

Social Branding in Urban Burkina Faso

Jesper BJARNESEN

The Nordic Africa Institute, Sweden

ABSTRACT

In the past decade Diaspo youths – second generation immigrants in Côte d’Ivoire who were forced to migrate to their parents’ country of origin, Burkina Faso, during the Ivorian civil war – have become a visible presence in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso’s second largest city. By consciously displaying their Ivorian origins, they have provoked both the admiration and resentment of local youths, whose ambivalence towards the outspoken and colourful newcomers stems from Côte d’Ivoire’s central role as a destination for Burkinabé labour migrants since the colonial period. Regardless of this animosity, Diaspo youth culture has made its mark on the city.

This paper explores the response of Diaspo youths to their social stigmatisation and argues that their claims to recognition and access may be understood as a process of social branding. It may be seen as a self-aware performance of otherness, intended to evoke a collective identity that is mediated through a specific set of aesthetics to a well-defined audience.

Keywords: Social branding, regeneration, mediation, urban youth, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the commercial centre of Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso’s second largest city, one of the most successful mobile phone vendors goes by the nickname “Wassakara”. The same name adorns the façade of his shop, remarkable for its bright red and white colours and display cases containing the latest models in an array of colours and brand names.

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 the only one who exploits his Ivorian upbringing to distinguish himself from the competition. Over the past decade, young informal refugees from the armed conflict in Côte d’Ivoire have succeeded in creating livelihood opportunities as traders, performers, radio hosts, and other publicly profiled professions. In fact, they have been more successful than local youths.

Wassakara dresses in fashionable streetwear that he buys second-hand, rather than wearing the tailor-made shirts in local fabrics (*pagne*) associated with Burkinabé 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 2009, 2012; McGovern 2011). *Nouchi* is a French-

based urban slang and figures prominently in many of the Ivorian pop songs and music videos, popular among youths in Côte d'Ivoire's poorer neighbouring countries: Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali. "Wassakara" calls himself a 'Diaspo' – a label initially ascribed to him by others as a negative stereotype but one that he now embraces as a positive social marker.

Through a general discussion of both Diaspo youth culture and its perceived counterpoint – Burkinabé youth culture – this paper explores how such labels were articulated and negotiated in encounters between proponents of these two social categories. The main conceptual argument suggests that the reinterpretations of the social category of "Diaspo" are best understood as a process of social branding. Through this process Diaspo youths themselves claimed creative ownership by mediating the desirability of participation in expressions of Ivorian urban youth culture.

2. SOCIAL BRANDING AND REGENERATION IN URBAN SPACES

In order to understand the emergence and influence of Diaspo youth culture on social identification in Bobo-Dioulasso, I suggest that we think of "Diaspo" as a social brand and the process of enacting Diaspo youth culture as one of social branding. In *Webster's revised unabridged dictionary* from 1828, "branding" was defined as the literal action of "impressing a mark with a hot iron" and the derived figurative action of "fixing a stigma or mark of reproach".

Social stigmatisation, we might say, involves impressing a mark on individuals as belonging to a particular category of people. Contrary to the practice of branding cattle (or, tragically, human beings) with a hot iron, the mark applied through social stigmatisation is one of exclusion rather than inclusion. Taking racism as an obvious example, the branded hide represents inclusion in the flock of those impressing the mark (albeit in an inferior hierarchical position), whereas the marked, or stigmatised, skin colour implies exclusion from the collective, represented by those inflicting the social stigma¹.

In more recent times, especially since the 1990s (Bastos & Levy 2012: 357; Moor 2007: 3), the term "branding" has acquired a new and more positive connotation. In the anthology *Branding cities* (2009) the editors describe branding as

“... a product development and marketing activity, which ascribes products with unique characteristics or reasonably unique bundles of characteristics. These are designed to define the product for its intended consumers”

(Donald, Kofman & Kevin 2009: 7)

¹ For a more nuanced discussion of exclusionary practices relating to racism, see e.g. Ghassan Hage's *White nation. Fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society* (1998).

