

**The London School of Economics and Political Science**

*Living Together in the Post-Conflict City:  
Radio and the Re-Making of Place in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire*

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## **Declaration**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the role of proximity radio (*radio de proximité*) in the re-making of place in post-conflict Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Proximity radio stations are area-based, non-commercial broadcasters introduced in the late 1990s as part of the liberalisation of the Ivoirian airwaves. Following recent politico-military conflict, stations have become key actors in national and local efforts to rebuild ways of living together.

To understand the role that proximity radio stations play in post-conflict cohabitation, it is necessary to move beyond policy discourses of "reconciliation" and "social cohesion." These discourses are ubiquitous in Abidjan but they provide an abstracted and de-politicising account of togetherness. Instead, putting critical media and urban studies in dialogue, I ground my approach in the layered complexities of everyday mediation, as well as the contested politics of city life. Theoretically, the work of proximity radio stations can be understood in terms of what I call the mediated production of locality. This situates radio's significance in its ability to sustain habits of shared space from which encounters can spring and new commonalities can emerge. It also conceives of urban place as thoroughly political terrain, challenging top-down discourses that posit the local as a realm of social activity separate from (national) politics. The centrality of place, as a concept for inquiry, informs an ethnographic methodology attuned both to the multiple sites of media-related practices and to discourses linking (or de-linking) locality, media and politics in Abidjan.

Asking what kind of place proximity radio stations make in the Ivoirian metropolis allows us to grasp local mediation in its full ambivalence - that is, considering both its challenges and its potential for new commonalities. My empirical analysis shows that, on the one hand, proximity radio stations carry discourses in which the local serves to contain and constrain urban dwellers' ability to question their situation. On the other hand, stations foster a sociability of encounter in which it is possible to discern the promise of a new form of local politics, rooted in the shared experiences of everyday urban life. In the end, I argue that proximity radio should allow inhabitants to make their own place in the city, rather than tell them what kind of meaning the local should take in their lives.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>
Media and City Life in the Aftermath	10
Place as a Frame of Inquiry	13
An Interdisciplinary Dialogue	15
An Ethnographic Project	16
Structure of the Thesis	18
<b>Map of Abidjan</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Chapter 1 - A City Divided? Conflict and the Question of Living Together in Abidjan</b>	<b>23</b>
1.1 - Introduction	
1.2 - Abidjan: A "Super-Diverse" Metropolis	25
1.3 - A Brief Sketch of "Crisis" in Côte d'Ivoire	27
1.3.1 - The 1980s and 1990s: Decline, Democratisation, and the Birth of Ethno-Nationalism	28
1.3.2 - 1999-2000: Premises of Violence	30
1.3.3 - 2002-2011: From Rebellion to War	30
1.4 - Everyday Life in Crisis	32
1.4.1 - Against the Indoctrination Thesis	33
1.4.2 - Against the "Ethnic War" Thesis	37
1.4.3 - Local Alignment and Its Apparatus in Abidjan	40
1.4.4 - Territorialising Identities: A War of "Who is Where"	42
1.5 - Living Together in the Aftermath	45
1.5.1 - The CDVR, Local Reconciliation and Social Cohesion	45
1.5.2 - Proximity Radio and Local Peace-Building	47
1.5.3 - "Silencing the Past": Deferrals of Justice and Public Truth	51
1.6 - Conclusion: Toward an Interrogation of Place and Its Re-Making in Abidjan	54
<b>Chapter 2 - Proximity, Encounter, Togetherness: Theorising the Mediated Production of Locality</b>	<b>58</b>
2.1 - Introduction	
2.2 - Urban Closeness and Togetherness: An Everyday Perspective	60
2.2.1 - Beyond Policy Concepts	60
2.2.2 - A Critical Urban Perspective: Everyday City-Making	62
2.2.3 - Everydayness as Analytical Frame: Some Clarifications	64

2.2.4 - Media Practices and Everyday City Life: Experience, Representation, Infrastructure	67
2.3 - Place and Place-Making: Understanding Closeness and Its Geographies	70
2.3.1 - Place, Its Multiple Proximities, and the Challenge of Making Close	71
2.3.2 - Place and Its Mediations: Renewed Dialogues	74
2.3.3 - Mediating from Place: Promises and Limits of Community Media Studies	76
2.4 - Producing Senses of Place: Familiarity and Encounter	79
2.4.1 - Urban Familiarity and Indifference	80
2.4.2 - Radio and the Making of Familiarity	82
2.4.3 - Encounters and the Possibilities of Heightened Closeness	84
2.4.4 - The Mediation of Urban Encounters	88
2.5 - Conclusion: In (Careful) Praise of the Everyday	90
<b>Chapter 3 - Understanding Power in the Making of Place: Localism and Its Constraints</b>	<b>93</b>
3.1 - Introduction	
3.2 - How Power Makes Place	94
3.2.1 - Place in Power, Power in Place: The Geographers' Warning	94
3.2.2 - A Contemporary and Global Trend: The "New Localism"	96
3.2.2.a - Localism as Historical Trend	97
3.2.2.b - The Workings of Localism	99
3.2.2.c - The Paradox of Localism	101
3.2.3 - Localism as Analytical Frame	103
3.2.4 - Media and Mediations of Localism	106
3.3 - Containment, Social Control and Depoliticisation: Critiques of Localism	108
3.3.1 - Defining "Local Issues": Localism as Containment	109
3.3.2 - Defining the "Good Place": Localism as Social Control	112
3.3.3 - Curtailed Claims and Consensus: Localism as Depoliticisation	115
3.4 - Conclusion: Place-Making and Localism on Proximity Radio - Toward a Dialectical Inquiry	120
<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>Chapter 4 - Writing the World from the African Metropolis: Methodological and Representational Challenges</b>	<b>122</b>
4.1 - Introduction	
4.2 - Why Abidjan?	123
4.2.1 - Justifying an African Research Site - and a Comparative, Ethnographic Ethos	123

4.2.2 - First Encounters with the City: Pilot Research (November-December 2014)	126
4.2.3 - Selecting Case Study Stations	128
4.3 - Multiplying Sites and Modes of Engagement: A Mixed-Method Ethnographic Approach	132
4.3.1 - Bringing About Different Kinds of Talk	133
4.3.1.a - Interviews	133
4.3.1.b - Participant Observation	134
4.3.1.c - Focus Groups	139
4.3.1.d - Listening to the City	140
4.3.2 - (Small) Media Ethnography Across the Audience- Producer Divide	145
4.4 - Managing Expectations, Staging Complicity: Conflict, Whiteness and Hierarchy	148
4.4.1 - Making Space for Trauma and Fear	148
4.4.2 - Making Whiteness Familiar	151
4.4.3 - Navigating Social Diversity and Hierarchies	156
4.5 - Conclusion	159
<b>Chapter 5 - Between Street and State: Radio Encounters and Popular Topographies of Power</b>	<b>160</b>
5.1 - Introduction	
5.2 - Proximity Radio in Popular Topographies of Power	161
5.2.1 - The "Over There" of Power	161
5.2.2 - Constrained Radio Talk	164
5.2.2.a - Municipal Control	164
5.2.2.b - State Monitoring	167
5.2.2.c - Organised Uncertainty and the Spectral State	169
5.2.3 - "On Est Dedans" (We're in It)	172
5.3 - Popular Research, Radio Encounters, and a Dynamic Sense of Place	176
5.3.1 - Finding Oneself and Others After Crisis	176
5.3.2 - A Sociability of Encounter	179
5.3.2.a - A Premise of Equality	180
5.3.2.b - On- and Off-Air Sociability	184
5.3.3 - Radio Encounters and the Making of Place	188
5.4 - Conclusion: Of Power, Encounters, and Place	190
<b>Chapter 6 - Radio Reconciliation: Repair and Injunction in the Neighbourhood</b>	<b>193</b>
6.1 - Introduction	
6.2 - Repairing the Neighbourhood	193
6.2.1 - The Neighbourhood and the Nation	194
6.2.2 - Trauma and Anxieties over Social Infrastructure	197

6.2.3 - Proximity Radio in the Neighbourhood: Staging Reconciliation	201
6.2.3.a - Conviviality	201
6.2.3.b - Testimonies and Round-Tables	205
6.2.3.c - Revived Neighbourhood Mediators?	208
6.3 - The Injunctions of Neighbourliness	212
6.3.1 - Hierarchies of Voice	213
6.3.2 - Bracketing Responsibility, Localising Attention	215
6.3.3 - Circularities of Neighbourliness and Forgiveness	220
6.4 - Turning Away: Radio Reconciliation Met with Silence?	225
6.5 - Conclusion	230
<b>Chapter 7 - Proximity Radio and the Place of Politics in Abidjan</b>	<b>233</b>
7.1 - Introduction	
7.2 - The What and Where of Politics	234
7.3 - Anti-Politics of Proximity Broadcasting	236
7.3.1 - Neighbourliness Without Claims: The Case of Reparations	236
7.3.2 - The Responsibility of Politics	241
7.3.3 - Irresponsible Citizens	246
7.3.3.a - Passions vs. Peace	248
7.3.3.b - Democratic Immaturity	249
7.3.3.c - Politics vs. Everyday Life	250
7.3.4 - Localism and Its Contradiction in Abidjan	253
7.4 - Reclaiming Political Terrain	256
7.4.1 - Making Place, Making Publics?	256
7.4.2 - Challenging the Political (In)Significance of the Urban Local	261
7.5 - Conclusion: Avoiding Politics and Making Place Political	264
<b>Conclusion: Proximity Radio and the Dialectics of Place</b>	<b>267</b>
8.1 - Introduction	
8.2 - Findings	268
8.3 - Implications for Theory and Method	269
8.3.1 - Place, the City and Everyday Media Practices	269
8.3.2 - Radio Encounters and the Meaning of Urban Togetherness	272
8.3.3 - Media, Localism, and the Politics of Place	274
8.4 - Moving Beyond Anti-Politics in Abidjan?	276
8.5 - Limitations and Avenues for Future Research	278
8.6 - Conclusion	280
<b>Annexes</b>	<b>282</b>
Annex 1 - Description of Case Studies	283



Annex 2 - Radio Stations in Abidjan (Sept. 2017)	287
Annex 3 - Proximity Radio Public Shows in Abidjan (2014-2015)	288
Annex 4A - Producer Interviews	289
Annex 4B - Listener Interviews	291
Annex 4C - Focus Groups (2015)	293
Annex 5 - UFARA Membership List (Partial) (July 2015)	295
Annex 6 - Day of Peace Programme - Transcript	297
Annex 7 - Interview Transcript - Aboulaye & Rose (23 July 2015)	304
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>323</b>

## Introduction

I walk around so pessimism doesn't set in. I walk in great strides, I speak with the people I meet. I don't decide with whom. As you can see, there are lots of people on the street. I love meandering and I have many acquaintances. They like to have a pleasurable chat with me. I can talk to everyone, but not with anyone. When a person looks away or responds curtly, I let them be, and I walk on.

Englebert, Tutsi genocide survivor (Hatzfeld 2014: 19)<sup>1</sup>

## Media and City Life in the Aftermath

Cities are defined by heterogeneity. They are compactions of different social groups and identities, crossroads for multiple trajectories, layers of more or less dormant and contested histories. In cities, a unique combination of diversity and proximity makes "living with difference" (Valentine 2008; Amin 2002) - sharing close quarters with multiple "Others" - a complex affair. As growing cities are put under pressure by widening inequalities and exclusionary ideologies, the search is on for new ways of living together. African cities, in particular, are amongst the fastest-expanding in the world, and among those where acute shortages and regimes of organised brutality put the heaviest strain on processes of cohabitation (Simone 2004a; Simone & Abouhani 2005; Myers 2011; Parnell & Pieterse 2014). Urbanists, in their reflections on togetherness in difficult conditions, have long pondered the importance of housing, water pipes and public spaces, among other material infrastructures. They tend to forget about media. Yet media, while apparently less tangible than pavement, roofs and walls, are no less fundamental to urban life. Indeed, media can be considered infrastructures of the urban in their own right (Sheller & Urry 2006; Larkin 2008; Calhoun et al. 2013). They are certainly indispensable to how cities are visualised and sensed as shared territories (Georgiou 2013), and to how urban dwellers manifest their "civic agency" (Willems & Obadare 2014; Diouf & Fredericks 2014). This thesis situates itself at the intersection between media and urban studies, and its starting question is: how can media help people live together in cities, and in particular in African cities?

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<sup>1</sup> For the French texts cited in this thesis, as for the interview quotes in the empirical chapters, all translations are my own.

To delve into this question's complexity and urgency, I have grounded my research in Abidjan. Abidjan is Côte d'Ivoire's primary urban centre, a coastal metropolis of nearly 5 million inhabitants (RGPH 2014). It is a "super-diverse" (Vertovec 2007) city, due to a long history of migration, both colonial and postcolonial. Home to Côte d'Ivoire's more than sixty ethnic groups, as well as a sizeable population (roughly 23%) from neighbouring West African countries, Abidjan's mixture of languages, outlooks and customs requires great skill to navigate - a kind of savvy cosmopolitanism whose stakes and modalities amount to a distinctive form of citizenship (Le Pape 1997; Konaté 2005; Newell 2012). Yet Abidjan is also a "wounded city" (Schneider & Susser 2003), as I detail in Chapter 1. In Spring 2011, a decade of simmering politico-military conflict in Côte d'Ivoire came to a head when two political leaders - Alassane Ouattara and Laurent Gbagbo - claimed victory in the presidential election. As the seat of Côte d'Ivoire's political, economic and media power, Abidjan was one of the final battlegrounds in a conflict that left more than 3000 people dead nation-wide. The post-electoral crisis mobilised ethno-nationalist ideologies and inter-ethnic resentment. By April 11, 2011, when Laurent Gbagbo was arrested by pro-Ouattara troops backed by French military, more than 700 000 *abidjanais* residents had fled their home (OCHA 2011). At the time of my fieldwork, in 2014-2015, Abidjan was truly a city in which cohabitation was in question.

What role, then, could media play in helping *abidjanais* residents live together after conflict? The role of media in fostering conflict has been an object of significant academic scrutiny and debate - especially, in an African context, since the Rwandan genocide (e.g. Thompson 2007; Théroux-Bénoni 2009). Conversely, the positive role of media in post-conflict settings has drawn increasing attention (see Price et al. 2009; Schoemaker & Stremlau 2014). There remains much to clarify, however. Few studies of media after conflict have considered the specific challenges posed - and opportunities offered - by urban contexts. And still fewer studies of media in post-conflict cities have engaged with the literature in urban studies that seeks to understand the practices and intricacies of urban cohabitation. Yet as urbanist Suzi Hall (2012) points out, how can we understand what living with difference in cities means, if we do not interrogate the ordinary practices through which urban dwellers share space and relate to "Others" in their day to day lives? This thesis sets out to

interrogate the role of media in post-conflict cohabitation in Abidjan through the lens of residents' everyday practices, aspirations and imaginaries.

Such a perspective involves theoretical and methodological challenges. For one, where to begin the investigation? Both "media" and "the city" are dauntingly vast objects of study. "Media" not only designates a dizzying "manifold" of practices and rapidly changing technologies (Couldry 2004; 2012), but as a "common-sense" category it can mean very different things in different contexts (Slater 2014). I have thus elected not to approach "the media" as a whole, but to focus on a specific type of media organisation. At the centre of my analysis are small-scale, area-based broadcasters that in Abidjan are called *radios de proximité*. There are more than fifteen "proximity radio" stations in the city, at least one for each of Abidjan's ten municipal districts (*communes*). These stations occupy a position in the *abidjanais* media landscape that is unique and challenging in its own right. Proximity radio is at once established (the first stations in Abidjan were launched in 1998) and continuously evolving. As non-commercial and underfunded operations, stations' survival relies on being able to constantly take the pulse of the new. Proximity radio thus encapsulates historic attitudes toward "the media" in Abidjan, as well as a sphere of continuous practical experimentation. Proximity radio, furthermore, is a peculiar hybrid. Authorised as part of the liberalisation of the Ivoirian airwaves - less than a decade after the introduction of multi-party elections in 1990 - proximity radio presents many of the features associated with "community media" (Howley 2005; 2010) and grassroots communication. At the same time, proximity radio is shaped by the overbearing presence of the state in Ivoirian media and the active involvement of municipal authorities. Crucially, it is defined by its regulatory interdiction to discuss politics. As a result, any account of proximity radio must consider the fraught interplay between street and state - between urban dwellers' ordinary doings and aspirations, on the one hand, and official attempts to order urban life and communications, on the other. Proximity radio presents a case of "how to be both," in novelist Ali Smith's (2014) words: both state communicator and community media, its ambivalence challenges normative media models, and offers a distinctive case study as far as the literature on media in Africa is concerned. Last but certainly not least, proximity radio offers a good vantage point from which to explore the role of media in post-conflict cohabitation because stations have been the most active media organisations in peace-building in

Abidjan (Internews 2014). Stations have received significant funds and training from many international organisations precisely to help *abidjanais* residents live together after violence.

### **Place as a Frame of Inquiry**

But what, exactly, does living together mean in an urban context characterised by irreducible heterogeneity? Conceptualising urban togetherness and its multiple mediations is the second challenge that I tackle in this thesis. I employ the term mediation in a deliberately open-ended sense here. It refers to the dispersed practices of brokering and exchange that allow social collectives to "hold" internally, as well as practices through which people articulate a sense of the broader social world in which they belong. Mediation in this sense is largely underpinned and facilitated by media (Martín-Barbero 1993; Spitulnik 1996; Livingstone 2009), but allows for a conception of "mediators" that includes, in the African city, churches, neighbourhood groups, trade organisations, ethnic associations, international agencies, etc. (Simone 2005b; 2010a; 2010b).

Mediating urban togetherness is a difficult task because mediation is a complex and refracted process, but also because the idea of living together is at once loaded - with anxieties, normative expectations, or unhelpful avatars - and taken for granted. The process of cohabitation involves a kind of background sense of commonality, one that is as minimal as it is infrastructural (Simone 2004b; Amin 2012). Togetherness, in this infrastructural sense, is often barely registered as such, even when it is crucial to further social exchange and collaboration. To explore the meaning and maintenance of such infrastructural togetherness, I draw on the concept of *place*, or locality. Place, as feminist scholar Sara Ahmed (2006: 3) writes, involves "different ways of registering the proximity of objects and others." It is at once a habitually practiced terrain and a field of common meaning and lived experience - a "world of shared inhabitation" (ibid.). Invoking place leads to its own set of challenges, however. Place is often a misunderstood concept, associated with fixity, homogeneity and boundedness - incompatible with the city's fluctuating and multitudinous nature (Massey 1994). Relatedly, place is often thought to exist outside of media. Indeed, many theories see in media place's erasure. In Chapter 2, I theorise place as a

continuous and open-ended process, and elucidate how media might be involved in what Arjun Appadurai (1996) calls "the production of locality."

It may appear that conceptualising place as a figure of urban togetherness is far removed from the exigencies of post-conflict Abidjan. But defining place is not just a scholarly pursuit. A host of practitioners, programmes and policies also take the local as a prime arena for urban intervention. And as Ash Amin (2004; 2005) argues, a flawed understanding of place can make these interventions deeply misguided. Indeed, sharp debates over the definition of place animate the field of peace-building; while a "local turn in peace-building" (Mac Ginty & Richmond 2013; Hughes et al. 2015) has begun to acknowledge the importance of place in re-building togetherness after conflict, critics argue that a poor conceptualisation of the local leads peace-building initiatives to keep repeating past mistakes (Öjendal & Ou 2015; Paffenholz 2015; Schierenbeck 2015; Randazzo 2016; Kappler 2017). This is not just a problem of programmes that do not "work." More fundamentally, misunderstanding place can lead to urban interventions (including peace-building programmes on proximity radio) that actively constrain everyday practices, talk and social relations. In doing so, these urban interventions may become complicit in enacting power differentials, wittingly or not. Put bluntly, "local peace" can turn into domination. I theorise why that maybe in Chapter 3.

A close attention to place as a figure of urban togetherness, then, does not just consider ordinary citizens' practices and outlooks. It is equally attentive to the ways powerful institutions conceive the local to intervene in it. Once again, proximity radio's position at the juncture between street and state, between the grassroots and the institutional, offers a unique perspective to capture contests over the definition of place in Abidjan - contests that Amin (2004: 34) describes as nothing less than a "war of imaginaries." My thesis thus examines four points: 1) the ways that proximity radio stations allowed *abidjanais* residents to make a place for themselves and others in the post-conflict city; 2) whether and how proximity radio stations enacted institutional and interventionist visions of the local; 3) how contrasting imaginaries of place, to use Amin's expression, interacted on proximity radio; and 4) what this meant for proximity radio's contribution to urban cohabitation.

## **An Interdisciplinary Dialogue**

Through these considerations, I aim to contribute to several bodies of literature, or at least bring them into dialogue. To be sure, I aim to contribute to ongoing discussions about life after conflict in Abidjan. While considerable attention has been paid to the conflict years in Côte d'Ivoire (e.g. Marshall-Fratani 2006; Banégas 2010a; Akindès 2011; McGovern 2011a), less has been written since the end of the 2011 post-electoral crisis, and most of what has come out has focused on macro-level politics and processes (e.g. Banégas 2012; Charbonneau 2013; Akindès & Zina 2015). Yet if contemporary Abidjan is a "social time-bomb," as one French newspaper recently put it (Sylvestre-Treiner, 26 February 2017), strained by post-conflict legacies, poverty and neoliberal economic policies, it is all the more important to understand ordinary *abidjanais* residents' practices, views and aspirations. This can help avoid misinterpreting and sensationalising resurgent tensions as well, perhaps, as pointing toward how proximity radio stations might offer urban dwellers additional agency in tackling current difficulties.

Through this thesis, I also hope to show that proximity radio stations in Abidjan are relevant for more global academic discussions, in both media and urban studies. By approaching proximity radio as an urban mediator, I situate myself within an emerging corpus that deals with what Ravi Sundaram (2010) calls "*media urbanism*" - the kaleidoscopic interplay between media and city life. The present study addresses several gaps in this body of work, which has not paid sufficient attention to small-scale, community and local media operations (with some recent exceptions: Georgiou 2016; Rodgers 2017b), often appears to have forgotten non-digital media, and, by and large, tends to ignore African contexts (with the influential exception of Brian Larkin's [2008] work). Simultaneously, I hope to broaden the frame of inquiry that currently predominates in studies of *community media*, suggesting that a more spatially-attuned approach, and one less oriented toward normative models, might yield renewed insights into community media's importance (drawing much inspiration from Rodríguez 2011). Certainly, I also wish to contribute to the variegated literature on *media in Africa*. My research seeks to consolidate bridges between literature on African community media (e.g. Tudesq 2002; Goretti 2009; Bosch 2010) and scholarship on African urbanism. In so doing, I add to African media studies' and

anthropology's growing appraisal of everyday media audiences and practices (e.g. Spitulnik 1996; 1998; 2000; Newell & Okome 2014; Willems & Mano 2017a), paying particular attention to the spatialities of mediation (e.g Barber 1997; Castryck & Sieveking 2014; Gunner 2015), and to citizens' mediated imaginaries of place, state and society (e.g. Gupta & Ferguson 2002; Englund 2011; Willems 2015).

Additionally, there are two strands of work in urban studies that I address in this thesis. On the one hand, I hope to offer some insights to long-standing reflections on *urban multicultures* (e.g. Back 2001; Amin 2002; Keith 2005; Binnie 2006; Wise & Velayutham 2009; Hall 2012; Werbner 2014; Glick-Schiller & Schmidt 2016). On the other, I speak to a growing, critical literature on the role of the local in urban management, government and politics - what political geographers tend to refer to as *localism* (Goetz & Clarke 1993; Brenner & Theodore 2002; Wills 2016). Urban multicultural and localism map onto my dialectical concern with everyday and institutional imaginaries of place, respectively. My work is original in that these two strands of literature rarely interact with each other, save in the budding literature on policies of urban "diversity management" (e.g. Amin 2002; 2005; Però 2013; Fincher et al. 2014; Scalbert Yücel 2017). I also hope to show the benefits, for both strands of literature, of deeper engagement with media. While the literature on urban multicultures has been more attuned to questions of media consumption and representation, it tends to consider media practices only in relation to the formation of distinct socio-cultural identities, and has paid less attention to how media can be catalysts for interrelations (Dreher 2009; Georgiou 2016). As for studies of localism, they mostly ignore media altogether. I hope to demonstrate that this is a worthwhile gap to fill, since attention to media allows a more thorough appraisal of the contested imaginaries involved in urban politics - challenging the often-totalising visions of policy analysis, governmentality studies and "post-political" theories. Finally, studies of urban multicultures and localism tend to be focused on cities of the so-called "Global North." In line with a growing effort to stage theoretical and empirical dialogues between African urbanisms and the broader "world of cities" (Robinson 2011), I hope to go some way in showing that Abidjan can be perfectly relevant to discuss the contemporary challenges of urban life and politics.

## **An Ethnographic Project**



To recapitulate, this thesis asks how proximity radio stations may help *abidjanais* residents live together in the post-conflict city. It is committed to approaching the question through the lens of everyday life. The third main challenge that this perspective raises is methodological. To tackle it, I adopt an ethnographic approach informed by established practices and recent discussions in media studies, urban studies, and anthropology. I aim, first, to study proximity radio stations across the audience/producer divide. To do so, I draw on rich precedents in media production and audience ethnographies, and follow Harri Englund's (2011) lead in attempting to weave both together, as well as Nick Couldry's (2000) insight that there is much to learn from the points of contact between "media" and "ordinary" worlds. By bridging the audience/producer gap, furthermore, I aim to address a central blind spot in studies of community media, which tend to focus on production practices and organisational questions. I show that proximity radio's embeddedness in everyday urban life would have been impossible to document without a nuanced dialogue between producers' and listeners' perspectives, however uncomfortable this dialogue may appear at times.

Another methodological complexity that arises is how to approach the local not as a pre-conceived category - e.g. "the neighbourhood" or "the municipal district" - but as a process actualised and envisioned at various levels and scales. In tackling this issue I follow Suzi Hall's (2012; 2015a) "trans-ethnographic" method, attempting to relate micro-level interactions to meso-level visualisations of locality, habits of movement at various scales (Ingold 2009; Moores 2012), and politico-administrative referents. The aim, as Hall (2012: 14) puts it, is less to map out a single territory of the local in Abidjan than to document "practices of being local" along with the relations and meanings these practices were associated to.

To capture the fullest possible glimpse of media practices and livelihoods in Abidjan, I focus on four proximity radio stations in four distinctive areas of the city: Radio Arc-en-Ciel in Abobo, Radio ATM in Port-Bouët, Radio Fraternité in Yopougon and Radio Téré in Adjamé. In addition to participant observation in the stations, I spent months with listeners' clubs in the large, working-class (*populaires* in *abidjanais* parlance) and semi-peripheral districts of Abobo and Yopougon (see the map that follows this

introduction). I also spent time with *non*-listeners, urban dwellers for whom proximity radio stations did not appear to offer much excitement or promise, and whose perspectives were crucial to understand the hopes and frustrations associated with media in the Ivoirian metropolis. Along the way, I met and exchanged with associational leaders, religious actors, political activists, musicians, students, informal traders, and the unemployed. Many of my informants were experimenting with more than one approach to "the work of being in the city" (Simone 2012: 202) in difficult and uncertain times. The multiplication of social relations, in a city that lives in an urgent present, occasionally made multi-sited ethnographic engagement overly demanding. The occasional anxiety of not being able to stretch myself across several places at once was compounded by the intricacies of staging "complicity," in George Marcus' (1997) term, in a context where my whiteness was an irrefutable marker of exteriority and colonial legacy. I reflect further on these challenges and how I endeavoured to mitigate them in Chapter 4.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

In **Chapter 1** I provide a more detailed, historical account of the Ivoirian conflict and its aftermath, to contextualise the theory and analysis that follow. By re-tracing the roots and manifestations of the Ivoirian conflict, I highlight the importance of the local as both a strategic ground for political-military control, and a site of resistance in which the continuities of everyday life could be affirmed. This serves as a justification for attention to place in the rest of my thesis. It is also a corrective to simplistic narratives of the Ivoirian conflict - namely, narratives of "ethnic war" and political indoctrination - that often served, even if implicitly, as bases for post-conflict peace-building discourses. Chapter 1 ends with a discussion of the role of the local and of proximity radio stations in (widely criticised) reconciliation efforts after 2011.

In **Chapter 2** I offer a theoretical framework to understand everyday place-making, media's role in the process, and its significance for urban cohabitation. This framework situates my perspective on place and media in critical theories of everyday urban life, as well as in an emerging field of what might be called urban media studies. I go on to detail the conceptual value of place as a nuanced approach to media's role in fostering togetherness or "bringing people closer " in the city. Place, understood as

a continuous and contested process, accounts for the complexities of urban mediation while underscoring the importance of everyday practices that generate familiarity and encounters.

If Chapter 2 considers the everyday practices through which urban dwellers make and mediate place, **Chapter 3** examines policy-driven attempts to orchestrate place-making practices and orient them towards instrumental aims. I group these institutional endeavours under the banner of "localism." I theorise how localism involves place in the exercise of power through its definitional work (defining what the local *is*). I review critical studies of localism in various fields and disciplines - chief amongst which: development, governance and urban planning - in order to clarify some of the ways in which localism limits what people can do in and from place. In particular, localism tends to deny place's political significance by removing possibilities for structural critique and by emphasising place as consensus.

In **Chapter 4** I outline the multi-sited, mixed-methods ethnographic approach that guided my fieldwork in Abidjan between November 2014 and January 2016. I discuss the epistemological and representational considerations underpinning my choice of Abidjan as a research site. I retrace the steps that led to my selection of four case-study stations. I detail the challenges involved in conducting a multi-sited urban ethnography across the listener/producer divide, and in a context where radically uneven social locations complicated interpersonal relations in a variety of ways.

**Chapter 5** tackles the question of proximity radio's embeddedness in ordinary urban life in Abidjan, and begins to clarify its ambiguous position between street and state. The chapter begins with the difficult issue of municipal control and state surveillance on the airwaves. I examine some of the realities behind proximity radio's entanglement with authorities, but also how these entanglements positioned stations in what I call popular topographies of power: urban dwellers' understandings of relations between the local and the state. By paying attention to the nuances of popular perceptions of power, especially in its less visibly institutional forms, I aim to show that proximity radio's entanglements with authorities did not radically remove stations from the concerns and life-worlds of ordinary residents. To further confirm this, the chapter moves to examples where listeners actively engaged with radio

stations. The example of a listeners' club in Abobo (the UFARA, linked to Radio Arc-en-Ciel) reveals the distinctive nature of proximity radio's sociability. It also shows how this sociability intersected with urban dwellers' search for social connections and livelihood after conflict, to turn proximity radio into a formidable platform for encounters. I argue that it is in these encounters, and in the open-ended landscapes of familiarity that they create, that proximity radio's significance for place-making and togetherness lies.

**Chapter 6** departs from everyday practices and talk on proximity radio to consider its role in formalised peace-building interventions. I focus on the ways that reconciliation programmes on Radio Arc-en-Ciel and Radio Fraternité Yopougon framed *the neighbourhood* as a primary space for reconciliation. I show that while this framing sought to address real anxieties about the impact of conflict on local social relations, the way the programmes were set up opened them up to accusations of being top-down initiatives. The reliance on neighbourhood mediators - primarily "traditional" authority figures - reinforced hierarchies of local voice. Neighbourhood experiences were not allowed to relate to macro-level processes of conflict. Instead, the shows presented neighbourliness as evidence of urban dwellers' individual moral duty toward forgiveness and reconciliation. The shows' inability to discuss reconciliation as anything other than a neighbourhood affair ended up disciplining local talk, focusing it "inward" toward the individual and the local rather than allowing it to accrue toward broader, collective narratives of crisis. In a context where, as mentioned in Chapter 5, *abidjanais* residents presumed the pervasiveness of state control and surveillance, I explain why the nature of these reconciliation programmes could do little to revive the local as a sphere of public expression.

**Chapter 7** hones in on one of the primary reasons why formal reconciliation programmes took the shape that they did: the need to avoid "political content" on the airwaves. Examining what this meant is important, because an apparently widespread agreement over the need to avoid politics masked opposing perspectives in Abidjan - and *on proximity radio itself*. I start by tracing some of the ways that producers justified the absence of politics on air. I connect these justifications to several broader discourses - (neo)liberal, developmental and peace-building - to show that each envisioned a deeply problematic separation between the local and the political. Not

only did these discourses conflate different understandings of "political" to silence various kinds of talk, but they articulated place as a "given," an absence of contest. Behind the "givenness" of place lay an implicit understanding of citizens' democratic immaturity, which local interventions ought to remedy by reminding them of their responsibilities. In sharp contrast to this view, I show that proximity radio listeners and some producers practiced a local politics rooted in everyday experiences, knowledge, concerns and claims - and aspired for proximity radio stations to amplify these outlooks and claims. Truly, then, there was a "war of imaginaries" (Amin 2004: 34) on proximity radio. In Amin's words (ibid.), what was at stake was "not only [...] the scope and reach of local political activity, but also what [was] taken to count as political at local level."

In the thesis' **Conclusion**, I reflect back on proximity radio's ambiguity as an urban mediator, and return to the question of how it may have supported *abidjanais* residents' efforts to live together after conflict. I conclude that proximity radio stations did play a positive and meaningful role in post-conflict cohabitation, but not in the ways imagined by state regulators, international donors, or even some proximity radio producers themselves. Indeed, the encounters and new landscapes of familiarity that emerged on proximity radio, deepening urban dwellers' sense of place and togetherness, did so *despite* formal peace-building programmes, and especially despite the stifling "safeguards" of current media regulation. An in-depth exploration of proximity radio reveals that the medium has much potential to create new, cross-ethnic and agonistic publics, further dissolving lines of division inherited from crisis years. At the moment, such publics are nascent but continue to be forced off the airwaves. Bolstering proximity radio's contribution to living together after conflict requires a re-conceptualisation of what Richard Pithouse (2013) calls "the political significance of the local." This is not some radical, utopian project, but simply a way to better align radio with *existing* practices and democratic aspirations in a city anxious to hear its own voices.



## **Chapter 1**

# **A City Divided? Conflict and the Question of Living Together in Abidjan**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Over the next seven chapters, I theorise and analyse proximity radio stations' contribution to everyday urban life in Abidjan in terms of place-making. Before I do so, I want to provide a sense of what place means in contemporary Abidjan and what is at stake in its making - or rather its re-making. The purpose of this chapter is to set the scene, so to speak. It aims to contextualise the theory and analysis that follow by providing a brief, recent history of life in the Ivoirian metropolis. In doing so, I also justify a nuanced attention to the urban local.

I begin by providing a brief description of Abidjan as a "super-diverse" (Vertovec 2007; Arnaut 2013; Hall 2015a) city (Section 1.1). A long history of hospitality, migration and mixture has made diversity commonplace in the Ivoirian metropolis, though the city has also repeatedly been the site of conflict. I delve into Côte d'Ivoire's most recent history of conflict, which I briefly summarise in Section 1.2. Between 1999 and 2011, Abidjan was the scene of several "crises" during which violence, political antagonism and discourses of ethnic resentment combined to damage the social fabric. This succession of crises was linked to efforts by various parties to stake out claims of belonging and citizenship. Ruth Marshall-Fratani (2006) describes the ensuing conflict as a "war of who is who": various actors, including most prominently the regime led by President Laurent Gbagbo (2000-2011), attempted to resolve the question of who could and could not be part of the national body. Such efforts mostly failed. Marshall-Fratani shows that, even at the height of crisis, attempts to determine who is who could not definitively demarcate lines of belonging, nor consolidate ideological positions.

The result was a civil war that remained "in the making" (McGovern 2011a) for more than a decade. While it gripped national and international attention with heated rhetoric, the conflict only intermittently lapsed into gruesome but localised violence.

In Section 1.3 I consider the Ivoirian crises "from below" (Roubaud 2003; see Bayart et al. 1992), which is to say from the perspective of ordinary *abidjanais* residents. If political discourse and military sequences have been well documented in research on the Ivoirian conflict, less attention has been paid to the ways in which crisis permeated and re-shaped everyday life (with a few exceptions: Vidal 2002; Chauveau & Bobo 2003). How might attempts to re-define national cohabitation have shaped urban dwellers' sense of place, their ways of inhabiting the city and relating to "others" around them?

Capturing such a perspective "from below" requires challenging schematic readings of the Ivoirian conflict as one of "political indoctrination" (Section 1.3.1) or "ethnic war" (Section 1.3.2). The Ivoirian crises did not "activate" or definitively consolidate antagonistic ethno-political identities, as the realities of both state power and ethnicity were far too heterogeneous. Instead, as I discuss in Section 1.3.3, the crises involved contested local "alignments" (McGovern 2011a: 190-197), whereby political interests, locally-embedded intermediaries, popular resentments and struggles over access to resources intersected to create allegiances strong enough to lead to violence. The importance of circumstantial alignments in the Ivoirian conflict alerts us to the importance of place, as a microcosmic encapsulation of struggles over national belonging. I document how *abidjanais* residents suffered attempts by various actors to *control their locality*, whether by securing the allegiance of local mediators (neighbourhood chiefs, religious and "traditional" leaders, youth sections and women's associations, gangs and transport syndicates), or by forcefully territorialising ethno-political identities (Section 1.3.4). "Control of the street" (Banégas 2012), which is to say control over the intimate spaces of talk, sociality and politicisation (Ellis 1989; Fourchard et al. 2009), was paramount for the Gbagbo government to maintain its power in the face of armed rebellion in the North of the country and international pressure from France and the U.N. Public expression in the street became closely monitored, and conflicts between neighbours could quickly be read through the prism of ethno-political antagonism (peddled by political rhetoric) (Vidal 2002).

In Section 1.4 of this chapter I move to the aftermath of conflict, on which the rest of my thesis concentrates. If the "war of who is who" did not definitively resolve the question of national belonging, it created deep uncertainties about *the terms of*



*cohabitation* - what in French is called *vivre-ensemble* (living-together). The deep implication of locality in the Ivoirian conflict meant that place took centre stage in the aftermath as the site in which national anxieties over living-together took on practical urgency and symbolic potency.

## **1.2 Abidjan: A "Super-Diverse" Metropolis**

Diversity in Côte d'Ivoire is as commonplace as it is extremely complex. It is almost impossible to represent neatly and accurately. The 1975 Ivoirian census featured 65 Ivoirian ethnic groups, but geographers, anthropologists and sociologists have long recognised the degree of arbitrariness involved in administrative ethnic categories (Marguerat 1979; Chauveau 1987; Dozon & Chauveau 1987; 1988; Le Pape 1997). A more common way of apprehending ethnic diversity in Côte d'Ivoire is through national geography. Ethno-linguistic groups are associated with regions - North, South, West and Centre - though a long history of population movement makes this grid highly imprecise, to say the least (Bassett 2003; McGovern 2011a). The Akan ethnic "family," for example, is primarily associated with groups from central Côte d'Ivoire, such as the Baoulé and the Agni, but also includes the Ébrié, an ethnic group native to the southern lands around Abidjan. Similarly, Northern ethnic groups are commonly assumed to be Malinké-speaking and Muslim, but the Sénoufo, an important Northern ethnic group, are neither.

The picture of diversity is no less complicated in Abidjan. With more than 4.7 million inhabitants, according to the latest official statistics (RGPH 2014: 3), Abidjan is home to 20% of Côte d'Ivoire's total population. It is West Africa's most populous city after Lagos, Nigeria. Although there is no up-to-date data on Abidjan's ethnic composition, one thing is clear: there is no majority ethnic group in the city. According to the 1998 census (Badou 2001: 66), roughly 45% of Abidjan's Ivoirian residents identified as members of the Akan family (which includes both Southern and Central ethnic groups, as mentioned), while Northern ethnic groups represented 29% of Abidjan's Ivoirian population, and Western groups 25%.<sup>2</sup> In addition to Côte d'Ivoire's many ethnic

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<sup>2</sup> I use "Northern" and "Western for simplification," knowing full well the approximations that these labels carry. In the statistics I present here, "Northern" combines the *Mandé du Nord*

groups, Abidjan has also historically hosted a sizeable foreign population, from all over West Africa and beyond. In 2014, more than 22% of the city's residents were classified as "non-Ivoirian" (RGPH 2014: 3), a proportion that has declined since the 1970s but long hovered around a quarter (Roubaud 2003: 74).<sup>3</sup> As far as religion is concerned, Abidjan is more evenly split: in the 1998 census, 42% of *abidjanais* residents were Christian, while 41% identified as Muslim (Badou 2001: 57). Behind these apparent blocks, however, lies a wide spectrum of practiced faiths, perhaps best captured in the explosion in the number of Evangelical churches, of all sizes, in the last decade.

This dizzying statistical tableau can be likened to what Steven Vertovec (2007) calls "super-diversity" in London (see also Arnaut 2013; Hall 2015a). Super-diversity describes a social context in which the sheer variety of languages, social and geographic origins, ethnic and religious identifications, migratory statuses and transnational belongings (to which I would add infra-national belongings and migratory desires) prevents any easy description in terms of homogenous social groups. In Abidjan, furthermore, this complexity maps onto a city that geographer Bill Freund (2001) describes as deeply *mixed*, socio-spatially speaking. All municipal districts and most neighbourhoods feature a mix of social classes (as loosely indicated by housing types), ethnic and religious groups. As a result, diversity is, above all, an everyday experience. Statistical complexities and categorical imprecisions mattered little to the *abidjanais* residents that I met. They evoked the city's mixed and multitudinous nature - often symbolised by the traditional, multi-colour and multi-fabric *n'zassa* quilt - with hyperbolic expressions of togetherness. Residents frequently described their neighbourhood by claiming that "you'll find everyone here" (*tout le monde*, literally "the whole world"). They prided themselves on Abidjan's hospitality and cosmopolitan conviviality - a sign, for many, that Côte d'Ivoire ranked as one of the most "developed" and attractive countries in the region.

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(20%) and the Gur (9%), and "Western" combines the *Mandé du Sud* (7.5%) and the Krou (17.5%).

<sup>3</sup> As Thomas Bassett (2003: 20, footnote 13) reminds us, the census category "non-Ivoirian" includes both migrants and those born in Côte d'Ivoire but who have not acquired citizenship. Bassett notes that in the 1998 census, 47% of "non-Ivoirians" were actually born in Côte d'Ivoire.

Abidjan's super-diversity has historical roots in its role as a hub in the colonial extractive economy (Haeringer 1985; Antoine et al. 1987; Bonnassieux 1987; Dubresson et al. 1989; Le Pape 1993; 1997). French colonial administrators began developing the city as a major port in the early 1900s. Abidjan grew exponentially from the 1920s onwards along with the Ivoirian plantation economy, exporting - to this day - coffee and especially cocoa. A railway line extending northward meant that Abidjan was a point of passage for goods and labour (including forced labour) from the inland colonies of present-day Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Equatorial Guinea and even Bénin and Togo. Abidjan's attractiveness only increased after Ivoirian independence in 1960. Côte d'Ivoire's "founding father," Félix Houphouët-Boigny (ruling from 1960 to his death in 1993) practiced a policy of active hospitality, drawing migrants from all over West Africa. This open-door policy was primarily geared toward boosting agricultural productivity (allowing anyone, regardless of nationality, to claim unused land for their own use [Babo 2011: 46]), but fuelled Abidjan's growth as well (Dembélé 2002; Bredeloup 2003; Leimdorfer & Marie 2003). Between 1960 and 1987, Abidjan's population roughly doubled in size every 7 years (Antoine et al. 1987: 21-22).

A history of migration and hospitality does not mean an absence of tension and antagonism. Abidjan's super-diversity has periodically been marked by conflict, since the colonial period (Le Pape 1997; Contamin & Memel-Fotê 1997). In large part, conflict arose because of ethnicity-based social stratifications linked to colonial practices of preferential treatment: the French reserved certain positions, both administrative and productive, for ethnic groups they deemed "more apt" (which often meant, "less resistant" - see Dozon & Chauveau 1987; Le Pape 1997; Dembélé 2002). Colonial ethnic stratifications led to punctual anti-foreigner riots in Abidjan's dense and diverse "African quarter" of Treichville during the late 1930s (Le Pape 1997: 40-47). Frantz Fanon (1961: 156, quoted in McGovern 2011a: 85) deplored similar instances of anti-foreigner violence in 1959, on the eve of Ivoirian independence. Fanon lamented that Ivoirian independence threatened to replicate European patterns of ethnically motivated ultra-nationalism and xenophobia. The Ivoirian crises of the 1990s and 2000s appeared to validate Fanon's analysis.

### **1.3 - A Brief Sketch of "Crisis" in Côte d'Ivoire**

This section provides a brief overview of a recent, nearly 30-year period of political upheaval, economic crisis and occasional armed conflict in Côte d'Ivoire. I do not attempt a full account of successive Ivoirian crises. I provide only a basic outline, drawn from much fuller pictures, to introduce some of the main actors and stakes behind the most recent episode of conflict - the 2011 post-electoral battle between partisans of Alassane Ouattara and Laurent Gbagbo. I begin with the economic manifestations of crisis in the 1980s. I then briefly describe the succession of events between 1993 and 2002 that Claudine Vidal (2008) summarises as "the brutalisation of political life in Côte d'Ivoire." The political dimension of crisis was linked to Félix Houphouët-Boigny's passing in 1993, and to the simultaneous end of single-party rule by the *Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire* (PDCI). Multi-party politics further coincided with variegated opposition to Houphouët-Boigny's policy on migration and hospitality, manifesting in increasingly mainstream - and violent - xenophobic discourses.

### 1.3.1 - The 1980s and 1990s: Decline, Democratisation, and the Birth of Ethno-Nationalism

In the 1980s, "the crisis" (*la crise*) referred to Côte d'Ivoire's steep socio-economic decline (Vidal & Le Pape 1986a; Contamin & Memel-Fotê 1997). The collapse of cocoa prices on world markets in 1978 brought two decades of post-colonial "Ivoirian miracle" almost to a halt. Farmers' livelihoods were threatened but the extent of crisis went deeper. Because cocoa had been - and in many ways, remains - a pillar of state finances, its devaluation caused public employment and investment to dry up. So-called "structural adjustment policies" led by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund further called for drastic and destructive reductions in state spending (Briggs & Yeboah 2001; Jarret & Mahieu 2002). Given the historic role of the state as a motor of Ivoirian capitalism (S. Amin 1967; Fauré & Médard 1982), successive structural adjustment measures led to the destruction of tens of thousands of formal jobs, while the importance of the informal sector in the workforce more than doubled between 1980 and 2000 (Toh et al. 2009: 6-8). Poverty surged and insecurity grew (Vidal 1987; Marie 1995; 2002; Akindès 2000; Jarret & Mahieu 2002; Toh et al. 2009). In 2008, nearly half of the Ivoirian population was under the poverty line, earning less than 661 FCFA per day (£0.9) (Toh et al. 2009: 10). The collapse of state

finances also put an end to public investment in urban housing and infrastructure, leading to shortages, neglect, disrepair and costly privatisations (Antoine et al. 1987; Bredeloup et al. 2003).

Political instability reared its head. The influence of international institutions on Ivoirian economic sovereignty opened the Houphouët-Boigny regime, in its final years, to heightened political contestation (Campbell 2000; 2008; Cogneau & Mesplé-Somps 2003). Under tremendous popular pressure, Houphouët authorised a multi-party political system in 1990 (N'da 1999). In doing so Houphouët ended the monopoly of his PDCI formation and of the Akan ethnic groups that had dominated most levers of political and economic power since independence (Dozon & Chauveau 1987). Yet multi-party democracy did not happen overnight. The first multi-party presidential elections in Côte d'Ivoire, in 1995, were deemed so unfair and non-transparent that the opposition parties - Alassane Ouattara's RDR (*Rassemblement des Républicains*) and Laurent Gbagbo's FPI (*Front Populaire Ivoirien*), briefly united - boycotted the vote (Crook 1997).

Alassane Ouattara himself had been excluded from the 1995 presidential race on the basis that he was "not Ivoirian" - or at least not Ivoirian enough (Le Pape 2002; Konaté 2002). Houphouët's successor, Henri Konan Bédié (also of the Akan group), combined electoral law reform, legal harassment and ideological "ethno-nationalism" (Dozon 2000) throughout the 1990s to discredit his RDR opponent (who had risen to prominence between 1990 and 1993 as Prime Minister under Houphouët). In the background of these ethnicity-based political machinations loomed a growing discontent with Houphouët's "paternalistic management of diversity" (Akindès 2004: 14). Houphouët's "clientelist" relations with his own or allied ethnic groups, as well as with foreigners (Chappell 1989; Woods 1994), became a target for political opposition. Above all, his policy of open-door hospitality to immigrants was challenged. In the western parts of Côte d'Ivoire, an increasingly marginalised "autochthonous" and massively impoverished population expressed deep and often violent resentment - largely channelled by Laurent Gbagbo in his own political campaigning - against "Northern" foreigners who had "colonised" their land (Chauveau 2000; McGovern 2011a). By the end of the 1990s, these land-tenure issues, the hot topic of Ouattara's procedural persecution, and culturalist debates around the concept of *Ivoirité*

("Ivoirianness" - see CURDIPHE 2000; Akindès 2004; Arnaut & Blommaert 2009; Bahi 2012) amplified each other and crystallised into a single question: who had the right to participate in the public affairs of the country (Marshall-Fratani 2006; Ouédraogo & Sall 2008; Geschiere 2009; Cutolo 2010; Akindès 2011; Mitchell 2012)? The question was as urgent and volatile as it became increasingly abused for electoral and political gain.

### 1.3.2 - 1999-2000: Premises of Violence

On Christmas eve, 1999, President Henri Konan Bédié was deposed by a "bloodless" coup (N'Guessan 2002). Popular resentment against Bédié was so high that when his flight into exile was announced many on the streets and in intellectual circles openly rejoiced (ibid.). Yet the coup also ushered in a period of radical destabilisation. In a single "terrible year" (December 1999-December 2000 - Le Pape & Vidal 2002), the contest for state power became tinged with the threat of armed conflict, as rumours and evidence of new coups surfaced nearly every month (Le Pape 2002). The already bitter struggle for political legitimacy between Ouattara, Gbagbo and Robert Guéï, the ex-general who came to head the military junta after the 1999 coup, took a thoroughly ugly turn as candidates became accused of plotting take-overs or of conspiring with foreign agents.

Post-coup elections were held in October 2000. To his own surprise, General Guéï was defeated by Laurent Gbagbo (other candidates had been excluded) and attempted to seize the election by force. In response, ordinary citizens flooded the streets of Abidjan over two deadly days, and successfully ousted the military government (Le Pape 2002; Vidal 2002). Attempting to harness the power of the street, the RDR mobilised its partisans to call for a new presidential election, in which "their" candidate, Alassane Ouattara, would be allowed to run. The RDR's demands were interpreted as an attempt to undermine the already insecure Gbagbo government and take power through intimidation. Repression against RDR militants in Abidjan was not only strikingly brutal but also ethnically targeted (ibid.). It confirmed the confused but durable entanglement of ethnicity with politics - and violence (Vidal 2008; Dozon 2011).

### 1.3.3 - 2002-2011: From Rebellion to War

This entanglement of ethnicity, politics and violence became even more inextricable when, in September 2002, a coup led by disgruntled ex-officers (several of them previously exiled in Burkina Faso) failed to overthrow Laurent Gbagbo but took over the northern half of the country. The "rebels," or *Forces Nouvelles* as they came to be called, spoke a language of "redress" for the northern territories and ethnic groups, heretofore excluded from the nation, its government and economic development. The *Forces Nouvelles* occupied roughly half of Côte d'Ivoire for eight years. The armed occupation of the north confirmed, in many Ivoirians' minds, that foreigners were indeed seeking to destabilise their country (Banégas & Marshall-Fratani 2003; Le Pape 2003), and that the "Dioula" - a popular term conflating Muslims, Malinké-speakers, and ethnic groups from northern regions (who may be neither Muslim or Malinké) (Bouquet 2003) - were in cahoots. Gbagbo and his followers fuelled these visions, blending virulent anti-colonialism with xenophobic nationalism in speeches and intimidating street mobilisations (Le Pape 2003; Dembélé 2003a; Toh & Banégas 2006; Banégas 2007; Dozon 2011).

Gbagbo repeatedly deferred new presidential elections, arguing that occupation in the north was antithetical to a credible vote. Eventually, elections were called in November 2010, as part of an internationally brokered peace process. Under international pressure, Gbagbo validated both Alassane Ouattara's and Henri Konan Bédié's candidacies. In a striking reversal of old rivalries, Bédié threw his (and the PDCI's) backing behind Alassane Ouattara when he was eliminated in the first round of the elections. The Independent Electoral Commission announced Ouattara's victory but many expressed doubts over the validity of results in some northern circumscriptions, in which armed groups still operated. The head of the Constitutional Court invalidated these northern results and declared Gbagbo victorious. International observers, amongst which the United Nation's mission in Côte d'Ivoire (ONUCI), declared the elections globally fair and transparent, and backed Ouattara's victory - a move for which they were much criticised (see Mbembe & Monga 2011).

The electoral deadlock turned into a military scramble for power (Banégas 2011; Bassett 2011; Straus 2011; McGovern 2011a). As Ouattara and his camp bunkered up in the Hôtel du Golf in Abidjan, *Forces Nouvelles* warlords marched down on Abidjan.

Pro-Gbagbo militias attempted to tighten their control over the city, but faced intensified attacks by pro-Ouattara guerrillas. The Ivoirian army and police forces split, as some battalions pledged allegiance to Ouattara and joined the *Forces Nouvelles* under the moniker of FRCI (*Forces républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire*) (Fofana 2011). In March 2011, FRCI troops entered Abidjan from the north and the west; with support from a French military contingent they arrested Laurent Gbagbo and his closest guard on April 11, 2011. Although Ouattara officially called for appeasement and prohibited retaliations, the following months witnessed many an atrocity (HRW, 2 June 2011). It is estimated that more than 3000 people lost their lives, in Côte d'Ivoire, during this final episode of crisis.

#### **1.4 - Everyday Life in Crisis**

The Ivoirian crisis, as described above, was born out of simultaneous attempt by various actors to seize power and to re-define the terms of national cohabitation. Questions about the criteria for citizenship or presidential eligibility (for Ouattara), attempts to clarify "who is who" in the context of insurgency (Marshall-Fratani 2006), the mobilisation of primordial forms of belonging (the ethno-nationalist discourse of autochthony) to justify exclusion in the absence of administrative clarifications, all led to what Ivoirian geographer Ousmane Dembélé (2003a) called a "communitarian fracture." Ethnic and religious groups that had lived side by side for decades were now casting doubt over each other's right to occupy the national arena.

In this section, I consider the question of how the national debates and conflicts over citizenship, belonging and cohabitation manifested at the local level, with a particular focus on Abidjan. The question of place is not secondary but, on the contrary, fundamental. The Ivoirian crisis was *highly localised*, as political anthropologist Mike McGovern (2011a) shows in his monograph on the 2002-2007 period of conflict. Some places, even within Abidjan itself, witnessed high levels of violence, while in others conflict was defused. The distinct experiences of crisis can be explained, at least in part, by variations in what McGovern (2011a: Chapter 6; more particularly pp. 190-197) calls local "alignments." As I discuss below, neither side of the Ivoirian conflict could rely on effective mechanisms of mass indoctrination to further their political-military objectives, nor on already-constituted "blocks" of ethnic kinship. Political



actors at all scales of government thus attempted to secure allegiances locally - on a place by place basis, so to speak. The local, in other words, was not an incidental element in the Ivoirian crisis but an essential strategic node in networks of war and domination - but also in what political scientist Scott Straus (2012; 2015: Chapter 5) calls "the dynamics of restraint." Attention to place through a fine-grained politics of local alignments challenges "mechanical" readings of national-local relations. The local did not passively "register" what was happening at larger scales, and while people's everyday lives were deeply affected, the need for local control by conflicting parties contradicts analyses of mass complicity in xenophobic or violent political enterprises.

#### 1.4.1 - Against the Indoctrination Thesis

In this section I consider what I call the *political indoctrination* thesis, or what French writers would call *instrumentalisation* (see Banégas 2010b). The indoctrination thesis is, first and foremost, a particular reading of conflict and its causes. It is a reading that focuses on political discourse and media content, as though these elements *in themselves* explain the incidence and manifestations of conflict. The first issue with the indoctrination thesis is that it posits a functionalist view of media as more or less transparent message-bearers that act as triggers for violent social action. Media audiences, which are left un-interrogated, are presumed to be duped into politicians' power games, or at worst rationally convinced to indulge in violence. While few authors would adhere *explicitly* to such functionalist reductionism, it remains implicit in many accounts of media and conflict (for an international assessment and critique, see Schoemaker & Stremlau 2014). Perhaps most influential in this regard have been analyses of the role of media in the Rwandan genocide (e.g. Kirschke 1996; Kellow & Steeves 1998; Li 2004; Straus 2007; Bromley 2011). As nuanced as analyses of the Rwandan case have been - that is, as complex as they have made their theories of media effects - they remain linked to a very specific context and focused on establishing the causal role of media as order-transmitters and social triggers (though, for more comprehensive and less functionalist analyses of media in the Rwandan genocide, see the edited collections by Chrétien et al. 1995; Thompson 2007). Lori Théroux-Bénoni (2009; Bahi & Théroux-Bénoni 2008) argues that the Rwandan "paradigm," consciously or subconsciously, influenced analyses of Ivoirian media during crisis

years, as evidenced by journalistic tropes such as "*radio mille lagunes*" (in reference to Radio-Télévision Mille Collines in Rwanda).<sup>4</sup> Indeed, when academic or "grey literature" accounts of the Ivoirian crisis do consider media, they tend to focus strictly on media's role in furthering messages of division and "hate" (e.g. Yéo 2008; Zio 2012; Straus 2015: Chapter 5) - or, in an equally functionalist vein, media's role in spreading peace messages (Korson 2015). As I show below, this is a misrepresentation of the Ivoirian media landscape between 2000 and 2011. The second, deeper issue with the political indoctrination thesis is that it has little to say about the local: by positing a primary causal relation between political/media discourse and violent action, this reading obscures or side-lines the relations between national events and local life. The local is reduced to a passive terrain where existing groups and categories - including ethnicity, which I discuss in the next section - are merely activated by national actors and media institutions.

To be sure, political ideology and media-sourced calls to arms by charismatic politicians did play some role in the violence that took place in Côte d'Ivoire between 2000 and 2011. Many of the people I spoke to during my fieldwork produced detailed accounts of media events during which the direct effect of political speeches could be felt and witnessed on the streets. They remembered key phrases from these radio or television speeches, pondered their enormous mobilising power and instant manifestation - often tragic - in everyday life. Similarly, it is difficult to deny that various media carried what effectively amounted to virulent propaganda, either for Gbagbo's increasingly xenophobic "patriotic" socialism, or for the *Forces Nouvelles'* vision of northern martyrdom. The written press, liberalised under Houphouët-Boigny in 1990, along with the party system, was and remains unmistakably polarised (Bahi & Théroux-Bénoni 2008; Théroux-Bénoni 2009; Zio 2012). It peddled many a politically-motivated conspiracy theory during the crisis. As for the national broadcaster, the Radio-Télévision Ivoirienne (RTI), it has historically been so closely linked to the expression and legitimation of state control that it was always the first target of military intervention. For example, before the Forces Nouvelles/FRCI could

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, this analysis was shared by the head of the national media regulator in Côte d'Ivoire (HACA), Ibrahim Sy Savané (Interview, 24 January 2016): he claimed the Rwandan paradigm was behind many actors' unwillingness to allow politics on radio in Abidjan.

enter Abidjan, during the post-electoral battle 2011, the Ouattara camp spared no expense trying to "out-broadcast" the RTI.<sup>5</sup>

However, it would be wrong to attribute struggles in the spheres of media and politics with too much causal significance. First, because the landscape of media and popular culture remained pluralistic throughout the crisis. Indeed, proximity radio stations emerged around that time - the first stations in Abidjan, Radio Fraternité and Radio ATM, began emitting in 1998-1999 - and broadcast without much interruption until the very eve of post-electoral violence in 2011. While I have found little research on proximity radio's activity during crisis years (Internews 2014), my interviews confirmed that stations were important carriers of peace-building campaigns throughout the conflict, as I return to below. More broadly, however, proximity radio stations were purveyors of a multi-faceted popular culture. Proximity radio stations closely accompanied the birth and expansion of popular music scenes in Abidjan during crisis years. Popular music did become "politicised" as crisis ebbed and flowed: songwriters took up political debates or referenced events in their lyrics, and musical genres became loose signifiers for ideological positions.<sup>6</sup> Yet Anne Schumann (2009; 2013; 2015) and others (Konaté 2002; S. Akindès 2002; Kohlhagen 2005; Bahi 2011; 2012; Newell 2012) have contradicted the idea that popular music simply reflected the ideological and ethnic divisions implied by political-military conflict. Faced with the often contradictory pressures of money, mass appeal, political power and ethnic "kinship," *abidjanais* musical artists very often refused to be pinned down, to simply align one way or another. Many retained a stance that was universally dismissive of politicians' manoeuvres and of the drive toward war. Indeed, one of the most popular genres to emerge during the Ivoirian crisis, *couper-décaler* (literally "cut and step

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<sup>5</sup> I interviewed one of the key technical operators in the Ouattara camp's efforts at radio supremacy during the post-electoral crisis (Hassan, Interview, 12 June 2015).

<sup>6</sup> As Anne Schumann (2009; 2015) writes, reggae became associated with the "northern" cause and with anti-Gbagbo critique after the 2002 "rebellion," principally through the voices of international super-stars Tiken Jah Fakoly and Alpha Blondy (both Northerners). The former has been accused of being more targeted in his critiques, but both Fakoly and Blondy remain quite general in their protest agenda. Both have criticised Ouattara in their recent music for of his perceived willingness to maintain abusive practices of power. Zouglou, contrary to reggae, appeared to carry a predominantly pro-Gbagbo ideological position during the conflict, yet many zouglou artists publicly distanced themselves from political partisanship, lest they be accused of being "mouthpieces" and thereby lose credibility with some of their fans.

aside," which in *abidjanais* slang means "defraud and vanish"), was interpreted - by both scholars (Kohlhagen 2005; McGovern 2011a: Chapter 4; Bahi 2011; 2012) and *abidjanais* residents themselves - as a wholesale rejection of constraining social, moral and ideological positions. *Couper-décaler* promoted hedonism and youthful liberation (albeit in gendered and ambiguously violent terms) in the face of a war that younger generations felt they did not choose.

The second reason why the political indoctrination thesis, along with its functionalist view of media, simply does not hold in Abidjan is because media audiences were not passive. Bahi's (2001; 2003; 2004a; 2011; 2012) research on popular culture and contested political imaginaries in Abidjan goes furthest in challenging the idea that Ivoirian audiences were blindly responding to propaganda messages. Particularly relevant are Bahi's (2001; Bahi & Thérroux-Bénoni 2008) analyses of the figure of the "*titrologue*": this humorous play on the word *titre* ("title," "headline") designates, in disparaging journalistic commentaries, an ill-educated man (more rarely a woman) whose only understanding of current affairs comes from blaring and polarised headlines, pinned daily to wooden boards around the city. Bahi's (2001) qualitative and deconstructive work shows that the *titrologue* is more a figment of elite anxieties over "the masses" and their media literacy than an accurate description of everyday media consumption in Abidjan.

Thérroux-Bénoni's (2009) ethnography of the Ivoirian press further shows that, even in moments of radicalised political antagonism and under threat of censorship, media producers continued to seek ways to provide balanced news and level-headed analyses (also Bahi 2004b). Like Bahi, Thérroux-Bénoni also emphasises audience agency. She points to the existence of many "alternative" or "informal" sites of everyday media consumption in the city, where group analyses, decoding, discussion, and ultimately "co-production" (Bahi 2011) of political discourse took place. In sum, by documenting audience and producer agency, work by Bahi (2001; 2003; 2004a; 2004b; 2011; 2012), Thérroux-Bénoni (2009; Bahi & Thérroux-Bénoni 2008), Schumann (2009; 2013; 2015) and others shows that, however intensely polarised and violent politics may have been at any given point during the Ivoirian crisis, they never exhausted nor fully structured the realm of popular culture. By extension, media-sourced politics never saturated media discourse nor fully determined people's subject positions within it.

Put plainly: *abidjanais* residents had mental, cultural, social and moral lives beyond "the crisis." Their everyday needs, hopes, dreams, aspirations and frustrations were the basis on which they reflexively partook in multi-faceted discourses over the future of conflicted Côte d'Ivoire.

#### 1.4.2 - Against the "Ethnic War" Thesis

Another tempting frame of the Ivoirian crisis is as an "ethnic war," or at least as a story of "ethnic politics" (Carruthers 2004; Meehan 2011; Elischer 2013; Koter 2013; 2016) gone wrong. The "ethnic" frame reduces the political crisis to either a manifestation of prior antagonisms between identified ethnic groups, or the dysfunctional "*instrumentalisation*" of fundamental ethnic differences for political gain (tying back to the indoctrination thesis critiqued above). Here again, the ethnic frame is not specific to Côte d'Ivoire, but has been used in many contexts and conflicts in Africa, often peddled by mainstream, Western media (see Bassett 2003; Meehan 2011 in an Ivoirian context; Carruthers 2004; Banégas 2010b; Nyamnjoh 2010). The "ethnic war" frame continues to serve analyses of African conflicts even though it has been even more thoroughly rebuked by scholars than the indoctrination thesis. In the words of Nederveen Pieterse (in Carruthers 2004: 165):

Ethnicity, although generally considered a cause of conflict, is not an explanation but rather that which is to be explained. The terminology of ethnicity is part of the conflict and cannot serve as the language of analysis.

I do not propose an overview of the vast literature on ethnicity and Africa in this section (e.g. Amselle & M'bokolo 1985; Chrétien & Prunier 1989; Ekeh 1990; Lonsdale 1994; Mbonimpa 1994; Lentz 1995; Fardon 1996; Berman 1998; Yeros 1999; Berman et al. 2004; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Mhlanga 2013; Fourchard & Segatti 2015); I simply wish to flag some of the complexities of ethnic difference in Côte d'Ivoire and in Abidjan, as a way to re-state the importance of paying attention to local configurations.

Attempts to marginalise Alassane Ouattara on the Ivoirian political scene since the 1990s unambiguously involved discourses of ethnic othering. In their more strident terms these discourses amounted to autochthonous "ethno-nationalism" (Dozon

2000; Geschiere 2009; Cutolo 2010): they aimed to establish certain ethnic groups' primordial connection to the "land" of Côte d'Ivoire in order to justify exclusive control of economic assets and political power. They branded "other" groups "foreign" - *étranger*, also "stranger" (Dembélé 2002; Bredeloup 2003; Ouédrogo & Sall 2008; McGovern 2011a) - to disqualify them from taking part in national affairs. This process was initiated under Bédié but took full-blown expression under Gbagbo. Ruth Marshall-Fratani (2006) vividly describes a "war of who is who" in Abidjan in 2002-2003, a period of heightened tension during which regular paramilitary patrols, round-ups and killings engulfed the city in a "reign of terror" (ibid.: 28), while the government attempted to push forward identification programmes aimed to exclude foreigners once and for all from the citizenry.

Yet Marshall-Fratani also notes that identification programmes were a failure, stirring up resistance and providing no clarity whatsoever to the question of "who is who." Even in the face of atrocities and their undeniable "realness," she questions "the performative capacity of these discourses [of xenophobic exclusion] ... [g]iven the 'reality' of Ivoirian populations, the multiplicity of modes of subjectification, the diversity of their individual experiences and origins, and the multiplicity of their ancestries" (ibid.: 37). As McGovern (2011a) similarly demonstrates, discourses of autochthonous nationalism, ethno-political resentment and exclusion failed to cohere or become hegemonic, making the Ivoirian conflict a war that seemed perpetually "in the making."

There are several reasons for this. First, even under challenge from several fronts, the *houphouétiste* discourse of Ivoirian hospitality and openness to "strangers" retained some of its potency (Straus 2015: Chapter 5). As noted in the opening section of this chapter, many *abidjanais* residents still equate national pride with a capacity for indiscriminate inclusion. Second, Houphouët's own approach to ethnicity was more strategic than anything else (Dozon & Chauveau 1987; 1988; Chappell 1989; Vogel 1991). His postcolonial elite nationalism favoured "modern" visions of a society without "backwards" ethnic allegiances, yet was periodically and selectively contradicted by celebrations of the village, of tradition and traditional leadership (consistent with what some have called "the (re-)invention of tradition" in Africa, in colonial and post-colonial eras - e.g. Ranger 1983; Spear 2003; Comaroff & Comaroff

2009). As a result, the public discourse of ethnicity in Côte d'Ivoire remained very contentious. Politicians after Houphouët adopted almost schizophrenic attitudes to ethnicity as they simultaneously called upon an ethnic "base" to increase their own electoral share, and challenged other parties' "ethnicist" or "tribalistic" political motivations (Crook 1997).

Third, on a fundamental level, the "reality" of ethnic lineage in Côte d'Ivoire is so fragmented and "entangled" (Nuttall 2009) that ethnicity and ethnic difference have multiple, often disjunctive meanings amongst Ivoirians (Dozon & Chauveau 1987; 1988; Woods 1994; Bazin 1998; Launay & Miran 2000; Bouquet 2003; Bassett 2003; Dembélé 2003a; McGovern 2011a). Discourses of ethnic kinship, deference to ethnic "traditions" (of marriage or conflict mediation, for example) and what Robert Launay (1999) calls "stereotypic visions" of various ethnic groups are relatively widespread in Côte d'Ivoire, both in elite circles and vernacular conceptions. Yet these discourses of ethnicity are often tinged with an acknowledgement of their own limited grasp on reality.<sup>7</sup> This is no doubt truer in Abidjan than anywhere else. Not only is ethnic super-diversity (Vertovec 2007) most pronounced in the Ivoirian metropolis, as mentioned earlier, but many younger residents, born in the city, have only remote ties with their ethnic "origins" (symbolised by their parents' "village"). Oftentimes, this remoteness is reinforced by mixed origins. In the end, if ethnic identities have not dissolved in the city, they are to a large extent contextually variable and evolving, sometimes even provisional (Simone 2008a; 2010; 2012; for studies of urban Côte d'Ivoire that make a similar argument, see Cohen 1974; Touré & Konaté 1990; McGovern 2011a: Chapter 4; Newell 2012).

In sum, ethnicity, in Côte d'Ivoire as elsewhere on the African continent, is only one mode among many of establishing identity and social bonds, not to mention political

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<sup>7</sup> This is perhaps best exemplified by what anthropologists call "joking relationships" (Fouéré 2005; Canut & Smith 2006; Launay 2006) or in French "*relations à plaisanterie*" and in Côte d'Ivoire "*jeux d'alliances*" (alliance games). These are codified modes of engagement between members of different ethnic groups who are "allied" through ancestral ties. Alliance games in Côte d'Ivoire are meant to prevent inter-ethnic conflict and as part of this prevention encourage members of allied ethnic groups to insult and demean each other through disparaging jokes, to "test" alliances in a variety of circumstances. While alliance games were a common source of entertainment and sociability in Abidjan, most people I spoke to admitted that their conflict-defusing power was in reality limited.

affiliation. As Mike McGovern (2011a) is careful to show, emphasising the provisionality and context-dependency of ethnic identities does not deny that appeals to "ethnic votes" or narratives of autochthony resonated with parts of the Ivoirian and *abidjanais* population. Nor does it deny the violence involved in ethno-nationalist rhetoric, or claim that those who killed in the name of ethnic defence or retaliation - especially but not exclusively in the more rural parts of western Côte d'Ivoire - were somehow bluffing. Simply, McGovern disqualifies ethnicity as a category of discourse and personhood capable, *in itself*, of inciting collective violence. He turns attention instead to the local conditions under which ethnicity succeeded or failed as a mobilising factor for political violence.

#### 1.4.3 - Local Alignment and its Apparatus in Abidjan

McGovern shows that mobilisation for Gbagbo's political project was the result of local configurations and what he calls accomplishments of "*alignment*" (ibid.: 190-197). McGovern's overall point stems from the fact that the Ivoirian conflict took different shapes and different intensities in various locales. In his careful retracing of possible explanations for conflict, McGovern concludes that the Ivoirian war was localised because neither the Gbagbo regime nor the *Forces Nouvelles* had the institutional and ideological apparatus at their disposal to hegemonise their struggle - a complex task in super-diverse national, regional and local contexts. The uptake of violent political projects necessitated the brokering of unprecedented alignment between different groups, identities, desires, interests, social and environmental histories, and so on, often at micro-level. Such alignments were difficult, most often partial and precarious, even in the western heartlands of Gbagbo's ethnic "base," where autochthonous, anti-foreigner resentment was the strongest. Alignments required the work of *intermediaries* - or what McGovern also calls "intercalaries" (following Manchester School anthropologists) - whose embeddedness in local contexts was crucial to making local concerns and state-level programmes congruent.

To secure its position, the Gbagbo government thus had to employ - directly and indirectly - a loose network of middlemen and intermediaries whose task was to localise the regime's legitimacy or, failing that, its domination. In Abidjan and elsewhere in southern Côte d'Ivoire, this network became known as the "Patriotic



Galaxy" (*Galaxie Patriote*) (Bahi 2003; 2012; Konaté 2003; Marshall-Fratani 2006; Banégas 2007; Banégas & Cutolo 2012; Koné 2012; 2015). The Patriotic Galaxy began as a spontaneous response to the 2002 uprising in northern Côte d'Ivoire, but evolved into a "nebulous," semi-institutionalised "*dispositif*" (Banégas & Cutolo 2012: 24) of ideological dissemination and territorial control. The Patriotic Galaxy brought together a host of often competing organisations, associations and syndicates, evangelical churches, neighbourhood chiefs, student unions (including the powerful FESCI - *Fédération Estudiantine et Scolaire de Côte d'Ivoire*), militia members, and a large contingent of unemployed young men for whom political mobilisation promised self-realisation and social mobility (Arnaut 2005; 2008; 2012).<sup>8</sup> A combination of generous patronage, charismatic rhetoric and skilful communication allowed the Patriotic Galaxy to operate as both mass movement and clan-based secret society. In its various iterations over the years, it served as voice and muscle for the Gbagbo regime, blurring the line between ideological work and urban warfare, between civil society and paramilitary activities. Members of the Galaxy manned demonstrations and speakers' corners - *agoras* and *parlements* - as well as armed patrols and checkpoints. They were behind several violent uprisings, often targeting foreigners.<sup>9</sup> The Patriotic Galaxy's role, overall, was to use rhetoric, surveillance and violence to "secure" Abidjan's acquisition to Laurent Gbagbo, to his blend of socialist populism, partly xenophobic anti-colonialism, and messianic Evangelism.

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<sup>8</sup> The Patriotic Galaxy's mobilisation was largely orchestrated by Charles Blé Goudé, then head of FESCI, later recruited as Minister of Youth (*Ministre de la Jeunesse*) by Laurent Gbagbo. Like Gbagbo, Blé Goudé currently stands trial for crimes against humanity in the International Criminal Court. His media interventions during crisis years were still being quoted with admiration during my fieldwork. Blé Goudé's predecessor and one-time mentor at FESCI, Guillaume Soro, became the political leader of the northern rebellion in 2002. Soro is currently President of the National Assembly. At the time of my fieldwork, it was widely suspected that Soro, constitutionally "next in line" for presidential office, would take over from Ouattara. Changes to the Constitution in 2016 - which introduced the role of Vice-President, following a U.S. model - appeared to dash Soro's hopes of further political ascendance, leading to renewed political splintering.

<sup>9</sup> For example, pro-Gbagbo militias called for and led attacks against French nationals and institutions in Abidjan in early November 2004. French war planes bombed Côte d'Ivoire's air force on November 6 in retaliation for the (allegedly accidental) bombing of a French military base in Bouaké. In the days that followed, with rumours that France was plotting a coup circulating, mass protests turned violent, especially after French troops opened fire on thousands of protesters massed around the prestigious Hôtel Ivoire on November 9, probably killing dozens (Mas, 1 December 2004).

As Richard Banégas (2007; 2010a; 2012; Toh & Banégas 2006; Banégas & Cutolo 2012) and others have argued, the varied operations of the Patriotic Galaxy amounted to a struggle for "control of the street." In Banégas' words (2012: 3), "control of the street became the key variable of access to power." Control of the street involved at least three dimensions. First, the Patriotic Galaxy aimed to ensure that the street, where most of the city's talk and political expression happens (see Ellis 1989), was literally flooded by pro-Gbagbo rhetoric. The *agoras* and *parlements* were the clearest manifestation of this endeavour (Bahi 2003; Toh & Banégas 2006; Banégas & Cutolo 2012). They were semi-permanent speakers' corners and open discussion spaces, strategically placed in key intersections or highly visible public spaces, from which individuals commented on current affairs, relayed messages and delivered sermons, all reinforcing in some way or other the ideological underpinnings of the regime. They aimed to materialise political discourse in the spaces where urban communication is "thickest."

