Diaspora at Home?
Jesper Bjarnesen

Diaspora at Home?
Wartime Mobilities in the Burkina Faso-
Côte d’Ivoire Transnational Space
Abstract


In the period 1999-2007, more than half a million Burkinabe returned to Burkina Faso due to the persecution of immigrant labourers in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire. Ultranationalist debates about the criteria for Ivorian citizenship had intensified during the 1990s and led to the scapegoating of immigrants in a political rhetoric centred on notions of autochthony and xenophobia. Having been actively encouraged to immigrate by the Ivorian state for generations, Burkinabe migrant labourers were now forced to leave their homes and livelihoods behind and return to a country they had left in their youth or, as second-generation immigrants in Côte d'Ivoire, had never seen.

Based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, the thesis explores the narratives and everyday practices of returning labour migrants in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso's second-largest city, in order to understand the subjective experiences of displacement that the forced return to Burkina Faso engendered. The analysis questions the appropriateness of the very notion of “return” in this context and suggests that people's senses of home are multiplex and tend to rely more on the ability to pursue active processes of emplacement in everyday life than on abstract notions of belonging, e.g. relating to citizenship or ethnicity.

The study analyses intergenerational interactions within and across migrant families in the city and on transformations of intra-familial relations in the context of forced displacement. A particular emphasis is placed on the experiences of young adults who were born and raised in Côte d'Ivoire and arrived in Burkina Faso for the first time during the Ivorian crisis. These young men and women were received with scepticism in Burkina Faso because of their perceived “Ivorian” upbringing, language, and behaviour and were forced to face new forms of stigmatisation and exclusion. At the same time, young migrants were able to exploit their labelling as outsiders and turn their difference into an advantage in the competition for scarce employment opportunities and social connections.

Keywords: Wartime mobilities, home, transnational space, diaspora, urban anthropology, West Africa, conflict, return, migration, youth, intergenerational relations

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Uppsala, April 2013
Based on map from the United Nation's Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Cartographic Section.
Based on map from the United Nation's Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Cartographic Section.
1. Introduction

At the turn of the new millennium, the once prospering West African nation of Côte d’Ivoire embarked on a decade that would see an enduring economic and political crisis digress into armed conflict. The fall from grace of what was once ‘the Ivorian miracle’ of stability and prosperity was to the detriment of the populations not only in Côte d’Ivoire but across a region that has relied on the Ivorian plantation economy for their livelihoods for the better part of the last century. With the notable exception of Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire is surrounded by countries that have been characterised by political instability and armed conflict (Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea) and some of the world’s poorest economies (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger). In Burkina Faso especially, the livelihoods of many are premised upon the opportunities for seasonal and more permanent forms of labour migration. The territories of present-day Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire were important during the French colonisation of West Africa: the former as a labour reserve for the entire French territory, the latter as one of the main zones of the development of a lucrative plantation economy that has retained its financial importance to this day.

Following the outbreak of armed conflict in Côte d’Ivoire in the early 2000s, labour migrants and long-settled immigrant families were forced to return to their country of origin. While the Ivorian crisis to a large extent revolved around notions of autochthony and belonging that singled out Burkinabe strangers as particularly unwanted in the nationalist rhetorics of *ivoirité*, the return to Burkina Faso of nationals who for the most part had lived the greater part of their lives in Côte d’Ivoire was experienced as an ambiguous movement from one state of exclusion to another. Labelled as “diaspos” and “ivoiriens” in Bobo-Dioulasso – Burkina Faso’s second largest city – their forced displacement from Côte d’Ivoire entailed a displacement to the margins of social life in the city, from where it was up to each individual and family to face up to these persistent displacements and carve out a living space in their new neighbourhood: materially, socially, and existentially.

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1 A citizen of Burkina Faso is referred to throughout this text as “Burkinabe”.
The overall purpose of this thesis is to explore the experiences and everyday practices of returning Burkinabe migrants in an urban neighbourhood, in order to understand how the political conflict in Côte d'Ivoire affected their migrant trajectories, settlement practices, and daily livelihoods in Burkina Faso. The experiences of young adult men and women, both in relation to their parents and other significant seniors and in relation to the non-migrant youths of the neighbourhood, are given particular attention. An analysis of intergenerational relations in this context allows for an exploration of the ways in which the experience of forced displacement influenced the structures of social inclusion and exclusion that returnees faced in the process of re-defining a socially meaningful identity in Burkina Faso.

The study is based on ten months of ethnographic fieldwork in the neighbourhood of Sarfalao in Bobo-Dioulasso, where many displaced returnees settled during the turbulent decade of the Ivorian political conflict. Through a combination of life histories and participant observation, it considers the past experiences as well as the future aspirations of migrants, in the context of everyday life in Bobo-Dioulasso. The study also draws on three shorter fieldwork periods in Korhogo in Northern Côte d'Ivoire (approximately 10 weeks in total), providing an empirical perspective on the socio-political unrest that still characterised the region in the period 2008-2010.

The thesis sets out to analyse the everyday lives of residents in Bobo-Dioulasso who, while facing the same predicaments as so many others across the neighbourhood and the city, shared a particular history of labour migration and forced displacement in the context of the Ivorian crisis. On a conceptual level, I suggest a more holistic study of mobility practices and aspirations. Mobility is approached here as an aspect of everyday practice rather than an exceptional event or sequence of actions. This approach has informed the study from the outset, inspired by other writings on mobility in contemporary Africa (e.g. de Bruijn, van Dijk, and Foeken 2001) but was given its shape in dialogue with the narratives of my informants. The empirical material illustrates that movement between Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire is best understood as a continuous exchange between the networks of individuals and families and that migrant trajectories were often started by preceding generations and will most likely continue in new forms in the future.

The overlaps between rupture and continuity – both in terms of migrant trajectories and in terms of the associated feelings of home and belonging – suggest that analysing particular kinds of movements as strictly labour migration (implying continuity, predictability, and economic mo-
tivations) as opposed to forced migration (implying rupture, a state of exception, and undeliberate movement), may neglect the existential and social implications of migrant practice in everyday life. This approach does not imply that migrants’ aspirations of accumulating wealth – or the structural conditions and processes that shape their trajectories – are rendered irrelevant. Rather than seeing displacement as a state of exception, brought about by external forces and resulting in predictable reactions on the part of the migrant, the study explores subjective experiences of displacement in the context of radical changes and events. In this regard, the concept of emplacement is evoked as a prism for understanding both subjective feelings, and processes of, homemaking and belonging, on the one hand, and the structural conditions and processes that influence individual and collective agency, on the other.

A central theme running through the thesis is the generational differences in these subjective experiences of displacement. Young adult returnees in Sarfalao expressed multi-layered attachments to the home they left behind in Côte d’Ivoire. As second-generation immigrants in Côte d’Ivoire (as the political terminology on immigration in Europe would have it), their move to Burkina Faso was at once articulated as a move ‘home’ to their family origins, and a move away from the ‘home’ of their upbringing. The contradictions and complexities of this on-going process of emplacement were obviously affected by, but cannot be reduced to, the political discourses on national ‘homes’ in and across both countries. This is also true of the experiences of first generation migrants, who followed well-established paths from Burkina Faso to Côte d’Ivoire in their youth and were later forced to return with the onslaught of the armed conflict.

By emphasising the relationships between parents and young adult children, I pay particular attention to the dynamics of intergenerational relations and how the move from Côte d’Ivoire to Burkina Faso affected the configurations of migrant families and the outlooks of, and relationships between, individual family members. The study considers a group of young adults who seemed to be succeeding in turning their stigmatisation as “diaspos” as well as their social vulnerability as youth to their advantage by embracing both these categories and manipulating them in the quest for access to elite networks and new opportunities. This political reading of the question of African youth emphasises the interplay between hierarchical structures of inclusion and exclusion, and the capacities for individual and collective agency.
The Gradual Onslaught of Armed Conflict

The brutal killing of more than one hundred Burkinabe migrant workers in the Ivorian town of Tabou near the Liberian border, in September 1999, marked a new era in the history of labour circulation between Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire. The Burkinabe plantation workers were victims of retaliatory militias of “autochtone” workers, following a dispute between a Burkinabe planter and an autochtone plantation worker who was killed in the dispute (Zongo 2003, Bredeloup 2006, Black & Koser 1999b). The Tabou massacre marked a turning point, or rather a turn to armed aggression, that was a strong indication of the troubles ahead for the Burkinabe diaspora in Côte d’Ivoire. Persistent economic decline due to low world market prices on cacao and coffee, as well as the mismanagement of the plantation economy, had led to rising tensions between immigrant and autochtone labourers, but hostilities and animosity had been kept at the level – both in terms of casualties and publicity – of their local context. The Tabou massacres, on the other hand, were widely reported and debated on both sides of the border. The killings generated the first visible flow of an estimated 12-17,000 refugees from Côte d’Ivoire to Burkina Faso (Zongo 2010c:25, see also Bredeloup 2006, Bauer 2006, Zongo 2003).

Despite summary reports of specific outbursts of violence, there seems to be no reliable assessment of the total number of refugees from Côte d’Ivoire to Burkina Faso which, as Mahamadou Zongo has noted, is surprising, since these movements have had a significant impact on public debates regarding the role of the Burkinabe diaspora (Zongo 2010a:11).

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2 This is not to say that the Tabou massacre was the first instance of violence between immigrants and locals in the history of the region. As will be elaborated in Chapter 2, resentment had been directed towards other categories of immigrants at earlier points in history, e.g. Dahomian white-collar workers in Abidjan and other cities in the 1950s. Clashes involving Burkinabe immigrants had also occurred throughout the 1990s, contributing to the gradual increase of tension. However, despite these precedents, the Tabou massacre became a common frame of reference both in public debates (cf. Hagberg & Bjarnesen 2011) and in individual migrant biographies.

3 Given the varied and politicised debates around the emic category of ‘autochtone’ in Francophone West Africa, it is important to emphasise that the concept is understood as such – an emic category that evokes first-comer status, or indigenousness, in opposition to those perceived as late-comers, strangers, or migrants (see e.g. Ceuppens & Geschiere 2005, Dunn 2009, Geschiere & Jackson 2006, Jackson 2006, Lentz 2006a).

4 For example, Sylvie Bredeloup notes that almost 80,000 refugees followed in 2001 (Bredeloup 2006:185), and Mahamadou Zongo notes that the official total increased from 158,155 in March 2003 to almost 200,000 refugees in Burkina Faso the following month (Zongo 2003:113). Kerstin Bauer refers to reports of a total of 366,000 ‘returnees’ as of December 2003 (Bauer 2006:2).
He suggests that the difficulty in assessing reliable numbers of return migrants was not in itself a result of the Ivorian crisis but is also traceable to the lack of distinction between return migrants and foreign immigrants to Burkina Faso in censuses before 1996, and the ‘extreme mobility’ of migrants between Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso (Zongo 2010c:25). Tentative estimates range from 500,000 to one million forced returns during the period 2002-2006 (see e.g. Boswell 2010:10, Zongo 2010c:25).

The less visible “trickle” of refugees in response to more indirect aspects of the conflict – including rumours of imminent attacks, social tensions in their area of residence in Côte d’Ivoire, and deteriorating living standards in both urban and rural parts of the country – has probably been the main form of displacement caused by the Ivorian crisis (see also Boswell 2010:153). Aside from being administratively invisible, refugees arriving in Burkina Faso by their own means without the involvement of the Burkinabe authorities may be said to defy a clear distinction between labour migration and forced displacement: having left Burkina Faso in their youth, older migrants returning as refugees may be said to have come to the (abrupt) end of their migration cycle, rather than fitting the standard definition of refugees. This definitional challenge is not merely academic, since the number of displaced people, and their legal status, has become a highly sensitive political and diplomatic issue on both sides of the border. In Côte d’Ivoire, the question of who has the right to be recognised as an Ivorian citizen has, of course, been at the heart of the political conflict, not least through the rhetorics of ivoirité that has dominated Ivorian politics since the mid-1990s (see e.g. Arnaut 2008, Akindès 2003, Beauchemin 2005, Collett 2006, Dozon 2000, 2006, Olukoshi & Sall 2004).

In Burkina Faso, the accusations by the Gbagbo regime that Burkina Faso was responsible for the mobilisation of the failed coup d’état of 19 September 2002 was followed by a diplomatic crisis that eventually gave way to a reconciliation between presidents Compaoré and Gbagbo (see Hagberg & Bjarnesen 2011). Furthermore, the prospect of the sudden repatriation to the Burkinabe state of a large part of the Burkinabe diaspora in Côte d’Ivoire – estimated to number approximately 2.2 million, or 15% of the total Ivorian population in 2003 (Zongo 2003, Bredeloup 2006)\(^5\) – caused serious concerns regarding how to accommodate such

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\(^5\) As an illustration of the problem of numbers alluded to in this section, Zongo notes that these estimates from the Ivorian population census of 1998 are unreliable for several reasons, most notably due to the contested definition of what constitutes an Ivorian, and by exten-
large numbers of citizens in need of housing and other basic needs, already scarce in the country, as well as eventual access to cultivatable land. In the eyes of the Burkinabe authorities, in other words, the mass return of Burkinabe citizens living in Côte d’Ivoire would be a tremendous burden on public resources and on the population in general, potentially turning the profitable flow of remittances into a flow of more or less disenfranchised return migrants. This concern contradicted the official declaration of solidarity with the diaspora in the context of the public ‘rescue mission’ launched in December 2002 by the Burkinabe state – Opération Bayiri; Bayiri being the Mooré word for ‘motherland’ – which was organised to repatriate Burkinabe citizens living in Côte d’Ivoire (Banégas & Marshall-Fratani 2003:10, see also Bredeloup 2006, Banégas & Otayek 2003). Despite its stated intentions of coming to the aid of the Burkinabe diaspora in Côte d’Ivoire, the operation was only able to repatriate approximately 10,000 citizens – a negligible percentage of the total population of Burkinabes in Côte d’Ivoire (Action-Sociale 2003:8, SP/CONASUR, UNICEF, and PAM 2004). Given the importance of Burkinabe citizens living in Côte d’Ivoire – as long as they remained transnational – the authorities were well advised to declare their support publicly towards the Burkinabe diaspora in Côte d’Ivoire, while having obvious interests in not coming through on their promises of repatriation and support, or of officially acknowledging the large numbers of migrants making their way back to Burkina Faso without any public support.

On the one hand, then, the question of the numbers of Burkinabe citizens arriving in Burkina Faso as refugees would relate to the Burkinabe state’s ability to accommodate the needs of an important section of the population – contributing to the country’s economy through considerable flows of remittances – while, on the other, would raise diplomatically sensitive questions about the plight of Burkinabe citizens living in Côte d’Ivoire6.

6 The argument that statistics on Burkinabe refugees remains a sensitive issue in Burkina Faso was confirmed to me by Prof. Albert Ouédraogo, the President of the influential support organization for the Burkinabe diaspora and returnees, Tocsin, who had been the main author of a report destined for the International Criminal Court in the Hague, detailing the numbers of refugees displaced from Côte d’Ivoire and accusing the Gbagbo regime of crimes against humanity on their account. This report was confiscated by state authorities and stamped as classified, M. Ouédraogo claimed.
Given the prolonged period of continued arrivals since the mid-1990s, the “rapatrié”7 population in Burkina Faso is highly heterogeneous, consisting of both recent arrivals and residents who have established themselves in their own households and have consolidated their legal status as Burkinabe citizens by acquiring national identity cards, etc. In connection with the 2010 presidential elections in Burkina Faso, informants from Sarfalao – some of whom had been living in Burkina Faso since the early 2000s – were able to acquire Burkinabe citizenship, despite lacking the required documentation of their place of origin and prior citizenship. Refugees arriving without valid identity papers admitted to having bribed the local authorities in order to acquire the new national identity card in Burkina Faso. Such cases would be reluctant to identify as refugees, since their migration histories might cast doubt over their Burkinabe citizenship.

Finally, the combination of a long history of circular migration and the difficult living conditions in Burkina Faso were said by the refugees to have caused the return to Côte d’Ivoire of many of their travel companions and acquaintances from Côte d’Ivoire. Some long-term residents in Sarfalao would answer my questions about refugees from Côte d’Ivoire by saying that the rapatriés had returned to Côte d’Ivoire several years ago. Although such statements willfully disregarded the continued presence of rapatriés in the city, they communicated the impression of a more acute refugee crisis at the height of the Ivorian crisis that had now dwindled into a less visible presence of newcomers who were either gradually integrating into the population or moving on to other destinations on either side of the border.

Analysing a Regional History of Mobility
Throughout this thesis, the long history of labour migration and other forms of mobility between Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire, and the gradual politicisation of immigration to Côte d’Ivoire during the past two decades, form an underlying backdrop for understanding the experiences of returning labour migrants in the context of the Ivorian crisis. Conceptually, this implies approaching the structural context of individual trajectories as a historically constituted and economically and politically reproduced transnational space that influences the aspirations and practices of

7 *Rapatrié*, meaning repatriated or repatriate in French, was the widely used appellation of people who were understood to have returned to Burkina Faso from Côte d’Ivoire in the context of the Ivorian crisis (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of the term’s connotations).
migrants while simultaneously being shaped and constituted by their variable practices over space and time.

The notion of a transnational space should not be understood as simply comprising a geographical territory of the two nation-states but rather as a concept that “… includes not just the material geographies of labour migration or the trading in transnational goods and services but also the symbolic and imaginary geographies” (Jackson, Crang, and Dwyer 2004:3, in Blunt 2007:687, emphasis in original) that inform and inspire the choices of individual migrants. In this way, the notion of a Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space at once captures not only the profound interconnectedness in terms of labour migration, trade, cultural idioms, and social formations that have crisscrossed the territory for centuries, but also the significance of the political and administrative border that has separated the two territories since 1947. This approach entails a political reading of transnational connections in that their forms and transformations are historicised in relation to structural policies, implementation efforts, and individual choice.

This section discusses the empirical and conceptual basis for understanding the experiences of migrants across the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space, from the perspective of their everyday lives in the neighbourhood of Sarfalao. I begin by relating the study of labour migration to life cycle progression, since the regional ethnography of West Africa has shown how these two aspects of social life have been linked for generations.

Labour Migration and Life Cycle Progression in West Africa

Labour migration between the territories of present-day Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire has predominantly been a preoccupation of young men and women, as is often the case. As so many studies of West African migration have shown, labour migration is mainly a preoccupation of the young, whether as agricultural workers (Dacher 2005, Berry 1985, Hagberg 1998, 2001), rural to urban migrants (Geschiere & Gugler 1998, Gugler 2002, Ouédraogo 1995), international migrants (e.g. Al-Ali & Koser 2002, Carling 2002, Levitt 2001, Åkesson 2004, Zongo 2010b), as domestic workers or foster children (Thorsen 2007, Carling 2007), or indeed military recruits or other forms of armed combatants (e.g. Utas 2008, Hoffman 2011, Reinwald 2007). Common to such migrations is that they, ideally, represent an important sociocultural process in the lives of the migrants and their families. The move away from home is often
inscribed into local cosmologies as a move towards maturity and independence, and is often seen as the promise for a change in socioeconomic status, through the potential for accumulating wealth – to pay bride-wealth, invest in agricultural land, buy urban property etc. In this way, these trajectories have been important acts of social practice for individual migrants as well as in a more general sense as cultural idioms of paths to adulthood (cf. Barrett 2004).

In a study of Burkinabe labour migration in the early 1970s, the typical migrant – statistically speaking – was argued to be a young, unmarried man. These young men were motivated to initiate a migrant career primarily by their dependence on their seniors with regard to the payment of bride wealth (Boutillier, Quesnel, and Vaugelade 1985:245). While the choice to migrate tended to be met with disapproval in the 1950s and 1960s (see also Fiéloux 1980), migration was seen as a legitimate livelihood strategy by two thirds of the population in the 1970s (Boutillier, Quesnel, and Vaugelade 1985:245). As labour migration became an accepted livelihood option for young people, well-established social hierarchies were challenged by the new possibilities that emerged during this period for accumulating wealth (Berry 1985:9).

In this way, the enrichment of unmarried young men posed a threat to the gerontocratic social order, by providing young men with new possibilities, not only for accumulating wealth, but to bypass their elders by achieving the status symbols associated with social adulthood, such as the capital to marry, settle and invest in land or other liable livelihoods at home (Skinner 1965:73). Yet this transformative potential of the introduction of labour migration does not imply that such hierarchies would necessarily be overturned by the material enrichment of young men (Meillassoux 1960:51-52). More often than not, the introduction of wage labour only served to change the currency available to young men in negotiating with their elders, not the structural terms of being obliged to engage in that negotiation in the first place (see also Cordell, Gregory, and Piché 1996:48).

Whether or not the introduction of large-scale labour migration led to the increased influence or independence of young men and women is, in other words, a question to be explored empirically rather than assumed. The regional ethnography on West Africa suggests a host of different reactions and strategies of young migrants with regard to their migrant trajectories and their attitudes towards their social seniors. For example, rather than returning home to challenge the dominance of their elders,
many young Mossi\(^8\) men in central Burkina Faso chose to leave the village indefinitely and settle in the city, or in Côte d’Ivoire. Riester argues that in this way, ‘migration in Mossi society came to be seen as a means of individualisation for young men’ (Riester 2011b:66). Although often couched in gendered notions of masculinity, a similar dynamic may be seen in relation to the migration of young women, as Ouédraogo has shown in a study of female migrants to Bobo-Dioulasso (Ouédraogo 1995). Although these young women move away from the village to gain access to the same sense of independence as typically described of young men, Thorsen emphasises that ‘… the restrictions imposed socially on their mobility implies that marriage is still the most important marker of transition into young adulthood’ (Thorsen 2007:195). Blion & Bredeloup demonstrate that during the post-independence period, more women began to migrate from Burkina Faso to Côte d’Ivoire. In fact, between 1960 and 1975, the number of female Burkinabe migrants to Côte d’Ivoire doubled, with more than 95% of them accompanying or joining their migrant husband. The authors summarise the changes of that period as a ‘…passage from an international, individual, and male labour migration to an international “family” migration, apparently closer to a population movement’ (Blion & Bredeloup 1997:714). In other words, during the period 1960-1975, the tendency for migrants to establish themselves more permanently as families in Côte d’Ivoire developed as a significant form of transnational migration, as an alternative to the shorter stays of male migrants, who returned more frequently to their families in Burkina Faso.

The trend towards more couples migrating together is present in the life stories that inform this study, as will be elaborated in Chapter 4, in some part due to the explicit efforts of the French colonial administration in the 1950s and 1960s. The concern at this point is to introduce the general sociocultural idioms of life cycle-related mobility, whereby male migration continues to be seen as a more defining moment in terms of social progression, while independent female migration continues to be viewed as something of an anomaly, and the migration of couples as a collateral effect of male labour migration. In other words, labour migration still presents men, more than women, with a ‘socially structured zone of possibility’ (Johnson-Hanks 2002:871) for social progression, or what Jennifer Johnson-Hanks refers to as a ‘vital conjuncture’ (ibid.). Whether or not the social ideals of gendered mobility are seen as determinant, or even significant, to the outlooks, decisions, and practices of individual

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\(^8\) Mossi is an ethnic group in Burkina Faso that has been particularly associated with labour migration to Côte d’Ivoire, as we shall see in Chapter 2.
migrants is a matter for empirical investigation, and does not follow in any deterministic sense from the fact that a migrant career, as a vital conjuncture, represents a template for the aspirations of individuals who imagine their own future in dialogue with these ideals.

As a final aspect of the relationship between labour migration and the life cycle, we should note that, in addition to the gendered notions of social adulthood considered above, migrant trajectories also relate to the individual migrant’s progression through the latter stages of the life cycle. In his analysis of urban-rural connections in West Africa, Joseph Gugler (2002:31-32) notes a significant overlap between a circular migratory pattern of rural-urban-rural migration and life cycle progression. Building on his earlier work (with William Flanagan) on *Urbanization and Social Change in West Africa* (1978), he criticizes the tendency to assume that the large numbers of young people who leave the village for the city necessarily imply a correspondingly high urbanisation rate – which would assume the permanent settlement of the young migrants in town. Gugler argues that this assumption conflates two different forms of change: the large-scale ‘historical change’ of social structures and dynamics, on the one hand, and the ‘biographic change’ of an individual, moving through the life cycle (Gugler 2002:22), on the other, implying that ‘the majority of adults in African cities continue to be first-generation migrants from rural areas’ (Gugler 2002:22). The conceptual point here is that migrant practices as well as aspirations should be analysed as part of life-long projects of social mobility, rather than as isolated instances of movement from one place to another (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006:3-4, see also Cresswell 2001, Fortier & Lewis 2006, Gill, Caletrío, and Mason 2011). I will return to this point in the methodological discussion of what I call ‘the mobile life story’ later in this introduction.

To summarise the discussion so far, across empirical cases, the generational competition over resources and status obviously plays out differently, as do the individual aspirations and trajectories of migrants who change their plans, improvise and get stuck along the way. Chapter 2 is devoted to a more thorough historical discussion of some of these dynamics across the territory that is now Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso. What is important to recognise at this point is that, firstly, the introduction of large-scale labour migration during the colonial period both challenged and was inscribed into longer histories of youth mobility, and the idioms

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9 Gugler goes on to suggest that this confusion may arise when fieldworkers base their understanding on conversations with young people in the city, who convey the intention to stay, without relating these statements of permanency to the transformations in strategies and outlooks over the course of an individual’s lifetime.
of life cycle progression that they motivated. Secondly, these gendered paths to adulthood have tended to preserve a male-dominated social hierarchy, despite the increased mobility of young women. Thirdly, although labour migration tends to be a preoccupation of youth, migrant trajectories rarely end with adulthood or old age, but take on new forms throughout the life cycle.

Ethnographies of Return Migration and Homecomings

This section continues the conceptual discussion of circular labour migration in West Africa, but rather than focusing on life cycle progression, the attention turns to questions of return migration. More specifically, this discussion explores the analytical basis for studying homecomings, or subjective notions of home, particularly in relation to the idea of a return to a national or more localised point of departure. A signification portion of the ethnographic literature on return migration focuses on the dynamics of return as a final phase of a labour migration cycle. On a very general level, George Gmelch’s influential (1980) review of the literature on return migration outlined the general pattern of circular labour migration that is still, to a large extent, representative of the overall structure of many of the migrant biographies I collected in Burkina Faso:

Most return migrants originally emigrated from rural areas and small towns in developing regions. Their decision to leave was voluntary, yet motivated by economic necessity – high unemployment, decline in the amount of available agricultural land, the fragmentation of family holdings, and so forth. More men than women left, most while in their late teens or early twenties and still single … They followed a pattern of chain migration, going to places where their kinsmen or friends had already become established. Among the married couples, the men usually went first, sending for their wives and children later, once a home had been set up. Upon returning many settled in large towns or cities but many also went home to their rural place of origin. Few, however, resumed the agricultural occupations they had held before emigration (Gmelch 1980:136-37)

Gmelch considered a broad selection of studies of return migration, with an emphasis on European returns from America and Australia as well as studies of Eastern European cases\textsuperscript{10}. He suggested that return migration as a field of inquiry could enrich the migration studies literature, which tends to take departures, rather than returns, as their focal point. Accord-

\textsuperscript{10} J. Clyde Mitchell’s (1969) analysis of urbanization and labour circulation in Southern Rhodesia was the exception to the rule.
ing to one of the editors of a more recent volume on ‘homecomings’ (Markowitz & Stefansson 2004), the dynamics of return migration ‘...always have fallen at the margins of the grand narratives in migration research, those of assimilation, multiculturalism/diaspora, and transnationalism/globalization’ (Stefansson 2004:5). Even outside the specialised field of migration research, Stefansson continues, return migration tends to be viewed as ‘... an act of unproblematic and natural reinsertion in the local or national community once left behind’ (ibid.). This sedentary view of a “natural” connection between people and place has been the object of much debate (see e.g. Appadurai 1996, Gupta & Ferguson 1992, Malkki 1992, Jansen & Löfving 2009a). For the purpose of understanding Burkinabe labour migrants returning to Burkina Faso in the context of the Ivorian crisis, recent studies have contributed to a deconstruction of that perceived natural link, both within the above-mentioned migration-related research and in studies of autochthony and belonging (e.g. Ceuppens & Geschiere 2005, Cutolo 2009, Geschiere 2009, Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000, Hilgers 2011).

The deconstruction of the concept of ‘place’ led some authors to argue for a radical conceptual shift, in order to ‘de-territorialize’ analyses of people’s sense of belonging, inspired by the observed empirical change towards the increased mobility of ‘people, things, and ideas’ so famously described by Appadurai (1996). As this approach has become a common frame of reference within the field, however, the complete rejection of the significance of place has been argued to throw the baby out with the proverbial bathwater. This more recent shift, in its turn, has been inspired by the growing importance of rooting and autochthony in political discourses of belonging across the globe. Aside from the growing literature on these political discourses in and of themselves (e.g. Appadurai 1996, Featherstone & Lash 1999, Friedman 2002, Gupta 1999, Hannerz 1996, Kearney 1995, Mbembe 2000), this development has led to a renewed theoretical interest in the dynamics between people and place as an empirical field of inquiry into the ‘... unequal, differential and contested process by which persons come to be (dis)associated – and (dis)associate themselves – with or from place’ (Jansen & Löfving 2009b:6).

Central to these discussions is the question of the nature of the ‘home’ that a migrant is assumed to return to. From an anthropological perspective, notions of home and belonging are multiplex from the point of view of a single actor who, as we shall see below, may be involved in several home-making processes simultaneously. Notions of home and belonging may vary across generations and relate to a person’s migrant biography and his/her position in a social hierarchy. Laura Hammond (2004) has
analysed the repatriation of Ethiopian refugees from refugee camps in neighbouring Sudan. While the older generation of returnees were more concerned with retaining a relationship to multiple homes, the younger generation was primarily intent on making a home in the area they had repatriated to (Hammond 2004:48). In other words, the individual migrant’s aspirations notwithstanding, the assumption that the notion of a ‘home’ to return to is a straightforward matter seems too simplistic (Ferguson 1999:131).

Laura Hammond’s study of Tigrayan returnees considers five different words that allude to the home-like quality of a place in the Tigrinya language, spoken by the returnees. To her informants, ‘Return … involved a process of “home-making” or emplacement, whereby new relationships between person/community and place were forged that gradually took on characteristics that in English are labelled “home-like”’ (Hammond 2004:38). These subjective experiences of home-making may or may not relate to one or several ideas of a nation, or some other institutionalised idea of a collective ‘home’, but they may also be oriented to much more idiosyncratic notions of what constitutes a home. This point is important to emphasise, considering the highly politicised ideas of home and belonging that have been at the heart of the Ivorian crisis, as we shall see in the discussion of autochthony below, and more comprehensively in the historical analysis of the build-up to the Ivorian crisis in Chapter 2.

In analytical terms, we may for now proceed from the premise that, more often than not, the bond between a place and a person is less than straightforward, as migrants may retain a diasporic longing for a (symbolic, ancestral) home, while simultaneously investing in other places through transnational practices. In other words, feelings of home may be ascribed both retrospectively to particular places or sites of belonging and prospectively to new or imagined sites of longing (Lovell 1998a:1-2, Jansen 2007:27). The need to empirically investigate, rather than assume, the extent to which migrants attach particular significance to specific places is also emphasised by the fact that many Burkinabe returnees from Côte d’Ivoire continued to explore the prospects of going back to Côte d’Ivoire and sometimes perceived themselves as being in exile in Burkina Faso. As Boswell argues, the continued orientation of these returning migrants towards their former host country poses a conceptual challenge precisely because of our tendency to perceive a ‘homecoming’ as the end of a migration cycle (Boswell 2010:252).
Understanding Wartime Displacements to Burkina Faso

The discussion so far has centred on the dynamics of circular labour migration but, as already mentioned, the present study concerns the experiences of labour migrants whose sojourns in Côte d’Ivoire were disrupted by the onslaught of armed conflict. The study of forced displacement has until recently been dominated by the field of refugee studies; a multidisciplinary approach that tends to be implicitly or explicitly articulated in dialogue with humanitarian practitioners and policy makers. The refugee studies literature may be said to be fundamentally concerned with the return side of a migration trajectory, in the sense that these studies tend to see return as the logical conclusion of a move caused by armed conflict or other catastrophic events such as natural disasters. Despite the different interests of refugee studies and studies of labour migration, scholars within both genres have argued for their convergence on important points, for example regarding how migrant aspirations influence their trajectories and practices (Agier 2011, Jackson 2002, Jansen 2008, Lubkemann 2008b, Riester 2011a). Commenting on the tendency to assume that all refugees prefer repatriation over integration into the place of arrival, or a third option, the editors of the influential volume, *The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction* (Black & Koser 1999b) argue that rather than devoting analyses to the circumstances of flight,

> [t]here is equally a need to understand the priorities of refugees in exile, for many of whom repatriation is not a desired outcome, and for whom ‘home’ has come to mean something quite different from the meaning often ascribed by policy makers. Even where return has occurred, there is a need to pay much closer attention to relations after return, and to recognise that even if repatriation is the end of one cycle, it is also usually the beginning of a new cycle (Black & Koser 1999a:3)

Although the refugee studies approach is more oriented towards humanitarian interventions and policy makers, this call for a more holistic understanding of return as a part of a social process of home-making resembles the literature on labour migration already considered and raises the same questions of the dynamics between person and place as central to understanding migrants’ experiences of both forced displacement and potential return.

Here the concept of home resurfaces as a notion that is often assumed *a priori* rather than explored empirically. For example, the tendency to take the meaning of ‘home’ for granted as fixed in space and time may be
said to jeopardize the security and well-being of refugees as they are sent ‘back’ to a situation that may be more distressing than that which caused their displacement in the first place (Black & Koser 1999a:6-7). In addition to the structural complexities of refugee return, Liisa Malkki’s (1995) study of Burundian and Rwandan refugees in Tanzania is illustrative of the fact that refugees themselves are capable of exerting their own agency within and in spite of the formal structures of humanitarian intervention, with ‘camp refugees’ and ‘town refugees’ representing two reactions to the same conditions of forced displacement from the Burundian genocide of 1974-75. In this way, the distinction between forced and economically motivated migration is rarely clear-cut and also less significant when the analysis centres on processes of home-making and subjective senses of belonging. The notion of displacement, from this perspective, may be unable to serve as a categorisation of particular forms of mobility writ large, but recent studies have suggested that the concept may retain its analytical value in researching empirically how these processes of home-making and subjective feelings of belonging may be disrupted or challenged by other actors or by larger structural forces.

Delimiting an Anthropology of Displacement

From this perspective, the extent to which the move to Burkina Faso was experienced as disempowering by returning migrants depended on a variety of factors, such as whether or not they had longstanding ties with the country, city, or neighbourhood through family members or their own shuttling back and forth. As the following chapters will show, even in their retrospective accounts, returnees acknowledged that their decision to leave Côte d’Ivoire was just that – one option among several others. The task of an anthropological analysis of displacement, in this light, would need to move beyond Boswell’s assumption that, ‘[r]epatriates experienced the absence of choice in Côte d’Ivoire in the war and when repatriation was no longer a choice, but an obligation’ (Boswell 2010:241). A focus on mobility practices, on the contrary, begins with the assumption that migrants as well as refugees are engaged in a continuing process of weighing their options and making decisions based on an on-going assessment of their changing social terrain (see also Gill, Caletrião, and Mason 2011:301-302).

This articulation is inspired by Stephen Lubkemann’s lucid analysis of wartime mobilities in the context of the enduring civil war in Mozambique, in Culture in Chaos. An Anthropology of the Social Condition in War (2008). Lubkemann suggests a definition of displacement as, ‘…the trans-
formation of lifescapes in ways that render essential life projects harder to achieve and that, in the extreme, place life strategies at risk of ultimate failure’ (Lubkemann 2008a:193). In this view, the central question is not – as it would be in rational choice theory – whether or not a movement came about intentionally, or in the form envisioned by the migrant, but rather the social and existential consequences of a significant change in the social landscape. In this sense, we are dealing with changes that are experienced as abrupt or unsettling, whether they have been brought about by spatial moves or by sudden changes in the social terrain. What aspects of the move were experienced as disruptive by the migrant? Why did the move take the form and trajectory it did, rather than any other? How did aspirations and expectations change during the course of a move – including a longer or shorter period of settlement? Similar questions are raised by Barrett’s assertion that,

At an existential and emotive level … even when ‘ordinary life’ is largely devoid of violent conflict (as in Zambia) there is a continuum between what are perceived as life-sustaining and life-rupturing forms of mobility (Barrett 2009:95)

Approaching displacement as a life-rupturing form of mobility invites a detailed empirical investigation of specific histories and experiences of mobility without the need for overall categorisations of migrants or their movements. Such an empirical exploration of subjective experiences of displacement is also relevant when we consider another group of migrants between Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire, namely the young men who were mobilised by the rebel forces (eventually united as the Forces Nouvelles) and took part in the fighting against the Gbagbo regime during the period 2002-2007. As will be shown in more detail in Chapter 6, some of these ex-combatants were recruited in the Northern towns of Côte d’Ivoire, while others were recruited in Bobo-Dioulasso (and probably elsewhere in southern Burkina Faso), which is rumoured to have been, and to remain, a central base for the leaders and commanders of the Forces Nouvelles. Some high ranking Forces Nouvelles officers had constructed apartment buildings in Sarfalao and others were said to be living in more wealthy parts of town, or to be shuttling back and forth between the two countries, giving the city a direct connection with the rebel movement in Côte d’Ivoire.

The circumstances for returning rebel fighters differed in several ways from those of returning long-time labour migrants, or their children who arrived in Burkina Faso for the first time as refugees. Yet they all shared an experience of the Ivorian crisis at close range. In that sense, they were
all still coming to terms with those experiences in their everyday life in Sarfalao, and they were also to varying degrees perceived as outsiders by non-migrant residents. Conceptually, these experiences imply that the distinction between victims and perpetrators of war may be less relevant when it comes to understanding the migrant trajectories and returns of both groups. While a focus on African conflicts tends to relate (however critically) to formal post-conflict rehabilitation programmes and ideas about the reintegration of former combatants, a focus on migration rather than conflict evokes more similarities with peacetime and refugee migration than differences; after all, even ‘...[s]oldiers are trying to make their own decisions about what is best for them, in a ‘return’ process that parallels that of refugees’ (Hansen & Tavares 1999:208). In this sense, we might argue that the basic resource that both rapatriés and returning rebels found lacking in their new life situation in Sarfalao was immediate, accessible social relationships that under normal (or ideal) circumstances are vital for pursuing everyday life strategies, in line with Lubkemann’s definition of displacement considered above.

If the concept of displacement, in this way, is divorced from refugee-oriented studies that tend to equate involuntary mobility with given social and existential consequences, which part does mobility play in the equation? If displacement denotes a (radical) disruption that deteriorates the actor’s relation to the social terrain, what does the notion of “place” imply? These questions might be answered by evoking the notion of emplacement as a complementary concept to that of displacement.

Conceptualising Emplacement in Relation to Home and Belonging

Having emphasised the importance of individual and collective agency, as well as subjective senses of home and belonging, in relation to the concepts of return and displacement, it is worthwhile to consider the conceptual implications of some of the structural forces and broader discourses that impinge on the outlooks and practices of social actors. When analysing the narratives and practices of returnees from Côte d'Ivoire to Burkina Faso, the Ivorian nationalist political rhetoric that took shape during the 1990s is an unavoidable backdrop for these subjective stories and experiences. Chapter 2 is devoted to a historical discussion of the emergence and articulation of what has become known as a rhetoric of ‘Ivorianness’, or ivoirité in French, which motivated and justified the persecutions of Burkinabe and other immigrants in Côte d'Ivoire during the Ivorian cri-
sis. At this point, it suffices to provide a more conceptual context for this nationalist rhetoric, in order to further articulate the analytical tools that will guide the analysis in the remainder of the thesis.

To this purpose, Peter Geschiere’s recent comparative study of autochthony discourses in Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, and the Netherlands, *The Perils of Belonging. Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion in Africa and Europe* (2009) demonstrates eloquently that the logic of autochthony is gaining influence in many different forms across the globe. Geschiere explores the etymology of the concept of autochthony, which is evoked by nationalist movements across the globe, including successive regimes in Côte d’Ivoire since the early 1990s. He traces autochthony’s origins to classical Greece where the concept was used by Athenian intellectuals, such as Pericles, Euripides, and Plato, in the 5th century BC to express their uniqueness among the Greek city states of the era, in that ‘[a]ll other cities had been founded by immigrants; only the Athenians were truly autochthonous – that is, born from the land where they lived’ (Geschiere 2009:7). Geschiere suggest that despite the surprisingly similar meaning evoked in present-day claims to autochthony in different regions of the world, the term has taken on a broader sociopolitical connotation of belonging to the soil and claiming first-comer rights to a given territory. An essential aspect of autochthony thinking is related to land ownership, which ‘gives it a strong territorializing capacity, outlining – in a more or less symbolical way – a clearly defined “home”’ (Geschiere 2009:29).

However, while this appeal to a primordial, territorially bounded home resonates with nationalist ideals, Geschiere demonstrates that when its protagonists have attempted to specify the delimiting characteristics of autochthony, it proves much more elusive:

Despite its heavy appeal to the soil, autochthony turns out to be quite an empty notion in practice: it only expresses the claim to have come first. It is precisely this emptiness that makes the notion so pliable: autochthony’s Other can be constantly redefined, entailing new boundary marking for the group concerned, which may be one reason why it fits so well in a globalizing world (Geschiere 2009:28).

In other words, rather than expressing a natural relationship between a population and its links to a given territory, it is the very elusiveness – or emptiness – of the notion of autochthony that facilitates its success at this particular moment in history (see also Lentz 2006a, b). Geschiere, in collaboration with several colleagues, has explored the role of mobility in relation to discourses of globalisation. Briefly stated, globalisation theorists such as Arjun Appadurai (1996), Ulf Hannerz (1996), and Zygmunt
Bauman (1998) have seen globalisation as characterised by the increased and accelerated mobility of people, things, capital, and ideas. Bauman sees mobility as a defining resource in the age of globalisation and argues that ‘[t]he dimension along which those “high up” and “low down” are plotted in a society of consumers, is their degree of mobility – their freedom to choose where to be’ (Bauman 1998:86, emphasis in original). The globalisation literature’s celebration of cosmopolitan mobility suggests that mobility is the quintessential privilege of our times, implying that sedentarism, or immobility, would be seen as the corresponding curse of the underprivileged.

However, studies of new forms of nationalism and ‘balkanisation’ (e.g. Castles 2000, Friedman 2002, Hage 1998, Kearney 1995, Malkki 1992, Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002) argue that, as the world becomes smaller, the urge to draw stricter boundaries between insiders and outsiders increases (see also Nyamnjoh 2006). In The Perils of Belonging, Geschiere argues that the colonial heritage of contemporary discourses of autochthony in West Africa reveals their fundamental linkage with issues of governance and the modern state, despite their neo-traditionalising language:

Autochthony’s obsession with fixing people – whether by tying them to a village of origin or by classifying them in accordance with colonial boundaries – is strongly reminiscent of the colonial government’s obsession with la population flottante that one way or another had to be contained in order to make control and colonial rule possible ... In many respects, autochthony’s protagonists seem to be heirs of this colonial tradition; but the forms of mobility they are trying to contain have increasingly global aspects (Geschiere 2009:104, emphasis in original)

The discourse of autochthony, in this way, provides one of the most acute examples of how structural forces impinge on the agency people have over their own mobility: by articulating specific ideas about the link between people and place; by excluding other possible understandings of these links; and by inciting aggression against those seen to be in the wrong place according to such ideas. In a more general sense, the edited volume Struggles for Home. Violence, Hope and the Movement of People (Jansen & Löfving 2009a) presents a series of case studies that analyse the underlying structural violence that shapes people’s ‘... capacities and incapacities to work, live, rest and aspire in the place you happen to be located’ (2009a:13). This brings us to a consideration of the concept of emplacement as complementary to the concept of displacement as discussed above.
Towards an Anthropology of Emplacement

The concept of emplacement has taken on a somewhat cryptic analytical meaning, despite its mundane etymology. Dictionary definitions are sometimes limited to the military term, implying a permanent position of (usually) heavy weaponry. A broader definition includes the settling, mounting, situation, or location of an object, such as the emplacement of a house. This latter understanding has lent itself to social analysis. For example, to Harri Englund, “[e]mplacement refers to a perspective in which the subject is inextricably situated in a historically and existentially specific condition, defined, for brevity, as a “place”’ (Englund 2004:267, emphasis in original). He draws on the work of geographer Edward Casey, who argues that, ‘We are never anywhere, anywhen, but in place’ (Casey 1996:39, in Englund ibid.). This notion of “place” is reminiscent of Appadurai’s oft-cited definition of “locality” as ‘…primarily relational and contextual rather than … scalar or spatial’ (Appadurai 1996:178), and the common postmodernist space/place distinction, by which undifferentiated physical space is distinguished from place, as invested with meaning through human (inter)actions.

This understanding of place has, in turn, been related to notions of home and belonging, as in the anthology Locality and Belonging (Lovell 1998b), where ‘landscape’ and ‘locality’ are seen as a continuous process of ‘…the sitedness of belonging …[,] constantly re-enacted in order to transcend (and simultaneously allow) the vagaries of migration, of movement and of existential uncertainties’ (Lovell 1998a:10). I would suggest a similar approach to the concept of ‘emplacement’, contrary to Lovell who reserves the term for a more neutral understanding of ‘actual territorial emplacement’ (Lovell 1998a:1). With the moderation of the social constructivist approach to place that seems to inform the spatial (re)turn in geography and (some) anthropology, the notion of emplacement might better evoke the processual, non-linear interaction between body and landscape, in other words the understanding of embeddedness as an ongoing dialogue between the material and the imagined.

This granted, the association of place with belonging runs the risk of an a priori confirmation of the sedentary logic of seeing rootedness as the basis of identity, which characterised the discourses of autochthony considered above. Similar to theories of embodiment, I would advocate a less normative approach to emplacement, as neither a privilege nor a predicament, but an entanglement with the lived environment that influences our outlooks and manoeuvrings. This does not prevent a more political reading of emplacement in particular contexts but poses the relationship between place and belonging as a question for empirical investigation rather
than a premise of social analysis. Löfving evokes the usage of the term ‘emplacement’ in geology, where the concept relates to the development or intrusion of ore in rock, which he translates into social terms as a sense of being, ‘... spatially fixed to degrees far beyond sedentarism ... roots in the earth become stones or minerals in rock’ (Löfving 2009:157). In this understanding, dwelling in a particular place implies abiding by the structural forces that characterise that place, giving the sense of embeddedness discussed above a less romanticised ring to it than sedentarian discourses of autochthony as based on rootedness. Löfving suggests that this sense of radical fixity be viewed as externally imposed, as a consequence of structural violence, whereby ‘... emplaced people become part of a political “battle” with very specific aims’ (2009:157).

While subjective experiences and cultural idioms may evoke the sedentarian logic of rootedness as belonging, this approach allows us to investigate the structural conditions of dwelling within the same analytical optic. In other words, while Löfving’s Guatemalan informants were acutely aware of their ‘forced emplacement’ into a subordinate socio-political position, other cases may evoke more subtle forms of structural violence as the basis for emplacement, ‘...setting the stage’, and thereby producing the very conditions for its own opposition’ (Löfving 2009:150).

This spectrum of more or less visible, and more or less oppressive, structural forces as endemic to the analytical concept of emplacement, then, adds a nuanced structural dimension to the subjective processes of home making discussed above. More practically, to explore notions of home and emplacement empirically may imply several different analytical strategies. Laura Hammond’s discussion of the discursive/linguistic dimensions of her informants’ understandings of home may be taken as one approach. The present study, inspired by theories of social practice rather than discourse analysis, approaches the study of processes of emplacement and displacement through their manifestations in speech and other actions in everyday life. This said, informants in Sarfalao obviously related to several different kinds of discourses concerning notions of home, ranging from the subjective feeling of belonging – or indeed the lack thereof – in their new surroundings, where returnees would often talk of feeling at home using the French expression “chez soi”, to their understanding and opinions of political discourses of national ‘homes’ in both Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire.

But an exclusive focus on people’s verbal expressions regarding home has its conceptual disadvantages. Hammond treats the notion of feeling “at home” as a positive sentiment which is undoubtedly true to her informants’ verbalised sentiments but which tends to over-emphasise the
discursive over the structural dimensions of home-making. As an analytical concept, emplacement provides a prism that incorporates these subjective sentiments, on the one hand, and the structural forces that both contribute to defining the sociocultural criteria of these sentiments (e.g. through cultural idioms about the good life) and the constraints to achieving such ends (e.g. local social hierarchies, broader socioeconomic structures, etc.), on the other. Whether or not one is content or satisfied with these circumstances is less important, analytically speaking, and even if the individual experiences “home” as a welcoming place, a social analysis of that sentiment would entail a consideration of the underlying structures that participate in creating it. Rather than seeing ‘home making’ merely as the subjective ascription of meaning by the social actor, an analysis of emplacement incorporates power into the equation, by exploring both the unequal distribution of the capacity to make a home within and across groups of people, and the politico-ideological forces that shape and constrain such efforts (Jansen & Löfving 2009a:13).

This approach to emplacement operationalizes the general theory of practice (e.g. Bourdieu 1977, de Certeau 1984, Giddens 1979, Ortner 2006) which is premised on the notion that “[c]ultural distinctions and cultural values … produce and are produced by daily activities, but in a way that is not recognized, or only rarely, by those who carry out those activities’ (Moore 1999:10, quoted in Barrett 2004:25). In this dialectic between structure and agency, the actor’s intentions are an important vehicle of social practice but so are accidental actions and their consequences, undeliberate reactions or impulses, misunderstandings, etc. In other words, the complexity of social practice cannot be reduced to the verbalised intentions or interpretations of social actors. Adding further to the complex relationship between structure and agency is the fact that social structures – whether expressed through discourses of proper conduct, hierarchies of access to power or resources, or networks of relatedness – are equally volatile and unpredictable, despite the tendency of both social actors and analysts to perceive of them as static and predictable. This conceptual understanding has been articulated by Henrik Vigh in *Navigating Terrains of War. Youth and Soldiering in Guinea Bissau* (2006a), in which he outlines a theory of social navigation that incorporates the volatility of both social agency and structural forces, particularly in the context of radical social change, such as the war-torn social landscape of Guinea Bissau:

As we seek to move within a turbulent and unstable socio-political environment we are at the same time being moved by currents, shifts and tides, requiring that we constantly have to attune our action and trajectory to the
movement of the environment we move through. Social navigation may thus involve detours, unwilling displacement, losing our way and, not least, redrawing trajectories and tactics. Social navigation in this perspective is the tactical movement of agents within a moving element. It is motion within motion (Vigh 2006:14)

Vigh considers the fluctuating structural forces that impinge on the outlooks and possibilities of the social actor a social terrain, although the navigational metaphor evokes a moving sea rather than a stable terrain. The analytical metaphor of social navigation through unstable social terrains evokes the same embeddedness as is intended here with the concept of emplacement. As a complementary concept to that of displacement discussed above, then, we may take emplacement to signify the subjective experience of a life-sustaining form of social practice that is articulated in relation to structural forces that influence and restrict this form of social agency.

Summary of the Main Analytical Concepts

On the basis of the conceptual discussions above, we may now outline three theoretical concepts that will orient the analysis in the following chapters. Firstly, I have discussed how the changing historical patterns of regional mobility may be theorised through the concept of wartime mobilities in relation to social idioms of life cycle progression, in order to explain the more recent transformations of family dynamics and migrant trajectories in the context of the Ivorian crisis. This discussion evoked a shift in focus from labour migration towards a more holistic analysis of mobility practices as an aspect of the social practice of life-making. Relating this analytical approach to the context of Burkinabe migrants’ forced returns during the Ivorian crisis, I further emphasised the need to include conflict-related mobility in the same basic optic as labour migration rather than seeing these two forms of mobility as fundamentally different. The concept of wartime mobilities suggests an attention to the particular circumstances of war-related migration but insists on the conceptual parallels – in terms of migrant trajectories, aspirations, etc. – between mobility practice in peacetime as well as in war.

Secondly, forced displacement is related to the longer history of regional mobility in an effort to elaborate an understanding of displacement that lends itself to qualitative analysis. Following Barrett’s (2009) articulation, displacement is defined here as a life-rupturing form of mobility which
may be explored empirically in the broader context of a life-long process of mobility.

Finally, the discussion of displacement leads to a consideration of a conceptual counterpoint, the concept of *emplacement*, which is theorised in relation to notions of *home*, *autochthony*, and *belonging*. Whereas the concept of *home-making* suggests one aspect of social agency, embedded in a larger structural context, the concept of *emplacement* evokes a general theory of social practice, as a prism for analysing the dialectic between social agency and structural forces. In this way, the dialectical relationship between displacement and emplacement does not imply a continuum of more or less ‘home-like’ social positionings, but rather enables an analysis of how subjective experiences of both life-sustaining and life-rupturing forms of mobility, or social practice more generally, are articulated in relation to more or less restrictive social forces, including more or less visible forms of structural violence.

**Methodology**

The ethnographic fieldwork that provided the empirical material of the study was conducted between 2007 and 2010, divided over three different fieldwork periods, totalling approximately 12 months. The first two periods were largely explorative and included a six-week stay in Bobo-Dioulasso as well as two one-month stays in Korhogo. My first visit in Bobo-Dioulasso was mainly devoted to an intensive language course in Jula and did not entail focused data collection as such. The initial intention was, in fact, to conduct long-term fieldwork in and around Korhogo, but the continued instability of the region led me to reconsider a longer stay with my family, and eventually devote most of my attention to Burkina returning migrants in Bobo-Dioulasso.

The main fieldwork period was from January to December 2010, during which time I lived in Bobo-Dioulasso with my girlfriend and two children. We lived in the adjacent neighbourhood to Sarfalao, which gradually became the locus of my fieldwork – a decision that implied that my family was less involved in the fieldwork than I had envisioned, but which also enabled me to distance myself from the field from time to time and take stock of my progress and priorities.
Life Story Interviews and Migrant Biographies

From the outset, I familiarised myself with the city and began to conduct life-story interviews with returning migrants on the basis of a methodological strategy I had developed beforehand, on the basis of prior fieldwork experiences and methodological readings (see Bjarnesen 2009). Through this form of interviewing, I collected a total of 45 life stories. In the remainder of this study I will refer to this material as *migrant biographies*, since the methodological approach was based on inviting the informant to reflect upon his or her most significant experiences of mobility and dwelling, structuring the conversations around a spatial, rather than temporal, ordering of the life trajectory. This methodological strategy was inspired by Michael Jackson’s eloquent reflections in *The Politics of Storytelling*:

> It is often observed that both stories and lives are structured *temporally*, in terms of sequences of events aligned along a continuum from beginning, through a middle, toward an end … But this progressive, lineal model of human existence may lose its analytical usefulness in societies where cyclical modes of both human life and social time predominate, and where notions of individual finitude and millennial endings have minimal purchase. In such cases, the *emplacement* rather than the *emplotment* of stories becomes crucial, and suggests a model for cross-cultural analysis … If stories are artefacts of dwelling, articulating relations of *identity* between people and places, they are just as obviously products of journeying, and thus sometimes depart from fixed itineraries, unsettle orthodox identifications, and open up horizons to new patterns of association (Jackson 2002:31, emphasis in original)

In addition to this spatial orientation, which I found to correspond better to the informants’ own cognitive ordering of their memories, I explored memories of important life-cycle events, or *vital conjunctures* (cf. Johnson-Hanks 2002), as well as memories of past *aspirations* in deciding moments. Although the core of this biographical material is retrospective, these guiding concepts enabled conversations that were more attuned to the prospective: by discussing how informants had envisioned their future at different junctures in their past, as well as by exploring their hopes and plans for the future in some detail. In this endeavour I tried to be respectful of people’s need for narrative coherence, while at the same time guiding the conversation enough for me to understand idiosyncratic references and occasional contradictive statements. As Ochs & Capps have argued, ‘coherence dominates authenticity as an existential narrative solution to understanding the past and coping with the future’ (Ochs & Capps 2001:279, see also Peacock & Holland 1993:368).
The majority of these accounts stem from semi-structured interviews conducted in the first half of my fieldwork, and were often first-time conversations with the informants. I came in touch with these informants through my assistant – who either knew the informants personally, or had been pointed towards the person through common acquaintances in the neighbourhood. In retrospect, some narratives possess a considerable degree of what Mats Utas (2005:408) has called “victimcy”, that is, a deliberate emphasis on the vulnerability and powerlessness of the speaker which is evoked in exchanges with a more powerful listener who is perceived as an access point to resources or recognition, e.g. humanitarian assistance or other material assets. As Utas argues, this presentation of self represents a way of exerting agency in an otherwise vulnerable social position (see also Shaw 2011:68).

Furthermore, emphasising the duress of traumatic experiences is not only a sound strategy for obtaining resources but also an important existential reaction to both the traumatic experiences of wartime migration and the equally dramatic experiences of war-related settlement (Jackson 2002, Lubkemann 2005, 2008a), and should be seen as an expression of the existential quest for narrative coherence. I would suggest that we perceive of these accounts as “rapatrié narratives” or refugee stories, deliberately evoking the administrative/structural senses of rapatrié/refugee and the subjective/existential connotations of storytelling (see also Turner 2010, Malkki 1995). As all stories, these are partial, positioned, and contextual statements that speak to multiple audiences and issues simultaneously.

Some migrant biographies were collected during one or two interviews – particularly once I estimated that I had reached a certain level of saturation (cf. Olivier de Sardan 1995) – while the ones that are given most attention in the chapters that follow were collected over the course of repeated conversations of varying duration and formality throughout the fieldwork period. In analysing this material, furthermore, I emphasise the need to, firstly, contextualise the narratives in the present and, secondly, to supplement the formal narratives of more structured life story interviews with information from casual conversations – not only with the main narrator but also with other actors in their social network – as well as with (participant) observations regarding the narration of the past in other contexts than the interview setting, and the discourses that influence how narratives are given shape and meaning (Ochs & Capps 2001:24, 55).
Participant Observation and Extended-Case Studies

In addition to the biographical material, the main form of data collection was conducted through participant observation and casual conversations, primarily with the eight families that became the focus of the fieldwork. In some of these families, all the members I came to know lived in the same household, while in others people were spread out across the neighbourhood and wider city, as well as across the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space. While family sizes varied significantly, I generally spent time with 2-5 members of each family on a regular basis, and was particularly conscious of getting to know members of different gender and generations, resulting in a total of 28 main informants across the eight families.

As already mentioned, the material collected through participant observation served to supplement more formal life story interviews, but also provided more contextual understandings of intra-family and intergenerational relationships, as well as the significance of informants’ relationships to their neighbours and casual acquaintances.

Outline of the Thesis

The thesis is organised into seven main chapters, each focusing on a separate aspect of wartime mobilities in the context of the Ivorian crisis, and a conclusion that brings together some of the main themes emerging from the preceding chapters in a more theoretical light. Chapter 2 is devoted to a historical reading of the development, consolidation, and destabilisation of the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space. The history of migration between Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire is discussed with particular attention to the roles of Burkinabe migrants as a significant social category in official policies regarding labour migration and national politics, as well as in the context of their host communities in Côte d’Ivoire.

This chapter provides an historical context for the following chapters and several points of reference with regard to the past decade’s political instability in Côte d’Ivoire. By setting the general discussion of the Ivorian crisis in the context of a broader history of labour migration, I hope to

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11 Although I visited Côte d’Ivoire during the main fieldwork period, I only met these migrant family members in the context of their visits from Côte d’Ivoire to Bobo-Dioulasso.
12 I also conducted several formal and informal ‘expert interviews’ with local public officials, journalists, researchers, and other resource people in both Korhogo and Bobo-Dioulasso, as well as a comparative survey of the two parts of the neighbourhood of Sarfalao, of 150 households in each part.
contribute to a more holistic understanding of the conflict, and the chang-
ing image of the stranger that has been central to its dynamics.

Chapter 3 provides a different kind of contextualisation, drawing pri-
marily on empirical material from the neighbourhood of Sarfalao to in-
troduce the empirical setting of the study. By considering some of the
important challenges to everyday life in this urban neighbourhood of
Bobo-Dioulasso, the chapter places the informants of the study in not
only a material but also a sociocultural context and explores the differing
experiences of inhabitants within this context. On the basis of a reading of
a more general literature on urban Africa, the analysis centres on ques-
tions of urban land allocation and subjective feelings of belonging – a
somewhat odd conceptual pairing that combines a discussion of the struc-
tural aspects of urban residency with an analysis of the practice of every-
day life in the city. This discussion refers back to the dialectical under-
standing of emplacement discussed above, as encompassing both the
structural forces that shape and influence the agent’s space for manoeu-
vring and the social practice that constitutes individual and collective
agency. In a similar vein, the chapter suggests that the double meaning of
the concept of *neighbourhood*, as signifying both a social setting – the
neighbourhood as a place – and a relationship – neighbourhood as the act
of co-habitation – captures both the structural and the subjective dimen-
sions of social life in the city. From this point of view, the *rapatrié* return-
ees that make out the main group of informants are introduced as facing
particular challenges in their efforts to make a home in Sarfalao, in rela-
tion to their status as ambiguous newcomers in the neighbourhood.

