12/2021/2

RLS RESEARCH PAPERS
ON PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES
IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Dealing with the Security Crisis in Burkina Faso: Development and Civil Society Perspectives on Crisis Prevention

Bettina Engels

Dealing with the Security Crisis in Burkina Faso

Table of contents

About the author

Bettina Engels teaches political science focussing on Conflict and African Studies at the Department of Political and Social Sciences at Freie Universität Berlin, Germany. She is an editor of the Review of African Political Economy, the Canadian Journal of Development Studies and the Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies (Edward Elgar, 2021). Her research and teaching focusses on International Political Economy in Africa, agrarian change, social transformation, contentious politics and social movements. She has published in the Review of African Political Economy, the Canadian Journal of Development Studies, the International Review of Social History Geoforum, Political Geography, and others.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to all the people in Burkina Faso who shared their knowledge, opinions and, often difficult sometimes, traumatic experiences on the recent security crisis with me. I highly appreciate their confidence and patience. Franza Drechsel, Didier Kiendrebeogo, Claus-Dieter König, Marie N'guettia, Ndongo Sylla and participants of a workshop in Ouagadougou on 20-21 September 2021 provided comprehensive feedback on an earlier draft: Many thanks for this. This report represents my perspective and interpretation of what people shared with me, and of course all errors are mine.

x

Introduction

Burkina Faso is hardly on the radar of German political, military, and civil society actors, as a country experiencing a serious crisis of insecurity, conflicts and violence. Yet it has witnessed increasing security threats by various armed groups since the last couple of years, with severe impacts on social, cultural and economic rights, civil liberties and political participation.

Since 2017, more than 120 attacks on schools have been reported; half of them in 2019 alone. 2,500 schools have been closed due to the security situation, with catastrophic consequences for access to education. More so, more than 1,000,000 people are internally displaced. Thousand are seeking refuge in neighbouring Mali, another crisis-ridden country. Most of the attacks have taken aim at institutions of the Burkinabe state, increasingly, with peculiar targets on leaders of schools, churches and religious.

More than 2,200 people have died in 2019 and 2020 from social unrest related to the conflicts, including civilians and members of state security forces and non-state armed groups—a terrifying increase as compared to about 300 fatalities in 2018. Reported fatalities remain at the same level in 2021 thus far (ACLED data, 2021[1]).

The vast majority of these pathetic legacies occurred in the Northern Sahel region, but the attacks have gradually spread to several other regions, especially to the East of the country. In addition, criminal attacks in the capital city of Ouagadougou have increased, especially in 2020, and human rights violations by state and non-state armed groups, including vigilante groups and state-sponsored civil militias, are alarming.

The recent creation of a transnational "anti-terror" military operation, the G5 Sahel Joint Military Force, has not yet succeeded in improving the security situation; neither did the French military intervention "Opération Barkhane". The latter, quite the contrary, led to intensified anti-French resentments in

[1] https://acleddata.com, last accessed: 7 October 2021.

the region. Many observers noted that the military interventions rather destabilize than stabilize the security situation in Burkina Faso (e.g. Lacher 2021).

Yet economic growth in Burkina Faso has consolidated during the last years, and some indicators of human development have slightly improved. More importantly, the country is characterized by a vibrant civil society, a highly motivated young generation, and a still relatively strong cultural and social cohesion and striving for solidarity and "national unity". After long-standing President Blaise Compaoré and his semi-authoritarian regime were successfully overthrown by a popular insurrection on 30-31 October 2014, aspirations for a substantial political and social change could so far not be achieved. For instance, with regards to poverty, access to education, health care, water and sanitation, Burkina Faso is ranked at the bottom of the Human Development Index (182 out of 189 in 2020[2]).

Additionally, according to the national anti-corruption network (Réseau national de lutte anti-corruption, REN -LAC[3]), the majority of the population consider politics and administration in Burkina Faso fundamentally corrupt. In its 2019 study, REN-LAC reports that 30.3 % of the respondents stated having been subjected to, or witness of, corruption. Most frequently, corruption is reported with respect to the municipal police, to customs, and to the national police (REN-LAC 2019). Because the physical and institutional infrastructure in Burkina Faso is weak, the economy is characterized by low diversification, particularly high dependency on imported food and fuel, and on resource exportation (namely, gold and cotton), making it highly exposed to fluctuation of its world market prices.

This being said, Burkina Faso is widely considered a 'developing country', and target of bi- und multi-lateral developing cooperation, with the German Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation investing more than 100 million

[2]http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/latest-human-development-index-ranking, last accessed: 20 September 2021

[3] REN-LAC is a civil society network created in 1997 by around 20 Burkinabé civil society organizations. It conducts and published annual surveys on the state of corruption in Burkina and organizes workshops for civil society and public authorities.

Euro bilaterally since 2017. A range of German and international humanitarian NGOs, civil society organizations and political foundations are currently engaged in Burkina Faso.