In this understanding, branding signifies the calculated ascription of particular characteristics to a specific object (the product), communicated to an envisioned audience (the consumer) (see also Schroeder & Salzer Mörling 2006; Arvidsson 2005). Contrary to the impression of social stigma, the promotion of a corporate brand is intended to inspire a positive process of identification on the part of the consumer, to create a bond between the consumer and the brand. This article aims to show that the term “Diaspo” changed significance on the streets of Bobo-Dioulasso – from a social stigma ascribed by others to a purposefully performed social brand by those who were so defined. This analytical approach applies the notion of branding in a non-corporate context. The process of branding is then intended to “sell” a specific characterisation of a social category rather than a consumer product and the “consumers” of the brand are the audience to the social performance of these specific characteristics.

In her work on the place branding of Tapiola Garden City in Finland, Marjana Johansson describes the purpose of “regeneration projects” as “... to imbue a ‘degenerate’ place with alternative, positive meanings” (Johansson 2012: 3614). By re-appropriating the meaning of the term “Diaspo”, young adult refugees from the Ivorian civil war engaged in a process of regeneration, or re-branding (Moor 2007: 3), of their social categorisation in response to the social exclusion they faced in everyday life in the city. Instead of rejecting their social stigma, the young refugees redefined its connotations in this process of transformation, reaffirming the categorisation as well as the reified characteristics implied by the term.

Contrary to recent anthropological uses of the term “branding” (see Manning 2010 for an authoritative review), the concept of social branding signifies the individual as well as collectively reaffirmed and performative affiliation with a publicly recognised group identity. Recent studies (e.g. Nakassis 2012; Hearn 2008; Moore 2003) evoke the notion of branding in relation to individual efforts at “self-branding”, “... to achieve the visibility and influence deemed necessary to achieve status or fame” (Page 2012: 182), for example through social media representation. Instead of an effort to achieve singularity and to stand out as individuals, social branding is a process of regenerating the characteristics of belonging to a collective identity.

In order to explore the practices of social branding in everyday encounters between young people in the city, it must be emphasized that this analysis, based on 11 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the neighbourhood of Sarfalao in Bobo-Dioulasso, perceives urban spaces as sites of coexisting heterogeneity, produced through materially embedded practices of interrelations (cf. Massey 2005). This fairly abstract notion of urban space has several implications for the analysis of social practices. First, everyday practice is understood as such – processes that change over time, making it untenable to think in terms of stable identities and fixed locations. Second, expressions of identification are always relational; the products of exchanges between different actors and points of view. Third, social practices are seen as placed in the urban material landscape, allowing

the urban physical environment a conceptual role in shaping the outlooks and possibilities of its inhabitants.

In this analytical view, everyday practices of social branding are seen as materially embedded social practices in which the material and social dimensions of urban space intersect. These intersecting dimensions are particularly relevant when appreciating how the Diaspo social brand was regenerated simultaneously in exchanges between urban residents and in the resulting reconfigurations of Bobo-Dioulasso's cityscape. The following section begins with the latter, describing how the Ivorian war affected the material landscape of the city.

3. BOBO-DIOULASSO'S CITYSCAPE IN A REGIONAL WARTIME ECONOMY

The city of Bobo-Dioulasso, in south-western Burkina Faso, has been a regional crossroads for traders and labour migrants for centuries, and more recently for informal refugees from the Ivorian civil war (see Bjarnesen 2013; Werthmann & Sanogo 2013). The Ivorian crisis has both shaped the city's appearance and altered people's perceptions of cross-border movements in various ways. For example, a significant part of the last decade's building boom is attributed to the investments of high-ranking commanders from the Forces Nouvelles rebel movement in Côte d'Ivoire and other Ivorian business people who moved their capital to the more stable economy across the border during the war. New nightclubs, transport companies, office buildings, apartment complexes, and luxury villas appeared, some of them suspended, mid-construction, as a testimony to the abrupt disintegration of the rebel war economy in northern Côte d'Ivoire in the last half of the previous decade (Global Witness 2007). At the same time, the financial turmoil in the Ivorian plantation economy, which has been a primary source of livelihood for several generations of Burkinabé labour migrants (Cordell et. al. 1996), was experienced across the border as remittances dwindled and aspiring migrants were discouraged from following their predecessors, leaving many competing for scarce employment opportunities at home instead.