Chapters 4 and 5 are based on the narratives of returning migrants in
Sarfalao and analyse the circumstances and experiences of migration from
Burkina Faso (in Chapter 4) and the forced return from Côte d’Ivoire in
the context of the Ivorian crisis (in Chapter 5). Here, expectations of
idealised trajectories and narratives of forced displacement from Côte
d’Ivoire are analysed with attention paid to subjective experiences of con-
tinuity and rupture that nuance the immediate impressions of both depar-
ture stories and refugee narratives. In Chapter 4, I emphasise the underly-
ing sense of continuity that characterises narratives that place the effects of
the Ivorian crisis within the longer processes of transnational mobility. I
argue that migrants’ continued orientation towards Côte d’Ivoire despite
their forced displacement during the conflict suggest that life-rupturing
forms of mobility were already an expected facet of the trajectories that
migrants embarked on prior to the turn to armed aggression and that
migrants reacted to the threat of violence in similar ways as they did to
other obstacles during their migrant careers.
In Chapter 5, the accompanying experiences of the effects of the Ivorian crisis as an abrupt rupture of a migrant trajectory are analysed in relation to notions of home and belonging that underlie the idea of a “return” to Burkina Faso. The narratives of returning, or escaping, migrants illustrate the considerable variations in which experiences and circumstances give rise to a sense of rupture and how individual migrants and families cope with these predicaments. One important dimension of this discussion is that variations may occur even within families, or across generations, giving further examples of the need to explore subjective experiences empirically. Finally, a consideration of settlement histories in Sarfalao non-loi emphasises the importance of social networks in Burkina Faso for migrants arriving during the Ivorian crisis.

Chapter 6 introduces a different kind of transnational mobility, namely the cross-border recruitment of young Burkinabe men into the Forces Nouvelles rebel army in Côte d’Ivoire. As the empirical cases will demonstrate, although the experiences of armed combat and the daily life in military camps and armed patrolling units differ significantly from those of other migrants, several aspects regarding both motives for departure and experiences of return resemble the experiences of the labour migrants considered in Chapters 4 and 5. The chapter serves, in this way, both as a significant empirical study in its own right and as a vehicle for a broader conceptualisation of wartime mobilities.

The two final chapters focus on everyday practice in Sarfalao and evoke extended-case studies of some of the same informants that provided their narratives as migrant biographies in earlier chapters, as well as interactions between other rapatrié residents in the neighbourhood. Chapter 7 discusses a number of diverging experiences of families whose constellations and intergenerational relationships were affected by the move to Burkina Faso from Côte d’Ivoire. A common theme throughout the chapter refers back to the concepts of neighbourhood and emplacement, concerning both the sense of a locality that both enables and constrains the agency of its residents and as an ambivalent proximity within a heterogeneous population that become the observers, and sometimes judges, of the actions and behaviours of individual family members. The analysis emphasises the need for an empirical exploration of the nuances and variations of seemingly categorical positions – even within families and households.

Carrying the same discussion further, Chapter 8 relates the questions of intergenerational relations to the experiences of young rapatriés, the so-called diaspos who had come to Burkina Faso for the first time during the war. Here, youth is approached as both an issue of life-cycle progression and as subculture, with the diaspo identity analysed in relation to the gen-
eral focus of the dissertation on intergenerational relations. At the same time, the performative aspects of diaspo identity are emphasised as an ambiguous role connoting both cosmopolitan refinement and intrusive foreignness in the eyes of non-migrant youths. The discussion also provides another take on the question of home and belonging, as diaspo youths evoke both their right to the city and their superiority as outsiders who have acquired social and linguistic skills that allow them to access valuable networks of resources and employment.

Finally, the conclusion (Chapter 9) outlines five overarching themes running through the chapters: firstly, the dynamics of wartime mobilities in the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space; secondly, the overlaps between labour migration and forced displacement that these mobility practices entail; thirdly, the characteristics of south-south transnationalism; fourthly, the generational variations in experiences of displacement and home-making; and, finally, the experiences of being seen, and of feeling as, outsiders in your country of origin – in other words, as a diaspora at home. This discussion is organised to cut across the different chapters of the thesis, in order to emphasise the interrelatedness of the broad themes explored in individual chapters. In the conclusion, these themes are brought into more explicit dialogue with each other, in order to articulate how the Ivorian armed conflict and its socio-political environment affected transnational mobility between Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire, and how these dynamics of wartime mobilities, in their turn, affected the practices and outlooks of former migrants in Sarfalao.
2. A History of the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire Transnational Space

This chapter discusses the gradual development of a circular labour migration regime between Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire. In the context of a much longer history of regional trade and mobility, emphasis is placed on the colonial period as formative for the structural relationship between these two present-day nation-states. On the backdrop of this historical reading, the postcolonial political developments that eventually led to the Ivorian crisis are discussed as a part of a longer socio-political tension regarding labour migration and the articulation of post-independence discourses of national belonging. As Lubkemann argues, ‘... the analysis of war-time behaviour and the tracing of war-time social processes can never start in war or with violence [but] ... must begin with an exploration of the historically constituted and culturally specified terms of meaning and social practices that define the life projects and social struggles, which are the final object of such questions’ (Lubkemann 2008a:325). Given its centrality to the experiences of the informants of this study, the armed conflict in Côte d’Ivoire is given considerable attention, with a particular focus on the changing role of immigrants and perceived ‘strangers’ in Côte d’Ivoire, as well as on other factors that influenced the structural conditions under which several generations of Burkinabe migrants carried out their transnational life-making projects.

Pre-Colonial Mobilities and Long-Distance Connections

The territory that comprises present-day Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire was marked by intense regional trading networks since the time of the great cross-Saharan caravans of the 3rd century B.C. Trade in gold was central to the region’s internal trade, but the traders carried equally valuable items such as kola nuts, salt, and slaves, as well as foodstuffs such as grain, fish, and livestock (Lovejoy 1985:653). The trade in slaves was
practiced long before the trans-Atlantic trade began in the sixteenth century. Before that time, slaves were traded internally in the region and transported across the Sahara to provide North African Muslims with concubines, soldiers, domestic servants, and eunuchs (Lovejoy 1985:663). Furthermore, although the pace and intensity of the movements of people and goods across the globe may have accelerated during the past century, the West African region was linked to global trade networks as early as the fifteenth century. Ivor Wilks suggests, for example, that West African gold is likely to have travelled from the Akan areas of present-day Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire via Timbuktu to the Mediterranean coast and from there off the African continent towards the Middle East and Western Europe. These exchanges are evident from the goods the traders received in return, including Syrian and Egyptian ornate brass vessels as well as bronze bowls made for Richard II who ruled England from 1377-99 (Wilks 1985:480). Intra-continental trade networks were also well established by the fifteenth century, including the trans-Saharan caravans that passed regularly through the main cities of the Songhay and Borno empires (Lovejoy 1985:648) and the Muslim networks of Muslim Dyula, Jahaanke, and Hausa traders who were based in the main trading towns of the savannah belt from Futa Jallon on the Guinean coast in the west to Lake Chad in the east. These traders travelled northwards to the southern fringes of the Sahara desert to towns such as Timbuktu and Gao along the River Niger, and southwards to trade with European merchants on the coast of present-day Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire (Lovejoy 1985:677).

While the trajectories of traders (and slaves) were an early form of long-distance mobility, the most significant population movements occurred in relation to the expansion of pre-colonial kingdoms such as the Akan, Asante, and Mossi states. Whole groups or villages moved in response to the arrival of settlers or soldiers from these expansionist societies who claimed new lands and took control over attractive natural resources (Riester 2011b, Kuba 2006). In other words, these organisational units were themselves mobile, rather than delimited to specific territories. For example, the city of Kong was an important commercial centre in the 17th and 18th centuries and was one of the main loci of the Wattara ‘war houses’, discussed by Mahir Şaul. He argues that the tendency to classify social formations in West Africa as ‘states’ or ‘kingdoms’ ‘... projects upon the social formation a foreign and anachronistic notion of territorial sovereignty and central administration, and hinders the understanding of its radical multicentricity’ (Şaul 1998:541). Instead, he continues:

The war houses had no political borders to separate inside and outside territory, to mark off limits against rival houses or independent villages.
There was ranking and personal subjugation, prototypically expressed in the alternative idioms of kinship and slavery, but no political subjecthood. The war houses operated as private enterprises (Şaul 1998:541)

The Wattara war houses, in this way, relied upon – and contributed to – the regional significance of the city of Kong, but did not operate as territorial rulers of the region.

In terms of connectivity, Wilks suggests that the Akan and Asante states differed significantly from the Mossi kingdoms, ‘... which, at the end of the eighteenth century, remained little affected by the global changes that had occurred in production and commerce’ (Wilks 1985:502). At the beginning of the colonial era, a century later, the Mossi came under the much more oppressive influence of the French colonial administration, which was quick to take control over the territory and appoint a local authority, the Moro Naba Sighiri, who was willing to collaborate with the invading power (Riester 2011b:62). At the beginning of the colonial era, then, the external connections of the populations of West Africa had been highly differentiated and had generally taken the form of relatively benign trade networks, on the one hand, and direct aggressions from the region’s expansionist societies, on the other. European colonisation introduced a much larger scale of territorial domination and population control, albeit in highly differentiated ways.

1919-1947: Early Colonial Labour Migration

The territory of present-day Burkina Faso was part of the colony of Haut-Sénégal Niger, which included large parts of what is today Niger and Mali (Deniel 1974:216). Haute-Volta first became a separate colony in 1919, with territorial borders encompassing parts of present-day Niger, Mali, and Côte d’Ivoire and it gradually became exploited by the colonial administration primarily as a labour reserve.

The initial ambition was to develop Haute-Volta into a self-sufficient colony similar to the other territories of French West Africa, or Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF). Self-sufficiency was to be achieved primarily through the collection of head-taxes and the development of an agricultural export economy – in Haute-Volta focussed mainly on the production of cotton. In addition, the colonial subjects of Haute-Volta were exploited in the major infrastructure projects of the early colonial period, such as the construction of the Côte d’Ivoire-Niger and Senegal-Niger railways. In the years leading up to World War I, the French administration also imposed military conscription on its subjects and laid the ground
for the use of Voltaic labour in other parts of the AOF (Gervais & Mandé 2000:60-61). These demands on Burkinabe households to provide labour to serve the interests of the colonial administration forced families to search for new ways of meeting, or evading, their obligations while still securing their own livelihood.

During this period, migration to neighbouring Gold Coast emerged as an important strategy to that end: leaving the French colony of Haute-Volta for the British colony of Gold Coast was, for the migrants, a way of falling off the map of colonial tax collectors and labour recruiters while at the same time proving to be a viable destination for a more profitable migrant career. Voices within the French colonial administration were well aware of the unintended effects of their policies. As early as 1917, the Governor-General of French West Africa noted: ‘Comment s’étonner que nos sujets ... nous quittent pour aller chercher, de l’autre côté de la frontière, une tranquillité que nous n’avons pas su ou pu leur donner?’ (quoted in Asiwaju 1976:577). Efforts were made throughout the first half of the 1920s to facilitate the administration’s access to, and control over, one of the most densely populated areas of the AOF (Tokpa 2006:15).

In this way, the extension of the railway from Tafiré to Bobo-Dioulasso, which was constructed between 1928 and 1934 (David 2009:29, Dupré la Tour 2006:21), served the purpose of, on the one hand, facilitating the administration’s access to a territory holding between 2.5 and 3 million inhabitants and, on the other hand, allowing the growing southern plantation economy to dispose of a workforce of seasonal migrant workers, whose circulation would be eased by the new railway (Tokpa 2006:47). However, this initiative had little initial effect in redirecting migrants towards the French plantation areas in the southern forest belt. The strict control over the population’s mobility caused resentment, and the population found ways to resist.

The forced recruitment of Voltaic labour was but one expression of the French desire to order the movement of people in the AOF territory: before 1936 any change of residence from one administrative area (Cercle) to another was supposed to be overseen by the administration (Breusers 1999:223). Furthermore, the plight of Voltaic workers in the plantation areas in the south were abysmal, which was evident to the potential migrants in the north: ‘The fact that those who returned from Basse Côte d’Ivoire were often sick and weak, while others had died, contributed to the unpopularity of the French labour programmes’ (Breusers 1999:223-24). Asiwaju estimates that approximately 80,000 French subjects left

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13 How could we be surprised that our subjects ... leave us to go and find, on the other side of the border, a tranquillity that we have not known how to, or been able to, offer them?
Haute-Volta for neighbouring Gold Coast (present-day Ghana), in what he calls ‘protest migrations’, in the late 1920s and early 1930s (Asiwaju 1976:590). In addition to being an ‘exit’ option (cf. Hirschman 1970, Cruise O’Brien 2003) in response to French colonial policies, the conditions in Gold Coast were not only less restrictive but also more lucrative. In 1936, the average remuneration in Côte d’Ivoire was 1.5 FF per day, in comparison with a 5.25 FF per day average in Gold Coast (Gervais & Mandé 2000:63). These unintended advantages for the British administration in Gold Coast, in combination with the administrative costs of maintaining the colony of Haute-Volta, were the main incentives for the French administration’s gradual inclination towards the abolition of Haute-Volta, which was to serve strictly as a labour reserve for the rest of the AOF (Tokpa 2006:22-23).

The Abolishment of Haute-Volta

The incentive to abolish Haute-Volta as a self-sufficient colony was also provided to the central administration by the growing opposition to forced labour in the colony, which saw the local French administration join forces with traditional authorities to press for the freeing of Voltaic labourers in order to give priority to internal agricultural and infrastructural projects in Haute-Volta (cf. Riester 2011b:27). In combination with the failure of the cotton production, then, the loss of manual labourers to Gold Coast and the mobilisation of political actors within Haute-Volta were decisive factors for the central colonial administration’s decision to abolish the colony in 1932.

The abolition meant that the territory of Haute-Volta was divided between the neighbouring territories, with the largest territory, renamed ‘Haute Côte d’Ivoire’ annexed to the colony of Côte d’Ivoire, which was then renamed ‘Basse Côte d’Ivoire’ (Breusers 1999:219, see also Riester 2011b:63). In this new partition, Haute Côte d’Ivoire was explicitly intended as a labour reserve to service the cacao and coffee plantations in Basse Côte d’Ivoire. Central to the concerns of the French colonial administration was still the loss of labourers to neighbouring Gold Coast. During the following period, these efforts proved more successful, in part due to the more aggressive recruitment techniques of the administration in Basse Côte d’Ivoire and partly because the global economic conditions of pre-World War II Europe made the British administration in Gold Coast more reluctant towards accommodating Voltaic migrants (Gervais & Mandé 2000:78). The switch to more aggressive recruitment policies of the French administration angered the traditional chiefs and Voltaic intel-
lectuals, not only for the damage it did to migrant households but on a more structural level because it consolidated a virtual monopoly by European planters over migrant labour.

This discontent led to calls for the reconstitution of the colony of Haute-Volta, among others from the influential Mossi king, the Moro Naba Saga II, who spoke out against the abuse facing Voltaic workers in the plantations in a letter dated 26 July 1946 (cf. Madiega 1987):

… la portion cédée à la Côte d'Ivoire pour mettre ses enfants à la merci des planteurs pour l'intensification de la culture du café et du cacao sur un sol meurtrier pour les enfants voltaïques ne veut plus de la Côte d'Ivoire¹⁴ (quoted in Tokpa 2006:80)

As the leader of arguably the most densely populated area in the AOF, the Moro Naba’s implicit threats to resist colonial recruitment policies was taken seriously by the administration. Mossi land was not only an invaluable labour reserve to the French, but the Mossi worker was seen – in the racialist taxonomic logic of the day – as the most disciplined and resourceful workers, adding leverage to the Moro Naba’s demands (Gervais & Mandé 2000:66-67).

In this way, the French administration formed an alliance with the Moro Naba (see Cordell, Gregory, and Piché 1996:74), which served to oppose the growing number of other political actors in the AOF, who were becoming increasingly vocal in their criticism of the French administration. Particularly under the Vichy government in France, colonial policies had become increasingly restrictive against African planters in Côte d’Ivoire who were seen as a competitive threat to the European planters, despite the massive privileges bestowed on the latter by the administration. Not only did the forced labour recruitment in Haute-Volta benefit the European planters exclusively, the administration paid twice as much for their produce and provided them with access to imported consumer goods and vital agricultural implements, all of which served to inflate the competitive advantages of European planters (Boone 2003:194).

In response, African planters eventually joined forces in the Syndicat Agricole Africain (SAA) and were able to put more pressure on the colonial administration (ibid.). One of the founding members of this union was a young Baoulé canton chief of Yamoussoukro; a trained medical doctor

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¹⁴ The part given to Côte d’Ivoire in order to place its children at the mercy of the planters, in order to intensify the cocoa and coffee cultivation on a murderous land for the Voltaïc children will have no more of Côte d’Ivoire.
and one of the wealthiest African planters – Félix Houphouët – who was elected president of the SAA in September 1944 (Boone 2003:196). The following year, Houphouët was elected as Côte d’Ivoire’s representative to the French Constituent Assembly and used his position to form an alliance with the French Communist Party in order to press for the abolition of forced labour. These efforts succeeded in March 1946, with a law bearing Houphouët’s name (Boone 2003:196). This success was an important step in Houphouët’s political career, as his name became known all across the AOF. He had already been elected president of the newly founded Parti Démocratique de la Côte d’Ivoire (PDCI), and this political party took the initiative to form a cross-regional nationalist party, the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA) in 1946 (ibid.), which was a driving force on the road towards independence.

The Reconstitution of Haute-Volta

The formal abolition of forced labour in 1946 coincided with a rise in prices on primary products and the salaries, which were imposed by regulations, could not compete with the potential revenue of small-scale production (Gervais & Mandé 2000:78). These developments aggravated the lack of labour for the French administration and eventually led to the acknowledgement of the calls from the Moro Naba and other traditional chiefs in the former Haute-Volta to reverse the abolition of the colony (Tokpa 2006:24, see also Breusers 1999:222-23, Skinner 1972:381). The Moro Naba’s central position in the politics of labour recruitment enabled him to act as the figurehead of an increasingly vocal civil society, and to set the agenda to the benefit of his own interests.¹⁵

Aside from the interests of the Moro Naba, the interests of the French administration and the other main actors in the plantation economy gradually converged over the reconstitution, as Gervais and Mandé summarise:

¹⁵ For example, in the electoral campaigns of the 1945 elections of the First Constituent Assembly, discussed above, the Moro Naba mobilised support in the Union pour la Défense des Intérêts de Haute-Volta (UDIHV) which, although it was known simply as the ‘Union Voltaïque’, worked specifically to forward Mossi interests in pushing for the reconstitution of the colony of Haute-Volta (Gervais & Mandé 2000:75). This stance was in opposition to the RDA of Félix Houphouët, whose main constituency were the African planters of Basse Côte d’Ivoire. This opposition did not imply, however, that Houphouët was entirely opposed to the Moro Naba’s agenda. As we have seen, once he was elected, Houphouët’s political position as a member of the French Assembly was often to represent the joint interests of African workers and planters, most notably the abolition of head-taxes and forced labour (see e.g. Strozeski 2006:91).
The European planters were counting on the enhanced interventions of chiefs in labor recruitment and positive propaganda to counter the Gold Coast’s renewed attraction, the African planters who felt they could better compete on the labor market with the abolition of forced labor; the administration’s divide-and-rule policy was viewed as requiring the dislocation of a large Côte d’Ivoire; Voltaic intellectuals and chiefs believed that access to new political and administrative tools would allow them to better serve their own agenda (Gervais & Mandé 2000:75)

From the point of view of the Voltaic labourers themselves, their importance to the colonial economies of both the British and the French did not translate into significant political or economic privilege. As we have seen, the main political struggles were over rights to access to labour, and throughout the early colonial period Voltaic labourers were excluded from accumulating any significant wealth, because of their low wages and the limited possibilities of acquiring their own land in the plantation areas.

In addition to improving the conditions of workers in the plantations, and facilitating their transportation through the expanding railway line, the planters had accepted the demands of workers’ representatives to be allowed to bring their wives and children with them to the south (Breusers 1999:233), encouraging more migrants to settle in the plantation areas. With the large numbers of migrant labourers in the south, Ivorian nationalism was in this way founded on the competition for access to land, as well as white-collar employment, and the notion that the wealth and privilege of the southern forest belt was reserved for the perceived autochtones – the indigenous population – and was under the threat of invasion by foreign elements, or allochtones (Gervais & Mandé 2000:77). The growing resentment towards migrants was initially targeted towards those seen as most privileged – Dahomean and Togolese migrants on the white-collar labour market in Abidjan – as early as 1937, and most famously in 1958, when groups of these immigrants were expelled from Côte d’Ivoire in what may be seen as a precursor to the politics of ivoirisation (see below).

The French exploitation of Voltaic labour had begun as the forced recruitment of workers for the large infrastructure projects undertaken from the 1920s and the various agricultural efforts across the territory of Af-

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16 Gervais and Mandé argue that the efforts of the French administration to retain its control over Voltaic labour by preventing workers from constructing their own plantations informed a sense of territoriality in the AOF colonies that may be seen as a precursor to the exclusionist nationalism of the past decade’s political conflict in present-day Côte d’Ivoire (Gervais & Mandé 2000:76-77).
rique Occidentale Française. What is important here is to note, on the one hand, that labour migration from Burkina Faso was an essential, and contested, resource for both French and British colonial administrations and that, on the other hand, migrants responded to, and influenced, the formal policies by their choice of trajectories.

1947-1960: The Development of a Labour Migration Regime

Following the reconstitution of the colony of Haute-Volta in 1947, labour recruitment in Haute-Volta to the ever-expanding plantation economy in southern Côte d’Ivoire benefitted from the improved infrastructure and the administration’s shift from forced labour towards more subtle ways of attracting labour: an increase in remuneration; the promise of better living and working conditions in Côte d’Ivoire; and the closer collaboration with the Moro Naba and other local representatives. At the time of the reconstitution of Haute-Volta, the AOF colonies had taken their first formal step into French political participation, with the 1946 parliamentary elections appointing three deputies for (the still unified) Côte d’Ivoire. The three new MPs were to become important political figures: Ouèzzin Coulibaly, a teacher in psychology turned politician from the centre-western borderland between present-day Mali and Burkina Faso (cf. McFarland & Rupley 1998:32), who was one of the figureheads of the RDA; Philippe Zinda Kaboré, a dominant advocate for the reconstitution of the colony of Haute-Volta and, until 1947, a collaborator of the Moro Naba (cf. Gervais & Mandé 2000); and finally Félix Houphouët-Boigny – who was to become Côte d’Ivoire’s first president at independence in 1960. As leading members of the RDA, Ouèzzin Coulibaly and Houphouët-Boigny were both engaged in cross-regional questions of negotiating the conditions of French labour recruitment and the rights of African planters in the agricultural sector. In this period, such questions were more important than territorial denominations in shaping political alliances (Hagberg & Bjarnesen 2011:512).

The regional context was also important for financial reasons. Rather than being the direct result of the continued French efforts, the attraction of the Gold Coast as the preferred destination for Voltaic migrant workers finally faded in the 1950s when cacao production in Gold Coast began to stagnate, while producer prices for cacao in Côte d’Ivoire rose significantly, giving the Ivorian plantation economy the advantage for the first time (Breusers 1999:236). Furthermore, the recruitment of Voltaic labour
after the abolition of forced labour became organised through labour unions, most notably the Syndicat interprofessionnel pour l’acheminement de la main d’œuvre (SIAMO), who negotiated wages and other working conditions, as well as transportation between the recruitment zones in the north and the plantation areas in the south, with the French administration on behalf of their members (Riester 2011b:64-65). Between 1951 and 1958, the SIAMO facilitated the recruitment of 230,000 Voltaic workers to the southern plantation areas, or approximately 20,000 per year (Mandé 2003), which resulted in the number of workers in Côte d’Ivoire doubling the equivalent numbers in Gold Coast by the end of that period (Blion 1992:28).

To begin with, the growing influx of immigrants into Côte d’Ivoire did not result in the same resentment towards agricultural labourers as the hostility already noted against white-collar workers in the city. On the contrary, migrant workers were seen as an important resource both economically, providing cheap labour to African planters, and politically, as a vital part of the RDA’s constituency in pushing for independence from France (Riester 2011b:69). In this way, the 1950s were marked by the emergence of Côte d’Ivoire as the primary destination for Voltaic workers and of their vital role as both an economic cornerstone in the Ivorian plantation economy and a political cornerstone in the agenda of the RDA in the years leading up to independence. It should be emphasised, however, that although the present-day trajectories of circular labour migration between Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire have their origins in the colonial period, the intensity and seeming inevitability of Côte d’Ivoire as the predominant destination of Burkinabe migrants was only consolidated after independence – despite half a century of concerted efforts by the French colonial administration (Cordell, Gregory, and Piché 1996:76).

1960-1980: The Consolidation of the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire Transnational Space

The paths taken by the first generation of African leaders at independence differed greatly, both in terms of their political orientations and in terms of their economic and social impacts on the role of postcolonial labour migration. Although transnational mobility remained important politically, culturally, and financially to both migrants and governments throughout the region, Burkina Faso is today one of the countries most affected by the mobility of its citizens (Zongo 2010c:20). This section considers the postcolonial consolidation of transnational labour migration between
Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire and the early signs of the troubles to come that it entailed.

The Félix Houphouët-Boigny Compromise

At the heart of the political outlook and economic policies that characterised the role of labour migration in the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space following independence in both countries in 1960 was the leadership of Félix Houphouët-Boigny who, as we have seen, entered the political scene via the SAA labour union and who was, at independence, already one of the region’s most influential politicians. As opposed to such leaders as Senegal’s Senghor and Ghana’s Nkrumah, Houphouët-Boigny pursued a close collaboration with France and liberal financial policies, aiming at expanding the Ivorian plantation economy on the principles inherited from the colonial administration. The remarkable success of this approach, which is often referred to as the Ivorian model (Contamin & Memel-Foté 1997, Beauchemin 2005), provided Côte d’Ivoire with a leading role in the region in the first two decades after independence.

The success of the Ivorian model was not just a question of growth rates but first and foremost of its political and financial stability at a time when other newly independent nations were immersed in internal power struggles. Houphouët-Boigny’s economic model assigned a fundamental role to labour migration, both internally – from the north and centre to the expanding western frontier of the plantation economy – and internationally, primarily from Haute-Volta, Guinea, and Mali. As already noted, this agricultural frontier had been expanding westwards since the early colonial period, with large numbers of labour migrants settling in its wake, often outnumbering the local population. In this way, labour migration was in many ways the driving force of ‘the Ivorian miracle’ of the independence era. The other side of this financial ‘miracle’, of course was a semi-authoritarian style of political leadership. Houphouët-Boigny immediately abolished multi-party democracy in Côte d’Ivoire upon his ascent to the highest office, in part to prevent the ethnicisation of national politics, at a time where the two leading opposition parties to Houphouët-Boigny’s PDCI were based on Agni and Bété ethnic allegiance respectively – both groups originating in the southern forest belt that had now become the centre of the country’s financial development (Beauchemin 2005:15).

Many studies emphasise the importance of the struggles over access to agricultural land in the context of the gradual westward movement of the agricultural frontier during the Houphouët-Boigny era. As the plantation
sector eventually saturated the southern half of the country, all the way to the national border with Liberia, the influx of immigrants to the southwest changed the dynamics between locals and settlers. The agricultural expansion brought farm labourers to the southwest to an extent that the local population was outnumbered by settlers who were both immigrants from the neighbouring countries and ‘internal migrants’ who had, as it were, followed the frontier from the eastern and central regions westwards.

Jean-Pierre Chauveau has provided fine-grained analyses of the social and political implication of the changing constellations of the population in the central and western regions of Côte d’Ivoire. He argues that the Houphouët-Boigny policies of encouraging both these forms of labour immigration to the agricultural frontier zone were legitimated by the regime with reference to the traditional institution known as the ‘tutorat’, which prescribed the welcoming of strangers and providing them with agricultural land in exchange for a share of their produce and, more importantly, the establishment of a moral obligation of ‘gratitude’ that could be inherited from one generation to the next (Chauveau 2006:214-15). The political exploitation of this institution exacerbated tensions between locals and immigrants in the southwestern plantation areas.

At the same time as the rural agricultural sector continued to incorporate internal and international labour migrants, independent Côte d’Ivoire also stood out in the regional context for its high rates of urbanisation, once again on the basis of both internal and international migrants. In large part due to the success of the plantation economy, Ivorian cities flourished in the post-independence period all across the southern forest belt but none more than Abidjan, which became the regional metropole on the basis of the importance of its harbour in the shipment of cacao and coffee off the continent (Beauchemin 2005:11). But while the general sentiment remained one of an African ‘melting-pot’ until the death of Houphouët-Boigny in 1993, the economic success of the migration-driven model of development was not without its social difficulties. The large influx of migrants into the southern forest belt and its cities and towns induced resentment from the local population even before independence and led to the emergence of immigrant enclaves and settlements in both rural and urban environments, rather than to a gradual integration of foreigners into the local communities. Under Houphouët-Boigny, foreign immigrants were recognised as a specific group within the Ivorian polity, enjoying the right to vote and to cultivate land under the famous
dictum, ‘the land belongs to he who cultivates it’. In 1966, Houphouët-Boigny presented an initiative granting double citizenship to all West African immigrants in Côte d’Ivoire, but the proposition was rejected by Parliament (Beauchemin 2005:14).

Despite the president’s personal inclinations, the state’s public policies became increasingly restrictive towards immigrants during the 1970s. In 1974, the Ivorian Parliament passed a law barring immigrants from registering at the labour office (OMOCI, Office de la main-d’oeuvre de Côte d’Ivoire), effectively relegating foreign workers to the informal sector, since an inscription was required of all wage earners (Beauchemin 2005:15). These restrictions also applied to the children of immigrants, since they were not entitled to citizenship rights despite being born in Côte d’Ivoire (ibid.).

In summary, ‘the Houphouët-Boigny Compromise’ (Akindès 2004:8-12) was a reflection of Houphouët-Boigny’s strategy of embracing the open market in his economic policies and expecting the ensuing financial gain to consolidate the internal division within the country, along ethnic/tribal lines as well as between (perceived) immigrants and autochthones. This compromise, however, was undermined not only by the long-term failures of his economic policies, but also by Houphouët-Boigny’s manipulation of internal divisions, for example in his privileging of his own ethno-linguistic group, the Akan, on the basis of ‘the myth of the higher meaning of the state to the specific ethnic group to which he belonged’ (Akindès 2004:12), in other words on an ideology of a national ethnic hierarchy.

1980-1993: Socio-Economic Decline and Autochthony Politics

The last decade of Houphouët-Boigny’s rule in Côte d’Ivoire was marked by dramatic shifts in the diplomatic relations between Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire, as well as by the deterioration of the Ivorian economy due primarily to the strains of the structural adjustment programmes that were imposed by the Bretton-Woods institutions (World Bank and IMF) and the decline in world market prices on primary products such as coffee and

17 ‘La terre appartient à celui qui la met en valeur’.
18 The term ‘Akan’ is an overarching ethno-linguistic category that should be treated with some caution analytically (Collett 2006, Langer 2005, Djité 1989, Tice 1974, Ceuppens & Geschiere 2005). It is used here without further scrutiny more as an emic term, used by political actors in Côte d’Ivoire both then and now.
cacao. As Jean-Pierre Chauveau has shown, the socio-economic crisis following the structural adjustment programmes characteristic of the neoliberal reforms of the time aggravated relations between Burkinabe migrant workers and their hosts in Côte d’Ivoire: ‘The ruthless stopping of the policies of local development support made the relative success of the Burkinabè even more visible, which allowed them to be turned into scapegoats for the rural crisis’ (Chauveau 2006:227). In addition to these external factors, the miracle of the Ivorian economy, with its heavy reliance on the plantation industry, was beginning to lose its momentum, as the western plantation frontier reached the Liberian border, implying that the strategy of clearing forest for cacao and coffee plantations had run its course (Beauchemin 2005:16). The agricultural sector increasingly had to rely on improving the efficiency of the already-existing plantations, which was a daunting task given the proliferation of family-sized farms.

In terms of the political landscape, the military coup of 4 August 1983 in Haute-Volta, which brought a revolutionary Marxist regime to power in the midst of the Cold War marked a dramatic change of the main political actors, with significant implications for the bilateral relationship between Côte d’Ivoire and the renamed Burkina Faso, meaning ‘Land of the Virtuous People’ (*pays des hommes intègres*). Politically, Thomas Sankara’s socialist and explicitly anti-colonial political agenda resulted in an abrupt end to Burkina Faso’s alliance with Houphouët-Boigny, nurtured by Maurice Yaméogo19:

The radical young officers who ruled Burkina Faso after 1983, revolutionary in their rhetoric and pro-Libyan in their foreign policy, caused serious concern to Houphouët-Boigny. The Burkinabe President Thomas Sankara, dashing, articulate and handsome, was a hero to youth all over West Africa, where the economic crisis of the 1980s had alienated a generation of young people born after independence, who had grown up expecting their governments to provide them with jobs and education (Ellis 1999:159)

Thomas Sankara’s socialist revolution was based on an ideology of complete financial and political independence from France, and he openly criticized Houphouët-Boigny for his close collaboration with the former colonial masters (Hagberg & Bjarnesen 2011:512). Furthermore, Sankara’s remarkable initial success in leading the country towards self-sufficiency posed a threat to the Ivorian plantation economy. The revitalisation of the agricultural sector in Burkina Faso would potentially redirect

19 This alliance had not been without adversity, however, most notably in relation to discussion regarding customs policies and the possibility of acquiring double citizenship (see Hagberg & Tengan 2000:9, Banégas & Otayek 2003:75).
Burkinabe labourers from Côte d’Ivoire towards new farmlands within Burkina Faso, to the detriment of the Ivorian plantation economy, which was already under the pressure of the international terms of trade. Finally, Sankara’s alliance with other socialist revolutionary regimes, such as Gadaffi’s Libya and Castro’s Cuba, further aggravated the diplomatic relations with Côte d’Ivoire, in the context of the increasing political polarisation that characterised the Cold War period (Banégas & Otayek 2003:75).

The assassination of Thomas Sankara on 15 October 1987, therefore, and the ascension of his second-in-command, Captain Blaise Compaoré, to the highest office was a welcome change not only to Houphouët and the Mitterand governments but also to American Cold War interests in the region20. Not only was Compaoré willing to reinvigorate diplomatic relations with Côte d’Ivoire and France, his marriage to Chantal, a distant relative of Houphouët, consolidated a closer tie between the two leaders (Banégas & Otayek 2003:75). These changes in leadership and alliances apart, however, the changing political climate in Côte d’Ivoire with regards to the presence of Burkinabe immigrants was noted with concern and frustration across the border. The policies of ivoirisation of the 1980s, which sought to “cleanse” the Ivorian public and educational sectors of foreigners was one of the most explicit expressions of how the growing public resentment against Burkinabe and other immigrants was making its way into political agendas and public policies (Blion 1995). Even in terms of political allegiances, Compaoré did not shy away from allying with Houphouët-Boigny’s political opponents, most famously by accommodating Laurent Gbagbo in the late 1980s when he was an upcoming opposition leader in Houphouët’s one-party regime (see e.g. Hagberg & Bjarnesen 2011:513).

1993-2002: Succession Struggles and the Build-Up to Civil War

In addition to these political challenges, the political class inherited an economic situation in which plummeting world market prices on primary products had halted the momentum of the Ivorian miracle. Houphouët-Boigny had appointed a northerner, Alassane Dramane Ouattara, as Prime Minister, charged with implementing the World Bank/IMF struc-

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20 These external interests in the demise of Sankara have led to many speculations regarding the circumstances of his murder, including the extent of the complicity and involvement of France and Compaoré himself in removing the controversial leader from power.
tural adjustment programmes that were intended to restructure the Ivorian plantation economy and restrict public spending. In an effort to appease the growing tensions between immigrants and locals in the southern forest belt, Ouattara – who had held a leading position in the IMF prior to his recruitment for public office – had introduced the carte de séjour; a new identity card intended to clarify the status of immigrants in Côte d’Ivoire (see e.g. Serhan 2002:176).

At the moment of the old president’s death, Alassane Ouattara is said to have attempted to bypass the constitutional successor to the presidency, the President of the National Assembly, Henri Konan Bédié (Akindès 2003:18, Vidal 2003, Dozon 2001)\(^\text{21}\). In this way, Côte d’Ivoire’s political landscape was marked by fierce political competition from the instance of the founding father’s death. Bédié was well aware that Alassane Ouattara was more likely to inherit Houphouët-Boigny’s popularity with the northern electorate, given Ouattara’s own origins in the north and his Muslim faith. In response, as Joseph Hellweg aptly summarises: ‘Bédié presided over the National Assembly’s rewriting of [Côte d’Ivoire’s] electoral and nationality codes to exclude Ouattara from the 1995 presidential elections on the grounds that he lacked third-generation status as an Ivoirian citizen. Bédié alleged that Ouattara was in fact not Ivoirian but Burkinabé’ (Hellweg 2004:8).

These initial legislative changes marked the beginning of the institutionalization of a new concept of Ivorianess, or ivoirité, which was to become fundamental for articulating the fault lines of the Ivorian crisis and which continues to influence Ivorian politics. In a sense, Bédié’s strategic manoeuvre, aimed at excluding one of his main opponents from the 1995 elections\(^\text{22}\), was the first in a series of efforts to exploit the Ivorian constitution and legislation to promote the interests of southerners and thereby pander to that electorate, and simultaneously undermine the legitimacy of the demands by anyone deemed to lack the proper credentials for Ivorian citizenship.

\(^{21}\) Crucially for the diplomatic relations between the two countries, Burkina Faso’s President Blaise Compaoré subtly supported Ouattara’s intentions by addressing his official condolences for Houphouët-Boigny’s death to him, Ouattara, rather than to Bédié (see Hagberg & Bjarnesen 2011:521). This gesture was duly noted by Bédié who responded by hastily proclaiming himself president on national television, rather than allowing the Constitutional Court to first declare an official vacancy of power (Hellweg 2004:8).

\(^{22}\) In the end, Bédié won the 1995 elections with 96% per cent of the vote, when the two main opposition parties – Alassane Ouattara’s Rassemblement Démocratique des Républicains (RDR) and Laurent Gbagbo’s Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI) – joined forces in a boycott to protest the undemocratic conditions of the elections (Bassett 2004:39).
In 1998, the Bédié government passed a new land law, excluding foreign citizens from land ownership rights and thereby further repudiating Houphouët-Boigny’s ‘open door’ approach of facilitating immigrant participation in the plantation economy (Geschiere 2009:111). According to Chauveau & Richards (2008:525), ‘… the law also implicitly privileges autochthony as the main source of legitimate entitlement to ownership rights, opening up the possibility of an exclusion of Ivorian Baoulé and Jula’. This piece of legislation, in other words, amounted to a state-sanctioned exclusion of the broad and the elusive category of ‘strangers’ from access to land and influence, as planters and farm workers were left to settle ensuing disputes on their own – with local authorities either turning a blind eye or siding with the perceived autochtones (Dembéle 2003:38).

As already implied, these early populist political manoeuvres occurred in the context of an all-pervasive sense of crisis, along three main axes: firstly, the growing social instability, particularly in relation to conflicts over access to land; secondly, the continued economic decline which was aggravated further in 1994 when the regional currency – the CFA franc (FCFA)– was devalued by fifty per cent, to the detriment of local producers who saw their profits halved overnight; and, finally, the political uncertainty lingering after the end of the Houphouët-Boigny era. In addition to these fundamental expressions of societal instability, Houphouët-Boigny’s support to Charles Taylor’s NPFL movement in Liberia (cf. Ellis 1999:161) resulted in the trafficking of illicit weapons and drugs in the western borderlands, and the presence of NPFL rebel soldiers who were trained in camps in Burkina Faso, and eventually launched their attack against the Doe regime in Liberia from positions in Côte d’Ivoire (Hellweg 2004:7).

Ivoirité Nationalism and Autochthony Discourse

Aside from the structural conditions considered in the previous section, Henri Konan Bédié’s political project of redefining a more restrictive concept of Ivorian citizenship was given legitimacy by a group of intellectuals at the Cocody University in Abidjan. This team of historians, ethnologists, and sociologists had formed the Cellule universitaire de recherche et de diffusion des idées et des actions du président Henri Konan Bédié\(^{23}\) (CURDIPHE), which was active in organising seminars and conferences exploring the historical basis of their understanding of the origins and

\(^{23}\) University Cell for the Study and Diffusion of the Ideas and Actions of President Konan Bédié (Geschiere 2009:102).
characteristics of Ivorian identity, or ivoirité. Their most influential publication, ‘L’ivoirité ou l’esprit du nouveau contrat social d’Henri Konan Bédié’, was published in 1997 and came to be seen as an ivoirité manifesto, outlining the defining characteristics of a ‘true Ivorian’\textsuperscript{24} identity (Bassett 2004:39, Curdiphe 2000).

Chauveau has characterized the fundamental vision of the CURDIPHE manifesto, and the ivoirité identity politics in general, as the incentive to ‘reset the clock of History to zero’ (Chauveau 2000, see also Marshall-Fratani 2006:11, McGovern 2011:84), with ‘zero’ signifying the defining geopolitical moment when the territorial borders of this ‘true’ Ivorian polity was founded\textsuperscript{25}.

On this basis, the CURDIPHE manifesto listed the common traits of these autochthonous groups, delimiting the essence of Ivorian identity, supposedly shared by all “true Ivorians”\textsuperscript{26}. As already implied, an essential aspect of autochthony thinking is related to land ownership, which, Geschiere argues, ‘gives it a strong territorializing capacity, outlining – in a more or less symbolical way – a clearly defined “home”’ (Geschiere 2009:29). However, while this appeal to a primordial, territorially bounded home resonates with nationalist ideals, Geschiere demonstrates that when its protagonists have attempted to specify the delimiting characteristics of autochthony, it proves much more elusive:

\begin{quote}
 Despite its heavy appeal to the soil, autochthony turns out to be quite an empty notion in practice: it only expresses the claim to have come first. It
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{24} The concept used was “ivoirien de souche” – literally, Ivorian of the trunk (Geschiere 2009:103). This notion was developed in the writings of the CURDIPHE anthropologist Georges Niangoran-Bouah, director of the national heritage section at the Ministry of Culture (Geschiere 2009:102-103, see also Arnaut 2004:239).

\textsuperscript{25} As these commentators have noted, it is not without irony that the defining historical moment for the CURDIPHE intellectuals was France’s initial delimitation of Côte d’Ivoire as a colony on 10 March 1893: ‘By the late nineteenth century, they argued, proto-Ivorians had completed the region’s settlement into five ethnic areas: Akan, Gur, Northern Mande, Southern Mande, and Krou … Supposedly, these ethnically bounded enclaves set precise geographical references by which one could judge regional claims of autochthony, citizenship, and residency’ (Hellweg 2004:8).

\textsuperscript{26} As we have already seen, the idea that the geopolitical constellations at any given moment in the centuries long history of constant mobility and societal reconfigurations should be more “true” than at any other given moment is difficult to reconcile. Rather, as Geschiere argues, “[t]he very rigidity of Niangoran-Bouah’s ethnic classifications suggests what they have to hide: the evident fact that most of the groups mentioned have a long history of having come from elsewhere” (Geschiere 2009:103). Of course, the fundamental problem of this agenda was not academic – in the sense of implying an essentialist and sedentarist understanding of identity – but political, since its main purpose was to provide legitimacy for the continued exclusion of Alassane Ouattara from Ivorian politics, and the northern populations from social and political participation (Dembélé 2003:40).
is precisely this emptiness that makes the notion so pliable: autochthony’s Other can be constantly redefined, entailing new boundary marking for the group concerned, which may be one reason why it fits so well in a globalizing world (Geschiere 2009:28)

In other words, rather than expressing a natural relationship between a population and its links to a given territory, it is the very elusiveness – or emptiness – of the notion of autochthony that facilitates its success at this particular moment in history (see also Lentz 2006a, b)

Coup d’État in Côte d’Ivoire: The Militarisation of the Political Competition

The Bédié government was overthrown on 23 December 1999 when dissatisfied soldiers took advantage of the growing disaffection in the country to oust Bédié. General Robert Guéï, whose attempted suspension by Bédié triggered the coup d’état, became the country’s first and so far only military ruler, calling himself the spokesperson for “the young people” within the armed forces behind the coup (Le Pape 2002:24-25). Guéï promised early elections, but not only would he not repeal the law excluding Ouattara, he sought to profit from it, presenting himself as a candidate in elections a year later.

During his brief time in power, Guéï added another layer of legislation to the institutionalisation of the ivoirité recipe for national belonging through a series of changes to the Constitution in the quest for national cleansing and purity. As Dembélé (2003:40-41) argues, the centrepiece in these amendments to the Constitution was the criteria for eligibility of the President of the Republic. These criteria implemented the definitions of the CURDIPHE manifesto of what constituted a ‘true Ivorian’, and required of future presidents that they be ‘true Ivorians’ to the third generation, in other words that both parents be ‘autochthonous’ Ivorians in appliance with this definition. Dembélé notes that these definitions, once publicised, increased the anxieties of anyone with the slightest doubt of his or her ancestry, which, in a country saturated by mobility for generations, would include a large majority of the population (see also McGovern 2011:13). These incertitudes affected daily interactions regarding

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27 Geschiere’s (2009) comparative study of autochthony discourses in Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, and the Netherlands demonstrates eloquently that the logic of autochthony is gaining influence in many different forms across the globe. This is important to emphasise at this point, because the primordialism evoked by ivoirité might otherwise be interpreted as a particularly “African” or “Ivorian” problem.
basic citizen rights, such as access to land, employment or public office – which were now more than ever monopolised by southerners under the patronage of the state (ibid.)

In this way, Robert Guéï’s brief reign in Côte d’Ivoire proved to be yet another step down the road towards the implementation of the logic of autochthony into the Ivorian state bureaucracy, which had begun with the reclamation of the rights of foreigners to vote and introduction of the carte de séjour, at the hands of Alassane Ouattara in the last days of the Houphouët-Boigny; was distilled further in the articulation of Henri Konan Bédié’s manifesto for the redefinition of ivoirité, and its initial institutionalisation in the 1998 land law; and written into the Constitution by Robert Guéï in the build-up to the presidential elections of 2000. As already mentioned, Guéï reneged on his initial promise and presented his candidature for these elections, with Alassane Ouattara excluded once again on the grounds of his alleged Burkinabe origins and former president Henri Konan Bédié disqualified by Guéï’s Constitutional Court along with most other opposition candidates on dubious grounds.

With Ouattara and Bédié out of the competition, Guéï’s main challenger was Laurent Gbagbo, a veteran opposition leader who had been in and out of jail for his political activities under Houphouët-Boigny’s one-party reign. Gbagbo became the beneficiary of a voter backlash against Guéï, who conceded defeat in the face of days of massive street protests.

The Ivorian Identity Crisis

From the outset, Laurent Gbagbo’s leadership was characterized by a rhetoric that approached the question of national belonging from a different angle, although less distanced from the logic of autochthony than he had claimed in his electoral campaigns against Guéï. As he demonstrated until his last days in power, Gbagbo mastered a different discourse from his predecessors, namely the language of international politics and principles of state sovereignty, and it was through this lens that he approached the question of national belonging when he acceded to the presidency. In Gbagbo’s view, the ambiguity of Ivorian identity was to be handled as an administrative, rather than an ideological, problem, begin-

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28 The new institutionalisation of the criteria for eligibility, and by extension of citizenship more generally, also affected General Guéï himself, as he was obliged to implement the same criteria for entry into the Ivorian armed forces. By ‘cleansing’ the armed forces of northerners, Guéï added another dubious contribution to the increasingly hostile socio-political environment in the country, since many of the leading commanders of the ensuing rebellion were among the soldiers dismissed on the grounds of their less than ‘true’ Ivorian identity.
ning by addressing the long legacy of informal integration of strangers into Ivorian society through local traditions of marriage, hospitality, and land-sharing arrangements as well as by bureaucratic favours such as the right to vote that had been bestowed uncritically upon all foreigners, and the informal practice of issuing identity papers to foreigners, to facilitate their integration, that had been the order of the day under Houphouët-Boigny (Dembélé 2003:42). These social and bureaucratic digressions presented, to Gbagbo, a technical problem to be rectified – by carrying out an exhaustive identification campaign and the issuing of new identity cards, intended to clarify once in for all the question of who was to be recognised as ‘true’ Ivorian citizens and who was not.

The increasingly radical definitions of the criteria for national citizenship moved Gbagbo’s rhetorics closer and closer to the rhetorics of ivoirité, as they had been articulated in publications by the CURDIPHE group at the University of Cocody under Bédié. These demands required every Ivorian citizen to provide evidence of his or her specific native village (village d’origine) within the historically appropriate geopolitical territory of Côte d’Ivoire, and a similar proof of the origins of both parents. By thus embracing the CURDIPHE definitions of ivoirité and applying them as the foundation of the administrative process of identifying every Ivorian citizen, the Gbagbo regime gradually implemented a technical definition of national citizenship founded upon the logic of autochthony. According to Dembélé, these administrative measures amounted to a political strategy that was based on manipulating the language of international principles of sovereignty and citizenship:

La stratégie consiste à se barricader derrière la légalité et la souveraineté nationale: tout pays est en droit de compter ses citoyens et, pour ce faire, peut arguer que les lois sur la naturalisation et l’établissement des pièces personelles, sur la base des témoignages des communautés villageoises dont sont originaires les parents, suffisent et ne favorisent pas l’arbitraire (Dembélé 2003:43)

29 Not surprisingly, this administrative process proved to be impossible to carry out in practice, and Gbagbo eventually halted the first attempt, arguing that the implementation had been tainted by the issuing of fake papers to foreigners and widespread fraud concerning the proof of origins. As we shall see, these administrative difficulties continued throughout Gbagbo’s ten years in office, and were a central point of contestation in the 2010 post-electoral crisis.

30 This seemingly unquestionable strategy may go some way in explaining the international leniency with the Gbagbo regime, which continued throughout the voter registration process leading up to the 2010 elections – which were based on the same legislative foundation and the same criteria for eligibility and citizenship (see below).

31 The strategy consisted in entrenching behind legality and national sovereignty: all countries have the right to count its citizens and, to do that, can argue that the laws of naturalisa-
Through the avenue of technocratic initiatives and international discourses of citizenship and sovereignty, then, the logic of autochthony once again found its way into Ivorian political rhetoric, which was now broadcast in national and international media and promoted at political rallies in the southern half of the country.

The president of the National Assembly, Mamadou Koulibaly, Gbagbo’s second in command during most of his rule, personified many of the paradoxes of the logic of ivoirité, being of northern descent and carrying a family name commonly associated with northern Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso. Koulibaly, nevertheless, became a central proponent of the Gbagbo regime through public statements such as the one quoted in Ruth Marshall-Fratani’s oft-cited analysis of the early moments of the 2002 rebellion:

> Can we say that all those born in ... Côte d’Ivoire are automatically Ivoirian? ... We need to realize that a Burkinabè who lives in ... Côte d’Ivoire continues to be Burkinabè, and his descendants continue to be Burkinabè ad vitam æternam (Mamadou Koulibaly in Le Temps, November 21, 2003, quoted in Marshall-Fratani 2006:34)

The quote expresses a potentially genocidal quest for purity that brings to mind the fixation with identity papers and other external signifiers in Nazi Germany and the Habyarimana regime in Rwanda. As with the original amendments to the Constitution that required both parents of a candidate to the presidency to prove their ‘true Ivorian’ origins, the consequences of the Gbagbo regime’s rearticulation of Bédié’s version of ivoirité were not felt by the power holders but rather by ordinary citizens in their daily interactions, whether regarding the access to rights or simply the basis for coexistence in villages and neighbourhoods across the South. Mamadou Koulibaly’s uncompromising articulation also brings the diaspo youths of this study to mind as primary examples of the Burkinabe descendants, born in Côte d’Ivoire that the Gbagbo regime aimed to alienate.
2002-2011: Between War and Peace in Côte d’Ivoire

Even within the Ivorian armed forces, the first years of the Gbagbo regime were marked by increasing internal instability, resulting in several minor uprisings and tentative coups (Hellweg 2004:20). The most serious coup attempt was launched on 19 September 2002 while President Gbagbo was visiting Italy. As mentioned above, the core of the rebel armed forces consisted of former soldiers of the Ivorian army, who had been dismissed by Robert Guéï as a part of his project to implement the principles of ivoirité into his own ranks, upon changing the Constitution to reflect the logic of autochthony as the basis of citizenship rights. The three rebels groups that later became united as the Forces Nouvelles, carried out simultaneous attacks on the country’s three major cities, Abidjan in the south, Bouaké in the centre, and Korhogo in the north. The attack was repelled by the Ivorian security forces in Abidjan and the attackers retreated to Bouaké, effectively dividing the country through the middle. The security forces, accusing Guéï of being responsible for the plot, attacked and killed him in his Abidjan home. Ouattara and his family escaped a similar attack, taking refuge in the French embassy.

France, which has always maintained a military base in Abidjan, initially used its troops to maintain a buffer zone between the two sides. They were later joined by UN troops while the two sides were encouraged to hold peace talks. The subsequent difficulties in implementing a long series of agreements between the main actors in the conflict provide an indication of the political struggle at the centre of the Ivorian crisis. As McGovern argues with regard to the failure of the Linas-Marcoussis accords, signed in January 2003,

[i]ts fundamental shortcoming was to treat a political problem as if it were a technical one. As a result, it had no provision for key actors persistently

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32 The term “Forces Nouvelles” was introduced in March 2003 in the context of the Linas-Marcoussis negotiations, as a unifying label for the three coordinated rebel groups, the Mouvement patriotique de Côte d’Ivoire (MPCI), the Mouvement pour la justice et la paix (MJP), and the Mouvement populaire ivoirien du Grand Ouest (MPIGO).

33 Following the signing of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement in May 2003, the UN Security Council initially established what they called a “political mission” to assist the ECOWAS and French security forces already present in Côte d’Ivoire. As the failure of the peace agreement became apparent, the MINUICI were replaced by the United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI), whose mandate was ‘…to prevent, within its capabilities and its areas of deployment, any hostile action, and to investigate violations of the ceasefire’ (UNOCI 2008) and to assist in the implementation of the long list of peace agreements signed in the 2002-2007 period between the warring parties (see below).
reneging on promises they had made, or seeking to sabotage the process
leading towards full implementation of the Accords (McGovern 2011:6)

In other words, the ‘poker game’ of political manoeuvring that had been
institutionalised under Henri Konan Bédié continued to characterise the
competition for political power under its militarised form in Côte
d’Ivoire. A whole series of peace talks$^{34}$ collapsed in the same manner,
when both parties failed to honour the promises they had made at the
negotiating table.

In November 2004 President Gbagbo ordered his troops to retake the
rebel-held north and the air force launched bombing raids on Bouaké and
several other northern towns, including Korhogo. In these attacks French
troop positions were hit by Ivorian planes, resulting in the death of nine
French soldiers. France launched retaliatory attacks against the Ivorian air
force. Gbagbo later said the strike on French troops had been uninten-
tional, but the French action became a spark for anti-foreigner riots in
Abidjan and several southern towns, with businesses owned by foreigners
looted and destroyed. Some 10,000 French citizens resident in Côte
d’Ivoire were evacuated and tens of thousands of African migrants fled
after hundreds had been killed in the violence. International efforts con-
tinued at restoring peace to the country with the African Union (AU) and
the UN collaborating. With Gbagbo’s original term due to expire in
2005, the UN Security Council backed an AU proposal to extend his time
in office for one year pending disarmament by the rebels and new elec-
tions. It was extended again in 2006 when no breakthrough was forth-
coming.

After four years of high tension and sporadic instances of armed ag-
gression, the intervention of Burkina Faso President Blaise Compaoré,
who had been accused by Gbagbo of backing the rebels (see Hagberg &
Bjarnesen 2011), brought the peace process back on track. The peace deal
signed in March 2007, known as the Ouagadougou Political Accords
(APO), brokered by Compaoré resulted in the appointment of the leader
of the Forces Nouvelles, Guillaume Soro, as Prime Minister in a new Gov-
ernment of National Unity.

$^{34}$ Toulou lists the overwhelming number of agreements and resolutions: ‘Les accords de
paix et résolution des Nations Unies sur la Côte d’Ivoire sont multiples et variés. En plus des
pourparlers de paix de Lomé (novembre 2002), on peut citer les accords de Linas
Marcoussis (janvier 2003); d’Accra I, II et III (septembre 2002, mars 2003, juillet 2004);
Victor (avril 2005); les résolutions 1528 (février 2004), 1633 (octobre 2005),
1721 (novembre 2006) du Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies; l’accord de Ouagadougou
(mars 2007) et ses dispositions complémentaires’ (Toulou 2008:8-9).
The Ouagadougou Political Accords bought Laurent Gbagbo additional time in power, as presidential elections were postponed and rescheduled continually during the period 2007-2010. The task of registering voters was complicated by being combined with other official administrative identifications of the populace, namely the reissuing of identity papers as well as steps towards a more general population census; administrative procedures that were obstructed by the political conflict (ICG 2007, 2008). A central question facing the actors in these parallel manoeuvres was whether the dichotomising identity politics that were at the base of the Ivorian crisis could be resolved, or at least set aside, in the complex processes of identification. This question was critical, since the question of identifying legitimate Ivorian voters and citizens had been institutionalised by the Gbagbo regime, making some observers emphasise the similar administrative initiatives taken by the regime to register the population as the deciding factor for spurring the September 2002 rebellion. As Marshall-Fratani argues:

For the political leaders of the Forces Nouvelles, longstanding collaborators of Laurent Gbagbo throughout the 1990s, the turning point was not principally the question of xenophobia, or Ouattara’s nationality, or the victimization of northerners by state security forces ... but the FPI’s program of national identification (Marshall-Fratani 2006:26)

Since the basic criteria of identification had not been altered before the onset of the electoral registration (cf. Toulou 2008), the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), consisting of representatives from all political parties and a number of civil society groups, faced the risk of inciting similarly dividing and fatal reactions if the process was deemed to be tainted by either side. With the registration process completed to the satisfaction of all parties involved in late 2009, Côte d’Ivoire finally headed towards presidential elections.

However, on 12 February 2010, Gbagbo took most political observers by surprise by suspending the electoral commission (CEI) and dissolving the government, arguing that CEI president Robert Beugré Mambé was guilty of fraudulently including more than 400,000 names on the electoral list (see Jeune Afrique, 12 February 2010b). The announcement came just one day after a meeting of the main political actors in Ouagadougou, under the auspices of Blaise Compaoré in the role of chief mediator. The parties had allegedly been unable to resolve their disagreements over the workings of the electoral commission (CEI). The consequences of Gbagbo’s announcement were immediate. Across the major towns of Côte
Ivory Coast, opposition parties mobilised protest rallies that raised fears of a return to outright civil war, with Alphonse Djédjé Mady – president of the Houphouëtist electoral alliance – declaring on behalf of the joint political opposition that Gbagbo’s actions were tantamount to ‘an outright coup d’État’ (quoted in Jeune Afrique, 13 February Jeune Afrique 2010a).

The electoral coalition that Mady headed, the Rassemblement des houphouëtistes pour la démocratie et la paix35 (RHDP), tells its own story of postcolonial politics, since it brought together two former rivals – Alas- sane Ouattara and Henri Konan Bédié. This surprising coalition against Gbagbo, in other words, saw the man who had been made into the emblematic ‘stranger from within’, Ouattara, join forces with the originator of the ivoirité ideology, Bédié, who had positioned Ouattara as a stranger of Burkinabe origins, to the detriment of so many civilian residents with more or less tangible origins elsewhere in the region. Despite its contradictory prelude, however, the “Houphouëtist alliance” was a sound exercise in realpolitik, as it brought the regionalised votes of Ouattara’s northern constituency into coalition with Bédié’s dominance in the old Baoulé heartland of Houphouët-Boigny, in the centre-east. International observers were relatively optimistic and put their faith in the democratic process to reconcile the fractured socio-political landscape in Côte d’Ivoire.

As already implied above, the 2010 presidential elections were prepared on the same legislative foundations of Ivorian identity that were introduced under Bédié; institutionalised by Robert Guéï; and bureaucratised and (at least partially) implemented under the Gbagbo regime’s project of national identification. With substantial international backing, the 2010 voter registration process proceeded on the basis of identifying the ‘true’ Ivorian electorate, able to back their claims with references to a native village within the Ivorian territory. The electoral process proved to be the most expensive per capita recorded in history – at a total cost of a staggering 305 million € to accommodate 6 million registered voters, out of a total population of approximately 20 million.

