RESEARCHING INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

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‘Better to be raped than to be killed’ A gendered analysis of internal displacement in Burkina Faso

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Abstract

Burkina Faso is experiencing one of the fastest growing internal displacement crises in the world, currently counting 1.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). 80% of the displaced population is made up of women and children. Struggling with insecurity due to attacks from international and local armed groups in the Sahel, domestic political instability, climate change and deeply rooted farmer-herder conflicts, Burkina Faso's population, displaced or not, is facing a complex humanitarian crisis that shows little signs of abating. Since research into internal displacement in Burkina Faso is still scarce, this paper attempts to develop an initial analysis. It takes a gendered approach to understand how different social groups are affected by internal displacement, how they adapt to a context of crisis and to what extent gender helps us reveal continuities of violence and solidarity. Gender, rather than an essentialised category of being, is used as a frame for understanding social relations. The aim is to analyse how gender shapes experiences of displacement, violence, and solidarity among IDP and host populations in Burkina Faso today. Starting with the continued stigmatisation of rape (survivors), the paper moves on to interrogate negative coping mechanisms of displaced communities, including the link between early and forced marriages and host-displaced community relationships, the gendered dimension of social cohesion, and survival sex work. In a third section that focuses on decision-making processes, it will take a closer look at female-headed households, mobility, and women support networks. Finally, the paper will consider forced recruitment as a form of gender-based violence and examine women's involvement in combat. It will be argued that a gendered analysis of internal displacement and conflict is crucial to understanding the current humanitarian crisis in Burkina Faso and escaping false dichotomies of pre-, post and conflict ruptures.

Keywords

IDPs; gender; Burkina Faso; IDP-host relationships; social cohesion

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1 Introduction

Burkina Faso is experiencing one of the fastest growing displacement crises in the world. Counting 50,000 internally displaced persons in early 2019, the number of IDPs increased tenfold until the end of the year and has since reached nearly 1.5 million.[1] The vast majority of people are displaced within the Sahel and Centre-Nord regions in the north of the country.

Figure 1 Most people in Burkina Faso flee the Sahel and Centre-Nord regions in the north of the country.[2]

Insecurity has spread form neighbouring Mali, as non-state armed groups, including *Ansarul Islam*, Al-Qaeda-affiliated *Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin* (JNIM), and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), as well as local militias terrorize local populations. Disappointed by the inability of government forces, the *Forces de Défense et de Sécurité* (FDS), to protect villagers and in fear of extrajudicial killings, Burkinabè citizens have formed local self-defence groups, known as *koglweogo*, 'guardians of the bush', that have drawn international media attention for allegedly perpetrating attacks on other villages.[3] Volunteers recruited to support government

[1] UNHCR (2021d). Operational Data Portal Burkina Faso. https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/bfa.
[2] WorldAtlas. (2021). Karte der Regionen von Burkina Faso. https://www.worldmap-knowledge.com/maps/burkina-faso.
[3] Da Cunha Dupuy, R. and Quidelleur, T. (2018). Mouvement d'autodéfense au Burkina Faso: Diffusion et structuration des groupes Koglweogo, Noria research. https://noria-research.com/mouvement-dautodefense-au-burkina-faso-diffusion-et-structuration-des-groupes-koglweogo/; HRW (2019). « Nous avons retrouvé leurs corps plus tard ce jour-là »: Atrocités commises par les islamistes armés et par les forces de sécurité dans la région du Sahel

security forces, the *Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie* (VDP), further contribute to the web of violent actors in Burkina Faso.[4] Domestically, the country is still struggling with a complex political transition in the aftermath of the 2014 popular uprisings that dethroned 27-year President Blaise Compaoré. In addition, long-lasting conflicts between herders and farmers, sometimes connected to the stigmatisation of the Fulani community, are aggravated by desertification and the effects of climate change.[5] The privatisation of gold mines and inter-generational tensions further destabilise the country.[6] Burkina Faso's humanitarian crisis is thus the result of a number of interdependent conflicts driven by international and local state and non-state actors, long-held grievances, and environmental degradation.

Driving people to leave their homes in the northern and western regions of the country, the internal displacement crisis has affected social groups differently. Women and children make up over 80% of the internally displaced population.[7] To better understand the diverse and differing implications of internal displacement in Burkina Faso, this research paper takes a gendered approach to the crisis. The aim is to analyse how gender shapes experiences of displacement, violence, and solidarity among IDP and host populations in Burkina Faso today. To that end, this paper will, firstly, address the silenced prevalence and stigmatisation of rape (survivors). It will, secondly, analyse negative coping mechanisms of displaced communities, including the link between early and forced marriages and host-displaced community relationships, the gendered dimension of social cohesion and survival sex work. In a third section, this paper will interrogate decision-making processes, taking a closer look at female-headed households, mobility, and women support networks. Finally, the paper will consider forced recruitment as a form of gender-based violence and examine women's involvement in combat. It will be argued that a gendered analysis of internal displacement and conflict is crucial to understanding the current humanitarian crisis in Burkina Faso.