Control of the street also meant maintaining a monopoly - or the appearance of a monopoly - over political mobilisation. After mass demonstrations successfully thwarted General Guéï's attempt to usurp the presidency in 2000 (Le Pape 2002; Vidal 2002), Gbagbo sought to channel the power of street protests and marches, and turn them into literal demonstrations of political legitimacy (even if, increasingly, demonstrators expected to be remunerated) (Banégas 2007; Arnaut 2008; Akindès et al. 2014; Koné 2015). Thirdly, control of the street during crisis years involved a very fine-grained, micro-level monitoring of urban flows and territories. Alain Toh and Richard Banégas (2006: 143-144) note that the *agoras* and *parlements* themselves composed "a very tight surveillance [*quadrillage*] of urban territories under the vigilant control of patriotic militants." Through regular presence in public space, these speakers' corners kept a watchful eye over comings, goings and gatherings in the neighbourhoods around them. While the opposition enjoyed no such visible apparatus of local control, some traditional, Muslim tea circles known as *grins* became counter-public spaces of talk and organisation, as well as surveillance and information at the height of crisis (Vincourt & Kouyaté 2012).

#### 1.4.4 - Territorialising Identities: A War of "Who is Where"

It is possible to say that, in Abidjan, the crisis was as much a "war of who is *where*" as a "war of who is who" (Marshall-Fratani 2006). Gbagbo himself is said to have labelled the conflict "war of my street against your street" (cited in McGovern 2011a: 122). The Patriotic Galaxy's attempts to secure local alignments *territorialised* identities in the city (drawing on Sjögren 2015). While they may not have succeeded in "interpellating" residents into a unified ethno-political ideology, the Patriotic forces aimed to claim territories for their cause. The *agoras* and *parlements*, notably, literally projected pro-Gbagbo rhetoric onto local spaces and through constant surveillance marked neighbourhoods as ideologically aligned, often regardless of residents' views or input.

Simultaneously, non-aligned territories could be marked as "other," as dangerous or oppositional - potentially legitimate targets for preventive and retributive raids. Neighbourhoods like Doukouré and Port-Bouët II in Yopougon, whose maze-like street patterns and high numbers of "Northern" and "foreign" (Bouquet 2003) residents made the penetration of pro-Gbagbo platforms too difficult, became cordoned off and monitored from the outside. People coming in and out were frequently stopped and harassed (if not worse), and residents on the outer edges of the neighbourhood lived in fear of drive-by shootings (Protection Média Côte d'Ivoire, 27 February 2011).<sup>10</sup> Often this prompted neighbourhood residents themselves to organise a kind of defensive territorialisation, setting up checkpoints, outposts, night patrols and emergency evacuation procedures (Dembélé 2003b). During the 2011 post-electoral flare-up, neighbourhoods that had been associated with the Gbagbo regime, for whatever reason (because they had harboured a famous *parlement* or a bar known to host pro-FPI reunions, for example), were in turn targeted by pro-Ouattara armed groups.

A decade of territorialising efforts in Abidjan meant that residents' everyday activities, talk and movement could be interpreted - by Patriotic militias or simply by anxious

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<sup>10</sup> There was a major *parlement* set up at a junction a few hundred meters south on the Boulevard Principal that lines Doukouré's western edge. Pedestrians and vehicles coming through frequently reported being harassed. Those coming from the north on the same Boulevard would have to pass a police station (*Commissariat du 16e*), where abusive checkpoints were often set up (Moussa and Alassane, interview, 13 August 2015).

neighbours - as local manifestations of broader conflict. In an extensive transcript of two testimonies collected in late 2001, sociologist Claudine Vidal (2002) documents how one of the first major episodes of crisis (the elections of October 2000) engendered a slide "from political conflict to threats amongst neighbours." What the testimonies describe is not a situation in which neighbour turned upon neighbour: though that did happen, in some tragic instances, much more widespread was a re-interpretation of neighbours' public activities as potential alignments with this or that faction. Street conversations, declarations and interventions by local mediators (women and youth groups, churches, traditional leaders and so on), and more generally the thick webs of "mutual witnessing" (Simone 2012: 215) that underpinned the habitual sharing of space, all became laced with surveillance, and with the fear that one's being-in-public could now be read as political identification. In this context, conflicts between neighbours could quickly escalate and stand in for acts of war.

As Vidal's (2002) interviewees make clear, however, a tense political situation did not erase long-standing neighbourly relations overnight. One of Vidal's interviewees, B., was an elderly Muslim man who was still, at the time, a member of Gbagbo's FPI party. B. remarked that he had not been the target of violence because his neighbourhood, in Yopougon, was not commonly thought to house many "Northerners." Anti-RDR raids and exactions were being carried out in other areas (he mentions Doukouré and Port-Bouët II), where he had friends or kin. B. then described how one of his neighbours, commenting on the news in front of B.'s house, exclaimed that the "Dioula" were aiming to overthrow the newly elected Gbagbo government and may therefore have to be "killed." After the elderly Muslim man had chased his neighbour away, the latter returned in a delegation to apologise, acknowledging that he had made a mistake in associating all Dioula with RDR supporters.

Both of Vidal's testimonies show that the terms and routines of cohabitation were put to the test by ethno-political conflict. Yet these testimonies also show that the very habitual nature of local social relations in Abidjan (or at least in B.'s neighbourhood in Yopougon), combined with the complexity of identity positions in a super-diverse city, made the passage from rhetoric - "kill the Dioulas" - to action very difficult. This is not to idealise neighbourhood life as conflict-free and harmonious. Simply, it is to once again emphasise the importance of local configurations - habitual social bonds, local

leadership and mediation, balances of power between multiple groups, etc. - as decisive elements in the spread, meaning, and containment of political violence. Indeed, both McGovern (2011a: 81-84) and Straus (2015: 167-168) note that the local's close-quartered complexity frequently acted as a deterrent for the most brutal acts of violence in Côte d'Ivoire.

## **1.5 - Living Together in the Aftermath**

The "final assault" on Abidjan by pro-Ouattara troops (FRCI) in March 2011 led to the arrest of Laurent Gbagbo on April 11. As noted in the Introduction, Gbagbo's arrest did not signal the end of hostilities. It was followed by a prolonged period of *mélagement* (the Ivoirian slang term for both "mess" and "duplicity") during which the Ouattara administration struggled to bring competing warlords into the fold, to provide a sense of justice and certainty without either popular legitimacy or clear military authority, and to re-start an economy strangled by international sanctions. Amidst this multi-faceted task of reconstruction, I consider the main lines of *reconciliation* as it was put into place after the 2011 post-electoral conflict. I highlight the role of the local and of proximity radio within the Ivoirian reconciliation process. I end with the *critiques* of reconciliation in Côte d'Ivoire that lamented, on the eve of my fieldwork, the absence of a collective narrative of crisis and of a sense of equitable justice.

### 1.5.1 - The CDVR, Local Reconciliation and Social Cohesion after 2011

The public work of reconciliation in post-conflict Côte d'Ivoire was led by the *Commission Dialogue, Vérité et Réconciliation* (CDVR). The CDVR was created by Alassane Ouattara in the immediate aftermath of his camp's military victory and was to serve as Côte d'Ivoire's version of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The CDVR emerged in parallel with Ouattara's repeated pledges that justice would strike warring parties equally and punish all human rights abusers.<sup>11</sup> In a gesture of political reconciliation, Ouattara put Charles Konan Banny - former

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<sup>11</sup> Unlike the South African TRC, the reconciliation process led by the CDVR did not have provisions for amnesty in return for perpetrators' confession. Ouattara reaffirmed his commitment to equal justice in multiple interviews and media appearances (e.g. Ben Yahmed, 6 June 2011; Ben Yahmed, 14 May 2013).

Prime Minister under Laurent Gbagbo - at the helm of the CDVR. In the CDVR's (2016: 24) own words, its main mission was to stage "frank" and "equitable" dialogue between and within communities, so that the "ideal of living-together" might once again consolidate (*"faire que les populations partagent à nouveau l'idéal du vivre-ensemble"*). More specifically, the CDVR was tasked with gathering testimonies and publicising them in various forms and forums so that catharsis, forgiveness and a collective understanding of "crisis" might be accomplished.

One crucial facet of reconciliation as the CDVR envisioned it was a harnessing of the local as a key site where dialogue and understanding might occur. The CDVR (ibid.: 20) prided itself on "being the only Truth and Reconciliation Commission to install [37] local commissions" around the country. These local commissions, it was envisioned, would be better able to liaise with "local communities," to establish the specific nature of conflict in different locales, and to "propose culturally specific procedures to facilitate local dialogue" (ibid.). This was important, the CDVR (ibid.: 38) emphasised, because "the crisis had collateral effects on good neighbourly relations, leading to mistrust, insecurity and the disappearance of the spirit of solidarity [*l'esprit de solidarité*]." Thus, the CDVR acknowledged the role of the local in the Ivoirian conflict, though we can note it considered this role "collateral" and passive, rather than central to the overall dynamics of violence and restraint. The decision to ground reconciliation in the local aligned the CDVR with local approaches to peace-building (for recent discussions, see Mac Ginty & Richmond 2013; Hughes et al. 2015; Leonardsson & Rudd 2015; Paffenholz 2015), appearing to denote a shift from top-down procedures and programmes hatched by international institutions. At the same time, local reconciliation was envisioned as tying back into national reconstruction and the strengthening of the Ivoirian nation-state: "The strengthening of social cohesion [...] must lead to the emergence of a national consciousness and adherence to the primacy of the general interest" (CDVR 2016: 29).

The role of the local in post-conflict transformation was also affirmed by a widespread emphasis on "social cohesion." Where reconciliation designated a process of overcoming established enmities, social cohesion aimed to restore close and harmonious relations between groups sharing space in the city. In supplement to the CDVR, the Ivoirian government created a *Programme Nationale de Cohésion Sociale*

(PNCS) in 2012, later integrating it directly into a governmental portfolio.<sup>12</sup> The PNCS' aim was to coordinate and fund local social cohesion initiatives around the country. Social cohesion, as a concept and an objective, also came to justify or simply label variegated interventions by international donors and NGOs in Côte d'Ivoire. Together, government and international investments funded a plethora of social cohesion initiatives at local level. In 2014-2015, Abidjan was abuzz with micro-scale events linked to social cohesion in some way or another - football tournaments, block parties, prayer camps or street-sweeping initiatives - led by myriad, formal and informal organisations (churches, mosques, neighbourhood youth sections, women's associations, etc.). While it was unclear whether these initiatives were funded by the PNCS, they signalled a widespread adoption of social cohesion as a term to describe local post-conflict interventions. Indeed, notwithstanding conceptual distinctions between social cohesion and reconciliation, most *abidjanais* residents used both interchangeably (a point also noted by Charbonneau [2013: 112, footnote 1]).

#### 1.5.2 - Proximity Radio and Local Peace-Building

Proximity radio stations in Abidjan played a key role in publicising and discussing local social cohesion initiatives. There was not a day during my fieldwork when stations did not broadcast an announcement in this regard. In addition, stations were pivotal actors in the CDVR's effort to foster local reconciliation and amplify it back into nation-building. Interestingly, proximity radio stations featured in the CDVR's final report (ibid.: 33, my emphasis) not as part of its media strategy, but as part of its "strategy *beyond* media [*stratégie hors-média*]." The CDVR (ibid.) writes:

Emphasis is placed on local communication [*la communication de proximité*] [...] (seminars, street discussions, use of local radio stations and organisation of mobile caravans throughout Côte d'Ivoire's main cities) in addition to the use of generic messages on television, on radio, in the press and on billboards.

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<sup>12</sup> PNCS website: <http://www.pncs.ci/>; the director of the PNCS, Mariatou Koné, was nicknamed "*Madame Cohésion Sociale*" and is now Minister for Solidarity, Social Cohesion and Victims' Compensation (Bekrou, 11 January 2017).

This distinction between proximity radio and "the media" is tempered by the CDVR's director of communications, Franck-Kouassi Sran, who in September 2011 announced: "All media have a part to play in the return to peace and stability. Proximity radio stations even more so, because they are closest to the population [*elles sont plus proches des populations*]" (quoted in Internews 2014: 11).

Together, Sran's and the CDVR's conception of proximity radio capture its liminal position in the Ivoirian media landscape. On the one hand, proximity radio stations are part of "the media," in that they share some formal qualities with larger-scale broadcasting. To start with, all broadcast media (and the press) in Côte d'Ivoire operate predominantly in French. Like the national, state-owned radio station (*Radio Côte d'Ivoire*, RCI), proximity stations privilege a linguistic formalism that denotes "official" broadcast talk. Both proximity and state radio also tend to bolster what Harri Englund (2011: 23; also Hasty 2005) calls "the timeless legitimacy of the state" by carrying announcements from public authorities and reporting daily on the latter's development activities. At the same time, proximity radio stations share with *commercial* broadcasters (Radio Jam, Nostalgie, in 2015) an emphasis on new music, urban scenes and youth cultures, as well as an occasionally "edgy" approach to radio conversational styles and talk-show themes (with sexuality and modern romance at the forefront). Finally, proximity radio stations share with the five *religious* broadcasters (Damome 2012) operating in Abidjan a significant amount of faith-related content, featuring all religions but with a notable dominance of Evangelical churches.<sup>13</sup> Proximity radio stations, in sum, draw elements from several types of broadcasting together, into variegated and generalist programming that ensures they are recognised as "media."

On the other hand, however, as the CDVR's categorisation above makes clear, proximity radio stations in Côte d'Ivoire are often seen to be different from "normal"

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<sup>13</sup> The religious broadcasters operating in Abidjan in 2015 were: Radio Espoir (Catholic); Radio Fréquence Vie (Evangelical); Radio Chandelier (Evangelical); Radio Nationale Catholique; and Radio Al Bayane (Muslim). In 2016, at least three new commercial channels began broadcasting in Abidjan, including Trace FM, linked to a popular music television channel and brand. I must also mention here Alpha Blondy FM, a radio station opened in 2014 by the famous reggae artist, whose status is ambiguous: I was unable to ascertain whether it was a commercial or a proximity radio station.



broadcasters. According to the CDVR's categorisation, proximity stations were so "close" to the population, so embedded in grassroots networks of communication, as to be almost indistinguishable from street discussion spaces (Ellis 1989).<sup>14</sup> This is what made proximity radio stations so pivotal to the post-conflict reconciliation effort. In the CDVR's vision, proximity radio would allow reconciliation to reach the everyday and intimate spheres of social life that had been damaged by conflict but that had only tenuous connections with "the media."

Proximity radio's "in-between" position, straddling the spheres of media and non-media in Côte d'Ivoire, stems in part from its history as symbol of the "liberalisation" of the Ivoirian airwaves. Broadcasting, in Côte d'Ivoire as elsewhere on the African continent, initially took shape as a tool of colonial rule and a vector of top-down communication (Bebey 1963; Bahi 1998; Fardon & Furniss 2000; Tudesq 2002; Larkin 2008; Gunner et al. 2011). This did not prevent radio from "indigenising" and from being an object of popular contest after independence, but the centralised political-economic structure of broadcasting remained mostly unchanged from the colonial era. Until 1990, the single-party (PDCI) Ivoirian state retained a monopoly on the press, on television and on radio (Bahi 1998; Zio 2012). Under pressure from popular unrest, the PDCI state began liberalising the media landscape at the same moment it allowed multi-party politics, in 1990. The first step of liberalisation was freedom of the press. Soon after, the government granted licenses to three international broadcasters (RFI, BBC and VOA), followed by two commercial radio licenses and the creation of a "younger," friendlier-faced state channel, *Fréquence 2* (Bahi 1998; Tudesq 2002). Here again, Côte d'Ivoire mirrored what happened elsewhere in Africa (Fardon & Furniss 2000; Frère 2005; Nyamnjoh 2005; Gunner et al. 2011; Capitant & Frère 2011; Englund 2011). Commentators have noted, however, that liberalisation in Côte d'Ivoire was comparatively "reluctant" (Bahi 1998; Tudesq 2002: 60-63) and remains a far cry from the commercial media boom observed in Nigeria, Kenya or South Africa (Capitant & Frère 2011; Frère 2012).

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<sup>14</sup> The close association between proximity radio stations and street talk in Abidjan can be illustrated by the fact that "Radio Treichville" denotes both rumour and a municipally-owned radio station in the city's oldest municipal district.

Indeed, proximity radio stations were initially announced in 1991, but the government waited seven years to grant the first frequencies (Bahi 1998; Tudesq 2002). Of the 52 new stations authorised in 1998, 13 were in Abidjan: 5 frequencies went to municipalities (Attécoubé, Yopougon, Treichville, Port-Bouët and Anyama - all run by the ruling PDCI at the time) and 8 to private entrepreneurs (Tudesq 2002: 61). A second wave of licenses was granted in 2004, and more continue to be allocated on a case by case basis (Sy Savané, Interview, 24 January 2016). Proximity radio stations were introduced in Côte d'Ivoire with a discourse that emphasised grassroots and democratic communication (Frère 1996; 2005; Adjovi 2007). Stations' "closeness" to local populations was to be guaranteed by their regulatory status as area-based, small-scale, non-commercial and non-profit broadcasters. This regulatory distinction was enshrined in a "*cahier des charges*" (mission statement) signed with the national, state-appointed media regulator, the *Haute Autorité pour la Communication Audiovisuelle* (HACA, formerly CNCA). Proximity stations' mission statement committed them to broadcasting in the community interest, to focusing on "local development," to providing airtime for public service announcements and development campaigns, to refraining from broadcasting political content, and to reflecting the diverse make-up of urban audiences (catering to a plurality of ethno-linguistic identities as well as women's and young people's interests) (HACA 2014). It should be noted that, although much is made of proximity radio's role in sustaining African languages in Côte d'Ivoire, such languages account for a very limited portion of overall programming in Abidjan. With some (popular) exceptions, stations limit themselves to translating weekly bulletins into five or six main languages, and to African-language musical selections. This reflects a long-standing marginalisation of African languages in formal public life in Côte d'Ivoire, inherited from the days of "assimilationist" colonial administration, and carried over by post-colonial elites keen to valorise their own French education and wary of ethno-linguistic fragmentation (Derive & Derive 1986; Akissi 2003; Newell 2009). Notwithstanding their lack of departure from mainstream media's linguistic norms, proximity radio stations' regulatory status allowed them to be classified as "community media" by scholars (Tudesq 2002; Myers 2011; Frère 2012) and international organisations (Interviews 2014). Proximity radio stations collectively belong to the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) through their national union, the *Union des Radios de Proximité de Côte d'Ivoire* (URPCI), and have long benefitted from

training and support by Panos, UNESCO, and other international organisations dedicated to the emergence of community media in support of democratisation and development (Frère 2005: 10).

Proximity radio stations have also been integral to the peace effort in Côte d'Ivoire since the very premises of armed conflict in 2000. While the United Nations' peace-keeping mission in Côte d'Ivoire (ONUCI) opted to set up its own radio station in 2003 - ONUCI FM<sup>15</sup> - many international organisations - such as Search for Common Ground, UNICEF, USAID, Interpeace, UNHCR, the Fondation Hironnelle, etc. - turned to proximity radio stations as key actors in their campaigns for peace-building (mirroring the role given to media in peace-building elsewhere in Africa - see Galtung 2003; Frère 2005; Howard et al. 2003). Like the CDVR, international peace-building organisations prized proximity radio's credentials as community- and development-oriented broadcasters. In turn, solicitations by international NGOs have been fundamental to securing proximity radio's livelihood (see Myers et al. 2014), and to shoring up its status - one might even say its aura - in the Ivoirian media landscape. With very few exceptions, international peace-building organisations do not work with commercial, religious or state broadcasters.<sup>16</sup>

### 1.5.3 - "Silencing the Past": Deferrals of Justice and Public Truth

If proximity radio stations were a key communicational component of the CDVR's peace and reconciliation endeavour, the latter has been abundantly criticised. Some international observers have called the CDVR itself "a nice empty shell" (Calame & Hubrecht 2015). The International Group for Research on Peace (GRIP) concluded in June 2015, less than a year after the CDVR had disbanded, that "reconciliation never took place" (Lopes 2015). Similar critical analyses appeared in international media

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<sup>15</sup> ONUCI FM had relays throughout Côte d'Ivoire, unlike local stations. It was a prime source of news for Ivoirians in moments of heightened crisis. However, the station lost much of its credibility in 2010-2011 by dropping its "neutral" stance and supporting Alassane Ouattara after the contested presidential elections (Infoasaid 2012: 14). Since January 2017, ONUCI FM no longer operates with UN funds but has been rebranded as *La Radio de la Paix* and taken over by the *Fondation Félix Houphouët-Boigny pour la Recherche de la Paix*, a private organisation that works in partnership with UNESCO and receives some funds from the Ivoirian state (<http://www.fondation-fhb.org/la-fondation/>).

<sup>16</sup> The only exception I am aware of is USAID's partnership with Muslim station Al Bayane.

(e.g. Koffi, 24 July 2013; Chalvon, 28 September 2014; Grisot, 8 April 2014; RFI, 01 October 2014). Hindered in its first year by lack of money and continuing threats of violence, the CDVR asked the Ivoirian government for a one-year extension until October 2014, but then failed to publish its final report. At the time of my fieldwork, many commentators thought the Ouattara government had buried the report definitively. Eventually, Ouattara "asked" for its release in December 2016. The report read as a subtle but unmistakable admission of failure, and an indictment of the post-conflict regime.

Two points were particularly salient in the CDVR's report. The first was an admission that post-conflict justice in Côte d'Ivoire had not been equitable. The CDVR (2016: 67) noted that very few of its own testimonial hearings led to any kind of investigation and judiciary procedure. The report (*ibid.*: 96) further highlighted the "impression of a selective justice" as a key hindrance to national reconciliation. Stopping just short of accusations, the report (*ibid.*) simply noted:

Although the [CDVR] took "Neither vengeance nor impunity" as its guiding rule, as recommended by the United Nations, and although the President [Ouattara] declared that he was deeply committed to fair justice, some citizens have the lingering impression that Ivoirian justice is selective. Several hundreds of Laurent Gbagbo's partisans are in exile or incarcerated, whereas few partisans of Alassane Ouattara have been tried, despite some grave accusations.

The lack of even-handed, post-conflict justice has been lamented by multiple international observers (RFI, 22 June 2012; Amnesty International 2013; HRW 2013; Koepf 2013; FIDH 2014; Lopes 2015; 2016; ICTJ 2016). The deferral of justice in Côte d'Ivoire has been tied both to a lack of political will by the RDR and PDCI parties in power, and to Ouattara's imperfect control over the newly-reconstituted army, making it impossible to prosecute old warlords or militia members (Banégas 2012; Charbonneau 2013; Koepf 2013; Leboeuf 2016).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> A string of serious mutinies in 2016 and 2017 appeared to confirm this thesis, according to which factions within the Ivoirian army wield enough power to act as "king-maker" - or alternatively topple a sitting government.

The second point that the CDVR (2016: 87) made in its report was that its *own* efforts at publicising the reconciliation process had been unsuccessful:

It was planned that the CDVR's hearings, at least those that were bearable, would be widely covered in the [media], so that Ivoirians might take stock of the horrors they were capable of and refuse to repeat them. Yet the CDVR has finished its work without anyone hearing about its results. [...] Catharsis was a methodological choice for the CDVR, and was meant to operate at two levels. First, during the hearings, where [...] dialogue allowed wounds to heal. Then, on a national scale, through the televised broadcast of these hearings: the broadcast sequences were supposed to bring about communion between protagonists from the hearings and viewers, which is to say the entire Ivoirian society. By not broadcasting these images, which are but the reflection of lived experiences, we have renounced an effective means of solving Côte d'Ivoire's problem [...].

Despite initial announcements that its hearings would be public and televised, the CDVR reversed its position when it came to implementation. National hearings did eventually take place in September 2014, featuring a selection of testimonies from tens of thousands of closed-door hearings led by local commissions. But the national hearings were held in a small room in a luxury hotel in Abidjan. Journalists were only allowed to record or transcribe the opening speech, after which even their pens were taken away (Suy 2014; RFI, 8 September 2014). Ivoirian national television channels only broadcast edited, minute-long segments of the hearings, emptied of testimonial substance. The president of a victims' collective (*Collectif des Victimes de Côte d'Ivoire*) called the hearings' outcome "catastrophic" (RFI, 1 October 2014). Sociologists Francis Akindès and Seydina Zina (2015: 252) write that the CDVR "failed to create the condition for social dialogue, to establish the truth or to promote a history accepted by collective memory." Unlike the post-apartheid, South African context, then, where media coverage of the TRC's activities allowed for a national debate to take place (Krabill 2001; Wilson 2001; McEachern 2002; Moon 2008; Cole 2010; Chakravarti 2014), the Ivoirian context has been marked by a deafening "silencing of the past," to borrow from anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995). No national understanding of conflict and no national dialogue on the meanings of reconciliation emerged.

While the CDVR did not explain why its hearings were not broadcast, it is no stretch of the imagination to suggest government interference. The fact that *television* was specifically mentioned in the CDVR's report indicates as much, since the two national television channels closely followed the administration's line, under Ouattara as they did under his predecessors (Tozzo 2005; Frère 2015). Beyond television, however, the post-conflict context in Abidjan was marked by a fear of government interference in *all* media. This fear was linked to the Ouattara regime's monopoly on "all levers of administrative and political life" (Banégas 2012: 2), continuing perceptions of the state's subordination to clan-like networks of power, as has been analysed in several African countries (e.g. Bayart 1993; Bayart et al. 1998; Chabal & Daloz 1999; Mbembe 2001). The marginalisation and silencing of political opposition by state authorities was visible in Abidjan in the lead-up to the October 2015 presidential election.<sup>18</sup> It was doubled by regular pressures on journalists and media owners for politically-related offenses.<sup>19</sup> Such pressures, although not entirely new (Bahi 1998), led media scholar Marie-Soleil Frère (2015) to characterise Côte d'Ivoire's media landscape as having evolved toward "pluralist authoritarianism." The Ivoirian state's pressures on journalists mostly targeted the press (including online publications), but proximity radio stations could understandably be wary of falling victim to similar repression. In the post-conflict context, proximity radio's regulatory interdiction to air content "of a political character" (HACA 2014: n.p.), tied to the possibility of its constant monitoring by the HACA, became weighted with additional threat.

## **1.6 - Conclusion: Toward an Interrogation of Place and Its Re-Making in Abidjan**

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<sup>18</sup> Scores of Gbagbo supporters were still imprisoned and awaiting trial in 2015, as indeed they remain to this day according to Amnesty International's latest international report (Amnesty International 2017: 129-131). Marches by opposition parties ahead of the elections were systematically forbidden on grounds of public order, and remained so after the 2015 elections. Two researchers I met during my fieldwork, Marika Tsolakis and Joanna Rice, whose investigations led them to frequent opposition circles, attested to arbitrary police raids during meetings and rallies.

<sup>19</sup> *Reporters Sans Frontières* and others have documented - and condemned - recent instances of journalist imprisonment and harassment by state authorities in Côte d'Ivoire (e.g. RSF 26/06/2016; RSF 14/02/2017; RSF 1/08/2017; Amnesty International, 9 December 2016).

It is in this difficult context that we must begin to interrogate proximity radio stations' contribution to post-conflict reconstruction in Abidjan. I have noted that proximity radio stations were tapped to play a pivotal role in the reconciliation effort led by the CDVR. In large part, this was due to the CDVR's emphasis on the local as a key site for reconciliation. Proximity radio stations were positioned as primary local mediators. To be more precise, proximity radio stations occupied a strategic in-between, straddling non-media networks of local communication and the formal world of "media." This positioning itself merits further questioning. What was this "closeness" that tied proximity radio stations to "the populations," as ordinary urban dwellers were referred to in official documents? In other words, what was proximity radio stations' "local" in post-conflict Abidjan? And what kinds of peace-building initiatives did it enable?

I have discussed how many commentators, in Côte d'Ivoire and abroad, considered the CDVR's mission of national reconciliation a failure. The CDVR produced a "silencing of the past" (Trouillot 1995) instead of a collective understanding of crisis. While we do not yet know the full reasons behind the CDVR's failure, it is likely that it was linked to political interference. The post-conflict Ivoirian context was marked by continued practices of domination (the subordination of the state to a political party, or even a faction within it), by one-sided justice, by the active dismantling of political opposition, and by the hovering threat of crackdowns on media actors. Proximity radio stations, nominally protected by a community media status, were not exempt from this threat. They were on the contrary exposed by a regulatory interdiction to broadcast "political" content - interdiction that came with the threat of monitoring by the state-nominated HACA. Post-conflict domination and the national silencing of the past are not the end of the story, however, but its beginning. If national reconciliation was a non-event, what happened at local level? And if the threat of state repression hung over all media, how was this threat lived, imagined, challenged or bypassed by proximity radio producers and listeners? How did it affect their sense of place? Given the complete lack of public engagement in the CDVR's national reconciliation process, it is all the more important to examine proximity radio's activities in post-conflict Abidjan. It can provide some clues about how silence was produced, and what else may have been happening in everyday life, under the radar of peace evaluators so to speak.

There is much at stake. I have covered in this chapter some of the ways in which the local was embroiled in crisis and conflict since the 1990s, and especially since the December 1999 coup that ushered in more than a decade of violence. The local in Abidjan was not activated from above through political indoctrination or mobilisation of well-defined ethnic identity categories. Even at the height of tensions, everyday life remained characterised by a pluralist media landscape and a multiplicity of available subject positions. This complexity was at odds with warring parties' attempts to demarcate "who is who" (Marshall-Fratani 2006), which is to say who belonged and who was to be excluded. Instead, place was an arena in which national struggles over belonging became materialised and contested in specific configurations of everyday life (McGovern 2011a). Contests over the local were particularly salient in Abidjan. I highlighted efforts by the pro-Gbagbo Patriotic Galaxy to enforce local alignments and territorialise ethno-political identities at neighbourhood level in Abidjan. Through this attempt to control the urban local, the Gbagbo regime attempted to secure its domination and perpetuation in the absence of hegemony.

The Ivoirian conflict turned the local into a site of contest and an object of deep, quasi-existential uncertainty. But how might proximity radio remedy this situation? If place was to be a primary site of post-conflict intervention and mediation, how do we understand place, and proximity radio's role in its (re-)making? I begin to answer this question over the next two chapters by taking a step back from the Ivoirian context and from analytics of peace and conflict. In Chapter 2, I draw upon rich traditions in urban and media studies to theorise the significance of place itself for togetherness in diverse and fragmented urban contexts. I go on to detail what an everyday process of mediated place-making might entail. In Chapter 3, I return to the question of how place can be enlisted into top-down apparatuses of social engineering or domination. After conflict, visible practices of "control of the street," such as those documented under the Gbagbo regime, disappeared. In the absence of manifest coercion, we need a more nuanced critical arsenal to understand how place might continue to be involved in domination and exclusion. Critical theories of "localism," understood most broadly as top-down place-making, reveal that place can be made part of modes of rule *without* force and intimidation being overtly employed. The contrast - and frequent entanglement - between place as an everyday process and place as an instrument of



power informs my analysis, over the following chapters, of the potentials and constraints of proximity radio's place-making activities in post-conflict Abidjan.

## Chapter 2

# Proximity, Encounter, Togetherness: Theorising the Mediated Production of Locality

### 2.1 - Introduction

In the previous chapter, I provided a brief history of the Ivoirian conflict, discussed its manifestation in Abidjan's streets and neighbourhoods, and highlighted the challenges involved in effecting post-conflict transformation. Calls and programmes for reconciliation in the Ivoirian metropolis, in 2014-2015, evoked a sense that social groups living side by side in the city needed to be brought closer to each other. But what does this "making close" mean? How to conceptualise proximity radio stations' role in the process?

My theoretical and analytical approach to cohabitation or living-together (*vivre-ensemble*) begins from everyday urban life as the realm where social closeness is achieved and experienced. I explain the value and specificity of this everyday perspective in Section 2.1. First, I note that focusing on everyday life eschews policy-oriented concepts and formalised peace-building frameworks (Section 2.2.1). While concepts like reconciliation and social cohesion are good at asking what might *need* to be done, they provide very poor accounts of how cohabitation and closeness are *actually* understood and secured in an urban context. In Section 2.2.2, I draw on a well-established literature to show how an *urban* perspective on living-together departs from national-level analyses of belonging and "imagined communities" (Anderson 2006). While remaining attuned to national and even transnational scales of power and discourse, an everyday urban perspective locates proximity radio stations in Abidjan within the myriad practices through which ordinary residents "make" the city as a space of shared existence. In Section 2.2.3, I justify such an everyday urban perspective in relation conflict and violence, both of which have been part of Abidjan's recent history.

If my theoretical point of departure lies in urban studies, the latter too often disregards media's contribution to city life. Addressing this gap in Section 2.2.4, I situate myself

within an emerging, interdisciplinary body of work that has sought to theorise how various forms of mediation, including radio, are embedded in the urban. This leads me to conceptualise urban mediation - and more concretely, proximity radio in Abidjan - as a partially routinised practical assemblage (Couldry 2004; Braüchler & Postill 2010; Slater 2014). This is to say that the significance of mediation in the city lies not just in experience, in discourse or in technology, but in the relatively stable ordering and circulation of all three (Larkin 2008), as well as in the opportunities this opens for social life.

In Section 2.3 I return to the question of closeness and living-together. I introduce place as a lived geography of proximity, drawing on phenomenology, geography and anthropology. Place is a particularly fruitful concept through which to interrogate the dynamics of urban closeness because it is at once loaded with meaning and open-ended. Place captures the interplay between physical cohabitation (living in the same street, neighbourhood, city), on the one hand, and a sense of togetherness, on the other, that is precisely in question in post-conflict Abidjan. In this light, I theorise proximity radio's role as *urban place-making*, or what Arjun Appadurai (1996) calls "the production of locality." Place-making can be understood as the partially conscious process whereby the multiple proximities of place are arranged and given collective meaning. Sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3 examine more closely how media might be said to make place, combining insights from communication geography (Adams 2009; Adams & Jansson 2012) and research on community/alternative media (e.g. Rodríguez et al. 2010; Howley 2013; Atton 2015).

In the final sections of the chapter, I consider two specific, practical processes through which to analyse mediated place-making: familiarity and encounter. In Sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2, I connect theories of familiarity in urban and media studies. Together, these theories suggest that the routines of sharing space, both in the street or on the airwaves, can make urban "others" familiar: minimally close, but part of a meaningful background of everyday life. In Sections 2.4.3 and 2.4.4, I highlight encounters as one of the most important practices through which heightened forms of closeness can emerge in cities. Many urban scholars argue that togetherness in the city is enhanced by the ability for ordinary residents to cross paths with strangers, while recent work in media studies emphasises the importance of media for the multiplication of

encounters. These urban and media perspectives on encounters enrich and reinforce each other, and can only benefit from closer attention to urban theory generated in African contexts (most notably, the work of AbdouMaliq Simone [2004a; 2010a]). In sum, familiarity and encounter, as different degrees of closeness, capture the potential of proximity radio for the re-making of place in Abidjan, which I examine empirically in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

## **2.2 - Urban Closeness and Togetherness: An Everyday Perspective**

### 2.2.1 - Beyond Policy Concepts

To understand what it means for radio stations in Abidjan to bring people closer together after conflict, it is necessary to depart from notions such as social cohesion, reconciliation, and peace-building. These concepts originate in, and are geared toward social policy intervention. They usefully capture a sense that there is a problem - social conflict, or the looming threat of "social disintegration" (Dobbernack 2010; Barolsky 2012) - and that something needs to be done. Yet there are several issues with reconciliation and social cohesion as concepts for inquiry. The first is that they are relatively vague. Social cohesion, in particular, has been critiqued as a "quasi-concept" (Bernard 1999) that is almost never defined (Dobbernack 2010: 148; Jenson 2010) even as it finds its way into a growing number of policies around the world. Reconciliation appears barely more straightforward. Reconciliation's entanglements with justice, history and memory means that it has been linked to multiple registers of analysis and debate, philosophical, critical and practical (e.g. Abu Nimer 2001; Rotberg & Thompson 2000; Marchal 2003; Wilson 2003; Short 2005; Ure 2008; Butler 2009; Hirsch 2012; Neumann & Anderson 2014; Little & Maddison 2017). In this, reconciliation may be even more difficult to pin down conceptually than its close synonym "peace," which has also been the object of many meditations, definitions and critiques (e.g. Abu Nimer 2001; Charbonneau & Parent 2012; Kühn 2012; Richmond & Mac Ginty 2014).

Second, social cohesion and reconciliation's conceptual malleability means that they refer to different empirical realities and normative visions of social togetherness in different contexts - including within the same country. Pauline Cheong and her

colleagues (2007) show that social cohesion in the UK has referred to contrasting ideals of harmonious society and variable views of what (or who) constituted a social problem, depending on the ideological leanings of government and the prevailing social climate (also Kearns & Forrest 2000; Holtug 2010; Parker & Karner 2010; Ratcliffe 2012; Dobbernack 2012; Però 2013). Similarly, studies of post-conflict reconciliation in Northern Ireland (e.g. Porter 2003; McGrattan 2013; Hughes & Kissane 2014), in South Africa (e.g. Wilson 2001; Borer 2004; Moon 2008; Cole 2010; Sitze 2013), or in Chile and its neighbours (e.g. Lazzara 2006; Lessa 2013; Collins et al. 2013; Passmore 2016), among other examples, show that reconciliation takes many shapes and meanings depending on social and political configurations. Social cohesion and reconciliation, then, are best left as "*problématiques*": they signal collective and contextual interrogations over the modalities of "living together differently," but require significant contextual unpacking (Novy et al. 2012: 1874).

The third and most important reason why social cohesion and reconciliation are best left aside as concepts for inquiry is because of their underlying social epistemology. They most often conjure abstracted, procedural visions of social life. Social cohesion rests on a quantifiable and schematic vision of the social world, often translated into technocratically determined indicators that have, in any case, repeatedly failed to demonstrate their empirical validity (for a review, see Jenson 2010). As for reconciliation, it tends to reduce the complexities of life after violence to what Dustin Sharp (2013) calls a "post-conflict checklist" of issues to be resolved. This abstracting, problem-oriented epistemology stems from a fundamentally "interventionist" principle: social cohesion and reconciliation rely on external evaluations of a social situation meant to guide (or justify) intervention by expert actors (Eastmond 2010). Both social cohesion and reconciliation, furthermore, have been accused of thinking social groups as homogenous and bounded "containers" (on reconciliation: Little & Maddison 2017: 146-147; for social cohesion, Amin 2002; 2005; 2007; 2012; Arneil 2009; Portes & Vickstrom 2011; Ratcliffe 2012; Hall 2012). This perspective is at odds with the heterogeneous, relational and continuously contested nature of social identities (Vertovec 2007; Simone 2012; Glick-Schiller & Schmidt 2016). As a result of their "container" thinking, social cohesion and reconciliation tend to envision social togetherness itself in terms of a unified community. In order for reconciliation or social cohesion to take place, in this view, there must be verifiable "strong bonds"

between members of distinct social groups, underpinned by shared values and markers of common identity. Ash Amin (2012; also Blokland 2003; Hall 2012; Simone 2004b) critiques this underlying epistemology, which he refers to as "a sociology of ties." For Amin, social togetherness is both infinitely more complex and less constraining than the formation of a unified community of strong social ties. In his writings, Amin (2002; 2005; 2007; 2008; 2012; 2014; 2015) proposes a shift of focus from social groups, whose values and interactions are asked to "measure up" to arbitrary benchmarks of social togetherness, to the complex, variously mediated conditions in which people negotiate multiplicity. This shift can be summarised as one from cohesion to cohabitation: the former attempts to evaluate a social situation, while the latter documents the myriad, often mundane ways in which togetherness can be achieved, made meaningful, or alternatively impeded.

### 2.2.2 - A Critical Urban Perspective: Everyday City-Making

Ash Amin's perspective exemplifies a body of work in critical urban studies that has emphasised everyday life as a primary realm of city-making (e.g. Amin & Thrift 2002; Amin 2002; 2007; 2008; 2012; 2016a; 2016b; Simone 2004a; 2010a; 2014; Tonkiss 2005; Sennett 1994; 2012; Hall 2012; 2013; 2015b; Calhoun et al. 2013). While the cited authors vary in their theoretical starting points, their main argument is that ordinary citizens and their routines of sociality and cultural exchange are what "make" cities hold, however precariously, as grounds for living-together. The critical urban perspective that I adopt in this thesis has three main sources. The first is Henri Lefebvre's (1991; 2003; 2005; 2014; Highmore 2002; Goonewardena et al. 2008) theorisation of social space and his own rejection of rationalist and functionalist urban policies. Echoing recent critiques of social cohesion and reconciliation's epistemology, Lefebvre critiqued urban planning policies in the 1960s as "spatial representations," static and power-laden, that abstracted everyday life from social space. In his triadic theory of spatial production, Lefebvre opposed spatial representations to everyday "spatial practices" and what he called "spaces of representation." For Lefebvre and his followers, spatial practices continuously weave a rich and contested realm of experience, relationship and knowledge in which new commonalities can become manifest. Spaces of representation, in Lefebvrian theory, can be thought of as sites of creativity in which aesthetic intervention makes urban togetherness visible, however

fleetingly. Lefebvre, in the final instance, argued that the collective meaning of the city and the true measure of social transformation are to be found in everyday life (Lefebvre 1991; Highmore 2002; Goonewardena et al. 2008).

The second origin for a critical perspective rooted in everyday urban life is an argument that cities have their own, distinct ways of enacting togetherness. Discourses of national belonging and "imagined community" (Anderson 1983) have often had only partial hold in urban contexts, and do not exhaust the frames through which diversity, commonality, "globality" and inequality are lived in the city (Massey et al. 1999; Holston & Appadurai 1999; Holston 2008; Isin 2002; Roy 2011; Roy & Ong 2011; Amin 2012; Newell 2012; Closs Stephens 2013; Diouf & Fredericks 2014; Nicholls & Uitermark 2017). This is not to say that living-together in cities is autonomous from what happens at a national or even global level. Simply, the very nature of cities, as compactions of people from very different social, ethnic, national and religious backgrounds, means that national discourses of identity and belonging get refracted and interpreted in different ways. Some authors (e.g. Holston & Appadurai 1999; Holston 2008; Purcell 2003; Isin 2002; Diouf & Fredericks 2014; Blokland et al. 2015) have even argued that cities articulate their own notions of citizenship, which do not always match state-sanctioned regimes of belonging. This may appear to diminish the importance of studying togetherness in cities - the situation in Abidjan might offer only a very partial glimpse of what is happening in Côte d'Ivoire as a whole, for example - but various authors argue the reverse: the growing importance of cities, nationally and globally (Sassen 2001; Le Galès 2003; Robinson 2011; Calhoun et al. 2013), means that examining the *urban* grounds for togetherness may yield more insights for the future than analyses of nation-building (Holston & Appadurai 1999). This is particularly true in a context like Côte d'Ivoire, where, as discussed in the previous chapter, state-level politics have failed to bring about a fully credible discourse of national unity and belonging (Marshall-Fratani 2006; McGovern 2011a; Newell 2012; for a wider African perspective, Mamdani 1996).

The third strand of work that emphasises the significance of everyday practices for city-making comes from research on cities in Africa and the so-called "Global South." The fact that African urban life is characterised by regular breakdowns in infrastructure (e.g. Rao et al. 2010), a restricted formal economy (e.g. Meagher 1995;

Lindell 2010), and limited capacities for urban governance (e.g. Chabal & Daloz 1999; Lund 2006) means that ordinary residents regularly need to display heightened levels of ingenuity and collaboration. AbdouMalik Simone (2004b) captures this in his concept of "people as infrastructure." While African cities have long been conceived as spaces of lack where external intervention was needed to organise social life, Simone (2004a; 2004b; 2010a; 2010b; 2014) is part of a growing literature (Tostensen et al. 2001; Mbembe & Nuttall 2004, 2008; Simone & Abouhane 2005; Malaquais 2005; Murray & Myers 2006; Myers 2011; Diouf & Fredericks 2014; Fourchard 2011; Pieterse & Simone 2012; Parnell & Pieterse 2014) that brings to the fore the myriad ways that social organisation *already* exists and is sustained by African urban dwellers' everyday resourcefulness. Taking an everyday perspective on proximity radio stations' operations and projects in Abidjan thus situates them within existing practices of ordinary city-making which constantly stake out common ground, even in the face of great challenges, such as poverty and conflict.

### 2.2.3 - Everydayness as Analytical Frame: Some Clarifications

To be clear, by a positive view of everyday life I do not mean a romanticised and unproblematic sphere of existence. As evidenced by its history of conflict, everyday life in the Ivoirian metropolis is marked by social tensions, frustrations, antagonisms, prejudices, inequalities, domination and indeed violence, in different forms and with varying frequency. Research on everyday urban life in Africa (and the so-called "Global South" more generally) has occasionally been criticised for over-praising practices of "making do" in tremendously unequal or repressive contexts (e.g. Vidal 1994; Davis 2007; Meagher 2016; Rizzo 2017). But the traditions of critical urban studies referenced above, not unlike critical ethnographic work in anthropology and sociology, demonstrate that a focus on everyday life is not a way to dispel social problems or structures, or to make them secondary. Rather, it is to trace these problems' and structures' manifestation in the lived experience of urban dwellers, and to document the ways ordinary citizens have found to lead full lives in the interstices of poverty and power. It is all the more crucial to insist that everyday life is not autonomous from social structures and problems that, as I show in the following chapters, delineating the everyday as a sphere of consensus, untouched by divisive and "political" issues,



was precisely what those in power in Côte d'Ivoire attempted to do at the time of my fieldwork (2014-2015).

Equally, it is imperative to remember that everyday life does not disappear - not as grounds for action, thought and emotion, nor as a valid object of inquiry - in the face of violence. This is not to minimise the importance of conflict as a life-altering process, but, arguably, to highlight it - to bring it out even more starkly from the background of ordinary goings-on. Certainly, the *abidjanais* residents who participated in my research made sense of moments of crisis in relation to their everyday life, as it was interrupted or re-routed (for anthropological studies of post-conflict "return to normalcy," see e.g. Thiranagama 2007; Eastmond 2010; Helms 2010; Stefansson 2010). Crucially, their way of addressing conflict and its aftermath was precisely by emphasising life in its habitual dimension - by "doing being ordinary," as Harvey Sacks (in Scannell 1996: 94) put it.

Media play a multi-faceted role in the sustenance and "enlivening" - the *animation*, as it is called on radio in Abidjan - of everyday life. Paddy Scannell (1996; see also Silverstone 1994; Markham 2017) has argued that radio, in particular, has taken shape as a medium geared toward embeddedness in, and sublimation of, the joys and routines of ordinary talk. Scannell is universalistic to a fault, undeniably media-centric, and problematically reifies everyday life as an "unpolitical" realm of existence (ibid.: 4). But Scannell's emphasis on everydayness, in broadcasting, as fundamentally about the pleasure of sociability (ibid.: 21-24; drawing on Simmel 1950) and the crafting of a meaningful background to the flow of modern life (ibid.: 93-94; Tacchi 1998; 2009) are important. Crucially, as Clemencia Rodríguez (2011) argues in her book on media in conflict-affected areas of Colombia, everyday media routines and sociability are precisely what matter to repair social fabric damaged by violence (see also, from a psychoanalytical perspective, Bainbridge & Yates 2013). Providing joy in unforced togetherness, Rodríguez (2011) argues, is more "performative" - and much more realistic for small and under-funded radio stations - in terms of normalising peace than either didactic messages or journalistic investigations of violence. This is not to say that the latter are not useful, but that, without the affective "resonances" (Schulz 2014) of music and talk, without the liveness and surprises of sociability (to

which I return below), and without the resulting sense of togetherness, messages of peace have little chance of finding an echo.

Beyond the question of peace and conflict, Scannell's emphasis on the everyday social pleasures of broadcasting challenges instrumental communication frameworks that remain dominant in research in African - and generally "Southern" - contexts (Arora 2012; Schulz 2014; Slater 2014; Willems & Mano 2017a). Payal Arora (2012: 1), for example, critiques the "utilitarian" framing of (new) media in development frameworks because they apprehend media content and use exclusively through a pre-conceived lens of individual and social betterment. This erases play, leisure and pleasure from media use. In so doing, the development communication perspective posits "users in Third World countries [as] inherently and intrinsically different from those in the Western world." Wendy Willems and Winston Mano (2017b) make this very simple but potent point in their edited volume on new media audiences in Africa: if "what people do with media" (Couldry 2004) in the "Global North" is enormously varied and almost impossible to classify *a priori* according to normative categories, then so it goes with media practices in Abidjan and elsewhere in the "Global South."

Geographer Jenny Robinson makes a similar point in urban studies (2006). She argues against analytical divisions of "modernity" and "development" that have over decades made contemporary "Southern" and "Northern" urban processes incomparable (or only comparable on terms that take "Northern" cities as the norm). In Robinson's view, *all* cities are "ordinary" in that urban dwellers and managers everywhere must contend with often multi-scalar processes of change and, for the poorest, must struggle to improve their own living conditions. While cities have different histories and varying degrees of poverty, inequality, formalisation and violence, there is no *a priori* reason that what happens in Abidjan cannot speak to what is happening in London or Bangkok. While Robinson does not address issues of violent conflict, it is possible to extend her argument and argue that conflict is not a ground for urban incomparability (or exceptionalism). Garth Myers (2011) makes this point in a reflection on literary representations of conflict-torn Mogadishu. Myers counter-poses external representations of the Somalian capital, which depict urbanity reduced to ruins and violence, with writings by Somali novelist Nuruddin Farah. As Myers (*ibid.*: 140) writes, "even the most wounded cities might be constructive of

alternative models of seeing cities." To Myers' point I would add violence and social strife take many forms but they are not confined to (or specific to) the "Global South." Anthropologist Peter Geschiere (2009) argues as much in his cross-continental, comparative study of "autochthony and citizenship." Geschiere's analysis of xenophobic discourses of belonging in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and the Netherlands does not just reveal common idioms, problems and modes of thought, but demonstrates the insights of thinking issues truly globally. In sum, a focus on everyday life questions North/South binaries in media and urban research. It asserts not only that there is nothing outlandish about living in post-conflict Abidjan (difficult as it may be), but also that the Ivoirian metropolis is as good "a place from which [to] start theorising the human condition" as any (Willems 2014a: 9; see also Comaroff & Comaroff 2012).

#### 2.2.4 - Media Practices and Everyday City Life: Experience, Representation, Infrastructure

If ordinary people around the world make cities what they are through their everyday practices, and if many of these practices are media-related (Couldry 2004; Braüchler & Postill 2010) in some way or other, there remains some uncertainty over how to conceptualise media's involvement in city life. Media studies are increasingly attentive to this question, as are urban studies-related disciplines, and recent work can schematically be grouped into the following conceptual strands. These strands are not mutually exclusive, on the contrary: I suggest they can be woven together in a theorisation of mediated place-making, as detailed in the following section.

The first conceptual strand is an *experiential* line of inquiry. It views the "media city" (McQuire 2008) as a new kind of everyday sensorium, particularly marked by a digitalised - individualised, data-extracting, mobile - relation to the urban environment (Boyer 1996; Mitchell 1999; Galloway 2004; Gandy 2005; McCullough 2007; 2015; Bull 2007; 2013; Gabrys 2007; 2014; Wasiak 2009; Coyne 2010; Gordon & de Souza e Silva 2011; Kelley 2011; Licoppe 2013; Shepard 2011; 2013; Thrift 2014; Shaw 2014). This work regularly suffers from technologically deterministic tendencies, as it seeks to document the causal significance of new media technologies in the transformation of urban experiences. The experiential strand of media/urban

research also tends to focus on Euro-America, which is often presumed to be the locus of the "new" in technological developments and practices (see Chan 2013). The emphasis on the new has been challenged, however, by authors drawing on phenomenology to theorise everyday life's resilience to technological change (Jansson 2007; 2009; Moores 2012; Tacchi 2012). In addition, there is a burgeoning literature that seeks to document diverse "media urbanisms," highlighting both old and new media in the process (Larkin 2004; Hirschkind 2006; Sundaram 2010; Datta 2015).

The second line of work on media and the city is more focused on *representations and identities*. It is concerned, broadly speaking, with contests over the city's symbolic realm. Cities are grounds in which groups struggle over the terms of their (self-)representation, as well as over the meanings associated to urban spaces, lifestyles and practices. A key source of inspiration for this body of work is post-structuralist cultural geography (e.g. Burgess & Gold 1985; Duncan & Barnes 1993; Gregory 1994; King 1996; Cresswell 1996), as well as sociologies of urban cultural production and consumption (e.g. Zukin 1995; Dávila 2004). Representational studies of media and the city have been concerned with a very wide variety of arenas for symbolic contest. These arenas include, *inter alia*, representations of urban poverty and marginality (e.g. Chevalier 1978; Hall et al. 1978; Dikeç 2007; Pype 2011; Mehta 2012; Tyler 2013; Englund 2015), urban (sub)cultures and their publics (e.g. Schulz 2002; Shipley 2009; Pieterse 2010; Pardue 2011; Newell 2012; Fredericks 2014; Beer 2014), urban art and its politics (e.g. Miles 1997; Chang 2013; Lee 2013; Young 2014), the representation of urban futures (e.g. Jansson 2003; Prakash 2010; Millington 2013; Arnold 2015), urban mediations of religion (e.g. Oosterban 2008; 2009; de Witte 2011), and the representation of urban diversity and difference (e.g. Vaillant 2002; Dávila 2004; Georgiou 2008; 2013; 2016). These works' analytical avenues remain primarily textual and discursive, and as a result struggle to account for everyday practices that are not themselves representational. Another way to put this is that studies of urban media audiences and users remain the exception rather than the norm (Englund 2011; Krajina 2014).

The third conceptual strand in the literature on media and cities revolves around the notion of *infrastructure*. Much of this work apprehends media in terms of socio-technical systems and large-scale "assemblages" (Farías & Bender 2010; McFarlane

2011) that both sustain everyday practices of movement and communication, and maintain structures of exclusion and surveillance in the city (Castells 1989; Thrift & French 2002; Sheller & Urry 2006; Crang & Graham 2007; Gabrys 2007; Edwards et al. 2009; Packer & Crofts-Wiley 2012; Graham & Marvin 2001; Corsin Jiménez 2014; Kitchin 2014; Klauser & Albrechtslund 2014). The infrastructural perspective has the merit of integrating media more fully into the multiplicity of urban processes and practices. In parts, it also suffers from some form of technological determinism - as in Nigel Thrift's (2004) notion of a "technological unconscious," by which he designates the assemblage of technologies systematised to constantly reproduce a sense of social givenness - and tends to reduce city life to the impersonal workings of machines - as in Friedrich Kittler's (1996) "city as medium" proposition. This machinic approach to media-as-infrastructure has been inflected, however, by recent studies of infrastructure in anthropology (Larkin 2004; 2008; 2013; Postill 2008; Rao et al. 2010; de Boeck 2012; Melly 2013; Nucho 2016), media studies (Parks & Starosielski 2015; Hoyng 2016; Plantin et al. 2016), sociology (Simone 2004b; Pinch 2009; Calhoun et al. 2013) and geography (Amin 2014; Graham & McFarlane 2015). While these studies are not all concerned with city life, the urban has been an important site where scholars have re-connected infrastructural studies with everyday practices, largely through ethnographic perspectives. In this growing body of literature, Brian Larkin's (2008) *Signal and Noise* stands out for its detailed consideration of media infrastructures - including radio - as enablers of social life, carriers of aesthetic experience, and objects of moral and political debate.

In parallel to anthropological perspectives, urban media research influenced by the "practice turn" in social sciences (Schatzki et al. 2001; Couldry 2004; Braüchler & Postill 2010) uses infrastructure - sometimes interchanged with "architecture" (Rodgers 2014) or "assemblage" (Slater 2014) - as a metaphor to describe the stable patterning and ordering of communicative practices in space (see Motta & Georgiou 2016; Georgiou et al. 2016; drawing on Kim & Ball-Rokeach 2006). In this vein, it is possible to conceive of proximity radio stations in Abidjan as small-scale, area-based "communication infrastructures" (Kim & Ball-Rokeach 2006; Georgiou et al. 2016) or "communicative assemblages" (Slater 2014). This is another way to say that Abidjan's proximity radio stations are best interrogated as *a relatively stable set of practices oriented to, or at, radio in the city*. This open-ended conception is in line with recent

anthropological arguments in favour of radio's radical, practical malleability (Bessire & Fisher 2012; also, from a sound art perspective, Augaitis & Lander 1994; Friz 2008). It is possible to connect such a "practical assemblage" conceptualisation back to Paddy Scannell's (1996) theorisation of radio as a medium whose familiarity and continuity allow it to embed itself in the flow of everyday life, if we ask: how and under what conditions proximity radio stations "routinise" as an everyday medium? The question of how media assemblages routinise and acquire meaning out of identified ways of doing and circulating provides a bridge between the infrastructural/assemblage and practice perspectives (Couldry 2008). Echoing Paul Du Gay and colleagues' (1997; Larkin 2008) "circuit of culture" model, an assemblage perspective attuned both to the contingencies of practice and the deep-set regularities of infrastructure allows simultaneous consideration of political economies of radio, of the crafting of content (formats, genres, oratory styles), and of the urban social dynamics in which audiences crystallise to give radio form and meaning.

A review of the literature on the "urban-media nexus" suggests that bringing together media and everyday city life most often involves a bridging concept. Whether this bridging concept is "cosmopolitanism," "technology," "infrastructure," "the digital," "urban publics" (Iveson 2007) or "urban politics" (Rodgers et al. 2009a; 2009b; 2014; Bridge 2009; Ward 2009), it inflects how (and where) one considers media-related urban practices. The plethora of possible concepts reveals the multi-faceted nature of urban practices and their entanglement in discursive, material and social dynamics. In the following section, I introduce *place* as a concept that brings together these different registers of everyday life, and puts the issue of closeness at the centre of the inquiry.

### **2.3 - Place and Place-Making: Understanding Closeness and Its Geographies**

Having found a starting point in everyday city life and in the undetermined multiplicity of urban, media-related practices, we can return to the question of "bringing people closer" in post-conflict Abidjan. What kind of closeness are we analysing, and how might we say that proximity radio produces it? To be sure, there are several proximities at play. I mentioned in the previous chapter that the Ivoirian

crisis was dubbed a "war of my street against your street" by one its main protagonists, ex-President Laurent Gbagbo (in McGovern 2011a: 122). This had at least two meanings: 1) a conflict between different social groups whose political affiliations led them to mobilise - "take to the street" - with increasingly antagonistic intentions; and 2) a conflict between people living physically very close to one another. "The street" is at once a shorthand for political collectives and for the close quarters of city living. What makes the Ivoirian conflict so complex, especially in Abidjan, is how both "streets" overlapped and influenced each other in occasionally disjunctive ways. Political polarisation pit residents of the same street against one another, while the sheer fact of sharing space daily complicated efforts to turn ethnic and political adversaries into enemies. In the aftermath of this "war of my street against your street," "bringing people closer" could thus involve reviving or strengthening the meaning of spatial proximity (sharing space). Or it could involve bridging distances between cultural and political positions (concretely, between sympathisers of Gbagbo and Ouattara). Making place, as I theorise it below, underscores the complexity and the necessity of both.

### 2.3.1 - Place, Its Multiple Proximities, and the Challenge of Making Close

Place, as influentially theorised by humanist geographers in the 1970s (Tuan 1975; 1977; Relph 1976; Seamon 1979; see also Pred 1984; Massey 1993, 1994, 2005; Casey 1996; Cresswell 1996; 2004; Feld & Basso 1996; Ingold 2009; Moores 2012), is fundamentally about a multi-layered sense of closeness. A "sense of place" involves feeling attachment to one's surroundings, but also a disposition toward the people one shares these surroundings with. This sense of place does not arise naturally or spontaneously, but is rather the result of continuous, practical engagement with one's surroundings. Edward Relph (1976: 29) acknowledged this early on by noting place's processual and relational dimension:

In our everyday lives, places are not experienced as independent, clearly defined entities that can be described simply in terms of their location or appearance. Rather they are sensed in a *chiaroscuro* of setting, landscape, routine, other people, personal experiences, care and concern for home, and in the context of other places.

While Relph mentions place's emergence in routines and continuous "sensing," in his writings he mostly emphasises place's stability and permanence. As Doreen Massey (1994: 9) argues, Relph and other phenomenologically-influenced writers (Tuan 1975; 1977; Seamon 1979; Bachelard 1994) associated place with Being, as opposed to the Becoming of technological and social transformation. Massey and other post-structuralist geographers offer a thorough re-theorisation of place as a constant, "historically contingent process" (Pred 1984; Massey 1994, 2005; Cresswell 2004; Pierce et al. 2011). As I return to in the next section, this post-structuralist and processual understanding of place is crucial to conceptualising media's involvement in place-making.

Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996; also Gupta & Ferguson 1997; Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003) theorises place - or locality, as he prefers to call it - as a dynamic interplay between a physical, material setting (what he terms "the neighbourhood"), an experiential process of inhabiting (or what Heideggerian writers would call dwelling), and a socio-cultural "valuation" of both process and setting. Place is at once a lived experience, a locale, a social terrain and a symbolic construct. It is possible to summarise place as a meaningful configuration of proximities: 1) physical/material (what is locationally, tangibly or intangibly close by); 2) experiential/phenomenological (what comes into inhabitants' field of experience, as routine or as surprise); 3) symbolic/cultural (what, in people's cultural dispositions and identities, they are more willing to accept as proximate); and 4) social (the relations of closeness residents develop or would like to develop with others). Together, these proximities form a variable geography of what people in any given locale encounter, arrange, and collectively define as "close" to them.

The fullness of place, as a concept, highlights both its promise and its complexity as a figure of togetherness. Complexity because there is no guarantee that different proximities will overlap, and no single logic for their alignment. Nowhere is this truer than in cities, which are fundamentally characterised by diversity - even "super-diversity" (Vertovec 2007; Arnaut 2013; Hall 2015a), in the case of Abidjan - and difference. As urban sociologists have long argued (for a review, see Blokland 2003), social groups may share the same vicinity but have little contact or affinity with each other. Ulf Hannerz (1980: 116) notes that "[just] because individuals are within



convenient reach [...] does not mean that they always are or want to be on view, or available for interaction." There can be many (often combined) reasons for this: because some groups feel "closer" to another place of origin, because racist or exclusionary regimes prevents contact between groups, because the demands of neighbourliness become too burdensome, because the design of public space discourages mingling, or indeed because public violence has led to a general retreat into private confines. Whatever the causes, a common result, as sociologist Robert Park put it in his analysis of interwar Chicago, is that social groups live side by side in a "mosaic of little worlds which touch but do not interpenetrate" (quoted in Tajbakhsh 2001: 9).

How to make social worlds interpenetrate - which is to say, how to bring people who live next to each other to find a common sense of place? Taking a full view of the "production of locality" (Appadurai 1996), which I understand as synonymous with place-making here, again reveals the complexity of this endeavour. Geographer David Seamon (1979: 151), drawing on Jane Jacobs' seminal *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1964), likens place-making to the orchestration of a multitudinous "ballet." Yet Seamon (1979: 151) notes that even the ballet metaphor is limited because there is no single orchestrator, most dancers have never been made aware of a choreography, the movement needs to be endless, and the steps keep changing. As he concludes (ibid.):

Place ballet is fragile. Its pattern arises not from conscious planning but from the prereflective union of people usually unaware of the whole they help to create. Only when the ballet is weakened or destroyed do its members normally realise their participation.

If, as Appadurai (1996: 183) argues, "the transformation of spaces into places requires a conscious moment," most place-making practices are situated in the realm of habits and routines, or more broadly of unreflective everyday life. Such practices are constitutive - they continuously "enact" or perform a geography of the local (Dewsbury et al. 2006; Anderson & Harrison 2010) - without being reflexively targeted. Put another way, place is made in everyday life without necessarily figuring as a conscious and collective project, let alone an identity. This partly explains why deliberate place-

making projects - common in urban planning and design, but also in the social cohesion policies critiqued at the start of this chapter - often fail (Amin 2004; 2005; 2012): however well-meaning and important their ambitions might be, they most often cannot consider the multiplicity of seemingly unrelated practices necessary to sustain a "full" sense of place, one that is at once meaningful, durable and mutable. Place's complexity also explains why localities do not exist as fixed and readily identifiable "objects," as Relph suggests in the quote above. Not only is place always "under construction," as Doreen Massey has forcefully argued (2005: 9; also Massey 1993, 1994; see also Pred 1984; Thrift 1996; Cresswell 2004), but its collective perception and knowledge is always to some extent fragmented. Places, in other words, exist as varying "stages of intensity," and sometimes only as "traces" (Thrift 1994: 213).

Place's complexity also offers a good corrective to simplistic accounts of community and urban diversity, which are often found in social cohesion policies and other blueprints for urban intervention. By rooting analysis and social intervention in "multiplicity and heterogeneity itself" (Massey 2005: 11), place shifts attention away from social identities as pre-constituted and programmatic, and toward the conditions of their relational (if often unequal) co-constitution. The question of living-together ceases to be one of aptitudes - as in certain groups' ability to "integrate" or "tolerate" - to focus on the multiple registers and practices through which cohabitation can take place (Hall 2012; Amin 2012; Glick-Schiller & Schmidt 2016). This is particularly important in super-diverse urban contexts, where linking attitudes to stable identities, when it is not simply impossible, is reifying and counter-productive. In post-conflict Côte d'Ivoire, focusing on urban place and its inherent multiplicity serves as a counterpoint to discourses of "autochthony" evoked in the previous chapter, discourses in which the reification of ethnic identities, as bases for citizenship, necessitated the abstraction of place's historically composite nature (Geshiere & Nyamnjuh 2000; Geshiere & Cutolo 2008; Geshiere 2009; Marshall-Fratani 2006; Cutolo 2010; McGovern 2011a).

### 2.3.2 - Place and Its Mediation: Renewed Dialogues

If place is a process whereby urban dwellers come to collectively recognise each other as close, media's role in this process has for a time been considered deleterious. For Relph (1976: 90-92), quoted above, media are *external* to locality and have degrading influences on an "authentic" sense of place. In part, this argument is tied to a broader moment in the social sciences (the 1980s to the early 2000s) during which the local was seen to be "losing out" to globalisation. Yet the idea that place was being erased in global change relied on its conceptualisation in terms of permanence and authenticity, as advocated by Relph and phenomenological geographers. Post-structuralist and processual conceptions of the local have since argued against place's disappearance in a globalising world. Massey's re-theorisation dismantles rigid dichotomies of local and global, and, like Appadurai (1996), she sees "the production of locality" as co-terminous with globalisation, rather than as a doomed opposition to it. Since these arguments in the 1990s, there has been growing recognition that, if place is not a fixed essence but a process (continuously updated, as it were), then it is possible to think the local and the global as dialectically produced in "translocal" circulations, many of them media-related (Kraidy & Murphy 2008).

In a slightly different way than globalisation arguments, Joshua Meyrowitz's (1985) book *No Sense of Place* further established the idea, in media studies, that networked communication and transnational media flows were gradually abolishing the importance of physical location, thereby making people's sense of closeness with their surroundings more difficult. Yet as Nick Couldry (2000: 25-26) remarks:

Places [...] do not, even in principle, have univocal meanings [...] and this is true even without considering the impacts of the media. Why assume, then, that the media's impact on place, space, and territory would be anything other than complex and contradictory? [...] [Media] do not simply 'cover' territory, let alone 'collapse' the boundaries between places. Instead, they shape [territory] and reorganise it, creating new distances [...] and building new presences, new places of significance.

Couldry's geographically sensitive argument paves the way for a relation between media and place that is *productive* (see also Silverstone 1994; Gillespie 1995; Kraidy 1999; Morley 2008; Moores 2012; Parmett & Rodgers 2017). Mediation and networked communication are no longer thought as distinct from the realm of

dwelling and inhabitation, but rather enmeshed within it and reconfiguring it in different ways.

How media continuously reconfigures place has been the object of more recent work in "communication geography" (Adams 2009; Adams & Jansson 2012; also Falkheimer & Jansson 2006; Craine 2007; Moores 2012; Couldry & McCarthy 2004; Georgiou 2010) as well as anthropology (e.g. Ginsburg 1994; Appadurai 1996; Spitulnik 1996; Miller & Slater 2000; Postill 2008; Weiss 2009; Vokes & Pype 2016). These studies challenged Meyrowitz's view - itself weakened by the renewed importance of location in the new media ecologies and economies (see Gordon & De Souza e Silva 2011) - and theorised the pluri-vocal complexities of place-media entanglements. If, as Doreen Massey (1994: 164) argues, "place [...] was never an unmediated experience," then the task, communication geographers argue, is to explore the changing role of media and mediations in the "experiential accomplishment" (Moores 2012: 31) of place. As Paul Adams (2009: 8-9) notes, the theorisation of media as everyday practices precisely facilitates a re-conceptualisation of media as deeply woven into the fabric and "textures" (Jansson 2007, 2009) of places. Adams (2009: 147) goes on to explain:

A text resonates with or contradicts its surroundings, a place comes to memorialize a song or film, and our environments become instruments in their own right. Communications meld with places, build up over days, months and years, form visual landscapes, acoustic soundscapes, and textures of other senses, which all support a collective performance of the sharing role of the audience. Being-together in place means sharing mediated and direct experience at the same time.

Adams captures some of the many ways in which mediation might make place by reinforcing or challenging its complex configuration of proximities. His consideration of multiple temporalities, including that of long-term sedimentation, as well as media experiences, texts and performative engagements, connect back to what I have written above (Section 2.2.4) about media as partially routinised practical assemblages.

### 2.3.3 - Mediating from Place? Promises and Limits of Community Media Studies

Having conceptualised place as a changing configuration of meaningful proximities, and considered the recent literature theorising media's embeddedness in place, I now turn to what might be termed place-based media. A longer-standing challenge to conceptions of media as external to places has come from what can most generally be called "small media" (Sreberny & Mohammadi 1994). Behind this generic term lie different strands of scholarship that nonetheless converge on a few, fundamental points. Research on local or "hyper-local" media has long emphasised the importance of media that operate in and for a particular place (McCain & Lowe 1990; Jauert 1992; Hilliard & Keith 2005; Navarro 2009; Evens & Paulussen 2011; Dickens et al. 2014; Ewart 2014; Firmstone & Coleman 2014; Schulz 2014; van Kerkhoven & Bakker 2014; Barnett & Townend 2015; Hess & Waller 2015; Ali 2016; 2017; Bullivant 2017; Rodgers 2017a; 2017b). Complementing studies of local media, scholarship on community media has argued that in order for media to truly "represent" a place, there should be procedures to provide ordinary residents with opportunities for self-representation (Carpentier et al. 2003; Howley 2005; 2010; 2013; Rennie 2006; Adjovi 2007; Lewis & Jones 2008; Powell 2008; Cammaerts 2009; Goretti 2009; Leal 2009; Coyer 2011; M. Myers 2011; Pardue 2011; da Costa 2012; Helbardt 2015). The democratic significance of "small," local or community media has further been conceptualised in terms of citizens' media (Rodriguez 2001; 2011; Rodriguez & Kidd 2010; Rodriguez et al. 2014) or alternative media (Atton 2002; 2015; Langlois & Dubois 2009; Santana & Carpentier 2010; Harcup 2015). Taken together, this vast literature on local, community, citizens' or alternative media documents media forms whose defining features, almost regardless of the precise label that is used, include *local embeddedness* and *orientation* (Rodriguez 2001; 2011; Howley 2005; Ginsburg 1994). If places are woven through with mediations, then community and alternative media are distinctive because they are "closer" to ordinary people: they mediate *from* the local, as well as to and through it.

Certainly, that is one of the claims made about proximity radio stations in Abidjan, as seen in the previous chapter. However, somewhat paradoxically, the community/alternative media literature has not been very concerned with unpacking what locally embedded mediation might mean in practice and in context. The community/alternative media literature is primarily concerned with political economic and organisational questions (e.g. Hochheimer 1993) - issues of media

access and autonomy - and this brings up two limitations. First, this literature's normative models of media democracy often fail to account for the complexities of mediation in imperfectly democratic contexts such as African cities. A revealing example is Peter Lewis and associates' (1984: 29) global review of community media in cities for UNESCO, which ends up dismissing African urban media initiatives as failing to meet the necessary criteria to be labelled as "community media." Anthropologists and scholars of African media have disputed this dismissal on the grounds that media models are most often "hybrid" in reality (Wasserman 2010a; Medrado 2013; Willems 2014b; Stremlau et al. 2015; Gagliardone 2016), and that democratic values, discourses or practices can often be found in apparently "undemocratic" conditions (Englund 2011; Wasserman 2011; Willems & Obadare 2014). I discuss this matter empirically in Chapter 5.

The second (related) issue with the community/alternative media literature is that a focus on organisational models and media democracy creates the rather functionalist impression that embeddedness simply arises from opening up a space of grassroots communication, or an opportunity for community self-representation. In this implicitly functionalist conception, place tends to be an already-constituted "thing," ready to be represented or given voice (see for example Browne 1988; for a recent critique, Ali 2016). In addition, alternative or community media are often presumed "close" to people in a locality simply by virtue of being organisationally accessible. The latter is a paradoxical presumption, because the community media literature documents myriad creative (production) practices whose role is precisely to secure community media's embeddedness, sometimes against great contextual odds (see in particular Rodríguez 2011). Writers on community media, in other words, recognise that embeddedness is hard work. This is especially true in cities, where there is often no single or identifiable community which might seize the opportunity for self-representation (Lewis 1984). Yet even while recognising that local embeddedness is a complex affair, the community media literature allows little consideration of the nature of place, or of the realities of local embeddedness itself, certainly not from the point of view of everyday urban life. This blind spot is linked, in part, to an absence of consideration of *audiences* in the literature (Couldry 2010: 25-26; Willems 2013; Scott & Dietz 2016): very few community media studies interrogate how such media forms feature in audiences' everyday life (with some exceptions, e.g. Chibita 2006; Mchakulu

2007; Goretti 2009; Brisset-Foucault 2013; 2016). This is a gap my research addresses, and to which I return in Chapter 4's methodological considerations. For now, what I propose here is that while alternative/community media studies alert us to the promises of mediating from place, it is worth paying closer attention to *what kind* of place is made through small-scale mediation, what kinds of proximities and distances this mediation creates, and how this might be significant for city life.

A promising start to answering these questions is offered by theorisations of community media as "rhizomatic" assemblages. Drawing on a Deleuzian metaphor, such theorisations stem from frustrations with rigid models of democratic communication, as well as the kinds of functionalist understandings of community that pervade "social cohesion" and "reconciliation" initiatives. Rather than locating community media's significance in organisational forms and political economic demarcations (the idea that media can only be truly democratic if they are non-state and non-private), rhizomatic conceptions value community media's ability to multiply connections across social groups, institutional levels, and private/public sectors (Carpentier et al. 2003: 63-63; Bosch 2010). As Tanja Bosch (2010) notes, this conception shifts the focus away from questions of "vertical" power differentials toward the significance of "horizontal" networks that increase community media's ability to tap into the "heterogeneity" and "multiplicity" (ibid.: 76, 80) of place. Bosch eventually returns to the question of media democracy and hegemony, and this limits consideration of the *contextual* importance of community media rhizomes. Bosch mentions the non-hierarchical nature of interactions between producers and audiences (ibid.: 76), and hints that the kind of publics created through rhizomatic connections are akin to "ripples under the surface" (ibid.: 75), but does not offer insight into what this might mean for everyday urban life. Rhizomatic conceptions of community media open up inquiry beyond organisational formats and invite the following questions: what kinds of social practices does the community media rhizome enable? What kind of place does it create, and what does this mean for urban togetherness?

## **2.4 - Producing Senses of Place: Familiarity and Encounter**

So far in this chapter, I have situated my theoretical and analytical approach within a critical urban perspective that is rooted in everyday city life but pays attention to media and media-related practices. I have then reviewed interdisciplinary theories of place to demonstrate the concept's value for an exploration of urban proximities and their mediation. In the sections that follow, I zoom in further to examine two manifestations of place-based proximity, familiarity and encounter, and discuss the attendant (radio-related) practices involved in their production.

#### 2.4.1 - Urban Familiarity and Indifference

As noted, bringing people closer to each other, in social cohesion policies, often means creating the "strong bonds" of community. People have to be actively engaged with one another (an engagement whose measurement is often criticised as imprecise), failing which social cohesion will be decreed a failure (Amin 2005). But theories of urban place have highlighted an entirely different kind of closeness: the proximity of familiarity. Suzi Hall (2012.: 95) argues that "in the banal aspects of everyday life, shared local spaces are shaped by habitual associations rather than outright compatibilities." What this means is that to share space and to develop a common sense of place, it is not necessary to share a community or an identity. The mere practice of what Simone (2012: 215) calls "mutual witnessing" through the habitual crossing of paths takes on significance: it can bring multiple "Others" (or "strangers," as Georg Simmel [1950a; Amin 2012] would call them) into the taken-for-granted background of everyday life. As Fran Tonkiss (2005: 23) puts it: "As the passing scene orients the individual to a succession of images, others become just so many things in a general field of objects." Difference can thus become commonplace, folded into closeness-as-familiarity: no longer quite the distance of radical otherness, not yet the socio-cultural nearness of community, but something in-between. Neither matter of rejection nor of concern - simply, a "matter of fact" (ibid.: 27).

