Mediating anti-political peace in Abidjan: Radio, place and power

Abstract
After a decade of conflict (1999-2011), peace-building in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, focused on the local as a primary site of reconciliation. In addition to being local, peace was *anti-political*, seeking to separate place from politics as autonomous realms of public life. Through the example of local radio peace programmes, this article offers a critical, ethnographic account of anti-political peace as a spatial process. It links local peace and its justifications to the operations of governmental power, emphasising continuities of anti-political mediation and political domination. Such a historicised perspective challenges the framing of anti-political peace as the opposite of politics-as-conflict: they have long been two sides of the same coin in Abidjan and, as a binary "choice," prevent the search for more democratic alternatives. Simultaneously, I argue that anti-political peace it is best approached as a field of contest. An ethnographic approach acknowledges the widespread rejection of politics in the Ivoirian metropolis, while resisting the collapse of institutional and everyday perspectives into a self-reinforcing consensus. I show that radio producers and *Abidjanais* residents could not quite pin down the meaning of politics, as that which ought to be shunned. Rather than bypass these hesitations through normative or ontological reasoning, I suggest (following others) that we might treat politics' irreducible polysemy as a source of continued struggle.

Between 1999 and 2011, Abidjan was the scene of repeated political tension and violence. As the seat of power in Côte d'Ivoire, the city of five million inhabitants was a battleground for competing actors seeking to control the state apparatus, and to define postcolonial citizenship (Marshall-Fratani 2006; Banégas 2010; Akindès 2011; McGovern 2011). In the aftermath, national and international funds fostered a lively ecology of peace initiatives focused on *the local*, constructed as a primary ground for reconciliation (Piccolino 2019). By 2015, Abidjan was abuzz with micro-level activities for peace, from football tournaments to prayer camps, pageants, street-sweeping competitions, reconciliation ceremonies, block parties and radio round-tables. Indeed, few actors were as audibly active as local radio stations (*radios de proximité*). As popular media and long-standing intermediaries between large donors and neighbourhood groups, stations were pivotal orchestrators of local peace in the city.

This article draws on an ethnography of local radio to examine *how* peace was localised in the Ivoirian metropolis, and with what consequences. Local radio is approached as a spatial technology and a site of urban geopolitics (Pinkerton & Dodds 2013; Peters 2018). It offers a unique vantage point on peace-building because it sits at the intersection of street and state – mobilising governmental, institutional and everyday agencies. Listening to radio allows us to capture local peace as a contested discourse and performance, articulated within complex, multi-scalar relations of power.

The most striking – and troubling – aspect of local peace in Abidjan was its anti-political character. I show that, in radio programmes, the local was constructed as a ground for peace on the condition that it be demarcated from the realm of politics. Bringing together scholarship on peace geographies (Megoran 2011; Williams & McConnell 2011; McConnell et al. 2014; Harrowell 2018) and anti-politics (Ferguson

1994; Barry 2002; Swyngedouw 2011; 2017; Clarke 2015), I link *anti-political peace* in Abidjan to operations of governmental power. Such a critical approach allows me to argue that anti-political peace should not be accepted as the opposite of politics-as-conflict, either temporally or ontologically. Far from being opposites, anti-political peace and politics-as-conflict, like their framing as a binary "choice," were both historical and intertwined products of political domination.

At the same time, I recognise that anti-political peace was not just a top-down imposition in post-conflict Abidjan. In a city "wounded"(Till 2012) by political violence, many actors had different reasons for bounding everyday life from politics (Spencer 2012; Gerlofs 2019). This, I suggest, complicates the critical gestures that anti-politics scholarship puts into play. Ultimately, I propose that anti-political peace is best analysed as a grounded field of contest; this entails problematising it not through a normative or "ontological" (Barnett 2017) perspective on what politics should look like after conflict, but rather from an inductive approach to politics as an irreducibly polysemic, shifting and contextual notion.

The article proceeds in four parts. In the first, I describe my methodology and the data that this paper is built on. In the second, I outline a critical geographical perspective on local peace. I situate peace-building within a history of power struggles over the local as a political territory in Abidjan. I show that the discourse opposing anti-political peace to politics-as-conflict dates back (at least) to the mid-1990s, when it served as justification for the surveillance of local radio stations. This long-standing association with governmental control means that anti-political peace is impossible to disentangle from the more violent policing of local political identities.

In the third part, I delve into the mechanics of anti-political peace after 2011. I note the formal similarities between local peace programmes in Abidjan and what has elsewhere been called anti-political localism. I then explore the specific discursive articulations of local peace-building. I show that radio programmes circulated a narrative of the Ivoirian conflict as generalised political excess, thereby framing anti-politics as the necessary retreat from pathological political engagement. This narrative echoed a government line in 2014-16, but in peace programmes had a supplementary spatial dimension. Local narratives of conflict were scripted in such a way that they deliberately obfuscated geographies of responsibility (Massey 2004) for violence, strongly implying that urban dwellers had all in some way been complicit. In turn, narratives of peace insisted on the autonomisation (Burchell 1996) of the local as a site of exclusive responsibility for peace, making the latter incompatible with "political" claims on government.

In the final part of the article, I consider some ways in which the discourse of anti-political peace was contested. What emerges from selected examples is that *Abidjanais* residents critiqued both local radio and political elites in anti-political terms. I argue that it remains important to emphasise the difference between this popular form of anti-politics (Clarke et al. 2018; Gerlofs 2019) and its institutional counterparts precisely to keep the meaning of politics unsettled, and a continued object of struggle.

LISTENING IN A WOUNDED CITY

What follows stems from an ethnography of local broadcasting in Abidjan. Fieldwork involved visiting eleven of the city's twenty-four registered outlets, spending four months embedded with four stations, and three months working with listeners' clubs in Abobo and Yopougon, Abidjan's largest municipal districts (Figure 1). Overall, I conducted a total of 80 interviews with producers and listeners, six focus groups with

specific categories of listeners, supplemented by hours of radio listening, dozens of informal conversations, and hundreds of pages of field notes. All interviews and conversations were in French, my native language and most of my interlocutors' main idiom for daily interactions. Translations are my own.