This paper aims at investigating perspectives of actors affected by the current security crisis in Burkina Faso and by development and humanitarian interventions. Views on the causes and impacts of the crisis in general, and on military and civilian interventions in particular, are summarized. The matter is not to present a comprehensive and representative picture of the range of existing perspectives, but to provide insights on some positions that seem important to me for solidary and internationalist actors abroad to reflect and discuss on the positions and actions they may take towards the recent crisis, conflicts, and military-civilian interventions in Burkina Faso.

The paper is based on desktop research (review of academic literature, policy papers, donor documents, press and internet sources), and interviews and informal talks with actors from the field of humanitarian help and development cooperation, both state and non-state, and with Burkinabe actors involved in, or impacted by, international humanitarian and development intervention in Burkina Faso (civil society organizations, labour unions, NGOs, state actors on the national and municipal level, internally displaced people). Essentially, the interviews focused on the actors' perceptions of the recent security crisis, its causes and impacts, and of possible solutions. They were conducted in French in November-December 2020 and in February-March 2021. English translations of interview quotations in the paper are mine.

In what follows, I first briefly discuss some key terms: conflict, violence, peace, (human) security, conflict management/transformation and (civil) crisis prevention. This is followed by an introduction to the recent security crisis and conflicts in Burkina Faso, including a discussion of possible ethnicitization of conflicts, the role of local self-defence groups (the *Koglweogo*, Dozo and "Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie"), the role of the French military intervention ("Opération Barkhane") and the G5 Sahel joint military forces, and of the "security-development nexus" in development cooperation in

the Sahel region. Then, I summarize how actors from development agencies, NGOs, civil society organizations and local communities in Burkina Faso perceive the recent security crisis and present it in the interviews. Depending on the activities they engage in and their political positions, actors focus on various impacts of the crisis and topics. Notably, perspectives vary with regard to the appraisal of projects of social cohesion, conflict management, dialogue and the likes. When it comes to the role of external actors, namely the French military intervention, almost all are clearly critically, though the political arguments and the degree of support of the Burkinabe state security forces vary.

Conflict, violence, peace and security: conceptual notes

To begin with, it is fundamental to keep in mind that conflict is by far not something negative but an expression of antagonisms that are ubiquitous and constitutive to society as such. Antagonisms are inherent to the relations of production and social relations of hierarchy and inequality (gender, class, etc.) (cf. Laclau and Mouffe 1985). We may understand conflicts as structured by power and opposed interests, aims and needs of individual or collective actors. The means and strategies actors deploy in conflict are various, including physical violence but of course not limited to it. Which options and means actors have on their hands depends of their social positions and power resource, and of course on the historical and political-institutional conditions of the respective conflict setting (Dietz and Engels 2021)? What actors then actually do, depends on their interest-led aims, on their various experiences, and related to this, which means they consider being adequate to achieve their aims. Conflicts may cause and trigger social change, but they do not at all always result in it (Turner 1975).

The concepts of peace and violence, notably when it comes to their nexus to development, are closely linked to what Johan Galtung has suggested from the late 1960s onwards (Galtung 1969, 1985). He differentiates three forms of violence: direct (personal, physical), indirect (structural, latent) and cultural

(symbolic) violence, highlighting those structural conditions of power and inequality that deny people access to food, drinking water, health care, etc. may be conceptualized as violence, too, as probably many more people would die from this than from direct violence. This is reflected in Galtung's notion of peace: negative peace is understood as the absence of war (direct violence between collective actors, particularly states but including non-stated violent groups, too), and positive peace is the absence of all dimensions of violence (direct, structural, and cultural). While it is of course intuitively plausible and politically winsome that peace is supposed to be "more than the absence of war", and should refer to an end of exploitation, inequality, exclusion and repression, researchers and practitioners though contest in how far this concept is helpful when it comes to designing precisely analyses and political interventions.

In the international development community, corresponding to the broader notions of violence and peace is the concept of human security. In January 2001, on the UN level, the twelve-headed Commission on Human Security was established. In its 2003 report, "Human Security Now", it is argued that "the international community urgently needs a new paradigm of security" (Commission on Human Security 2003, 2), centring on people rather than on states. While states are indeed supposed to guarantee people's security (though they frequently fail to do so), the notion of security should not be limited to the security of state borders, it is argued, but likewise focus on human rights and human development. Human security "seeks to protect people against a broad range of threats to individuals and communities and, further, to empower them to act on their own behalf" (ibid.).

It is obvious that the ideas of human security, positive peace and human development are closely related. It is now uncontested in academic and policy debates that security and development are interdependent. This holds true also when security is understood in a narrow sense: physical security is a precondition for human development, and lack of human development is a driver of violent conflict, e.g. as it may create a fertile soil for armed groups' (both state and non-state) recruitment.

