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What is radical?
Silent and noisy intersections in Abidjan's struggles against housing precarity

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Abstract

Is it time to reconsider *radical* housing struggles? This is the main question animating the article, in the light of telling evidence from Abidjan's contemporary evictions, where dwellers put in place a plethora of practices against their displacement, from collective to individual ones. The study builds on Abidjan's eviction programs under the SDUGA (Schéma Directeur d'Urbanisme Grand Abidjan) to pick up three urban scenarios of neighbourhoods' reaction to precarity, considering data from scientific and administrative papers, press review, and interviews and participant observations. Conventional and non-conventional forms of reaction to eviction in the three case studies inform a more dynamic reading of the concept of radicality. A radicality referred to the aim and not to the outcome of a struggle, a subjective concept belonging to the perception of those who struggle, an objective feature that shares a semantic familiarity with the essential core of the oppressive force.

Keywords

Urban political sociology, housing studies, evictions, Abidjan, qualitative research.

1. Configurations, un-makings and quiet noises of precarity. Conceptual keys to rethink housing struggles

In the urban edge, life is profound and persistent suffering, and therefore volatile, but (even) in the instability and despair the human being (alone or in a group) can find themself grappling with amazing experiments: this is the physical and conceptual locus of what in this paper is called 'precarity', with specific reference to the housing sphere.

Analysing social struggles at the urban edge is not a fad for scientists, but a necessity for decision makers and civil societies. This holds true especially as far as housing issues are concerned, as from within housing struggles, scholars at the crossroads of research and activism are able to address vital questions that cannot be properly answered from the outside. Questions such as: 'What are the actual needs of people living in precarious conditions?'; 'How can these needs be properly met by decision makers?'; etc. And the more scholars have paid attention to multilocal dynamics, stimulating scientific dialogues that reflect the globality of housing issues, the more powerful their insights have been (Martínez 2018).

But how is it that an event or a process is defined as a 'housing struggle' and therefore as worth being studied and divulged? How does it happen that a researcher is attracted by a housing struggle?

Literature in the subfield of housing studies is a rich of example of 'radical' struggles, i.e., cases in which the urban marginalised unite against the political and economic agents that force them out of home. There, neighbours coalesce in more or less structured social movements so as to harmonise their reactions, taking up the streets and squatting apartments or entire buildings and frequently being targeted by police violence, institutional buck-passing, and civic indifference. But what makes these cases 'radical' examples? Is it because of their formal characteristics, their being 'noisy', so to speak? Or perhaps this is an incomplete list that could include even more examples, such as cases of 'quieter' housing struggles?

Let us look again at what is behind precarity today. Housing precarity is gobbling up the most diverse residential settings, urban cores and peripheries (Hepburn et al., 2022), less advantaged groups as much as parts of the middle class (Davis, 2017), cities in the Global South as well as in the Global North (Aguilera et al., 2018; Blot and Spire, 2014). The unprecedented upsurge of housing precarity, one may think, would trigger transversal agreements among the marginalised, eventually united by the same pain and committed to the same fight (Harvey, 2012). In fact, this is seldom the case. As omnipresent in the contemporary city as it is, precarity is also getting more and more routinised, justified with magniloquent promises of city beautification, collective growth, and urban development (Brickell et al., 2017; Harvey, 2007; Lees, 2012; Sassen, 2014). Chances of radically subverting this status quo may be now at their lowest level, making up the exception rather than the rule as new forms of reactions appear beside confrontational ones (Desmond, 2016). Put otherwise, people are still fighting against their marginalisation, but in absence of great political resources, less noisy movements prevail most of the time.[1] In other words, people are weaker and distrustful of their peers, but this does not make them any less pissed off.

By acknowledging that any attempt of rebellion is (also) exogenously determined, this contribution attributes a primordial relevance to the study of the political opportunities in

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[1] To direct the attention to more silent struggles also implies working on social problems that, although dramatic and disconcerting, do not need drastic, harmful actions to be 'solved' but rather pre-emptive, collectively concerted interventions (Dall'Ò et al., 2022).

play from the point of view of the precarious neighbourhood (Tarrow, 1994). Chances to react may change across residential communities depending on a broader political equilibrium, that is, on the configuration of interests, powers and needs of several city actors (Vitale, 2019 Weinstein and Ren, 2009). To use a metaphor that has been recently rehabilitated from political science, (housing) struggles are inscribed in institutional arenas where legal boundaries for collective and individual actions are fixed (Salvaire, 2020; Stoppino, 2015 [1983]). So, it is worth the researcher asking whether these boundaries are rigid or porous, and from where these boundaries can be penetrated and how. In other words, it is worth considering how power is distributed among relevant actors, namely studying which actor is able to change or affect the 'arena' in which it operates and how.

And of course, 'housing precarity' is a condition that is exogenously imposed but also potentially criticised and unmade from within (Lancione, 2019), depending on the politico-economic resources inherent in the precarious group. 'Social crystals' do not immediately perish when hit (Brighenti and Kärrholm, 2021), they rather evolve based on what is spared, i.e., the vibrant immateriality of home – namely, home's ability to 'reflect the (ever-changing) interplay between intimate, familial, private and broader social, economic and political spheres of influence' (Beeckmans et al., 2022:18; see also Boccagni and Kusenbach, 2020).