2 A Note on Methodology

Since the Burkinabè crisis of internal displacement only recently started gaining momentum, there is little Francophone and nearly no Anglophone research available on this topic. To provide a point of entry into detailed further studies, this piece draws on such published data as exists, as well as a limited number of expert interviews. Interviews were undertaken with Jean-Baptiste Rafiki, the UN SGBV sub-cluster coordinator in Burkina Faso, Mamadou Baro, the Hauts Bassins, Cascades

au Burkina Faso. https://www.hrw.org/fr/report/2019/03/22/nous-avons-retrouve-leurs-corps-plus-tard-ce-jour-la/atrocites-commises-par-les.

[4] Schmauder, A. (2021). The Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland. Clingendael Institute. https://www.clingendael.org/publication/volunteers-defense-homeland.

[5] UNHCR (2021). Le changement climatique et les conflits poursuivent les Burkinabés déplacés. UNHCR Story. https://www.unhcr.org/fr/news/stories/2021/1/600ef4c8a/changement-climatique-conflits-poursuivent-burkinabes-deplaces.html.

[6] Ferrari, F. and Barry, B. (2020). Rapport de l'analyse des risques liés à la crise sécuritaire et des facteurs de cohésion sociale au Burkina Faso. UNICEF, Search for Common Ground.

[7] OCHA (2021). Burkina Faso: Aperçu de la situation humanitaire. https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/bfa_apercu_de_la_situation_humanitaire_12052021.pdf.

and Boucle de Mouhoun Bureau Director of international NGO ICAHD, and Mariam Sawadogo, the Burkina Faso Country Director of Search for Common Ground. Their precious insights guide the underlying analysis.

3 Gendering Internal Displacement in Burkina Faso

3.1 Continuities of Rape and Stigmatisation

In their 2020 conflict analysis for UNICEF and Search for Common Ground, Florence Ferrari and Boubakary Barry find that only about 1-2% of Burkinabè respondents across the country mention rape as one of the consequences of increasing violence in Burkina Faso, with no difference in responses from women and men.[8] Instead of proving the irrelevance of rape to the humanitarian crisis in Burkina Faso, however, people's unwillingness to discuss such instances of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) points to the deeply rooted social stigma attached to rape, or rather, the person that survived being raped. This stigmatisation of rape survivors clearly predates the country's displacement crisis and must be understood on a continuum of gendered violence spanning across pre-, post-, and conflict settings.[9] Gender-sensitive protection monitoring as conducted by UNHCR may help identify rape in displaced communities, therefore drawing more attention to the broader societal issue especially in northern and western zones of humanitarian intervention.[10] When perpetrators of SGBV are known to the survivor, and possibly related to them, as is often the case, survivors are silenced to protect the family name.[11] With an increase in attacks by non-identified armed groups since 2017, perpetrators may less often be part of the survivor's community, but shame and fear of the stigma that will follow an accusation remain.

In rural settings, the village community may punish a survivor, not the rapist(s), for reporting gendered violence, as speaking up about rape and bringing the social shame associated with it upon oneself and one's family is judged more harshly than rape itself.[12] The stigma associated with rape hence not only affects the life of the survivor but their entire extended family. An unmarried rape survivor, for instance, will most likely be unable to find a fiancé if their story is known to the community. Since marriage serves as a primary social safety mechanism in Burkina Faso where the state cannot provide adequate assistance to its population, reporting SGBV puts the very survival of entire families at risk. If a married woman is raped and gets pregnant, she will try to hide the assault. If word comes out, her husband might be suspected of having caught a Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) and his authority as guardian of the family may be questioned.[13] He

[8] Ferrari and Barry, 2020.
[9] Moser, C., & Clare, F. (2001). The gendered continuum of violence and conflict: An operational framework. In *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors: Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*. Zed Books.
[10] UNHCR (2021a). Burkina Faso Fact Sheet 1 January-30 June. https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/87861.
[11] Interview conducted with Mamadou Baro, the Hauts Bassins, Cascades and Boucle de Mouhoun Bureau Director of the international NGO ICAHD International, on 26 August 2021. 74:58 min.
[12] Interview conducted with Jean-Baptiste Rafiki, the UN SGBV sub-cluster coordinator in Burkina Faso, on 20 August 2021. 52:42 min.
[13] Ibid.

may choose to abandon his wife because she is rejected by her family and the wider community.[14] As the stigma of rape threatens to unravel the social safety net of entire families and village communities – ties on which especially displaced people depend – survivors are structurally silenced.