In the first round of the elections, held on 28 October, the results held few surprises. Laurent Gbagbo won by 38.3% of the votes, while Ouattara came in second with 32.08% and Henri Konan Bédié received 25.24%. Following the announcements of the results, Bédié objected to the procedure and voiced accusations of rigging on the part of both of his main opponents – thereby threatening to destabilize the unlikely “Houphouëtist alliance” he had formed with Alassane Ouattara, and hand the final victory to Gbagbo. A few days later, however, Bédié appeared along-
side Ouattara, who honoured Bédié – his old archrival – as the true inheritor of Houphouët-Boigny’s spirit of national unity and promised to base his eventual leadership on the guidance of his newfound mentor. With the Houphouëtist Alliance reconfirmed, both sides prepared for the 28 November run-off by scaling up the rhetoric, with Gbagbo famously referring to Ouattara and Bédié as “false inheritors” of the Houphouët-Boigny legacy, based on their poor record in terms of unifying measures during their time in office as Prime Minister and President of the Republic, respectively.

On 28 November, voting seemed to proceed relatively undisturbed, and, early on the 29th, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General in Côte d’Ivoire, Y.J. Choi, declared that the UN was pleased with the “democratically held elections” and urged both parties to respect the final results, to be announced within a week by the Independent Electoral Committee (CEI). In an episode that was later broadcast to a global audience in disbelief, the UN delegate’s optimism proved to be premature on 1 December, when the president of the CEI M. Bamba Yacouba’s announcement of the preliminary results on live television was interrupted by Damana Adia Pickass, one of Gbagbo’s FPI’s representatives in the committee, who claimed that the CEI had yet to approve the results. While M. Yacouba was reading the results, M. Pickass passed by several guards and journalists and grabbed the papers from the CEI president’s hands, ripping them up as he left the room.

Following intense diplomatic negotiations, the CEI was finally able to announce its results on 2 December, declaring Alassane Ouattara the winner by 54% of the votes. Far from resolving the tense political situation, however, the CEI’s announcement was rejected by the Gbagbo camp, who argued that it was the mandate of the Ivorian Constitutional Council, not the CEI (which had been formed in compliance with the Ouagadougou Political Accords), to verify the final results of the elections. The following day, the Constitutional Council – which was dominated by representatives of the FPI and other actors loyal to Gbagbo – declared Gbagbo the winner, by 51% of the votes, stating that confirmed suspicions of fraud in the northern parts of the country had led to the annulment of all votes cast in several of these districts – who were, of course, predominantly pro-Ouattara.

The diverging announcements by the CEI and the Constitutional Council marked the beginning of a spectacular political deadlock that was broadcast around the world for several weeks. Both candidates claimed to be the legitimate president, with Ouattara receiving the support of most international actors, including the European Union, the US, France, and
ECOWAS, while Gbagbo’s argument was backed by South Africa’s Jacob Zuma and Zimbabwe’s Mugabe, as well as several other African leaders known for their anti-Western political stance. After a series of failed diplomatic attempts, by the UN, a number of bilateral mediators, as well as by a brokering team of former Heads of State appointed by the African Union, the stalemate remained unresolved for several months, with Alassane Ouattara ensconced in the Golf Hotel on the outskirts of Abidjan, under the protection of UN peacekeepers, while Gbagbo worked to mobilise supporters for his claims that the UN and French forces were meddling in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation, which therefore constituted nothing less than a foreign invasion.

With no diplomatic solution in sight, the Forces Nouvelles armed forces took matters in their own hands, and began an advance from Bouaké in the centre of the country through the Southwest towards Abidjan. They met relatively little resistance from Gbagbo’s security forces and virtually no reactions from the international community, who had failed to offer any viable alternatives to armed force. When the Forces Nouvelles reached the western outskirts of Abidjan, they met heavy resistance, and a fierce battle ensued. After days of heavy fighting, Gbagbo was arrested during a dramatic attack on his compound in the Cocody neighbourhood, on 11 April. He was eventually placed in house arrest in the northern town of Korhogo, awaiting trial. Alassane Ouattara was sworn in as President on 6 May 2011, with the International Criminal Court investigating war crimes on both sides of the conflict.

Aside from recurring instability in the Liberio-Ivorian borderlands (see e.g. HRW 2012, 2012), Ouattara’s first years in power have been marked by calm and patience from all sides, and there is a sense of optimism and a hope for reconciliation. The trial which is on-going at the time of writing (in March 2013) at the International Criminal Court against Laurent Gbagbo (see e.g. Jeune Afrique 2013) may either help consolidate Ouattara’s legitimacy in the eyes of the Ivorian population or provoke pro-Gbagbo groups to revitalise their opposition through political or violent means.

Ruptures and Continuities in Transnational Mobility

The impact of the French colonial administration in structuring agricultural exploitation and labour recruitment is crucial for understanding the historical as well as present-day migration dynamics between Burkina
Faso and Côte d’Ivoire. The colonial plantation economy laid the foundations for the initial prosperity of independent Côte d’Ivoire, at least up until the late 1980s. Félix Houphouët-Boigny led the way in an economic policy that was based on the continuation of the administrative structures and priorities that had been established by the French. In hindsight, the two major weaknesses of that policy may be said to have been the reliance on the global prices on cacao and coffee, as well as the failure to broaden the country’s economic base by investing in alternative industries and infrastructure.

When the French colonial administration expanded from a marginal coastal presence into a more ambitious plantation economy in the first decades of the twentieth century, the policy of investing exclusively in the production of cheap export goods was much less dubious. Not only was this the stated economic goal of the colonial presence in Africa writ large, but the French administration operated on a much larger geographical scale – eventually assigning specific production roles to different territories within the whole subcontinent: groundnut production in Senegal; cacao and coffee in Côte d’Ivoire; etc., giving shape to a regional ‘political topography’ (cf. Boone 1993). In this overall colonial strategy, Haute-Volta proved to be unfit for developing an independent agricultural sector, an assessment by the French that eventually turned the territory into a recruitment zone to service agricultural and infrastructural projects in other parts of the AOF. These initial strategies by the colonial regime, although implemented to varying degrees across the region, and susceptible to significant transformation throughout the colonial period, were significant in shaping the opportunity structures (cf. Hart 1974) available to colonial subjects. As head taxes and forced labour recruitment, as well as the attraction of wage labour opportunities and adventure, induced more people to migrate, the concerted efforts of the colonial regimes played an important role in making particular areas and labour markets available as possible destinations at a given time. In other words, while the decision to migrate or not may be said to depend upon the individual migrant or his/her social network, these decisions were made in relation to the perceived opportunity structures which were, to a large extent, the result of explicit policy decisions by the colonial regimes in the region. Rather than merely describing the fundamental interplay between structure and agency that characterises social life in general, the reading of the labour migration regime between Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire suggests that the forced displacement implied by forced labour migration during the colonial era may be said to linger on in the opportunity structures of the postcolonial period. To elaborate on this point, it is worthwhile to turn to an earlier
attempt at historicising the political economy of the West African plantation economies.

What is most important in contextualising the circular migration regime that gradually developed between the territories of present-day Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire is that the colonial mercantile economy ascribed to the African colonies specific roles in a global economy that fixed their societies in relation to global capital, at the margins of that system. In Samir Amin’s analysis, this role implies an enforced dependency on the colonial metropolis and locks this unequal power balance so that ‘... “traditional” society is not in transition (towards “modernity”); it is fully formed as a society, dependent and peripheral ... Mercantile economy defines the process of the subordination/domination relationship between this pseudo-traditional society integrated into the global system and the central capitalist society that shapes and dominates it’ (Amin 1995:33-34).

Raising a similar point, Claude Meillassoux argued on the basis of his Marxist reading of the rural domestic economy in Côte d’Ivoire in the late 1960s, that ‘... migrations are organised to coincide with the needs of international capitalism and operate for its profits’ (Meillassoux 1981:126). Briefly stated, then, the global division of labour that gradually shaped the labour regime between Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire was premised on the availability of cheap, mobile labour from the areas deemed unsuited for agricultural exploitation (see also Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000). From the migrant’s point of view, these broad political and economic structures implied a well-organised and persistent displacement of agricultural workers, on the one hand, and the underdevelopment of their home regions due, in part, to their absence and the administration’s priorities, on the other. Although the incentives to migrate gradually shifted from forced labour recruitment, through organised trade unions, to the independent migration that has been predominant in the post-Houphouët period, the underlying opportunity structures that have directed Burkinabe labourers towards Côte d’Ivoire have shown a remarkable continuity. During the colonial period, these structural limitations

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36 Much has been said against the dependency theory school that Amin represents since the 1970s, especially regarding the emphasis on the deterministic role of structures over individual and collective agency. But since the economistic and individualistic approaches have come back into fashion, so does, I believe, the Marxist critique of rational choice theory. As is more commonplace in contemporary anthropology, I do not see this argument as implying a total adaptation of a dependency theory frame of analysis but rather evoke these conceptual points, and the debates they have engendered, as a building block in a composite analytical framework that provides migrant biographies with historical depth and structural contextualisation.
were imposed to redirect migrants from their journeys to the Gold Coast, the competing colonial plantation economy. The consolidation of these structural impositions were carried into the post-independence period by Houphouët-Boigny, but met a considerable challenge in the leadership of Thomas Sankara and his policies to promote self-sufficiency and agricultural development in Burkina Faso. Given the brevity of his rule, Sankara’s Marxist critique of his region’s place in the global capitalist economy proved to be short-lived, and the ascension of Blaise Compaoré proved to be a return to the principles of the mercantile economy, even as the momentum of the ‘Ivorian miracle’ came to a halt during the economic crisis of the 1980s.

As a conceptual consequence of this shared history, in this study I see Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire as part of a common transnational space, which is constituted by migratory practices, various forms of exchanges of information, capital, and goods, as well as by individual and collective imaginings of a coherent space across which these multiple exchanges occur and are ascribed with significance. At the same time, the formal structures delimiting the two nation-states, such as border controls, customs inspections, identification requirements, legislation etc. are, and have been in changing ways over time, significant for the practices and orientations of individuals across this transnational space. This conceptualisation of a transnational space as constituted by the dynamics between its structures and social practices has been characteristic of the transnational studies approach since the seminal *Nations Unbound* (Basch, Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994), summarised by the editors of the more recent volume *Transnational Spaces*, as a term which

... encompasses all of those engaged in transnational cultures, whether as producers or consumers. It includes not just the material geographies of labour migration or the trading in transnational goods and services but also the symbolic and imaginary geographies through which we attempt to make sense of our increasingly transnational world (Jackson, Crang, and Dwyer 2004:3, emphasis in original)

In this way, the notion of a Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space at once captures the profound interconnectedness in terms of not only labour migration and trade but also cultural idioms and social formations that have crisscrossed the territory since at least the early sixteenth century, and the significance of the political and administrative border that has separated the two territories since 1947. This entails a political reading of transnational connections in that their forms and
transformations are historicised in relation to both structural policies, implementation efforts, and individual choice.

Crisis and Chronicity in the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire Transnational Space

The turn to militarisation and armed conflict in Côte d’Ivoire marked a dramatic rupture with the country’s relatively peaceful political history, but there are also considerable socio-political continuities at the heart of the Ivorian crisis, beginning with the political cast of main figures: Bédié, Ouattara, Gbagbo, who have dominated Ivorian politics since the early 1990s. As Toulou argued in anticipation of the 2010 presidential elections:

Le très faible renouvellement de l’élite n’est pas banal en Côte d’Ivoire. Ce sont ceux-là même qui ont plongé le pays dans la guerre qui prétendent lui offrir les dividendes de la paix37 (Toulou 2008:13-14)

In this regard, although the past twenty years have seen some remarkable shifts in alliance – the most recent one involving the winning (Houphouëtist) alliance of two former rivals, Bédié and Ouattara – the political competition has continued to revolve around the question of national belonging, informed by Bédié’s notion of ivoirité. In other words, while individual political actors have had a fairly pragmatic, some would say cynical, approach to the political poker game of positioning themselves against their main rivals, the discourse of autochthony, centred on the debates regarding Alassane Ouattara’s eligibility, has persisted through one of the most turbulent decades in Ivorian politics. In this way, the persistence of the autochthony logic as fundamental to the articulation of political, and by extension social, fault lines have provided a definite sense of continuity underlying the sequence of apparent ruptures.

Secondly, despite the shattering effects of the violent aggression against perceived strangers since the late 1990s, migrant trajectories across the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space have persisted along well-trodden paths to a large degree – testifying to the continued importance of the cyclical labour migration regime to people on both sides of the border. Thirdly, the violent aggression against strangers in Côte d’Ivoire is in itself an intensification of a much longer history of animosity be-

37 The very weak renewal of the elite is not insignificant in Côte d’Ivoire. It is those same leaders who threw the country into war who now pretend to be offering it the benefits of peace.
tween immigrants and locals that has been overlooked, condoned, or encouraged by shifting regimes since the 1950s.

This emphasis on continuities in a time of political crisis serves as a warrant not to overestimate the importance of the ivoirité ideologues in articulating the inherent fault lines of the broader underlying social dynamics, such as the rural crisis in which the young rurbains of the central forest belt redefined their opposition to the parent generation in political terms (Chauveau & Bobo 2003), or the more general problem of land scarcity, following the arrival of the plantation frontier at the western border with Liberia, and the uncontrolled influx of regional and international migrants along that frontier, which was already causing increased tensions during the time of Houphouët-Boigny. Emphasising the underlying potential for societal instability, however, should not be taken to suggest a structural-functionalist connection between these social dynamics and the eruption of armed conflict. On the contrary, the discussion in this chapter has insisted upon the cynical pursuit of political ambitions by the main characters in Ivorian politics, in which the logic of autochthony has served as a convenient means to an end, as a driving force in the escalation of armed aggression (Dembélé 2003:47-48).

This lack of a broader popular mobilisation may be one reason why the Ivorian crisis has been characterised by a prolonged period of political instability, dotted by instances of armed fighting and an enduring sense of insecurity and the threat of an escalation of military aggression38. This dynamic informs the label of the conflict as a prolonged ‘crisis’, characterised by delimited moments of armed combat, which has dominated the literature, and which also informed the outlook of informants on both sides of the border.

During fieldwork in Korhogo in 2009, I often encountered the phrase, ‘the war has ended but the crisis continues’, referring to the general calm following the signing of the 2007 Ouagadougou Political Accords and the persistence of the deadlock in the standoff between the Forces Nouvelles, who were reluctant to demobilize out of mistrust with the intentions of the Gbagbo regime, and the loyalist forces. The notion of a crisis, rather than a war, to inhabitants of the northern part of the country, implied first and foremost the deteriorated living conditions and financial isolation

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38 To some extent, the sense of a prolonged period of ‘no peace, no war’ (Richards 2005b) has characterised recent ethnographies of armed conflict in general, even in conflicts with higher death tolls, suggesting that the corrective to commonsensical notions of war as an all-encompassing break with the (peacetime) social order is intrinsic to the analytical approach, rather than to the dynamics of a specific instance of armed conflict (Englund 2002, Lubkemann 2008a, Utas 2003, Vigh 2006a).
that both preceded and outlasted the eruption of armed conflict. In this way, the combination of the unresolved questions of citizenship rights and the perpetual economic hardships had characterised everyday life in the north well before the outbreak of armed conflict and persisted in spite of its absence following the Ouagadougou peace agreement. This continuity of uncertainty and insecurity betrays the conceptual connotations of the term ‘crisis’, which, as Henrik Vigh (2008) has noted, are usually of rupture; a state of exception from the social order and of a delimited, event-like nature. On the other hand, in the persistence of a situation of ‘no peace no war’ (cf. Richards 2005b), crisis becomes the underlying premise of everyday life; it becomes contextual rather than exceptional (Vigh 2008:8).

Vigh suggests Estroff’s notion of ‘chronicity’ as ‘the persistence in time of limitations and suffering’; ... ‘the temporal persistence of [...] dysfunction’ (Estroff 1993: 250, 259, in Vigh 2008:10), which is perceived as an enduring state of exception rather than an irreversible structural transformation. The statement that ‘the crisis continues’ captures the sense of chronicity that inhabitants in Korhogo expressed in 2009, wherein armed conflict was but one symptom of a more enduring socio-political dysfunction. I would suggest that we take the vernacular insights to heart and conceive of the conflict in Côte d’Ivoire as a socio-political crisis that preceded the outbreak of armed aggression and persisted despite the cessation of fighting in the two years following the 2007 Ouagadougou Political Accords.

Conclusion

This chapter has intended, firstly, to demonstrate the gradual development and consolidation of a Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space, emphasising the significant efforts and resources invested by colonial and postcolonial state apparatuses in shaping and controlling the movements of people, things and ideas across that space. The discussion showed that labour migration between Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire was an important part of the French colonial administration’s strategy for developing a plantation economy in the southern forest region of present-
day Côte d’Ivoire, and was pursued actively throughout the colonial period. Despite these coercive efforts, as well as some obvious incentives to the movement of people from the densely populated areas of present-day Burkina Faso towards the fertile lands of the forest belt in Côte d’Ivoire, the discussion confirmed Tokpa’s assertion that, ‘... the Voltaic overpopulation did not provoke, in a mechanical way, the movement of its inhabitants towards Côte d’Ivoire’ (Tokpa 2006:13).

Secondly, the chapter discussed the postcolonial Ivorian plantation economy and the changing perceptions of immigrants as well as the conditions for Burkinabe labour migrants in Côte d’Ivoire. The considerable continuities with colonial policies in this era were emphasised, as they had evolved from being based mainly on forced labour recruitment towards providing more attractive financial and logistical incentives for potential migrants. Many of the former labour migrants I met in Bobo-Dioulasso experienced this era first-hand, and the discussion therefore provides an important contextualisation of their narratives in the following chapters.

Thirdly, the chapter considered the build-up to the Ivorian political conflict with particular attention to the central role of Burkinabe immigrants in the changing political landscape in Côte d’Ivoire during the 1990s. Finally, the Ivorian political conflict of the ensuing decade was discussed in relation to the broader history of migration and political interconnectedness. The socio-political contours of the Ivorian crisis were outlined, and some of the main events of the crisis were inscribed into the longer history of transnational politics and mobility. The relations between the Burkinabe and Ivorian heads of state were given some emphasis, and the role of Burkinabe immigrants in Côte d’Ivoire was shown to be central to the new articulations of Ivorian belonging and citizenship that have been at the heart of the political debates of the past decades in Côte d’Ivoire.

In this way, the chapter has served as a historical and structural context for the chapters that follow. As the migrant biographies collected in Bobo-Dioulasso will show, present-day migrants saw Côte d’Ivoire as a self-evident choice of destination, and followed well-trodden paths on their journeys to the forest zone plantation areas as well as to the regional financial capital of Abidjan. For these generations of migrants, who primarily moved from rural homes in Burkina, the journey to Côte d’Ivoire was a well-established socio-cultural institution (Dessein 2000, Fiéloux 1980, Hagberg 2001, Hagberg & Tengan 2000, Hashim & Thorsen 2011), providing the opportunity for young adults to liberate themselves from their parents while at the same time living up to their expectations and setting out on a path that was meant to eventually lead back to the rural
home, with enough capital to invest in bridewealth or agricultural land (Dacher 2005). In practice, many migrants moved continuously across the transnational space (Hagberg 1998, 2001), rather than demarcating a clear beginning and end to a migrant career.
3. Home-Making and Livelihood in a Bobo-Dioulasso Neighbourhood

In the commercial centre of Bobo-Dioulasso, one of the most successful mobile phone vendors goes by the nickname “Wassakara,” which also adorns the façade of his shop, remarkable for its bright red and white colours and display cases which contain all the latest models in an array of colours and brands. Across the border in Côte d’Ivoire, “Wassakara” is the popular name for Abidjan’s Yopougon neighbourhood, known for its emblematic nightlife and celebrated in Ivorian pop culture. Aliou “Wassakara” is not alone in exploiting his Ivorian upbringing to distinguish himself from the competition. He dresses in fashionable street wear that he buys second-hand, rather than wearing the tailor-made shirts in local fabrics (pagne) stereotypically associated with Burkinabe youths. He uses handshakes and mannerisms that originate in Abidjan and speaks French interspersed with nouchi slang, which has become a signature of Ivorian pop culture (Newell 2006, 2009). Nouchi figures prominently in many of the Ivorian pop songs and music videos being consumed by youths in Côte d’Ivoire’s poorer neighbouring countries: Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali. Aliou “Wassakara” calls himself a “diaspo”, a word that has its origins in the university circles of Ouagadougou, where the children of wealthier Burkinabe labour migrants in Côte d’Ivoire have been sent to escape the instability prevailing in Ivorian higher education since the 1980s (Zongo 2005, Bredeloup 2006, Mazzocchetti 2009, Zongo 2003, 2010b).

In the past decade diaspo youths have become a visible presence in Bobo-Dioulasso as well. By displaying their Ivorian origins, they have provoked both the admiration and resentment of local youths, who prefer to perceive the outspoken and colourful newcomers as arrogant and disrespectful. But regardless of these animosities, diaspo youth culture has made its mark on the city. From the elaborately decorated shops in the city centre to the proliferation of brands like “Diaspo Coiffure” hairdressers or “Diaspora Revelation” tailors, “diaspo” has become a cultural brand associated with the regional metropole, Abidjan.
This perceived intrusion of diaspora youth culture into Bobo-Dioulasso’s cityscape is only one way in which the Ivorian crisis has changed the meanings of transnational mobility between Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire. Before and after the attempted coup of 19 September 2002, rebel recruiters allegedly held secret meetings in Bobo-Dioulasso, recruiting young Burkinabe men into the Forces Nouvelles rebel movement. In various ways, the Ivorian crisis has both shaped the city’s appearance and altered people’s perceptions of cross-border movements. A significant part of the last decade’s building boom is attributed to the investments of high-ranking rebel commanders and Ivorian businessmen who moved their capital to the more stable economy across the border. New night clubs, transportation companies, office buildings, apartment complexes, and luxury villas have appeared, some of them suspended, mid-construction, as testimony to the disintegration of the rebel war economy in northern Côte d’Ivoire (Global Witness 2007).

More generally, the mass arrival of Burkinabe migrants from Côte d’Ivoire during the war made a considerable impression on the neighbourhood of Sarfalao and its residents, as it did on other parts of the city where residential areas were sparse and informal enough to allow for the influx of new residents who generally needed immediate and affordable housing and livelihood options. On the backdrop of this awareness of the impact of the Ivorian crisis on Bobo-Dioulasso’s cityscape, this chapter introduces the neighbourhood of Sarfalao, which became the focal point of the main fieldwork of the present study. Specifically, I explore three fundamental and overlapping concerns of its residents: struggles over land rights, notions of home, and the ambivalence of spatial and, by extension, social proximity.

40 Of course, the city of Bobo-Dioulasso was not alone in receiving these refugees. Despite the uncertainties regarding formal statistics on the numbers of forced returns (as discussed in the Introduction), it seems safe to say that relatively large numbers settled in the rural borderland with Côte d’Ivoire; for example in the hinterland of the bordertown of Niangoloko, where the municipality estimates that the population has almost doubled since the beginning of the Ivorian crisis: from 30,000 in 1996 to 54,000 inhabitants in 2006 (Neya 2010:226). Others went back to their villages of origin or the area of their parents, and still others settled in Ouagadougou or in other secondary towns.
Entering Sarfalao

The city of Bobo-Dioulasso\(^{41}\) lies at the crossroads of several pre-colonial trade routes, and was in this way an important regional town well before the advent of French colonialism (Tokpa 2006:8). With a population of approximately 500,000 in 2006 (Guengant 2009:42, Roth 2007:185), the city of Bobo-Dioulasso is the second-largest in Burkina Faso, the capital of Ouagadougou’s population of approximately 1.5 million (ibid.), making it the largest urban population in the country. Bobo-Dioulasso’s economy is based primarily on the industrial sector (mainly cotton processing) as well as formal and informal trade\(^{42}\), representing 26% and 28% of the city’s gross local product, respectively (Fauré & Labazée 2002:76). Under French rule, the city was invested with a central role in the regional economy of the French colonial territory, with the construction of industrial processing plants and a railway connection with Abidjan enabling Bobo-Dioulasso to become a modern metropole, attracting large numbers of migrants from its hinterland and from the neighbouring countries of Mali, Niger, and Ghana (Werthmann 2013:8). For many Burkinabe migrants, in addition to being a destination in its own right, the city is also a compulsory stop on the way to Côte d’Ivoire (Ouédraogo 1995:309).

For migrants intent on settling down in Bobo-Dioulasso, the Jula language is essential to learn as the \textit{lingua franca} (Werthmann 2013:17), which sets the city apart from the capital of Ouagadougou, where Mooré dominates. At the time of my fieldwork, the Municipality of Bobo-Dioulasso was divided into three \textit{arrondissements}: Dafra, Dô, and Konsa, with their respective mayors (ibid. 27)\(^{43}\). In this context, it is particularly important to note that the municipalities have become the main administrative apparatus charged with designing and implementing the land management schemes of urban informal neighbourhoods, as part of a broader decentralisation process since the late 1990s which was consolidated with the local elections in 2006 (Hagberg 2009:10, see also Fauré & Labazée 2002:32).

\(^{41}\) For an elaborate analysis of the social life of Bobo-Dioulasso, see the edited volume ‘\textit{Urbanité et appartenances en Afrique de l’Ouest. La ville de Bobo-Dioulasso au Burkina Faso}’ (Werthmann & Sanogo 2013).

\(^{42}\) The distinction between formal and informal modes of trade are obviously difficult to delimit and these figures should be taken as estimates (see Fauré & Labazée 2002:64-92 for a thorough analysis and delimitation of the various forms of production and revenue that are taken into consideration in order to arrive at these figures).

\(^{43}\) For an illustrative outline of the municipality’s administrative structure, see http://www.mairie-bobo.org/. Since the December 2012 municipal elections, there are seven \textit{arrondissements} in Bobo-Dioulasso.
Bobo-Dioulasso’s Secteur 17, known as “Sarfalao”, in the Dafra arrondissement is one of the city’s most populous neighbourhoods, with an estimated population of 40,000 inhabitants (in 2006), or approximately 10% of the city’s surveyed population (Municipality of Bobo Dioulasso 2007:3). Sarfalao is located at the edge of one of the tarmac roads leading from the central Rond point de la nation roundabout away from the city centre. In celebration of Burkina Faso’s 50th Anniversary of Independence in December 2010, a monument to commemorate Independence was erected in the junction that marks the end of the tarmac road, and the entry to Sarfalao. The fact that two of the four roads forming the junction in which this important monument was being built were dilapidated gravel roads did not escape sarcastic commentary by Sarfalao’s residents, and it testifies to the contradictory status of the neighbourhood as marginal to the public administration, yet demographically and culturally central to the city. The literal meaning of “Sarfalao” is translated as “the end of the road”\(^{44}\), testifying to its peripheral location in the city at the time of its emergence in the late 1970s and early 1980s but also to some of the symbolism surrounding its present-day position in the city.

From the newly built monument of Independence, a broad and uneven gravel road leads into the planned part of Secteur 17, often referred to as Sarfalao loti\(^{45}\), the reconstruction of which began in 1986, when 4,472 plots (parcelles) were allotted (MHU 2007). In this part of the neighbourhood, plots are evenly and symmetrically distributed and most houses are supplied with electricity. The broad gravel road features a pharmacy, a section of the caisse populaire, a super market, and a number of hairdressers, bars, hardware shops etc. This road ends in a T-junction, marking the entrance to Sarfalao non-loti, a large informally settled area that has filled out the empty space between secteurs 17 and 25 on the official city map.

The restructuring of the non-loti area has been in preparation since at least 2005, when the municipality conducted a census of its residents and assigned each house in the area an official plot number, indicating that the house would be considered in the coming land allotment or reallocation process. Long-time residents in the area told me that they had moved here to cultivate on the outskirts of the city in the 1980s and early 1990s. At that time, the houses were separated by fields, and land was easily ac-

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\(^{44}\) “La fin du chemin”, according to an introduction to the neighbourhood by a local association, Association Ankataa (Ankataa 2012).

\(^{45}\) The adverb ‘loti’ is conjugated in French in relation to the preceding noun, meaning that an ‘c’ is added when used in relation to words such as ‘la zone’. However, since I employ the emic terms loti and non-loti in relation to particular places, I choose to use the most common form of the word, irrespective of the English noun preceding it.
quired through a symbolic payment to the ‘chef de terre’ (*dugukoloti*), or village chief (*duguti*), of Kuinima – a village that was gradually being incorporated into the city at that time. The restructuring of *Secteur 17/Sarfalao* in the mid-1980s caused many residents of the area, who were unable to acquire the administrative rights to the space they had inhabited, to move into the adjacent areas where the state was yet to register plots and take (relative) control over access to land. This was the first major wave of settlements in what is now known as Sarfalao *non-loti*, and it was followed by a decade of progressive settlement, primarily by rural migrants and residents of other parts of Bobo-Dioulasso. The Ivorian crisis may be said to have caused a second wave of settlement of Sarfalao *non-loti* – and areas of Bobo-Dioulasso similar to it, e.g. in *Secteurs 21, 22* (Belle Ville), and 24.

Streets are much narrower in the *non-loti*, winding between unevenly sized plots and enclosures. Houses, the bronzed colour of the sandy streets, delimit pathways with their porous *banco* façades, built with mud bricks that are manufactured on site, with the help of neighbours and friends. When it rains, water trickles from the parallel depressions in the wavy aluminium roofing, gathering in little streams along the edges of the jagged streets. At night, some houses in the first rows towards the *loti* zone are alit by the warm glow of light bulbs or the colder glare of fluorescent tubes, the electricity supply drawn illicitly from houses in the *loti* section. Further away from the T-junction, the *non-loti* area is lit only by battery-driven or kerosene lamps.

In order to acquire a plot of land in the *non-loti*, new arrivals would either negotiate with a resident in the area intent on selling, or approach the local traditional authorities, or *duguti*, to be granted the right to settle\(^\text{46}\). These requirements applied, of course, not only to migrant families arriving from Côte d’Ivoire but to anyone seeking to settle in the area. The *non-loti* areas of Bobo-Dioulasso were inhabited by a heterogeneous population both in terms of origin and social class. Settlement or investment in the *non-loti* was also a known strategy of middle-class *bobolais*, either hoping to sell off their plots after zoning, to rent out rooms or houses as a source of regular income, or to speculate in the future gentrification of these peripheral and affordable parts of the city. Acquiring plots in the *non-loti* was like buying tickets in the lottery. If a plot was given a

\(^{46}\) Although I did not explore this theme exhaustively during my fieldwork, it seems that there were several individuals claiming such authority over Sarfalao *non-loti*. This did not seem to be of concern to the refugees who had acquired land in the area: according to them, the involvement of the *duguti* was a symbolic gesture meant to generate legitimacy of their residence vis-à-vis their new neighbours.
registration number in the formalisation process, its value would increase significantly and enable the owner to sell off plots in order to invest in more attractive locations in the city. To most residents, as we shall see in this chapter, the hope was rather to have their plot recognised officially by the municipality, as a potential source of social mobility. What few residents took into consideration, however, was that the municipality would require them to, as it were, buy their own land back from the state at a price few people would be able to afford. This was made clear to me through interviews with public officials at the office of Mayor of Dafra. The municipality was in the midst of preparing the announcement of the distribution of plots in Sarfalao non-loti but did not consider it their duty to inform its residents of these formal procedures beforehand.

The following section discusses the analytical delimitation employed in this thesis’ study of everyday life in Sarfalao, through a consideration of some of the most influential approaches to urban ethnography and their conceptual pitfalls and legacies.

Exploring Emplacement and Neighbourhood in Sarfalao

In much the same way as other analytical concepts used by anthropologists – culture, ethnicity, identity, place, to name but a few – the concept of the ‘neighbourhood’ has so many connotations in everyday parlance that its analytical use has been troubled for some time. In anthropology, the term is most commonly associated with the Chicago School of Sociology, and its monographical studies of particular areas in and around the city of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s (Konings, van Dijk, and Foeken 2006:1). Their overall approach, which has been called ‘ecological’ (Hunter 1974:5), was initially developed by Robert Park, who applied concepts from plant ecology, such as dominance, symbiosis, and succession (Hannerz 1980:27), to the urban setting which he believed was structured by a fundamental competition (another concept from plant ecology) for urban space. Hannerz characterises this approach as resembling natural selection, by which ‘... the strongest inhabitants of the urban environment would occupy the most advantageous locations, and others would adjust to their demands’ (1980:27). These ideas were further developed by Ernest Burgess, whose well-known model of The Growth of the City (1967) posited a developmental model of concentric circles that was argued to be representative of the developmental cycle of large industrial cities in general. This holistic ambition of the Chicago School approach, of developing general theoretical models of urban transformations on the basis of their ethnographic studies in Chicago, ‘implying that the Chicago
spatial order was the spatial order of any city’ (Hannerz 1980:57), came to be seen as one of its fundamental weaknesses (Burawoy 2000:14).

This difficulty in defining a workable notion of the role of the spatial dimensions of social life in general and urban social life in particular, has continued to vex urban analysts. One response to these questions was taken up by another dominant force in urban studies, developed by the anthropologists of the British Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, which became known simply as ‘the Manchester School’47. A central concern in the, it should be noted, quite varied approaches that characterise the work of the Manchester School was to delimit a pertinent object of study in the bewildering context of the expansive growth of industrial towns on the Zambian Copperbelt and other towns in Southern Africa. Rather than base their studies on the spatial dimensions of the city, the Manchester anthropologists developed an approach more akin to the later postmodernist theories of practice (cf. Evens & Handelman 2006), with their focus on social interactions and personal networks. As J. Clyde Mitchell argued, the focus on social actors and their interactions was a conscious analytical choice of delimitation, rather than a disregard for the broader contexts of these social practices: ‘Cities and city life are always parts of larger wholes and some of the difficulty with which the analyst is faced is that of separating for analytical purposes the part from its integral whole’ (Mitchell 1987:2).

As opposed to the macro-social focus of the Chicago sociologists, Mitchell and his colleagues worked primarily with qualitative data, gathered through interviews and observations over longer periods of time. Conducting ethnographic fieldwork in urban settings led to analyses that related implicitly or explicitly to the more conventional tribal studies in rural settings (e.g. Mayer 1961), and to reflections on the differences between social life in these two ideal-type settings. One aspect of these discussions was the mobility practices of the urban dwellers under study, who not only moved between urban and rural locations but also showed an ability to adapt seamlessly to the cultural practices of these settings (Mayer 1962, Epstein 1967). These empirical insights contributed to the theoretical questioning of the notion of stable identities and inspired the development of the situational approach. Summarizing the interplay between these empirical and theoretical reflections, Mitchell argued:

It may well be that the social situations in which a town-dweller interacts are more varied than those in the life of a tribesman but, so far as sociolog-

47 See the edited volume The Manchester School (Evens & Handelman 2006) for a series of articles reflecting on its history and epistemological heritage.
This fundamental concern with the characteristics of urban social complexity remains important and is reminiscent of the broader constructivist turn in the social sciences in the 1980s (see e.g. Ferguson 1999:271, note 15). On the basis of these theoretical concerns, the Manchester anthropologists gradually developed a set of methodologically oriented concepts to guide urban fieldwork, most famously perhaps the extended-case method, which originated in Max Gluckman’s seminal ‘Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand’ (1940) but was, according to Gluckman himself (2006 [1959]:19), developed into its more enduring shape in Mitchell’s (1956) monograph *The Yao Village*. Mitchell later characterised the extended-case method as the most complex version of a continuum of case study methods, and characterised by the analysis of, ‘… a sequence of events sometimes over quite a long period, where the same actors are involved in a series of situations in which their structural positions must continually be re-specified and the flow of actors through different social positions specified’ (Mitchell 2006 [1982]:28-29). This attention to the contextual and processual dimensions of social analysis has since then permeated anthropological thinking, while most ethnographers find it somewhat unrealistic to achieve a grasp of, let alone describe, ‘the total process of social life’ (ibid.). In this way, the contemporary use of the extended-case method – the present study included – may have seemed to Gluckman to fall under the simplistic model of ‘apt illustrations’, simply because the analytical ambition of present-day writers tends to be limited to understanding smaller slices of social life, without drawing general conclusions about the workings of a social system.

Urban ethnographers therefore continue to grapple with the sense of a lack of appropriate analytical tools for understanding social transformations in urban Africa. Current debates continue to criticize the same proclivity as the Chicago School’s: towards preferring quantitative methods in the face of the seeming complexity of urban social life, and the problem of a delimitation that does not fall back on the tendency of earlier studies to over-emphasise spatial relations. These reservations have led to reiterations such as AbdouMaliq Simone’s that, far from being limited to a particular place or neighbourhood, ‘popular investments in time and energy are often elsewhere; that is, focused on piecing together larger
spaces of action – larger both in terms of territory and social interdependencies across status, class, ethnicity, generation, social position, and so forth’ (Simone 2004:10).

At the same time, the terminology of landscapes, localities, places, and neighbourhoods has been reintroduced, rather than rejected, by constructivist theories of social practice, albeit with considerably different analytical implications. In this way, the Chicago School’s much-criticized preoccupation with the relationship of urban residents to their physical environments seems to have been somewhat vindicated, as the concept of ‘neighbourhood’ is being employed and discussed more frequently in urban analyses (see e.g. Christensen & O’Brien 2002, De Boeck, Konings, and Pellow 2004, Harsch 2009, Hilgers 2008, Konings, van Dijk, and Foeken 2006, Piot 2006, Werthmann 2006). As the otherwise sceptical Hannerz noted in his elaborate review of urban anthropology, the Chicago School may have ‘… offered to [urban ethnography] what one might consider a largely useful sense of place. The Chicago studies are quite clearly set in a particular territory, not in a vacuum as certain more purely organizational analyses seem to be’ (Hannerz 1980:57). But rather than seeing these two currents as contradictive, it may be more useful to think of them dialectally, as mutually constitutive dimensions of urban space as at once a social and a spatial phenomenon.

This duality is also implied by Charles Piot, who suggests that, ‘[s]ince the social is forever em-placed, it gets spatialized and embodied in highly specific ways, ways that must also conform to territorializing logics ... The embodied spatial – place, city, neighbourhood, road network – must be seen as asserting its own agency, actively shaping power’s imperatives’ (Piot 2006:197). What this implies is that the extent to which neighbourhoods or other spatial delimitations are inscribed with meaning in relation to specific actors cannot be determined a priori but must be explored empirically. As Katja Werthmann argues, evoking Albert Hunter’s (1974) revisiting of the Chicago School approach, ‘[w]hether a “neighbourhood” as a community of significant others in an urban environment consists of a street, a block or a quarter depends both on the physical features and the symbolic boundaries drawn by its inhabitants’ (Werthmann 2006:119).

In the introduction to this thesis, I suggested a definition of emplacement as the subjective experience of a life-sustaining form of social practice, articulated in relation to structural forces that influence and restrict this form of social agency. The materiality of the city figures as an important factor in this understanding of emplacement, as both shaping and being shaped by concerted governmental efforts and fortuitous everyday
practice. This approach to the concept of emplacement might inform an understanding of ‘neighbourhood’ as simultaneously an expression of materiality, sociality, and an idealized sense of belonging, or proximity. As a particular form of urban emplacement, neighbourhood describes both a social relationship – in the positional form of the word⁴⁸ (that is, the position of residing next to others, of living in the physical proximity of other residents) – and a material infrastructure that is shaped by, but also takes part in shaping, the concerted efforts and unintended effects of the everyday practice of social actors⁴⁹. In its positional, or relational, form, neighbourhood signifies proximity. Whether in an urban or a rural setting, neighbourhood may be one of the most important sources of relatedness, as Werthmann shows in her study of Muslim women in an urban neighbourhood in Kano, Nigeria, where ‘[r]elationships with neighbours, some of whom became close friends, were not merely a substitute for kinship but created a sense of belonging’ (Werthmann 2006:140). As opposed to the term ‘neighbourliness’, however, the relationship is not assumed a priori to be of a particular normative quality: while being neighbourly implies being friendly to one’s neighbours, neighbourhood in its positional form simply describes the fact of residing in spatial proximity of others⁵⁰. Analysed as a form of emplacement, neighbourhood as spatial proximity does not assume any such normative ascriptions but rather takes the forms and interpretations of that proximity as its object of study.

Neighbours were potentially important collaborators but also harbingers of gossip and ill will, and neighbourhood in this sense implied both an acute sense of collectivity and of being monitored and judged. In this sense, one informant, when I asked him why he had kept his past as a rebel soldier in Côte d’Ivoire a secret, declared that ‘Sarfalao itself is bad. That which you haven’t done, people say you did’. In other words, this former rebel who was now intent on leaving his combatant past behind him, preferred to keep his past to himself, because of the rumours and contempt he expected of his neighbours, if they knew. By ascribing this ill

⁴⁸ The Oxford English Dictionary defines this form of the word ‘neighbourhood’ as ‘The quality, condition, or fact of being situated near to someone or something, or of being neighbours; nearness, proximity’ (OED 2013).

⁴⁹ In the present study, a methodological consequence of this approach has been to balance the incentive to ‘follow the people’ (cf. Marcus 1998) in their movements through the city and neighbourhood with an attention to flows through places that are vested with meaning by virtue of their fixity: specific street corners, courtyards or coffee shops serving as places of congregation or avoidance (see also Lefebvre 2004).

⁵⁰ Far from irrelevant in this context, the connotation of the word ‘neighbourliness’ is similar to the sense of affinity that is so often exploited in rhetorics of belonging on sub-national, national, and even global scales and is an expression of the sedentary logic of seeing rootedness as the basis of belonging.
will to “Sarfalao itself”, this resident intended both the place and its residents, in a normative sense of the term neighbourhood. At the same time, Sarfalao was just as easily idealised as one of the most vibrant and colourful areas of the city, and the notion of neighbourhood was thereby fraught with ambiguity as a positive social proximity (implying solidarity), on the one hand, and an imposing intimacy that reveals private affairs and begets jealousy and competition, on the other.

Wassakara: The Aesthetics of Urban Emplacement

A recurring theme of this thesis is the presence of Côte d’Ivoire in the neighbourhood of Sarfalao: as a place of origin or departure of migrants; as a destination for future migrations; and as a social, political, and cultural point of reference. In terms of popular culture, allusions to Abidjanais fashion, music, film, and vernacular were abundant, not only among returning migrants. For example, the lyrics of Ivorian rapper Billy Billy were a common frame of reference for young residents in Sarfalao. Whether brought up in Côte d’Ivoire or Burkina Faso, the songs of “the son of Wassakara”\footnote{‘Le fils de Wassakara’ is one of Billy Billy’s appellations.} spoke to most young people, with their mix of original rhymes and biting satirical remarks about the social and political kingpins in Côte d’Ivoire. A common reaction to a Billy Billy song, played at the highest volume in an empty bar in the early afternoon or on a small portable radio placed in the centre of a group of friends passing time on a street corner, would be an incredulous laugh at the artist’s ability to pinpoint issues, events, and characters that speak simultaneously to highly specific political questions (regarding e.g. immigration, poverty, corruption in the Ivorian football league, or the idiosyncrasies of Ivorian president, Laurent Gbagbo) and general paradoxes of everyday life in urban West Africa and beyond. Part of the reaction would be to the sharpness of Billy Billy’s social analysis, and part would be at his audacity to say such things out loud, in a context where juniors were expected to bite their tongues towards their seniors, at least in public.

In that sense, Billy Billy’s childish pronunciation of one of his favourite mottos: ‘what I see is what I say’\footnote{‘Ce que moi je vois, c’est ce que moi je dis’}, was seen – and intended – as the battle cry of a new urban youth rebellion against an archetypical gerontocratic rule:
Wassakara isn’t pretty but it’s where I live. It’s sort of like my identity card, it’s a ‘cri de coeur’. It’s the mirror of our society that I reveal in front of every Ivorian. Because the people ‘high up’ don’t know: They certainly don’t imagine the realities that I describe in “Wassakara”. It is also an appeal that I forward to the youth – a sort of “get up and fight”… Because you can’t be 30 years old and be living attached to someone.

Billy Billy, interviewed by DirectAbidjan.com, 21 March 2008

In this interview quote, Billy Billy presents his 2008 album, ‘Allons à Wassakara’ as an insight into the realities of the urban poor in Côte d’Ivoire, particularly in his own neighbourhood, Yopougon (called Wassakara by its residents), which has been a symbol in Ivorian popular culture for the past decade, with its vibrant night life, glaring contradictions, and dense population serving the artistic imagination as a microcosm or, as Billy Billy puts it, a mirror reflecting everyday life in contemporary Côte d’Ivoire as a whole.

Central to the poetry of Billy Billy is the desire to present the harsh realities of life in the slums of Wassakara as both a celebration of the ingenuity of its residents and a critique of the leaders who ignore it. This simultaneous appeal to the political elite and the man on the street has made Billy Billy’s farcical depictions a source of insight and reflection for his audiences in both Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire. In response, some young returning migrants would refer to Sarfalao non-loti as “Wassakara”, juxtaposing the informal neighbourhood with its muddled infrastructure to the symmetry and orderliness of the city centre and Sarfalao loti.

Through his depiction of the everyday practices of residents in Wassakara, and its physical appearance and infrastructural deficiencies, Billy Billy makes a passionate outcry to politicians who are ignorant of the plight of ordinary citizens and to the young residents of such areas to ‘get up and fight’ for better living conditions in a broader sense, including not only housing but also employment opportunities and voice. To the young residents in Sarfalao, Billy Billy articulated an aesthetics of the non-loti which resonated with the youth in the neighbourhood, and which simul-

53 ‘Cri de coeur’ literally means ‘cry of (the) heart’ but in a more figurative sense connotes a passionate outcry, making a statement about something close to one’s heart.

54 Wassakara n’est pas beau, mais c’est là que je vis. C’est un peu ma carte d’identité, c’est un cri de cœur. C’est le miroir de notre société que j’expose devant chaque ivoirien. Parce que les gens « d’en haut » ne savent pas, ils n’imaginent certainement pas les réalités que je décrit dans « Wassakara ». C’est aussi un appel que je lance à la jeunesse, une sorte de « lèves-toi jeune et bats-toi… » Parce que tu ne peux pas avoir 30 ans et vivre accroché à quelqu’un.

55 “Let’s go to Wassakara”.
taneously celebrated and berated the living conditions of many urban residents across the continent.

The Micro-Politics of Urban Land Allotment

Living in Sarfalao non-loti was, as the name itself implies, to be involved in land allotment politics by definition. While recognised as a neighbourhood in the normative sense of a place ascribed with particular idealised meanings, the formal status of the non-loti area was as an illegal, or squat-ter, settlement. Controversies arising over urban land allocation schemes are commonplace in Burkina Faso, for example in Ouagadougou (see Hagberg 2001:59-65) and Koudougou (Hilgers 2009, see also Hilgers & Mazzocchetti 2010). My interest in land rights arose empirically from the concerns of the people I met in the non-loti part of Sarfalao, where the premise of being settled on un-allotted government land made the question of land ownership rights a fundamental issue for all residents with a wish to remain on that land. This led me to investigate the formal status of the area in the eyes of the municipality, which proved to me that the settlement of these approximately nine thousand families was indeed precarious, since the plans for the demolition and restructuring of the area were already in the making at the Mayor's office and in the Ministry of Urban Planning.

Even though the municipality admitted that it would be out of the question to evict everyone, the restructuring would most likely imply that the majority of the residents would be pushed out of the area, while more affluent and well-connected residents would move in. This, at least, seems to have been the general tendency in previous restructuring processes, which had indeed caused public protests, and rumour had it that the mayor had developed a strategy of paying off the most vocal protestors with land plots, or providing the same favour for potential figureheads of mobilised resident movements. While such rumours are difficult to verify, the following case study suggests that similar tactics had been used before in Sarfalao and that suspicions remained that they would be deployed again in the impending land allocation process.

“Les Déguéris de SOS”

The case of a formal appeal to the municipality on behalf of the evicted residents of an area bordering the two halves of Sarfalao is an illustration of how competitive the access to land has been in the past and present
preparations for urban land allotment in Sarfalao. In 2000, the International NGO, *SOS Villages d’Enfants*\(^{56}\), was allocated a large parcel of land by the municipality in what was, at the time, a densely populated part of a growing spontaneous settlement between the formally recognised sectors 17 and 25. The contract allegedly included a budget for recompensing the settlers – who were usually referred to as *déguéris*, meaning evictees – who were to be evicted of their homes. The terms for these reimbursements had been negotiated by a committee of resident representatives, the most influential members of which were bought off with new parcels of land in a more attractive part of town by the then mayor of the Arrondissement de Dafra, Sanou Souleymane. In the end, the remaining residents (approximately 600 families) never saw a penny. One major problem, for the residents and the authorities alike, was the questionable registration process of residents in the area prior to demolition. As a member of the resident committee exclaimed:

…it [the registration process] was chaotic! Because, eh, even pigsties … the pigsties were given a number. For example, if me, I have my house, I have built a … pigsty in front of it, [I claim that] it’s for me, you have to give me a number. Like that. Even ruins, they were all given numbers. So it was shit! Well, we saw that the numbers that were published, the [real] number wasn’t the one that was published

The present mayor of the *arrondissement* of Dafra, Sidiki Sanogo, was said to have made the case into a matter of personal pride, since he was witness to the evictions in 2000 and had been deeply ashamed by the previous mayor’s handling of the illegal settlers. In April 2010, a petition registering former residents in the evicted area was opened – in the shade of the mango trees just outside the imposing walls of the fully constructed and functional compound of *SOS Villages, Dafra*. The petition marked the result of intense lobbying by a group of neighbourhood residents, who had been among the settlers evicted from the area that now housed the *SOS Villages* compound, and was intended to re-register all the former settlers of that space, in order to provide them with the long-awaited compensation by receiving the right to a plot in the upcoming land management scheme in Sarfalao *non-loti*. The slim odds that these promises would actually materialise were not lost on the settler representatives, who

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\(^{56}\) According to the organisation’s website, *SOS Children’s Villages* International was founded in Austria by Hermann Gmeiner in 1949, and has developed into an umbrella organisation with programmes in 133 countries. Its stated purpose declares: ‘We work for children who are orphaned, abandoned or whose families are unable to care for them. We give these children the opportunity to build lasting relationships within a family’ (*SOS* 2012).
nevertheless were willing to give the municipality the benefit of the doubt. At the same time, the petition was an occasion for other disenfranchised residents, such as the rapatriés who had returned from Côte d'Ivoire during the armed conflict (see below), to try their luck in this exceptional gesture by the public authorities. Whether eligible for the petition or not, many Sarfalao residents were aware of its potential for providing an alternative access point to a land parcel in the impending land allocation scheme, and sought ways of positioning themselves for a spot on the list. One old man spoke openly to my assistant about having paid the officials for including his name on the list, while others waited in line with no clear strategy prepared, other than their negotiating skills and the intent to be included.

The petition of April 2010 demonstrates how present residents of the non-loti engaged in negotiations with the municipal bureaucracy that they felt they had very little influence over, and that land allotment – whether to the former settlers of the SOS Villages area or other residents in the non-loti – was perceived as a question of personal connections and/or chance. As one evictee put it, having praised the new committee for their work on the April 2010 petition: ‘It’s still about luck, eh. Until they [the State] show you the land you can’t say that you have won. That’s it!’ The déguérpis were aware that in juridical terms, they had little wager in claiming compensation for being evicted from State-owned land. But seeing me as a more of a journalist than a student, being able to broadcast their message to the outside world, they stated their emotional claims to common decency on the part of the authorities in, at least, helping the poor residents find another place to live. ‘All we can do is keep asking’, one man said, since in essence it was up to the people in power, and those with the right connections. These fatalist discourses abound in discussions of anything from politics to dreams of potential livelihood options: ‘If you are small, you stay small. That’s how life is here. If you are big you don’t want a small one coming to replace you. If you are small, you stay there’, the evictee quoted earlier summarised. Such statements, while expressing the sense of arbitrariness that characterised the land allocation process, obviously downplayed people’s efforts and abilities to influence their well-placed connections and getting ahead through the very channels they condemned rhetorically.

The many levels of bureaucracy involved in the land allocation process – ranging from resident representatives to public officials at the municipal levels – implied that a favourable connection on one level might not guarantee compliance at another level. In the following I describe the sense of arbitrariness expressed by different actors in Sarfalao.
“Lotissement is a Lottery”

Given the particularities of the administration and implementation of the evictions, as well as the involvement of a well-known International NGO, the case of the SOS Villages évictees may best be seen as linked to the more general micro-politics of urban land allocation, which as Körling argues in her study of peri-urban Niger, ‘is not just a technical operation but also mobilizes a number of political, economic, and symbolic stakes’ (Körling 2011:80). The April 2010 petition of former SOS Villages residents was directly linked to the larger land allocation scheme that was planned to be carried out in November (but has been continually postponed), involving the whole area of Sarfalao non-loti. While most buildings in the non-loti bore large numbers written in white paint, indicating their identification number in the on-going restructuring, the oldest houses also bore traces of an earlier census that was conducted in 2004 but eventually rejected because of the mounting accusations against the involved officials for fraudulently adding names to the list of residents.

A local journalist, who had reported on the controversies in Sarfalao in 2004-2005, remembered that the first list of residents contained more than 18,000 names, while the current list had verified less than 10,000 residents as eligible for a stake in the distribution of new parcels in Sarfalao non-loti. These estimates corresponded to the numbers given to me by the public official in charge of the upcoming land allotment scheme, M. Cristophe Sanou, the Second Deputy of the Mayor (2ème adjoint au maire) of Dafra. He said that the current plan operated with approximately 9,800 buildings in the area considered for restructuring but only approximately 4,000 parcels to be divided among the current residents, since they were officially considered illegal settlers on state-owned land. These figures were unknown to the residents I spoke to, but they were not surprised to learn that the upcoming restructuring spelled eviction for many. The Deputy Mayor also said that aside from the challenge of selecting the eligible residents and assuring a fair distribution of parcels, the municipality struggled to convince the engineers in charge to proceed with the restructuring: not only was the entire area in a constant process of erosion, with houses crumbling and streets being washed away in the heavy rains of the rainy season, but the area also descended towards a steep ravine that expanded with each new measurement, spelling trouble for any attempt to construct a permanent infrastructure, such as roads, power lines and water supplies.

What, then, did it mean for migrant families and other residents to be dwelling on such precarious land rights? In terms of the structural impediments to pursuing a project of home-making (as discussed in the Intro-
duction), the unpredictable and haphazard mechanisms of land allocation, as well as the proliferation of informal land transactions in the neighbourhood, made access to land an important expression of the migrants’ access to the pursuit of essential life projects such as making a living and providing for the schooling of younger children. Whether or not individual families were able to negotiate such access was, in their own eyes, illustrative of their status in the neighbourhood. Living as locataires (renters) was generally associated with a lower social status – much more so than being without a job or having to ask friends or relatives for financial help – because the acquisition of land was generally seen as an important step towards self-sufficiency and respectability. Once acquired, however, land ownership in the informal settlement spelled new concerns and anxieties, since the investments required to build were an additional strain on the household economy, as witnessed by half-built structures around the city that were now dilapidating under the duress of scorching sun and heavy rains. This feeling of uncertainty was reinforced by the persistent rumours of the impending restructuring scheme.

In response to this fragile settlement basis, many residents expressed moral indignation over the nepotistic and secretive process of land allocation, claiming ownership rights on the basis of what is fair, not on bureaucratic rules and regulations, which they found to be negotiable in any case by anyone who has the resources and connections to back up his or her claims. In other words, their moral indignation did not prevent them from doing all they could to increase their chances for acquiring land, but the active speculation in future land allocation was mainly the privilege of more wealthy residents who were able to invest in several plots in the non-lotis – as one would buy several tickets to increase the chance of winning the lottery. I heard of few attempts at approaching officials or other well-placed individuals in the pursuit of better chances, and the less well-off residents were either apathetic or fatalistic about their chances, which gave extra weight to the lottery analogy.

Land Rights, Home-Making, and Ambivalent Neighbourhood

As the discussion of the SOS Villages evictions suggested, the politics of urban land allocation were to a large extent played out at the level of the neighbourhood, and these negotiations, alliances, and accusations were

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57 For another discussion of the unpredictable micro-politics of urban land allocation, see also Körling’s discussion of the notion of a ‘zoning tombola’ (lotissement tombola) in peri-urban Niamey (Körling 2011:81).
consequential for intermediaries such as Bouba, who lived in his father’s courtyard in the loti section of Sarfalao, after having been evicted from the area appropriated by SOS Villages.

I had met Bouba, a robust man in his late thirties, as one of the resident representatives during the petition of the SOS Villages déguérpis and interviewed him in an adjacent bar about what was going on and the events that had led up to the registration taking place under the trees outside. That recorded interview had become the topic of considerable gossip in the neighbourhood, and a rumour was started that I had come on behalf of the authorities to investigate (faire une enquête) any illicit activities related to the land allotment process. It was through Bouba that I was eventually able to appease the other members of the resident committee, and I would often stop by his family courtyard to chat with him and his brothers.

Having been away for a month, I visited Bouba in late July 2010 and asked him about the latest developments in the registration process. Two and a half hours later he had told me not only about the latest developments but about his own road into local politics, his experiences of the changes in the neighbourhood he had lived in all his life, and his ambivalent dreams of becoming involved in politics but resisting a position that would tempt him to act as corruptly as many of the people he had collaborated with over the years. Our conversations have already informed my rendering of the case of the SOS Villages petition in the previous section, but I want to bring out an observation that speaks to the interrelatedness between neighbourhood as place and as social proximity. Telling me about his entry into local politics, Bouba told me that he had assisted the resident committee that was rumoured to have been bought by the former mayor before the residents were evicted and the SOS Villages complex was built. He had been part of a team that went door to door to register people and write numbers on the houses that were deemed worthy of financial compensation. He told me that he had included houses that were below standard because he found it unjust that so many people would be chased away with nothing. His soft heart was the reason why he would never want to become a real politician – he wouldn’t be able to bear the responsibility for bereaving people of their homes or their livelihoods, he stated with considerable rhetorical pathos.

He was now a member of the new resident committee, charged with overseeing the registration process relating to the petition of former residents in the SOS Villages area. His greatest fear was that all their efforts would result in as little as the former committee, after all the promises they had made to the residents. He said that every time he met with the
head of the committee, Bouba said ‘please, you have to make sure that the residents get their parcels’, but Bouba was well aware that it was all just a lottery with winning tickets only for the lucky few. He said that even the registration process itself was haphazard, as there was no structured way of categorising the residents, for example according to the distinction between residents and non-residents, that was supposed to help the committee select the most deserving for the final list. Since many people had built several makeshift houses in non-loti areas around town, as stakes in future land allocation schemes, the mayor’s office had decided to give priority to resident house owners. This criterion, of course, was not lost on the residents and Bouba said that everyone knew that in order to have a chance for a parcel, you would have to say that you were living in the area permanently.

The committee had no way of knowing who was telling the truth and who had just moved to the area to position themselves for a land plot. People not only lied about their own settlement history but also tried to outmanoeuvre their neighbours by telling lies about them. The fierce competition over land had divided the residents, with several people making claims to the same plot and outsiders buying their ways into the lists of the committee. In this way, Bouba described the micro-politics of land allotment as grounded in ambivalent social proximity. Neighbours were dependent on each other’s testimony to present themselves as eligible candidates for the petitioning list, while they were also each other’s rivals and potential worst enemies. While the uncertainties of the micro-politics of urban land allotment were a predicament shared by all residents of the non-loti, migrants who had been forced to return to Burkina Faso from Côte d’Ivoire were particularly vulnerable to this ambivalence because of their weak social networks in the city. The following section introduces the rapatriés in Sarfalao by reflecting on their arrival to Burkina Faso and their reception by the authorities as well as by their new neighbours in Sarfalao.

The Rapatriés in Sarfalao

As early as the Tabou massacres in September 1999, the changing attitude towards Burkinabe immigrants in Côte d’Ivoire provoked the forced return of Burkinabe migrants at a scale that was visibly different from the long-established “trickle” of returning migrants who concluded their circular paths, went on shorter or longer visits, or were forced to return due to personal misfortune or other less structural reasons. As the persecution
of Burkinabe “strangers” in Côte d’Ivoire intensified after Gbagbo’s contested electoral victory in 2000, so did the flows of returnees, who left their plantations, wage employment or small businesses behind in Côte d’Ivoire and returned to their country of origin in growing numbers.