Yet, several observers have been witnessing a global shift from less traditionally contentious movements towards silent, progressive reactions against marginalisation (Bayat, 1997; Boltanski and Chiappello, 2005; Della Porta and Diani; 2020, Simone, 2004; Tilly and Tarrow, 2015). In housing studies as well, a growing literature is demonstrating how silent activities are surging and often powerfully altering housing marginalization—activities that range from: the exchange of useful information among neighbors; covert operations that sabotage public infrastructure works; civil society pressure on members of the local political class; and even social imaginary exchanges and resistance thinking and dreaming among pairs (Accornero, 2021; Centner, 2012; François, 2014; Ghazali, 2021; Soaita, 2022; Vieira da Cunha, 2018).

The short theoretical discussion which has just been completed sheds light on new targets to focus on when aiming at a critical reframing of the notion of radical housing struggle. I refer to these tools as conceptual possibilities or 'keys', formulated to: a) establish and qualify the political factors that are external to a community and may lead to a precarious housing condition; b) acknowledge the socio-political resources available to an inhabitant or neighbourhood to cope with its precarious condition; c) consider all possible forms of housing struggles, including those that can arise from silent, progressive practices of resistance developed by precarious dwellers.

2. Methods and contents

The following text is organised as follows. In section 3, Abidjan contemporary transformations are illustrated. First, a digression on the urban governance under the colonial rule is made so as to better access the ambiguity of present times, where urban development plans are pushing for a new historical wave of mass evictions. To this end, references are

made to recent scientific works, archive materials and the main contents of the Schéma Directeur d'Urbanisme Grand Abidjan (SDUGA), the urban master plan for the city that is set to expire in 2030. The section ends with a first overview of the eviction processes involving the two urban settings of Port-Bouët and the 4th bridge area.

Sections 4.1 and 4.2 deal respectively with the urban areas of Port-Bouët and the 4th bridge. Following the three conceptual keys formulated above, and drawing from a variety of qualitative data, the following interventions are made: a) the institutional arenas hosting the housing struggles in the two neighbourhoods are defined based on existing official documents and statements by civil servants and politicians and on the news; b) the internal composition of precarious communities is enlightened by resorting to already existent scientific works, online press, and social media; c) the struggles carried out by community members are investigated through interviews collected directly and indirectly and participant observations so as to access both the personal narratives and feelings of the neighbours and their actual actions.[2] Section 4.3 includes insights that are specific only to the case of Doukouré, a neighbourhood in Yopougon that has been significantly hit by 4th bridge-related evictions. There data from twenty in-depth interviews and respective participant observations have been selected as telling material for reconsidering the notion of 'radicality' in the framework of contemporary housing struggles—anticipating the final theoretical remarks included in the conclusive section.

3. Abidjan. A new wave of déguerpissements[3] falls over the 'triumph of the elephant'[4]

The city of Abidjan gives an ideal setting where to apply the article's theoretical reasoning, as likewise many non-Western urban regions, it offers plenty of information about housing struggles that, contrary to Western canons, do not necessarily contemplate a direct confrontation with public institutions (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 2014; Goodfellow, 2020). In this sense, and in line with promising directions advanced in the literature (Fourchard, 2021; Lancione and McFarlane, 2016; Le Galès and Vitale, 2013), this paper sees the opportunity of breaking through Eurocentric barriers of thought that examples from the 'Global South' may offer.

Epicentre of the economic growth of Ivory Coast, the city of Abidjan encapsulates many urban trends of African megalopolises: segregation; overcrowding; rapid economic,

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[2] Interviews and participant observations have been conducted remotely, due to Covid 19-related travel limitations. I personally thank Souleymane Kouyate, researcher in Abidjan, for his marvellous work in the 4th bridge area.

[3] "Déguerpissement" is the specific term used in the former French colonies, since the colonial period, to refer to operations of removal and destruction of local people's settlements to make way for new installations by the men and women originally from the French empire. The verb "déguerpir" (literally "to clear out") has remained in use in the region to this day, while it can rarely be found in the spoken language of France.

[4] The expression " triumph of the elephant " has repeatedly been used in journalistic jargon to describe the phases of greatest economic growth in the Ivorian nation as well as in its economic heart, the city of Abidjan. Much in vogue in the post-colonial Golden Age, the expression came back into popularity in the aftermath of the civil conflict, in 2011, to praise economic policy choices under the presidency of Alassane Ouattara.

financial, and digital transformation; and more (Meyers 2011). Despite this, seldom has the region been the object of urban and housing studies, whether due to the discomfort of the disciplines to venture in sub-Saharan regions (Fourchard and Bekker, 2013), or due to the highly uncertain times that have made Ivory Coast quite a hostile place for social research during the civil war which lasted from 2002 to 2011.[5] And yet, to get in touch with the vicissitudes of a parable that, from its very beginning, shows neat distinctions among urban winners and losers, it suffices to question the very etymology of the region's name. Up to the late 1980s, the meaning of 'Abidjan' has been based on a false myth: a misunderstanding between a French settler and a native allegedly occurred after the French arrival in the lagoon. Only in 1991, a more realistic explanation was found, once Diabaté and Kodjo (1991) discovered the name of the Akan ethnic group that was inhabiting the place in 1904, when the occupation began: the Bidjan, indeed (David, 2009).

