HARD WORK, HARD TIMES

Global Volatility and African Subjectivities

Edited by
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tions or even the slow betterment of the macroeconomy and the regeneration of livelihoods. Success will hinge on a longer and much more fundamental regeneration and revaluation from within of everyday Congolese political culture, reversing a very long and involved history of the *faire semblant* and the *faire croire*.

4. This Is Play

Popular Culture and Politics in Côte d'Ivoire

Mike McGovern

Cross your wrists in front [as if shackled]
Cross your wrists behind
Guantanamo . . . Souba!
Oh you, my brother, oh you who create these problems—
  Guantanamo!
Even if you've done nothing, you can find yourself there—
  Guantanamo!
You who do menial jobs there [abroad], you'd better watch out—
  Guantanamo!
You who are working, you can find yourself in—Guantanamo!
Pray to God that you're not too late—Guantanamo!
When you're there everyone will forget you
Your friends will give your wife an STD rather than watch over
  your family.
[Finally] you'll be freed, paid for the mistake that was made—
  Guantanamo!
Claude Bassolé!

DJ ZIDANE

PRELUDE

Every era has its soundtrack. The first years of the new millennium, marked for many by the events of September 11 and the United States government's disastrous response, were marked by rather different events in Côte d'Ivoire, as the formerly stable country's self-image was rocked by a coup d'état on Christmas Eve, 1999. 2000 was a "terrible year" that culminated in deeply flawed presidential and legislative elections accompanied by carnage and the increasing use of rape as a weapon of political terror (Le Pape and Vidal 2002). The situation reached its nadir with an attempted coup-turned-rebellion on September 19, 2002. This rebellion, which pitted cashiered soldiers from the country's north against the sitting government, soon transformed into a de facto partition of the country.

Despite the suffering and distraction caused by these events, Ivorians remained vitally engaged with world events. They also continued to live

their lives in all their mundane details, eating, making love, and hustling for a living. Seen from the outside, quotidian life seems suspended in "war zones." Inside, it is apparent that babies do not stop crying when they are hungry, smokers do not cease to crave cigarettes, and people still drink and dance during lulls in the fighting. Certainly this has been the case in Côte d'Ivoire.

In this essay I explore several dimensions of everyday life by way of an examination of Ivorian popular music. On the one hand, this allows me to make a rhetorical point in keeping with the overarching theme of this book: in Côte d'Ivoire, as in other parts of Africa, creativity continues not only "beyond" crisis, but alongside and *inside* it, while popular culture itself remains a kind of work undertaken in hard times. This proposition leads to the empirical core of this essay, which is an analysis of shifts within Ivorian popular culture and within Ivorian politics, and of the links between the two.

During the period of civil conflict Côte d'Ivoire's soundtrack undoubtedly has been *coupé décalé*—a music with Ivorian roots and strong Congolese influences—born in the African nightclubs of Paris and now one of the most widespread forms of popular music on the continent. *Coupé décalé* is party music: the rhythms are supremely danceable and the form has spawned dozens of subgenres, each with its own dance. "Guantanamo" is one of these. The lyrics quoted in the opening epigraph are testament to Ivorians' continuing engagement with global events; they may also be a kind of oblique commentary on the precariousness of living in Côte d'Ivoire.

Most of the rest of the lyrics (beginning with "Claude Bassolé!" the name of a *coupé décalé* record producer) are forms of "throwing" (White 2008)—"shout outs" to various in-group members of the *coupé décalé* community, its producers, patrons, singers, and celebrities. As in many *coupé décalé* songs, most of the lyrics are metacommunicative:[1] Listen to me, I'm singing; yes, I'm on your stereo system. Yes, I know those others you've been listening to, too. We all have money—look how much money! This may seem frivolous in the context of a song about what many have come to call the Global War *of* Terror. And yet, how much does one need to say about the American prison in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba? The song is wonderfully succinct. Even if you have a job and have done nothing wrong, you might just find yourself there. No sooner will you arrive than you will be forgotten and forsaken by your erstwhile friends and family. Combined with dance, in which dancers respond to the commands, "Cross your wrists in front!"—everyone crosses their wrists as if manacled—

"Cross your wrists behind!"—we put our wrists together behind our backs—"Guantanamo" condenses the essential knowledge the weak have of their own vulnerability to the organized violence of the state. *Coupé décalé* also ekes out what little transcendence there is to be had in such circumstances: the song and its dance underline not only the control each of us has over our own bodies as pleasure-making machines,[2] but also the ability we have as meaning-making machines to look directly at torture and illegal detention and belittle it, dancing with arms satirically crossed behind our backs at the edge of the abyss.

This, I propose, is the soundtrack of the contemporary Ivorian conflict. I use it here as a window on that conflict because it shows one way that the links between artistic production and political, economic, racial and gendered formations are never deterministic in the way an older Marxist approach might have it. They are, rather, linked by what Raymond Williams (1977) called "structures of feeling;" those subtle and shifting ways of thinking about and representing the world that shape, rather than determine, the products of creative life and political decisions.

A GENEALOGY OF VIOLENT PLAY

The Republic of Côte d'Ivoire has long been the richest nation in West Africa, aside from post–oil boom Nigeria. Unlike Nigeria, Angola, or other mineral-rich states where most citizens have seen little benefit from the fabulous profits derived from their underground wealth, many Ivorians did benefit from the "Ivorian miracle" of the 1960s and 1970s.[3] Because Ivorian wealth was built upon plantation agriculture that led hundreds of thousands of small and medium holders and some 2,000 large holders to produce 40 percent of the world's cocoa, a significant tranche of the population benefited directly from cash-crop agriculture, and most Ivorians saw significant increases in their access to education, healthcare, paved roads, electricity, and potable water during the first quarter-century of independence (1960–85).

