

# Not Seeing the Cattle for the Elephants: The Implications of Discursive Linkages between Boko Haram and Wildlife Poaching in Waza National Park, Cameroon

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## Abstract

The decline of wildlife in Central and West African border parks has been directly linked to Islamic terrorism in the region in media and government discourse. Using Waza National Park in the Far North Region of Cameroon as a case study, we show that wildlife declines in the park long preceded the appearance of Boko Haram, the extremist group best known for kidnapping over 200 girls in northern Nigeria. We also show that there is no evidence that Boko Haram are using wildlife products from the park to sustain their operations. Instead, the “poacher-as-terrorist” narrative obscures complex, historically embedded reasons for insecurity in northern Cameroon as well as massive losses of biodiversity in this region. The media and governments’ focus on the “poacher-as-terrorist” narrative has important implications for the victims of Boko Haram, including mobile pastoralists. It is their cattle that are most likely a major source of sustenance and funding for the operations of Boko Haram. However, because these mobile pastoralist groups are “invisible” in the bush, their struggles remain ignored. We argue that the continued espousal of the “poacher-as-terrorist” narrative allows Boko Haram violence against mobile pastoralists to continue, and makes way for further environmental degradation in Cameroon’s protected areas.

**Keywords:** Wildlife conservation, Waza National Park, Cameroon, Boko Haram, political ecology, war on terror, poaching, border parks, ivory, pastoralists

## INTRODUCTION

Mainstream media, NGOs, the US Department of State, international organisations such as the United Nations, and various other state governments have directly linked the

decline of wildlife in Central and West African border parks to the maintenance of Islamic terrorism in the region. In these narratives, groups such as Boko Haram are alleged to poach elephants and lions to fuel their operations and activities (c.f. Gettleman 2012; Kalron and Crosta 2012; Bigelow 2014; Ambassador Power remarks 2016; Moreau and Wenger 2016; Wille 2016). Boko Haram, which we will be discussing specifically here, is an Islamic extremist group best known for their kidnapping of over 200 school girls in Nigeria (the Chibok girls), but who have also displaced 2.8 million people in the Lake Chad Region of Africa due to continued violence and disruption of trade (United Nations Security Council 2016).

In their 2016 *La LibreBelgique* photo essay “L’Ivoire de Boko Haram,” Belgian Journalists Aurelie Moreau and

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Melanie Wenger link profits from illicit wildlife trafficking to the sustained operations of Boko Haram and other Islamic extremist groups. Cameroon's border parks—Waza, Bouba N'djida, and Faro—are depicted by authors like Moreau and Wenger (2016) as prime sites of poaching for these wildlife products. In Waza they report that ivory has become a new source of income for Boko Haram and that this group also killed lions for magical practices to promote their invincibility in the battlefield (Moreau and Wenger 2016, chapter 2). Narratives like Moreau and Wenger's imply that it was only with the rise of Islamic extremism that wildlife and local security in and around these national parks came under threat. Following this discursive thread, to stop poaching is to cut off important economic resources for violent extremists. However, as we will show here, this argument is not sustained by the facts on the ground, and has led to erroneous conclusions that threaten not only wildlife, but also people living in these regions.