Since the 1990s, conflict management, conflict transformation and crisis prevention have become prominent concepts in development policy. Conflict management refers to the idea that conflicts can and should be resolved, by negotiation and the establishment of appropriate institutions particularly on the level of diplomacy, state institutions, and social elites. One problem with this approach is that it favours elites and thus risks to even reinforce inequalities and power asymmetries. As related to this, the focus on negotiation might send the doubtful message that "if you are armed, you are invited to negotiations" (van Aken 2018, 6). Conflict transformation rather refers to an assumption of "positive" or transformative potential of conflicts, and advocates a multi-level approach, including state politics, social elites, actors on the grassroots level, and structural engagement, which is very similar to the idea of human security. Crisis prevention implies the idea that not conflict is to be prevented, referring either to the positive, transformative notion of conflict (conflict indicates that something goes wrong, so it has a potential for positive social change), or to the understanding of conflict as the reflection of antagonisms that are inherent to social structure and neither can, nor need to be prevented or overcome. Either way, crisis prevention aims at preventing direct physical violence; it is not necessarily concerned with the social-structural and political-economical causes of violent conflict. Jan van Aken (2018) summarizes that "civil" crisis prevention, in German politics, is often referred as everything but the military, meaning that police operations, training of police staff, etc. is considered to be "civil crisis prevention", too. For other, particularly NGOs, the notion of "civil" refers to everything that is non-state and non-corporate, thus civil society in a broad sense—which means non-governmental and non-profit, but by far not necessarily progressive (ibid., 6). Van Aken suggests linking civil crisis prevention to human security, and taking "the needs and demands of the population in the affected country" (ibid., 10) as a starting point for intervention. This equally means putting an end to direct violence, and "peaceful escalation of a conflict at its source" (ibid.), thus offensively targeting structural violence.

Conflicts and security crisis in Burkina Faso

The recent phase of extended violence and insecurity has emerged since 2015 (as many observers have noted, not by chance in the year after the turnover of Blaise Compaoré) in the northern Sahel region, particularly the zones close to the Malian border. One event that marked its beginning was the abduction of a Romanian citizen working as a security guard for the Tambao Manganese mine in May 2015. Two jihadist organisations that are key to the crisis in Northern Burkina Faso (though they are of course not the only armed groups that are active in the area) are "Ansaroul Islam" (led by Ibrahim "Malam" Dicko) and the "Islamic State in the Greater Sahara" (ISGS), both having shown up in 2016 (Thurston 2019, 28; ICG 2017). Since then, the activities of jihadist and other terrorist groups have spread around the regions of the Boucle du Mouhoun, the Sahel, North, Centre North, the East and the Cascades. Particularly, the East is considered by many observers as a passage of jihadist groups from the Sahel to the coastal countries, Benin and Togo in particular (Thurston 2019, 38). Many of the jihadist groups are supposedly linked to Al-Qaeda Maghreb (AQM).

The security crisis in Northern Burkina Faso, at least, begun as an extension of the Malian crisis. Without any doubt, it has been amplified by external influences, both from state and non-state armed actors from Mali, Niger, Northern Africa and Europe. Yet, these external influences encounter socio-structural and political-economic national conditions (cf. Idrissa 2019). The interfering of external and internal factors results in specific conflict dynamics that make the situation in Burkina Faso differ from that in Mali. Nevertheless, there are typical features that can be observed in many West African countries (not limited to those that are currently witnessing severe security crisis), such as conflicts between farming and pastoralism, the political neglecting of certain regions within a country in favour of others, the risk of ethnicizing of conflicts, and the presence and sometimes instrumentalization of vigilante groups.

Ethnicizing of conflicts

In general, ethnicity does hardly present a politically relevant category in Burkina—at least not as compared to many other states. However, in early January 2019, a serious intercommunal clash occurred in Yirgou (Centre North province, about 200 kilometres North of Ouagadougou) which particularly targeted ethnic Fulbe (Peulh). Almost 50 persons were killed. Since then, discriminating narratives against the Fulbe have been observed more frequently, and political ethnicizing of conflicts has increased. In the municipality of Thiou, in 2020, the state-sponsored civil self-defence groups ("Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie", see below) expelled all ethnic Fulbe in a circuit of five kilometres from Thiou, blaming them to be Islamist armed groups. Fulfulde is indeed the lingua franca of many of the non-state armed groups in the North, but these groups are yet composed of members of various ethnic groups, including Fulbe from the neighbouring countries (Mali, Niger, and Nigeria) (VAD 2020, 18).

In mid-2020, at least 180 bodies, all men, were found in common graves in a five kilometres circuit of the town of Djibou (Sahel region, Soum province). The international NGO Human Rights Watch investigated the case; almost all residents and observers who were interviewed stated that they assume the vast majority of the death being Fulbe, and that they believe that state security forces had executed most of them (HRW 2020).

Yet altogether, inner-state conflicts in Burkina Faso are not ethnically shaped. The incidence in Yirgou was followed by an enormous wave of solidarity and endeavours for national unity. Moreover, the level of solidarity and social cohesion became obvious related to the massive internal displacement: large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) are hosted in private households where local communities share land and other resources with them. In a so far unpublished empirical study, which was conducted in 2020 in the Centre North (Bam province), the overwhelming majority of interviewees both from host households and IDPs outlined that they feel that IDPs are welcome by, and included in the local community.

