

The Popular Movement of Coupé-Décalé. Anthropology of an Urban and Coastal Dance

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Abstract: This article deals with the development of the popular cultures among the urban societies of the Gulf of Guinea. In the early 2000s, various Ivory Coast movements know an important success among the African youth. In all French-speaking Africa people dance on Coupé-Décalé. It's a fashionable movement inspired by daily life in war time. Coupé-Décalé is a funny approach of dance. We note more than 120 gestures, some skills consist of an imitation of football or traditional dance of the ancestors; the different ways of dancing are named *Drogba*, *Dribble*, *Goal*, *Zidane*, *Bird Flu*... Every year an artist invents a new dance.

Keywords: Africa, Dance, Fashion, Youth, Culture.

INTRODUCTION

The study focuses on a West African country, well known for his football team, chronic crisis and his musical movement: Coupé-Decalé. For the 1970s Ivory Coast, mainly the city of Abidjan, represents one of the most important commercial place for the musical industry in Africa. A lot of African charts were recorded in the numerous studios of Abidjan. The African artistic currents follow an unchanging course, leading them from Abidjan or Accra towards Paris or London, before broadcasting all over the world. How local and coastal dances become a world phenomenon?

During this period, The Ivory Coast artists did not create the tendencies but followed them. The Ivorian artists were more celebrated as singer than dancer, in various music as reggae (Alpha Blondy), or folklore (Dodo Paul, Antoinette Konan, François Lougah, Ernesto Djédjé). During the 1980s and 1990s, the most of African musicians knew that the best way to be successful pass through the city of Abidjan. It was an attractive place for West Africa migrants and business. Ivory Coast was a peaceful state, where people could dream to build the future, students and workers had not any reason to emigrate in Europe, unless they held a grant from a famous French university. Ten years later, the economic migration substituted to cultural emigration and the national movement of Coupé-Décalé spreads all over the world.

The Context

The beginning of 1990s means the fall. The economic crisis increase, it is the end of "the Ivorian miracle". In the same time, a new musical movement

was born, the Zouglou. This music is played by people from poorest borough, this conscientious movement talks about the political troubles, unemployment and denounces the corruption. The zouglou is the music of students and the dance of working class.

Whereas border countries like Mali, Liberia or Guinea, swing between dictatorship, political reforms (multiparty) and civil war, the end of 1990s announces the struggle for the power between four characters: Henri Konan Bédié, Robert Gueï, Alassane Ouattara, and Laurent Gbagbo, each of them claims to be legitimate to hold the presidential armchair; following the death of the president Felix Houphouët-Boigny in 1993 these political conflicts led to civil war and divided a large part of the population, constituted in ethnic groups: Akan, Mandinka, and Kru.

After the putsch of General Gueï, in 1999, the football national team was imprisoned because of the players failed in African Cup of nations 2000. Living in the fear of civil war, the Ivorian are confronted to the problem of curfew (18pm -5am). Young city-dwellers, who usually dance in the and the pubs or snack-bars called *Maquis*, didn't change their habits for the curfew. They went to the *Maquis* at 18 pm and go back home at 5 am. As a lodge, dancing in the *Maquis* became the best way to forget troubles. The youth was disappointed by a system unable to offer them a future, the dance become a way to express this revolt.

The First Movement

Following the conscientious Zouglou, in 2000 appears the Mapouka Dance, what means opening. Coming from the folklore of the Kru and Ahizi societies this sexual dance spreads all over the country. The oldest criticize this dance who means for them the end

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of the times, the ugly side of Abidjan. Practised by sensual women, the controversial Mapouka consist to dance energetically with the buttocks. Mapouka was prohibited in the Muslim areas and north border countries; Sahelian people were shocked to watch women shaking their body in public. Finally this dance was just a show for men. The most of women dancing Mapouka were professional. Many managers used the Mapouka in order to promote their pornographic tapes.