[Figure 1]

Local radio provided a relatively unproblematic entry point into life after conflict in the Ivoirian metropolis. This is because stations are used to collaborating with Northerners, and because the common perception that they operate outside of politics suggested to participants that no contentious issues would be raised. My fieldwork took place at an anxious time, when Côte d'Ivoire was facing its first presidential elections (in October 2015) since the conflict. This created a tense atmosphere in which many Ivoirians wondered what they could and could not say, beyond the usual restrictions imposed on the airwaves (Author, forthcoming a). In this context, focusing my research on participants' relations to radio and place allowed them to feel at ease during our initial interactions. From there, long-term ethnographic engagement through regular, casual interactions allowed me to build trust. To make room for potential trauma, I left it up to participants to evoke issues of conflict and politics, which many did. As a White, French man I was simultaneously positioned as an outsider, an object of desire, and a geopolitical ally to the post-conflict Ouattara regime (which France backed militarily in 2011 [Mbembe & Monga 2012]). Reflexive attention to which of these aspects coloured fieldwork relationships allowed me to make myself familiar in particular ways, mostly successfully. While relations with young women were sometimes too difficult to negotiate, in terms of their expectations of intimacy or propriety, older women featured amongst the most active contributors to the research

The language of peace was ubiquitous on the local airwaves during my fieldwork. To capture the essence of these peace-building activities, I have selected particular programmes for in-depth analysis. The first set of programmes were "public shows" (*émissions publiques*) organised and recorded by Radio Arc-en-Ciel (RAC thereafter) and Radio Fraternité (RFY thereafter) in different neighbourhoods of their respective districts, Abobo and Yopougon. Funded by USAID, these public shows were held every other week in the months leading up to the October 2015 elections. They involved hours of music, comedy and games (Figure 2), but most centrally a round-table segment during which neighbourhood representatives were asked "what went wrong" during the Ivoirian conflict (*qu'est-ce qui n'a pas marché?* – see Figure 3). I supplement my analysis of RAC and RFY's public shows with another round-table segment, recorded in RFY's studio for the National Day of Peace on November 15, 2014. Similar in style and content to the public shows (it opens with the same question of "what went wrong"), the Day of Peace segment has the advantage of being longer (one hour) and easier to transcribe than my field recordings (the public shows were held in open spaces that were invariably cacophonous).

Together, the public shows and Day of Peace programme were representative of peace discourse on the local airwaves, and arguably beyond, even as they stood out for their interactive character.

[Figure 2]

[Figure 3]

LOCALISING CONFLICT AND PEACE IN ABIDJAN

Conflict: Struggle for control of the local

The Ivoirian conflict revolved around a struggle for state power. Without being able to provide a full account here, conflict arguably began in December 1999 when a military coup deposed President Henri Konan Bédié and ended nearly 40 years of post-independence, single-party rule (Vidal & Le Pape 2002). The power vacuum this created, together with the possibility that power might be seized through violence, led to increasingly brutal confrontations between partisans of Bédié, Laurent Gbagbo (socialist opposition leader) and Alassane Ouattara (former IMF executive and Prime Minister).

Another coup in September 2002 failed to topple Gbagbo's fledgling government, but durably split the country into North and South. Regional resentments (particularly over land ownership) and debates about the ethnic underpinnings of Ivoirian citizenship fuelled the conflation of ethno-regional origin and partisan affiliation, with frequently deadly results (Dembélé 2003a; Marshall-Fratani 2006; McGovern 2011). In their attempts to secure territories, political and military elites could draw on a vast "reserve army" of young men seeking a way out of economic residualisation and generational subordination (Banégas 2007; Matlon 2014; Koné 2015). In late 2010, the presidential elections that were meant to provide a transition out of conflict instead sparked a brief but deadly war opposing forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo, and those supporting challenger Alassane Ouattara. The latter eventually secured victory in April 2011, with support from the United Nations and French military.

In Abidjan, conflict manifested as a struggle for "control of the street" (Banégas 2010: 38), or what I call control of the local. Competing actors sought to define "who is who" (Marshall-Fratani 2006), distinguishing friend from foe; to do so, they used ethnicity and religion, but also urban space itself as a shorthand for partisan affiliation. It became crucial to define and secure neighbourhoods and districts as political territories. Thus, the municipal districts of Abobo (north of Abidjan) and Yopougon (west), both home to over a million inhabitants, emerged as antagonistic geographies. After 2000, the Gbagbo regime deployed considerable resources to consolidate Yopougon as its militant "bastion" (Banégas 2007; 2010), while the pro-Ouattara opposition made Abobo one of its strongholds in the city (Konaté 2017). Because both districts are hugely diverse and mixed, political territorialisation involved more fine-grained practices of policing and bordering. Not all of these practices were physically violent: efforts to control local areas also involved the co-optation of neighbourhood organisations, the saturation of public spaces with propaganda (notably through discussion spaces known as *parlements*, *agoras* and *grins* – see Banégas & Cutolo 2012; Vincourt & Kouyaté 2012; Atchoua 2017), and constant micro-level surveillance (Dembélé 2003b).

The struggle for control of the local in Abidjan was not homogeneous, instead fluctuating across time and space. As Mike McGovern (2011) shows in his anthropological account of the Ivoirian conflict, habits of mixing and coexistence in diverse areas made political control often difficult to achieve. As a result, the geographies of conflict in Abidjan were variegated. In my own research, several participants described fleeing their neighbourhood during the 2011 post-electoral war only to find that, in other areas, life appeared to continue relatively unperturbed.

Peace, place and power: Continuities and contest

Given the localised unfolding of the Ivoirian conflict, a focus on local peace might appear sensible. The Commission for Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation (CDVR in French), an *ad hoc* body created by Alassane Ouattara in May 2011 to oversee peace efforts, prided itself for being the first of its kind to set up local commissions, ostensibly to provide a more intimate setting for testimonies and to align reconciliation protocols with local traditions (CDVR 2016: 20). Likewise, the National Programme for Social Cohesion (PNCS), the Ivoirian state's funding arm for peace projects and reparations, primarily targeted small-scale initiatives. Giulia Piccolino (2019) further notes that the spatialisation of peace in Côte d'Ivoire can be tied to a "local turn" in the field of international peace-building. The most prominent international funders in Abidjan at the time of my fieldwork all privileged explicitly local projects. In peace studies, proponents of a "local turn" argue that small-scale approaches facilitate grassroots ownership, making peace-building more participatory, better suited to contextual specificities, and overall more "emancipatory" (Mac Ginty & Richmond 2013; Hughes et al. 2015).