Self-defence groups (Koglweogo, Dozo and Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie)

Nevertheless, the massive activity of different vigilante and Islamist groups intensifies the potential for intercommunal conflict. One consequence of the weakness of the state's security forces is the strengthening and spreading of the Koglweogo and other self-defence groups all over the country, who also come into conflict with each other and are being instrumentalized by political actors (party politicians, majors, and others). The historically oldest self-defence group are the Dozo, traditional hunters that exist in Northern Côte d'Ivoire, parts of Mali and South Western Burkina Faso, and draw their legitimacy from local tradition and culture (see in detail e.g. Hellweg 2004, and Hagberg 2019 for contention between the Dozo and the Koglweogo). In view of escalating violence, the Burkinabé Parliament reacted with voting a law (no. 002-2020) on civil defence forces, the "Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie" (VDP) on 21 January 2020. It enables the government to financially and technically support "volunteers" that are supposed to protect their communities. This decision has been widely criticized, especially internationally but also by Burkinabe civil society organizations (Zutterling 2020).

Especially in the North, the VDP frequently act without being controlled by the army or other state agencies. In principle, the VDP groups are supposed to register and then can receive financial and material (arms etc.) support from the state. Yet by far not all groups register. Besides, it is important not to put the VDP and the *Koglweogo* on the same level: The VDP have been established by the state purposefully to fight against terrorism, whereas the *Koglweogo* have emerged before as a response of the absence or the inactivity of the police and gendarmerie, and mainly engage in the fight against crime (ICG 2020). In the North and East of the country, they indeed also fight against terrorist violence; in these areas some *Koglweogo* joint the VDP but others oppose them (VAD 2020, 13-14). Neither civil defence group can be considered being homogenous. The *Koglweogo* and the Dozo do not have a centralized structure, and local groups act autonomously (Tisseron 2021). Also, positions and strategies vary among the local groups. In some cases, conflicts emerged

between the *Koglweogo* and the state armed forces, as state actors assess some local *Koglweogo* being close to political oppositional groups.

G5 Sahel and the Opération Barkhane

Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad and Mauretania, since 2014, have built the alliance "G5 du Sahel". In February 2017, G5-Sahel states decided to set up a joint military force of 5,000 military and police forces to fight terrorism and organized crime. The Security Councils of both the African Union and the United Nations, both in 2015, approved the plan. The European Union provides financial support for infrastructure, equipment and training. Germany engages particularly in training and in infrastructure to set up the regional commando in Niamey (Niger). In principle, European and German cooperation with the G5 Sahel refers to combat and "protective" missions (such as the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), established by Security Council Resolution 2100 of 25 April). The Mission was tasked to support the transitional authorities of Mali in the stabilization of the country and implementation of the transitional roadmap), to strengthening the security forces, and to security sector reforms—whereby the latter, until now, seems to remain rather a matter of rhetoric. Related to the EU's joint Security and Defence Policy, the EU Council in May 2017 approved that the European civil missions EU Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP) may also provide training in Burkina Faso, assumed that there will be a demand from the Burkinabe government.

Both the G5 and the international military cooperation have been sharply criticized: G5 soldiers and gendarmes were repeatedly accused of human rights violations and even of committing massacres against civilians. The European military cooperation is blamed to lack any critical analysis and differentiation between the involved Sahel states (Lacher 2021, 30; VAD 2020, 4, 26-27).

The same holds true for the French military intervention "Opération Barkhane". France started to intervene in Mali in early 2013; by mid-2014, the intervention was transformed to

Barkhane, a military operation that now includes all French troops in the region under a joint commando. In 2020, Barkhane was comprised of 5,100 soldiers, half of them in combat units (Moderan and Hoinathy 2021; Tull 2020, 3). The mission strongly focuses on the bordering area of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Though often, at least by European militaries, considered a success, there is hardly any doubt that "counterterrorism" intervention has not led to more security (Tull 2021)—not even if security is defined in narrow conventional terms, not to speak of human security. Barkhane rather seems to serve political purposes in France itself, as Wolfram Lacher (2021, 8), researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)[4], argues: After the attacks in France in 2015 and 2016, the French government strived to demonstrate its engagement in fighting "Islamic" extremism—partly to be able to oppose right-wing populist forces in France. Similarly, Germany's military engagement in Mali via the European Union Training Mission European Union Training Mission (EUTM) Mali and MINUSMA primarily serves to demonstrate solidarity with France, rather than to fight extremism and allegedly causes of flight (ibid., 27-28). Most recently, however, the military interventions in the Sahel have lost considerably support in France: In a January 2021 poll, 51 per cent of respondents stated that they were "not in favour" of it (Poncet 2021). Altogether, external military intervention, namely Barkhane, probably rather destabilizes than stabilizes the region, in Mali and Burkina Faso likewise (Lacher 2021; Idrissa 2019).