Familiarity here is a *minimal* form of closeness, even an ambivalent one, but retains tremendous significance. Tonkiss (ibid.: 23) touches upon the ambivalent significance of urban familiarity in what she calls "indifference as a politics of tolerance." Tonkiss suggests that indifference toward "strangeness," which arises out of routines of shared space, is *in itself* an accomplishment, and as a general social disposition it can be



likened to an embryonic form of ethics (Tonkiss acknowledges the inequality built into the notion of tolerance). Amin (2008: 8) calls this indifferent disposition "a tacit human response to a condition of 'situated multiplicity'." Indifference, in this line of thought, allows otherness to exist as both physically proximate and "unassimilated" (Tonkiss 2005: 27; drawing on Young 1990; see also Watson 2006). Strangeness can become familiar, at which point it ceases to be off-putting without being fully subsumed into the "same." Familiarity, in this sense, is a "[civil] indifference to difference" (Amin 2013: 3). It provides an open neutrality to urban public spaces, which in turn can act as a sense of safety, however minimal: it ensures that specific identities and bodies will not be singled out and recalled to their own difference.

It should be noted that this conception of urban familiarity as indifference departs from the very loaded (and static) understandings of familiarity in phenomenological accounts of place (Tuan 1975; 1977; Relph 1976; Seamon 1979; Casey 1996). In such accounts, familiarity is a strong attachment best embodied in the notion of *home* and "at-homeness" (Bachelard 1994). These phenomenological considerations of familiarity as strong attachment to home were often rooted, if only implicitly, in conceptions of *the village* as an idealised setting for collective human life. In contrast to the village, where familiarity involved knowing neighbours personally and knowing the physical landscape in detail, urban environments were considered to offer weakened familiarity and degraded opportunities for "at-homeness." The contrast between village familiarity and urban familiarity is a classic trope of European sociology (Tönnies 2001; Simmel 1997[1929]) and of early anthropology (in an African context, the Manchester School of anthropology - e.g. Epstein 1953; 1958; 1981; 1992; Gluckman 1955), but has been abundantly challenged (Massey 1994; Krause 2013; in anthropology, e.g. Barnes & Peil 1977; Dubisch 1977; Hannerz 1980; Geschiere & Gugler 1998).

Notwithstanding Tonkiss' departure from phenomenological geographers' understandings of familiarity, her theorisation of urban familiarity as indifference retains phenomenological writings' idea that there is no togetherness possible without a shared field of experience, sensation and knowledge - however diffuse and minimal. AbdouMaliq Simone (2004a; 2004b; 2005a; 2005b; 2008a; 2010a; 2010b; 2011; 2014) forcefully emphasises this point in his own sociological writings on African

urbanism. He notes that a background sense of familiarity is necessary for coordination and collaboration to occur in contexts that might otherwise present all the marks of uncertainty and fragmentation. Against the brittleness of social existence, created by poverty, precariousness, institutional opacity and unassimilated difference, Simone (2004a: 12) argues that urban dwellers are constantly working to uphold an "emotional field" in which "a very physical sense of connection" can lead to social collaboration. Simone is careful to note that this familiarity is often trace-like, far from systematically productive, and certainly does not prevent ruptures of violence. But it is precisely in these ruptures that the "infrastructural" (Simone 2004b) importance of urban familiarity becomes manifest. Returning to Seamon's point about place as a ballet, the choreography of familiarity is invisible and taken for granted until breakdown reveals just how much the routines of place-making had been sustaining.

#### 2.4.2 - Radio and the Making of Familiarity

It is in these routines and in the sustenance of background familiarity that we can begin to locate the significance of media practices for place-making. Paddy Scannell (1996) argues that broadcasting, and radio in particular, is precisely *about* the production of familiarity. Such familiarity, he notes, is both taken-for-granted and an extraordinary achievement. It rests, first, on a temporality of "dailiness" (ibid.: 149-150; see also Mano 2005), which is to say a continuous scheduling in which the succession of time is always marked as a recognisable "now." The familiarity of broadcasting is also produced through "liveness" (ibid.: 80), which is to say a collection of codes, conventions and aural conditions that allow listeners to "[be] in two places at once" (ibid.: 91) (what Shaun Moores, drawing on Scannell's media phenomenology, calls the "pluralisation of place" [Moores 2004, 2012]). Lastly but perhaps most crucially, the familiarity of broadcasting is conditioned by the maintenance of "sociability" (Scannell 1996: 21-24; drawing on Simmel 1950). Sociability, in Simmel's original sociological theorisation, is the very premise of any social interaction; it is social interaction whose only purpose is itself, and the encouragement of more social interaction. Radio sociability, as Scannell (1996: 21) defines it, is that most basic level of talk that ensures that mediated interaction will be intelligible and inviting (which is to say pleasurable). The fundamental sociability of radio is a condition for listeners tuning in to gain a rapid sense of what is going on and

to feel welcomed to join in - albeit under the "role and identity appropriate to [a] particular communicative occasion" (ibid.: 140).

Routinised practices of liveness, sociability and dailiness are how radio becomes embedded in everyday lives - which is to say, how it becomes familiar and in turn sustains a mediated sphere of familiarity. It is there that research into proximity radio's role in the production of urban closeness should begin. These practices are not to be taken for granted (although, by their very nature, they are so routine as to be nearly invisible), for two reasons noted above. First, as discussed in Section 2.3.3, "small media" like proximity radio stations must constantly work for their embeddedness (an issue that Scannell's implicit functionalism and generalisation does not consider - see Couldry & Markham 2008). Second, in a context where the continuity of everyday life itself is never given - because of the threat of conflict or the more regular occurrence of urban disorder (see Section 2.2.3 and the above discussion of Simone) - the sustenance of familiarity through radio routines can be tremendously important. Scannell's theory only offers a departure for inquiry, and requires some fleshing out.

Scannell has been rightly critiqued for his media-centrism. He does not consider what happens outside of the studio, which limits the generalisability of his claims about broadcasting's significance and closeness in everyday life (Couldry & Markham 2008). To more fully understand the kinds of closeness that radio's familiarity *actually* facilitates, it is necessary to look, first, at where different audiences position the medium in their everyday routines. Jo Tacchi's (1998; see also Bull 2004; Cook 2011) study of radio audiences in Britain, for example, shows that the medium's familiarity is variously registered and enacted by people. While listeners all value radio's familiarity as opening the possibility for embeddedness in their daily lives, they draw different levels and layers of social closeness out of this embedding, which in turn affects how we can talk about closeness and radio overall. Beyond habits of listening, Harri Englund's (2015) study of tropes of "radio kinship" in Zambia, like Dorothea Schulz's (2014) work on local broadcasting in Mali, shows that radio sociability can set different terms for the emergence of familiarity. Radio sociability is inflected by shows' aesthetics, listeners' expectations and affinities, as well broader significations linked

to orality, public talk and self-recognition. In turn, these dimensions affect the different ways that listeners and participants can register each other as familiar.

Debra Spitulnik (1996), writing about urban Zambia, further points out that radio sociability - and its meaning for the mediation of togetherness - should also be traced *off-air*, in the circulation and re-contextualisation of broadcast talk. This means that radio's familiarity is productive outside of the studio - a particularly important avenue of inquiry for community media, whose survival rests on the ability to multiply "rhizomatic" connections, including listener-producer interactions, in all sorts of contexts (Carpentier et al. 2003; Bosch 2010; see Section 2.3.3 and Chapter 5). The fact that radio sociability is played out off air also means that the closeness it enables is itself mediated by social identities and situations (more on this below). Other studies of radio audiences (Cohen 1989; Berg 1999; Bull 2007; Mchakulu 2007; Larkin 2008: Chapter 2; Englund 2011; Blanton 2012) raise the question of collective, public and mobile listening for the medium's embeddedness in routines of city life. In other words, the "where," "how" and "with whom" of listening, are crucial to grasping the shape and generative qualities of radio familiarity. Such practices of listening and circulating are all the more important given that, unlike Scannell, my research does not consider the familiarity and closeness of media in general, but of a specific mediator - whose embeddedness in super-diverse Abidjan, as evoked above, cannot be presumed.

#### 2.4.3 - Encounters and the Possibilities of Heightened Closeness

If urban familiarity - understood as the benevolent indifference arising out of routine - is a kind of closeness, in which togetherness can begin to be envisaged, this familiarity is only a starting point. Not only is it fragile, especially following conflict, but its significance for the emergence of commonalities remains open-ended. New collectives and collaborations might emerge - or they may not. Whether this happens rests on the ability for the background of familiarity to allow further interaction and intermingling between "strangers."

What kind of interaction and intermingling we might be talking about has long been an object of debate in urban theory. As geographer Gill Valentine (2008, 2013) points

out, different hypotheses about the meaning of urban interaction have guided reflections in both policy and academic research over several decades. One position is referred to as the "contact hypothesis" (Valentine 2008). Proponents of the "contact hypothesis" argue that social groups must be brought into regular, direct exchange for them to bridge their differences. Only through direct contact can the baseline of urban familiarity translate into a more lasting sense of togetherness. This idea remains central to theories of urban *public space* (Merrifield 1996; 2011; 2013; Amin 2008; Watson 2006; Mitchell 2003), as well as to positive accounts of urban multicultures (e.g. Back 2001; Sandercock 2003; Keith 2005; Wise & Velayutham 2009; James 2015). Public space's value, in this literature, lies in its ability to be open to all and thereby bring different people into interaction.

The contact hypothesis is not without its critics. It is accused of forgetting inequalities of power and capital, as well as the fundamental imbalance between "majority" and "minority." Feminist and critical race scholars in a North-American and European context have on this basis strongly challenged perspectives descending from the contact hypothesis (e.g. hooks 1992; Pratt & Hanson 1994; Puwar 2004; Werbner 2008; Isoke 2011; Lipsitz 2011; Back & Sinha 2016). They ask: on whose terms can contact happen? Contact, according to this critique, will always be happening on the terms dictated by "the majority" and thus increase pressure on "minorities," however defined (Valentine 2008, 2013; Amin 2002; 2004; Georgiou 2016). Sara Ahmed (2006, 2012; see also Cresswell 1996), for example, draws on phenomenology to theorise ways in which the familiarity of place can be invisibly but potently exclusive. Ahmed points out that social domination "sediments" in places through seemingly mundane spatial and discursive habits, naturalising exclusion *even when everyone professes to agree on the desirability of inclusion*. This is very important to keep in mind because it reminds us that the negotiation of closeness and the making of place can never be dissociated from questions of power - a point I return to in the next chapter.

While critical about the possibilities of togetherness in shared space, Ahmed (2006) also recognises the transformative potential of *the encounter*. Encounters, as Helen Wilson (2017) recently summarised, are a fundamental concept in urban theory. Encounters are variously theorised as central to the democratic potentialities of public

space (Laurier & Philo 2006a; Watson 2006; Amin 2008; Merrifield 2011; 2013; Wilson 2011; 2013; 2017), a defining element of the urban sensorium (Seamon 1979; Amin & Thrift 2002; Liggett 2003; Laurier & Philo 2006b), and an ordinary but fundamental practice through which social differences are registered and lived in the city (e.g. Amin 2002; 2012; Colombijn & Erdentug 2002; Valentine 2008; 2013; Hall 2012; Lundy 2012; Bannister & Kearns 2013; Carter 2013; Mayblin et al. 2015; Selim 2015). Encounters, in this variegated literature, are one of the primary occurrences through which atomised identities - individual and collective - can forge new commonalities and collectives in the city. Encounters bring into meeting people whose social worlds, returning to Robert Park's mosaic metaphor, are contiguous but do not *a priori* interpenetrate. The encounter offers the *possibility* of worlds interpenetrating through the unforeseen crossing of social trajectories. In Ahmed's (2006) phenomenological perspective, encounters occur when "Others" are brought to attention out of the background of place's familiarity; they are momentous ruptures in the routines that had previously sustained a habitual sense of closeness. While encounters have the potential to cause negative reactions (of rejection), they can also be seized as new, meaningful proximities, which durably alter "not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitation" (Ahmed 2006: 3).

The form and context of the encounter is inherently open-ended, perhaps to a fault in the urban studies literature cited above. Descriptions of encounters feature both passing gestures (e.g. Laurier & Philo 2006a; Wilson 2011) and arresting confrontations; encounters are sometimes considered singular and momentous occasions (as in Ahmed's [2006] writing), or gather their significance from a combination of fleetingness with repetition (as in Ash Amin's [2002; 2008; 2012] perspective). For my purposes, attempting a kind of synthesis, encounters are social interactions between people who are strangers to each other, and in which some amount of information is exchanged in mutual discovery (however slight). Mutual discovery is key here. Encounters go beyond mutual *witnessing* (Simone 2012: 215) and involve an element of unveiling - an ever-so-slight opening of social worlds.

The recent emphasis on encounters in urban studies can indeed, as Gill Valentine (2008; 2013) argues, be considered a "cosmopolitan" revival of the "contact

hypothesis." Yet recent theorisations of encounter offer a more nuanced perspective on "contact" than early interactionist perspectives; they take into account the critiques of inequality and power imbalance evoked above. Encounters, in the more nuanced view, are not theorised as transformative in themselves, not on an individual level and certainly not on a social level. Rather, they are moments of *potential* and *possibility* (Amin 2012; Hall 2012; Wise 2013). Encounters are *not* mechanically coded interactions and do not have mechanical effects, but rather provide opportunities to inflect ways of relating to place and togetherness. Encounters are not enough to change ideological symptoms - deep-held beliefs and attitudes toward difference - and as such do not erase the need for a progressive politics of representation and inclusion (Amin & Thrift 2002: 142-158; Amin 2002, 2004, 2008, 2012; Mayblin et al. 2015; Georgiou 2016). Encounters, in sum, are starting points for the discovery of unforeseen commonalities, which themselves offer only a starting point for the emergence of new urban collectives.

If encounters offer potential for new social bonds and the possibility of emerging collectives, AbdouMalik Simone (2004a; 2004b; 2008a; 2010a; 2010b; 2012) argues that these possibilities are fundamentally important to everyday life in African cities. Simone notes that, because existing institutions in African cities often fail to provide either the necessary infrastructures or options for livelihood, urban dwellers have to be constantly on the lookout for new connections and openings. In other words, encounters in African cities are often a matter of individual survival and a way of collectively "making things work" (see also Vidal & Le Pape 1986a; 1986b; Le Pape 1997; McGovern 2012). Consequently, one of the primary objects of Simone's sociological inquiry is the practices through which African urban residents maximise their chances for encounters. Simone (2008b: 105) writes:

For many, the job of urban life has been to maintain a heightened sense of engagement with all that could ensue from applying a barely discernible gaze, from overhearing a conversation, from securing an almost invisible yet strategic proximity to others, from interrupting the flow of events ever so slightly but powerfully enough to move something in another direction.

In an essay titled "Screen," Simone (2012) further describes African urban dwellers' practices of encounter-seeking. As he puts it (ibid. 208), residents "try different ways of being in the city 'on for size' without making definitive commitments to them," and "regularly 'step into' situations where they don't necessarily belong and have no apparent eligibility to participate" (ibid.: 212). Residents, in other words, seek encounters by introducing a dose of risk and provisionality in their own performance of social identity, which allows them to navigate the multiplicity and heterogeneity of urban place more easily - and more safely. Simone labels such encounter-seeking practices "popular research" (ibid.: 208), insisting that, much like scholars, ordinary urban dwellers are constantly attempting to work out "what is going on" in the city. The outcome of this constant readiness for encounter is "a thickness of people paying attention to each other, not with wary eyes, but attention to points of mutual entry and implication" (ibid.: 212). The indeterminacy and precariousness of everyday life in African cities, in sum, not only makes encounters particularly "valuable" but also inflects people's dispositions toward place as a sphere of potential social collaboration. Simone is careful not to "romanticise encounters," as Valentine would put it (2013: 6). He does not minimise the danger and uncertainty of city life, the practices of exploitation or exclusion. Encounters are not a panacea for the future of African cities, a future he recognises is continuously being deferred (2004a). Nonetheless, encounters are a crucial part of how African cities currently work on an everyday basis, and how urban livelihoods are secured - often against the odds. Encounters are part of "what people are doing to deal with both the constraints and possibilities" of urban life (Simone & Abouhani 2005: 4).

#### 2.4.4 - The Mediation of Urban Encounters

If urban encounters are an important practice through which urban dwellers make "others" or strangers close, beyond the routines of familiarity, very few urban studies writers consider the role of media in this process. Simone, for one, makes regular reference throughout his work to "mediators" and "intermediaries," which he sees as facilitating or brokering encounters between urban dwellers, but he does not consider



*media*.<sup>20</sup> This betrays urban studies' more general disregard for media in the dynamics of urban encounters. My research seeks to challenge this assumption by examining proximity radio stations as mediators of urban encounters. In doing so I am inspired by growing attention to the concept of encounter in media studies. Roger Silverstone (2007) conceives mass mediation as a space of appearance and interrelation - what he calls the Mediapolis - where listeners or viewers might encounter unforeseen "others." Attention to the mediation of encounters has increased with the spread of digital technologies allowing both the deep embeddedness of media in spatial routines and the multiplication of forms of interpersonal communication (see, notably, work on digital urban gaming - Licoppe 2013; 2016; Licoppe & Inada 2015; Shklovski & de Souza e Silva 2013). Paul Adams (2017) even writes that encounters, "perplexingly both mundane and transformative" (ibid.: 2), might be a new "paradigm" to conceptualise the kind of synaptic work performed by media in contemporary social space. In an African context, the concept of encounter remains predominantly used to think about relations between the (post)colony and the West in media (as in "the colonial or postcolonial encounter" - e.g. Asad 1973; Willems 2011b; Nafafé 2013), but the use of media for the open-ended multiplication of social connections in African cities themselves is increasingly well documented (De Bruijn & Van Dijk 2012; Burrell 2012; Slater 2014; Willems 2013; Willems & Mano 2017a).

Myria Georgiou (2006, 2008, 2013, 2016) is one of the very few writers who have made encounters a central frame of inquiry into media's role in the making of urban togetherness, at both micro, meso (city-wide) and macro scales. While Georgiou's earlier writing is almost exclusively concerned with the "politics of representation" (2006 - see Section 2.2.4), her more recent inquiries (2016; Leurs 2014; Motta & Georgiou 2016; Georgiou et al. 2016) have moved toward the communicative practices through which urban dwellers navigate the "dialectic" of togetherness and separation in socially diverse locales.

Georgiou's work is particularly useful, first, because she considers the mediation of encounters "ecologically." On the one hand, she eschews media-centrism by

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<sup>20</sup> A word search in more than twenty of Simone's writings does not yield any reference to media, except once, in the introduction to a special issue that includes an article on "black Twitter" (Simone 2016).

considering a wide variety of media and non-media venues for encounter. This echoes Don Slater's (2014) concept of the "communicative ecology" of place, which includes but is not limited to media. On the other hand, for Georgiou, a varied communicative ecology is key to what she calls an "ecology of possibility" in which urban dwellers can find multiple opportunities for encounter, as well as multiple available degrees of closeness, from basic politeness to neighbourliness and friendship (Georgiou 2016: 4; drawing on Amin 2012). Georgiou makes the point that media are not just "add-ons" to the dynamics of urban encounters, but an integral and even decisive part of how these encounters happen, whom they make close, and the meaning that they are given in social life. Georgiou (2016: 14-15) further singles out the importance of (hyper)local media - which I have referred to above as place-based media (Section 2.3.3) - in allowing encounters to happen and to contribute to a collective sense of place.

Georgiou's work speaks to why it might be important to pay attention to media in relation to urban encounters. To be sure, encounters take place on the street or in (physical) public spaces, in Abidjan as elsewhere. Place-based media like proximity radio stations should not be conceived in isolation but as one among many urban "micro-publics" (Amin 2002, 2012; Hall 2012) where encounters can coalesce into meaningful urban collectives. But media also differ from other venues of encounter, such as schools, workplaces, *maquis* (open-air bar in Abidjan) or *grins* (tea or coffee kiosks - see Vincourt & Kouyaté 2012). This is, first, because media remain imbued with a distinctive aura of power and potential (see Couldry 2000), which can make them attractive catalysts for social connection. Second, if urban encounters involve what Amin and Thrift (2002: 158) call "representational experiments," in which new visions of togetherness are fleetingly articulated, then media such as proximity radio can routinise and amplify these new visions in significant ways. Media's power of representation and amplification, in other words, can be instrumental in turning encounters into shared visions of place, as a ground for commonality and collective mobilisation.

## **2.5 - Conclusion: In (Careful) Praise of Everyday Place-Making**

This chapter began with the question of what it means for media to bring people closer together in a city like post-conflict Abidjan. I have started by showing that this

question finds rich and nuanced echo in critical studies of everyday urban life and practices. Cities are always characterised by difference and degrees of social division, and thus provide a crucial lens through which to research how ordinary people negotiate living-together. I have gone on to identify the concept of place, understood as a changing configuration of who and what urban dwellers consider close to them, as a particularly fruitful one for inquiry. The process of making place, theorised through phenomenology, post-structuralist geography and anthropology, captures the complexities and open-ended modalities of urban dwellers' articulation of mutual proximity. Place-making takes everyday life seriously as a realm in which togetherness is sensed and experienced. It also takes seriously the difficulty in creating social bonds out of shared space. Rather than pushing for the "strong" bonds of community and identity, place reminds us that a background sense of familiarity and the possibility of crossing paths with strangers are meaningful accomplishments in and of themselves. Becoming indifferent to otherness and finding pleasure in the unenforced mutual discovery of encounters are some of the ways that urban dwellers make place and, in the process, secure the city's precarious status as a space of cohabitation. It is on these terms, I suggest, that proximity radio's role in the re-making of place in Abidjan might be interrogated.

While detailing the analytical importance of place and everyday urban life, I have sought to theorise media's involvement in both. In doing so I am taking part in an emerging, sometimes fragmented interdisciplinary dialogue between urban and media studies. Media's embeddedness in city life, too often reduced to technological experience or symbolic representation, can be synthesised in terms of routinised practical assemblages, whose significance lies in the circulation of meaning and experiences conducive to various forms of sociality. The mediation of place, in turn, must be considered not as an external process but as media's everyday entanglement in the production of background familiarity and the search for encounters. Theories of media's - and radio's, in particular - everydayness, together with recent work on the mediation of encounters, provide a well-suited framework in which to understand why media are important to consider in the making of urban place.

This chapter has situated the importance of urban place and its mediation in everyday life. This perspective argues that everyday life is where closeness and togetherness are

most meaningfully registered, but also that everyday practices are fundamental to securing living-together. As noted in the opening section of the chapter, this is a deliberate argument against policy concepts and procedural frameworks of social cohesion or reconciliation. These frameworks have a reductive view of social life. They are also deeply entwined with power and rule, as I show in the following chapter. Having highlighted the importance of everyday place-making, I now turn squarely to the question of power's involvement in co-opting, constraining or containing this everyday process.

## Chapter 3

# Understanding Power in the Making of Place: Localism and Its Constraints

### 3.1 - Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed place as a process through which ordinary urban dwellers negotiate closeness and togetherness. The significance of proximity radio stations for post-conflict reconciliation in Abidjan, I suggested, should be examined in their everyday operations of place-making: in broadcasting's daily sociability, in the open-ended landscapes of familiarity that arise from it, and in the practices of encounter that this familiarity can generate. Contrary to media phenomenologist Paddy Scannell (1996: 4), however, I do not suggest that the everydayness of mediated place-making is somehow removed from relations of power. Indeed, powerful actors play a part in the production of locality. In Abidjan, the fact that local reconciliation initiatives on proximity radio took cues from the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CDVR), from state programmes of social cohesion (PNCS), and from international NGO campaigns, signals that each of these actors had something to say about the post-conflict re-making of place (see Chapter 1). In this chapter, I propose a framework to explore these powerful actors' role in the mediated production of locality.

I start from critical geographers' insight that place, as a process, is shaped by uneven "power-geometries" (Massey 1993) (Section 3.2.1). These power-geometries affect what the local can mean - in particular, how it can relate to processes at wider scales - and what people can do in and from place. Geographers, furthermore, have highlighted a recent, globalising trend in which the role of place in the formal exercise of power is reconfigured. This trend is labelled *localism*, both in the "Global North" and in the "Global South." Critical analyses of localism offer a good starting point to understand how power is implicated in the making of place through institutional programmes such as local peace-building initiatives on proximity radio (Section 3.2.2). In particular, critical analyses of localism highlight the subtle ways in which the very same initiatives that officially promote the local as a space for grassroots

empowerment can implicate place in the workings of domination. In Sections 3.2.3 and 3.2.4, I connect geographers' critical take on localism to anthropological and media studies perspectives on place and power. This focuses analysis more squarely on localism's influence on everyday practices of place-making, while allowing for a better integration of the role of media - including local/community media - in theorisations of localism.

Section 3.3 considers three main critiques of localism. The first (mostly Marxist) critique argues that localism *contains* ordinary citizens' sphere of action and thought: by focusing attention on "local issues," localist initiatives can discourage people from considering more structural problems and engagement at wider scales (Section 3.3.1). The second critique of localism envisages its *disciplinary* component: by setting out "good practices" of local engagement, localism can subordinate place-making to pre-established, ideologically determined values and purposes (Section 3.3.2). The third critique of localism, which takes elements from the other two, emphasises its *de-politicising* effect (3.3.3). This critique points to localism's drive toward consensus and its claims that place-making should be an un-political process.

In a concluding section, I bring the three critiques of localism back to Abidjan. Taken together, these critiques highlight the need to consider ways that proximity radio producers' and listeners' everyday, place-making practices might have been re-directed or outright constrained. Critiques of localism raise the possibility that some proximity radio programmes and practices may have been complicit in aligning the production of locality with power. At the very same time, more nuanced, critical readings of localism point toward ways that *abidjanais* residents' ordinary practices might have challenged power-laden visions of the local. This possibility brings the present chapter into dialogue with Chapter 2, and leads to the research questions that guide my empirical analysis.

## **3.2 - How Power Makes Place**

### **3.2.1 - Place in Power, Power in Place: The Geographers' Warning**

In much social-scientific writing, the local is constructed in opposition to power, or at least as external to it. In this binary view, place is pressed upon by power from the outside, or from the "top down." There are two versions of this view. In one, place is conceived as a site of resistance against powerful processes, and in the other place is simply seen to be submerged by external forces. The binary view of place and power presumes that place is a constituted and bounded entity, discrete from equally bounded entities such as the state, globalised corporations or international agencies. It also imagines place as a realm in which everyday life and social relations are unaffected by power. While few scholars would explicitly subscribe to such a view, it remains implicit in many academic domains. For example, as anthropologist James Ferguson (2006b) remarks, many analyses of relations between state and civil society in Africa remain tied to a dichotomous "top-down vs. bottom-up" approach. Civil society is seen to operate in distinct localities from which they make claims on, or subvert, the actions of the state. A binary conception of place and power also suffuses the literature on community media. A local scale of mediation is often opposed to the powerful interests of transnational, corporate media actors. Similarly, writers on local peace-building (Mac Ginty 2010; Mac Ginty & Richmond 2013; Charbonneau & Parent 2012) tend to assume place-based initiatives will be "bottom-up," because they frame locality in an opposition with externally-imposed reconciliation frameworks (Paffenholz 2015; Randazzo 2016; Kappler 2017). In these examples, place is thought as distinct from power, if only because researchers omit to ask how power might operate *from within* place.

Post-structuralist geographers - already introduced in my definition of place in Chapter 2 - have most actively challenged the binary view of place and power. They argue that place is itself made through operations of power at various scales. Power differentials are inscribed in place in a variety of ways. What is more, the making of place is one of the ways in which various forms of power are exercised and reproduced. In geographers' view, then, power is not just imposed on and contested from place; power is exercised and contested both in and through the making of place. Allan Pred (1984), drawing on Anthony Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration, argued that place could not be understood outside of the "dialectics of practice and structure" (Pred 1984: 281) through which social reproduction is continuously ensured. Doreen Massey's (1993; 1994; 2005) notion of "power-geometry" highlights the fact that

place's socio-material "content" and meaning is shaped by various regimes organising the flow of people, goods, capital and culture (also Appadurai 1996). These power-geometries can make places relatively marginal, dependent, isolated, and constraining for their residents. Tim Cresswell (1996) shows that places can materialise the ideological leanings of dominant actors or social groups and that, in turn, place can be a powerful conduit through which dominant ideologies become naturalised (also Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003).

The geographers' warning helps us reframe the question of how local peace-building programmes on proximity radio might relate to power. If place is shaped by power, then we can ask how local reconciliation programmes might be complicit in this shaping. If place is implicated in the exercise of power, we might ask what kinds of power relations get instantiated through particular visions of the local. In other words, the question ceases to be: "Is the local a good (resistant, emancipatory) scale at which to achieve peace, reconciliation and social cohesion?" Instead it becomes: "What kind of place gets made through proximity broadcasting and peace-building programmes, and what kinds of power relations does this place manifest?"

### 3.2.2 - A Contemporary and Global Trend: The "New Localism"

Massey (1993; 1994; 2005), Pred (1984) and Cresswell (1996) have been pioneering in arguing that the relation between place and power is dialectical and mutually productive. Nonetheless, they still put place on the receiving end of power, so to speak. Powerful processes still tend to be situated at larger scales, even when their effects can be felt - and contested - in place. Yet recent geographical writings have emphasised place as a *central*, active component in the exercise of power. Place, according to this literature, has played a pivotal role in transforming the exercise of power itself, in many parts of the world. The contemporary transformation of power in and through place is referred to as *localism*. Without delving fully into the debates around this transformation's roots, theorisations and consequences, I pause on localism in this section because it allows me to situate my analysis within a "contemporary moment" in the conceptualisation and actualisation of place-power relations. This later allows me to connect what was happening on proximity radio in post-conflict Abidjan to analogous processes elsewhere - and to their critiques.



I begin with a brief historicisation of localism, highlighting its significance as a shift of power from the nation-state to the local. I then initiate a more focused discussion of the workings of power in localism. In this section I synthesise localism as 1) a "*mobile technology*" or a procedural template (Ong 2007); 2) a basic set of underlying *principles*; and 3) a *social ontology*. A unified conception of localism, across different fields (development, governance, social policy, media policy, and so on), highlights a central paradox defining place's contemporary relation to power: while a host of initiatives propose to construct place as a site of participation and empowerment, these same initiatives have seemingly heightened the local's implication in regimes of domination.

### *3.2.2.a - Localism as Historical Trend*

Localism, in the current historical moment, and in the scholarly literature that analyses it, is first and foremost a re-evaluation of place's importance vis-à-vis the nation-state. Modern nation-states, by and large, took shape and consolidated by establishing administrative and military control over a unified national territory (e.g. Gellner 1983; Taylor 1985; Anderson 1996). The local never disappeared as a site of decision-making or identification, but it remained for the most part subordinated to logics of nation-building, national economic growth, and centralised authority. Post-colonial African states were no exception in this regard (Diouf 1999), even accounting for the imperfection of their territorial control (for West Africa, see Boone 2003a). In the 1980s and 1990s, however, the principle of centralised government over a unified national territory came under significant challenge. The increased power of transnational organisations, failures of centralised state planning, the weakening of state finances post-1973, struggles over local/regional cultural identities, and the growing demographic and economic importance of cities (Sassen 2001; Le Galès 2003; Léautier 2006) are amongst the factors that explain the challenge to the nation-state's existing territorial principles (see Sassen 2006). One of the results was the rise of a "new localism" (Goetz & Clarke 1993) in many parts of the world, or what geographers Neil Brenner and Nikolas Theodore (2002: 341) call a global "revival of the local." By "new localism," Brenner and colleagues designate a new way to

apprehend and formalise the relations of power between the local, the state, civil society, international organisations, and corporations.

The most visible part of this new localism was a wave of state "decentralisation" initiatives (Slater 1989; Bardhan 2002; Connerley et al. 2010; Faguet 2014) and near-ubiquitous calls for new models of local governance. This trend played out in different ways in different places. Nonetheless, it became a central tenet of international organisations and creditors such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, both of which played a key role in "promoting" - many would say imposing - decentralised governance in debtor countries (in an African context, Jaglin & Dubresson 1993; Mohan 1996; Diouf 1999; Le Bris 1999; Boone 2003b; McEwan 2003; Ouédraogo 2003; Smoke 2003; Olowu & Wunsch 2004; Coll & Guibbert 2005; Bekker & Fourchard 2013; Mohmand & Loureiro 2017). Côte d'Ivoire and Abidjan have mirrored this trend. The Ivoirian state introduced the first wave of decentralisation in the early 1980s, at the same time that it implemented its first series of devastating "structural adjustment" policies under IMF counsel. Decentralisation in Côte d'Ivoire led to the creation of 10 municipal districts in Abidjan (*communes*) in 1980 and, since 2001, a metropolitan body for the city and its hinterlands (the *District d'Abidjan*) (Yapi-Diahou 1990; Contamin & Memel-Fotê 1997; Jarret & Mahieu 2002; Bredeloup et al. 2008; Soumahoro 2015).

Decentralised governance is only one aspect of localism, albeit a fairly decisive one. As the local became an important arena for political deliberation and decision-making, so it became a terrain where a host of state competencies and responsibilities could be devolved, and where multiple fields of policy could experiment. Social policy and urban planning, welfare and health, but also development (e.g. Yusuf et al. 2000; Parpart et al. 2002; McCann & McCloskey 2003), peace-building and indeed media policy (see below), have all begun to integrate place more fully into their rationales and procedures over the last decades. The drive toward localism, understood in this broad sense, has been particularly evident in the United Kingdom, where successive governments since New Labour have highlighted the local as a productive arena for civic and socio-economic regeneration (Newman 2001), culminating in the previous Conservative government's wide-ranging Localism Act in 2012 (Davoudi & Mandanipour 2013; Clarke & Cochrane 2013; Deas 2013; Evans et al. 2013; Tait & Inch

2014; Wills 2016). But localism also describes many recent developments in cities of the "Global South," where public administrations, international organisations and private companies have enlisted the local - districts and neighbourhoods - into their activities in a variety of ways.

### *3.2.2.b - The Workings of Localism*

I am not claiming here that localism has represented a universal push or a uniform set of policies. Brenner and Theodore (2002; 2004; Brenner et al. 2010; also Goetz & Clarke 1993; Peet 2007; Clarke 2009; Blanco & Griggs 2014; Wills 2015), while making a sweeping argument about the new localism's global reach through its relation to neoliberalism, concede that there is a need to study contextual variations and reformulations of localist frameworks (Brenner & Theodore 2002: 344). Scholars of policy mobility (e.g. Ong 2007; Peck & Theodore 2010; Clarke 2012) argue that ideas such as decentralisation and localised service management do travel extensively, through international organisations and inter-city competition, but that these ideas are often flexibly adapted and re-purposed according to national and local context. Thus, if localism is a "mobile technology," to borrow Aihwa Ong's (2007) expression, it is often dis-assembled and re-assembled to serve disparate aims and visions in different places.

Nonetheless, by "mobile technology" Ong does designate a blueprint of some kind, or a procedural template. Simin Davoudi and Ali Mandanipour (2013) themselves describe localism as a technology, drawing on governmentality theory (Burchell et al. 1991; Barry et al. 1996; Dean 1999; Inda 2005; Foucault 2008a; 2008b). For them (ibid.: 552), localism corresponds to a "bundle of techniques, knowledges, representations, mechanisms and practices through which we are governed and we govern ourselves." Put more simply, describing localism as a technology means that while it may have various guises, it presents recognisable features. Two central ones are *participation* and *partnership*. These twin procedural orientations translate into institutionally-outlined road-maps staking out the modalities for local participation, and pinpointing local bodies that ought to be partnered with. These participatory road-maps not only stage engagement in place, but also give this engagement purpose: they harness local participation and partnership to achieve broader aims and influence

wider processes. The imbrication of localism with participation has been extensively (and critically) discussed in the fields of governance, urban planning, peace-building and development (e.g. Feeney 1997; Raco & Flint 2001; McEwan 2003; Hickey & Mohan 2004; Lane & Corbett 2005; Guarneros-Meza & Geddes 2010; Korf 2010; Mansuri & Rao 2013; Hewitt & Pendlebury 2014; Leonardsson & Rudd 2015; Nair 2016; Warren & Visser 2016). In development, perhaps more than in any other field, media - local and community media - have been theorised as playing a crucial role in realising localism's participatory ambitions (e.g. Adjovi 2007; Milan 2009; Tacchi et al. 2009; Tufte 2014).

In addition to displaying a set of recognisable procedures, localism is based on common, driving *principles*. Here again, two central ones arise: *democracy* and *empowerment*. Like participation, democracy and empowerment are malleable notions. But they are key rhetorical devices justifying the devolution of power to the local. Localism purports to "bring government to the people" (McEwan 2003). This involves making democracy more "tangible": more direct and meaningful, better embedded in the everyday concerns of ordinary people. Simultaneously, localism "activates" citizens, allowing them to play a more involved and ideally more decisive role in the democratic process (Sharp 2012). More broadly, empowerment refers to citizens' activation in all sorts of processes of social transformation, from development to urban social cohesion and regeneration. Media are often seen to play a key role in citizens' activation and empowerment, as well as in the sustenance of local democracy. Indeed, the principles of democracy and empowerment have underpinned localism in media policy for decades (e.g. McCain & Lowe 1990; Hilliard & Keith 2005; Ali 2017), and have been central to its recent revival in the digital age (e.g. Odendaal 2006; Misaruca 2007; Paulussen & D'heer 2013; Firmstone & Coleman 2014; Barnett & Townend 2015; Gordon & Mihailidis 2016; Bullivant 2017; Haque 2017; Rodgers 2017a). I return to this point later.

Localism's procedures and principles, last but not least, are always undergirded by a set of assumptions about the nature of the local itself. These assumptions are mostly left implicit. They nonetheless surface in the ways that local participation, democracy and empowerment are effected in localist policies. Ash Amin (2005: 615), analysing localism in British social and urban policy, writes that localism's collection of

underlying assumptions coheres into a social ontology he refers to as "the localization of the social." By this, Amin designates the idea that the local is an existing, identifiable "thing": a configuration of social relations, characteristics and concerns that can readily be marked out, and for which adequate policies and procedures can be derived. Localist policies' idea of the local as a pre-constituted "thing" contradicts the open-ended and processual understanding of place outlined by post-structuralist geographers, a point Amin (2004: 36) makes himself in another article. The problem is not so much that localism is misguided about the nature of geographical place, however. The issue is that the very act of defining what place is implicates power.

What kind of power is involved in defining place? This has long been an object of concern for geographers and urbanists. For example, they have studied how maps, street or neighbourhood naming, place-branding, urban planning and design, all define what particular places are, and thus influence, to some extent, what people can do in these places. Localism defines place purposefully to organise and galvanise local social practices. But unlike procedural road-maps, which explicitly set out to formalise the avenues and outcomes of practices, localism's *implicit* social ontology informs the very conditions under which people can "act locally." Defining place involves defining what practices count as "acting local," and how acting local articulates to other registers of practice. For example, as I detail in a later section, localism often distinguishes between "acting local" and "acting political." Such distinctions do not manifest as mere interdictions or incentives. Defining place and defining local practices can deeply affect how people can apprehend place as a site of interrelation and agency, as well as a collective project (see Osborne & Rose 2004).

### *3.2.2.c - The Paradox of Localism*

The fact that localism's social ontology implicates power complicates dominant narratives, repeated by governments and international organisations alike, according to which localism is about "giving power away" to the local (Simin & Davoudi 2013: 552). The narrative of "giving power" implies an already-existing local ready to take on new competencies. Such a view masks the constitutive role of defining place, and avoids questions about who gets to define place, how and for what purposes. Localism

is thus not about giving power away but about *exercising power through the defining and making of place*. This point is important in at least three respects.

First, notwithstanding its principles of democracy and empowerment, localism is *not* an inherently democratic or empowering technology. By emphasising the local in governance, policy, media or peace, localism does not affirm democracy *a priori* but merely highlights the importance of place-making for contests over democracy's meaning. Localism thus concretises philosopher Jacques Rancière's point that power struggles are always about "the givenness of place" (in Dikeç 2007: 19). Rancière (2003: 201; my emphasis) writes:

[Political] action always acts upon the social as the litigious distribution of places and roles. It is always a matter of knowing who is qualified to say *what a particular place is* and what is done in it.

Second, and relatedly, the fact that localism exercises power through its definition of the local re-frames attention away from procedural questions of participation or partnership. While it is important to ask what constitutes meaningful participation and partnership (e.g. Arnstein 1969), these questions can greatly benefit from a critical examination of localism's power of definition. An analysis of localism's significance in terms of place-making, rather than participation, can allow a more comprehensive view of how power works through particular policies - what power "does," how it organises the stakes and roles of social transformation, and how it relates to place as a practiced, everyday experience.

Third, the fact that localism involves power at the moment that it defines place means that we cannot be sure that the state, or any other powerful actor, actually "gives away power" in any significant way. If there is a fundamental imbalance of power when place is defined, it is likely that the local thus set out will reflect and enforce this imbalance. For example, localism can involve "seeing the local like a state," to paraphrase James Scott (1998), and not involve citizens in its design. Indeed, writing about Africa and Latin America, David Slater (1989) argues that localism (under the guise of decentralised governance) is a "mask" for state power, which can be strengthened by being exercised indirectly. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (2002; Ferguson 1994;

Werbner 1999) make a similar assessment, showing that localist development initiatives can serve to strengthen state presence and legitimacy at local level. Concordant criticisms abound in relation to localism in the UK. The latest manifestations of British localism have been accused of drastically centralising power in the hands of the pro-austerity Conservative government (Raco 2013; Deas 2014; Tait & Inch 2014; Wills 2016). Beyond the state, a significant geographical literature associates localism with neoliberalism, and thus argues that it furthers corporate interests (Tickell & Peck 1996; Brenner & Theodore 2002; 2004). Similarly, critical studies of development and peace-building have shown how localist initiatives serve the agenda of liberal organisations and re-inscribe a neo-colonial, "North-South" imbalance (Cooke & Kothari 2001; Kapoor 2005). Leaving aside debates over whom localism serves, for now, we can simply state its fundamental paradox: presented as a step towards empowerment, it can - and often does - serve to strengthen apparatuses of domination.

### 3.2.3 - Localism as Analytical Frame

In the previous section, I have outlined a general understanding of localism as a contemporary trend in the way place's role is codified in processes of rule and social transformation. Localism involves a set of principles that justify its deployment, a social ontology (a definition of what the local *is*), and a loose procedural template. Through its multiple facets, localism fully engages the making of place in the exercise of power. In this section I move away from geographers' political-economic accounts of localism, which tend to be totalising and are poorly suited to an inquiry into media-related practices. I discuss what an *anthropological*, practical account of localism might look like, as a first step toward clarifying the terms under which localism can guide inquiry into the workings of power on proximity radio in Abidjan.

As noted, geographers tend to attribute the global rise of localism to neoliberalism (Mohan 1996; Tickell & Peck 1996; Brenner & Theodore 2002; 2004; Brenner et al. 2010; Peet 2007; Raco 2013). My aim is not to debate whether neoliberalism is the primary causal force behind localism's rise, or to explore whether it is in fact global

capitalism that is being served by localist frameworks in Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>21</sup> I instead wish to move away from the need for a single and totalising explanatory framework. Sue Parnell and Jennifer Robinson (2012; also Ferguson 2009) note that neoliberalism threatens to become a unitary frame of reference that reduces the complex workings of power in "Southern" cities to a single logic, and marginalises attention to the contextual variety of urban processes in which power plays out. While Brenner and colleagues' macro-level accounts produce a convincing theory about localism's global significance, in other words, they are not well suited to explaining how localism works, what it means and how it is contested "on the ground," so to speak. Parnell and Robinson thus argue (ibid.: 597) for "locally legible accounts [of political and policy dynamics] that give due weight to the diversity of drivers of urban change relevant to specific urban contexts." This does not mean dismissing neoliberalism as a global reality, infiltrating state logics and pressing upon everyday urban life. But it does mean providing a more nuanced account of localism, one that does not presume a direct translation of ideological and institutional intent (or even hidden agendas) into specific programmes and their reception.

Instead of presuming that localism represents a direct translation of (neoliberal) powerful intents, the connection between the "ground," networks of power (which in an African context can be opaque [Bayart 1993; Bayart et al. 1998; Chabal & Daloz 1999]), and a broader ideological climate, should be traced *back* from a situated inquiry - with all the complexities that this tracing entails. A starting point for such a nuanced and situated inquiry is provided by anthropological studies of policy and administration, in Africa and elsewhere (e.g. Ferguson 1994; Aretxaga 2003; Blundo & Le Meur 2009; Olivier de Sardan 2013; Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan 2014; Graeber 2015). These studies begin from the perspective that implementing policies or institutional programmes at local level involves many difficulties and sometimes contradictions. Anthropological studies of policy suggest that localism's power of defining the local is not exercised in a direct and uniform way, but materialises

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<sup>21</sup> The current Ivoirian President, Alassane Ouattara, rose to international prominence as an executive at the IMF. He entered the national political scene as Prime Minister under Houphouët-Boigny, responsible for some of the most draconian structural adjustment measures in the country's history (including monetary devaluation in 1994). Ouattara has since been accused of running a blatantly neoliberal political platform geared almost exclusively toward privatisation and foreign investment (Jarret & Mahieu 2002).



diffusely in various *practices*. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (2002) make the clearest argument in this direction. They argue that, in order to grasp how localist policies produce an understanding of place in relation to power (or most concretely, to the state), it is necessary to focus on the practical routines through which policies become locally embedded. An analysis of localism, following Gupta and Ferguson (*ibid.*: 984),

[Must] include not only explicit discursive representations of the state [and the local], but also implicit, unmarked, signifying practices. These mundane practices often slip below the threshold of discursivity, but profoundly alter how bodies are oriented, how lives are lived, and how subjects are formed.

What Gupta and Ferguson point toward is an inquiry into localism that goes beyond the discursive, policy-analysis level, and tracks its unfolding at the level of practices. Admittedly, Gupta and Ferguson (*ibid.*) are solely concerned with practices related to local offshoots of the state, or to para-statal bodies. It is necessary, however, to expand the types of practices under consideration, for two reasons. First, as mentioned, localism in its broadest sense is not just about decentralised governance, but also includes initiatives such as social cohesion and local reconciliation programmes. In the latter, localism is not primarily concerned with organising people's practices in relation to government. Instead, social cohesion and reconciliation programmes are primarily concerned with influencing local dynamics of cohabitation. Put another way, in social cohesion or reconciliation frameworks, localism defines the local for the purposes of organising practices and interrelations amongst social groups *themselves* - *outside* of the direct implication of the state or administrative bodies (see Rose & Miller 2010). The state does not disappear, as it often retains (at least) a monitoring role, but practices are not oriented toward it, or not directly.

Second, localism often mobilises non-state intermediaries for its implementation. Neighbourhood associations, "traditional" leadership, *ad hoc* consultative forums, NGOs, and indeed local radio stations, can all be tapped to play a part. These intermediaries then act as points of reference for practices set in motion by localist initiatives. This can introduce competing agendas and rationales, putting localism's ability to impose a unitary vision of place and local action further into question. I make

this clearer in the next section by discussing how media's role can be understood in the implementation of localist policies.

#### 3.2.4 - Media and Mediations of Localism

Media have, for the most part, been left out of critical accounts of localism. This assertion immediately needs to be qualified. Media have been thought as *tools* that strengthen localism's procedures, chief amongst which participation, and have been thought as important actors in the realisation of localism's principles, democracy and empowerment. As a sub-field of development studies, communication for development/media for development (e.g. Gandelsonas 2002; Alumuku 2006; Milan 2009; Gaynor & O'Brien 2012) have theorised the importance of media as key enablers in participatory and empowering initiatives. Equally, peace-building frameworks increasingly include considerations of media at local level (Price et al. 2009; Brisset-Foucault 2011; Frère 2011; Schoemaker & Stremlau 2014). A similar, perhaps more recent line of work has explored media's importance - including new media technologies - in local governance. In African cities and elsewhere, local media are regularly included in frameworks of "good (local) governance," not just as participatory platforms but also as purveyors of information and public debate (Stremlau et al. 2015; Gagliardone 2016; Kramp 2016).

These intersections between media and various strands of localism indicate just how important media are to the implementation of localist agendas. Yet these intersections also feel, most of the time, like missed connections. Allowing for nuance in much of the works cited above, their discussion of media is often constrained by a reductionist functionalism (see Stremlau et al. 2015). Media either appear as transparent catalysts and transmitters, or are themselves reduced to procedures whose outcome is but one component in the streamlined execution of localist frameworks. These studies do not account for the fact that media organisations such as proximity radio stations in Abidjan have their own preoccupations, objectives and imaginaries. Most importantly, even when studies of localism include media, they forget that media organisations have an everyday, practical involvement in making place that is *not* reducible to pre-ordained functions of information, participatory gatekeeping, development, and so on (Slater 2014).

Another reason that critical studies of localism tend to forget or reduce media is because these studies often rely on totalising - or as Harri Englund (2006: 38) puts it, "inexorable" - understandings of power. As noted, many critical studies of localism presume a direct translation from (mostly neoliberal) policies or discourses into practices. From policy rationalities and institutional intentions, these studies infer un-reflexive subject positions. In such a perspective, media can play little role other than as unidirectional carriers of discourse, entirely in the service of a policy vision. Such a perspective ignores the inherently contested and plural nature of media discourses. It also very poorly accounts for the critical capacities of media audiences and the reflexive nature of many media-related practices. In addition, this perspective has little to say about the specific role of local, alternative or community media. Put simply, critical studies of localism struggle to imagine that media's implication might involve multiple (discursive and practical) understandings of the relations between place and power.

Admittedly, the literature on *media localism* has not been of much help in this regard. Scholars and advocates of local media (McCain & Lowe 1990; Jauert 1992; Navarro 2009; Evens & Paulussen 2011; Dickens et al. 2014; Ewart 2014; Firmstone & Coleman 2014; van Kerkhoven & Bakker 2014; Barnett & Townend 2015; Hess & Waller 2015; Bullivant 2017) have been so concerned with theorising the local as a site of resistance that they have forgotten to ask how local media discourses and practices might be entangled in the exercise of power. When this question is considered, it is often in the bluntest of terms (with some recent exceptions - Ali 2017; Rodgers 2017a; 2017b). Local media's entanglement with power is most often reduced to political-economic determinism. Scholars limit their interrogation to regulatory frameworks, and if these are not judged to secure local media's full autonomy from powerful institutions (the state, corporations, or even development organisations), then it is assumed - even if not explicitly stated - that local media organisations are compromised as agents of rule. Political-economic determinism works the other way around as well: if local media carry discourses that align them with powerful actors or policy visions, they will be assumed to be under some kind of controlling influence. Yet situations are often much more complex, even in contexts (like Abidjan) of domineering state presence. Florence Brisset-Foucault's (2011) research in northern Uganda shows that local radio

stations often strategically negotiate their agency in landscapes of power relations by adopting discursive frames from different powerful actors. As she puts it (ibid.: 218), stations "look for" ambiguities in status and function in order to broadcast flexibly, maintaining both a semblance of financial security and local legitimacies. Nicole Stremlau and colleagues (Stremlau et al. 2015), Iginio Gagliardone (2016) and Wendy Willems (2013) have all demonstrated the difficulty of attributing labels to local radio operations based on either political economic or procedural interpretations (e.g. participatory/interactive programmes). What actually takes place on local radio stations, they argue, should be interrogated through a careful analysis of media practices and the complex, plural networks of power in which they may be entangled. Harri Englund's (2011) ethnography of production practices on Malawian public radio confirms that editorial censorship is never complete; that politically and ethically resonant discourses may cohabit with those that legitimise domination; and that it is crucial to interrogate media audiences to understand how media content resonates with their everyday imaginaries of place, nation and world.

A nuanced and situated approach to localism that takes (local) media seriously, in sum, cannot presume that media will either be "resistant" or transparent carriers of power-laden, localist visions of place. Media-related practices may be ordered according to localism's implicit definitions of place and "acting local," or they may involve different orderings. The two possibilities are not exclusive. Their interplay, furthermore, cannot be determined by any single source or diagram of power. With this in mind, I now return to the critical, geographic literature on localism.

### **3.3 - Containment, Social Control and De-Politicisation: Critiques of Localism**

In this section I examine three recurring critiques addressed to localism policies and related discourses. The first is a rather traditional Marxist critique: it contends that localism focuses attention on the local, as both symptom and solution to social problems, and thereby brackets away the true origin of said problems. The second is more Foucauldian and points to localism as a technology of social control and discipline. It constructs the local as a field of agency only to impose ideological schemas upon everyday practices. The third critique shares much with the other two

but focuses specifically on the relation between the local and the political. Drawing primarily on Jacques Rancière, this critique argues that localism constructs place as a non-political realm of everyday life from which claims can no longer be made. Each of these critiques implies a normative view of place from which localism can be challenged, which I outline in turn.

### 3.3.1 - Defining "Local Issues": Localism as Containment

In their analysis of localism in development, Giles Mohan and Kristian Stokke (2000: 253) argue that localism "circumscribes consciousness and action." By this they mean that localism focuses attention on the local in a way that *contains* urban dwellers' ability to envision and engage processes at wider scales. As Mohan and Stokke (ibid.) make clear, this is not just a containment of knowledge - as in, residents are prevented from knowing what happens at larger scales - but a containment of *social agency* - as in, the local becomes the dominant realm of engagement, at the expense of wider realms (Davoudi & Mandanipour 2013: 558).

Localism's potential for containment has roots in its definition of place. Implicitly, localism operates a distinction between "local issues" and "non-local" issues. The former warrant or even require urban dwellers' everyday engagement, while the latter's elision implies that non-local issues lie outside of people's concern or control. Critics of localism identify two main dangers in this process. First, by defining what counts as "local issues," localism effectively risks telling urban dwellers what they should care about. Second, and more importantly, by focusing attention on the local as a sphere of concern and action, localism can bracket away what James Ferguson (2012) calls national and transnational "structures of responsibility." By urging urban dwellers to apprehend social issues at local level - from housing and service shortages to political violence and inter-ethnic resentment - localism is seen to discourage ordinary people from considering or acting upon the structural conditions that create these issues in the first place.

Localism's bracketing away of structures can happen in two, often interconnected ways. On the one hand, localism can disguise structural problems as "local problems with local solutions." In this confusion of cause with symptom, urban dwellers are

simply enjoined to tackle the consequences of structural processes while their structural roots remain unaddressed or hidden from view. On the other hand, and often simultaneously, localism can suggest that structural concerns are simply "out of reach," too distant to be acted upon. Here, it is acknowledged that external forces press upon the local, but local mobilisation is judged to be the most effective response.

Whether or not structures are acknowledged in localist policies and discourses, they threaten to "conflate place-based action with place-*bound* action," as Doreen Massey (1994: 141; emphasis in original) puts it. In localism, local engagement ceases to be targeted at anything other than immediate, non-structural issues. Anthropologist Nina Eliasoph's (1998) book on North-American political apathy provides a striking picture of how this process of containment can manifest in citizens' imaginaries. Eliasoph documents how residents in a mid-size American town distinguish between social issues that are "close to home" and "not close to home." This distinction does not correspond to issues' actual spatial closeness, but to residents' sense of agency. Issues that relate to large-scale, corporate and political processes (such as the processing of highly toxic waste in nearby facilities), are considered distant, out of reach, and unworthy of daily civic engagement. Issues that are "close to home," in contrast, invariably involve a place-bound sphere of action limited to interpersonal relations. Eliasoph interprets this containment of agency through a social interactionist lens, rather than through considerations of power and rule, but she captures exactly what some critics of localism fear.

In sum, the "containment" critique of localism argues that promoting the local as a dominant sphere of thought and action risks limiting the ways that ordinary people can register and act upon the structures that shape their environment. The Marxist overtones of this critique are strong. In its opposition between the local and the structural, between a narrowed consciousness and a wide-ranging analysis of political-economic world-systems (Wallerstein 1979), the containment critique echoes Marxism's suspicion of place as a scale of thought and action *tout court*. For Marxist thinkers like (early) Manuel Castells (1977; 1983), localism is flawed simply because emphasis on local action and practices is misguided (for a critical genealogy of Marxism's despise for "local cretinism," see Pithouse 2013). Such a view negates any

possibility of challenging localism's constraints from place itself (Featherstone et al. 2012). In line with my previous chapter, however, I favour a different line of challenge.

The reason why localism's containment of local concerns and practices is dangerous is not because attention to place contradicts an internationalist class struggle, but because place is a *condition* for such a struggle's emergence in the first instance (Harvey 2012; Pithouse 2013; 2014). Place - especially urban place - is precisely where people begin to form an individual and collective understanding of the world in its structural complexity, diversity and inequality (see Massey et al. 1999; Massey 2007; Simone 2005b; 2008b; Roy & Ong 2011). This point extends beyond an acknowledgement of the situated nature of knowledge (Thrift 1985; Haraway 1987). It draws on Henri Lefebvre's (1991; 2014) argument that political consciousness begins in everyday life and from its practiced spatialities. For Lefebvre, urban places allow a unique mediation (see Kipfer et al. 2011) between the everyday and the structures that shape it. Because they are compactions of different social groups and sociotechnical systems (Amin & Thrift 2002), because they play such a central role in maintaining systems of economic and political domination (Lefebvre 2003), cities allow individuals and groups an unparalleled grasp of the multi-scalar interconnections in which their lives are constantly ensnared (which is not to say that rural areas are somehow disconnected - see Piot 1999; Tsing 2005; Krause 2013). This means that, for Lefebvre, the making of place in the city is always in part, and almost by necessity, extraverted (see also Simone 2001; 2005b; 2008a; Roy & Ong 2011). It also means that the making of place is tinged with potential for the emergence of new urban publics (Iveson 2007; Simone 2014) capable of collectively addressing contentious issues across various scales.

By containing the concerns and practices involved in the making of place, localism thus intervenes in processes of "world-disclosure" (Bartky 1979). It threatens to direct attention inwards when places could look further outwards, a tension Ash Amin (2007: 185) refers to as the "politics of local attention." Localism further threatens to stifle the connections between situated experience and collective mobilisation on broader scales. The fact that media and media practices are fundamental to world-disclosure (Scannell 1996; Rodgers et al. 2009b; Rodgers et al. 2014) reaffirms the importance of considering media in critical analyses of localism. What role do local

media play in defining "local issues," in directing attention inwards and bracketing away structures of power and responsibility?

### 3.3.2 - Defining the "Good" Place: Localism as Social Control

Another critique of localism identifies it as what we might call a mode of social control. Here again, what is in question is how localism defines the local - and in particular, how it envisions the "*good*" local. Critics argue that behind localism's intention to "empower" and "activate" places, often lies a pre-conceived idea of what an "activated" locality ought to look like. This idea in turn implicates social practices: the definition of a "good place" is often tied, in localism's participatory road-maps, to residents' "good practices" of social engagement.

Needless to say, localism's vision of the "good place" is often flawed. For example, a common misconception in localism conflates place with community. In this conflation, places are seen to be pre-disposed to foster the strong social ties associated with community, a point I have challenged in the previous chapter (Blokland 2003; Amin 2005; Amin 2012). Becoming a "good" and "active" place, according to many localist policies, thus involves demonstrating the existence of these strong ties - in a performance of togetherness that Richard Crisp (2013) humorously calls "communities with oomph." But beyond its misreading of place as a social configuration, localism's implicit vision of the "good place" introduces two, fundamental issues.

First, the normativity inherent to defining a "good place" involves an ideological component (Cresswell 1996). This ideological component plays out in more or less subtle ways when localism attempts to codify the social practices through which urban dwellers ought to engage in place (in order to make it "better"). Some authors argue (Raco 2003; Amin 2004; 2005; Wills 2016) that, in setting out the modalities of local engagement, localism stealthily attempts to impose an ideology, providing a code of conduct for social engagement *in general*. By defining the "good place," in this view, localism sets out "good" practices through which urban dwellers ought to relate both to one another and to the state. The ideological nature of such prescriptions is perhaps clearest in the UK., where localism has been explicitly associated with a neoliberal



political project. Thus, as Davoudi and Mandanipour (2013; Clarke & Cochrane 2013; Tait & Inch 2014; Wills 2016) argue, British localism is infused with values of individualism, entrepreneurialism and the primacy of economic growth. These values surface in localism's emphasis on public-private initiatives (citizens working together with corporations), on the driving force of individual leadership, on the moral significance of maintaining a clean and ordered neighbourhood, or on the key role of voluntary organisations in providing the infrastructure for "community well-being."

This leads me to the second critique of localism's pre-conceptions of the "good place," which is that it shifts the responsibility for social maintenance and transformation onto places themselves. To start with, social transformation comes to *rely* on places becoming better versions of themselves, which is to say on conforming to visions of the local implicitly written into localist policies. Places' "activation" becomes a precondition for better governance, for peace, or for social cohesion. Writing in a British context, Ash Amin (2005: 620) thus criticises localist urban and social policy for implying that "[local communities'] future lies in their capacity for self-regeneration." Such an implication has perverse effects. Places become evaluated based on their capacity to become activated, to "rise up" to the challenges posed to them. Places' empowerment thus turns into their responsibility to be and to act empowered (Cruikshank 1999; Dean 1999). This explains why, as Amin (2005: 620) notes, places' ability to meet the criteria of "good" and "activated" localities is evaluated according to "a strong morality of blame and praise." Even more perversely, places can be asked to take on an increasing part of the burden of social maintenance and improvement. As localities become "empowered" to tackle social problems, these problems' persistence can be discursively attributed to places' own shortcomings. This dissimulates the structural underpinnings of territorialised inequality. In effect, writes Amin (*ibid.*: 623), localism can end up asking the most disadvantaged areas and populations to remedy their own marginalisation.

In Amin's view, widely shared in the UK (Raco & Imrie 2000; Raco 2003; 2013; Davoudi & Mandanipour 2013; Deas 2013; Gallent et al. 2013; Tait & Inch 2014), successive localism frameworks have shifted *too much* of the responsibility for social transformation on places themselves. The UK, again, presents an exceptionally salient case. Localism has been deployed in parallel with a focus on austerity and the state's

disengagement from public services and expenditure. The shift of responsibility from the state to the local has been explicitly paired with a neoliberal discourse that limits the state's ability to effect change (to tackle poverty, housing shortages, etc.). Localities were quite literally asked to "take over" from the state. As unique as the British case may be, there are echoes of similar shifts in responsibility in many parts of the world (e.g. in an African context: Briggs & Yehoah 2001; van de Walle 2001; Ferguson 2006a; Narsiah 2010; Boone 2012; Bekker & Fourchard 2013; Pikalo & Banjac 2013; Thörn 2016). Nicolas van de Walle (2001: 276), writing about neoliberal restructuring in Africa, finds "a progressive withdrawal of governments from key developmental functions they had espoused in an earlier era," with aid agencies and NGOs having increasingly taken over the delivery of public services. In Côte d'Ivoire, as noted in Chapter 1, economic crisis and structural adjustment programmes led to the state's withdrawal from public investment and services in the 1980s (Antoine 1987; Dubresson et al. 1989; Le Pape 1997; Contamin & Memel-Fotê 1999; Bredeloup et al. 2008; Boone 2012), itself leading to increasing privatisation and/or informalisation of urban development (though this process may not have been as drastic as in other African countries).

Leaving aside the grander political and economic projects to which it may be tied, localism's normative vision of place is encoded into its procedures of participation and partnership. These procedures are intended to make "good" local practices *manifest*. In turn, these good practices can be registered by monitoring bodies, whose proliferation has been critiqued in studies of the "new managerialism" associated with localism (Desai & Imrie 2000; Mohan & Stokke 2000). Thus, participation in place takes on a disciplinary as well as instrumental character. Localism codifies the forms of engagement in place, sets out its purposes, and connects local processes to monitoring chains in which local residents and organisations may themselves be asked to play a role. Local NGOs and associations can be asked to track their beneficiaries in various ways (Murray Li 2007; Biradavolu et al. 2015; Thörn 2016), while ordinary citizens can be asked, even indirectly, to surveil each other's behaviour.

Media's role in bolstering localism's potential for social control can be interrogated in at least two registers. The first is participatory: given media's growing importance in fostering participation in place (through interactive radio programmes on local radio,

for example), we might investigate the different modes of public address (Iveson 2007) that are built into mediated participation; the kinds of normative understandings of "good" place and practice that participation connects to; and of course, the simple question that Wendy Willems (2013) poses in her study of interactive programmes on local radio in Zambia: "participation - in what?" For what purposes? Such an inquiry cannot simply presume the complicity of mediated participation in "tyranny" (Cooke & Kothari 2001), however. It must instead approach mediated participation as a site of contest (White 1996; Hickey & Mohan 2004; Carpentier 2011), and consider media audiences' own views on the meaning of participation (e.g. Bird 2011; Brisset-Foucault 2016). In a more discursive vein, we can examine mediated narratives of local responsibility, tracing attributions of "blame and praise" (Amin 2005: 620), and attempt to situate them within broader, normative frameworks linking place-making to social transformation. Again, such an analysis cannot limit itself to official texts, to formulas circulated by the state or development agencies, but must also explore their commentary, and seek out counter-discourses.

### 3.3.3 - Curtailed Claims and Consensus: Localism as Depoliticisation

The preceding sections have discussed two recurring critiques of localism. In the first critique, localism is accused of directing local attention inward, containing urban dwellers' consciousness and sense of agency. The second accuses localism of disciplining local practices according to ideological schemas and political projects that shift responsibility for social transformation onto ordinary places and citizens. I now consider a third critique that, in a sense, builds upon the first two but synthesises them into a single process of *depoliticisation*. This third critique argues that, if localism defines "local issues" and the "good place," it tends to define both as inherently non-political. De-politicisation evokes a growing literature on what has been variously called the "post-political" (Mouffe 2000; Rancière 2003; 2010; Oosterlynck & Swyngedouw 2010; Swyngedouw 2011; Korf 2010; Wilson & Swyngedouw 2014), "post-democratic" (Crouch 2004; Mair 2013; Raco 2013), or "anti-political" (Ferguson 1994; Clarke 2015; Raco et al. 2015) condition of contemporary governance. Without delving fully into the nuances and debates of this literature, it is possible to highlight two ways in which localism acts as a depoliticising technology: by constraining political claims made from the local, and by positing place as a site of consensus.

Localism's limitation on claims made from place follows, first, from its definition of what counts as "local issues." By focusing local attention on a limited number of "manageable" issues, localism actively discourages consideration of structural dynamics, and thus limits the chance that local experiences and knowledge can directly translate into claims on institutions at larger scales. Second, the shifting of responsibility onto localities often - implicitly or explicitly - places conditions upon their involvement in politics. Residents and local groups are often asked to demonstrate their own "empowerment" by speaking in a language intelligible to monitoring bodies - the technocratic language of diagnosis and impact (Raco & Imrie 2002; Davoudi & Mandanipour 2013; Deas 2013). In turn, these monitoring bodies - from local administrations to development NGOs to *ad hoc* local commissions - are seen to offer only fragmented and technocratic avenues for local queries and claims (Parker & Street 2015). Third, and more broadly, the shifting of responsibility onto the local can limit the scope for making claims on the state. On the one hand, the state's role is often discursively reduced, which has the effect of branding certain claims on the state as "unrealistic" or "unreasonable." On the other, the state is turned into a managing body for various "stakeholders," such that political issues are reduced to the technicalities of finding a "rational," non-partisan agreement (see Mouffe 2000: 6-7). Again, this is a process of depoliticisation much discussed in the UK and the "North," but one equally identified in African and "Southern" contexts (e.g. Ferguson 1994; Hibou 2004; 2017; Murray Li 2007; Raco & Lin 2012).

Media have contributed in a variety of ways to the constraining of local claims. "Mainstream" media have long been argued to legitimise and normalise technocratic governance, turning the state's declarations on its own (in)abilities into "common sense." But local, alternative and community media have also been implicated in this kind of depoliticisation, in subtle but decisive ways. In her account of the 2007 World Social Forum in Nairobi, Florence Brisset-Foucault (2009: 134-135) further points out that many community media actors actively promoted a detachment of "development issues" from "politics." Coverage of "development issues," in these media actors' view (which echo longer-standing frameworks of "development journalism" [Domatob & Hall 1983; Odhiambo 1991]), was to favour solution-oriented discussions around the "concrete" problems of localities, while "politics" referred to the games of elites. As

Brisset-Foucault (2009: 135) notes, this rhetoric frames local issues as technicalities to be assessed with development "partners," and indirectly threatens to deny the relations between local conditions - infrastructural shortages, poverty, etc. - and the activities of the state.

In addition to narrowing the scope of local, political claims, localism acts as a depoliticising technology by equating place with consensus. Consensus, in the sense that I am using it here, differs from the kind of social homogeneity implied in expressions such as "local community" (Mohan & Stokke 2000: 253). More fundamentally, following Rancière, consensus designates the repression of political disagreement (Rancière 2003; 2010). It denies politics understood as the possibility of questioning *how things are* - or as Mustafa Dikeç (2007: 19) put it, the "givenness of place." Consensus often underpins localism's vision of the "good place": Amin (2005: 627), for example, writes that localist urban policies in the UK posit "a [local] public arena deliberately engineered for community consensus." Localism's vision the "good place," argues Amin, is one in which political disagreement disappears, either because it is overcome or because it is recognised as undesirable. Localism's procedures thus often demand the convergence of local interests (always assuming interests can converge); they demand that places speak with a unified voice. Consensus becomes a horizon for participation in any kind deliberative process - a town hall meeting, a neighbourhood planning initiative, etc. In this context, politics, or the political expression of disagreement, is seen as counterproductive, backward, "divisive" and even violent. The expression of disagreement becomes cast as unhelpful and burdensome - antithetical to the urgencies of problem-solving - and, at worst, is seen to signal a place's democratic immaturity.

Localism's drive toward consensus is problematic in several ways. To begin with, it presumes that the power struggles that fuel politics on a national scale can be abstracted away in place. This is simply not the case, as places are traversed by power differentials and, consequently, by different visions of the social good. Political philosopher Chantal Mouffe (2000) argues that politics involves a constant dialectic between conflict and consensus - what she terms (ibid.: 103) "conflictual consensus" - embodied in adversarial political positions - what she terms *agonism*. As Amin (2005: 626) argues, the local is as agonistic, in Mouffe's sense, as any other scale of political

life. To argue that political differences should be resolved in consensus at local level, as a result, is to hijack politics as a multi-scalar process in which the local, the national and the global constantly feed back to each other (albeit in uneven power-geometries, as noted in the starting section).

In addition, equating place with consensus confuses urban dwellers' ability to live alongside each other with their ability to erase or overcome political differences. This confusion is particularly frequent - and understandable, to some extent - in peace-building initiatives (at local but also at national level). For peace-builders, the need to overcome recent political violence often makes consensus something to aspire to (see Donais 2012; also Stremlau 2013; Datzberger 2014). The argument in favour of consensus prevailed, for example, in South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation process (Tutu 1999; Krog 2000; Moon 2004). Proponents of post-conflict consensus argued that expressions of anger and despair in the face of loss or injustice should be contained, for the sake of forgiveness, peace and cohesion. In their view, it was right for post-conflict political expression to be "modulated" in ways that encouraged consensus. Sonali Chakravarti (2014; Krog 2000; Wilson 2001; Borer 2004; Short 2005; Little & Maddison 2017) and other scholars have critiqued this position, however, on the basis that post-conflict consensus effectively failed to address imbalances of power and to recognise the value of ordinary victims' claims to justice. Mouffe (2000: 103-104) further argues that for democratic and social institutions to secure legitimacy and adherence, they *need* to demonstrate their ability to withstand and channel diverging political perspectives. In this way, Mouffe (ibid.) contends, antagonism - relations of enmity - can turn into agonism - relations between political adversaries (see Hirsch 2012; Maddison 2015). In Mouffe's view, then, there is no lasting (democratic) reconciliation or social cohesion possible without agonistic politics.

An analysis of localism in terms of "post-politics" raises an interesting question. What is politics, or political, and who gets to define that? For Rancière (2003; 2010), as noted, democratic politics is about the possibility of radical disagreement or *dissensus* over how things are. Democratic politics is also about a fundamental principle of equality. Rancière theorises democracy as the struggle for true equality, against its constant deferral in actuality. Rancière's perspective directly challenges paternalistic

discourses, from Plato onwards, that claim citizens have different abilities to participate in politics. Such discourses were prevalent in modern, "Western" democracies at their outset, justifying both in their unequal internal organisation and their colonial enterprises (Chevalier 1978; Rosanvallon 1992; Mamdani 1996; Fanon 2004). These discourses have since been peddled by development actors and African states themselves, and continue to hold sway in liberal and leftist condescension toward the urban poor, as Richard Pithouse has pointed out in a South African context (2013; 2014; also Desai 2007; Neocosmos 2008; in a "Northern" context, e.g. Wacquant 2008; Tyler 2013). For Rancière and Pithouse, there is no ontological reason why a place, understood geographically and as a social position, should be denied full participation in politics. A local politics, it follows, should be recognised as a matter of democratic principle, both within place and in an interplay with larger scales. This, at least, is the starting perspective in which I have endeavoured to situate my analysis of the post-conflict *abidjanais* context.

Rancière provides starting principles to understand how the denial of local politics might operate in Abidjan, and why it might be significant. But Rancière and writers on the "post-political" condition only take us so far. As Harri Englund (2011) argues, Rancière's principle of equality cannot do without a careful analysis of what equality *means* in context, how it is conceived, represented and drawn upon for claims-making. In addition, the terms and practices of politics itself must be interrogated in context (Stren 1985; Bayart et al. 1992; Bayat 1997; 2010; Constant-Martin 1998; Banégas & Warnier 2001; Banégas et al. 2012; Chabal 2009; Bompani & Frahm-Arp 2010; Bénit-Gbaffou & Oldfield 2011; Akindès et al. 2014; Diepeveen 2016). This is first a matter of "Western" theories of politics confronting "Southern" terrains: the "politics of suffering and smiling" that Patrick Chabal (2009) evokes in an African context have little to do with the Marxist-revolutionary ideal that haunts analyses of the "post-political" condition in Europe and North-America. More broadly, the understanding of politics I propose to work with is resolutely grounded in everyday life. It considers what Asef Bayat (2010; Agier 2007; Simone 2011; Banégas et al. 2012) calls "street politics": the situated, dynamic, informal and often fleeting ways that urban life produces publics and practices that end up being recognised as "political." As a growing number of studies have shown, media of all kinds have bolstered such everyday (re)definitions of politics and the political in African contexts (e.g. Larkin

2008; Mudhai et al. 2009; Wasserman 2010a; 2011; Englund 2011; Pype 2011; Willems & Obadare 2014; Willems 2016a; 2016b). To return to the question of localism, in short, how urban dwellers define "the political" and aspire to "do politics" ought to be central to any analysis of the de-politicisation of the local.

### **3.4 - Conclusion - Place-Making and Localism on Proximity Radio: Toward a Dialectical Inquiry**

In this chapter, I examined the relations between place, media and power through the lens of localism. The studies of localism reviewed here, drawn from the fields of development, governance, urban and social policy, peace-building and media policy, provide a detailed and contemporary understanding of how power shapes and *uses* place in its own exercise. Localism brings ostensibly democratic principles and procedures to bear on places, but involves a social ontology that necessarily implicates power. Localism defines place in such a way that it conditions - wittingly or unwittingly - what people can do in and from place. Localism can contain local knowledge and practices by focusing attention inward, at the detriment of structural analyses in which the local relates to wider scales. Localism can act as a mode of social control by tying local practices to instrumental and ideological schemas of "good practice." Localism, finally, can depoliticise the local by preventing the emergence of claims out of local experiences, and constructing place as a site of political consensus.

Localism, as a frame of inquiry, usefully informs studies of local media, which often fail to consider place's entanglements with regimes of power, and local media's role in sustaining such entanglements. Media play a key role in the unfolding of localism's participatory procedures, and in bolstering localist policies' visions of "the good place." Localism helps us understand how proximity radio stations may have been complicit in directing and constraining local practices all the while acting in their capacity as community mediators and professing to "empower" urban residents. At the same time, a study of localism that takes seriously the role of media and media-related practices must move away from the totalising views of power that underpin many critical writings. While local media like proximity radio stations may contribute to localism's less democratic outcomes, all media remain contested sites of practice and symbolic production. It remains to be seen, then, how and to what extent localist programmes



on proximity radio constrain local practices, how they interact with urban dwellers' own views on place and agency, and with the everyday politics that can arise from the dynamics of urban locality.

Tying this chapter back to the previous one, we can understand place-making as an everyday, mediated process (Chapter 2), and localism as an attempt by powerful actors to codify and often constrain this process. In the chapters that follow I set out to explore the interplay between both dynamics on proximity radio in Abidjan, highlighting both ambiguity and potential. The following research questions guide my analysis:

### **Research Questions**

*RQ1:* How do proximity radio stations mobilise place as a resource or collective project?