State services in charge of caring for rape survivors are often unable to guarantee confidentiality.[15] If a survivor has the courage to denounce, they will rarely have a one-on-one conversation with a counsellor. Instead, the survivor will have to share their story in an open space where anyone, including people they may know, can listen in. Reporting anonymously to escape social stigma is thus hardly possible. In cities, survivors who seek support from the police risk being blamed for 'provoking' the rapist(s) and suffer re-traumatisation. Addressing the lack of accountability in the justice system, Mamadou Baro argues that 'even if you denounce, there is no legal protection. You are left to your own devices, the perpetrators can make fun of you or even come back and attack you again'.[16] While NGOs are trying to fill the gap in official assistance by providing medical care and counselling, the power to ensure just legal proceedings lies with the authorities. Dealing with the physical violence of an assault in silence, survivors who do not dare to seek medical assistance rely on traditional remedies often leading to a lifelong negative impact on their health.

Rape must be understood as a social phenomenon that predates Burkina Faso's humanitarian crisis. Stigmatisation of rape survivors serves to ensure that SGBV does not unravel social safety nets, including marriage, with disastrous consequences for survivors' physical and mental health. As kinship and village ties only become more important in times of displacement, it is crucial to ensure that survivors receive appropriate care and access to justice without risking their own and their family's (social) survival.

3.2 Gendering Negative Coping Mechanisms

3.2.1 Early and forced marriage: showing gratitude, earning protection

With the steep rise in internal displacement since 2019, Burkina Faso has witnessed an increase in early, forced and child marriages.[17] Several factors play into this development. As instability forces children to abandon their education, girls are often the first ones to drop out of school and get married in order to unburden their parents. Furthermore, marriage is often considered to protect girls from the social stigma of an unwanted pregnancy after rape. During the internal displacement crisis, early and forced marriage has played an important role in maintaining or improving relationships between IDPs and their host communities. Marrying an IDP girl to a host family may, for instance, be seen as a sign of gratitude for the support provided and will establish kinship ties between the displaced and host family, thus securing the livelihood of those who left behind most

[14] Interview with Mamadou Baro.
[15] Interview conducted with Mariam Sawadogo, the Burkina Faso Country Director of Search for Common Ground, on 30 August 2021. 46:33 min.
[16] Interview with Mamadou Baro.
[17] Ferrari and Barry, 2020; OXFAM (2020). Survivantes et Héroïnes: Les femmes dans la crise au Burkina Faso. https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/survivantes-et-heroines-les-femmes-dans-la-crise-au-burkina-faso-620988/.

if not all of their belongings and means of subsistence when fleeing their village of origin.[18] Early and forced marriage therefore becomes a negative coping mechanism to address the vulnerability and precarious poverty of displaced communities in the country's northern and western regions. It remains to be researched to what extent girls are involved in seeking a husband to fulfil material needs that their parents are unable to attend to, as IDP communities in North and South Kivu, DRC, note, and whether boys are also made to enter such unions.[19]

While internal displacement has led to an increase in early and forced marriages, the phenomenon has historically been part of Burkinabè society, especially in the Centre-Nord and Sahel regions that are the main targets of armed attacks today: 'Child marriage existed in Burkina long before the crisis'.[20] Communities that are strongly represented in these regions, including Fulani herders, traditionally marry their children, particularly girls, at the age of 9 to 12. Different explanations include the desire to protect one's girl from the stigma of an unwanted pregnancy outside of marriage, as well as the control of female sexuality and thereby her family's reputation. An intellectual at a workshop on child marriage in the Sahel region, for instance, argued: 'I would rather marry my daughter at the age of 12 than find her on Kwame Nkrumah Avenue in Ouagadougou [a main road known for nocturnal sex work]', Mamadou Baro remembers.[21]

Burkina's Ministry for Women, National Solidarity, and the Family, better known as *Action Sociale*, recently introduced a toll-free number[22] to encourage the local population to report early and forced marriages. Although child marriage is illegal in Burkina Faso, such a ban does not apply to religious and traditional unions and is seldom enforced due to extremely low reporting rates.[23] Understanding early and forced marriage as a negative coping mechanism that potentially secures the survival of a displaced family due to the material benefits of kinship ties with a host community rather than an essentialised cultural practice may help inform sensitisation campaigns currently run by international NGOs and UN agencies.[24] How crucial these ties are to the survival of displaced persons becomes clear when looking at the diminishing levels of support host communities are able and willing to give due to the endurance and intensification of the crisis.[25]