On the one hand, although this may not sound new, the etymological discovery demonstrates that the very foundation of the city of Abidjan came with an expropriation of land. On the other hand, the long survival of this false myth sheds light on a less trivial truth about the city: Abidjan's history of expropriations has been subtracted, since the foundation and for decades, to public knowledge. 'Déguerpissements'—this is how evictions are called in francophone Africa—continued during the entirety of colonial rule and after 1960 Independence (Bouquet and Kassi-Djodjo, 2014). Then, a rhetoric of public interest was efficiently mobilised to justify the social and housing disasters associated with them, and to make *déguerpissements* themselves 'normal' or even absent from public opinion. For instance, François-Joseph Amon d'Aby, first Ivorian in charge of the administrative affairs of the former colony in 1961, wrote about Abidjan under the colonial rule: '[The Ivorian western region] lived in a half-democratic half-anarchic state. But thanks to French politics, peace and order rule everywhere][6] (Amon d'Aby, 1951). Yet interestingly, ideals of order and anarchy might have served political interests well before French had colonised the lagoon, as during Agni kingdom's coronation rituals in the 18th century (Balandier, 1992).

Brief historical-philological insights like the former may be useful to identify continuities between the pre- during- and post-colonial eras with respect to the way in which the Ivorian city has been at the center of systematic operations of disruption and remaking.

From 2011, the Ivorian State has been performing unprecedented levels of growth, with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) annual increases of around ten percent (Bamba, 2016; Cogneau et al., 2017). Abidjan was at the core of these progresses and of subsequent national development plans promoted by President Alassane Ouattara—today at his third, consecutive term.[7] The quest for urban modernisation was coming in a megalopolis that had lacked a coherent governance for decades. A megalopolis that was mindful of the late 1960s housing crisis (Bernus, 1962; Haeringer, 1985), the 1970s-1980s economic and financial state

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[5] A fertile ground for sociological studies, Ivory Coast becomes inhospitable to social research during the civil war. A renovated scientific production is only observable from 2018, when two special issues (by Afrique Contemporaine and Politique Africaine) are dedicated to the country.

[6] This and all the other quotations in French are translated by the author.

[7] For a brief overview of the most recent political developments in the nation, see Banégas (2021).

crackdown (Haeringer, 2000; Contamin and Memel-Fotê, 1997), and the catastrophe of the 2000s civil war (Steck, 2005).

Yet, as renowned Ivorian analyst Francis Akindès suggests (2017), today's political efforts to modernise the city are barely efficient. According to the Ivorian sociologist, many urban development projects are either not solving the longstanding Abidjan housing crisis or creating new swathes of social suffering and precarity. Not differently from one century ago, he observes, these damages are nowadays hidden by an official rhetoric of national interest that depoliticizes any possible 'struggle' against them.

Akindès' words cast many doubts: Is his concept a reliable indicator for the nation's contemporary political history? Does not it push the reasoning to be entwined in itself? (see Haegel and Déloye, 2019). There is not enough room to address these important questions here. If nothing else, Akindes' speculation could be seen as an invitation to elaborate more accurate scientific research about Abidjan's contemporary urban transformations—an invitation that is all the more persuasive if two additional elements are considered. First, as anticipated before, little has been written about the topic of Abidjan's contemporary urban transformation, as the Ivorian city rarely appears in urban sociologies after 2011. Second, the so-called 'reconciliation phase' (the set of public policies set out by Ouattara with the aim of re-establishing national unity after the civil war) has been already criticised for his ambiguity at the level of internal political fragmentation (Diallo 2017). Thus, there is reason to foresee
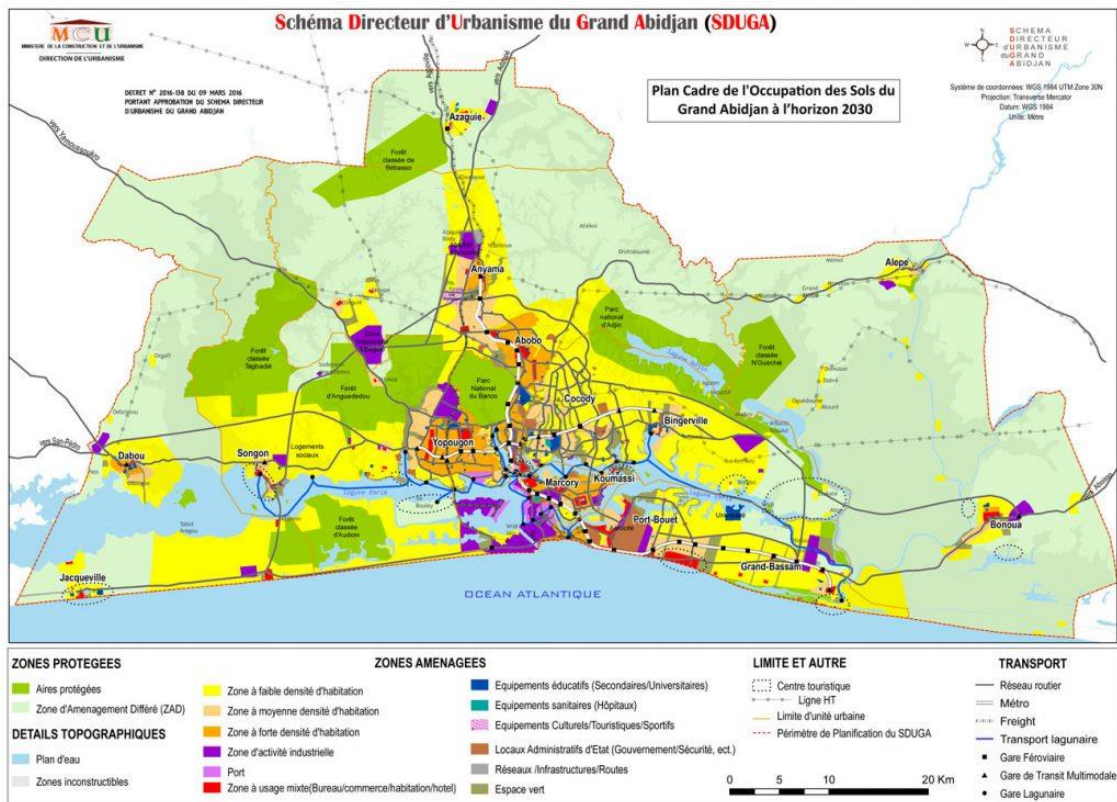