The Burkinabe authorities were well aware of the phenomenon and, in addition to repatriating a relatively negligible number of citizens through Opération Bayiri, articulated a “National Assistance Strategy for the Socio-Economic Reintegration of the Repatriates” (Action-Sociale 2003), outlining the main logistic and developmental challenges facing the repatriates, or rapatriés, and called for external assistance in accommodating these urgent needs. The strategy was to be administered by the National Council for Emergency Assistance and Rehabilitation (CONASUR), a government body responsible for coordinating international humanitarian assistance since the droughts of the early 1970s (Riester 2011b:192, see also Blot 2003). However, as Riester notes, the implementation never received the required funding and was only able to provide actual assistance to around 7,000 individuals (Riester 2011b:192). Riester also notes that the official approach to administering aid to the rapatriés not only failed by its weak implementation but also by invoking resentment towards the refugees at the local level:

The twofold but badly targeted approach of the government ultimately heightened tensions at the local level. On the one hand, it provided basic support to every rapatrié regardless of personal circumstances, with no support being extended to the local population, hence the frustration. On the other hand, it uncritically praised the rapatriés’ qualities and experiences, while characterising the local population as backward, hence the rejection. Rapatriés were officially welcomed back as citizens and, at the same time, alienated from their compatriots (Riester 2011a:175)

This ambivalence towards the rapatriés in official policies, and the resentment in generated on the ground, is intrinsic to the term “rapatrié” itself, which was used by the state and quickly became the common appellation of people known to have returned to Burkina Faso from Côte d’Ivoire in the context of the Ivorian crisis. The term exists in international refugee law terminology, but to denote a much more delimited category of return migrants in relation to UNHCR repatriation programmes (Riester 2011b:42). What is more relevant than the formal juridical misappropriations in this context is that the state’s ambivalent perception of the rapatriés as both admirable and cosmopolitan role models, on the one hand, and in need of undifferentiated financial public support, on the other, infused the term with negative connotations in the eyes of other citizens
who were already charged with the burden of accommodating the new arrivals in their villages and urban neighbourhoods. At the same time, however, the official views of rapatriés by the Burkinabe authorities tell us relatively little about how individual migrants or families actually experienced the forced return to Burkina Faso. As Riester’s own figures illustrate, government intervention into the mass arrivals of Burkinabe citizens from Côte d'Ivoire was negligible, with the overwhelming majority were left to their own devices – both in terms of material assistance and in terms of how to relate to their new surroundings and neighbours. As this thesis will explore explicitly, attitudes towards rapatriés were much more varied and ambivalent than simply a government-induced resentment, as were the individual and collective responses to such sentiments by the rapatriés themselves.

Sarfalao non-loti was usually the second or third destination of the rapatriés I encountered there in 2010. The notable exceptions to that rule were migrants who had already built a house in the area before the war. Building a house in an informal neighbourhood could be an investment in urban land, pending the urban land planning of the area, or it could be a first step towards settling in Burkina Faso upon (formal or informal) retirement from a migrant career. To most of the people I met, building a house had been a more or less well-defined combination of both these strategies. Migrants without such investments, arriving with little or no savings or other assets, would initially settle with kin in the city or continue to their villages of origin or other rural settlements where they could depend upon the accommodation and support by family or (social) kin from their area. Most of the migrants I interviewed said that they had arrived in Burkina Faso with the intention to settle here permanently, rather than return to Côte d’Ivoire in the event of a perceivable end to the political crisis. Following a period of residence with friends or family,

58 Informants predominantly phrased their social networks as based on kin or regional affiliation (through kinship terms such as parent or cousin), rather than explicitly stating ethnicity or other socio-cultural identity-markers. I feel obliged to follow that logic, although I acknowledge that these same networks may be argued to be “based on ethnicity”, and in recognition that the anthropological literature on the region has demonstrated the relevance of ethnicity in analyses of social organization (see e.g. Breusers 1999, Blion 1995, Dacher 2005, Fiéloux 1980, Hagberg 1998).

59 Although such statements may have been somewhat rhetorical, a way of claiming agency despite their forced displacement, it is not surprising that the remaining refugees in Sarfalao in 2010 would be intent on settling down here, since most refugees arrived in the period 2001-2004. Although the escalation of the conflict in the aftermath of the November 2010 presidential elections confirmed the impressions of a lingering political crisis, rather than a durable peace, many refugees intent on returning to Côte d’Ivoire benefited from the relative
most rapatriés moved to Bobo-Dioulasso in search of more permanent residence. New arrivals to the city would be referred to the informal settlement areas (zones non-loties) by acquaintances or family members in the city.

Among the rapatriés in Sarfalao were a significant number of female heads of household (of the 34 women I interviewed more extensively, 16 may be said to fit the description), who were either living apart from their husband in Côte d’Ivoire or widows, who had spent most part or all of their (adult) life in Côte d’Ivoire. They came to Bobo-Dioulasso to escape persecution in the plantation areas, or in Abidjan or other main cities of the loyalist part of Côte d’Ivoire. They had lost contact with their husbands, or hardly ever heard from them, and they had certainly lost all hope of receiving financial contributions. Others did see their husbands once or twice a year, and/or received fairly regular remittances from Côte d’Ivoire. Most female returnees had initially made their way to Burkina on their own with their children – leaving behind their husbands in the common hope that he would be better able to continue providing for the family from there.

The young adult children of the rapatriés were often seen as, and presented themselves as, “diaspos” or “ivoiriens”, implying that their appearance and behaviour revealed that they have grown up in Côte d’Ivoire. As I will explore more thoroughly in Chapter 8, according to the diaspos themselves, this identification was ambivalent, since the local “burkinabè” youths both envied and admired the cosmopolitan dress and behaviour of the newcomers, while condemning them for their inability to speak proper Jula and their lack of polite manners (see also Bantenga 2003:334, Riester 2011b:111). Other rapatrié youths were more intent on adapting or fitting in to the behaviour and appearance of Bobo-Dioulasso youths, or simply shared more similar behaviour with them from their upbringing in Côte d’Ivoire. As I will explore in more detail in Chapter 8, the youths considered diaspo had either grown up in Abidjan, or emulated the same urban youth culture that includes nouchi slang, sapeur fashion clothing or (hip hop) street wear and zouglou music.

Migrants “At the End of the Road”

In an area inhabited predominantly by migrants – if not from Côte d’Ivoire as the main informants of this study, then from other parts of the region or the country – social ties and feelings of belonging were often calm following the signing of the 2007 Ouagadougou peace agreement (Accords Politiques de Ouagadougou) and were no longer available to the ethnographer in Sarfalao.
based on pragmatic patch-works of personal relationships and alliances, rather than, say, common origins or ethnicity *per se*. This does not mean that such collective identities were not significant to the identifications of urban residents but that they rarely seemed to be decisive in forging alliances or keeping people apart. Perhaps a testimony to this ‘loose’ form of organisation in the city, I heard of no formal structures such as village associations or ethnic groupings during my time in Sarfalao. More significantly than being identified in relation to one’s ethnicity or origins, returning migrants from Côte d’Ivoire were viewed apart from the neighbourhood at large by themselves as much as by their neighbours, with changing connotations, and their common migration history would be evoked as a bond by young and old migrants alike. It is notable that these identifications would not be based on specific points of departure in Côte d’Ivoire. The Ivorian experience served as a common frame of reference despite the considerable variations in migrant biographies.

Being new to the city, returning migrants from Côte d’Ivoire generally had relatively weak social ties in the neighbourhood or wider city, and they tended to establish bonds to other migrants more easily than to longer term residents, in some ways reinforcing the distinction between migrants and residents (although, as I have implied, most “residents” had themselves migrated to the city from elsewhere). Although many returning migrants from Côte d’Ivoire presented themselves as refugees from the Ivorian civil war, there were few formal support structures to rely on for financial and logistical assistance, the exceptions being local NGOs or International NGOs such as SOS Children’s Villages and the International Red Cross. In all of these cases, being seen as a refugee from the Ivorian crisis was not a prerequisite for receiving support, but these structures became associated with refugees because of their unmistakeable presence and vulnerability.

For all residents in the *non-loti* section of the neighbourhood, the fact that the municipality was preparing an all-encompassing land allocation scheme for the sector gave land ownership and settlement an acute sense of impermanence and unpredictability. Living in the *non-loti* under the constant threat of eviction was experienced as a sense of displacement – not in the sense of being forcibly removed but rather, as Lubkemann describes it, as a disruption of the possibilities of pursuing livelihoods and other aspects of home-making (cf. Lubkemann 2008a:193). This experience of being continually deprived of the conditions that would enable a more enduring process of home-making in Sarfalao was distributed unevenly across its residents, but returning migrants were generally in a more vulnerable position, given their weak social ties and their experiences of
forced displacement from Côte d'Ivoire, which often entailed leaving farmland or other investments behind and arriving in Burkina Faso with little or no financial means to invest in building a life anew. In this way, the impending restructuring of Sarfalao non-loti and the structural vulnerability of returning migrants combined to impose a sense of persistent displacement on the migrants, in which their unpredictable and impermanent settlement shaped their outlooks and life-making strategies to an extent that made long-term plans unthinkable and thoughts of the future unbearable.

Such a precarious settlement of migrant families in Sarfalao had implications for the migrants' feelings of belonging. In addition to the already mentioned sense of exclusion and social stigmatisation in relation to their prospects for informal land ownership, the impending formalisation through the municipal land management scheme gave residents a sense of urgency and despair which was expressed in varying emotional statements about the future. For example, Fatoumata, who was destitute after receiving the news of her husband's death in Côte d'Ivoire, refused to face the prospect of a future eviction: 'If I imagine that we will have to move, I can't sleep at night', she exclaimed with resignation in her voice. She was now living in a courtyard that had been empty for some time because the owner, a civil servant living closer to the city centre, was awaiting the land management scheme and expecting to sell off the plot if he was given the opportunity.

The owner was aware that Fatoumata and her five children had taken residence in his courtyard but had accepted their presence out of pity, Fatoumata said. He did not charge them any rent but had told her that the minute the plot was sold her fate was out of his hands. Fatoumata was one of the most destitute returnees I met in Sarfalao. Her husband had worked in the plantation economy near San Pedro but had been chased off his land following Laurent Gbagbo’s contested victory at the polls in 2000. After spending most of the ensuing war moving from place to place in the vicinity of their former home, the couple decided in 2006 that Fatoumata should bring the children to Burkina Faso, and they had thought of Bobo-Dioulasso as an ideal place to settle. Fatoumata's husband remained in Côte d'Ivoire, looking for work in the area adjacent to where his plantation had been. Arriving in Bobo-Dioulasso, Fatoumata had been approached by a man claiming to represent an association of rapatriés in the city and offering to help find a place to live, on the condition that she become a member of the association. She showed me the membership card that she had chosen to pay for out of her modest savings and added that the association had turned out to be a scam. She had never
heard from the man again, and none of her neighbours had ever heard of the association.

Fatoumata’s misfortunes had only just begun. Her husband was struggling with illness and was unable to send any remittances to her in Bobo-Dioulasso. When he died in late 2009, Fatoumata suspected that he had been poisoned by his Ivorian neighbours – which had been a fear of his ever since they were evicted from their lands in 2000. Although she had no rights to the land she inhabited, she articulated the same sense of moral outrage as many other residents in the non-loti: ‘if they evict us, what will we do? Where will we go? This is our home!’ Given her complete lack of justifiable claims to any form of land rights, Fatoumata’s case for appealing to the human decency of the authorities was perhaps more rhetorical than anything.

Crumbling Futures: Urban Emplacement and Reluctant Home-Making

The structural impediments to residents’ processes of home-making also included the more material dimensions of urban emplacement. The rainy season in the months of August-September 2010 brought on the latest wave of torrential rains and ruthless winds, causing houses to collapse on a large scale. Residents tried to reinforce their homes with wooden poles supporting the most fragile walls, and casual conversation would often turn to estimates of the durability of a seemingly fragile building and the housing options available to a given family in case of a collapse. Many houses had been hastily built in banco upon the arrival of returning migrants from Côte d’Ivoire, making migrant families particularly prone to dilapidation.

Two young men, who had both moved away from their migrant mother’s house recently, told me of their ironic encounter one morning, as both their new lodgings had collapsed in the same thunder storm, and they met each other half-way between the two houses – each one carrying his personal belongings to ask his friend for temporary shelter. Their social networks in the neighbourhood were strong enough to be accommodating under these circumstances, however, and one friend moved back into his mother’s house, while the other found shelter with his older brother.

Less fortunate residents were forced to construct temporary roofs and shelters next to their dilapidated homes, using plastic sheeting and other makeshift solutions. One migrant mother, whose husband had remained in Côte d’Ivoire when she brought their five children to Burkina Faso in
2005, told me that the combination of having built their house in a hurry upon their arrival and the unpredictable land allocation process made for the worst odds against the rains: not only was the building poorly constructed but the impending eviction also removed all incentive to reinforce the structure, which would entail unnecessary expenses. A migrant husband living nearby noted that in Abidjan even the poorest families had houses reinforced with concrete on top of the walls in banco. But in Sarfalao non-loti, even the wealthiest families – who were most likely to have ensured their plots in the land allocation process – were hesitant to improve their houses because the restructuring scheme would include the clearing of broader, grid-like streets between parcels, and since no one had seen the specific plans for the restructuring, the specific location and delimitation of the new streets and public squares was anyone’s guess. The non-loti was dotted with stone markers (bornes in French), intended to mark the locations of this future infrastructure, but after two censuses with their accompanying plot numbers and political manoeuvrings, residents were reluctant to take any such signs for granted.

In this way, even in terms of the physical construction, reinforcement, and maintenance of buildings in the non-loti, the unpredictable future of the neighbourhood and its residents provided a structural impediment to establishing enduring homes – a self-reinforcing predicament in the sense that the choice not to invest in improving houses in the area exposed residents to, at the same time, the risk of their houses collapses in the torrential rains, and the risk that these buildings would be assessed as substandard according to the municipality’s criteria in the land allocation scheme. Residents in the non-loti were not merely passive victims of these structural impediments but were active in choosing strategies and responses to these predicaments. Their urban emplacement was, in other words, a continually reproduced interaction between the effects of an array of structural forces and the choices and actions of the residents themselves. Choices and strategies varied across households and over time, and were not necessarily in the best interest of the people making them. In a similar way, the structural conditions affecting these forms of agency were not only variable over time and across different social networks and positions, but were also variable and unpredictable in their effects, rather than simply being malevolent or impeding individual and collective action: for example, it is impossible to judge or foresee whether the residents’ choices not to invest in the reinforcement of their homes in the non-loti would eventually turn out to be in their own best interest. In the lottery of the land allocation scheme, there were no guarantees that investment in the quality and solidity of a house in the non-loti would necessarily translate
into a formally recognised plot in the restructured neighbourhood – and households who prioritised their resources in improving their houses ran the risk of coming up short in buying their plot from the municipality, should their house be approved.

The following section considers an example of the ambivalence of neighbourhood, which involved Lucien, who had spent three years in Côte d’Ivoire as a rebel soldier. Rumours are central to this story, and I explore how lingering judgements of individual residents gain traction in light of a theft that was the talk of the neighbourhood for about a fortnight in the final stages of my fieldwork.

The Case of the Stolen Pig

On one morning in November, the streets in the non-loti were buzzing with rumours surrounding the theft of a pig from the pigsty of a well-known family of porc au four vendors. The thieves were said to have knocked the pig unconscious before killing it on the spot, to avoid it making too much noise and waking up the whole neighbourhood. Having made off with the cadaver, the thieves had then returned for a second pig, but they had failed to silence it, and its shrieks had awoken the owners and a considerable number of their neighbours. After a dramatic chase through the narrow winding streets of the moonlit non-loti, one of the thieves had been apprehended and handed over to the police, while another had escaped without being identified.

Rumour had it that the young man who had been caught had claimed that he had been paid to act as accomplice to the real mastermind behind the devious crime and that he had named his conspirator. Aside from the discussion about the cunning execution of the theft, the following day’s gossip revolved around the probability of that accusation and the possible motives behind the actions of all parties involved. The case of the stolen pig thus brought out old grudges and suspicions and turned former friends against one another as competing interpretations clashed over tea sessions in the grins, and across the coffee shop counters at the border between the two halves of Sarfalao.

The man who was accused of being the mastermind behind the theft was a friend of mine, Lucien, who had just become a father for the fourth time.

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60 Porc au four, literally meaning pork in the oven in French, was barbequed pork sold in vending stands and restaurants across the city.

61 A grin de thé can be described as meeting point for a group of friends, but the meaning is more complex, since it connotes both the group and the place, in a somewhat similar way to the multiple notions of neighbourhood, discussed above.
time, and who was well known for his generous servings of *porc au four* at the crossroads of the two Sarfalaos. For every fact that emerged in the course of the following day – from witnesses to the late-night chase and character witnesses who knew the involved parties in one way or another – Lucien’s case seemed to weaken considerably. Several witnesses stated that they had seen Lucien that night. The pursuers had passed him in the street, and he had pointed further ahead, saying that ‘they went that way’. Speculations abound on whether he had said ‘the *thieves* went that way’, which might have indicated that he knew what was going on, and thereby may have revealed his involvement. The very fact that Lucien was out walking in the neighbourhood past midnight arose suspicion: whether Lucien was innocent or not, he was certainly caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, and people were quick to point out this violation on respectable behaviour in their debates.

For Lucien, walking the deserted streets of the *non-loti* at night provided his neighbours with a commonly recognised clue to suspicious, or dissenting, behaviour that strengthened the case against him. Most of the talk soon turned to a dissection of Lucien’s character in order to determine whether his complicity was likely. I had, as several others of his acquaintances that day, been by Lucien’s family courtyard several times in vain, his mother saying that he was out on a job. His absence from the neighbourhood only fed speculations about his culpability, and by the same evening the popular verdict had more or less settled on a “guilty” verdict, not so much on the basis of the available evidence but rather on the collective assessment of Lucien’s character and more specifically on the sides of his person that were least known, namely his involvement with the *Forces Nouvelles* rebel movement across the border in Côte d’Ivoire during the most intensive years of the conflict, in 2002-2005. Having been trained as a soldier and enrolled in the rebel movement was not seen as a heroic act of involvement in an ideological cause to fight for the plight of the Burkinabe diaspora in Côte d’Ivoire, as the former rebels themselves would claim, but rather as a self-serving and immoral indulgence in a war that had only brought misery and impoverishment on both sides of the border. Chapter 6 is devoted to the experiences and interpretations of young Burkinabe men’s involvement in the rebel movement in Côte d’Ivoire. Suffice it to say here that Lucien’s violent past was highlighted in street-level gossip as the flaw in his character that made his guilt in the case of the stolen pig plausible. In other words, his neighbours’ assessments were mainly based on sides of his character they had never seen but only heard of or imagined, while his everyday comportment as a
quiet and polite porc au four vendor and family man was seen as irrelevant and likely to be a façade.

It took me several days to find Lucien. When he finally answered my calls he said that he was at home and that I could stop by in the afternoon. By that time my assistant, Kader, had become a locus point of Lucien-related gossip because of my well-known friendship with Lucien. It annoyed Kader that people would refer to Lucien as “his friend”, which he understood as implying that Kader was morally involved in Lucien’s wrongdoings. The case of the stolen pig, still unresolved a week after the theft, was drawing stricter lines of loyalty and respectability in the neighbourhood, and Kader was feeling caught on the wrong side of the divide.

Lucien was asleep when I arrived at his house that afternoon. Rather than sitting in front of the courtyard as we would usually do, overlooking the busy boulevard that runs from the newly built Independence monument to the entrance of the non-loti, we sat in the dim light of his single room, the afternoon light filtered by a worn cloth draped across the doorway. It had been more than two weeks since I had seen Lucien, and we spoke for a while about his newborn daughter, his mother’s recent illness, my son’s accident that cost him the corner of a front tooth. When we finally breached the subject of the stolen pig, I was holding Lucien’s newborn daughter on my arm and feeling as the most rapturous of all the gossipers I had been listening to over the past week. Looking up Lucien to get his version suddenly felt more like an act of trespassing than an attempt to understand how he had experienced the past week of accusations and tensions.

Fortunately, Lucien seemed to have been waiting for a chance to talk about the accusations as much as I had and as I see it, our conversation turned out to be an occasion for him to rehearse his defence speech and explore his own version of the events. I had decided not to ask Lucien directly whether he had been complicit or not and rather to try to understand how Lucien had reacted to the accusations against him, and what consequences they might have for his business and his social life in Sarfalao. I asked him where he had been this last week, and he said that he had been working at a construction site in another part of town and then keeping to himself at home. He had asked his mother to tell visitors that he was out because he needed time to think through his options before facing his neighbours.

He told me how he had known that he would be accused from the moment the pursuers swished by him that night in the winding streets of the non-loti. According to Lucien, he had been on his way home from the construction site late at night, when two people ran by him, followed
moments later by a group in hot pursuit. One of the pursuers had stopped and asked Lucien if he had seen anyone pass, and then explained that someone had stolen a pig from a family in the vicinity.

Lucien knew the family well, and being in direct competition with them over costumers for his grilled pork, he instantly realised that he would be suspected of the theft. They had never liked him, nor he them, and they had held an unspoken truce, each sticking to their section of the neighbourhood and generally relying on different suppliers. But Lucien believed that it served them well to have him accused of theft. And that they might even have been behind the whole thing, in order to run him out of business. The morning after the theft, he had been on his way to the supplier where he usually gets his pork when an acquaintance had told him that everyone was looking for him and that he was suspected of having stolen a pig the night before. He had abandoned his errands and returned home and spent the morning weighing his options before finally deciding to take matters into his own hands. Equipped with his newly issued identity card (the 2010 presidential elections in Burkina Faso had occasioned the distribution of new identity cards in relation to the voter registration process), he had taken a more discreet route out of the neighbourhood and gone to the local *gendarmerie*.

Lucien smiled proudly when he told me how baffled the *gendarmes* had been when he had told them that he had come to register his statement in relation to the alleged theft in Sarfalao the night before. ‘Ah, *mon petit*, you have some nerve’, the officer had said laughing and taken Lucien’s statement. The same afternoon, two officers had come by Lucien’s house to ask a few questions, and they had given Lucien the impression that the accusations against him would not lead to any prosecution. The day before our meeting, one of the officers, who lived in Sarfalao, had come by in civilian clothes and told Lucien that what he had done in reporting himself at the station had been courageous and showed character and that his colleagues had dissuaded the plaintiffs from pursuing the matter further. He knew the family in question and didn’t care much for them either.

The case of the stolen pig faded from public interest after that and Lucien was able to join his brothers at the barbeque stand, selling *porc au four* and chatting with his customers as usual. His friends would bring up the matter jokingly, and Lucien would shrug and smile, as he often did when other young men might have picked up the mantle. What was at stake for Lucien was first and foremost the threat of being arrested and involved with the public authorities. His strategy to face that threat directly seemed to pay off, and point to the second site of contestation, namely
Lucien’s character, which was evaluated by both his neighbours and the police officers as the basis of their respective moral verdicts. While his neighbours evoked his morally dubious past as a rebel soldier in Côte d’Ivoire, Lucien employed an air of honesty and transparency towards the gendarmerie as a way of proving his moral character. In contrast, his reaction towards his neighbours was initially a strategy of complete avoidance; staying at home, having his mother divert visitors, and taking unseen roads out of the neighbourhood. On hearing the accusations against him, Lucien predicted the flood of rumours that would arise in a matter of hours and chose to stay away until he had reassessed his situation in the safety of his home. He was well aware that such an accusation might pose a serious threat to his reputation if he handled it the wrong way and that, behind the façade of conviviality, prejudice and betrayal lurked: ‘Here in the neighbourhood, we laugh together but everyone is watching one another. Everyone is jealous of one another’, he concluded our conversation. As we shall see in Chapter 6, Lucien was not the only former rebel to perceive the neighbourhood as a threatening place. Yet, the sentiment is less related to their combatant pasts than to a more general double-sidedness to the social proximity implied by neighbourhood in Sarfala. Not only are living quarters densely located in physical terms, but this spatial proximity also has social implications in everyday life.

We thus return to the theme of the ambivalent neighbourhood. The case of the stolen pig brought out the proliferation of rumours and suspicions that were a powerful source of social control in the neighbourhood. In their open courtyards side by side, residents were visible and audible to each other in most of their activities and interactions, and the fear of rumours and resentment made residents cautious in their actions and appearances, in order to avoid suspicion or accusation of improper behaviour. The case of the stolen pig also involved the tactics employed by Lucien in the face of the suspicion directed against him. Here, Lucien initially chose avoidance as a main strategy towards his neighbours, as opposed to his strategy of direct confrontation towards the authorities. Whether Lucien was guilty of the theft or not, he was able to manoeuvre his way out of trouble, first by convincing the police that he was courageous enough to be seen as morally superior to his accusers and, secondly, by staying out of sight in the neighbourhood until he felt sure that the authorities were on his side, and that the accusations would therefore only risk damaging his reputation, rather than have more serious reprisals at the hands of the gendarmes, such as a fine or a conviction for theft. In this way, although the ambivalent neighbourhood may be seen as an expression of a disciplining social structure, exerting social control through the
visibility of neighbours in the *non-loti*, the case of the stolen pig also illustrates the considerable room for manoeuvre that allowed Lucien to shrewdly navigate his way out of trouble, thereby exerting his own agency in a treacherous situation.

### Conclusion

The informal neighbourhood of Sarfalao *non-loti* provided an elusive field site in the very real sense that the impending land allotment process, under preparation during the time of my main fieldwork period, would probably imply a radical restructuring of the area’s physical appearance and social composition. Neighbourhoods – as places – may be invested with particular idealized meanings, branding some places as ‘bad neighbourhoods’ and others as ‘migrant’, ‘traditional’, or ‘upper class’, but an urban ethnography must move beyond popular imaginaries in its analysis and offer insights into how such ideas emerge and are reinforced and reproduced in the practice of everyday life. In this normative meaning of the term neighbourhood, Sarfalao *non-loti* was, as we have seen in this chapter, inscribed with idealized notions of belonging in different ways by different social actors, ranging from the romanticized view of ‘the slum’ inspired by Ivorian popular cultural references to ‘Wassakara’ to the administrative view of a politically challenging ‘blank spot’ on the official map, in need of formalisation and planning. In addition, as an expression of spatial proximity, the neighbourhood was experienced by residents in Sarfalao as the basis of highly ambivalent social relationships.

In this way, the neighbourhood provided an elusive sense of emplacement, since the uncertainty surrounding the impending restructuring made it difficult to think ahead and invest resources or expectations in a tangible future. What did these material and structural challenges mean for the residents in Sarfalao? Some residents, such as Fatoumata whose desperate attempt to ignore impending misery compelled her to focus on the considerable challenges of the present – of seeing to the needs of her children and earning enough to pay for the next meal – reacted with hopelessness and apathy. Such sentiments are not surprising, given the many spheres of impermanence and unpredictability that characterised life in the *non-loti*.

The precarious settlement in the *non-loti* was experienced as an impediment to the realisation of residents’ projects of life-making. Not all reactions to this predicament were as despairing as Fatoumata’s, but common to most residents was the feeling that their emplacement in the neigh-
bourhood was a constant concern and a source of profound uncertainty about the future, and specifically about the prospects of being able to pursue tenable livelihood and settlement strategies. In other words, living in the *non-loti* under the constant threat of eviction was experienced as a sense of persistent displacement. In the Introduction, I proceeded from Lubkemann’s definition of displacement as a disruption of the possibilities of pursuing livelihoods and other aspects of home-making to suggest that we think in terms of life-rupturing forms of mobility as displacement. But in this context, the effects of the relationship between external structural forces and the possibilities for individual and collective agency are well characterised by the notion that an unaccommodating socio-spatial environment in Sarfalao acted to impede the home-making efforts of most residents, sometimes to the point of apathy or despair. In other words, the sense of persistent displacement, although reinforced by the vulnerability entailed in being refugees from the Ivorian crisis, were not exclusive to migrants, and is better understood as a disruptive transformation of the conditions of emplacement which may or may not be related to mobility as such. As Lubkemann argues, ‘... people may find themselves inhabiting dramatically reconfigured lifescapes for a variety of reasons other than migration. They may find themselves without access to vital resources because the places they inhabit qualitatively change under their feet – without their having moved at all’ (Lubkemann 2008a:193). Impending eviction is a particularly forceful articulation of this predicament, whereby the overlying threat of dislocation imposes a disruptive quality on everyday practice, a sense of ‘displacement-in-place’ (Hammar & Rodgers 2008:356), with detrimental effects on the pursuit of practices of home-making over an open-ended period of time.

For others, however, the unpredictable and haphazard mechanisms of land allocation, as well as the proliferation of informal land transactions in the neighbourhood, provided room for manoeuvre that had the potential of providing a lucky few with access to legitimate land ownership rights, at the expense of the many. As the discussion of the SOS Villages evictions suggested, the politics of urban land allocation were to a large extent played out at the level of the neighbourhood, with neighbours acting simultaneously as indispensable witnesses to residents’ settlement histories, on the one hand, and fierce competitors and harbingers of gossip to discredit other residents, on the other. In this way, the micro-politics of urban land allocation that played out at the level of the neighbourhood contributed to a sense of ambivalent social proximity.

Even in material terms, home-making in the *non-loti* was fraught with uncertainty about the immediate future and a sense of waiting out an
ever-extended (the land allotment scheme has still not been set in motion at the time of writing, in March 2013) period of impermanence. In this situation, residents tended to focus their attention on the here and now; on cultivating relationships in and outside the neighbourhood; and on responding to more immediate problems, such as a collapsing wall or a friend or relative in need. The formal processes of urban land allocation, then, may be seen as part of an alignment of external structural forces that combine to affect the outlooks and possibilities for individual and collective agency, but in ways that must be expected to vary considerably over time and across segments and households within a population.

Emphasising the impact of structural forces on the outlooks and actions of social agents should not, therefore, be taken to mean that residents in Sarfalao non-loti were in a constant state of apathy, nor that despair or hopelessness was the only possible reaction to the difficult structural conditions. It is worth remembering Susan Reynolds Whyte’s discussion of uncertainty as fundamental to the human condition. Uncertainty is not just a momentary doubt, but a fundamental premise of social life that inspires action as much as it constrains it: ‘…it is not just doubt, but hope for a better future that hangs on the ifs and maybes’ (Reynolds Whyte 2002:177, see also Weiss 2004:14)62. Hope is always edged with anxiety; social agency unfolds with an imminent risk of failure – in a ‘subjunctive mood’. As a positive capacity, hope may be a particular form of agency, premised upon anticipation: the ability to stay alert to sudden changes in the social terrain – or indeed in the material landscape, as the former residents of the area now occupied by the SOS Villages had been forced to acknowledge.

4. Narratives of Departure and Continuity

Somewhere in Sarfalao non-loti, a handful of cowry shells fall on a worn plastic mat. Basile is known in the neighbourhood as a great féticheur – as he was in Côte d’Ivoire before the war. He searches the formation of shells for signs of good fortune or bad omens, to pass on to his clients who wait in line in front of his house in the morning before entering the single room that serves as his consultation. This morning, three friends, all in their fifties, who know each other from their time as labour migrants in Côte d’Ivoire, are waiting to consult the féticheur. One is planning a journey to Côte d’Ivoire and is hoping for advice on when to go and what potential misfortunes to be aware of. Another is concerned about his plantation outside Daloa and losing confidence in the young relative who looks after his land in his absence. He is looking for reliable news on the state of his land through the cowry shells. The third friend has already consulted the féticheur and has just come for some more protective potion (médicaments) to keep in his house as a guard against malevolent spirits and other threats.

Inside the dimly lit room, the cowry shells fall again. A cell phone rings and Basile’s client tells the person on the other end to wait for the féticheur’s pronouncement about the answer to his question. The person on the phone is a Burkinabe migrant who has returned to Côte d’Ivoire but is having a hard time rebuilding his cacao plantation there, having been away in Burkina Faso for several years during the conflict. Basile tells the intermediary his reading of the shells and the diagnosis is passed on. The client in Côte d’Ivoire is advised to carry out a number of sacrifices to the spirits and all will be well.

Basile’s cowry shells are consulted by aspiring first-time migrants as well as more experienced seasonal migrants, moving back and forth, or labour migrants planning to return to Côte d’Ivoire after years of absence during the conflict. They consult other news sources as well – the radio news, other migrants arriving or departing and so on in an effort to prepare for the next journey. In this way, Basile’s consultations are neither seen as spectacular nor associated with particularly grave or dangerous circumstances or problems. The line in front of his dimly lit room, rather,
testifies to how connections and mobility practices across the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space are a part of everyday life. These preparations are not based on idealised expectations but are made by migrants who are well aware of the potential problems, and even failures, that await them on their journeys. The endurance of this transnational space draws a long line of continuity from the colonial period across the turbulent first decade of the new millennium and points ahead into the future.

This chapter considers narratives from labour migrants who had left Burkina Faso in their youth and returned during the war. These accounts share a sense of continuity with earlier generations of migrants despite the disruptive effects of the Ivorian crisis. Experiences of continuity in a time of crisis are a somewhat neglected aspect of the study of displacement, which tends to emphasise ruptures and dramatic events. By emphasising the ordinariness of transnational mobilities and connections in these narratives, the chapter explores subjective experiences of continuity during a period that was marked by gradual socio-political rupture and a growing sense of crisis.

Transnational Families in Historical Perspective

As in all spheres of social life, the aspirations of becoming a labour migrant in Burkina Faso may be said to build upon the practices and narratives of previous generations of migrants, whose trajectories and articulations of these projects serve as paths (cf. Barrett 2009) for new generations to follow, or at least take as a point of reference. In the migrant biographies that inform this study, the ideals for how a migrant career would proceed and how it would fit in to a broader life project of establishing a family and becoming a respectable person were explicitly based on the narratives and accomplishments of older generations of migrants (see also Boswell 2010, Chapter 2). Aspirations for joining the labour migration circuit were inspired by successful returnees who sported Ivorian consumer goods and enough capital to invest in land and marriage upon their return. More fundamentally, as Chapter 2 established from an historical perspective, becoming a labour migrant in Côte d’Ivoire had become inscribed into the opportunity structures of many Burkinabe families, promising not only a liable source of income but a potentially successful life trajectory for the migrants and their families. The underlying social significance of transnational migration has been analysed by
Lisa Åkesson in a similar way. In her study of transnational migration from Cape Verde, she explains:

People say that the meaning of their migration project is to fazé um vida (make a life). Life-making is associated with livelihood, but it also signifies the transformation of an unfulfilling life into a potentially fulfilled one. The desire to migrate and make a life is therefore intimately connected with local notions of what constitutes a good life (Åkesson 2004:22)

Through her ethnography of the experiences of young men and women on the island of São Vincente, she goes on to show that Cape Verde’s long history of transnationalism has made migration an expected part of life, to the extent that young people feel pressured into migration (see also Carling 2002). In a similar way, the road from Burkina Faso to Côte d’Ivoire and back again represented a prospect for a socially upheld project of ‘life-making’, reproduced through the returns of seemingly successful migrants and relying on practices and narratives reaching back much further in time. At the core of these representations were, as in Åkesson’s ethnography, the notion of mobility as a central resource in producing and affirming one’s social worth. The paths laid out in front of an aspiring migrant, then, was not merely a geographical route towards specific destinations but a social map, indicating ways towards respectability and social adulthood (Barrett 2004).

In more practical terms, the departure depended as much on a contact to another migrant as on the material means to purchase a train ticket. Already-settled migrants would often sponsor their village kin (in the broadest sense) and provide for them upon their arrival in Côte d’Ivoire. Houphouët-Boigny’s famous slogan, that the land belongs to he who cultivates it, was not lost on the aspiring migrants and during his reign, these expectations – of the opportunity to acquire land through hard labour – were likely to be met.

The majority of the 45 life stories I collected were from men and women between the ages of 35 and 50 years, who began their migrant careers between 1970 and 1995. As outlined in Chapter 2, this was a period marked by a gradual political shift in the perception of labour migrants in Côte d’Ivoire, from the ‘open door’ policies of Félix Houphouët-Boigny to the rise of hostility and the eventual articulation of an exclusionist nationalism, based on the logic of autochthony. Despite this changing political climate in Côte d’Ivoire, informants generally perceived their mixed fortunes as labour migrants prior to the military coup of 1999 as coincidental, rather than resulting from systematic persecution. Some
migrants had changed location within the plantation zone several times during their time in Côte d'Ivoire, for example following bad harvests and sometimes due to increasing hostility on the part of their hosts or neighbours. Nevertheless, the time before 1999 was remembered in continuity with the early post-independence migration regime, where individual fates may have varied but where the possibilities were there to make a living and work hard.

In what is today the idealised era of Houphouët-Boigny (*bœfε tile* in Jula, literally “the day of Houphouët”), the importance of family ties on both sides of the border was crucial for the success of the individual migrant. Whether settled as a family or a lone (male) farm worker, migrants would usually spend several years working the land of a friend or relative in order to save up the money to purchase their own plot of land. In areas with more concentrated settlement, those seen as autochthonous "sons of the soil" would present migrants with the possibility of earning a piece of land through labour, organised through the institution of the *tutorat*. Some migrant biographies describe settlement in Abidjan where husbands would work as watchmen, gardeners, or cooks for the elite or as mechanics, drivers, or doing various crafts, in intense competition on an overcrowded urban labour market and wives would work in various forms of trade, selling foodstuffs, textiles, or second-hand goods. Both the rural and urban versions of labour migration remain tied to the plantation economy, since Abidjan became the region's financial centre through its important seaport that facilitated the export of primary products and provided employment for carriers, customs officers, cooks, etc. (Beauchemin 2005:11, see also Amin 1967).

Although the colonial labour migration regime was based mainly on the mobility of male plantation labourers, women began migrating more frequently after the abolition of forced labour in the late colonial period, often accompanying their migrant husband and participating in agricultural labour in the central and western parts of the forest zone in Côte d'Ivoire. Marriages in that period, as in the preceding generation, tended to be brokered by the couple’s parents and to remain within the same village or sub-district (Cordell, Gregory, and Piché 1996:52). To the women I interviewed in Sarfalao, the journey to Côte d'Ivoire as a newlywed was the adventure they had aspired to despite their limited say in whom to marry and where in Côte d'Ivoire to settle. The already-settled migrant was the ideal husband and the promise of seeing new lands and living in a place where work opportunities were abundant was an important part of the attraction. In this way, marrying a migrant was also seen as a success – both by the women themselves and by their families.
Some women had married men who remained in the village and then made the journey to Côte d’Ivoire as a couple. While many migrant men had settled in the plantation areas in West and Central Côte d’Ivoire, their wives described their expectations of Côte d’Ivoire as being a dream of the bright lights of the city; of arriving in a metropolis and seeing an urban world radically different from their own. In daily parlance, the place names “Côte d’Ivoire” and “Abidjan” would often be used interchangeably, reflecting the metropole’s importance for how aspiring migrants viewed the wealthier neighbouring country from afar. Given that the railroad – rather than the busses that now constitute the primary means of cross-border transportation – had been the preferred means of transportation in the 1960s and 1970s, many had indeed arrived in Abidjan and experienced the hectic traffic and worldly look of the city and its residents. From there, most couples continued to the North or Northwest of the financial capital to villages or worker settlements (campements) in the plantation areas.

The remainder of this chapter explores the migrant biographies of men and women who made the journey to Côte d’Ivoire and back under circumstances that conformed with the general patterns described above. Although the Ivorian crisis interfered with their pursuit of the ideal migrant trajectory – of succeeding in the plantation economy and either returning to Burkina Faso with enough savings to retire and/or invest, or to settle permanently in Côte d’Ivoire – the mobility and continued orientation towards Côte d’Ivoire that characterised the post-return practices of these migrants illustrate how forced displacement was coped with and overcome.

A Male Migrant Biography

Patrice, now in his forties, grew up in a village near Koudougou, west of Ouagadougou. Like many of his friends, he had set his mind on going to Côte d’Ivoire when he was in his teens. He was convinced that becoming a migrant would be the best way for him to achieve a certain level of economic independence and the possibility of getting married and establishing his own household. He was finally given the opportunity to leave at the age of 19, when a friend visited his parents in the village, having been in Côte d’Ivoire for several years. Patrice had been impressed by his friend’s looks and behaviour and he had asked to join the friend on his way back to Côte d’Ivoire. They had passed through Daloa and further on to the hinterland of San Pedro, on the coast west of Abidjan where the
friend had his plantation. Daloa, the provincial capital of Haute-Sassandra and a town of approximately 200,000 inhabitants, had fascinated Patrice, who had felt the excitement of arriving from the village to the city. Outside San Pedro, Patrice had worked on his friend’s plantation with the intention of eventually acquiring his own land. The friend, also a Burkinabe, had worked for four years before he was given his own piece of land by his Ivorian tuteur. The land was fertile and at the time, in the mid-1980s, anyone who was willing to work hard would be able to earn a decent living.

It took Patrice six years to earn a piece of land for himself. When the friend was ready to stake out a part of his land for Patrice to cultivate, they had called a meeting with the village elders and the friend’s tuteur, who was also the village chief. He had agreed to the transfer and accepted to be Patrice’s tuteur as well. The following four years were devoted to building up a cacao plantation, which meant that Patrice was dependent on his friend for food and housing since he had no income from the land. Being in the fertile forest zone of Côte d’Ivoire, finding enough to eat was not a problem: they would subsist on a staple of manioc and plantains and eat meat whenever they, or someone in the vicinity, had luck in hunting. Around 1993, Patrice’s plantation began producing enough cacao to run a profit and in the following year he consolidated his production before visiting his village in Burkina with the intention to marry. He had met his future wife during his time in Burkina and had taken steps to marry her. He had first inquired about her behaviour with his parents and siblings in the village, to establish whether she would make a suitable wife. Reassured, he had proposed to her and she had agreed. Patrice’s parents then forwarded his request to her parents and the appropriate rituals were held.

After the wedding, Patrice brought his bride with him to San Pedro. It was a time of affluence and happiness. They ate well and the land was fertile. They had two children; a boy and a girl. But with the advent of the Ivorian crisis, their circumstances gradually deteriorated. Before the outbreak of violence against immigrant residents, the village was patrolled by soldiers (corps habillé), who checked identity papers and went door to door, collecting payments from immigrants and harassing people. Patrice and his wife stayed close to their tuteur who came to their defence on several occasions, evoking his authority as village chief. In 2002, the tuteur fell ill and died and Patrice had realised that it would be too dangerous for them to stay on without his protection. They had left Côte d’Ivoire in 2003 via Ghana since the roads heading north were said to be too dangerous.
A Tentative Return

Patrice had a friend in Bobo-Dioulasso – a former migrant who had constructed a house in the neighbourhood of Belle Ville (another non-loti area which had expanded rapidly with the arrival of rapatriés since the 2002 rebellion in Côte d’Ivoire) with the profit he had made in Côte d’Ivoire. The friend had accommodated Patrice and his family until they were able to rent a house in the same area. Patrice still had some savings from his plantation, and he had invested part of it in farmland outside the city.

In 2006, Patrice went back to Côte d’Ivoire to check on his plantation, the maintenance of which he had entrusted to a younger relative. He still made a little money on the cacao production but the plantation was dilapidating under the care of his inexperienced relative. The farming village had been more or less abandoned, and Patrice had realised then that it would be impossible to move back to Côte d’Ivoire. Upon his return, he decided to invest in the building of a small hardware shop in the rapidly expanding neighbourhood of Belle Ville. He had relatives in Sarfalao non-loti but believed that his chances of setting up the shop and turning a profit were better in Belle Ville, which was still not as densely populated and had the potential for many customers among the flow of new arrivals from the rural hinterland, or from Côte d’Ivoire. He used his savings and income from the plantation in San Pedro and the extra income from his farm outside the city to invest in the building materials and merchandise to set up the hardware shop in 2007.

So far, the shop had not been as successful as he had hoped. He believed that his main problem was his lack of connections in the city. He was still a stranger here, as he put it. He said that you needed influential friends to recommend your shop to their friends and that it took time to build up a suitable network of customers. The problem was that in order to attract the right clientele, you needed high-quality merchandise and in order to acquire these goods, you needed more funds. But he believed that in time, he would be able to make a name for himself and begin to attract more affluent customers.

Forced Displacement as Open-Ended Wartime Mobility

Patrice’s migrant biography bears similarity with a majority of the narratives I collected, particularly with regard to the circumstances of his migrant aspirations and his departure from Burkina Faso. It was a common theme in the narratives of men and women alike to have been inspired by the success stories and appearances of returning migrants, as well as by the recognition that these returnees would receive from their peers in the
village. Visiting migrants would generally be prepared for the requests from non-migrant kinsmen and friends and found a certain prestige in their ability to help aspiring migrants to begin their journey. These new migrants would also, of course, provide a useful source of labour and, in the longer term, establish a tutorat-like bond of obligation between the experienced migrant and his junior.

In Patrice’s case, this arrangement worked out exactly as an aspiring migrant would dream of: no one seemed to have had overly idealised expectations of the life that awaited them in Côte d’Ivoire. This was no Eldorado, but a place where the opportunity to work hard would be available and be rewarding. Patrice had also managed the increasingly difficult task of finding a local tuteur that would vouch for him in the farming village and acknowledge his claim to cultivable land once he had paid his dues as a day-labourer. It is noteworthy that Patrice’s tuteur, unlike other local landowners during the Ivorian crisis, remained loyal to their reciprocal bond even after the arrival of armed groups of corps habillé to the village. In other cases, local tuteurs would use the ivoirité logic of autochthony to their advantage and make claims to the land they had already given to the Burkinabe workers. This is a befitting example of the fact that public persecution and xenophobic rhetoric do not seal individual fates in any predetermined way, even in the midst of an armed conflict and a general sense of impunity. Patrice’s luck changed with the death of his tuteur but even after his initial return to Burkina Faso in 2003, his orientation towards Côte d’Ivoire persisted and was only laid to rest after another visit to San Pedro in 2006.

This initial tentative return illustrates how Patrice’s displacement did not take the form of a clear-cut break with Côte d’Ivoire. The decision to remain in Burkina Faso more permanently was taken only after his 2006 visit. He could easily have chosen to await an improvement of the political situation in Côte d’Ivoire, as many other rapatriés had done, but given the state of his plantation he decided instead to invest more wholeheartedly in his emplacement in Burkina Faso. Interestingly, for Patrice the effort and resources needed to rebuild his plantation were crucial for his decision to leave Côte d’Ivoire. The political rhetoric and growing hostility relating to the ivoirité logic of autochthony had affected him and represented a threat of violent aggression but did not in itself amount to a compelling reason for him to abandon his land.

In these choices and reflections, Patrice’s narrative continues to reflect an underlying sense of continuity rather than rupture. Even after his forced return to Burkina Faso, Patrice was able to proceed with the kinds of plans and projects that most circular migrants aspire to: turning their
savings from the Ivorian plantation economy into profitable long-term investments at home. Again, Patrice’s migrant biography seems to represent an almost ideal migrant career, despite the onslaught of the armed conflict in Côte d’Ivoire. To some extent, his success may be explained by his social network in both Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso, but there also seems to be a great deal of chance and personal perseverance involved, which makes it difficult to generalise about the social and existential effects of displacement.

In Patrice’s case, as in the other migrant biographies considered in this chapter, an underlying sense of continuity with regard to his migrant trajectory predominates despite his experiences of forced displacement and misfortune. In the following chapter, similar destinies that nevertheless are characterised by a sense of permanent rupture are considered in contrast.

Female Departures

Marie left her village in 1988, at the age of seventeen, when her father’s sister had given her away in marriage. Her husband had come from Côte d’Ivoire to take her with him. They spent about a month in the village before they left Burkina together. She had been pleased when she first met her future husband, she says. The day they left the village, Marie’s husband first brought her to Koudougou, which already felt like an adventure for her, having grown up in the regional town’s western hinterland. From Koudougou, the young couple took the train to Bouaké and spent the night there before continuing towards the husband’s plantation outside Daloa, further west.

This was a happy time for Marie. She was thrilled to have made it all the way to Côte d’Ivoire and to be married and living the life she had wished for. Marie worked in the plantation with her husband during the busiest parts of the year and also tended to a vegetable garden around their house, which contributed to their subsistence. She had no trouble making friends in the farming village. She met many other Burkinabe migrants, but, looking back, she did not remember the early years as marked by any difficulties in being accepted by non-migrant residents. She remembered, rather, a shared sense of solidarity and purpose, one family helping another when they could and everyone working earnestly to develop their farms. This was also the period during which Marie had become a mother. During their time in Côte d’Ivoire, Marie gave birth to eleven children, one of whom died in labour. As the family gradually ex-
panded, Marie and her husband moved to a bigger house in the farming village and expanded the original building over the years, to house their children and a fluctuating number of visitors from home who stopped by to visit or settled down for a few months or more than a year in order to establish their own plantations. Marie’s household developed from its modest beginnings to being a socially emplaced home in which they could accommodate new migrants and provide for their own children.

With the financial, physical, and emotional labour invested in this home, the thought of returning to Burkina Faso grew increasingly distant to Marie and her husband, not least as their oldest children attended school and learned the language and social skills of their Ivorian peers. But fortunes were to change abruptly for Marie and her family. In 1998, following a devastating fire in the plantation, the family was forced to leave their home, which was beyond repair, at least with their means. All the resources invested in the land went up in smoke and with no savings to reinvest in re-planting, and to uphold their subsistence during the five to seven years it takes for a cacao plantation to produce a profit, they were obliged to leave it all behind.

Rather than considering a return to Burkina Faso, the family moved to another farming village closer to Daloa, initially staying with the husband’s younger brother who had been settled there for several years. During this time, seven of their children attended school, as Marie’s husband worked in his brother’s plantations. In addition to finding themselves in a much more vulnerable financial situation, their new surroundings were also marked by the increasing hostilities of Ivorian planters and workers. Henri Konan Bédié’s political leadership had provided a meta-narrative that increasingly informed localised disputes regarding land rights and access to resources. Marie’s identity as Burkinabe was increasingly charged with a political significance originating in the pages of the CURDIPHE manifesto, which posed the Burkinabe ‘stranger’ as the scapegoat for Côte d’Ivoire’s financial decline and social instability. This rhetoric increasingly confronted Marie and other immigrants in their dealings with village chiefs, local authorities, and autochtone workers on a daily basis. This hostility meant that chances of finding a tuteur and acquiring land were diminishing, and their situation remained volatile and dependent on the goodwill of Marie’s husband’s relatives in the area.

Once the war reached their region, with the attempted coup d’état in September 2002, many Burkinabe immigrants left the area and went home. After a series of assaults on Burkinabe migrants in the village, Marie and her husband decided to join them. Destitute, they had to walk for long stretches in the cool of the night, carrying the youngest children
when they were exhausted, hoping for the generosity of other travellers during the day. When they finally arrived in Bobo-Dioulasso, they stayed with the husband’s uncle until they were able to construct a small house in Sarfalao non-loti. The whole family had participated in making the bricks and digging out the base of their new home.

Marie’s migrant biography features several elements that were recurrent in the accounts I collected. As in Patrice’s case, Marie’s aspirations to become a migrant were founded on the stories and appearances of returning migrants from an early age. As a young woman, Marie had taken the most established road towards that goal: to accept the hand of a migrant chosen by her kin. Her future husband had represented the possibility of a life in Côte d’Ivoire. In her first decade in Côte d’Ivoire, Marie had experienced the availability of land, work, and social inclusion that had been promised through the narratives and practices of so many returning migrants. She and her husband had worked hard but with a sense of possibility and longevity and had gradually established their home. The Ivorian crisis was but one of several obstacles to the ideal migrant trajectory, inscribing Marie’s narrative in continuity with other stories of mixed fortunes during a migrant career. The emphasis in this rendition of Marie’s migrant biography, then, is on the way in which her departure to and sojourn in Côte d’Ivoire inscribes itself in a longer history of transnational labour migration. In order to appreciate some important variations on this common departure story, the remainder of this section considers Haya’s migrant biography.

Haya was born in 1981 in a village near Boromo, on the road between Bobo-Dioulasso and Ouagadougou. Both her parents hail from the same area. She was only twelve when she left her parents to travel to Côte d’Ivoire with her future husband. Haya’s husband had been working in the plantations in the hinterland of Abidjan and had returned to his hometown to accept the bride that had been chosen for him. Haya knew several other girls from the village who had gone to Côte d’Ivoire under the same circumstances. Haya says that she was happy to have been married so young. She had wanted to travel and experience another country, and she had grown up listening to stories from returning migrants about the abundances of Côte d’Ivoire: the fertile soil, the variety of fruits and vegetables, the availability of work and money.

On the day of her departure from the village, she had left by bicycle to the nearest town to catch a lift to the train station in Koudougou. From there, the train had carried the couple all the way to Abidjan. When they arrived in the metropole, Haya had been thrilled to see the crowded streets, people in fine clothes, bright streetlights, and tall buildings. But
her fiancé had told her that they would be living outside the city in a small farming village. Her heart had sunk, but he had cheered her up and taken her to the bus station. The farming village, although not as impressive as Abidjan’s cityscape to Haya, had been bustling with activity, and she felt inspired and grateful to be working alongside the others, seeing her labour bear fruit and promising a prosperous future. At first, they lived with Haya’s parents-in-law while her fiancé searched for a house to rent and for work with the autochtone planters. The couple lived together in Côte d’Ivoire for three years before they married when Haya was fifteen.

Her parents-in-law were also Burkinabe, but they had lived in Côte d’Ivoire since their youth. Haya’s fiancé had found work in the plantations, but the Ivorian planters had divided the land into three parts and only allotted him one third of the produce. In the mid-1990s, Côte d’Ivoire’s cacao belt was becoming increasingly crowded as migrants from other parts of the country as well as from its neighbouring countries followed the paths laid out by their parents and grandparents. The cacao frontier had expanded from east to west during the colonial period but reached the Liberian border well before the arrival of Haya and her fiancé. Land was becoming increasingly scarce and those seen as autochthonous ‘sons of the soil’ were more hesitant to allot farming land to newcomers, while exploiting the increased demand to redefine the reciprocal terms of the tutorat in their own favour (cf. Chauveau 2007).

Despite their exploitative tuteur, Haya and her fiancé never considered abandoning their migrant endeavour. They had no illusions of arriving in a land of plenty but were prepared – by the narratives of returning migrants back home – to work hard and face obstacles along the way. In the early days of the Bédié regime, they did not feel that their personal security was threatened but merely that the changing conditions on the plantation economy’s labour market were limiting their possibilities and reducing their potential profits. Eventually they had been able to buy their own land, and the couple had six children. Looking back, Haya made a clear distinction between the time before and after the attempted coup of September 2002: ‘things used to be good there [in Côte d’Ivoire]; it’s the war that came and mixed everything up’, she sighs.

Ideal Beginnings

In order to compare the two departure stories, we should of course note the age difference at the time of the two women’s departure and betrothal. Although not unique, Haya’s age of twelve years was relatively rare in the material I collected, with 19 women out of the 25 female migrant
biographies being between the age of 16 and 20 years of age at departure. Having grown up in a rural setting, both women found the prospect of experiencing the atmosphere of a larger city appealing, but both women also easily came to terms with the fact that their new homes in Côte d'Ivoire would be in the farmlands of the plantation zone, rather than in the city. In the experiences of both women, their intentions to settle down and eventually cultivate their own farmland were achieved, despite some difficulties, and their expectations had thus to a large extent been realised, again illustrating the quite pragmatic nature of these aspirations.

It may be true that returning migrants tend to be eager to display their success and downplay their hardships (cf. Boswell 2010:71), and also that retrospective accounts in the context of forced displacement may tend to romanticise life before the onslaught of war, but in Marie and Haya's narratives there is no uncompromising dream of 'the bright lights of the city' but simply the hope of being successful in farming and marriage in a place where a whole regional economy has proven the soil to be more fertile. In this way, despite their experience of displacement in relation to the war, there is a sense of continuity with earlier generations of migrants as a point of departure. At the same time, of course, more diverse paths intersect these seemingly homogeneous trajectories of labour migrants leaving Burkina Faso to work in Côte d'Ivoire.

Continuity in a Time of Crisis

Awa was born in 1973 to Burkinabe parents in a village north of Abidjan. Her father retired from his career as an army official while Awa was still a young child, and the family returned to their village in southeastern Burkina Faso, near Garango – a provincial town located near the borders with Ghana and Benin. Awa's parents had travelled to Côte d'Ivoire as a couple, when her father was transferred from his posting in Garango to a military camp in Côte d'Ivoire. When Awa was born, her parents went back to their village in Burkina Faso, her father returning to his posting and her mother tending to their seven children. Awa, the oldest child, began helping her mother with the daily chores around the house at an early age. She had attended school in the village but only sporadically, and she still had trouble reading and writing.

Awa's husband was already married and living in Côte d'Ivoire when they met – or, as she put it, when 'he saw her'. He had come home to the village in Burkina Faso to find a wife for his unmarried younger brother but had ended up proposing to Awa himself. She had accepted. She knew
that her parents were actively searching for a husband for her, and she found him more attractive than the men in the village. She had always wanted to go to Côte d’Ivoire, since people always spoke of how good life was there, and their marriage would make that dream come true.

The day Awa left for Côte d’Ivoire she had gone with a relative of her husband’s, visiting the village with his wife. When the couple was due to return to Côte d’Ivoire, they brought Awa along. They arrived in Vavoua, in the heart of the central forest zone where her husband had been settled for some time, cultivating cacao and subsistence crops on the land of an Ivorian planter. She was happy to be with him and to have finally moved away from her parents. Her parents were pleased too: seeing her marry a migrant was all they had hoped for. In the beginning, Côte d’Ivoire was everything she had expected. They lived on the planter’s land, and she would work in the field and tend to the house. All of their five children were born in that house. In retrospect, Awa considered her departure from Burkina Faso and settlement as one coherent period of ideal steps on the right track, a gradual cumulative process of reaping the benefits of the couple’s hard work and concerted efforts to build a life together. These ideal conditions changed with the advent of the Ivorian crisis.

The Advent of the Ivorian Crisis

Awa remembered the day the fighting had come to their village, a few months after the attempted coup in September 2002. She had been sitting in a group and watched people in the village leave their houses with machetes. The gendarmes (corps habillé) had been there, and people scattered in all directions to avoid being captured or beaten. She had already heard rumours of an impending war, but this was the day she saw it with her own eyes. That day they had stayed indoors and barred the front door with their bed. For the following four days, they hardly went outside, except to look for food and other supplies. They had not been harmed, but they had been very afraid.

Awa had asked her neighbours what was going on and had been told that the Ivorians and the strangers were fighting. All of the quarrels were about accusations that strangers had taken all the land of the Ivorians. In the following months, weeks of calm would be interrupted by new spurts of fighting, either by armed outsiders passing through the village or in fights between neighbours. Seeing no likely end to this state of affairs, Awa and her husband began looking for ways to leave the country. Finally, during a period of relative calm, they had taken a bus to Bouaké and from there to Bobo-Dioulasso, where Awa’s parents-in-law lived. The
journey had been strenuous, and they had negotiated their passage and paid off rebel soldiers all the way through the occupied north.

In Bobo-Dioulasso, they were received by Awa’s parents-in-law and spent the first few weeks in their two-bedroom house. They all knew that this solution was temporary: in addition to her father-in-law and his two wives, several children were also living at home, and the arrival of Awa, her husband, and their five children was too much of an imposition. Awa had noticed that one of the neighbouring courtyards was uninhabited and she had inquired about it with the children in the street. She had learned that the owner was in Mali, and she had been able to contact him and ask his permission to use the house in his absence. She still kept in touch with him, through his acquaintances passing by to check on his property, so she felt assured that she was updated on his plans. Awa’s husband had gone back to Côte d’Ivoire to continue working after realizing that employment opportunities in and around the city were few and far between. She had not heard from him for quite some time, she added, and had no money to spare for phone calls. Instead, she relied on other travellers to pass on news about him, but for the time being she had received neither word nor remittances for quite some time. She relied on herself now, selling groundnuts and charcoal to make ends meet. She also attended a local neighbourhood association, ASSEO, which was sponsored by a Spanish woman who sold the products that Awa and the other members produced in Spain and sent the profit back to the association. ASSEO was founded several years before the war began, as a women’s group, but has become focused on helping female refugees from Côte d’Ivoire in need (see also Bauer 2006). Despite their difficulties, Awa preferred to remain in Burkina Faso with the children, rather than return to Côte d’Ivoire. She was considering a move back to her parents’ village if things got too difficult in the city.

Ruptures and Continuities in a Migrant Biography

Undoubtedly, Awa’s narrative describes a dramatic series of events that interfered with the family’s plans of building a life for themselves as labour migrants in Côte d’Ivoire, as so many others before them. Although they were fortunate not to suffer any direct aggression, the threat of falling prey to the patrols of gendarmes and other armed groups passing through the village eventually convinced them that their situation had become untenable and led them to leave. Without disregarding her subjective sense of displacement, Awa’s narrative illustrates the structural continuities that allowed her and her family to cope with the events of the
Ivorian crisis in a manner that integrated their forced displacement within a longer history of mobility.

Put differently, while Awa’s narrative describes the advent of the Ivorian crisis as a dramatic rupture in the otherwise coherent and predictable process of life-making (cf. Åkesson 2004) we should note some considerable continuities that underlie this apparent sense of rupture. Firstly, Awa’s migrant biography described the initial fulfilment of her aspirations to become a migrant by accompanying her husband to Côte d’Ivoire. Her initial trajectory established a profound sense of continuity by inscribing itself in the practices and narratives of other migrants. These stories were not simply idealised tales of a carefree ‘wonderland’ in Côte d’Ivoire (cf. Boswell 2010:146) but included tales of misfortune and adversity and the unsuccessful return of migrants who had been unable to achieve their aspirations. In this way, secondly, the Ivorian crisis represented neither the first nor the last adversity to Burkinabe migrants in Côte d’Ivoire, and the persecution of Burkinabe families could be interpreted within the well-established framework of the labour migration regime, despite its dramatic events and rhetoric.

Thirdly, Awa’s return to Bobo-Dioulasso, where her husband had lived prior to his move to Côte d’Ivoire, provided some sense of continuity in the midst of her experience of displacement. Being able to rely on her husband’s family provided an initial source of support which was unavailable to many other returnees and enabled the family to settle in Bobo-Dioulasso and take stock of their new circumstances. Finally, Awa’s husband’s return to Côte d’Ivoire established the experiences of the onslaught of armed conflict as an adversity to a continuing migrant trajectory, rather than an insurmountable rupture that put an end to the family’s orientation towards the Ivorian plantation economy and the transnational livelihood strategies it had inspired. To use Barrett’s words, as discussed in the Introduction, through their continued efforts to remain transnational, Awa’s family relied on the same mobility practices that had provided them with a life-sustaining migrant career before the war to see them through the life-rupturing effects of their forced displacement (see Barrett 2009:95).