*RQ2:* How do producers and listeners situate the local in relation to their everyday lives, to state power, to national politics and to histories of conflict?

*RQ3:* What do radio's place-making activities signify for the medium's contribution to living-together in post-conflict Abidjan?

## Chapter 4

# Writing the World from the Post-Conflict African Metropolis: Methodological and Representational Challenges

*Le bois a beau durer dans l'eau, il ne deviendra jamais caïman.*  
(However long the stick may float, it will never turn into a caiman)  
Malinké proverb

*Il n'est pas là pour rien...*  
(He's not here for nothing)  
Tiken Jah Fakoly (1999), "Toubabou [White Man]"

### 4.1 - Introduction

The aim of my thesis was to document proximity radio stations' role in the re-making of place in Abidjan. I sought to trace proximity radio's embeddedness in city life, and to understand the figures of locality being produced and contested through its mediation. Doing so involved two main lines of inquiry: 1) everyday radio-related practices and talk ("what people do with radio in the city" [Couldry 2004]); and 2) discourses and popular representations of place, politics and mediation. A focus on place, everyday life and media practices called for an ethnographic methodology. The routines of place-making and place-representation are not only inextricably contextual, but also only partially reflexive. In order to capture these routines, in their often faint surfacing, I had to devise a research method that would permit multiple modes of engagement with participants, both reflexive and situational.

My decision to ground my research in Abidjan - West African metropolis, post-conflict city, and outpost of French colonial interests since the 18th century - required specific methodological and ethical inflections. Learning to navigate an unknown city and attempting to secure familiarity with informants despite our vastly unequal social locations demanded careful, flexible self-positioning, as well as a constant self-reflexivity. In this chapter I present the different stages and layers of my methodology. I begin by explaining how and why Abidjan emerged as the site for my research. I retrace the epistemological, ethical and political questionings that preceded my first trip to Côte d'Ivoire in November-December 2014. This pilot phase of fieldwork allowed me to familiarise myself with the city and its radio landscape, to pick out case

study stations, to refine my approach to data gathering and to adjust my lines of questioning.

I go on to detail how I operationalised and carried out embedded fieldwork in four radio stations and with two listener groups over seven months. I drew on established traditions in production and audience ethnography, while gearing my investigations to radio's points of contact with city life. This involved radical multi-sitedness (a constant and occasionally exhausting criss-crossing of the city), a precarious balance between maintaining personal familiarities and searching for new participants, the multiplication of recording methods, and above all, *listening*. In the final sections I focus on three specific challenges that I faced in the field and explain how I attempted to overcome them. The first was the set of expectations and power differentials linked to my whiteness (understood as a multi-faceted, relationally-enacted but inerasable social location). The second was an additional level of suspicion, fear or restraint on behalf of participants, linked to the post-conflict context. The third was the difficulty of navigating social differences and hierarchies in the super-diverse city.

## **4.2 - Why Abidjan?**

### 4.2.1 - Justifying an African Research Site - and a Comparative, Ethnographic Ethos

My decision to conduct fieldwork in Abidjan came from a general interest in cities, media and politics. I did not initially have Abidjan in mind when I first submitted my doctoral research proposal, but, having done historical work on black radio in the United States, I envisioned a comparative study of broadcasting and city life across Global "North" and "South." During my first-year reflections over where to ground my fieldwork, I considered a number of "candidate" cities and radio scenes across Europe, North, Central and South America, and Africa. Abidjan eventually emerged as a city in which my starting questions would resonate deeply, and in which my theoretical building-blocks promised to be productively challenged, re-arranged, even possibly dismantled. The Ivoirian metropolis' recent history of conflict and dislocation made the question of (re-)building locality especially salient, as outlined in Chapter 1. The contested politics of post-conflict social cohesion and reconciliation in Côte d'Ivoire made place more urgent as a critical, conceptual counterpoint to state and

development discourses. Abidjan's established local or proximity radio scene, furthermore, promised rich material for research and analysis. The abundant literature I found on Abidjan's history and culture (see Chapter 1) meant that I could travel to the city knowing as much about its history and social landscape, if not more, than I did about London, Paris or Detroit.<sup>22</sup>

I also picked Abidjan as a fieldwork location because I wanted to address a personal and, to a large extent, institutional blind-spot. Africa, as a whole, had very rarely featured in my curriculum at Sciences Po and the EHESS in Paris. At best, it surfaced, trace-like, in historical debates over globalisation and the Black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993; Cooper 2001) during my masters in North-American studies. Africa's absence remains the norm in much of the media, urban and social theory I have encountered over the years, despite recent calls to "globalise," "de-westernise" or "internationalise" related academic disciplines (e.g. in urban studies: Robinson 2006; Roy 2009; Edensor & Jayne 2012; in media studies: Park & Curran 2000; Thussu 2009; Willems 2014a). In picking Abidjan as a ground for research, I thus sought to challenge simultaneously my own ignorance and assumptions about urban Africa, and its academic marginalisation.

In doing so I was inspired by geographer Jennifer Robinson's (2006; 2011; 2016) reflections on comparative urbanism, which I discovered while studying with her at UCL. Her comparative approach, while much more macro-oriented than suited my own research sensibilities, offered me an entry point into African urbanism not (just) as a locus of specialised knowledge and instrumental concerns (e.g. "development"), but as a theoretical and political terrain entirely commensurate with the one I had already begun to tread. I thus approached this PhD thesis, and its *abidjanais* fieldwork, as an attempt to advance a growing and much-needed intellectual agenda: to make African urban, social and political realities integral to any comparative

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<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 1 for a more extensive discussion of scholarship on Abidjan. On the city's urban development: Haeringer 1985; Le Pape 1985; Yapi-Diahou 1986; 1990; 2000; Antoine 1987; Bonnassieux 1987; Dubresson 1989; Freund 2001; Steck 2005; 2008; Lombard 2006; Bredeloup et al. 2008; Atta et al. 2015. On Abidjan's politics: Cohen 1974; Armand 1988; Leimdorfer 1999; Bahi 2001; 2003; Marie 2002; Blé Kessé 2009, among many others. On social practices, diversity and culture in the Ivoirian metropolis: Vidal & Le Pape 1986a; 1986b; Le Pape 1997; de Latour 2001; 2005; Dembélé 2003a; 2003b; Konaté 2002; 2005; Bredeloup 2008; Newell 2012; Koenig 2014.

discussions of the contemporary. An account of what is happening in cities or in media today simply cannot do without asking what is happening in Africa and without reflecting on what this means for presumptions of equality, difference and "progress" (Comaroff & Comaroff 2012; Willems 2014a). As I saw it, working toward such an agenda had to involve both an ethnographic commitment to "writing the world from the African metropolis" (Mbembe & Nuttall 2004; also Parnell & Pieterse 2016) and a comparative mind-set open to "thinking cities through elsewhere" (Robinson 2016).

I decided against including two different fieldwork locations in this doctoral project because, to start with, this would not have allowed enough time for a mindful ethnographic inquiry. In addition, Abidjan's diverse urban landscape and lively radio scene allowed me to select four case studies within a single city (see below, and Annex 1). Even without a cross-continental perspective, however, my research remains comparative by virtue of its interdisciplinary theoretical dialogue. One way to put it is to say that my research grew with different imagined audiences in mind, for which I tried to build a single room of mutual intelligibility. My own pluri-disciplinary training had cemented my belief that there is immense value in looking and exchanging across disciplinary and geographic areas of knowledge. I have learned in this project from anthropology, sociology, geography, political philosophy, area and development studies, and of course media and communications. While I cannot do justice to each discipline's canon and epistemological specificities, I have attempted to highlight how they might complement each other and find productive echoes or "frictions" (Tsing 2005) in addressing what I consider to be fundamental contemporary issues: the opportunities for meaningful, collective emplacement, and mediated attempts by the powerful to constrict the horizons of everyday life.

Beyond academia, I have found it crucial and beneficial to make - or attempt to make - my research intelligible to friends, participants and colleagues in a variety of contexts. This is of course a central tenet of ethnography. Some of my initial ideas about the project were luckily challenged by research participants and abandoned when it became clear that they made very little sense in the scope of *abidjanais'* own "popular research" for meaning and livelihood (Simone 2012). The assumption that participants would want to reflect and converse on the aesthetic pleasures of radio, for example, was challenged by the fact that radio's aesthetic "resonances" (Schulz 2014)

mattered precisely because they could remain an un-thought background to listeners' daily search for new opportunities and a more secure future. It was only when radio shifted into a level of active popular research - promising new proximities and social connections - that participants could reflect on what radio brought to their lives.

Also inflecting my ethnographic ethos was a prior understanding that academic research has much to gain from comparing its own modes and aims of knowledge production with those of the non-academic world. Before I started the PhD, place-making was for me a practical and political project thought together with community planners and popular education activists in London and Paris. Throughout my doctoral work, I benefitted from conversations with people in my south London neighbourhood who considered themselves "local activists" or "engaged residents"; their questioning and reflections on the meaning of place in their lives further reinforced my commitment to anchoring academic concerns to those of ordinary citizens. This explains why, as reluctant as I am to offer certainties and "expertise" in this project, I conclude my thesis with recommendations regarding radio regulation in Côte d'Ivoire.

I firmly believe that thinking from Abidjan can inform conversations about urban issues in London, and vice versa. For me, comparison, even at such an implicit or theoretical level, has thrown clarifying light on the vastly different qualities of everyday life and political rule in London and Abidjan - but equally threw up similarities in the ways urban residents think about place and politics. A comparative mind-set further urged me to keep in sight each vantage point's historically produced position in uneven "power geometries" (Massey 1993; 1994). This is another tenet of ethnography, which has led the way in demonstrating the value of reflexive positioning in research, and of interrogating the influence of power differentials in producing both "data" and its representation. I return to this point in Section 4.4 below.

#### 4.2.2 - First Encounters with the City: Pilot Research (November-December 2014)

In order to confirm the suitability of Abidjan as a fieldwork site I organised an initial research visit in early November 2014. The aims of this pilot trip were to familiarise myself with the city, scope out the proximity radio scene (since none of the radios I

had managed to identify were audible online), make contacts amongst radio producers and listeners, and generally assess whether I could negotiate access to a wide enough variety of sites and social fields to carry out more embedded research.

The first contact I obtained was for Sylvie, a senior *animatrice* on Radio ATM in the southern, coastal municipality of Port-Bouët (see station and area descriptions in Annex 1). I had obtained Sylvie's email through Danielle, a French (white) freelance correspondent for international news outlets in Abidjan. Danielle had met Sylvie during a training workshop but, rather tellingly, Danielle dismissed proximity radio stations as "predominantly religious and providing (far) too much air-time to greedy mystics who give advice to cure AIDS" (email correspondence, 16/09/2014). My first hours of radio listening in Abidjan confirmed that mystics - *tradi-praticiens*, as they are called in Côte d'Ivoire - did indeed feature prominently on the city's airwaves, but that they were far outweighed by music and talk shows of various kinds (most often personal advice, humour/games or sports commentary). Danielle's comments alerted me early on to a continuing divide between the "African" and "Euro-American" city, largely inherited, in its spatiality and mutual regard, from the colonial era (Le Pape 1997; Freund 2001; Coquery-Vidrovitch 2006; 2014). This was confirmed when I reached out to some radio stations in spatially or socially peripheral areas (e.g. Abobo, Attécoubé, Adjamé), where producers were initially perplexed that a white researcher was interested in their work. The divide between white and African quarters in Abidjan also meant that my everyday movements through the city were the object of much curiosity and commentary on the street.

Prior to arrival in Abidjan, I had found a list of radio frequencies in the metropolitan area<sup>23</sup> and had distinguished proximity radio stations from state, commercial or religious broadcasters (see Annex 2). On my second day in the city, I purchased a portable radio from a near-deserted commercial centre, and scanned the airwaves from my first flat in the new-built, low-rise, middle-class residential tracts of Riviéra Bonoumin. I struggled to pick up several proximity radio frequencies. This remained the case even when I moved to a fourth-floor apartment almost exactly at the geographical centre of Abidjan (*220 Logements* estate, Adjamé - see Figure 1 and

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<sup>23</sup> <http://worldradiomap.com/ci/abidjan>

Figure 4). It quickly became clear that: 1) proximity radio stations varied significantly in broadcasting power, which geographically limited their potential audience; 2) Abidjan's airwaves were saturated (there was a striking amount of frequency overlaps); 3) proximity stations had a broadly similar programming ethos, with some pronounced inflections in a few cases (see Annex 1). The broad similarities in proximity broadcasting content were confirmed when I was able to obtain schedules in different stations. Producers attributed these similarities to proximity radio's regulatory remit - the *cahier des charges* to which all stations were beholden - but also to the regular poaching of staff and ideas between stations in the city.

I met Sylvie in Radio ATM on November 10, 2014. After introductions, Sylvie agreed to an interview in which she retraced her (15 year) career at the radio station, reflected on changes in her practice and in the context of proximity broadcasting, and offered a detailed account of how place surfaced, as an object of concern or a resource for content production, in the station's programming. Sylvie's account suggested that I would need to alter my interview strategy quite significantly (see following section). She introduced me to the rest of station staff, ensuring that Radio ATM would remain one of my bases for participant observation. Because she was active in the national Union of Proximity Radio stations (URPCI), she gave me contacts in every station in the city. Within a month, I had managed to visit all of them except two and had interviewed at least one senior figure in each (though hierarchy was far from clear in many stations).

#### 4.2.3 - Selecting Case Study Stations

Following my first phase of fieldwork, I selected four stations to be case studies for further participant observation: Radio ATM in Port-Bouët, Radio Fraternité in Yopougon, Radio Téré in Adjamé, and Radio Arc-en-Ciel in Abobo (see map in the Introduction and Annex 1). The fact that proximity radio stations all operated according to broadly similar principles allowed me to select these case studies based on the following variables:

- Public/private ownership: In 2014, four proximity radio stations were officially owned by the *mairie* (municipal authority) in the district from which they



operated. The rest were owned by private individuals and organisations. Two, Radio Téré and Radio N'Gowa in Koumassi, ambiguously straddled the ownership divide. Nominally, Téré is owned by an association of local traders, but as I eventually discovered the station "belongs" to the mayor of Adjamé, Youssouf Sylla. N'Gowa (which I did not manage to visit) is allegedly private but operates from within the town hall in Koumassi. I sought case studies that would allow me to see both sides of the public/private ownership structure - including, in Téré's case, the murky overlaps between political and private interests.

- Geography: The four *communes* in which I picked my case studies cover distinct areas of Abidjan and exemplify its diversity. Abobo and Yopougon are sprawling and in parts peri-urban, while Port-Bouët and Adjamé are much smaller and far less populated. Adjamé and Yopougon are both urban centralities, if not in actual location then in their commercial and cultural attraction (see, for Yopougon, Steck 2008); Abobo and Port-Bouët, for their very different size, are largely residential and peripheral to the city's hubs of social activity. All four municipal districts are part of Abidjan's *quartiers populaires*, designating working-class residential, commercial and leisure spaces. Yet they are also internally very varied: all of them include pockets of precarious, informal housing as well as more middle-class tracts (with all the limits of this designation - see Toh et al. 2009; also Section 4.4).
- History and popular representations: Established "popular cartographies" (Moyer 2004) give different areas of Abidjan distinct social, cultural and political characteristics, in many residents' minds. While these cartographies only sketchily match the city's density, diversity and socio-spatial complexity, they nonetheless have cohered into stable representations, place-discourses and geographic self-identifications. These popular cartographies have undeniably been shaped by the Ivoirian conflict: residents often described neighbourhoods as having been "badly hit" or having "suffered," pointing to the ways in which experiences of violence and division had suffused socio-spatial narratives of the city. For my case studies, I picked stations in four *communes* that had salient popular identities and histories of conflict (see Annex 1 for a

fuller description). This gave conversations about place additional substance - since there were many representations to discuss with inhabitants - and additional urgency. Put another way, it allowed me to contextualise and enrich the post-conflict operations of proximity radio stations in dialogue with a multiplicity of lively, anxious, contested and contradictory everyday conversations about the local (at municipal or neighbourhood scale).

- Political identities: I picked districts whose party-political identities were presumed to be at odds, in case this would have an influence on residents' sense of place and on radio stations' approach to their broadcasting territory. This influence was palpable in each case but far from straightforward. What emerged was less a pattern than four distinct scenarios demonstrating the sheer complexity of articulations between place and party politics (Annex 1).
- Personal rapport: Because I wanted to carry out embedded participant observation, I picked case study stations where I felt personal rapport - or as George Marcus (1997) puts it, "complicity" - might be easier. Two considerations came into play here. First, my first initial contact with station staff. While I was welcomed in each station I visited, in some I was met with a noticeable dose of wariness, while others were more enthusiastic about my research project. I wanted to make sure I did not make anyone uncomfortable, and especially that station managers would be willing to let me engage with their staff. The importance of this became clear when, in one of my case studies, the manager suddenly became suspicious of my inquiries and actively discouraged his staff from talking to me. By then, however, I had developed close connections with most staff members. They went out of their way to meet me outside the station and keep me informed of station activities. (The manager's sudden reluctance, I learned, had to do with shadowy accounting practices and the exploitative treatment of staff.) The second consideration that came into play in terms of personal rapport was what could be called station "ambiance." Some of the stations were so under-staffed that, when I visited, there was barely anyone to talk to apart from a secretary and a technician. Others were run in such a business-like and hierarchical way that there appeared to be little scope for anyone "hanging around" after their show had

ended. The case studies I picked all prided themselves on being "a family" - a trope of radio kinship (Englund 2015) that I further discuss in Chapter 5. Simply put, the stations valued and fostered conviviality *outside* the studio, where staff regularly spent time together, elaborated projects, welcomed guests or passers-by, and more generally, were open to conversations of all kinds.



**Figure 1 - The 220 Logements Estate, Adjame**

The 220 Logements complex was built over three decades from the late 1950s, initially as housing reserved for public sector employees (some even say, for white colonial officials). The estate is located at the very geographical centre of Abidjan, making the link between the business district (Le Plateau) and the hyper-dense trading district of Adjame. After the semi-public companies that built the 220 Logements went bust in the 1980s, the estate fell under resident management, very loosely formalised and often fractious. The presence of low-ranking public sector employees and of a university residence meant that the 220 Logements was a hotspot for pro-FPI militancy, alienating many of the estate's Muslim/Northern/foreign residents, and leading to brutal retaliatory violence after the fall of Laurent Gbagbo.

### **4.3 - Multiplying Sites and Modes of Engagement: A Mixed-Method Ethnographic Approach**

Radio is a notoriously difficult medium to research (Alasuutari 1997). Not only does its aural content often vanish without a trace after the broadcast occasion (more on this below), but, as discussed in Chapter 2, radio is often best apprehended as a continuous flow of talk and music whose everydayness can make it a background to social life rather than a point of active engagement. This means that, in relation to audiences especially, it is crucial to capture radio in the flow of everyday life itself. Interviews, however flowing and candid they may have been, were simply not enough to grasp what people did with radio. I thus adopted a multi-method ethnographic approach combining interviews, participant observation, variously staged group conversations, radio listening, broader media monitoring, and the deep reflexivity required by ethnographic engagement (Coffey 1999; Wacquant 2002; 2008; 2009).

The city, furthermore, is a difficult terrain for ethnographic research (e.g. Hannerz 1980; Buire 2012; Ocejó 2013; Parnell & Pieterse 2016). It constantly eschews attempts to pin it down as a singular space, or a single and bounded locale (Hall 2015a). Abidjan is characterised by ethno-religious "super-diversity," requiring additional efforts to find out who one is speaking with, how their perspective might be inflected by their social identity, and whose perspectives one *hasn't* been engaging with. While urban ethnography rarely makes claims to generalisability, it remained important for me - given what many people considered to be the "ethnic" dimension of recent conflict - to pre-empt biases in perspective that might have emerged out of single-group engagement. Last but not least, the multi-scalar nature of urban place and the diffuse geographies of broadcasting meant that I had to quite literally cover a lot of ground. To answer to these challenges I combined what Suzi Hall (2015a) calls a "trans-ethnography" of urban place as a locus of diversity, with the more established tradition of multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995; Falzon 2009). While this radical multi-sitedness prevented a certain depth in embeddedness, I argue it was the only way to "imagine the whole" (Marcus 1989) of radio and city. As I discuss below, the incessant movement between sites offered both safeguards and constraints. It was given coherence by constant note-taking and above all *listening* (Back 2007): one ear

to the airwaves, and one to the chatter of *radio-trottoir* (Ellis 1989; Nlandu-Tsasa 1997; Burrell 2013).

#### 4.3.1 - Bringing About Different Kinds of Talk

##### *4.3.1.a - Interviews*

I spent my first month in Abidjan learning how to get around the city and conducting semi-structured interviews with producers in different radio stations (see Annex 4A). In the first few interviews, I asked participants immediately upon meeting them whether they would be willing to be recorded (though I told them I could return at a later date). I always began with the same question: "How did you get into proximity radio?" This opening allowed me to get insights from life histories, though it let participants decide how much or how little they wanted to share. The stories were often rich and gripping narratives, sometimes outright surprising. When relevant, I used aspects of life histories to spur further conversation when it did not spontaneously flow. In keeping with my research questions, interviews included prompts dedicated to place, to radio routines, and to the points of contact between media practices and city life. Conversations ranged anywhere between 45 minutes and nearly three hours, depending on the interlocutor's disposition. Following John Law's (2004; also Sin 2003) remarks on the informative "messiness" of interview situations, I took careful notes of interruptions and sudden changes in situation, as well as how interviewees reacted to particular questions or themes in their body language and tone (visible in transcription where relevant - see Annex 7). I also let interviewees pick their interview location, which itself led to some instructive choices.

I very quickly brought changes to my interview approach. First, it became clear that asking for written consent (through pre-printed consent forms) made most interviewees ill at ease. Participants who had been forthright and jovial suddenly became subdued and showed signs of wariness. This unease was even more manifest during listener interviews (see Annex 4B). Consent forms added a layer of "officialness" to interviews, confirming power differentials already embodied in skin colour (see below), and introducing suspicions of hidden bureaucratic agendas (see Bell 2014; Tittensor 2016). Written forms so distorted inter-personal relations and

inflected interview conversations that I opted for oral (recorded) consent. During the interviews themselves, I also realised that direct questions about participants' personal opinions, impressions or feelings were much less engaging than the elicitation of narratives and anecdotes. It thus became all the more important to ask about life events and situations, or get participants to describe the sequence of a talk show or discussion they'd listened to - rather than what they'd thought about it. Such narratives allowed jump-cuts and associations that my own prompts would never have been able to conjure.

As I began to weave interviews into ethnographic "hanging out" at radio stations or in listeners' neighbourhoods, many of the later interviews I conducted were with people I had already informally interacted with. These interviews were not always easier. For some participants, existing mutual knowledge made conversation less intimidating and more equal (they could challenge me about things I had previously said or bring up my own witnessing of past situations). Other participants, however (both producers and listeners), were noticeably put off by the idea of having to talk on record after having so casually exchanged in the past.

Interviews, as is well established, simply do not yield the same kind of talk as informal participant observation. I nonetheless attempted to carry out at least one recorded interview with each participant I got to know personally, for several reasons. First, interviews sometimes did establish additional personal rapport, creating a context of heightened intimacy and leading to a level of self-disclosure that had not surfaced in prior interactions (see Livingstone 2010). This did not happen systematically, of course, but on enough occasions to justify the continued relevance of interviews. Second, the fact that interviews were recorded and involved formalised back-and-forth encouraged participants to make their narratives as detailed, as precise and as verifiable as possible. On a few occasions, it allowed them to back-track on previous exaggerations or imprecisions. Third, interview recordings allowed me to remember voices and to return to the context of conversations, which was very useful during the months of subsequent analysis.

#### *4.3.1.b - Participant Observation*

Organising participant observation was both easy and, at times, very difficult. As mentioned above, the four stations I asked to grant me access as a participant observer did so without much hesitation. Though it was not always comfortable, at first, to spend days at a station when there was not much to do (which was regularly the case in the two lesser-staffed stations, Radio Arc-en-Ciel and Radio Téré), I quickly became familiar enough as a presence to insert myself into conversations or to simply linger at the mixing console.

Spending time at each station was crucially informative, but not for the reasons I had anticipated. I initially focused on the studio, which I thought would be the major site of interaction and data recording. What turned out to be much more interesting was the sociality that took place *outside* the studio. Each station had an external social space in which producers discussed personal and professional matters, entertained guests, or simply started conversations with strangers. In Radio Arc-en-Ciel, it was a small hut just outside the station's turquoise wall; the hut looked onto a two-lane road leading out of the city (towards suburban Adzopé) and, across the road, the working-class neighbourhood of N'dotré (see Figure 3). In Radio Fraternité Yopougon, I spent hours in the open-air café just outside the studio where producers watched TV, held meetings, had drinks and occasionally tried to schmooze municipal administrators coming in from nearby offices. Radio Téré was built on top of a similar café (see Figure 2), in which station staff had their meals and commented on the bustling street-life of Williamsville, Adjamé (the surrounding neighbourhood). The fact that local political and commercial "big men" often met in the café's more secluded corners only made hanging around more informative. In Port-Bouët, finally, the station was relatively removed from the street (it was part of a municipal culture and leisure complex, the Centre Pilote), but staff members invariably met for extended lunches and drinks in the plethora of small bars and restaurants tucked in nearby alleyways.

In these spaces around the studio, talk was frank, fast, sometimes rowdy, and often difficult for me to capture entirely. Taking notes in such interactions was not always permitted. I stopped writing notes in Radio Arc-en-Ciel after an episode during which producers interrupted their (political) conversation the moment I took out my notebook. As I gradually became more of a taken-for-granted presence, my note-taking was the butt of many jokes. I opted for written notes rather than sound



recording because the visibility of note-writing mitigated the fact that I could not always gain informed consent from everyone involved in a conversation.



**Figure 2 - Radio Téré, Williamsville, Adjamé**

The radio station occupied the first floor, above a lively café. Producers spent many hours either in the café, or at the balconies observing the street - occasionally intervening if they spotted theft or disorderly conduct.

My participation in radio activities was limited but I regularly contributed to preparatory meetings for on-air shows, live events, or internal management. Most informatively, I accompanied producers on errands, *reportages*, and the myriad side-activities through which they secured a living (what producers called *gombos*) in the absence of stable and sufficient wages (as inspired by Englund 2011; Pype 2013). Following producers - and later listeners - around the city in their more or less routine tasks provided me better insight into their disposition to urban life, and alerted me to the fundamental importance of encounters in living out radio sociability (see Chapter 5).

The difficulties of ethnographic hanging out arose gradually. As mentioned, one station manager became hostile to my presence at the station. More broadly, some producers were reluctant to let me join meetings with guests or follow them on *reportages* because that would make me privy to "off the books" tariff negotiations -



small commissions station staff often relied on for survival, but which were frowned upon by managers.



**Figure 3 - Radio Arc-en-Ciel, N'dotr , Abobo**

Producers spent much time under the small hut at the entrance of the station, from where they could monitor what happens on the busy road. Passers-by, be they friends, listeners or strangers, often stopped by for a chat.

One of the main dilemmas I faced was how to establish a schedule that would allow me to visit four sites regularly without becoming exhausted (especially since long days would often end with long evenings) (on the complexities of multi-sited, media-related fieldwork see Couldry 2003; Burrell 2009). I tried to devise a research programme that would allow me to visit each case-study station at different days, thereby covering the full week of scheduling, while keeping my visits frequent enough to remain "in the loop," so to speak, of each station's often impromptu or last-minute activities. Initially, I spent two- or three-day periods with each station, but this proved unmanageable. I then decided to spend one full week at a time in each station, but this required rebuilding relationships after each three-week period of absence. In the lived time of *abidjanais* social relationships, three weeks is an eternity: "It's been two days!" is a phrase routinely used to reproach someone their lack of interaction. While for most *abidjanais* residents, "* a fait deux jours*" is just an expression, the desirability of my presence and my limited time in Abidjan made some participants very anxious when

I failed to reach out for days at a time (more on this below). The experience of multi-sited engagement with producers informed my decision to limit my audience research (which began in March 2015 but became most active in June-September) to two *communes*, Abobo and Yopougon. I also elected to spend two weeks at a time in each municipal district.

In keeping with a *neighbourhood*-focused tradition of urban ethnography (e.g. Gans 1962; Hannerz 1969; Anderson 1992; Venkatesh 2000; 2006; Konings & Foeken 2006; Postill 2008; Wacquant 2008; Ross 2010; Newell 2012), I attempted to pick a specific neighbourhood in each district in which to embed myself. While a single-neighbourhood approach would not have mirrored radio's dispersed listenership, I thought it might more closely capture the everyday rhythms and routines of *abidjanais* residents' lives (that is, of listeners, their friends, family and neighbours). I asked listeners with whom I had developed emerging friendships to host me, offering to pay rent, but all of them refused. It turned out - and this was pointed out to me by an Ivoirian friend and fellow researcher, Clay - that participants thought their home would not be suitable to my (presumed) elevated standards. Rather than press listeners for access to their homes, I decided to drop plans for neighbourhood embeddedness (I spent a lot of time developing relationships in my neighbourhood of Adjamé *220 Logements*, but did not meet any proximity radio listeners there). I focused instead on day-time hanging out and offered to meet away from home when I sensed participants were reluctant to disclose their living conditions.

Overall, my approach to participant observation was "trans-ethnographic" (Hall 2015a). By trans-ethnography, urbanist Suzi Hall means a constant back-and-forth between scales of ethnographic engagement and interpretation. Trans-ethnography requires drawing connections, together with residents, between the micro spaces of intimate exchange, the meso level of "place," understood as a space shared with partially-known others, and the macro level of representational scripts and political-economic ordering. For Hall, a feedback loop between these levels of inquiry and analysis allows researchers to capture urban locality as it is produced through multi-scalar processes, mediations, and urban dwellers' own incessant mobilities - movements to and fro through which they often seek to expand the scope of their local (see also Simone 2005a; 2005b; Malaquais 2005; Konings & Foeken 2006; Moores &

Metykova 2009). Other challenges I met during participant observation came from being white - *le blanc*, singular, since I was always the only white person in any context of interaction - but I discuss these challenges in more detail below.

#### *4.3.1.c - Focus Groups*

I had not initially intended to use focus groups as a methodology, because I thought the spontaneous group discussions emerging as part of my participant observation would be enough. Nonetheless, I decided to conduct six focus groups in the final week of my audience-related fieldwork (see Annex 4C) in order to "test" my findings with specific social categories that, for a variety of reasons, I had not reached very effectively through individual interviews (see Section 4.4.3). These social categories included:

- Young people (under 25; with and without a degree)
- Women (over and under 25)
- Explicitly politicised individuals (RDR and FPI tendencies)

The focus groups were organised in Yopougon and Abobo with the help of listeners (and one intern at Radio Fraternité Yopougon) I had become friends with. In three instances, I knew the focus groups would involve a majority of Malinké speakers and asked Clay, a fellow PhD researcher whom I have mentioned above, to help with translation. In the end, he could not adequately translate the exchanges as they were taking place, since they were often too rapid, but participants always offered a summary of what had been said when they spoke in Malinké. Clay confirmed that I had not missed any of the substance of what had been said, though I undeniably missed the nuance of jokes, puns, proverbs and innuendos.

The focus groups were mostly lively and informative, with five lasting well over two hours. Clay's extensive experience in qualitative field research (for himself, for donor-sponsored projects, and for a number of established foreign academics) ensured participants were at ease and conversations flowing. I used a very simplified version of my individual interview schedules to lead discussions, allowing ample room for back and forth and spontaneous re-directions (see Lunt & Livingstone 1996). I focused on the following themes:

- The media landscape in relation to urban dynamics (in particular, to the circulation of information)
- Municipal issues, modes and modalities of local participation (at all scales)
- Politics at all scales
- Reconciliation and post-conflict everyday life

The focus groups confirmed and consolidated interpretations I had begun to form from interviews and field notes. Most immediately, they confirmed the influence of gender, political identity, and to a lesser extent age and "class" (or educational capital) on people's relation to media, place and politics - as well as in their relation to me as a researcher (see Section 4.4.3). The focus groups yielded many fascinating discussions but my attempts at recording them were only partially successful: because the discussions all took place in open-air contexts and in mostly large groups (two had 8 participants and two had more than 10), the recordings are inaudible in many parts. It did not matter so much because I had not set up the focus groups to yield quotes so much as general perspectives. I wanted to see whether narratives and opinions I had picked up over seven months would be questioned not just by myself, but by peers within the same social group.

#### *4.3.1.d - Listening to the City*

Ethnography involves developing an acute "sense of place" (Feld & Basso 1996; Pink 2009; Hall 2012; Rhys-Taylor 2013) and what sociologist Les Back (2007) calls an ethnographic "art of listening." Participant observation in Abidjan was indeed an intensely aural experience. Listening, as an exploratory practice, most basically involved following and recording a very wide range of conversations. But this apparently simple recording activity required me to significantly adjust my "listening habitus" (Becker 2010; also Levin 1989; Born 2010). It took me weeks, first of all, to adjust my bodily disposition to a new urban soundscape (Schafer 1994; Arquette 2004). Beyond registering sounds and relating them to sensory orders of urban space (Atkinson 2007; 2011; Labelle 2010), I had to find my bearings in new aural textures of social space (Hall et al. 2008). For example, I had to adapt my listening dispositions to follow conversations in what I found to be extremely loud environments. Because Ivoirian bars and social spaces are most often open to the street, the volume at which

they play music is overbearing by "Western" standards. The effort involved in talking and listening in such contexts often left me drained after a few hours - yet these bars were prime sites for social affairs in the Ivoirian metropolis. Listening to the radio, as mentioned, sometimes involved straining to hear through layers of interference, piecing together conversation flows in the crackle (this was particularly true for Radio Arc-en-Ciel, located at the north-western edge of the city, and equipped with limited broadcasting power - see Figure 4). In addition to its sensory dimensions, listening involved an ethical dimension, akin to what Tanja Dreher (2009; drawing on Bickford 1996; also Back 2007) calls "listening across difference." Listening meant developing ways of carrying conversations that avoided imposing my experiential schemas and expectations, as well as being attentive to the ways inequality and difference imprinted themselves on social exchange - an issue I return to in Section 4.4.2.



**Figure 4 - The Technicalities of Radio Listening**

From my room in the 220 Logements, I could only pick up Abobo's Radio Arc-en-Ciel if I tilted my mobile phone against the window's metal frame.

Returning to listening's practical components of following and recording, I obviously kept an ear out for what was happening on radio. Sounding out the city through its cluttered airwaves, in the first days of my arrival in Abidjan, remains one of the most vividly imaginative urban experiences I have ever had. Even seven months in, tuning

in still led to surprises. I kept encountering odd programmes on frequencies I could not identify, both because my dial was too imprecise and because no one, in the studio, would bother to clarify who was speaking and from where. I set aside two hours every day for radio listening and note-taking, in addition to the morning talk shows (6-10am) I quasi-systematically woke with. In the end, however, broadcast programmes did not become a central part of my data collection and analysis. There are three reasons for this. The first is that it was often difficult for me to obtain recordings. Although all stations were required by law to keep at least three months' archives on their computers, chaotic file organising and the recurring breakdown of computer systems meant that my collection of recordings was un-systematic. Second, few shows were continuously relevant for my research questions. While place and city life were regular objects of focus on some programmes (e.g. "Social Plus" on Radio Fraternité Yopougon, a show dedicated to social and developmental issues such as infrastructure, environment and governance), these shows themselves were irregularly produced - varying wildly in emphasis and sometimes off-air for weeks at a time (when the lead producer was ill or travelling, for example). In other words, there was no single programme that fully captured or exemplified proximity radio stations' contributions to city life. This is consistent with the fact that radio can be apprehended as a continuous flow of content, which is the third reason I do not primarily work from recorded programmes. I use the transcript of a particularly salient show on neighbourhood reconciliation in Chapters 6 and 7, and detail a phone-in language segment in Chapter 5, but overall radio content remains a *background* to my argument.

Beyond my individual experience of tuning in, the quasi-public nature of radio listening in African cities (Fardon & Furniss 2000; Larkin 2008; Gunner et al. 2011; Englund 2011; Bessire & Fisher 2012) led me to stop and listen whenever I picked up radio voices during my walks around the city. Asking people what they were listening to was an obvious conversation starter that led to exchanges with artisans, taxi drivers, bar owners or patrons, and market traders. One surprising finding, from these non-systematic interactions, was that many people simply had no idea what they were listening to. This fit with many of my interviewees' claim that they had started listening to a particular radio station out of sheer chance - a happy encounter in the ether.

By listening, I also mean paying attention to the "talk of the city" - or as Stephen Ellis (1989) put it, "tuning in to pavement radio."<sup>24</sup> In Abidjan as elsewhere in urban Africa, residents rely on street discussions to gain a sense of what is going on in the city, the country and the world. From street discussions, urban dwellers *collect* information from interpersonal networks and variously reliable media outlets; they *debate* the veracity of news and claims (as one focus group participant called it, "*on chauffe*" - meaning "we put it on the burner"); and in turn, they *spread* information amongst friends, neighbours or strangers happening to stop by. In Abidjan, the role of street discussion spaces for political talk is well documented. Yacouba Konaté (2005) writes that open-air bars (*maquis*) and mini-buses were crucial spaces of vernacular political discussion under Houphouët-Boigny's single-party regime. During the intensely polarised crisis years, in Abidjan, street discussion spaces became an intense battleground for the spread of ideas and the control over public talk (Banégas & Cutolo 2012; Silué 2012; Vincourt & Kouyaté 2012; Tsolakis 2016). Through friends and participants, I was frequently invited to sit, listen and debate in such street discussion spaces. In particular, I regularly attended *grins* (predominantly Muslim and male gatherings centred around tea or coffee - Vincourt & Kouyaté 2012; Tsolakis 2016) and Scrabble clubs (which attracted educated and politicised young men). There, I could hear news and analyses very rarely (if ever) featured on non-pavement radio.

Outside of relatively formalised spaces such as *grins* and Scrabble clubs, I kept a constant ear out for any conversation about radio and place in bars, restaurants and markets (drawing on Hobart's [2006] emphasis on ordinary *commentary* as a prime object of analysis for media anthropologists). Spontaneous discussions with strangers about current events and rumours - the two being indistinguishable in pavement radio - yielded tremendous insight into how *abidjanais* residents used media, how they kept abreast of information, and how discrepant the noise of the street could be from the routines of radio news. As Ellis remarks about pavement radio, and as many of my

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<sup>24</sup> *Radio-trottoir* in francophone Africa. Allegedly, pavement radio is referred to as *Radio-Treichville* (currently the name of a proximity radio station) in Côte d'Ivoire, though I myself have never heard that expression. It is entirely possible, given the historic importance of Treichville: the dense and diverse municipal district was Abidjan's original "African quarter," where colonised elites were first allowed to own property, and where much anti-colonial activism originated (see Le Pape 1997; Freund 2001; Konaté 2005). The *abidjanais* residents I met simply called pavement radio "rumour" and "hearsay" (*les on-dit*).

informants confirmed, rumour, hearsay and interpersonally-exchanged information are treated with much ambivalence (even suspicion) by urban residents. Leaving aside debates about the morality and reliability of pavement radio, I have found it useful to consider what it circulates, what representations of the social world it constructs, and what material effects it can have in the flows of city life (see Malaquais 2005; Burrell 2013).

[Figure 5 has been removed in this electronic copy to protect participants' privacy.]



[Figure 6 has been removed from this electronic copy to protect participants' privacy.]

#### 4.3.2 - (Small) Media Ethnography Across the Audience-Producer Divide

The aim of multi-sited ethnography was to be able to provide a full account of proximity radio as one of many mediations making up everyday life in Abidjan. This required engaging with both producers and audiences - something too few studies of "small media" have set out to do (Couldry 2010: 25-26; also Scott & Dietz 2016). I suspect this is because many studies of community, citizens' or alternative media often set out to "defend" their object of research as both worthy of attention and politically or socially progressive (for such an explicit defence, see Rodriguez 2001; 2011). When the stakes of promoting community media's social and political value are so high, audience research threatens to "expose" a small or only casually engaged listenership. An audience only passingly and passively interested in community radio would complicate academics' and activists' claims about the fundamental civic/democratic value of such media organisations. Limited audience numbers would play into the argument that small media can be dismissed because their "impact," in the quantified world of policy valuations, is negligible. In sum, when studying small, precarious and well-meaning media organisations, it is ethically tricky as a researcher to go "beyond the presumption of attention" (Couldry et al. 2010).

My attempt to resolve this dilemma has been two-pronged. First, methodologically, I refused audience quantification and placed a great deal of trust in audience ethnography's searching, non-judgmental yet empathetic gaze. Inspired by work on audiences in media studies, anthropology and sociology (e.g. Ang 1991; 1995; Silverstone 1994; Spitulnik 1996; 2000; Barber 1997; 2006; Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998; Alasuutari 1999; Bird 2003; Dayan 2005; Abu-Lughod 2004; Okome 2007; Englund 2011; Nightingale 2011; Butsch & Livingstone 2013; Newell & Okome 2014; Willems & Mano 2017a), I was certain that discussions with listeners would provide

rich accounts of proximity radio's meaning in their everyday lives - though I did not presume that these meanings would match normative notions (e.g. "empowerment," voice, etc.) found in community/citizens' media studies.

Second, as discussed in my theoretical framework, I approach place and place-based mediation in terms of its *potential* to foster familiarity, encounter, and place-based projects. There are plenty of reasons to think that proximity radio stations can produce meaningful forms of togetherness out of shared space (Chapter 2). But there is nothing automatic about the proximities of place, and administrative attempts to force and codify closeness often end up being constraining and counter-productive (Chapter 3). Approaching proximity radio stations and their role in the production of locality in terms of their potential meant that I did not refrain from being critical but retained the possibility of things being different. Thus, even when research participants revealed themselves to be minimally engaged (or sometimes not at all - see below) with proximity radio, I sought to understand what *potential* they might envision for the medium in their lives, and urged them to reflect on why this potential could not yet be fulfilled. I asked questions like: "What do you think proximity radio stations *should* do for residents of Abobo? Can they do more? Why or why not?" The use of potentiality as a line of questioning is inspired by recent, critical and speculative work on city and media futures, not least Simone's work on "the city yet to come" (2004a; 2016) and anthropological writings on African conceptions of the future (e.g. Ferguson 1999; Guyer 2007; Melly 2009; Lachenal & Mbodj-Pouye 2014; Goldstone & Obarrio 2016). It ensured that my questioning would not limit itself to the level of appreciation for proximity radio but would capture more broadly the aspirations and latent in the very notions of urban place and media.

My ethnographic approach meant I did not discriminate between various "types" of producers and audiences but rather sought to understand their own, complex proximity to radio. I found it just as informative to interview producers who had been involved in proximity radio since its inception in the late 1990s as I did interns whose involvement in radio was often happenstance - a pit-stop in their difficult quest to for a secure future. On the audience side of things, situations were a bit more difficult to navigate. I was first faced with the problem of listeners inflating their own engagement with proximity radio in order to "please" me. My first listener interview was with

Franck, a taxi driver in Port-Bouët who had been listening to Radio ATM when he happened to pick me up at the airport in February 2015. When we later met up for a recorded interview (for which Franck asked if I would be "bringing cameras"), I realised Franck was very anxious to make it seem as though he listened to ATM frequently and knew the stations' activities inside and out - even when it was clear, from my slight probing, that he did not. This alerted me to the importance of focusing, in interviews, on specific instances of engagement with radio - specific shows, call-in interactions, moments of the day, live events... - rather than attempt to generate an overall account of listenership. In addition, I attempted to lessen the pressure of demonstrating proximity radio listenership by asking about media use and everyday life more broadly. A key aspect of this revised inquiry was situating radio listening within a complex arrangement of social interrelations, rather than approaching it as an individualised and self-centred activity (Englund 2011: 176; drawing on Spitulnik 2000). Another aspect was asking about how particular social issues and stories (e.g., an incidence of crime, disruption or social success) might relate to media, rather than starting from media stories themselves. Not incidentally, such an approach allowed me to better situate proximity radio in what Don Slater (2014) calls a "communicative ecology" of the city, understanding what stories proximity radio did or did not circulate, and was *expected* to circulate.

I also thought I might lessen interviewees' anxiety by targeting active listener groups. I learned that both Radio Fraternité Yopougon and Radio Arc-en-Ciel in Abobo had *listeners' clubs*, and prioritised them for my audience research (see Annex 4B). The semi-formalised, public nature of "club" listenership, I thought, would make the question of audience "engagement" easier to settle and therefore allow listeners to more comfortably reflect on radio's meaning in their lives. I did not anticipate that members of listeners' club could be much more interested in the social benefits of club membership itself than in radio. In Yopougon, in particular, the "listening clubs" (*clubs d'écoute*) set up in many neighbourhoods of the *commune* were often made up of young people for whom membership promised a vague sense of opportunity and social connection, but who did not feel very "close" to the radio itself. This was a crucial finding in its own right, informing my analysis of a "sociability of encounter" in Chapter 5. But it also meant I had to revise my audience engagement plan to include *non-listeners* (Gray & Murray 2016; Wyche & Baumer 2017): people for whom

proximity radio was more of an idea (positive or negative) than an actual part of their everyday life. As mentioned, the inclusion of non-listeners was itself informative, since it gave me a better sense of how *abidjanais* residents conceived of the potentialities of proximity radio. As time went on, and as I supplemented interviews with repeated informal conversations, some "distant" listeners and non-listeners got more actively involved with proximity radio and documented their own discoveries for me. In any case, the inclusion of non-listeners fit within the open-ended nature of my ethnographic approach (what I describe above as listening to the city). It allowed me to document a highly variegated landscape of media-related proximities, and contributed to the weaving of a non-media-centric interpretation of proximity radio's role in Abidjan.

#### **4.4 - Managing Expectations, Staging Complicity: Conflict, Whiteness and Hierarchy**

In this final section I highlight three specific challenges I encountered during fieldwork, and explain how I attempted to mitigate their consequences. The first had to do with the post-conflict context. The second had to do with my whiteness. The third had to do with the hierarchies ordering social life in Abidjan.

##### 4.4.1 - Making Space for Trauma and Fear

As ethnographers of conflict (Warren 1992; Rodríguez 2011; McGovern 2011b), post-conflict uncertainty (Cooper & Pratten 2015) and instability (Greenhouse et al. 2002) have discussed, doing fieldwork in the aftermath of violence and division is a thorny affair. Trauma and a desire to forget can make discussions of the past impossible - or worse, painful to participants. In addition, the fear of retribution and the occasionally fractious "politics of mourning" (Eng & Kazanjian 2003; Butler 2009; Schwab 2010; McGrattan 2013) can dissuade frank analyses of post-conflict politics.

My first concern was to avoid inadvertently reviving trauma. Thankfully, this never happened. Equally, I did not want to pressure participants into recalling what they preferred to forget. Because many of my interviews were conducted upon first contact with participants, I deliberately refrained from asking about histories of crisis. In the

vast majority of my interviews<sup>25</sup>, then, I let participants bring up conflict if they wished, but took no initiative on this issue. Most interviewees did recount crisis-related hardships unprompted, and I encouraged them to elaborate as far as they felt comfortable. Avoiding direct questions about conflict in my initial interviews had another ethical justification: it was intended to avoid participants feeling that their lives were valued, in my research, only in relation to questions of conflict and survival. If our discussions inevitably *were* about life after conflict, I wanted to make sure that the primary emphasis would be on life itself, in the fullness of its trajectory, desires and hardships. In other words, I endeavoured to make accounts of crisis and its aftermath emerge from participants' reflections on their everyday life, rather than starting from conflict and gauging its "impact."

Such an approach was not just ethically committed, but empirically motivated as well. Four years after the 2011 post-electoral crisis, I sought to avoid any presumption about the importance of conflict, or specific dimensions of it, in *abidjanais* residents' lives. Indeed, as mentioned in Chapter 2, conflict mostly appeared in conversations when participants asserted their desire for normalcy, for moving on and beyond crisis. Similarly, I wanted - as much as possible - to side-step the ubiquitous language of peace-building in order to capture what participants *themselves* considered to be the challenges of post-conflict cohabitation. As anthropologist Marita Eastmond (2010) argues, peace-building frameworks often enact an "interventionist" division of labour, in which the external researcher maps out the intricacies of reconciliation to make them intelligible or "actionable" in the post-conflict context. In an attempt to reverse this script, I sought to trace the complexities of post-conflict living-together in participants' everyday lives, in their many stories about attempting to secure a livelihood and build networks of support and collaboration. The contrast between these everyday concerns and practices, on the one hand, and, on the other the abstractions of local peace-building initiatives (on proximity radio and beyond), could not have been starker. This contrast underpins my analysis in the chapters that follow.

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<sup>25</sup> As mentioned above, I conducted a few interviews *after* having become well acquainted with participants. When I felt that I knew them well and had seen them undaunted by "difficult" topics, I asked them directly about their personal experiences of crisis. Other participants - such as my flat-mate - I befriended without ever interviewing them, but over the course of our many exchanges they provided detailed stories of violence, its causes and its legacies.

Allowing participants to evoke conflict and its aftermath in ways they felt comfortable did not fully resolve the issue of post-conflict *fear*. I found a pervasive sense in Abidjan that any potentially contentious topic - related, chiefly, to ethnicity, politics, violence and justice - should be avoided in public and even private talk, because it might trigger some unpredictable reaction from one's interlocutor. As a result, such topics most often surfaced in traces: in short, unqualified assertions, in stories shorn of detail, in euphemisms, vague allusions, and silences. In order to avoid asking questions that made participants uncomfortable, I had to develop an acute ear for these traces. I gradually learned to make sense of them through extensive readings and through friends' occasional decoding, eventually developing a web of analogies and associations linking together different conversations. Making these interconnected traces intelligible in analysis was a challenge I struggled to overcome.

It was not just contentious topics that were to be avoided in post-conflict Abidjan. Public talk overall appeared to have become contained to intimate spheres where people felt fully safe. This impacted my research in two ways. First, at the micro level of my engagement with participants, it made creating spaces of intimacy and relative secrecy crucial - but this could not be achieved with all 65 of my interviewees. The need for safety in intimacy also meant that some of the most open-hearted discussions I partook in happened out of earshot - including my recorder's. Second, at a broader level, the post-conflict situation severely dampened *abidjanais* residents' public engagement with (or participation in) media. Philomène, a former *animatrice* at Radio Fraternité Yopougon and teacher in an internationally-funded radio school, described this most unambiguously:

Everything has changed. Everyone has become too careful. [...] Before the post-electoral crisis, people opened up, and everyone could express themselves. But today, no one says anything. People tell themselves they don't want any trouble. [...] It's fear, you know. Even when you go into institutions, private companies, no one wants to talk until you've given them an official letter from their hierarchy saying, 'please express yourself'. [...] I went to a clinic, for a piece on malaria, and the doctor wouldn't talk. He said he wanted a letter from the Ministry of Health [...]. He said, 'Madam, I don't want any trouble, my job is to heal people not to talk into a microphone and find tomorrow that my words have landed somewhere to cause me trouble'. [...] People don't want to

talk, they're afraid of talking. Maybe they'll be pro-Gbagbo or think you are - it's really difficult. (interview, 16 April, 2015)

Fear that media were now unsafe spaces of public talk impacted my entire fieldwork, yet at the same time it was extremely difficult to capture. I had to account for what was essentially people's *absence*, in addition to others' participation. This poses some analytical difficulties, such as how to interpret the lack of an audience for public shows (see Chapter 6). How to reconstruct people's attitude toward media when it consists of silence (see Eastmond & Selimovic 2012; Obadare 2016)? I have tried to provide a nuanced account that does not overdetermine this silence/absence while attempting to make sense of it based on what listeners, non-listeners and producers thought of it.

#### 4.4.2 - Making Whiteness Familiar

My whiteness was the primary and inescapable feature of my identity that set me apart as a stranger (in Simmel's sense) in Abidjan. By whiteness here I do not mean an essential component of personhood but a relational social position marked by colonialism and its geopolitical legacies, by drastic inequality (of income and mobility), and by what Sara Ahmed (2007; also Mayer 2005; Matlon 2011; Emirbayer & Desmond 2012) calls the "bad habits" acquired through relatively segregated socialisation. Whiteness in the context of African urban fieldwork is best understood as a non-Africanness that shaped how I responded to certain situations, and more pervasively how people engaged me in the street. The point here is not to dwell on postcolonial guilt and privilege but to highlight three practical ways in which whiteness affected the conduct of fieldwork, and how I attempted to mitigate these effects.

The first way that whiteness affected my fieldwork was linguistic. I cannot go into the complex, post-colonial politics of the French language in Côte d'Ivoire (e.g. Lafage 1978; Derive & Derive 1986; Akissi 2003; Akissi & N'Guessan 2016; Newell 2009), but my own, rather Parisian strand of French associated me with a high social position, linked not just to colonial and neo-colonial configurations, but also to an upper-class status within Côte d'Ivoire. As *abidjanais* residents put it, my French was *chôcô*: ostentatious in its formality and vocabulary flourish, and a marker of racial and class

hierarchy. I noticed that some participants attempted to adapt their own manner of speaking, or felt intimidated by what they considered to be their linguistic inferiority. In some early instances, I could not make myself understood, and in at least one situation I was dismissed somewhat aggressively. Over time, I learned to modulate my language and integrate elements of what is commonly called *français populaire ivoirien*, or simply Ivoirian inflections of spoken French (Lafage 1978; Newell 2009). Perhaps most importantly, I learned to use body language in discussions. I also drew many expressions from *Nouchi*. *Nouchi* is a hybrid, ever-evolving *abidjanais* language that, as Sasha Newell (2009: 172) explains, gained national currency as part of a "self-recognition of Ivoirian popular culture" in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Words from *Nouchi* now circulate in Côte d'Ivoire well beyond the working-class neighbourhoods where the language originated, allowing a kind of national "vicarious banditry" (ibid.: 173). Drawing self-consciously on *Nouchi* words in interviews and conversations allowed me not to blend in, but to introduce a dose of playfulness in exchanges by gesturing toward Ivoirians' own self-conscious adoption of a once-reviled idiom.

A more difficult barrier to mitigate was my lack of knowledge of Côte d'Ivoire's more than sixty African languages (Derive & Derive 1986). I did develop a sizeable vocabulary in Malinké<sup>26</sup>, the second most spoken language in the country (and a major influence behind *Nouchi*); I also picked up words in Baoulé. But I could not carry a conversation in either. This lack of knowledge only affected my ability to participate in a few, very specific occasions. As mentioned in Chapter 1, African language programmes represented only a limited percentage of overall scheduling on proximity radio (I would estimate no more than 20%, including musical numbers). More broadly, African languages were rare in most venues of public talk in Abidjan. This situation follows from a colonial and post-colonial policy of consolidating French as the only workable *lingua franca*, as well as the language of administrative elites (ibid.; Newell 2009). While Derive and Derive (1986), in the 1980s, found that African languages remained prevalent in everyday situations in Côte d'Ivoire - at the market, for example - they acknowledged that Abidjan's super-diversity made recourse to such languages far less systematic. In a recent survey, Anne-Danielle Koffi (2016: 15) found that nearly 80% of *abidjanais* residents favoured French for their day-to-day

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<sup>26</sup> Thanks to my host Boubacar's patient efforts in the *220 Logements*.



communications, mirroring earlier studies. Indeed, most of the people I met in Abidjan during fieldwork were either not proficient in the language associated with their ethno-regional lineage, or simply preferred to speak French.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, the few African language programmes that existed on proximity radio in the city *were* manifestly popular. A few interactive programmes, usually no more than three per station, focused exclusively on one African language.<sup>28</sup> These programmes I could not follow. However, some African language shows involved translation as an integral part of their on-air interactions. These allowed participants from all ethnic and national groups to participate, as well as many - like me - who did not master *any* African language. I discuss one of these programmes in more detail in Chapter 5.

The second element of whiteness that played out in my interactions with *abidjanais* residents was my *desirability as a social connection*. My social position as a relatively wealthy European meant that, for many in Abidjan, interactions with me were loaded with a sense of promise and opportunity. These expectations were often the object of jokes and occasionally they translated into open requests for help. Mostly, however, such expectations made participants anxious to spend time with me and to keep in touch. Initially, this made *me* very anxious as well, and threatened to exhaust me as I doubled my research schedule with individual social calls. It also threatened to jeopardise relations within radio stations as hierarchical superiors sought to secure preferential rapport with me. Eventually I learned to better manage expectations. I allocated chunks of time every week to a social visit in each of my four *communes* of

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<sup>27</sup> Malinké-speaking social circles provided a notable exception. I am thinking here, in particular, of the street-side Muslim tea/coffee corners known as *grins*. But even some *grins* carried conversations in French.

<sup>28</sup> The two stations that featured the most African language programmes were Radio Treichville and Radio Téré, in Adjamé. Both Treichville and Adjamé are major trading districts and house a significant migrant population. African language shows on Radio Treichville and Radio Téré thus centered around non-Ivoirian languages such as Moré, Yoruba, Wolof, Twi and Hausa. Radio Téré stood out for having *three* popular Malinké programmes (Malinké being spoken in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, parts of Guinea and parts of Burkina Faso). Other stations, however (Radio Arc-en-Ciel, Radio Zénith, Radio ATM, Radio Attécoubé, Radio Amitié), featured - at best - a programme in Baoulé, one in Malinké and sometimes one in Bété. In Radio Fraternité Yopougon, the only space allocated to African language programming were daily translations of news bulletins into five or six of Côte d'Ivoire's main languages. Cocody FM and Radio Bien-Être did not, to my knowledge, have any African language programming whatsoever.

fieldwork. When individual relations with producers and listeners did develop and strengthen, I learned to keep them away from stations and group setting. Overall, I became more proficient at deferring or deflecting social duties, learning to say no while remaining open to impromptu "hanging out."

The expectations tied to my relatively elevated social position in Abidjan disposed some interviewees to say *what they thought I wanted to hear*. I realised this quickly, as mentioned, when a few (listener) participants claimed to know or to like proximity radio stations more than subsequent questioning revealed they actually did. I had to learn to discern half-truths or outright fabrications, which often took the form of shorter and vaguer answers, as well as devise interview approaches that sounded less interrogatory. One way in which interviewees tried to say what they thought I would want to hear was by using a language mostly drawn from developmental and policy discourse - which is to say, a language of international donors and funders. This is the third way that my whiteness intervened in fieldwork socialisation: it positioned me, in many people's minds, as an *evaluator* of radio content and campaigns. Because I was white, I simply *had* to be part of the field of development/humanitarian aid, and some participants tailored their answers accordingly. I am not implying here that radio producers and listeners did not take the medium's developmental work seriously, as they clearly did. Simply, the contrast between the language *abidjanais* residents used amongst themselves and the language some used with me pointed to their conception of me as an arbiter and evaluator of some kind. Evidently, my research focus on everyday life and city affairs was not enough to shift the inquiry away from the kind of performance-indicator talk sometimes used in development programmes. My way around this conundrum, as mentioned, was to orient my interviews toward personal stories and anecdotes rather than opinions and knowledge. In particular, I did not push respondents on their thoughts about particular policy or development-led initiatives, such as the USAID-sponsored "public shows" discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

No doubt some producers will find my own take on some of these shows to be overly critical, and fear that I may have jeopardised their chances for further funding. I hope it will be clear from my argument in this thesis that I am not at all critiquing proximity radio stations' efforts, but rather the *conditions* in which their work was carried out

and the way their interventions were framed by policy discourse (what I have called in the previous chapter "localism"). As stated in my introduction, I undertook this research and carried out my analysis in this way because I have found clear evidence of proximity radio's tremendous potential for producing new forms of togetherness in Abidjan (see Chapter 5, Chapter 7).

To conclude this section, my overall approach to whiteness, understood as a relational social position in Abidjan, was not to aim to transcend it but to make it familiar, taken for granted. In this way, whiteness - which could not ever be erased - would move further enough into the background to allow further, less affected interaction to take place. Rendering my own whiteness familiar to others involved a reflexive and considerate approach to fieldwork, especially to interviews. Beyond this inter-relational and interactional dimension, however, the process of making-familiar involved a constant bodily (Wacquant 2009) and mental disposition toward receptivity and adaptability. It involved accepting my own strangeness, and the varied responses to it on the street, at the market, in the crowded and dusty minibus stations (where shouts to "Le blanc! Le blanc!" were a daily occurrence), and so on. Making-familiar involved taking seriously the resentments, aspirations or misconceptions associated with my nationality or my imagined *mentalité*. At the same time, it involved a great dose of humour. In some ways, my aim was to turn whiteness into an object of mockery and ridicule on the same level as "ethnic" stereotypes and "joking relationships" (Fouéré 2005; Canut & Smith 2006; Launay 2006), still prevalent in Abidjan.

#### 4.4.3 - Navigating Social Diversity and Hierarchies

In a super-diverse urban context, ethnographic research faces two challenges (Back 2007; Hall 2012; Berg & Sigona 2013). The first is to create a sample of participants that either reflects urban diversity itself or is clearly positioned within it. The second is to avoid unwittingly reproducing the social hierarchies that inevitably structure urban life. My ethnographic approach, in keeping with the method's tradition, does not claim to offer generalisability or to mirror Abidjan's stupendous social complexity. Yet I did not want to pick a defined or bounded social group for research (as tended to be the case in "classic" anthropology), as this would have run counter to proximity

radio's "generalist" ethos and diversity-oriented programming. The need to integrate diversity itself in my ethnographic inquiry was also made essential - as well as complicated - by the sensitivity surrounding post-conflict identities - especially ethnic and political identities. Because ethnicity and political allegiance were seen to be lines of social division in Abidjan, I could not afford to conduct research that did not consider perspectives from across the supposed "divide." With this in mind, I did my best to systematically engage as broad a cross-section of *abidjanais* society as I could manage within the scope of a single-researcher, embedded inquiry.

Though I did not ask participants about their ethnicity (or their age and employment for that matter), such elements usually surfaced at some point in our interactions. When they did not, I most often found ways - typically participants' patronym - to at least situate participants within a narrowed spectrum of regional-ethnic backgrounds. I endeavoured to engage participants from Northern, Central and Western/Southern ethno-regional clusters (with all the approximations that these clusters carry - see Dozon & Chauveau 1987, 1989; Bouquet 2003; Roubaud 2003; Bassett 2003; McGovern 2011a). Political identities, on the other hand, were almost never discussed openly, in interviews or informal interactions. It goes without saying that participants about their political allegiance outright would have been indelicate. Yet gradually I learned to discern political leanings (where they existed) in off-hand comments and allusions. As with ethnic diversity, I sought to capture political diversity by developing meaningful research bonds with *abidjanais* residents I could almost certainly identify as FPI (pro-Gbagbo), RDR (pro-Ouattara) or PDCI (allied to Ouattara but often reluctantly so).

To be clear, I was not "testing" ethnicity and politics as variables. Nor did I base my inquiry upon "ethnic" readings of the Ivoirian conflict, in which ethnicity and politics overlapped to mechanically produce polarised visions of the social world (see Chapter 1, Section 1.3.2). Indeed, in-depth ethnographic probing always revealed individual life trajectories and opinions to be far more complex than macro-sociological schemas might indicate. Correspondingly, I make limited claims about how ethnicity or political identity affected people's engagement with proximity radio. My own data does not allow such generalisations. This does not mean "disappearing" ethnicity and politics entirely, however. I do consider both as possible, non-determining

explanations for observed trends, based on what I consider to be a satisfactory amount of information (both fieldwork-generated and based on other studies of the Ivoirian context).

Other social hierarchies surfaced in my fieldwork: generation, gender and class. The fact that most radio producers I met were past their mid-thirties can be explained in part by the well-documented subordination of young people as "social cadets" in African urban contexts. Working in proximity radio is a professional position that, while precarious, does implicate social status and prestige. This status was often tied to expectations of generational accomplishment, understood as a degree of self-realisation in terms of income, family life, and education, which ensured "respectability" and authority. By contrast, "young" interns - who may have been in their thirties themselves, but had not yet "gone up in the world" - were often treated as subordinates and indeed expected it to be so. The influence of generational hierarchies was compounded, on the listener side, by radio's reputation as an "old" medium, which meant that most of the listeners I interviewed were equally "adult." I mitigated the influence of this hierarchy by engaging younger radio interns as well as listeners, which was not always well received by social elders, but was facilitated by my own age (26-27 at the time of fieldwork).

In terms of class, many of my research participants were what one could call "lower- or aspiring middle-class." The category of "middle-class" is deeply contested in African contexts, but I use it here to describe a relative position marked by ambiguity and non-urgent precariousness (for a fuller sociological account of "middle-class" in Abidjan, see Toh et al. 2009). Most of the *abidjanais* residents I developed sustained relationships with were informally employed (that is, they did not have formal contracts, wages and protection) or unemployed, yet they tended to have minimal assets (a small shop, a productive device such as a sowing machine, a university degree, etc.) and, for the most part, lived relatively stable lives in solidly-built homes (as opposed to squatter settlements). This set them apart from the poorest of the poor, and equally from the salaried middle class or the elite. I made a conscious decision not to pursue research with the latter, because it quickly became apparent that Ivoirian elites' status was bound up in primarily global-oriented media consumption (as indeed is the case elsewhere). As for the lower end of the class spectrum, my access to the

poorest sectors of Abidjan was limited by my own class position, by linguistic barriers, and by my decision to target "active" listeners' groups. Being an active radio listener, for many people, was implicitly a marker of (aspiring) middle-class status. Phoning in, most basically, required money for calls, which even some regular callers I worked with struggled to come by from time to time. That being said, I did develop relations with listeners (and a very small number of producers) whose life conditions were much more acutely precarious. For these particular informants, even more than for others, radio represented an intense hope for social mobility and self-realisation.

Gender was perhaps the most difficult social hierarchy for me to address. To start with, proximity radio remained a very male-dominated field. Sylvie, whom I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter (Section 4.2.2), was not only one of the few women in salaried positions in proximity radio, but also the only female radio owner in the country (when I met her, she was in the process of installing a proximity radio station in central Côte d'Ivoire). Beyond the world of radio, women's public expression more generally was the object of complex, gendered commentary in Abidjan. The young women I spoke to were expected not to "wander" too much (*se promener*), for example, limiting their ability to partake in the encounters and mobilities opened up by radio sociability. Beyond gender hierarchies within Ivoirian society, however, my position as a white, European male introduced additional tensions. Several women interviewees were visibly intimidated by my gendered position, while in other instances I had to abandon my research relationship because it had become far too flirty. Such an experience fits with anthropologist Sasha Newell's (2012: 28-29) explanation that he had to focus his fieldwork in Abidjan on *male* youth because the sexual politics of ethnography with young women was too fraught. I did not experience such a level of discomfort, and developed deep bonds of friendship with some women. Still, my efforts to include as many women as men amongst my participants were thwarted both in the numbers and in the depth of several of these research relationships.

#### **4.5 - Conclusion**

In this chapter I retraced the steps involved in carrying out ethnographic research on place and radio in Abidjan. I began by detailing the political and epistemological

underpinnings of my decision to ground fieldwork in the Ivoirian metropolis. Then, beginning from my first visit to the city in November 2014, I outlined the ethical and practical challenges I faced in studying small-scale radio across the producer and audience divide, in a context where I was a stranger and where recent conflict, super-diversity and social hierarchies modulated public and private talk in complex ways. I documented the difficulties and rewards of setting up a multi-sited, multi-scalar ethnographic field of research, using a combination of qualitative methods - from interviews to participant observation, with focus groups in between. In the end, researching objects as stretched and multitudinous as radio and urban life required mobility, adaptability, reflexivity and above all, a disposition toward listening.

## Chapter 5

# Between the Street and the State: Radio Encounters and Popular Topographies of Power

### 5.1 - Introduction

In Chapter 2, I theorised the role that proximity radio might play in the (re-)making of place after conflict. I suggested that radio contribute to a background familiarity and to the staging of encounters in the city. I recognised, however, that radio's embeddedness in everyday urban life could not be taken for granted. In Chapter 3, furthermore, I noted that the making of place is always entangled with power. In this chapter, I thus examine how *abidjanais* residents positioned proximity radio in relation to place and power, and how this positioning influenced what people did with, on or through radio.

Counter-intuitively, perhaps, I begin this chapter with a pessimistic account of proximity radio's embeddedness in Abidjan. In the opening section, I recount a conversation I had in a *grin*, a common street discussion space in Abidjan, where Muslim men comment on current affairs over the making of tea (Vincourt & Kouyaté 2012; Tsolakis 2016). When I told *grin* members about my research, they scoffed and contrasted proximity radio, which they saw as constrained by censorship and surveillance, with their own circle of - presumably unfettered - talk and sociability. While *grin* members did not intend this contrast to be flattering for proximity radio stations, it is a useful one from which to launch my own inquiry. The *grin* members' critique provides a local framework from which to investigate proximity radio's role in the making of place in Abidjan. It confirms that the relations between media and the local cannot be understood without considering power. At the same time, the *grin* members' perspective begs the question of why many *abidjanais* residents *did* value proximity radio and actively engaged with their local station.

I unpack this question by addressing two elements, in turn: 1) proximity radio stations' position in what I call popular topographies of power; and 2) actually-existing practices and sociability on proximity radio. In the first half of the chapter, I consider



issues of municipal control and state surveillance over proximity radio. My main concern is to acknowledge the intense pressures that stations faced in their everyday practices, while explaining why *abidjanais* residents might still consider stations to be "close" to them. This involves making subtle but important nuances about how proximity radio stations operated and how ordinary urban dwellers distinguished between victims and agents of power. In the second half of the chapter, I take a much more positive perspective to document what motivated urban dwellers to engage with proximity radio. I discuss the importance of encounters and offer insights about the kinds of meaningful proximities that radio sociability enabled. In the conclusion, I return to the initial contrast between *grins* and proximity radio to argue that this contrast was not so unfavourable after all. While the two parts of the chapter may appear drastically different in tone, they are not mutually exclusive but instead capture the full ambiguity of proximity radio as an urban mediator.

## **5.2 - Proximity Radio in Popular Topographies of Power**

### **5.2.1 - The "Over There" of Power**

On a late afternoon in March 2015, I accompanied my host Boubacar to the market in the bustling trading district of Adjamé, a fifteen-minute walk from where we lived. On the way home, we stopped at a *grin* that Boubacar often frequented. The *grin* was informally nicknamed "Arafat," and most participants were long-time regulars. Boubacar knew them, he later explained, from his days as a political activist. On that March evening, there were about a dozen men sat around two pots of tea. After lively group discussions about the declining price of fuel, abusive practices by informal transport syndicates, and the fallacies of puritanical Islam, *grin* members turned to me and asked me about my research. The following is an edited passage from my field notes:

I mention that I am researching *radios de proximité* and note that am working with Radio Téré [the proximity radio station in Adjamé]. One man dismissively gestures: "Là-bas là?" ["Over there?"] He implies distance with a wave of the hand and a look above our heads. [Another man I identify as a] taxi driver claims he thought the station had stopped operating: "Ca marche toujours ça?" [...] The man with the hat [...] agrees

that Téré should broadcast local information [...] but he doesn't seem to think they do so adequately. Indirectly, Téré is framed as "*divertissement*" [entertainment] and in the midst of the debate I hear someone mention the omnipresence of *tradi-praticiens* [mystical healers] on air. The consensus, amongst *grin* members, is that Téré has failed to "*descendre au niveau du vécu quotidien des gens*" ["come down to the level of people's everyday life"]. Diabaté [elder and unofficial convenor of the *grin*] says that he does not feel he is asked his opinion by the station and does not have a voice on proximity radio in general. Echoing him, several members agree that Téré should come down to the *grin*, that it would not cost much but would be a symbol of the station going down to street level, to what people think and expect. The "up-down" metaphor is further confirmed when they link Téré to political power. Téré stands for [Adjamé mayor Youssouf] Sylla, whom *grin* members consider illegitimate: they explain he got a 10-year term because of "the crisis" [during which local elections were deferred] and, in the last, post-crisis election, was only re-elected because he was the RDR candidate - a sure win in Adjamé, I am told. (excerpt from field notes, March 10, 2015)

In this exchange, proximity radio stations were not presented as close to urban dwellers at all. Their distance from everyday life and concerns was made quite literal: it was spatialised by a gesture toward "over there," outside of the neighbourhood and outside of the local circles of talk in which *grin* members pursued sociability and information. This distance was first linked to content: *grin* members wanted to listen to current affairs, but radio stations, they claimed, gave more airtime to music and mystics. Direct, personal contact was also important: men wondered why Radio Téré did not simply come and broadcast from the *grin*.<sup>29</sup> Finally, the distance was linked to the stations' "closeness" with municipal authorities, and in particular Adjamé mayor Youssouf Sylla. *Grin* members considered Radio Téré to be "*pour le maire*" (for the mayor). By this they meant that the station only broadcast what was in the mayor's financial and political interest - everything else would be censored - and that the resulting style of communication was very scripted and exclusionary ("we are not

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<sup>29</sup> This is not an outlandish suggestion. Researcher Marika Tsolakis (Personal Communication, n.d.) informed me that various media outlets in neighbouring Mali have based programmes around *grins*. (*Grins*, as customary Muslim and Malinké discussion spaces, are popular in several West African countries.) One example is Bamako TV, a now defunct online television channel, which carried a show simply titled "*Le Grin*." The first episode, as described on Youtube, features ordinary young men engaged in discussions "based on [their] knowledge and critique of current affairs in [their] country and the rest of the world." See: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_CmKzOoNDdc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_CmKzOoNDdc)

asked for our opinion"). In implicit contrast, the *grin* stood for the street as an open and unfettered space of talk.

I have found the reality of proximity broadcasting in Abidjan to be very different from *grin* members' pessimistic perspective. As will be evident in the second half of the chapter, many urban dwellers *did* value proximity radio and considered it to be an important part of their everyday life. Nonetheless, *grin* members raise some crucial issues that cannot easily be side-stepped.<sup>30</sup> In the next sections, I explore 1) the question of proximity radio's entanglement with power, and 2) the extent to which this entanglement set proximity radio stations apart from the moral universes and concerns of everyday urban life.

In addressing these questions, I have found it necessary to go beyond considerations of political economy. It is one thing to note that proximity radio stations were constrained by power, and another to ask how these constraints may have been perceived by producers and ordinary urban dwellers. Structures of ownership and appraisals of state monitoring only take us so far. Similarly, the contrast between a "bottom" of local life and a "top" of power, captured in the contrast between *grin* discussions and radio talk, is of limited use. Although this top/bottom disjuncture is not uncommon in African contexts, where the disconnect between state and society has historical roots in the colonial institutionalisation of power (see Ekeh 1975; Bayart 1993; Mamdani 1996; Mbembe 2001), its dichotomous lens poorly accounts for the actual relations between place and power (Chapter 3). Most importantly, dichotomy cannot capture proximity radio's deeply ambivalent *in-between* status. As I began to discuss in Chapter 1, proximity radio stations occupied a curious straddling ground in the Ivoirian media landscape. We can recall that in the CDVR's (2016; Internews 2014) communications strategy, proximity radio was both included in the formal world of "media" (where political control is notoriously exercised), and included in the informal communicative ecology of street discussion spaces and interpersonal networks. If *grin* members positioned proximity radio as "over there," then, this was clearly an ambiguous position. To elucidate it, following Gupta and Ferguson (2002), it is

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<sup>30</sup> It would be impossible to consider all of these issues in a single thesis: I leave aside, for example, rich debates around the presence of mystics on proximity radio, or intractable distinctions between "current affairs" and "entertainment" as radio genres.

necessary to interrogate urban dwellers' own conceptions of place and power. I refer to these conceptions as popular topographies of power: ordinary people's understanding of the state's reach in relation to the spaces - and media - of their everyday lives.

### 5.2.2 - Constrained Radio Talk

#### *5.2.2.a - Municipal Control*

It would be futile and dishonest - including to those working in proximity radio stations - to claim that radio in Abidjan offered an unscripted space of talk. There were multiple sources of pressure constraining proximity radio talk (and, I would argue, talk on broadcast media more generally). The first, as the *grin* members mentioned above, was municipal control over stations. As noted in Chapter 1, a handful of proximity radio stations in Abidjan were directly owned and operated by municipal authorities - themselves often aligned with the governing political party. Even proximity stations that operated privately were often tied to municipal authorities. Radio Zénith in Marcory and Radio Amitié in Yopougon, for example, were privately owned stations but operated from premises paid for by municipal funds. Both were eagerly pursuing further financial support (in the form of waived electricity bills, for example) when I visited them in 2014. Returning to Radio Téré, which the *grin* members singled out above, it was nominally administered by a group of local traders but notoriously controlled by Adjamé Mayor Youssouf Sylla. Station staff made no secret of the mayor's grip on Téré's finances and management. The sound technician who served as Téré's founding architect, Hassan, was similarly honest in his admission that he built the station (in 2003-2004) with Sylla's political and financial fortune in mind (interview, 12 June 2015). Clearly, then, the *grin* members were right to claim that Radio Téré was "*pour le maire*" (for the mayor).