Development cooperation and the security-development nexus

In view of the worsening security situation, the governments of Germany and France in 2019 created the "partnership for security and stability in the Sahel" (P3S), aiming at increasing their support to stabilize the region and to improve coordination of international partners. P3S is supposed to complement the

[4] The SWP (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik) is a Berlin based policy think-tank that "advises the German government and parliament on questions of foreign and security policy" (https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/swp/about-us, 15 September 2021).

civil activities of the "Sahel alliance" for sustainable development that was established in 2017 to support the G5 Sahel, flanking the military stabilization of the region with development cooperation. Burkina Faso is a prioritized partner state of the P3S. According to the "4-point plan for the Sahel" (BMZ 2020), the German ministry for economic cooperation and development aims at 1) reinforcing trust in the state; 2) creating perspectives for the youth through education and employment; 3) strengthening resilience against external shocks, instability and crisis, including climate change; and 4) preventing that the crisis spreads to the coastal states.

Analysts criticize this security-development nexus as being dysfunctional and eventually remaining in the priority of the military (VAD 2020, 18, 27). Moreover, civil and military interventions are based on the misleading Western construction of the Sahel region as dangerous, ungoverned, uncontrolled, and an area of "state failure"—which represents a quite problematic discourse; moreover, empirically does not hold true, as large areas and relevant parts of statehood remain under governmental and administrative control (ibid., 8; Idrissa 2019). As opposed to this, Idrissa (2019) suggests the concept of the "Conflict Zone". I do albeit find this concept neither convincing, as it also suggests a territorial notion of the conflict—which does not correspond to what can be observed in Burkina Faso during the last years, and it does neither help to understand the political-economic factors that drive the conflict and the complex constellation of actors.

The crisis, development and military intervention: Perceptions of development and civil society actors

The way international and national actors—state and developmental agencies, NGOs and more critical and leftist civil society organizations—perceive and present the recent security crisis in Burkina Faso varies considerably, depending on the activities they are engaged in and the programmatic they subscribe to, and on political positions. Some focus on the humanitarian situation; other emphasize social cohesion and

conflicts that are perceived as inter-community, religious or ethnic; yet others point to underlying political-economic structures and related interests notably of external actors.

Development cooperation, humanitarian aid, social cohesion and dialogue projects

Representatives of bi- and multilateral development cooperation and NGOs alike agree that the security crisis massively impacts their work, and that they thus are required to address issues of crisis prevention and conflict management. Depending on where projects are located, their project activities are cancelled or severely constrained due to the conditions of insecurity. Many actors, bi- and multilateral agencies and developmental NGOs alike, consider development politics as being a way of structural crisis prevention: They aim at providing basic services in education and training, health care, WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) and state administration. It is argued that if basic services work non-state armed groups will be less able to recruit and obtain support from local communities. Most agencies and NGOs have only recently started to incorporate crisis prevention, conflict sensitivity and management in their programmes and projects in Burkina Faso. Agencies of bi- and multilateral development cooperation are supposed to adapt their planning to the principles of "Leave No One Behind" (LNOB) and "Prevent Violent Extremism" (PVE), i.e., paying particular attention to that all social groups are adequately included in the activities, and that some activities specifically target certain groups.

The disastrous humanitarian situation leads to a shift in donor policies and new calls for proposals for project funding; in consequence, several humanitarian and emergency relief organizations have entered the scene of developmental agencies and NGOs in Burkina Faso, and others have amplified their activities in the fields of humanitarian help and sometimes shifted their portfolios.

A range of NGOs, both national and international, engage in projects aiming at what in the Burkinabe discourse is named "social cohesion". This builds on the assumption that conflicts are inter-communal, religious or ethnic, respectively that a

considerable risk exists; that communities will be instrumentalized and fractured alongside constructions of ethnicity and religion. In 2019, a state minister of national reconciliation and social cohesion was established (Ministre d'Etat, Ministre auprès du Président du Faso, chargé de la Réconciliation nationale et de la Cohésion sociale), and the Department of Social Cohesion (Direction Générale de la Cohésion Sociale) was created at the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization and Social Cohesion (Ministère de l'Administration Territoriale, de la Décentralisation et de la Cohésion Sociale). It is comprised of three divisions: (1) Prevention of violent extremism; (2) Promotion of social dialogue and fight against exclusion; and (3) Promotion of conflict management. For example, it promotes community leaders who voluntary engage for peace and social dialogue and alike projects.

Given that suchlike projects are fostered both by the national government and by international donors and discourses, it is hardly surprising that national and international project implementing NGOs get engaged in the fields of social cohesion. Activities include workshops for community leaders, media campaigns for religious tolerance, and "inter-community day" on that Muslims sweep the church whereas Catholics clean the Muslim prayer spot and the like.