In the following narrative, the same sense of continuity in spite of the dramatic events surrounding the 2002 rebellion runs through the experiences and practices of Adama and his family. Thematically, this migrant biography adds another dimension by emphasizing Adama’s desire to settle, or dwell, and his sense of being forced to remain mobile in order to search for new livelihood options across the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space.
Incessant Mobilities and Displacements

Adama followed his older brother to Abidjan when he was 17. His parents were former migrants themselves, having worked in the informal sector in Abidjan until they moved back to their village in Burkina Faso in the province of Banwa near the Malian border. He had married a girl from his own village once he was settled in Abidjan but finding steady employment in the city without an education or knowing a craft had proved difficult. He had worked in different factories; as a guard; a taxi driver; and numerous other occupations during his time in Abidjan. In 1999, Adama had decided to try his luck in the cacao plantations.

Adama had initially gone to the plantation areas north of Abidjan alone, his wife and child staying behind in Abidjan until he found a tuteur who was willing to accommodate him. It had taken him two years to find a planter who was willing to let him work on his land and gradually earn the right to cultivate his own land. The two years Adama spent looking for a place to settle coincided with Laurent Gbagbo’s first years as President of the Republic. These were hard times for Burkinabe workers in Côte d’Ivoire, and Adama had moved several times because of the hostility of his employers or the local population. He had been cheated out of his salary on numerous occasions when employers exploited their impunity by refusing to pay him, citing minor mistakes he had made in the field or other bad excuses. He had been forced to leave without a dime and try his luck in a new place.

Adama finally found his tuteur in a farming village in the hinterland of Agboville – the provincial capital of Agniéby-Tiassa and a town of approximately 80,000 inhabitants, 80 kilometres north of Abidjan. He worked with several other Burkinabe migrants on the lands of the autochtone planter, and once Adama felt assured that he would not be deceived again, he sent for his wife to join him. They had stayed in the same village for six years, and their second child was born there. But the plantation economy around Agboville was deteriorating during the Ivorian crisis, and Adama was unable to acquire his own farm to cultivate. In 2007, the couple decided to move back to Burkina Faso and try their luck in Bobo-Dioulasso rather than continue the more physically demanding work as farmers.

One of Adama’s brothers was already living in Sarfalao non-loti and agreed to house the couple when they first arrived. The house, built by a public official who lived in a wealthier neighbourhood, featured four rooms in conjunction and was constructed to house four tenants. Adama eventually rented one of the adjacent rooms, but he remained dependent
on his brother’s financial assistance during the times when he was unable to find work. He had worked at a mill recently but had been laid off.

New Departures, New Returns

Unable to find work in Bobo-Dioulasso, Adama had contacted another one of his brothers who was living in Agboville. His migrant brother had assured him that the economy was improving in Côte d’Ivoire. This was in 2008, about a year after the signing of the Ouagadougou Political Accords, which had inspired an atmosphere of optimism and reconciliation. The prospect of better employment conditions in Côte d’Ivoire had spurred Adama on to move once more, this time leaving his wife – who had just given birth to their third child – behind in Sarfalao. But the promises had been too good to be true. In fact, his brother in Agboville was struggling to manage himself but had been too ashamed to admit that to Adama. The brother was still a bachelor and had been clinging to the hope of a change of fortunes that would allow him to put money aside and return to Burkina Faso as a successful migrant, ready to marry. For Adama, conditions in the plantation areas were even worse. His brother had stayed in the same place long enough to build connections with local farmers and other immigrants, and he had many people to rely on when times were tough. Adama, on the other hand, was new to the area and was competing with all the other migrant workers who were moving from place to place in search of work. Once more, Adama was forced to return to Burkina Faso empty-handed, his last savings evaporating in the hands of rebel soldiers at the roadblocks dotting the roads across the occupied territory.

Upon his return he had, once again, searched for employment in Bobo-Dioulasso in vain and was considering yet another attempt as a migrant worker in Côte d’Ivoire. He had decided that the cacao production in and around Agboville was too stagnant to provide a realistic opportunity and that he would rather ‘start from scratch’ (commencer à zero) somewhere else. Someone had told him that Burkinabe workers were better treated in Aboudé, south of Agboville but he had no way of knowing whether the rumours were true or whether they would benefit him specifically, being a newcomer and lacking the connections that were crucial for providing an entry point into a network of more established migrants and their tuteurs. Adama bemoaned his incessant mobility and declared that, had it not been for the lack of opportunities in Bobo-Dioulasso, he would much prefer to stay in one place with his family.
Between Displacement and Labour Migration

Adama’s migrant biography is another example of a narrative that reads more as the story of a labour migrant than a refugee, despite the centrality of the Ivorian crisis to the misfortunes and adversity he faced in Côte d’Ivoire. For example, after a series of failed attempts to establish a plantation, the family left Côte d’Ivoire only in 2007, at a time when the Ivorian crisis is generally perceived to have been on the (albeit bumpy) road to reconciliation. Being faced with the hostility of local landowners in several localities across the hinterland of Abidjan was experienced by Adama as instances of forced displacement but not to the extent that it discouraged him entirely from pursuing his intentions of setting up a cacao plantation. This series of ‘small displacements’ were indeed life-rupturing, as they forced him to leave and start anew, but they were not insurmountable and were treated by Adama as the adversities of a labour migrant rather than rendering him a refugee.

In the same way that the boundaries between labour migration and forced displacement overlap in Adama’s migrant biography, the family’s shifts in strategies and locations also cross over rural and urban delimitations. Moving from his native village to the regional city of Abidjan might be considered as a transnational form of urbanisation, had it not been for Adama’s inability to find work and settle more permanently in the city. Abandoning these aspirations, the family then oriented itself towards the rural hinterland and the prospect of cultivating farmland, only to eventually return to an urban setting in Bobo-Dioulasso with its own specific spectrum of livelihood options. Finally, the many shifts in the constellation of Adama’s transnational family are noteworthy. Leaving Burkina Faso as a couple, Adama eventually moved as a lone migrant across the Ivorian plantation zone for two years before sending for his wife and child to join him. Once in Bobo-Dioulasso, Adama again took on the role of the lone male migrant as he returned to Côte d’Ivoire in search of work. In this way, Adama’s migrant biography demonstrates what is gained from a study of mobility practices as opposed to schematic understanding of migration flows. His narrative is undoubtedly marked by numerous instances of forced displacement, but neither his displacements nor his moments of dwelling proved to last, leaving him with the desire to settle in one place. We may ask whether his sense of being compelled to leave Bobo-Dioulasso for Côte d’Ivoire once more is any less of a displacement than the decision to leave Côte d’Ivoire after enduring the most of tumultuous years of the Ivorian crisis.
Conclusion

This chapter’s discussion of the circular labour migration regime between Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire has emphasised the development and reproduction of distinct paths (Barrett 2009) or migrant trajectories across generations that was discussed from an historical perspective in Chapter 2, and on the expectations of individual aspiring migrants as well as the broader idioms of migration that characterised the migrant biographies of returnees in Sarfalao. The analysis emphasised the significant overlaps between idioms of life course progression and migrant trajectories and the ensuing sense of continuities in migrant practices across generations. Building on that discussion, the notion of “coming home” to Burkina Faso was a well-established phase in the idiom of circular migration but not necessarily a well-defined concept to the migrants themselves. Despite the hostility of landowners and political ideologues in Côte d’Ivoire, migrants in Sarfalao continued to plan and realise longer and shorter moves to Côte d’Ivoire in the time following their forced displacement from Côte d’Ivoire.

This continued orientation towards the place that they had been forced to leave is reminiscent of the general tendency expected by studies and interventions relating to forced displacement: that the involuntary move away is eventually followed by a return, once structural conditions allow for it. In this study, however, the potential return to Côte d’Ivoire of Burkinabe labour migrants could not be considered a ‘repatriation’ in the strict sense, given the Burkinabe origins and citizenship of the migrants, nor can the potential return to Côte d’Ivoire be expected a priori to be their final destination. As expressions of wartime mobility, the migrant biographies considered in this chapter, rather, describe instances of displacement and longer or shorter processes of emplacement as part of a migrant career. In these migrant trajectories, the Ivorian crisis posed a significant but not insurmountable obstacle to the achievement of the aspirations that were founded on the narratives and practices of former generations of migrants. In this way, the chapter has portrayed a sense of continuity underlying individual experiences of life-rupturing events, thereby contrasting subjective experiences of displacement with a structural durability of the labour migration regime that migrants have continued to perpetuate despite the dangers posed by the armed conflict.

At the same time, the Ivorian crisis may be said to have affected the structure of migrant strategies and trajectories across the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space. For example, whereas many returning migrant families had initially settled as a household in Côte d’Ivoire, they now resorted to the familiar model of the early colonial period (and be-
fore) – that of the lone male migrant, providing for his family in the country of origin. In this way, rather than spelling the end of labour migration from Burkina Faso to Côte d'Ivoire, the Ivorian crisis may be said to have reinforced its circular nature, as families preferred to build a life in Burkina Faso and perceive of migration as one among other livelihood strategies.

By exploring the migrant biographies of Burkinabe labour migrants in Côte d'Ivoire over a time period encompassing, but not being limited to, the previous decade’s armed conflict, the chapter has inscribed the study of wartime mobilities into the more established ethnographic study of transnational practices (e.g. Al-Ali & Koser 2002, Levitt 2001, Eastmond & Åkesson 2007a). By approaching wartime mobility in this way, the continuous process of movement and dwelling that characterises the narratives and practices considered in this chapter was explored empirically and suggested that both life-rupturing and life-sustaining forms of mobility were a part of migrants’ trajectories both before and during the Ivorian crisis. Their continued orientation towards Côte d’Ivoire also implied that migrants continued to weigh future moves as one among other livelihood options and that such considerations and strategies were less concerned with narratives of “returning home” or settling permanently in one place than with a continuous process of life-making that may span several “homes” (Faist 2006:3, Eastmond & Åkesson 2007b:11). Put differently, although processes of gradual emplacement were central to the migrant biographies, the continuous process of life-making that involved longer and shorter moves over longer or shorter periods of time was not premised on notions of a particular place as more home-like than any other place. Migrant practices and aspirations were, rather, based on on-going assessments and explorations of the potential of places for providing the circumstances that would allow for the financial, physical, and emotional investment that I understand as the structural and agentive aspects of emplacement, respectively.
5. Narratives of Return and Rupture

As the sun rises over Sarfalao non-loti, Kadi is already on her way back from collecting firewood on the outskirts of the city. She carries a large bundle of distorted sticks in a worn piece of cloth that she supports with her forehead, as it rests across her back. By selling the firewood she will be able to provide for her four children living at home for another couple of days. Back at their one-room house in the non-loti, Kadi’s daughter, Barakissa, is looking after her two younger siblings while their mother is away and her older brother gets ready to leave for school. Since the adjacent house, which was built hurriedly when the family arrived during the Ivorian crisis, collapsed in the rains, they all live in the same house.

At the age of 47, Kadi had never expected to be rummaging the outskirts of Bobo-Dioulasso for firewood in order to feed her family. Before the war, she was a successful trader in Abidjan, and her husband worked as a watchman for an American NGO. They lived in a two-bedroom house in a neighbourhood where migrants and Ivorians lived side by side and running water and electricity could be taken for granted. The small house in mud bricks they had built back home in Burkina Faso, in what is now Sarfalao non-loti, was meant as an investment in their old age, not as their only home. But Kadi is not one to complain, and she makes an effort to appear smiling and jovial in front of her neighbours. She rarely falls asleep without weeping, though. Her husband in Côte d’Ivoire has been struggling to find work for the past two years and hardly ever calls them, out of embarrassment, she believes. The family receives support for the children’s schooling from an international NGO, but the several hundred thousand people who have been displaced by the Ivorian crisis are generally left to their own devices for their survival in Burkina Faso. ‘We are the rapatriés’, Kadi stated emphatically on our first meeting, ‘we are everywhere but no one sees us’.

This chapter explores the experiences and practices of migrants who were forced to leave Côte d’Ivoire during the armed conflict and settled in Sarfalao non-loti. The relative invisibility of these migrants, whom Kadi alluded to above, may be understood in relation to the ambiguous status of migrants who had left Burkina Faso in their youth and were, as labour
migrants, generally expected to eventually return to their country of origin. In this way, both the authorities and the general population in Burkina Faso perceived of families such as Kadi’s as returning labour migrants whose experiences in Côte d’Ivoire were inconsequential to their status or their plight upon their return. At the same time, the circumstances of their return, as well as the suspended intentions of many migrants to remain permanently in Côte d’Ivoire, obviously made a crucial difference for the migrants themselves, prompting Kadi and others in her situation to evoke the administrative label of refugees, the *rapatriés*, to describe their predicaments. Rather than limit the analysis to questions of whether or not, or to what degree, these experiences qualify Kadi as a migrant or a refugee, the chapter centres on questions of belonging in the context of forced displacement and on subjective experiences of rupture in relation to wartime mobility.

Migrant Trajectories in the Context of the Ivorian Crisis

When understood in relation to discourses of national belonging, Burkina labour migrants hardly ever opposed the principle of them being strangers, or outsiders, in Côte d’Ivoire but rather evoked the century-long history of labour migration as implying a moral contract between strangers and hosts, which, as we have seen above, was articulated in the institution of the *tutorat*. While individual fates testify to feelings of deceit and injustice on the part of their Ivorian hosts, many returning migrants were less surprised by increasing hostility towards them in Côte d’Ivoire. As we saw in the previous chapter, most returnees tended to state their expulsion abjection from Côte d’Ivoire as a matter of fact and were more engaged with planning new travels in search of temporary employment and devoted their time to discussions about on-going developments, reports, and rumours from friends and relatives in Côte d’Ivoire. In this way, the sense of continuity explored throughout the previous chapter may be seen as an expression of the open-endedness of wartime mobility, in the sense that the effects of experiences of forced displacement are difficult to predict *a priori*, as migrant careers may take many different trajectories under seemingly similar circumstances.

The diverse circumstances of the returnees' departure from Côte d’Ivoire illustrate their experience of the conflict as a series of violent events with a more continuous state of tension underlying everyday life. While some returning migrants experienced direct assaults or witnessed
attacks on neighbours or family members, others fled in large part because of persistent rumours of impending violence, and due to the difficulties in continuing their work under the increased hostility of Gbagbo-friendly militants in both rural and urban areas.

The journey to Burkina Faso was also experienced in strikingly different ways, depending on both the standing and resourcefulness of the migrants, on the one hand, and on a number of more or less arbitrary events and circumstances along the way, on the other. In other words, whether migrants spent a few days or several weeks en route to Burkina Faso was obviously affected by their ability to pay the tickets and bribes required for safe passage across the divided territory of Côte d'Ivoire. But their security also depended on their abilities to negotiate with soldiers manning road blocks along the way and on whether or not the route passed through areas with heavy fighting or not, and so on. During the first half of 2003, the Ivorio-Burkinabe border was officially closed, and most migrants passed through Ghana on their way to Burkina Faso.

Once in Burkina Faso, the options available in terms of where to settle and how to provide for themselves depended once again on a number of factors, including financial capacities, individual resourcefulness and, not least, the nature and extent of migrants’ social networks (see also Boswell 2010:12). In Bobo-Dioulasso, some migrants were received by their close or more distant kin who provided shelter to the best of their abilities, while others were dependent on the charity of humanitarian organisations, state authorities, or generous citizens who were ready to offer housing or other forms of assistance. Many migrants simply used Bobo-Dioulasso as a transit point before heading towards rural areas familiar to them, or where they had maintained kin or other social connections during their years in Côte d'Ivoire. Finally, some migrants were installed by the authorities in temporary shelters on the SNC fairgrounds not far from Sarfalao non-loti, as a last resort. According to Boswell, ‘[t]hese repatriates were identified as friendless, with insufficient information about or connections to their village to enable them to reinsert themselves into a rural environment’ (Boswell 2010:162).

The specific circumstances of departure from Côte d'Ivoire, as well as travel to and arrival in Burkina Faso were, in other words, variable and must be explored empirically rather than assumed or overly generalised. To this end, this chapter explores the nuances of migrant narratives of escape and return in the context of the Ivorian crisis. The following section presents the migrant biography of a female head of household and is based on recurring interviews and informal conversations with five members of the family throughout the fieldwork period.
Charred Ambitions in Abidjan

Susanne came to Sarfalao in 2001, having lived in Abidjan for nineteen years. She was born and raised in Tougan, a provincial town in Burkina Faso’s northwestern corner, near the Malian border. At the time of our first conversation, she was 52 years old. She went to Abidjan with her husband after their wedding at home in “the village”\(^63\). Although she married late – in her mid-twenties, she had the same dream as many young women of her generation, of marrying a local man who had already initiated his migrant career and then following him to Côte d’Ivoire where work opportunities and money were said to be abundant. She had embarked on that very trajectory and had, as she recalls her arrival to Abidjan in retrospect, not been disappointed. Her brother-in-law was already working in the city and had helped her husband find a job as a cleaner in the offices of a French-owned company, while he looked for an opportunity to practice his trade as a carpenter, and helped the family find a place to live in his own neighbourhood.

Susanne gave birth to all of their six children in that house, and she took care of the children and made her own money through trading, beginning with prepared food and eventually selling fabrics that she dyed herself. After ten years in the city, Susanne opened her own restaurant and became a well-known figure in the neighbourhood. Looking back at the life she was forced to leave still feels unbearable to her now, as the family gets by on what little she makes from selling her home-dyed bogolan fabrics. During one of our interviews Susanne struggled to keep her composure and keep back the tears when she reflected upon the life she left behind in Abidjan in comparison with her present predicament.

But despite her nostalgia of life in Côte d’Ivoire before the war, she vowed to me that she was never going back. Her restaurant in Abidjan was burnt to the ground by “Gbagbo’s soldiers” (corps habillé) because she possessed Burkinabe identity papers. The soldiers arrived at her restaurant at around eleven in the morning. She had known for some time that there was trouble on the horizon, so she was already sitting in front of her restaurant when they arrived. She had taken to doing that several days before. The soldiers had asked Susanne for her papers and whether she was

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\(^63\) Tougan is the provincial capital of Sourou province in the Boucle du Mouchoun region, and can hardly be called a village in demographic or sociological terms. The notion of “the village” evoked here by Susanne is, rather, as a reference to one’s origins which in some sense are rural per definition. This is clear from the Ivorian identity politics discussed above, where the notion of “village d’origine” bears similar connotations. In chapter 7, I discuss the prevalent stereotypes and roleplaying in Sarfalao, regarding notions of rurality and urbanity.
the rightful owner of the restaurant. As soon as they saw that she was Burkinabe, they had set the place ablaze.

She had been brought home to Burkina Faso on one of Blaise’s buses, as part of the *Opération Bayiri* repatriation programme of the Burkinabe government. The Burkinabe embassy had made a list of citizens eligible for repatriation. She had waited for one month and seventeen days before she was informed that a bus was ready to take them back to Burkina Faso. During that time, she and her children slept on mats on the veranda in front of the charred ruin. Three of her six children had already been sent to Burkina to continue their schooling. One was now a teacher, another was in the Burkinabe army, and a third son drove a taxi in Bobo-Dioulasso for a living, which made them, and by extension Susanne herself, more privileged than the majority of their neighbours. Having three sons with regular work and two of them in fairly prestigious positions at that was what many other parents could only dream of.

It was Susanne’s husband’s older brother who had received her children when they first arrived to Bobo-Dioulasso. He had also supplemented the money that Susanne’s husband transferred from Côte d’Ivoire to pay for their tuition and helped the oldest son, Augustin, find work as a taxi driver. Upon her own arrival, Susanne had first spent two days in Ouagadougou with her three children. Her husband had not been given a seat on the bus and had remained in Abidjan. At the time of my first meeting with the family, he had not visited them for a little more than two years. He was struggling to find employment in Abidjan as a carpenter and only rarely contributed to the household economy through remittances. The couple agreed that they would prefer to stay in Burkina Faso rather than return to Côte d’Ivoire, and Susanne’s husband would join them once he was able to put aside some savings to get by on in Burkina Faso.

The Strength of Weak Transnational Ties

Susanne and her family have experienced displacement from a life of relative affluence in the metropolis of Abidjan to the destitution of starting anew in a fragile house in Sarfalao non-loti. As in many other families I encountered there, Susanne is the *de facto* head of household, as her husband is not only distant in spatial terms but also in terms of his contribution to and influence over the family’s well-being. By not contributing remittances to the household economy and by neither being in touch nor visiting his family in Burkina Faso, the husband is one of many male migrants who have left their families guessing, and his neighbours, and even
his own children, would often speculate as to whether he had engaged in what Stephen Lubkemann has called ‘transnational polygamy’ (2008a:275), that is, whether he had established a new family abroad without necessarily informing his Burkina-based family.

As other women of her generation, and situation, Susanne was able to live out the dream of her youth – of marrying a successful migrant and moving with him to Côte d’Ivoire – until the Ivorian crisis descended on her in Abidjan and eventually forced her to leave the country. She may well have envisioned a return to her country of origin but not at the time and under the circumstances she faced as immigrants were persecuted in her neighbourhood and the relative financial stability of Abidjan was shaken. Not only did her husband lose his job but the restaurant that she had invested all her earnings in was burnt to the ground, and with it the backbone of the family’s financial security went up in smoke.

Despite their acute sense of displacement upon arrival in Sarfalao, the family has benefited from the kind of social ties that are expected from the extended family but not necessarily available to all. Not only did one of Susanne’s brothers-in-law help them settle in Abidjan upon their arrival in the early 1980s, but another brother-in-law was there to receive them upon their return to Burkina Faso. Susanne’s husband clearly had a resourceful network of relatives to tap into, and this may be part of the reason for the success of her sons in finding steady employment in their new surroundings. The abrupt end to Susanne’s migrant trajectory is perhaps the primary source of her sense of displacement. Had she been able to sell her restaurant and amass her savings, her departure from Abidjan may not have been so traumatic, despite the persistence of a xenophobic atmosphere and even the threat of violence. Many returnees in Sarfalao dwelled more on having been forced “to start over from scratch” (commencer à zéro) in their narratives than on their being labelled as strangers in Côte d’Ivoire or the aggression against them per se.

“In Search of my Children’s Future”

Kadi lives in Sarfalao with four of her six children and makes a living through petty trade in the neighbourhood, and selling firewood that she collects outside the city when times are really tough. Her husband, Oumar, remained in Abidjan when she moved to Burkina with their children, believing that employment opportunities would be easier to come by in the regional metropolis than in Burkina Faso. Kadi was born in Abidjan of Burkinabe parents, who had migrated from Tougan (in the
Northwest, close to the Malian border) as a couple before she was born. She is the youngest of three, and her sister and brother still live in Abidjan.

Despite her Burkinabe origins, she never felt personally threatened while living in Abidjan. The family was affected by la crise – the Ivorian crisis – nevertheless, when Oumar lost his job as a watchman for an American organisation. His American employers had left the country in 2006. Oumar has been struggling to make a living ever since, but they still hope that the Americans will come back – as they have seen other foreign organisations do in the last year or so.

Kadi’s husband originates from the same village as her own parents, and they are both from the Samo ethnic group. They lived in the same neighbourhood in Abidjan, along with many others from the same region in Burkina Faso. They had met – or ‘he had seen her’, as she puts it – at the house of her parents, and Oumar had eventually asked her parents for her hand, and paid the initial bridewealth. She had been pleased with her suitor, she adds with a girlish giggle. After the wedding, they lived with his parents in Rubino, north of Abidjan, until they eventually moved into their own house in the city. Oumar still lives in the same house, where their six children were born.

Aside from the departure of Oumar’s employers, la crise was also felt through the recurring strikes and public protests that made it difficult for the children to attend school in Abidjan. Kadi says that the concern for their children’s schooling was the main reason why they finally decided that she should bring the children to Bobo-Dioulasso in 2004. She had made the case to Oumar before the Americans had left and he had agreed: he was also concerned for her own security at home, since many of their friends had been harassed by militias loyal to the Gbagbo regime.

The choice of Bobo-Dioulasso, and Sarfalao non-loți, as their place of refuge was not a random one. One of the family’s two houses in the neighbourhood had been built several years before the Ivorian crisis. They had built a house in Sarfalao as a way of confirming their bonds with their country of origin and to enable a future return: ‘if you are not at home you have to build, to be able to return home’, she explains. Since the early 1990s, many Burkinabe migrants in Côte d’Ivoire had begun buying land and building houses as a way of preparing for their eventual return (Mathieu, Zongo, and Paré 2002). But she had never imagined actually

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64 Many Western expatriates and international organisations began leaving Côte d’Ivoire in 2004 when Jeunes Patriotes militias targeted foreigners on the encouragement by President Laurent Gbagbo to avenge the French army’s retaliatory attacks on the Ivorian air force, with the slogan, “à chaqun son français!” (see e.g. Dozon 2006).
settling down in Sarfalao. She was born in Côte d’Ivoire, and found life in Burkina Faso too arduous and joyless compared to her former life in Abidjan, where she lived close to both her kin and her large network of friends and neighbours from the area around Tougan. She believed that her husband had probably built the house with the intention to move to Sarfalao upon his retirement, but she insisted that she had come for the sake of her children and that she had always thought of the house as an investment, rather than a future home.

Starting from Scratch in Sarfalao

I asked her to describe their journey from Abidjan to Bobo-Dioulasso, and she told me that it had been a difficult one: ‘c’était dur!’ They had left on the morning of 11 September 2004 by train, buying the tickets at the station on the same day. She had left alone with all six children, and every car had been packed with travellers leaving Abidjan to escape the war. She had not been harassed by soldiers or officials along the way, as many returnees travelling by bus had been, but the uncertainty of packing up all their belongings and setting out on a journey to a place she hardly knew anything about, to settle down and make a life anew, still signified a strenuous and worrisome experience to Kadi. Her sister-in-law had received them at the train station in Bobo-Dioulasso and brought them to the house in Sarfalao – which Kadi had never seen but only heard of. The sight of her new home had left her discouraged and sad (découragée): Sarfalao was far removed from the life she knew in Abidjan. Not only was there no electricity and no running water nearby, but she was used to the routines of her life in Abidjan and had lived out her life there: she was born and raised in Abidjan; was married and had had her own children there; had aged there and always liked the lively atmosphere of the city. Coming to Sarfalao was like starting from scratch – ‘commencer à zéro’. She knew no one in the neighbourhood and only a few of her husband’s relatives in other parts of town. At the same time, the town seemed so small and quiet compared to Abidjan, and in contrast to the anonymous crowds of the big city, you faced people “one-on-one” in Sarfalao, obliging you to greet everyone and face the gossip and disapproval of your neighbours if you were unable to meet their expectations of politeness and respect.

But adapting to the new social and material surroundings had not been the toughest challenge. Until Oumar lost his job in 2006, he had been able to send remittances every month through Western Union. But since then they had struggled to feed their children, let alone pay for their tui-
tion. Oumar had been to see them in Sarfalao once, in 2005, while he was still employed by the Americans. Following the 2004 riots, there had been continuous strikes and protests in Abidjan, and eventually all the white people left. She remembered the day he had called on his brother’s mobile phone to tell her that he was out of a job, saying simply ‘the work has ended’. He had been very sad that day, and so had she. Before she acquired the mobile phone she now owns, they would have appointed days where she would go to a calling centre to call him, so she knew that he was bringing bad news when he suddenly called on a neighbour’s phone to reach her. She had prayed the Lord that he would get his job back, but so far he had no steady employment and rarely sent remittances to supplement her own meagre earnings.

In 2009, Kadi had accompanied her oldest daughter, Asséta to Abidjan during the summer break. She had been happy to be back in Abidjan but soon understood that life was not the same there any longer. When she lived in Abidjan she felt “at ease” and she enjoyed working as a trader. Coming back, she realized that the people she knew had progressed in their trades and other livelihood activities despite the political crisis, and that she had been left behind by leaving the city. Before their troubles began, Oumar had bought a courtyard and constructed a house in their neighbourhood in Abidjan, to earn money renting out rooms to migrant workers and families. When he lost his job, they had been forced to sell the courtyard to raise money for tuition fees, setting the family back financially compared to their neighbours. She was acutely aware that her move to Sarfalao had been a financial disaster for the family, but she had done it for her children, in “search of their future”, as she put it. She had never gone to school herself and could not read or write, but she wanted a different life for her children. I asked her what she hoped for on their behalf, once they left school. She said that she would want them to pursue their dreams, whether that implied staying in Burkina Faso or searching for work elsewhere – perhaps even in “Europe” (meaning the West in general). Several months after our first conversation, she told me that she was hoping that her oldest son, Abdoulaye, who was studying history at the university in Ouagadougou, would find a job and help support the family.

Knowing her oldest children well, and having listened to their complaints about life in Burkina Faso, and their concerns for their mother, I asked her why she did not want to take her children back to Côte d’Ivoire. Her initial answer was a phrase I often heard from returnees in Sarfalao: ‘ici, c’est chez nous’ – this is our home. Kadi explained that things had changed in Côte d’Ivoire, that even with an education you would never be
able to make a living over there (là-bas). Her elaboration evoked the politics of ivoirisation of the public sector in Côte d’Ivoire, whereby the Gbagbo regime barred perceived foreigners (étrangers) from holding public positions (teachers, doctors, public officials etc.), replacing them with “true Ivorians”. Intent as she was on providing her children with a higher education, she believed that their chances of finding work would be better in Burkina Faso. This was your home (chez toi), and you would never be bothered in that way. Once you had acquired your Burkinabe identity papers you would be all right. She elaborated that her children held Ivorian birth certificates but Burkinabe citizenship65.

I noted that her husband had been able to find work in Côte d’Ivoire, but she argued that, first of all, he had been an unskilled labourer, which was easier than finding work in the public sector on the basis of a high school or university degree. Secondly, the plight of foreigners (étrangers) in Côte d’Ivoire had been a different story under Houphouët-Boigny. While he was president, you could easily find work even without identity papers (sans papiers). But ever since President Bédié, and especially once President Gbagbo came into power in 2000, the Burkinabe had been suffering in Côte d’Ivoire.

Generational Returns

Kadi’s story is neither unique, nor particularly typical of the migration histories I collected in Sarfalao. I recount it in some detail because it raises issues and touches upon themes that were important to many returnee families and because it presents a testimony to the experience of displacement in the context of the Ivorian crisis in its own right. Commenting on some of the most significant themes raised by Kadi’s narrative, this section offers a broader view of the experiences of the returnees in relation to the labour migration that preceded the Ivorian crisis and the trajectories that the political crisis generated or profoundly affected.

In relating Kadi’s narrative to the experiences of other returnees in Sarfalao, we should first of all note that her trajectory from rural Burkina Faso to Abidjan is one out of several migration trajectories across the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space. For example, other informants followed the long-established rural-rural migration route from the traditional “labour reserves” of Northwestern Burkina Faso to the

65 It was not uncommon for Burkinabe migrants to hold a variety of, more or less illicit, identity papers in both countries as a strategy for coping with the unpredictable inclinations of public officials, vigilante groups, and roadblock patrollers on both sides of the border.
plantations in Central and Western Côte d’Ivoire (cf. Cordell, Gregory, and Piché 1996). Despite the rural-rural trajectory of many migrating couples, the dream of the “bright lights of the city” did inform many young women’s aspirations, and Kadi can be said to personify an ideal of many of the migrants who settled in rural areas. At the same time, the plantation economy has been the backbone of Burkinabe migrant economies and the remittances transferred to relatives in Burkina Faso, and “the bright lights of the city” are perhaps best understood as the adventurous dreams of prospective migrants in Burkina Faso, rather than the more realistic aspirations that motivated labour migration.

What seems to be a more general tendency, however, is the family’s attitude towards investment in land in Burkina Faso while living in Côte d’Ivoire, choosing to invest in the city, rather than building in Tougan, their common “village” of origin. Kadi often said that her children, born and raised in the big city, would not be able to endure life in “the village”, but Abdouleye, her oldest son, believed that it was his mother’s strained relations with her family-in-law that had made them turn to Bobo-Dioulasso instead. Several returnee families in Sarfalao were reluctant to settle in their village of origin because of disagreements with their rural relatives. Kin of the parent generation in the village would often blame their migrant relatives for not keeping closer ties to their homes during their absence, and migrants would confess their fears of reprisals through witchcraft or other forms of aggressions by their disaffected rural relatives. Migrant parents particularly feared exposing their children to the anger of their rural kin. The reluctance to settle in the village, however, represents one side of a conflicting perception of the village as, at once a rural backwater, filled with witchcraft accusations and cultural conservatism and, at the same time, the cradle of a disappearing heritage and cultural roots.

Abdouleye was, in fact, first sent to live with his paternal uncle in Tougan, before his mother moved from Abidjan to Sarfalao. He was around twelve at the time, and had been terrified when he realised that he was being brought to the village. His parents had simply told him that he was visiting his uncle in Yamoussoukrou. The reason for his concern was not first and foremost that his parents had been dishonest about the motives for his journey. It was the stories of “the village” he had heard growing up that worried him most. Migrant parents in Côte d’Ivoire would actually use a longer stay in the village as a threat in order to discipline disobedient children: ‘if you do not behave, we will send you to the village!’, had been a recurrent reprimand in Abdouleye’s childhood.

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66 Informants often referred to their place of origin as “the village” regardless of its size and character.
In terms of migrant trajectories, the common phenomenon of transnational families investing in urban land in Burkina Faso while remaining in Côte d’Ivoire confirms the argument that a new migration axis took shape in the mid-1990s: from Côte d’Ivoire to Western Burkina Faso (Zongo 2003, see also Hagberg 2006) as a reaction to the growing resentment towards perceived “strangers” in Abidjan and the plantation areas. This new trajectory complicates the image of a symmetrical migration cycle, by which the migrant ideally ends up where he or she began – in the village of origin (cf. Cordell, Gregory, and Piché 1996). Kadi’s example also shows that the notion of a migration cycle may span generations, since she and her siblings were all born in Côte d’Ivoire. However, the question of home and belonging remains ambiguous to her, and many other returnees.

Another important theme in the narrative is the question of how disruptive the forced displacement has been to the family. In Kadi’s family, the feeling of rupture and bereavement caused by their displacement varies among the individual family members, and she is perhaps the one who has experienced the most drastic and negative changes. Her oldest son, Abdouleye, who was attending the university in Ouagadougou during the time of my fieldwork, believed so. He told me about the circumstances of his mother’s return to Burkina Faso and the first time he visited her in Sarfalao:

So, I made an effort in 2006, the school holidays 2006, I came to Bobo to visit la vieille\textsuperscript{67}. In any case, I arrived and really … mmm tsk … I was not pleased at all. Because us, we … we live and we know that it is a poverty we are living but when I came to see my mother, I told myself that my poverty, there [in Ouagadougou], is a hundred times better than what she is living here! So, that is, there were these things … I had these little problems that I wanted to explain to her … When I saw that, tsk, I lost the courage to speak again… I … even to eat, it was a problem. You see, in Côte d’Ivoire, well, in any case, we didn’t … to eat, we didn’t have that problem. If … the problems arrived at a point where … to eat, it’s a problem, you know that it is very very serious…

JB: Mmmm, while here, it’s…

My younger brother, every time he wakes me up, they are arguing about food. Tsk! Really, it made me… She even … She doesn’t eat.

JB: Mmhmm?

\textsuperscript{67} ”The old [woman]”; a common nickname for one’s mother.
She doesn’t eat! Even ... like this? [Cups hands to indicate amount of food] Nnhnn [No]! She doesn’t eat ... She eats just a little bit… Tsk tsk … And she manages

His mother’s hardships had humbled him. He had come, as most students do, to see his mother and solicit a little extra money to serve as pocket money in the capital, but seeing his mother living on a subsistence level with nothing to guarantee the next meal had left him speechless. His shock stemmed both from his comparison with his own living standard in Ouagadougou and from the life the family was accustomed to in Abidjan. Hunger, back then, was an expression of a severe exception, whereas for his mother in Sarfalao, it had become the order of the day.

There is much to say about the family’s reconfiguration and how relationships between husband and wife, and parents and children, had been transformed in the process. For now, we should note, first of all, how dramatic Kadi’s change of material living conditions changed with the move to Burkina Faso. Not only did Abdouleye realise that his own problems in Ouagadougou were dwarfed by the challenges facing his mother in Sarfalao, he later told me that he, in fact, had appreciated the move away from Côte d’Ivoire altogether. Abdouleye said that he had benefited from the move to Ouagadougou, since he had been struggling to pass classes in Abidjan. In addition to the constant strikes and “blank years” (les années blanches), he also blamed the many distractions of the big city, which he now believed corrupted the youth and caused them to waste their time on fun and games instead of achieving an education. Although Kadi struggled to make a living in Sarfalao, she never appeared, nor did she perceive herself as, powerless or destitute, which is also seen in the family’s continued aspiration for social mobility despite their displacement. By prioritising the schooling of Abdouleye, and his younger sister Asséta, at the University of Ouagadougou, Kadi felt able to “search for her children’s future”, implying both the investment in their future care in her old age, but also in the wish for them to see more of the world than she had been able to, through learning how to read and write and obtaining higher-level education. Many families in Côte d’Ivoire, in fact, sent their children to school and university in Burkina Faso even before the war because of lower fees and a more politically stable environment (Zongo 2003, Mazzocchetti 2009).

Kadi’s narrative describes the question of belonging as more than a political question of where she has the rights and recognition entailed by citizenship or other legal statuses. To her, and many other returnees in Sarfalao, home is first and foremost a sentiment of feeling “at ease” (à
to be in surroundings where everyday life is filled with predictable routines and familiar faces. In this regard, her nostalgic memories of life in Abidjan, in spite of the emergence of anti-immigrant rhetorics and the eventual regression into violence, is quite remarkable and testifies to the resilience of subjective feelings of belonging. Her sense of belonging in Abidjan is contrasted with the popular saying among returnees that, 'this is our home' (*ici, c’est chez nous*), implying that their proper home is in Burkina Faso, as was made clear to them by the Gbagbo regime in Côte d’Ivoire. This phrase dominated my conversations about home and belonging with returnees in Sarfalao, but the nostalgia over the loss of predictability and the feeling of being à l’aise came out when informants were asked to describe their everyday lives in Côte d’Ivoire.

**A Man of Extraordinary Powers**

This section considers the return to Burkina Faso of another transnational family, primarily from the point of view of the family’s head of household, Basile – a good-humoured man in his seventies whose family I came to know quite intimately during the course of fieldwork. Through regular visits and spontaneous encounters in the neighbourhood, Basile’s migrant biography was collected through formal interviews and casual conversations with him, his first wife, his two sons, and his neighbours over the course of ten months.

Basile has lived in Sarfalao for the last six years, after having spent most of his adult life in Côte d’Ivoire. He tells me that he is the proud father of 28 children – eleven of whom came to Burkina Faso with him. He sends all his children of age to school, and his son Marc attends the university in Ouagadougou. In the last months of 2010, Basile’s remittances from Côte d’Ivoire decreased and became more irregular, making it harder to pay tuition fees. However, thanks to his standing as a respected elder in the community and not least to his son’s ability to negotiate with school officials, all of his children of school age did indeed attend classes, despite lagging behind on their payments.

When he left Burkina Faso in the mid-1970s, he first arrived in Bengouro, near Bondoukou towards the Ghanaian-Ivorian border, where he succeeded in acquiring his own land and began cultivating coffee and cacao. In 1982, a forest fire destroyed everything he had built up, and rather than attempting to rebuild his house and plantation, he decided to leave it all behind and start over almost 500 kilometres further West – in Daloa, in the central forest region. The first step in the long struggle to
start anew was to present his request for land to the local master of the earth (chef de terre) but at that time, in the early 1980s, it was much easier to acquire land than it is today. During the course of twenty years, he constructed a profitable cacao plantation and established himself as a respected member of the community. It was only because of the war that he eventually considered leaving his land behind once more – this time to move back to his country of origin. He had already built several small makeshift houses in Burkina Faso in the early 1990s, in the open land that is now the densely settled neighbourhood of Sarfalao non-loti. He did want to provide himself the option of settling in Burkina Faso in his old age, but that the idea had been fairly vague before the war broke out. He had preferred to build in Bobo-Dioulasso, despite his origins outside Koudougou, 40 kilometres from Ouagadougou, but he often visits his ancestral village, where life is cheaper than in the city and where he still has relatives.

Basile has been back in Daloa twice since he moved to Sarfalao. He has left his oldest son in charge of the plantations there, and he mainly goes back to see his children, grandchildren, and his second wife who has remained there so far. His first and third wives live with him in Sarfalao. His son calls him regularly from Daloa to keep him updated on the production, but Kader – the oldest among the children who came to Burkina with him – tells me that his father has little say in the family business and that the phone calls from Daloa are his brother’s way of letting their father feel important. Despite his old age and fragile health, Basile still takes part in cultivating. He has cleared a plot of land in the bush – in a sparsely populated area two hours by motorcycle northeast of the city. Apart from cultivating a variety of grains and vegetables for subsistence use, he also raises chicken and guineafowl, to feed his family and as a supplementary income to the (fairly) regular remittances he receives from Côte d’Ivoire. The plantations have not been yielding well since the war broke out. Fertilisers and equipment have been hard to come by and the market conditions have been precarious.

The last time he went to Côte d’Ivoire, the bus had been stopped by soldiers on the road between Vavoua and Daloa. He had escaped into the bush but had hurt his feet running. Since then, he had not returned to Côte d’Ivoire. He might go back if he were convinced that the situation had improved, but he no longer wishes to live in Côte d’Ivoire. He tries

68 A master of the earth, or earth priest (dalgukolotigi, in Jula), is the traditional custodian of the land, dalguko denoting land and tigi referring to a form of ownership related to a spiritual and religious guardianship, rather than an economic or political property (cf. Hagberg 1998:86, see also Lentz 2006a:54).
to keep updated on the political situation – through the radio and through his son in Daloa. Basile never tells me of the specific circumstances of his departure from Côte d’Ivoire. When I ask, all he tells me is that it was not easy, and that the country has changed since the days of Houphouët-Boigny. But his son, Kader, tells me of the persecutions that almost killed his father. His father’s secrecy is in part related to his reputation as a great *féticheur*[^69]. Kader assures me that he would not mind me knowing but that he would be too modest to tell me the whole story himself. According to Kader, his father was known in Daloa as possessing extraordinary powers, and when the tensions between *autochtones* and *étrangers* reached them, their *autochtone* neighbours sought him out as suspected of providing spiritual protection to the rebels. Basile was taken out of town with a group of other *étrangers*, and the soldiers had begun executing them one by one. Before they reached Basile, someone had alerted the *préfet* who had sent a messenger to intervene because Basile was a respected landowner and well known in the community. He had already been severely beaten, but he was brought back to his house, and his family began preparations for his departure to Burkina Faso. Kader assured me that it was his father’s guardian spirits that had protected him that day, proving his reputation as a man of extraordinary powers.

When he first arrived to Sarfalao from Côte d’Ivoire, Basile had no relatives or other connections to rely upon. He had asked around in order to understand what he needed to do to acquire a piece of land and the right to build. At that time, it was still the *chef de terre* who granted such rights. These days it was difficult to know who to approach, and how to acquire rights that would not be taken away, once the municipal land management scheme was put into effect. Since his early visits were part of a long term strategy to invest in land and in a possible future settlement, he had the time needed to establish the vital relationships that would come to benefit him once he settled in the neighbourhood several years later. Initially, he had not been certain that he would be able to live in Bobo-Dioulasso. He doubted that his funds would suffice for building an adequate house and provide for his large family, but his younger brother had helped him with the construction. In any case, returning to Côte d’Ivoire was no longer an option. During the days of Houphouët-Boigny, Basile told me, immigrants (*les étrangers*) were given opportunities to prosper.

[^69]: “*Féticheur*” was a derogatory term, meaning “witchdoctor”, applied by the French colonial administration to any form of local medical or spiritual practitioners. It has been reappropriated into local parlance to signify these practitioners in a more neutral sense. I use the term in compliance with the colloquial use in Bobo-Dioulasso.
and were rewarded for their labour. As he shows me his “STNF Carte de société”, he says that he had much preferred the system back then.

Ambiguous Returns as Displacement?

Basile’s experiences, and not least his relatively carefree life in Sarfalao, do indeed seem extraordinary – not only because of his alleged spiritual powers but also because of his family’s ability to retain their land in a turbulent part of wartime Côte d’Ivoire and the privileged socio-economic position that the ensuing remittances provide. Although Basile has many mouths to feed, he is able to send all of his eight school-going children to class, and tough times, when remittances from Daloa are overdue, are averted through loans from friends and relatives around the city. The plantation income has also made it possible for the family to invest in farmland outside the city as well as a clutch of poultry – something many less privileged families can only dream of as a way to establish a regular income.

Basile’s privileged position is further confirmed by his land ownership in Sarfalao non-loti, where he owned eight separate plots of land with mud brick houses. These plots are not likely to stay in the family after the land allocation process, but with eight “tickets” in the lotissement lottery, the family’s chances are perhaps better than most. Some of the houses are rented out, providing a little revenue in their own right. Furthermore, Basile’s reputation as a powerful féticheur gives him yet another source of income, in addition to the general esteem of his neighbours. His consultations take place in the single room that is his bedroom, and clients seek him out from all over town – most of them of Gurunsi origin, like Basile himself. He even consults clients in Côte d’Ivoire, who attend his divining sessions by proxy. There are no fixed fees, but in addition to the sacrificial chicken, clients pay what they are able to.

Despite all these privileges, prosperity is neither stable nor equally distributed among the family members on either side of the border. For example, while Basile seems to be enjoying his retirement in Sarfalao, his sons in both Sarfalao and Côte d’Ivoire are struggling to make ends meet and are frustrated with the old patriarch’s irresponsible consumption of dolo (sorghum beer), and his expectations of a weekly allowance out of the modest remittances from Côte d’Ivoire that have to feed the whole family. Having left the management of his lands to his son in Daloa, Basile had also passed on the main responsibility for his younger children and the general well-being of the family as a whole. This was also felt by Kader, his oldest son in the Burkina part of their transnational family, who com-
plained and worried constantly about how to live up to his father’s expectations.

Finally, Basile’s story speaks to a different experience of return than Kadi’s. Although both families had built houses in Sarfalao long before their forced return, Basile had succeeded in building more than mud brick houses during his visits to Burkina Faso before the war. He had already sowed the seeds of a social network in the neighbourhood, despite originating from a small village further north, and being new to the city at the outset. Even though Kadi’s husband had visited Sarfalao regularly to supervise the construction, he had not been able to lay the grounds for their return in a similar way.

In addition, the two heads of household in Sarfalao face strikingly different social expectations because of their differences in generational and gender terms. As the retired patriarch of a successful land-owning family, Basile sits atop a social hierarchy that favours male elders, while Kadi is in the socially dubious position of a married woman living alone with her children in the city. In the long-established circular labour migration system, she would usually be expected to live with kin, if not to return to her (or her parents’) rural origins during her husband’s absence. At the same time, it seems clear that while Basile’s authority is mainly symbolic, in that his two eldest sons have taken over the responsibilities of running the family business and taking care of the family on both sides of the border, Kadi’s responsibility is very real, while her husband’s influence from across the border is fleeting at best.

In this way, while Basile was exposed to direct aggression in Côte d’Ivoire, and was forced to flee Côte d’Ivoire during the war, his arrival and settlement in Sarfalao does not evoke the sense of displacement that was so striking in Kadi’s situation. Through regular visits to his ancestral village and his privileged social standing in Sarfalao, Basile is able to feel “at ease” and leave the worries of breadwinning and finance to his adult sons. His frequent visits and numerous constructions in Sarfalao before the war played an important role in preparing for his present sense of security, reinforced in no small part by the hard social and physical labour of his sons across the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space. They clearly felt that these privileges were fleeting, given the strained cacao economy in Côte d’Ivoire around the time of my fieldwork, leading up to even harder times during the post-electoral crisis when all formal exports were halted for several months. Basile’s investments in urban land in Sarfalao were still only potential sources of revenue, given the unpredictability of the upcoming municipal land management scheme (see Chapter 3). All these worries aside, Basile’s investments in both Côte
d'Ivoire and Sarfalao had laid the foundation for his sense of ease, reinforced by his generational position as the elderly patriarch who was tended to by his wives, children, and grandchildren, and tolerated by his eldest sons, who sometimes complained that he was spending too much money on local beer and trips to the village.

One important similarity across the two preceding migrant biographies is exactly the striking generational variations in the experience of the forced return to Burkina Faso. While Abdouleye believed that he and his siblings had been handed the advantage in Kâdi’s family, Basile claimed most of the privileges in his family. Both families were able to send most of their children to school, setting them apart from many migrant, and most non-migrant, families in the neighbourhood. The extent to which the transnational family composition, or the socioeconomic standing of transnational families in Côte d'Ivoire, articulates class differences in Sarfalao is an important question. Yet, in the following I mainly focus on gendered and generational differences.

"If they Killed our Children, What Would We Have Done?"

Iris was one of several returning female migrants, living as the de facto head of household while her husband remained in Côte d'Ivoire. She was 43 years old at the time of our first meeting, and made a living by selling vegetables in the neighbourhood. Her migrant trajectory had brought her to Bobo-Dioulasso well before she joined the flow of Burkinabe migrants to Côte d'Ivoire. Her parents had moved from Diébougou – a provincial town east of Bobo-Dioulasso, near the Ghanaian border – and settled in Bolomakoté, a neighbourhood adjacent to Sarfalao, when she was a child. When Iris became betrothed to her husband, they moved to a house near her parents, in Bolomakoté, and she remained when he left for Abidjan to explore the opportunities of finding work in the Ivorian metropolis.

Once Iris’ husband had found work in Abidjan, he first paid her bridewealth and then returned to Burkina to arrange the “traditional wedding”. They had lived together in Abidjan for several years before they finally could afford a Catholic wedding. He had been lucky to find work as a cook for a Lebanese company, through the connections of his brother who was already settled in Abidjan when he arrived. Once he had established himself, and rented a one-bedroom house (chambre-salon) in the neighbourhood of Koumasi, he called for Iris, who joined him in 1989, at the age of 22. She remembered the train ride from Bobo-Dioulasso to
Abidjan very well, not least for the trouble she had en route. She had lost her purse in Ouangolo, an hour into Côte d’Ivoire across the border, during an inspection in which all passengers were asked to descend the train. She had lost her ticket and all her money and had been forced to phone her husband in Abidjan and ask him to send money for a new ticket by carrier on one of the many buses crossing the country on a daily basis. Luckily, the station attendant was of Lobi ethnicity, like Iris and her travel companion, and he had generously offered to house them for the night.

When she finally arrived in Abidjan, Iris was impressed by the crowded streets of the metropolis and felt that she was embarking on the dream that she had envisioned well before she met her husband. This was the big city (là-bas, c’est la ville!), even more so than Ouagadougou! Life in Abidjan had been comfortable, as her husband made a steady income from his Lebanese employers and Iris supplemented household income by selling food in front of the school that Francine and Nestor, their two children, eventually attended. The Koumasi neighbourhood sits on the Lagune Ébrié, which divides the city in two, and they would cross the bay in pirogues, taxiing back and forth between the residential areas on the lower side and the city centre’s Plateau District on the upper side of the lagoon. But when “the trouble began” (la palabre a commencé), the Lebanese company relocated to safety in neighbouring Mali, leaving her husband out of work and the family at the threshold of the harder times ahead.

Iris told me how she experienced the Ivorian crisis in Abidjan. ‘There were many dead’, she said. The Ivorians (les ivoiriens) had killed people and thrown them in the water, and the residents of Koumasi would find their corpses on the shores of the lagoon. Iris did not relate the onslaught of violence to the attempted coup of 19 September 2002. She remembered some of the first attacks on immigrants taking place when her son was an infant, which would have been around 1994, since Nestor was seventeen at the time of my fieldwork (in 2010). Ghana had beaten Côte d’Ivoire in a football match, and some of her “Ivorian neighbours” had avenged the loss by targeting Ghanaian residents of the neighbourhood, killing several before the gendarmes arrived to intervene. In their courtyard, which was owned by Ivorians, strangers and Ivorians lived side by side, but a group had arrived looking for Ghanaians and causing trouble. Later, the trouble was mainly directed towards Burkinabe immigrants, Iris says, and she remembers hearing about the killings of Burkinabe in Abidjan, Tabou, and San Pedro during the early days of the Gbagbo regime.

During that time, their courtyard was once again targeted by Ivorians seeking out immigrant residents, and she would try to be as silent and
unnoticeable as possible, rather than engage in the quarrels. For Iris, the persecutions culminated when a friendly Ivorian neighbour had warned them that a militia was on its way and had guided her family and some of their Burkinabe neighbours to a nearby monastery where the Catholic sisters were known to take people in to protect them from persecution. They had heard rumours of a militia mobilising from Tabou – a name that instilled fear in every immigrant because of the 1999 Tabou massacres, in which more than a hundred Burkinabe workers were killed – and Iris and her neighbours had agreed that the threat was real and that it was time to leave. At the church gates, they had negotiated their access with the watchman and were allowed to enter. At around two in the morning, the Ivorians had knocked on the gate, demanding all strangers delivered to be killed. They had ransacked the houses of immigrants on their way to the church, and Iris had feared for her life. They had been saved by the protection of the monastery, but Iris’ sister had not been so lucky. Her husband and their three children had all been brutally killed in front of her, and she had never recovered. She had gone crazy, Iris explained in a matter of fact tone of voice. It was these kinds of stories that made many Burkinabe leave Côte d’Ivoire, she adds, as she had done herself following that night in the monastery.

There were no trains to Burkina in 2004 and most busses passed through Ghana, rather than cross the heavily patrolled Ivorian terrain. Furthermore, the border between the two countries was rumoured to be closed for weeks at a time, meaning that civilian passengers were denied access. As Iris’ daughter Francine recalls, their journey to Burkina Faso had been fairly straightforward. The family were not as destitute as most of those repatriated by Opération Bayiri (see Chapter 2), and they had not been harassed by soldiers along the way. Iris’ sister lost 100,000 FCFA and all of the fabrics (pagne) she was planning to trade in Burkina Faso, during her travel through rebel territory. Iris points out that they had no choice but to leave and that even though they had been fortunate, their departure was an act of desperation. The bus prices to Burkina Faso exploded during the 2002-2005 period, but Iris had seen no other option than to pay the 35,000 FCFA per ticket to escape: ‘We had no choice but to leave. If they killed our children, what would we have done?’

Forced Displacement or Return Migration?

As a migrant trajectory, Iris’ journey from Diébougou via Bobo-Dioulasso to Abidjan, and back to Bobo-Dioulasso, highlights the effects of the Ivorian crisis in the context of the social practices that preceded it (and to
some extent shaped the conflict itself). Iris and her family felt assured that they would be taken care of by their relatives in Bobo-Dioulasso – a place they were already familiar with – and their flight was, in this sense, not just an escape from the threat of aggression but a choice of strategy in the face of gradually changing circumstances.

When forced displacement is viewed apart from its historical and social context, the specific cause of flight tends to be taken for granted. The appearance of dead bodies at the shores of the lagoon, for example, might easily have been taken as a self-evident cause of flight for Iris, especially when investigating forced displacement retrospectively, as I have done in the present study and as is customary in refugee studies. But as Iris’ reflections illustrate, the killings of other immigrants were not, in themselves, enough to drive her and her family to the decision of flight. Neither can the incident in the monastery, where Iris feared for her own life for the first time, be said to be the single cause of her decision to leave. It was, rather the gradual accumulation of threatening experiences that eventually became a decisive factor in that choice.

Encountering Iris in her modest surroundings in Sarfalao non-loti, one might perhaps think that escape to such a place was no choice at all. Having left their plantations in the southwest or their trades and employments in Abidjan, many refugees in Sarfalao might seem to have settled wherever possible, the escape from the threat of aggression overshadowing any concerns for the future. Obviously, Iris’ prior residence in Bobo-Dioulasso informed her choice of destination. By emphasising the element of choice, and seeing escape as a calculated decision, we may in fact see her escape as a continuation of a migrant trajectory rather than an abrupt end to a labour migration cycle. I do not intend to downplay or disregard her traumatic experiences in Abidjan but am rather attempting to understand those experiences in their proper context, as Iris did herself. In this light, the choice to leave Abidjan is akin, albeit not identical, to the labour migrant’s decision to leave because of declining employment opportunities or failing harvests. In fact, many refugees in Sarfalao emphasised the lack of employment opportunities in the city, or the denial of access to cultivable land in the plantation areas, as decisive factors in their decisions to return to Burkina Faso.

None of these decisions are entirely voluntary – obviously the changing circumstances are an expression of external forces ‘pushing’ migrants away – nor are they entirely ‘rational’ in the sense of that term as applied in some versions of rational choice theory. As in all social life, actors make decisions on partial and sometimes faulty assessments of their circumstances and prospects, but they do make choices. This approach to Iris’
wartime mobility blurs the lines between labour migration and flight from violence.

Conclusion

Through the exploration of the narratives of returning migrants in Sarfalao, this chapter has explored empirically how the notion of “returning home” was experienced in conflicting terms by labour migrants, although in different ways and with considerable variations across generational, gender, and social class differences. Despite being settled in the area for several years, the migrants in Sarfalao were still coming to terms with their past experiences in their everyday life in Sarfalao, and they were still sometimes perceived as outsiders by the other residents. Rather than a “return” to their origins, implied by the term *rapatrié*, informants had virtually never lived in Bobo-Dioulasso, let alone Sarfalao *non-loti*, before the war. While the desire to contrast life in Côte d’Ivoire with their present predicaments may have encouraged returnees to romanticize the life they had left behind, the sentiment of having left a life of relative affluence – where daily meals and the opportunity to work could largely be taken for granted – was widespread among young and old alike. For the young adult returnees, the notion of a “return” was even less true, since many had come to Burkina Faso for the first time because of the war.

The lack of familiarity with Burkina Faso does not imply that the returnees felt no connection to their country of origin whatsoever. While the slogan of sending the ‘strangers’ living in Côte d’Ivoire “home” was clearly a fabric of ivoirité rhetoric, informants described their expectations of “coming home” to Burkina Faso and being received with solidarity and openness as an important motivating factor in leaving Côte d’Ivoire. Despite difficulties in adapting to life in Sarfalao, and problems in integrating with the non-migrant population, the sense of having “come home” remained an encouragement for both old and young returnees. No one seemed to disagree with the logic of ivoirité rhetoric that even second- and third-generation Burkinabe immigrants to Côte d’Ivoire “belonged” in Burkina Faso.

That migration remains circular in this way, both in principle and in practice, fits well with Ferguson (1999) assertion that urbanisation rates may be overestimated when (circular) migrants are seen as permanently settled in town. Migrant biographies in Sarfalao indicate that “return” actually was already envisioned as an “indirect urbanisation” of Bobo-Dioulasso before the Ivorian crisis: many migrant families were already
building in the city, despite their rural origins. The “return” to the village, in old age or at death, then, was maintained as an important expression of identity and belonging rather than an indication of the sociospatial commitments of the migrants or their children.

In Côte d’Ivoire, these symbolic bonds to the village d’origine have been institutionalised on the national level through the politics of ivoirité, whereby anyone who claims Ivorian citizenship has to be able to cite a rural origin on Ivorian territory. The symbolism of rural origins helps us understand the powerful evocations of the ivoirité rhetoric in Côte d’Ivoire and also appreciate the precarious positions of returning migrants who settled in the city, rather than their place of origin in Burkina Faso. Many migrant parents would say that although the ties to their village were important, they were reluctant to bring their children back, for fear of the aggression (e.g. through witchcraft) and envy of their rural kinsmen.

For Kadi, the insecurity and unpredictability of living in Abidjan during the eruption of the Ivorian crisis caused the family to reconfigure across the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space, in a familiar constellation of a lone male migrant providing for his family in the country of origin and the female head of household responsible for the family when remittances run dry. Faced with the rhetorics of ivoirité, conflicting perceptions of belonging were a central cause of their displacement, in addition to the threats of direct physical aggression and the deteriorating economic possibilities for migrants of Burkinabe origin in Laurent Gbagbo’s political heartland. Having grown up in Abidjan, Kadi had never planned on returning to the birthplace of her parents in Tougan, a sentiment that was reinforced by the fact that she did not get along with her family-in-law. Even if we consider the possibility of return migration across generations, Kadi’s trajectory – from her parents’ origins in Tougan, through her upbringing and adult life in Abidjan, to her settlement in Sarfalao – does not resemble a symmetrical migration cycle, making the idea of a “return” ambiguous. Furthermore, her difficulties of adjusting to life in Sarfalao were related to nostalgia over the loss of her familiar everyday life in Abidjan, making her sense of emplacement resemble that of a person in exile rather than someone who has “come home”. This sentiment of being in an unfamiliar and unwelcoming place coexisted with the discourse of belonging that placed Burkinabe returnees “at home” in Sar-

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70 This facet is lost in the analytical framework of Hoe and Wage (Cordell, Gregory, and Piché 1996), which considers a return to the sous-préfecture of birth as a “return”, thereby ignoring a shift from rural to urban settlement. This also means overlooking the “newness”/unfamiliarity of the “return” in terms of social network and emplacement.
falao, regardless of their origins and their subjective sentiments of loss and longing.