In addition to the retracting possibilities in the plantation industry and the arrival of new financial players on the scene of local business and industry, there was a mass incursion of Burkinabé migrants from Côte d'Ivoire during the war. This made a considerable impression on a city where residential areas were relatively sparse and informal enough to allow for the influx of new residents who generally needed immediate and affordable housing and livelihood options. Young adults arriving in the city from Côte d'Ivoire were a particularly visible category of informal refugees, provoking both the admiration and resentment of local youths, who initially preferred to perceive the outspoken and colourful newcomers as arrogant and disrespectful. Despite this animosity, the new arrivals made their mark on the city. The association of migrant youths, especially, with the regional metropole of Abidjan – Côte d'Ivoire's financial capital – was

reflected in the adornments of shops in the city centre, such as Wassakara's that was described in the introduction and the proliferation of shop façades like "Diaspo coiffure" hairdressers or "Diaspora revelation" tailors (Bjarnesen 2012).

In the neighbourhood of Sarfalao, where I conducted fieldwork during most of 2010, urban space also reflected the presence of a new social category. One example would be the two coffee shops located on opposing corners of the T-junction that marks the indistinct entrance to the informal section of the neighbourhood, 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 shopkeepers, and flirt with young women passing by. One coffee shop is known to these young regulars as the *kiosque des diaspos* (the Diaspo coffee shop); the other as the *kiosque des burkinabé*.

One tends to play Ivorian *zouglou* (dance) 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 Eto'o. 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. Both rely on the social branding of their domain, evoking well-established characterisations of Diaspo as distinct from Burkinabé youth culture.

In these diverse ways, Bobo-Dioulasso's cityscape was inscribed with the presence of the Ivorian cosmopolitanism associated with refugee youths in particular. But their image in the city was not unequivocally seen as a positive attribute and the origins of the social category of Diaspo in the city were in practices of social exclusion rather than celebration.

4. FACING SOCIAL STIGMATISATION

In response to such marginalisation, migrants resorted to various social performances in order to evoke membership in less stigmatised social categories. In Erving Goffman's influential terminology, a social performance may be understood as the individual's effort to fit into an established social role or category. Performativity may tend to be misunderstood analytically as a more artificial, or insincere, form of social practice. To Goffman, however, 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; also see Argenti 2007: 11). For the parent generation of

migrants in Bobo-Dioulasso, the most common social performance entailed demonstrating their ability to abide by the expectations of a modest, polite, and self-evasive Burkinabé adult. In the presentation of self in everyday life, this could imply speaking the regional lingua franca Jula (preferably with a non-Ivorian accent), Burkina Faso's other dominant regional language 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 ease and promote their integration into (perceived) Burkinabé 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 Burkinabé neighbours. Many informants, however, 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 filled other social roles in the neighbourhood – most importantly the very same behaviour that "revealed" their Ivorian upbringing and caused their stigmatisation as outsiders. This social performance implied different dress codes, speech, and behaviour 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 (also see Boswell 2010: 189–90). 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.

5. PERFORMING DIASPO YOUTH CULTURE

The Abidjanais urban youth culture associated with the social role of Diaspo was not unknown in Burkina Faso before the arrival of migrant families during the Ivorian crisis. While access to Ivorian TV channels and music videos may have exposed Burkinabé audiences to the styles of the regional metropole, the influx of Ivorian students to the University of Ouagadougou since the 1980s (Zongo 2010: 26; also see Mazzocchetti 2009) provided a precedent for the meeting between Ivorian and Burkinabé youth culture and aesthetics (Kibora 2012: 174). The Diaspo style is reminiscent of the Congolese Sape² 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 (Devish 1998; De Boeck and Plissart 2004; Friedman 1994).

² Sape is an acronym for *Société des ambassadeurs et des personnes élégantes*, or the Society of fun lovers and elegant persons (cf. De Boeck & Plissart 2004: 54).

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 the Diaspos in Sarfalaou emulated but the style favours the youth of the street – inspired by African-American hip-hop aesthetics – rather than the upper-class salons (Ouattara 2008: 124; Newell 2012). As most subcultural styles, the urban youth culture of Abidjan was signified by a particular terminology, or lingo, and young migrants would speak the *nouchi* slang associated with Abidjan as informal public performances of their otherness, as they met at designated coffee shops or *cabarets*, or met at their *grins*³, or hang-outs in the neighbourhood. Sasha Newell describes how the *nouchi* performance in Abidjan served as a “proclamation of modern identity that excluded all those in the audience that could not equal the performance”, thereby enacting “a critique of local power and claim to superiority, utilizing the semiotic force of alterity” (Newell 2012: 140).