Several interviewees from the affected communities and from critical civil society organizations expressed themselves rather critically with regard to these activities: They emphasize that a whole business of NGOs, consulting, expertise and research has emerged with a certain class of people; many of them either from Ouagadougou or abroad, but not residents of the region and communities themselves, making money out of the crisis, whereas the communities hardly do benefit from this. "Whom do you think your study will benefit?", one interviewee asked me, for example. "All these questions that you are asking have been posed and answered dozens of times." (Interview with representative of a community from the Sahel region, Oudalan province, Ouagadougou, 2 December 2020) The same person told about a workshop organized by a French NGO on conflict

management, negotiation and dialogue in a municipality close to both the borders of Mali and Niger. From their perspective, the NGO must have been in contact with terrorist groups[5]—otherwise it would have been impossible to organize the workshop in the municipality without provoking a terrorist attack, and representatives of the non-state armed groups had even been invited to it. Understandably, this enraged many residents and also representatives of the local authorities. "We have no clue who the terrorists are" (ibid.), they stated, but the French obviously knew them. Given that many people in Burkina Faso assume that the French are in one way or another involved in the conflict—namely to justify the presence of the French military and to assure strategic control over the region, including access to resources and markets, and possibly to deliver military equipment—a conflict management and dialogue activity organized by a French organization is likely to be considered as an affront by many from the affected community.

Besides, many social cohesion and dialogue projects, according to critiques, are rather apolitical; they leave the political-economic power relations unaffected, and thus miss the point of the actual conflicts. The conflicts, from this perspective are not about religion and ethnicity—religious framings were just a blind to mobilize Muslim communities (which somehow suggests itself, as the majority of the Burkinabe population are Muslims, especially in the North). Ethnic frictions are typically constructed by the power politics of political parties and politicians who aim to mobilize voters referring to autochthony (Interview with representatives of civil society organization, Ouagadougou, 1 December 2020).

Representatives from critical civil society organisations point out that, while funds are considerable for humanitarian relief and apolitical projects, political campaigns challenging the authorities and the current state encounter difficulties to get funding. Yet humanitarian action that does not actively target the underlying causes of a humanitarian crisis turns out to be

[5] I was unable to get in touch with the respective NGO to get their point of view on this.

short-sighted and questionable. Domination is multi-dimensional, including economic, military, social and cultural domination, as one representative of a civil society organization pointed out, and from his view, the developmental NGOs are part of this logic.

Impact of the crisis on civil society organizations

Similar to the developmental agencies and NGOs, critical civil society organizations also report that their activities are heavily impacted by the security crisis. Due to the security situation, they feel unable to effectively reach the population in some areas. In the affected regions, many of their activities, namely those who include public gathering of more than four or five persons, have become virtually impossible because of the risk of attacks. Many people fear to express themselves in public. Organizational structures of civil society organizations have been affected and partly dissolved related to the massive internal displacement, though in some cases groups continued to exist when communities were displaced to the same spots. Yet reorganization and reestablishment of their structures and local groups is a current central task for the nation-wide civil society organizations that fundamentally build on decentralized local groups.

Referring to the security crisis, basic civil rights—namely, freedom of assembly, expression and press—have been restricted by the state authorities in Burkina Faso. In June 2019, the Criminal Code was amended by adopting a new law (no. 044-2019) that in its article 312-11 criminalizes any acts that may "demoralize" the state security forces "by whatever means". Human rights groups complain that the law is used frequently to intimate and persecute human rights activists, journalists, and bloggers. On 12-13 November 2019, blogger Naïm Touré was arrested and accused of "attempt of demoralizing the state security forces". On 26 December, activist Kémi Seba received a two-month suspended sentence and a fine for "public insults" and "contempt towards the president and foreign heads of state" after a public conference in Ouagadougou (BTI 2022). Human rights organizations complain that according to the reformed

Criminal Code they are not supposed to investigate possible human rights violations by the state security forces, publish reports and photographs refereeing to it, etcetera. (Interview with representative of civil society organization, Ouagadougou, 4 December 2020).

Related to the state of emergency that, due to the increase in terrorist attacks, has been effective in several provinces since 31 December, 2018, assembly rights are restricted by the authorities. They frequently make use of this to ban on short notice activities by oppositional civil society organizations. From the perspective of critical civil society organizations, the government uses the terrorist threat as an excuse to curtail civil liberties and to oppress oppositional activities, especially by leftist organizations. "The crisis abets repression", an activist stated (Interview, Ouagadougou, 1 December 2020). Activists of civil society organizations feel that they were denounced to be terrorists, and that they feel threatened both by terrorist groups and by the state security forces. They thus feel required to take precautionary measures when planning their activities to ensure security. They fear that activists may even be killed and then blame the killing on the terrorist groups. A well-known example is the case of two leading activists of the Democratic Youth Organization of Burkina Faso (Organisation Démocratique de la Jeunesse, ODJ) who were killed in the province of Yagha in the North East of the country, bordering Niger on 31 May, 2019. An alliance of trade unions, human rights and students, and other civil society organizations immediately condemned the killing and demanded an official investigation and prosecution of the perpetrators and those responsible for the murder (Engels 2019). However, until now, the authorities seem remaining inactive, and the autopsy that the civil society organizations demand has not been accomplished.