However, as peace geographers remind us, peace, like the local itself (Massey 1993), is always a product of power relations. Peace is continuously made "in someone's image" (McConnell & Williams 2011: 929): its definition, content and spatialisation are never independent from existing practices of rule and social inequalities. On the contrary, peace is frequently leveraged by powerful actors, not least governments, to increase their legitimacy or political capital (McConnell et al. 2014). As Patricia Daley (2014) and Nicole Laliberté (2016) demonstrate, furthermore, international agencies' racialised and gendered visions of peace continue to re-inscribe social and political hierarchies in African contexts. Beyond institutional peace-building, Philippa Williams (2013; 2015) has shown that even "everyday," vernacular practices of peace can end up reproducing power asymmetries, by leaving them unspoken or unchallenged.

Such a critical, geographical approach has at least three implications for an analysis of local peace in Abidjan. First, it focuses attention on the ways peace and the local, as processes shot through with power, mutually constitute each other. As Williams (2015: 3) puts it, "peace makes place and place makes peace." This is an important departure from a tendency within peace studies to treat the local as a pre-existing entity and, on that basis, to question its suitability for peace-building. As I detail below, the question in Abidjan was not whether the local was the "right scale" for peace but *what kind of local* was being enacted in its name.

Second, peace geographers caution against the neat demarcation between peace and conflict (Koopman 2011a: 93), either temporally or ontologically. They call instead for close attention to continuities and ruptures in the apparatuses and practices through which power is exercised. This allows a more precise view of what is actually involved in the transition from violence to peace. In Côte d'Ivoire, several analysts have noted that Alassane Ouattara, despite his attempts to distinguish himself from his predecessors, perpetuated practices of political domination – including a winner-takes-all approach to power that can be traced back to single-party rule (Akindès 2017). A year after the 2011 post-electoral conflict, Richard Banégas (2012: 3) found that "Ouattara and his allies [held] a monopoly over all levers of political and administrative life." In part, Ouattara's domination was achieved through the weaponisation of transitional justice, which disproportionately targeted Gbagbo supporters (Piccolino 2019): at the time of my fieldwork, hundreds of militants were in prison or in exile. Gbagbo himself awaits the outcome of his trial for crimes against

humanity at The Hague's International Criminal Court, following a first acquittal. Such a context, and especially the continuities that it puts into play, is essential to contextualise local peace-building in Abidjan, not least to understand various actors' attitudes toward the state.

However, the making of local peace cannot be explained through the single variable of political domination. This is the third implication of a geographical approach to peace. Peace geographers, following work in critical, feminist and subaltern geopolitics (e.g. Secor 2001; Hyndman 2001; Koopman 2011b; Sharp 2011), have pushed for consideration of multiple agencies in the making of peace, beyond traditional power-holders and institutional architectures. Without diminishing the role of established geopolitical actors, geographers have shown activist or community initiatives (e.g. Megoran 2011; Koopman 2011b; Courtheyn 2018), as well as everyday practices and imaginaries (e.g. Williams 2015; Bregazzi & Jackson 2018), to be important in the shaping of peace. This opens the question of power itself to a plurality of influences, modalities and directions. In other words, local peace in Abidjan is best investigated as the *contested* product of disparate and unequally positioned agencies.

Local radio, or peace-building between street and state

Local radio in Abidjan demonstrates the importance of continuities in the exercise of power. It also makes clear that, even in a context of political domination, power is not a singular mechanic but a diverse and often ambiguous field, characterised by uncertainty.

Stations like RAC and RFY are paradoxical or "hybrid" media (Gagliardone 2016). On the one hand, they are a crowning achievement of media "liberalisation" in the 1990s, and of democratisation more broadly. Until 1990, all media in Côte d'Ivoire were state-controlled. Protests forced the PDCI party-state (*Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire*, in power since 1960) to relinquish some of its grip on the media landscape. When local stations were created in 1995, they offered ordinary citizens unrivalled opportunities for participation. As a result, as I show elsewhere (Author 2018), many stations have developed a deep, "rhizomatic" (Bosch 2010) embeddedness in a multiplicity of communities and networks. It is partly for this reason that international funders prize local radio. RAC and RFY's publics shows in Abobo and Yopougon were typical in this regard. Stations received funds from USAID to host these shows, but principally to liaise with neighbourhood organisations and ensure their collaboration.

On the other hand, however, local radio was from its inception in 1995 a highly policed space of talk. Some stations, like RFY, are owned by municipal authorities, themselves party-controlled.[1] Other outlets, like RAC, are privately-owned, but frequently depend on municipal subsidies (for a more detailed account of structures of ownership, see Author, forthcoming b). Most fundamentally, stations are prevented by law from "producing or broadcasting content of a political nature" (HACA 2014), lest they incur sanctions from the government-appointed regulator (the *Haute autorité de la communication audiovisuelle*, or HACA). This vague clause facilitates censorship at all levels and ensures that oppositional perspectives are dampened on the local airwaves. In 1995, it was part of the PDCI party-state's efforts to retain as much control

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[1] The Yopougon municipality has been an administrative outpost of paramount strategic importance for successive Ivoirian governments.

as possible over broadcasting (Bahi 1998), and to contain democratisation.[2] In other words, local radio has *also* been part of the apparatus through which elites attempted to shape and control the local as a political territory in Abidjan.

Crucially, the prohibition of politics on the local airwaves was originally justified in the name of peace. In 1995, Ivoirian legislators invoked radio's enabling role in the Rwandan genocide to argue that the "politicisation" of the local airwaves posed a threat to public order (Théroux-Bénoni & Bahi 2008; Zio 2012). Radio thus materialises a foundational opposition between local peace and politics in Côte d'Ivoire.

This opposition was further legitimised, if not strengthened, by international agencies, who funded peace campaigns on the local airwaves from the early days of the Ivoirian conflict, and consistently praised stations for their "neutrality" in times of violent polarisation (e.g. Internews 2014). Of course, stations' neutrality was relative: between 1999 and 2011, the national and municipal actors enforcing anti-politics on local radio, in the name of peace, were frequently *the same* who sought to control local territories as part of political warfare. Despite their best intentions, stations could not somehow detach themselves from the power struggles taking place around them. Through their silences, innuendos or daily *communiqués*, many broadcasters normalised partisan and administrative violence. During the 2011 war, several stations in Abidjan (including RFY) were attacked on the basis of their perceived allegiance to one side or the other.