To the Diaspos in Bobo-Dioulasso as well, performing a locally desired expression of otherness served to exclude their local audience, thereby challenging their stigmatisation. In the Ivorian case, the *nouchi* source of desirable otherness was American hip-hop culture, whereas the source of desirable otherness in Burkina Faso was Côte d’Ivoire, the destination of generations of labour migrants and the predominant source of popular culture in the French-speaking part of the region. In other words, Diaspo youth culture was derived from Ivorian urban youth culture, both in its aesthetic expressions and in its source of authority, thereby corresponding more directly to the aspirations and desires of local youths in Burkina Faso.

The parent generation of informal refugees also expressed themselves in speech and behaviour associated with Côte d’Ivoire: when meeting other returning migrants, when reminiscing about their experiences in Côte d’Ivoire, or when carried away by the atmosphere and alcohol at celebrations and other social events. These variable strategies of self-presentation evoked a mutual association between Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso.

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 study 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

³ A *grin de thé* can be described as a meeting point for a group of friends, but the meaning is more complex, since it connotes both the group and the place.

allow female informants to express themselves more freely. They were also divided into Diaspo and Burkinabé participants, which had become a significant emic dichotomy in the study.

When I asked one of the male Burkinabé groups to explain the term “Diaspo”, they seemed to agree that the term signified someone who was neither Ivorian nor Burkinabé: a typical Diaspo had Burkinabé parents, which made him/her not an Ivorian, but he/she was born in Côte d’Ivoire and therefore held an Ivorian birth certificate, making him/her not truly Burkinabé (also see Zongo 2006; Boswell 2010; Kibora 2012). They all believed they could tell that someone was a Diaspo. The Diaspos’ way of talking and their behavior gave them away, they said: 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. Even worse, the longer the Diaspos stayed, the more arrogant they became, some argued: the new arrivals were more humble and eager to fit in.

Although male informants tended to provide a gendered, masculine view of a Diaspo, both the male and female focus groups also discussed feminine Diaspo characteristics. Overall, the characteristics ascribed to both Diaspo and Burkinabé were very similar across all four categories of focus groups. The term “Diaspo” was said to designate a young person, male or female, who was born in Côte d’Ivoire to Burkinabé parents and arrived in Burkina Faso because of the Ivorian crisis. This style spanned everything from the American-inspired “gangster” look, sporting white t-shirts, jeans, and caps for men as well as women, to the more Parisian *haute couture* look with ironed shirts and pants for men and short dresses and elaborate hairstyles for 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 subcultural identities, the idea of Diaspo appearance and behaviour was articulated more or less explicitly in relation to a significant other. In this case, the significant other was always the equally reified description of a Burkinabé youth, designating someone who was perceived as an “autochtone” in Burkina Faso.

Of course, the category of “Burkinabé” 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 other social categories. When related to the category “Diaspo”, a Burkinabé was described as modest by the Burkinabè and as introverted and inhibited by Diaspos. In terms of dress, African *pagne* fabrics would be contrasted to the European aesthetics of the Diaspos for both men and women, although some women in the focus groups said that Diaspo

girls had invented new ways of wearing the *pagne* fabrics that the Burkinabé girls started copying.

“Diaspo” was a familiar category to most youths I met in Bobo-Dioulasso, and although the normative perceptions of both Diaspo and Burkinabé characteristics obviously were in the eye of the beholder, they were reproduced in fairly similar ways across different groups. Despite the contested normative interpretations of the role of Diaspo youths, this consistent representation gradually inscribed the social category into the urban social fabric. The next section presents the experiences of Pascal, a young informal refugee who was introduced to the notion of Diaspo upon his arrival in Bobo-Dioulasso during the civil war in Côte d’Ivoire.

6. BECOMING DIASPO IN SARFALAO

The story of Pascal’s arrival in Bobo-Dioulasso resembles many of the narratives I heard and recorded during my time in the city. His experiences of facing and coping with social exclusion in Sarfalao are particularly illustrative of how one might come to perceive oneself as Diaspo. Pascal was born in a regional town in southern Côte d’Ivoire and went to school there until the tension between so-called “strangers” and “autochthones” prompted his parents to consider a new life in Burkina Faso.