Côte d'Ivoire has also been a magnet for immigrants from neighboring countries. Some of the enticements have been purely economic, as Côte d'Ivoire quickly became richer than most of its neighbors. However, there are other, less tangible benefits to living in Côte d'Ivoire. Particularly in Abidjan, the attraction may be much the same as the attraction of moving to London, Paris, or New York City for people coming from provincial towns: the excitement, the anonymity, and the freedom of the city. That freedom takes many forms. It may be the freedom from the claims family

members place on successful kin back home, or the freedom from certain social and religious constraints. It is also the freedom of the city—the possibility of reinventing oneself, the encompassing promise of social license.[4]

These freedoms are perhaps most attractive to young people—those old enough to make a living for themselves but not yet constrained by the responsibilities that come with spouses and children.[5] Young people are a central element on both sides of the Ivorian conflict, and war-making in this region has been a means of upward mobility and intergenerational jostling since at least the nineteenth century. Youth respond to the cues of and work within conditions of possibility that have been set by their elders, but at the same time, participation in Abidjan's violent street politics is one of the ways that young people—especially young men—have carved out spaces of self-expression, enjoyment, and freedom in the city, just as their opposite numbers have created a rural version of the same freedoms by joining the rebellion in the country's north. The similarities between these two groups of Ivorian youth pose a significant question: while the Ivorian war has been portrayed as primarily a battle between ethno-religious groups, is it perhaps more accurate to understand the conflict as an intergenerational struggle?

There appears in the words and acts of many of the Ivorian conflict's protagonists a pronounced sense of play. To call such things as street protests, lootings, and virulent xenophobic speech "play" may seem perverse, given that these acts are often accompanied by considerable violence and suffering. However, I use the term in the sense developed in the anthropological and sociological literatures (Simmel 1971; Huizinga 1950; Bateson 1972). This literature emphasizes the "metacommunicative" aspect of play in order to show how it can frame an event or utterance in such a way that those who are culturally fluent can understand it to be set apart from ordinary life. In this sense, play quotes "real" life and can even appear identical. The stakes are nonetheless different.

This urban social dynamic, I argue, relies on young people—mostly young men, often unemployed or underemployed—looking for "where the action is," to use the title of Erving Goffman's generative 1967 essay (Goffman 1967). Such young men, poor, bored, filled with desire fed by lubricious music videos, consumerist fantasies, and the soft pornography televised on Ivorian satellite television, seek the consequential, risky terrain of combat to try their chances and to fashion new selves (Banégas 2006). As Goffman writes, those most likely to try their luck in such violent activity are those who "have not been tightly woven into organizational structures. Presumably among them these fateful activities will be

least disruptive and the most tolerable; it is a case of having little to lose, or little to lose yet, *a case of being well organized for disorganization*. The study of corner gangs of aggressive, alienated urban youth provides an illustration" (Goffman 1967:212, emphasis mine).

In the last sections of this essay, I suggest some ways that the "play" frame has helped to limit the damage done in the Ivorian war at the same time that it cannot be tightly controlled by those who would cast themselves as its producers. The consequences of a "play" scenario spun out of control may quickly turn ugly, as the case study of "deadly play" presented later in this essay suggests. However, one of the characteristics of the Ivorian conflict has been that the occasional explosions of violence are often deflated and de-escalated very quickly. This is possible, I argue, because many of the protagonists understand that the violence in which they are involved has been "bracketed"—it is intended to send a message, but definitely not meant to spin out of control into a durable cycle of tit-for-tat violence.

I want to begin, however, with a description of the emergence of Abidjan's violent youth politics. It is ironic that the two figures who galvanized young men's resolve to change their situations in Côte d'Ivoire's North and South—Guillaume Soro and Charles Blé Goudé—were both English majors and sometime roommates at the University of Côte d'Ivoire's main campus in Cocody, a posh neighborhood of Abidjan. More importantly, both were heads of the Féderation Estudantine et Scolaire de Côte d'Ivoire (FESCI; Federation of Ivorian High School and University Students). Soro headed the organization from 1995 to 1998, and Blé Goudé succeeded him from 1998 to 2001. Another famous "Young Patriot," Eugène Djué, was also head of the organization from 1994 to 1995. FESCI was founded in 1990, the year of Côte d'Ivoire's first multiparty elections, and backed Laurent Gbagbo, a professor of history on the Cocody campus, who had established the Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI) in 1982, going into exile soon thereafter.

Yacouba Konaté (2003) has described the ways that the campus politics of the 1990s spiraled toward increasing violence as the FESCI, allied with the teacher's union, increasingly mobilized its student base against the regime of then-president Félix Houphouët-Boigny. As government repression of student activists turned violent and included long periods of detention without charge,[6] the students themselves became increasingly violent. This violence was turned against a government that had come to represent a calcified structure of illegitimate rent-seeking by elders who had mortgaged the younger generation's future. It was also turned inward, with fights among students leading to deaths and even such neologisms as to "Zébiér," meaning to stone someone to death (the fate of one FESCI

defector); *braiser*, meaning to burn someone alive; or *machettage*, referring to killing by machete. As Konaté writes, "weapons as dialectic had got the better of dialectics as a weapon" (60).

In the Ivorian context of diminishing cash crop income and rising demands for transparency from donors, Ivorian elites were no longer able to maintain the comfortable lifestyles to which they had become accustomed while distributing the patronage that had been the basis of an earlier generation's political legitimacy. Insurgent youths chafed against the sudden downturn in their prospects, both in the short and the long terms. Yet even this contradiction was not entirely new. Toungara (1995) wrote about much the same dynamic in the context of intergenerational competition within Côte d'Ivoire's one-party state in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s, however, what was qualitatively different was the way in which Ivorian elites embraced and refashioned the neoliberal mantras of privatization and decentralization, effectively subcontracting out domains of economic activity to younger protégés and allowing them to "pay themselves." Young Ivorians were prepared to take on the opportunity, and some showed themselves especially apt at using violence and the threat of violence tactically to gain what they considered their due. As one former FESCI head told a Human Rights Watch researcher: "FESCI is the best school for leaders there is. You come out battle hardened and ready to do politics. Ours is a generation that had to come to power one day, so if you see members of FESCI rising up, our view is that it was inevitable and came later than it should have. The arrival of this class will change politics" (Human Rights Watch 2008:1).