3.2.2 Sharing and accessing land: the strains of an enduring crisis

From the beginning, Burkina Faso's internal displacement crisis has been characterised by a remarkable outpouring of solidarity from local communities in surrounding villages and cities. Camps for IDPs do exist, but inhabitants are generally isolated from the local population and struggle with poor living conditions: 'On displacement camp sites, people are suffering a lot'.[26]

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[18] Interview with Jean-Baptiste Rafiki.
[19] Kesmaecker-Wissing, M. and Pagot, A. (2015). Driven apart: How repeated displacement changes family dynamics in eastern DRC. IDMC, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, pp. 11-13.
[20] Interview with Mamadou Baro.
[21] Ibid.
[22] *Numéro vert* : (+226) 80001287
[23] Amnesty International (2016). Le mariage précoce et forcé au Burkina Faso : les faits. https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/campaigns/2016/04/burkina-faso-forced-early-marriage-facts/.
[24] UNHCR, 2021a.
[25] Interview with Jean-Baptiste Rafiki.
[26] Ibid.

That is why, instead of focussing on the construction of camp sites, Burkina Faso's government in cooperation with UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency and implementing partner NGOs encourage IDPs to stay with fellow citizens in their respective homes.

To give an example, following a violent conflict between *Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie* (VDP) and armed individuals in Koumbri, Yatenga province, Nord region in January 2020, approximately 375 people fled to Ouahigouya, the capital of said province. Almost 90% of those displaced were received by host families, according to Kagoné Alassane, Acting Provincial Director of *Action sociale* in Yatenga. 'The whole family got together, and we left the village. On foot, without our luggage, we set off. We were about 40 people. It took us more than 20 hours to arrive in Ouahigouya, where we then slept at my father-in-law's house', Diallo Aguiratou, a 40-year-old mother of four children, recalls. 'When we arrived, we were counted by government employees, but we have not yet received any assistance. My nephew is housing us and taking care of us. In total, he has taken in 78 people,' 81-year-old widow Salamata Noaga Ouedraogo, who fled with three of her five sons, their wives, and children, adds. Diallo Micailou, a 72-year-old inhabitant of Ouahigouya, recounts that he hosted almost 400 people on his land a few days after the attack had started.[27] Hosting displaced families is not limited to sharing shelter and food. Instead, members of the displaced and host communities engage in agricultural activities, cook, and eat together, forming bonds and helping IDPs feel included. Especially widowed or separated women who fled without their husbands benefit from these communal exchanges.[28]

In contrast to a period of solidarity between local and internally displaced populations towards the beginning of the crisis, spreading regional insecurity and precarity are now putting a strain not only on displaced communities, but Burkina Faso's population in general. The initial spirit of hospitality is thus tested and slowly crumbling: 'Now the crisis lasts, it is hard for everyone'.[29] Sharing already scarce local resources with IDPs is burdening relationships between host and displaced communities.[30] UNHCR notes that land disputes, evictions, and the increase in housing prices in towns where IDPs have arrived are the primary problems in all regions of the country.[31] Access to land has been a trigger of conflict in Burkina Faso for years and lies at the root of confrontations between farmers and herders who struggle to either perform agricultural activities or let their cattle graze as adequate land is less and less available.[32] Climate change and desertification descending towards the south of the country intensify the scarcity of land in combination with the growing inaccessibility of parts of the country in the north and west due to insecurity.[33] Despite these environmental constraints, some host families have given land to IDPs

[27] UNHCR (2020). Recueil de témoignages sur les nouveaux afflux de déplacés à Ouahigouya. Shared via email by Moussa Bougma, Communications and PI Associate, UNHCR Burkina Faso.
[28] Interview with Mariam Sawadogo.
[29] Interview with Mamadou Baro.
[30] Kesmaecker-Wissing and Pagot, 2015, p. 9.
[31] UNHCR, 2021a.
[32] Brottem, L. (2021). La complexité croissante des conflits entre agriculteurs et éleveurs en Afrique de l'Ouest et centrale. Centre d'Études Stratégiques de l'Afrique. https://africacenter.org/fr/publication/la-complexite-croissante-des-conflits-entre-agriculteurs-et-eleveurs-en-afrique-de-louest-et-centrale/.
[33] UNHCR (2021c). Le changement climatique et les conflits poursuivent les Burkinabés déplacés. UNHCR Story. https://www.unhcr.org/fr/news/stories/2021/1/600ef4c8a/changement-climatique-conflits-poursuivent-burkinabes-deplaces.html.