To recap, stations' pivotal role in local peace-building in Abidjan, after 2011, links local peace to a paradoxical legacy of democratic aspirations and political control, of grassroots participation and anti-politics. This paradox is well encapsulated in the peace-building shows that RAC and RFY organised across their districts in 2015: while these public events invited residents to discuss their experiences of conflict and their visions of peace, they could only do so within the tightly bound discourse of anti-political peace.

ANTI-POLITICAL PEACE

Concluding her critique of local peace in Côte d'Ivoire, Piccolino (2019: 368) writes:

> Taking a cynical view, it can be argued that focusing on small scale projects targeting local communities has freed both national and international actors from the imperative of addressing politically charged national level issues revolving around transitional justice and democratization.

In this section, I unpick *how* the separation of local peace from "politically charged national level issues" was enacted and justified in Abidjan. To understand this, I first turn to scholarship on anti-politics to highlight formal similarities between peace-building in Abidjan and what might be termed "anti-political localism." I then delve into the narrative scripts through which local peace programmes made sense of conflict and its aftermath.

Scripting and autonomising the local

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[2] It is worth noting that, at the time (1995), the first multi-party presidential elections were deemed so unfair that opposition parties boycotted them.

In its most general understanding, anti-politics refers to power-laden processes through which domains of public engagement are removed from overt political contest. This is often achieved in the name of technocratic efficiency – framing issues such as development, sustainability or welfare as technical problems best managed by experts (e.g. Ferguson 1994; Barry 2002) – or in the name of community empowerment (e.g. Mohan & Stokke 2000; Amin 2005; Davoudi & Mandanipour 2013), or a mixture of both, with experts positioned to guide community participation.[3] Geographers have emphasised the central role of power and space in demarcating political from non-political domains of public life. In particular, they have shown that the local is a privileged geography for anti-political programmes, gathered under the banner of "localism" (Mohan & Stokke 2000; Amin 2005; Clarke & Cochrane 2013). Without doing full justice to scholarship on anti-political localism, we can draw out three characteristics that are helpful to analyse peace-building in Abidjan.

First, anti-political localism *scripts* the local as a non-political geography in various ways. That is, localism policies and programmes, even when they purport to simply enable grassroots participation, construct the local in their own image, materialising their assumptions about the local's relation to politics (or lack thereof) (Mohan & Stokke 2000; Amin 2005).

Second, as part of its anti-political scripts, localism seeks to perform the local as a *self-contained* space of engagement (and, by that same token, bounds politics off as a distinct spatiality). Borrowing from Graham Burchell (1996: 27), we might refer to this process as the "autonomisation" of the local. Even as localism encourages grassroots participation, the latter is often focused inward toward identifying "local needs" and tackling issues that fall within a territorially bounded locality – at the expense of translocal assemblages and associated power asymmetries (Mohan & Stokke 2000). To paraphrase Doreen Massey (1993), localism's scripts make the local anti-political by denying its fundamentally relational character, and by conflating place-*based* with place-*bound* engagement.

Thirdly, anti-political scripts justify the autonomisation of the local in the name of *responsibility* (Raco & Imrie 2000; Amin 2005; Swyngedouw 2005). At the same time that localism purports to empower communities to "have a say" in various matters, it emphasises these communities' responsibility for their own activation, management, and problem-solving. This process entails close monitoring of localities' performance in a quasi-competitive framework (Raco & Imrie 2000; Swyngedouw 2005; Davoudi & Mandanipour 2013), such that local dispositions and capabilities become a dominant concern, interpreted through "a strong morality of blame and praise" (Amin 2005: 620). In turn, the rhetoric of local responsibility further naturalises the localisation of social issues, and reinforces the importance of sticking to localism's anti-political scripts.

Peace-building in Abidjan exemplified all three characteristics of anti-political localism. RAC and RFY's peace programmes were audibly scripted. Radio producers intervened directly to determine what could and could not be said, guided by their regulatory imperative to avoid political talk. Stations advanced a list of what they called "taboo words," which were presented as a kind of game (participants would be playfully reprimanded if they used the words in question).

Furthermore, RAC and RFY selected participants to embody the script of local peace. Participants were most often representatives of semi-formalised neighbourhood organisations. Not only did they enact hierarchies of gender and

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[3] While geographical literature on anti-politics does not appear to have engaged explicitly with peace-building, the latter's anti-political tendencies have been noted in IR (e.g. Chandler 2005; Bächtold 2015; Datzberger 2015).

generation in their role (with male elders' voices carrying the most weight), but they also embodied complex relations of dependence on municipal authorities, party-political patronage, and international funders. Like radio stations themselves, in other words, these neighbourhood representatives had a stake in ensuring that only the "right kind" of local talk was produced. For instance, it was in their interests to insist on the autonomisation of the local, as one neighbourhood chief in Yopougon put it:

> No one is going to fix Côte d'Ivoire's problems except for ourselves. In my neighbourhood, we chiefs have come together to bring forth social cohesion. (Day of Peace show)

As I expand on below, this view of the local as an autonomous space of peace-making was linked to a broader discourse about neighbourhoods' responsibility for post-conflict reform, tied to a forceful rejection of politics.

Lastly, the script of local peace in Abidjan was shaped by unspoken expectations. Participants knew they could not talk about politics on programmes organised by local stations, and, considering what I have written above about the Ouattara regime, many likely thought it wise to avoid open critiques of the government. While it would be too hasty to conclude that participants self-censored (see below), what they felt able to say was conditioned by what they knew about radio's entanglements with power, as well as their anxieties about repression in the pre-electoral context in 2015 (see Author, forthcoming a).

If local peace-building in Abidjan exhibited several formal similarities with anti-political localism elsewhere, however, it also complicates any mechanical transposition. In particular, it cautions against interpreting anti-politics within a singular logic of power, be it "neoliberal governmentality" (Raco 2003; Davoudi & Mandanipour 2013), "post-political democracy" (Swyngedouw 2011; 2017) or simply "elite strategies" of rule (Clarke 2015; Barry 2002).

To begin with, anti-politics in Abidjan was not *only* a government injunction: for many, it was a moral imperative (echoing Spencer 2012). Radio producers discussed anti-politics as a positive aspect of their work. For example, Germaine, a journalist at RFY, explained to me during my second visit to the studio:

> We radios don't do politics. That's a good thing! Look at the newspapers. Politics is what messed everything up [*c'est la politique qui a tout mélangé*] in this country (field notes, 4 December 2014).