It is not all young Ivorians who combined the sense of *débrouillardise*, or the ability to get over, with the feeling of entitlement that would allow them to characterize their accession to wealth and power as "inevitable and [coming] later than it should have." Under the structural constraints they met, it was Côte d'Ivoire's rising elite, its most ambitious and entrepreneurial university students, who granted themselves this license. This activism gradually became mixed with political and economic ambitions, too. After General Robert Gueï took power in a 1999 coup, he granted the FESCI rights to control a large portion of the stock of university housing in Abidjan. This move resembled similar ones within the security forces, where legitimate claims for structural change that would ensure a future by and for the younger generation were parried by a government increasingly squeezed by external factors yet which remained unwilling to give up the perks that had become the expected reward for arriving at the top of the political hierarchy. The FESCI turned university housing into a sizeable rent and began to shake down other students, petty traders, and the women who served prepared food on campus. Disgusted Ivorians increasingly came to play on the similarity between the organization's acronym and the term *fascist*, referring to members as *féscists*. Most Ivorians have become skeptical about the putative "patriotism" claimed by FESCI or its Young Patriot spin-offs.[7]

It is within the FESCI that such figures as Soro, Blé Goudé, and Djué learned the mechanics and the rhetoric of violent street politics. This form of political practice combined a fluency in the language of civil and human rights with the practices of organized crime, charismatic oratory with the mundane organizational skills necessary to running an institution, and a mode of self-fashioning as a political avant-garde with the supplications of an excluded generation without prospects. It is crucial to understand that this is not simply a world of *either* criminal accumulation *or* of principled "legitimate defense." Rather, the two coexisted in the actions and words of many FESCI "alumni" as they went on to take leadership positions in the political process in both the South and North of the country.

FREE MONEY: THE TRANSITION FROM *ZOUGLOU* TO *COUPÉ DÉCALÉ*

Yacouba Konaté begins his article "Génération zouglou" with a list of the national musical styles that conquered African audiences continent-wide: multiple types of music from Congo/Zaire, Ghana, Nigeria, and Guinea. He then goes on: "As for us, the children of Houphouët-Boigny, we remained skeptical: When would we have a national music? What day would we have the pleasure of hearing a music which, from its first notes, would evoke, would signify, Côte d'Ivoire from the West to the East, and from the North to the South?" (Konaté 2002:777). Konaté answers his own question. Abidjan had long been the hub of the West African recording industry, with musicians coming from Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and even Zaire to record music there. Alpha Blondy's success in the 1980s and 1990s was also continent-wide, but his reggae, though lyrically Africanized, was in the classic Jamaican style. It was not until the emergence of *zouglou* in the late 1980s and 1990s that Côte d'Ivoire finally got its own national musical style.

Sung in the Abidjanais working-class French patois known as Nouchi and using *alloukou* rhythms from the Bété-speaking West of the country, *zouglou* was a popular musical form that met with broad success that even seems to have surprised its creators. At the same time that young people's

dissatisfaction with Côte d'Ivoire's one-party state was crystallizing on the Cocody campus, in part through the FESCI, *zouglou* was born. The music combines social commentary with humor, portraying the tribulations of ordinary Abidjanais in their search for money, love, and enjoyment in precarious circumstances.

Like the literature of Sony Labou Tansi, Ahmadou Kourouma, and Ayei Kwei Armah, the lyrics are often ludic and lascivious. Songs tell stories of *grottos* (big men, especially those with a taste for young girls) and *gos* (girls), of prostitutes *faisant boutique son cul* (peddling their asses) (Konaté 2002:787), of *côcôs* (mooches), *mogos* (best friends), *yeres* (those who are streetwise), and *brezos, gnatas,* or *gaous* (bumpkins).[8] They are frequently humorous, as in the expression *tysoner,* which means to bite someone's ear, or *gbangban (problem) de Molière,* which is Nouchi slang for standard French. Nouchi phrases comment sardonically on politics: to *gueï robert* is to go back on one's word, just as the 1999 *putschiste* Robert Gueï did when he ran for president in 2000 after promising to step aside. *Les temps sont Gbagbo* means that times are hard and a person is broke. *Filer des AFP* is to speak untruthfully because one has an ulterior motive, as many Ivorians believe the French news agency Agence France-Presse does in its reporting on Côte d'Ivoire. A *Cube Maggi* is someone who gets involved in everyone else's business, just as the ubiquitous Maggi Cube condiment is "mixed into every sauce" in West African cuisine.[9] A *blessé(e) de guerre* is a very ugly person, whose looks are compared to one wounded in war—slang that has emerged in the context of Côte d'Ivoire's recent experience of conflict and yet still manages to find humor in it.

In addition to recounting the challenges faced by poor but industrious *gazeurs*[10] in their search for good times, *zouglou* acknowledges the realities of ethnic stereotypes without conceding anything to them. Interpreting one *zouglou* hit, Konaté asks, "How can youths whose everyday lived reality is deeply cosmopolitan fall so easily into xenophobia?" He answers his own question: "In the cosmopolitanism of the large African city, citizenship remains a fragile given."[11]

Many *zouglou* tunes recount the trials and tribulations of ordinary Ivorians who know they have the cards stacked against them. The biggest international *zouglou* hit was "Premier Gaou" by Magic System. The original video begins with a scene of a woman getting into a well-used Mercedes sedan. A young man in flip-flop sandals and a sleeveless t-shirt tries to talk to her as the car drives away. Twice in the video, his poverty is indexed by one of his flip-flops falling off as he chases the Mercedes. The story, as developed in the song, is of a struggling musician abandoned by

his girlfriend, Antou, for a richer man. When he achieves some success, getting one of his songs broadcast on national radio and television, she comes back to him, once he seems a more attractive prospect than the man she had left him for. The lyrics recount: "elle dit le gaou a percé/ Attends je vais partir le couper" (She says [to herself], look, the bumpkin has achieved some success/Wait, I'm going to go back and trick him out of some of his wealth). The refrain to the song, "On dit premier gaou n'est pas gaou, oh/C'est deuxième gaou qui est gnata, oh," translates loosely as "once burned twice shy." However, this proverbial knowledge is transmitted in the vocabulary of *gaou* and its synonym, *gnata,* which are implicitly opposed to the savoir faire of the *yere.* In short, the song is a kind of bildungsroman, showing the singer's transformation from newly arrived yokel to slick urban star, his sentimental education effected by his painful first romantic deception in the big city.