who left their own farmable land behind when fleeing their homes. As the crisis is aggravating with no end in sight, host communities worry about reclaiming access to their land. 'People are tired: I gave up my land two years ago. I no longer cultivate it. How am I going to access my fields when I have given them to someone else?'[34] In the western regions, IDPs work on the land of their host communities, but are rarely allowed to own it.[35] The scarcity of farmable land and the endurance, or worsening, of the crisis thus negatively impact on social relations between host and displaced communities, risking to unravel the relatively successful strides towards social cohesion of the past few years.

3.2.3 Survival Sex Work

As the government and humanitarian organisations are unable to meet the basic needs of IDPs, survival sex work has been on the rise in Burkina Faso's urban centres, zones of humanitarian intervention, and camp sites. In the city of Kaya, Sanmatenga province, Centre-Nord region, sex workers who traditionally came from neighbouring countries have now been replaced by Burkinabè women due to their increasing precarity.[36] Survival sex work often is the only way to secure something to eat and take care of one's parents and children in a context of extreme instability, poverty, and scarcity of resources.[37] In zones of humanitarian intervention, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) is one of the root causes of survival sex work.[38] In Burkina, the Ministry in charge of distributing emergency aid recruits volunteers to help cover remote areas. Mariam Sawadogo shares an example of these volunteers abusing their position of power to extort sex from displaced populations for free, public aid: 'What they [displaced women] get is already not enough, so they think: 'If I refuse and he doesn't give me food, my children will starve.' […] They think that when they denounce, they will lose access to emergency aid. Because this man who comes to distribute food is the one who has the power.' Although public officials or volunteers and humanitarian aid workers are obligated to refrain from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, it remains a prevalent issue in the country's humanitarian zones. UN agencies try to respond by developing income-generating activities and transfer cash directly to female-headed households, for instance.[39] While respondents focused on women performing survival sex work, it would be interesting to know more about the involvement of men and members of the LGBTQIA+ community in these negative coping mechanisms.

Due to a volatile environment of insecurity, impunity, and stigmatisation, survival sex work puts many at risk. Survival sex workers often experience physical and psychological violence, while trying to hide their activities from parents, husbands, and other members of their community to avoid humiliation. Unprotected survival sex work may lead to an unwanted pregnancy or infect

[34] Interview with Jean-Baptiste Rafiki.
[35] Interview with Mamadou Baro.
[36] OXFAM (2020). Survivantes et Héroïnes : Les femmes dans la crise au Burkina Faso. https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/survivantes-et-heroines-les-femmes-dans-la-crise-au-burkina-faso-620988/.
[37] Interview with Jean-Baptiste Rafiki.
[38] Mednick, S. (2021). Sex-for-food aid claimed by women in Burkina Faso. The New Humanitarian. https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/investigations/2021/7/26/sex-for-food-aid-allegations-in-burkina-faso.
[39] Interview with Jean-Baptiste Rafiki.

the person performing it with a Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD).[40] Due to stigmatisation, survival sex workers may be isolated and harassed, pushing some to take their own lives.[41] These negative consequences are likely to affect an IDP's life in the long run. If the displaced community decides to return to their home village, a woman who got pregnant outside of marriage as a result of performing survival sex may risk being left behind: 'They will say: 'You have disappointed us. You had a child, and we know your husband is dead. You shouldn't return home with us. You have to go and find the man who gave you the child.''.[42] This account of the continuing impact of SGBV on a person's and community's life again points to the importance of understanding gendered violence as a continuing phenomenon that is not reduced to the moment of internal displacement but may be magnified due to the precarious living situation of IDPs well after a crisis is officially over.

3.3 Traditional Decision-making Mechanisms and Women's Agency

3.3.1 The internal displacement of female-headed households

Internal displacement changes family roles. Prior to fleeing their homes, household are usually headed by a man who is married to one or several women that take care of rearing their children. Husbands are expected to be the family's breadwinner, while women's involvement in the economic sphere is often limited to petty trading and less demanding agricultural work, for instance. Girls assist their mothers when it comes to household chores and are less likely to be sent to school than boys.[43] In Burkina Faso, the social roles are similarly assigned. Although women cannot officially lead their family when a husband is present, they are the 'hidden heads of household'.[44] They are those who take care of the home, allocate resources, provide food, and take care of their children, while benefitting from the social protection of marriage.