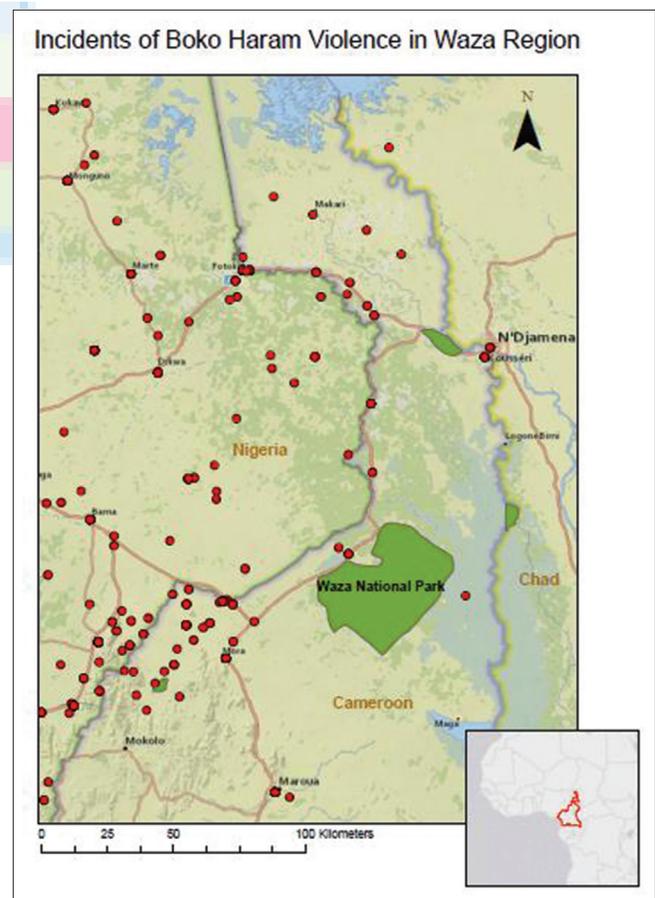
The idea that the poaching of ivory or other animal products is being used to enrich extremist groups in Africa has been challenged by academics, the news media, and international organizations alike as being "highly unreliable," "unsubstantiated," "unverified," "altogether anecdotal," and in some cases, just plain wrong (McConnell 2014; Nelleman et al. 2014; Duffy 2015; Maguire and Haenlein 2015; Elliot 2016). Indeed, many publications that link Islamic extremism with large-scale wildlife poaching across the African continent hinge their claims on the findings of a single document entitled "Africa's White Gold of Jihad: al-Shabaab and Conflict Ivory," published by the Elephant Action League (EAL) (Kalron and Crosta 2012). As several academic, NGO, and international institutional authors (Duffy 2015; Maguire, Haenlein 2015; Nelleman et al. 2014), and news media sources (McConnell 2014) have shown, this report uses only a single unnamed source to make its estimations of terrorist profits from ivory. Further, other studies like the UNEP and INTERPOL's Rapid Response Assessment entitled "Environmental Crime Crisis" that attempted to substantiate EAL's claims that thousands of elephant tusks were being harvested and sold to fund al Shabaab terrorism were unable to do so and found EAL's estimations to be "likely highly unreliable" (e.g. Nelleman et al. 2014, 78-81). None of the critiques of reports that link poaching and Islamic extremism deny that large-scale wildlife slaughter is occurring. Rather, many argue that the slaughter is driven by criminal syndicates seeking large profits, not terrorists or extremists.

Despite strong and well-founded arguments to the contrary, the concept of poached ivory fuelling Islamic terrorism has gained traction, an example of what Büscher (2014, 80) calls "epistemic circulation." Building on Haas's (1989) concept of "epistemic community" which is a "common set of cause-and-effect relationships as well as common values to which policies governing those relationships will be applied," epistemic circulation emphasises the movement of these interpretations of value through time and space (Büscher 2014). Indeed, conceptualisations of poacher-as-terrorist began in East and Southern Africa in 2012 and today this same narrative is echoed in West and Central Africa. Boko

Haram continues to be linked to ivory poaching in places like Waza National Park.

The misrepresentation of linkages between Islamic extremist groups and poaching of African wildlife has material consequences (Duffy 2015). For example, as Duffy (2015) has argued, linkages between conservation and the war on terror lead to a situation where the importance of conservation is subordinated in the face of global security concerns; and the practice of conservation itself may become more militarised and violent. While Duffy's critiques of "poacher-as-terrorist" (Duffy 2015) narratives are important, there is even more at stake.

Using Waza National Park in the Far North Region of Cameroon as a case study, we argue that the park's geographical and historical unruliness make its use by the extremist group Boko Haram seem almost inevitable. Indeed, Boko Haram has been known to use protected areas in Nigeria to perpetrate violence and as sites of refuge—Nigeria's Sambisa Forest Reserve was used as a Boko Haram stronghold after the kidnapping of the Chibok girls (Abubakar et al. 2014; Okeowo 2014). In turn, Waza, a swampy border park (Figure 1), has historically been the site of repeated violence, extra-legal activity, and environmental degradation. Investigative journalists Moreau and Wenger (2016) draw on



**Figure 1**  
*Map of Boko Haram Violence in Waza National Park (red dots) in the Far North Region of Cameroon, based on Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED 2016)*

the park's historic and geographic unruliness as they state, "Located in the Far North Region, just 12km away from the Nigerian Border, Waza National Park is particularly vulnerable to poaching practised by armed groups." Given Boko Haram's past use of protected areas, Waza seems an ideal setting for environmental crimes perpetrated by this extremist group. However, despite the park's geographic location and history of violence, we argue that claims that the park is used by Boko Haram for anything more than occasional transit and perhaps some ad-hoc hunting are specious and unfounded. The "poacher-as-terrorist" narrative is a spurious one here.

