) as arrangers and sound engineers of Ivorian popular music.¹² Through their family history, the multiple skills they have acquired in the music and sound professions, and the professional opportunities they have been able to seize, I will show how their artistic identity is constructed at the crossroads of a territorial attachment and an experience of the world, involving context and projection (Agier 2013¹³).

I will pay particular attention to the musical and sound resources that Adolphe Yacé, Patché and Gabriel Adjé mobilize and connect, evidence of a multiculturalism that I describe as *banal*, emerging from below, so much so that it permeates their daily life and their professional practice. This *banal multiculturalism* is the hallmark of a "musical omnivorousness" (Peterson 1992¹⁴) that is specific to these great arrangers and sound engineers. Beyond that, it reflects the cosmopolitanism of Abidjan and its music industry, characterized by populations mix and multiple influences, be they African, French or North American. This multiculturalism is also *situated*, referring to imaginaries of tradition and modernity produced in the Ivory Coast for an essentially African audience. The vicinity of Ivorian music with other African and Afro-American music is the strongest expression of this situated multiculturalism, which evokes an implicit 'Afro' identity. This multiculturalism at work in the Abidjan recording studios ultimately produces a sense of national belonging, which makes sense in a global context. The aim of most arrangers and sound engineers is to produce a music that is both anchored in an Ivorian reality and exportable within a globalized industry, i.e. music defining itself resolutely Ivorian towards the outside world.

In this text, I will first draw up a portrait of Adolphe Yacé, Patché and Gabriel Adjé, before examining their multiculturalism through the prism of an Ivorian history pulled in the opposite directions of cosmopolitanism and ethno-nationalism. Finally, we will see how the individual trajectories and creative resources of these three arrangers and sound engineers embody a series of geographical and artistic *shifts*, that are characteristic of this situated multiculturalism¹⁵.

¹¹ Jean-Loup Amselle, *Branchements. Anthropologie de l'universalité des cultures* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001).

¹² By popular music, I mean all musical genres that enter a media regime and mass consumption.

¹³ Michel Agier, *La condition cosmopolite : l'anthropologie à l'épreuve du piège identitaire* (Paris: La Découverte, 2013).

¹⁴ Richard A. Peterson, "Understanding audience segmentation: From elite and mass to omnivore and univore," *Poetics: Journal of Empirical Research on Literature* 21(1992): 243-258.

¹⁵ I would like to extend my warm thanks to Fatoma Diarra for accompanying my fieldwork in Abidjan and to all the arrangers, sound engineers and musicians who participated in this ethnography for their welcoming me, giving me their time, and for letting me attend their recording sessions. I would like also to thank Sébastien Le Pipec for his English language review and translation. This research is funded by a 2019-2024 partnership grant

1. Individual career paths

Adolphe Yacé: the figurehead of musical cosmopolitanism

A few days after the MASA event, I conducted a first interview with Adolphe Yacé, who received me at his home, in a villa in the wealthy district of Deux Plateaux. I would then meet him several times during my two field trips to Abidjan, in March 2020 and July 2021, notably at his recording studio in the Cité des Arts or at the B&B where I was staying in Cocody.

Adolphe Yacé spoke bluntly: "We are musicians from father to son, so from a young age we live in a musical world."¹⁶ His father was a gendarme, but a saxophonist gendarme who conducted a band and then taught at the National Institute of Arts.¹⁷ From an early age, in the 1970s, Adolphe and his two brothers, Marcellin and Évariste, listened to and played Afro-Cuban music, French Variety and Congolese Rumba, which were all trendy in Ivory Coast at the time. Among the Cubans, Adolphe recalled the Matamoros trio¹⁸ and the Los Compadres ensemble.¹⁹ He also mentioned the Dominican musician Johnny Pacheco,²⁰ Joseph Kabasele alias Grand Kallé²¹ from Congo (DRC), the music played by his father's band, with its Paso Doble, Waltzes and Marches, the traditional Ivorian repertoire and the Evangelical songs imported from Ghana and Nigeria. Adolphe explained that his family hailed from a coastal village near San Pedro, in the west of Ivory Coast, which was very early on in contact with the Portuguese, English and French European trading posts: "That's how they [the people of the coast] inherited this culture [of the brass band or *Fanfare*], a bit like the American Blacks in the sugar cane fields who watched the masters playing Waltzes, Ball music in the evenings." It was precisely this *Fanfare* music that his elder brother Marcellin would promote and modernize in the early 1980s with his Woya²² ensemble, which soon became famous in Ivory Coast.

from the National Research Agency of France (ANR) as part of AFRINUM "Digital Cultures in West Africa: Music, Youth and Mediations" programme.

¹⁶ The quotes from Adolphe Yacé are from three interviews conducted on March 10, 2020, July 6 and 13, 2021.

¹⁷ The National Institute of Arts became the National Higher Institute of Arts and Cultural Action (INSAAC) in 1991.

¹⁸ See: <https://www.montunocubano.com/Tumbao/biogroupes/matamoros,trio.htm>.