After its ascendance over the course of the 1990s, *zouglou* began diversifying and transforming into *mapouka,* famous for the sensual (some would say obscene) dance that accompanied it, and later informing the development of *coupé décalé.* Simon Akindes argues that "[t]hrough the reappropriation of *reggae,* the re-invention of *zouglou* and the explosion of *mapouka* and new forms of local expression, popular music gradually became a voice for the voiceless and a mouth for the speechless, especially at a time when the myth of the 'Ivorian miracle' was quickly crumbling" (Akindes 2002:86). Most Ivorians would agree that *zouglou* was a genuinely "bottom up" popular musical genre that nonetheless seduced high school and university students in Côte d'Ivoire just at the moment that they became political forces on the Ivorian scene. *Coupé décalé,* though indirectly related to *zouglou,* is its sociological mirror image. Introduced from Europe, it is a musical and dance form created by the rich and subsequently accepted by Ivorians of various social strata. As Dominik Kohlhagen has described it, *coupé décalé* was created in 2002 not in Côte d'Ivoire but in Paris's chic African nightclubs like the Atlantis. At the beginning of 2003, shortly after its birth (and the outbreak of war in Côte d'Ivoire) the "concept" came to Abidjan (Kohlhagen 2006). While the figure of the *zouglou gazeur,* which I would translate as "reveler," has a roguish quality, it is roguish in a self-deprecating, loosely carnivalesque sense. And although the *gazeur* is successful and able to enjoy the good life, he is never too far removed from the poor and spurned boyfriend, who loses his sandal as he chases his girlfriend's new lover's car. In the new style, the figure of the *coupeur décaleur* takes the trickster side of the *gazeur* and adds something more explicitly criminal to the mix.

It is worth delving into the meanings of some of the terms that define the universe of *coupé décalé* in order to have a clearer sense of its orientation. In Nouchi, *couper* (in standard French, literally "to cut") means to embezzle, cheat, or steal.[12] *Décaler* (in standard French, to shift or unwedge) means "to scram" or "to disappear" in Ivorian patois. The figure of the *coupeur décaleur* is thus similar to the Nigerian 419 artist or Cameroonian *feyman*—a criminal who specializes in fraud, one who does not necessarily resort to violence to achieve his ends but uses the trickster's superior intelligence and shrewdness to take advantage of others.[13] Also, unlike the petty pickpocket or the heavily muscled *loubard* who might execute purse snatchings or robberies, the *coupeur décaleur* set his sights higher, using wire fraud, counterfeiting, and other skills to make a big profit (cf. Piot, this volume). As Kohlhagen has said of the original *coupeurs décaleurs:*

> Most of them succeeded financially very quickly in [sic], by not always very clear and very honest ways—that's what people say, one doesn't know exactly. Some of them have spent some time in prison but this is also rumors, it's not very clear. What is clear is that they are quite young, between I would say 25 and 35, recent arrivals, and people who succeeded in some way quite quickly after their arrival in France. (Mitter, Shipley and Kohlhagen 2007)

Coupé décalé inventors like Douk Saga and Lino Versace arrived at Parisian clubs with ready cash and began to *travailler.* In the drab, law-abiding world this word meant "to work." But in the playful space of night time *jouissance*, the *coupeurs décaleurs* "worked" by buying bottles of champagne for everyone, spreading cash around, treating DJs especially well, and they found themselves at the center of new, ephemeral networks of patronage in which they traded a portion of their wealth for a degree of fame and deference.[14] (This gives an ironic twist to the title of this volume, *Hard Work, Hard Times!*)

The founding song of the genre was "Sagacité," or "Wisdom." This is the fourth key term in the lexicon of *coupé décalé* and it, too, has seen its meaning stood on its head. The Web site nouchi.com defines the term thus:

> Sagacité (noun): In its proper meaning, the word "sagacité" means clear sightedness or insight, but in the figurative sense we might call Ivorian, "sagacité" means to maneuver by working (*travailler*—in the sense of spreading largesse) and dodging (*décaler*—running away, implicitly after committing some kind of fraud) in various countries. Example: "Hey, my brother, I'm hustling in London [now] and two days before, I hustled in Paris."

As with "Guantanamo" and "Premier Gaou," the video of "Sagacité" tells us much about the imaginative universe of the genre. Where "Premier Gaou" was filmed in Abidjan,[15] "Sagacité" is filmed in Paris. The opening scene, in front of the Prince de Galles Hotel, shows Douk Saga[16] flipping through a thick wad of 50, 100, and 200 euro notes and handing a fat tip to the (white) doorman. The video cuts quickly to Douk exchanging *bisous* with three white women in front of an FNAC music and bookstore. They are evidently seeking his autograph. After a quick cut to show him tipping yet another doorman, the camera zooms in on a group member's wrist, showing an expensive watch. Next, they climb into a Mercedes (in this case a new SL 550, not the twenty-five-year-old sedan of "Premier Gaou") and drive away, with other successive clips showing them shopping at Versace and Dolce & Gabbana. Just as with the shift in Congolese music videos, Ivorian videos in the twenty-first century have shifted away from images depicting the excitement of the African capital to images of the European capital in order to highlight the glamour and wealth of their performers.[17]

Coupé décalé thus builds upon the fantasy structure of an idealized "elsewhere" underlying much popular culture around the world. Togolese lotto visa candidates (Piot, this volume), Senegalese and other West African immigrants undertaking the risky voyage toward the Canary Islands (introduction, this volume), and Ghanaian hiplife performers critiquing the state through a hybrid performance genre that borrows from transnational hip-hop codes (Shipley, this volume) are other examples in this collection of related stances toward a place that has been imaginatively cleansed of ambivalence. There is a close kinship between the fantasy of freedom and anonymity of African capitals like Abidjan and the imagined overseas paradises where West African immigrants throw money at working-class Europeans (with the same aggressiveness buried in the gesture as in the putative charity of Euro-American "aid" to Africa) and enter into sexual congress with women of all colors by dint of their charm, style, and easy money.