Unsubstantiated claims about Boko Haram's wildlife poaching in Waza National Park ignore this group's ongoing violence towards mobile pastoralists *outside* of the park. Cash from cattle stolen from pastoralists in the region is a far more likely source of income and sustenance for Boko Haram than profits from poached elephant tusks or other wildlife products. By the time Boko Haram arrived in the region in 2012 (International Crisis Watch n.d.), elephant populations in northern Cameroon had been severely depleted (<1,000), so their economic potential is limited (Scholte in comm. with African Elephant Specialist Group 2016). While we do have evidence that Boko Haram members are stealing herds of cattle, we have found no similar evidence that they are poaching ivory or other wildlife products. Unfortunately, this reality does not have as much political traction with the global north which envisions Africa as a "wild" place that needs preserving, not a complex peopled landscape (see Neumann 1998). In terms of its success as a policy priority and a magnet for international funding, the concept of saving elephants rather than pastoralists is far more attractive to politicians, NGOs, international organisations like the UN, news media, and conservationists alike (see Büscher 2014).

In light of these data, calls for an increased militarised presence in conservation areas like Waza National Park (c.f. Ambassador Power remarks 2016) may not live up to their stated goals. As we will argue, and others have shown (e.g. Lunstrum 2014; Duffy 2015; Büscher and Ramutsindela 2016), the militarisation of protected areas may further threaten wildlife and natural resources rather than protect them. As militarised groups untrained and uninterested in natural resource conservation are called upon to safeguard protected areas, we may actually see more environmental degradation in these sites. Meanwhile the trauma and economic losses visited upon pastoralists and other natural resource users outside of protected areas continue to be ignored (Moritz and Ahmadou 2016). Getting the story straight matters: addressing misconceptions about Boko Haram funding and activities not only better serves efforts to combat this extremist group, but also helps better protect wildlife within protected areas and local natural resource users who reside adjacent to and within protected areas.

To dispute the terrorist-as-poacher narrative in Waza National Park, we use evidence from in-depth interviews spanning from 2010-2016, historical ecological data, and archival material to show that the violence as well as wildlife

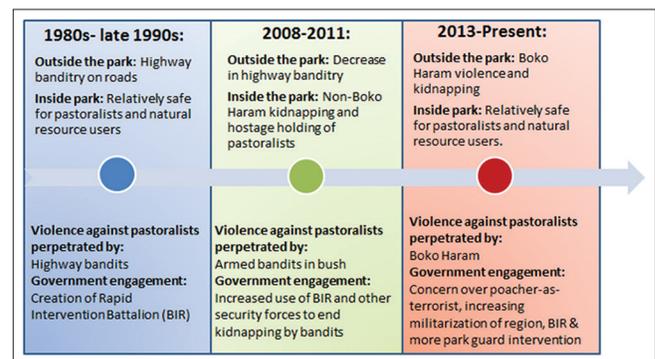
decline in the Waza region have histories that began well before Boko Haram appeared in the region in 2012, that there is no evidence of Boko Haram's sustained use of the park, and even less evidence of their use of ivory or wildlife products to fund their operations as has been suggested by news media and NGO representatives (c.f. Moreau and Wenger 2016). In particular, we show that though violence has punctuated Waza's long history; in this particular moment, the park is comparatively safe from the violent dealings of Boko Haram (Figure 2). With this evidence, we show that the "poacher-as-terrorist" narrative obscures complex, historically embedded reasons for insecurity in northern Cameroon as well as massive losses of biodiversity in this region. Furthermore, we argue that the unsubstantiated claims about Boko Haram's involvement in poaching operations ignore the violence towards pastoralist communities in these areas.

## METHODS

The evidence presented in this paper is based on fieldwork performed by the authors in the Far North Region of Cameroon. Historical and archival information were collected at park, regional, national, and international levels. Data collected on the rising insecurity in Waza National Park from the mid-2000s to the 2010s was collected by Alice Kelly Pennaz between 2010-2011. Alice conducted over 300 interviews with pastoralists and villagers adjacent to Waza National Park during this period. Historical data were collected from park, regional, and national archives.