The Government of Robert Gueï prohibited the Mapouka.⁵ Whereas the civil war divides the country between North and South areas; in the working class districts of Abidjan like Yopougon, Marcory or Treichville, young men create a new movement, they found the Coupé-Décalé dance. The artistic movements are characterized by the social stratification. Zouglo represents the music of students and working poor; Logobi is the music of hooligans and Coupé-Décalé is called “the music of the thieves”. Every social group possesses his own music, his own dance.

A New Movement

At the beginning of twenty first century, new masters of the musical industry are the DJ named also *Boucancier*. They base their creativity on the hobbies and hopes of the youth. They do not want to deal with politics, they feel a common destiny with football players who like them come from the poorest districts of Abidjan [1]. The techniques of dance base on the movements of this sport. The Coupé-Décalé is successful all over the French-speaking area. In Paris, Abidjan, Bamako, Lomé, Ouagadougou, Brazzaville or Dakar, people is dancing and reproducing the steps of Coupé-Décalé. The language borrows French, Dyula, Bété, Baule and a sort of Pidgin called *Nouchi*. The dance gesture borrows step from football dribble and is inspired by Ndombolo, the famous congolese dance of the 1990s; the leaders of Ndombolo are Quartier Latin, Koffi Olomide, Extra musica, Wengue and Werrason.

This melting of styles and skills makes the success of Coupé-Décalé, the DJ become stars as football players. Like the football players, the Coupé-Décalé stars represent the hopes, a large part of the youth identify to the artists. The *boucancier* wears the fashionable marks. Boys and girls follow the fashion promoted by famous DJ as Douk Saga, and buying the same clothes they feel good, far from the frustration.

Called “the Ivorian Jet Set”, the DJ and *boucanciers* like to be compared to the French Côte d’Azur Jet set members. This phenomenon reminds the Congolese movement ‘la S.A.P.E’: *Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes*; a fashion movement born in Kinshasa and Brazzaville, during the decade 1980.

Into the *Maquis* ‘La Cour Des Grands’ the dancers wear fashion jeans and small t-shirt, they dance on rhythm making little steps, the only gestures facilitated by the tight pants.

What makes the success of this movement? Everybody can dance on Coupé-Décalé songs. Up on then women were dancing and men sitting down were watching them. From now on the Coupé-Décalé more men are dancing than women. Some women explain that they love watching young men challenging on the song of décalé-chinois or Konami.

What’s more, by the past, slim women were ashamed and excluded to the dance. Fortunately Coupe-Décalé is a dance in which the most import is not to move the buttocks but the feet.

We notice that the children living next to the *Maquis* are the main promoters of the new dance. They watch people dancing in the snack-bars and learn to further children the new way of dancing.

Sita, 19 years old, Abidjan: “I spend my time in Rue Princesse”

The Ivorian call the district of Yopougon, “The department of welfare”, because of the high density of *Maquis*. The night clubbers come from every part of Abidjan. Upon the Tables, we can see the bottles of “Drogba beer”, the surname of beer drink by men; women prefer drink sodas or Flag beer. The girls are dressed according the fashion of the year. In December 2006, it was the fashion of Brasil; they have chosen to wear with *auriverde* clothes. In order to earn more money many owners of Yopougon don’t hesitate to break a part of their house and transform it in *Maquis*.

In 2006, the most famous DJ, Douk Saga, who claim to be the founder of Coupé-Décalé, died. People called him “the President” or “the Top of Top”, is death caused the sadness among a large part of the youth [2].

Didier, 26 years old, taxi driver:

«The President Douk Saga is dead!»

Simone, 20 years old, Haircutter:

“We were in the cemetery, for his burial, we were dressed with white clothes, following the convoy led by a white Hummer. I was so sad”.