¹⁹ See: <https://www.montunocubano.com/Tumbao/biogroupes/compadres,%20los.htm>.

²⁰ See his biography on the Universal website: <https://www.universalmusic.fr/artistes/10000011864>.

²¹ Grand Kallé is an emblematic musician of the Democratic Republic of Congo (ex Zaïre), composer and singer of *Indépendance Cha Cha* (1960) which will be played by most new independent African countries.

²² See: <https://rti.info/culture/7590>.

The Yacé family lived in the Cité des Arts, in the wealthy district of Cocody, where the Abidjan bourgeoisie at the time of Houphouët-Boigny²³ resided. There lived Georges Diby, one of Abidjan's town planners and a friend of Adolphe's father's, who was also a musician. In 1978 he enabled Les Mewlessel ensemble (which included Marcellin) to record the album "La marche du Bélier" in New York. There was also François Konian, the founder and owner of Radio Jam, one of the most popular commercial radio stations in Ivory Coast. Upon his return from the USA where he spent some time, he brought back audio equipment with which he set up a vinyl record manufacturing company, the Société Ivoirienne de l'Industrie du Son.²⁴ Adolphe Yacé explained:

"We were in contact with friends who were often travelling: ministers' sons, ambassadors' sons who were our neighbours. [...] We even had friends who were flight attendants. Kanté, I remember him, he was a flight attendant. He used to bring us the latest news. When he travelled, he flew to New York, he flew to London, he came back with the latest reggae, the latest folk. We had all the new stuff, even before it landed here. So we were ahead of the game! We had all the hits! Kanté, every 2-3 days, he would travel around the world and bring us back all the new stuff. So, there were all the sounds that we heard and that we could reproduce. There was equipment that he could carry too, without customs problems or anything. He came up: "Hey you, I brought you such a thing! You play the guitar, I'll bring you something next time. He'd bring us Jimmy Hendricks records, he's always bring us something. The whole foyer of the Cité des Arts was a tremendous cultural melting pot! So you had access to a lot of things, without necessarily buying them. And without travelling, because everyone who'd travel brought us what they could carry."

Adolphe Yacé attended the National Institute of Arts, then the École Normale Supérieure and ended up at University to become a music professor, while leading several University orchestras and a Reggae band. Finally, he engaged in what is known in Ivory Coast as "Research Music", which draws on traditional repertoires to modernize them, which entailed

²³ Félix Houphouët-Boigny (1905-1993) was the first President of the Republic of Ivory Coast from 1960 to 1993.

²⁴ About François Konian, Adolphe Yacé added: "Konian François was always on the look out for the new the most efficient, the most awesome thing. "What do they broadcast in LA? What does this radio station in New York broadcast? What does this engineer in London use?" These were his references. He said to himself: "If I want to run a radio station, it must be up to international standards."

that he regularly performed in the United States from 1986 to 1991. When he was in Detroit, he seized the opportunity to visit the famous Motown studios, which produced the greatest African-American Soul, Funk, RnB and Pop Music artists, and where he came across sound engineering that did not yet exist in Ivory Coast.

In Abidjan, Adophe Yacé recalled the "swinging" 1980s and 1990s, when the major recording studios (JBZ, Nefertiti, Séquence) operated and welcomed musicians from all over the region: "The Malian producers would bring in six artists at a time. They used to book JBZ for two months." For Adophe, the 1980s also means the arrival of the French band Kassav, which chose Abidjan for its first concert in 1985. Thanks to Jacob Desvarieux, the band's lead singer and a friend of François Konian's, Kassav offered its audio equipment to the Woya band conducted by Marcellin Yacé. Kassav thus introduced the Yacé brothers to the world of digital music which, in the mid-1980s, aroused amazement and wonder in Abidjan.

In the 1990s, Adolphe Yacé set up the Yacé's Brothers studio, while at the same time being a professor and then the director of INSAAC. His studio was one of the first in Abidjan to switch from analog to hybrid production (analog and digital), using an Atari computer as a midi sequencer, plugged to a mixer and a multitrack tape recorder. From 1994 to 2000, Adolphe also worked as an audio production manager at Population Services International (PSI-Ecodev), a major American non-profit social marketing organization fighting AIDS and advocating family planning in West Africa. Although this position may appear remote from the Ivorian music scene, it nevertheless offered him the opportunity to build skills to operate computers and to become familiar with the emerging Internet in Ivory Coast: new skills that he very swiftly harnessed in his studio work. He thus purchased high-tech equipment and acquired a solid knowledge of new audio production software (Soundforge, Vegas, Protools, etc.).

In 2002, at the time of the Ivorian crisis, Adolphe moved to the United States where he stayed 16 years, first as a Master's and PhD student, then as a lecturer at the College of Fine Arts at Boston University. Back in Abidjan in 2018, after the conflict ended, he was approached by Universal to set up its recording studio. And renowned Malian Toumani Diabaté, whom Eliezer worked with in March 2020, was the very first musician to record in this studio. Then, Adolphe Yacé resumed his teaching at INSAAC and at the Houphouët-Boigny University,²⁵ while setting up recording studio in the Cité des Arts where he grew up. Impressed by the artists he met in the USA, for they can carry out several professional activities at the same

²⁵ Teaching bass guitar, computer-assisted music (CAM) and musical English at INSAAC; teaching musical acoustics, CAM and collective creation at the University.

time, he too sets up recording studios and concurrently manages the Pentatonic Sounds & System company, which produces commercials, institutional films, film and show soundtracks.