Figure 1

SDUGA's map illustrating the occupation of lands in Abidjan.
Source: JICA

that similar criticisms can be also found in the urban and housing sphere, as already hinted at by Banégas (2017) and N'Goran et al. (2020)

That said, this contribution can address more legitimately the SDUGA (Schéma Directeur d'Urbanisme Grand Abidjan),[8] the multi-annual urban plan for Abidjan whose end is forecasted for 2030. The SDUGA comprises a set of urban projects and interventions aimed at modernising the city of Abidjan while healing its main misfortunes: overpopulation, traffic congestion, lack of public services and infrastructures, underuse of territorial resources (environmental, agricultural, and even human ones), low sanitary conditions in the slums, disconnection among the peripheral residential centres of its 2,119 km² large metropolitan area.

The abundance of objectives makes the SDUGA an highly ambitious plan with no parallels in the history of the city, which also explains why the SDUGA itself has been positively hailed by international institutions such as the World Bank or the African Development Bank (Koutoua 2019). Accordingly, Ivorian institutions claim their legitimacy any time. In the name of fulfilling SDUGA objectives, they opt for undertaking interventions that can be harmful for some. According to Akindès, it seems that myths of prosperity and of modernization are exploited by public authorities to neutralise any controversy underlying interventions with high social impact, like the numerous mass evictions of the so-called Abidjan's 'quartiers précaires', the slums of the city where one fifth of the urban population lives, or about one million people. City policy makers resort to evictions to carry out huge infrastructural plans as much as to remedy contingent social and housing crises, depending on the cases.

This article tries to give an overview of the two most frequent scenarios of Abidjan's evictions: evictions due to the implementation of infrastructural projects, and evictions commissioned as an act of retaliation against the explosive social and political situation in slums. Collected data refers to two urban areas, one is the *quartier* of Adjouffou (municipality of Port-Bouët), and the other is the construction area of the 4th bridge of Abidjan, among the municipalities of Attécoubé and Adjamé et Yopougon. In the first case, we deal with a *quartier précaire* in the southeastern part of the city, adjacent to the international airport 'Félix Houphouët-Boigny'. Adjouffou has been put in the spotlight in January 2020, when a social drama had occurred. By taking advantage of the porosity of the border among the *quartier* of Adjouffou and the airport, a youth entered an aircraft hold by stealth, dreaming of an escape towards Paris. His body was found dead at the Paris-Charles de Gaulle airport given that the living conditions in the hold were unbearable. The news spread panic in the city and public authorities decided to react firmly so as to prevent tragedies of this kind from happening again. They therefore commissioned the securitization of the area around the airport and the evacuation of the shanties located nearby. Yet, after the first evictions, residents began to contest political choices, demanding the immediate departure of the bulldozers.

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[8] JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency), The Project for the Development of the Urban Plan in Greater Abidjan (SDUGA). Final Report, 2015.

Different is the case of the area of the 4ᵗʰ bridge, where development projects started in 2015 and are not yet concluded. The construction of the bridge, partially realised by the China State Construction Engineering Corporate (CSCEC), plays a crucial role in the globality of contemporary interventions in Abidjan, as it is aimed at addressing the long-lasting problem of urban congestion and at letting the eastern part of the city breathe while connecting the municipality of Youpougon with Attécoubé and Adjamé. In fact, the bridge is the flagship of Abidjan resurgence under Ouattara's reconciliation phase and, although slow in getting completed, it represents a concrete breakthrough after decades of promises in vain. Except that in order to be accomplished, works require the evacuation of entire residential slots as in the neighbourhoods of Boribana and Doukouré (Yopougon). With public authorities determined to carry out the *déguerpissement* of the area, the affected residents are opting for less conflicting arguments and actions to make their voices heard and their living conditions not irreparably compromised.