To Basile, his return to Burkina Faso felt more as “coming home”, as he could rely on his adult sons on both sides of the border who were gradually taking over the responsibility of ensuring some degree of continuity in the face of precarious market conditions for the cacao production in Côte d’Ivoire and the changing fortunes of the supplementing sources of income in Burkina Faso. Basile’s departure from wartime Côte d’Ivoire had all the makings of an archetypical refugee story, but his groundwork in Bobo-Dioulasso and the family’s ability to retain their land holdings in Côte d’Ivoire made his forced return to his country of origin resemble the end of a labour migration cycle more than a forced displacement in the conventional sense. His nostalgia for the days of Houphouët-Boigny was related to a longing for the predictability and order inherent in the retrospective. Basile’s escape from violent aggression on two occasions – first as his autochtone neighbours prepared to execute him along with other influential étrangers in Daloa, and then en route from Burkina Faso at a loyalist roadblock outside Daloa – had instilled in him the conviction that he would no longer consider settlement as a Burkinabe in Côte d’Ivoire. This sentiment did not challenge the ivoirité logic of belonging but addressed the conditions of immigrant labour in Côte d’Ivoire. As with Kadi, Basile was not contesting his being labelled as a stranger in Côte d’Ivoire, but in contrast to his less privileged neighbour in Sarfalao, he was able to live out the idiom of being at ease in Burkina Faso in everyday practice.

In conjunction, the migrant biographies of this chapter represent a variety of circumstances, strategies, and aspirations regarding the return to Burkina Faso from Côte d’Ivoire in the context of the Ivorian crisis. These experiences have provided a nuanced perspective on theories of displacement and demonstrated how subjective experiences of life-rupturing forms of mobility can vary within families and across generations. Furthermore, rather than being mutually exclusive, the experience of displacement in this sense co-existed with notions of having returned, or “come home” to Burkina Faso as a national home. In other words, while individual projects of home-making in Sarfalao may have been rendered more difficult to achieve by the predicaments of forced displacement from Côte d’Ivoire, migrants retained their notions of national belonging in the face of such difficult circumstances.
The armed conflict in Côte d’Ivoire resonated throughout the region, already marked by the civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia and the unstable environment in Guinea-Conakry. Despite the gradual build-up of hostilities in Côte d’Ivoire, there was a sense of disbelief in the early reports from both national and international observers (e.g. Daddieh 2001, Toungara 2001, HRW 2002, IRIN 2002, Le Pape & Vidal 2002), not only by way of the disturbing images of its most obvious victims: the dead bodies in mass graves on the outskirts of Abidjan in October 2000, or the Burkinabè labourers killed in Tabou in 1999, but also as a further fall from grace of the former regional economic super power. The deterioration of financial and political stability, as well as the receding possibilities for labour migrants, affected livelihoods across the Ivorian borders and changed political outlooks of actors across the continent.

In addition to these structural and symbolic regional impacts, the perpetrators of armed aggression on both sides of the conflict were a corollary of nationalities and ideological affiliations. The rebels employed Sierra Leonean and Liberian mercenaries as well as dozo hunters from the north and from Burkina Faso, while Gbagbo’s loyalist forces, in addition to Liberian fighters and dozo hunters of their own, employed South African, Angolan, and European mercenaries. Finally, the French army’s Licorne forces in collaboration with peacekeeping forces from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations’ Operation in Côte d’Ivoire (ONUCI) were deployed to keep the two parties apart (Banégas & Marshall-Fratani 2003:8). In this sense, the regional entanglements of the Ivorian crisis covered a vast array of actors and social spheres, assisted by the gradual loosening of national border controls in order to accommodate refugees, particularly into Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, and Liberia.

This chapter explores the involvement of young Burkinabè fighters in the Ivorian crisis, through their recruitment into the Forces Nouvelles rebel

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71 A number of analyses have considered the conflicts in the Mano River Union countries from a regional perspective (see e.g. Galy 2003, 2004, Utas 2012, Richards 2004, 2005a, Jörgel & Utas 2007).
movement by recruiters stationed in Bobo-Dioulasso during the period 2000-2004. Rather than setting rebel recruitment apart from other forms of mobility, the analysis inscribes the cross-border recruitment of young Burkinabe men within the analytical concept of wartime mobilities, as applied in the study so far. Thus, the empirical material conforms to the two overall templates of migrant biographies and everyday practice, and considers the former rebels’ urban emplacement in the neighbourhood of Sarfalao upon their return to Burkina Faso. In this way, the analysis reflects back upon the earlier discussions of ambivalent neighbourhood and urban youth, emphasising how the motivations of the young recruits converge with other aspirations towards social adulthood. Rebel recruitment is analysed on the premise of the motivations and practices of mobility as akin to other forms of mobility. In other words, rather than treating cross-border recruitment as fundamentally different from the more established trajectories across the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space, the differences and similarities between these forms of wartime mobility are explored empirically. Finally, by considering the movement of military recruits in relation to the trajectories of labour migrants and forced returnees, the chapter examines these different forms of mobility under the common prism of social displacement.

Cross-Border Recruitment in the Ivorian Crisis

The Ivorian crisis added a new movement to the flows across the Ivorian-Burkinabe border, namely that of young Burkinabe men joining the rebel forces against the Gbagbo regime in Côte d’Ivoire. This cross-border recruitment was not only hazardous for the recruits who generally had no prior experience or military training: it was also a potentially dangerous political issue on both sides of the border, both in terms of the illicit border transgressions, and in terms of the identity politics in Côte d’Ivoire and the diplomatic crisis between the two neighbours. One aspect of the identity politics of the ivoirité rhetoric was to construct northerners as foreigners and the Forces Nouvelles movement as a foreign invasion rather than party in a civil war. This made the presence of Burkinabe recruits within the rebel ranks potentially problematic for the legitimacy of the Forces Nouvelles. President Gbagbo’s allegations against Blaise Compaoré of supporting the rebels, similarly, made any Burkinabe affiliation with the Forces Nouvelles a diplomatic liability for the Burkinabe authorities (see Hagberg & Bjarnesen 2011). In spite of the precarious political situation, rebel recruitment meetings were said by local residents to have been a
public secret in Bobo-Dioulasso in the time around the 19 September 2002 attacks on Korhogo, Bouaké, and Abidjan. Some former fighters claimed to have been recruited as early as 1999 or 2000 while others only crossed the border in 2004.

As other studies of wartime mobilisation have shown (e.g. Hoffman 2011, Honwana 2005, 2006, Utas 2003, Vigh 2006a, b, Richards 1996), joining the rebel movement and becoming a soldier was experienced by these young Burkinabe men as empowering and an adventure that changed their outlook on life as well as their opportunities for enrichment (see also Förster 2010:712-13). Engaging in armed combat was rarely described as shocking or traumatising but as a job that had to be done. In this way, military recruitment was perceived, not primarily as an ideological choice to join the ranks of the rebels under the banner of a common cause, but rather as a different form of labour migration that had arisen due to the changing socio-political circumstances. Rather than perceiving the quest for enrichment as an immoral act, outside the normal social order, this perception invites us ‘… to think of violence as literal work, to think of the labor of war as labor … Combatants saw themselves as workers as much as they saw themselves as patriots, democrats, youth, and rebels’ (Hoffman 2011:34), as Hoffman has suggested in relation to young combatants in Sierra Leone. Similarly, Hagberg & Ouattara argue, with regard to the Burkinabe dozo hunter Dow:

[I]t seems that Dow was practicing a new kind of seasonal migration. Instead of moving to Côte d’Ivoire as a labourer or to undertake farming, as previous generations of migrants from Burkina Faso had done, Dow and his peers travelled intermittently to Côte d’Ivoire to take part as combatants in the civil war (Hagberg & Ouattara 2010:111)

In this way, military recruitment presented at once a rupture with societal norms, in the sense of being a self-fulfilling search for adventure and engaging in immoral activities, and a continuation of the mobility practices of earlier generations of young men, in the sense of a labour migration trajectory intended to provide an income in the context of overwhelming youth unemployment. As Mats Utas has shown in his study of the Liberian civil war, however, these two aspects of youth mobility and masculinity do have historical precedents in the region, for example in the legend of Sunjata Keita who, despite being of royal decent, was born into a marginal position, being both the son of the king’s third wife, and being a cripple. Upon the death of his father, Sunjata was forced to flee into exile to avoid his brother’s persecution in the battle for succession. While away in exile, he gathered supernatural strengths and magical skills, and upon his
return, he conquered the throne and founded the Mali Empire. As Utas argues, this legend – which is found in different forms across the West African region – not only alludes to modern migrant trajectories in a general sense, by which the migrant is expected to gather strength during his absence, only to return home, empowered and successful. The legend also speaks to the antisocial behaviour of the ‘rebel hero’ (Utas 2003:140) who is obliged to engage in antisocial behaviour in order to ascend to personal status and power:

Young combatants in the Liberian Civil War took upon themselves images of a rebel-hero character. Just as Sunjata gained some of his legitimacy as a warrior, so too did young Liberians. Joining the rebel forces they found a path similar to other migrant patterns. Turning the moral upside-down, linking to myths of extreme egotistical individualism can be effective in the short-turn, but eventually one will have to repent and turn morally virtuous again (Utas 2003:166)

Through the image of the rebel hero, the immoral and anti-social actions of the young recruits during their absence may be inscribed with a socially viable rationale, although the extent to which other members of their home communities agreed with such a view is far from given. In fact, most residents in Sarfalao perceived the former rebels as immoral hoodlums, and the rebels themselves generally preferred to keep their violent pasts to themselves. That said, such secrets were usually hard to keep, given the proclivity of their neighbours to locate other residents in social genealogies on the basis of direct inquiries and indirect rumours and gossip. They were thus particularly prone to the feeling of ambivalent neighbourhood, discussed in Chapter 4, whereby the social proximity of everyday life in Sarfalao was potentially both a source of well-being and ill will. In this way, the violent past deeds of the former rebels were public secrets to the extent that most people avoided confronting the rebels with their past actions, and had the decency to discuss such matters behind their backs.

To the combatants themselves their violent acts were perceived as both traumatically violent and as achievements of a job well done, so to speak. Success on the battlefield – whether personal or collective – was often remembered with nostalgia and a sense of history in the making. Fighters were given responsibility and recognition they had never imagined and took pride in their severity and uncompromising aggression as leaders of units, responsible for ammunitions, or other tasks within the group. Upon their return to Burkina Faso, however, none of the former rebels I met had been able to accumulate anything but a few memorabilia, such as
military boots or photos of themselves in uniform, sporting machine guns or other weapons. Materially, they were no better off than before their recruitment, as Till Förster argues in relation to former rebels in Korhogo:

The ordinary rebel soldier did not really profit from the rebellion. Salaries were ridiculously low and there were not even adequate supplies of food. Most of the young rebels were obliged to make a living by other means, for instance by running a road-block — much like the ‘young patriots’ on the opposite side of the divided country. Those who profited most in the military were the leaders (Förster 2010:13)

As with other migrant aspirations, of course, the eventual failure to accumulate the envisioned capital from participating in the rebellion takes nothing away from the fact that rebel recruitment was approached by young Burkinabe as a livelihood option rather than an ideological calling.

Cross-Border Precedents: Dozo Hunters in the Ivorio-Burkinabe Borderlands

So far, I have introduced the cross-border recruitment of Burkinabe youths into the Forces Nouvelles rebel movement as a new form of transnational mobility, emerging with the turn to armed aggression in the Ivorian crisis. At the same time as these young men began their migrant careers as rebel soldiers, another group of combatants in the Ivorian crisis continued a longer history of cross-border mobility in the Ivorio-Burkinabe borderlands by engaging in the conflict. Traditional dozo hunters participated in the conflict on both sides and provided local communities with protections against other armed groups (Leach 2004:ix). These continued movements across the political border separating the two countries were already tolerated by the authorities prior to the Ivorian crisis, but with the division of Côte d’Ivoire following the attempted coup on 19 September 2002, the border was first formally closed, bringing trade and labour migration to a virtual standstill. In early 2003, however, the border was re-opened, and in the following years both formal and informal border-crossings between Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso was much easier, facilitating new forms of transnational trade as well as the movement of combatants and other actors in the armed conflict.

In this way, as Hagberg & Ouattara have argued, the Ivorian crisis changed the significance of the border between Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire to people whose livelihoods or daily activities led them to move
across the borderland regularly, while a different boundary emerged that was more significant. The authors suggest that, ‘...since the outbreak of the Ivorian civil war in 2002, the most pertinent border for hunters has not been that between the two states, but the boundary between government-controlled Ivorian territory on the one hand and the territory controlled by the Forces Nouvelles rebels on the other’ (Hagberg & Ouattara 2010:103). Dozo hunters were already criss-crossing the territory prior to the conflict, but with the Forces Nouvelles occupation of the northern half of Côte d’Ivoire, their passage to and from Burkina Faso was made much easier.

The active participation of dozo hunters in the armed conflict in Côte d’Ivoire was facilitated not only by the open border with Burkina Faso but more importantly by the historical precedents of such involvements. In addition to the historical links between hunters and warriors (Leach 2004:viii), the secret knowledge of the dozo societies has provided them with a particular standing as guardians of relations between people and the forces of nature. They were also increasingly employed as security patrols in northern Côte d’Ivoire prior to the conflict, organised through new forms of hunter associations were effective in ‘...encompassing state security prerogatives within sacrificially defined roles’ (Hellweg 2004:14). These various roles however, are laden with ambiguity, firstly, because of their association with ‘... strange and dangerous bush liaisons and capacities for sorcery’ (Leach 2004:xiv). Secondly, the dozo identity was appropriated and manipulated by raising doubts about their legitimacy as protectors of the general public. Furthermore, the Bédié regime in Côte d’Ivoire actively sought to delegitimize the public’s positive opinion of the dozo in the 1990s as a strategy to ‘contain’ their influence in the northern half of the country, as part of a broader strategy to ‘...circumscribe the political geographical influence of the main opposition party, the RDR, by reducing the presence and popularity of the [dozo hunters] in the South’ (Bassett 2004:44).

The active participation of dozo hunters in the Ivorian armed conflict was, to summarise, facilitated by their longer history of cross-border mobility as well as their increased influence and popularity as security providers in the absence of other state-sanctioned policing agents, especially in the northern half of Côte d’Ivoire. The Ivorian crisis eventually made border-crossings easier, also for other forms of migrants, facilitating the recruitment of young Burkinabe men into the Forces Nouvelles rebel movement. The ambivalent attitude towards the power and intentions of dozo hunters, finally, in some ways provided a precedent for how rebel recruits would be perceived by their home communities. At the same
time, of course, the secret societies of dozo hunters were inscribed in particular cultural and social functions that were far removed from the realm of armed conflict. On the basis of this general discussion of the dynamics and meanings of cross-border recruitment and its precedent movements, the chapter proceeds by exploring the extended cases of some of the former rebel fighters I encountered in Sarfalao.

The Public Secrets of a Burkinabe Rebel

Lucien was the first ex-combatant I met in Sarfalao. My assistant knew him from the neighbourhood and had arranged the meeting, explaining my intentions to Lucien beforehand. We met at an empty bar on the border between the two halves of Sarfalao, in the early afternoon when the level of activity in both the bar and in the neighbourhood at large was in a lull. Although Kader and Lucien were acquaintances, they had never spoken at length but Kader had spent the past week or so befriending Lucien as he sold grilled pork in the evenings. I had my doubts as to how Lucien had understood Kader’s explanations about my project, and was wary of approaching a former rebel soldier, since I knew very little of the circumstances surrounding his recruitment and participation in the Ivorian conflict.

Our meeting took place several months before the pig theft of which Lucien was accused, as I recounted in Chapter 3, and I was at the time unaware of the extent to which his neighbours were informed about his combatant career. I told Lucien that I wanted to understand his experiences, straddling the border between Burkina Faso and Côte d’Ivoire, and how he had experienced taking part in an armed conflict. I said that I had spent some time in Korhogo, and was expecting to return in a few weeks’ time to catch up with old friends there. While I spoke of my time in Côte d’Ivoire, Lucien began arranging identity cards on the table in front of us with a complicit grin on his face. He drew my attention to one card in particular, his Forces Nouvelles ID card, indicating that he belonged to the Korhogo battalion.

With this gesture, Lucien took the word and began his narrative. He said that his chef, who had recruited him here in Bobo-Dioulasso was still around. I asked an elaborative question which he understood as being about the superior officer’s identity and the jovial atmosphere between us vaporised in a blink. I clarified that I was not asking for his commander’s name and that seemed to reassure him. Lucien embarked on a narrative that we often returned to during the ten months that followed, and par-
ticular events and dates are still unclear to me, as I believe they were to Lucien himself. I include some of these confusions to illustrate the form the narrative took, but also to prioritise Lucien’s sentiments and retrospective evaluations. The overall chronology, or formal history of the Ivorian conflict, has already been discussed above, and the purpose of exploring Lucien’s narrative is to take seriously how the conflict was experienced, rationalised, and narrativised by a participant in the events who had no justification for being there, in the logic of any of the dominant rhetorics of belonging considered so far in this chapter: a Burkinabe citizen migrating to take part in a civil war in another country.

Cross-Border Recruitment

Lucien explained that he had been invited to a secret meeting by a friend of his in which they had been told about the possibility of going to Côte d’Ivoire as soldiers in a rebellion against the Gbagbo regime. Most people I spoke to, including a local journalist, said that they had known of the public secret of recruitment meetings and that they were being held all around Bobo-Dioulasso during the year preceding the 2002 attacks on Korhogo, Bouaké, and Abidjan. The journalist had decided not to write about these meetings out of an awareness of the diplomatic sensitivity of the issue. Lucien said that he had been motivated to partake in the fight against Gbagbo in defence of Burkinabe citizens living in Côte d’Ivoire but that the considerable sums of money they had been promised obviously had played a large part in making him consider taking up arms in the first place. Lucien’s parents were against his recruitment into the rebel forces from the beginning. They had pleaded him not to leave, and his father had fallen ill with worry while Lucien was away.

When Lucien and his friend had decided to join, they went to the recruiter who asked them to hand over all their identity papers and any other possessions that might reveal them to be Burkinabe. Even cigarettes of the brands sold in Burkina Faso were confiscated. They were given 25,000 FCFA each, which my assistant found to be outrageously little, but Lucien explained that they were promised 100,000 per day for their service in Côte d’Ivoire – which, they were told, would only last for three days or one week at the most. With a pensive smile, Lucien added that in the end he had spent more than five years over there. Lucien and the other recruits were taken at night along the back roads from Banfora to the Ivorian border in carriers belonging to the Burkinabe army and left at the banks of the Léraba River, which straddles the border due north of the city of Kong for about forty kilometres, before joining the larger Comoé
River, which flows southwards across Côte d’Ivoire into the Atlantic Ocean. At Comoé they waited from 3 until 9 a.m., when canoes arrived from the Ivorian side and transported them across. On the other side, trucks awaited them to bring the new recruits to the main training barracks in the North, in Korhogo, via a brief stop in the nearest rebel base, in Ferkéssédoubleu. Lucien claimed that Commander Fofié received them in person at the banks of the Léraba River.

After the first few days in Korhogo, the recruits were told that their initial “mission” was over and that they now had to decide for themselves whether they would stay on. The proposition was, of course, rhetorical: no one who had come this far would turn back before being sent into battle, and the rebels were unlikely to dish out the initial allowances and then let people simply return home. So Lucien, as his fellow recruits, stayed. The 100,000 FCFA a day allowances would obviously no longer apply but they were promised 500,000 FCFA at the end of their service and 1 million FCFA in compensation to their families, should they be killed in battle. As the other ex-combatants I met in Sarfalao, Lucien was awaiting the presidential elections in Côte d’Ivoire, saying that the 500,000 FCFA payment at the end of service would only be paid once the elections were held and the movement was able to demobilise its remaining troops. Lucien said that he couldn’t care less about the outcome of the presidential elections: whether Gbagbo or someone else would win it. But he believed that if the elections were fair, Gbagbo wouldn’t stand a chance, and “ADO” (Alassane Dramane Ouattara) would be the obvious winner. It was because of “ADO” that he and the others had joined the war in the first place, he said.

Contours of a Combatant Career
Initially, Lucien’s tasks had been to patrol Korhogo town, but he had been anxious to join the battle against Gbagbo and proceed towards Abidjan. His unit had finally left Korhogo to reinforce the rebel positions at Bouaké. But the situation in Bouaké was strained. They were only fed

72 According to Till Förster, Kouakou Martin Fofié was chief security officer of Korhogo between 2002 and 2005. He held more power in the city than the official commanders of the area Messamba Koné and Youssouf Diarrasouba and succeeded them also because of his popularity among the city’s youth (Förster 2012:13).

73 Based on the former rebels’ attitude towards the impunity of their former commanders in matters of remuneration, however, I doubt that they genuinely expected such large sums to materialise. In the few conversations I have had with them over the phone since the December 2010 elections they have not made a point out of not receiving any news from their former commanders.
once a day and often only ‘riz simple’: plain rice. Lucien said that the commanders didn’t even add salt or sugar to the rice, saying that the soldiers would be out chasing girls if they had too much salt. Within a few months, people began showing signs of malnourishment. Lucien said that people’s feet would swell up, and that if you ran your finger across the skin, it would leave a depression. They called this symptom ‘Biri biri’. Eventually Lucien and his unit were moved back to Korhogo and from there to Ferkessedougou to prepare for a move towards the southwest.

Once in Ferkessedougou, Lucien and three of his brothers in arms made friends with a local recruit who invited them to stay with him, rather than remain in the camp. After some time, their new friend introduced them to another rebel commander, Oumar Bâ, who was being sent to Man and needed men for his unit. They all agreed to leave with the newly formed unit, and arrived in Man, which was already occupied by the rebels. The Forces Nouvelles movement consisted of three groupings, the MPG, the MPIGO, and the MPCI, who eventually joined forces under the leadership of Guillaume Soro around the Linas-Marcoussis peace talks in January 2003. To Lucien, however, these groupings were present but fairly irrelevant to his combatant career. He held membership cards for all three groups, which he still kept, and moved from the alleged territory of one to the other without knowing, or without having to relate to any shift in authority other than on the level of individual commanders and unit leaders. In this way, Lucien moved from the heart of the MPCI in the north, through the MJP heartland in and around Man, into the home of the MPIGO movement around Danane in the west. Lucien was at this point part of the rebel frontline fighters, facing the Ivorian army and moving the frontline further south and west with each invaded town. After a successful attack on a town, Lucien’s unit would call for reinforcements and proceed once another unit arrived to secure the town.

Along this route, Lucien’s unit would fall under the authority of shifting commanders, who were in charge of different territories. Leaving Ferkessedougou under the leadership of Oumar Bâ, they had come under the command of Dô Félice, whose territory was around the Zou commune of Danane district. Dô and his collaborator, “Israël” were later killed for having provided intelligence to the Ivorian army, and Lucien claimed that his unit had been led into an ambush by Dô Félice. He had also favoured the Liberian fighters in their unit, supplying them with heavy weaponry while the others were left with a few handfuls of bullets.

On the mission that Lucien now believed had been a deliberate ambush he had been transported in a large truck, escorted by dozo hunters in smaller vans and pick-up trucks. Having faced heavy resistance, they had
turned back when they suddenly met Dô, who had stepped out of his car and asked them why they had turned back. He had implored them to return to the front and said that he had sent for reinforcements, but the fighters had refused. Finally, Dô had confiscated the truck and told them that if they wouldn’t fight, they would have to make it back to base on their own. They had been left with one small pick-up truck and had crammed so many people onto it that it eventually broke down and they were forced to continue on foot.

Back at the base in Man, the atmosphere had been tense, and an argument had erupted when Lucien and another Burkinabe realised that they had left a fellow Burkinabe behind at the front lines. They had insisted that their comrade be rescued, but the following day the entire area had been bombed from the air, and it had been impossible to leave. So they remained in Man. This had been an uncertain time, with a unit of the French forces patrolling between their position in Man and the Ivorian army. Despite these intermediaries, Ivorian forces made continuous attacks into rebel territory and plundered positions on the rebel side of the buffer zone. Given his interlocutor, Lucien chose his words with caution, saying that he couldn’t prove that the French had allowed the transgressions but that they had all known that something wasn’t right.

They had also been under pressure from Liberian fighters, who entered the area around Man in large trucks, which they loaded with cacao and brought back into Liberia. This transport was organised by a rebel commander called “Adame”. The Liberians had been heavily armed, and the rebels were forced to allow this illicit removal of resources that they themselves could have benefited from.

Approaching Desertion

The chronology of Lucien’s account is difficult to establish, and even more so to verify in relation to other sources, or the formal chronology of the conflict outlined above. He claimed to have been recruited well before the September 2002 attacks, but his identity card from the Forces Nouvelles Korhogo battalion is dated 2002, while there were no dates on the cards belonging to the three sub-groupings of the movement. We spent a significant amount of time trying to calculate the time he had spent in Côte d’Ivoire and arrived at an estimated time of recruitment in mid-2001. He

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74 It is not clear from the interview whether the man left behind was still alive, or a dead body that was to be buried and I did not consider this possibility until much later. As an example of the everyday concerns of a rebel fighter, these details would have enriched the narrative but are not vital for getting a sense of Lucien’s experiences and concerns.
said that he had been in Bouaké in the days after the 2002 attacks but that
the invasion – that marked the formal beginning of the war – had been
left to more experienced fighters. He added that it had only been Ivorians
who were allowed to invade Bouaké and that the Burkinabe fighters had
been dissatisfied. Their Ivorian comrades had been given free rein and had
used the city as their own playground – they just did it, ‘pour faire la belle
vie’: to have a party.

Lucien described the development of the plight and organization of the
fighting units as being one of gradual degradation. As the frontline’s pro-
gression was halted south of Man and Danane in the west, Lucien was
stationed at roadblocks along some of the main roads into rebel territory:
initially to secure the occupied territory but eventually to search for “infil-
trators” or spies who were feared to have integrated into the rebel move-
ment to provide the Gbagbo regime with intelligence about rebel posi-
tions and capacities. Lucien said that there were so many roadblocks that
you couldn’t take a walk without bumping into one and as lower ranking
rebels took charge, the main purpose of the roadblocks became to extrap-
olate money and other valuables from travellers. Passengers travelling
with Burkinabe papers were particularly ill treated, and this had pained
Lucien and made him doubt the sincerity of whole movement. Towards
the end of Lucien’s career as a rebel soldier, the roadblocks were manned
by nine soldiers in shifts of three days. During that time, Lucien relied on
what he could earn from the travellers passing through to pay for his sub-
sistence. Extolling pennies from fellow Burkinabes was not his idea of an
armed rebellion against the Gbagbo regime:

At the roadblocks … and … me, I’m Burkinabe. You often collect identity
papers like that, you’ll see parents, brothers, all that. Well, if, well … the
others anyway, if it’s the Ivorians, they cheat (trichent). They’ll say, “yeah,
the Malians there’d better give a thousand francs a piece. The Burkinabe,
five hundred a piece”. Others will say, “Ivorians, well, give 250”, like that.
Well, me I think all that, well, it’s not … it’s not good

Seeing the family names of Burkinabe travellers that were associated with
his own ethnic group made Lucien doubt the task he had been given. He
had joined the rebels, in part, to take part in the struggle against the
Gbagbo regime’s repression of Burkinabe immigrants in Côte d’Ivoire,
and now the rebels themselves were mistreating his social kinsmen. Man-
nning a roadblock was worse than risking one’s life on the frontline. The
combination of boredom and this less than honourable assignment made
him consider desertion. He thought of his parents back home, who were
expecting him to come home – as any successful migrant – with money
and presents at the end of his stay. He had to come to terms with the fact that a successful return seemed less likely by the day. His decision was made easier by his past experience as a carpenter and mason. Lucien was confident that he would, in fact, be able to make a better living in Bobo-Dioulasso than he did manning one of the innumerable roadblocks in the stagnated political landscape of the Ivorian crisis.

His decision to desert developed during a mission to Ouagadougou in 2007, where Lucien was part of the group protecting Guillaume Soro when he was appointed Prime Minister as a part of the Ouagadougou Political Accords peace agreement. On a visit at home after Guillaume Soro and his entourage had left by plane to Bouaké, Lucien’s father had persuaded him not to return to Côte d’Ivoire. He had said that the money didn’t matter, that they would manage together as a family.

Livelihood, Ideology, and Adventure as the Basis for Recruitment

As with the other former combatants I met in Sarfalao, Lucien was wary of having his past exposed to his friends and neighbours. At the same time, he took our conversations as an opportunity to reminisce about his life as a rebel soldier and was eager to show off his memorabilia and his connections to well-known rebel commanders, even in the presence of my assistant and other familiar faces. Despite this secrecy, the rebels’ violent pasts were already a public secret that people did not hesitate to discuss in private, and Lucien in particular had shared his stories with several others before my arrival in Sarfalao.

An important aspect of Lucien’s story is his status as a Burkinabe citizen in the armed rebel forces. Lucien was ordered to conceal all formal signs of that identity – identity papers and personal belongings that might expose him as Burkinabe – upon his recruitment in Bobo-Dioulasso. As the other rebel fighters I met, the plight of fellow Burkinabes in Côte d’Ivoire was a justification for why Lucien had joined the movement, giving his citizenship an ideological bearing on his recruitment. At the same time, the position of a Burkinabe fighter attacking the Gbagbo regime was at the heart of the ivoirité xenophobic rhetoric, through which even Ivorian citizens with foreign, or indeed northern, origins were perceived as strangers. In fact, both rebels and migrants agreed that the reifying, sedentarist logic of ivoirité was right in principle but that the persecution against Burkinabe citizens in Côte d’Ivoire violated the moral foundation of the contract implied by the transnational labour migration cycle. In this view, in terms of political rhetoric, the only real victims of the
simplistic rendering of Ivorian autochthony implied by *ivoirité* were Ivorian citizens perceived as strangers and denied their full citizen rights. This group was, of course, personified by Alassane Dramane Ouattara – the symbol of the injustice of the Gbagbo regime and the Burkinabe par excellence (cf. Hagberg & Bjarnesen 2011) – that informed Lucien’s reasons for becoming a rebel soldier.

**War Changes a Man**

Thierry was born in Côte d’Ivoire, in Bouaké in the centre of the country, to a Burkinabe father and an Ivorian mother. His father worked in the transportation business in Bouaké until his retirement in 2005. His employer was a white guy, Thierry impresses upon me. Thierry was 28 years old at the time of my fieldwork and had attended school in Bouaké until the ninth grade (3ème), by which time his studies were interrupted by what he referred to as ‘the crisis’. I asked Thierry to recall the first time he became aware of ‘the crisis’, and he described the imposition of a curfew following shootings in town in September 2002. They had thought that it was a strike by the police or military.

The curfew lasted for about a week, and then things calmed down. However, a week later, gunshots rang through the streets of Bouaké once more. Thierry had thought that it would be the same scenario as the week before, but this time it was a confrontation between rebel soldiers and the Ivorian army. It was a Sunday, and everyone was running through the streets, looking for cover. The fighting took place on the outskirts of town and ended with a victory for the rebels, who managed to take control. One of Thierry’s friends was killed on his way home during the fighting. He was stopped by Gbagbo’s mercenaries who had identified him as a Burkinabe from his ID papers. They had ordered him to undress and led him into the bush. A woman who had witnessed the incident informed Thierry and his friends, who immediately went out looking for him. It took a couple of days to find his body, which had already started to decompose. They had no way of finding a car to transport the body, so they borrowed a push cart and brought it home, to clean the corpse up before taking it to the morgue.

I asked him about the alleged mercenaries and Thierry told me that they were recognizable because of their uniforms, which were slightly different than Gbagbo’s soldiers. Everyone knew that they were Angolans, he claimed, based on their uniforms, berets, and weapons. A few days after his friend’s burial, Thierry’s father went to Burkina to visit his family.
The border was closed at that time, and he had passed through Ghana to enter the country. It was during his father’s absence that Thierry had decided to join the rebel forces. He said that he was worried that Gbagbo’s men would avenge their defeat and return to kill all the Burkinabes, including his own family.

Thierry and Lucien had been in the same camp, and had come to realize that they both had their origins in Burkina Faso. Thierry said that there was a large group of Burkinabe recruits among the rebels. I asked him if he was asked to discard of his identity papers indicating his Burkinabe origins through his last name and his father’s village of origin, but he said that he had been too young to hold proper identity papers when he joined the rebels, and only had his student card (carte scolaire). He told me that it was easy to enlist. In fact, the rebels were forcefully conscripting young men in and around Bouaké, so joining voluntarily was quickly done. They had trained for about a week before they were given guns and uniforms, and sent out to different bases around the rebel-held territory. Thierry’s father returned to Bouaké a few days later and had summoned his son to demand an explanation for his enlistment. Thierry had argued that he was acting to defend their family, but his father would have none of it. Thierry had returned to the base without settling the argument with his father. A few days later he was sent out on his first mission – to seize the town of Touba, near the Guinean border in the west, which was held by Angolan mercenaries. He had seen his mother before he left, and she had given him her blessings. Unlike his father, she understood his motivation for taking up arms.

They descended from the truck outside of Touba. The senior officers gave them unspecified narcotics; “things” (trucs) that made them brave. In this case, it was a potion that was mixed in a large pot in the barracks. It was so pungent that you had to hold your breath while you drank it. They were told to apply the potion to their skin as well and that this would make them impenetrable to bullets. They had taken Touba. Thierry stayed in camp in Touba for two months. The rebels were bored and unruly, and during one quarrel two rebels injured each other with gunshot. At one point Thierry was also shot in the foot by one of his comrades. He had thought that if they remained in camp much longer, they would begin killing each other. A few weeks later they were sent to Man further south, one of the most unstable places in the Ivorian crisis, to push back “the Angolans” once more. Once again the rebels descended from their trucks outside of town and prepared to attack. But this time the enemy had been warned and was positioned on the hills surrounding the town. They had allowed Thierry and his group to advance and then closed
an ambush behind them. The combat had lasted more than twenty-four hours. Eventually, the rebels began sneaking out through the enemy lines. Many had left their weapons behind. They had been forced to march the whole way back to Touba, a walk of about 90 kilometres.

Back in Touba, the rebel commanders had called for the aid of Liberian mercenaries, who knew the area much better and were better trained and equipped. They had led the next attack on Man, with Thierry’s unit as backup. It was around that time that Thierry’s mother received news that Thierry had been killed in battle during the ambush in Man. Thierry was unaware of the rumour when he returned to Bouaké on leave, following the successful attack on Man. His family had been relieved to learn that he was all right, but they were unable to convince Thierry to abandon his combatant career.

After his leave of absence, Thierry re-joined his group in Man, and proceeded from there to Danane. He was appointed ‘chef de poste’ under ComZone Traoré, with the responsibility of collecting levies at a roadblock outside town. Initially, the roadblocks were installed to control vehicles, not to collect money. The rebels on guard were paid 10,000 FCFA per day and were in no hurry to menace passengers for petty change. Once the salaries dried out, they began collecting money from travellers as compensation. After a few months, he was sent back to Bouaké, to join the Camp Peloton de Bouaké under the leadership of ComZone Ouattao, or “Camp Ouattao”, as the camp was usually called. His group would pass the time playing football against another unit, belonging to Cherif Ousmane, but the friendly rivalry on the football field turned serious after a fall-out between the two commanders, and the two groups began fighting each other in the camp. Several fighters were killed but eventually the two leaders settled their differences, and the victims were buried in Korhogo, during the celebration of the onset of the rebellion in 2002, on 19 September 2004 (see also Ouattara 2008, Hellweg 2011).

In 2005 Thierry took leave to accompany his father to Bobo-Dioulasso to visit their relatives. Once in Burkina, his parents told him that they intended to remain here, and they soon moved into a rented house in Sarfalao. Thierry had thought that he would return after a month but he appreciated the calm pace of life in the non-loti and his father, intent on persuading him to leave the rebels, had provided him the opportunity of working as a driver for Sofitex, one of Burkina Faso’s leading cotton-processing companies.

He accepted the job without having made up his mind about the future and began earning a little money. He gradually realized that it would make no sense to go back to war and risk his life. He found an even better
job with another company, through one of his former rebel commanders who now lived in hiding in Bobo-Dioulasso, and made a steady income as a driver of his own truck. He had never really articulated the decision to desert – and claimed that his friends still called him from Bouaké, asking him to return to camp. To avoid their questions he just made up stories about familial duties or other reasons for staying on in Burkina. He imagined that his name was still called out at roll call in ‘Camp Ouattao’ in Bouaké every morning.

War changes a man, Thierry said. Seeing so many dead bodies. Seeing yourself search a corpse for money and valuables. Angolans would often carry 50,000 or more in cash. Thierry seemed to be haunted by the memories of war, much more so than the other rebels I met in Sarfalao. As we shall see in the following chapter, his personal trauma led him to drink abusively, which in turn affected his relationship with his parents and his reputation in the neighbourhood.

From Wartime Empowerment to Peacetime Displacement

This section narrates the experience of return of a Burkinabe rebel who had lived in Sarfalao non-loti for several years prior to his recruitment. Those who joined the rebel movement from Sarfalao and spent between two and five years as soldiers in Côte d’Ivoire might be expected to be most literally “returning home”. And yet, the most acute sense of social displacement was perhaps felt by the returning rebel soldiers I encountered.

The nickname, “bandit”, of Idrissa, a quiet and slim man in his thirties, goes a long way in accounting for his social positioning in neighbourhood upon his return from a long and eventful fighting career in Côte d’Ivoire. Idrissa explained that he had been recruited in Bobo-Dioulasso, following his failed attempt to enlist in the Burkinabe army. He had done well at the try-outs but had failed to provide the 25,000 FCFA fee required for inscription. Two months after the try-outs, he had been contacted by men claiming to be army personnel who were looking for recruits for a mission in Côte d’Ivoire. They had said that the reward for a completed mission would be a permanent employment in the Burkinabe army and that he would be serving his country by taking the mission. Unlike the other ex-combatants I met in Sarfalao, Idrissa was adamant that he had enlisted in the rebel movement on these terms and that the promise of a considerable
financial gain and the adventurous life of a soldier had nothing to do with it.

But in addition, Idrissa’s insistence on his noble motivations for becoming a rebel soldier spoke to the way he had been received in the neighbourhood upon his return:

When I left over there [Côte d’Ivoire] to come [back home], I noticed something in … the old pals that I went with before … I noticed something. Even if they are ten, standing. If I alone, I approach them to stand among the ten … within some five minutes like that, I will see just about two persons next to me, plus me three, or just me and someone else … two. Other than that, those other nine there [whistles] they’re gone. When I noticed that too, I am guarded towards everyone. I don’t talk to anyone. I don’t visit people as one should. We meet on the road, we greet, we pass, that’s it. I have no friends. I have no girlfriends. So, I stay like that.

In face of his neighbours’ denunciation, he had decided to “be guarded” (se méfier) towards everyone. He did the same thing towards me, he said calmly, while looking me straight in the eyes, an unfamiliar gesture during my time in Burkina. He did not speak to people as he would before the war. The only person he had told about his time in Côte d’Ivoire was his childhood friend Dédé, no one else. Once he realised how Burkinabes fighting in Côte d’Ivoire were perceived at home, he had made preparations to return. Of course, he did not deny that his life as a soldier had been privileged in many ways and that he had gained access to resources and luxuries he had never before seen. But he now viewed the material advantages of inscription as immoral, and those who continued to indulge in that life style as weak and apathetic:

Everyone was searching [for wealth] in it [the war]. Those who are clever … they cleared out. And those who have nothing to do: who don’t know what to do with their lives, they are still in it. Harassing people … If I liked the easy life, I would still be over there. I was … well fed, well dressed, and then well equipped. Life doesn’t exceed that but … you have to search for tomorrow.

Like the other ex-combatants I met, Idrissa felt that his commanders had lost sight of the movement’s cause and were now simply “harassing people” at the ubiquitous roadblocks, as well as in the increasing armed robberies and car-jackings in Northern Côte d’Ivoire since the signing of the 2007 peace agreements. This sentiment contributed to his perception of rebel life as immoral and self-indulgent. Although he might have argued that enlisting had been a “clever” choice in order to provide for himself,
Idrissa now perceived the “easy life” of being a soldier as being without prospects, as being indulgent and only serving the present. He saw himself as better than that, with more capabilities to take care of himself, as opposed to those remaining “over there” as soldiers who he believed remained out of a lack of other options.

Idrissa was able to make sense of his sense of exclusion in the neighbourhood upon his return from Côte d’Ivoire, while at the same time articulating a way forward for himself, instead of succumbing to apathy and desperation, as we saw in the case of Thierry. In our last recorded interview, Idrissa had a much clearer and more convinced perception of the relationship between the different sides to his experiences and their consequences:

Once that I myself I knew that we are not even liked by our [Burkinabe] authorities, especially the gendarmes, so me, I … tried to remove myself. Of this employment. An employment that holds no future. I’m not in it. That’s why me too I looked to come and move in here … I have come, I want to try to practise my trade as well … I will not be ordered around by someone else.

Being aware of the Burkinabe authorities’ wariness towards the presence of a considerable number of ex-combatants, Idrissa was articulating a prospect for himself as a good citizen who would provide for himself through an honest trade – he said that he was trained as both a welder and a mason – rather than relying on his connections or skills as a rebel soldier. As it turned out, Idrissa was hired by the largest security company in Bobo-Dioulasso, but he insisted that he had said nothing of his past as a high-ranking security officer in Côte d’Ivoire:

Me myself I don’t want the label rebel … “rebel” … to be stuck to my … stuff … documents. No no no. So, wherever I go, tsk tsk, maybe it’s … people who will come and ask me is it that I was in the rebellion, other than that, it’s not me, my mouth that will say that. Because I don’t want … their label. Yeah. For it to be in my records. The word “rebel” … it’s a bad omen. It’s a bad omen.

Despite his reference to his own agency in turning his back on his rebel past, a sense of exclusion underlies this quote. While many of Idrissa’s reflections posited himself as strong and independent enough to resist the “easy life” of the rebellion and return to the honest hard work in Burkina Faso, he spoke of the word “rebel” being imposed upon him, it being “their label”. In this quote “their” refers to potential employers, judging
him to be undeserving of a job, but also to the authorities, and in a broader sense to the Burkinabe public in general. In his everyday life, his sense of exclusion was primarily felt in relation to his neighbours and former “pals” in Sarfalao.

Spiritual and Parental Protection in Battle

At the end of his service in Côte d’Ivoire, Idrissa had returned to his paternal village, to which his father had also returned recently, following his retirement as a pilot. He had asked his commander for a week’s leave of absence to attend to his father who was ill, and had extended that leave to another week and so on. Finally he had stopped calling in and when his commander sent someone to bring him back he had refused. He had spent some time in his father’s village, helping him cultivate. His parents, both Lobi farmers from the east, had moved to the city in 1987, when Idrissa was five years old, and built the family courtyard in Sarfalao loti that now housed a considerable part of his father’s family.

Upon his return, he had explained what he had been through to his parents. He would not have been able to live with them if he did not act as a son should, but it was also a way of lowering their expectations regarding his ability to provide for them. Furthermore, his mother had worried for him while he was away. During his first mission in Côte d’Ivoire, a rumour had reached his parents that his entire unit had been killed in battle, as had been the case for Thierry’s family. His father had refused to believe the story but his mother had mourned his death. Once Idrissa became aware of the rumours – from a fellow Lobi who had been shocked to meet him in the rebel headquarters in Korhogo – he made plans to return to his family. When he arrived in the village, his aunt had dropped an entire stack of plates on the ground in shock, and it took some time before she believed that it was actually him and not a living dead (revenant).

He had made the obligatory rounds to all the elders of the village and explained that he had not been killed in battle. He had brought a little cash to give at each home he visited and done everything that was expected of him as a returning migrant. Once he began preparing to go back to camp, his mother had objected. But through Idrissa’s eloquence, she had eventually accepted and given him her blessings: “My son, go even if it rains. The bullets falling like raindrops, you will make it … alive. I haven’t told you that you will not be hurt but you shall not die on the battlefield”. The day he was wounded in battle he had remembered his mother’s words. Idrissa claimed that he had been wounded from less than
six metres, his adversary emptying an entire round clip at him but only hitting him with a single shot. Thirty bullets. He had been massively protected that day. In addition to the blessings of his parents, and the many amulets that he always carried, filled with powerful “medicine”, he carried a bible in his pocket. He had found the bible in a burning house in Ferkessédougou, while assisting in salvaging the furniture and personal belongings of its residents. When he saw the bible among the flames, he knew that it would be a potent charm. The medics who had attended to his wound had said that it must indeed have been the will of God that had kept him alive that day.

I asked Idrissa how he related to the other ex-combatants in the neighbourhood:

Well, since we went over there, it’s like we’re in the same sack. I shouldn’t cut my ties with them. To say that I will go to their house or that they come visiting me at home, no! No no no. Me myself, I have forbidden that. With everyone. Yeah.

JB: Why?

Because, me I know myself. Them, I don’t know them … I don’t want someone to … (…) do damage somewhere and then he will come and get me mixed into it … in his deeds. That’s why I prohibit them at my house and I have … made … eh … I have … I am guarded towards them, you know. It’s … quite simply that. Because at present, there, me myself I know that … we who went over there, we are being watched (…) We are being watched.

Again, Idrissa’s sense of being watched is stated with reference to a specific actor, the authorities, keeping track of former rebels who are seen as potential delinquents. But at the same time, his attitude of “being guarded” relates to both his brothers in arms and to his neighbours, giving the sentiment of being watched a more general ring. This feeling of being watched and on guard is not uncommon among former combatants in uncertain surroundings (see e.g. Christensen 2007). Being guarded is Idrissa’s response to a general sense of being observed at a distance, by the authorities that may cause him serious problems and by his neighbours and former friends who share the state’s view of him as a bad seed, a potential wrongdoer.

Idrissa’s sense of displacement upon his return to Sarfalao was both related to his reception in the neighbourhood as well as the broken promises of his recruiters, who had told him that his services in Côte d’Ivoire would be rewarded with a post in the Burkinabe army: ‘Had I known,
that it was a lie, ah, that I would become an enemy of my ... country, of the community, I wouldn’t have gone over there [to Côte d’Ivoire]. Because ... I don’t want to be an enemy of the community’. He told me that it was not only the Burkinabe authorities who were now hostile towards the former combatants, who were feared to have been turned into violent vigilantes that would pose a threat to their home communities. Back in his house in Sarfalao, he had noticed his neighbours’ hostility as well. If he approached a group of ten jeunes talking, nine of them would get up and leave, he exemplified. People blamed the rebels for the war in Côte d’Ivoire, he said, and most of all for the suffering and impoverishment it had caused on this side of the border. Things here were much worse than before the war, he admitted.

Once a Rebel, Always a Rebel

Lucien seemed to me to be the most reintegrated of the former rebels I knew. He had started up a business of selling grilled pork on the border between the two parts of Sarfalao, and also found work as a painter and a carpenter at building sites around town. His wife gave birth to their fourth child in July 2010, and as he sat outside his family’s compound on the main street leading through Sarfalao loti, he would greet and chat with friends and neighbours passing by, giving the impression of someone in his right element, truly à l’aise, as most people would express it in the neighbourhood. As the pig theft-episode recounted in Chapter 3 showed, however, Lucien was keenly aware that he was seen by his neighbours as untrustworthy and potentially dangerous because of his violent past. Everyone had seemed ready to believe that Lucien was the culprit in the theft of two pigs from a competing pork vendor, and he felt betrayed even by his closest friends, who took part in spreading rumours about how he would have orchestrated his alibi and chosen his accomplice. Lucien echoed Idrissa’s words in telling me that he had to guard himself (se méfier) towards his neighbours and not trust in anyone but his own family.

The time of the theft coincided with the first time I observed Lucien’s friendliness towards another former combatant who was said to have gone mad in Côte d’Ivoire and who roamed the neighbourhood begging for food and loose change. As we sat in front of Lucien’s family compound in the late afternoon, contemplating the circumstances of the theft he was being accused of, a dilapidated figure in a worn army jacket and ashen skin approached us with a haunted look in his eyes. Lucien took his time to tell me who he was before addressing him in the way that you
would a child: he smiled but spoke in a slightly commanding or patronising tone of voice. Jean-Baptiste, known to everyone as “JB”, responded and offered me his hand in greeting, but was clearly unsettled by my presence. Lucien told him to go inside and ask his brother for some food. As JB disappeared inside the courtyard, Lucien told me that they had been in the same unit in Korhogo, and that JB had been afraid to go outside and mostly stayed in the barracks when the others went on patrol. Lucien had known JB in Sarfalao before their recruitment as well, and said that he had always been a bit strange. But it was all the drugs in Korhogo that had made him lose it, Lucien added. JB had been sent home eventually, but his family had refused to take him in, and he now lived alone in the ruin of a collapsed house in the non-loti. In what I understood as a reflection on the accusations against him, Lucien said that even though most people made fun of JB, they were still brothers in arms, and he felt a responsibility for JB’s well-being. He told me that JB would come by often to receive food or loose change from Lucien. We went inside and found JB frantically filling his pockets with uncooked rice and other items from the part of the courtyard that was used for preparing food. Lucien laughed and told JB to put the things back. He would give him a coin instead if he obeyed. JB mumbled a sequence of obscenities but complied and received his reward and a plate of food.

As JB left, Lucien told me that many of the returning rebels had been traumatised. He mentioned our common acquaintances, Ambroise and Thierry, who were both known as unpredictable drunkards, and said that people here saw all rebels that way. The theft incident had proven to him that he would always be seen as a rebel. His return to Sarfalao had been a return to a transformed social terrain. Not so much because of his violent experiences in combat – as one would think of in relation to the American war veterans after the Vietnam War, for example, and as several of Lucien’s brothers in arms were sad examples of in Sarfalao – but rather because his social position had been dramatically altered by his neighbours’ perceptions of his choice to enlist in the Forces Nouvelles movement. Following Stephen Lubkemann’s definition of ‘displacement’ as, ‘…the transformation of lifescapes in ways that render essential life projects harder to achieve and that, in the extreme, place life strategies at risk of ultimate failure’ (Lubkemann 2008:193), the hostility that both Idrissa and Lucien experienced from their neighbours may be understood as such a transformation.

The disorientation of having to reassess a social terrain that was once so familiar made both men suspicious of their surroundings and motivated them to guard themselves in the company of others. Although the
psychological trauma of armed combat may be part of the reason for their feeling of unease, both Lucien and Idrissa face the tangible hostility of their neighbours, which makes the achievement of their essential life projects harder to achieve. In contrast to other former combatants, who exploit their experience in war to further new careers as security guards, mercenaries, or drug traffickers, Idrissa and Lucien only discussed their violent past with outsiders and preferred to look for more conventional occupations in the neighbourhood. Like Thierry, they both preferred to keep their past secret to their neighbours, but failed famously because of the efficacy of gossip and the pathos of their experiences.

**Conclusion**

This case study of rebel returns may seem to relate to a different set of questions and experiences than the previous chapters, but the structural differences between transnational families and rebels serve to clarify the equally important similarities with regard to subjective experiences of displacement. Despite their much shorter absence from Burkina Faso, and their more unequivocal socio-spatial commitments to Sarfalao, the returning rebels faced similar impediments to the pursuit of a meaningful life and a sense of belonging to that of the migrant families. Contrary to their own expectations, the returning rebels arrived in a radically transformed social terrain in which they also struggled to find their bearings. These social transformations werefelt through their neighbours’ moral judgements of the young men’s choice to join the *Forces Nouvelles* rebel movement. Being excluded from everyday social interactions and suspected of immoral behaviour in the neighbourhood were external signs of a more fundamental transformation in their access to long-established social networks, obliging returning rebels to rely more closely on their kin and personal resourcefulness.

In the case of Idrissa and Lucien, the question of belonging was obviously never posed in national terms, but rather in relation to their social standing or reputation in Sarfalao. Their violent past as *Forces Nouvelles* soldiers in Côte d’Ivoire was seen as an immoral and self-serving choice.

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75 Idrissa did in fact work as a watchman but insisted that he had not disclosed his combatant past to his employers, nor relied on his commanders’ social networks for the connection. In response to my repeated questioning, he did admit that his employers may have been able to recognize his military training in his behaviour and vocabulary, but I believe that he did see his affiliation with the *Forces Nouvelles* as a disadvantage, despite the nature of his work tasks as a watchman.
rather than a heroic effort to counter the aggression facing Burkinabe citizens in the Ivorian crisis, they themselves tried to evoke in their narratives. In that sense, the returning rebels were perceived by their neighbours as having engaged in an immoral form of labour migration, leading to their stigmatization as unreliable and potentially dangerous, much in the same way as dozo hunters are generally seen as powerful, yet potentially dangerous social actors.

There seemed to be no forced inscription in the experience of these fighters. But the return to Burkina Faso, on the other hand, was seen as a shocking reception into a community they expected would understand, if not appreciate, their motives for joining the fighting. After all, the official denunciations of the violence by President Blaise Compaoré and other leaders in Burkina were echoed in the general concern for the plight of the Burkinabe citizens in Côte d'Ivoire, who were not only caught in the midst of armed fighting but targeted by militias loyal to Laurent Gbagbo, as greedy invaders of the wealthier neighbour. This symbolism was personified by Alassane Dramane Ouattara, who had been Prime Minister under Houphouët-Boigny. But the symbolism of unjust persecution of Burkinabe nationals in Côte d'Ivoire did not benefit the fighters upon their return to Burkina Faso. On the contrary, returning combatants were perceived by other residents as immoral and self-indulgent “bandits” who went to kill for money and were (partly) responsible for the onslaught of financial instability and considerable waves of refugees.

Despite the significant differences with regard to the forms and circumstances, in terms of their reception in Burkina Faso, there were important similarities between the two types of Burkinabe migration to Côte d'Ivoire considered – the long-established labour migration of individuals and families, on the one hand, and the recruitment of young fighters into the rebel forces during the build-up to the attempted coup d'état in September 2002, on the other. The migrant families were part of a long-standing circular labour migration regime, and had in many ways done what was expected of them in leaving home in their youth to search for work in Côte d'Ivoire. The young fighters, on the other hand, often left on their own initiative – against the will of their parents – in search for personal fortune and adventure. Upon their return to Burkina Faso, however, both types of migrants faced the scepticism of their non-migrant neighbours, which made the notion of "coming home" ring false in the ears of many.

In this way, rebel recruitment may be approached as a form of labour migration, as Hoffman argues in his recent analysis of war and work in relation to the Sierra Leonian and Liberian civil wars:
To fight was not so much to take on the enemy as to take up a labor, to work. One might do so at the behest of a patron or under duress, and one might do so as part of a political project and with a real sense of grievance. These are not mutually exclusive. But what is clear is that an understanding of the violence rooted primarily in a desire to fix and expunge the enemy does not account for the labors of this particular conflict (Hoffman 2011:41)

In other words, the perception of a combatant career as fundamentally different from that of a plantation worker or a migrant working in Abidjan’s informal sector may relate more to normative preconceptions about morally appropriate forms of labour than to the motivations for engaging in war, and the material and social effects of this engagement (see also Elwert 1999). In this sense, the juxtaposition between ‘violence as a mode of production’ (Hoffmann 2011:6), on the one hand, and labour migration, on the other, is similar to the difference between ‘labour’ and ‘work’ in the Comaroffs’ study ‘The Madman and the Migrant: Work and Labour in the Historical Consciousness of South African People’ (1987). Their exploration of ‘modern Tshidi consciousness’ identified labour/work as a ‘root contrast’ where labour signified the asocial wage labour imported by colonialism and where ‘[w]ork, in short, is a positive aspect of human activity, and is expressed in the making of self and others in the course of everyday life’ (Comaroff & Comaroff 1987:197). Interestingly, it is exactly the wage labour regime of French colonial administration that lies at the core of what would be considered ‘positive human action’ in opposition to the ‘asocial wage labour’ implied by a career as a mercenary. A similar understanding of the motivations for participating in armed conflict can be found in studies of the involvement of *dozo* hunters in the Ivorian conflict (Bassett 2004:36, Hagberg & Ouattara 2010).
7. Intergenerational Dynamics in Transnational Families

On a cloudy Wednesday morning, just as the rush of residents leaving Sarfalao non-loti on their way to the city had receded, an elderly woman with a walking stick and a headscarf walks briskly through the neighbourhood in the opposite direction. She arrives at the courtyard of a family who came to Burkina Faso from their plantations outside Daloa in Côte d’Ivoire, and after the obligatory introductions and greetings, the old woman announces that she has come to bring her granddaughter back home with her and that she will not leave until she can do so. Perplexed by the arrival of a woman she has never met, Mariame calls her oldest son, Drissa, whom the old woman has identified as responsible for an evolving family drama.

Drissa’s childhood friend from Daloa, Xavier, moved to Dédougou in Burkina Faso in 2001, in order to continue his schooling. He now works as a teacher there. Xavier usually stays with Drissa and his family when he visits Bobo-Dioulasso, and on one such occasion, he had been introduced to Justine, the great niece of the old woman who now sits determinedly on a wooden stool in front of Mariame. Justine and Xavier had exchanged phone numbers and had kept in touch for several years over the phone since their initial meeting. A year prior to this Wednesday morning’s encounter, Xavier had asked Drissa to accompany him to Justine’s uncle, where she had been living since her own father’s death. The uncle was in Côte d’Ivoire at the time, tending to his considerable land ownings there and his mother, the old woman, had received the two young men in his place. Xavier had informed Justine’s grandmother of his intentions to marry Justine, and asked the old woman’s permission to bring her granddaughter with him to Dédougou for a brief visit. The old woman had, given Drissa’s distant kinship with her, agreed. The old woman now informs Mariame that her granddaughter has been away for more than two weeks and that Drissa is responsible for bringing her back home, immediately!

It will require weeks of diplomatic negotiations between the two families to appease the old woman, and much longer before the young couple
will be able to even consider their plans of marrying and moving to Dé-
dougou. Drissa will face the anger of his own parents as well as of Justine’s uncle for his responsibility in brokering the meeting of the young couple. Interactions within and across extended families are central to everyday practice in Sarfalao, as it is in most other places. The ways in which such exchanges unfold in this particular context, however, illustrate how ideas of relatedness and family obligations are articulated across the Burkina Faso–Côte d’Ivoire transnational space, and how the reconfigurations of families in the context of the Ivorian crisis influence and challenge these fundamental notions of kinship and intergenerational commitments.

Through the accounts of intergenerational interactions in Sarfalao, this chapter explores the implications of these new challenges of adaptation and integration for the renegotiations of familial roles and hierarchies. Living as a migrant family, generally under harsher material conditions, shaped the expectations of parents towards their adult children and intensified intergenerational tensions. At the same time, as young adult children struggled to find employment and their parents counted their options and hoped to build new social networks, migrant families were, as it were, forced together by circumstance and in some cases built new bonds of trust and respect out of their interdependence. Sometimes parents and children were able to collaborate and provide for the family’s subsistence by pooling their earnings – including the provision of schooling for the youngest children – in other cases, the pressure split migrant families apart, or resulted in the intergenerational power balance tipping in favour of either the child(ren) or the parents. By oscillating between the perspectives of parents and young adult children, the chapter analyses intergenerational relations in everyday practice and reflects upon the perceived changes and challenges of living as a migrant – and sometimes transnational – family and how these experiences relate more generally to our understanding of intergenerational relations and youth in Africa.

Understanding Intergenerational Dynamics

Youth is seen as an ambiguous position in many African societies, in terms of social norms, political structures, and economic possibilities\(^\text{76}\), as

was observed already in earlier anthropological works on life stage progression and kinship structures (e.g. Evans-Pritchard 1940, Fortes 1959, 1969a, b, Goody 1971 [1958], 1989, Ottenberg 1971). Recent works have shown that the position of youth should be understood as an actively constructed, and negotiable, social position rather than a fixed age or generational grouping (cf. Bucholtz 2002, Christiansen, Utas, and Vigh 2006, Cole 2004, Cole & Durham 2007, Durham 2000, Honwana & De Boeck 2005, Vigh 2006a). Youth implies a hierarchical position as junior in relation to someone senior, a socially vulnerable position characterised by the lack of influence and independence. In these works, young Africans are actively trying to escape this position by searching for employment opportunities, connections to influential and powerful patrons, by achieving different socially recognised roles through religious piety or political success, and the like (see also Bjarnesen 2007). In this sense, the literature on African youth focuses on individual social action: people do what they can to progress to a more desirable social position that is often understood in generational terms.

As early as the 1930s, the studies of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute documented radical changes in the employment opportunities in the Copperbelt region of present-day Zambia, turning generational structures upside-down as fathers became dependent on the wage their sons were earning in the copper mines (Alber, van der Geest, and Reynolds Whyte 2008, see also Berry 1985). This highlighted the ‘… “intergenerational contract”, that is, the implicit expectation that parents will care for their children until they can care for themselves, and that children will support their parents when they can no longer support themselves’ (Reynolds Whyte, Alber & Van der Geest 2008:7).