Patché, the musical omnivore

Like Adophe Yacé, Patché comes from the San Pedro coastal area. He too was born into a family of musicians in the mid-1970s. Actually, his father modernized a dance, the *Bolo* (from the English word 'ballroom'), based on a repertoire imported from Ghana at the beginning of the 20th century by the San Pedro sailors (Guiro 1975²⁶). Patché himself is a percussionist and a singer. At his recording studio located in the Marcory Résidentiel district where I met him several times,²⁷ he explained that he grew up in Treichville. This is the district of Abidjan where, in the 1970s and 1980s, most of the musical life concentrated, in its clubs, concert halls and recording studios. His childhood was filled with music: that his father listened to, especially French Variety - he quoted Charles Aznavour, Joe Dassin, Claude François... - and the music he liked: Reggae, RnB, New Jack and Gospel, all of which were to become the resources for his work as an arranger.

In 1997 he formed the RnB group Nexane with his younger brother, and the following year he took part in the 'Sono de Villes'²⁸ project initiated by Grenoble-based NGO 'Culture et développement', which supported cultural industries in the South. In this context, he participated in workshops and exchanged what he calls "sketches" with Burkinabè and French musicians, with the aim of producing 'fusion music'. This collaborative experience with musicians (and an NGO) from very different backgrounds sharpened his sense of dialogue, which allowed him to adapt to all kinds of music and to be multi-skilled. Sono de Villes led him to perform in Ouagadougou, but also in France and Germany where he discovered musical genres unknown in Ivory Coast, such as Punk and Metal music.

In the early 2000s, Patché engaged in training as an arranger and sound engineer in one of Abidjan's major recording studios, Studio Project, run by Gustave Oulahi a.k.a. Tonton Momo. Patché worked there with the famous Ivorian Rap band R.A.S.²⁹ At the same time, he joined Gbonhi Yo-Yo-Yo³⁰ a band created by the Ivorian singer Nash in 2005, of which he

²⁶ Clément Guiro, *La fanfare krouman* (Abidjan: ORSTOM, 1975).

²⁷ Several interviews were conducted with Patché on March 11 and 14, 2020, and on July 1, 7 and 12, 2021.

²⁸ <https://www.culture-developpement.asso.fr/a-propos-de-c-et-d/nos-actions/ingenierie-culturelle/sono-de-villes/>

²⁹ For a presentation of R.A.S., see: <https://www.afrisson.com/r-a-s-903/>.

³⁰ On Gbonhi Yo-Yo-Yo, see <http://forleaders.afrikblog.com/archives/2007/02/09/3752927.html>

became one of the main composers and arrangers, as well as the "backeur."³¹ Along with Nash, he engaged in Rap Nouchi (Abidjan slang) with multiple influences: from Ivorian Zouglou to Zouk, via RnB. Together, they performed several times at the Eurockéennes festival in Belfort, but also in West Africa and in Europe in many Hip Hop festivals. When he was in France, Patché worked with artists from the Ivorian diaspora, whose tracks he recorded in studios in Montreuil.

After RnB and Rap, Patché joined the Coupé-décalé scene, a new Ivorian music that was already very popular among the youth in Abidjan. He composed and arranged tracks for several popular singers, such as DJ Alan or Prince Bardy DJ, and thus established his reputation as an arranger in Ivory Coast, until he was nominated in 2018 for the International Prize for Urban Music and Coupé Décalé (PRIMUD Awards). In 2012, he ended up setting up his own recording studio, Matrix, where he recorded West African artists who have very different musical styles, including Ivorian Zouglou, Manding and Rap groups, but also Congolese artists and French rappers.³² Since 2019, Patché has been collaborating with Gabriel Adjé for the mixing of the tracks he arranges and records. He used to do the mixing himself, but he recognizes Gabriel's expertise and added value in terms of the sound quality of the recordings.

Gabriel Adjé, Universal's sound sculptor

I first met Gabriel Adjé, a.k.a. Gab, precisely at Patché's studio. When I arrived there, Gab was about to mix the track "Tudi" by Griot Guéré, an Ivorian singer based in France, whose latest album Patché arranged and recorded.³³ Born at the end of the 1980s to a father who is "half Nigerian and half Ghanaian" and a mother from Benin, Gabriel grew up in Lagos (Nigeria) and then in Accra (Ghana). Unlike Adophe Yacé and Patché, there were no musicians in his family. But his father, who made his career in the military, practiced DJing as a hobby and was fond of the Afrobeat music of Fela Kuti. At the age of 17, Gabriel was in Accra and began to visit recording studios. Then, he wanted to become an "artist", i.e. a professional singer, but he was already interested in the work of sound engineers. He attended recording sessions, while teaching himself how to use mixing software on his computer with the help of online tutorials.