Expectations towards partners in internationalist networks

With regard to what kind of support they expect from their international partners, i.e. NGOs, foundations, CSOs, solidarity networks and the like, interviewees from critical civil society organizations in Burkina Faso expressed the wish for

acknowledgement and critique of the increasing constraints of civil rights and repression under the pretext of the security crisis. Partners, for instance, in their political work, public statements, lobby and advocacy campaigns, should be solidary advocates for the marginalized populations; rather than collaborate with the neo-colonial state, they should support the progressive non-state forces in the country. European partners, according to the interviewees from civil society organizations, should take a stand for a substantial transformation of socio-economic and political structures, which included reflecting on alternatives to dominant liberal economic and political institutions.

One critical point partners in internationalist networks have to reflect and discuss on is the position to take towards the state security forces. With all necessary critique of them remains the case that terrorist groups are armed actors, and that the attacks, at least in a short run, will hardly be stopped with non-violent means alone. So, if one opposes external military intervention, still questions remain of whether a national army should exist, how it should be structured, how it should behave and can be hold accountable, etcetera.

Political economy of the crisis and critique of external interventions

Recurrent in the interpretation of the current security crisis of most interviewees are critical references to the political economy of the crisis and the role of external actors, particularly France. Many interviewees refer to the subsoil resources in the Sahel region, gold in particular, and that most likely the armed groups in the region are involved in artisanal gold mining, respectively the traffic of *artisanally* mined gold and weapons (cf. ICG 2019). Leftist civil society activists consider the security crisis as being a consequence of (a crisis of) capitalism and imperialism. Yet observers who do not refer to, and probably not necessarily subscribe to, a general critique of capitalism and imperialism also point to the political economy of the crisis, to the history of European and particular French geopolitics in Western Africa and the Sahel region, and to contemporary French economic and military interests in the region. “It’s not for our beautiful eyes that France is here”, as one activist put it (Interview,

Ouagadougou, 1 December 2020): "Africa is the richest continent, but with the poorest populations. And somebody has an interest in that." (ibid.) From an anti-imperialist and radical political economy perspective, it is argued that the terrorist threat would suit French economic interests just fine, as these might be less ensured since the popular insurrection and the turnover of Blaise Compaoré.

There is in increasing need to justify the French military presence in the former colonies, both towards the French society and the societies and politics in the respective African states. The security crisis and terrorist threat might be assessed as an opportunity for such a justification, though recently it does not seem to succeed in mitigating both internal and external critique. Critical activists argue that the acceptance of French military cooperation would amount to a public acceptance of neo-colonial dependency relations. Moreover, the European armaments industry would benefit from the crisis, also besides the direct French military intervention, as the European Union provides equipment and training to the Burkinabe military and the G5. Yet it is not only the leftist organizations in Burkina Faso that express critique towards the French military engagement. Several other interviewees from civil society, NGOs and authorities at various scales pointed out that despite its technological superiority, the French military either was incapable to detect and fight the terrorist groups in the Sahel, or it actually did not want to do so. One resident from a community in the Sahel region said they felt "sacrificed", in view of that French military forces with highly development drones seemed unable or unwilling to stop terrorists from massacring villagers in the municipality.

Conclusion

In summary, it can be stated that interviewees from development agencies, NGOs, civil society organizations and local communities outline various impacts of the recent security crisis, depending on the mandate and the field of action of their organization, and on their political position. Perspectives particularly vary on the appraisal of projects of social cohesion;

unsurprisingly, representatives of organizations that promote and implement such projects argue in favour of them, whereas many representatives from local communities and more critical civil society organizations are rather sceptical.

Almost all interviewees agree in criticizing external military cooperation and intervention, namely by France. However, the line of argument in these critiques varies, with some arguing from a political economy and more or less anti-imperialist perspective, whereas others raise doubts with regard to the transparency and effectiveness of the military intervention. Moreover, variation exists regarding approval to the Burkinabé state security forces: While some appraise them and argue that the state army should be supported and equipped to fight the terrorists, others point at possible human rights violations by the state security forces and state-sponsored vigilantes, and consider the army being an instrument of a neo-colonial state that rather serves the interests of economic elites and external forces than those of the population.

Accordance exists between the perspectives of various actors from Burkina Faso on one hand and external analysts on the other that the idea of the security-development nexus, as long as it builds on the primacy of the military, is doomed to fail. A main point here is that development is used to legitimate military intervention; another is that the armed forces are presented as guarantees of the security of the population—whereas they may frequently be, rather, a risk and harm for many people than a provider of security, even if security is limited to physical (not human) security. Conventional military "empowerment" based on provision of military training and equipment, and direct intervention by foreign militaries, turns out to be rather problematic.

So far it has hardly proven any effect in terms of stopping killings and enhancing the security situation for the local population; and it has boosted anti-French sentiments in the region, namely in Burkina Faso and Mali.

References

BMZ 2020: 4-Punkte Plan – Sahel-Initiative. Entwicklungspolitik als zentraler Baustein zur Stabilisierung des Sahel. Bonn: BMZ, https://www.bmz.de/de/laender_regionen/sahel-allianz/index.jsp (last accessed: 19 March 2021).

BTI 2022: Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) 2022 Burkina Faso Country Report. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung.