Such a statement can be related to my Whiteness, which almost automatically tied me to development work in Abidjan (see Pierre 2013). Considering international agencies' legitimation of "non-political" peace-building during the Ivoirian conflict, Germaine possibly thought she was saying what I wanted to hear. As suggested previously, furthermore, Germaine's claim that her own station "didn't do politics" was belied by RFY's association with the municipal, partisan agenda in Yopougon. Nonetheless, anti-politics provided a source of legitimation for local broadcasting that was not reducible to partisan hypocrisy or fear of government repression. For producers, anti-politics could be a source of pride and a condition for their relative independence, as signalled by Germaine's contrast between local radio and newspapers: the latter are unambiguously party-aligned, and were widely accused of fanning the flames of violence during conflict (Théroux-Bénoni & Bahi 2008; Zio 2012).

Moreover, Germaine's rejection of politics as a source of disorder was widely shared in Abidjan. As I show in the final section, ordinary urban dwellers also framed peace as the minimisation or containment of politics. This furthers James Spencer's (2012) observation in Sri Lanka that many community organisations sought to distance themselves from politics, and oriented members' activities to this effect. In a UK context, Nick Clarke (2015; Clarke et al. 2018) also discusses anti-politics as a two-dimensional phenomenon, with an elite or institutional dimension and "popular" or "folk" manifestations. I consider the resonances between different forms of anti-politics in Abidjan at the end of this article. For now, my point is that, to capture the contextual nuances of peace-building as a form of anti-political localism in Abidjan, it is vital to look beyond governmental power as the sole source of authorship. If local radio's peace programmes were scripted, they were not entirely pre-written.

The starkest indication of this is that radio producers had no clear idea of what "content of a political nature" actually meant. They could not rely on any guidance or jurisprudence from the HACA – there is none[4] – to decide what they should keep off the airwaves. During interviews, producers gave varying interpretations. And during the preparation meetings ahead of RFY and RAC's first public shows, decisions over what words to make taboo were thoroughly *ad hoc*. This makes all the more necessary a detailed, ethnographic examination of local peace programmes in their unfolding. This reveals the complex discursive dynamics at work in the making of anti-political peace, and provides a fuller picture of *what kinds of politics* were "interrupted" (Murray Li 2019) in its name.

Pathologising politics: conflict as collective excess

RAC and RFY's peace-building shows all began by asking participants, in different neighbourhoods of Abobo and Yopougon, "what went wrong" for conflict to happen. But in 2015, anticipating new presidential elections, producers were mostly keen to "draw lessons" to avoid repeating "past mistakes." Narratives of conflict primarily served to bolster the case for peace and to present it as a break from the past. What I want to show here is that local peace programmes circulated a narrative of conflict as generalised political excess. In this narrative, politics and conflict were folded into one another and manifested as pathological behaviour. The significance of *local* peace-building for this narrative was twofold: first, by fostering scripted accounts of "what went wrong," radio programmes obfuscated responsibilities for violence; second, and relatedly, they emphasised local complicity in the pathological politics of conflict. This paved the way for an understanding of peace as individual self-reform and local autonomisation from politics, as I discuss in the following section.

The narrative of conflict as collective political excess did not originate with local peace programmes, but can be traced to more powerful discourses. Its clearest expression can be found in the final report of the CDVR, the national truth and reconciliation commission. As many critics have noted, the CDVR was hindered in its truth-telling mission by underfunding, continued insecurity, and interference by the Ouattara regime. The commission's final report, delayed until after the 2015 presidential elections, was allegedly significantly redacted (Piccolino 2019: 368). The

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[4] I interviewed the President of the HACA in January 2016 and had off-the-record conversations with a HACA employee during my fieldwork in 2015. I obtained a copy of the regulatory texts that all local stations receive from the regulator. Lastly, I engaged HACA legal experts during a workshop in June 2019. At no point, despite my repeated inquiries, could anyone provide me with a clear definition of "content of a political nature" (*contenu à caractère politique*).

section where it presents its own conclusions on "what went wrong," is strikingly devoid of specifics. It begins by linking the entirety of the Ivoirian conflict to "the search for a society of abundance and freedom," which led Ivoirians to "[lose] our culture of restraint" (CDVR 2016: 98). As a result, the report continues, political engagement became pathological:

> 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 (ibid.).

Reduced to "mutual blackmail," politics had no meaningful content to speak of. Crucially, it involved no defined power hierarchy; by implication, conflict politics made clear attributions of responsibility impossible.

RAC and RFY's local peace programmes repeatedly echoed CDVR's narrative of conflict. They did so, first, by preventing programme participants from attributing responsibility for conflict. This was arguably the main purpose of the taboo words evoked above. Consider how RFY's host introduced the station's first public show:

> We are here to take stock [...] of what went wrong. […] Through the past, we hope to find solutions, considering that this year [2015] will be crucial for all of us. [...] Meanwhile, dear audience, there are some expressions that our debaters cannot use. We cannot mention political parties, or the name of politicians, even less anything like LMP [pro-Gbagbo group], FRCI [pro-Ouattara forces], ONUCI [UN peace-keeping mission], Licorne [French battalion]... We don't say 'war' [*la guerre*]. These are words which left a mark during the post-electoral crisis [*des termes qui nous ont marqués*], and words which we cannot use here. (Personal recording, 22 March 2015)

The taboo words included all geopolitical actors involved in the Ivoirian conflict, and indeed the very notion of conflict itself: the latter is referred to in Côte d'Ivoire as "crisis." As Janet Roitman argues (2014), the term "crisis" allows narratives to posit a historical break while masking the underlying, normative and teleological assumptions through which these same narratives link past, present and future. Unlike the word "war," simply, crisis requires neither identifiable parties, motives for violence, nor consideration of outcomes. Local peace programmes' imperative to avoid placing responsibility manifested in other ways, beyond the explicitly taboo words. During RFY's Day of Peace show, for example, one participant was further told off for using the word "executioner" (*bourreau*) because distinguishing perpetrators from victims was itself "contrary to reconciliation" (Day of Peace show).