³¹ The "backeur" is the singer who does the secondary voice.

³² Patché has notably worked with Satchela Evrard Djédjé alias Vegedream, a famous French rapper of Ivorian origin produced by Universal.

³³ The interviews with Gabriel Adjé took place on 14 March 2020, 6 and 10 July 2021.

Gabriel's father left the army in 2009 and set up a transport company based in Abidjan. Gabriel moved with him before joining his mother in Lomé, as Ivory Coast was undergoing political crisis anew. Between 2010 and 2012, he travelled between Lomé, Accra and Lagos to train as a sound engineer in several recording studios, notably those of Nollywood. Back in Abidjan in 2012, once the political crisis was over, Gabriel studied for a degree in computer networking/programming in an engineering school. At the same time, he learnt to play the piano at the Evangelical church in his district and soon started to play professionally at the many religious services during the week. In addition to earning a living, religious music allowed him to become acquainted with the harmony of Western music. He also began to buy studio equipment, which he ordered in Togo³⁴ and brought to Abidjan via his father's transport company.

After completing his degree, Gabriel was employed as a sound engineer in two important audiovisual production companies in Abidjan, where he recorded and mixed TV shows and series, as well as advertising clips. At the same time, he collaborated with prominent Ivorian arrangers such as Patché or Shado Chris, whose tracks he mixed. In May 2021, Gabriel was hired by Universal as the resident sound engineer of their Abidjan recording studio. He has since then recorded many Ivorian, Malian and Congolese artists who were produced by Universal.

Gabriel listens to many genres of music: Nigerian and Ghanaian Afrobeat, but also RnB, Soul, especially Motown artists, and American Rap. Alongside these artists, he follows the work of Nigerian, Togolese and Ivorian sound engineers. He mobilizes all these resources in his work as a sound engineer. Gabriel needs to immerse himself in different styles of music in order to be able to mix them. "You don't mix Afrobeat like Trap," he explained. He considers that mixing is a "point of view" on the track; it depends on the sound engineer's own creativity and sensitivity, which stems from both his or her own musical tastes and his or her intimate knowledge of the music.

Ivory Coast between foreign cultural influences, cosmopolitanism and ethnonationalist temptations

What appears clearly from these three portraits of arrangers and sound engineers is that their multiple connections stem from their family history and their individual carrier paths, and

³⁴ In Togo, audio equipment is cleared through customs, which significantly lowers its cost.

from the professional opportunities they have seized. What is also striking is their ability to move from one music to another, also when it is new, and their knowledge of the codes for accessing the international music market. But these connections are anchored in an Ivorian context, which we need to return to in order to understand the "space of experience" (Kosseleck 1990³⁵) of Adolphe Yacé, Patché and Gabriel Adjé.

Whether in the political or economic, artistic or media world, everyone agrees on the cosmopolitan character of the Ivorian capital. By virtue of its geographical position, a harbour and on maritime routes, Abidjan seems destined to be a cosmopolitan city (Boutin and N'Guessan 2016: 174³⁶). But it is above all the international integration of Ivory Coast by means of colonization, the continuation of this process after independence and its amplification through the regime's "liberal migration policy" (Bredeloup 2003: 25³⁷), which was to foster the formidable cosmopolitan character of Abidjan. In fact, the project promoted by President Houphouët-Boigny advocated the opening of Ivory Coast's borders to capital and people, and the maintenance of close links with the former colonial power. Houphouët-Boigny thus imagined a kind of "pan-Africanism à l'ivoirienne" (Dozon 2000: 60³⁸), according to which the Ivorian territory was to be "the hub for neighbouring African populations, and [...] its population it were to reinvent themselves in view of this necessary cosmopolitanism." (*ibid.*).³⁹

Abidjan thus imposed itself as the top metropolis in French-speaking West Africa, the one that "sets the tone [...], that broadcasts information and fashions." (Konaté 2005: 321⁴⁰). Musical life testifies to the cosmopolitanism of the Ivorian capital, starting in the 1950s with the popularization of radio⁴¹ and vinyl records⁴² that broadcast French Variety as well as Latin

³⁵ Reinhardt Kosseleck, *Le Futur passé. Contribution à la sémantique des temps historiques* (Paris:Éditions de l'EHESS, 1990).

³⁶ Akissi Béatrice Boutin and Jérémie Kouadio N'Guessan, "Abidjan, une métropole de plus en plus francophone ?," *Le français en Afrique. Revue du Réseau des Observatoires du Français Contemporain en Afrique Noire* 30(2016): 173-186.

³⁷ Sylvie Bredeloup, "Abidjan sous haute tension," *Les Annales de la recherche urbaine* 94(2003): 24-32.

³⁸ Jean-Pierre Dozon, "La Côte d'Ivoire entre démocratie, nationalisme et ethnonationalisme," *Politique africaine* 78(2000): 45-62.

³⁹ This cosmopolitanism has, however, provoked a feeling of loss of identity among certain Ivorian social groups, leading to a policy of *ivoirisation* of jobs from 1975 onwards (Dozon *ibid.*: 60).