Commission on Human Security 2003: Human Security Now, New York: Commission on Human Security.

Dietz, Kristina, and Engels, Bettina 2021: „Konflikt", in: Gottschlich, Daniela; Hackfort, Sarah; Schmitt, Tobias, and von Winterfeld, Uta (eds): *Handbuch Politische Ökologie: forthcoming*.

Engels, Bettina 2019: "Activists Killed in Burkina Faso", https://roape.net/2019/07/03/activists-killed-in-burkina-faso/ 3 July 2019 (last accessed: 30 March 2021).

Galtung, Johan 1969: "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research". In: *Journal of Peace Research*, 69: 3, 167-191.

Galtung, Johan 1985: "Twenty-Five Years of Peace Research: Ten Challenges and Some Responses". In: *Journal of Peace Conflict & Development*, 22: 2, 141-158.

Hagberg, Sten 2019: "Performing Tradition while Doing Politics: A comparative study of the dozos and koglweogos self-defense movements in Burkina Faso". In: *African Studies Review*, 62: 1, 173-193.

Hellweg, Joseph 2004: "Encompassing the State: Sacrifice and Security in the Hunters' Movement in Côte d'Ivoire". In: *Africa Today*, 50: 4, 3-28.

HRW 2020: Burkina Faso: Residents' Accounts Point to Mass Executions. Identify Remains of 180 Men Found in Djibo; Prosecute Those Responsible, 8 July 2020, Human Rights Watch, https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/08/burkina-faso-residents-accounts-point-mass-executions (last accessed: 7 October 2021).

ICG 2017: The Social Roots of Jihadist Violence in Burkina Faso's North. Africa Report No. 254, 12 October 2017. Dakar and Brussels: International Crisis Group.

ICG 2019: Getting a Grip on Central Sahel's Gold Rush. Africa Report No. 282. Dakar and Brussels: International Crisis Group.

ICG 2020: Burkina Faso: sortir de la spirale des violences. Africa Report No. 287. Dakar and Brussels: International Crisis Group.

Idrissa, Rahmane 2019: Tinder to the Fire. Burkina Faso in the Conflict Zone. RLS Research Peapers on Peace and Conflict Studies in West and Central Africa 2/2019. Dakar: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

Lacher, Wolfram 2021: "Unser schwieriger Partner. Deutschlands und Frankreichs erfolgloses Engagement" in L*ibyen und Mali*. SWP-Studie 3. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik.

Laclau, Ernesto, and Mouffe, Chantal 1985: *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London: Verso.

Moderan, Ornell, and Hoinathy, Remadji. 2021: G5 Sahel: N'Djamena summit should redefine France-Sahel cooperation. ISS Today, 15 February 2021, https://issafrica.org/iss-today/g5-sahel-ndjamena-summit-should-redefine-france-sahel-cooperation (last accessed: 23 March 2021).

Poncet, Guerric 2021: « Sahel : la moitié des Français opposés à la présence française ». In: *Le Point*, 11 January 2021, https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/sahel-la-moitie-des-francais-opposes-a-la-presence-francaise-11-01-2021-2409098_24.php (last accessed: 23 March 2021).

REN-LAC 2019: Etat de la corruption au Burkina Faso. Rapport 2019. Ouagadougou: Réseau national de lutte anti-corruption.

Thurston, Alex 2019: Escalating conflicts in Burkina Faso. RLS Research Papers on Peace and Conflict Studies in West anf Central Africa 1/2019. Dakar: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

Tull, Denis M. 2020: German and International Crisis Management in the Sahel. Why Discussions about Sahel Policy Are Going around in Circles. SWP Comment 2020/C 27. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik.

Tull, Denis M. 2021: Operation Barkhane and the Future of Intervention in the Sahel. The Shape of Things to Come. SWP Comment 2021/C 05. Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik.

Turner, Jonathan H. 1975: "Marx and Simmel Revisited: Reassessing the Foundations of Conflict Theory". In: *Social Forces*, 53: 4, 618-627.

Tisseron, Antonin 2021: Pandora's box. Burkina Faso, self-defense militias and VDP Law in fighting jihadism. Dakar: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Peace and Security Competence Centre Sub-Saharan Africa

VAD, Ausschuss Sahel 2020: Sahelländer in der Existenzkrise. Papier Nr. 2, November 2020.

Van Aken, Jan 2018: Left perspectives on civil crisis prevention. Between critique and concrete intervention. online-Publikation 9/2018. Berlin: Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung.

Zutterling, Claire 2020: Armer les civils : la loi des Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie au Burkina Faso. Brussels: Groupe de recherche et d'information sur la paix et la sécurité (GRIP).

This publication was funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany

Dealing with the Security Crisis in Burkina Faso: Development and Civil Society Perspectives on Crisis Prevention

ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG
REGIONAL OFFICE WEST AFRICA
VILLA 43, MERMOZ SOTRAC, DAKAR, SENEGAL
TEL : +221-33-8697519
EMAIL : infodakar@rosalux.org