Increasing insecurity in Burkina's northern and western region and attacks targeting especially boys and men have seriously upset these traditional gender roles. Women and children make up over 80% of IDPs in Burkina Faso. Many men have already been killed or injured by armed groups, disappeared, or abandoned their family out of fear of being targeted or shame of being unable to provide and protect.[45] As a youth leader in Dori put it: 'There are no more fathers because of the killings'.[46] Without their husbands present and no community or state protection available, displaced women take on the official role and title of head of household in addition to their traditional responsibilities as mothers and carers.[47]

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[40] Ibid.
[41] Interview with Mamadou Baro.
[42] Interview with Jean-Baptiste Rafiki.
[43] Kesmaecker-Wissing and Pagot, 2015, p. 9.
[44] Interview with Mariam Sawadogo.
[45] Interview with Mamadou Baro.
[46] Ferrari and Barry, 2020, p. 43.
[47] UNFPA (2020). Stratégie du sous-cluster Violences Basées sur le Genre. Humanitarian Response. https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/opérations/burkina-faso/document/burkina-faso-stratégie-du-sous-cluster-vbg, pp.3-4.

This shift in family roles has, on the one hand, given female heads of household more autonomy, while, on the other hand, increasing their vulnerability. Since 'a woman without a husband is not respected enough in these communities', widowed or separated women are at a high risk of sexual harassment and violence.[48] Their responsibilities at home and the danger of dealing with additional stigma prevents many survivors from reporting traumatic experiences.[49] Although women take on additional responsibilities for their household, they remain excluded from community-level meetings, in the village or on the camp site.[50] This poses a fundamental problem for female-headed households when men come together on IDP sites to discuss problems and decide how to resolve them collectively. With no access to these meetings and informal exchanges, female heads of household miss out on crucial information concerning the distribution of resources and local security developments, for instance.[51] Nor are they able to influence decisions or present their point of view.

International NGOs and UNHCR have started setting up protection committees, *comités de protection*, on camp sites consisting of five male and five female representatives from the displaced community. These committees talk about issues of common concern relating, for example, to hygiene and income-generating activities. Their members are expected to relay what has been decided and collect feedback. Still, it is important to maintain separate meetings when discussing issues around SGBV. Neither men nor women will be able to freely express themselves in mixed groups due to cultural constraints.[52]

Displacement also changes power relations in male-headed households. Many men, disabled, injured, and traumatised from attacks, unable to move freely and find work, struggle to live up to societal expectations of normative masculinity and their traditional role as protector and provider.[53] While women often adapt and take on different responsibilities, men tend not to engage in new activities. Instead, they appear to be more vulnerable to alcohol abuse because of their social incapacitation and feelings of humiliation and loss of control at home. Humanitarian organisations prefer transferring cash directly to women so that the assistance is used for the family's and children's wellbeing instead of personal benefit.[54] However, women will often have to give any money they receive to their husband who claims the rights to manage household finances, or risk domestic violence.[55]

3.2.2 Gendered mobility

Men and boys are, moreover, vulnerable because they are the explicit target of gender-based killings executed by armed groups in Burkina Faso. Women and girls are therefore often associated

[48] Interview with Mamadou Baro.
[49] OXFAM, 2020, p. 14.
[50] Interview with Mariam Sawadogo.
[51] Interview with Jean-Baptiste Rafiki.
[52] Interview with Mamadou Baro.
[53] Lwambo, D. (2011). Before the War I was a Man: Men and Masculinities in Eastern DRC. http://www.healafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/men-and-masculinities-in-eastern-dr-congo.pdf.
[54] Kesmaecker-Wissing and Pagot, 2015, pp.10-12.
[55] Interview with Mariam Sawadogo.

with a higher degree of mobility in zones of humanitarian intervention. When discussing who should temporarily return to the village of origin to fetch possessions left behind, displaced communities, for instance, choose to send married women rather than men, boys, or girls.[56] While leaving a camp site or the host family's home may not put women at the immediate risk of death, they are more vulnerable to sexual violence and rape. That is why humanitarian organisations are supporting IDP women in the construction of improved cookstoves that reduce the risk of SGBV linked to collecting firewood.[57] Displaced communities do recognise this additional danger, but, fearing for the lives of boys and men who are unlikely to survive an attack, some believe that 'it is better to be raped than to be killed'.[58] A similar reasoning emerges from interviews with Somali women refugees in Kenya. When collecting wood, they 'knew that attackers would kill any man they encountered from a warring clan whereas they would 'only' rape a woman'.[59] The gendered nature of how different social groups are perceived to experience violence thus plays an important role in the decision-making process of an IDP community. Considering the previous section on traditional decision-making structures, women are neither fully involved in the process that determines their temporary return to the village of origin nor is the violence they are likely forced to endure as well as its long-term consequences taken seriously enough. Sexual assault and rape may very well lead to death, inflict life-long physical pain on the survivor or traumatise them to such an extent that they kill themselves.[60]