Resulting from municipal authorities' implication in the proximity radio scene, I witnessed several instances of political "nudging" in stations. I describe one example below, taken from my extensive "hanging out" in Yopougon's municipally-owned Radio Fraternité (RFY thereafter). The example reveals just how casual political nudging could be, but also how radio journalists could retain a significant level of

editorial autonomy. Before I go on to tell the story, it should be noted that RFY was both paradigmatic and exceptional, as far as municipal oversight was concerned. Yopougon's sheer size (at least 1.25 million inhabitants [RGPH 2014]) and its position in popular imaginaries as a hotbed of political activism, made control of the municipality strategically important for any national government. In 2014-2015, the Yopougon municipality was administered by Gilbert Koné Kaffana, a "strongman" (*homme fort*) of President Alassane Ouattara's ruling RDR party. This was a political reversal for Yopougon, which until 2011 was widely thought to be a bastion for Laurent Gbagbo's FPI party. If there was any municipal district in which administrative censorship of proximity broadcasting should be visible, then, Yopougon was surely it. At the same time, however, the *commune's* reputation as a pro-Gbagbo stronghold meant that the station was very wary of exposing itself to residents' discontent, and that there were plenty of people watching out for any sign of authoritarian overreach on the part of the RDR administration. In addition, RFY's history as an incubator for wildly popular music genres - especially *zouglou* and *coupé-décalé* - gave it an unrivalled prestige amongst proximity radio stations, and an audience that extended beyond Yopougon's already vast territory. Given the station's visibility - which also attracted many international development organisations, such as USAID - municipal authorities may well have been reluctant to constrain RFY too audibly. At the very least, Mayor Kaffana made the decision to keep all existing radio staff when he came into power in 2012, and to fund a well-equipped news team. Such was not the case in other municipal stations I visited.

I now return to my example. On the morning of March 17, as part of my participant observation in the RFY newsroom, I accompanied Salomon, a reporter in training, on what was to be routine radio story. Long-overdue improvement works had recently finished on a major intersection in Yopougon. Salomon's task was to assess traffic fluidity, and to ask drivers, transporters and residents how their lives had been affected by the works and their completion. In itself, the story was typical of proximity radio stations' "local reporting." The conditions of infrastructure were a frequent and much-commented topic in Abidjan, as elsewhere. Rather than taking a minibus (*gbaka*), Salomon and I were invited to ride with the station manager, who was running an errand in one of the municipal authority's several satellites. We climbed into a municipally-stamped Clio. This was not Salomon's first foray "on the ground"

(*sur le terrain*), but Issa, RFY's manager, saw fit to give him some pointers. I saw Salomon's face drop when Issa encouraged him to promote the road improvements as part of "the mayor's good work," and to ask at the end of each interview whether people had a (positive) message for the mayor. Salomon was incensed. Not only was Issa giving him editorial directions - a prerogative normally reserved for the chief editor, Rachel (hired at RFY in the mid-2000s) - but the angle was a misleading one: the road repair had been carried out as part of the *Projet d'Assistance Post-Conflict (PAPC)*, a central government reconstruction programme underwritten by the World Bank. When Salomon reported back to the RFY newsroom, his colleagues were similarly disgruntled. "That's not *reportage*, that's political communication," a senior editor thundered. The segment that was aired during the day's evening news included some residents' and drivers' praise of the mayor. However, the segment also mentioned that the project had been part of a national programme (the PAPC). It also included a mother's vehement criticism of the works' collateral effects on her neighbourhood: cars had taken a habit of driving around the intersection, in much narrower, unpaved and residential streets, leading to accidents involving children, and a significant degradation of roads within the neighbourhood. Salomon's inclusion of this mother's criticism was his way of being truthful to "the life of the population" (*la vie des populations*), and of refusing to be straightjacketed into a mouthpiece role (see Englund 2011; Fraser 2016 for similar points elsewhere on African radio stations). No doubt Salomon felt emboldened to push back against the station manager's directives by the fact that he had gone out on the field with me: as a white European researcher, I could vouch for his diligence as a field reporter, and perhaps cover him if the mayor became angry. Still, RFY's senior editor Rachel vindicated Salomon's position by arguing: "If you have the recording, no manager can say it didn't happen" (field notes, 17 March 2015).

This, unfortunately, was not entirely true. I encountered at least one story of blunt censorship on RFY. It came from Damien, whom I interviewed at his home with his friend Fred. Damien was not a radio producer but an unemployed graduate student and a once avid RFY listener. In early 2014, Damien was selected to be part of RFY's "community reporters" initiative, funded by USAID. Community reporters received training and equipment to become, as Damien put it, "the station's [RFY's] eyes and ears in the neighbourhoods" (interview, 24 April 2015). The station hoped to get the

freshest news from the locality, but also to rebuild trust with residents by asking them to "talk about their problems." After his training, Damien decided to investigate a vexed issue in his relatively middle-class, residential neighbourhood: noise from newly established *maquis* (open-air bars). Damien, like other nearby residents I got to know, felt that his neighbourhood had become overrun by new drinking establishments in recent years. This, Damien argued, had created all sorts of disruptions, from loud music late into the night, to new temptations for school-children, to regular street brawls and unspecified "insecurity." To investigate the issue, Damien interviewed *maquis* owners, DJs, patrons and residents. He discovered that the *maquis* had relocated from other parts of Yopougon and had been granted licences - which is to say, authorisation to settle - from the municipality. To confirm this, Damien sought out an interview from the mayor's urban planning team, to no avail. When he eventually presented his edited recording to RFY's news team, Damien claimed, they were enthusiastic and praised him for the quality of his work. Yet his segment was never aired. According to Damien and others who were aware of the issue, Issa invited him into his office to personally apologise and to explain that the *reportage* would not sit with the mayor.<sup>31</sup>

### 5.1.2.b - State Monitoring

As noted in Chapter 1, proximity radio stations were not just exposed to municipal control, but also monitored by the national media regulator, the *Haute Autorité pour la Communication Audiovisuelle* (HACA). Monitoring was meant to ensure stations did not broadcast indecent or - above all - *political* content (HACA 2014). The slipperiness involved in defining what "political" content might be was a source of great anxiety for proximity radio producers, and even listeners, although many preferred to deny such concerns. Knowledge that the HACA might be monitoring

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<sup>31</sup> The issue of noise was a highly contentious one for the Yopougon municipal authority. On the one hand, the administration's decision to dismantle popular night-time spots where many *maquis* had been concentrated - most famously, the Rue Princesse - in the name of sonic and moral hygiene had divided opinion. On the other, neighbourhoods that had not previously hosted large numbers of bars complained about a new influx of displaced establishments. Because these neighbourhoods housed many pro-Gbagbo residents (who had also frequented the Rue Princesse in its heyday), the situation was interpreted as political revanchism. In June 2015, Daouda, one of RFY's senior journalists, had planned to host an edition of his talk show on the topic. The mayor's representative cancelled last minute and the show never happened.

content introduced suspicions of surveillance by politically motivated authorities. The head of the HACA was appointed by the Ivoirian President, and the regulator itself was widely seen to act on the government's bidding. As a result, many producers felt that they should interpret "political content" as widely as possible, and avoid any topic or format that might lead to challenging authorities. Restrictions on "political" talk created a diffuse but palpable fear of state intervention that stifled proximity radio content in many ways, far beyond news or current affairs.

This sense of fear was most vividly described by David, a young *animateur* on Cocody FM, a private station in one of Abidjan's elite municipal districts. During our interview, David made small, off-hand comments on state monitoring. He was initially reluctant to clarify, but when I encouraged him he eventually voiced a frank appraisal:

Everything started with the regulatory mission statement [*cahier des charges*, enforced by the HACA]. Before, you had the state radios, only talking about the regime, before multi-party politics. When they decided to liberalise, the people in power at the time didn't want media that would contradict their actions. That's why the law said, "we're going to liberalise, but you, you can't take part in the political debate." That's where it all comes from. Today we have to make do with that. Of course we would want to stand up and talk about it because everyone is interested in politics. When you go on social media, everyone... Well, everyone speaks their mind, and shares the [political] news. I send out my news [*je balance mes informations*] on Facebook, I start my debates there. But I can't talk about these debates [on air] because, when you talk about it, you get death threats. I know some people who received those. I know them. So today, you can't criticise [the government], and that's that. (interview, 4 December, 2014)

David spoke for a widely-held view in Abidjan that the state retained near-total control over *all* media, not just proximity radio. One thing to note in David's comment, however, is the violence of the repression he envisions. The HACA could issue warnings and suspend a programme, a producer, or an entire station for varying amounts of time (Sy Savané, interview, 24 January 2016; Mack, interview, 8 April, 2015). But it could not send death threats. This alerts us to the fact that the kinds of pressures exerted upon proximity radio stations were not all visible, or at least



formally traceable. Indeed, state monitoring's very elusive nature connected with widespread fears about the more shadowy sides of power in the post-conflict city.

### *5.1.2.c - Organised Uncertainty and the Spectral State*

For many *abidjanais* residents, the state was at the apex of popular topographies of power. In Abidjan, as elsewhere in Africa, and notwithstanding successive reductions in its bureaucratic capacity (see Chapter 3), the state remained imagined and called upon as a central, orchestrating and dominating figure (for a similar point on Kenya, see Gagliardone 2016). At the very same time, the state was widely seen to exercise its power in indirect, informal and largely invisible ways - a perspective long documented by Africanist scholars (Bayart 1993; Bayart et al. 1998; Chabal & Daloz 1999; Mbembe 2001). Two key principles defined the popular *abidjanais* view of state power: *organised uncertainty* and *spectrality*. By organised uncertainty I mean a pervasive sense that the opacity, insecurity and unpredictability that characterised life in many parts of Abidjan were deliberately engineered. By the spectral state, I mean a generalised suspicion of ubiquitous state surveillance - a feeling that public spaces were quite literally haunted by a politically repressive presence (I return to this feeling in the next chapter). Organised uncertainty and the spectral state were two sides of the same coin, so to speak. They captured a diffuse way of thinking and talking about the state's presence in the post-conflict city - at once all-pervasive and withdrawn, feared and desired (Hibou 2017).

An issue that will illustrate this way of thinking vividly was the *microbes*. The *microbes* were gangs of armed street children who were accused of robbing, maiming and killing at random in Abidjan's peripheral neighbourhoods. In popular imagination and grisly tabloid "reports," *microbes* were figures of near-fantastical evil that embodied urban dwellers' anxieties over violence, moral collapse, destitution and injustice/impunity. *Microbes* were often said to be based in the slums of Abobo, in the north of the city, or to live amongst rubbish heaps on the district's peri-urban edges (Bastide & Dupiot, 15 May 2015; Capron, 29 May 2015). For many *abidjanais* residents, the *microbes* were protected by authorities' misguided reluctance to punish children, but also by their association with pro-Ouattara warlords (*chefs de guerre*), accused of having armed street children in their effort to take over the city during the 2011 post-electoral conflict

(see Figure 7). The *microbes*, in other words, were widely thought to be protected by a kind of post-conflict shadow state. As a result, they crystallised critiques of the Ouattara government, accused of letting insecurity run wild for its own sinister purposes - reminiscent of Chabal and Daloz's (1999) notion of "disorder as a political instrument." In the months immediately preceding the 2015 presidential elections, my fieldwork in Yopougon was marked by incessant rumours of sudden attacks by *microbes*, causing at least one panicked dash through narrow alleyways. Several of my interlocutors associated these attacks - real or imagined - with an attempt by the Ouattara government to terrorise the opposition in a municipal district still thought to be pro-Gbagbo.



Figure 7.1



Figure 7.2



Figure 7.3

Figure 7 - The “Microbes,” an Urban Nightmare

The two newspaper front pages exemplify the kinds of sensationalistic stories about microbes that suffused abidjanais discussions - and fantasies. We can note that in *Le Patriote* (Fig. 7.1), which is a pro-government newspaper, the headline emphasises that the microbes are growing in number and in arsenal. In the opposition newspaper *Nouveau Courrier* (Fig. 7.2), there is talk of “government failure” in the face of insecurity. The satirical weekly *Bôl’Kotch*, from which the cartoon in Fig. 7.3 is taken (R.B., 4 June 2014), highlights a common argument in Abidjan that the microbes children became violent thugs after they were armed and trained by the pro-Ouattara militias (the “Commando Invisible”) during the 2011 post-electoral crisis.

The popular imaginaries of organised uncertainty and spectral state power also constrained what could be said on proximity radio. Jacques, manager at Radio Arc-en-Ciel (RAC thereafter), on the north-eastern edge of Abobo, confessed as much when I asked him about how RAC covered the *microbes* situation:

It's an issue that's... difficult. Because it's not under control [*pas maîtrisé*]. Even by the country's security forces. [...] When we touch upon these security issues, we have to be really careful. We don't know if [the *microbes*] will start attacking us! [...] And if they have backing, you don't know, you could be making an enemy out of these children and then seek protection from authorities who are in cahoots. You risk running from the lion and into his lair. (interview, 10 December 2014)

Jacques' speculations illustrate that proximity radio stations felt at the mercy not just of criminal networks, but of the state's inability - or unwillingness - to ensure its monopoly on violence. RAC felt itself so bereft of certainty and backing that it simply could not, indeed, distinguish inability from unwillingness. The issue here is not whether the *microbes* were, in fact, protected by a shadow state, but that it was *impossible to know*. Like RAC, proximity radio stations could rely on precious little institutional support, at urban or national level. On many an occasion, I witnessed proximity radio producers try in vain to obtain information from the police. On one occasion, a journalist in Radio Téré, the Adjamé radio owned by Mayor Youssouf Sylla, told me that she had to abandon a story on child kidnappings because even Adjamé's municipal authority refused to issue any statement on the ongoing situation (which had already led to instances of mob justice). Other municipally-owned stations like RFY or Radio ATM in Port-Bouët equally struggled to get straightforward information from the police - let alone protection. This made the production of news and reporting, at least on some issues affecting urban dwellers, both extremely complex and perilous.

### 5.2.3 - "On Est Dedans" (We're in It)

What can we make of this pessimistic picture of proximity radio's entanglements with power, both visible and invisible? To start with, we must agree with the *grin* members cited at the start of the chapter: talk, on proximity radio, was heavily constrained. However, it is possible to refute two of the *grin* members' other points. First, the constraints placed upon radio talk did *not* straightforwardly follow from control by

municipal or state authorities. Second, and relatedly, popular topographies of power did not position proximity radio stations as radically "over there," removed from the realities and concerns of the street.

I have shown above that municipal oversight was not uncontested, as evidenced by furtive but significant instances of editorial agency in RFY's newsroom. As for state monitoring, I have shown that it was nebulous enough to create pervasive anxiety but also room for interpretation and margins for manoeuvre. One margin that proximity radio stations were prompt to exploit was what geographer Alphonse Yapi-Diahou (1990; see also Lund 2006) calls a "hide and seek game" between municipalities and the state. Examining processes of land acquisition in 1980s Abidjan, Yapi-Diahou found that neither institution could fully clarify its competencies and responsibilities; both were involved in a constant back and forth of blaming each other and being blamed for each other's incapacities. A similar process might be described on proximity radio, and RFY was exemplary in this regard. Using its relative institutional security as a municipal station affiliated with the RDR state, the station regularly sought to call out the government on its mishandling or misreading of local situations. One example came during a weekly, Monday-morning staff meeting. Diane, one of RFY's lead *animatrices*, announced that she had witnessed the abuse of an informal water and juice peddler by the police, and wanted someone to do a segment on the issue. Such peddlers sold small plastic bags full of ice-cold refreshments to sun-baked, dust-caked drivers and passengers waiting on the city's often congested (and polluted) arteries. A recent government decree, seeking to improve Côte d'Ivoire reputation in the realm of environmental policy, had banned the use of plastic bags, specifically targeting street sellers. Station manager Issa enthusiastically seized the issue and made a broader point to his employees: RFY's role, he explained, was to highlight the discrepancy between national policies and lived realities, and to document why these policies "kept failing" (field notes, March 16, 2015). During my time in Abidjan, RFY covered a number of politically "controversial" topics, from residents' frustrations with pre-electoral identification procedures, to a cement company dumping toxic waste next to a poor neighbourhood on Yopougon's northern edge, to the police's inability to provide information on a city-wide "wave" of child kidnappings. There is ample ground to say that, like RFY, other municipally owned or affiliated stations in Abidjan made use of their position to challenge state policies and lack of state responsiveness.

Radio Téré, maligned by the *grin* members above, thus featured some of the most vocally oppositional programming I heard in Abidjan - targeting not Adjamé Mayor Youssouf Sylla, the station's owner, but the RDR government more broadly (I discuss Radio Téré's programme in more depth in Chapter 7).

Responding to the *grin* members' second point, that proximity radio stations' entanglements with power fundamentally set them apart from everyday urban life, involves a more complex argument. This is because *grin* members' perspective involved a degree of moral judgment. What they suggested was that proximity radio stations were so compromised by censorship and surveillance that they could not be trusted to care for and carry urban dwellers' interests or concerns. Such a perspective set proximity radio apart from everyday life understood as a kind of moral universe or "moral economy," to use the preferred anthropological concept. Yet I have found that most critiques of proximity radio in Abidjan did not operate such a moral distinction. In part, this was because stations' exposure to a regime of organised uncertainty and spectral surveillance meant that they faced the same challenges as ordinary urban dwellers. On a subtle but fundamental level, this meant that in popular topographies of power, proximity radio stations were seen not as repressive agents, but as fellow *victims* - albeit more or less passive - of a more "encompassing" (Gupta & Ferguson 2002) regime of ubiquitous surveillance. In turn, the *abidjanais* residents I met allowed that radio producers shared their own life-world, facing the same moral dilemmas, ethical outlooks and repressive constraints (I draw inspiration in this analysis from Englund 2011: Chapter 5). As proximity radio producers liked to say, to signal their intimate knowledge of Abidjan's many hardships: "*on est dedans*," roughly translating as "we're all in the same boat."

The case of Damien, the RFY listener whose investigation was censored by the station, illustrates the kind of nuanced moral appreciation I aim to capture. Damien (interview, 24 April, 2015) was understandably disheartened when his investigative piece was rejected by RFY. Shortly thereafter, he abandoned the idea of being a "community reporter," and eventually lost RFY's manager's number, and stopped listening as frequently as he used to. Yet Damien was not resentful in a way that denied RFY any moral standing. During our interview, Damien mentioned that he later regretted losing RFY's number because it prevented him from phoning the station

when, in the dead of night, he witnessed a spectacular robbery in a petrol station near his home. I asked Damien and his friend Fred, present during the interview, why it might be important to report such crimes to the radio. They argued that a direct line to proximity radio stations might provide urban dwellers with reliable access to police, ambulance and fire services - regularly accused of ignoring distress signals in Abidjan's lower-income neighbourhoods.<sup>32</sup> Fred and Damien thus clearly viewed stations as potential allies in the struggle against urban insecurity - a potential solution rather than part of the problem. Indeed, many people I spoke to in Abidjan had phoned stations to report crime or accidents. Even when they had not, coverage of crime was often interviewees' first response when I asked about the kind of news might be important on proximity radio. This echoes Herman Wasserman's (2010b: 39) finding that South African readers often contacted tabloid newspapers with unfolding crime stories, as a way to highlight insecurity and indirectly critique government narratives of progress.

In addition to conceiving of RFY as a potential ally in the struggle against insecurity, Damien emphasised the distinction between proximity radio producers as moral individuals, and the regimes of censorship in which their practices were situated. Reflecting on the censorship of his own investigation, Damien concluded: "The manager [Issa], he's in his seat but... it's someone else's seat." We can recall that Issa personally apologised for the censorship Damien experienced. Damien's statement did not exonerate Issa, nor deny the outcome of his complicity. But it did mean that Damien continued to ground his relationship with Issa in a shared ethical outlook - at the very least, a shared exposure to the vagaries of a higher power. Damien, in other words, allowed that personal character and personal relations might take meaning independently of Issa's close association with what many Yopougon residents considered an authoritarian administration. This nuance is crucial not because it

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<sup>32</sup> Fred told a story in which he was driving down a deserted Yopougon road late into the night, and witnessed a vehicle ahead of him hitting a pedestrian before dashing off. When Fred stopped to look after the injured pedestrian, neighbouring residents initially accused him of having been responsible for the collision. Fred pleaded that they wait for the police to clarify the situation. A police car appeared down the road some hour and a half later, but stopped at a distance. Quickly, the police vehicle turned around and sped away. For Fred, there was no doubt that the police had been afraid to approach a ground of young men in the dead of night, for fear that it might be a trap set by the *microbes*, the youth gangs mentioned earlier. Luckily for Fred, the injured pedestrian was able to testify that the car that hit him had long vanished.

preserves Issa's moral integrity, though in Damien's eyes it did. It is crucial, much more broadly, because it conditioned the very possibility of meaningful personal relations on proximity radio. And as I show in the next part of the chapter, personal relations were precisely what many proximity radio listeners were looking for.

### **5.3 - Popular Research, Radio Encounters, and a Dynamic Sense of Place**

Returning to my starting conversation in the "*grin* Arafat," in Adjamé, I have so far acknowledged that proximity radio talk was constrained, but challenged *grin* members' claim that control over radio was straightforward. Most importantly, I have countered their view that proximity radio stations were somehow "over there," removed in some fundamental way from the spaces, moral universes and concerns of everyday urban life. In the next sections, I confirm this by examining why some *abidjanais* residents actively engaged with proximity radio. I continue to take up the *grin* members' critique. If radio talk was so constrained, what were listeners looking for on the airwaves? And surely, such a constrained space of talk offered only a degraded form of sociability? To answer these questions, I draw primarily on my fieldwork with a listeners' club in Abobo, though I argue that this club was not entirely exceptional in Abidjan's proximity radio scene.

#### 5.3.1 - Finding Oneself and Others After Crisis

In Abobo's central neighbourhood of Mosquée Blanche, in a courtyard in the back of a tailor's workshop, amidst curious children and the rat-tat-tat of sewing machines, I interviewed Roger about his life and his active engagement with Abobo's Radio Arc-en-Ciel (RAC). Roger was an elderly man, originally from the eastern regions of Côte d'Ivoire. He made a living from land he owned on the outskirts of Abidjan, as well as from his self-employment as a photographer. During the conflict that followed Côte d'Ivoire's 2010 presidential elections, a retributive raid in March 2011 forced Roger to flee his neighbourhood of Anonkoi-Kouté (also in Abobo) for several months (APDH n.d.). When he returned in June, his home, like his neighbours', had been entirely emptied of possessions. Still, when discussing life after "the crisis," Roger tried to keep an optimistic outlook. "It's going OK, since we're alive. We've lost a lot, so we're still searching [*on se cherche encore un peu*], but we've got life and health so it's OK"



(interview, 18 June 2015). The expression *se chercher*, which literally translates as "to search oneself" but means "to seek a livelihood," was one I heard very often in Abidjan during fieldwork. The expression recalls AbdouMaliq Simone's (2012) notion of "popular research," by which he describes African urban dwellers' constant efforts to mitigate precariousness and insecurity through exploratory social connections. Roger, like many others in post-conflict Abidjan, was similarly "searching" for new connections. And RAC, "his" proximity radio, offered him an unparalleled way to do so.

Roger was a leading figure in UFARA - the *Unions des Fidèles Auditeurs de la Radio Arc-en-Ciel* (Union of Radio Arc-en-Ciel's Dedicated Listeners). Roger became active on RAC's programmes and later in UFARA because, quite simply, he wanted to meet new people. In this, Roger echoed the experience and desire of almost every UFARA member I interviewed. Through radio, in other words, UFARA members were searching for encounters. They found in RAC a convivial venue in which to meet strangers from various walks of life. While they also found many *other* pleasures and "resonances" (Schulz 2014) on radio, the possibility of encounter was what set RAC apart in their media usage, and what, in the overwhelming majority of accounts, initially motivated listeners to phone in.

The UFARA listeners' club emerged out of an apparently unassuming radio segment: "*Je sais parler ma langue*" ("I know how to speak my language" - JSPML thereafter). JSPML was a 15- to 20-minute segment on RAC's daily morning talk show, *Couleur Arc-en-Ciel*, during which listeners were invited to call to translate a phrase in the African language associated with their ethnic lineage. In passing, callers could extend personal greetings to three people. The premise was not particularly original - a similar programme existed on at least one other proximity radio stations, Radio Amitié (Yopougon) - and it did not appear to offer much potential for free expression. Listeners could not phone it to say what they wanted in "their" language, but had to follow the tight script of translation. Nonetheless, the show gradually grew in popularity in late 2013-2014. RAC's lines became busier and regular listeners began to greet one another. As "serial callers" (Brisset-Foucault 2016), they sought each other out on some of RAC's other interactive programmes. Greetings evolved into jokes, flirting, personal musings, congratulations and condolences. The growing sense of

familiarity included not just listeners but also the cast of *animateurs* involved in *Couleur Arc-en-Ciel*. As the *animateurs* used their mobile phones to receive calls on air, they collected listeners' numbers, and exchanged them upon request (always, they claimed, asking for consent before doing so). The *animateurs* themselves received personal calls and solicitations, some romantically interested and others purely curious. In the autumn of 2014, Roger asked the station's *animateurs* to compile a list of regular callers and personally invited them to attend a get-together. Roger suggested that listeners formalise<sup>33</sup> their association, and about a hundred RAC listeners signed up to form UFARA (see Annex 5). The new, formally constituted listeners' club was inaugurated on February 14, 2015 with a party (*Journée des Auditeurs*) on RAC's premises. Each of the UFARA meetings I attended, between April and September 2015, brought new, prospective listeners, lasting hours and ending with drinks or dancing.

Although UFARA stood out in my fieldwork, it was not entirely exceptional as manifestation of proximity radio listenership. The UFARA was one amongst several listeners' clubs (that I was aware of) in the city. As mentioned above and in Chapter 4, RFY, in Yopougon, also had "listening clubs" (*clubs d'écoute*) in many neighbourhoods. In the southern *commune* of Marcory, I also met a well-organised club formed around Radio Zénith's Baoulé language show. In Adjamé, Salif, a textile worker and *animateur* on Radio Téré, met regularly with a group of listeners who relished the *Mandingue* music he regularly put on, as well as his joking ways in Malinké; prior to his beginnings as an *animateur* on Radio Téré, Salif had himself spearheaded a listeners' club in Treichville.

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<sup>33</sup> Adherents paid a small, monthly fee, in return for which they could benefit from support in the event of illness, birth or family loss, as well as decide on the group's social activities. The desire for formalisation was not well understood by many UFARA members. When I joined, the group was still hesitant to commit to a constitution, and to let Roger carry out what he claimed were the necessary formalities to obtain administrative recognition. He argued that this would grant the UFARA better visibility, a more transparent and trustworthy organisation (guaranteeing newcomers that they weren't being scammed), and stronger leverage if the UFARA were to place requests on the station. Many UFARA members went along, but several privately voiced their disapproval and felt the UFARA had become bogged down in organisational details.

Like Radio Téré and Radio Zénith's listeners' clubs, the UFARA was born out of a radio show featuring African languages (JSPML) (echoing Chibita 2006). In what follows, I consider some reasons why African language shows may have been conducive to such forms of sociability. UFARA differed from these two other listeners' clubs, however, in the same way that JSPML differed from the bulk of African language shows on proximity radio: JSPML was multi-lingual, and UFARA consequently multi-ethnic (as were, for different reasons, RFY's listening clubs). However, in all the clubs I frequented, whether centred around a single ethno-linguistic identity or not, the driving principle was the same: the search for encounters. Radio Zénith's Baoulé listeners' club, for example, was not primarily concerned with promoting the Baoulé identity, but with bringing strangers together who might offer sociability, mutual help and support. In this, it was no different from UFARA. The examples of UFARA and RAC thus resonate beyond the context of Abobo and RAC, to capture a more general feature of proximity radio. With this in mind, we can ask: why did so many UFARA members turn to proximity radio for encounters? How did these encounters happen, and what did they come to mean?

### 5.3.2 - A Sociability of Encounter

To answer this question, we must start with the specific *sociability* that RAC cultivated. To be sure, this sociability had much to do with the skill of radio *animateurs*. *Animateurs* were more or less professionalised hosts and DJs whose role was precisely to enliven radio talk. RAC's *animateurs* were experts at cracking jokes, treading the lines of provocation and flirting, listening and responding seriously when they had to, and nurturing familiarity. *Animation*, on RAC as elsewhere, provided the kind of baseline familiarity and excitement that allowed listeners to be immediately situated when they heard a proximity radio talk show - to know what they were getting into, so to speak (Scannell 1996). Many listeners who encountered RAC through a scan of the airwaves told me that what first captured their attention was an *animateur's* voice and style. But RAC's sociability was about more than the craft and pleasure of on-air conviviality. First, it rested on *a premise of equality*, meaning that (nearly) everyone could join in. Second, it rested on the possibility for radio talk to combine with *off-air* interactions. These two factors, I argue, made RAC a formidable platform for encounter.

### 5.3.2.a - A Premise of Equality

JSPML, like other interactive programmes on RAC and proximity radio more broadly, was inviting not just because it was fun or entertaining - though it *was* filled with laughter - but also because it invited participation on an equal basis. To be clear, and as I return to later, equality here does not mean the erasure of social hierarchies and differences. It is rather an *a priori* condition of participation, or as Englund (2011: 50) puts it, "a condition of relationship" between co-dependent subjects. Equality in this sense is truly a premise: it does not claim that differences in status or material conditions ought to disappear, but begins from the assumption that people are mutually dependent, and as such offers a possibility for "discovery" of "different [ways] in which persons might be involved in each other's lives" (ibid.: 149). Put simply, JSPML and the sociability that underpinned it allowed most people to join in, and suggested that entrenched social hierarchies were not antithetical to the emergence of new familiarities.

The clearest symbol of JSPML's premise of equality, for many listeners, was the ability it offered to develop personal relations with radio producers. This was not just an abstract or "imagined" interrelation. Quite the contrary. Proximity radio's sociability offered the possibility for listeners and producers to develop concrete, tangible relations of mutual knowledge and obligation. Consider the following remark by Thibault, a dedicated RAC listener. Thibault was a tailor whose small, mortgaged workshop is photographed in Figure 8. During one of our conversations, I asked him whether getting to know radio producers personally had challenged his preconceptions about people working in media - or what one anxious producer had called "the myth of the media personality" (*le mythe de l'homme des médias*). This myth equated media work with wealth, which proximity radio producers most certainly did not possess. Some producers worried privately that listeners would be disappointed if they realised that the people they heard on air were, like them, barely getting by. Thibault vehemently denied the importance of the "media personality" myth, valuing instead *animateurs'* closeness and accessibility (in terms reminiscent of class belonging):

We [at UFARA] don't care! We live like that [meaning we share the same material conditions]. We don't look at who has what. What you have, go with it [*faire avec*]. Maybe, if you see their home [meaning if you really see how destitute or wealthy they are]... Armand [a lead *animateur* on JSPML], I don't know his home, but I went to his village for his mother's death. Really, the *animateurs*, they're too simple! You get hold of them easily. You have their number, you can just call. You talk easily. So how could we say, they don't have this or that - whatever the situation, they're always there. They come to [UFARA] meetings. Armand comes to my workshop and we chat. There's no problem! [...] On proximity radio, you can't always have what it takes to buy a car. So tell yourself - no, they are people like us, we're all in the same boat, we take that as it comes to us and go with it. (interview, 30 July, 2015)

For Thibaut, the premise of equality on proximity radio meant that questions of wealth and material standing were, if not erased, then at least deferred, and in the end weighed against other measures of human worth, such as kindness and accessibility. What he makes clear, in any case, is that radio sociability was valued first and foremost for the kinds of concrete social relations and mutual implications that it fostered.



**Figure 8 - Thibault's Workshop, Samaké, Abobo**

The small tailor's workshop that Thibaut purchased on a loan exemplifies the type of small but significant capital that many UFARA members possessed. We can note the small boom-box from which Thibaut listened to Radio Arc-en-Ciel during his long work hours.

The premise of equality between producers and listeners was, arguably, imprinted in proximity radio's very political economy. The overwhelming majority of proximity radio producers were unsalaried, and often even unpaid: few of them were able to rely on sponsorship for their programmes, and not all could demand commissions for announcements. Producers thus relied on external gigs (referred to as *gombos*) to make ends meet: they were regularly called upon to "animate" weddings, baptisms, funerals, birthdays, official ceremonies, neighbourhood parties, and so on. Their need to make a living through *animation* both on- and off-air meant that radio staff were particularly keen to stage encounters and accrue social networks in all sorts of contexts. While many producers evidently sought social networks that would allow them to access more prestigious social fields, most knew that they could not afford to discriminate between social connections. It is also worth noting that most proximity radio producers I met were not "meanwhile journalists" (*journalistes en attendant*), an expression used by former Ivoirian media regulator Diégou Bailly (2001) to lament the absence of professional consciousness in Ivoirian media. The producers that I met were not simply working in radio in the hope of finding something better, but found in the medium a source of fulfilment as well as a crucial platform for visibility and legitimacy.

The fact that *animateurs'* very lives and livelihoods were, almost by necessity, imbricated with listeners', permeated sociability on proximity radio in various ways. On RAC, *animateurs* were particularly willing to give time and attention to listeners, to visit them or chat with them for long hours under a small hut looking onto the road in front of the station (see Figure 3). Producers collected personal stories and dilemmas from listeners, which they anonymised for people to collectively "resolve" on air. They "animated" - for free - at listeners' weddings and ceremonies, attended funerals for deceased family members, and called for support when a listener was ill or grieving. The UFARA listeners' club returned such favours. During a staff meeting, Jacques, RAC's manager, remarked that more listeners than staff had attended a recent funeral for the station owner's brother (RAC was owned by a wealthy pharmacist) - emphasising both the value in having a dedicated listenership, and the duties that producers were expected to fulfil.

Of course, the equality that underpinned sociability on proximity radio was not unqualified. Status differentials may have been suspended but they did not dissolve in radio sociability. Although Thibault professed that wealth meant little in UFARA, other listeners spoke with pride of "big men" (*grands types, grandes personnes*) in the group, highlighting the promise of social mobility associated with their frequentation. In addition, the type of French used on air, on RAC as elsewhere in broadcasting, tended to be associated with higher educational capital and a display of respectability. As a result, as mentioned in Chapter 4, UFARA's membership tended to aspire for a kind of lower-middle-class status. Last but certainly not least, gender and generation differentials remained prevalent in UFARA. Roger's authority over the group derived, in part, from his status as a land-owning male elder, and some UFARA women expressed discontent (in private) with the way their voices were belittled in the organisation.

Nonetheless, the premise of equality on RAC allowed participation - both in radio programmes and in UFARA - to be strikingly diverse, and less hierarchical than in other venues of public talk. If we return, once again, to the Adjamé *grin* where I began this chapter, the comparison is revealing. *Grins* are discussion spaces exclusively reserved for Muslim men (and, most often, Muslim men who speak Malinké). What is more, as Sarah Vincourt and Souleymane Kouyaté (2012) demonstrate, *grins* enact a strict generational hierarchy between *grands* (accomplished, married and wealthy men) and *petits* (men who remain dependent and, as a result, do not have equal speaking rights). In contrast, UFARA had many active female members, and welcomed participation from the young and the unemployed. In the course of my interviews and hanging out I met small, independent traders, high-schoolers, housewives, informal hustlers, a couple of salaried men, and several unemployed people of all ages. Paying visits to individual UFARA members took me all across Abobo, from informal neighbourhoods like Kennedy-Clotchoua to relatively well-off residential quarters like Abobo Baoulé.

In addition, by virtue of JSMPL's multi-lingual format, UFARA was a thoroughly multi-ethnic organisation (see Annex 5). Therein lay one of the benefits of JSPML's tightly scripted translation exercise. The fact that it required limited linguistic abilities allowed even those who did not master "their" African language to join in. At the same

time, the inclusion of African languages brought in an element of self-disclosure that might have remained absent in a show entirely carried out in French. Such was Ibou's argument. Ibou was a young man (less than 25 years old) living in one of Abobo's several informal neighbourhoods (PK-18). Stalled in his attempts at various trades, and equipped with only a primary education, when I met him he helped run a video game parlour in a wooden hut in front of his family's house. Ibou did not speak "his" African language (Malinké) very well, yet when he discovered JSPML, he was encouraged to have a go. When I asked Ibou why he thought it was important to hear African languages on air, he responded:

Now you don't hide. Well, I don't know that people were hiding, but maybe you wouldn't be able to say "I'm from this ethnic group or that ethnic group." [...] It's allowed people to express themselves in their language. When JSPML came along, that's when you could find out where people are actually from: some listeners you would've thought they're Malinké, for example, but not at all! They are Tagbana, or Moré. Or [this elder] is Agni, whereas [this young woman] is Baoulé. Without the show, you wouldn't know that all of these people are from all of these ethnic groups. From Côte d'Ivoire and Africa. [...] I think this demonstrates peace. (interview, 28 July, 2015)

According to Ibou, JSPML's simple premise allowed the unproblematic and playful disclosure of speakers' ethno-linguistic identity. Ibou's mention of "peace" indicates UFARA's relatively self-reflexive approach to post-conflict ethnic diversity, though the language of "peace" and "social cohesion" was mostly intended for me, the white researcher. Peace, social cohesion and diversity were not commonly used concepts in ordinary UFARA conversations, and, in Ibou's remark, had no doubt been adopted from RAC's abundant donor-sponsored content on such issues (see Chapter 6).

### *5.3.2.b - On- and Off-Air Sociability*

For most UFARA members, radio sociability could not stay confined to the airwaves. As Roger put it, "calling all the time without knowing each other, it's pointless [*ça donne rien* - literally, it gives nothing]." Taking radio sociability off the air had at least two rationales. First, as Roger indicates, it allowed listeners to know each other better. Face-to-face interactions were seen to be paramount to the emergence of meaningful social bonds, and every listener I interviewed spoke enthusiastically of the moment



when they "put a face to the voice" of other listeners, so to speak. Furthermore, the deepening of bonds between listeners required interaction in specific settings, including the home and - ideally - the village. As evoked in Thibaut's quote above, knowing someone's home was a marker of trust and mutual implication. And while few listeners could afford to travel beyond Abidjan without urgent business, many expressed the desire to take fellow listeners to their village of origin (however remote that origin may have been in actuality). This echoes anthropologists' findings about the continued relevance of "the village" as a marker of urban dwellers' personal identity and social life in Africa (e.g. Geschiere & Gugler 1998; Geschiere 2014; Englund 2002). For UFARA members, the hope of bringing radio sociability to "the village" was a way to share a part of themselves, and to confirm the strength of emerging social bonds. In one instance, a contingent of UFARA listeners did go to "the village": they rented a minibus to attend the funeral of an RAC *animateur's* mother in Montézo, about two hours east of Abidjan. This was such a defining experience in the life of the group that, afterwards, members informally referred to any exciting social occasion - drinks in a local *maquis*, or even a particularly momentous radio segment - as "going to Montézo."

The other reason for taking radio sociability off the air was, undoubtedly, to allow conversations to run a freer course. Off-air talk allowed RAC listeners to discuss topics that would be off-limits on the airwaves. Thus, many UFARA meetings, formal or impromptu, were occasions for listeners to talk politics and current affairs - much like the *grin* evoked at the start of the chapter. Thus, *grin* members' claim that proximity radio only allowed constrained and censored talk was, to some extent, misguided. Proximity radio's sociability *did* include unbridled conversations about controversial topics. These conversations simply took place off the air.

The importance of off-air interactions for the enactment of radio sociability had *spatial* in addition to social implications. Many UFARA members expressed the thrill of encounters in terms of expanding territorial knowledge. Personal visits, group meetings and social occasions with fellow listeners gave them a reason to travel the city in ways they would not have otherwise. Linda, a UFARA member, expressed this very clearly. Linda was a single mother, whose difficult divorce, unsuccessful enterprises and menial informal revenues forced her to live day to day. In our

interview I asked her whether she followed any kind of current affairs (*l'actualité*), to which she replied negatively. She quickly corrected herself, and reflected that becoming active on proximity radio had allowed her to expand her knowledge of "what was going on" in other ways:

I move a lot [*je bouge beaucoup*]. Because you have to search [*il faut chercher*]! When I said I don't follow current affairs [*je ne suis pas l'actualité*], that's not it. You always have to search, search... how to live! How to make a living! You can't stay in the house and it will come find you. So you need to go out and move. Find out what to do... How to collaborate with people so you can do projects together. So, thanks to RAC, I move a lot. (interview, 30 July, 2015)

Like many other UFARA members, Linda continuously sought to expand her reach and knowledge, and radio allowed her to feel on the move. Linda highlights the link, common in Abidjan as elsewhere (Simone 2005a; Konings & Foeken 2006; Moores & Metykova 2009), between physical mobility in the city and the promise of new opportunities.

If mobility mattered in radio encounters, it is important not to overstate its importance. Proximity radio's sociability of encounter did not promise to abolish distance so much as expand listeners' practiced territory. The importance of regular, face-to-face interactions for the life of UFARA meant that physical proximity between listeners also mattered considerably. Many listeners' mobility - and indeed many *abidjanais* residents' - remained constrained by the brute realities of money. This is not to say that urban dwellers were not often energetically on the move (as Linda demonstrates), but that they had to make difficult choices about which travels to prioritise. Some listeners lived in Abobo's more central neighbourhoods and could thus pay visits on foot; others lived near transport hubs and thus frequently received visits from fellow listeners on their way to and from elsewhere. For those who lived in more peripheral zones, and/or whose income was limited (one often went with the other), paying visits could be a considerable financial effort. Linda, for example, was often moneyless, and explained that she befriended collective taxi drivers (*wôrô-*

*wôrô*) passing in front of her shop in the hope of getting an occasional free ride.<sup>34</sup> While a few active RAC listeners lived outside of Abobo, they struggled to attend meetings and as a result could be more easily forgotten. Manon, a young (20 years old), unemployed woman, offers a heart-breaking example. Manon had been actively involved in UFARA affairs for a year when she moved south of the city with her aunt, upon whom she depended. She could no longer pay visits to UFARA members, who had been her primary social group in Abobo. Just as Manon could not travel northward, most RAC listeners could scarcely afford to her new home in Marcory. In addition, Manon could no longer clearly receive RAC's signal from where she lived, and stopped calling on RAC's shows. Gradually, she faded from the group's social horizon. When I met her two months after her move, she lamented that only a handful of members had kept in touch through text messages. Manon's case reveals that physical proximity was not incidental to sustaining radio sociability. In a context of limited mobility, it ensured the possibility of regular contact and the concrete expression of familiarity.

A final but crucial point: for all the importance of off-air venues and interactions, on-air radio interactions remained central to the life of UFARA. It is worth reiterating that on- and off-air were not thought as distinct realms of sociability, but part of a single, radio-related social life. Off-air experiences turned into allusions or inside jokes during interactive radio programmes, infusing radio talk with additional playfulness. In reverse, on-air interactions, playlists and stories were the object of much commentary off the airwaves. Radio stories that featured personal dilemmas (mostly amorous or sexual) were often discussed weeks after they aired, partly because listeners sought to find out whether the story came from someone they knew (see Grätz 2014). Furthermore, interactions on the airwaves continued to be important because they "officialised" UFARA membership. One could simply not be a member of UFARA without active on-air participation - possibly because, as mentioned, radio talk involved unique modalities of self-disclosure. Equally, it was on the airwaves that UFARA's *togetherness* was daily actualised. As mentioned, UFARA members did not have the time or money to meet on a constant basis. Regular calls and salutations on

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<sup>34</sup> The *wôrô-wôrô* ran fixed routes, mostly within the same municipal district. Many passed on the road where Linda watched over some friends' stalls, and stopped at a coffee kiosk - a kind of *grin* - where she killed time.

the airwaves acted as a reminder and re-enactment of social bonds, in anticipation of the next meeting. When members stopped calling, other listeners inquired about their health or fortune, and no effort was spared to find out what was wrong. Indeed, one of UFARA's formative experiences was the decision, by a group of regular callers and RAC *animateurs*, to pay a (surprise) visit to a listener who had fallen badly ill. Above all, however, UFARA members valued on-air sociability because radio's reach meant that *new listeners could always join in*. They regularly did, and so existing listeners relived, again and again, the pleasure and mystery of encounter.

### 5.3.3 - Radio Encounters and the Making of Place

Proximity radio's distinctive sociability, premised on a relative equality and on an interplay of on- and off-air interaction, resonated with *abidjanais* residents' practices of popular research. This "resonance," to borrow a term from Dorothea Schulz's (2014) work on local radio in Mali, drew urban dwellers to proximity radio stations in search of encounters. In this section, I consider how proximity radio's sociability of encounter could be said to make place in the post-conflict city. To do so, I draw on a quote from Rose, one of UFARA's most dynamic and enthusiastic members. Perhaps more than anyone I met in Abidjan, Rose exemplified the kind of popular research that motivated active listenership on proximity radio. She offers a perfect summary of what was at stake in the search for radio encounters, and allows us to capture the ways in which this search amounted to a collective "production of locality" (Appadurai 1996).

Rose was a single mother and polyvalent informal entrepreneur. Before the 2011 post-electoral crisis, she made a decent living organising the transport of large quantities of coal into Abidjan. At the height of conflict, however, Rose was targeted as a "Dioula" (Bouquet 2003) and a Ouattara-supporting "Northerner" (which, she repeatedly emphasised, she was not). Rose herself was not harmed, but lost an entire coal shipment and was forced out of business. She became a hair dresser and a broker of fresh produce. Although Rose had known RAC for a long time, she started listening regularly and phoning in in 2014. When I met her in the spring of 2015, she had come to know every UFARA member personally, and prided herself on having "seen their home" (a sign of trust and familiarity, as mentioned). She paid and/or received visits almost daily, often walking great distances, and regularly invited listeners and

*animateurs* for a meal in her small salon. Rose spoke of new connections with excitement, each one loaded with the promise of discovery and surprise. She was constantly on the lookout for new listeners to join UFARA, and to this end encouraged her neighbours - or anyone she met - to start phoning in. When I asked Rose why it was so important to gather new listeners and get to know them in person, she explained:

Phoning in gave me... I met Roger, Micheline, Fanta... Many, many people. Especially - well, all of the people in the radio. That's how I met them. [...] So through [phoning in] I've got to know many people in Abobo. Some listeners are in Yopougon, too! And I've even been to Azaguié [rural suburb, 30 minutes north of Abobo] to meet some listeners there. [...] There's an old Mossi, I go to meet him. [...] He's become... like a father. [...]

And now, when more people call in, you start to form a family! Today - you never know. I hope it won't, but what if my head starts to ache? At one point my mother was ill and I lost my two fathers - by which I mean, my father and his little brother. In one week, both of them died. The old Mossi, he called me, he was so sad. So many people called me - I tell you, I was so relieved. [...] Imagine, if I didn't know all these people, who would have comforted me? [...]

It's all relations. And we can have more! Today, there are some big people [*grands types*] among us [in UFARA]. Two work in the port, one in the airport [meaning they are salaried]. Of course, they don't always have time for our meetings, but at all times we call each other to see how things are going. [...] And in the group, we've decided to trade services. Outside of radio. I'm a hairdresser; if a listener has a daughter who doesn't want to school but to learn hair-styling, I can take her in. I wouldn't ask for a penny! [...] People don't realise just what radio can open. Did I know I was going to be drinking with you today? If people are mourning, we support them. If they lost money, we can top them up. It's through radio that we met but beyond radio, life goes on. (interview, June 25, 2015)

Rose summarises the many facets of proximity radio's sociability of encounter. For Rose, encounters promised almost endless possibilities for social exchange and mutual implication. Thus, while she refers to "family," using a language of "radio kinship" (Englund 2015), this kinship was clearly "aspirational" (McGovern 2012): it did not seek to enact specific forms of mutual dependence, but rather allow for deepening bonds in an open-ended landscape of familiarity. In the same way, if Rose's

anticipation of new social connections was to some degree instrumental, it was "aimlessly instrumental," in Don Slater's (2014: 81) expression. Encounters remained encounters - that is, unforeseen and unplanned moments of social discovery - and the pure pleasure of curiosity was indistinguishable from the search for a more secure and, ideally, less cash-strapped life. In addition, for Rose, radio encounters implicated both distance and face-to-face interactions, on- and off-air. As such, encounters took their full meaning when they involved the simultaneous expansion of Rose's social network, spatial knowledge and spatial habits. Rose found pleasure in physical mobility and territorial discovery, relishing the occasion to go to nearby Yopougon or Azaguié. Yet for Rose, radio encounters were not (just) about the promise of limitless mobility. They also involved the constitution of a ready-to-hand support network, one that could offer her security and carry her through life-rattling events. In sum, radio encounters involved dynamics of expansion and rootedness, inseparably. They allowed the consolidation of a sense of basic but fundamental familiarity from which Rose, like other UFARA members, could seek out the new and the unknown.

In this combination of rootedness and expansion, of the social and the spatial, proximity radio's sociability of encounter contributed to *abidjanais* residents' everyday making of place. Through radio, listeners like Rose, Roger or Linda could share, strengthen and expand meaningful configurations of closeness. The locality that was thus being produced was not a fixed geography of dwelling, but a shifting terrain of movement, habit and knowledge (Massey 1994; Ingold 2009; Moores 2012). In turn, the making of place through radio encounters provided listeners with an open-ended way of apprehending togetherness in the city. UFARA's multi-ethnic membership demonstrates that radio sociability could sustain inclusive ways of living together. Again, UFARA did not remove or dissolve social hierarchies and conflicts, but offered a place for "probing and working out" (Hall 2012: 5) differences after conflict.

#### **5.4 - Conclusion: Of Power, Encounters, and Place**

I began this chapter with an *abidjanais* critique of proximity radio. Participants in a *grin*, a common street discussion space in Abidjan, argued that proximity radio was too entangled with power. *Grin* members contrasted radio's scripted and censored talk

with their desire to keep abreast of current affairs and discuss politics. Implicitly, *grin* members were comparing proximity broadcasting's contribution to local talk and sociability with their own. In the rest of the chapter I endeavoured to address two elements of the *grin* members' critique. The first was that proximity radio stations were controlled by authorities, starting with municipal administrations. I showed this to be broadly true, but with significant caveats, not least proximity radio producers' ability to find critical margins of manoeuvre. The second element of critique was that censorship and surveillance on proximity radio removed stations from the sphere of everyday life, which is to say from urban dwellers' concerns, ethics and interests. I showed that this was not the case. *Abidjanais* residents, or those whom I met, did not envision proximity radio stations and producers to be alien to their realm of experience or from their own moral outlook.

Most crucially, I showed in the second part of this chapter that proximity radio stations *did* offer urban dwellers a venue for meaningful talk and social exchange. Stations such as Radio Arc-en-Ciel, in Abobo, fostered a lively sociability in which urban dwellers found extraordinary opportunities for encounter. Proximity radio stations were thus not very different from *grins*. Indeed, as a sociable venue, proximity radio was far more diverse than *grins* and most other spaces of public talk in the city. By tracing radio encounters' meanings and geographies, furthermore, I demonstrated that proximity radio could play a pivotal and multi-faceted role in urban dwellers' practices of making place. Proximity radio's distinctive sociability allowed listeners to find both rootedness and expansion in social connection, and, in so doing, articulate open-ended ways of living together in the post-conflict city.

In this chapter, I have begun to provide answers to my research questions. RQ2 asked how *abidjanais* residents positioned the local in relation to power, politics and histories of conflict. In this chapter, I have discussed how popular topographies of power in Abidjan involved two overlapping readings: 1) a dichotomous reading of "top" *versus* "bottom," or street *versus* state; and 2) a pervasive anxiety over spectral state presence. The ways people conceived of proximity radio stations, in Abidjan, was influenced by both readings. *Grin* members associated proximity radio with "top-down" communication, while producers and listeners worried about their exposure to ubiquitous surveillance and organised insecurity.

RQ1 asked about the ways that place featured as a collective project on proximity radio. Here, I have shown that everyday place-making lay at the heart of proximity radio's sociability of encounter, albeit as a partially reflexive outcome of listeners' search for social connections. Facilitating encounters and allowing the fruition of open-ended familiarities, furthermore, allowed proximity radio to contribute in deeply meaningful ways to the process and practices of post-conflict cohabitation (RQ3). Proximity radio's entanglements with power, however, meant that much of the social exchange involved in making place remained inaudible. The knowledge, ideas, concerns, critiques and claims that might emerge out of listeners' encounters, out of their active cohabitation, could find only a limited outlet on the airwaves. In this way as well, proximity radio stations were like *grins*: although they were abuzz with talk, much of it could not be easily amplified. This, perhaps, was the source of *grin* members' frustration with proximity radio. *Grins* and other street discussion spaces provided Abidjan with venues in which to share local critiques and experiences, but proximity radio's contribution to the making of urban place, they felt, ought to be so much more.



## Chapter 6

# Radio Reconciliation: Repair and Injunction in the Neighbourhood

### 6.1 - Introduction

In the previous chapter, I described how proximity radio's sociability of encounter contributed to the re-making of place in Abidjan. Interactive programmes resonated with urban dwellers' search for social connection, and in this way proximity radio played an important role in the dynamics of post-conflict living-together. It will have been apparent, however, that listeners' search for encounters and togetherness was not couched in the language of peace-building. In addition, much of the social exchange that radio encounters fostered took place off the airwaves - due in part to restrictions on radio talk. In this chapter, I turn to proximity radio's more *deliberate* and audible engagement with local peace-building, social cohesion and reconciliation (the three terms, as mentioned, were used interchangeably in Abidjan). I consider the programmes through which radio producers explicitly addressed the terms and meanings of local reconciliation. In doing so I ask: what kind of place did proximity radio's reconciliation programming envision? Why and with what consequences? Here again, the question of place's relation to power features prominently, although in complex and refracted ways. I start by briefly re-situating reconciliation programming on proximity radio within Côte d'Ivoire's national peace-building process. I note that *the neighbourhood* was the key figure of locality around which radio peace-building programmes were articulated. After discussing why that may have been, I draw on two exemplary programmes to examine how the neighbourhood was apprehended as a site of reconciliation. I trace these reconciliation programmes' underlying conception of place through the practices they set out to mobilise and the kinds of talk that they aimed to elicit. Drawing on critiques of localism, as expounded in Chapter 3, I pay particular attention to the terms under which the local was connected to larger scales of concern, responsibility and action.

### 6.2 - Repairing the Neighbourhood

### 6.2.1 - The Neighbourhood and the Nation

As noted at the end of Chapter 1, proximity radio stations' peace-oriented programming should be understood within the context of Côte d'Ivoire's inconclusive process of national reconciliation. The CDVR (2011-2014), an independent Commission for Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation, set out the process's overarching framework but much of its components - from the collection of evidence to the publicising of testimonies and findings - was decentralised. Proximity radio stations, in particular, were envisaged as ground workers of reconciliation (Internews 2014; CDVR 2016: 33-35). Their role was to make peace tangible at local level by publicising the work of the CDVR and organising conversations around *vivre-ensemble* in more intimate settings, where the stakes and parameters of cohabitation could presumably be more concretely contextualised. Indeed, proximity radio stations were the *main* media institutions involved in the Ivoirian reconciliation process at the time of my fieldwork. The CDVR's own report, published in December 2016 (two years after the official end of its mission), lamented an absence of coverage and engagement in the national media.<sup>35</sup> Along with the deep bias of post-conflict justice (Amnesty International 2013; ICTJ 2016), in 2015, this absence of national media coverage was one of the reasons many international analysts and Ivoirians considered the CDVR's mission to be a failure (Akindès & Zina 2015).

Unlike on national media, reconciliation programming was prominent on proximity radio. In what follows, I focus on two programmes that were at once salient and typical. The first was a series of fortnightly "public shows" (*émissions publiques*), organised between March and October 2015 by Radio Fraternité Yopougon (RFY) and Radio Arc-en-Ciel (RAC). The shows promoted reconciliation, social cohesion and peaceful electoral behaviour in different neighbourhoods of Yopougon and Abobo, respectively. The second was a single programme, a live, hour-long testimonial/round-table segment organised by RFY for the National Day of Peace in November 2014. In their performative ideals, in their content and in the actors that they brought together, the public shows and the Day of Peace programme exemplified the overall discourse of

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<sup>35</sup> The CDVR does not mention commercial media in its report, but my regular listening of Nostalgie and Jam FM, Abidjan's two main commercial broadcasters, did not indicate the presence of much peace-oriented programming on either station.

local reconciliation found on proximity radio in Abidjan. This is not to say that similar shows filled the airwaves: programmes specifically dedicated to peace-building required considerable planning and organisation for producers, and as such represented only a small portion of stations' weekly scheduling. Still, in their reflexive and exceptional nature, the programmes I analyse below epitomised ways of thinking and talking about local reconciliation that surfaced more widely and diffusely on proximity radio - and beyond. The issues and language that these programmes showcased could be found on many other, more regular and development-oriented radio segments. This language, furthermore, was by no means specific to proximity radio. Radio producers borrowed without citing from the CDVR's public interventions or government statements; they were also influenced by donor organisations such as USAID, which funded the public shows under discussion. In Abidjan, in 2014-2015, expressions like "*vivre-ensemble*," "*cohésion sociale*" or "*rapprochement entre les populations*" (bringing people closer) had gained such widespread currency that proximity radio producers employed them as though they were self-evident. This self-evidence could itself be a challenge: producers had to devise ways to translate it into everyday talk, into local aspirations and lived processes.

A common way that proximity radio programmes attempted to make reconciliation and social cohesion intelligible as local concerns was by anchoring them to *the neighbourhood*. As a figure of "the local," the neighbourhood was conceived as both a primary unit of city life and an intimate sphere of communication. RAC and RFY's public shows in March-October 2015 toured different neighbourhoods because, in producers' words, this would allow "the message to transmit more easily," the issues to feel "closer" to residents, and overall communication to be more "proximate." The Day of Peace programme on RFY did not venture out into Yopougon's neighbourhoods, but its guests were neighbourhood representatives standing in for a popular geography of conflict: there were three representatives from neighbourhoods popularly identified as Muslim and "Northern" (Port-Bouët II, Doukouré and Mami-Faitai), and two from neighbourhoods commonly associated with Western ethnic groups (Yao-Séhi and Koweit); all of these neighbourhoods were recognised as "hard hit" (*très touchés*) by post-electoral violence. The show made constant references to "*dans nos/dans les quartiers*" (in our/the neighbourhoods), implying that neighbourhoods were key loci where *abidjanais* residents thought about, discussed

and ought to practice post-conflict cohabitation. Beyond the radio programmes that I discuss in this chapter, many if not most local reconciliation initiatives I encountered in Abidjan were neighbourhood-based. As mentioned in Chapter 1, in 2014-2015 the city was awash with neighbourhood football tournaments, prayer vigils, block parties, communal meals and street-sweeping initiatives linked, even if only rhetorically, to social cohesion and reconciliation.

The abundance of neighbourhood reconciliation initiatives poses two questions. The first is proximity radio's specific contribution. Proximity radio producers mainly saw their peace-building role as one of making a national message of reconciliation intelligible to local audiences. Their way of apprehending reconciliation, in other words, was similar to the way they approached their broader developmental mission, and was fairly "didactic," if not in tone then in outlook (Englund 2011: 24; also Fardon & Furniss 2000). This didactic positioning was largely linked to external donors' intervention, but was to some extent adopted and internalised by producers themselves: the Day of Peace programme on RFY, for example, was not funded by an international organisation but led by the station itself in collaboration with Yopougon's municipal "Civil Society Platform" (*Plateforme de la société civile de Yopougon*). In a broader, more discursive sense, proximity radio's role could be understood as one of articulation (Slack 1996). Its aim, in keeping with the CDVR's strategy, was to link neighbourhood reconciliation to national re-unification, making the part stand for the whole.

The second question that arises from proximity radio's position amidst a plethora of neighbourhood initiatives is one of legitimacy. If neighbourhood initiatives were already plentiful in Abidjan, how was proximity radio's intervention perceived? As noted in the previous chapter, proximity radio's everyday activities had to be understood in light of urban dwellers' anxieties about power, surveillance and insecurity. The shows I discuss here were no exception. RAC and RFY's public shows, especially, took place in the lead-up to the October 2015 presidential elections, and as such were difficult to disentangle from worries over justice, propaganda and domination. In a context in which marches by the opposition were being prohibited or shut down by police, residents of Abobo and Yopougon could understandably ask themselves who and what lay behind the messages of reconciliation and democracy

suddenly blaring on their doorstep. Or as one public show audience member asked me: "who is saying this?"

### 6.2.2 - Trauma and Anxieties over Social Infrastructure

In this section, I briefly consider why the neighbourhood may have been a prime site for peace-building initiatives, on radio and beyond. If the neighbourhood was discursively articulated to the nation in local reconciliation programmes, in everyday life it was also often seen to be an essential component of city life. Many sociological and anthropological studies of urban Africa have highlighted the neighbourhood as a key geographical unit for sociality, belonging and politics (e.g. Konings & Foeken 2006; Desai 2007; Wade 2009). In Abidjan, neighbourhoods have historically served as reference points for grassroots social organisation, from the development of communal and informal housing to the implementation of private, resident-led security schemes (e.g. Yapi-Diahou 1986; Bonnassieux 1987; Dembélé 2003b; Steck 2008). In turn, many - though not all - neighbourhoods have acquired a quasi-administrative status and become part of *abidjanais* "popular cartographies" (Moyer 2004), even when boundaries remained fuzzy. Neighbourhood life was tremendously important for many *abidjanais* residents I spoke with. It was often amongst neighbours that they found financial and moral support, collaborators, and entry into broader social networks.

This sheds some light on why the breakdown of neighbourliness was a salient element in narratives of crisis and conflict in Abidjan. We can recall the testimonies gathered by Cécile Vidal (2002) shortly after the 2000 elections, evoked in Chapter 1. In Vidal's testimonies, national conflict took on heightened significance when it began to scramble habitual neighbourly relations. "Threats amongst neighbours" materialised anxieties about national disintegration. Such anxieties remained widespread at the time of my fieldwork. An account by Brahim, a news agent and regular contributor on Radio Téré (Adjamé), illustrates the kinds of stories that would circulate in 2014-2015. Brahim lived on an Adjamé estate that he considered to be predominantly "pro-Gbagbo." In the weeks immediately following the November 2010 elections, Brahim found out through a friend in the police that one of his neighbours had singled him out as an RDR agitator to the Patriotic Galaxy militias of Williamsville (a central Adjamé

neighbourhood where Radio Téré is located). The neighbour in question fled Adjamé when the pro-Ouattara FRCI reclaimed the *commune* in a bloody battle in March-April 2011. Brahimá noted that his neighbour never returned:

These people who took up arms, or who put the names of their neighbours on lists, even if you offer them a million they'll never come back to the neighbourhood. To this day, we promise that nothing will happen. But they know deep down that it's too good to be true. So they'll never come back. There are plenty of abandoned houses.

Fabien: So the person who put you on a list, he didn't come back?

He didn't come back. Because I wasn't the only one on that list. I can forgive. But what about the others? And maybe it's a façade. On the surface, they might accept his apologies. But if he comes to spend the night, what guarantees that he'll wake up in the morning? (interview, 11 June, 2015)

In Brahimá's story, trust amongst neighbours had been put into question. Local surfaces that once projected friendly, acquiescent or at least indifferent gazes could not be taken for granted anymore. Without this basic sense of trust, commonality and predictability, one's very *home* - what Bachelard (1994) conceived as the most fundamental space of intimacy, from which one's sense of the world expands - had become insecure.

Neighbourhoods' historical importance for social organisation in Abidjan gave stories of residents turning against each other a wider resonance. Consider the two following accounts. The first is from an interview with Momo, a youth section leader (*président des jeunes*) in one of Abobo's dense *quartiers populaires*, Plaque I. It is followed by another excerpt from a conversation with Hervé, also a youth leader, in the equally working-class neighbourhood of GESCO (on Yopougon's north-western periphery, where the city gives way to a large industrial estate and to the more rural ring of *abidjanais* suburbs).

Momo: [My role] is to make sure that people conform to a certain number of rules in order for things to go forward. We have to strengthen familiarity, these familial bonds. [...] Without solidarity... we can die! Let me give you an example. Imagine that your

wife is pregnant. Maybe - you don't know! - she'll go into labour at one in the morning. Where are you going to find a taxi at that hour, here, to take her to the hospital? [...] If you have a neighbour who has a car you can knock on his door [...] But if you haven't exchanged with him before, anything, then there's no solidarity - everyone goes home and shuts their door. [...] That's why we try to keep solidarity going in the neighbourhood. At the level of infrastructure [...] take the sewers around here. Often people make illegal connections from their showers and toilets. But they're open sewers! [...] So someone will come see me: "Ah, *président*, I'm not looking for a fight but what my neighbour has been doing, I just can't stand it." We at the youth bureau will send a delegation to the family in question [...] we tell them they should consider digging a septic tank, or contract waste extractors... We negotiate with them, to solve the problem. (interview, 2 August, 2015)

Momo's self-presentation - in which we must allow for some self-aggrandisement - gives us a sense of what was commonly seen to be at stake in neighbourhood sociality in Abidjan. Social exchange or practices of "mutual witnessing" (Simone 2012) amongst neighbours were key to ensuring the provision of necessities, whether that meant access to emergency health services or the maintenance of environmental hygiene. This was especially important for poorer and service-strapped areas of the city, but even the emerging "middle-class" neighbourhoods I visited lacked integrated infrastructure and required advanced cooperation on the part of residents.<sup>36</sup> Drawing on AbdouMaliq Simone's work on ordinary city-making practices in the Global South, we can say that in visions like Momo's, neighbourhoods are a crucial node in "the social infrastructure of city life" (2010b; 2004b).

The infrastructural importance of neighbourhood sociality was confirmed by Hervé, a youth section leader in GESCO (Yopougon). During our interview, Hervé let slip that one of his attempts to orchestrate collaboration had been "boycotted" by

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<sup>36</sup> *Abidjanais* residents often spoke of middle-class neighbourhoods as places where individualism could flourish and where, as the expression went, "*chacun est dans son chacun*" (roughly translating as: each to their own). This appraisal could be negative as well as positive - even envious: some residents in poorer parts of the city aspired to living conditions in which they did not have to be so heavily implicated in their neighbours' lives. However, such a view was not entirely justified. In the recent, largely middle-class neighbourhood of Plateau Dokui, for example, where residential development had often occurred without public investment and planning, cooperation between residents was essential to deliver navigable roads, nighttime security and even running water in some parts.

neighbourhood youth. He had tried to organise local men to repair one of the main roads bordering one of the area's markets: the road had been ravaged by rain and, when I visited, had turned into a gigantic pool of water and mud through which no vehicle could pass. When I asked him why local people had boycotted Hervé's initiative, he answered:

They boycotted! And now we're all paying for it. The SOTRA [public] buses no longer come through. We all lost - all of us who live here. What did they tell themselves? Why is it *me* [Hervé] organising this, why isn't it one of their sons, why isn't it them, why isn't it so and so? Why is it a Baoulé running the show [central ethnic group aligned, in the spectacle of national politics, with the Ouattara government], and not a Gouro, a Bété [both western groups, a presumed majority in GESCO], a José or a Robert... But today, it's not just the Baoulé and the Northerners who use the road. The road belongs to José, to Robert, to Kouakou, to Konan [both names typical of central ethnic groups], to Yéo [Western], to Ouattara [Northern], to Digbé [Western]... It belongs to all of us. (interview, 14 August, 2015)

Hervé made clear the impact of inter-ethnic suspicion on neighbourhood organisational capacities. He contrasted "lack of solidarity" in post-conflict GESCO with the impressive infrastructural accomplishments he witnessed during his childhood: examples included neighbourhood security patrols and the informal extension of electric lines from the pillars lining the nearby highway. Through damage to social infrastructure, physical infrastructure itself was thus at risk of decay, in the absence of state intervention. Stories like Hervé's echo Susan Leigh Star's (1999) point that it is in breakdown that infrastructure becomes most visible. As Star (*ibid.*) and Brian Larkin (2013) have further pointed out, infrastructures always involve some form of politics, which is usually masked and "naturalised" in infrastructures' very matter-of-fact-ness. Yet as Hervé indicated, even the professed neutrality of roads had succumbed to division in Abidjan.<sup>37</sup> "People as infrastructure" (Simone 2004b) and

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<sup>37</sup> A ubiquitous example of road politics during my fieldwork was the so-called "*troisième pont*" (third bridge). Initially announced by Henri Konan Bédié in the late 1990s, construction on the third bridge linking north and south Abidjan across the lagoon was launched by Ouattara in 2011 and completed just as I first landed in Abidjan, at the end of 2014. The bridge crystallised debates about infrastructure's neutrality. Ouattara supporters used the bridge to demonstrate the President's ability to deliver progress for all Ivoirians, while opponents



material infrastructures, in Hervé's account, had both been interrupted by a decade of ethno-political conflict and had not fully been re-integrated in the aftermath.

The experiences of neighbourhoods in crisis were part of a broader conception of social infrastructure, which gave them urgency and resonance far beyond local affairs. Both testimonies above rested on the understanding that neighbourhoods were essential grounds for the expression and consolidation of solidarity, without which urban living threatened to descend into anomie. Functioning neighbourhood solidarity was seen to be indispensable to individual survival and infrastructural repair. In this way, the local was made part of a broader edifice. "Fixing" neighbourhood cohabitation became paramount to achieving a working urban order. Although proximity radio's role was rarely conceptualised as such, its focus on neighbourhood reconciliation can be interpreted as an attempt to orchestrate the repair of Abidjan's social infrastructure. Yet as indicated in the previous chapter, radio itself was not always envisaged as a neutral infrastructure.

### 6.2.3 - Proximity Radio in the Neighbourhood: Staging Reconciliation

Proximity radio stations placed neighbourhood stories and anxieties at the heart of their reconciliation programming. While varied in tone, content and approach - from daily community announcements to more developmental exposés to explicit peace-building initiatives - this programming can be reduced to three fundamental elements: the production of local conviviality, testimony, and the promotion of neighbourhood mediators. RAC and RFY's public shows condensed all three elements. The Day of Peace programme was more solemn in tone, and focused only on testimonies and commentary by neighbourhood mediators.

#### *6.2.3.a - Conviviality*

The public shows (*émissions publiques*) were led by RAC and RFY in their respective *commune* between March and October 2015 (see Annex 3). On Sunday afternoons, every two weeks, the stations set up a powerful sound-system on dirt fields and side-

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criticised the fact that the bridge, financed in public-private partnership, required vehicles to pay a consequential fee.

alleys often far removed from the city's main thoroughfares, and invited residents to join in dancing, games and round-table discussions centred around peace, reconciliation, social cohesion and peaceful elections (*élections apaisées*) (see Figures 9 and 10). Public shows, or what would elsewhere be called road shows, were nothing new for proximity radio stations in Abidjan. RFY used to hold regular and popular road shows in Yopougon in the mid-2000s (2002-2005, roughly, according to interviews), before heightened competition gradually chipped away attendance and political tensions put an end to the practice. All the stations I visited had attempted similar public show initiatives or were very keen to. "Going out" into the neighbourhoods was seen to offer a chance for publicity and prestige. But it was also very costly, and most of the stations in Abidjan could not afford public shows more than once or twice a year.



**Figure 9 - Public Show in Anonkoi-Kouté, Abobo**

The show, which took place on June 21, 2015, was situated in a corner of a large, unpaved open space, possibly a school's football pitches. The show was one of the less attended and less lively I witnessed, dominated by elderly neighbourhood figures, and too removed from the street to capture attention. I would argue it is also significant that Anonkoi is an allegedly "Southern" neighbourhood, heavily targeted by pro-Ouattara militias during the post-electoral crisis, and perhaps unwilling to demonstrate convivial allegiance in a one-sided presidential election.

In the case of RFY's and RAC's public shows, equipment and logistical costs were covered by USAID, as part of the donor's wider campaign for peaceful elections.<sup>38</sup> This, of course, raises the question of how much input USAID - or rather its local consultants CHEMONICS - had in crafting the public shows. Although the meetings I attended were led by station staff, who made all the decisions, there is little doubt that further meetings with CHEMONICS were determinant on a number of aspects. This became apparent as the public shows in Abobo and Yopougon increasingly converged in style and content after four or five instalments. Unfortunately, CHEMONICS repeatedly evaded my requests for interview. The question of who led in the shows' elaboration is of only secondary importance to me, since I am mainly concerned with their resulting construction of the local. And notwithstanding the donors' overall editorial control, the shows required tremendous investment from the proximity radio staff. RAC and RFY donated precious air-time to broadcast announcements and edited recordings of each show (a feat considering that each show lasted three hours or more). Staff deployed considerable energy finding locations, securing ties with neighbourhood organisations and animating the Sunday afternoon events, which often lasted over three hours and prevented station volunteers from taking on lucrative weekend gigs elsewhere (*gombos*). On several occasions, staff members had to physically fight off groups of rebellious youths determined to access the refreshments and t-shirts normally reserved for game participants. The public shows were anything but an easy accomplishment. And they did not just involve producers. In Yopougon, RFY's "listening clubs" were mobilised to publicise the events ahead of time, to encourage participation from youth and women's associations, traditional/community leaders, and religious groups, and to act as local voices in "round-table" discussions during the shows. In Abobo, several UFARA members (introduced in the previous chapter) acted as "hosts" for the station in their neighbourhood. For every show, neighbourhood youth, both women and men, were enlisted to support logistics and crowd control.

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<sup>38</sup> USAID's multi-pronged intervention in Abidjan, on the eve of elections, made clear that "going out into the neighbourhood" was desirable practice not just for radio stations, but for international organisations as well. USAID's pre-electoral peace campaign targeted a variety of street-level communication channels, including transport networks, murals and the *grins* introduced in the previous chapter. No doubt the decision to host shows in neighbourhoods, as opposed to simply broadcasting them, also allowed the donor to gauge audience engagement and participation, in the absence of listenership numbers for proximity radio.

RAC's and RFY's public shows were intended to "show that social cohesion is taking hold," in the words of RFY's manager. A mixture of concerts, games, storytelling, talk and comedy aimed to foster a convivial occasion in which the diversity of ethnic and religious groups living in the neighbourhood could be witnessed as "reconciled." Sidiki, lead producer behind RFY's public shows, described one of the station's pilots in Koweit, a large and semi-informal neighbourhood targeted as a pro-Gbagbo stronghold during the 2011 conflict:

In Koweit, which was badly hit by the crisis, [...] we can say that all of the community leaders were involved [*associés*]. On the day we went out there, they were all there - Bété, Gouro, Baoulé chiefs - *you could say everyone was there*. That's what we want to do with the upcoming public shows. Put together a string of musical performances, to make everyone happy. Maybe 1, 2, 3 big artists. We'll do a sketch. On a very precise theme, which is social cohesion: *yesterday we weren't together, today we're together*, we can have a laugh and the message will come through. (interview, 16 March, 2015; my emphases)

Sidiki perfectly captured the performative ideal underpinning the public shows. They were meant to enact the transition from a state of division to one of "being together."<sup>39</sup> Through laughter and dance, the act of physical co-presence was turned into the promise of unification, the creation of familiar bonds necessary to support cohabitation. This approach to conviviality as a demonstration of reconciliation was a principle underlying many other events around the city. Blaise, a senior *animateur* at RAC, recounted similar initiatives in his own neighbourhood of N'dotr  after the crisis.

In the neighbourhood [N'dotr ], we organised parties to create a sort of social cohesion. Just like [the public shows]. There was one celebration I remember, here in front of the station [RAC]. It was organised by a women's association in the neighbourhood. They came to see us [station staff] to ask if they could organise the show here. There were Christians and Muslims... We brought in the imam, the pastors,

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<sup>39</sup> *On est ensemble* is a phrase routinely used in Abidjan to signal a shared condition ("we're in this together" would be the closest translation), as well as a call for familiarity, friendship, and the promise of mutual support.

we had the FRCI chiefs - really, everyone was here [*tout le monde était ici*]. (interview, 17 June, 2015)

Like Sidiki, Blaise spoke of "everyone being there" to showcase reconciled neighbourhood diversity. The claim was hyperbolic, or rather impossible to ascertain, but captured the ideal of total openness and full inclusivity underpinning the shows. During their public shows, RAC and RFY spared no effort in trying to make "everyone being there" a reality, by reaching out to a wide variety of neighbourhood groups and mediators - a challenge I return to below.



**Figure 10 - Public Show in Plaque I, Abobo**

The public show in Plaque I was the liveliest I attended, in either Yopougon or Abobo. Strikingly, the audience claimed ownership of the show toward the end, by entirely overrunning the performance space (which also happened in GESCO and in Doukouré, in Yopougon). Radio Arc-en-Ciel staff were reassured by local youth section leaders that they could continue safely, and a rowdy dance party ensued. The fact that the show took place in the middle of a relatively narrow dirt road in the neighbourhood meant that the audience became very compact, contributing to an electrified atmosphere throughout.