⁴⁰ Yacouba Konaté, "Abidjan: malentendu, poésies et lieux propres," *Outre-terre* 11(2005): 319-328.

⁴¹ Radio Abidjan was created in 1951 by two technicians from Radio Dakar. It covered the whole country from 1954. In 1961, Radio Abidjan became Radio Côte d'Ivoire, the national radio. See: <http://raymondadrienne.blogspot.com/2013/09/lepopee-de-radio-abidjan-2.html>

⁴² The vinyl records were distributed by the major international labels of the time: Columbia, HMV, La Voix de son maître, Odéon and Pathé Marconi.

American music, Jazz, Ghanaian Highlife, Nigerian Juju and Congolese Rumba (Collins 2012⁴³).

In the wake of independence, Ivorian singers such as Amédée Pierre, Ernesto Djédjé and François Lougah emerged on the national scene. However, the 'liberal' Ivory Coast (Losh 2000: 14⁴⁴) did not develop a cultural policy⁴⁵, unlike its 'socialist' neighbours Guinea and Mali, which made music one of the strongest components of their national identity (Counsel 2003; Djebbari 2013⁴⁶). Abidjan's cultural autonomy was thus based on materials from the local Akan⁴⁷ culture, French colonization mixed with other popular music, whether African, Latin American or Western ones. The Ivorian government considered music as a commercial product and an instrument for promoting its development policy as any other good on the market: what mattered was attracting foreign investors to a country in development, where it was pleasant to live (Bahi 2021: 81⁴⁸). Moreover, when in the early 1970s the Ivorian state set up the Radio-Télévision Ivoirienne (RTI) orchestra, which can be considered the first national orchestra, musicians from abroad were appointed to conduct it: Nigerian Lionel Fibbs, followed by Malian Boncana Maïga and Cameroonian Manu Dibango (Ketchiemen 2020⁴⁹).

In the 1960s and 1970s, Abidjan's musical life concentrated in the Treichville district, where local musicians performed, along with Congolese orchestras which were very popular in Abidjan. Musical recordings were made at the RTI studio, but also in Nigeria, at the EMI studios in Lagos, in Togo at the OTODI⁵⁰ studios in Lomé, or in Benin at the SATEL⁵¹ studio in Cotonou. As for distribution, it was operated by French firms (Philips, Fiesta, Africavox, Vogue and Le Chant du Monde). But from the 1970s onwards, a proper music industry was established locally, with recording studios, producers, record labels, distributors and vinyl pressing companies. According to Flemming Harrev, "by 1983 the number of local record

⁴³ John Collins, "Contemporary Ghanaian Popular Music," in E. Charry (ed.), *Hip Hop Africa: New African Music in a Globalizing World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), pp. 211–231.

⁴⁴ Losh *op.cit.*

⁴⁵ For a history of the Ministry of Culture in Ivory Coast, see: <http://culture.gouv.ci/historique/>.

⁴⁶ Graeme Counsel, "Cultural Policy and Music in Mali," *Africa Quarterly* 43/3(2003): 36-51; Élina Djebbari, *Le Ballet National du Mali : créer un patrimoine, construire une nation. Enjeux politiques, sociologiques et esthétiques d'un genre musico-chorégraphique, de l'indépendance du pays à aujourd'hui* (Paris, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2013).

⁴⁷ The Akan are a group of populations spread between Ivory Coast and Ghana, who speak the same language with many dialectal variants.

⁴⁸ Aghi Bahi, *'Il n'y a pas de crocodile à Cocody'*. *Anthropologie de la communication musicale en Côte d'Ivoire* (Mankon: Bamenda, 2021).

⁴⁹ Arol Ketchiemen, *Manu Dibango. La plus grande icône de la musique camerounaise* (Douala: Éditions du Muntu, 2020).

⁵⁰ Office Togolais du Disque.

⁵¹ Société Africaine des Techniques Électroniques, which was also a record pressing company and later an analogue cassette reproduction company.

producers and labels had grown to around 75" (2015⁵²). This music industry was highly cosmopolitan, with Nigerian⁵³, Senegalese⁵⁴, Malian⁵⁵, French⁵⁶, North American⁵⁷ and Lebanese⁵⁸ professionals. Some Ivorian labels implemented an international strategy. This was the case of Disco Stock which expanded its catalogue by establishing licenses with Congolese, Ghanaian, Malian and Senegalese producers. Its albums were then sold in France by Sonodisc and in the USA, thanks to a partnership with the renowned Makossa label (Harrev 2015).

This music industry, unique in French-speaking Africa at the time, attracted numerous musicians from the region who came to Abidjan for concerts and to record in the studios. Some even settled down in Abidjan, such as Salif Keita (Mali), Mory Kanté (Guinea), Laba Sosseh (Senegal), Sam Mangwana (Congo) and Sammy Lartey (Ghana). Thanks to a relatively stable political situation and a flourishing liberal economy, Abidjan became "the hub of African variety music" (Konaté 2005: 325), where many artists launched their careers internationally in the 1980s, while some proceeded to recording in France and in the United States. As for the music recorded in the major studios in Abidjan, it was often mixed and mastered in France, England or the United States,⁵⁹ which can be interpreted as a sign of fruitful collaboration between Ivorian and Western studios, or conversely as "industrial patronage" (De Beukelaer and Eisenberg 2020⁶⁰).