After the Tabou massacres in 1999, in which more than 100 Burkinabé labour migrants were killed following a dispute between a Burkinabé migrant and a local land owner (see Hagberg & Bjarnesen 2011; Zongo 2003; Bredeloup 2006), Pascal’s parents became increasingly aware of the threat they were facing as Burkinabé immigrants in Côte d’Ivoire. In early 2002, they sent the then 16-year-old Pascal to live with an uncle and continue his studies in Bobo-Dioulasso.

Pascal 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, he brought Pascal with him to Burkina Faso and their paternal uncle’s house in the neighbourhood of Sarfalao. 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 what he referred to as 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 in Burkina Faso from Côte d’Ivoire for the first time, the difference in living standards came as a shock to him, despite the familiar characterisation of Burkina Faso as a rural backwater compared to the metropolitan and urbanised ideas of Côte d’Ivoire. Having to live 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 well-lit 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 suburban 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's formal section to sharing a two-room house with his parents in the informal section of the neighbourhood. Pascal's uncle had also arrived recently from a successful migrant career in Côte d'Ivoire, but unlike Pascal's father he invested in a house in Bobo-Dioulasso.

Pascal realized then that his father had, in fact, never expected to move back to Burkina Faso and would not have done so, had it not been for the political developments in Côte d'Ivoire. In that sense, Pascal's parents arrived 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 of friends or relatives (Bjarnesen forthcoming 2015). Pascal had been under the patronage of his paternal uncle until the arrival of his parents. During that time, he continued his schooling until the ninth grade, but he failed his final exams and was unable to obtain a diploma.

He dropped out of school in 2007. Since then, he has 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 came to Burkina Faso for the first time in their youth. Their clothes, linguistic styles, and mannerisms associated with Côte d'Ivoire in general, and Abidjanais youth culture in particular. It made these young men and women stand out – something that made it easier to make friends as well as 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. He was constantly applying for work or preparing for the national tests that gave access to public employment in Burkina Faso, 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 ... They, to them, we have

come to wreck their country, but that's not it. There were even protests ... where they managed to ... people ... the [Burkinabé] President – excuse me – himself he went out and said that ... 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 from Côte d'Ivoire that 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 context where much recruitment into both public sector and other jobs seemed to rely heavily on knowing someone in an advantageous position. In the following section, the implications of the gradual process of stigmatisation and regeneration that Pascal and other Diaspos were experiencing is analysed as a process of social branding.

7. DIASPO YOUTH CULTURE FROM SOCIAL STIGMA TO SOCIAL BRAND

As we have seen, in the city of Bobo-Dioulasso the term “Diaspo” was originally impressed upon young adult refugees from the civil war in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire in the early 2000s. These youths arrived in a city that represented the home country of their parents, but was far removed from their own upbringing in urban centres across southern Côte d'Ivoire. In the context of the Ivorian civil war, “Diaspo” became the catch-all term for young adults perceived to have grown up in Côte d'Ivoire. The social category of “Diaspo” was, in other words, not an invention of the young migrants themselves, but a label that was ascribed to them upon their arrival in Burkina Faso from Côte d'Ivoire. It was intended, and experienced by the arriving youths, as a social stigma – a mark of otherness, of not belonging.

Being impressed with the social stigma of Diaspo may be said to have created for the young migrants a moment of what William Mazzarella refers to as “close-distance”, which he characterises as “... a figure for the dialectic of engagement and alienation inherent in all cultural politics” (Mazzarella 2004: 361). The notion of close-distance describes the implications of a process of mediation, a concept that Mazzarella theorises as:

“... a matter of the greatest intimacy. It is the process by which the self recognizes itself by returning to itself, renewed and once removed ... All mediation, then, involves a dual relation: a relation of simultaneous self-distancing and self-recognition” (Mazzarella 2004: 357)

In this encounter, migrant and local youths were established as counterpoints in a shared “mediatory space” (cf. Teppo 2011: 226), within which the categories of “Diaspo” and “Burkinabé” were given particular meanings in relation to one another. For Diaspo and Burkinabé youths alike, their confrontation reveals the transformative power of such heterotopic (ibid.) encounters – encounters that “interrupt the apparent continuity and normality of ordinary everyday space” (Dehaene & De Cauter 2008: 4; Teppo 2011: 226). Through the confrontation between Diaspo youths and their Burkinabé counterparts, both groups were constituted as such.