### *6.2.3.b - Testimonies and Round-Tables*

In addition to the staging of convivial neighbourhood diversity, proximity radio stations sought to publicise and amplify neighbourhood accounts of crisis, conflict,

and post-conflict renewal. To elicit such accounts, proximity radio stations used two, often overlapping genres: testimonies and round-table discussions. One of the most accomplished pieces of testimonial work I encountered on the *abidjanais* airwaves was RFY's Day of Peace programme aired on November 10, 2014.<sup>40</sup> It was an hour-long round-table discussion on the origins and aftermath of the crisis. Led by RFY's most senior *animateur*, Abou, the show centred on testimonies of neighbourly relations gone sour. Five guests from different parts of the municipal district were invited to respond to anonymised testimonies and occasionally provided their own stories of neighbourhood trouble (see Annex 6 for a full transcript). RFY's Day of Peace programme was exceptional in its depth of testimonial investigation and in its willingness to tackle difficult questions head-on. It was not without its limitations, but exemplified an ideal of post-conflict reconciliation programming to which many proximity radio broadcasters aspired. Several other stations I worked with, including RAC, attempted similar testimonial work, most often in partnership with international organisations (RAC and RFY both partnered with Search for Common ground, for example).

The Day of Peace programme began ominously with a recording in which an unidentified woman described the trauma that she suffered from seeing her husband and brother shot in their own courtyard. Her voice was distorted in speed and pitch, difficult to understand in parts. The woman went on to explain that some of her neighbours were behind the murders. While it was difficult to make out what role these neighbours played exactly (the scrambling of her voice made passages almost inaudible), a reasonable guess is they pointed out her household as part of "the opposition" - which is to say, in a time of militarised conflict, the enemy. Her story resonated with Brahima's above, and with experiences recounted by the Day of Peace programme's live guests themselves. Guest 5, an Islamic educator in the working-class neighbourhood of Port-Bouët II, claimed that neighbours had mocked or goaded his family in December 2000 after his brother had been shot dead by men in unidentified uniform:

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<sup>40</sup> Côte d'Ivoire's National Day of Peace was a commemorative event created after the 2011 post-electoral conflict upon recommendation by the CDVR.

Guest 5: On the 5th of December, 2000, during the events that preceded the legislative elections, my older brother was shot. I was told it was men in uniform, though I can't say which uniform exactly-

Abou [interrupts]: Yes, that's what happened during the crisis, and we don't want to dwell on it, because it still hurts. We're talking about forgiveness. How did you forgive?

Guest 5: What I meant to say is, my family paid for the funeral in 2000. While we were mourning and crying, my neighbours came to parade in front of our home, dancing and pretending to sweep the street. But after the funeral, I didn't harbour resentment. When I noticed that they were wary of me, I went to them to shake their hand! I talked to them as I would have before. I let them know that, as far as I was concerned, it was God's will that my older brother was taken away. I didn't accuse my neighbours, even if people in my family were saying, 'But they came to dance in front of our house!' I had friends who fled other neighbourhoods to come hide at my house, family as well, and during all this time I mediated-

Abou [interrupts]: And now, is everything back in order?

Guest 5: Today there's no problem.

This passage exemplifies how testimony overlapped with commentary in the round-table format, to produce neighbourhood accounts of crisis and reconciliation. Neighbourhood accounts were important because they made experiences relatable and comparable. In this, they allowed micro-level stories to "rise in generalisability" (*monter en généralité* in French) and accrue toward a collective narrative of crisis and its aftermath.

Such was also the aim of round-table discussions during RAC and RFY's public shows (Figure 11). Both stations included round-table segments - called "little debates" or "mini-debates" by producers - whose starting questions were geared toward the production of a narrative of "what happened" and "where next" (see Figure ...). RFY's first few shows opened their round-table discussions with the question: "Post-electoral crisis: what went wrong?" RAC, meanwhile, asked: "How to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past?" The 2015 elections made such questions urgent, but they were also important because they were rarely asked elsewhere in the media during my time



of fieldwork. Returning to the CDVR's perceived failure to orchestrate national reconciliation (Chapter 1), the absence of a collective, public narrative of life after conflict, meant that proximity radio stations had a significant gap to fill.



**Figure 11 - “Small Debate” Round-Table, Plaque I, Abobo**

This picture exemplifies the round-table set-up in all the USAID-funded public shows I attended, in Abobo and Yopougon. The person standing up and taking notes is a USAID consultant, who - I later found out - had very good relations with the local youth section leader. Many neighbourhood organisations (especially women’s organisations) had come to the show with placards mentioning their name, which I suspect is what the USAID consultant was writing down.

### *6.2.3.c - Revived Neighbourhood Mediators?*

In addition to conviviality and testimony, proximity radio stations' contribution to neighbourhood reconciliation - and, more broadly, to the idea that the neighbourhood was a key site where reconciliation could be effected - lay in the promotion of neighbourhood mediators. By mediators, following AbdouMaliq Simone, I refer to the vast range of local figures or organisations whose role was to facilitate, enhance or make local collaboration possible. While I have already mentioned two men (Hervé and Momo) leading neighbourhood youth groups, there were many other entities performing mediating functions in *abidjanais* neighbourhoods: women's groups (*association des femmes*), religious groups, ethnic/village associations, mutual fund



initiatives, traders' groups, issue-specific NGOs, and so on. Like Momo, these mediators all played a role - however minimal and contextually dependent - in the maintenance of a basic, working sense of commonality and order within the neighbourhood. They kept track of local physical features and social relations as these transformed, and set themselves up as interfaces with external actors. In Momo's case, he presented himself as a kind of local registrar:

You have to master [*maîtriser*] the neighbourhood. By that I mean, first, that you have to know the key people in the area. Then, you have to know the neighbourhood in terms of its infrastructure. And you have to meet families regularly. If today you come ask me about such and such family of the Bété ethnic group, in no time I'll have found someone who can put you in touch. (interview, 2 August, 2015)

Momo was keen to place himself as a point of contact for families in the neighbourhood, and through this position, highlighted his role in what we might call "diversity management" in the neighbourhood. Such a role was put forward by other neighbourhood mediators I spoke to, like Moussa and Alassane, two elders in Doukouré (Yopougon). Moussa and Alassane were "*leaders communautaires*": they each represented a particular ethno-regional community (in both cases, Northern), but unlike "traditional chiefs" (*chefs traditionnels*) they derived their leadership position less from tradition than from their social status and their long-standing involvement in local affairs.

Moussa: Just recently we surveyed all the home-owners in the neighbourhood [ahead of a planned re-development]. [...] I surveyed landlords who are from my region, and he surveyed those from his region. [...] We sent a communication through the neighbourhood, we put up posters and told everyone who owned a home they should be accounted for.

Alassane: That's it. There are 23 communities that live in the neighbourhood. [...] So each community has its leader (*chef*). The Gouro chief, the Bété chief, the... Mahouka chief, who is from the Bafing region... Each community looks to its leader to be surveyed. As for the number - um... After the crisis, after the crisis a humanitarian agency came to help people in the neighbourhood, because really this is an area that has *suffered* [Alassane's emphasis]. [...] From the neighbourhood, more than 180

people died or disappeared. The humanitarians came, and they asked us to divide the neighbourhood into sectors, to count doors and inhabitants. That was in 2012. [...] Our job as community leaders is, um... to make sure that when something isn't right, as we see it, information travels quickly to the neighbourhood chief (*chef central*). So if the Guéré community is causing problems, as soon as we inform the neighbourhood chief he calls up the Guéré leader and tells him that in this particular vicinity some Guéré residents are starting... something. So, um, the Guéré leader will send someone over quickly. And if it can't be solved, the neighbourhood chief will... intervene, to solve the situation. (interview, 13 August, 2015)

Moussa and Alassane also emphasised their role as "diversity managers" of sorts. Crucially, they highlighted the importance of their work in a post-crisis context. It transpired from our conversation that they had taken on the role of distributing (or at least monitoring) aid and reparations to victims of the post-electoral conflict in the neighbourhood.

Undeniably, mediators like Momo, Alassane and Moussa were brought to the fore after the crisis. They became official or unofficial conduits for a national reconciliation and reconstruction effort. They were part of a broader process whereby local mediators were "activated" by municipal, national and international institutions. As carriers of local knowledge and representatives of local voices, they became tasked with delivering post-conflict aid and messages of peace to neighbourhoods that had been "hard hit," as well as with the general maintenance of inter-ethnic and inter-faith cohabitation. They became *de facto* agents of reconciliation and urban diversity managers. Proximity radio played an important role in this "re-activation" of local mediators. All the men I have quoted were closely involved with RFY and RAC. Momo, Hervé, Moussa and Alassane helped stage public shows in "their" neighbourhoods. Momo and Alassane, furthermore, had previously been guests on "reconciliation" shows in Abobo and Yopougon respectively. Alassane was one of the guests on RFY's Day of Peace programme; the four other guests on the show were equally invited in their capacity as neighbourhood representatives.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Guest 1 was a leader for the Burkinabè community and elected chief in the neighbourhood of Mami-Fитай; Guest 2 was a Bété elder from Koweit; Guest 3 was a leader for the Mahouka ethnic group in Doukouré (the Mahouka, or Mahous, according to classic anthropological

Through proximity radio stations, these mediators could publicise their role and position themselves as key actors in the post-conflict "social cohesion" process. This was well illustrated during the Day of Peace programme:

Abou: What to do to avoid further violence?

Guest 3: Thank you for this question. We community leaders, we have to be vigilant. In every neighbourhood, you have people responsible. We chiefs, along with others - we must start reconciliation. It is up to us to set an example for the population. If we leaders don't do our work, then we'll never find a solution. Because the state cannot go door to door! [...]

Guest 2: In our neighbourhood, we've long held events to promote social cohesion and peace. These events have gone well, thanks to community chiefs and religious leaders, Christian and Muslim. Hand in hand we work for social cohesion.

In this excerpt and many others like it - both within the show and more widely in radio programmes - the neighbourhood was envisioned as an active sphere of (re-)organisation, in which community leaders spearheaded residents' efforts to turn toward each other in new ways. These local mediators presented themselves as actors best poised to re-configure local social relations, reminding neighbours of their obligation to live together and, by extension, of their "mandatory" duty to forgiveness. Guest 3's point that "the state cannot go door to door" reveals how these local mediators conceived of their role in relation to national discourse and policy. They were there to bridge the distance between the authorities and the street, making state orientations intelligible and embodying new social dispositions.

In turn, these local mediators were presented as indispensable to radio's ability to "address" neighbourhoods as local publics (Iveson 2007). This was particularly evident for the public shows. Proximity radio producers spent considerable amounts of time brokering meetings with local leaders to obtain their blessing, ask for their

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schemas, are originally from the north of Côte d'Ivoire); Guest 4 led a women's organisation in Yao-Séhi; and Guest 5 was an "Islamic educator" in Port-Bouët II.

participation, and hopefully get them to mobilise a local audience. Working with neighbourhood mediators, in other words, was a question of access. When I asked Jacques, RAC's manager, whether the station would be able to set up its public shows everywhere in the *commune*, he responded:

Yes, it will be possible to go to every neighbourhood, as long as we do it right. That is, if local people are implicated in the organisation process. That will prevent a lot of slip-ups, a lot of slip-ups [*dérapages*]. If you take your sound system, come to the neighbourhood and start making noise without anyone knowing why you're there or why there are no neighbourhood people [*personne du quartier*] with you - that would be difficult. (field notes, 2 April, 2015)

Jacques' conception of "doing things right" first raised concerns over security, but also, as mentioned, legitimacy. Having "neighbourhood people" visible and audible during the public shows might allow stations to speak "from" as well as "to" the neighbourhood. Yet this was no straightforward process. Enlisting neighbourhood mediators was not always easy, and did not always guarantee that residents would listen. One question that it posed was: who could speak from and for the neighbourhood? And what for? These dilemmas have long been at the heart of participatory development, governance and peace-building (e.g. Mitra 1992; Guijt & Shah 1998; Cooke & Kothari 2001; Beall 2005; Cornwall & Fujita 2012; Arnall et al. 2013), in ways that resonate with my own critical assessment below.

### **6.3 - The Injunctions of Neighbourliness**

In this section, I take a more critical look at RAC and RFY's public shows, as well as RFY's Day of Peace programme. I show that, while the neighbourhood was meant to be an arena for intimate dialogue rooted in everyday life, from which a shared account of crisis and peace might emerge, reconciliation programmes *constrained* what could be said and done locally in several ways. These constraints shaped both the local and its articulation with the national. In documenting the constraints of proximity radio's neighbourhood-focused approach to reconciliation, I do not wish to say that stations should have done better. I hope to have made clear by now, in this chapter and the previous one, that producers spared little effort and were operating in extremely

difficult conditions. But I do want to ask what was being done through the discourse stations managed to produce, and the performances they managed to stage.

### 6.3.1 - Hierarchies of Voice

Relying on neighbourhood mediators, for proximity radio stations, implied negotiating a complex hierarchy of speaking positions. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Abidjan's social complexity is ordered, to some extent, by differentials of class, ethnicity, gender and generation, and neighbourhood mediators often embodied these hierarchies in various ways. Two key hierarchies were generation and gender. Momo and Hervé, introduced above, were *youth* leaders, and because of their generational subordination, they were expected to speak *after* the "traditional" chiefs and community elders in their neighbourhood, who acted, nominally at least, as the highest points of authority (on generational hierarchies in Africa see e.g. Diouf 1996; Abbink & van Kessel 2005; Philipps 2014). Mirroring this hierarchy, RAC and RFY privileged elders, and in particular elderly *men*, in their programming and most of their public shows. This was visible in the Day of Peace show, where the predominance of traditional and "respectable" community figures excluded young people and allowed only one female presence (and even then, the woman, a guest from the Yao-Séhi neighbourhood, was given much less speaking time) (on the gendered inequalities often inscribed in "local participation" in various contexts, see e.g. Guijt & Shah 1998; Cornwall 2000; Cornwall & Anyidoho 2010; Moran 2010). Similarly, the public shows positioned elders as primary points of contact, and, if not as dominant neighbourhood voices, then at least as overarching symbolic authorities. At the start of RAC's second public show in Agbékoi, the *animateur* thus introduced a representative of the local chieftaincy to "give benediction, unction and authorisation." Beyond these theatrically deferential words, the round-table discussions reproduced the glaring imbalance of RFY's Day of Peace segment. Although a few round-tables were gender-balanced, with women leaders occasionally taking a prominent and charismatic role in the discussions, most of these round-tables often blatantly privileged older, male participants. In one particularly ironic instance (in Anonkoi, Abobo), three male elders, including an Ebrié chief and the representative for the neighbourhoods' "non-autochthonous" ethnic groups, discussed the importance for

young people - those who turned 18 since the previous presidential election, in 2010 - to register to vote.

The prominent positioning of traditional and community leaders thus evoked a performance of local diversity in which youth and women were expected to know their place as subordinates. It invited participation but only on the condition that pre-ordained social positions be respected. In their subordination of youth, in particular, the shows played into history of social control in Côte d'Ivoire, in which local spaces - starting with the village - were instrumental to the disciplining of "social cadets." The marginalisation of young voices in the public shows was all the more striking that, as many scholars have argued (Konaté 2003; Arnaut 2005; 2008; 2012; Banégas 2007; Bahi 2011; McGovern 2011a; Koné 2015; N'Guessan 2015), the Ivoirian conflict was fuelled by young men's rebellion against social immobility, as well as by their desire to circumvent gerontocratic channels of access to power and self-realisation. Diane, a lead *animatrice* for RFY's public show, acknowledged this inter-generational tension during a preparatory meeting: "the old resent the young, the young resent the old." She meant to emphasise the urgency of RFY's mission, but the public shows provided young people with only very tightly constrained channels for expression. Even when youth section leaders *were* invited on public shows, they tended to be middle-aged "older brothers" (*grands frères* or *vieux pères*) like Momo and Hervé, whose leadership was premised on more "advanced" generational status (e.g., they were married and/or had steady income and/or had nascent political careers) and on the management of youth organisations along noticeably hierarchical lines.

It is important to emphasise that these hierarchies of neighbourhood voice, as constructed through reconciliation programmes, did not always reflect the reality of *power and legitimacy* in the neighbourhood.<sup>42</sup> In GESCO and in Plaque I, Hervé and Momo's youth section (*association des jeunes*) appeared to run things, though they had to symbolically defer to elders (as Momo put it, he always had to "inform the chieftaincy" when there was a problem in the neighbourhood). Their local legitimacy

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<sup>42</sup> It is also worth noting that proximity radio producers were aware of the limits of such hierarchies. Many privately expressed frustrations over the ways young voices were being constrained in Côte d'Ivoire, and scepticism in the face of traditional authorities. Still, they felt obligated to defer to hierarchies in their quest for access to different neighbourhoods.

allowed them to mobilise widely for the public shows.<sup>43</sup> The shows in GESCO and Plaque I were among the liveliest I attended. In Doukouré, where RFY also put on an emotionally resonant event, elders Alassane and Moussa were key points of contact for the station and manifestly wielded significant power. But they had strong backing with local youth; they also limited themselves to a background role, refusing to speak publicly during the show and opening up the event as "an occasion for young people to have fun." Anador (Abobo) offers yet another configuration: RAC's show in the relatively working-class neighbourhood attracted much attention and enthusiasm even though the neighbourhood appeared to have no identifiable leadership - neither local chiefs nor an active and unified youth organisation. The show's success was single-handedly crafted by Rose, introduced in the previous chapter, through her extraordinary campaign to publicise the station amongst her neighbours.

In sum, proximity radio's approach to local voice tended to reproduce and even validate existing hierarchies of gender and generation. The extent to which these hierarchies were enacted differed from one neighbourhood to the next. Overall, however, the inclusion of neighbourhood mediators did not encourage ordinary residents to join in, and in many cases it did the contrary. My point here is not that neighbourhood mediators had no value as speakers during the public shows. Nor am I saying that proximity radio stations should not have relied on them for the organisation of public shows. In many ways, as mentioned, the stations had no choice. Still, the end result was that RAC and RFY's public shows promoted neighbourhood mediators in a way that turned them into authoritative voices and thereby agents of power: in the public show performances, they spoke to and for, rather than with, ordinary residents.

### 6.3.2 - Bracketing Responsibility, Localising Attention

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<sup>43</sup> While I have noted above that Hervé experienced a "boycott" of some of his initiatives as youth leader (e.g. his road-repair initiative), on grounds of ethno-political opposition, he retained significant legitimacy because he had been active at neighbourhood level since the 1990s. Walking through GESCO with him demonstrated that he was well known around the area and enjoyed popularity amongst both elders and young people. Hervé also managed to convince young people of different ethnic groups and political sensibilities to attend GESCO's public show. It was the only show during which I spotted t-shirts with Laurent Gbagbo's effigy, a striking sight in a city where many residents feared any politically-connoted public display.

The hierarchies embodied by neighbourhood mediators prevented public discussions from being meaningfully inclusive and grounded in a multiplicity of everyday experiences, but this was not the only way that local accounts of crisis and reconciliation were impeded in proximity radio programmes. In this section I focus on proximity radio's approach to testimonies and show that the conditions under which testimonies were to be produced tended to bracket away responsibility for violence and breakdown. This, in turn, disconnected neighbourhood accounts of crisis from a national narrative.

Let us return to RFY's Day of Peace programme. In the opening recorded testimony, in which the woman with the warbled voice recounted her husband and brother's murder in their courtyard, she did not directly name or describe the assailants. From her narration of the scene one could guess that the aggressors were men in uniform - *corps habillés*, as the Ivoirian expression goes (literally "clothed bodies"). They wielded enough authority to demand access to the victims' home and to ask for money. These details were kept out of the frame, so to speak, even while many Yopougon residents would easily pick up on the subtleties of the accusation, drawing on their own or their close ones' personal experiences. Similar details were erased in the exchanges between the *animateur*, Abou, and his guests. In a passage cited earlier, we can recall that Abou twice interrupted Guest 5's recollection of his brother's murder and his neighbours' taunts. I quote this passage again for convenience:

Guest 5: On the 5th of December, 2000, during the events that preceded the legislative elections, my older brother was shot. I was told it was men in uniform, though I can't say which uniform exactly-

Abou [interrupts]: Yes, that's what happened during the crisis, and we don't want to dwell on it, because it still hurts. We're talking about forgiveness. How did you forgive?

Guest 5: What I meant to say is, my family paid for the funeral in 2000. While we were mourning and crying, my neighbours came to parade in front of our home, dancing and pretending to sweep the street. But after the funeral, I didn't harbour resentment. When I noticed that they were wary of me, I went to them to shake their hand! I talked to them as I would have before. I let them know that, as far as I was concerned, it was



God's will that my older brother was taken away. I didn't accuse my neighbours, even if people in my family were saying, 'But they came to dance in front of our house!' I had friends who fled other neighbourhoods to come hide at my house, family as well, and during all this time I mediated-

Abou [interrupts]: And now, is everything back in order?

Guest 5: Today there's no problem.

Abou interrupted Guest 5 because he referred to *concrete dates and places*, in which *actors* (or at least their *uniforms*) could themselves be identified. Furthermore, in his account the consequences of persecution extended to a wider group rather than simply to the speaker as an individual: from Guest 5's ethno-national identity as a Muslim leader, we can gather that the people who came to find refuge in his house were likely Muslims and/or "Northerners" fleeing violence in other neighbourhoods of Yopougon after the repression of RDR protests in 2000 (Le Pape & Vidal 2002). In this exchange, we also discern the show's anxiety to move from the past (narrative of crisis) to a reconciled present ("now there's no problem").

The same process of bracketing was at work during the public shows. RFY and RAC organised round-table discussions in each neighbourhood they visited through which they aimed to produce a local account of the crisis. As noted, for its first show, RFY asked the same question with which it had opened its Day of Peace programme: "Post-electoral crisis: what went wrong? [*qu'est-ce qui n'a pas marché?*]." RAC asked "How to avoid repeating the errors of the past?" Yet RFY did not allow its round-table participants to go into any detail. To prevent the "wrong" kind of testimony or commentary to emerge, the station planned strict safeguards. These were discussed during a preparatory meeting on the morning of March 16, 2015. I sat with Diane, Aristide and Sidiki in the café adjacent to the station, to work out the details of the public shows' content and sequencing. When it came to safeguarding the round-table segments, Diane and her colleagues drew inspiration from a recent series of live events led by a Swiss-funded radio school, Studio Mozaik. They decided to introduce elements of a *game* into what they called the "little debate." Participants would be promised prizes but their chances of winning decreased if they used certain "taboo"

words. An edited excerpt from my notes taken during the meeting details the rationale behind this game and highlights some of the words that had to be avoided:

Diane leaves to take a call/do business. [...] She leaves us to think through the “*mots interdits*” [forbidden words] which will lead the *animateurs* to “*arracher le micro*” [snatch the microphone]. Sidiki emphasises that, in any case, the microphone should not be handed to those speaking, but always be carried by the *animateur*. I ask why he insists on such a procedure: won't it make the debate seem hollow, and make people too uncomfortable to say anything? Sidiki explains: "This show is for peace. So we want to avoid someone at the mic screaming, 'Gbagbo is at The Hague', or 'They came to murder my brother'... We're not there to talk about that, but to talk about peace." He says that he is not overly worried, however, because everyone will be briefed of the rules of the game beforehand, so it won't seem like the *animateurs* are stifling debate. It is also important, he notes, that “when the shows are broadcast on air, listeners know why a speaker was cut off.” When I point out that it would be possible to let the debate be free and later edit parts out for airing, Sidiki argues that the prior interdictions and rules during the live event will ensure technicians/editors won't have too much work in post-production.

Forbidden words include: *la guerre*, all names of political parties, political leaders such as Blé Goudé, *les assaillants/les rebelles/les miliciens*. Sidiki suggests removing *nordistes* [Northerners] so as to "avoid ethnicising the debate." Diane, who has returned, agrees that participants will not be able to say "Dioula" or name any other ethnic group. Forbidden also: FRCI, FDS ("if we take one away, we have to take the others" says Sidiki), LMP, Loyalistes [all names of various military factions]. Sidiki suggests removing FESCI as well - the once-powerful student's union that back Laurent Gbagbo. Diane does not seem to consider that one important.

Sidiki remarks that, post-crisis, people are reluctant to use certain words and labels - "people are scared to say 'Dioula' now." Aristide adds that forbidding ethnic labels will allow the debate to “just state facts, without lingering over any of them.” Aristide suggests the need to make "*Force Licorne*" a taboo phrase [the French battalion that contributed to Gbagbo's arrest], but Sidiki dismisses the idea: "who cares, those were white people affairs." Yet Diane wants to go a step further and ban ONU et ONUCI [the United Nations and their contingent in Côte d'Ivoire], to avoid reliving memories of the UN's involvement in the "takeover" of Yopougon in April-May 2011. "The young [*les jeunes*] will remember, it's still heavy on their heart" [*leur coeur est encore chaud*]. (field notes, March 16, 2015)

What I want to emphasise here is how these safeguards, like the testimonies' editing or interrupting during RFY's Day of Peace show, prevented local accounts of crisis from connecting to specific events and macro processes. The inability to mention dates or actors, including ethnic groups, involved in a multi-faceted conflict prevented any allocation of responsibility. This drastically limited their potential for catharsis, for the emergence of a sense of justice, and beyond them for contributing a shared narrative of the crisis.

Indeed, the result, during RFY's public show, was ten minutes of talk almost entirely void of substance. The game element, originally intended to "soften" the potential interruption of speakers, failed to relax the atmosphere, and engaged neither the four round-table participants (who were mostly inaudible over the background noise of the public square where the show was taking place), nor the wider audience. Audience members were asked to shout the public show's slogan - "We Are One!" - in the event that participants accidentally uttered one of the taboo words. They failed to do so, and were repeatedly reproached for not paying attention.<sup>44</sup> To the question of "what went wrong," inevitably, the four participants could only give extremely vague and abstract explanations for their lived experiences of crisis. They referred to "events" (*les évènements*), to "things" that happened ("*il s'est passé des choses ici*" was a recurring euphemism through which *abidjanais* residents evoked the crisis). They attributed the 2011 crisis to "misunderstanding," "miscommunication" and "African politics" without any elaboration. The whole exchange made participants so uneasy that after three or four shows (I travelled back to Europe for a month after show number 3), RFY stopped using the format altogether. Instead, like RAC, it shifted the "little debate" to more technical and consensual (on the surface, at least) questions such as the importance and modalities of voter registration, inter-ethnic alliances, and the role of specific groups (young people, traditional leaders, women...) in the consolidation of peace. Such testimonies and testimonial exchanges constructed the crisis as vague,

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<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, "war" was the only taboo word that participants used during the short while that RFY included the game in its round-table segments. In the second of RFY's public shows, in the neighbourhood of SOGEFIHA, a youth section leader explicitly challenged the *animateurs'* injunction and argued that the first step to reconciliation was the acknowledgement that Yopougon had truly lived a war. He was persuaded otherwise - threatened with "disqualification" - and after everyone agreed that "conflict" was a more palatable term, the show resumed its emphasis on peace (field notes, 5 April 2015).

non-attributable disorder, for which all Ivoirians bore collective responsibility. Why neighbours had turned upon each other was left unexplained, and in the absence of any structural considerations, audiences were invited to consider their own shortcomings.

### 6.3.3 - Circularities of Neighbourliness and Forgiveness

While purporting to reflect on "what went wrong," the public show discussions and RFY Day of Peace programme were less interested in retrospective work and more focused on ensuring that "the crisis" never happened again. This was most evident in the Day of Peace programme. After the woman's testimony of losing her husband and brother, the *animateur*, Abou, introduced the round-table in the following way: "What went so wrong that we reached such horror? Dear guests, in your opinion, what must we do to prevent anything of the sort from ever happening again in Côte d'Ivoire?" If we return to the excerpt from the show, during which Abou twice interrupted Guest 5 in his personal recollection, we see that the *animateur's* main anxiety, besides avoiding explicit attributions of responsibility, was to move the speaker toward discussions of "forgiveness":

Abou [interrupts]: Yes, that's what happened during the crisis, and we don't want to dwell on it, because it still hurts. We're talking about forgiveness. How did you forgive?

The rapid passage from "what went wrong" to "never again" was also visible in RAC's first public show, whose round-table discussion asked: "How can we avoid repeating past mistakes?" More broadly, much if not all of proximity radio's reconciliation programming endeavoured to articulate *solutions* to the problem of living-together, even while the exact contours of this problem remained blurry.

The solution was unambiguous: forgiveness. The largest section of RFY's Day of Peace programme was devoted to exhorting residents of Yopougon's neighbourhoods to forgive. In the process the show highlighted "what [...] victims [should] do for harmony to return." In this emphasis on forgiveness, the show - and beyond it the Ivoirian national reconciliation discourse - self-consciously echoed the South African truth and reconciliation process, in which testimonial accounts of violence were

framed to meet the national line of "no future without forgiveness" (Tutu 1999; also Krog 2000; Moon 2004; Castillejo-Cuéllar 2007). Unlike the South African TRC, however, forgiveness in Côte d'Ivoire did not involve general amnesty, but a one-side justice. In addition, forgiveness on proximity radio and elsewhere was not anchored to the detailed testimonies of "restorative truth" that underpinned the South African effort (Castillejo-Cuéllar 2007; Moon 2008). On RFY's Day of Peace programme, it was once again the woman whose brother and husband had been murdered who served as a prompt for discussions on forgiveness - this time, her testimony being held as a counter-example. The woman explained that the neighbours she held responsible for her loss came to beg for forgiveness after the post-electoral fighting ended. They visited her in a small delegation that included members of different ethnic groups, possibly as mediators. The woman refused to grant them forgiveness, arguing it was not hers alone to give. She invited the neighbours to return in presence of the victims' parents. In her account, they never did. In a chilling conclusion, the woman stated that she was open to forgiving her neighbours but would not forgive the men (in uniform?) who had carried out the killings: "If I had their strength, and if I had weapons, I would do the same thing to them."

In response to this testimony, the show's participants were invited to agree that forgiveness was the best course of action. The following edited transcript brings together highlights from the discussion:

Guest 1: No one is going to fix Côte d'Ivoire's problems except for ourselves. In my neighbourhood, all of the chiefs have agreed to come together to bring forth social cohesion [*faire cohésion sociale*], because no one else will if we don't do it for ourselves. Really, in my area [*chez moi*] there is no problem. That's the solution: to grab hold of our own destiny. I say this as someone who - in my [communal] courtyard, six people were killed. Including my two children and my younger brother. So I have to forgive! Because the President [A. Ouattara], they dug up his mother's body [in 2005], and he forgave. So, we have to forgive - it's mandatory [*c'est obligatoire*]. [...]

Guest 2: I would like to ask this woman [whose testimony we just heard] to search deep within herself for the sense of social cohesion and forgiveness that moves her so that she... Tries to get closer [*faire des rapprochements*]. I mean, if she has the time to... understand her neighbours, her co-inhabitants [*ses cohabitants*], with the neighbours

who caused her harm. She should let things go - she lived a tragedy but should not seek revenge. [...]

Guest 4: Yes, I also want to say to this woman, get closer to those who did you harm. If they are still around, they must be *scared* [speaker's emphasis]. Because those who are still around, they probably live in *fear* [speaker's emphasis]. So if she gets closer to people, I think it will get them to *reflect* [her emphasis]. To understand. To try to come to terms with what they did. [...]

Abou: In the testimony, the woman says that the culprits [her neighbours] came to ask for forgiveness. Do you think that was a courageous initiative?

Guest 4: A sin confessed is already half forgiven. [...]

Guest 2: They were courageous, those who came to seek forgiveness. If the lady were to forgive them, she would leave them with their conscience. You know, when someone hurts you, and comes to ask for forgiveness, you need to accept. After that, the person will never raise their head to look at you. They will know you've been unusually tolerant.

Guest 3: What I heard in the woman's testimony before is that she's looking to know why her neighbours did what they did. Before she can forgive. That's not a bad position. Because if someone does something against you or your kin, and the person acknowledges their deed and offers reasons for their actions - that can push one to forgive them. But if everyone hides from everyone, reconciliation will never be sincere. The persecutor [*le bourreau*] needs to acknowledge what he did.

Abou [interrupting]: To start with, we should avoid certain expressions, such as "persecutor." To talk about the neighbour who did you wrong...

Guest 3: The word is often used and it just rolled off my tongue - but you're right of course. Even if my neighbour was a persecutor we must look to get close again. It's difficult to forgive but we need to make an effort. Because living with knives drawn [*à couteaux tirés*] amongst neighbours is not going to help anyone. You always need your neighbour.

In this exchange, we can note that none of the participants picked up on the question of who killed the woman's brother and husband. They focused only on the neighbours. In this targeted emphasis we can read once again the refusal to assign definitive positions of responsibility for violence - one could not even call one's aggressors "perpetrators" - combined with the pointed duty to forgive. Abou's question about whether the woman's neighbours were "courageous" because they came to ask for forgiveness served a rhetorical function. By underscoring the perpetrators' initiative, he questioned the victim's failure to hold up her end of the bargain, so to speak. Some guests argued that the victim should forgive out of her own initiative, going out of her way to extend forgiveness. As they presented it, the woman should take it upon herself to "get closer" to those who did her wrong; this was the only way for her to unambiguously assert her moral superiority.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to moral arguments, guests presented forgiveness as an *imperative* - "it's mandatory" - resulting from the sheer fact of living together. As Guest 3 puts it, "living with knives drawn amongst neighbours is not going to help anyone. You always need your neighbour." In turn this was translated into one's individual, socio-ethical sensibility - one's "sense of social cohesion" - as well as a demonstration of civic agency - "grabbing one's own destiny." In a circular line of reasoning, neighbourliness thus appeared to demand forgiveness just as forgiveness was constructed as the clearest indication of good neighbourly and civic behaviour. Finally, as Guest 1 put it at the start of the quote, neighbourliness may just be all there is: "no one will [enact social cohesion] if we don't do it for ourselves" (or, as another version I heard in Abidjan goes, "*personne ne va nous réconcilier si ce n'est pas nous*"). In this circular assertion, the neighbourhood is made to stand in for the nation, and urban dwellers' ability to rebuild healthy neighbourly relations is presented as the only - or at least the main - solution to the crisis.

The circularities of forgiveness and neighbourliness translated into a form of stating the obvious: in effect, it said to *abidjanais* residents "you have to learn to live together

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<sup>45</sup> There are also many explicitly religious arguments in favour of forgiveness in the show but these mostly serve to reinforce the two main arguments highlighted here: that forgiveness is the right thing to do, morally speaking, and that living together is a necessity, not a choice ("God put us here on this land"), thereby requiring compromise and adaptation.

because you live together." I do not mean here that the moral reasonings behind forgiveness were unnuanced or misguided. Many *abidjanais* praised acts of everyday forgiveness as visible signs of hope, and it is in these everyday acts that they located national salvation. Take for example Brahima, whose experience of being betrayed by neighbours I related earlier in this chapter. When I asked him what role media should play in the reconciliation process, he argued:

Personally I prefer the door-to-door approach. To sort out this reconciliation business. [...] That's how I see it. Personally I... It's the politicians who got us into this mess, so it should be them, if things were fair, who should, you know, get us out of a bad situation. But they don't want to. (interview, 11 June, 2015)

Brahima agreed with Guest 1 above that ordinary citizens would need to go "door-to-door" and bring about reconciliation on their own. In Brahima's view, however, neighbourliness was important not (just) because it implied a superior order of civic agency and individual morality. It was important because state-level politics had manifestly failed to deliver; "only we can reconcile ourselves" is thus revealed as a sign of deep disavowal, more than a collective invigoration. Guest 1 may have shared Brahima's view on politics, along with a large majority of the *abidjanais* residents I spoke with, but he did not voice this in the show. Behind the moral imperatives of neighbourliness, the state's deferred duties of truth and justice remained unspoken - a proverbial elephant in the room. Emphasising neighbourly forgiveness on proximity radio thus amounted to stating the obvious not just because it insisted on a fine-grained process of active cohabitation that was already underway. It also reminded ordinary citizens of what they already knew - that they had to find ways of living together, against the odds, and hoping for the best, while questions of power and responsibility remained ever out of their control. If the neighbourhood was to connect with the nation in proximity radio's local reconciliation programming, then, it was not in terms of a dialectic, but rather as a kind of imposed metonymy. Even as national elections were taking place, the neighbourhood stood in for the nation in the sense that it was presented as the *main* horizon of discussion and action. The structural and historical dimensions of conflict and reconciliation being abstracted away, what mattered was neighbourly forgiveness - presented as a moral imperative, when in fact it was a long-standing tactic of accommodation.



## 6.4 - Turning Away: Radio Reconciliation Met with Silence?

So far, I have shown that proximity radio's reconciliation discourse, as exemplified in RFY's Day of Peace programme and the public shows it carried out together with RAC, sought to make the neighbourhood a prime site of reconciliation but did so in a way that artificially severed the neighbourhood from national levels of reflection, analysis and critique. Rather than excavate and amplify neighbourhood experiences of crisis and its aftermath, rather than collect them into a broader narrative in which different levels would be interwoven, proximity radio stations' reconciliation programming appeared instead to contain neighbourhood accounts within a limited sphere of thought and action - with its own, seemingly autonomous morality and urgency.

What did *abidjanais* audiences think about such a discourse? This is a thorny question. Very few of my interviewees - listeners or producers - would venture an opinion about RAC or RFY's public shows, for example.<sup>46</sup> One of the very few commentaries came from Philomène, who used to work as an *animatrice* for RFY in the early 2000s and attended the station's first public show:

The show is a good idea. [...] But back in the days, the square where the show was held, you could turn up with a small guitar and crowds would flock. It was a space where people went to have fun. But at [RFY's event], there weren't many people. People are

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<sup>46</sup> Almost all my attempts to discuss the public shows were met with some form of discomfort, circumspection or evasion. A good example of such discomfort comes from an interview with Ibou, the young RAC listener introduced in the previous chapter. When I asked him what he thought of the public shows, he noted that the audience in the predominantly Southern (Ebrié and Attié) neighbourhood of Anonkoi-Kouté had failed to turn up. When I asked him why he thought that had happened, he became nervous; his laughter sounded forced, his tone became shriller, his speech quicker and less assured. "Ah!" he exclaimed. "I don't know... Maybe... Maybe it's their way of life [*manière de vivre*]! Maybe it's their way of life." I tried to press further but all Ibou would concede is the hypothesis that residents in Anonkoi simply did not like celebrations. By then had I learned to decode these non-answers as both loaded and definitive. I sensed that Ibou had more on his mind, but that prodding him would only make him more uncomfortable. Most interviewees did not even acknowledge attendance or audience engagement. They simply praised the public shows' mission of peace, without any commentary on the actual performances.

holding back. They wonder if their participation won't be misinterpreted. People are scared.

Philomène lamented a stiff and sparse crowd. This was not everywhere the case: as mentioned, several of RAC and RFY's public shows involved enthusiastic crowds. But many more shows were met with polite distance, indifference and sparse attendance. For every Plaque I (Figure 10), there were three Anonkoi (Figure 9). Crowd sizes and observed engagement levels tell us little, however, not just because attendance numbers do not speak for themselves, but because a crowd's *absence* is especially difficult to explain. Philomène thought that urban dwellers held back because they were afraid. This was certainly possible, given that public alignments during the crisis had often been pretexts for retaliation (Chapter 1). And in a pre-electoral context where public demonstrations of opposition were being met with tear gas, *abidjanais* residents could rightfully be wary of an event whose actors and ramifications were ambiguous. Or, they could worry that their neighbours would "misinterpret" their participation as a political alignment of its own.

Non-participation could also be interpreted as defiance, in the face of mediators - the stations and the neighbourhood leaders evoked above - whose positions and intentions were ambiguous, and whose discourse of neighbourly reconciliation could itself be interpreted as alignment with an exclusionary regime (certainly in the absence of fair justice or credible elections). Ebenezer Obadare (2016: Chapter 4) discusses the role of silence and withdrawal as a moral-political gesture in Nigeria, but in the end the point of non-participation may precisely be to resist any interpretation one way or the other.

One of the fullest commentaries on the public shows, and on neighbourhood reconciliation more widely, came from Blaise, a senior *animateur* at RAC, already introduced above. Like most of the people I spoke to in Abidjan, Blaise was reluctant to comment on RAC's and RFY's public shows. However, he talked more openly about how post-conflict reconciliation had taken place in his neighbourhood of N'dotr  (which happened to be where RAC is located). Blaise's account of how ordinary residents worked out reconciliation in their neighbourhood, confirmed that proximity

radio stations shared a similar premise to existing, grassroots reconciliation efforts but added very little.

At the beginning, after the crisis, everyone kept to their own. ... But some good things arise out of misfortune, as they say, because neighbours started saying hello to each other, when we didn't necessarily do that before. Everyone was talking about what to do, there were suspicions that some pro-Gbagbo neighbours had kept weapons, you had to go get the imams to reach out to the Abey [Southern ethnic group] community - there was a lot to manage, that's for sure. This created a sort of solidarity. People talked more than they used to. There were many parties and celebrations [*fêtes*]. Admittedly, these parties were kind of forced on people. You had people coming to your house saying 'We'd like to organise a party [...], we need money for tents and chairs' - you give your 5000 [francs CFA] without hesitation and you go out wearing an ADO Solutions t-shirt, of course! [ADO stands for Alassane Dramane Ouattara; ADO Solutions is one of Ouattara's slogans.] The tents were out and we danced. You could say you had to, since he's President. If you don't come out to party, it means you're unhappy. So you had to celebrate.

Fabien: The people who organised the parties, they were from the neighbourhood?

Blaise: Yes. It wasn't the RDR. It was people from the neighbourhood. [...]

Fabien: Do you have a sense that RAC's and the public shows' message is getting through, that people are listening?

Blaise: People appreciate it. I remember this old Bété man who said once that we had to let things go [*il faut laisser tout ça*]. He said: "Sure, Gbagbo is in prison, but one thing is clear - Alassane is president and what we wish is for peace to return once and for all. We're back in the neighbourhood, let's not bring anyone else's fight in with us. Let's leave politicians to sort out their issues and we'll go back to living as we used to. You're a Baoulé, I'm a Bété: one day we may need to help each other out, so let's not bring the divisions in."

Last time my girlfriend went to Yopougon and she heard these Bété people ranting about Alassane, how's he's this or that... She asked them: "Is anything you're saying right now going to get Gbagbo out of prison and back into Côte d'Ivoire? We women cook and sell our braised fish. Let us pray God that business is good so we can

survive. If the kind of upheaval you're talking about happens, you think it'll be good for us?"

So yeah, some people still carry a strand [*brin*] of vengeance in their heart. Today, if things veer off course that wouldn't be good - we could end up like the Central African Republic. We hope this doesn't happen, and that we can keep moving forward. People are starting to get it. These are our lives and businesses at stake. So even those who don't accept they lost the war, they are starting to understand. And they're a bit scared, too: some things you just can't say. They prefer to keep things to themselves. Because we all live in the same neighbourhood! We know who took up arms. We know who became an FRCI. We know - we eat with them and drink with them and we know how they entered in some people's house last time, how they slit some people's throats. Even if you know this, you can't say it, so mistrust is starting to dissipate.

Fabien: What you're saying is, because people can't say certain things and yet they have to cohabit, things are getting better.

Blaise: It's a bit hypocritical [*ca fait un peu l'hypocrisie*], but I mean, whether we like it or not, we've realised we have to live together. (interview, 17 June, 2015)

Blaise's account perfectly captured the rationale for the public shows, and for the framing of reconciliation as a neighbourhood problem more generally. Damage to trust in his vicinity was real. It affected people's very experience of cohabitation, such that they had to rebuild a sense of commonality, of shared space, and ideally, of solidarity. As Blaise saw it, post-conflict division and trauma in N'dotr  had thus rightly called for a surge of conviviality. People had to perform neighbourliness as they never had before. Members of different ethnic groups had to say hello, to be involved in each other's business, to defuse tensions, to party together. Blaise repeatedly emphasised that this convivial performance arose not out of a coordinated effort but out of sheer necessity.

In Blaise's narration, neighbourliness acted as both a fatality and an imperative: "whether we like it or not, we have to live together." This echoes the kind of circularity encountered on RFY's Day of Peace programme, and indeed in many local reconciliation initiatives I encountered in Abidjan. Conviviality and participation were not just desirable, they became mandatory. Neighbourhood celebrations were to some

extent "forced" on people. There is a sense that celebrations simply had to take place, because what else would repair a torn social fabric? Equally, the success of their performance relied on everyone being there. Mutual witnessing was key to rebuild some sense of trust.

Blaise did not reject public celebrations altogether; he did not dismiss them as useless. Their meaning was ambiguous, not just in terms of what they achieved, but also in terms of what they were *supposed* to achieve. Blaise hints that celebrations may have had a hidden purpose: to demonstrate neighbourhood allegiance to Ouattara, victor of 2011's bloody post-electoral conflict. In celebrating, we can surmise, residents may have been seeking to put an end to the military and paramilitary surveillance of the area. Lurking behind this imperative of convivial participation were political control and surveillance. People joined in the performance out of fear that one's absence would be interpreted as defiance, and possibly cause reprisal. Moreover, there was a sense that celebrations *had* to involve political allegiance, almost as a precautionary measure. Whether or not the state really was there watching over the celebrations, Blaise joined the party wearing an Alassane Ouattara jersey. As for the old Bété man whose words of wisdom are quoted, his advice was informed by the blunt fact of power ("one thing is certain, Alassane is president"). Whatever one did to patch up inter-ethnic relations, in other words, it was strongly recommended to include deference to the people in power (Akindès et al. 2014).

The celebrations Blaise mentioned, unlike RAC and RFY's public shows, were organised by neighbourhood people themselves. Public shows were interventions from "outside" the neighbourhood (involving none of the existing networks of knowledge, trust and dependence), and came to a large extent after the fact. If conviviality was already taking hold in the neighbourhood out of necessity, then public shows were, in a sense, a way of stating the obvious - that neighbours simply must get along. Yet because proximity radio stations are external to the neighbourhood, and popularly entangled with state power, as discussed in Chapter 5, their presence in the neighbourhood - in a pre-electoral period, no less - could only strengthen residents' worries about the political implication of participation. For many, the public shows were demanding allegiance to a regime whose domination in the upcoming elections was already ostensibly assured.

Also lurking behind post-conflict convivial efforts were silenced memory, and the knowledge of culpability ("we know who took up arms"). Much like proximity radio's reconciliation programmes, the post-conflict performance of neighbourliness in N'dotr  silenced the past, preventing local experiences of trauma and violence from being connected to broader responsibilities, which is to say to a full fleshed narrative of crisis and its aftermath. Together with repressed feelings of vengeance, this silence acted as a shadow to the beacon of transparent reconciliation. These shadows introduced the threat of "hypocrisy," as Blaise called it - or as a man I met in a bar in Port-Bou t's neighbourhood of Gonzagueville put it, "white smile, black heart" reconciliation (*dents blanches, coeur noir*).

## **6.5 - Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have analysed proximity radio stations' contribution to the discourse of local reconciliation in Abidjan. Using RAC and RFY's donor-sponsored public shows, as well as RFY's Day of Peace programme, as representative examples, I have questioned the construction of the neighbourhood as a figure of "the local" in which reconciliation was deemed most desirable - and most workable. Acknowledging the importance of neighbourhood sociality in Abidjan's urban order, I highlighted the challenges faced by proximity radio stations in articulating neighbourhood reconciliation with a broader sphere of concern and conversation. I argued that the programmes carried out by stations in 2014-2015 attempted to apprehend the local (the neighbourhood) as a space of conviviality and testimony. Simultaneously, however, reconciliation programmes constructed the local as an arena for 1) social control (the enactment of social hierarchies, especially generational); 2) erasure (bracketing away broader responsibilities for conflict); and 3) moral injunction (equating neighbourliness with forgiveness). Echoing critiques of localism in peacebuilding and other fields (Chapter 3), the shows discussed in this chapter envisaged the local in ways that constrained what residents could say or do - at least in relation to the public terms of living-together. Instead of making the local subordinate to national, the shows emphasised the neighbourhood's capital importance as a scale of social engagement and duty. The effect, however, was to deflect attention from macro-level issues of past, power and justice.

In large part, the constraints that proximity radio's reconciliation programmes placed on the local stemmed from the apparent deadlock of post-conflict government and politics in Côte d'Ivoire. Proximity radio stations were not alone in curtailing testimonies and promoting forgiveness without frank appraisal of histories and experiences. The silences that the public shows and Day of Peace programme generated were audible at national level as well. In this regard, the minute procedures through which radio initiatives constructed the local enact a broader effort to "silence the past" (Trouillot 1995). Understood within the context of *abidjanais* residents' everyday efforts toward post-conflict cohabitation, however, the radio programmes analysed here took on a quasi-tautological and fatalistic character. They amounted to stating the obvious: that urban dwellers already sharing space must live together. In addition, without the possibility to openly discuss structural issues, the shows exposed themselves to political interpretations and anxieties: despite producers' best intentions and most carefully neutral language, RFY's and RAC's public shows may well have been heard as requests for political allegiance to the Ouattara regime and its one-sided approach to post-conflict democracy.

Returning to the research questions that guided my inquiry, it is possible to provide supplementary answers to all three. Analysis of proximity radio's peace-building programmes revealed that stations constructed the local - the neighbourhood - as an autonomous scale of reconciliation, largely disconnected from the national and from a dynamic sense of history (RQ2). Place, in this process, was explicitly envisioned and codified as a collective project but in ways - hierarchical, silencing - that imposed a strict limit and purpose on local practices (RQ1). These partial conclusions are not meant to evaluate the "success" or "impact" of proximity radio's reconciliation programmes. Instead, the constrained and constraining nature of these programmes highlights more starkly the importance of proximity radio's active involvement in *everyday* place-making, as documented in Chapter 5. This contrast suggests that proximity radio's contribution to post-conflict living-together (RQ3) was not just about the best peace-building message or procedure. This is not to say that proximity radio's testimonial methods and output could not have been enriched. On the contrary, I hope to have made clear that the work of public truth largely remained to be done in Abidjan in 2015. More fundamentally, however, I argue that it was reconciliation

programmes' construction of the local, together with its underlying conception of relations between place, power and "civic agency" (Willems & Obadare 2014), that hindered its meaningful contribution to living-together. This will become clearer as I explore some of the rationales behind reconciliation shows' format in the next chapter.



## Chapter 7

### Proximity Radio and the Place of Politics in Abidjan

#### 7.1 - Introduction

In the previous chapter, I documented reconciliation programmes' emphasis on the neighbourhood at the expense of wider scales. The issue was not that proximity radio stations centred talk on the neighbourhood, but the fact that they did so *in a certain way* - framing local engagement as distinct from national considerations, turning the former into a prelude, if not a substitute, for the latter. Here, I consider one of the main rationales behind this process: the avoidance of politics. If we recall RFY's choice of taboo words during its public shows, one of station staff's main concerns was to prevent someone saying, "Gbagbo is in The Hague!" into the microphone. Although a statement of fact, such a declaration would have amounted to "political content," which stations were strictly forbidden from airing. In this chapter, I consider the difficulties, justifications and contests involved in constructing the local as a non-political space on proximity radio. The delineation of place from politics was an effort that influenced *all* of proximity radio stations' activities, beyond reconciliation initiatives. I start by highlighting that part of the difficulty stemmed from the very elusive definition of "politics." Rather than reconstructing a single definition, I explore different operations through which radio producers justified and explained politics' avoidance - or in a more nuanced way, outlined what they perceived to be "good" local politics. The views I analyse below were fragments of broader, partly overlapping discourses: the CDVR's discourse of national crisis and reconciliation, to start, but also an older developmental ethos and a post-conflict ideology of individual responsibility and entrepreneurship. I trace discursive connections as much as possible without being able to undertake a full genealogy. What preoccupies me is an underlying vision of place in relation to politics - or the proper place of politics - that, regardless of specific ideological intent, was enacted daily in proximity radio's approach to local issues, knowledge and experience. In the last part of the chapter, I confront this vision to proximity radio's sociability of encounter, discussed in Chapter 5. I ask whether the open-ended making of place through social connection and exchange might have provided a different understanding of politics, one that warrants a full place on the *abidjanais* airwaves.

## 7.2 - The What and Where of Politics

Politics - *la politique* - was a fearsome word in almost all the conversations I had during fieldwork. Many seemed to agree that it was to be banned, buried, done with.<sup>47</sup> Let us return to my conversation at the *grin* "Arafat," on the streets of Adjamé, which I introduced in Chapter 5. After *grin* participants had criticised Radio Téré for its distance with the everyday lives of ordinary residents, called upon the station to "come down" into the streets to visit the *grin*, and lambasted the station's owner, Mayor Youssouf Sylla, for his inefficacy, they concluded in the following way:

Diabaté argues that [Radio Téré] should ditch politics. "We're tired of politics," he claims [*on est fatigués de la politique*], and calls once again for the station to come to the *grin* and hear "real talk." I point out that Téré, like all proximity radio stations, is actually prevented from talking politics by state regulations. The *grin*, on the other hand, seems to me to be a very political space of talk, and thus difficult to integrate into the station's programme. To my surprise, everyone agrees. One man confirms that the *grin*'s discussions "*vont beaucoup sur la politique*." He gives an example: when discussing youth unemployment, many speakers will eventually veer off into comments such as "under Gbagbo things were worse, or better." In these discussions, the man concludes, political allegiances must inevitably surface. Diabaté counters that Radio Téré should still come to the *grin* precisely to explain that some words are not allowed, that there are rules, defined ways that one should talk about social issues. As he puts it: "You need to know how to re-orient the debate. There are always orientations, you just have to know how to handle them." Diabaté illustrates what he means by citing the example of a journalist on RFI [name unintelligible] whom he considers particularly adept at "re-orientation." "Every time, someone phones in and goes off topic. But he knows how to bring the discussion back on track." (field notes, March 10, 2015)

The conversation, like many others I had around this topic, revealed how complex and loaded "politics" could be, as it is in many places. Politics was variously conceived as a

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<sup>47</sup> In this regard, there are striking similarities between *abidjanais* discourses on the undesirability of politics, and "Western" calls for their transcendence in the wake of the Cold War.

practice ("doing politics," *faire de la politique*), as a way of talking about current affairs (partisan, or "oriented" as Diabaté put it), or as a corpus of issues, actors and institutions with a semi-autonomous existence in the social world - as when one of Radio Téré's interns explained to me that "often there are themes that bring us to brush against politics [*effleurer la politique*]." Politics could be something one accidentally "stumbled into."

In the discussion at the *grin*, the main distinction appeared to be between politics as agonistic debate - talking about "social issues" - and politics as partisanship - linking social issues to a particular president or party. For Diabaté, Radio Téré's association with the Adjamé mayor meant that broadcast content would be "political" in the sense of partisan, preventing a proper discussion of social issues. Ironically, when I suggested to Téré's manager that the station might broadcast from local *grins*, he dismissed them along the exact same lines:

That's an idea but we all know what goes on in the *grins*. We would like to go to them but we can only discuss social issues. We have to avoid political topics. [...] If they can set aside their political leaning [*penchant politique*], we're open to it. (Cheick, interview, 23 March, 2015)

This indicates that proximity radio producers and ordinary citizens both wanted to avoid politics. Both conceived of politics as something that could and should be contained, or cordoned. But the recurring conflation of partisanship with debate over "social issues" put this delineation in jeopardy. In Adjamé, radio producers and *grin* members accused each other of being responsible for the conflation. In what follows I relate this mutual accusation to a deeper debate about the "proper place" of politics.

The fact that Téré's manager and *grin* participants could accuse each other of being too political points to two things. First, the looseness of the term "politics" allowed the desire for its avoidance to silence different kinds of talk. During my fieldwork, I found many indications that regulatory interdictions, apparently straightforward, took on a "surplus" of meaning on proximity radio, largely (but not only) because of the sensitivities of the post-conflict context. Second, Radio Téré and *grin* members' mutual accusations of "doing politics" remind us that the *what* and *where* of politics

are, by definition, deeply contested. Ordinary urban dwellers, like their counterparts in many other cities, also expressed a desire to break from "politics." But what they understood by "politics," like their idea of where alternative voices should come from, may have been very different from what politicians, elites and even proximity radio producers were willing to imagine. I demonstrate this in the following section by examining the kinds of talk that were constrained by proximity radio's "anti-politics" (Ferguson 1994; Clarke 2015), and how various discourses justified such constraints.

### **7.3 - Anti-Politics of Proximity Broadcasting**

#### 7.3.1 - Neighbourliness Without Claims: The Case of Reparations

One of the most audible ways that proximity radio producers delineated place from politics was by limiting avenues for urban dwellers to make claims on the state. In this section I detail a striking example, through the case of post-conflict reparations. In the previous chapter I explained that proximity radio stations couched post-conflict reconciliation as a neighbourhood problem, both by bracketing macro structures of responsibility during the crisis and by using neighbourliness as a kind of injunction: residents simply had to live together. This operation also involved an effort to limit claims on the state and associated institutions. I return to the Day of Peace programme aired on RFY on 30 November, 2014. As a reminder, this programme began with testimonies of trauma and neighbours turning against each other, followed by repeated emphases on the necessity of forgiveness. At one point, the *animateur*, Abou, asked guests:

Abou: But what about institutions? Some people want a strong signal from the state [meaning material reparations] - but should we wait for institutions to come to us before we reconcile ourselves?

Guest 3: No, absolutely not. Institutions are what they are. We're the population. We are the ones who suffered the most from the crisis. If reconciliation initiatives come from us directly, I think - I think it will touch the population more deeply.

Abou's leading question was intended to hammer home the point, previously reiterated by guests, that reconciliation was primarily a matter of urban dwellers' own

doing: "no one will fix Côte d'Ivoire's if not for ourselves." In this exchange, the perspective of reconciliation as a neighbourhood affair is directly counter-posed to institutional intervention. Institutions - implicitly synonymous with the state - were envisaged as separate entities with their own autonomous rationalities (they "are what they are"). Their intervention in social affairs therefore could not and should not be linked to any ordinary expectations. In this radical separation of state rationalities from social needs and dynamics, this brief excerpt echoes theories of the African state as an alien "graft" (Bayart 1993) whose operations have little to do with a notion of public interest.

In his mention of institutions "coming toward" citizens, the *animateur* alluded to the thorny question of post-conflict *reparations*. Reparations, most obviously, were concrete symbols of the national effort toward "truth and justice" carried out by the CDVR. Immediately after the fall of Laurent Gbagbo in 2011, the Ouattara government announced a national programme to compensate victims of violence, both civilian and military, as part of a wider package of reconciliation and peace-building measures. The CDVR took on the task of identifying victims eligible for compensation. When the CDVR was dismantled in December 2014, the actual work of compensation was handed to the CONARIV (*Commission Nationale pour la Réconciliation et l'Indemnisation des Victimes*) and its *Programme National de Cohésion Sociale* (PNCS). Yet in June 2015 victims were still being identified (Coulibaly, 7 July 2015), with varying figures put forward; by the end of the year, only a small fraction of the nearly 150 000 identified victims had been compensated (RFI, 30 December 2015).<sup>48</sup> Frustrations over delays, uncertainties about who could claim victim status, fears of corruption (middlemen taking cuts out of compensation payments), combined with worries over rising costs of living and lingering post-conflict resentment made reparations a hot issue in Abidjan during my time of fieldwork. It was made even more contentious by the lingering sense of injustice that came out of the CDVR's inability to pursue investigations at ground level, as well as the one-sided prosecution of Gbagbo supporters.

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<sup>48</sup> The RFI report stated that out of the 4500 individuals slated to benefit from the first, most urgent wave of financial reparations, 3500 had died by the time reparations were ready to be handed out.

To give a further sense of how important the issue of reparations was in Abidjan in 2015, I offer this account of RAC's first public show, in the neighbourhood of PK-18, on April 12. PK-18 is a large, working-class and mostly informal area near Abobo's peri-urban edge, where some of the main roads coming into the city from the north intersect. Owing to its strategic location, the neighbourhood witnessed intense fighting. Pro-Gbagbo troops attempting to cordon off Abobo faced fierce resistance from guerrilla factions based in the area, before being overwhelmed by pro-Ouattara militias coming from further afield. The neighbourhood briefly became an unofficial fiefdom for one of the Forces Nouvelles's leading warlords, Ibrahim "IB" Coulibaly, before his outsized claim to power prompted his assassination. Parts of PK-18 were shelled, while the fear of stray bullets or abusive checkpoints kept many residents trapped without food or water for days (Kouakou, 25 July 2011). When I met Yaya, an RAC listener and small shop owner in PK-18, in June 2015, he was still in debt from the goods he gave away to desperate families during the crisis months of 2011.

RAC's decision to host its first public show in PK-18 was thus symbolic, in addition to being motivated by practical concerns: the station was situated nearby, and some staff members had friends and family in the neighbourhood. The show took place on an overcast Saturday afternoon in late April, on a large, unpaved open space where, I was told, Alassane Ouattara held many a rally.<sup>49</sup> The space was lined with low-rise houses of rough concrete. The festivities started late with a sparse crowd and sluggish musical numbers (RAC did not enjoy RFY's privileged access to the *abidjanais* music scene). About an hour in, two of the station's journalists engaged four participants - two women and two men - on the topic of "How to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past." After initial exhortations to peace and reconciliation, one of the participants - she was leader the local women's organisation - picked up on the theme of post-crisis reparations. Her tone rose as she enumerated the different kinds of violence that the

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<sup>49</sup> I do not have a recording of RAC's first show because, quite simply, I felt too exposed and intimidated. As I waited for the music to start, I felt scrutinised by residents watching from their doorsteps, and was constantly followed by children tugging at my arms and clothes. I decided not to take out my recorder and take minimal notes. I could not help but think of Abobo's reputation for disorder. I also remembered RFY's first show, which had taken a chaotic turn toward the end, as groups of older children threatened to overrun station staff in a last-chance grab for t-shirts and soft drinks. Indeed, the PK-18 ended in very much the same, rowdy way.

neighbourhood suffered, from shelling to shortages. Increasingly fired up, she argued that, for all of the post-crisis state visits and pledges, for all of the reconciliation programmes and infrastructural promises, PK-18 had "received nothing" of its due. She held central and municipal governments responsible for diverting post-conflict aid toward Abobo, meaning toward the denser, more central areas of the *commune*. She talked of impoverishment and rising costs of living, unfair slum clearance (*déguerpissements*) campaigns<sup>50</sup> targeting PK-18, a general sense of having been forgotten. She warned: "There will be no reconciliation until the government does something for the population here."

She spoke for what felt like a full fifteen minutes. After seeing two of RFY's tightly scripted shows in Yopougon, I was surprised that RAC journalists did not interrupt her. RAC had not planned to exclude "taboo words" from the discussion, as RFY had done, but I assumed they would also be looking to control public talk in some measure (as indeed they did in the rest of the public shows). In all likelihood, the speaker's status (she was resplendently dressed and clearly commanded respect) and her family relation to one of RAC's lead reporters (who, in spite of her pregnancy, was present for the occasion) kept her from being silenced. Crucially, this was the only time, in all of the public show "debates" I witnessed in Abidjan, that one of the participants drew responses from the audience. No doubt many of the women clapping and cheering that evening were members of the speaker's own neighbourhood association. Still, the result was a uniquely electrified atmosphere, which I took as clear evidence that local talk in Abidjan was searching for outlets and amplification (field notes, April 12, 2015).

The issue of reparations, and the opinion that the state could and should do more for ordinary people affected by the crisis, crossed ethnic, social and geographical lines in my conversations. RFY's Day of Peace show could not limit itself to allusion and thus included three women's demands for reparations (each linked to individual testimonies of loss). One of the recordings went as follows:

Woman Victim [warbled audio recording]: They want us to forgive? Then they should offer reparations. That's what they ought to do. The son that I have left - they should find him a place to get work. That way he'll forget. His father, he provided for us. So

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<sup>50</sup> See Kouassi, 11 December 2012.

now my son could provide what his old man did. Until I die. As long as we don't get compensation, our hearts will be heavy [*le coeur est chaud*]. They tell us to forgive. That's hard. It's hard.

The woman indirectly criticised the emphasis on forgiveness, carried by proximity radio as part of a broader, state-sponsored discourse. She equally, and implicitly, commented on the nature of reparations being offered by the state, which tended to be financial and circled around 1 000 000 FCFA (roughly \$1500) per person (RFI, 30 December 2015). In the face of such claims, the show's guests agreed that reparations were an important element of post-conflict reconciliation.

Guest 3: Forgiveness, yes - the government should really roll out its support programmes. We men can get by, but these women - they must be helped, for the children and the family.

Guest 4<sup>51</sup>: Poverty slows down forgiveness. Because if you've lost everything, your home looted and your parents killed, and at the end of it you can't even find money to eat, I don't see why you would want to forgive.

However, the show quickly moved on from the issue, to a series of *vox pop* opinions on "what Côte d'Ivoire should do to recover its lost glory [*lustre d'antan*]." Lip service to victims' claims avoided any mention of which organisations were available to compensate victims, how they worked and whether they were seen to have delivered on their promise. Claims were only allowed in gendered terms, which is to say on the basis of women's perceived dependence and powerlessness. Moreover, such claims had previously been framed by what I have mentioned above: speakers' insistence that ordinary residents should take on the task of forgiveness and reconciliation without waiting for any kind of state support or intervention.

In this way, reparations were a contested issue not just because they symbolised the incomplete work of post-conflict truth and justice, but also because they symbolised relations between the state and the local after conflict. The Day of Peace's reluctant acknowledgement of the reparations issue strongly suggests that the desire to turn

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<sup>51</sup> It is worth mentioning again here that Guest 4 was the only woman on the show.



reconciliation into a neighbourhood issue was combined with an attempt to prevent claims being made by citizens on "institutions." In further evidence that such claims were being silenced, the PK-18 public show in which the women's association leader voiced her discontent over the way the state had neglected the neighbourhood was never broadcast on RAC, as was originally intended.<sup>52</sup>

### 7.3.2 - The Responsibility of Politics

Limiting avenues for urban dwellers' claims on the state was often justified, for proximity radio producers, in the name of *responsibility*. Most fundamentally, what was at stake was the distribution of responsibility between the individual and the state. This is a hugely complex political and philosophical question. In this section, I want to take the time to situate producers' views on individual responsibility within two, prominent strands of public discourse in Côte d'Ivoire at the time of fieldwork. The first was the discourse of *émergence*, and the second a moral discourse of post-conflict redemption. I explicate the first quickly, before dwelling on the second. I expand on discourses of post-conflict redemption because it was clear to me that references to conflict and its responsibilities played a crucial role in justifying the silencing of claims and the removal of politics from local life in Abidjan - as I go on to detail in the following section.

*Émergence* acquired currency and popularity in Côte d'Ivoire as President Alassane Ouattara's main slogan and political promise in 2011. By the time of my fieldwork, the concept designated an ongoing process, that of "becoming emergent"; a blueprint for socio-economic transformation; and a time in the near future - the full slogan being *Émergence 2020* - when Côte d'Ivoire aimed to have achieved economic and democratic maturity. *Émergence* conjured the hope that Côte d'Ivoire could once again, after the "miracle" years of post-independence growth (1960-1978), secure its footing on the path to development and global integration. Under Ouattara, *émergence* combined an economic policy geared toward attracting international capital with the promotion of self-help and entrepreneurialism. The idea that many of

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<sup>52</sup> RAC producers later claimed they had not yet mastered the recording equipment. It remained, as I detail below, that they considerably adapted later public shows to prevent any similar outbursts from panel speakers.

Côte d'Ivoire's problems, starting with youth unemployment, might be solved by a wider embrace of the entrepreneurial mind-set was a fixture on national television in 2015, spawning countless conferences, seminars, fairs and salons around the city.<sup>53</sup> The promotion of entrepreneurship was perhaps the clearest and most recurring strand of *émergence's* emphasis on activating individual responsibility after conflict. There are clear parallels between entrepreneurialism under Ouattara and neoliberal discourse in other parts of Africa and the world (e.g. Harvey 1989; Pikalo & Banjac 2013; Datta 2015), but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to excavate the Ouattara government's ideology of so-called "humane liberalism" (*libéralisme à visage humain*).<sup>54</sup> Moreover, it was difficult to assess just how hegemonic *émergence* had become as an individual and collective outlook at the time of fieldwork. *Émergence* as a term was ubiquitous, but many *abidjanais* residents used it ironically, and it had become the object of abundant joking.<sup>55</sup> Without making any claims about its ideological lineage or supremacy, then, I wish simply to note that proximity radio producers could draw on an omnipresent and state-sponsored discourse of *émergence* in their reasoning about individual responsibility.

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<sup>53</sup> One might also mention much-trumpeted prizes such as the Alassane Ouattara Prize for Young Emergent Entrepreneurs (*Prix Alassane Ouattara du Jeune Entrepreneur Émergent*), launched in 2012.

<sup>54</sup> The expression appears to have been born out of a conference in Abidjan, in January 2014, organised by Côte d'Ivoire's Liberal Initiative (ILCI) think tank and funded by Ouattara's once-close ally, Guillaume Soro (AIP, 29 January, 2014). Tracing the origins of Ouattara's ideology would no doubt begin with his training as an economist in US universities, before his rise to prominence as Africa Director for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the second half of the 1980s, at the height of the neoliberal "Washington Consensus." Indeed, the label of "humane liberalism" might well have been an attempt to re-brand a President many of his critics accused of having helmed a particularly brutal sequence of structural adjustment during his mandate as Ivoirian Prime Minister in the early 1990s (see Contamin & Memel-Foté 1997; Akindès 2000; Contamin & Losch 2000; Jarret & Mahieu 2002).

<sup>55</sup> I once attended an official ceremony organised in Adjamé, during which a representative for the District d'Abidjan (metropolitan body) lamented *émergence's* trivialisation as a concept: "I even hear of 'emergent sheep' on the cattle market in Port-Bouët!" he exclaimed. Needless to say, what the representative found reprehensible was a tremendous source of amusement in Abidjan. Many urban dwellers weaved *émergence* into witty puns or absurd associations. The effect was often to ridicule development lingo's talismanic qualities, and to highlight the contrast between future promises and an impoverished present - in keeping with the role of humour in many African contexts (e.g. Willems 2011a; Obadare 2016).

The question of individual responsibility was not just posed in economic or developmental terms, however. In post-conflict Abidjan, it acquired a moral dimension linked to the need to atone for recent violence and destruction. While I have identified no single, identifiable doctrine, a good summary of this diffuse, post-conflict public morality can be found in the CDVR's (2016) final report. As noted, the report fails to provide any detailed account of the Ivoirian crises. But it does make brief pronouncements about who was responsible for conflict. The CDVR (*ibid.*: 98) begins its one-page "findings" as follows:

The deep roots of the crisis have been identified after a year's work by the Heuristic Commission. A number of risk factors have been brought to light or confirmed. Recommendations have been made. In the search for a society of abundance and freedom, we have lost the culture of restraint (mastery of self, ability to withstand pain and shortages, respect of totems and interdictions) that allowed our old societies to manage the constraints with which they lived. The consequences that followed were of an economic, social and political order.

This opening introduces the entire text's idea that the crisis was, first and foremost, the result of a national moral shortcoming. Its nostalgic appeal to values of yore is followed by critiques of "excessive consumerism," dependence on the state as opposed to "entrepreneurship," and "degraded forms of solidarity" (*ibid.*; on the "myth of African solidarity," see Vidal 1994). Wary, perhaps, of relying too heavily on moral vocabulary, the CDVR draws on social psychology to conclude that the ethno-political crisis that began in 1999 had its roots in a breakdown of the "psychological equilibrium of the populations" (2016: 98). In these evocations, which bypass attempts at historicising experience, every individual Ivoirian is made to bear responsibility for the crisis, if only implicitly. It is thus not simply the vagueness of language that is at issue, nor the CDVR's reluctance (or incapability) to designate concrete actors and causalities. What the CDVR report encapsulates is a moral discourse in which "the populations," to use a preferred aggregative term in Côte d'Ivoire, were indistinctly responsible for crisis.

The CDVR's (*ibid.*) psycho-moral reasoning was associated with a reading of politics as pathology:

Politics, perceived as the main source of the Ivoirian crisis, [became] an affair of arrangements rather than rights; of strong presidentialism, seen to be excessive by some, in which one [searched] for a father-figure; of practices, common in both leaders and ordinary citizens, that undercut the state, that defied the Law, the people and the authorities. In this general context, the elites and the base were victims of mutual instrumentalisation, manipulation and blackmail.

The CDVR's account gestures toward a widespread, popular indictment of politicians' role in the crisis, already touched upon in Chapter 6 (Brahima's view that reconciliation had to be local because politicians had failed their duty) and above in the *grin* members' claim that they were "tired of politics" in relation to Adjamé's mayor. But the wording above indicates an effort to contain the responsibility attributed to politicians, by once again making ordinary citizens share the blame for the pathologisation of politics. Citizens' psychological dispositions (to seek a father figure), their "common" tendencies toward lawlessness and disobedience, and most curiously their "manipulation and blackmail" of political elites, are brought to the fore. If "politics" was "perceived as the main source of the Ivoirian crisis," then "politics" was what is practiced by a complicit and morally corruptible population.

In different versions, in more or less subtle hues or distant echoes, the CDVR's moral discourse of shared yet individualised responsibility for crisis surfaced frequently in Abidjan in 2014-2015. While the CDVR's mixture of religion and psychoanalysis language did not make it *verbatim* onto the proximity radio airwaves, it is tempting to make the parallel with RAC and RFY's reconciliation programmes analysed in the previous chapter. Like the CDVR, the programmes prevented any specific attribution of responsibility for crisis. They did not allow instances of neighbourhood violence (in rare testimonies) to be clearly contextualised, and forbade public show discussants from naming actors and power positions in their narratives of "what went wrong." From this truncated process could emerge a perverse subtext: because local acts of violence had no real explanation, no background from which they could spring, they might well be interpreted as resulting from a widespread pathology. In this light, we can also understand proximity radio's blanket imperative for post-conflict forgiveness, salient in RFY's Day of Peace programme: because every individual carried a degree of responsibility, even victims, the latter's duty toward re-moralising the nation justified

considerable effort and self-sacrifice. While the Day of Peace programme's guests did not explicitly make this moral connection between responsibility (for crisis) and duty (to forgiveness), the idea of the crisis as collective fault, for which only individual self-betterment could atone, was recurrent. For example:

Guest 5: When today the Head of State says *émergence*; when everywhere you hear *émergence, émergence*. Well, *émergence* is a behaviour. It is our behaviour [*notre comportement à nous*] that needs to change. The hate we carried in us, we need to get it out. We need to step away from it, and we need to accept our neighbours. Those who fled the neighbourhood and may fear retribution if they return - we need to let all that go. If we really want an "emergent nation" in 2020, we need to accept this.

Guest 5, like his fellow discussants, linked neighbourliness to individual moral/behavioural reform, and in turn to national salvation and the production of a collective future. That this future was couched in Ouattara's slogan of *émergence* indicates that the political-economic and moral discourses highlighting individual responsibility were by no means distinct or exclusive. Indeed, they often intertwined in the language of self-improvement. Consider for example this excerpt from a recent speech by the (government-appointed) head of the national Observatory for Solidarity and Social Cohesion:

Access to health, access to basic social services [...] when all of these aspects are strengthened of course it facilitates social cohesion. [But] very often we accuse Pierre or Paul of not doing this or that, when social cohesion is everyone's affair. Whatever small thing you do, at the level of your family, can contribute - or not - to social cohesion. [...] If we can all analyse and critique our individual behaviour, and better ourselves, evidently we will have a peaceful nation. We will truly achieve what we are looking for. (I. T. Coulibaly in AIP, 29 November 2016)

Coulibaly asserts that the equivalence between individual reform and national peace had become "evident" by the time of his speech. Without taking his word for it, he indicates just how widespread the entrepreneurial and post-conflict discourses of individual responsibility had become in Abidjan by late 2016.<sup>56</sup> Coulibaly also

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<sup>56</sup> The timing of Coulibaly's speech was not innocent. Less than a month earlier, Ivoirians had been called to vote in a referendum over Ouattara's proposal for a new Constitution - a process

confirms that individual responsibility for post-conflict social cohesion was often invoked explicitly to deflect citizens' claims on public institutions: in Coulibaly's speech, "Pierre" and "Paul" could refer to any Ivoirian, but also to welfare services, whose shortcomings Coulibaly exhorts citizens not to over-emphasise.

To be clear, my intention is not to debate the validity of the CDVR's moral reasoning (expanding responsibility for conflict to every individual Ivoirian), nor its expediency in a super-diverse and fractured context. Nor am I looking to question the specific political motivations for Coulibaly's speech. What is at issue here is that overlapping public discourses of individual responsibility, in post-conflict Abidjan, offered proximity radio producers a readily available repertoire through which to justify the limiting of local claims - far beyond the interdiction of partisan content, which media regulation purported to target. The discourses to which I refer were powerful, not in the sense that they were hegemonic and "commonsensically" translated into proximity radio programmes, but in the sense that they were widely circulated by elites, including state officials<sup>57</sup>; in a context of deep fears over pervasive surveillance and monitoring, such discourses might easily be interpreted as a "government line" according to which radio producers should interpret their duties, especially in regard to politics. At the very least, they were the discursive background against which to further consider radio producers' own understandings of the place of politics.