4. Navigating Abidjan's housing struggles

In the following subsections, differences and similarities among the two observed areas will be illustrated so as to fuel a reconsideration of the notion of radicality in the framework of housing struggles. Attention will be paid to the determinants for the kind of struggle that is preferred by residents and to what it means to struggle 'for' and 'against' from the perspective of Abidjan's precarious neighbourhood.

4.1 Case of Adjouffou (Port-Bouët). Enhancing or minimising the level of tension in a highly politicized arena

To have an idea about which kind of political 'arena' is set out by eviction processes in the Adjouffou neighbourhood, it can be useful to take a step back into the political context of 2020. In January 2020, the Ivorian nation was about to go through the highly contested phase of presidential elections. The leaders of two opposition parties, Laurent Gbagbo, former President and head of the Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI) and Guillaume Soro, former vice-President (Génération et Peuples solidaires), were exiled. Meanwhile, rumours started to be cast over President Alassane Ouattara's ambitions. He was in charge since 2011, and until the last moment, he did not exclude the possibility of presenting himself as a candidate for a third, consecutive term, thus pushing for a reinterpretation of Constitutional norms. Potentially, the situation in the country was explosive, and a low profile had been adopted by the government so as to avoid possible escalations.

Beside the national context, some elements that could give an idea of the political opportunities at hand from Adjouffou's residents' perspective can be deduced from the type of evictions that was about to be inflicted on them. Eviction policies can be classified depending on the politico-economic interests and objectives that are behind them, and this classification holds true also about eviction techniques. In the case of Adjouffou, displacements were instigated by security reasons, thus: i) they were violently carried by

public authorities; and consequently, ii) they had to be carried in the shortest possible time, so as to avoid popular reactions.

To sum up, residents of Adjouffou were faced with the following scenario. On one hand, they could count on the fact that national political tensions could have dissuaded the government from putting too much pressure on them, in order to avoid escalations. On the other, as targets of a security-led eviction, they were faced with a violent and quick attack, thus they had little time to react.

Concerning the internal composition of Adjouffou, it is worth highlighting two main aspects that share some links with the aforementioned opportunities. To start with, the municipality of Port-Bouët, is one of the main city strongholds of opposition parties. Port-Bouët's mayor belongs to the Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire-Rassemblement démocratique africain (PDCI-RDA), the oldest Ivorian party led by the 88-year-old former President Henri Konan Bédié. Allied to President Ouattara, the PDCI left the presidential coalition in 2018 and carried out an autonomous political campaign. On the other hand, Adjouffou also hosts the majority of the activities of Gbagbo's FPI's associative branch, the Ensemble pour la Démocratie et la Souveraineté (EDS). Adjouffou's (and Port-Bouët's) vibrant political activity, as for housing issues, has proved quite efficient. In the end, this is the place where 'Maman Bulldozer', the nickname of Anne Désirée Ouloto, former Minister of Sanitation and Salubrity, had to give unprecedented justifications to motivate her goals:

> 'You should know that my bulldozer has a heart in it. It's Alassane Ouattara's bulldozer, it has a heart, it has eyes and ears to hear'.[9]

The readiness to engage in oppositional actions, coupled with the fragility of the Ivorian political context and the necessity to react as soon as possible in order to stop in time the rough security-driven mass eviction of Adjouffou, in retrospect, are essential elements that explain why residents quickly set out what can be considered as a 'radical housing struggle'.

Figure 2
Adjouffou's students demanding President Ouattara's direct intervention to stop the eviction process. Source: linfodrome

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[9] « Arrêt des déguerpissements au quartier Abattoir Port-Bouët d'Abidjan », APA news, 5 July 2020. http://apanews.net/fr/news/anne-ouloto-demande-larret-des-deguerpissements-au-quartier-abattoir-port-bouet-dabidjan.

Immediately after the first announcements by Minister of Transportation Amadou Koné, students took up the streets. Their physical presence in the quartier caused stir among the residents as well as the broader urban public opinion, as testified by the plethora of articles that are published on the online press.[10] Students' unrest was then reverberated by the oppositional parties that have their members in Port-Bouët, most notably the Ensemble pour la Démocratie et la Souveraineté. One statement published on the Facebook page of EDS in particular gives the idea of how much eviction programs in Adjouffou became a national issue, with accusations directed to the highest levels of the state and the event getting extraordinarily politicised:

> 'Today we have decided to go towards the EDS, which is for us the voice of those-without-voice […]. President Gbagbo has always respected the rights of the residents of *quartiers précaires* and he has never damaged ourselves'.[11]

The attempts to subvert the whole eviction program proved quite successful, and demolitions got stopped a few weeks later, with only fifteen percent of the state objectives being accomplished. Yet it is worth noticing that fewer confrontational initiatives were also carried out, as the vibrant political life of the quartier also translated in a multiplication of civic associations that at one point decided to halt mass demonstrations. An unusual 'fight' was established beside contentious demonstrations, as civic associations and their leaders started to compete with each other in order to have a seat in the meetings where municipal authorities negotiated with central state representatives.