There is a more prosaic history involved, too, inasmuch as the links between Abidjan and European capitals, and between Congolese dance music and *coupé décalé*, are the consequence of a very real trajectory of immigration during the 1980s and 1990s. During the Mobutu period, moderately popular Zairois musicians had difficulty getting visas to France. By coming to Abidjan, making some recordings, and playing some concerts, they were often able to get visas that were denied to them in Kinshasa. This network was intertwined with another by which bandleaders made money by bringing large retinues of musicians and dancers with them

on each European tour, leaving many of them behind in Europe and then returning with a new lineup a year or two later. This network brought together music, immigration, and illegal activities at the same time that it brought Congolese influences into Ivorian popular music. *Coupé décalé* was thus the fruit of several decades of cross-fertilization, and several prominent *coupé décalé* artists are in fact of Congolese origin.[18]

In the new millennium, Ivorian music has approached, and perhaps even surpassed, Congolese music as the most popular in francophone Africa. If, as Achille Mbembe has argued, Congolese popular music "has demonstrated itself to be the most successful expression of *serenity in the face of tragedy*" (Mbembe 2006:63, emphasis in the original), then Ivorian music's rise to continental importance has taken place under similar circumstances of warfare and economic downturn. Kohlhagen argues that the hedonistic culture that has grown around *coupé décalé,* including its suspension of moral disapprobation concerning fraud, is part of Ivorians' attempts to distract themselves from a situation of war, unemployment, and lack of prospects. Yet there is more than mere distraction at stake here. The moral imagination that underpins the justification by the former FESCI leader quoted above, who conceives it normal that a student union should be a place to become "battle hardened and ready to do politics," is a reaction to the circumstances of blocked progress experienced by the country's youth. Similarly, *coupeurs décaleurs* resident in "fortress Europe," where they have difficulty gaining visas in the first instance and are often treated as less than second-class citizens when they do arrive, may consider anti-immigrant prejudice and racism sufficient justification for bilking Europeans out of their money. Undoubtedly, this is a case of people making their own history, though, to paraphrase Marx, not under conditions of their own choosing (Marx 1963 [1852]).

This raises a delicate question in the context of the relationship between creativity and crisis explored in this volume. It is easy for many of us to appreciate the creative genius that deflates the hubris of the Bush regime through a parodic recreation of Guantánamo Bay prison as a sexy song-and-dance number. It is difficult, though, to assimilate the perversion of a student union into a racketeering operation that uses rape, beatings, and even assassinations as its tactics in the same positive light. By disposition and disciplinary training, I remain interested in understanding these dynamics rather than in rendering judgments about them. However, many Ivorians express trepidation about the future, one in which an FESCI leader boasts, "So, if you see members of FESCI rising up, our view is that it was inevitable and came later than it should have. The arrival

of this class will change politics."[19] Educators and others in Côte d'Ivoire fear these changes.[20] The valorization of "free money" may be part of the problem facing Côte d'Ivoire, not the solution. This uncertainty and moral ambiguity are captured as well in *coupé décalé.*

"THIS IS PLAY"

Talk about Ivorian music is one thing, its connections to youth politics another. In trying to understand the motivations and sociology of the Young Patriots, it may be helpful to ask what these young men are trying to do, and how they square the language of legitimate defense and concern for the "republican institutions" with the use of intimidation, racketeering, and xenophobic rhetoric. Spurred by Erving Goffman's essay "Where the Action Is," I want to ask *where* exactly the action might be for an unemployed twenty-seven-year-old resident of a working-class neighborhood like Koumassi or Yopougon.

Such "action" takes place within a frame that sets it apart from ordinary life. One advantage of a "play" frame, as it pertains to political speech and action, is that it renders opaque the relationship between illegal acts and personal responsibility. One might well ask what is communicated within such a frame. Charles Blé Goudé and other Young Patriots, just like the "Patriots" in the rebellion,[21] speak "the language of protest, in which one seeks a redress of grievances, and speaks to power in the supplicative voice, legitimating power by the act of speaking" (Marcus 1989:13). As previously noted, the leading Ivorian Young Patriots are university students or graduates whose path toward professional careers has been blocked by factors both local and international, and their performance of violence is, in part, a call to be included in a larger set of forces.

In addition to the kind of supplication that aims to focus attention on young people's plights, urban youth politics in Côte d'Ivoire is shaped by a strong sense of "play." There are obvious elements of play in the supplication of the Young Patriots, embodied in Blé Goudé's charismatic pop-star lifestyle and the hyperbole that characterizes much of the movement's rhetoric. Notwithstanding, it is useful to look at play as a separate dynamic in its own right and to think of play and supplication playing off one another, sometimes in balance and at other times tipping dangerously toward one or the other within an unstable, frequently violent context involving high political and monetary stakes.

Perhaps the best rendering of play comes from the anthropologist Gregory Bateson.[22] He wrote that "this phenomenon, play, could only

occur if the participant organisms were capable of some degree of metacommunication, i.e., of exchanging signals which would carry the message of 'this is play'" (Bateson 1972:179). What Bateson is keen to point out is the bracketed nature of such activity, conveying the sense that "[t]hese actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions for which they stand would denote" (ibid.:180). It is this framing that concerns us here, and the possibilities that it presents to people who would organize or participate in violent political action.

I have already noted the playful qualities of Nouchi language as well as its use in Ivorian popular music. Nouchi culture styles itself as "street," and this self-fashioning revolves around the distinction between those who are *yere,* or street-wise, and those who are *gaou,* or rural and credulous. In a masterful paper on Ivorian urban culture, Sasha Newell (n.d.) distinguishes two levels of segmentary opposition. At the first level, the Ivorian elite cultivated under Houphouët-Boigny's rule signaled its difference from the rest of the population by its appropriation of the language, dress, educational credentials, and lifestyle of the French political class. Houphouët-Boigny's success in this process—in which his own claims of equal status with French politicians was ratified by the reciprocal network of corruption that made French politicians beholden to him and vice versa—gave Ivorian elite culture a large measure of hegemonic legitimacy. Although Houphouët-Boigny's Baule ethnic group dominated the Ivorian elite, every community in the country had members in this privileged, cosmopolitan group (Bakary 1997). Newell points out that among the remaining 90 percent or more of the population, there was yet another opposition, that is, between the disabused, hustling non-elites of Abidjan and their country cousins, who were yet to acquire the cosmopolitan habits of their city-dweller counterparts.