The impact of taboo words on local accounts of conflict was not so much a silencing of the past, to evoke Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995), as its *obfuscation*. They prevented a clear chronology of conflict, and its concrete spatialisation. While the RFY host's itemisation of taboo words at the beginning of the show paradoxically acknowledged the role of political parties and paramilitary factions in the Ivoirian conflict, participants could not relate their own experiences to any of these actors' ideologies or practices. Local events remained unnamed and unexplained. If "many

things happened here," as one public show participant put it in Yopougon (personal recording, 9 August 2015), these "things" could neither be described nor situated within specific geographies and structures of responsibility (Massey 2004). Despite their claim to put forward local experiences of conflict, then, RFY and RAC's peace-building shows dissolved any possibility of actually placing conflict, of articulating relations between neighbourhood occurrences and distant events. What remained was an a-spatial narrative of crisis in which, because responsibility was impossible to pinpoint, everyone was potentially implicated.

Indeed, many aspects of local peace programmes implied that citizens had all played a role in conflict. For example, humorous sketches, featuring popular comedians such as Dr Philo, routinely derided stereotyped characters – usually uneducated men, strongly ethnicised in their attire and accents – for the mixture of ignorance and aggressiveness with which they approached electoral politics, from voter registration to post-election celebration. Through these caricatures, they linked the violence of 2011 to pervasive excess: neighbourhood political engagement, it was shown, had gone beyond reason and even beyond individuals' abilities to understand what they were getting involved in. More seriously, discussions of "what went wrong" during RAC and RFY's round-tables unfailingly returned to citizens' behaviour – their "lack of love," "lack of fraternity," "lack of solidarity," or "miscommunication." One participant on RFY's Day of Peace show, a Muslim educator from one of Yopougon's informal neighbourhoods, put it most unambiguously:

> When today the Head of State says *émergence*; when everywhere you hear *émergence*. Well, *émergence* is a behaviour. It is our own that needs to change. The hate we carried in us, we need to get it out. [...] If we really want an "emergent nation" in 2020, we need to accept this.

In his intervention, the educator linked conflict to collective pathology, implying that citizens carried "hate in their hearts." His reference to *émergence* in 2020 – Ouattara's re-election slogan in 2015, promising the inclusion of Côte d'Ivoire amongst emergent economies by the end of his second mandate – provides an example of how local peace programmes refracted governmental discourses under the guise of grassroots awareness-raising. In this quote we can also discern the role that obfuscated narratives of crisis played in the scripting of local peace: if conflict could be attributed to pathological politics, then the surest path to peace was depoliticisation.

Local peace as depoliticisation: Removing overflow

The idea of conflict politics as an excess to be removed permeated what Francis Akindès (2017: 9) calls Alassane Ouattara's "depoliticising approach" to peace. Akindès insists on Ouattara's technocratic style of government and focus on macro-economic growth as the sole horizon for peace, both manifesting a desire to re-centre public life away from political contention. We might add that Ouattara's approach to urban space was also a very clear expression of his anti-political ideology. In the immediate aftermath of conflict, Ouattara ordered the demolition of prominent discussion spaces in Abidjan (Banégas & Cutolo 2012). Later, during my fieldwork, municipalities held by Ouattara's RDR party (*Rassemblement des républicains*) razed dozens of open-air bars (*maquis*) popular with pro-Gbagbo militants. Even after Ouattara's re-election in 2015, public demonstrations remained systematically banned in the name of public order. Threaded through these interventions was not only the

revanchist silencing of opposition, but, more broadly, a desire to rid the city of ordinary militancy, conceptualised as "dirty" or "noisy," both out of order and out of place.[5] By 2015, even Ouattara's own supporters resented his distance from the street as a locus of political engagement (Miran-Guyon 2017; Konaté 2017).

Local peace programmes also framed peace as the evacuation of politics. Most centrally, this involved autonomising the local as a site of responsibility. If the local had been dissolved in the general breakdown of crisis, it was now to be reclaimed as a firmly bounded, self-sufficient and by that token non-political geography. Take the following exchange, from RFY's Day of Peace round-table programme. After one of the participants (already quoted above) had argued that "no one will fix Côte d'Ivoire's problems except for us," emphasising the exclusive nature of local responsibility for peace, the show's host asked, rhetorically:

> Host: What about institutions? Some people want a strong signal from the state [meaning material reparations, a contentious issue in 2015] – but should we wait for institutions to come to us before we reconcile ourselves?
>
> Participant [another neighbourhood chief from Yopougon]: 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 [...] it will touch the population more deeply.

The exchange bluntly argued for separation between "the population" and "institutions" as unrelated realms of activity. Importantly, minimising the former's demands on the latter was presented as a one of the conditions for local autonomy to be re-affirmed. In the name of peace, citizens had to tone down their claims. This was a frequent subtext also in government discourse. As one example amongst many, we might consider the following excerpt from a speech by the (Ouattara-appointed) head of the national Observatory for Solidarity and Social Cohesion:

> Access to health, access to basic social services [...] when all 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 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. (I. T. Coulibaly in AIP, 29 November 2016)

In this speech, what began as an agreement that reform was required at both everyday and institutional levels turned quickly into the one-sided "evidence" that citizens bettering themselves was the key to peace. Moreover, Coulibaly implied that citizens had no business questioning institutional dynamics. The expression "accusing Pierre or Paul" denotes an undiscerning ignorance, and implicitly positioned health and basic social services as complex issues best left to experts.

The emphasis on citizens' self-reform, to be demonstrated by turning away from institutions, justified the policing of claims and critique during peace-building shows. That is, it involved silencing ways of talking that were deemed "too political." What this

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[5] For example, the leading pro-government daily applauded Ouattara's order to dismantle oppositional street discussion spaces in 2011 by describing them as "sordid, dirty and ragged" (in Banégas & Cutolo 2012: 22).

entailed is best illustrated by RAC's first public show, in the poor and peripheral neighbourhood of PK-18 (Abobo). Radio hosts were unable to steer the conversation and the leader of a neighbourhood women's group expressed her anger at the government's post-conflict reparations programme. She argued that, despite state visits and pledges, ceremonies and promises, PK-18 had "received nothing." She held central and municipal governments responsible for diverting post-conflict aid. She talked of impoverishment and unfair slum clearance campaigns 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" (field notes, 26 April 2015). Her words drew applause from the crowd. But they were never broadcast, as initially intended, and later shows were more tightly policed. When I asked a lead producer whether this additional policing was linked to RAC's PK-18 experience, he responded:

> Of course, and it's deliberate! You were there with us. People were out of line [*il y a eu des débordements* – literally "things overflowed"], they strayed, there were claims [*revendications*] that went beyond the show's objectives. Because our objective 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)

The RAC producer's remarks provide a better sense of what made talk "too political." Talk was political when it spilled out from the local, breaching the separation between everyday and institutional processes in the making of peace. In addition, echoing conceptions of politics as excess during the Ivoirian conflict, talk was political when it stirred negative emotions. Political talk was understood to unleash overwhelming, even dangerous feelings of anger and pain (on the contested role of emotions in post-conflict settlements, see e.g. Ure 2008; Chakravarti 2014). Thus, the "taboo words" were partly justified because they might trigger uncontrollable responses from youth whose "heart is still too hot," as one RFY producer put it (field notes, 16 March 2015). Politics as overflow, then, was both a statement of relation between the local and its outside, and a style of claims-making and critique, rooted in emotional landscapes marked by shifting but enduring violence.