In sum, the effectiveness of the struggle could be also measured by looking at how efficient civil society has been in monitoring local authorities and pushing them to defend the neighbourhood from evictions. In short, key neighbors acted in the right place at the right time, first defending the neighborhood from eviction with street demonstrations and later taking advantage of the political 'victory' to increase their clout within local decision-making structures.

4.2 Abidjan's 4th bridge area. Reinventing the struggle in a de-politicised arena

The opportunities of reaction that were given to the residents of the 4th bridge area consistently differed from those in Adjouffou. Much can be learned from the type of eviction programs this time in play: a 'developmental eviction', a slum demolition process that is inscribed in wider city infrastructural plans. Two aspects should be considered. On the one hand, the salience of the 4th bridge as far as SDUGA objectives are concerned makes the relative displacements more justifiable and legitimate from the point of view of decision makers, and less opposable from residents' perspective. Contrary to Adjouffou's security-driven eviction plans, there are few chances here to stop or subvert the whole eviction

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[10] « Déguerpissement annoncé à Port-Bouët -Adjouffou: Plus d'un millier d'élèves menacés », linfodrome, 17 January 2020. https://www.linfodrome.com/societe/54281-deguerpissement-annonce-a-port-bouet-adjouffou-plus-d-un-millier-d-eleves-menaces.
[11] Post on the EDS official Facebook page, 19 January 2020. https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1520699324743725&id=932236626923334.

Figure 3

A baby in Doukouré surrounded by rubble.
Source: Author

process. On the other hand, as infrastructural works cannot be concluded in a hurry, the time span of the process is much longer. Which means that institutions could wait for less tense political periods to intervene as well as that evicted groups, rather than venturing in a little promising radical struggle, could find incremental remedies to their situation, not least by taking advantage of the construction plan's bureaucratic niches.

Additional differences from Adjouffou can be also found concerning the internal composition of the neighbourhood. First of all, the mayor of the Yopougon *commune*, as member of the state's ruling party, the RHDP, is in line with the urban objectives for the city, and since his election in 2018, he has never shown any opposition to eviction plans. As for residents, there is no 'community of struggle' (Hamann and Türkmen, 2020), as had been the case in Port-Bouët. Once the stronghold of Gbagbo's FPI during the civil war, today opposing actors have been almost dismantled from Yopougon. Associations and activist groups are scarce, and residents from *quartiers précaires* have often conflicting interests, especially considering the renter-owner cleavage.

Given the kind of political opportunities offered to the evicted community of the 4th bridge area, as well as the scarce political resources detained by it, we can better understand why no real radical struggle, in the traditional meaning that is attributed to the notion, has been performed by dwellers. When asked about their perceptions about the incoming demolitions, in fact, dwellers rather expressed sentiments of hopelessness and fatalism. In so doing, they confirmed how ineluctable and unstoppable developmental evictions seem, with state institutions carrying out them whatever it takes:

'The founder of the quartier… this is what he told us: that since they gave him the land […] this was State's land. "Sooner or later, the State will need its land. If the State will need the land, you are going to leave". So, this is what the founder told us'.[12]

Fatalism is coupled with a feeling of incertitude and disorientation with respect to the future:

'Quite frankly, we are a bit lost. Nobody prevents us from taking the money. But we cannot understand the mechanism. We do not understand anything anymore… where does the business go!? My neighbour, he has been paid back, they destroyed its courtyard. And me, I am still here, in the middle of the quartier. All this… it wears us out'.[13]

Limitations against the possibility of a radical struggle can be well understood also in relation to the parable of an anti-evictions association, the NGO Colombe Ivoire (CI). CI was founded in 2014 by a former municipal councillor of the RHDP party, who decided to resign after the municipality started the first demolitions in the lagoon functional to the construction of the 4th bridge. Back then, some margins of manoeuvre for a radical contestation were still on the table, as shown by CI's leader himself when asked to recall the story of his NGO:

'Ouattara's societal project was clear: the improvement of Ivorians' lives, accessible education, accessible housing, women's financial empowerment. After President Ouattara's election we tried to organise ourselves to impose peace in our country. But at the same time, after this election, what we saw was the *déguerpissement* of the people. I am telling you, an abusive and arbitrary eviction, as they evicted people who were not in dangerous areas!'[14]

Figure 4
The President of the NGO Colombe Ivoire holding a vest saying, 'Stop unjust and abusive evictions'.
Source: Author

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[12] Interview with M. non-compensated evicted from Doukouré (Youpougon), 22 March 2020.
[13] Interview with L. non-compensated evicted from Doukouré (Youpougon), 22 March 2020.
[14] Interview with Sylla Sékou, President of the NGO Colombe Ivoire, 11 March 2020.