Souleymane, 25 years old, student:

“In this context of crisis, Douk Saka, enjoyed people”

Maimouna, 21 years old, Bamako, Faladie:

“I would want to go in Abidjan it’s the better place for the show”

Maimouna quotes the best nightclubs of Bamako as Platinum, Byblos or Ibiza Club. In Mali, we can hear the Coupé-Décalé songs everywhere. However there’s no *Maquis* culture, because the majority of Malian is muslim. Maimouna says that the main fear of Malian is

Table 1: Typology of Coupé-Décalé

Techniques of Coupé -Décalé	Gesture Consist to	Borrow to
Drogbacité	Dribble like Didier Drogba, the player of Chelsea	Football
Dindané	Dribble like Haruna Dindane the player of the national team	Football
Zidané	Dribble like Zinedine Zidane, the player of French national team	Football
Aile de pigeon	Realise a kick in a virtual ball	Football
Décalé chinois	Do a ‘Kata’ like Bruce Lee	Karate, Martial arts
Petit vélo	To pedal	Cycling
La moto	Start and take the handlebars	Bikers
Krikata	To gallop with an horse	Western (Cinema)
Grippe aviaire (Bird flu)	Feign the trance, become crazy like a madman or an animal infected by the bird flu (cock, Hen)	News
Travaillement	Prodigality, to count money as a rich man	Society
Prudencia	To watch your step, be careful	The fear of war, be safety, avoid the danger
Tirer photo or camera-camera	Take a photo	Marriage
Farot-Farot	Be extravagant	S.A.P.E from Congo
Petit Malin	Be contemptuous	Chat up
Sentiment Mòkò	Mime the sexual act, Make love	Sexual feeling
La comporta	Be pretentious Affected	Make fun of the behaviour of Ivorian immigrants from Paris coming back in Abidjan for the holiday
Vivacité	Speed movements	Sport, football
Konami	Move like the famous fellow of the video game	Video games
Décalé Décollé	Put the left hand high (steal) Turn left/right (run away)	Ivorian Logobi dance and Congolese Ndombolo
Coupé	Put the right hand low	Ivorian Logobi dance and Congolese Ndombolo
Guantanamo	Dancing with handcuffs.	Imitation of members of Al-Qaïda imprisoned in the island of Guantanamo
Fouka-Fouka	Movement with arms, courage (energetic)	Society, daily life
Fatigué-Fatigué	Move like an exhausted man	Daily life, be fed up of war

Table 2: Abidjan by Night

Period	Dance	Promoters	Countries
1950s	Salsa	Grand Pacheco	Cuba
1960s	Congolese Rumba	Afrisa, Grand Kabasele	Zaire
1970s	Congolese Rumba Afrobeat- Highlife	Tabu ley, Afrisa International, Rochereau, Sam Mangwana, Pierre Moutouari, Franco, Franklin Boukaka. Les Ambassadeurs Bembeya jazz Enersto Djédjé	Zaire Mali/ Guinea Guinea Ivory Coast
1980s	Soukouss and Kwassa Kwassa	Zaiko Langa Langa, Loketo, Aurlus Mabele,, Bopaul, Empire Bakuba and Pepe Kalle, Nyboma, Kester Emeneya, Papa Wemba	Zaire/DRC Congo
1990s	Ndombolo Zouglou & Logobi dance	Wengue musica, Extra Musica, Quartier Latin and Koffi Olomide, Werasson Les garagistes, Espoir 2000, Anti Palu, Bile Roger, Petit Denis, Yodé	Zaire/DRC Congo
2000s	Mapouka Coupé-Décalé	Les tueuses, Kebesse, Aboutou Roots, Nigui Saff La Jet set Douk Saga DJ Lewis Dj Alan DJ Jacob Molare	Ivory Coast

to be caught drinking some alcohol. The parents advise their children against travelling to Abidjan, they argue that is a dangerous place (crime, aids, war...). Whereas some see Abidjan as the “city of evil” others are fascinated by the coastal and urban way of life.