### 7.3.3 - Irresponsible Citizens

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marked by the silencing of political debate (Penar 2016), and leading to low turn-out. Weeks after Coulibaly's speech, Ivoirians were once again called to the voting booth to elect parliamentary representatives (an election in which the RDR-PDCI alliance, unsurprisingly, won a crushing majority). The speech thus came at a sensitive time when the Ouattara government enlisted many channels to normalise its political domination.

<sup>57</sup> Admittedly, I have not considered the role of development agencies and donors in circulating or reinforcing these discourses. Given my limited access to USAID's consultants, to take a key example, I cannot say how they positioned their intervention in the pre-electoral landscape of power and politics. No doubt their targeting of street-level communication spaces had something to do with a desire to avoid being too closely associated with the RDR state and its associated line. Still, given the public shows' constraints on public talk, it was difficult not to wonder how much of USAID's campaign for peaceful civic engagement was aimed at legitimating a manifestly one-sided election.

One of the first arguments I heard in favour of avoiding politics came during a day of participant observation in the studio at RFY. Evelyne, a newscaster who had lingered after her bulletin, explained to me in passing: "You know, we radio stations don't do politics. That's a good thing! We aren't like the newspapers. During the crisis, we didn't propagate hate. Politics is what messed things up [*c'est la politique qui a tout mélangé*]" (field notes, 23 November 2014). Evelyne's argument was a common one.<sup>58</sup> It stemmed, first, from a reading of the Ivoirian press (liberalised in 1990) as a hyper-polarised and over-politicised medium, in which partisanship had replaced any commitment to information and ideas. While this reading of the press as a hate-mongering, party-serving organ has been nuanced (Théroux-Bénoni 2009), it remains undeniable that most newspapers were clearly identified with a party and a variably polarised political position. In contrast, many proximity radio stations and producers prided themselves on their political neutrality during the crisis (a claim to neutrality we can also nuance, however - see Chapter 5). Evelyne's argument further harnessed the narrative of "politics as source of conflict" to bolster the station's policing of political talk after the crisis. Considering what I have discussed above, her point of view could be considered ambiguous. Saying that politics had "messed things up" could be interpreted as an indictment of politicians, as in the *grin* members' rejection of politics. But it also carried the suggestion that politics needed to be avoided because it had become synonymous with citizens' pathological behaviour (as in the CDVR's narrative). In this section, I try to delve deeper into this ambiguity by weaving together several other comments by proximity radio producers who, like Evelyne, sought to justify the absence of politics on air. We might term these justifications proximity radio's anti-politics (Ferguson 1994; Clarke 2015). These justifications are not meant to form a coherent perspective, however. On the contrary, I aim to document the variety of arguments that could be invoked. I show that, while some accounts were "negative," referring to a quasi-pathological understanding of politics, others were

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<sup>58</sup> The director of the HACA, I. Sy Savané, confirmed this in the interview (January 26, 2016) he gave me: "In reality, I think this fear [of politics] comes from this analogy made with the press. Which is very partisan. And people fear that radios might reproduce this model." Echoing Lori Théroux-Bénoni (2009; also Stremlau 2013), he added: "And outside of the specific case of Côte d'Ivoire, you have a sort of obsession with Radio Mille Collines. That blocked many initiatives in Africa. Everywhere, even in countries far from Rwanda, people told themselves, 'If we leave radios to their own devices...' But in reality, the regulator only has to do their job."

more "positive," highlighting the benefits of avoiding politics. Yet for all their variety, they promoted a separation between politics and everyday life, one in which the connecting thread was a conception of citizens as irresponsible.

### 7.3.3.a - *Passions vs. Peace*

Let us return to RAC's public show in PK-18, during which the leader of the local women's organisation accused state and municipal authorities of withholding support for her distressed neighbourhood. As I have mentioned, this initial show was never aired, despite the station's commitment to editing and broadcasting each episode of its USAID-funded "caravan." In subsequent shows, RAC's *animateurs* scripted their round-table discussions much more tightly; like RFY, they shifted their questioning away from past violence, and toward the ins and outs of electoral procedure. In a recorded conversation with Victor, one of RAC's lead *animateurs* during the public shows, I confronted him with my observation that the station's round-table segments had become much more scripted, subdued and consensual since the first, electrified discussion in PK-18. He responded:

Of course, and it's deliberate! You were there with us, on the ground; you saw that first show. People were out of line [*il y a eu des débordements* - literally "things overflowed"], they strayed, there were claims [*revendications*] being made that went beyond the show's objectives. Because our objective with this show is not to stir revolt and get people to rise up. Our objective is to bring peace to people's hearts, and lead them to peaceful elections. (interview, 24 June, 2015)

In Victor's explanation, quieting people's passions ("bringing peace to their heart") involved avoiding conversations turning into "claims." By associating these claims to "revolt" and "rising up" he linked them to a deep, lingering social discontent, one that, if liberated, would involve unmanageable political upheaval. Considering the threat of talk becoming political, he judged it better to avoid any potentially contentious issue altogether. As RAC's manager, Jacques, put it (in a general description of the station's reconciliation work with international partners): "We get people to understand that the round-table is not a debate. So the discussion can't be contradictory. It is... Well, we are there to reach a very specific objective [which is peace]" (interview, 12



December 2014). Similarly, RFY justified its own scripting of public show round-tables (see Chapter 4) as a way to "put everyone in agreement" (*mettre tout le monde d'accord*), in Aristide's words (field notes, March 16, 2015). The production of consensus involved stripping local talk of words that could stir up the "heat" (as in the expression *le coeur est chaud*) of uncontrollable passions and emotions. In Sidiki's conception, such safeguards would prevent round-table participants from seizing the microphone and voicing their resentment ("they killed my brother!"), their anger, their fear, and especially their political position ("Gbagbo is in the Hague!"). In both RAC's and RFY's justifications, avoiding politics was synonymous with avoiding passion and emotion, antithetical to peace (understood as individual disposition, as in: "peace in people's hearts") (for similar aversion to political passions in post-conflict contexts, see Ure 2008; Chakravarti 2014; Datzberger 2014). By extension, avoiding politics meant avoiding claims, controversy, oppositional stances - the sheer agonism of debate (echoing ideologies of *consensus* critiqued in a European context by Mouffe 2000; Rancière 2010). In this construction of post-conflict discussion as consensus, agonistic talk, affect and partisanship were conflated into a single notion of politics, which ought to be avoided.

### 7.3.3.b - Democratic Immaturity

I suggest that this conflation, and the negative connotations attached to it, were possible precisely because of the view, expounded in the previous section, that ordinary citizens had perverted politics during crisis years. This was rarely directly acknowledged but, once again, surfaced in traces in producers' - and even listeners' justifications for the avoidance of politics. One of the clearest expressions of this view came from Salomon, the RFY intern already introduced in Chapter 5. When I asked him whether he thought it right that proximity radio stations could not discuss politics on air, he responded:

For now, because we are a young and weak democracy, it's better to keep it a bit in the drawers. We need to take time to prepare peoples' minds [*préparer les mentalités*], and wait until things are comfortably settled. My thinking is, something that comes all at once doesn't last. So I support preparing minds. When we're finished preparing people's minds, when in his/her head, the Ivoirian is developed, "*émergent*," ready to

accept political decisions - because they are often very difficult to accept - then we can allow everyone to do politics. (interview, 25 March, 2015)

Salomon's view was relatively extreme. He evoked long-standing arguments, couched in variously euphemistic terms by different actors, that post-colonial African citizens were "not ready for democracy" (arguments whose different facets were influentially challenged by Claude Ake [1996], Mahmood Mamdani [1996] and Rita Abrahamsen [2000]). For Salomon, the crisis had demonstrated both citizens' inability to separate politics from violence and fanaticism, and media's destructive power in this volatile contest. While Salomon was the only one of my interviewees to make the argument so overtly - in a perspective that I relate to his class background (he comes from a family of wealthy planters) and interpret as a marker of distinction, in a Bourdieusian sense - his line of reasoning surfaced in several other commentaries. Take the following response from David, *animateur* at Cocody FM also introduced in Chapter 5. When I asked him whether he supported the HACA's regulations regarding politics on air, David responded:

I can't say that I'm *against* [his emphasis], because for me, you have to prioritise the reality lived by populations rather than talking about politics. When for example you know that there are many illiterate people in Côte d'Ivoire, that when people join political parties it's only out of affinity [*par affinité*]... It's not because the person who is at the head of the party has a good plan or programme. It's because you come from the west of the country that you are going to follow a politician from the west; if you are from the central regions, you are going to follow a party whose leaders are from the centre as well. So we tell ourselves: why conduct a political debate when we know these are the realities? (interview, 4 December, 2014)

David's view closely mirrored Salomon's. By highlighting citizens' illiteracy, and above all their inability to conceive of partisan belonging outside of "ethnic" kinship (another longstanding discourse about African democracies' immaturity, debunked by, *inter alia*, John Lonsdale [1994], Patrick Chabal [2009] and Dominika Kother [2016]), he effectively posited citizens' shortcomings as the basis for democratic malfunction.

### 7.3.3.c - Politics vs. Everyday Life

I also want to highlight a slightly subtler point David was making, one that is important because it corresponds to the way most proximity radio producers argued for the policing - or silencing - of political talk. For David, talking politics on air would amount to negating the "reality lived by populations." By this he meant two things: first, as we have seen, it referred to the "reality" of citizens' shortcomings, but second, it signified "everyday life" itself. Indeed, the most common line, when I asked radio producers about the justification for regulations, was that avoiding politics was a way to focus attention (back) on everyday life - and in particular, on *local* everyday life. This was most fully explained by Bamba Karamoko, president of the URPCI, the national union of proximity broadcasters.

In the [post-conflict] context in which we live, I think we need to be very reserved about things. Politics, as I've said, everyone is free to have their political opinion. As citizens, we are allowed to do politics. But in the context of our role [as broadcasters], we should not. [...] Information is key nowadays, and proximity radio is a powerful means of communication, which can be constructive as well as destructive. [...] So the state has said, listen, there is much to do in the population. In the communities. Populations have a lot of problems. And those problems are what radio should be talking about. There's much to do. People have a lot of worries. You live in here on the 220 Logements estate [where the URPCI is also situated], look around you! For a radio station, there is an abundance of topics: where do people sleep? What do they do [for a living]? Children in the street, children forced to work... People who are poor, filth in the neighbourhood, people who are sick but instead of going to the doctor they visit traditional healers [*tradi-praticiens*]... [...] So, let's not turn away from reality to go onto political terrain. Because once you start following who is doing what in politics, you forget populations' everyday life [*le quotidien des populations*]. (interview, 10 April, 2015)

Mr Bamba followed this explanation by emphasising, much like Salomon in his earlier quote, that radio's role might be to better prepare citizens for effective democracy ("we have to start by raising people's awareness of the electoral process"). What I want to underscore here is Mr Bamba's notion that everyday life and politics were two distinct spheres, and his argument that turning radio's attention to one excluded attention to the other. We can note that such a distinction between politics and everyday issues has roots in development discourse and "communication for development" frameworks:

Florence Brisset-Foucault (2009: 135), for example, points out that prominent, development media actors at the World Social Forum in Nairobi in 2007 similarly called upon journalists to stop "over-covering politics while ignoring other spaces such as the slums." In avoiding politics, then, proximity radio stations might rediscover, as it were, the everyday "realities" of the neighbourhood.

Similar perspectives to Mr Bamba's surfaced regularly in my conversations in Abidjan, in settings far removed from the URPCI's neat and air-conditioned locale. If we return to the conversation at the *grin* at the start of this chapter (also Chapter 5), we see that *grin* members adhered to Mr Bamba's distinction between everyday life and politics, at least on the surface. "Real talk" on social issues such as unemployment or living costs were opposed to the "politics" of municipally-controlled radio (on Adjamé's Radio Téré). The *grin* members, however, then conceded that it was difficult to discuss everyday issues without "going on political terrain," as Mr Bamba would say. They found it difficult to discuss poverty, housing and populations' many other "problems" without referring them to the work of successive governments. When I mentioned this to Mr Bamba, asking him whether he considered it possible to discuss social issues without ever mentioning political authorities (and municipalities in particular), he responded:

A journalist's role is not to attack the mayor. All we ask of him [sic] is to direct the microphone towards people for them to say that their neighbourhood is dirty. It's true that the mayor is responsible for some of what happens, but the population is responsible, too. The mayor does not ask people to throw soiled water in front of their homes. Is it the mayor asking people to throw tissues and plastic wrappings in the open-air sewers? [...] The mayor has his/her responsibilities, populations have their responsibilities, and that's what we need to talk about.

We return full circle to the question of attributing responsibilities and limiting claims. For Mr Bamba, talking about everyday issues without talking about politics was possible under two conditions. The first was to treat authorities as benevolent actors concerned with public welfare but operating within a limited remit. Any other conception might lead to claims so outsized as to become "attacks." In this way, Mr. Bamba evoked models of "development journalism" (e.g. Domatob & Hall 1983), according to which media in Africa should focus on supporting authorities'

developmental and pedagogical role - therefore reining in journalists' critical or "watchdog" postures (a perspective critiqued by Odhiambo 1991). The second condition for an effective discussion of everyday issues was that citizens constantly be reminded of their own responsibility in the problems they faced. That Mr Bamba saw fit to re-emphasise urban dwellers' poor display of individual responsibility, in his argument, allows for a clear analogy with the views previously presented. Citizens manifestly failed to take care of their environment in the same way that they had perverted politics, or were demonstrably not "ready" for a "proper" political discussion. In Mr Bamba's argument, as in the others I have quoted above, politics was to be avoided because politics amounted to citizens forgetting or denying their own responsibilities. It was therefore expedient to set politics aside, and focus first on the "reality" of responsibilities.

#### 7.3.4 - Localism and Its Contradiction in Abidjan

In Mr Bamba's argument, proximity radio's attention to the local, to the neighbourhood and its everyday issues, was precisely a way to remind urban dwellers of their responsibilities. Mr Bamba's conception of the local was similar to RAC and RFY's construction of the neighbourhood in their reconciliation programmes. The local was not a space from which to gather and amplify knowledge and experiences, so much as an arena in which urban dwellers could be recalled to their conditions and guided to act on them. If the local was where "everyday realities" could be uncovered, these realities were fundamentally non-political in the sense that they were not open to contest. Instead, place was emphasised and celebrated for its very "givenness" (Dikeç 2007: 19; Rancière 2003). This givenness had different aspects: some were factual and even sociological (poverty, limited access to health, etc.), but others were clearly normative. A "good" place was one in which consensus was secured, or in which the streets were clean. Regardless of what aspects of the "good" place producers envisioned, the fundamental variable was urban dwellers' abilities to fulfil their responsibilities, both individually and as an aggregate group ("the populations").

In this way, the discourses employed to justify avoiding politics on proximity radio bore many similarities with the policy discourses of localism in many other contexts, as discussed in Chapter 3. Proximity radio producers' justifications relied on a

normative ontology of place (underlying visions of the "good" place). They envisaged proximity radio's role in place-making as one of shaping what urban dwellers did and talked about, according to pre-conceived notions of "local issues." By (implicitly or explicitly) defining the "good" place and "local issues," producers operated a fundamental distinction between place and the political. And in doing so, they played into a regime of domination all the while professing to be serving urban dwellers. The end result of producers' justifications was not simply that local politics did not get sufficient coverage on proximity radio, but that local engagement itself became a tool to limit political critique.

The parallels with localism are instructive, for two reasons. First, they confirm that producers' thinking was not exceptional or *sui generis*. The deployment of place as a containing and constraining sphere of social engagement on proximity radio did not happen in a vacuum, but in a broader discursive and institutional environment, both national and transnational. The quotes I have featured in this chapter show that liberal (or even neoliberal) discourses of individual responsibility and entrepreneurship; longer-standing, anti-political (Ferguson 1994; Murray Li 2007) developmental outlooks; and visions of local peace as non-political consensus (Donais 2012), all intertwined in producers' justifications. While I cannot trace discursive connections here, there is little question that these different discursive repertoires are, to varying degrees, internationally circulated. This is not to absolve proximity radio producers, but to re-emphasise that they could hardly have reflected on their practices outside of their context of operation.

At the same time, I am not suggesting that producers were puppets or unwitting mouthpieces in a sinister political project. The second reason why it is enlightening to consider proximity radio's anti-politics in light of localism is because it complicates theories that either posit a single political-economic drive for localism (neoliberalism) (e.g. Brenner & Theodore 2002), or see it as a fine-tuned apparatus translating discourse into subjectivities (as in Foucauldian policy analyses). I hope to have made clear that producers' justifications did not stem from a single and clearly identifiable source. Nor were they the straightforward outcome of regulatory frameworks or developmental campaigns. Nor, finally, did they cohere into an ideology that could easily be mapped onto radio programming. If localism is a globally widespread mode

of apprehending place in relation to the state and politics, then, considering its manifestations on proximity radio in Abidjan shows that it can involve several different rationalities, and does not always form a unified perspective in actors' self-reflective accounts.

Indeed, localism cannot be conceived as a unified way of thinking and acting because it was extensively contradicted on proximity radio itself. In Chapter 5, I noted that proximity radio catalysed urban dwellers' everyday practices of place-making. Radio's sociability of encounter participated in the construction of place as simultaneously rooted and expansive. Making place, in these everyday radio interactions and practices, was a process predicated on equality and open-endedness, in the sense that baseline familiarities could develop into unforeseen bonds and boundless talk. The contrast with localism is clear. Instead of recalling urban dwellers to the neighbourhood, and setting out what they ought to do and talk about, radio encounters offered listeners the chance to move and explore, while building a network of support. There were thus two, contradicting place-making dynamics at work on proximity radio in Abidjan.

Such a contradiction is not easy to explain. It stemmed, undoubtedly, from proximity radio stations' liminal and tension-ridden position in the Ivoirian media landscape, as both an avatar of community media and a product of state control. The contradiction was also reflected in producers' split professional identity, a kind of double consciousness (Du Bois 1994) linked to a difficult professional limbo. In their material conditions (unpaid or barely-paid labour) and everyday lives, producers were indistinguishable from ordinary citizens, but their status as media professionals opened possibilities for social advancement (however remote) that appeared to require a pre-emptive effort at social distinction. Because social advancement in Ivoirian media remained closely tied to political patronage (following a long history - see Bailly 2001), proximity radio producers often felt that they had to "speak like a state," to paraphrase James Scott (1998), to signal their availability for advancement. This would explain producers' comments quoted above, in which they positioned urban dwellers on a lower plane of knowledge and competence, while posturing as external arbiters of local responsibility. In the end, the contradiction did not resolve itself in reflective commentary so much as continuously play out in practice. What I

want to ask in the next part of this chapter is whether and how the everyday making of place on proximity radio challenged the separation of place from politics that I have analysed above.

## **7.4 - Reclaiming Political Terrain**

### 7.4.1 - Making Place, Making Publics?

As noted in the introduction, the avoidance of politics was not simply a top-down strategy of rule in Abidjan. It resonated widely in the city's streets. Like the *grin* members of the introduction, several listeners I interviewed, also called on stations to side-line politics. They also supported the primacy of everyday life as a realm where reconciliation was meant to happen, where the problems were most urgent and where "development" should be "felt." Like the *grin* members they privileged "real" talk amongst neighbours and equal citizens; they had little faith in politicians. However, as I detail below, their understanding of what avoiding politics meant was significantly different from the discourses analysed above. For them, avoiding politics was precisely to recover the local as political terrain. They wanted to localise politics, to re-ground them in the everyday in order to transform them. Unlike the *grin* members, furthermore, these listeners sought to bring local agonism to the airwaves, instead of keeping to the streets.

As scholars of media and politics in Africa (and elsewhere) have argued, ordinary citizens find myriad, everyday ways of "being political" (Isin 2002) even under repressive conditions. Rich commentaries on the state, on configurations of power, on inequality, citizenship and technological change abound in popular-cultural texts, as indeed they did in the stories of personal dilemma, witchcraft and online fraud (*broutage* in Ivoirian - see Koenig 2014) that made proximity radio stations' bread and butter. Similarly, popular music in Côte d'Ivoire remained loaded with ethical and political significance continuing a decades-long trend (Schumann 2009; 2013; 2015). In Abidjan, these cultural texts and practices did form a "common sense," as Jean-François Bayart (Bayart et al. 1992; also Simone 2004a; 2004b) understands it: less in a Gramscian way than as an infrastructural field of commonality, in which basic



agreement about how things are and work can allow the emergence of collaboration and exchange, as well as the relational articulation of ethical and political positions.

As Bayart, echoing James Scott and others, also shows, ordinary citizens' modes of "being political" are often dissimulated, cautious or deliberately allusive. This was certainly a trend in post-conflict Abidjan, where many urban dwellers still spoke about politics in strikingly roundabout ways. Because these popular political "transcripts" are mostly and purposefully "hidden" (Scott 1990), it is often difficult for citizens to recognise their own "arts of citizenship" (Diouf & Fredericks 2014) and "civic agency" (Willems & Obadare 2014) as political - or as "doing politics," as the French expression would have it. In contrast to these visions of dissimulated everyday politics, or "tactics" as Michel de Certeau (1984) might call them, what I wish to bring to the fore here are efforts to constitute publics that are reflexively "political." Again, this does not exhaust the political significance of radio texts and practices by any measure. Simply, I will only be discussing listeners' efforts to make sense of proximity radio's and their own position in relation to politics.

To do so I use the example of RAC and its listeners' club, the UFARA, already introduced in Chapter 5. The UFARA was not constituted as a "political public" but centred around sociability, aesthetic sensibility, and mutual support (as in the "formalisation" of the group into a mutual assistance fund). Yet off the air, in UFARA meetings, and especially in smaller groups, UFARA members and RAC *animateurs* regularly brought up political affairs. I was able to follow such conversations by hanging outside of the radio station, and by following listeners around as they paid visits to each other or met in a *maquis* for a cold beer. In particular, Rose, whom I have already mentioned as a very active listener, took me around Abobo to meet various UFARA members. Her presence was key to putting interlocutors at ease, and her own volubility helped launch many an interesting conversation without my intervention. I owe much of the excerpts quoted below to her.

Strikingly, the political conversations I had with Rose and others took place across boundaries of age, gender, ethnicity and to some extent class. While they did not shy away from mentioning - critiquing or, more rarely, praising - political actors, UFARA members never expressed political allegiance nor accused each other of partisanship

(as the pathological view of vernacular politics highlighted above would have suggested). They systematically undermined partisanship, and especially its association with ethnic identities, through jokes and ridicule. For all their disagreements, UFARA members were united in two key elements, which I suggest were central to their ability to broach topics explicitly political in nature: their commitment to civic duty and civil society engagement (exemplified by their commitment to voting in presidential elections they otherwise felt very dispassionate about); and their deep discontent with power and authorities. In this way, UFARA challenged Nigerian sociologist Peter Ekeh's (1975; also Mbonimpa 1994) theory of the "two publics" of African polities. Ekeh argued that the ideological and institutional legacies of colonialism had led to a fundamental division in African public spheres. Ekeh opposed a "primordial public," in which citizens conceived their belonging and obligations in mostly ethnic terms, and a "civic public," in which citizens approached the state and public affairs purely instrumentally. While it was true that proximity radio stations like RAC appeared to have two distinct publics - one facing the state and the other the street - UFARA demonstrates that the distinction between these two publics was not one between "civic" and "primordial" (ethnic). Rather, both publics were oriented toward non-ethnic questions of public good. But they had fundamentally different views about where these questions should be addressed from - that is, different views about the proper place of politics. This finding supports sociologists' findings about the emergence of a thoroughly cross-ethnic "civil society" in Abidjan since the 1990s (Marie 2002; Leimdorfer & Marie 2003).

So far, what I have described refers us back to the sociability of encounter that characterised proximity radio stations like RAC, discussed in Chapter 5; as I hinted then, this sociability was conducive to the emergence of political talk *off* the air. What was remarkable about the UFARA, however, was that many members were not content with off-air politics and sought to harness radio as a platform for political talk. This does not appear to have been a consciously articulated desire. But as listeners familiarised themselves with each other, with producers, and with the formats of talk offered to them, they began to feel more comfortable voicing claims directly targeted at the authorities - something that, as I have shown above, could be interpreted as "doing politics," at least if it was not accompanied by a strict delineation of responsibility.

During RAC's morning talk-show (*Couleur Arc-en-Ciel*), segments reserved for greetings or translation (see Chapter 5) became used for commentary, as listeners themselves suggested phrases to translate. As Rose noted during our first interview:

It's a show where people can put their sentence [*phrases*] on air [about what angers them]. And once you do that, there will be plenty of people to call! What I mean is that, these sentences are also concerns for other people [*souvent ça concerne les gens*]. And when they feel concerned, they call to manifest their pain. [...] So, one can text a phrase for everyone to translate in their African language: "They told me they would pave the road in front of me, today they still haven't, it angers me!" [This is a reference to Rose's personal experience: her hairdressing salon was partly demolished to prepare for road pavement, but months later nothing had been done. The dust from the unpaved surface rendered the air difficult to breathe during the dry months.] [...] Radio does that. Everything but politics. But for me I have my way of manifesting my discontent with the government [*manifester ma politique envers the gouvernement*]. When the show comes on I can say, "Tsk, really, back then there was money [*y'avait l'argent*, meaning I could make a living], today I've nothing left." Those listeners who understand... They'll understand what I'm talking about. They'll understand: "Probably she had money back then, but she lost everything during the war." [...] So even when they tell you no politics, you can still express your pain. (interview, June 25, 2015)

Rose explained that the translation segment *Je sais parler ma langue* (JSPML) became used to express urban dwellers' "pain" and anger. Rose considered her own participation as compatible with RAC's regulatory restrictions, yet she also saw it as "covertly" political, so to speak, because it indirectly targeted the government and macro "structures of responsibility" (Ferguson 2012).

Eventually, RAC *animateurs* introduced an entirely new segment, simply titled "It angers me!" (*Ça m'énerve!*), to allow listeners to relate their experiences of frustration, deprivation, corruption and disrepair, so that these might become amplified and shared.<sup>59</sup> While the topics varied greatly, from dressing styles to infrastructural

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<sup>59</sup> The role of anger as a political emotion has been discussed in a West African context by Célestin Monga (1994), and in reconciliation-era South Africa by Sonali Chakravarti (2014). The title of RAC's show also echoes the slogan *Y'en a Marre!* ("we're fed up!") that federated mass protests in Sénégal in 2012, leading to President Wade's downfall.

shortages, such programmes were significant if only because they reclaimed anger and emotions as valid bases for claims-making in a post-conflict context. These emotions were not, as in the public shows mentioned above, rejected as dangerous impediments to local consensus. More broadly, ordinary urban dwellers' everyday experiences were firmly established as the grounds from which debate and discussion should take place. While some listeners - Rose included - still voiced their doubts about their neighbours' democratic abilities, in terms reminiscent of state discourses - the phone-in discussions were premised on the very idea that ordinary citizens' lives, perceptions and affects were legitimate grounds from which to address the state, public institutions and structural issues.

Not all UFARA listeners would consider this emerging public to be political. Most of my interviewees in the group still claimed they were "not interested in politics." Still, many would admit, like the *grin* members in the introduction, that the talk they were engaged in did have political resonance. In a conversation with Rose and Aboulaye, a Burkinabè man in his thirties who worked as a gardener, Aboulaye began by saying that he considered it "better" that RAC stayed away from politics. Immediately after, however, Rose once again explained her conception that RAC had "their own way of practicing politics"; she showed how some topics discussed on air "concerned politicians a little bit." As she covered issues such as snares in the electoral registration process, employment discrimination, the unacceptably high price of certain goods produced nationally, or the opacity of slum clearance projects, Aboulaye agreed with her at every turn, and eventually confirmed Rose's analysis (see Annex 7 for a transcript of extended conversation):

Rose: So yes, people called in to say what they saw [slum clearance resistance].

Aboulaye: It's what they saw!

Rose: And that's their way of doing politics. It's good that way. It's not too... They mask it a little bit, but we understand, we know what they want to say, so we can intervene!

Fabien: Aboulaye, would you agree?

Aboulaye: Yes, yes! [Laughs] She's said it all.

Rose: Yes, that's how it is. Because you're not going to say something else. You can't say... some things and then they'll burn down your radio. Or they'll - no! You won't have any problems.

Aboulaye: Hm, they would shut down the station for sure.

Aboulaye remained visibly uncomfortable with the issue of politics - not the various topics Rose discussed, but their very labelling as "political." Still, he agreed with Rose's view that RAC's discussions touched upon, dealt with or responded to the exercise of power by authorities. While he remained circumspect on issues that related to the state, he became more confident later, when Rose remarked that many of RAC listeners' claims were addressed to the Abobo municipality (see Annex 7): "Filth in the streets, on the road... The, um... Potholes and overgrowth... All these things we talk about on radio over there."

The exchange quoted above confirmed how significant it was for RAC to allow people simply to phone in and report on their experiences - "what they saw." Implicit in Rose and Aboulaye's discussion was just how rare such on-air possibilities were in post-conflict Abidjan. Nonetheless, the excerpt reminds us that radio talk was neither free nor comfortable. (We can note that Aboulaye continued positioning RAC as "over there," a distance I have analysed in terms of topographies of power in Chapter 5; although Aboulaye considered RAC to be a safe space for convivial expression, it remained less "close" and intimate than the street, where he felt most comfortable expressing himself.) While listeners' claims and discussions on RAC were not entirely "hidden transcripts," they still relied heavily on coded language and ellipses (*non-dits*), and could thus be described as "covert politics," borrowing from Norma Verwey (1990). In the end, the threat of repression still loomed; we can note that Rose and Aboulaye attributed this threat both to an official regulatory body ("they'll shut down the station") and to a more shadowy, violent retributive agent ("they'll burn down the station"; see Chapter 5).

#### 7.4.2 - Challenging the Political (In)Significance of the Urban Local

In post-conflict Abidjan, discourses of neighbourly consensus and pathological politics intersected to produce a vision of the urban local almost entirely devoid of political agency or potential. Politics, in these discourses, was external to local life, where it had to be implanted or cultivated through top-down campaigns and scripted performances. By recognising the kind of talk Rose and Aboulaye discussed as political, I want to emphasise not resistance but an alternative definition of local politics that is already being put in practice on an everyday basis (echoing Richard Pithouse's [2013; 2014] arguments in a South African context). This is a local politics in which ordinary African urban dwellers' experiences are legitimate grounds for claims-making, critique and agonistic debate. It is a local politics that is rooted in the egalitarian premise of the encounter: though it does not negate hierarchies, it is open to hearing everyone, on the basis that commonalities may appear (Merrifield 2011). Finally, it is a politics in which the local is not seen as a space where concerns narrow and become more tightly bound to individual and community responsibility. Instead, the local is a starting point from which urban dwellers can - even should - question the power geometries (including state and international institutions) shaping their everyday conditions (Massey 1993).

UFARA members were not alone in practicing this kind of local politics. As mentioned briefly in Chapter 5, Radio Téré *animateurs* Sébastien and Brahima also sought to produce an interactive phone-in - *La Tribune du Matin* - that, to begin with, would actually be contradictory and agonistic. As Brahima explained: "We wanted to have a show where opinions opposed one another [*où les avis sont contraires*]; we didn't want everyone just saying the same thing." While this may seem like the most basic of accomplishments, it flies in the face of RAC's manager's description of "social cohesion" discussions in which debate itself was proscribed. The show covered such issues as access to health and public services, organised corruption (including from public officials) in the sports world, abusive slum clearances, unemployment and higher educations, and multiple other topics that directly addressed state responsibility. Brahima conceived his show with Sébastien on Radio Téré as a way to "hit hard" against what he considered to be "people who want to mask the truth." When I asked him to clarify, he responded:

For example, uh... We're entering politics, you know?

Fabien: Not a problem.

Today, you have households who struggle to live. Couples, relationships are falling apart because of that. Because of how expensive life has become. And that's everywhere! Yet you have authorities that come out and say, "No, everything is fine, everything is fine" - Listen, let's be serious! It's not fine! The housewife's basket [*le panier de la ménagère*, an expression in French to designate everyday family consumption] has become the housewife's small bag [*sachet*]. Households' finances have been hard hit. That's a reality. You can tour Abidjan, people will complain about that. You only find authorities to say, "It's going to be fine." Until when? People are tired of tightening their belts. [...] That's why when we do [the show], we go all out [*on se déchaîne*]. Ah, yes, we go all out. And when we get feedback on the show, people are on board. Because they find themselves in what we say. So they're behind us. I don't think there is better protection than that [in reference to my previous question about whether he felt at ease talking about social issues on air]. That's our shield. So we're not afraid. It might happen [that we get sanctioned], but for now we own up to everything we're saying on air. [...] Because, really, you can say that our editorial board is large. All listeners are part of it. (interview, 11 June, 2015)

Brahima was upfront about the fact that his discussions on air amounted to "entering politics." It should be noted that he also ran a *grin* next to his newsstand, and that his RDR activism prior to 2011 had ensured him that, regardless of the virulence of his criticisms against the Ouattara administration, he would always have "people behind him" to guarantee his safety. This gave him confidence to speak his mind. It also meant that he fully supported the *grin* members' idea, mentioned at the start of Chapter 5 and this chapter, of bringing radio stations "down" to the street, where unfettered talk took place. "I agree," Brahima said when I mentioned my story from the *grin*. "This is a proximity radio station. That's its name. Proximity. It's next to them. It's close to them. That's its role: to be connected to what's being said in the city."

Although Brahima counterpoised the frank discussions of his show to authorities' "masking of reality" (as well as to other proximity radio programmes, where opinions tended to converge), he did not present himself as being in opposition. Like Rose, Brahima conceived of his show less as an oppositional platform than as a space in which local "pain" and anger could be voiced. Well aware that he himself lacked a

journalistic background, he positioned himself as "not an expert" ("*on est pas des sachants*"), thereby confirming a certain ethos of equality in the discussion (echoing Englund 2011). He noted that his own interpretations of the social situation might be wrong and that the point was not so much to deliver a truth than to ask for it. This search for truth amounted to a re-politicisation of local experiences not because it presented them as a superior order of truth or legitimation (as in "truth to power"), but because it re-valued their power of interrogation. In a very Lefebvrian (1991; 2014) way, Brahima posited everyday urban life as the site where the structures of social reality could be collectively questioned. In this, he contrasted sharply with discourses of depoliticisation, for which everyday life could produce no claims (in its inherently anarchic nature), and rather necessitated top-down pedagogical efforts. In both versions, what was at stake were relations between the urban local, which is to say everyday life, and macro structures of responsibility. In the dominant, post-conflict version of localism, the local (and especially the neighbourhood) was there to be managed, tidied, controlled. In Rose's and Brahima's minds, however, localism meant something else altogether: it signalled their ability to autonomously (yet collectively) make sense of the world, to question the power encroaching upon their lives, to turn cohabitation into collaboration for a better future.

## **7.5 - Conclusion: Avoiding Politics and Making Place Political**

In this chapter, I examined discourses justifying the absence of politics on proximity radio. It initially appeared that everyone I met, in post-conflict Abidjan, agreed: politics should be avoided. By probing the paradoxes and ambiguities behind such an agreement, I aimed to demonstrate that it masked two fundamentally opposed perspectives. In the first, avoiding politics meant curtailing urban dwellers' claims on the state, and emphasising instead their own responsibilities in the problems that they faced. This view apprehended place as *inherently* non-political because, normatively speaking, place ought to be about consensus and about the "givenness" of everyday life - a mere assessment of how things are and how they work. I acknowledge that several proximity radio producers subscribed to such an anti-political perspective. I highlighted the fact that producers' justifications for avoiding politics drew on several broader discourses - liberal entrepreneurialism, development, post-conflict consensus - without cohering into a unified ideology.



The second, contrasting perspective on avoiding politics on proximity radio was not articulated as a counter-discourse, but emerged from the practices of everyday place-making. In the discussions arising from radio's sociability of encounter, it became clear that avoiding politics meant avoiding partisanship and the stranglehold of elites on public debate, in order to allow urban dwellers' lived experiences to amplify into public talk and collective claims. While listeners and producers who subscribed to this view remained reluctant to acknowledge their practices and expressions as "politics," they retained the local as a potentially political space - in that it was where claims could be made, shared and amplified. Place was precisely the point from which the "givenness" of the post-conflict situation ought to be questioned, and ordinary citizens' experiences and emotions were legitimate channels through which to do so.

An analysis of what "avoiding politics" meant on proximity radio in Abidjan provides additional answers to my research questions. First, it reveals that there was a deep divide between two ways of positioning place in relation to politics (RQ2). On the one hand, discourses of individual responsibility and consensus removed the local from politics; on the other, listeners and some producers sought to make place a basis from which to question the status quo. This divide underscores proximity radio's ambivalence as a mediator - but also highlights its potential. *Potentially*, proximity radio could mobilise the local as a *public* (in response to RQ1): going beyond the staging of encounters and the sustenance of open-ended familiarities, proximity radio might more audibly circulate experiences, confront everyday hopes and desires, and amplify claims. At the time of fieldwork, unfortunately, proximity radio's ability to mobilise place as a public remained constrained by anti-political discourses. Last but not least, we might ask - following RQ3 - what this had to do with proximity radio's contribution to post-conflict living-together. The fact that anti-political discourses so thoroughly contradicted urban dwellers' aspirations for critical local talk suggests that avoiding politics on air *hindered* proximity radio's role as an urban mediator. In this chapter, I have provided evidence to show that proximity radio could contribute to the normalisation of a cross-ethnic, non-partisan but still agonistic local politics - one that challenges the ethno-partisan political grid left over from crisis years (Akindès et al. 2014). Contrary to consensus-based peace-building frameworks, then, I would argue

that a fuller embrace of place's inherently political nature - as a locus for agonistic claims-making - might reinforce radio's positive role in post-conflict cohabitation.

## Conclusion

### Proximity Radio and the Dialectics of Place

#### 8.1 - Introduction

Proximity radio, in post-conflict Abidjan, was an ambiguous mediator. Over the last three chapters, I have documented its promises - its potential for new, meaningful bonds and commonalities - as well as its constraints. To be sure, some of these constraints were contextual. In 2014-2015, Abidjan was a metropolis marked by organised uncertainty and enforced silence. Proximity radio itself occupied a difficult, liminal position between street and state. In this concluding chapter, I review proximity radio's paradoxical contribution to post-conflict living-together in Abidjan, answering the research questions with which I set out to do fieldwork:

*RQ1:* How was place mobilised, as a resource and a collective project, on proximity radio in Abidjan?

*RQ2:* How did producers and listeners position the local in relation to their everyday lives, national politics, and histories of conflict?

*RQ3:* What did proximity radio's place-making activities signify for its contribution to living-together after conflict?

If proximity radio's ambiguities were linked to its context of operation, these ambiguities nonetheless speak more broadly to the fundamentally dialectical nature of place. In the rest of the chapter, I reflect on the usefulness of place, as a concept, to explore the relations between media, power and the city, in three ways. First, I discuss how place allowed me to conceive proximity radio as an urban mediator, and in particular its complex relations with the street. Second, I review how place allowed me to address the meaning and production of urban togetherness in Abidjan, in dialogue with scholarship on urban multicultures. Third, I consider how the case of proximity radio in Abidjan informs debates around the politics of place, challenging "post-political" readings of contemporary urban rule and urging further dialogue between urban and media studies on this topic. I end with considerations about perspectives for change in Abidjan, as well as avenues for future research.

## 8.2 - Findings: Proximity Radio and Living-Together in Abidjan

My starting research question (RQ1) asked: how is place mobilised, as a resource and collective project, on proximity radio? I have shown that there were in fact two different ways of mobilising and making place on proximity radio. The first corresponded to peace-building programmes, and the second to *abidjanais* residents' practices of encounter and "popular research" (Simone 2012). In each of these parallel processes of place-making, the relations between place, everyday life and politics were envisioned differently (answering my second research question). The contrast between these two processes was reflected in what I describe as proximity radio's ambiguous or paradoxical contribution to post-conflict cohabitation (RQ3).

On Radio Arc-en-Ciel (RAC) and Radio Fraternité Yopougon's (RFY) reconciliation shows, detailed in Chapters 6 and 7, place appeared as a *non-political realm*: a site of consensus and heightened individual responsibility. If the shows constructed the neighbourhood as a prime locus of social engagement, this was mostly to recall urban dwellers to their duties and shortcomings. Re-making place after conflict, in this vision, involved a kind of turning inwards: the "good place" was one in which urban dwellers focused on neighbourliness and self-help, both conceived as moral imperatives. "Local issues" excluded consideration of wider processes, especially the "political" arena of state activities. By examining the justifications behind proximity radio's peace-building programmes, I have shown that their anti-political and inward-looking vision of the local was tied - wittingly or unwittingly - to broader discourses that minimised the role of everyday life in social and political critique, and even raised doubts about ordinary citizens' democratic capacities.

In contrast, proximity radio's sociability of encounter allowed stations like Radio Arc-en-Ciel to contribute to a much more open-ended sense of place. For many *abidjanais* residents, re-making place after conflict involved meeting unsuspected Others and finding points of mutual implication, all the while exploring new territories and building ready-to-hand support networks. Proximity radio stations acted as a catalyst for this process by offering a formidable platform for encounters, as well as sustaining convivial interaction on- and off-air. The resulting sense of place was neither tied to a specified geographical referent (the neighbourhood, the district, the city) nor inward-

looking, even if it was given contour by mobility constraints. Place, as it emerged from radio encounters, combined both rootedness and a desire for continuous expansion. Closeness was not a fixed or given condition, but rather a continuously evolving set of situated interrelations. It followed that, in this process of place-making, there was no *a priori* reason why everyday experiences, talk and claims could not interrogate wider "structures of responsibility" (Ferguson 2012) involved in shaping residents' immediate environment. On the contrary: I have shown that some proximity radio listeners and producers aspired to amplify their experiences and claims, hoping to use proximity radio to turn "their" local into a more self-aware urban public (Iveson 2007).

Proximity radio's two ways of envisioning and mobilising the local in Abidjan did not amount to a confrontational dynamic of power and resistance, so much as one of mutual ignorance. Most proximity radio producers and listeners I spoke to (with some exceptions cited in Chapter 5) did not make any reflective connection between proximity radio's sociability of encounter and post-conflict "social cohesion." Listeners, furthermore, had little to say about proximity radio's peace-building programmes, while these programmes failed to acknowledge urban dwellers' already-existing practices of cohabitation. Taken together, this dynamic of mutual ignorance captures the paradoxical nature of proximity radio's contribution to post-conflict *vivre-ensemble*. Stations *did* contribute meaningfully to healing the wounded city, by allowing unforeseen commonalities to emerge between residents moved to make a place for themselves. But this contribution had little to do with the ways international donor agencies, Ivoirian state officials, and even some producers themselves imagined radio's post-conflict intervention. In fact, it is possible to say that proximity radio enabled the everyday re-making of place in Abidjan *in spite* of the limiting visions manifested in peace-building programmes. To add to the paradox, the new landscapes of familiarity, of talk and mutual discovery, that arose out of radio encounters were only very partially audible on the airwaves. They remained largely off-air, for reasons I evoked right at the start of Chapter 5: talk on proximity radio remained too constrained by regulatory interdictions on "political content."

### **8.3 - Implications for Theory and Method**

#### **8.3.1 - Place, the City and Everyday Media Practices**

When I set out to interrogate whether and how proximity radio contributed to post-conflict cohabitation in Abidjan, my first challenge was to understand the relations between radio and what is arguably the quintessential realm of city life, certainly in the Ivoirian metropolis: *the street*. In the first weeks of fieldwork, I panicked because it seemed that the conversations and issues I was hearing on the street appeared to have little to do with those featured in proximity radio programming. I realised, however, that this anxiety was linked to a tenacious assumption, which is that media's urban significance lay in its *representation* of urban activities and themes. Proximity radio's significance as an urban mediator did not lay only, or even primarily, in its representations of street life, but rather in the everyday *practices* through which stations secured their porousness to the street. Methodologically, this meant that I had to track everyday, radio-related practices (Couldry 2004; Braüchler & Postill 2010) far and wide. Some of the practices that ended up being most relevant to my analysis initially did not appear to have any direct relation to proximity radio at all: producers' side-projects and everyday hanging around, listeners' phone calls and visits to each other, or commentary (Hobart 2006; Englund 2011) on proximity radio - including by people who did not listen to it. This leads me to re-emphasise the importance of *ethnography* for urban media research, but a kind of media ethnography that keeps the meaning and workings of media radically open-ended (following Couldry 2004; Slater 2014). It would have been impossible to understand what proximity radio was, and what *abidjanais* residents did with it, if I had approached radio as a bounded and self-evident medium (echoing Bessire & Fisher 2012). Put another way, had I just focused on the studio and the airwaves, I would have missed much of proximity radio's significance as an urban mediator.

Yet tracking radio-related practices was only the first challenge that I faced. The second was to identify a collective project, and through it a shared plane of practice for producers and audiences. What, in other words, were listeners and producers doing with proximity radio - when it appeared that the kinds of practices being fostered were multitudinous? Indeed, it was difficult to capture a *self-reflective* project linked to proximity radio-related practices because indeterminacy was precisely what drove listeners' and even some producers' engagement. "You never know" (*on sait jamais*) was the name of the game. In addition, while the street remained a crucial realm of

city life, radio-related practices did not acquire their significance on the street, but in their ability - real or imagined - to open a wider, more complex geography of social connection. It is here that place and place-making offered crucial conceptual lenses to make sense of the relations between radio sociability and the mobilities, familiarities and open-ended aspirations that it crystallised. The dynamic conception of place as a constantly re-configured landscape of meaningful proximities (Massey 1994; Appadurai 1996; Cresswell 2004), together with recent conceptualisations of media practices' involvement in place-making (Adams 2009; Moores 2012; Rodgers et al. 2014), allowed me to *reconstruct*, as it were, a common project for everyday practices linked to proximity radio.

The third challenge I faced in understanding proximity radio's role as an urban mediator was to situate the everyday practices that the medium enabled and crystallised in relation to power. Here again, place was a useful concept. Place's dialectical nature as both a lived geography and a site of social ordering (Pred 1984; Massey 1994), traversed and produced by "power-geometries" (Massey 1993), made the simultaneous consideration of power and agency almost necessary. The fact that power can be exercised in and through the making of place itself created some analytical difficulties, however. In more traditional media research, the question of proximity radio's relation to power would be considered primarily from the point of view of political economy. Yet this would have overlooked crucial nuances, and would have offered a poor understanding of proximity radio's role in the politics of place. Taking the perspective of place required me to supplement political-economic frameworks with three additional operations. First, I interrogated how urban dwellers themselves positioned proximity radio in what I called popular topographies of power, which is to say in shared perceptions of power in everyday life. This was crucial to capture how, notwithstanding political economic constraints, proximity radio could still be perceived as connected to the street. Second, I considered the discourses that proximity radio content echoed or contributed to in its programming. This allowed me to consider ways that radio might be involved in the exercise of power even in the absence of visible political control and coercion. Third, I found it necessary to consider proximity radio in a broader "communicative ecology" (Slater 2014) of the city. Comparing proximity radio to other spaces of talk - such as the *grins* - was a way to

better understand why the contest over proximity radio might matter, as well as nuance the extent of domination in post-conflict Abidjan.

In sum, place was a useful concept through which to capture and make sense of proximity radio's ambiguities. It provided a flexible methodological and analytical lens through which to examine radio's entanglement with city life, and its significance as an urban mediator. Place's nature as a lived geography, accomplished in part through everyday habits, raised the question of *where* to look for relevant, radio-related practices. In addition, place's dialectical and open-ended nature begged the question of *what kind of place was being made* through proximity radio practices. The methodological and interpretative challenges that these questions involved can usefully inform media research broadly speaking, and more particularly research on media and the city (McQuire 2008; Sundaram 2010; Georgiou 2013; Tosoni et al. 2013; Aiello & Tosoni 2016).

### 8.3.2 - Radio, Encounters and the Meaning of Urban Togetherness

In addition to challenging the way we conceive of media in the city, proximity radio's contribution to post-conflict cohabitation in Abidjan informs scholarship on the meaning and production of urban togetherness. In line with a slew of studies and theorisations in urban geography and sociology, my research confirms the importance of *encounters* as salient moments in the process of urban cohabitation (e.g. Amin 2002; 2008; Liggett 2003; Watson 2006; Valentine 2008; Wilson 2011; 2013; 2017; Jones et al. 2015; Mayblin et al. 2015). *Abidjanais* residents, I have made clear, were constantly on the lookout for encounters, and many found them on the proximity radio airwaves. The case of proximity radio in Abidjan further supports recent arguments about media's importance in fostering or enabling urban encounters, supplementing urban studies' more traditional concern with physical public spaces (Georgiou 2008; 2016; Georgiou et al. 2016; Leurs 2014; Licoppe & Inada 2015; Adams 2017). Notably, these recent studies tend to emphasise the newness or primacy of digital media in dynamics of encounter; I have shown that an "old" and taken-for-granted medium like radio could be an equally lively catalyst.



As Helen Wilson (2017: 463-465; Valentine 2008) recently summarised, a key question in urban studies is what makes urban encounters "meaningful" - which is to say, what leads encounters to develop into emerging social bonds and commonalities. My research suggests that *practices of conviviality, regularities* and *dispositions* played a crucial role in making radio encounters meaningful. Proximity radio's sociability was particularly conducive to meaningful encounters because it was literally "animated" (see Amin 2015) by rhetorical one-upmanship, jokes, and more generally the pleasure and *frisson* of talk with strangers. In addition, radio's regularities allowed interactions with strangers to be more than "passing propinquities" (Wilson 2011). Radio encounters could be fleeting, but they also had the opportunity to gather significance in a sustained landscape of familiarity, on and off air. Lastly, AbdouMalik Simone's (2012) notion of "popular research" remains crucial to understand why radio encounters became meaningful in Abidjan. Popular research designates African urban dwellers' disposition toward new and unforeseen social connections. Without this disposition, it is unlikely that radio encounters in Abidjan would have developed so easily and so visibly into further, deepening bonds.

Tied to the question of meaningful urban encounters is the question of *what kind of togetherness* encounters manifest. I have linked proximity radio stations' sociability of encounter to the everyday making of place. It is worth underscoring briefly what kind of togetherness was at stake in my analysis of place in Abidjan, and how the concept departs from other approaches to urban cohabitation. First, place has to be distinguished from *community* (Blokland 2003; Amin 2005). The process of everyday place-making that proximity radio enabled did not involve the dissolution of social differences or divisions into a shared identity. Rather, it opened a space where differences could be routinely experienced and relationally re-enacted (Massey 2005; Hall 2012). Place, furthermore, was not a uniform mode of belonging, but a multiplicity of different kinds of attachments - in contrast to the "strong bonds" of community. Second, although I note that proximity radio audiences were multi-ethnic, my analysis of place as a form of togetherness leaves open the normative questions of "cosmopolitanism" (Beck 2006; Binnie 2006; Werbner 2008; 2014; Carlier 2010; Georgiou 2013; Zeng 2014) or "tolerance" across difference (Bannister & Kearns 2013; Werbner 2014). Cosmopolitan/tolerance analyses attempt to decode positive perceptions of otherness and non-exclusive modes of identification from everyday

practices of cohabitation. But they run into the thorny issue of normative labelling, as Michael Skey (2012) notes. What/who counts as cosmopolitan? According to which standards? These are worthwhile interrogations, perhaps, but they require an in-depth exploration of *abidjanais* conceptions of ethnic, gender, class and generational differences, which can only be left for future research (see below). Third, my focus on place eschews dialectics of urban togetherness in terms of "contact" vs. "separation" (Selim 2015; Georgiou 2016). The contact/separation approach tends to think social groups as bounded "containers" that are measurably "close" or "distant." In contrast, I have not presumed the "weight" of specific group identifications - identifications which are no doubt a complex affair in a super-diverse city (Vertovec 2007; Arnaut 2013; Hall 2015a).

More positively, place in my study was a kind of *infrastructural* togetherness (Simone 2004b; Amin 2012; Hall 2012). It sustained a shared ground for regular interaction and encounters, without presuming who might join in or what might come out of such intermingling. This common ground was as minimal as it was indispensable for further notions of the collective to emerge, cosmopolitan or otherwise. I would argue, moreover, that in a super-diverse city where the local had been a site of violent political contest until 2011, re-making place as a common ground for ordinary "living with difference" (Valentine 2008) was quite an extraordinary achievement in itself.

### 8.3.3 - Media, Localism and the Politics of Place

Place-making was not without its politics in Abidjan. I have situated these politics of place not in the contests between different social groups inhabiting the city, but in a contest over what Richard Pithouse (2013) calls "the political significance of the local" itself. This contest was mostly, I would suggest, between urban dwellers and the state, but it was refracted through proximity radio programmes, as well as through discourses justifying the interdiction of politics on the airwaves. I have found that there are clear parallels between these programmes and discourses, on the one hand, and on the other, frameworks of *localism* in many contexts around the world. Localism, as I discussed it in Chapter 3, designates variegated policies and institutional interventions that harness practices of place-making for instrumental aims. While further research would be needed to identify whether localism was indeed

a wider policy framework and/or a government strategy in Abidjan (see below), it remains that a similar logic was at play on proximity radio. My findings confirm, in particular, "post-political" readings of localism (Korf 2010; Swyngedouw 2011; Deas 2013; Wilson & Swyngedouw 2014). Proponents of the post-political thesis have highlighted how place-based policies and participatory initiatives enlist the local in the exercise of power by defining and dictating what counts as "political." This is a key critique I level at peace-building and reconciliation programmes on proximity radio. These programmes were problematic not just because they amounted to flawed or "ineffective" approaches to local peace-building. In a deeper sense, they contributed to denying the role of local experiences as grounds for discussion, claims and critique at larger scales. In other words, they constrained the local as a sphere in which political consciousness might emerge, and from which challenges to the "givenness" of Côte d'Ivoire's post-conflict social order might be articulated (Rancière 2003; Dikeç 2007).

At the same time, the case of proximity radio in Abidjan challenges totalising narratives on the post-political condition (McCarthy 2013; Davidson & Iveson 2015). First, it eschews the post-political literature's abstract and universalistic understandings of "the political," understandings which are mostly left implicit but are often imbued with Marxist-revolutionary overtones. If post-political writers are right to highlight the role of the local in defining what counts as political, then it is important to keep in mind that this definition emerges *in context*, which is to say in a specific configuration of government and out of urban dwellers' ordinary lives and considerations. Indeed, it is necessary to examine both simultaneously. Studies of localism tend to focus on policy discourses and institutional initiatives, and often forget that ordinary urban dwellers also discuss and enact definitions of "politics" and "the political" in their everyday practices and interactions. It would have been impossible to understand what "avoiding politics" meant in Abidjan without considering official and vernacular discourses together - lest one be led to think they were in agreement.

By highlighting proximity radio's *ambiguities*, I have further sought to retain the local as a site of *contest*, rather than simply as a cog in apparatuses of domination, as it often appears in post-political critiques of localism. One of the reasons why localism needs to be critiqued is because it denies the local's political significance. Lest critical

scholars also contribute to denying this significance, as Pithouse (2013; also Davidson & Iveson 2015) argues, they might do well to ask what alternative visions of place and politics *do* exist in the contexts under study. In this effort, however, it is also important to move beyond simplistic notions of resistance. Proximity radio listeners, and *abidjanais* residents more broadly, did not resist depoliticising programmes directly. If they challenged constraining visions of the local, it was not through counter-discourse and representation, but through their ordinary doing and making. Following Suzi Hall (2015b; also De Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 1991; Bayat 2010), I thus argue that *abidjanais* residents resisted through *place-making* itself, which is to say through a practical process of staking common ground with multiple Others in the city. In this argument, I also follow a recent shift in scholarship on African cities that emphasises everyday "arts of citizenship" (Diouf & Fredericks 2014; also Stren 1985; Simone 2005a; 2011; Pieterse & Simone 2012) as grounds for political potential and democratic aspiration.

Last but certainly not least, I have argued in this thesis for the importance of considering *media* in the politics of place. Proximity radio stations can be conceived as vectors of depoliticising localism in Abidjan, as well as catalysts for alternative ways of envisioning and "doing" place. This conceptualisation challenges urban scholars' and geographers' lack of attention to media in studies of localism. Media might productively be interrogated alongside local planning frameworks and community cohesion schemes in shaping urban dwellers' opportunities to "act and think local" in the city (Amin 2004). Similarly, conceiving of proximity radio as a vector for localism challenges media scholars' scant consideration of how media policies and projects promoting the benefits of (hyper)local media might contribute to the kinds of constraining and depoliticising visions of place highlighted by geographers. Some recent publications in media studies (Rodgers 2017a; 2017b; Ali 2017) indicate a shift in this direction, and there is ample room for further interdisciplinary dialogue.

#### **8.4 - Moving Beyond Anti-Politics in Abidjan?**

The question of post- or anti-politics on the proximity radio airwaves has serious implications both for the medium's survival and for life after conflict in Abidjan. There is little doubt that current restrictions on radio talk prevent proximity radio from

playing a more meaningful and enabling role as an urban mediator. To some extent, this was acknowledged by the head of the national media regulator (HACA), Ibrahim Sy Savané, when I interviewed him in January 2016. He described the current state of radio talk as "a kind of schizophrenia, whereby you can listen to your proximity radio station, and it will say *nothing* of what you're hearing around the city" (interview, 24 January, 2016; his emphasis). Mr Sy Savané expressed his openness to changing the regulations, including allowing proximity radio stations to discuss politics, in order to re-animate radio talk in Abidjan (and elsewhere in Côte d'Ivoire). But it is important to note that what is at stake in such a transformation is more than freer and more pleasurable conversation, or the availability of political information: it is the very possibility for local experiences, claims and critiques to find public resonance. What is needed, I would argue, is not just the possibility for radio stations to mention the name of political parties on air, but a deeper shift from the depoliticising, consensus-based approach to post-conflict reconstruction that currently dominates in Côte d'Ivoire. As Ash Amin (2005: 627) argues from a UK perspective, "a public arena deliberately engineered for community consensus [...] is not an arena of active citizenship, but an arena of fragile and forced consensus that glosses over real and irreconcilable divisions." Against brittle and stifling consensus, proximity radio stations' distinctive sociability, along with its role as a multi-ethnic ground for encounter, might play a significant role in fostering agonistic local publics in which "politics" would mean much more than the activities of entrenched politicians. In 2015, frankly agonistic discussions in Abidjan were the preserve of the street, of *grins* and equivalent discussion spaces (see Banégas et al. 2012). Agonistic talk is not a panacea to solve the city's complex issues, but I would argue that allowing such talk to reach the airwaves would go some way in *normalising* ordinary politics (Hirsch 2012; Maddison 2015), further erasing the spectacle of ethno-political enmity that characterised crisis years.

Nearly two years after my conversation with Mr Sy Savané, not much has changed for proximity radio stations. Of course, the complexities of amending media regulations in a meaningful way should not be underestimated - starting with the question of how to guarantee radio producers' independence in the face of municipal oversight. It is also likely that political events (including a referendum on a new Constitution in October 2016 [Bavier & Coulibaly, 30 October 2016; Penar 2016], and the current fragmentation of the political alliance that had underpinned Ouattara's regime) as well

as signs of renewed social turmoil since Ouattara's re-election in 2015 (including two, nation-wide mutinies and a number of tense strikes - see Sylvestre-Treiner, 26 February 2015), were invoked to delay changes to media regulations. Yet arguably these recent episodes make it even more important to reconfigure proximity radio's role as an urban mediator. They certainly indicate that enforcing appearances of consensus is not a very sustainable solution.

## **8.5 - Limitations and Avenues for Future Research**

In this research, I have sought to balance the exigencies of an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, together with the methodological and interpretative requirements of urban and media ethnography. Like any ethnographic work that tackles objects as vast and diffuse as radio, the city, and practices of cohabitation, I have had to operate difficult choices, both in the ground covered during fieldwork and in the elements included as part of my final analysis. I have much unused material, and several leads from which to develop further analyses of proximity radio in Abidjan. I detail three avenues for further research that address an aspect of proximity radio and/or place in this thesis that would benefit from further investigation.

The first avenue for further research would be the role of religion and ethnicity - one might say identity more broadly - in shaping both place and proximity radio. In this thesis, I have focused on place as a realm of social confluence and mixing, and therefore have considered social identities only at their point of interrelation. But a more sustained attention to perspectives articulated *within* communities of lineage or faith would only enrich an understanding of place and its mediation in Abidjan, as would considerations of public discourses about identity and difference. Religion, in which I include "the occult" (Geschiere 1997; Ranger 2007; ter Haar & Ellis 2009), would offer a particularly rich topic for inquiry, since churches and so-called "traditional healers" were a significant source of income for proximity radio stations. Given what some argue to be the deep implication of many Evangelical churches in Ivoirian politics (McGovern 2011a; Banégas & Cutolo 2012; Miran-Guyon 2015), it would be interesting to examine the role of religion in the politics of place in Abidjan. As for ethnicity, I have argued that it is a fragmented, provisional and contradictory category of identification in the Ivoirian metropolis (Freund 2001; Marshall-Fratani

2006; Newell 2012). Despite these complexities, it would no doubt be enlightening to consider the extent to which *abidjanais* residents' relation to place and radio are inflected by ethnicity as a lived and institutional category (Dozon & Chauveau 1987; Bazin 1998).

The second avenue for future research would be to develop a fuller understanding of proximity radio in relation to localism. As noted, my findings indicate a shared, depoliticising logic between some of proximity radio stations' programmes in Abidjan, and localism frameworks elsewhere. My focus on radio content and on producers' reflective accounts in this study, together with my limited access to institutional domains (starting with donor organisations like USAID), prevented a more minute mapping of the historical, institutional and discursive underpinnings of what might be an Ivoirian localism. Whether or not "Ivoirian localism" exists as a coherent framework, what remains to be understood is the extent to which the depoliticisation of the local that I witnessed in post-conflict Abidjan was 1) new; 2) tied to deliberate institutional strategies, by international donors and/or the Ivoirian state; and 3) tied to globalising neoliberal logics, as argued by Brenner and Theodore (2002). In turn, this might allow a better understanding of the politics of place in post-conflict Abidjan, of proximity radio's position in a broader apparatus of depoliticisation, and of Abidjan's distinctiveness in a comparative perspective with other cities, in Africa and beyond.

The third avenue for further research would consider proximity radio as part of the infrastructures of information circulation in Abidjan (in line with Brian Larkin's [2008] proposition). Although I have made efforts to situate proximity radio within a "communicative ecology" (Slater 2014) of the city, especially in relation to street discussion spaces, the kind of study I envision would more systematically interrogate proximity radio's position in the multiple channels that urban dwellers use to know "what is going on" in the city. These channels include transport networks, mobile phones and, increasingly, the internet. There has been a fairly recent explosion of online news sites in Abidjan (e.g. *Koaci.com*, *eburnienews.net* or *connectionivoirienne.net*), purporting to provide the latest and otherwise most inaccessible stories, along with commentary on the contemporary state of affairs. Similarly, social media, especially Facebook, has increasingly become a platform

where urban dwellers share their experiences and express their discontent (as elsewhere in Africa [e.g. Mudhai et al. 2009; Willems 2016a; 2016b], and the world). As a result, there is a strong narrative of technological replacement and newness surrounding the internet in Abidjan (including from some radio producers themselves: see Ako 2016). But bringing the internet, proximity radio and "*radio trottoir*" ("pavement radio," or rumour - Ellis 1989; Burrell 2013) together in an analysis of how information circulates in the city would likely nuance the newness of online practices, and reveal many similar constraints affecting all media - chief amongst which the refusal of official bodies to verify information.

## **8.6 - Conclusion**

This thesis set out to understand how a "small" medium like proximity radio might help *abidjanais* residents live together after conflict. The task appeared daunting for radio stations, in a super-diverse city marked by trauma and uncertainty. Anxieties over *vivre-ensemble* underpinned all sorts of interventions in the Ivoirian metropolis, and proximity radio was at the forefront of "reconciliation" and "social cohesion" campaigns. At the heart of these post-conflict anxieties and interventions was place. The local had been a key site of contest during the decade of conflict in Côte d'Ivoire (2002-2011). Controlling or containing neighbourhoods and public spaces in Abidjan, through a combination of violence and brokering, was a crucial strategy for the Gbagbo regime (2000-2011). After a bloody post-electoral battle in 2011, local peace-building became a centrepiece of the new Ouattara regime's reconstruction efforts, and indirectly a way to secure its own legitimacy. In 2014-2015, as Ouattara was seeking re-election, proximity radio stations in Abidjan redoubled their efforts to secure peaceful cohabitation.

I have argued, however, that to understand the how and why of proximity radio's post-conflict contribution, it was necessary to ask the right questions. What *is* the local? What is its significance as a lived geography? And how is it "made"? These are questions that resonate far beyond Abidjan, mobilising interdisciplinary scholarship on the complexities of urban cohabitation, the dialectics of place-making, and the practical implications of media in both. Theorising the local as the continuously renewed product of everyday practices, more or less constrained and co-opted by



power, allowed me to grasp the deeply contested nature of proximity radio's work in the post-conflict city. The contest that proximity radio stations brought to the fore had less to do with lingering resentment between social groups, as it did with two contrasting visions of place. On the one hand, proximity radio stations allowed urban dwellers to rebuild a sense of place by sustaining a lively sociability of encounter, through which strangers could meet and develop unscripted social bonds. Radio encounters led to open-ended landscapes of familiarity, in which listeners explored new terrain while deepening their sense of being with others in the city. On the other hand, proximity radio's formal peace-building and social cohesion programmes enacted a vision of place that was inward-looking and, most importantly, radically depoliticised. The local, in these programmes, was a realm of experience and action geared toward consensus, and almost entirely disconnected from questions of structural responsibilities and state affairs. The depoliticisation of place was at odds with urban dwellers' desire to share and amplify their local experiences, in order to interrogate place's entanglement with processes at wider scales.

Capturing the paradoxical nature of proximity radio's contribution to post-conflict cohabitation allows me to draw a two-pronged conclusion. Re-making place is indeed a fundamental, infrastructural contribution to living together after conflict. But sustaining the local as grounds for cohabitation requires acknowledging urban dwellers' *existing* practices and aspirations, not least their willingness to speak from place to the wider world.

## **ANNEXES**

## Annex 1

### Description of Case Studies

#### Radio Arc-en-Ciel

Radio Arc-en-Ciel (RAC) is a "private non-commercial" station, launched in the early 2000s, as part of the second wave of licensing by the national media regulator. In 2015, it was owned by a wealthy and foreign-educated pharmacist. RAC's premises are located along one of the main northern roads out of Abidjan (*route d'Adzopé*), near a busy intersection (*carrefour N'dotré*) that marks the juncture between the city's denser, more urban core, and its semi-rural hinterlands. Abobo, where RAC is situated, is Abidjan's second-largest *commune* (municipal district), housing more than one million inhabitants (RGPH 2014). It is also, in popular imagination, one of Abidjan's poorest and most "dangerous" areas: its reputation for disorder earned it the nickname "*Abobo la guerre*" (war-zone Abobo) in the late 1980s. Home to several sprawling, informal neighbourhoods, Abobo is also widely regarded as a majority "Northern" district. During the post-electoral crisis of 2011, Abobo was said to harbour the *Commando Invisible*, a much-fabled constellation of pro-Ouattara guerrilla operations that successfully thwarted the pro-Gbagbo military's efforts to control the district.

RAC's relatively peripheral location meant that it had to shut shortly after nightfall, the last live programmes usually ending at 9pm. Afterwards, it was considered unsafe to linger. Staff members regularly requested that the station be fitted with a dormitory, so as to be able to spend the night rather than travelling at dangerous hours. RAC's location on the outskirts of Abobo also meant that it was often assumed to serve Anyama, a bordering suburb. Interestingly, however, none of the active RAC listeners I met lived in nearby Anyama; most lived in the central parts of Abobo. For listeners, visiting the station was often a day trip that included outings to nearby farms, produce brokers and game-meat restaurants (most of them officially banned after the Ebola outbreak).

The station's facilities were small (four rooms) and minimally equipped. The lack of air conditioning in every room but the studio meant that anyone not on air or behind the console was sitting outdoors, under a small hut looking onto the road. There, station staff discussed current affairs, radio activities and side projects for hours, often joined by friends driving by or listeners on a courtesy visit. Most of RAC's staff relied on external projects - "gombos" - to make ends meet, since the station could not afford to pay much more than travel costs. Those *animateurs* who were established and had a network amongst local businesses or churches made money from sponsored programming, but this remained exceptional, and was frequently a source of friction with management.

In 2015, RAC was managed by Jacques, a dynamic and university-educated young man who firmly oriented the station toward "civil society" engagement, initiating collaborations with international NGOs as well as local groups. The station's relations with the Abobo municipality were, at best, frosty. Jacques explained to me that an attempt at

collaboration between the municipal administration, RAC, and other civil society actors had ended in acrimony. RAC's ability to garner a large, active following (exemplified by the UFARA listeners' club), and to win the favour of international donors like USAID (through the public shows evoked in Chapter 6), appeared to make the municipality envious: in 2016, it launched its own station, and poached at least two of RAC's *animateurs*. In response, RAC hired a manager from one of Abidjan's most prestigious commercial radio station - letting Jacques go in the process.

### **Radio ATM**

Radio ATM is a municipally-owned station in Abidjan's southernmost, coastal district of Port-Bouët. ATM was launched in 1998 amidst the very first wave of proximity radios in the city. In 2015, the station still enjoyed strong backing from the municipal administration. Port-Bouët is a mid-sized *commune* (about 420 000 inhabitants, or 9.5% of Abidjan's population [RGPH 2014]), and it is a place of contrasts. Home to Abidjan's port, airport and massive slaughterhouse, Port-Bouët is in parts industrial and in others densely residential. The district remains peripheral, however, in that it is accessible from central Abidjan by a single bridge, regularly inoperable during the rainy seasons. Port-Bouët is also about part-rural. It encompasses dozens of fishing or crop-growing villages, and is one of the city's main providers of *attiéké*, an Ivoirian staple made from cassava.

Port-Bouët's position at the interface between city and village was reflected in Radio ATM's programming, which placed significant emphasis on "modern traditional" (*tradi-moderne*), African-language music. The district's peripheral location meant that its lively cultural and night-time scene was relatively self-contained. In this *milieu*, ATM staff cultivated extensive networks, enjoyed quasi-celebrity status and continuously sought new side-projects (from restaurant/bar operations to managing artists and even advising on real estate investment). Producers' interpersonal ties were often tinged with the promise of patronage, since the station was viewed as a direct extension of Port-Bouët's municipal authorities (led, since 1980, by PDCI stalwart Hortense Aka Anghui). Many of ATM's staff members had been with the station for a decade or more, and several did indeed combine political with media activities. Nonetheless, my time with ATM staff revealed that they were turned as much toward municipal service as they were toward encounters of all kinds. During my first night in Port-Bouët, I witnessed producers strike up conversations with strangers at a public show titled "*La Nuit des Ethnies*" (The Night of Ethnic Groups). Many of these strangers became recurring presences at the station or in the group outings that ATM producers often organised.

### **Radio Fraternité Yopougon**

Radio Fraternité Yopougon (RFY), like Radio ATM, is a municipally-owned and run station. The comparison ends there, as Yopougon and Port-Bouët could not be more different as contexts for proximity broadcasting. Yopougon is Abidjan's largest *commune*, housing roughly 1 100 000 inhabitants. The area urbanised rapidly and unevenly in the 1970s and 1980s, as a continuous influx of migrants (especially from

the western regions of Côte d'Ivoire) could no longer be accommodated in the Abidjan's saturated central neighbourhoods. Yopougon's largely unplanned urban fabric combines informal settlements, government housing programmes and self-built residential initiatives from an aspiring middle-class. Long derided as a hodge-podge, "lower-class" quarter (*quartier populaire*) by the Ivoirian elites, Yopougon began to galvanise popular imagination in the late 1980s, as a result of two, interrelated processes. The first was a spectacular series of strikes and student protests (successfully) demanding the end of single-party domination in Côte d'Ivoire. The second was a flourishing of new popular music styles. Amongst them, *zouglou* rose to national prominence through its combination of "traditional" rhythms, modern production techniques, linguistic innovation (combining both French and African languages), ironic storytelling and acerbic social commentary. By the early 2000s, *zouglou* had become one of Côte d'Ivoire's national treasures, while *Yopougon la joie* was established as the raucous epicentre of *abidjanais* nightlife and popular culture.

Launched in 1998, RFY contributed significantly to Yopougon's cultural effervescence. In 2015, the station remained the most prestigious amongst proximity radio broadcasters, and retained privileged contacts amongst Abidjan's popular music scene. Integrated into Yopougon's central town hall, the station was a popular meeting place for artists, journalists and politicians. It was also well-staffed, well-funded and relatively formalised in its organisation. RFY's news team, in particular, stood out for the number of professional journalists involved, and the quality of the reporting produced.

RFY had to be entirely re-equipped after the 2011 post-electoral crisis, in large part through USAID funding. In 2015, the station operated in a very tense context. During the 1990s, Yopougon had been a privileged terrain for Laurent Gbagbo's FPI, whose socialist-leaning agenda gained support from student organisations and public-sector employees squeezed by structural adjustment. After Gbagbo won the presidential elections of October 2000, Yopougon concentrated militant efforts to demonstrate the regime's power and legitimacy. When the September 2002 "rebellion" broke out in the north of Côte d'Ivoire, militant demonstration in Yopougon blurred into armed struggle for territorial control. The district became a recruiting and training ground for "patriotic" militias intent upon combatting "foreign" influence and aggression in the city. When the 2011 post-electoral conflict came to a head in Abidjan, "the battle of Yopougon," as residents called it, was the deadliest and longest-lasting. RFY was partially burned and looted "down to the last wire," according to its manager, while one of its employees was found murdered after having been rounded up by pro-Ouattara forces (RSF, 24/05/2011). After the 2011 conflict, RFY did what it could to rebuild trust with the *commune's* residents, but many reproached the station for colluding with the new administration, led by Ouattara's RDR party after electoral boycott by the FPI.

### **Radio Téré**

Radio Téré was built and launched in 2004 with private funds from Youssouf Sylla, Adjamé's current mayor (RDR). It operates out of

Williamsville, one of the biggest residential areas in Adjamé. Adjamé began to urbanise in the 1950s as Treichville, Abidjan's colonial-era "African quarter," became too crowded and expensive to settle. Adjamé quickly became Abidjan's commercial heart: it houses the city's largest, labyrinthine market for second-hand electronics and various imported goods (called "*le black*," in reference to its largely informal and semi-licit nature); the city's largest market-place for off-the-counter pharmaceuticals (nicknamed Roxy, and apparently recently demolished); the city's main transport hubs, including hubs for the formal urban bus network, for the informal urban minibus network, and for bus lines connecting Abidjan to every West African country; and some of the city's main produce markets - among other trading spots. During the day, Adjamé's unpaved streets are extraordinarily dense, even suffocating at times, while during the night its dimly lit alleyways are reputed to be havens for organised crime.

37% of Adjamé's 370 000 residents are non-Ivoirian (RGPH 2014), and Radio Téré mirrors the district's social mix. The station dedicates roughly half of its airtime to languages (Hausa, Moré, Yoruba, and above all Malinké) and musical styles geared toward "Northern," migrant and predominantly Muslim audiences. This broadcasting orientation makes Radio Téré something of a "Dioula radio," as one employee put it, although its small staff is relatively diverse. The station's association with RDR politician Youssouf Sylla, the fact that it shares premises with an RDR office, and the fact that it caters to a largely "Northern/foreign" audience, made it a target of government censorship and militia harassment during the Gbagbo regime. During the 2011 post-electoral conflict, Radio Téré was burned down, possibly due to rumours (related to me) that the station was relaying pro-Ouattara messages. By 2015, the station had been nicely rebuilt on the upper story of a café overlooking one of Williamsville's main arteries, though its equipment and staff were minimal.