Newell emphasizes the extent to which cohabitation in large "courtyards"[23] and the frequency of urban intermarriage across ethnic, religious, and even national lines created Abidjan's cosmopolitanism, and how Nouchi became the language of that cosmopolitan urban culture. Other registers allowed Abidjan's residents to signal the extent to which they were "in the know," not least on the fashion forefront. Those wearing the ankle-length caftan known in West Africa as a *boubou* signaled both their probable Muslim faith and their "traditional" orientation to style, while the hip and *yere* (who might be Muslim or Christian) wore jeans, baseball caps, and t-shirts or polo shirts in the American style.

Newell extends the distinction to the division of labor: "*yere* describes someone who cannot be scammed, while to *yere* someone is to steal from them. A *gaou,* on the other hand, is . . . someone incapable of discerning his surroundings, and therefore easily duped . . . Those who work are uncivilized *gaous,* targets waiting for a streetwise Ivorian to demonstrate [his] supposed cultural superiority" (Newell n.d.:5–6) The similarity with the universe of *coupé décalé,* in which easy money and ephemeral pleasures are vaunted, becomes quite apparent in Newell's description. It also makes clear that there were already elements of what I have described as the *coupé décalé* aesthetic that were part of Abidjanais street life and *zouglou* music but later were magnified in *coupé décalé.* The outcome of this attitude is not just a matter of hipness. Newell argues, "The stylistic convergence of Nouchi networks and contemporary youth militias [like the Young Patriots] seeking out *gaous* to oust from the country clearly points to the role these style hierarchies have played in shaping Ivorian identity and contemporary understanding of citizenship" (ibid.).

In this way we see how play can be "a solvent of morality" (Sontag 1966:290). By bracketing activity (fraud, hate speech, interethnic violence) as play (in this case in the distinction between *yere* and *gaou*), the actor claims license to do what he or she would condemn in another setting (e.g., robbing someone). This allows groups like the Young Patriots to recruit more broadly than they might otherwise. It is also important in explaining the question already posed by Konaté, namely how youths whose quotidian reality is profoundly cosmopolitan can slide into practices of violent xenophobia. The play frame makes it possible to claim that things are not really as they appear to be, and this slippage between the frame of play and the quotidian goes some way to explaining the paradox of urban cosmopolitanism and xenophobia. Many alternative explanations, including the fact that political elites with nefarious intentions might be "pulling strings" from behind the scenes, tend to treat young urban actors as if they were puppets.[24] The license granted by the play frame helps to explain both how *yere* youths justify committing robbery and theft against neighbors who work hard for little pay,[25] and how they justify beating up or terrorizing immigrants.

"LA DEUXIÈME GUERRE D'INDÉPENDENCE" AND THE RHETORIC OF REVOLUTION

Je t'aime . . . Moi non plus
SERGE GAINSBOURG

Some of the most striking instances of the razor-thin line between the humorous and the frightening in the sphere of enframed politics may be

found in the rhetoric of the Young Patriots. Careening between virulent xenophobia, erudite historical analogy, and riotous humor, the public pronouncements of youth political figures show the different sides of the politics of play in Côte d'Ivoire. The rhetoric of the Patriots, of many Abidjan newspapers, and even of high-level political figures can be surprisingly inflammatory. Both scholars and activists have argued that this is simply the development of vulgar xenophobic discourse intended to foster a context in which mass violence is facilitated by demonizing and dehumanizing enemies (much as happened in Rwanda before and during the genocide there). In this section I try to show that this is a misreading. While taking very seriously the potentially violent outcomes of such rhetoric, I also want to insist that while much Ivorian political talk may be irresponsible and provocative, it is often launched in a kind of play frame in which actors like Blé Goudé appear to be carried away by their own rhetoric. This is tricky ground for analysis: the kinds of hateful speech I am analyzing represent true "deep play" in the sense that Clifford Geertz used the term, borrowed from Bentham. This is "play in which the stakes are so high that it is, from [Bentham's] utilitarian standpoint, irrational for men to engage in it at all . . . In genuine deep play, this is the case for both parties. They are both in over their heads" (Geertz 1973b:433). In other words, this is play that has long since ceased to be play in the usual sense of that term. For that very reason it is important to trace the genealogy of such actions back to the moment when they could still be regarded as play. Not only does this help to explain the rhetorical one-upmanship characteristic of the Ivorian conflict, it also shows how Ivorian politicians grant themselves deniability, claiming—plausibly, in the eyes of many Ivorians—that they did not truly mean what they said.

For instance, on October 2, 2006, Pascal Affi N'Guessan, president of Laurent Gbagbo's FPI party, and Gbagbo's prime minister between 2000 and 2003, spoke to a crowd in Côte d'Ivoire shortly before a meeting of heads of state of the fifteen-country Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

> Prepare yourselves for the end of the week. ECOWAS is going to meet. What we are saying is for their benefit. When they make their decision, they had better not forget that they have thousands of compatriots here. Each one should think of his compatriots who are in Côte d'Ivoire before speaking. They should pause [*remuer la langue*] seven times before speaking. . . . Because if they talk in such a way as to bring fire and disorder here, we don't know what is going to happen. (Panapress 2006)

This passage alternated between two "bracketed" registers. In one, Affi N'Guessan made explicit threats that he later disavowed. When threatened with placement on the UN Security Council's assets freeze and travel ban list, he defended himself by saying that he really had not meant what he said. What Ivorian audiences understood as slight dramatic overstatement, he implied, had been misunderstood in the overly literal reading of the West African and other international diplomats. The latter section of the passage operates in a somewhat more veiled style. Ending with, "we don't know what is going to happen," it points to the agency of the zealous crowd, which the state cannot be expected to control. This discursive evasion of responsibility, which is common all over the world (Tambiah 1997), offers both political figures and participants license when agency is imputed to "the crowd."