As the 4ᵗʰ bridge became a certainty for city policy makers and as developmental evictions became a 'must-do' to build the bridge, CI experienced growing difficulties in following its initial course of action. Furthermore, it started being targeted by retaliatory measures. For instance, the president and vice-president were subject to arrest when they dared object to one eviction or when they showed up during one demolition. Also, new NGOs blossomed trying to pin down CI's activity by discouraging residents to keep contacts with the latter. CI had thus to realign its plans to a fewer radical agenda. First of all, it shifted from resistance to advocacy. By taking part to ad-hoc meetings for the demolition works, it acted as a watchdog, verifying whether all standards for correct re-housing and compensation were met by the state. Secondly, as much as possible, it tried to denounce the conditions of dwellers there as well as in the neighbouring quartiers, not least by resorting to its Facebook page where public posts and messages were shared in groups of other civic associations based in other African countries. Finally, some small attempts to 're-politicise the arena' were carried out each time some opportunities were at hand, as it was the case in last legislative elections, where CI's leader unsuccessfully proposed himself as a candidate:

> 'We are here on this land… Each of us will be held accountable for what he did. As long as we will be on this land, let us prepare our terrestrial life as we will be held accountable. Those who will eat from this bridge to the detriment of these poor, God damn them. Those who know that some people are eating from this story of the bridge to the detriment of the poor, and that do not speak out, God damn them. And those who are diverting the trajectory of the bridge so as to damage the poor, God damn them. But we are not against development, oh!'[15]

In conclusion, moderate and incremental efforts to ensure the respect of housing rights while reactivating a conflicting collective sentiment are all elements that make CI, given the lack of opportunities and the dominant fatalism in the neighbourhood, a quite powerful actor in the 4th bridge area. Though these efforts have not been able to oppose the evictions in the area head-on and effectively, it is important to note how, through a grassroots profile of activism, groups opposed to the eviction have on the one hand slowed down the eviction operations themselves. On the other hand, by raising awareness among the affected populations, they have made the ground fertile for more individual and less conventional forms of reaction. I would like to dedicate an *ad hoc* section to the matter.

4.3 Doukouré (Youpougon). Individual housing struggles at the intersection with gender, ethnicity, and residential status

The long implementation phase of a developmental eviction policy as the one related to Abidjan's 4ᵗʰ bridge, as discussed in the previous section, complexifies the set of reactions that can be put into force by evicted dwellers. To build the bridge is a top priority for Ivorian urban and national development plans, and the dismantling of the coastal shanties, as a *conditio sine qua non* to the former, could be hardly impeded by the people. Nevertheless, this

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[15] Passage from the speech given by Doumbia Bakari to support Sékou's political campaign for 2021 legislative election. https://www.facebook.com/mouvement.colombeivoire.9/videos/852425588935838.

gives time enough to dwellers to find alternative solutions, not least by taking advantage of the bureaucratic niches inherent to the infrastructural plan itself. It is at the individual level in particular that we can observe how intersecting factors that structure Abidjan's society (residential status, gender, ethnicity) can play a crucial role in this game. They give rise to struggles that, although not radical, have a huge impact in the ultimate effect that the eviction will have on single dwellers' lives.

Residential status: leveraging on time to stall the eviction

Let us take for instance the perspective of the residential status held by one evicted individual. In Doukouré, as learned from our investigation, people were treated unevenly depending on whether they were resident landlords, non-resident landlords, renters, or traders. This holds true not simply in relation to the amount of money that was calculated as a form of a compensation for the eviction—unsurprisingly, landlords expected more money than renters. At the same time, only landlords were compensated before the eviction, while renters were provided with a receipt and forced to wait for months and sometimes years before seeing any money. As some renters have revealed, landlords consult each other and the *chef de quartier*[16] as well, and agree on a common bargaining position for the negotiations with public officials. Once an agreement with the latter is reached over the compensations for the evictions, they leave with the money:

> 'What I heard from people's mouth: the money that they [State agencies] will give you will pass by the *chef de quartier*'s hands. […] They [State agencies] gave him what he asked for and he left. It's because he has been paid that he left. He argued with them, he got his money, which means that he does not care about the rest. […] It's because he is the *chef de quartier* that he is their partner'.[17]

Renters, in turn, are left with no margins for negotiating over their compensation. Yet a first attempt at intervention, they teach us, is to slow down their eviction as much as possible by postponing the moment in which they will be officially registered to the AGEROUTE (the public agency in charge of the demolitions and compensation programs), and therefore legally bound to leave by a given delay. Sometimes, not to be at home at the right moment could be the right choice:

> 'Some people said, "if your husband is not there, you cannot be registered". If your husband is travelling and is not there, you can alternatively go [to the AGEROUTE] and register yourself'.
>
> *And why did you not go?*
>
> '[Laughter] Well I… I wasn't here…'[18]

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16 Literally, "district leader".
17 Interview with A. non-compensated evicted from Doukouré (Youpougon), 22 March 2020.
18 Interview with I., resident in Doukouré (Youpougon) waiting for the eviction, 22 March 2020.

In conclusion, the observed case demonstrates how even from a residential condition of extreme fragility (or precisely because of it), it is possible to considerably slow down an eviction operation.

Intersection with gender: giving the eviction a social dimension

The plethora of damages and opportunities that dwellers go through during an eviction is all the more understandable when a renter's 'residential status' intersects with other characteristics of the individual. A renter will not be informed about the eviction by their landlord, despite the fact that the latter is legally bound to do so. Yet, the unreadiness of the renter is much more dangerous if she is a female. For instance, S. did not know that the bulldozer would have come destroying the house that she was renting; the landlord did not tell her. The day AGEROUTE came for the first registration, she did not know what to say or to ask as a guarantee. Being illiterate didn't help. She had to ask her brother for assistance in filling out the AGEROUTE certificate and following up her dossier for getting the money back.