RTI broadcast music from all continents and all influences, more particularly Afro-American music. Indeed, the role of television-mediated music was strong in the Americanization of young Ivorians (Akindes 2002⁶¹). While being receptive to African musical genres, but also to Reggae and Zouk for their implicit 'Afro' identity, young Ivorians favoured Funk. They positioned themselves on a transatlantic axis, mediated however by Paris where Funk music was very popular in clubs. Some people viewed this inclination for African American music

⁵² Flemming Harrev, "Abidjan labels 1970s-1980s," *Afrodisc. African discographies* (2015): <http://afrodisc.com/west-africa/west-africa-abidjan-labels-1970s-1980s/west-africa-abidjan-labels-history>.

⁵³ Aliyu Maïkano of the eponymous label, Raimi Gbadamassi of the Badmos label.

⁵⁴ Abdoulaye Soumaré, who was one of Stevie Wonder's sound engineers, at Nefertiti recording studio.

⁵⁵ Boncana Maïga in the RTI orchestra, then an independent producer and arranger.

⁵⁶ Jacques Bizollon at the JBZ recording studio.

⁵⁷ Albert Loudes and Catherine Loudes-Oro de la Société Ivoirienne du Disque, Gerald Theus d'Ebony Records.

⁵⁸ Alain Sawaya at Séquence recording studio.

⁵⁹ Travelling from Ivory Coast to North countries did not require a visa, which made it easier to travel around.

⁶⁰ Christiaan De Beukelaer, Andrew. J. Eisenberg, "Mobilising African music: how mobile telecommunications and technology firms are transforming African music sectors," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 32(2020): 195-211.

⁶¹ Simon Akindes, "Playing It 'Loud and Straight' Reggae, Zouglou, Mapouka and Youth Insubordination in Côte d'Ivoire," in M. Palmberg, A. Kirkegaard (eds.), *Playing with Identities in Contemporary Music in Africa* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2002), pp. 86-103.

to the detriment of local music as "cultural imperialism" (Land 1992⁶²). They blamed Ivorian youth for being "entirely under the yoke of American fashion in terms of music, dance, and sometimes even language, in a word, the American way of life" (Ouattara 1985: 84⁶³). Conversely, the Ivorian authorities considered this opening up to foreign, and more particularly American, music and television programmes as powerful means for modernizing the country and opening it up to the world.

The end of the 1980s was marked by the weakening of the socialist regime in the USSR that was rocked by a deep crisis, and consequently the loss of relevance of developmentalist ideologies. In addition, President Houphouët-Boigny's regime, known as 'The Old Man', who had been in place for decades, was too starting to lose its lustre. The issue of 'Ivorianness' crept into the public debate, and culminated in a major political crisis at the end of the 1990s (Dozon 2000⁶⁴).

In the music world, this led to artists and sound engineers leaving the country to France or the United States. One example is Georges Kouakou, Alpha Blondy's arranger, who left for the USA where he worked with the Wailers and other Jamaican artists. A famous Ivorian producer, David Monsoh, moved to France where he worked with Congolese music stars Koffi Olomidé and Fally Ipupa. It was also in his Paris studio that the Coupé-décalé movement emerged in the early 2000s. In Ivory Coast, the crisis did not imply reviving 'traditions', but resulted in music that could both unite Ivorians and impose itself on a West African market where foreign music, particularly Congolese music, had so far prevailed (Akindes 2002; Kohlahgen 2005⁶⁵). As World Music emerged and Rap arrived in Ivory Coast, Zouglou music played this role, followed a few years later by Coupé-décalé. These two types of music have very different projects: Zouglou is clearly a protest music (Konaté 2002⁶⁶), while Coupé-décalé is an ambient, depoliticized music (Kolé 2021⁶⁷). However, they both quickly managed to unite the Ivorian youths. The national identity of these two musics is constantly highlighted, but their creative resources and their production methods rely on a

⁶² Mitchell Land, "Ivorian television, willing vector of cultural imperialism, " *Howard Journal of Communications* 4/1-2(1992): 10-27.

⁶³ Aminata Ouattara, "L'influence des Américains noirs sur les Ivoiriens dans la région d'Abidjan (à travers les mass-médias)," *Kasa Bya Kasa. Revue ivoirienne d'anthropologie et de sociologie* 7(1985): 70-97.

⁶⁴ Dozon, *op.cit.*

⁶⁵ Akindes *op.cit.*; Dominik Kohlahgen, "Frime, escroquerie et cosmopolitisme. Le succès du 'coupé-décalé' en Afrique et ailleurs," *Politique africaine* 100(2004): 92-105.

⁶⁶ Yacouba Konaté, "Génération zouglou," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 168(2002): 777-796.