When changing labour conditions offered young people the possibility of becoming financially independent from their seniors at a relatively early age, the criteria for achieving seniority, or social adulthood, were tested. This transformation of the labour market challenged the first premise of the generational contract: that parents should care for their children – not because children were better able to care for themselves but because it rendered fathers dependent on their sons, thereby placing them in the socially inferior position traditionally taken by their children. At the same time, as Claudia Roth has argued in her study of intergenerational relations in Bobo-Dioulasso, the inability of young adult children to provide for their ageing parents in the context of economic decline and receding employment opportunities posed a challenge to the second premise of the generational contract: that adult children should care for their ageing parents (Roth 2008:52). This inversion of the generational contract speci-
fied what is often alluded to as the blocked social mobility of African youth: the inability to achieve independence from one’s parents and establish one’s own network of dependants. Hence, the generational competition is not merely over power or privileges but much more fundamentally about how society ought to be structured. When structural conditions make it difficult to live up to the moral obligations of the intergenerational contract, or when specific actors challenge the structure by refusing to abide by its rules, the vision of what these rules ought to be is challenged. This chapter explores the challenges to and affirmations of the intergenerational contract on the level of individual families or households, rather than on a societal level, thereby continuing the analysis of the unequal and sometimes idiosyncratic distribution of social displacement in the context of the Ivorian crisis. The following section discusses the experiences of two young adults whose migrant trajectories had led them to strikingly different positions within their families in Sarfalao.

Gendered Inversions of the Intergenerational Contract

Hélène – a de facto household head in Sarfalao, who was also known as “Mama” – was born in Douékoué in southwestern Côte d’Ivoire. Her parents originated from the Gaoua region in southwestern Burkina Faso, near the Ghanaian and Ivorian borders. Her five siblings were also born in Côte d’Ivoire. One of her two brothers had remained in Côte d’Ivoire when the family moved to Burkina Faso, living with one of his paternal uncles. Hélène became the de facto head of household at the age of 19 because of her mother’s inability to provide for the family.

Having arrived in Burkina Faso for the first time in 2002, at the age of 14, Hélène had initially thought of her stay as an occasion to get to know her origins and her grandparents whom she had never met. As a Lobi, she said, the custom was for the firstborn child to learn of her origins, and she had stayed with her paternal uncle in his village while her father returned to tend to his plantation in Côte d’Ivoire. Her father returned the following year, bringing Hélène’s mother and four of her siblings. The family moved into the two-room mudbrick house in Sarfalao which Hélène’s father had been building for several years before the war. In 2006, her father died suddenly, leaving the family destitute. His land passed to his brother, since women were not allowed to inherit from their husbands,
and Hélène’s uncle had proved unwilling to share the income from the plantation with his brother’s widow.

Hélène’s mother was now rumoured to have promiscuous relations with several men in the neighbourhood, and brawls were frequent in the family’s courtyard. Although the mother’s boyfriends sometimes provided her with gifts and small amounts of money, Hélène claimed that they rarely benefited the children, and she was obliged to work full-time in a small coffee shop (kiosque) in another part of town while attending evening classes to continue her schooling. Her mother was often absent for days and weeks at a time, leaving Hélène to care for her siblings. Although Hélène was wary of criticizing her mother in public, she conceded tearfully, ‘I don’t know what God has wanted to show me with all this’, referring to the loss of her father, her mother’s neglect, and the gradual deterioration of her family’s plight.

One Friday morning at dawn, the otherwise collected and timid Hélène reached her limit and put her frustrations on full display in the neighbourhood. According to the rumours circulating in the days that followed, Hélène’s mother had come home at dawn from a night of drinking with a new boyfriend and had stumbled into the house and awoken the children. Hélène, who had been left alone with her siblings for several days yet again, had grabbed a broom and proceeded to evict the drunken couple from the courtyard, shouting at the top of her lungs for all the neighbours to witness the state of her mother and telling her to stay away this time and leave her to take care of the family. The incident was generally seen as an embarrassment to Hélène’s mother and a testament to the strength and maturity of Hélène. Despite her young age, she had – reluctantly – taken her mother’s place as the responsible adult. It was her calm demeanour and overwhelming responsibility that earned her the nickname “Mama” among her friends in the neighbourhood, referring to her position as similar to the social maturity associated with motherhood.

While Hélène’s situation illustrates the intergenerational scale tipping towards the child, Thierry – whose experiences as a rebel soldier in Côte d’Ivoire were discussed in the previous chapter – was struggling to retain some respect and influence in his family. At the age of 28 he was known to his neighbours as a drunkard and a liar, and his background as a rebel fighter added to his image as an unreliable and immoral person. His father had gone back to Côte d’Ivoire after the family moved to Burkina Faso in 2005, and as the oldest child and only son Thierry was expected to take the role as acting head of household while his mother attended to his younger siblings and her new-born grandchild. His father’s remittanc-
es from Côte d'Ivoire ensured the family's plight, which in principle facilitated Thierry's task of assuming responsibility in his absence. But although his father's connections had provided him with an attractive job in the city centre, his taste for dolo beer and late nights in the local bars (cabarets) was jeopardizing his employment as well as his standing in the neighbourhood and in his own family.

Thierry's father visited regularly and would scold his adult son for not taking better care of the family. Thierry's friends said that his drinking tended to get worse once his father left and Thierry would appear angry and aggressive, and embark on long rants about the courage required of a soldier and the experience of taking another life. On one of his father's visits, Thierry introduced me at their home in Sarfalao, in part, perhaps, to impress his father with having befriended a white, European university student. As we sat down in the family courtyard, however, Thierry's father began to lament the war in Côte d'Ivoire and what it had done to their family. His regret soon turned to his oldest son and the state Thierry had been in since he had left the rebels. Clearly discomfited by the situation, Thierry began smiling nervously, shifting on his wooden stool and looking away. His father continued to describe to me how Thierry had been visibly influenced by drugs when he came to see his parents in Bouaké between missions. He said that Thierry had been a very good student and had a good head on his shoulders but that the war had ruined him and made him unfit to care for his family. Thierry endured his father's disdain but was in a drunken rage when I caught up with him later that afternoon.

Many men in Thierry's age would have been well on the way to establishing themselves as respectable adults, had they been able to acquire the kind of employment that allowed Thierry to treat his friends to dolo beer night after night in the local cabarets. But Thierry's rare privilege of being steadily employed was not enough to win the respect of his parents or his peers. Thierry's transnational family required him to take responsibility and assume his absent father's authority — a role he was unable to assume because of his unpredictable temperament, his selfish use of his earnings, and his reckless consumption of alcohol. In the many cases where fathers had remained in Côte d'Ivoire, this new transnational configuration of the family placed significant pressure on young adult sons who were expected — and indeed aspired — to take the responsibility as acting head of household. Obviously, as in Hélène's case, the absence of one parent also affected young adult daughters — either placing the same demands on them as on young adult sons or posing them against their older — or, indeed, younger — brothers who attempted to take over the role as the family's
father figure. The lone mothers faced not only the pressure of providing for their children in the absence of remittances from their husband, or contributions from their young adult children, but also the stigmatisation as promiscuous by her neighbours. Although the role as de facto head of household in the absence of a migrant husband was socially well established, individual mothers were judged on their behaviour and reputation and would suffer the social consequences of being perceived as immoral and a threat to women whose husbands were present in the neighbourhood. More fundamentally, in contrast to young adult sons, the woman’s role of de facto head of household was generally perceived as temporary and socially anomalous, while young adult sons could aspire to using their role as acting head of household as a stepping-stone towards more permanent social mobility.

While one might have expected Thierry to distance himself more from his family, and perhaps attempt to establish his own family, he seemed to be stuck at home, seeking the approval of his father and the forbearance of his mother, which rendered him stuck in a position of social youth within his family and in the eyes of his neighbours and peers. As in Hélène’s situation, Thierry’s predicament may be understood in terms of the general moral expectations of the intergenerational contract, which would pose Thierry in the role of gradually assuming responsibility of both his own household and eventually of his parents’ well-being. As Roth’s study of ageing parents in Bobo-Dioulasso illustrated, the inability of adult children to assume their responsibility is perceived as a shame upon the whole family, the adult child’s shortcomings reflecting back upon his [sic] parents and other senior relatives. As Thierry’s reaction shows, even the unsuccessful juniors in such relationships tend to confirm the moral rationale of the intergenerational contract and suffer under their own inability to live up to expectations, rather than, for example, dismissing these same expectations as unjust or unrealistic. In other words, the intergenerational contract should be seen as an expression of a socially conservative moral order that puts pressure on young adult children to simultaneously liberate themselves from their dependency on their parents and assume responsibility for their continued obligations towards them. Hélène’s dismissal of her mother was experienced by Hélène as equally shameful because it exposed her mother’s shortcomings and the family’s failure to live up the expectations of the intergenerational contract.

The following section considers another brief account of a family whose composition was severely affected by its forced displacement from Côte d’Ivoire. Prisca’s experiences, although less concerned with the generational dimension of family life in the neighbourhood, provide another
perspective on the moral underpinnings of the ability, or the lack thereof, of families to live up to expectations and project an image of success and fulfilment.

The Crazy Ivorian

Prisca was born in Daloa to Mossi parents from Ouagadougou. Her recently made Burkinabe identity card showed that she was forty years old at the time of our meeting, although she was not quite sure herself and admitted that the date of birth was picked randomly for administrative procedures. Her three children were all adults and married, and Prisca did look older than her newly acquired date of birth suggested.

Growing up in Daloa, she had attended a Catholic school despite her father being Muslim, and she was now a devout Catholic. She married a Muslim, Burkinabe, man in Daloa. He had decided that they would move to Bobo-Dioulasso during the war. He had already lost his teaching job in Daloa because of the Bédié government’s policy of ridding the public sector of foreigners – the ivoirisation policies which were already initiated in the mid-1980s in response to the growing resentment towards white-collar immigrants. But the move had marked the beginning of the end of their marriage. The husband had joined the more orthodox Wahabi faith and had suddenly demanded that Prisca carry a fully covering burqa in public, despite her Catholic faith. They had been married for seventeen years when they divorced. She now lived alone in a small compound in Sarfalao non-loti. While we sat in her courtyard, Prisca’s daughter-in-law, wearing a fully covering burqa, was sweeping the kitchen area and lighting a fire. She came by every day to help Prisca with the daily chores.

Prisca was well aware of her nickname in Sarfalao – the crazy Ivorian – and explained that people in the neighbourhood mocked her for her outspokenness and her manner of speaking both French and Jula. She frequented the local cabaret and did not shy away from a bowl of dolo millet beer, which added to people’s perception of her as imprudent and somewhat out of control. Her behaviour had even given her problems during the divorce hearings. She was convinced that her husband had bribed the judge to rule in his favour, and when she spoke out in court, the judge had said that she was impolite and had no manners.

After the divorce, Prisca went back to Daloa and stayed with the Catholic sisters where she used to attend school for about a year. She had been having visions in her dreams for several years and claimed that the sisters believed in her gifts and had encouraged her to advise people on the basis
of her visions. Upon her return to Bobo-Dioulasso, she had purchased the courtyard in Sarfalao from its previous owner for 300,000 FCFA and had been given a new plot number when the municipality had registered eligible plots in preparation of the upcoming land management scheme. She was now hoping for ‘a winning ticket’ which would enable her to remain in the neighbourhood and provide her with a sense of stability. Her husband had gained full custody of the children in the hearings, on the charge that Prisca was mentally unstable, and financially unable to care for their needs.

Severed Commitments and Ambiguous Neighbourhood

With her divorce, Prisca was left socially isolated in Sarfalao, and her adult children seemed to side with their father and only pay her rare courtesy visits. Her outspoken and unabashed behaviour was interpreted by her neighbours, by the court judge, and even by her own children as being inappropriate and served to delegitimise not only her claims during the divorce hearings but, more importantly, her expectations of moral and material support from her adult children. In this way, Prisca’s stigmatisation as ‘crazy’ in the neighbourhood had profound consequence for her relationship with her adult children, as well as with her neighbours. As the following chapter will explore in more detail, it was a common stereotype to perceive of young female migrants from Côte d’Ivoire as outspoken and promiscuous on account of their Ivorian upbringing, and although Prisca was of an older generation, the same stigma applied to her as a second-generation immigrant to Côte d’Ivoire. Furthermore, her age made her stand out as particularly out of place in the neighbourhood and prompted her neighbours to perceive her as, not only adhering to the morally inferior standards of public behaviour associated with Côte d’Ivoire but a complete social anomaly, which was summarised in her nickname, ‘the crazy Ivorian’.

Although stereotypes of typical ‘Ivorian’ and ‘Burkinabe’ behaviour may seem as a relatively harmless way of processing the arrival of new influences and aesthetics in the neighbourhood, Prisca’s stigmatisation as ‘crazy’ was particularly hostile and exclusionist because it delegitimised her claims to participation in established social exchanges, including those of the intergenerational contract. Having explored the moral implications of the intergenerational contract from different perspectives, through the experiences of Hélène, Thierry, and Prisca, the chapter proceeds by considering some of the nuances in the intergenerational relationships that characterised transnational families in Sarfalao.
On the Path towards Social Adulthood

When Julien, the son of Susanne whose charred ambitions in Abidjan were discussed in Chapter 5, first arrived in Burkina Faso with his older brother, Augustin, he knew no one apart from his uncle’s family. He would ride his bike to school alone and return home after classes, alone. But he soon realized that there were many other diaspos – young people who had grown up in Côte d’Ivoire – in the neighbourhood: they were easy to recognise by their appearances, mannerisms, and way of speaking. Most diaspos dressed either in chique shirts and jeans, inspired by the metropolitan fashion of Abidjan, or in saggy pants and t-shirts inspired by American hip-hop icons, which was also an influential style of urban youth culture in Abidjan. Diaspos were usually more outgoing and talkative than Burkinabe youths, and they rarely spoke proper Jula but would fill in their sentences with French words, or speak French entirely, with a few Jula or nouchi words interspersed. Julien had no trouble finding friends among the diaspos in Sarfalao and soon became close friends with one of his neighbours, Kader, who was his age and had grown up in Bouaké and Daloa.

After completing high school, Julien was unemployed for a while and spent most of his time hanging out in Sarfalao with other idle diaspos. He had made friends with another young man who had grown up in Abidjan but whose mother had succeeded in finding a job in the municipality. She had helped Julien apply for a position as a teacher that bypassed the concours system by which thousands of high school graduates competed for a handful of positions by attending annual placement tests. Julien insisted to me that there was nothing illicit or corrupt in applying as he had done, by presenting himself to the principal at the school he wished to work for, although the personal connection in the municipal administration obviously played a large part in assuring him the principal’s attention. One of the schools Julien sought out was a special private school for the hearing impaired. He had submitted his files to the principal and was eventually called back for an interview. The principal had asked him why he had applied for this particular job, and Julien had replied that he had learned that deaf children now had the same opportunities for learning as everyone else but that they were taught with sign language. He had found the

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77 Riester points out that the aspiration of most young people pursuing higher education in Burkina Faso is to become a civil servant because it promises a regular monthly salary: therefore, ‘…the preparation for and participation in the so-called concours, the exam-like application procedures for public service, is of central importance to aspiring civil servants’ (Riester 2011b:136).
idea so fascinating that he had wanted to see it with his own eyes. The principal had eventually given him an internship, despite Julien’s complete lack of experience with teaching or sign language.

During the first year, he had been ready to give up several times, as he struggled with learning sign language and still depended on his mother for food and shelter. But from the first day, his new boss, the principal of the school, had been encouraging and supportive, which had kept Julien devoted to acquiring the new skills. Before the end of the first year, Julien was already teaching his own class, and he was given a permanent position as the youngest teacher at the school. He improved quickly and was, by now, one of the most competent signers among the teachers.

His mother had also encouraged him to think less of the obstacles of today and work towards the opportunities of tomorrow. Julien had taken her advice to heart and was thankful that he had persisted. His job was a source of a steady income, which had enabled him to move into his own single-room house in Sarfalao non-loti. Moreover, it was a challenging and inspiring occupation that provided him with opportunities to learn new skills and gave him a sense of purpose. The principal was sending him to Ouagadougou on a two-week course, held by a Belgian organization, and Julien was often chosen for events and tasks out of the ordinary. Julien believed that his availability as a young, unmarried man gave him an advantage over his older colleagues in that regard but also that his boss saw himself as a mentor to Julien and was investing time and resources in him as a sign of good faith. Apart from seventeen-year old Igor, Julien was the last son in his family to be living alone, without wife and children, and people would often ask him what he was waiting for. But Julien was in no hurry to settle down. He made a decent living by his own means and was able to support his mother financially, but he did not feel ready to marry.

Lingering Youth: Navigating Expectations of Social Becoming

Julien was visibly a better-off young man. He dressed fashionably, often buying new clothes, and he drove his own “Jakata” motorbike – a slang expression for motorbikes similar to Yamaha models, the kind of motorbike that young men would dream of as the ultimate status symbol, exuding wealth, style, and mobility. He was one of the few men in their late twenties who were able to emulate the Abidjanais life style of spending relatively large sums on his appearance and on nights out on the town, and he was both envied and admired in Sarfalao. Julien was well aware that some of his friends found it inappropriate for a man approaching
thirty years of age to be living alone and enjoying a lifestyle associated with (elite) youths in Abidjan, and he seemed to struggle with that awareness in his interactions in the neighbourhood. Julien would sometimes appear as carefree and boastful as most of the other diaspo youths, but at other times he would try to keep a more serious tone, acting as a senior to his peers, by way of his steady employment and superior standard of living. Although he did contribute to the household economy, the fact that he did not have his own wife and children to support placed additional pressure on him to take responsibility as acting head of household in his father’s absence. Julien, however, had a strained relationship with his father, whom he believed was neglecting his obligations by not providing regular remittances and by only visiting his wife and children in Burkina Faso on rare occasions. Julien, in fact, suspected that his father had secretly established a new family in Côte d’Ivoire and felt reluctant to live up to his father’s expectations of him because of these moral shortcomings.

When I met Julien’s father, he had just arrived the previous day, to attend his mother’s funeral. The fragile old woman used to greet me with a toothless smile when I visited the family, and she passed away in her sleep and was buried before her son arrived from Abidjan. The house was still packed with visitors on this, the second day of the funeral, and people sat in the shade of the courtyard wall and watched while others danced. Julien’s friend Kader was praised when he returned with me to the scene where he had excelled the night before by dancing tirelessly until sunrise. After expressing my condolences to Susanne and her husband, we sat with the two oldest sons who were listening to news about the Ivorian elections on the brand new radio that their father had brought them from Côte d’Ivoire. Julien had come from Ouagadougou to attend the funeral but had already left before his father arrived. He had said to Kader that if his father wanted to see him, he would have to come to Ouagadougou. The family was getting by in Burkina Faso, but the three oldest sons resented their father’s lack of commitment and contribution, and the serene atmosphere in the courtyard also betrayed the growing resentment between husband and wife.

Rumours were circulating in the neighbourhood about Susanne and about her husband’s life in Côte d’Ivoire. Susanne was rumoured to be romantically involved with men of her son’s age while her husband was away in Abidjan. She was often seen drinking and dancing in the local cabarets, which in itself was nothing noteworthy, but when she drank too much, she would flirt with the young men and sometimes go home with them. Wanting people to call her “Susanne” rather than by her family
name, trying to speak *nouchi* slang as the young returning migrants did, and dancing with men half her age, on the other hand, was seen as inappropriate and embarrassing ‘Ivorian’ behaviour – of the sort that had led to Prisca’s stigmatisation as ‘crazy’ and morally depraved.

Susanne was said to be seeing a man in his late twenties who lived nearby. Her neighbours claimed that they did not even make an effort to keep the relationship a secret. That behaviour reflected badly on Susanne and her whole family. No one had told her husband but he was undoubtedly aware of his wife’s alleged promiscuity. When the family had first moved to Sarfalao, after having stayed in a rented house in a neighbouring area upon their arrival, it was through the help of another family of Samo ethnicity. The family had eventually acquired a plot of land next to their kinsmen. But with her husband in Abidjan, Susanne had initiated a relationship with the neighbour and eventually became pregnant in her husband’s absence. The promiscuous couple had been forced to inform Susanne’s husband, and he had arrived from Abidjan a few days later, allegedly with the intention to file for a divorce. It was only by the pleading of Julien and his brothers that he had agreed to forgive their mother rather than break up the family, but everyone sensed the resentment between husband and wife. Susanne had given birth to a baby girl, but the child had died an infant. Rumour would have it that Susanne had killed the child out of shame, as if to erase the whole miserable story.

The rumours surrounding his mother’s inappropriate behaviour and his growing resentment towards his father’s lack of commitment to the plight of the family made Julien devote his attention and resources to his life outside the family. As I described in Chapter 5, Susanne was often discouraged by the circumstances of her forced displacement from Abidjan, where she had lost all her investments when the *corps habillé* burned her restaurant to the ground. In the absence of his father’s contributions to the household economy, Julien and his brothers were expected to contribute from their own earnings, but Julien did so only reluctantly and spent most of his time away from her mother’s courtyard. Even though he had the means to take on more responsibility, and thereby honour the intergenerational contract by supporting his mother as she struggled to get by, Julien distanced himself from these obligations out of resentment of the priorities and demeanour of both his parents. He preferred to identify more with the carefree attitude of his less privileged *diaspo* peers and, in this way, lingered on in the category of social youth when most others would be looking to progress along the path towards social adulthood. Julien’s orientations towards social youth reminds us that, despite the well-established expectations of intergenerational obligations and the
incentive to strive for seniority or social adulthood, individual paths are
still shaped by the priorities and outlooks of social agents who articulate
their strategies and aspirations on the basis of a broader set of moral and
social opportunities and orientations.

Romeo & Juliet in Sarfalao:
The Mamoushka Situation

Julien was also involved in another social situation that unfolded over
the course of my fieldwork period in Bobo-Dioulasso. This extended case
study speaks to the complexity and importance of intergenerational rela-
tions and emphasises that an individual is not alone in making decisions
about the future or choosing courses of action in the present. The case
also brings up the question of friendship in relation to family and to the
idioms of life-cycle transitions.

Mamoushka worked in Kader’s coffee shop (kiosque) when I first got to
know the area. She was more outspoken than most girls her age and han-
dled the flirtatious male costumers with grace and wit. Kader was very
pleased with her work, and the kiosque was especially a hub for young
people who had come from Côte d’Ivoire during the conflict. However,
the good working relationship between Kader and Mamoushka soon
seemed to deteriorate – to the point where Kader relieved Mamoushka of
her duties and replaced her with the daughter of one of his neighbours.
The trouble began when Mamoushka suddenly became more quiet and
moody, which did not go down well with the male clientele. She also
became forgetful and clumsy, and when she broke Kader’s only thermos,
he confronted her with her changing behaviour, and she left the place in
tears. The following day, Mamoushka’s mother summoned Kader to their
house in the non-loti and asked him to take better care of her daughter
because she would need all the help she could get in the time to come.
Kader had already begun suspecting that Mamoushka was pregnant and
this conversation had confirmed his suspicions.

It turned out that the father of Mamoushka’s unborn child was Julien’s
younger brother, Igor, the youngest brother in the family and, at seven-
teen, still a child in eyes of Julien and Kader. The prospect of a union
between Mamoushka and Igor was not received well by Julien’s family.
Not only was Igor too young and, most importantly, too dependent on
the financial assistance of his parents and older brothers, but the family
had already had an unfortunate relationship to Mamoushka’s family. Ju-
lien’s oldest brother had married Mamoushka’s older sister, Yvette, before
Julien arrived in Burkina Faso. The marriage had ended badly, with Cristophe accusing his wife of adultery and Yvette showing clear signs of physical abuse at the hands of her husband. In the disputes over the unhappy marriage, which had initially been welcomed by both families as an ideal union, dividing lines had been drawn between the two families and their respective allies in the neighbourhood. Yvette’s family had accused Cristophe and his family of behaving arrogantly and callously not only towards the bride and her family but in general, as was to expected of ‘Ivorians’ who had forgotten about their roots. Cristophe and his family, in their turn, saw Yvette and her relatives as being typical ‘Burkinabe’ – old-fashioned and prone to gossip and ill will towards people with some measure of success. The dispute, in other words, was in large part articulated as a conflict between a migrant and a non-migrant family, both sides referring to established stereotypes about the other. The divorce had been settled, but the two families still kept their distance.

This was the dramatic prelude to the relationship between Igor and Mamoushka. Although not exactly a feud between two aristocratic lineages, the fateful love between two youngsters from different lineages did have a certain touch of Romeo and Juliet to it. Both Mamoushka and Igor seemed to want to have the child and build a life together, and throughout the events that followed, they seemed to keep as low a profile as possible, awaiting the appeasement of their respective families. Julien had been sceptical when Kader employed Mamoushka but even Julien had never imagined that her presence in the midst of their favourite meeting point in the neighbourhood would have such serious consequences.

One evening Julien had stopped by Kader’s kiosque and suggested that Kader should fire Mamoushka because she had been impolite towards the customers. Kader was already aware that Mamoushka was carrying the child of Julien’s younger brother and of the family crisis the situation had created. But since Julien had not mentioned the pregnancy himself, Kader felt unable to confront Julien with the underlying reasons for his hostility towards Mamoushka. Kader worried that Julien would feel betrayed if he learned that Kader already knew of the pregnancy behind his back. Kader had asked Julien whether Mamoushka’s attitude towards the customers really was the only reason for his suggestion, and Julien had insisted that there were no other reasons. In this way, the Mamoushka situation made an already emerging distance between Julien and Kader more visible. Kader felt that they had been drifting apart for some time, especially since the birth of Kader’s daughter, Gloria. Before Kader became a father, he and Julien would go out on the town together, but Kader had a responsibility now and felt that Julien’s carefree attitude and spending habits were
irresponsible for a man of his age. Julien thought that Kader had become less fun to be around and spent too much time at home. It was this growing distance that made it difficult for the two friends to speak openly about the Mamoushka situation. Kader now thought that their different backgrounds made their friendship unlikely: Julien’s parents had been doing well in the big city of Abidjan before the conflict, while Kader’s parents were struggling in the Western plantation areas. Julien had arrived under the wings of his parents and relatives, while Kader had been forced to build a new life up from nothing, he said.

Kader had later confronted Mamoushka with Julien’s accusations about her attitude towards customers, and she had confessed to him that she was pregnant and begged him not to tell anyone, especially not Julien. Kader had realised then that his conversation with Mamoushka’s mother had been so confidential that even Mamoushka was unaware of it. He had decided to pretend ignorance and had questioned Mamoushka about the child’s father as if he did not already know. Kader had told Mamoushka that since she had worked for him so long, he had begun seeing her as a sister. He advised her to do all she could to be accepted by Julien’s family. She should spend time with his mother and be willing to help out around the house. Kader told her that he thought it best that she stopped working for him – not because of her attitude but just since she was pregnant and needed the rest. He ended the conversation by saying that they probably should not be seen talking privately and they had already been standing there too long. Julien had showed up at that very moment, and Kader could inform him that he had fired Mamoushka.

Mamoushka’s acceptance into Igor and Julien’s family did not go as smoothly as she and Kader had hoped. Julien had apparently formed an alliance with Mamoushka’s mother, to force Mamoushka to have an abortion. Julien had offered to pay all expenses, and Mamoushka’s mother had agreed that it was for the best. Julien’s mother, Susanne, had been informed of the pregnancy and had promptly volunteered to take Mamoushka to the clinic to end the whole story there and then. Mamoushka felt that she had no choice but to comply, and she had gone with Susanne to the clinic under the pretence of visiting her grandmother. Once at the clinic, however, Mamoushka had decided against it and had called her father in Ouagadougou out of sheer desperation. Her father had forbidden her to proceed with the abortion and promised to come to Bobo-Dioulasso immediately to settle the affair. After a heated discussion in the middle of the clinic, the two women had returned to Sarfalao, Susanne infuriated by the young woman’s obstinacy and especially with Mamoushka’s decision to involve her father in the affair. Faced with an in-
creasingly desperate situation, Mamoushka had asked Kader to help her appease Julien and his family, but Kader had reluctantly said that he could not involve himself any further without giving his old friend reason to think that he had betrayed him.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, Mamoushka gave birth to a healthy boy. Mamoushka was now living with Igor in his parents’ courtyard, and when I met Julien and Igor’s mother, she smilingly invited me back to the house to see the baby. When I asked Mamoushka about the delivery, she and her mother-in-law took turns explaining, neither of them seeming embarrassed about the situation. I do not know the details of how the two were reconciled, but it seems that once Mamoushka’s pregnancy became visible and the due date approached, Igor and Susanne had decided that a truce would serve the family better in the long run and had invited Mamoushka into the family. This does not mean that the Mamoushka situation was completely resolved, however. On my way home I met Kader, in a terrible mood. He told me that he had met Susanne in the street the day before and that she had told him to come and meet his child at their house. He had said “okay”, without understanding what she meant. It was only later in the day that her phrase had come back to him and he had felt obliged to pass by the house to find out what she had meant. That was how he learned that Mamoushka had given birth the night before. Kader was outraged that no one had bothered to inform him in an appropriate manner and that Susanne had been so vague in her way of telling him in the street. He had even met Igor, the child’s father, that morning at the kiosque, without him saying a word about becoming a father that very night! Kader found it outrageous that the whole family acted so ashamed about the child and that Julien should be ashamed of himself. I asked him whether he was certain that Julien was to blame for the family’s behaviour, and Kader said that he was certain that all Julien’s talk about how embarrassing the affair was to his family was to blame for everyone’s behaviour. He had said all this to Susanne and was now intent on not speaking to any of them again.

Great Expectations and Modest Beginnings

Souleymane was born and raised in a village near the coastal town of Fresco, in the Divou region of Côte d’Ivoire. The area is located between Abidjan and the Liberian border but was not as badly affected by the fighting as the areas around Man, further north. He is the second of seven siblings and moved to stay with a relative in the town of Fresco when he
reached the 6ème. His parents had remained in the village and still lived in Côte d'Ivoire despite their Burkinabe origins.

Souleymane had not experienced the violence of the war directly but had mainly experienced the difficulties of travelling freely. Souleymane’s eloquence in French and his Ivorian upbringing had been an important asset during the war. Once the passage from Fresco to Abidjan became difficult because of loyalist roadblocks, Souleymane found a well-paid job, bringing pharmaceuticals to Abidjan on the weekends for a Burkinabe trader in Fresco who was wary of making his way through the highly patrolled area. On these trips, Souleymane carried his Ivorian student card (carte scolaire) rather than his identity papers, which indicated his parents’ Burkinabe citizenship. Manipulating or forging one’s identity was an important survival strategy for Burkinabe migrants and their descendants in Côte d’Ivoire during the conflict. Boswell notes that ‘[s]ome Burkinabé obtained false identification papers with southern Ivoirian surnames, whereas urban fashions and the use of Ivoirian mannerisms and speech enabled Burkinabé born in Côte d’Ivoire to evade exposure and “pass”’ (Boswell 2010:7). For first-generation immigrants, in other words, their Burkinabe origins were generally on display through their accents and appearances, and they relied more on forged identity papers in order to pass as Ivorian citizens. Second-generation immigrants such as Souleymane could to a large extent rely on their Ivorian accents and mannerisms in order to be perceived as Ivorian. Obviously, both these strategies met their limits when militias, gendarmes or other agents of the Gbagbo regime deliberately sought to persecute Ivorian northerners to the same extent as Burkinabe immigrants, which we have already seen was the case both in the rhetoric of ivoirité and in the experiences of returning migrants in Sarfalao.

But the manipulation of identities was much more profound than simply forging identity papers or speaking with an Ivorian accent. For example, Basile – the man of extraordinary powers, whose migrant biography was discussed in Chapter 5 – had given his son, Kader, a Muslim name, despite being Catholic, and Lyela (of the Gurunsi ethnic assemblage), in order for him to blend in as Dioula in Côte d’Ivoire. In the context of Ivorian identity politics, “Dioula” had been a catch-all ethnic label, which was originally ‘... the professional name for trader and a family name in the Kong Manding dialect, but used here as a popular and pejorative reference to all Mandé and Gur people from the north and, therefore, to all Muslims’ (Akindès 2004:24, see also Dembélé 2002:137, Launay 1982:2). Furthermore, Kader’s facial scars (cicatrices) suggested that he belonged to a Baoulé sub-group, the ethnic group of presidents
Houphouët-Boigny and Bédié, in another, yet contradictory, effort to facilitate his integration. Both affiliations – to the Dioula and Baoulé ethnic categories – turned out to be unfortunate wagers by Basile at Kader’s birth, in the future integration of his son, since both categories were vili-fied and persecuted in the gradual redefinition of national belonging in Côte d’Ivoire.

Souleymane had left Côte d’Ivoire on 18 September 2005. As many others, he remembered the exact date as a memento. Growing up, he had always thought of Burkina Faso as a place you would only be sent as a punishment. His parents had often said, ‘if you do not behave, we will send you to live with your relatives in Burkina!’ But as he grew older, and at a time when his Burkinabe origins had taken on a new meaning in Côte d’Ivoire, he had wanted to visit his parents’ birthplace and learn more about his origins. The journey had been long and arduous because of the incessant roadblocks and harassments, particularly once they entered rebel-held territory. Unlike the loyalist soldiers on the road between Fresco and Abidjan, Souleymane was unable to assess the motives of the rebels – whether they were reacting to any particular traits or identity papers, or whether they were simply collecting as much revenue as possible from travellers.

Once in Burkina Faso, he first stayed with a relative in Sarfalao but moved out after a year, not wanting to remain a burden. He had dropped out of school and started working at the main market, but the pay was negligible and he had started looking for other opportunities. He had noticed that there were very few shops in the non-loti, selling groceries, cigarettes and so on, and he had decided to set up his own stall in the area. He found an abandoned house just opposite the SOS Children’s Villages courtyard, where many residents passed on their way to the city centre, and asked the owner of the house for permission to live there. He had started his business with a small vending tray, selling bonbons to the school children and cigarettes to the adults. He was gradually able to expand his assortment and even had the spare time to study for the high school exams he had missed.

In 2008, Souleymane went back to Côte d’Ivoire to visit his parents. He had tried to call them before leaving but had been unable to reach them by phone, so it was a complete surprise to them when he finally arrived. He had not been worried about the journey through the country. He felt that he was coming home and that he would be perceived accordingly. As if to illustrate his point, our conversation was interrupted by a customer who jokingly referred to my assistant as “ivoirien”. After the customer had left, Souleymane noted how annoying it was to be called
“Ivorian” in your own country. He said that he did what he could to fit in but that his way of speaking both French and Jula was always commented by Burkinabes in the neighbourhood and that he felt more of a stranger here than in Côte d’Ivoire.

Back in the village in Côte d’Ivoire he had helped his parents in the fields, as one should, and had looked up old friends. The village had changed; there were many newcomers and the atmosphere was one of reconciliation and a return to normal. This was a time of relative calm in Côte d’Ivoire, following the signing of the Ouagadougou Political Accords in August 2007 and the gradual downscaling of roadblocks and military presence in both halves of the country. During his absence, a friend had looked after his shop in Sarfalao. Souleymane phoned him regularly to keep updated, but at some point the friend stopped answering his calls. After several weeks of calling in vain, the friend’s younger brother had finally answered, and informed Souleymane that his friend had died unexpectedly. Souleymane could hear women crying in the background.

Souleymane had lost a close friend with whom he had made many plans for the future. Upon his return to Burkina Faso, he had realised that his investments in the shop had also perished, probably at the hands of his friend’s relatives, and he was forced to start over once more, trying to accumulate enough capital to relaunch his shop in front of the SOS courtyard. During my time in Sarfalao, Souleymane’s fortune waxed and waned, and he fell ill just before the high school exams, missing the opportunity for a diploma once more. He maintained his belief in his own abilities and felt assured that his parents in Côte d’Ivoire supported his decision to set out on his own in Burkina Faso. As most other young informants who were brought up in Côte d’Ivoire, he was open to the idea of moving back to Côte d’Ivoire eventually and was less concerned with his stigmatisation as a “stranger” there than many of the older returnees in Sarfalao.

A Transnational Migrant Career, in Reverse

Contrary to the other families considered in this chapter, Souleymane lived far apart from his parents’ household, since his parents had decided to remain in Côte d’Ivoire throughout the Ivorian crisis despite their Burkinabe origins and citizenship. He articulated his own decision to leave Côte d’Ivoire more as a formative journey to his parents’ home country than an escape from armed aggression, although the atmosphere in Côte d’Ivoire certainly had changed his perception of his own affiliation
with Burkina Faso. Souleymane’s decisions and experiences, in this regard, were quite unique among the migrant biographies I collected, and I include his story precisely for that reason: to point to the inevitable variation and idiosyncrasies in the decisions and trajectories of individuals and families.

As a counter-point to the cases which emphasise the displacing effects of the Ivorian crisis as well as the intergenerational dynamics centred on female-headed households, Souleymane’s lone journey to Burkina Faso serves to challenge the inclination of reading inevitability into the more general pattern of transnationalism and displacement. What is particularly curious about Souleymane’s trajectory is the extent to which it resembles the well-established paths of generations of young male labour migrants, only in the “wrong” direction. Souleymane left his parents to explore a new region and gain independence and maturity, much as young Burkinabe men have done since the late colonial period by leaving to Côte d’Ivoire. He relied on a relative upon his arrival to Bobo-Dioulasso in a similar way and was trying out different strategies in relation to the livelihood opportunities available to him in his new locality. He also visited his parents and devoted time to help their cultivation at home – a familiar practice among Burkinabe migrants settled in Côte d’Ivoire – and generally described his relationship to his parents as mutually respectful and lacking many of the expectations that characterised the other families considered in this chapter.

Souleymane’s resourcefulness and ingenuity had served him well in Côte d’Ivoire during the crisis, as he handled a job as a courier that few other people wanted, or dared, to perform, and these personal abilities served him in new ways in Sarfalao, as he analysed the supply and demand of petty trade in the neighbourhood and deployed a modest investment strategy to set up his own business. To manage as much in the context of massive unemployment and economic stagnation is no small feat and reminds us that individual agency may carve out livelihoods and living spaces under unlikely structural conditions.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, the ideas, experiences, and trajectories of individuals have been inscribed into the lives of their kin, neighbours, and families. Decisions about when and how to migrate are almost always collective decisions. This chapter has explored the ways in which families who arrived in Sarfalao in the context of the Ivorian crisis have handled that
move in the practice of everyday life, with particular attention to the dynamics between parents and their young adult children. The families considered here may be understood as transnational families, first of all in the sense that many households were reconfigured across the Burkina Faso-Côte d'Ivoire transnational space, with fathers remaining in Côte d'Ivoire as labour migrants while the rest of the family settled in Burkina Faso. Furthermore, the continued orientation towards Côte d'Ivoire of both parents and children now settled in Sarfalao also suggest a transnational outlook of these migrants. The study of transnationalism has been shaped to a significant extent by studies of immigrants to the United States and their continued ties to their home communities, often in Latin America or the Caribbean (Faist 2000, Glick Schiller & Fouron 1999, Levitt 2001, Levitt & Waters 2002, Portes 1999, Vertovec 1999, Basch, Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994). In the past decade, transnational studies have expanded their geographical scope, to include most regions of the world (Al-Ali & Koser 2002, Eastmond & Åkesson 2007a, Friedman & Schulermandl 2011, Riccio 2001, 2004, Åkesson 2004, 2007). Nevertheless, the present study departs from the transnational studies tendency to draw on cases where migrants move from poorer towards richer regions and where notions of a “home” community that the migrant departs from, yet remains connected to, are more unequivocal.

These differences have a series of implications. In practical terms, transnational families across the Burkina Faso-Côte d'Ivoire transnational space could not rely on the availability or the regularity of communication and remittances. The costs of using phone cards or Internet chat as a way of reinforcing bonds between family members in different localities was too much for most households, as were the transportation costs of regular visits, despite the relatively short distances. The armed conflict exacerbated these obstacles, but they remained similar to the conditions faced by previous generations of migrants. These practical challenges shaped the transnational practices and expectations of migrants to a considerable degree. So why consider these cases as transnational families at all? As we have seen, the significance of migration in the outlooks of young Burkina men and women from the late colonial period until the present is based on transnational connections and orientations that make it impossible to understand the aspirations and life-making practices without considering their investment in several localities simultaneously.

The chapter explored the dynamics of intergenerational relations in transnational families in Sarfalao, initially with reference to the notion of an intergenerational contract, by which parents and children are linked in a life-long relationship of mutual dependency. The cases demonstrated the
variability of how the move from Côte d’Ivoire to Burkina Faso had affected these relationships and suggested that these variations were as much effects of the capabilities and priorities of individuals as of the structural conditions they were embedded in. For example, Thierry’s situation was fairly privileged in material terms, since his absent father provided regular remittances and had secured his son a steady job in the city through personal connections. Despite these favourable conditions, and perhaps to some extent because of his traumatic experiences as a rebel soldier in Côte d’Ivoire, Thierry was unable to assert himself as a respectable adult in his family or in the neighbourhood, and he lingered on in the category of social youth because of these shortcomings. Julien, on the other hand, seemed to be more actively choosing his continued identification with his diaspora peers, rather than investing his steady income in establishing his own household or in the role of acting head of household in his father’s absence.

Hélène lacked the material privileges of Julien and Thierry but was gradually embracing the role of head of household, despite being involuntarily obliged to do so in face of her mother’s failing commitment to the plight of Hélène’s siblings. The family had been forced to leave a steady livelihood behind in Côte d’Ivoire and, with the death of Hélène’s father, even the value of the land he had owned was lost to them. What she lacked in material resources, meanwhile, she was gaining in recognition by her neighbours and friends, who acknowledged the burden she was lifting by taking responsibility for her siblings, despite her young age. Hélène’s calm demeanour stood in sharp contrast to the outspokenness of Prisca, who was increasingly marginalised both within her family and in the neighbourhood, because of her being labelled as ‘crazy’ and morally dubious. Finally, Souleymane’s unusual migrant trajectory pointed out how individual agency accounts for considerable variation in the strategies and outlooks of transnational migrants in the Ivorian crisis.

Running through the chapter was the concern with how the move from Côte d’Ivoire to Burkina Faso was experienced differently by different generations of migrants, even within the same families. Some of these dynamics may be related to the generational differences that characterise the migrant trajectories of first- and second-generation immigrants to Côte d’Ivoire. For the migrant families in Sarfalao, the parent generation may be said to have continued a migrant trajectory that had started with the move to Côte d’Ivoire in their youth, while their children were beginning their migrant careers as refugees to Burkina Faso. Hence, the situation of the young adult children in these families differed significantly from their parents’, in terms of their expectations of life in Burkina Faso.
as well as in their social and cultural capital vis-à-vis their non-migrant neighbours.
On opposing corners of the T-junction that marks the end of Sarfalao loti, and the indistinct entrance to Sarfalao non-loti, two coffee shops face each other, as mirror images across the dusty boulevard. Throughout the day, both coffee shops serve the neighbourhood’s residents as they leave for and return from errands in the city, take breaks from their tasks at home, or meet with friends. In the late afternoon, both coffee shops are meeting points for young men who share stories and small glasses of sweet coffee, joke around with the shop keepers, and flirt with young women passing by. One coffee shop is known to these young regulars as the “kiosque de diaspos” – the diaspo coffee shop; the other as the “kiosque de burkinabè”. One tends to play Ivorian zouglou music or American hip-hop, when the stereo works; the other offers a broader selection of African artists, and African icons such as Bob Marley and Tupac Shakur. One supports the football team Chelsea United, for its Ivorian star player Didier Drogba, the other FC Barcelona, for its pan-African idol, Cameroonian star player Samuel Etoo. One is loud and embarrassing to pass for a young woman, the other less so. The competition between the coffee shop owners and regulars is friendly but unmistakable. They both rely on the social branding of their domain, evoking well-established stereotypes of diaspo as distinct from burkinabè youth culture.

This chapter explores expressions of diaspo youth culture in Sarfalao in order to show how their social performance and diverse interpretations may be related to idioms of youth and adulthood, and the negotiation of social hierarchies. The influx of returning migrant families brought with it new aesthetics and increased competition over living space, livelihood, potential spouses, and “street respect” to the neighbourhood. As already alluded to, some migrant youths had turned their immigrant status into a key identity marker – sporting Abidjanais street wear or second-hand brand clothes from Europe (known as brodes), speaking characteristically Ivorian French (urban slang known as nouchi) and Jula interspersed with French words. Through a discussion of circumstances of this particular form of transnationalism, the chapter explores the history of the term “diaspo” that initially became associated with Ivorian exchange students in
Ouagadougou but acquired a new meaning with the arrival of returning migrant families in the context of the Ivorian crisis.

The chapter proceeds by exploring the experiences of diaspo youths in Sarfalao. Through a general discussion of the stereotypes surrounding both diaspo youth culture and its perceived counterpoint – “burkinabè” youth culture – I explore the variety of ways that such labels were put to use in different contexts of everyday practice. The chapter then considers the experiences of two young adults who both grew up in Côte d’Ivoire and came to Burkina Faso for the first time during the Ivorian crisis. Their different experiences in and attitudes towards the neighbourhood move the analysis beyond stereotypical categorisations to explore how subjective experiences of inclusion and exclusion are coped with and given significance. I then discuss how one group of diaspos were attempting to market themselves as representatives of Burkina Faso’s young and promising future, through their social performance as diaspos. This group was employed to perform with singing and dancing at inaugurations, political rallies, and even in Blaise Compaoré’s 2010 electoral campaign. These performances, in turn, provided the diaspos with access to the city’s political elite.

Finally, the chapter depicts how zouglou music is consumed and marketed by another group of diaspos, intent on performing their otherness in the competition with non-migrants youths over access to employment and privileges. More specifically, I first demonstrate that zouglou music has become a diaspo trademark, deliberately demarcating themselves from their burkinabè neighbours. I then discuss the consumption of zouglou music by the diaspos in Sarfalao as a source of hope through the messages of the lyrics as well as the socially constituting force of sharing the consumption with the group and as an identity-marker that draws a boundary between the diaspos and their neighbours, through a counter-exclusion to the name-calling and social marginalisation of the diaspo minority by the burkinabè majority.

78 The emic term “burkinabè” differs from the previous use of the term “Burkinabe” in this text; the former denoting an empirically viable stereotype and the latter denoting a nationality.
Diaspo Youth Culture in the Context of the Ivorian Crisis

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, returning migrants and their children were faced with discourses and practices of exclusion, as well as a lack of social connections that would facilitate their integration into their new neighbourhood, resulting in a sense of persistent displacement. In response to such marginalisation, migrants resorted to several different social performances, in order to evoke membership in less stigmatised social categories. In Goffman’s influential terminology, a social performance may be understood as the individual’s effort to fit into an already established social role or category. Performativity may tend to be misunderstood analytically as a more artificial, or insincere, form of social practice, but to Goffman, seeing social practice as a social performance does not concern, conceptually, the sincerity of the performer but rather the premise that “[i]f a performance is to come off, the witnesses by and large must be able to believe that the performers are sincere. This is the structural place of sincerity in the drama of events’ (Goffman 1959:77, see also Argenti 2007:11).

For the parent generation of migrants in Sarfalao, the most common social performance was to demonstrate their ability to abide by the (stereotypical) expectations of a modest, polite, and self-evasive Burkinabe adult. In the presentation of self in everyday life, this could imply speaking Jula (preferably with a non-Ivorian accent), Mooré, or another local language, as opposed to French; taking the time for salutations on the way through the neighbourhood; attending life-cycle rituals and other important events; dressing in locally produced fabrics rather than European-style clothing, or other fabrics associated with Côte d’Ivoire, etc.

For the young adult migrants, attempts were also made to evoke their integration into (perceived) Burkinabe standards of speech, dress, courtesy etc. Particularly when interacting with elders and authority figures, young migrant men and women would attempt to act according to the expectations of their Burkinabe neighbours, although many informants expressed frustration at having to behave in such a subdued fashion, which they often perceived as old-fashioned and unreasonable. At the same time, many young migrants evoked other social roles in the neighbourhood – most importantly the very stereotypical behaviour that "revealed" their Ivorian upbringing and caused their stigmatisation as outsiders. This social performance implied different dress, speech, and behaviour that was associated with urban youth culture in Abidjan and broadcast through music videos and sit-coms from the metropole to the rest of the
country, and beyond (see also Boswell 2010:189-90). In other words, the
mannerisms, accents, and other social skills learned in Côte d’Ivoire were
more likely to be associated by other residents to a different social role,
namely that of a diaspo. The Abidjanais urban youth culture associated
with this social role was not unknown in Burkina Faso before the arrival
of migrant families during the Ivorian crisis. While the access to Ivorian
TV channels and music videos may have exposed Burkinabe audiences to
the styles of the regional metropole, the influx of Ivorian university stu-
dents to the University of Ouagadougou since the 1980s (Zongo
2010c:26, see also Mazzocchetti 2009) had provided a precedent for the
meeting between Ivorian and Burkinabe youth culture and aesthetics (see
also Kibora 2012:174).

The diaspo style is reminiscent of the Congolese Sape movement of
the 1980s, in which French haute couture and a distinct genre of music
were the emblems of a cosmopolitan cultural elite, displaying symbols of
consumption and excess through elaborate dance performances in night
clubs in Kinshasa (see e.g. Devish 1998, De Boeck & Plissart 2004:54,
De Boeck 2004, Friedman 1994). In Abidjan, a similar celebration of
luxury consumption and cosmopolitan savoir faire is at the heart of the
social performances of nouchi youth culture that young migrants in Sar-
falao emulated, but the style favours the youth of the street – inspired by
African-American hip-hop aesthetics – rather than the upper class salons
(see also Ouattara 2008:124, Newell 2009). As most subcultural styles,
the urban youth culture of Abidjan was also signified by a particular ter-
minology, or lingo, and young migrants would speak the nouchi slang
associated with Abidjan as informal public performances of their other-
ness, as they met at designated coffee shops or cabarets, or met at their
grins, or hang-outs in the neighbourhood. In Sarfalao, young migrants
developed their own interpretations of a cosmopolitan urban youth cul-
ture, in response to the expectations and labelings of the people they met
in the neighbourhood. In this way, although diaspo youth culture was
already an established idiom in Ouagadougou before the Ivorian crisis,
the diaspo social performances were – as all everyday practice – contextual
and idiosyncratic, meaning that the individual performance, and its recep-
tion, is never given and is easily contested.

The parent generation also expressed themselves in speech and behav-
ior associated with Côte d’Ivoire: for example when meeting other re-
turning migrants; when reminiscing about their experiences in Côte d’Ivo-
ire; or when carried away by the atmosphere and alcohol at celebrations.

79 The word “Sape” is an acronym for “Société des ambianceurs et des personnes élégantes”, or the
and other social events. These various, and variable, strategies of self-presentation evoked a common association between Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso expressed across the transnational space. Informed by the shared history of circular labour migration between the two countries, both migrant and non-migrant informants would often refer to Côte d’Ivoire as "Abidjan", evoking the underlying association of Côte d’Ivoire with urban cosmopolitan modernity. In a similar way, young migrants remembered their expectations of Burkina Faso as being informed by their parents' reference to "the village" in an equally all-encompassing manner. The association of Côte d’Ivoire with urbanity and Burkina Faso with rurality – and the implicit parallel dichotomisation of modernity and tradition – did not, however, imply any straightforward hierarchy between the two places or idioms.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I conducted a series of focus groups where some of the concepts or phenomena that had become central to my exploration were discussed with groups of four to seven people, primarily people I had already interviewed or gotten to know. The groups were divided by gender, mainly to allow the female informants to express themselves more freely, and were also divided into diaspo and burkinabè, which had become a significant emic dichotomy in the study. When I asked one of the male burkinabè groups to explain the term "diaspo", they seemed to agree that the term signified someone who was neither Ivorian nor Burkinabe: a typical diaspo had Burkinabe parents, which made him [sic] not an Ivorian, but he was born in Côte d’Ivoire and therefore held an Ivorian birth certificate, making him not truly Burkinabe (see also Zongo 2006, Boswell 2010, Kibora 2012). I asked whether they could tell that someone was a diaspo, and they all believed they could. The diaspos’ way of talking and their behaviour gave them away: if someone showed up speaking either French or Jula in a particular way, they would know the person was a diaspo. One informant said that in Burkina Faso, they spoke “pure” French while in Côte d’Ivoire they spoke “dirty” or “mixed” French. The focus group participants generally agreed that it had been difficult to get along with the diaspos when the war broke out in Côte d’Ivoire and they started arriving in the neighbourhood. The longer the diaspos has stayed, the more arrogant they became, some argued: the new arrivals were more humble and eager to fit in.

Although these male informants tended to provide a gendered, masculine, stereotype of a diaspo, both the male and female focus groups discussed feminine diaspo stereotypes as well. Overall, the stereotypes of both diaspo and burkinabè were very similar across all four categories of focus groups. The term diaspo was said to designate a young person, male or
female, who had been born in Côte d'Ivoire to Burkinabe parents and had arrived in Burkina because of the Ivorian crisis. This style spanned everything from the American-inspired “gangster” look, sporting white t-shirts, jeans, and caps for both men and women, to the more Parisian “haute couture” look with ironed shirts and pants for the men and short dresses and elaborate hair styles for the women. All these styles were sported in Ivorian music videos and were associated with the flamboyant youth culture of Abidjan and with the Ivorian diaspora in Europe and America.

As with most stereotypes, the idea of diaspo appearance and behaviour was articulated more or less explicitly in relation to a significant other; in this case the equally stereotypical description of a burkinabè youth, designating someone who was perceived as an autochtone in Burkina Faso. Of course, the category of “burkinabè” in this context was more ambiguous, since in most other contexts or comparisons, young people would be classed in much more specific groupings, relating to a distinction between rural and urban style or origins; to ethnicity, religion, social class, or a number of other social categories. When related to the category diaspo, a burkinabè was described as modest by the burkinabè and as introverted and inhibited by diaspos. In terms of dress, the African pagne fabrics would be contrasted to the European aesthetics of the diaspo for both men and women, although some female informants in the focus groups said that diaspo girls had invented new ways of wearing the pagne fabrics that were now being copied by the burkinabè girls.

Diaspo was a familiar category to most youths I met in Sarfalao and although the normative perceptions of both diaspo and burkinabè stereotypes obviously were in the eye of the beholder, they were reproduced in fairly similar ways across different groups in the neighbourhood.

Becoming Diaspo in Sarfalao

The story of Pascal’s arrival in Bobo-Dioulasso resembles many of the narratives recounted in the previous chapters, but his experiences of facing and coping with social exclusion in Sarfalao is illustrative of how one might come to perceive oneself as diaspo. He was born in Soubré, north of San Pedro in Southern Côte d’Ivoire and went to school there until the tensions between strangers and autochthones induced his parents to consider a new life in Burkina Faso. They were both born in Yako, about 100 kilometres northwest of Ouagadougou and had come to Côte d’Ivoire in their youth, as so many other Burkinabe of their generation. Pascal’s fa-
ther had acquired work as a cook in Bassame and later followed his work to Abidjan and then to a residential area outside of San Pedro.

After the Tabou massacres in 1999 (see Chapter 2), Pascal’s parents became increasingly aware of the threat they were facing as Burkinabe immigrants in Côte d’Ivoire and sent Pascal, then sixteen years old, to live with an uncle to continue his studies in Bobo-Dioulasso in early 2002. Pascal had been too young to understand the hostilities taking place in Côte d’Ivoire, he said, but he still remembered the day he realized that he was not Ivorian like his friends:

I remember ... the first time I understood that I was not Ivorian

JB: Aha?

Yes, because we were in Côte d’Ivoire, we walked with eh ... well, that is with “the Ivorians”, as if I knew that they were “Ivorians”, me [I didn’t know]. We walked together, we did everything together, having fun. One day in the sixth grade [CM2] the teacher decided to have the strangers stand up

JB: They stand up in class ... Aha.

That they stand up in class, exactly, because it was as if he wanted ... to count the number of strangers that were in the class. Well, me I was still seated, because I didn’t even know where my parents came from – in the sixth grade, eh! – I didn’t even know where he is going with that question. I was still seated. Eh, he took the sheet, he says, “but Ouattara, get up!” Well, I stood up. It was when I came home, I say “but what is all that about?” They explained it to me. They said ... that’s when they began to make me understand that me, my country, it’s Burkina Faso. There, that’s when I started understanding, otherwise I was completely ignorant.

Pascal felt naïve that he had not understood his origins sooner and real-
ised that he was different from his classmates. In a scene that could have been taken from a story set in the Germany of the 1930s or Rwanda in the early 1990s, his teacher was the first to let him know that his family name gave his origins away and that he was a stranger in Côte d’Ivoire. I ask Pascal how old he was when this happened, and he says that he was not that quick to go through school and that he must have been twelve or thirteen. This would have been in 1997-98, at a time when Henri Konan Bédié was President of the Republic, and had introduced his concept of ivoirité into the national political debate. I ask him whether it was his last name that had identified him as a stranger: That’s it. It’s because of the
family name that I came to understand that ... well ... me myself, I was ... from another country. Not in my own country but in another country’. Within a few years, this other country, Burkina Faso, became Pascal’s home. He left Côte d’Ivoire with his older brother, who was already studying medicine at the university in Bobo-Dioulasso. After a visit to his parents in San Pedro, he brought Pascal back with him to Burkina Faso and their paternal uncle’s house in Sarfalao loti. Pascal remembered the bus ride through Côte d’Ivoire as untroubled and straightforward. It was only later – after the attempted coup of 19 September 2002 – that new arrivals would tell stories about overcrowded buses of people desperate to leave, and of roadblocks and harassments along the way. In early 2002, Pascal did not experience the journey as an escape from an armed conflict, despite the persecutions already taking place and the turmoil about to unfold.

Pascal remembered his first impressions of Bobo-Dioulasso as exciting. It was his first time to travel to another country, and he was proud to be visiting his “birth country” (pays natal) for the first time:

Alright, so I was very proud in the taxi but, well, as night fell, I instantly felt uncomfortable, since I was quite used to living with light … and today I see that there is no light in front of me. Everything is dark…

As other young people arriving to Burkina Faso from Côte d’Ivoire for the first time, the difference in living standard came as a shock to him, despite the familiar stereotypes of Burkina Faso as a rural backwater in comparison to the metropolitan and urbanised ideas of Côte d’Ivoire. Living in areas without streetlights, and sometimes without electricity and running water was a recurrent complaint from young people like Pascal. He described his first impressions of Bobo-Dioulasso as the opposite of the symmetrical parcels, calm and lighted streets of his childhood, but soon came to appreciate the lively atmosphere and the sense of living in a real city, rather than an isolated residential area.

In 2005, Pascal’s parents arrived in Bobo-Dioulasso, as his father had decided to retire. He had been able to keep his job despite the escalation of violence and insecurity in the Southwest. This marked another change of circumstances for Pascal, as he went from living with his uncle’s family in the relative comfort and affluence of Sarfalao loti to sharing a two-room house with his parents in the non-loti. Pascal’s uncle had also arrived recently from a successful migrant career in Côte d’Ivoire, but unlike Pascal’s father, he had invested in a house in Bobo-Dioulasso. I ask Pascal
whether his parents had envisioned a return to Burkina Faso prior to the conflict:

Yeaaaah ... well ... right ... well ... I don’t know, well ... [brief laugh] ... Someone who has the idea – it’s not as if I am criticising ... ehh ... my father ... someone who has the idea of coming to live in his own country, at least ought to prepare everything before coming. If I say “prepare everything”, it’s as, well, he should, being over there with ... ehh ... what little he makes, try to invest here for at least a construction and then he comes now one day to live here. The uncle, that’s what he did. Him ... he knew that one day he should come to the country and he had built. Today he is there, he is in his courtyard. But my father, anyway, honestly, he hasn’t built, at present as well, well, him he lives as a day renter. There.

Clearly embarrassed by the question, and eager not to be disrespectful to his father, Pascal described, as explicitly as he possibly could, his frustration with the lack of foresight on the part of his father, in comparison to the father’s brother who had invested in land and construction in the city beforehand and now could feel at ease in his own home. Pascal had realised that his father had, in fact, never expected to move back to Burkina Faso, and would not have, had it not been for the political developments in Côte d’Ivoire. In that sense Pascal’s parents did arrive in Bobo-Dioulasso as refugees, displaced into a living situation they had not prepared for, and a predicament they shared with so many others that it was difficult to rely on the support from friends or relatives. Pascal had been under the patronage of his paternal uncle until the arrival of his father, and during that time he had continued his studies until the ninth grade but he had failed his final exams and been unable to acquire a diploma. He dropped out of school in 2007. Since then he had struggled to find work, in his own opinion largely due to the stigmatisation he faced, having grown up in Côte d’Ivoire. Similar experiences were expressed by other young people who had come to Burkina Faso for the first time in their youth. Their clothes, linguistic styles, and mannerisms that were associated with Côte d’Ivoire in general, and Abidjanais youth culture in particular, made these young men and women stand out – something that made it easier to make both friends and enemies in the neighbourhood.