Aïcha, 22 years old, is a young Fulani. She wears with a *Niqab*. She's from a rough muslim family. She's not allowed to go out alone so to dance in nightclub. The only way to leave the home is to cheat, thanks to the help of her friend Mariam. Mariam goes regularly into Aïcha homes, Aïcha parents trust in Mariam; then it's the only way to go out of the district of Lafiabougou. Once in the taxi with Mariam, Aïcha begins its transformation, throwing her Islamic clothes, she wears a jeans, sunglasses and asks the driver to play her favourite Coupé-Décalé song.

There is a strong movement of Coupé-Décalé, led by Ivorian from Burkina. Since the Ivory Coast civil war, many migrants have chosen to go back in their motherland, Burkina Faso.

As in Bamako is not easy to find a *Maquis* in city of Bobo Dioulasso; because the most of population is Muslim. However at the corner of the street, in the concessions and in the nightclub it may to watch the younger dancing on the rhythm of Coupé-Décalé.

The Coupé-Décalé in France

In the suburb of Paris we notice that the pupils play two types of music in their iPod: Rap, Zouk and Coupé-Décalé. Children from African and Caribbean descendants like challenging on African music. The diasporic phenomenon contributed to the diffusion of African practices in the French society. Christelle, 17 years old, Italian descendant, says that she has discovered Coupé-Décalé thanks to her friend Aminata. In the social centre of Sarcelles, the Ndombolo dance was substituted by Coupé-Décalé choreographies [3].

The front door of African music in France is the XVIII th arrondissement of Paris. It may to meet famous

DJ or *boucanti*ers drinking beer in the african boroughs as Rue Mirha, La Goutte d'or, Porte de La Chapelle, Barbès or Chateau rouge. Celebrated as stars in Africa, unknown in the rest of France, Coupé-Décalé DJ are still famous and popular into the African community.

Seydou, 35 years old, Paris

"Chateau rouge, it's like Africa!"

The artist reaching to the celebrity has the better chance to get position as animator into the biggest *Maquis* of Abidjan located in the district of Marcory. Other opportunity is to take part in the concerts all over Africa, and later in France. In France, they live generally in Paris and take part in concert in suburbs hall located in the cities of Saint-Denis, Montreuil or Pierrefitte. The biggest scenes of Paris are too expensive for the artists, fewer African artists could do concert in the scene of Olympia or Zenith, among them we can quote Tiken Jah Fakoly, Salif Keita, Alpha Blondy or Koffi Olomide. It may to meet Ivorian artists in the numerous African nightclubs of Paris: Le Titan, L'Alizée. The Artists living as illegal are confronted to many problems: housing, black market, illegal workers; living in precarious lives they stop singing [4].

Confronted to the problem of visas some artists are worried to return in Africa, without money and insurance to be allowed to go back in Paris, they prefer stand in France. French administration is suspicious. According to the authorities, artist's status is another way to organize stowaway traffic; it appears as a new network of illegal immigration.

CONCLUSION

This study is basis on a field survey, led between 2005 and 2013 the research dealt with the physical activity in western Africa. We have chosen the method of participant observation. We have noticed various versions explaining the birth of Coupé-Décalé. Every DJ claim to be the founder of this musical movement. One thing is sure if it may to assert that Zouglou grew up in the University of Cocody, we can assert that Coupé-Décalé movement was really born in the numerous *Maquis* of Abidjan. However, some DJ or *boucanti*ers say that the movement was founded in Paris. The career of DJ and *boucanti*ers is close to the career of football players. They stemming from the popular boroughs and reach to celebrity [5]. Often we can meet football stars and *boucanti*ers together in the clubs and *Maquis* in Abidjan or Paris.

However, leaving Abidjan, they are confronted to the same problems of African immigrants in France. During the week they work in restaurants or cleaning and, the weekend, they play Coupé-Décalé in the African nightclubs of Paris.

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