It is by taking ownership, or more specifically authorship, over the signification of the category “Diaspo” that Diaspo youths gradually turned a process of social stigmatisation into one of social branding. This does not imply that the negative interpretations of the role of Diaspo vanished into thin air, but rather that the muted other in a relationship of stigmatisation engaged in what Achille Mbembe (2002) refers to as an articulation of self-styling. As this notion implies, the regeneration (cf. Johansson 2012) of the Diaspo social category is a performative action, whereby Diaspo youths consciously enacted the defining characteristic impressed upon them as the root of their otherness.

In other words, the regeneration of the Diaspo social brand was articulated in the same mediatory space as the social stigma it was conceived as: “As discourses of inversion, they draw their fundamental categories from the myths they claim to oppose and reproduce their dichotomies” (Mbembe 2002: 256–57). Relying on the same aesthetic characteristics and the same significant other, i.e. the Burkinabé youth identity, the Diaspo social brand not only reproduces but is premised upon the same categorical juxtaposition, delimiting the repertoire of self-styling to the same prevailing, and mutually constitutive, characteristics.

In many other cases of social stigmatisation, the authorial monopoly of the group impressing a stigma upon another seems almost impossible to challenge. The stigmatisation implied by anti-immigrant xenophobia in northern Europe or Australia, for example, is generally inflicted upon perceived outsiders by someone claiming membership in the white, unmarked, majority population. It takes encouragement from discourses being reproduced on all layers of society, including parliamentary politics (Hage 1998). In such cases, the xenophobic citizen mediates the authority of a larger system of exclusionary discourse and practice against perceived outsiders and directs it towards someone less able to claim the same, or an alternate, source of authority (Butler 2009). In Bobo-Dioulasso, Pascal described his experiences of social stigmatisation by public officials in the municipality and even suggested that the Burkinabé president, Blaise Compaoré at the time, publicly expressed his resentment against migrant youths from Côte d’Ivoire. So why, despite powerful endorsements of resentment against the Diaspos, did the social category of “Diaspo” adorn the façades of shops in Bobo-Dioulasso and establish itself as a social brand rather than a social stigma?

In order to appreciate the Diaspo competitive advantage in relation to non-migrant youths in the city, we must remember that Côte d'Ivoire in general, and the financial capital of Abidjan in particular, has been the desired destination for Burkinabé migrants for generations. Its urban youth culture has been an object of admiration and consumption through music videos and other forms of pop culture for Burkinabé youths. As Paul Manning argues, this is a central strength of corporate brands: "... they can gesture to diasporic, aspirational, or exotic elsewhere on the horizons of imaginative geographies of alterity" (Manning 2010: 39, also see Mazzarella 2003). In this sense, Diaspo youths in Bobo-Dioulasso represented the goal of the aspirations of local youths: of being part of the cosmopolitan modernity of the regional capital of Abidjan, and its urban youth culture. Within the mediatory space created through social stigmatisation, Diaspo youths appropriated the role as "third parties" (Englund 2007: 298), mediating between the reified youth identities "Ivorian" and "Burkinabé", rather than remaining the muted objects of stigmatisation.

The mediatory space created in the encounter between Diaspo and Burkinabé youths was not a binary relationship, but rather a triadic relation in which Diaspo youths were able to assume the position of mediators between two sources of authority, yet answerable to neither of them. As Teppo's informant, Reuben, expresses it, "... a person can only mediate between two things if he belongs to neither of them" (Teppo 2011: 236). As we have seen, the most common characterization of a Diaspo by local youths would be to say that a Diaspo was "neither Burkinabé nor Ivorian", referring to their parents' Burkinabé origins and their Ivorian upbringing as positioning the Diaspos between these two generalised social categories. In the process of social branding, the Diaspo youths converted, or regenerated, the "neither-nor" impressed upon them by their Burkinabé counterparts into a "both-and", evoking both the cosmopolitan modernity of their Ivorian backgrounds and their commitment to social inclusion in the city, inscribing their presence onto the Bobo-Dioulasso cityscape.

8. CONCLUSION

This article argued that the changing role of Diaspo youth culture in the city of Bobo-Dioulasso is best understood as a process of social branding, whereby migrant youths faced with social stigma were able to regenerate the same defining characteristics of their social exclusion into a social brand.