3.2.3 Solidarity among women

Due to the lack of involvement in formal decision-making processes, displaced women have developed their own informal support and problem-solving structures. With little activities to engage in on camp sites, women spend the day trying to take care of their household and start sharing details of their daily lives with other women nearby: 'They will talk about what they experience in their homes, the difficulties they face. During these encounters, they realise that they are not alone in this situation, that others are also in the same situation. And together they try to see what they can do about it.'[61] Some displaced women on camp sites set up organisations with official positions and regular meetings to find solutions to their hardships. They may collect ideas and resources to start income-generating activities. Crucially, these organisations also serve as a safety net for women who risk abuse from their husband: 'He knows that there is a formal structure, that he is being watched. He is [more] cautious.'[62] Decision-making may hence be more complex – although formal mechanisms may include women, they do not simply suffer what they must, but actively build alternative structures to share their concerns and find solutions. These self-help

[56] OXFAM, 2020, pp. 14-15.
[57] IDMC, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2019). Sex Matters: A gender perspective on internal displacement, p. 4; UNHCR (2021b). Burkina Faso Operational Update May-June 2021. https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/87859.
[58] Interview with Jean-Baptiste Rafiki.
[59] Musse, F. (2004). War Crimes Against Women and Girls in *Somalia the Untold Story – the war through the eyes of Somali women*, edited by Gardner, J. and El-Bushra, J. CIIR and Pluto Press, p. 82.
[60] Interview with Mariam Sawadogo.
[61] Interview with Mariam Sawadogo.
[62] Ibid.

structures then also influence how much power husbands have over their wives in situations of displacement.

3.3 Forced Recruitment as Gender-Based Violence

3.3.1 Vulnerable men

Not only are men and boys of any age more likely to be targeted and killed by armed groups, but they are also at a higher risk of forced recruitment. With little other livelihood opportunities available, men and boys join armed groups that offer a salary more than twice as high as the hard and dangerous work in gold mines.[63] Feelings of disappointment and anger at government forces that are unable to protect the local population and instead contribute to terrorising villagers may, in addition, push displaced boys and men who have lost their land and cattle to join armed groups.[64] Forced recruitment, in turn, increases insecurity and fosters internal displacement.[65]

3.3.2 Women combatants

As the crisis intensifies, an increasing number of young women are joining armed groups. The recruitment of female combatants in Burkina Faso is, however, not yet comparable to women suicide bombers in Nigeria.[66] Justine Coulidiati-Kielem, former coordinator of the G5 Sahel women's platform, considers women both victims and actresses of violence in the region, citing poverty, a lack of basic services, and employment as principal reasons for the recruitment successes of armed groups.[67]

The Solhan massacre that took place in a gold-mining town in Yagha province, Sahel region of northern Burkina Faso in June 2021 has drawn attention to the changing role and agency of women in Burkina Faso's increasingly violent conflicts. Government spokesperson Ousseni Tamboura declared that the attack had been carried out by a majority of 12- to 14-year-old children and that women had 'played a role in pointing out some of the targets'.[68] Mamadou Baro, commenting on Solhan, explains that mothers may witness their sons, husbands, or brothers return to their village of origin after a suspicious absence and start preparing for battle, but fail to report them to the Burkinabè army, the *Forces de Defense et Securité* (FDS). With a proven track record of extrajudicial killings and impunity, it may be of little surprise that the local population has difficulties trusting government forces.[69] Women's involvement, in this case, is reduced to silent complicity, or a failure to report suspicious behaviour.

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[63] IDMC, 2019, p. 1.
[64] Interview with Mamadou Baro.
[65] IDMC, 2019, p. 1.
[66] Interview with Mariam Sawadogo.
[67] OXFAM, 2020, p. 17.
[68] RFI (2021). Burkina Faso : les précisions du gouvernement sur les assaillants de Solhan. https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20210624-burkina-faso-les-précisions-du-gouvernement-sur-les-assaillants-de-solhan.
[69] HRW, 2019.