Although Pascal claimed not to have done much in the past three years, he was one of the most industrious people I met in Sarfalao and was constantly applying for work or preparing for the national tests that gave access to public employment in Burkina. But he believed that his background made it difficult to be successful:
I can say that in that sense even, there were ... big persons ... big persons, you could say the authorities here even, who ... really ... who didn’t like us, eh.

JB: Really?

Yes, when you go like that to establish ... for the establishment of your [ID] paper, a paper like that, “Ah it’s another Ivorian, there”, that, “it’s you, you’ve come to wreck our country!” In fact ehh ... They, to them, we have come to wreck their country, but that’s not it. There were even protests ... where they managed to ... people ... ehh ... the President [Compaoré] – excuse me – himself he went out and said that ... ehhh ... that if today the country is going astray, it’s because of the arrival of these youths from Côte d’Ivoire!

JB: Really?

Yes!

Pascal believed that it was this kind of prejudice against migrants arriving from Côte d’Ivoire that had prevented him from finding work. Another underlying difficulty would obviously be the lack of personal contacts in the city, or elsewhere in Burkina Faso, which was a disadvantage in a system where much recruitment into both public sector and other jobs seemed to rely heavily on knowing someone in an advantageous position.

Integrating by Force

Pascal, perhaps, emphasized the discursive persecution over the lack of personal connections because he had been involved with several attempts to mobilise young “Ivorians” against their stigmatization in order to negotiate access to formal employment as a disadvantaged minority. He was currently involved with a new association, after the previous group disintegrated when its president was selected to be president of the national youth council at the provincial level. The new association was called “Diaspora et développement”, referring to the most persistent label that Pascal and his friends had been given in Burkina:

Because we are treated as ... diaspo. They call us “the diaspo”. Well, the expression is badly chosen, since a diaspo is someone who lives in Côte d’Ivoire, well, if it’s not Côte d’Ivoire, it’s someone who ... it’s a Burkinabe who lives in Côte d’Ivoire who is the diaspo, you know, “the diaspora”. There. But us, we are not diaspos.
Faced with the derogatory term *diaspo*, Pascal was not alone in remarking that the idea of ‘diaspora’ was difficult to reconcile with his own situation. But, as Zongo notes, the term’s origins in the circles of university students in Ouagadougou suggest that the term “*diaspo*” was coined as an abbreviation of ‘children of or from the diaspora’ (Zongo 2010c:35, my translation), referring to the above-mentioned tendency for Burkinabe migrants in Côte d’Ivoire of sending their children to Burkina Faso to continue their education. Informants in Sarfalao also described a rural equivalent of this practice, by which children were sent to live with rural relatives in order to receive an education into the cultural and linguistic heritage of their parents. To Pascal, however, being labelled as *diaspo* upon his arrival to the country that he had painfully learned, while in Côte d’Ivoire, was his true origin was not only unjust but also semantically nonsensical.

The former president of the association was a friend of Pascal’s, and he had told Pascal that the only way to get a job was to mobilise collectively, as *diaspos*, that is to use that label as a rallying point in order to reach local politicians and attempt to negotiate access to public employment. More generally, the association had become a vehicle for reinterpreting the term “*diaspo*” by evoking, on the one hand, the initiative and resourcefulness of young people like Pascal and, on the other, to exploit the positive connotations of the Burkinabe diaspora in Côte d’Ivoire who, as Pascal was quick to emphasise, contributed significantly to the Burkinabe economy through remittances, although that influence was rarely acknowledged.

So far, the organisation was in its embryonic stage, with Pascal and fourteen other volunteers coordinating the meetings and collecting membership fees, and approximately three hundred paying members across the city, but to Pascal it was one among several ways that he was trying to turn his labelling into an advantage. I asked him why he was so committed to the idea of changing the connotation of the word “*diaspo*”:

> I fight to integrate myself – that is to say, I … integrate by force. Right. I integrate by force, because I acknowledge now that “home”, it’s here. I have become aware, since I was young. I see that “home” is here.

He explained that he had decided to show “the *autochtone*”, as he put it, that Pascal was more Burkinabe than “him” and to learn everything about his country to prove his commitment to Burkina Faso. He said that “*Diaspora et développement*” was based on the same idea: of showing their critics that they were a positive force in society, to be acknowledged as truly belonging: ‘So, it will be another shot for us to show people here that … we are truly [brief laugh] … the sons of the country, you know’.
Pascal’s experiences of being labelled as a stranger once more, having already left Côte d’Ivoire with the label “burkinabè” ascribed to him, were shared by many other diaspos in Bobo-Dioulasso. The following section relates more specifically to social performances in the practice of everyday life by considering an episode that occurred in a group of diaspo men on a Sunday afternoon.

Performing Subservient Youth

Dramane, Pascal, and Youssouf were close friends. They would usually hang out in front of the house of another diaspo friend, Cristophe, under the shade of a mango tree in the corner of a small quadratic open space in Sarfalao loti. One Sunday afternoon, as Pascal was taking his chance against the undefeated scrabble champion of the day and Dramane was practicing lyrics for an upcoming musical performance with Youssouf, the drowsy atmosphere was interrupted when a large white car, known locally as “quatre-quatre”, referring to the “4x4” four wheel drive mark on the side of such vehicles, pulled up in front of the mango tree.

A youthful looking man in his early fifties emerged and greeted the young men, who dutifully shook hands and sat up from their cosy positions. His driver also greeted us while his boss proceeded to inspect the open space in front of us, which was being cleared for shrubs at the end of the rainy season. He was involved in a resident initiative to improve the roads and rain dikes of that part of the neighbourhood and had come to meet with Cristophe’s uncle, the owner of the courtyard that served as a diaspo meeting point. After his casual inspection, the man from the car returned to our circle and asked if the tea was ready. Youssouf, who had been chatting lazily about the shrub-clearing issue with the others changed his voice and posture in a blink, from the confident, talkative, and smiling way I had come to know into a shrugging, subdued, and humble demeanour that made him almost unrecognizable. He politely replied that the tea was not ready yet. The man with the car was smiling and unimposing in his attitude, which made the contrast with Youssouf’s servility all the more striking. Some “big men” I met would take on a very authoritative attitude towards young men, but this man’s authority shone through his jovial attitude, reinforced by the reactions of the youths. The man gave Youssouf 1,000 FCFA and said that he had hoped that a contribution would have earned him a taste, but Youssouf repeated that he might have to wait a while. The man then asked whether Youssouf was a diaspo. Youssouf confirmed that he was born and
raised in Côte d’Ivoire. The man replied that he could tell from his demeanour that Youssouf was a *diaspo* – his appearance, his speech.

The second the man turned around, Youssouf’s attitude changed, and he told me, “Let’s go!” which I thought meant that he wanted us to follow the man towards his car. The others laughed and I understood his joke that he and I should make off with the cash. What I found remarkable about this episode, and the countless similar ones I have witnessed, was how the role of subservient junior to the authoritative (however understated in this particular instance) senior was, first of all, assumed and dropped in the blink of an eye and, secondly, how unremarkable this spectacle was to the group of youths who were witnessing the transformations with me.

While the last round of tea was passed around and the afternoon drew to an end, Dramane asked me whether young people hung out in this way where I grew up. I said that I had done that quite a lot when I was in high school but that once I went to university, my time was divided between my studies and my job at a local restaurant and I had had much less time for my friends ever since. Dramane said that that was the difference between us: among the ten young men who had been part of this cosy Sunday afternoon, he was quite certain that only one was employed. This was Cristophe, who lived in the house behind the mango tree, who worked as a teacher in a public school in town. Everyone else was trying their luck in the public admission tests (*concours*), Dramane said. I asked him if they were all *diaspo*, and he said that there was one guy who had grown up here in Bobo-Dioulasso but he had been hanging out with Dramane and his friends for so long that everyone thought he was a *diaspo* too.

As I discussed in Chapter 7, the hierarchical position of junior in relation to someone senior epitomizes the notion of youth, but this structural relationship does not determine how these roles are played, or used, by individual actors. In this trivial episode, Youssouf could play along with no particular stake in the game and set a friendly tone that provided the group with a little extra money for tea and, potentially, a positive relationship with a member of a local, or a “big man” (Utas 2012), that might be nurtured into a more binding alliance. Later in this chapter, I explore a more structured and public performance of youth by the same group of *diaspos*, to give more weight to the claim that the role of subservient junior was actively pursued, and that *diaspo* youths in some contexts fit the part better than their *burkinabè* counterparts. But in the following section, I explore the experiences of a young migrant woman who did not share
Pascal’s sense of labelling and exclusion, despite her similar upbringing and migrant trajectory.

The purpose of this counterpoint is to emphasise that social performances, and the roles or stereotypes they evoke, are negotiable and usually one of several options available to an individual agent. As the first half of this chapter should have made clear, gendered stereotypes of diaspo youth culture included both men and women, and the point here is not to provide a gendered contrast. Francine’s story, rather, is an example of a young migrant who might just as easily have been labelled a diaspo but for various reasons engaged in a process of emplacement in Sarfalao that relied on different social roles.

Inconspicuous Emplacement in Sarfalao

Francine was born in Abidjan. Her parents were born and raised in Burkina Faso. Her older sister was born before their parents left for Côte d’Ivoire, and her younger brother was born in Abidjan. Francine’s father used to work as a cook for a Lebanese company in Abidjan, but he had been unemployed for several years. Francine attended school in Abidjan, in the neighbourhood of Koumasi where the family rented a house, but when ‘the crisis’ began she had to stop going to school, just after passing the tenth grade. The family left Côte d’Ivoire in 2004, by train. It was Francine’s first time in Burkina Faso.

Once in Burkina Faso, she continued her studies but was forced to give up any hope of getting a bac because her parents were unable to continue paying her tuition. When Francine arrived in Burkina Faso with her mother, sister, and brother, her mother sent her to live with an aunt in Banfora, her mother’s older sister. There was not enough money for Francine’s mother to pay for schooling herself. Her aunt’s children were already grown up, and she was living alone after her husband died. Because Francine was a registered rapatriée, the Action Sociale funded her tuition in Banfora for two years. After passing 4ième, Francine decided to move back to her mother in Sarfalao. She did not get along well with her aunt. She had asked her aunt’s permission to leave, and she had accepted. Francine’s mother had said that Francine was welcome to live with her if she wanted to.

Francine much preferred life in Abidjan to living in Bobo-Dioulasso. Life was not as hard and there were more opportunities for finding work in the metropole. In Bobo-Dioulasso Francine worked for a man who sold pharmaceuticals in the city centre. Aside from attending to the cos-
tumers she was in charge of the accounts and writing receipts to the wholesalers. Francine used to work in a call shop with a friend. The friend had found another job and Francine had taken the opportunity to introduce herself to the owner. That was how she acquired her first job in Bobo-Dioulasso. Her father remained behind in Abidjan when the family moved. He never called them, and Francine suspected that her parents were having problems they kept from their children. She did not understand why he did not come to see them. She had not seen her father since they left in 2004, six years ago. She used to get along very well with her father. He was a kind and gentle man. Her mother claimed that she had no address or phone number to reach him, and Francine did not see how her father would be able to find them, even if he decided to come to Burkina Faso. Francine’s maternal grandmother lived with them in Sarfalao. They met for the first time when the family arrived from Abidjan in 2004. Francine liked her grandmother.

Francine was aware that there were other ivoiriens in Bobo-Dioulasso who were having a hard time getting along with the burkinabè and being accepted, but she had not had such problems. In the beginning she kept to herself out of her own free will and eventually she started making friends with her Burkinabe classmates in Banfora. She struggled most with learning Jula; her mother tongue was Lobi, but they mostly spoke French at home when they lived in Abidjan. From the outside, Francine possessed many of the characteristics associated with being a diaspo. She grew up in Abidjan and spoke French with an unmistakable Ivorian accent. She had never learned Jula in Côte d’Ivoire and would still use French words and phrases intermittently. Like Pascal, she was unaccustomed to the material standards and social etiquette she encountered in Burkina Faso in general, and she found the neighbourhood of Sarfalao to live up to the derogatory stories she had heard in Côte d’Ivoire. Living without electricity and running water was something Francine associated with the poorest slums of Abidjan and something she had been spared growing up. All in all, it would not be surprising if Francine would be perceived as more of an outsider in Sarfalao, and orient herself towards other diaspos in an attempt to find a footing in the neighbourhood.

But in Francine’s own experience, and in the eyes of the residents I met who knew her, Francine’s emplacement in Sarfalao was much more inconspicuous than Pascal’s concerted battle to both mark himself off as different and insist on his right to belong. Francine spent her first two years in the smaller town of Banfora, where the influence of diaspo youth culture was less influential than in Sarfalao. She was slightly younger than Pascal, and continued her schooling in Burkina Faso rather than facing the diffi-
culties of finding work. Her shy and subdued demeanour fit well with local ideals of femininity, thereby facilitating her integration into the neighbourhood and earning her a reputation as a polite and well-adapted _rapatrié_ in contrast to young women with more outgoing and confrontational behaviour. Under these circumstances, her difficulties with learning Jula and her distinctly Ivorian accent when speaking French was tolerated, and even admired, much in contrast to the experiences of other young migrants.

Despite Francine’s more inconspicuous process of emplacement in Sarfalao, the sense of finding one’s bearings and tuning in to a set of social performances or roles does not imply that she felt more at home in the neighbourhood than Pascal. Both families were struggling financially, and the parents in both households depended on the income of their young adult children to make ends meet. Francine had been lucky to find work but was paid sporadically and was on the lookout for other opportunities. She dreamed of saving enough money to travel to Abidjan and reunite with her father and often spoke of her plans of returning to Côte d’Ivoire more permanently. On the other hand, Pascal, who had experienced more hostility and name-calling on his arrival in Burkina Faso, was focusing all his attention on making a life in Bobo-Dioulasso. His experiences of exclusion had provided him with a social role that he was working consciously to redefine, or re-brand, in more positive terms, and despite the ambivalence surrounding the term _diaspo_, the label had provided Pascal with a sense of community and solidarity with other _diaspos_ that stood in stark contrast to Francine’s relatively lonely life in Sarfalao.

In more general terms, the contrasting experiences of Pascal and Francine relate to the dialectics of displacement and emplacement and illustrate how idiosyncratic trajectories and experiences simultaneously shape and are shaped by structures of meaning, influence, and access. From what began as parallel experiences of forced displacement from Côte d’Ivoire, Pascal and Francine engaged in strikingly different processes of emplacement in Sarfalao. Pascal’s initial experience of exclusion, or re-displacement, was gradually giving way to a sense of purpose and belonging as a _diaspo_, while Francine’s relatively untroubled integration had resulted in a process of emplacement into the neighbourhood on a par with so many other disenfranchised families in the _non-loti_, thereby in a sense glossing over her family’s sense of persistent displacement. Living as a well-integrated immigrant in Sarfalao made Francine blend in, rather than stand out as Pascal did through his social performances as a _diaspo_, but also left her to cope alone with the dramatic transition from living in a middle-class neighbourhood in the regional metropole of Abidjan before
the Ivorian crisis to eking out a living in Sarfalao. Francine’s experiences, in this way, point to the complex structural and emotional dynamics that underlie the stereotypes of *diaspo* and *burkinabè*: on the one hand, being labelled as *diaspo* was far from the only possible fate for a young adult migrant in Sarfalao, but, on the other hand, the social distance implied in the term “*diaspo*” may have provided Pascal with a less disenfranchised sense of emplacement. The following section explores the social potential of “*diaspo*” as a social brand, through a brief description of the mobilisation of *diaspo* youth culture in the context of a political rally that was an important point of access to members of the local and national political elite.

**Cheering for a Living: Performing Youth, Negotiating Adulthood**

On a Friday afternoon in August, I was supposed to make my debut on the *diaspo* football team where Pascal and some of his friends played every Sunday. The team had invited me to play in their last appearance of the season: a three-day tournament with other teams from the area, held at the football field where we usually held practice. With the new school year approaching, the annual summer tournaments, in which each section or neighbourhood of the city presented a team in a well-organised and very popular competition (see Baller 2005 for a Senegalese equivalent), were almost over. This was an important match for the team, not so much because of the modest prizes offered the winners but more because of their plans to celebrate the end of the season by organising a party afterwards. But the day before the match, Pascal sent the following text message on my mobile phone, ‘*Slt J. Demain si tu vien pour le match on ira assisté a l’installation du president ds jeune du haut. Donc tu te prepare pour sa oci. C’est un ami a nous. Merci*’\(^8^0\). The language was much more formal than in the messages he would send to his *diaspo* friends, which would contain abbreviations and *nouchi* expressions that made it almost impossible for the uninitiated to grasp their meaning. As he would in spoken language, Pascal went out of his way to make sure I understood – using “oci” to mean “okay” as the only slang word in the message. I imagined that Pascal had received a similarly brief message from the person who

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\(^{80}\) An English translation, that does not do complete justice to the particular “genre” of mobile phone text messages, reads as follows: ‘Pls J. Tomorrow if you come for the game we’ll go assist at the inauguration of the president of youth *du haut*. So prepare yourself for that *oci*. It’s a friend of ours. Thanks’. 
had passed on the orders from the newly appointed President of the Regional Youth Council of Hauts-Bassins (the provincial name abbreviated as du haut in Pascal’s message), and with that short message all plans for football matches and parties were postponed indefinitely. As with many other fleeting opportunities, the chance to take part in a meeting of the regional elite had to be grabbed without hesitation.

Pascal asked me to show up under the mango tree where we usually played scrabble at 14.30, but he called me at 14 to make sure that I was on my way. When I arrived, Pascal seemed nervous as he pleaded with some of the others to get going. One of the other friends stood next to Pascal, pointing out that it was now 14.33. Dramane and four others set off on foot, and Pascal said that he would catch up with them with me on my scooter. We were all given a t-shirt in red, green, or yellow with the print ‘Regional Youth Council of Hauts-Bassins. A Structure in the Service of the Youth’, to wear during the ceremony. We met the others in front of the imposing Catholic church in the upper class neighbourhood of Secteur 5, in front of which a row of shiny 4x4 (“quatre-quatre”) land cruisers were parked. Inside the imperious meeting hall of the church, an assembly similar to the one unfolding was being displayed on film on a large screen to the right of a large podium with a line of tables with name cards and small bottles of water. We waited outside in our colourful t-shirts and when someone passed us going to or leaving the meeting hall, one of the diaspos would imitate the person’s walk or make faces behind their back to the applause of the others.

A tall man in a dark suit, who I learned was the President of the National Youth Council, came over and shook hands with Pascal, whom he knew by name, and seemed to like. Pascal made a few jokes about his fancy suit, speaking with plenty of nouichi words and attitude but slightly more polite than he would to the rest of us “youths”. At 33 I was probably among the oldest in the group, but I would estimate the average to be around 27 in our “youth group”. But on this occasion, despite their age, the diaspo youths played their part well. When the actual inauguration ceremony began, we were placed at the back wall of the meeting hall and given a streamer with the same text as our t-shirts. In between speeches, our group would sing celebratory songs to the speaker, and we would lead the applause and cheering during and after each speech. The event’s guest of honour was the Minister for Youth and Employment, and other prominent guests included the Minister of Agriculture and the National Youth President that Pascal had met with before the ceremony.

During the first speech, Dramane and Youssouf whispered the lyrics to a song they had apparently improvised for the occasion to the rest of us.
By the fourth interlude, the group had worked out the song quite well (with the exception of the European ethnographer who was growing less fond of the idea of participant observation by the minute), and after the final speech, the TV crew from RTB\textsuperscript{81} approached us through the centre aisle from the podium, and the diaspo youths were given a moment in the spotlight while the crowd applauded. The ceremony ended at around five, and Pascal concluded that the football match was not going to happen. He had met both the referee and the tournament coordinator at the ceremony, and had been promised the possibility of a postponement in light of their duties this afternoon. We enjoyed the buffet of rice, chicken and sodas instead, and the following day Pascal called me, saying that we had been denied the postponement and had been declared the losers of the match.

What this description shows is first of all how the role of supporters to the regional youth council provided an entrance into the sphere of regional and national politics that many unemployed youths would never dream of. Performing the role of youthful backing singers is obviously not an expressway to fame and fortune, but, at least to Pascal in this description, the contacts to important allies in the political elite were maintained through these events. A month later, Pascal and Dramane were selected as volunteers for the Ministry of Employment and Youth’s regional office in Bobo-Dioulasso, during the preparations of the celebration of Burkina Faso’s 50th Anniversary of national independence in December 2010, in competition with hundreds of other applicants, perhaps not exclusively by way of their performance at the inauguration but no doubt because of their ability to contribute to such events in a positive and appropriate manner.

Rather than being subdued youths, the role taken by the diaspo youths at the inauguration was one that fit better with the cosmopolitan pretensions of the Ministry and the Regional Youth Council, where the youth represent the future and where the cheering and colourful group at the back of the meeting hall represents the promise of the youth of the entire region. What is ironic in this image is, of course, that the vast majority of this particular group consisted of youths who had grown up in Côte d’Ivoire, and who were struggling for recognition vis-à-vis their “autochthonous” peers in the neighbourhood. But the extrovert and jovial attitude of Pascal and his friends fit in perfectly with this event, and Pascal’s ability to play the role of the trickster by joking around with the National Youth President might have served him better than the subservient atti-

\textsuperscript{81} Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina : Burkina Faso’s national television service.
tude that Youssouf displayed towards the “big man” under the mango tree. On our way home, Pascal explained that in the circles of the political elite, it was no use to ask for help or try to be humble: these guys faced such behaviour from all the youths of their social networks on a daily basis, and Pascal knew that it drove them crazy.

Performing youthfulness, even in your late twenties or early thirties, might be a way of combining the best of a more cosmopolitan idea about youth as the nation’s future with the best of the persisting gerontocratic hierarchies, where those youths most able to assert themselves gain access to higher positions within the structure, while others remain stuck in youth as employment opportunities and access to higher education continue to recede.

Navigating towards Social Adulthood within and despite Social Networks of Access

I once asked Kader how he would describe the difference between himself and someone like Pascal. He asked me to elaborate, and I said that on the one hand they were approximately the same age, they were both born and raised in Côte d’Ivoire, and they were both called “diaspo” in Bobo-Dioulasso. On the other hand, they spoke differently and behaved differently – Pascal confirming the diaspo stereotype to a much larger extent, while Kader was less outspoken and dressed more like his burkinabè neighbours, much like Francine in the description above. Kader said that the difference was that Pascal was always in the diaspo “system”: he always behaved as a diaspo and hung out with other diaspos. Kader used to be more like that when he first arrived in Burkina Faso. He had used more nouchi vocabulary and dressed in fashionable clothes without caring what other people thought: ‘The diaspos don’t care’, he said repeatedly. Now Kader lived in a part of the non-loti where many of his neighbours were burkinabè. He had also aged, and matured, and was responsible for his girlfriend and their daughter. He could no longer be as carefree, and he was more concerned with fitting in. Kader’s new priorities did not go unnoticed. In a focus group with six diaspo young women, my question about what characterises a diaspo young man evolved into a longer discussion in which Kader was taken as a counter point to ‘typical diaspo behaviour’: he was described by the focus group participants as responsible and mature, unlike many of his agemates who still behaved like young boys by trying to seduce girls just for the fun of it. To the diaspo women in this discussion, being a diaspo youth was fine for a certain time in your life but inappropriate for someone with children and more responsibility.
Kader experienced the tension between his earlier and current priorities in his relationship with his best friend Julien these days. They were the same age, shared the same background, and were practically neighbours. But Julien acted much more as a diaspo than him – he was always in the system. They would talk about that when they went out. Julien would even tell Kader to slow down, saying that he could no longer be as diaspo as the others, now that he had a wife and kid to tend to. There were other, slightly older, guys that Kader knew in the neighbourhood who had changed in a similar way. Those were the people Kader related to these days wanted to emulate.

In this way, the desire to distance oneself from the youthful category of diaspo may not only be related to a desire to climb the ladder in one particular form of hierarchy. Performing the role of subservient youth may follow someone until death, since that position is relational to a particular position as senior (Durham 2004). But the youthfulness of Pascal and his friends at the inauguration has a social due date. As a parent, both men and women may feel the incentive to relate more to other social roles, as Kader did to his more mature male neighbours. Being in your early thirties, in and of itself, says very little about the appropriateness of embracing the role of cheering for the elite in the hope of eventually joining them. More than age, other factors such as becoming a parent, a head of household, or being steadily employed may be much more forceful in marking the gradual transition towards a new social role. For the diaspos, such roles would, once again, have to be invented as they go along. In the final section of this chapter, I explore a more existential side of being a diaspo in Sarfalao.

Zouglou and Hope in Sarfalao

In the middle of the smoke-filled room where Youssouf, Félix, and a varying number of other young men sleep, Paco dances slowly with his eyes closed, while singing along to the lyrics that are pouring out of a stereo, alit by a fluorescent blue backlight on the control panel. He has taken off his white t-shirt, and his body is glistening with sweat from the heavy heat of a Sunday afternoon in Sarfalao. Dramane explains to me that Paco is “inspired” by the music, which describes a kind of trance where the listener is drawn into the music and forgets about his surroundings. He says that this is how a zouglouman draws hope and courage from the zouglou music to endure the hardships of everyday life and face the world with his eyes open and his back straight.
One of the lyrics that filled the warm afternoon air spoke directly to the diaspo feeling of exclusion and of being a stranger in all places. In the popular song, “Quel est mon pays” by Ivorian zouglou artists Yodé et Siro, the sense of being denied a home is thus phrased in explicitly national terms, as being a struggle for national belonging or citizenship:

When I am in Gabon they call me Ghanaian
When I am in Ghana they call me Gabonese
In Burkina they say there’s an Ivorian
In Côte d’Ivoire, there’s a Burkinabe
Everywhere I am recognised but not as such
Where is my country, the country of métis
Don’t look at my face to ascribe me with a nationality
My dress to give the name of my country

I asked Kader and Pascal to explain the lyrics, which they both know by heart, to me. They explained the word ‘accoutrement’ with reference to the difference between how diaspos and burkinabè dress in Sarfalao and how Ivorians differ from Burkinabes more generally. The line ‘don’t look at my face...’ made Kader think of the traditional facial scars (cicatrices) that both Kader and Pascal had, Kader’s branding him as Baoulé and Pascal’s as a subgroup of the Samo ethnic group. Both these categorisations, they explained, were dubious, since Kader identifies himself as an ethnic Gurunsi, not Baoulé, but had been given the markings because he grew up in a Baoulé-dominated area. Pascal’s three parallel lines made some people think that he was from Benin. While the line “don’t look at my face to inscribe me with a nationality” might be taken to refer to the logics of autochthony or other exclusionist identity politics that base the criteria of national belonging on particular ethnic origins or characteristics, the central message of the song – and what resonated with the diaspos in Sarfalao was that all identities are “métis” and relational. The fact that someone who is perceived as Burkinabe in Côte d’Ivoire may also be perceived as Ivorian in Burkina Faso speaks to the social performance of the localised expressions of such identifications and to the structural power that the audience to a social performance has in setting the scene for any given performance. To the diaspo, the solution to this paradox – the paradox that their social performances were stigmatised in two different national

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82 ‘Quand je suis au Gabon on m’appelle ghanacen/Quand je suis au Ghana on m’appelle gabonais/Au Burkina on dit voilà ivoirien/En Côte d’Ivoire voilà burkinabè/De part et d’autre je suis reconnu mais pas en tant que tel/Quel est mon pays, le pays du métisse/Ne regarde pas mon visage pour m’attribuer une nationalité/Mon accoutrement pour donner le nom de mon pays’. 
contexts (see also Zongo 2006) – was to evoke a playful cosmopolitanism that both transcended these national(ist) discourses of belonging and provided them with at least one social role in the Burkinabe context that resonated with the political elite, namely that of the universalist ideal of an active and outspoken youth, which they performed so well at the inauguration ceremony and other political gatherings.

While the song ‘*Quel est mon pays*’, in this way, seemed to captivate the problem complex that has been at the heart of the present chapter, other *zouglou* songs dealt with other themes that also resonated with the diaspos. Dramane continued his explanations and told me that *zouglou* was not dance music for parties but was intended to inspire reflection in the listener. Many songs were about hope, about not being corrupted by money, about valuing friendship. These lyrics helped you hold your head up high and be proud, Pascal explained. You could tell a *diaspo* from a *burkinabè* by his taste in music: if someone walked proudly, as if listening to *zouglou*, he was bound to be a *diaspo*. He might even be dancing in the street in broad daylight – something you would never see a *burkinabè* do. This was an attitude the *diaspos* had brought with them from Abidjan. In Abidjan there were plenty of *zougloumans*, and this was the style that Pascal and his friends had brought with them.

At one point Pascal explained a song by saying that its message was that money changes a person and makes you forget what is important – friendship, for example. He said the lyrics were meant to make us understand that the life of the rich – the politicians and “the bosses” – was not worth striving for. I asked who the “we” referred to in this context, and he said that it was for “us, the weak”. He said that *zouglou* was about getting good advice from people who knew how it was to be “small”. He translated the following song, about a man who leaves his car at the site of an accident in Paris, despite having the law on his side in placing the blame for the collision. Pascal explained the message as being that if you go to Paris (or some other place) without papers, you do not have rights, and you would have been thrown out of the country by the authorities if you had stayed. This was a fitting example of how the *zouglou* songs also provided advice on situations that people like Pascal knew nothing about but which represented their aspirations. They were songs to make you think and retain your focus. They were songs that inspired hope.
Conclusion

This chapter has explored the cultural expressions and social positionings of diaspo youth culture in Sarfalao. From its origins in the university circles in Ouagadougou in the late 1980s, the term diaspo became associated with migrant families returning in the context of the Ivorian crisis, connoting the two-fold exclusion of young second generation migrants who were neither Ivorian – given their parents’ origins – nor Burkinabe, due to their upbringing in Côte d’Ivoire. Although the Burkinabe diaspora in Côte d’Ivoire has always been valued for its contribution to the Burkinabe economy through remittances and investments, the arrival of large numbers of displaced migrants during the Ivorian crisis changed the view that non-migrant Burkinabes held of the diaspora and brought veiled resentments out into public discourse. In this re-evaluation of the role of the Burkinabe diaspora in Côte d’Ivoire, the diaspo youths were seen as the personification of the problem – of Burkinabe migrants who had abandoned their Burkinabe origins and integrated into Ivorian society, to the extent that their speech, dress, behaviour, and social values were seen as alienated and inappropriate by non-migrant Burkinabes.

To the young migrants, having been persecuted and stigmatised as burkinabè in Côte d’Ivoire, being met with another social stigma as diaspos in Burkina Faso extended their sense of displacement and made it more difficult to proceed with a process of home-making in their new neighbourhood. In response to their derogatory labelling, diaspo youths attempted to mobilise collectively, intent on turning their stigma into a virtue and embracing the term diaspo in an effort to redefine its connotations in more positive terms. In a context of high unemployment rates and restricted livelihood opportunities, mobilising as diaspos turned out to provide some youths with access to parts of the local and regional political elite, who responded to the diaspos’ ability to perform the role of vibrant and active youths, representing the spirit of the regional and national youth councils and the political slogans about the country’s future. In this way, diaspo youth culture served as a social asset that provided diaspo youths with access to elite networks of privilege. Paradoxically, performing youth at political rallies showed the potential for providing a way out of the social moratorium of youth, which, Henrik Vigh argues, characterises the social position of youth in a context where persistent economic decline and ‘generationally asymmetric control over access to resources … greatly reduce [youth people’s] space of possibilities’ (Vigh 2006a:96). Performing diaspo youth culture in the service of the local political elite, in other words, was a way for the diaspos to negotiate access to networks of privi-
lege that might serve as a path away from the social position of youth, towards social adulthood (cf. Barrett 2004).

The chapter considered two different expressions of the social performance of youth in this regard. On the one hand, the political rallies and campaigns set the stage for the diaspos to perform the role of an active and politically engaged national youth. But, on the other hand, in the practice of everyday life, the role of youth might rely more on cultural idioms of generational hierarchy. In these contexts, performing youth implied acting as subservient and respectful towards seniors – a performance that went counter to the general stereotype of the diaspo as outspoken and arrogant. Goffman’s concept of a social performance was employed in order to analyse how social actors operate with multiple social roles and how these roles, and the performances that define them, are constituted in dialogue with an audience in the practice of everyday life. Goffman’s emphasis on the credibility of the role and its enactment, rather than the sincerity of the actor, provides an analytical approach to studying expressions of youth culture that acknowledges, firstly, that actors may engage with a whole repertoire of cultural roles, rather than being determined by a single role, as the Birmingham School of Sociology youth studies tended to imply; secondly, that cultural roles are articulated in a dynamic relationship between what can be understood as actors and audiences, rather than being a fixed categorisation of a delimited group; and thirdly, that actors may themselves be aware of playing a role; they may improvise and innovate within that role, and approach the role with a critical distance, rather than mechanically following a cultural script, as the functionalist studies of enculturation assumed. In these ways, the concept of social performance fits well with the emphasis in more recent studies of youth on the interplay between hierarchical social structures and individual agency (see e.g. Abbink & van Kessel 2005, Argenti 2007, Christiansen, Utas, and Vigh 2006, Cole & Durham 2008a, Honwana & De Boeck 2005, Richards 1996, Utas 2003, Vigh 2006a). At the same time, the concept may be ill chosen to do justice to the self-aware and strategic deployment of the social roles explored in this chapter. For example, the performance of subservient youth was explicitly directed at seniors who presented the diaspos with potential access to otherwise restricted social networks. Although a social performance may also imply a less strategic form of role playing in everyday life, then, the diaspo performance of both actively engaged and subservient youth was part of the conscious mobilisation of diaspo youth culture as a social brand that might provide some of its performers with access to employment opportunities and resources, bypassing the large number of local youths competing for the same privileges.
As a self-conscious promotion of a social brand, performing diaspo youth culture may be understood as relying on the same playful performances that Sasha Newell has described as ‘the bluff’ in his work on the nouchi youth culture in Abidjan. As we have seen, Abidjan’s urban youth culture provided the aesthetic role model for the diaspos in Sarfalao. Newell characterises the term “nouchi” as:

… a word meaning ‘hoodlum’ or ‘bandit’ but also referring to urban slang, coolness, and the ability to survive by one’s wits … [T]he term excludes those who symbolically distance themselves from urban style, especially those who identify themselves with northern, predominantly Muslim culture. This cultural opposition … was reinforced by the performance of the bluff, in which audiences distinguished who was a true urban citizen from those that were merely residents (Newell 2009:380)

For the diaspos in Sarfalao, this cultural opposition was easily transferred from its original dichotomy between true urban citizens and mere residents (implying rural origins) in Abidjan to a dichotomy between diaspos as true urban cosmopolites and burkinabè youths as traditionalists merely residing in the city, while espousing values and aesthetics associated (at least in the eyes of the diaspos) with the stereotypical village. Performing the diaspo ‘bluff’ in Sarfalao, that is, of proving oneself as a true cosmopolitan in contrast to local youths, relied on a cultural repertoire of nouchi slang, emblematic clothing, musical preferences, mannerisms, greetings etc., that were unintelligible to the uninitiated youths in the neighbourhood.

The chapter also reflected on the consumption of zouglou music as not only a social performance directed at non-diaspo youths but also as a collective practice that brought diaspos together and inspired hope in the listeners through the act of sharing their appreciation, as well as through the messages of the lyrics. In this way, the consumption of zouglou music illustrates the general point that the performance of diaspo youth culture – as any social performance, in Goffman’s understanding – cannot be reduced to the self-conscious impression management of the actor but is a multi-faceted social practice that may provide a deeply felt sense of belonging and hope while simultaneously serving as an identity-maker towards other social roles.

Finally, the chapter explored narratives and experiences of young migrants who did not identify with the social performances of their diaspo peers. Although Francine felt at ease in the company of other young migrants, her experience of emplacement was based more on her ability to adapt to, and fit into, norms of appropriate behaviour expected of stereo-
typical burkinabè ideals. Her social performance of an appropriately polite and restrained young woman was not well received in the neighbourhood because it completely glossed over her Ivorian upbringing but rather because her neighbours believed and appreciated her sincerity. To Francine, trying to fit in did not imply that she was intent on putting her Ivorian past behind her – after all, she still dreamed of returning to Abidjan and reuniting with her father – nor did it imply that she avoided other young migrants in the neighbourhood. Her experiences illustrate well that the dichotomy between diaspo and burkinabè was far from absolute and that migrants and non-migrants alike related to these social roles in different ways.

The same can be said of Kader, whose perception of the social role of diaspo had changed over the course of the five years he had spent in Sarfalao. He had initially found friends and assurance among other migrant youths and had emphasised his Ivorian upbringing by performing the social role of diaspo. Becoming a father and sharing his house with his (non-migrant) girlfriend had gradually changed his orientation from the carefree diaspo youths towards more mature peers in the neighbourhood. Even his friend Julien, who was still part of the diaspo ‘system’, found it appropriate that Kader should direct his attention more towards his role as a father and a provider. In this way, attaining social adulthood was a gradual process that Kader was able to influence deliberately, although he still described himself as a ‘youth’ because of his inability to make a steady income and his dependency on his father.

On the basis of these considerations, it may be tempting to conclude that diaspo youth culture should be seen as a rebellious departure from societal norms, in line with the thinking of the Birmingham School sociologists. However, despite the spectacular evocations of youth in the diaspo social performances, these aesthetic differences betray an underlying similarity between the aspirations of the young people considered in this chapter. After all, the incentive for diaspo youths to embrace their social branding was essentially their difficulties in finding work and integrating into the neighbourhood and the city. In their navigation of the social position of youth, the diaspos relied not only on the global discourses of youth as the future of the nation but also on the very restrictiveness of local social hierarchies to which it might seem to stand in opposition. Put differently, the combination of a cultural platform that encouraged the performance of youth culture with a social hierarchy premised on seniority provided the diaspos with a room for manoeuvre that would not otherwise have been available. This image of youth culture departs considerably from the Birmingham School’s view of youth culture as resistance.
(Hall & Jefferson 1976), and later works on youth culture as a vibrant form of self-expression and liberation from societal norms (e.g. Amit-Talai & Wulff 1995, Maira & Soep 2004), and emphasises the interplay between social hierarchies and individual agency through which youth may be understood simultaneously as an expression of cultural identity and social positioning, of both being and becoming (cf. Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 2006).

To the diaspos, the threat of being stuck in the social moratorium persisted, but some youths were negotiating access to social progression through networks of privilege at the expense of others. Negotiating social adulthood in this way designates a socially conservative practice that inscribes the image of an active and cheering youth into established social hierarchies. This observation warns against an overly romantic view of youth agency as implying a revolutionary potential for social change. As Deborah Durham argues from her ethnography of Herero youth associations in Botswana,

Youth in Botswana are and are not the kinds of agents of social and cultural change often envisioned in the West ... In Botswana, adults ... are the people understood most typically to effect change. Youth is not a period of liberation from a home society or cultural traditions, and the motif of development that youth engenders is not a linear move away from the past or from home ... [T]heir agency, or their ability to shape the culture and social relations around them, rests more in their ability to vest [their innovations] in relationalities, which they are only beginning to wield effectively in their later youth years' (Durham 2008:176)

While it may be tempting to inscribe the inconspicuous processes of emplacement that both Francine and Kader were engaged in, despite their Ivorian upbringing, as representing the more conservative path towards social maturity, and pose the performance of diaspo youth culture as a contrasting example of innovative and independent agents, challenging the established norms of appropriate behaviour, it may nevertheless be more useful to appreciate both the resourcefulness and independent agency involved in the former, and the conservative ambitions of the latter. The social position of youth implies that young people direct their efforts towards expanding their social networks and accumulating social recognition by all possible means, leading some to evoke their youthfulness in a context where such a social role is perceived as an asset, and others to emphasise their sense of responsibility and moderation to a different audience. Mobilising diaspo youth culture in Sarfalao, in this way, may be seen
as one among several strategies in the pursuit of social recognition and access to networks of privilege.
9. Conclusion

Through an exploration of migrant biographies and everyday practices in Sarfalao, this thesis has analysed two forms of conflict-related mobility that were shaped by the Ivorian crisis, namely the forced return of Burkinabe labour migrants and their children from Côte d’Ivoire to Burkina Faso, on the one hand, and the recruitment of young Burkinabe men into the Ivorian rebel forces, on the other. The study has focused primarily on the experiences and predicaments of Burkinabe labour migrants and their children, while cross-border recruitment has served as an analytical counterpoint, to broaden the discussion. By exploring the subjective experiences of migrants, whose journeys were shaped by the Ivorian crisis in diverse and often unpredictable ways, these empirical cases have required a conceptualisation of wartime mobilities that cuts across conventional categories of migrants, such as labour migrant, refugee, transnational migrant, and mercenary. Migrant biographies, which emphasise subjective experiences and practices of displacement and emplacement, contain a combination of elements of most of these categories and, therefore, point to alternative analytical strategies for understanding both the commonalities and the differences that they manifest.

This concluding chapter outlines the main conceptual contributions of the present study along those lines, discussing the way the empirical findings of the thesis relate to theories about labour migration (including return migration), transnationalism, and forced displacement (as conceived of in refugee studies).

Wartime Mobilities in the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire Transnational Space

Across the historical and empirical chapters, the thesis has explored the implications of the shift from hostile political rhetoric to armed aggression against perceived strangers in Côte d’Ivoire from two empirical perspectives. The main focus of the thesis related to the changing conditions and outlooks of Burkinabe labour migrants in Côte d’Ivoire since the
colonial period. These dynamics were discussed in relation to the political history of the region in Chapter 2 and in relation to the narratives of returning labour migrants in subsequent chapters. The second perspective related to the emergence of a new migrant trajectory in the form of combatant recruitment from Burkina Faso, which was the focus of Chapter 6.

In this way, the thesis has explored the historical background to, and some of the human consequences of, the *ivoirité* politics of belonging which were articulated by the ideologues of Henri Konan Bédié in the aftermath of the death of Houphouët-Boigny and gradually implemented into the Ivorian constitution, e.g. through the 1998 law regarding rural land ownership (see e.g. Chauveau 2000, 2010, Dembélé 2003) and the controversial amendments in July 2000 to the electoral code regarding the criteria for the illegibility of a presidential candidate (see e.g. Dembélé 2003:41, Le Pape 2002). The redefined basis of Ivorian citizenship drew an elusive, yet consequential, line between those seen by the regime as legitimate Ivorian citizens and those, of immigrant descent, who were now construed as illegitimate members of the Ivorian polity on a par with newly arriving immigrants from Burkina Faso, Mali and other historical labour-exporting countries to the Ivorian plantation economy. In the changing political landscape in Côte d’Ivoire, Burkinabe labour migrants and young Burkinabe men recruited into the rebel armed forces in the early days of the rebellion represented two roles in the same conceptualisation of the stranger as a threat to Ivorian national unity.

In order to provide an empirically grounded analysis of the experiences of migrants who were targeted by these rhetorical constructions and political strategies, I presented the voices of migrants who, in their own views, were unquestionably Burkinabe in terms of citizenship but who relied on Côte d’Ivoire’s long-established openness towards immigrant labourers for their livelihoods. With the intensified discourses of autochthony during the 1990s, Burkinabe labour migrants were seen by the Bédié (1993-1999) and Gbagbo (2000-2011) regimes and their followers as central symbolic figures in the politics of belonging: as the ‘strangers’ imposing on increasingly scarce agricultural land, in the case of labour migrants, or fuelling the armed rebellion under the patronage of Burkinabe President Blaise Compaoré and his alleged collaborator, Alassane Dramane Ouattara, in the case of cross-border recruits into the *Forces Nouvelles* rebel movement (see also Hagberg & Bjarnesen 2011). In other words, while both categories of Burkinabe immigrants were peripheral to the Ivorian crisis, both geographically and politically, their shared predicament relied on their centrality to their persecution by *ivoirité* militants, in rhetoric and in terms of armed aggression.
Between Labour Migration and Forced Displacement

A central theme running through the previous chapters has been the overlap between labour migration and forced displacement that characterises the experiences of migrants in Sarfalao. This overlap resurfaced in several different contexts. Firstly, the colonial labour migration regime whose legacy continues to structure the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space was founded on the forced recruitment of and structural violence against residents in present-day Burkina Faso. Despite the concerted efforts of the colonial authorities, the first generations of labour migrants did not follow the trajectories that now tend to be seen by aspiring migrants as well as external observers as inevitable; towards the plantation industry and urban informal sectors of southern Côte d’Ivoire. It took several decades, as well as the deployment of new and more compromising recruitment strategies on the part of the authorities, to gradually divert migrants from present-day Ghana, where work conditions and salaries were found by the first generations of labour migrants to be more advantageous. This exploitative and oppressive construction of the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space is easily forgotten in contemporary discussions of labour migration, not least in light of the 

Secondly, the migrant biographies that provided retrospective narratives on departures, sojourns, and returns in this thesis describe subjective experiences of continuity and rupture that complicate our understanding of both labour migration and forced displacement. On the one hand, migrants described their sojourns in Côte d’Ivoire prior to the armed conflict as characterised by fairly stable and predictable conditions under which to cultivate a livelihood and invest in a gradual process of emplacement. At the same time, however, these descriptions also featured sudden ruptures, such as failed harvests, fires, or disagreements with local farmers or residents, that obliged the migrants to revise their strategies and sometimes abandon their farms or residences altogether and start over somewhere new. These experiences, although not related to the armed conflict, represent instances of forced displacement, whereby the pursuit of the envisioned livelihood strategies and home-making practices are
made increasingly difficult to pursue due to external circumstances (cf. Lubkemann 2008a). On the other hand, even the most dramatic narratives of forced displacement during the Ivorian crisis were characterised by a gradual process of reflection and weighing of options on the parts of the migrants, including the consideration of viable destinations and alternatives to moving. As Lubkemann argues in relation to his study of wartime mobilities in the context of the Mozambiquan civil war,

... the choice to migrate in the midst of even the most dire situation is never a foregone conclusion; moreover, such decisions may well be informed by concerns other than those that can be traced to the crisis itself ... Rather, inhabitants sought to realize culturally imagined life projects and negotiate the meaning and configuration of social relations as socially positioned and differentiated actors (Lubkemann 2008a:21)

In other words, while forced displacement tends to be seen as a relatively instinctual reaction to external circumstances, these narratives express a considerable degree of agency and choice in the practices of migrants who eventually became refugees. In this way, the empirical cases and historical discussions of this thesis challenge the distinction between migrant and refugee by pointing towards significant similarities in the experiences of people who, at first sight, seem to fit neatly into either one category or the other. From an anthropological perspective, the general characterisations of historical periods as relatively accommodating or antagonistic towards Burkinabe immigrants in Côte d’Ivoire provide an essential context for these subjective experiences, but they say relatively little about how individual migrants and families fared in their migrant careers and how these experiences were interpreted at the time.

By arguing that we need to look beyond the historical distinction of periods characterised by more or less welcoming conditions for labour migrants, I wish to emphasise that there are other ways of deducing more general themes from the variation of individual narratives. The analysis of intergenerational relationships in Sarfalao suggested that first and second generations of migrants experienced structurally different trajectories, giving way to different processes of emplacement in Sarfalao. The parent generation, who were generally first-generation labour migrants, having left Burkina Faso alone or as a couple in their youth to pursue a career as labour migrants in Côte d’Ivoire, described the onslaught of the Ivorian crisis as a gradual process of displacement from their envisioned life-making projects. Their decision to leave Côte d’Ivoire or, as a common tendency to be discussed in the next section, to reconfigure their families across the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space, was informed
by their own attachments and networks in Burkina Faso. These connections were far from straightforward: some migrants deliberately chose to settle in Bobo-Dioulasso rather than to return to their place of birth, or to wherever their close kin or other important connections might reside. These decisions could be based on fairly explicit reservations about the usefulness of these connections, for example in cases where family members had expressed resentment against the migrant, or his or her spouse. They might also be based on a more elusive fear of potential conflicts arising from bringing their children back to a village they had never seen and the suspected jealousy or resentment of rural kin.

Analysing “South-South” Transnationalism

Across the empirical chapters, the thesis has explored how migrant families resorted to different strategies as part of their efforts to make a home for themselves in Sarfalao. One tendency to emerge from the cases considered was the changing constellations of migrant families. Having usually lived in a single household in Côte d'Ivoire, both urban- and rural-based migrants in Côte d'Ivoire chose to cope with their forced displacement by having the husband remain in Côte d'Ivoire, while the wife and children returned to Burkina Faso. In itself, this common decision illustrates that forced displacement is not a uniform reaction to external circumstances but a variable process that affects different family members in different ways over time and depends on an on-going dialogue between external influences, on the one hand, and individual and collective agency, on the other.

In the cases where husbands remained in Côte d'Ivoire, their experience of displacement was primarily related to the deteriorating living and working conditions in their place of residence, entailing different responses. For example, Kadi’s husband Oumar (discussed in Chapter 5), had been employed by an American NGO and had remained in the family’s courtyard in Abidjan when Kadi and the children left for Burkina Faso, hoping that the expatriate staff would return once the end of the conflict was in sight. In the meantime, though, he was struggling to get by and did not contribute significantly to Kadi’s household economy in Sarfalao. Awa (discussed in Chapter 4) had left Côte d'Ivoire with her husband in early 2003, leaving their cacao plantation outside Vavoua in the central forest zone. Being unsuccessful at finding work in Bobo-Dioulasso, however, Awa’s husband had returned to Côte d'Ivoire, hoping to continue his cacao cultivation despite the on-going hostilities in the area. These
different trajectories, once again, cut across distinctions between forced displacement and labour migration, the variation arising from the room for manoeuvre that migrant families found to impose their own decisions on even the most difficult circumstances.

For the wives who eventually settled in Sarfalao with their children while their husbands remained in Côte d'Ivoire, their position within the family changed, as they became *de facto* heads of households in the absence of their husbands, who were rarely able to provide regular remittances, and even tended to be completely absent and out of reach during the armed conflict. In this way, the families may be said to have returned to the family constellation that characterised the formative period of the colonial labour migration regime, whereby young men left their families behind in Burkina Faso to travel to Côte d'Ivoire. The responsibility placed on the female heads of households in Sarfalao was coupled with the anxiety of not knowing when or how husbands would participate in and contribute to the household economy. Communication technologies such as mobile phones and the Internet, although available, were rarely affordable to these families, and in a striking number of cases – 5 out of the 16 women who fit the description of *de facto* heads of household – wives said that they had lost contact with their husbands by losing his number or being unable to reach him at the address or phone number they had been given. This uncertainty as to whether husbands would ever return or contribute added to the hardships of their wives, already burdened with the task of providing for their children.

Another consequence of the reconstitution of transnational families in this way was that young adult children were faced with growing responsibilities to contribute to the household economy and participate in looking after the needs of their younger siblings. The fact that older children share a significant number of household responsibilities is, in and of itself, obviously nothing new in this context, but the absence of fathers did affect intergenerational relations. Hélène, whose struggles with her irresponsible and negligent mother were discussed in Chapter 7, had been obliged to become the *de facto* head of household and take care of her younger siblings at the age of nineteen. She had been unable to complete her schooling because of the demands placed on her at home and had been obliged to look for a job instead, in order to meet these demands. She was respected by friends and neighbours for this devotion to her family and her nickname, “Mama”, also hinted at her status as a social adult, despite her relatively young age.

The former rebel Thierry (discussed in Chapters 6 and 7) was less able to fill the shoes of his absent father and take on the responsibility for the
household economy and care of his younger siblings. Despite being one of the rare few to hold a steady job – working as a truck driver for the SOFITEX cotton company in Bobo-Dioulasso – his proclivity to spend his salary in the local cabarets had earned him a reputation in his family and among his friends and neighbours of being childish and irresponsible. In Kadi’s family (discussed in Chapter 5) her oldest son, Abdouleye, who attended the university in Ouagadougou, lamented his inability to support his mother, who was working too much and eating too rarely in order to make ends meet and assure the schooling of her six children. He was grateful for her efforts and intent on taking on more responsibility once he graduated but he was still a dependant, a burden, on his mother’s modest budget and, in that sense, very much still a child. His younger sister Asséta, who also attended university, was in a similar position despite being the same age as Hélène. Their younger sister, who lived at home in Sarfalao, on the other hand, was gradually assuming a more mature role in the family. She not only took care of the three youngest children when her mother was working but also contributed to the household economy with her earnings from working in Kader’s coffee shop.

The way the changing family constellations affected intergenerational relations, in other words, varied both across and within families. The cases illustrate, rather, that the positions and responsibilities of young adult children were negotiable and depended on individual choices and capabilities, despite the relatively limited space for manoeuvre imposed by strained household economies. The structural restraints of the transnational space within which these negotiations were taking place changed with the gradual developments of the Ivorian crisis and put increasing pressure on all family members, young and old, to take responsibility and contribute to the household economy. Prospects for new journeys to Côte d’Ivoire as well as the hope for remittances from absent husbands retained the orientation of family members in Burkina Faso towards Côte d’Ivoire and thereby sustained their transnational constitution, despite the often negligible degree of interaction between family members in the two countries. The concerns over losing touch with husbands and the inability to stay in touch despite the availability of communication technologies are rarely present in studies of transnational spaces that include a European or North American destination. On the contrary, transnational studies tend to emphasise the frequent exchanges that bind families together in new forms of everyday practice despite the geographical distances between family members. For example, Åkesson has shown how frequent phone calls between Cape Verde and Sweden, through the use of relatively inexpensive phone cards, have enabled transnational families to participate in
everyday activities over the phone and thereby sustain a sense of social intimacy (Åkesson 2007). Such options were not available to the transnational families in the present study and may be one of several ways in which south-south transnationalism differs from the connections between one or several migrants in a Western country and their family at home in a lower-income country, which comprise the vast majority of cases in the study of transnationalism (see e.g. Blanc, Basch, and Glick Schiller 1995, Eastmond & Åkesson 2007a, Faist 2000, Hannerz 1996, Levitt 2001, Nyberg Sorensen & Olwig 2002, Portes 1999, Vertovec 1999, Åkesson 2004).

Generational “Returns” and the Practice of Home-Making

From the point of view of young adult children, arriving to Burkina Faso for the first time during the Ivorian crisis was generally described as a quite difficult and traumatic experience. Some youths had idealised expectations of their arrivals in Burkina Faso. They evoked the notion of a (national) homeland, to which they would be welcomed by their kin and countrymen, as well as ideas about the virtues of a more traditionalistic way of life associated with their parents’ (rural) origins and upbringing. Other youths feared the worst from their move to Burkina Faso. In Côte d’Ivoire, these youths had been exposed to images of Burkina Faso as a rural backwater, where witchcraft and gossip would be inflicted on outsiders. These images were a part of the construction of Abidjan (and by extension) the southern part of Côte d’Ivoire as more cosmopolitan and civilised than the backward and traditionalist north (comprising both northern Côte d’Ivoire and its poorer neighbouring countries). Although evoked in ivoirité rhetoric as well, these stereotypes were not exclusive to a xenophobic rhetoric in Côte d’Ivoire but were even evoked by migrant parents, who would threaten their children with sending them “back to the village” in Burkina Faso as a punishment for their disobedience.

Regardless of their expectations, young second-generation migrants struggled to adapt to the material conditions of living in the non-loi, having grown up in Côte d’Ivoire where electricity and running water had been taken for granted. Positing themselves in this way, as more worldly in contrast to their Burkinabe neighbours, might have been a way of coping with their underlying difficulties of integrating into local social networks in the neighbourhood and the city. Settling in a new place as one among thousands of arriving refugees during the armed conflict in Côte
d'Ivoire presented all the challenges of being a refugee: competing for scarce livelihood options and living space, while poised in the guise of their parents’ trajectories as returning labour migrants.

In other words, the trajectories of second-generation immigrants to Côte d'Ivoire, the children of labour migrants, who had generally never been to Burkina Faso prior to the Ivorian crisis, seen in isolation from their parents’ trajectories, resemble the conventional understanding of forced displacement as the involuntary departure from a place seen as home to a new setting to which the refugee has to adapt. As the children of labour migrants, furthermore, they had little choice in where to go and how to settle; another characteristic commonly associated with forced displacement. Rather than a deliberate choice, the refugee’s destination is easily seen as either determined by the lack of options – refugees go wherever they can to escape violence – or is simply premised on the intervention of humanitarian organisations and the infrastructure provided by external actors to lead refugees to organised camps. What sets the structural conditions of second-generations apart from these conventional ideas about forced displacement, however, was first and foremost that they travelled and settled with their parents, who provided a basic set of relations in Burkina Faso that would generally not be available to a refugee arriving in a place of refuge for the first time. This premise, in combination with the symbolic ties to an imagined ‘homeland’ made the trajectories of second-generation immigrants resemble a ‘return’ rather than a refugee ‘escape’. But rather than negotiating a compromise between the migrant and the refugee, it may be more useful to understand these experiences as particular forms of wartime mobility that comprise elements of forced displacement and labour migration.

Regarding the young Burkinabe men recruited into the Forces Nouvelles, the notion of displacement would seem unlikely to emerge in cases where young men left their homes for relatively brief sojourns abroad as a part of what has been shown to resemble the trajectory of other forms of labour migration. However, when considered in parallel with the experiences of returning labour migrants, the sense of having arrived in a place that was expected to be welcoming and predictable, but proved to be more difficult to (re)integrate into, are strikingly similar. If we understand displacement as a life-rupturing form of mobility that impedes the migrant’s project of life-making, the two forms of wartime mobility do share several significant features. In this sense, we might argue that the basic resource that both rapatriés and returning rebels found lacking in their new life situation in Sarfalao was immediate, accessible social
relationships that under normal (or ideal) circumstances are vital for pursuing everyday life strategies.

In conjunction, these cases point to conceptual insights that may be applied in other studies of wartime mobilities. Firstly, labour migration may be seen to comprise an element of forced displacement, both in the sense of the structural violence that may compel migrants to set out on journeys they would rather not make, and in the sense that migrant sojourns may be disrupted by unforeseen events or changes in the social terrain, that compel the migrant to move on or reappraise his or her options. Secondly, combatant recruitment may be understood as an alternative form of labour migration, motivated by the prospects of making a living and returning home with capital and experiences to reinvest in other life-making projects. Thirdly, displacement signifies a qualitative rupture in the migrant’s possibilities for achieving his or her envisioned goals rather than an instinctive and physical move from a place of danger to one of relative safety, therefore, enabling a closer look at mechanisms and experiences that might otherwise be glossed over in the study of mobility practices in both wartime and relatively stable socio-political contexts.

Diaspora at Home

The generational variations in experiences of wartime mobility have unsettled conceptual ideas about ‘return’ and ‘home’ throughout this thesis. The forced displacement of labour migrants to their country of origin, as well as the migrants’ continued orientations towards Côte d’Ivoire, complicate or nuance our understanding of the way people relate to and invest in different places and invites to analyses of home-making as a continuous and subjective process rather than a static characteristic of any particular place. Despite its emic and administrative uses in Burkina Faso, the notion of a “repatriate”, then, is shown to have several layers, the formal denomination of a national citizenship rarely being the most important or relevant indication of where and how people related to different countries and localities within them. It is in this regard that the idea of a ‘diaspora at home’ becomes evocative of the multiple orientations and allegiances that migrants in Sarfalao were able to sustain simultaneously. The phrase is only contradictory if we limit our understanding of ‘home’ to the administrative ascription of citizenship: by that definition being ‘at home’ is inevitably the contrary to being ‘in diaspora’. But by understanding home-making as a complex and subjective process of ascribing meaning and investing time, attention, and resources in one or more places simultane-
ously, migrants who remain oriented towards another place as more home-like than their place of birth may be understood as harbouring a diasporic feeling of estrangement, despite being in the country of their formal citizenship.

In the cases considered throughout this thesis, furthermore, the importance of citizenship is further undermined by the ease with which migrants forged and manipulated their national identities in the transnational space, using fake identity papers and employing their acquired social performances to either blend in or stand apart when the situation required it. In this regard, the performance of diaspo youth culture in Sarfalao was but the most visible example of how particular social roles were playfully and self-consciously evoked in particular contexts. Far from being insincere, or false, these kinds of social performances may have ensured the survival of Burkinabe nationals in Côte d'Ivoire, who were able to pass as Ivorian or at least negotiate their safe passage with Gbagbo loyalist militants during the Ivorian crisis. In Sarfalao, the performance of diaspo youth culture facilitated the connections to important elite hierarchies that migrants otherwise found lacking in their new surroundings.

The notion of ‘diaspora at home’, then, represents a tension between two subjective orientations, rather than an opposition between two formal or administrative ascriptions of places with a particular significance or status. The diasporic orientation signifies both the condition of being in a place that is experienced as unaccommodating or hostile, and the embracing of foreignness that is also central to the notion of cosmopolitanism. Home, on the other hand, signifies a continuous process of emplacement by which a place is invested with significance and meaning.

To the migrants in Sarfalao, of different generations and with their different backgrounds, outlooks, and trajectories, their individual experiences across the Burkina Faso-Côte d’Ivoire transnational space shaped their ongoing processes of life-making in the neighbourhood, and the repertoire of social roles available to them. In this continuous dialogue between subjective feelings of estrangement and belonging, influenced by the structural processes of inclusion into and exclusion from the different spheres of the social life of the neighbourhood and the city, migrants in Sarfalao shared the collective predicament of being both insiders and outsiders simultaneously or, in other words, of being a diaspora at home.


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