The analysis showed that the confrontation between Diaspo and Burkinabé youth cultures in Bobo-Dioulasso created a mediatory space within which the defining characteristics of these two categories were consolidated, despite opposing interpretations. Although one might expect the interpretation of the group claiming to represent the majority population – in this case, Burkinabé youths – to dominate the mediatory space between these two categories, the sociocultural significance of Côte d'Ivoire as a site of cosmopolitan modernity

provided Diaspo youths with the discursive authority to effectively challenge the social stigma being impressed upon them.

In this way, the combination of the ingenuity of Diaspo youths and the discursive authority of local perceptions of Côte d'Ivoire helps to explain why the Diaspo social brand was successful in gaining traction in the city and gives traders like "Wassakara", or migrant youths in different spheres of the urban labour market, a competitive advantage. As a continuous process of materially embedded practices of interrelations, the inscription of the "Diaspo" social brand onto Bobo-Dioulasso's cityscape, for example through the appearance of Diaspo hairdressers and tailors in the city, created a positive momentum for Diaspo youths themselves. The fact that this sense of social inclusion was achieved on the basis of the reification of Diaspo youth culture testifies to the social exclusion that fostered the social category itself and inscribes the process of social branding into the sphere of everyday negotiations of cultural politics and the competition over authorial control.

REFERENCES

- Argenti, Nicolas. 2007.
The intestines of the state. Youth, violence, and belated histories in the Cameroon grassfields. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Arvidsson, A. 2005.
Brands. A critical perspective. **Journal of Consumer Culture** 5(2): 235–258.
- Bastos, W. & Levy, S. J. 2012.
A history of the concept of branding: practice and theory. **Journal of Historical Research in Marketing** 4(3): 347–368.
- Bjarnesen, J. 2012.
"Diaspo" youth culture and the Ivorian crisis'. In: *Cultural Anthropology Web Edition: "Hot spots" on Côte d'Ivoire*, Joseph Hellweg (ed.): <http://www.culanth.org/fieldsights/191-diaspo-youth-culture-and-the-ivoirian-crisis>.
- 2013
Diaspora at home? Wartime mobilities in the Burkina Faso-Côte d'Ivoire transnational space. PhD thesis. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.
- forthcoming (2015)
Displaced back home. Wartime mobilities in the Burkina Faso-Côte d'Ivoire transnational space. **Conflict & Society** 1(1).
- Boswell, K. V. 2010.
Migration, war, and repatriation from Côte d'Ivoire to Burkina Faso, West Africa. PhD thesis, Indiana University.

- Bredeloup, S. 2006.
Réinstallation à Ouagadougou des « rapatriés » burkinabé de Côte d'Ivoire. **Afrique Contemporaine** 1(217): 185–201.
- Butler, J. 2009.
Performativity, precarity and sexual politics. **Journal of Iberoamerican Anthropology** 4(3): i–xiii.
- Cordell, D., et al. 1996.
Hoe and wage. A social history of a circular migration system in West Africa. Boulder CO: Westview Press.
- De Boeck, F. & Plissart, M. F. 2004.
Kinshasa. Tales of the invisible city. Ghent: Ludion.
- Dehaene, M. & de Cauter, L. 2008.
'Introduction: Heterotopia in a postcivil society'. In: Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter (eds.), *Heterotopia and the city. Public space in a postcivil society*, pp. 3–12. London: Routledge.
- Devish, R. 1998.
La violence à Kinshasa, ou l'institution en négatif. **Cahiers d'Études Africaines** 38(150–52): 441–469.
- Donald, S. H., Kofman, E. & Kevin, C. 2009.
'Introduction. Processes of cosmopolitanism and parochialism'. In: S.H. Donald, E. Kofman & C. Kevin (eds.), *Branding cities. Cosmopolitanism, parochialism, and social change*, pp. 1–13. New York & London: Routledge.
- Englund, H. 2007.
Witchcraft and the limits of mass mediation in Malawi. **Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute** 13: 295–311.
- Friedman, J. 1994.
'The political economy of elegance: An African cult of beauty'. In: Jonathan Friedman (ed), *Consumption and identity*, pp. 167–87. Chur.: Harwood.
- Global Witness. 2007.
Hot chocolate: How cocoa fuelled the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire. At: <http://www.globalwitness.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/cotedivoire.pdf>.
- Goffman, E. 1959.
The presentation of self in everyday life. London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Hagberg, S., and Bjarnesen, J. 2011.
"‘Good guys’ and ‘bad guys’: The Burkinabé public debate on the Ivorian crisis." In: E. Jul-Larsen, P.-J. Laurent, P.-Y. Le Meur, and É. Léonard (eds.), *Une anthropologie entre pouvoirs et histoire. Conversations autour de l'oeuvre de Jean-Pierre Chauveau*, pp. 509–534. Paris: Karthala.
- Hage, G. 1998.
White nation. Fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society. Sydney: Pluto Press.