Tracing the genealogy of this rhetoric also points out another crucial factor in Ivorian political speech: much of it borrows liberally from the French rhetoric of revolution. From the 1980s onward, the vocal opposition spearheaded by Laurent Gbagbo and other Ivorian intellectuals—many of them educated in France in the post–May 1968 student environment—also draws liberally from this tradition, which has surged forth periodically in France since 1789. Tracing this heritage shows how a French rhetoric of root-and-branch cataclysmic change has been appropriated and recast in some francophone countries. More interesting still, it shows how in Côte d'Ivoire it is not necessarily the generations that lived with colonization, or even with the heyday of Franco-Ivorian neocolonialism, who spearhead the rhetoric of purging the nation of its polluting French presence. Ivorian youth are the ones who went out in the street to throw stones at the French military base, to protect the *Présidence* from perceived attempts to storm it by French soldiers in 2004, and to terrorize French citizens into leaving the country that same year.

In an important sense, their revolutionary fervor was heightened by the fact that they had had less contact with a French community that had been rapidly disengaging from the country since the 1990s. If the decreasing presence of actual French bodies in Côte d'Ivoire cleared the way for a transformation from sweaty bodies and sunburned skin into the phantasmatic structure of more-or-less pure symbol, then the French revolutionary tradition served, paradoxically, as a model for resolving contradiction by "setting the clock back to zero" (Chauveau 2000).

If one wants to start with a clean slate, then what models are available for structuring one's speech, one's actions, in short one's communication with others? The French model of revolutionary leveling may not have

been unprecedented, but it was exceptionally well articulated and packaged in such a way that it exerted tremendous influence on later moments of revolutionary negation the world over. The image of revolutionaries devouring their oppressors is one of the strongest metaphors available to express such erasure and the possibility of a new beginning. Although supplication may have dominated insurgent youths' claims for a place in a political and economic dispensation that seemed to have renounced them, the rhetoric of negation nonetheless emerged at times, drawing on French revolutionary precedents that are particularly familiar to the university educated elite.

The situation in Côte d'Ivoire, however, was never fully revolutionary. Although some members of the political class are strong ideologues, most Ivorians are far more practical in their ambitions—eating well, maintaining their families in good health and providing their children with good education, having some pocket money to enjoy the diversions of the city—and recognize the ways that a revolutionary upsetting of the order of things would imperil their own well-being. At the rhetorical level, Côte d'Ivoire's "second war of independence" borrowed heavily from the rhetoric of the history of the very country whose onerous yoke was said to be thrown off: the France of 1789, of 1848, of the Commune, and of May 1968. At a more affective level, the "family romance of Ivorian decolonization"[26] was so bitter in large part because it had been so long delayed. Amid this Franco-Ivorian mutual rejection we see less the leveling of revolution than the symbolic inversion of the carnivalesque. In this space the bitterness of postcolonial malaise (a malaise aggravated by poverty, pervasive violence, and xenophobia) is counterbalanced by play.

"IS THIS PLAY?" THE MEDIA AND THE EVENTS OF NOVEMBER 2004

> Intensity, passion, concentration, commitment: these are all part of the play mood. But this alone is not what makes play play. There is also the quality of acting out, of becoming another, of displaying a normally hidden part of yourself—and of becoming this other without worrying about consequences. Play implies getting away with it.
>
> RICHARD SCHECHNER (1985)

On November 4, 2004, in abrogation of all the agreements it had signed and several UN Security Council resolutions, the Gbagbo-led government in Abidjan began a series of bombardments of positions in the Forces

Nouvelles-held north. On the third day of these attacks (November 6), one of the government's Sukhoi jets dropped a bomb on a French barracks, killing nine French peacekeepers and an American. Within an hour, French jets based in Togo had flown over the political capital, Yamoussoukro, and the commercial capital, Abidjan, destroying or damaging most of the country's air force (two Soviet-era fighter jets and approximately one dozen Mi-24 attack and Mi-8 transport helicopters). That same night, Ivorians attempted to lay siege to the airport and the nearby French military base.

The next day, Ivorian youths began moving house to house, attacking expatriates, looting their property, beating many, and raping several French women. No expatriate was killed, but many were terrorized, and approximately 8,000 of the 12,000 French nationals resident in the country were evacuated, along with most other Europeans, North Africans, and North Americans. A large part of the Lebanese community left. In the following days, a standoff between French paratroopers and Ivorians gathered en masse outside the Hôtel Ivoire devolved into a massacre in which French soldiers killed several dozen Ivorians without any obvious provocation. In all, the Ivorian government listed sixty-four Ivorians killed by the French army in several clashes during this period.

Many aspects of this disastrous ten-day period are still the object of rancorous debate. Did the internationals (especially France) give the Gbagbo government an implicit green light to reconquer the North if it could? Was the bombardment of the French barracks an accident or a deliberate provocation? When a French tank started down the driveway to the presidential palace (next to the Hôtel Ivoire) was it an accidental wrong turn, or were the French about to remove President Gbagbo by force? Were the Ivorians at the Hôtel Ivoire shot by French troops or Ivorian gendarmes?

What is clear is that on the one hand there was disproportionate force used by the French soldiers on at least one occasion (at the Hôtel Ivoire) and there was organized and consistent incitement to violence coming from the Gbagbo government. This incitement specifically targeted Abidjanais youth, many of whom were already organized into the patriotic groups and militias described above. After the French counter-bombardment of November 6, Ivorian television was taken over by the Young Patriots, including Charles Blé Goudé, and transmitted messages such as the following in a continuous loop:

> It is night for the Ivorian revolution and for hope. The nation is in danger; the golden hour of glorious patriots is near.
>
> France has put a snake in the pocket of the Ivorian people.

> Ivorians must offer their bodies up at the airport. Thus [the French] will [have to] kill us all before ousting Gbagbo.
>
> If I find my Frenchman, I will eat him.
>
> Thanks again to the magnificent patriots who shall march and write the beautiful history of Côte d'Ivoire with their blood.