> 'I was at home and then they came to register me, they started registering… I asked, "when will it be?", they said no, that they would have destroyed my house but that it wasn't right now. […] that day, it's not me that they identified, do you see? The person they picked up was my brother […] To tell the truth, I do not have identity papers…'.[19]

A woman living in the 4th Bridge area of Abidjan, of modest socioeconomic status and more prone than a man to illiteracy and social immobility, may find in desperation an opportunity to reconnect with her family unit. This aA demonstrates how even the intensification of marginalization due to gender bases can be reversed by the new opportunities that open up for socialization.

Intersection with ethnicity. Hidden chances to intervene on the eviction file

Evictions in Boribana, the previous two cases have shown, give space for silent actions to slow down the process and take time to reorganise. Also, extra-legal activities can be performed such as enrolling one relative to the register conducted by the AGEROUTE. In this sense, evictions do not unilaterally determine the unfolding and the effect of the actual displacement; dwellers rather participate in the process, they perform a 'bureaucratic writing of the self' (Awenengo Dalberto and Banégas, 2018), situating themselves in a sociability framework that is officially recognised. Yet, in order to reach out concrete objectives, other paths can be followed by some—which is when a third intersection can be found. Ethnicity, a crucial dimension for Ivorian politics especially from the 1990s (Marshall-Fratani, 2006), still play a decisive role in contemporary times, not least as far as housing issues are concerned. For instance, it may determine the chances of a renter to get actual monetary compensation for their expulsion. In Abidjan, they call it the art of 'pistonner son dossier'— literally 'supporting' (or even protecting) your file. It is something that can work better if, for

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[19] Interview with B. non-compensated evicted from Doukouré (Youpougon), 22 March 2020.

instance, you belong to the same ethnic group as those in power or even personally know some people in the city hall or in some bureaucratic offices. Clientelist networks are a promising weapon to carry out the individual housing struggle of a displaced, even if it means antagonising the rest of the neighbours. It reinforces the power structure in place, reasserting the efficacy of ethnic-based divisions in the city. Accidentally, it could re-politicise the battlefield.

> 'There are those who got the money and those who did not. They sorted people… They did so according to their acquaintances. And now, as they don't know us, as we are not part of the family, as we don't make **noise**… This is what we think'.[20]

Woven into the social structure of a community, an eviction process can thus acquire connotations and generate different effects depending on the position an individual-displaced occupies in that structure. In the case of Abidjan, clientelist relations based on ethnic determinants prove to be a key element in undoing, on an individual, family or neighborhood basis, the marginalization suffered.

Three lessons to re-think radicality in housing struggles

From the previous sections, three arguments could be pushed forward in order to stimulate a deeper discussion about housing struggles and about the meaning of 'radicality' in the relevant field of study.

First, from the case of Adjouffou, we have seen how a high level of political tension, by steering eviction operations towards a more violent set-up, may stiffen and compact the spirits of those in a disadvantaged position. The political resources available to the community under eviction underpin the latter's ability to survive the tensions, even to the point of using the latter as a weapon to roll decision-makers back.

Secondly, in the 'de-politicised' arena of Abidjan's 4th bridge, an unconventional declination of struggle has been registered. The developmental imperative of building the bridge left little or no space for confrontational oppositions and collectives as the NGO Colombe Ivoire had to give up to their intention to stop infrastructural works. However, this has become a reason to invent new, less frontal modes of reaction, which take into account objectives such as re-politicisation, electoral campaign, advocacy, and public denunciation. Although it is difficult to assess whether these other actions can achieve a rethink on the part of the authorities, it is undeniable that they intervene to restore or build a community social fabric in a place rendered infertile by the destructive projects linked to the SDUGA.

Thirdly and lastly, individuals of Doukouré attempted to avoid the eviction, to postpone it, to find help in alleviating the pain associated with to it, and even to obtain some sort of relative privileges. All these attempts were aimed at altering the marginalising effect of an eviction on an individual basis, and sometimes they were quite successful in this respect. There is thus reason to include these examples in the concept of 'housing struggle'. Are they

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[20] Interview with O. non-compensated evicted from Doukouré (Youpougon), 22 March 2020.

not also comparable to forms of struggle? And doesn't their capacity to alleviate or subvert eviction, their ability to rewrite the social bonds and structures of the neighborhood community, make them radical struggles for housing?

In conclusion, literature and common sense have accustomed us to consider as 'radical' a social movement that makes no concessions to power, that fights it hand-to-hand at the cost of sacrificing its own components. But are these not only superficial aspects of radicality? Aren't these aspects merely the consequence of a claim to survival that is fueled by other exogenous factors (such as the level of tension in an institutional arena, the conflicting political culture of a community and its militant resources)? Radicality, rather, is the struggle that dialogues, regardless of methods, with the core of the enemy force. Where the enemy is essentially violent, radicality dialogues with violence. Where the enemy is essentially de-politicized, radicality dialogues with awareness-raising, or with silent action. The individualism of resistance does not make the latter any less radical, especially when the individual, intersecting multiple levels of being precarious, heralds processes of political experimentation such as those recounted so far.

Acknowledgements

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