- Hearn, A. 2008.
‘Meat, mask, burden’. *Probing the contours of the branded ‘self’*.
Journal of Consumer Culture 8(2): 197–217.
- Johansson, M. 2012.
Place branding and the imaginary: The politics of re-imagining a garden city. **Urban Studies** 49(16): 3611–3626.
- Kibora, L. 2012.
‘The issue of the Diaspo in Ouagadougou’. In: Hans-Peter Hahn and K. Kastner (eds.), *Urban life-worlds in motion*, pp. 173–186.
Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.
- Manning, P. 2010.
The semiotics of brand. **Annual Review of Anthropology** 39: 33–49.
- Massey, D. 2005.
For space. London & Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mazzarella, W. 2003.
Shoveling smoke. Advertising and globalization in contemporary India. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- 2004 *Culture, globalization, mediation*. **Annual Review of Anthropology** 33: 345–67.
- Mazzocchetti, J. 2009.
Être étudiant à Ouagadougou. Itinérances, imaginaire et précarité.
Paris: Éditions Karthala.
- Mbembe, A. 2002.
African modes of self-writing. **Public Culture** 14(1): 239–273.
- McGovern, M. 2011.
Making war in Côte d'Ivoire. London: C. Hurst.
- Moor, L. 2007.
The rise of brands. Oxford & New York: Berg.
- Moore, R. 2003.
From genericide to viral marketing: On ‘brand’. **Language and Communication** 23: 331–357.
- Nakassis, C. 2012.
Brand, citationality, performativity. **American Anthropologist** 114(4): 624–638.
- Newell, S. 2009.
Godrap girls, Draou boys, and the sexual economy of the Bluff in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. **Ethnos** 74(3): 379–402.
- 2012 *The modernity bluff. Crime, consumption, and citizenship in Côte d'Ivoire*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Ouattara, S. 2008.
Deux sociétés secrètes dans des espaces publics: Bois sacrés, initiations et rites de passage chez les Sénoufo de la Côte d'Ivoire et du Mali. PhD Thesis, ACTA Universitatis Gothoburgensis.

- Page, R. 2012.
The linguistics of self-branding and micro-celebrity in Twitter: The role of hashtags. Discourse & Communication 6(2): 181–201.
- Schroeder, J. & Salzer Mörling, M. 2006.
Brand culture. London & New York: Routledge.
- Teppo, A. 2011.
Our spirit has no boundary: white sangomas and mediation in Cape Town. Anthropology and Humanism 36(2): 225–247.
- Webster's revised unabridged dictionary, 1828 edition. Accessed online at <http://machaut.uchicago.edu/websters>.
- Werthmann, K. & Sanogo, M. L. (eds.). 2013.
Urbanité et appartenances en Afrique de l'Ouest. La ville de Bobo-Dioulasso au Burkina Faso. Paris: Karthala.
- Zongo, M. 2003.
La diaspora burkinabé en Côte d'Ivoire: trajectoire historique, recomposition des dynamiques migratoires et rapport avec le pays d'origine. Politique Africaine 89: 113–126.
- 2006 *Les diaspos au Burkina Faso: les parents à problème. Pambazuka News* 12.
- 2010 'Migration, diaspora et développement au Burkina Faso'. In: Mahamadou Zongo (ed.), *Les enjeux autour de la diaspora burkinabé Burkinabé à l'étranger, étrangers au Burkina Faso*, pp. 15–43. Paris: L'Harmattan.

About the author: *Jesper Bjarnesen* holds a PhD in Cultural Anthropology from Uppsala University. His main research interests concern the intersections between labour migration and forced displacement, urban settlement and social navigation, and the dynamics of intergenerational relationships and issues of social becoming. He has conducted ethnographic fieldwork mainly in West Africa, specifically in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, and Guinea-Conakry.