If discussed, women's participation in conflict is primarily linked to their passive complicity, caretaking, mothering male fighters and, possibly, intelligence-gathering and espionage. Women are usually not suspected of engaging in combat and can therefore move more freely and, to some extent, more securely than men. Often, they are considered the victims of forced recruitment, condemned to suffer constant abuse as sex slaves.[70] Mariam Sawadogo highlights that there are women who choose to join armed groups because, having lost the protection and support of their husbands and male relatives due to gender-based killings, 'some of them let themselves be wound up, thinking they will have a new life. That they will be safer with these people [armed groups], that these people will take care of them.'[71] Weighing her options, a woman whose husband was killed, disappeared, or abandoned his family might hence decide to join an armed group because it offers a degree of social safety that neither the state nor the village community will offer. There is no information available on what life is like for a woman who has joined an armed group, although experts suggest a continuation of SGBV.[72] One is left wondering why women's active choice to participate in armed groups is seldomly discussed. There certainly is an unease at the prospect of women as violent agents. Central research questions remain: Could female combatants be used as weapons due to the shame associated with being killed by a woman in Islamist circles? To what extent have women historically engaged in combat in Burkina Faso? Why is their participation not made more public, as it is with women clan militias in Somalia, for instance?

4 Conclusion

A gendered analysis of internal displacement in Burkina Faso reveals important social dynamics of conflict, violence, and solidarity among internally displaced persons and between IDP and host communities.

Albeit intensified by humanitarian, security, and political crises, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) must be understood on a continuum that spans pre-, post-, and conflict settings. The stigmatisation of rape survivors, inadequate medical care and a lack of confidentiality prevent displaced survivors from reporting. The displacement crisis adds social pressure to maintain family, kinship, and community ties that are crucial to the survival of those who have left most if not all their belongings behind. Survivors are thus structurally silenced and reported numbers are low, although rape is prevalent.

To cope with the precarity and extreme poverty that results from displacement, IDP families increasingly decide to marry their young daughters to a member of the host family as a sign of gratitude and to secure ongoing protection. Early and forced marriages play a crucial role in building social cohesion, as strains on already scarce resources and a worsening of attacks make access to farmable land a key site of contestation. Those who live in camps, urban centres, or do not benefit from the protection of a host family, increasingly engage in survival sex work. Especially in humanitarian zones, the phenomenon is well-known and scorned. In addition to stigmatisation and the risk of SGBV under highly unsafe working conditions, unwanted

[70] Ferrari and Barry, 2020, p. 36; OXFAM, 2020, p. 17.
[71] Interview with Mariam Sawadogo.
[72] Ibid.

pregnancies may result from survival sex work. If unmarried or widowed, a pregnant IDP woman faces social isolation and is unlikely to be able to return home with her village community in the future.

Internal displacement disrupts traditional family roles. Men and boys are particularly targeted by armed groups, making their killings a form of gender-based violence. Moreover, many husbands struggle to live up to the normative masculinity that tasks them with protecting and providing for their family, thus either abandoning their family, or succumbing to alcohol abuse. Women are pushed to take on new roles as official heads of household, while losing the protection of marriage. Decision-taking meetings, however, remain a male domain, making female-headed households miss out on crucial information on how to organise life on a camp site, for instance. As boys and men are killed in confrontations with armed groups, married women are sent to return to villages of origin to fetch left-behind belongings. Their increased mobility disregards the fact that they are at a higher risk of SGBV with potentially life-long consequences. Gender and perceived experiences of gendered violence and mobility heavily influence the decision-making process of IDP communities. Women, however, do not simply suffer what they must. On the contrary, women on IDP sites set up their own associations to discuss their daily lives and difficulties at home to find solutions together, start income-generating activities and benefit from an indirect control mechanism of their husbands.

Finally, forced recruitment of men and boys is a form of gender-based violence that, possibly motivated by the precariousness of life in displacement, fosters greater insecurity for communities and forces more people to flee. Organisations report a rise in the recruitment of young women into armed groups in Burkina Faso, although most sources focus on women as caretakers and informants, not active combatants. To what extent this is true or might change remains to be seen.

While this research paper aims to give an impression of the complex dynamics around gender and internal displacement in Burkina Faso, crucial questions that necessitate further study and field research remain. How does internal displacement influence the inability of men to fulfil their traditional gender roles? How do physical disability and alcohol abuse contribute to their clash with normative masculinity? Will the internal displacement crisis shift family roles permanently? To what extent are women in Burkina Faso's international and local armed groups involved in the reproduction of violence? How do the experiences of queer and gender-diverse displaced persons differ? Taking gendered social relations seriously will help us better understand how internally displaced communities experience violence, change, and continuities, how they adapt and interact with host communities. Considering the regional significance of Burkina Faso in the Sahel, investigating these topics further will yield crucial insights into internal displacement and conflict dynamics.

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