Opposition newspaper offices were burned down and/or vandalized, and international radio broadcasts were discontinued on the FM band. None of the incitement or the preplanning of a "patriotic" rejoinder to the French attack excuses the killing of Ivorian civilians on November 9. We may still consider the ways that the rhetoric of revolution contributed to the situation's spinning out of control. In this regard, it is interesting to return to Bateson's essay on play, in which he makes the following comment in passing: "But this leads us to recognition of a more complex form of play; the game which is constructed not upon the premise 'This is play' but rather around the question 'Is this play?' And this type of interaction also has its ritual forms, e.g. in the hazing of initiation" (1973:182).

The violence of November 2004 overstepped what can be surmised as the limits rather strictly imposed in the past. While the taboo against killing expatriates was respected in this instance, the probable ban on the use of rape of expatriate women as a weapon was not. In this regard there was some dissonance between the various goals of the Ivorian government—maintaining a legitimate sense of moral outrage at French actions while using the opportunity presented to terrorize as many French citizens as possible into leaving. Moreover, the strength of the rhetoric also entailed a set of actions that were probably not desired by the Patriots. In this case, what may have started in the play frame spun badly, if not completely, out of control.

In the introduction to *African Guerillas,* Clapham (1998) argues that there are four broad types of insurgency in modern Africa. Independence insurgencies aim at throwing off the shackles of colonial domination, separatist insurgencies attempt to form a new state out of a region currently encompassed by another, revolutionary insurgencies aim to topple the sitting government with the objective of instituting a qualitatively different style of rule, and warlord insurgencies try to overthrow the government (or substitute for it within a given territory), although without revolutionary intent.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Ivorian conflict is that it has displayed elements of all of these types. The rhetoric of a "second war

of independence" has been strong and many Ivorians have responded to the notion that Côte d'Ivoire's true decolonization was long overdue. The Forces Nouvelles' rebellion was partially separatist in nature, and over time they established many parallel structures in the country's North, including an education system, policing, and tax collection that operated autonomously from the Ivorian state. There were the beginnings of a youth "revolution" that might radically challenge the gerontocratic underpinnings of the Ivorian political class and the foreshortened opportunities for Ivorian youth. At the same time, the revolutionary firebrands of the FESCI like Blé Goudé and Soro found that there were significant rents that could be derived from the state of emergency characterizing a situation of "neither war nor peace."

Although all four of these tendencies coexist, often in the words and deeds of the same people, none of them seems to have been followed all the way to its conclusion. The anticolonial element of the conflict has remained an oscillation between rejection and reconciliation that I have described as *je t'aime, moi non plus.* The Forces Nouvelles frequently gestured at the possibility of secession, but always denied that that was what they were after. Revolution and pillaging coexisted, not so much mutually exclusive as tempering one another.

This halfway commitment could be read in an "Afro-pessimist" mode as a series of failures, as an instance of African lack. My own reading is in line with those of the other contributors to this book, as a characteristic approach of social and political actors who find themselves constrained on many sides. As Jackson (this volume) describes it, success in such circumstances requires "Hedging your bets and balancing your portfolio of societal debts and obligations." What I hope to have shown, at least in fleeting and partial fashion, is that such hedging brings together a political economy in which "trickster entrepreneurialism" (ibid.) flourishes. Hedging also conjures a sociology in which the networks facilitating political mobilization on university campuses transmogrify into protection rackets and into the violent extensions of political parties, then back to student politics. Finally, there are semiotic considerations, too, in which metacommunicative bracketing of violent political action as play can free a person or group to undertake acts they would otherwise condemn. This makes the use of violence as one tool in the repertoire of political actors in Côte d'Ivoire both unpredictable and potentially less devastating, as even intense violence framed as play tends to deescalate very quickly.

Even when violence is framed as play, and that play ensures both that actors "get away with it" and that it disappears as quickly as it appeared,

its traces may not disappear so quickly. The intertwined worlds of *coupé décalé* and the Ivorian "patriotic" militias are by turns fascinating, diverting, and fun. They stand as a testament to young Ivorians' ability to carve out spaces of *jouissance* in the face of diminished opportunities and real precarity. Perhaps we can admire that fact while refusing to forget that such fun often comes at another's expense.

5. Self-Sovereignty and Creativity in Ghanaian Public Culture

Jesse Weaver Shipley

In the streets and nightclubs of Accra, amid the political upheavals a
economic crises of the 1980s, rap music emerged as the latest African d
sporic[1] music to resonate with mostly elite youths. As local artists expe
mented with rapping, electronic beat making, and sampling, Americ
rappers such as LL Cool J, Heavy D, Public Enemy, and later Tupac Shak
and the Notorious B.I.G. became popular heroes. While for some, Afric
diaspora music provided a vision of black agency, others derided its bod
affect and clothing style as un-Ghanaian, even as a "foreign" imitatio
Groups such as Talking Drums and the producer Panji Anoff quick
began to infuse the genre with established styles of African performar
and language usage, giving it local legitimacy. This music moved out of t
schools and clubs onto a main public stage especially through the infl
ence of Reggie Rockstone Ossei. A Ghanaian rapper based in Lond
Rockstone returned to Ghana in 1994 and began rapping in the Twi la
guage over heavy hip-hop beats and samples of Ghanaian highlife a
Nigerian Afrobeat.[3] By the mid-1990s a new musical genre called *hipl*
emerged, combining older forms of highlife popular music, local langua
idioms, and proverbial oratory, with hip-hop sampling, scratching, and r
lyricism. Hiplife gained popularity through dance clubs, radio and tele
sion play, clothing styles, and the circulation of cassettes, videos, CDs, a
magazines. Around the open-air drinking spots and nightclubs, marke
taxi stands, and compound houses of Accra, hip-hop and hiplife clot
ing styles and bodily forms of expression reshaped urban speech cultu
and the mundane and spectacular narratives of nationhood and morali
This music was linked to the privatization of radio airwaves mandated
the 1992 constitution. New commercial radio stations in search of vibra
local programming played hiplife, popularizing the genre and openi