⁶⁷ Mahesse Stéphanie Kolé, *Musique urbaine ivoirienne et communication : le coupé-décalé comme expression d'une sous-culture jeune*, PhD (Abidjan: Université Houphouët-Boigny, 2021).

greater complexity of belonging, not to mention their inclusion in the Ivorian music industry, which remains highly international.

There is a tension between an "ethno-nationalist temptation" (Dozon 2000⁶⁸) of Ivorian society and a musical world that is not limited to national borders. This is particularly true of Coupé-décalé music, which draws its inspiration on both Ivorian Zouglou⁶⁹ and Congolese Ndombolo,⁷⁰ while incorporating a number of globalized references, mainly from American Rap and DJ culture. Shaped by young Ivorians who emigrated to Paris and chose to return to Abidjan, Coupé-décalé praises "a new cosmopolitanism, a resolutely African influence onto the outside world" (Kohlahgen 2005: 105⁷¹). The Coupé-décalé singers rose to become emblematic figures of Ivorian youth, whose success and clout testified to Africa's projection into Europe and North America, "where economic and social mobility is possible and where subjects succeed in asserting themselves as individuals" (*ibid.*).

The international success of Zouglou and Coupé-décalé, with the starization of Magic System and DJ Arafat, had an impact on the entire Ivorian music industry, which gathered renewed momentum after the crisis. Many musicians, arrangers and sound engineers who had left the country returned to Abidjan. The major music companies were back in Abidjan too, which was attracting musicians from across French-speaking West Africa and beyond. This is evidenced by the numerous concerts of African and international stars⁷² regularly held in Abidjan, as well as the festivals and performing arts markets organized there. But the context has changed since the 1980s.

In the wake of the 'digital turn,'⁷³ a new musical ecosystem is taking shape. Most of the analogue recording studios have disappeared, while Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) studios are sprouting and are now at the heart of this new music ecosystem. The reproduction and distribution companies of vinyl records, analogue cassettes and CDs have been replaced by local and international digital aggregators and distributors.⁷⁴ New actors and prescribers of culture are appearing: traditional media (private radio stations, cable television channels,⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Dozon *op.cit.*

⁶⁹ Zouglou itself derives from the Alloukou rhythms of the Bété of Ivory Coast, but also from Congolese Zaïko and West Indian Zouk (Akindès 2002: 99).

⁷⁰ Ndombolo is a music and dance that originates from Congolese Rumba and Soukous.

⁷¹ Kohlahgen *op.cit.*

⁷² Since 2019, Damso, Fally Ipupa, Koffi Olomide, Maître Gim's, Sidiki Diabaté, Singuila, Wizkid, etc. have performed in Abidjan.

⁷³ The Internet has been available in Abidjan since 1996, but the digital turn really started with the arrival of 3G technology and the development of mobile telephony in 2012.

⁷⁴ Universal and Believe are the most important digital music distributors in Ivory Coast.

⁷⁵ In particular, Canal + Africa and Trace Africa broadcast numerous African and international music video clips.

DTT), but above all digital media (social media on the Internet) and international phone operators (Orange, MTN, Moov-Etisalat) are carving an increasingly spacious niche for themselves in the music industry by developing their own music content services or by allowing local and international streaming platforms to deliver content via their mobile payment devices.⁷⁶ The digital music production, distribution and broadcasting chain has been set up without severing its links with the analogue era, allowing the Ivorian music industry to keep its influence over Francophone Africa.

Geographical and artistic shifts

The individual and professional career paths of these 'makers of Ivorian music', Adolphe Yacé, Patché and Gabriel Adjé, show both an "original subjectivity" (Heinich and Schaeffer 2004: 75⁷⁷) and a shared history, characterized by populations mixing and multiple influences. But what emerges more particularly from these three portraits are *shifts*. First of all, there are geographical shifts: that of Gabriel Adjé, whose family originates from Nigeria, Ghana and Benin, and who is a product of economic immigration. His choice to live in Abidjan bears witness to the multiple waves of immigration that have marked the history of Ivory Coast since the beginning of the twentieth century and to the importance of immigrants in the Ivorian economy and culture, despite the identity crisis that the country experienced at the turn of the twenty-first century. The artistic milieu cannot be compared to that of the cocoa or coffee economy, but let us note that many musicians from West and Central Africa have come to Abidjan since the 1970s, for political or economic reasons. Thanks to a well-structured music industry, Ivory Coast has a strong appeal and clout over a large part of Africa.

Conversely, let us observe Adolphe Yacé's shift, who performs as a musician in the United States and leaves Ivory Coast to graduate in musicology at Boston University. While these transatlantic circulations are in fact marginal (Ndiaye and Robin 2010⁷⁸), they do reveal real connections between Ivory Coast and the United States in musical circles, which have resulted in numerous *artistic vicinities*. Moreover, the impact of this type of shift was all the more important for the Ivorian music industry as it concerned the makers of music, the music technicians. From the USA, Adolphe Yacé brought not only high-tech equipment that was not

⁷⁶ Several local and international streaming platforms are available through Orange phone operator: Deezer, Waw Musik, Digster and Zikplay.