## Annex 2

### Radio Stations in Abidjan (Sept. 2017)

(In bold, stations visited, Nov. 2014-Sept. 2015)

- 88.00 FM - RTI Radio Côte d'Ivoire (State broadcaster)
- 88.90 FM - Abobo FM (Abobo - municipal; created Sept. 2016)
- 89.40 FM - Radio Fréquence Vie (Evangelical)
- 89.70 FM - Radio N'Gowa (Koumassi - private non-commercial)
- 90.50 FM - Radio ATM (Port-Bouët - municipal)**
- 91.10 FM - Africa n°1 (International)
- 92.00 FM - RTI Fréquence 2 (State broadcaster)
- 92.50 FM - Radio Attécoubé (Attécoubé - municipal)**
- 92.80 FM - Radio Zénith (Marcory - private non-commercial)**
- 93.30 FM - Hit Radio (Commercial)
- 93.60 FM - Radio Treichville (Treichville - municipal)**
- 94.00 FM - Radio Bien-Être (Treichville - NGO)**
- 94.30 FM - BBC Afrique (International)
- 95.00 FM - Trace FM (Commercial)
- 95.70 FM - Radio Al Bayane (Islamic)
- 96.10 FM - La Radio de la Paix (ex-ONUCI FM)
- 96.80 FM - Radio Fraternité Yopougon (Yopougon - municipal)**
- 97.30 FM - Radio Lepin (Alépé - private non-commercial)
- 97.60 FM - RFI Afrique (International)
- 97.90 FM - Alpha Blondy FM (Owned by reggae celebrity; launched 2015)
- 98.50 FM - Cocody FM (Cocody - private non-commercial)**
- 99.00 FM - Voice of America (International)
- 99.30 FM - Radio Jam (Commercial)
- 99.80 FM - Radio Chandelier (Evangelical)
- 100.10 FM - Radio Amitié (Yopougon - private non-commercial)**
- 100.80 FM - Radio Alobhé (Bingerville - municipal)
- 101.10 FM - Nostalgie (Commercial)
- 101.60 FM - La Voix de l'Espérance (Evangelical)
- 102.50 FM - Radio Arc-en-Ciel (Abobo - private non-commercial)**
- 102.50 FM - Radio Nationale Catholique
- 102.80 FM - Radio Espoir (Catholic)
- 103.40 FM - Ivoire FM (Le Plateau - private non-commercial)
- 103.60 FM - Radio Anyama (Anyana - municipal)
- 103.80 FM - ISTC FM (Journalism school)
- 104.00 FM - Radio Élit' (Journalism school)
- 104.20 FM - Bassam FM (Grand-Bassam - municipal)
- 104.40 FM - Radio Fatchué (Jacqueville - private non-commercial)
- 104.70 FM - Radio Téré (Adjamé - private but owned by mayor)**
- 105.10 FM - ADO FM (pro-Ouattara channel; unclear whether still operational)
- 105.30 FM - Zion FM (Private non-commercial; launched 2015)
- 105.60 FM - Abidjan 1 (Cocody - private non-commercial)
- 106.10 FM - City FM (Treichville - private non-commercial; no longer operational)
- 106.40 FM - Radio Bonne Santé (Le Plateau - NGO)
- 107.20 FM - Atlantique FM (Université Atlantique)

### **Annex 3**

#### **Proximity Radio Public Shows in Abidjan (2014-2015)**

A list of public shows I was aware of during the period of fieldwork. I refer to the USAID-funded public shows by the neighbourhood in which they took place. All of Port-Bouët's public shows took place in municipal halls in different parts of the district. The shows I attended are in italics.

##### **YOPOUGON (USAID funded)**

<i>Selmer/CP-1</i>	<i>22-Mar-15</i>
<i>SOGEFIHA</i>	<i>05-Apr-15</i>
<i>SICOGI</i>	<i>19-Apr-15</i>
(location unknown)	03-May-15
Nouveau Quartier	17-May-15
SIDECI	31-May-15
Wassakara	14-Jun-15
<i>GESCO</i>	<i>28-Jun-15</i>
<i>Camp Militaire</i>	<i>12-Jul-15</i>
Banco II	26-Jul-15
<i>Toit Rouge</i>	<i>09-Aug-15</i>
<i>Port-Bouet II</i>	<i>23-Aug-15</i>
<i>Doukouré</i>	<i>06-Sep-15</i>
FICGAYO	20-Sep-15

##### **ABOBO (USAID funded)**

<i>PK-18</i>	<i>26-Apr-15</i>
Gendarmerie	24-May-15
<i>Agbékoi</i>	<i>07-Jun-15</i>
<i>Anonkoi-Kouté</i>	<i>21-Jun-15</i>
Avocatier	05-Jul-15
<i>Plaque I</i>	<i>19-Jul-15</i>
<i>Houphouët-Boigny</i>	<i>02-Aug-15</i>
Colatier	16-Aug-15
<i>Anador</i>	<i>30-Aug-15</i>
Samaké	12-Sep-15

##### **PORT-BOUËT**

<i>Nuit des Ethnies</i>	<i>14-Nov-14</i>
<i>Fêtes des Écoles</i>	<i>13-Mar-15</i>
<i>Spécial Paquinou</i>	<i>11-Apr-15</i>



**Annex 4A  
Producer Interviews (2014-2016)**

**Adjamé**

Cheick	Manager	27-Nov-14	Recorded
Sébastien	Animateur	23-Mar-15	Recorded
Kara	Technician	09-Jun-15	Recorded
Cissé	Animateur/intern	09-Jun-15	Recorded
Brahima	Animateur	11-Jun-15	Recorded
Nadia	Journalist	07-Apr-15	Recorded
Salif	Animateur	01-Apr-15	Recorded
Célia	Journalist/intern	11-Jun-15	Recorded
Hassan	Former manager	12-Jun-15	Recorded

**Abobo**

Jacques	Manager	10-Dec-14	Recorded
Lydie	Administrator	18-Jun-15	Recorded
Victor	Animateur/journalist	24-Jun-15	Recorded
Chantal	Journalist/intern	18-Jun-15	Recorded
Blaise	Animateur	17-Jun-15	Recorded

**Port-Bouët**

Sylvie	Assistant manager/journalist	10-Nov-14	Recorded
Solène & Thierry	Journalists/interns	27-Mar-15	Recorded
Philippe	Journalist	31-Mar-15	Recorded
Félicien	Chief editor/animateur	01-Jun-15	Recorded
Paulin	Animateur	02-Jun-15	Recorded
Armand	Animateur/journalist	05-Jun-15	Recorded
Kevin	Animateur	05-Jun-15	Recorded

**Yopougon**

Issa	Manager	14-Nov-14	Recorded
Abou	Assistant manager/animateur	14-Nov-14	Recorded
Rachel	Journalist/chief editor	08-Jul-15	Recorded
Sidiki	Producer	16-Mar-15	Recorded
Salomon	Journalist/intern	25-Mar-15	Recorded
Sélim	Marketing assistant	09-Apr-15	Recorded
Roland	Technician	24-Nov-14	Recorded
Diane	Animatrice	08-Dec-14	Recorded
Philomène	Former animatrice	16-Apr-15	Recorded
Affoussiata	Former animatrice	21-Mar-15	Recorded

**Other**

Bamba Karamoko	URPCI president	10-Apr-15	Recorded
Soul Oulaï	Studio Mozaik, founder & director	17-Nov-14	Unrecorded
Mack	HACA, monitoring officer	08-Apr-15	Unrecorded
Gadou	Radio Amitié Yopougon, manager	01-Dec-14	Recorded
Violaine	Radio Amitié Yopougon, animatrice	01-Dec-14	Recorded
Oumar	Radio Attécoubé, manager	03-Dec-14	Recorded
Audrey	Radio Bien-Être, manager	28-Nov-14	Recorded
David	Cocody FM, animateur/journalist	04-Dec-14	Recorded
Lamine	Radio Treichville, manager	28-Nov-14	Recorded
Pierre	Zénith FM, founder & manager	13-Nov-14	Recorded
Gnamba Désiré	Port-Bouët municipality (cultural attaché)	10-Nov-14	Recorded
Sy Savané			
Ibrahim	HACA, Director	26-Jan-16	Recorded

Total producer interviews: 44

**Annex 4B**  
**Listener & Resident Interviews (2014-2015)**

This list of interviews does not include the many people with whom I had off-the-cuff conversations or with whom I spent regular time without ever engaging in an in-depth discussion about proximity radio. When interviews involved more than one person, I give the other participants' name only if they intervened significantly. All the names are pseudonyms except for public officials.

**ABOBO**

Roger	Photographer, planter	18-Jun-15	Recorded
Séverin	Tailor	19-Jun-15	Recorded
Micheline	Tailor	23-Jun-15	Recorded
Rose	Hairdresser, trader	25-Jun-15	Recorded
Fanta	Fruit seller	15-Jul-15	Recorded
Jeannine	Baker	22-Jul-15	Recorded
Renaud	Woodsmith	16-Jul-15	Recorded
Thibault	Tailor	30-Jul-15	Recorded
Ibou	Unemployed	28-Jul-15	Recorded
Manon	Unemployed	21-Jul-15	Recorded
Abdou	Tailor/traditional healer	22-Jul-15	Recorded
Aboulaye	Gardener	23-Jul-15	Recorded
Linda	Unemployed	30-Jul-15	Recorded
Mamadou	Student	30-Jul-15	Recorded
Fernand	Unemployed	16-Jul-15	Recorded
Dino	Hairdresser	14-Jul-15	Unrecorded
Yaya	Shop owner	22-Jul-15	Recorded
Momo	Youth leader	02-Aug-15	Recorded

**YOPOUGON**

Gérard	Dry-cleaner	09-Apr-15	Recorded
André	Unemployed	03-Jul-15	Recorded
Béatrice	Trader	09-Jul-15	Recorded
Anne-Lise	Unemployed	06-Aug-15	Recorded
Damien & Fred	Unemployed & entrepreneur	24-Apr-15	Recorded
Faustin	Political organiser	02-Jul-15	Unrecorded
Marie + 2	Student, bar manager	10-Jul-15	Unrecorded
Cyrielle + 3	Bar manager	10-Jul-15	Unrecorded
Vanessa + 1	Student	10-Jul-15	Unrecorded
Charly + 1	Musician	22-Aug-15	Unrecorded
Hervé + 1	Youth leader	14-Aug-15	Recorded
Moussa	Community elder	13-Aug-15	Recorded
Alassane	Community elder	13-Aug-15	Recorded
JM	Musician	02-Jul-15	Unrecorded

Dominique + 2	Women's organisation leader	05-Aug-15	Unrecorded
Félicité	Seamstress/apprentice	04-Jul-15	Unrecorded

**PORT-BOUËT**

Pasteur Jeff	Evangelical pastor	08-Mar-15	Recorded
Franck	Taxi driver	02-Jun-15	Recorded

Total listener/resident interviews: 36

## **Annex 4C**

### **Focus Groups (2015)**

#### **Maroc (Yopougon) - 19 August 2015**

I organised this focus group with André, who led a "listening club" for Radio Fraternité Yopougon (RFY) in his relatively well-off and recent residential neighbourhood of Maroc. The idea came after spending time with André and being introduced to many of his friends, some of whom I learned had been Gbagbo supporters to various degrees. I proposed to meet in an open-air *maquis* and to buy beers for anyone who wanted to join the conversation. 13 young men came along (not including myself or André). The result was a raucous, three-hour conversation that far exceeded the topics I introduced. Unfortunately, the number of participants, the scene, and the fact that it started raining on the *maquis'* tin roof made the recording unusable.

#### **Banco II (Yopougon) - 21 August 2015**

I met Félicité because she was a serial caller on RFY. She happened to visit the station when I was engaged in participant observation. I initially interviewed Félicité one on one, in a restaurant near her home, but she was so intimidated that I decided against using my recorder. I thought she might be more comfortable in a group setting, so asked her if she could organise lunch with some of her colleagues. Five young women, most likely aged 15-20, joined the conversation. Although they were all daily and active radio listeners, the conversation unfortunately remained hindered by gender/racial dynamics, and did not last more than half an hour.

#### **Doukouré (Yopougon) - 27 August 2015**

When I interviewed Moussa and Alassane, two elders in the largely informal neighbourhood (*quartier précaire*) of Doukouré, they introduced me to a group of young men who sat at a *grin* by the side of the road. Moussa and Alassane were collaborating with RFY to set up a public show in the neighbourhood. When they introduced me to the *grin*, they claimed that "they were trying to get our young men [*nos jeunes*] interested in radio, because it is good for their future." I asked if I could return for a focus group. I brought Clay, my friend, neighbour and fellow doctoral student, to help me navigate *grin* etiquette and assist in the case of language barriers with Malinké. Clay had conducted research in *grins* (see Vincourt & Kouaté 2012) and strongly advised I keep my recorder hidden; in the end, I opted to simply write notes. The discussion involved seven young men, including three transport workers (two taxi drivers and one mini-bus conductor) and a musician. Two of them explained having been political activists, before being disillusioned. They recounted tensions with the neighbouring area of Yao-Séhi during crisis years; explained the role of *grins* and transport networks in circulating information around the city; remembered the early days of RFY, when they would excitedly attend public shows; and faulted the station for "not doing enough" for young people in Yopougon.

#### **Anador (Abobo) - 2 September 2015**

The focus group in Anador was organised in Rose's small hair salon. She invited four local women to discuss radio listening, the role of personal stories on air, and Abobo's main social and political issues. Parts of the conversation broached on intimate topics (to do with sex or infidelity), and when they did some women spoke Malinké. Clay was able to translate parts, and Rose others.

#### **PK-18 (Abobo) - 4 September 2015**

Like the focus group in Rose's salon, the small get-together organised outside of Ibou's house mostly focused on participants' general media use (none of them listened to Radio Arc-en-Ciel, the neighbouring station), the kinds of stories they sought on radio, and their perceptions of life and politics in Abobo. The two young men and two young women were most likely around twenty years old, three of them precariously employed. They confirmed a deep distrust of Abobo's municipal team.

#### **GESCO/Mami Adjoua (Yopougon) - 7 September 2015**

For my final focus group I asked Salomon, intern at RFY and good friend by the end of my fieldwork, to invite some of his friends from university and from his residential compound of Mami Adjoua. Eleven young people, five men (not including Salomon) and six women sat with me around beers and food for a long, digressing discussion. Topics evoked included: the promises and limits of social media; the state of Ivoirian universities; humour and the art of ridiculing politicians; the need to avoid politics; the lack of faith in Ivoirian journalism; and young people's relations to ethnicity, religion and work.

**Annex 5**  
**UFARA Membership List (Partial) (July 2015)**

The following 59 names were taken from a partially handwritten membership list for the *Union des Fidèles Auditeurs de la Radio Arc-en-Ciel* (UFARA). The listeners' club had more members (I would estimate around 100), but about a dozen names were illegible on the list the UFARA secretary gave me. Roger, the head of UFARA, never provided me with a complete list, as he repeatedly assured me he would. Many members' ethnic identification was already in the list. For the rest I filled in, where possible, based on my personal acquaintance with members, discussions with others, or analysis based on patronym. Where this was not possible I indicated as such. To preserve anonymity, I have grouped ethnic lineage into the broad, ethno-regional categories - Northern, Western, Central and Southern - often used to simplify Ivoirian super-diversity. The list confirms UFARA's multi-ethnic composition while highlighting the relative importance of "Central" ethnic groups, including the Baoulé and Agni (the latter are also, it should be said, referred to as Eastern ethnic groups, but I have grouped them with the Baoulé because they are traditionally "allied" and share some linguistic features). In its composition, the UFARA broadly matches the statistics I have been able to find for Abidjan, with roughly 40% of the population hailing from "Central" regions/groups and 25% from the North of Côte d'Ivoire. The percentage of non-Ivoirians in the group is (roughly 15%) is consistent with the figures for Abobo, though lower than those for Abidjan as a whole (22.6%) (RGPH 2014).

<b>Name</b>	<b>Neighbourhood</b>	<b>Ethno-regional lineage</b>
Aka N.		Central
Aka T.		Central
Amoa M.		Southern
Assandé J.-M.	Avocatier	Central
Balodé A.	Gendarmerie	Central/Foreign
Bamba M.	Petit Carrefour	Northern
Ban D.	PK18	Foreign
Brou M.		Central
Dié A.		unknown
Diomandé S.		Northern
Doumbia I.		Northern
Duvan Y.		Foreign
Grand Korodjor		unknown
Ido G.		Western
Ismo la Joie		Central
Kan C.		Central
Kassi K.	Avocatier	Central
Kessé J.-L.	Dokui	Western
Kiko Bonigo	PK18	Eastern
Koffi F.		Central

Koffi Koffi J.	PK18	Central
Konan R.	PK18	Central
Koné S.		Northern
Kouadio R.	Yopougon Gesco	Central
Kouakou A.		Central
Kouakou N.	Dokui	Central
Kouakou R.	Yopougon Gesco	Foreign
Kouamé E.	Azaguié Gare	Central
Kouassi Yao P.	Songon	Central
Lobougnon Tra V.		Western
Lorès E.		Western
Madame Koné	PK18	Northern
Maman Caroline		unknown
Maman Hélène	Kennedy	Foreign
Maman Kouamé H.	Avocatier	Central
Marie Esyde		unknown
Marie-Jo	Abobo Baoulé	Central
Mia M.	PK18	unknown
N'Guessan G.	PK18	Central
Natacha	Belleville	Northern
Oliver de Samaké	Samaké	Central
Oudraogo M.	Azaguié Gare	Foreign
Rino l'Amour		unknown
Rolande		unknown
Sangaré A.	Anador	Foreign
Falash	PK18	Northern
Traoré M.		Northern
Traoré K. R.	Anador	Northern
Vanier A.		unknown
Yanou D.		Foreign
Yao A.		Western
Yao Kouassi N.		Central
Zoh Koko	PK18	Western
Maman Doh	Houphouët-Boigny	Western
Tino Tino	Agbékoi	Western
N'Goran E.	Anonkoi-Kouté	Central



**Annex 6**  
**Transcript**  
**Day of Peace Programme - 30 November 2014**  
**Radio Fraternité Yopougon**

Abou: Welcome to this bit of airtime dedicated to social cohesion, forgiveness and reconciliation in Côte d'Ivoire, generally speaking, and in Yopougon specifically. This show is produced by the Coordinating Committee for the *Plateforme de la société civile de Yopougon*. Côte d'Ivoire is emerging from a damaging, politico-military crisis, that killed 3000 people according to data from the United Nations. Yopougon has taken a heavy toll - both in the number of deaths and in the depth of the communitarian fracture [*fracture communautaire*]. There remains deep distrust between communities, some even say fear. Today, more than ever, it is important to discuss social cohesion, forgiveness and reconciliation to avoid prolonging, or should I say sinking once again into the mistakes and sadness of the past. But are Yopougon's populations ready to forgive? Are they disposed to take the path of reconciliation? To help us understand this, today we have gathered testimonies thanks to our community reporters out there in the neighbourhoods. We also have guests with us. Please welcome

- Guest 1 is central chief [*chef central*] in Mami-Faitai
- Guest 2 is a distinguished member of the circle of elders in Koweit
- we have with us Guest 3 who is a community leader in Doukouré
- Guest 4 comes to us from Yao-Séhi
- while Guest 5 is an Islamic educator in Port-Bouët II.

Welcome all, and we look forward to discussing with you after this musical number.

[Music]

Abou: Alpha Blondy tells us that we should all take a step toward peace. But memories and pain are difficult to erase. A victim spoke to one of our community reporters.

[Testimony: a woman describes the death of her husband and brother at the hands of men who came into their courtyard. After demanding money that the family did not have, the men shot the husband and brother before turning to the woman and telling her she was lucky they don't shoot women.]

Abou: What went so wrong that we reached such violence? Dear guests, what should we do in your opinion to avoid any similar situation in Côte d'Ivoire?

Guest 1: No one is going to fix Côte d'Ivoire's problems except for ourselves. In my neighbourhood, all the chiefs have agreed to come together to bring forth social cohesion [*faire cohésion sociale*], because no one will if we don't do it for ourselves. Really, in my neighbourhood [*chez moi*] there is no problem. That's the solution: we have to take hold of our own destiny. In life, everything that happens to you - even me, in my [communal] courtyard, six people died, including my two children and my little brother. So I have to forgive. Because the President [Ouattara], they unearthed his mother's body and he forgave! So we have to forgive - it's mandatory. In any case, no one will forgive in our place, so in Mami-Faitai we meet every day amongst the chiefs to share advice. Those people who just arrived back in the neighbourhood, we work to resettle them. What they did, those who feel ill at ease, they'll still end up coming back! Anyway, social cohesion is something we have to take seriously.

Guest 5: We need to love each other. This ethnic problem, saying I am from this region or from this ethnic group - Ivoirians should really get beyond that. We should tell ourselves - no one chose to come here on this Ivoirian

land. It's God's will, Who does nothing at random. God chose - so whether you are Dioula, whether you are Malinké, whether you are Bété, whether you are Baoulé, whether you are Guéré - that we all share this land, this is God's will.

Abou: Speaking of, people who once lived side by side peacefully ended up harming their neighbours.

[Testimony (continued): The woman explains that her killers are still out there, and that neighbours were involved in her husband's and brother's death. Although neighbours came in a delegation, she refused to forgive them because she claimed forgiveness was not hers alone to give - her husband's parents ought also to be consulted.]

Abou: What should this victim do? Generally speaking, what should victims do for harmony to return?

Guest 2: I would like to ask this woman to search deep within herself for the sense of social cohesion and forgiveness that moves her, so that she... Tries to get closer [*faire des rapprochements*]. I mean, if she has the time to... understand her neighbours, her co-inhabitants [*ses cohabitants*], with the neighbours who caused her harm. She should let things go - she lived a tragedy but should not seek revenge. And I want to add that politics - politics is not made for ethnic groups. Politics is about parties - it's parties who make politics. Politicians make politics live by creating parties. Now, as for ethnic groups, regarding the men [sic] who animate politics, we shouldn't talk about ethnic groups: you are Dioula, you are so and so... So really, speaking for myself I would like us all to move toward social cohesion by greeting each other, looking at each other, as brothers and sisters.

Guest 4: Yes, I also want to say to this woman, get closer to those who did you harm. Because those who are still around, they probably live in fear [speaker's emphasis]. So if she gets closer to people, I think it will get them to reflect [her emphasis]. To understand. To try to come to terms with what they did. Me for example, I come from Bouaké. I know the one who hurt me in Bouaké - I did not lose someone, just to be clear, no one killed a member of my family, but they looted my house. But the man who looted my house, today he's become my friend! I've let go! Today when I go to Bouaké I go to his house. We talk, he calls me his wife [*ma femme*] and I call him my darling [*mon chéri*].

Abou: In the testimony, the woman says that the culprits [her neighbours] came to ask for forgiveness. Do you think that was a courageous initiative?

Guest 4: A sin confessed is already half forgiven.

Guest 2: They were courageous, those who came to seek forgiveness. If the lady were to forgive them, she would leave them with their conscience. You know, when someone hurts you, and comes to ask for forgiveness, you need to accept. After that, the person will never raise their head to look at you. They will know you've been unusually tolerant.

Abou: Yes, it is all well to ask for forgiveness, but in Africa there are procedures to ask someone for their forgiveness. For example, we have [traditional] inter-ethnic alliances - do you think that alliances can facilitate forgiveness?

Guest 1: Yes, and that's perfectly normal. Because it's like - between the Dombia [patronym] and Koné, and also Sangaré, where there is a problem -

or, say if a Peul comes to beg forgiveness for something - you are obligated to grant forgiveness. Or if it's a Koné family, you have to forgive. Why? Because that's a programme that was put in place at the level of our forefathers [*ça c'est un programme qui a été fait au niveau de nos papas*]. You know, we weren't even born! And if now you're boycotting the traditions of, of - of your family, then you will suffer the consequences! So it's normal, if there is an alliance, you're going to forgive.

Abou: Well, let's listen to more of the testimony, because here it seems that inter-ethnic alliances did not work so well.

[Testimony (continued): The woman explains that her neighbours sought forgiveness in a delegation comprising members of six ethnic groups, all of them "Northern"; all were allied to each other, but some were allied to the woman's own ethnic lineage. The warbling in her voice makes it impossible to understand why the configuration of alliances did not "work."]

Guest 2: There came a moment when people, political actors, Ivoirians, they - they tried to go beyond themselves [*ils se sont dépassés*]. They set the bar too high - what I mean is they set these inter-ethnic alliances aside. But today, you need to go toward these people, do seminars, meetings, go see the community leaders, so that together we can resolutely march toward reconciliation.

Guest 3: If we reach out to religious leaders, to community leaders, I think that will be an important factor to go toward social cohesion. Alliances carry a lot of weight [*les alliances, ça pèse beaucoup*]. If you have a conflict with your ally and your ally comes to beg forgiveness, you have to accept. We were born to find this system in place. So with tradition, forgiveness can be sincere.

Abou: But what about institutions? Some people want a strong signal from the state [meaning reparations] - but should we wait for international and national institutions to come toward us before we reconcile ourselves?

Guest 3: No, absolutely not. Institutions are what they are. We are the population. We are the ones who suffered the most from the crisis. If reconciliation initiatives come from us directly, I think - I think it will touch the population more deeply. Because our community leaders, they live within the community, and they are listened to. They are opinion leaders. If they take the initiative to approach populations in the name of inter-ethnic alliances, in the name of our traditions, to try to silence our disputes [*taire nos querelles*], I think it will bear fruit.

Abou: Still, people are waiting for strong signals. This woman, for example, is waiting for a signal from institutions. But perhaps we can already start to meet each other, to talk to each other, to move forward?

[Testimony (continued): warbled recording is nearly unintelligible, but the woman concludes by saying that "if [she] was a man like them and [she] had weapons like them" she would seek to kill her husband and brother's murderers.]

[Testimony (another woman, voice much clearer): They want us to forgive? Then they should repair us [*ils n'ont qu'à nous réparer*]. Reparations, yeah that's what they should do. My son who's left behind, they should find him somewhere to work. That way he will forget. And what the old man gave me, he [my son] can now give me. Until I die. As long as they hold off on reparations, the heart is heavy [*le coeur est chaud*]. To tell us we have to forgive - it's hard, it's hard. [The woman continues to explain her son's qualities and the need for him to support her.]]

Guest 1: Forgiveness - the government needs to set up some assistance programmes. Men can find a way out, but women, we have to help them for the children and the family.

Guest 4: When there is poverty, forgiveness is stalled. Because - if you've had problems, your house was looted, your parents have been killed, and at the end of the day you struggle to eat, I can't see how you would forgive.

Abou: So despite efforts by local and international actors, the need for reparations remains. But let's listen to some propositions in Yopougon about how Côte d'Ivoire can recover its past glory [*son lustre d'antan*] - how Côte d'Ivoire can go back to how it was.

[Vox Pop 1: Really there needs to be reparations, to soften the hearts of people who are angry, those who have lost everything.

Vox Pop 2: Forgiveness comes with a certain attitude. You need to have the attitude of someone who wants to be forgiven. There aren't 1000 solutions. As long as you have the attitude of someone who regrets what they have done, who demonstrates you are conscious about what you did, then you will get forgiveness. You will need to turn the page.

Vox Pop 3: To gain forgiveness, we should disarm our spirits and our hearts. What I mean is it needs to be sincere. Because what we're doing right now - we are trying to find peace on one hand, but on the other what are we doing? Are we really doing what it takes?

Vox Pop 4: As believers we must forgive. These events that happened, they weren't planned. It was a shock to have them happen in Côte d'Ivoire. So, really, as the wind blows away the dirt, we need to let things go. Being angry cannot give you anything. It won't resuscitate your children.]

Guest 1: Me, my two children, they killed them! But if I think about that, can I forgive? I need to think that it's God who let this happen. You, in your life, even your birth, God allowed that. Your destiny, how it will go - no one can know that! But forgiveness - it's true the state needs to think about those of us who supported us, who have gone. How do you call it - reparations. Maybe if you're smart, you can make something out of that. But even if the state doesn't think of that, you always need to forgive. Reconciliation - we're on board! Always we're working toward reconciliation. Obviously, it's us who have to build social cohesion [*c'est nous-mêmes on doit faire cohésion sociale*]. No one will do it in our place. If you think that the interest of your child means you should not forgive - that's useless! He [your husband] is already gone. God called him.

Guest 2: I think that those people who are not ready to forgive, they are wounded. But in the end, it is the work of God. Everything that they lived through.

Guest 5: I am well-known in my neighbourhood. Since 2000, I've reconciled myself with my neighbours. My family has reconciled itself with its neighbours. Why do I say this? On the 5th of December, 2000, during the events that took place leading up to the legislative elections, for those who remember, my older brother, the eldest, my mom's first-born, he was shot. I was told it was by men in uniform [*corps habillés*], but I don't know which uniform-

Abou [interrupts]: Yes, that's what happened during the crisis, and we don't want to dwell on it because it hurts. We are talking about forgiveness. How did you forgive?

Guest 5: What I meant to say is, my family paid for the funeral in 2000. While we were mourning and crying, my neighbours came to parade in front of

our home, dancing and pretending to sweep the street. But after the funeral, I didn't harbour resentment. When I noticed that they were wary of me, I went to them to shake their hand! I talked to them as I would have before. I let them know that, as far as I was concerned, it was God's will that my older brother was taken away. I didn't accuse my neighbours, even if people in my family were saying, 'But they came to dance in front of our house!' I had friends who fled other neighbourhoods to come hide at my house, family as well, and during all this time I intermediated-

Abou [interrupts]: And now, is everything back in order?

Guest 5: Today there's no problem.

Abou: As we know, Côte d'Ivoire is entering a new electoral period ahead of the 2015 elections. What should we cultivate for these elections to go well?

Guest 5: When today the Head of State says *émergence*; when everywhere you hear *émergence, émergence*. Well, *émergence* is a behaviour. It is our behaviour [*notre comportement à nous*] that needs to change. The hate we carried in us, we need to get it out. We need to step away from it, and we need to accept our neighbours. Those who fled the neighbourhood and may fear retribution if they return - we need to let all that go. If we really want an "emergent nation" in 2020, we need to accept this.

Guest 3: What I heard in the woman's testimony before, is that she's looking to know why her neighbours did what they did. Before she can forgive. That's not a bad position. Because if someone does something against you or your kin, and the person acknowledges their deed and offers reasons for their actions - that can push one to forgive them. But if everyone hides from everyone, reconciliation will never be sincere. The persecutor [*le bourreau*] needs to acknowledge what he did.

Abou [interrupting]: To start with, we should avoid certain expressions, such as "persecutor." To talk about the neighbour who did you wrong...

Guest 3: The word is often used and it just rolled off my tongue - but you're right of course. Even if my neighbour was a persecutor we must look to get close again. It's difficult to forgive but we need to make an effort. Because living with knives drawn [*à couteaux tirés*] amongst neighbours is not going to help anyone. You always need your neighbour.

Abou: But what to do to avoid further violence?

Guest 3: Thank you for this question. We community leaders, we have to be vigilant. In every neighbourhood, you have people responsible. We chiefs, along with others - we must start reconciliation. It is up to us to set an example for the population. If we leaders don't do our work, then we'll never find a solution. Because the state cannot go door to door! In my neighbourhood, if someone comes to settle, we know they are new. We know each other. [Laughter in the background.] So we adopt good behaviour - people say "Ah, the man who came yesterday in the neighbourhood, who is he? That's how it is! And every community - well, first we're going to ask what ethnicity he is.

Abou: But surely, when you ask what his ethnicity is, is it out of suspicion or simply because you don't know him?

Guest 3: No no! Of course it's just because we don't know him. If you don't know someone, that's what you need to ask first. You ask, and you find out he is an Odiénéka. Then we're going to ask the leader of the Odiénéka - do you know this person? He's going to say yes, I know this village. So this

newcomer is home! If the newcomer is a Koyaka, we're gonna find the Koyaka chief. If he's a Mahouka, we're-

Abou [joking]: Going to send him to the Sénoufo.

Guest 3: No of course if he's a Sénoufo we'll send him to the Sénoufo chief. We'll say, "Chief, we have a stranger here, do you know his village?" And the chief will say, "Yes, I know this village, I know his parents." So the newcomer is now at home in the neighbourhood. We community leaders need to do our job.

Guest 2: In our neighbourhood, we've long held events to promote social cohesion and peace. These events have gone well, thanks to community chiefs and religious leaders, Christian and Muslim. Hand in hand we work for social cohesion.

Guest 1: In Port-Bouët II, there is a central chief. In, say, Toit-Rouge, there is someone in charge. In Yao-Séhi, there is someone in charge. So it is up to us chiefs to do our job. If we work diligently, social cohesion will take hold.

Abou: But say that there is a community leader who - say you learn a leader struggles to adopt a reconciliation mind-set. What do you do to get him on board? Do you go toward him or you exclude him?

Guest 1: No, in our neighbourhood, when someone has this problem, I invite him to a meeting. In fact, I bring all the leaders to a meeting, and we'll sit down to discuss these things. Even at some point, the District [District d'Abidjan, metropolitan authority] wanted to do something in the area, and asked for the youth section leader to be deposed. To have someone who is more willing to coordinate for reconciliation. But I said no way. I said, this would be humiliation, and I don't want that in the neighbourhood. So we had a talk, and found a solution, and now the District can work with everyone. That's what peace is. When the youth are out and about, can we sleep? A chief sleeps with one eye open. As soon as there is noise, we're wide awake! So we need to work together to find solutions, and not wait for the municipality to come in and sort us out.

Guest 5: When we say that for social cohesion you need forgiveness, acceptance - to prove that, in our neighbourhood we are organising next month, on the 30th to be exact, we are organising a day of social cohesion. All day, young people will be out, there will be young people from all ethnic groups, they will be playing sports, football tournaments on the school ground, from the morning until 6pm. There will be music... It's to show that really, in Port-Bouët II we have overcome our divisions, we've gone past what happened. So it's to say - it is one thing to be here talking on the radio, but there will be people who actually lost their husband, their hope, everything, and that day they will all be out to get some joy back in their life. Even the family of Imam Diabaté, who was killed in Port-Bouët II, they will be there. Everyone hand in hand, we will go to support national cohesion. We can't just talk about it, we also need to act upon it. And in our neighbourhood, we are acting.

Abou: In other neighbourhoods - in Koweit, for example, what can you correct to avoid living through crisis again?

Guest 2: You cannot go around telling yourself, this person did that and this other person was involved... This person left, who has now come back, and you want to have a word with them, or keep looking at them with anger. No. I think we need to have the sincerity of approaching this person and say, "Brother, or Sister, you who sold us out yesterday, you and I are one.

My flesh and your flesh, they are one." And that is where we will really be strong, in our hearts and minds. We need to do all that, so that as the 2015 elections loom, we can be strong. It's as I was saying at the start of the show: politics has no ethnicity. Politics has parties, and those who run these parties need to talk to each other, need to talk to their base, to their activists, so that they can sit together, forget the past, and move on.

Guest 4: There are also the women. We should not forget the women. It's not only men [working for peace]. Women have suffered a lot in this story, and it is important not to forget that we are also doing things. In Yao-Séhi, for example, I formed an organisation for reconciliation. The CRDI. Back in the days, between Doukouré and Yao-Séhi, it didn't stick. But now we are one.

Guest 3: Indeed, we have done things toward social cohesion, between Doukouré and Yao-Séhi. We had events that brought a lot of joy. And we really needed it, because the two neighbourhoods were really like cats and dogs. Now, as for your question about how to avoid repeating mistakes of the past, I think we need to communicate. We need to communicate, a lot, a lot, a lot. Between Yao-Séhi and Doukouré, you can say that... hearsay, rumours... they almost... They played a part! Rumours. Because there were people saying, "Doukouré is going to attack Yao-Séhi," and so on. That's what soured the whole situation. I think if we go toward each other and speak frankly, I think we'll avoid another crisis in Côte d'Ivoire.

Abou: Thank you dear guests for your perspectives, and dear listeners for having followed our conversation. One thing is clear: we are in agreement about the need to go toward peace and reconciliation. I now leave you all with music.

**Annex 7**  
**Interview Transcript**  
**Aboulaye & Rose**  
**Abobo, 23 July 2015**

[In the background, children mostly girls - are singing a song, call and response; we are in a long narrow interstice between a walled property - belonging to a Frenchman, consisting of a residence and a garden which Aboulaye looks after - and another tall wall which may be a school ground or simply more residential units. It is like an alleyway; along the way, we pass tents/semi-permanent dwellings where men are watching TV while drinking tea, children are running around, and in another section women are cooking. We sit and someone brings us something - possibly tea - as Rose asks Aboulaye how his day was. Aboulaye explains that he is recovering from a moment of extreme tiredness.]

**#00:00:56-5# Do you feel better today?**

#00:01:14-8# Aboulaye: Yes, yes, today is much better.

**#00:01:14-8# Fabien: You've been able to get some rest then?**

#00:01:14-8# Aboulaye: Yes, by the grace of God, I'm alright.

**#00:01:14-6# Fabien: Did you work today?**

#00:01:15-3# Aboulaye: Yeah, I've been working.

**#00:01:15-3# Fabien: When did you finish?**

#00:01:19-7# Aboulaye: I usually get off - yeah, I get off at around 16h00. Right here, I work [pointing to the garden beyond the wall].

**#00:01:33-4# Fabien: So what's in there?**

#00:01:37-9# Aboulaye: Basically a house. It's a house, with everything you need in there.

#00:01:48-6# Rose: It's like a family estate.

#00:01:57-4# Aboulaye [to Rose]: Welcome! And thanks for the visit.

**#00:01:57-4# Fabien: Well thank you for having us! We're just dropping by to say hello really. But beyond that... Well, as you may know, I've been going around to talk to different members of the UFARA family, to have a chat with them about radio and other things. It's for my research, as I explained last time [during a UFARA meeting]. Because Rose has been taking me around, we thought we'd come say hi, and if you're happy to, I'd love to ask you some small questions. So thanks again for having us.**

#00:02:45-6# Aboulaye: OK. Really, welcome.



**#00:03:02-3# Fabien: Thanks [drop my recorder]. When people have agreed, I've recorded my conversations with UFARA friends. Would it be OK to record our chat?**

#00:03:02-0# Aboulaye: It's OK. [Refusing a glass of water from Rose:] No, thanks, I don't like iced water.

**#00:03:03-6# Fabien: Ah, I wasn't aware you didn't like it iced, I would've bought another bottle. We also brought some sweets.**

#00:03:14-3# Aboulaye: Ah! *Wônmi!* *Wônmi* is good, but the other ones, the bean ones, *osso-froufrou*, I don't like those as much. You know my mom makes them up there on the street?

**#00:03:27-8# Fabien: Really? She's selling down there?**

#00:03:27-8# Aboulaye: Yeah, though right now she's not out, the little sisters are out. Yep.

**#00:03:31-4# Fabien: Is she tired as well?**

#00:03:35-3# Aboulaye: My mom? No. Her daughter, her daughter lost her baby. Last Thursday. So because of that, my mom is not coming out.

**#00:03:59-8# Fabien: Oh no! That is so sad! How old was the baby?**

#00:04:06-9# Aboulaye: The baby must've been around three months old, or thereabouts.

**#00:04:06-9# Fabien: And what happened?**

#00:04:06-9# Aboulaye: What I know, she [the baby] was ill. They sent her to a clinic in Adjamé, but it wasn't good [meaning they didn't have money to cover the costs]. They went to Treichville [to the public hospital], and the little girl died there.

**#00:04:20-4# Fabien: That must be so hard, to lose a baby like that.**

#00:04:25-1# Aboulaye [agrees]: She says it's the second baby she loses like this. She's my younger sister. My younger sister. As in, we have the same father, though not the same mother. So it's the second time she loses a baby. It's why - I can't even go see them, my little sisters. Because I was so broke! [Meaning he couldn't help them with medical costs.] Yeah, I was so broke. The other day, she called me. The day we went out to the public show, you remember? To... What's it - to Plaque I. She called me to ask why I wasn't calling her. I said I couldn't face seeing her and not be able to help. She said what's certain is that it was God's will. She said that.

**#00:05:09-6# Fabien: Does she have other children?**

#00:05:08-8# Aboulaye: No, no, she lost both of them. [To Rose:] How are you? [Rose responds she's fine and they discuss something about chickens. Back to me:] So I heard yesterday you went to see the old Abdou?

#00:06:10-6# Rose: Yesterday, we did a bit of tourism!

**#00:06:10-6# Fabien: Yeah, good tourism. We visite Azaguié [rural suburb].**

#00:06:16-8# Aboulaye: Yeah, Azaguié, Azaguié Gare [name of the transport terminal]! It's really been a while since I've been there!

#00:06:19-5# Rose: You mean to the old man's?

#00:06:23-6# Aboulaye: Yes! The other day, I called him on his Green [mobile operator] number. I spoke softly, and the old man he didn't know it was me initially! Eventually he figured out who was calling him [laughs, as does Rose]. He said "Eeeeeeeeh, Aboulaye!" I said, "You bet!"

#00:06:41-4# Rose: Yeah we went there and we met his family, and then we stopped by the Peul's store [Yaya, another UFARA member, whom Rose designates by his ethnic origin]. He [Yaya] started to *chôcôbi* [meaning he started to try to speak fancy French to impress me; laughter on all sides].

#00:06:53-2# Aboulaye: Yaya. Him and Ibou, these two guys, when they call I can barely understand what they're saying [meaning they use too much slang].

#00:06:55-5# Rose: After the *chôcôbi* we went to Jeannine's...

#00:06:56-6# Aboulaye: Aaah! You went there!

#00:06:59-2# Rose: She said, "I'm gonna speak a down to earth French with you" [everyone laughs]. It was good there. So we did a bit of tourism.

**#00:07:22-9# Fabien: Yes, we saw a bit of green. Though it's very green here!**

#00:07:22-9# Rose: Have you seen how nice he is here!

#00:07:22-9# Aboulaye: Ah, I do have a lot of nice trees here [in the walled garden]! So many trees.

#00:07:26-8# Rose [to me]: All these fruits you keep seeing at mine, he's the one who brings them to me! Even what you ate earlier. So much fruit. Mangoes, *kozonié*, with, what's it, mangosteen...

#00:07:47-3# Aboulaye: If we don't eat these fruits, no one will pick them. So I pick them and spread them...

**#00:07:47-3# Fabien: Remind me what mangosteen is?**

#00:07:47-3# Rose: What you wanted to try earlier.

**#00:07:45-7# Fabien: Ah yes, the purple thing.**

#00:07:49-4# Rose: He wanted to buy some, I said no, wait, Aboulaye has some.

#00:07:55-3# Aboulaye: Unfortunately I've run out.

#00:07:59-9# Rose: He has mango, coconut, guava...

#00:08:02-3# Aboulaye: Guava, these days, no - not yet the season for that.

**#00:08:14-9# Fabien: How did you become a gardener Aboulaye?**

#00:08:13-2# Aboulaye: Gardening? Now. I used to work the fields. The white man [who owns the villa where Aboulaye works], he also has a field in Abobo Baoulé. I used to work there, just me and my machete. At some point, the white man decided... I should come here. At some point, I was doing wood-carving with an old man, but the old man left Abidjan and so I was left to do gardening. Now, I used to just tend the trees, but then the wife [of the white man] said, why don't we plant salad and such. So I started doing that.

**#00:09:08-4# Fabien: So before that you were in the fields.**

#00:09:08-4# Aboulaye: Yeah yeah, back in the days - I was... Well, what's for sure, here I am now. And now some of the people here [living in the alleyway] they leave for the field in the morning.

**#00:09:12-4# Fabien: So he still has a plantation there?**

#00:09:18-4# Aboulaye: Yeah yeah.

**#00:09:18-4# Fabien: That's funny, I thought Abobo Baoulé was all tarmac and fancy buildings.**

#00:09:24-0# Aboulaye: No, they have their field there. It's massive. They have banana, coconut, cocoa, *comosol*, and white people's peanuts.

**#00:09:36-2# Fabien: Did you work there for long?**

#00:09:43-4# Aboulaye: Yeah, a long time, probably it's been 20 years with this white man.

#00:09:52-6# Rose: So how old were you then?

#00:09:52-6# Aboulaye: Well, I must've started, I wasn't 25 years old! [laughs]

**#00:10:00-3# Fabien: Are you born in Abidjan?**

#00:10:05-3# Aboulaye: Yes, I'm born here. There's a one-story block there, over there - that's where I was born. Now, at the time... When I was born, let me tell you Abobo was a forest [*brousse*]! There wasn't a municipality or anything. My birth was declared in Bingerville [a suburb east of Abidjan]. Abobo, nothing, even in Adjamé there wasn't a town hall.

**#00:10:21-9# Fabien: But they had a town hall in Bingerville?**

#00:10:20-2# Aboulaye: Yeah, in Bingerville they had municipal administration. Because the white man, the white man he first came to settle in Bingerville. You know? The white man first settled in Bingerville. Abobo, even Adjamé, it was all forest. Even the road you see here, going toward Adjamé, there wasn't any pavement. But after that - I grew up in the village. When I was small like that, the young children, they sent them off to the village. That's where I went to Coranic school.

**#00:10:58-8# Fabien: And where's your village?**

#00:11:03-7# Aboulaye: Well... My actual village is S., yeah. And those who command us [meaning the departmental authority], that's in Zitenga.

**#00:11:21-0# Fabien: That's the administrative capital?**

#00:11:21-0# Aboulaye: That's it! That was where we went to for all our papers and everything. - voila! c'est là bas pour nos papiers tout ça.

**#00:11:30-0# Fabien: Do you know if it's north, south, west?**

#00:11:30-0# Aboulaye: Ah, that I can't tell you. It wasn't too far from the village where Blaise [Compaoré, deposed leader of Burkina Faso] is from, Zienré. Not too far.

**#00:11:42-7# Fabien: So when you were little they sent you there?**

#00:11:43-9# Aboulaye: Yeah. They sent me to Coranic school. Then in 96 I came back. The old man, he said I shouldn't stay in the village. He's the one who sent me to the village, and then he said I should go back to Abidjan. So I came back. 96 or 98. So I came back, and since then I haven't been up there, yep.

**#00:12:11-8# Fabien: So... The garden here, you're the one who plants the food and looks after the trees?**

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#00:12:25-1# Aboulaye: Yeah, I do everything.

**#00:12:30-6# Fabien: I imagine after all this time you know lots of people in the neighbourhood!**

#00:12:39-9# Aboulaye: Around here? Eh, I know a lot of people! Lots and lots of people. This here is my neighbourhood [laughs].

**#00:13:04-2# Fabien: You don't have pictures of Abobo 20 years ago?**

#00:13:04-2# Aboulaye: Ah! My mother had that. Photos. Now that my mom is dead, all of that has gone. Yeah. They had - when we were very small, I even had a photo of me then. [A passer-by says hello and we all exchange greetings.] I used to have that photo. If you see it, you would have no idea it's me [laughs].

**#00:13:26-7# Fabien: So tell me about Radio Arc-en-Ciel. How did that start?**

#00:13:29-5# Aboulaye: Uh, with RAC... Me, I started... I started calling on the show led by Vieux Konan [an elderly *animateur* who ran a Baoulé language programme]. Vieux Konan, his show, in Baoulé, what is it - "N'koran Goa." That's when I started calling.

**#00:13:50-7# Fabien: You were calling in Baoulé?**

#00:13:51-7# Aboulaye: No! I can't - I was talking in French! Since I don't master Baoulé. I speak in French. The old man [Vieux Konan] said we could greet three people. So... I sent my greetings! Then... after a while, the old man called me. Says he wants to see me. So now, we told each other we'd meet by the *mairie* [Abobo town hall], I met him, and I even invited him here. After that, this one here [designates Rose], she called me, and she also says she wants to meet me. She asks me, 'What's your corner?' [meaning where do you live]. She told me where she's based, in Abobo right here, so I went for a visit. She's the one who told me about the show - I didn't know it - but she told me about the show where you have to speak your language ["*Je sais parler ma langue*"]. When I discovered that I started to call.

**#00:14:48-0# Fabien: Right, so you started with the Baoulé show. Did you find it by accident or...**

#00:14:52-8# Aboulaye: No, I - I started listening to this radio [RAC], and I heard his show, and then the next week I heard it again, and I told myself, "Hm, I could call and see what happens." That's how it started. And I could do that because he gives the number to call in French. I took down the number, and I called.

**#00:15:15-7# Fabien: Do you remember when that was?**

#00:15:21-1# Aboulaye: Ooh, that... It's probably been two years. But even before that I was - because RAC, it's an old station, you know! Not like the radio station in Adjamé [Radio Téré; though the stations were likely set up at around the same time]. These guys are new, but RAC has been there for a long time!

**#00:15:41-4# Fabien: You've been listening for a long time then.**

#00:15:41-4# Aboulaye: Yep, I've been listening... These days, not so much, because my mobile phone broke down. Back when I had a mobile, I could tune in. I listen mostly with my mobile.

**#00:16:02-8# Fabien: Good reception?**

#00:16:05-9# Aboulaye: Oh yeah, here it's fine.

**#00:16:26-4# Fabien: Because I went to visit Dino this morning and in his stall it's really bad reception. It was like he was picking up three stations at the same time, and RAC in the middle!**

#00:16:26-4# Aboulaye: Huh! [To Rose:] Ah, speaking of, did you hear that "His Almighty Highness" [nickname for Fernand, a particularly verbose serial called], he's back. He called this morning. "His Almighty Powerful Highness!"

#00:16:31-2# Rose: He's back!

**#00:16:31-2# Fabien: Who?**

#00:16:31-2# Rose: Fernand.

#00:16:31-2# Aboulaye: As soon as I heard him I called him this morning.

#00:16:31-2# Rose: He's always changing mobile numbers. It's like a hobby for him.

**#00:16:36-2# Fabien: He called to say what?**

#00:16:42-0# Rose [to Aboulaye]: You're talking on air, right? He called on the air?

#00:16:42-0# Aboulaye: Uh-huh.

#00:16:42-0# Rose: He probably spoke his fancy Baoulé.

#00:16:44-2# Aboulaye: Uh-huh. Now, he launched a debate: he said that in his village where he just spent some time, there was a doctor. His house or his office was burgled. Somehow, the doctor knew who the burglars were. One of the burglars fell very ill. He came into the office, and - well, the doctor refused to treat him. Fernand asked: what would we do? I responded that I'd just inject him with some poisons and let him die. Fernand got upset. He said "No! You can't fight evil with evil." I said "Nope, if it's up to me, I poison him." Another caller I don't know said he'd also "accompany him to his death" [laughter].

#00:17:31-7# Rose: But what did Fernand then say? Because he's always, always got a rebuttal.

#00:17:32-7# Aboulaye: Yeah, he said - he said the doctor should just tell him to go somewhere else.

**#00:17:47-4# Fabien: Aboulaye, did you call on radio before calling on the Vieux Konan's Baoulé show?**

#00:17:53-1# Aboulaye: No, that was when I started.

**#00:17:53-1# Fabien: What motivated you to call?**

#00:18:02-8# Aboulaye: What's for sure is... I like his show. His Baoulé show, it's in Baoulé but... I really like it.

**#00:18:15-4# Fabien: Anything in particular?**

#00:18:16-1# Aboulaye: I have to say, I really like the Baoulé sounds [meaning music].

**#00:18:14-5# Fabien: So music drew you in.**

#00:18:19-0# Rose: He likes "Akobo Poussière" [name of a hugely popular song at the time: a mixture of Baoulé rhythms and techno, beloved for its absurd lyrics and frenetic choreography].

#00:18:25-3# Aboulaye [laughing]: No, when I called, "Akobo Poussière" wasn't out yet. I said they should put on some... How do you call it? Some Antoinette Konan. When I called to request that the old man said "Of course, no problem."

**#00:18:50-4# Fabien: Were you at all scared to call on the air?**

#00:18:56-9# Aboulaye: No no no! [laughs]

**#00:19:03-7# Fabien: I'm asking because many people, if you hand them the phone and say, "Let's call the radio!" they back away.**

#00:19:07-3# Aboulaye: Ah, yeah, people are scared! Some people just choke, they can't speak [laughs]. But if you're used to it - because I also call on other stations, like the radio in Adjamé [Téré], they have a show in Moré where I like to call. Even last Tuesday I phoned in. And then... Even sometimes Fréquence 2 [youth-oriented state broadcaster] I phone in. They have interactive games around 11am - 11 to noon.

**#00:19:58-9# Fabien: So you also call on Radio Téré!**

#00:19:58-9# Aboulaye: Yes. Radio Téré, RAC, Fréquence 2... Now, I tried Radio Côte d'Ivoire [national state broadcaster], but I've never been put through. Their line was always too busy. Also Al Bayane, for the, the Muslims you know: I've been trying to call for a year, and you can't get through because there's so many people calling. I don't know how the people who get through manage!

**#00:20:31-3# Fabien: Do you listen to radio mostly during the day?**

#00:20:34-3# Aboulaye: Yeah, if I'm at work, I listen to the radio. RAC, I pick it up around 7, then at 9 I leave it to go toward Radio Côte d'Ivoire. Then I leave there around 11 - to Fréquence 2! After that, I'll go to BBC, then RFI. For the news at noon. BBC, I'll tune in until 12:30, because their news segment is until 12:30, and then RFI has one at 1pm. Then from about 3pm I tune back in to RAC, with their show... How do you call it...

**#00:21:19-1# Fabien: "Hits et dédicaces"?**

#00:21:20-9# Aboulaye: There you go. Now... On Wednesdays, I follow Bané's show [on RAC], where they speak Dioula, you know. That's on Wednesdays.

#00:21:37-2# Rose: And the shows with Blaise...

#00:21:37-2# Aboulaye: Yeah! Blaise, and his reggae, yeah I listen to that too. That's also Wednesdays, I think around 4pm no?

#00:21:45-0# Rose: I think it's 5-6pm.

**#00:22:00-0# Fabien: So 4pm is the Dioula programme then?**

#00:22:00-0# Rose: No, Dioula is at 6pm.

#00:22:00-0# Aboulaye: At 7pm. It's at 7pm.

#00:22:00-0# Rose: Ah yes, from 7 to 8pm. Now Bané, his Dioula show, it's on Wednesdays, but also on Thursdays and Fridays. That's in Dioula. He also... He also puts some topics out for discussion. People phone in. It's mostly in Dioula, but you can also call to intervene in French.

#00:22:31-4# Aboulaye: Yep. When I call - well, I can mostly understand Dioula, but I can't speak it very well. I can understand it. If I'm calling on his show sometimes I try Dioula, and because he's an elder, he knows what I'm trying to say!

**#00:22:54-4# Fabien [to Rose]: You also understand don't you? [Rose nods.] Yeah, I can try but I won't understand what they say.**

#00:22:54-4# Rose: Why? Of course you can! If you want to, you'll understand.

#00:22:54-4# Aboulaye: It's easy! Here in Abidjan, when I came back from the village, I only spoke Moré really. Spending just a bit of time in Abidjan allowed me to speak French and Dioula, little by little.

**#00:23:12-7# Fabien: You taught yourself Dioula and French? Wow.**

#00:23:16-7# Aboulaye: That's right! My little brother was sent to school, but not me. Yeah.

#00:23:20-8# Rose: The painter?

#00:23:25-0# Aboulaye: Yeah, my brother the painter. [Someone else walks by and we exchange greetings.]

**#00:23:34-2# Fabien: Is your younger brother here in Abidjan as well?**

#00:23:38-0# Aboulaye: Yes, he lives here with me too. But his work day isn't over yet, so he hasn't arrived.

**#00:23:55-1# Fabien: So you learned new languages just from speaking with people.**

#00:23:55-1# Aboulaye: I started with French. Because that's easier to... understand. Yeah. Then, after a while, since the old women here [designates neighbours] they always speak Dioula, each time I've kind of dipped into conversations and learned as I went along.



**#00:24:22-8# Fabien: That's quite incredible. les gens ici sont trop forts. apprendre une langue juste en parlant.**

[Interruption as another UFARA phones Rose, and we then digress into a discussion about Aboulaye's gardening work and broken equipment.]

**#00:25:10-9# Fabien: So the public show on Sunday, was that the first one you saw?**

#00:25:15-0# Aboulaye: No, since the shows started I haven't missed one!

**#00:25:17-1# Fabien: Really, you saw all of them!**

#00:25:22-6# Aboulaye: Yes, yes. Rose and I, we've seen all of them! Since ther started.

**#00:25:31-1# Fabien: So what do you think of the shows?**

#00:25:31-1# Aboulaye: Yeah it's good! It's a good thing even. It's good.

**#00:25:31-3# Fabien: What do you like about them?**

#00:25:40-6# Aboulaye: Ah, what's for sure is that they talk about good things. You know? The activities are not... yeah. [Long pause.]

**#00:25:54-5# Fabien: Going back, when Vieux Konan called you after you called on his show, were you happy?**

#00:25:57-6# Aboulaye: Yeah! I was happy. Really happy even [chuckles].

**#00:26:02-0# Fabien: You weren't wary or anything.**

#00:26:05-0# Aboulaye: Eeeeh, I wasn't scared. Wasn't scared at all!

**#00:26:05-2# Fabien: Even though you didn't know him...**

#00:26:13-5# Aboulaye: He asked me how I was dressed and how... When I went to the town hall I found him, based on his description. I asked, "Are you Vieux Konan?" He said yes. We exchanged greetings and he came over here.

**#00:26:28-9# Fabien: And when Rose called you weren't scared either.**

#00:26:31-0# Aboulaye: No no no [laughter]. We're in the same neighbourhood. When the old man visited I even asked him about Rose, but he said he hadn't met her yet, and didn't know where she lived. I asked and he said he'd give me Rose's number later. In the end, she's the one who called me. That's when I went to visit her.

**#00:27:00-5# Fabien: And since then, you're a member of UFARA.**

#00:27:07-4# Aboulaye: Yeah. When she [Rose] called me, she said there would be a meeting. That we should go together. At the time, they were

meeting by the station, around N'dotr . We went there, and that's where I met all the people, the president and so on. That day... Well, that day I couldn't give the money [for membership]. Since it's really far away... So after that we said we'd hold meetings in Mosqu e Blanche, next to S verin's workshop. When we started doing that, I could pay my dues.

**#00:27:41-5# Fabien: And you liked the idea of forming an association of listeners.**

#00:27:48-5# Aboulaye: Oh yes. I liked it.

**#00:27:54-2# Fabien: Why is it important to form a group like that?**

#00:28:02-0# Aboulaye: Eeh... When we go out like that [meaning when we meet in a group]... We share ideas. It's a good thing. It can give us ideas... Everything. I think it's a good thing.

**#00:28:15-0# Fabien: Changing subject, tell me a bit more about the Mor  show on Radio T r ; when did you start listening?**

#00:28:25-2# Aboulaye: Eeh. I can't even measure that. This guy [the show's *animateur*], the day I stop calling on his show, he'll be the one to call me and ask, "Why didn't you call me!?" [Laughs] But then, the *animateur*, he also works, so some weeks he can't come into the studio.

**#00:28:44-8# Fabien: You know him?**

#00:28:45-9# Aboulaye: I do. I know him. I even know his home.

**#00:28:49-2# Fabien: Where does he live?**

#00:28:49-2# Aboulaye: He lives there [meaning by the station], in Willy [Williamsville]. For this show we also said that maybe we would start the same thing... meetings... He [the *animateur*] said he'd organise a meeting on Sunday in Anono.

**#00:29:06-8# Fabien: This Sunday.**

#00:29:08-5# Aboulaye: Yeah, the upcoming Sunday. A meeting with listeners from, how do you call it...

**#00:29:14-0# Fabien: Radio T r .**

#00:29:14-0# Aboulaye: Yeah, T r .

**#00:29:17-3# Fabien: Do you know if all the show's listeners are Mor ?**

#00:29:20-5# Aboulaye: What's for sure is that, over there [on the show] we speak Mor . That's... That's us. [Laughs]

**#00:29:27-2# Fabien: So you know the other listeners as well.**

#00:29:31-2# Aboulaye: I know some of them over there. There are many of them.

**#00:29:37-2# Fabien: Many like in UFARA?**

#00:29:37-2# Aboulaye: Yeah. One day we organised a meeting with, with all the listeners [on Téré's Moré programme] who live in Abobo. Because there were about 6 or 7 of us it seemed. So I went to meet them, and stayed until 7pm! Yeah. It was a lot of people. And there was everything there [meaning it was a convivial occasion]!

**#00:30:04-5# Fabien: So how does the Moré show work...**

#00:30:14-2# Aboulaye: People phone in. The *animateur* gives a phrase, and then asks how we can do it. You know?

**#00:30:23-7# Fabien: You mean how to translate?**

#00:30:29-2# Aboulaye: There you go.

**#00:30:33-3# Fabien: How long does the show last?**

#00:30:39-3# Aboulaye: The show starts at 2pm, and ends at 3pm.

**#00:30:39-5# Fabien: And that's on-**

#00:30:42-7# Aboulaye: On Tuesday. Yeah, Tuesday.

**#00:30:58-4# Fabien: I work with RAC, but I also work a bit with Radio Téré. But I haven't met the Moré animateur.**

#00:30:58-4# Aboulaye: Would you like to meet him?

**#00:30:58-4# Fabien: Yes!**

#00:30:59-8# Aboulaye: OK. His name is Alphonse. Hm... His name is Alphonse... [searching for the *animateur*'s last name]. What's for sure is, I have his number right here. I'm going to call him and ask for his... for his position [meaning what he's up to at the moment], and I'll let you know. Also, in the group of listeners for the Moré show, our president, he's a Boussanga. He happens to speak Moré, but he's a Boussanga.

**#00:31:40-6# Fabien: Is he an elected president? [We are interrupted with a man with a crying child.]**

#00:32:06-6# Aboulaye: Well it's like... So since he's educated [*c'est lui qui connaît papier*, literally "he knows paper"]. So... Yeah. We chose him.

#00:32:15-9# Rose: Only because he's educated, or because he's nice? That's two different things! [In thinly veiled reference to the UFARA's president, whose occasionally domineering attitude angered members.]

#00:32:16-8# Aboulaye: No, what's for sure is that he's both. [Long pause]

**#00:32:43-7# Fabien: So, you know Abobo and Adjamé very well...**

#00:32:46-9# Aboulaye: Abobo, Adjamé - eh, I know them both. The only neighbourhoods I don't know so well is - well, it's Yopougon. I've been to Yopougon maybe three times. So I don't know it well. But the rest [of Abidjan]... I'm an expert! Koumassi, Marcory, Port-Bouët... All of that.

**#00:33:09-0# Fabien: Why is it that you don't know Yopougon? It's not as far as these other places!**

#00:33:11-4# Aboulaye: These other places, I've got parents there [meaning extended kin]. Not in Yopougon. Even if I have some, probably they've always come here, and I've never had to go there

**#00:33:48-2# Fabien: How do you feel about the way Abobo has changed in your time living here?**

#00:33:56-2# Aboulaye: Well, lots of things have changed in Abobo, you know! As I was saying, when I was little, Abobo was not at all like this. You see these houses? Maybe back then there was one here, one there, and that's it. When I came back from the village already things had changed a lot. Lots of construction. It didn't use to be so built up. [Turns to Rose:] Is Ludi [Rose's daughter] not with you?

#00:34:35-8# [Aboulaye does not know that Rose's daughter went to stay with her father for a short while, and that Rose is worried because the father seems reluctant to send Ludi back. Rose is worried that Ludi will miss the start of school.]

**#00:35:31-3# Fabien: Funnily enough, the old man [Abdou] yesterday was saying that RAC is great but it is missing a show in Moré.**

#00:35:38-6# [Aboulaye laughs.]

**#00:35:38-6# Fabien: Maybe you both could do a show in Moré!**

#00:35:45-8# Aboulaye: You mean animate it? OK. But really, if there's people who are educated [*les gens qui connaissent papier*], they are the ones who can do the show.

#00:36:01-0# Rose: Why?

#00:36:01-0# Aboulaye: No, if it's me, I can't do a show in Moré. Ah, what am I going to do! [Long pause]

**#00:36:25-0# Fabien: So Aboulaye, you could say you mainly get your news from BBC and RFI, correct? You don't listen to RAC's news bulletin.**

#00:36:25-0# Aboulaye: I do, I do!

#00:36:25-0# Rose: Now they've started doing it in the morning, at 8:30.

**#00:36:25-0# Fabien: That's true, they also have a morning bulletin.**

#00:36:26-0# Aboulaye: Yeah, around 8:30 I'm tuned in. But around lunch time, it's BBC, and then RFI. Especially... What's his name? Mamane. I like to listen to Mamane [laughs].

**#00:36:52-2# Fabien: I have to say I don't know who that is.**

#00:37:00-8# Aboulaye: Mamane, he's uh... It's... Well it's on RFI! How is it called... Starting from 1pm... or just before.

#00:37:19-4# Rose: It's a show you mean.

#00:37:19-4# Aboulaye: Yeah, and he's also on now, from 5pm. Or maybe he starts 3 minutes before 5. He's a... He's from Niger. Yeah. He's the one who says "Bongouana, Bongouana, Bongouana," you know? You'll listen and you'll know what I mean.

**#00:37:46-2# Fabien: What does he talk about?**

#00:37:55-8# Aboulaye: Well, it's like... For example, he can... He can attack Abidjan like... Politicians I mean. Yeah. Then he can attack others elsewhere. But he doesn't say their name, you know?

#00:38:02-4# Rose: He talks about politics. He criticises politicians [using humour].

#00:38:05-4# Aboulaye: Yeah, but he doesn't mention anyone's name!

**#00:38:18-3# Fabien: Speaking of, do you think it's a good thing that RAC can't talk about politics?**

#00:38:28-4# Aboulaye: Ah, RAC can't do politics, that's for sure! Politics, even, politics is no good. Yeah. It's not good. On radio, it's not good.

**#00:38:36-8# Fabien: So it's better if RAC doesn't do politics.**

#00:38:44-5# Aboulaye: Yeah, it's better. Because politics... Politics is strange [*bizarre*, meaning full of dangerous unknowns]. Especially in Africa.

**#00:38:41-2# Fabien: Rose, do you agree?**

#00:38:44-9# Rose: Yes! Politicians, you know... But, earlier [during another interview with a UFARA member] I didn't want to speak. But they have a way of practicing politics [*pratique leur politique*].

**#00:38:59-8# Fabien: Who do you mean?**

#00:38:59-8# Rose: RAC. They don't... They don't do politics directly. But gradually, when they put *topics* [Rose's emphasis] up for discussion, these topics they involve politicians a *little bit* [her emphasis]. But it's not too... too direct.

#00:39:17-1# Aboulaye: They don't really go into these things.

**#00:39:16-2# Fabien: Do you have an example in mind?**

#00:39:18-2# Rose: Yeah... There was... If I'm not mistaken [Aboulaye interrupts to ask whose number he got a missed call from - mine; he is surprised to learn that it is a number operated by MTN.] You see, don't you, when they [RAC] were saying that we should go vote. That we should go register to vote. *Many* [her emphasis] people didn't get their identification cards as they requested [identification needed to be able to register to vote]. So RAC opened the discussion on air. They were saying that the state should really do what's necessary so that *everyone* [her emphasis] can have their identification papers in time. To get people to register, you need to spend some money! How else would people go to all their villages to get the required documents [birth certificates or witness statements]. So they asked: how come some people didn't get their ID? Some [on the air] said it was because they weren't really Ivoirian. Then there was a debate about if they weren't Ivoirians, why they adamantly wanted an Ivoirian ID. But then some people said, it's not just that. If you're Ivoirian, and you didn't get your ID, why is that? So they debated a little. And then, another time they entered into... [lowers voice] they entered into things. Like there are people who have jobs... while others who have good diplomas and qualifications can't find work. Yet you have some who haven't gone past primary school, and they have jobs. Jobs in government [meaning public administration]. So we debated: everyone is saying there's no more "*bizness*" [corruption and informal patronage arrangements], back under President X there were all sorts of arrangements that had to end. But what we see is that... there are still arrangements. So you see, when they launch the debate on air, it touches people. It allows them to express their pain. Because some people call and they are full on: they say "*It's false, there is still bizness in Côte d'Ivoire today.*"

#00:41:52-5# Aboulaye: Yeah, that certainly hasn't ended.

#00:41:52-5# Rose: It's still the same *bizness*! Some callers said: "I have a university degree, but I don't work. But I know this, this and this person, since the tables have turned [politically] their entire family found work. Yet they don't have diplomas. So this - it touches - it does have to do with politics a little bit. But not directly. We can't say, "Alassane [Ouattara], you say one thing and do another!" No! So it means we circle around it, we touch, we touch the contours a bit.

#00:42:33-2# Aboulaye: Ah, in Abidjan, *bizness* will never end. It will take a long time.

#00:42:31-6# Rose: Or about electricity - they've raised the prices of electricity. RAC talked about that. They asked *why* Côte d'Ivoire delivers electricity to Ghana, Guinea-

#00:42:44-5# Aboulaye: Burkina...

#00:42:44-5# Rose: Or in Burkina... We're providing it to them. But how is it that their electricity is cheaper? Why is that? Or, we have two major ports in this country, in Abidjan and San Pedro. So why is

everything - everything so expensive? That touches upon the state, you know. Why is it so expensive? You have your car being shipped in, when you want to pay customs it's so expensive. We struggle here to buy rice when - I showed you yesterday [on the market] the rice, no? We grow rice in Côte d'Ivoire. So why don't we eat that? Because we don't have the right equipment to make it good. So those who do use the rice, I showed you, they just let it dry out and then they crush it. But we want to eat the good rice. "Uncle Sam," that's expensive. One kilo is about 700 [FCFA]. Why is it so expensive? When in other countries, it isn't?

**#00:43:58-8# Fabien: It isn't?**

#00:43:58-8# Rose: Not like here.

#00:43:58-8# Aboulaye: Even us in Burkina, we-

#00:44:07-3# Rose: In Mali, they have produce that's less expensive than here. Even though it is often produced here!

#00:44:10-7# Aboulaye: True! It's produced here and leaves for elsewhere.

#00:44:14-5# Rose: So, why? So, what I mean is, RAC doesn't do politics directly, but when they launch a topic you know what it's about. You know that, when something is broached, it concerns you. You have to intervene even. Because we can't - even before, when there was the water. Rains. The state evicted so many people. They were told the rains would come down hard and floods would kill them. But in some places... The state promised 150 000, people waited, no one knows who ate the money - the state had to come in and demolish everything!

**#00:44:57-0# Fabien: You saw that?**

#00:44:57-0# Rose: I've seen it!

#00:44:55-3# Aboulaye: There, over there, how do you call it...

#00:45:02-0# Rose: Some of these [evicted] people came to drop off some of their belongings where I live. Just around the corner - where we went to greet the old woman.

#00:45:07-6# Aboulaye: Yeah yeah yeah yeah.

**#00:45:07-6# Fabien: Which old woman?**

#00:45:07-6# Rose: The old woman who sells fruit just in front of my place, she lost her husband and we went to say hi [some days ago]. They demolished her house!

#00:45:15-7# Aboulaye: By SODEPALM. They were by SODEPALM.

#00:45:15-7# Rose: They saw that - they even said they themselves received the money [to move from the demolished slums]. They admitted to receiving the money - but they had no idea the state was going to demolish everything! [Aboulaye chuckles] So they took the money and

they stayed. But when rains come, they'll catch you and kill you. You see?

#00:45:35-4# Aboulaye: When the last rains fell, people died - some 20 people.

#00:45:41-3# Rose: 21 people. So yes, people called in to say what they saw.

#00:45:47-2# Aboulaye: It's what they saw!

#00:45:45-4# Rose: And that's their way of doing politics. It's good that way. It's not too... They mask it a little bit, but we understand, we know what they want to say, so we can intervene!

**#00:46:04-1# Fabien: Aboulaye, would you agree?**

#00:46:10-3# Aboulaye: Yes, yes! [Laughs] She's said it all.

#00:46:16-5# Rose: Yes, that's how it is. Because you're not going to say something else. You can't say... some things and then they'll burn down your radio. Or they'll - no! You won't have any problems.

#00:46:24-1# Aboulaye: Hm, they would shut down the station for sure.

#00:46:24-5# Rose: And it's like, when we go do the public shows. Should men tell women to vote for some particular candidate?

#00:46:33-2# Aboulaye: No!

#00:46:37-4# Rose: We tell you [during the public shows], "You're free to vote for whomever."

#00:46:39-9# Aboulaye: Yep.

#00:46:43-4# Rose: But then, it's up to you, you get to your home - "Ah, today they told me I could vote for who I want." You should think about it, weigh it and evaluate it. Sort the good from the bad. "Currently, this candidate, will he advance my interests? Or is it the other?" You know, we Ivoirians are curious, we like the new! So when there are new proposals, they want to see. See what can be new. So you can't tell them, "Don't vote for that person." The shows say: "Vote for the candidate you like; but after that, no violence. You're going to vote, but don't insult group X; don't attack people. You're going to vote - that's between you and God." But I have a nephew, he lives near Beugré. He worked in a polling station [in 2010].

#00:47:34-7# Aboulaye: Hm.

#00:47:34-7# Rose: He says that when they started to count votes - he said that someone had even written on their ballot: "ADO [A. D. Ouattara], without you, I die!" [Laughter] Someone else wrote: "Gbagbo, you're a killer! You'll die in hell."

#00:47:51-5# Aboulaye: Huh?! Someone wrote that?! [Laughs]



#00:47:52-7# Rose: Someone wrote that! Now, I also have a client [in the salon] who - she's Baoulé. Often I buy the *attiéké* that she sells nearby. So she says: "No, Rose! Listen to this!" She was around Samaké, in a school where they were voting [in 2010]. She says: "Rose, the women, they're all about politics! I saw a woman, she was so heavily pregnant they had to carry her in a wheelbarrow to go vote! I saw it. Her belly ached but she came to vote. In your opinion, a Dioula woman, they're carrying her in a wheelbarrow, who is she going to vote for? Stay tuned!" [Aboulaye laughs] Then there's an old woman. She was also carried in a wheelbarrow. Her sons pushed her in. Just as she was going in her son whispered, "Now, you have to vote for this person." She was up in arms! She said "No, I'll vote for this other person." Then there was another couple who came. The husband is Mossi, the wife is Bété. They live across from my client's apartment in the same courtyard. (My client herself is Baoulé, and her husband is Mossi.) So in the house there, the Bété woman she was going to go out to vote and her husband said: "If you're going to vote Gbagbo, you can pack your bags and leave." [Aboulaye chuckles] The husband said: "You live in a courtyard where I pay rent, you have to vote for Alassane!" When they went to vote the husband asked her: "Who did you vote for?" She said she voted for who she liked. The husband said: "If you voted Gbagbo, then let him take care of you from now on." Because they were policemen nearby, they came to tell them to leave. They said: "Sir, this is a family matter, please sort it out in your family." The man later divorced his wife!

#00:50:36-5# Aboulaye: You mean, she voted for, what's his name...

**#00:50:36-5# Fabien: But how could he know she voted Gbagbo?**

#00:50:36-5# Rose: She said it! She said it! She said, "I can't vote for your Mossi" [in reference to A. Ouattara's Burkinabè nationality]. The man said, "Well, you're sleeping with a Mossi." So I liked the story, I gave it to Armand [RAC *animateur*]. He put it on the air. Because I said, "I have proof this story happened!" That day, Fernand called in to say, "This man, he's out of his mind. He should've let it go! What does he want! All that matters is that their home works well." So all this is real. It's real. And it involves the state! It shouldn't be that politics cause divorce! So you see. It's like the new show that Armand launched, "It angers me." Ah, I phone in many times! Once I phoned it to tell them about how they [public authorities] demolished my shop-front to make way for a road that hasn't come. It angers me! That's what angers me.

#00:51:50-9# Aboulaye: Yeah, it angers me.

#00:51:54-4# Rose: So you can call and say, they demolished so many places around me - you can really talk!

#00:51:57-6# Aboulaye: One day I phoned in to say, "What angers me is how these young people they let their pants sag below the level of their underwear" [chuckles; Rose bursts out laughing]. It makes me so angry I could die. Armand said he agreed - it's filthy! [Laughter]

#00:52:22-3# Rose: So you see. Otherwise, it's about the municipality. You go there for a form, and you end up turning and turning and turning in circles. Is that normal?

#00:52:35-0# Aboulaye: I wanted to get citizenship. I can. But they told me to go sort it out in Bingerville.

#00:52:40-0# Rose: That's where you're born.

#00:52:41-1# Aboulaye: To go get something.

#00:52:45-6# Rose: A certificate?

#00:52:45-6# Aboulaye: A new certificate. Because I have one, I had two and I save one, but they don't want that one. I don't know where I put the other one. So I'll have to go look for a new one.

#00:53:04-7# Rose: So you need to get a new copy.

#00:53:06-4# Aboulaye: I don't really know. There's an old man, I'll ask him before I head out.

**#00:53:14-5# Fabien: What do you think RAC's role should be in relation to the municipal authority?**

#00:53:27-1# Aboulaye: Uh, in relation to the municipality?

**#00:53:33-7# Fabien: I sometimes get the impression that people talk a lot about what the state is doing, but not so much the municipality.**

#00:53:36-4# Rose: No, we do talk about the municipality!

#00:53:40-1# Aboulaye: Often, we talk about the municipality. Because-

#00:53:40-1# Rose: Yeah, often we call upon the municipality. Many times.

#00:53:44-9# Aboulaye [gets flustered]: The, the, the *trash* that gets left on the road. All the weeds and the crumbling roads... We talk about all that on RAC.

#00:53:50-3# Rose: And we who use special soaps [as part of sanitary requirements for a hairdressing salon], the municipality asks us to pay a tax - 10 000. And when you own two curling stations, you also have to pay a tax - 10 000, 5000 for each. It's too much! All because I bought another curling station. [To me:] You saw it - the white thing.

**#00:54:07-7# Fabien: To dry the hair.**

#00:54:14-6# Rose: Yes. When I had two, I needed to pay 10 000. I couldn't. So I gave one away, and only kept one.

#00:54:24-2# Aboulaye: You went to pay?

#00:54:29-1# Rose: To the town hall yes.

[We are interrupted by Aboulaye's mother who asks us whether Rose and I would like to join for dinner. A wider conversation begins with family members and neighbours.]

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