ANTI-POLITICS AS A FIELD OF CONTEST

In the previous section, I argued that local peace programmes circulated discourses promoting anti-politics – the autonomisation of the local and the containment of claims-making – as a remedy for the collective excesses of conflict. In this way, stations like RAC and RFY entrenched an opposition between anti-political peace and politics-as-conflict, which I have shown to be both long-standing in Côte d'Ivoire (it underpinned local radio regulations), and central to the Ouattara government's ideology. In this concluding section, I want to consider some of the ways the discourse of anti-political peace was contested in Abidjan.

As the PK-18 example above makes clear, radio producers were not always successful in scripting peace programmes. Another example of contest comes from Yopougon's SOGEFIHA neighbourhood, an area of densely packed low-rise houses, and the site of RFY's second public show in 2015. During the round-table discussion, one of the participants – the male president of SOGEFIHA's youth section (*association des jeunes*) – challenged the station's prohibition of the word "war." He argued that

one of the conditions for reconciliation was "calling things what they are." After the hosts threatened to exclude him from the discussion, he agreed to settle for the word "conflict" and the discussion proceeded as follows:

> Host: So, president, can you now please tell us what went wrong [leading to violence]?
>
> Youth leader: I would say that what went wrong is we [*on*, indefinite we] didn't take ordinary people into account. We played along with politicians' games.
>
> Host: We played politicians' games. [To the other guests] Is that an opinion you share?
>
> Elder: Yes, we blindly followed politicians. You have to admit that politicians are at the root of our misfortune. [...] Because you had politicians telling people to do this or that –
>
> Host: Let's avoid quoting them.
>
> Elder: I don't need to name names. Today, you have A, B, and C – and they all just tell us 'do this, do that, do that'. (Personal recording, 5 April 2015)

This exchange was tense, as evidenced by the host's readiness to interrupt. While it technically stayed within the bounds of what could be uttered, it challenged the scripts I have outlined above by placing responsibility for conflict squarely with political elites, as well as indicating that local occurrences were entangled with power struggles at wider scales. At the same time, the way SOGEFIHA participants expressed their critique of politicians was anti-political. In some ways, it did fall within the show's script, especially when participants evoked citizens' pathological political dispositions (the metaphor of "blindness"), and their passivity in following politicians' orders.

Local radio's rhetoric of anti-political peace was contested more broadly in Abidjan. Many residents, across ethnic and partisan lines, faulted their local station for serving government interests over listeners'. Let me give just two examples. In Adjamé, the city's central and hyper-dense trading district, I attended a *grin*, a street-side tea circle where Muslim men discuss current affairs (Vincourt & Kouyaté 2012). During my first visit, I introduced my research and mentioned to attendants that I would be working closely with Adjamé's local station, Radio Téré. *Grin* members were immediately dismissive:

> [A taxi driver] argues that Radio Téré should ditch politics. "We're tired of politics," he claims [*on est fatigué de la politique*], and calls once again for the station to come to the *grin* and hear "real talk" [*ici on parle des réalités*]. (Field notes, March 10, 2015)

In Yopougon, a young man echoed the *grin* members' dismissal when he accused his local station, RFY, of having "turned everything into politics [*ils ont tout politisé*]" (interview, 3 July 2015). Most *grin* members identified as RDR (Ouattara) voters; the young man in Yopougon was upfront about his pro-Gbagbo leanings. There would be much to say about how each quote tied to different political leanings and

inchoate frustrations with partisan polarisation, lack of political accountability, and absence of recognition for ordinary militants. My point is not that these two examples are equivalent, but that they are united in their rejection of anti-politics. Both correctly identified anti-politics on the local airwaves as a political project, one that served the consolidation of power. And yet, as with the SOGEFIHA discussion, these critiques ended up being anti-political themselves. They left unchallenged the idea that politics was a *problem*, something to be kept at bay from everyday public life.

The question is how we, as critical scholars, can make sense of the echoes between, on the one hand, the institutional discourse of anti-political peace, and, on the other, popular, anti-political critiques of anti-politics. Such echoes have been cause for concern elsewhere. In the UK, Nick Clarke (2015: 191) sees elite-driven anti-politics as a self-reinforcing dynamic that engenders further anti-political sentiment, leading to a "mutual withdrawal by politicians and citizens" from electoral politics. In Côte d'Ivoire, such a process might be discernible in the relatively low turnout observed during the 2015 presidential elections, as well as during subsequent elections and the 2016 constitutional reform referendum (Zina 2017; Bouquet 2017). Even more pessimistically, Erik Swyngedouw (2011; 2017; Wilson & Swyngedouw 2014) has argued that anti-politics fosters a new ideological consensus – what he refers to as the "post-political condition" – around the undesirability of politics, which entrenches injustice and closes down the possibility of genuine dissent. Swyngedouw further suggests that, in the long run, anti-political consensus pushes dissatisfaction with the status quo toward its most violent forms of expression.

Indeed, in the context of Abidjan, the most troubling aspect of widespread anti-politics is that it left unchallenged the dichotomy between anti-political peace and politics-as-conflict. This government-constructed binary, as mentioned, has hindered democratisation since the 1990s, and along with it the emergence of more bottom-up "other securities" (Koopman 2011b). This is not to say the latter do not exist, but that in 2014-16 they remained off the radar. Indeed, they were barely allowed to feature as legitimate contributors to the discourse of local peace, on the airwaves or off. Crucially, grassroots efforts for peace were not able to emerge audibly as shared grounds for *a different kind of politics*. Popular anti-politics in Abidjan was self-defeating in that it entrenched the local and the political as autonomous spheres of action rather than seek to reclaim the latter from the former. In this way, popular anti-politics left grassroots actors "only able to address the consequences of conflict, but rarely its cause," which most recognised to be elite-led politics (Spencer 2012: 731).