⁷⁷ Nathalie Heinich and Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Art, création, fiction. Entre sociologie et philosophie* (Nîmes : Éditions Chambon, 2004).

⁷⁸ Mandiogou Ndiaye and Nelly Robin, "Les migrations internationales en Afrique de l'ouest. Une dynamique de régionalisation renouvelée," *Hommes & Migrations* 1286-1287(2010): 48-61.

available in Ivory Coast, but also digital audio knowledge and an understanding of American show business that he adapted to the Ivorian context once he had returned to Abidjan.

Finally, Patché too embodies geographical shifts, but some of them are part of networks of cooperation and cultural development between France and West Africa, while others are part of a globalized economy of music performances. Throughout this career path, Patché incorporated music, sounds, and techniques destined to constitute reservoirs of knowledge then combined, merged, and metamorphosed to give rise to original compositions and arrangements. The acquisition of this plural, and sometimes even heterogeneous, knowledge allowed him to access freedom, in the sense of a form of musical subjectivity. For Patché, these shifts constitute so many spaces for capturing the knowledge of other artists, whether they are close to or more distant from him, leading to the acquisition of a unique "know-how-to-create" (Andrieu 2012: 39⁷⁹).

In addition to these geographical shifts, there are also artistic shifts. As these three portraits show, Adolphe Yacé, Patché and Gabriel Adjé have an extensive and plural musical culture. This testifies to the cosmopolitanism of the Ivorian musical milieu, to the international networks for the distribution and dissemination of music in Ivory Coast, and also to their musical tastes, which stem from their family heritage and their own career paths. They are eager to discover new music, which is very similar to "omnivorousness" (Peterson 1992⁸⁰).

The listening practices of Adolphe Yacé, Patché and Gabriel Adjé are constantly evolving to nourish and renew their professional practice, but also to compete with that of other musicians, arrangers or sound engineers. This is a highly challenging music environment, where the various actors are in competition with one another. These listening practices combined with their own practices as musicians provide a wide space of experiences that allows them to work with artists from highly diverse backgrounds, both geographically and artistically. This is clear in Gabriel Adjé's case who collaborates at Universal with musicians from West and Central Africa, in musical styles ranging from Rap to RnB, Afrobeat, Reggae, Zouglou, Coupé-décalé and Manding. But this is also true of Adolphe Yacé and Patché, whose clientele is just as eclectic. Moving from one musical style to another, cross-breeding them, even creating new styles, and moving from one cultural universe to another are part of their daily routine. In fact, we are dealing here with individuals who skillfully, even strategically, handle several artistic and cultural registers at the same time, depending on the situation.

⁷⁹ Sarah Andrieu, "Capture de flux esthétiques et imagination d'une danse intime : itinéraire d'un jeune chorégraphe burkinabè," in E. Olivier (ed.), *Musiques au monde. La tradition au prisme de la création* (Sampzon: Delatour, 2012), pp. 29-46.

⁸⁰ Richard A. Peterson *op.cit.*

These practices reveal *composite musical identities* that allow them to adapt to all kinds of artistic individualities, but also to respond to commercial demand, which is part of a highly competitive market based on constant renewals. In such a context, the pitfall may well be "standard creativity" (Nowak 2017⁸¹) adaptable to all kinds of musical styles and cultures, with which many musical productions in Ivory Coast is fraught. But it is also true that the composite character of these musical identities is an asset that allows some arrangers and sound engineers such as Adolphe Yacé, Patché and Gabriel Adjé to be singled out for their 'sound signature'. In return, this increases their attractiveness, their artistic capital within the Ivorian music market.

Conclusion: The *sound* of Ivorian music in a globalized market

If Adolphe Yacé, Patché and Gabriel Adjé embody "figures of success" (Banégas and Warnier 2001⁸²) in the milieu of Ivorian arrangers and sound engineers, it is eventually accounted for their mastery of the digital audio knowledge of music production and their experience of local and international sound standards. They are thus able to produce a sound that will find its place in a very localized market or a much wider one. Indeed, it is through the arrangement and adjustment of sound effects that aesthetic distinctions appear in the digital age and that the insertion of a music in the global market is negotiated.

Most of the music produced in Abidjan, whether recorded in an independent DAW studio or in the studio of a major label, will in reality only reach out to a local or regional audience. However, the aim of arrangers and sound engineers such as Adolphe Yacé, Patché and Gabriel Adjé is to produce music that is *exportable*, i.e. that primarily meets international sound standards. What is obvious in their work is their rejection of an inward-looking attitude, as much as that of an identity assignment. In this sense, the music produced today in Abidjan is both a "music from here and elsewhere" (Kohlahgen 2005: 103⁸³), a music with which young Ivorians identify and which at the same time participates in a global sound system.

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⁸² Richard Ban  gas and Jean-Pierre Warnier, "Nouvelles figures de la r  ussite et du pouvoir," *Politique africaine* 82(2001): 5-23.

⁸³ Kohlahgen *op.cit.*

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