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

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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 focusing 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

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Link to full-text: <http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:616952/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

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.