However, established geographical critiques of anti-politics as a self-perpetuating dynamic are also unsatisfactory. This is because they are often underpinned by normative assumptions about what politics should look like – assumptions that are ill-suited to a context like Abidjan. For Clarke (2015), countering anti-politics' negative effects involves conscious and collective re-investment in electoral and representative democracy. While there have been some efforts by civil society in Côte d'Ivoire to promote independent candidates in local elections, the "embedded ritual" (Willems 2012) of elections currently remains very much intertwined with the elite politics that lorded over violence (all main candidates for the 2020 presidential elections, for example, have been key actors of conflict). This is not to dismiss the importance of electoral reform in Côte d'Ivoire, but to note that a grassroots "return" to the ballot box on its own looks unlikely to alter the configurations fuelling anti-political sentiment. In contrast to Clarke, Swyngedouw (2011; 2017) finds electoral politics virtually hopeless; he identifies the "properly political" moment as one where *radical democratic alternatives* can be articulated. Meaningful politics is to be

found in insurgent ruptures that throw the existing socio-political order into question and offer a set of competing, universalising demands. While I would not want to make any claims about the likelihood of such upheavals in Abidjan, it seems reckless to pin on them all hopes for a more peaceful, democratic reclaiming of politics – in a city where violent insurgencies are part of recent memory (see Barnett & Bridge 2013: 1023; Rose 2019).

While Clarke and Swyngedouw's approaches to anti-politics are very different, in their own way they work within a predetermined understanding of politics, bounding how anti-politics might be meaningfully contested. What I want to retain, against both of these critiques, is the disjuncture between institutional and popular anti-politics in the Ivoirian metropolis – and its continued fertility as a field of contest. As Ben Gerlofs (2019) shows in his ethnography of anti-political sentiment in Mexico City, everyday anti-politics spawns all sorts of imaginative critiques, not least through humour, and paradoxically sustains citizens' oppositional attempts to alter the course of political processes – what he calls (ibid.: 383) "the hopeful refusal of perceived political realities." In Abidjan, similarly, despite widespread anti-politics, local radio listeners continued to test the bounds of political discourse by calling out governmental abuses and false promises. For example, a regular listener in Abobo one day called RAC to complain about the demolition of her business to make way for a road that never came. While she approved of her local station's anti-politics, she agreed that she always found ways to "manifest [her] own politics," as she put it (Interview, 25 June 2015).

As postcolonial scholars further remind us, citizens in much of the world have long lived politics as and in the gaps between institutional and everyday realities, formal and informal modes of influence, overt rebellion and covert subversion (e.g. Simone 2004; Chatterjee 2004; Bayat 2010; Pithouse 2013). In Abidjan, agreement over the undesirability of politics did not erase disagreements over its meaning. In the end, perhaps the impossibility of defining politics *a priori* is the point, as feminist geographers (Staeheli & Kofman 2004; also Barnett 2017) have often pointed out. Just as local radio stations could not definitively pin down what kind of politics they should silence, those who resented the airwaves' "politicisation" could hardly isolate a realm of politics of which they were not part. In this way, they remained entangled in a tussle over what the "right kind" of politics might be, whose outcome in Abidjan is yet to be determined.

CONCLUSION

After a decade of political conflict, peace-building in Abidjan focused on re-constructing the local as a depoliticised space of public life. Understanding this process in critical geographical terms is essential for several reasons. First, it sheds additional light on the "failures" of peace in Côte d'Ivoire. As critics have noted, peace-building seemed to focus on local social relations at the expense of meaningful political reform, not least long-delayed democratisation (Piccolino 2019; Akindès & Zina 2015; Akindès 2017). Close attention to local peace, as a discourse and a scripted performance, allows us to grasp how these two realms – local relations and politics – came to be separated, as well as how this separation was justified even as the Ivoirian conflict had demonstrated their entanglement. I have shown that local peace-building programmes re-activated and circulated a government discourse opposing politics-as-conflict to anti-political peace. The need to move from one to the other was underpinned by narratives of conflict as pervasive political excess. As a remedy, anti-political peace insisted on the local's capacity to re-affirm its autonomy as a site of

responsibility for peace. This justified the policing of "political" conduct, including claims-making, in the name of empowering individual self-reform.

While local peace in Abidjan exhibited many formal similarities with what is elsewhere called anti-political localism, I have argued for the value of ethnographic attention to anti-politics' situated justifications and precarious unfolding. The discursive rationales and power configurations that made anti-political peace possible in Abidjan cannot be reduced to a single logic. To fully understand it, it is necessary to historicise anti-political peace, to diffract it through the prism of competing perspectives, and to track it through the work of intermediaries – of which local radio stations offer a complex but revealing example. This is another way of arguing for the kind of detailed, critical and contextual work undertaken by peace geographers. In Abidjan, such an investigation reveals that the discourse of anti-political peace was not new after 2011. Its history as a tool of political domination shows that anti-political peace and politics-as-conflict, far from being opposites, were co-existing modalities of power in the Ivoirian metropolis, both working to control the local in the service of political elites.

At the same time, I have shown that anti-political peace was not merely a government template imposed on the local. This was, first, because the precise meaning of politics, as that which ought to be avoided or cordoned off, remained unclear, indeed necessarily so. As a result, the performance of local peace, however scripted, involved moments of negotiation, tension and opposition. Secondly, anti-political sentiment was widespread in the post-conflict metropolis. For local radio producers, the opposition between peace and politics was part of their professional identity. More broadly, ordinary residents frequently expressed their critiques of governing elites in anti-political terms. These echoes make critical analysis complex. While it is tempting to ascribe unequivocal significance to this apparent anti-political consensus – as either good or bad, legitimate or engineered – I argue for a more "hesitant" (Rose 2019) reading: hesitant not about the need for a more emancipatory peace congruent with Ivoirians' democratic aspirations, but about the possibility and even desirability of reasoning from a single, normative definition of politics. While I cannot emphasise enough that the binary opposition of anti-political peace and political conflict was a false one, any alternative – any articulation of peaceful politics – will have to come from the streets of Abidjan themselves.

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