Data for historical declines were based on wildlife counts Paul Scholte and others conducted in Waza National Park in the 1990s and again in 2012 and are presented alongside other surveys (Scholte et al. 2007, Scholte 2013). Data for contemporary management issues were based on Paul's continuing discussions with park wardens when based in North Cameroon in the 1990s up to 2011. In-person interviews were held with the wardens of Waza, Benoue, Bouba Ndjida and Faro national parks in May 2016.

The data from pastoralists comes from a collaborative project of the visual anthropologist Mouadjamou Ahmadou, who has studied the impacts of Boko Haram on the Cameroonian border



**Figure 2**  
 Progression of security outside and inside Waza National Park 1980-Present

area, and the ecological anthropologist Mark Moritz, who has studied pastoralists in the Far North Region of Cameroon. In February and March 2016, Mouadjamou Ahmadou and a team of anthropology students from the University of Maroua conducted semi-structured interviews with 55 pastoralists from Nigeria and Cameroon in the Logone Floodplain in the Far North Region of Cameroon. Most of the interviews were conducted with groups and held in the camps or villages where pastoralists were spending the day. Some of the interviews also included the villagers that hosted pastoralists in their homes. The semi-structured interviews covered the following topics: problems with Boko Haram in Nigeria, the migration to Cameroon, transhumance history, problems encountered in Cameroon, security near Waza Park, and access to pastures.

The topic of Boko Haram's involvement in the Waza region is not an easy target for study. Not only is there little existing data available on this topic, it is also a highly sensitive one to research. We found that by combining the research of four scholars, we were able to make better sense of what was happening in the Waza region than any one of us could have done alone.

### **WAZA'S HISTORICAL UNRULINESS & DECLINE: LAYING A FOUNDATION FOR CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES**

In this section we show that Boko Haram is not responsible for the drastic wildlife decline in the region. We also demonstrate that this extremist group falls into a long history of 'unruliness' in the region. As we show here, however, there are stark differences between the historical violence and banditry witnessed within and surrounding the park and the current terrorism perpetrated by Boko Haram outside of the park in the present day. Banditry in the Far North Region has evolved over time (Issa 2010; Roitman 1998). However, the bandits [*banndii*] referred to here, generally are foreign or domestic groups who are increasingly armed with automatic weapons and use violence and the threat of violence to extract money from people in the region via ransom and assault. These groups are primarily economically motivated. Only a few years ago Waza National Park was a site of severe violence--used by bandits for kidnapping and hostage holding (Moritz and Scholte 2011; Kelly 2015). However, today the park and its eastern environs are perceived to be safe by those most victimised by bandits in the late 2000s and by Boko Haram today, mobile pastoralists (Figure 2). Boko Haram are responsible for many atrocities, but large-scale poaching is not one of them.

Security and wildlife populations were well on the decline before the arrival of Boko Haram in the Waza region in 2012. The current moment is not the first in which the Waza region has been considered 'unruly' and in need of discipline (Kelly 2015). Located in an "in-between" space (see Bennafla 1996; Roitman 2005) between urban centers in Cameroon, Chad, and Nigeria; in the colonial period Waza's swamps were used to hide from authority, as well as to illicitly move

cattle and goods across borders. Along with other campaigns aimed at disciplining the largely mobile populations using this area (*la population flottante*—Roitman 2005), the French colonial government established the Zinah-Waza Reserve in the 1930s to regulate 'unruly' uses of the area (Arrêté no 71, 24 March 1934; Arrêté no 264, 9 September 1935; Arrêté no 297, 30 July 1938; Mbenkum 1997; Kelly 2015; 742-3;). The area was cleared of the fishermen, agriculturalists, and pastoralists who used these lands to support their livelihoods. As a result of this effort, as well as subsequent efforts by independent Cameroonian president Ahidjo, local authority was all but extinguished within the limits of Waza National Park. Further, the colonial, and later the independent Cameroonian state adopted a monopoly on force in the nation. Park guards then became the arm of the law that people living adjacent to Waza National Park depended on for protection. Police and gendarmes rarely patrolled the park's northern, eastern and southeastern borders. The secondary roads found in these areas were, and still are, just traces in the forest and grass, often flooded in the rainy season. Recognising the absence of law enforcement in the region other than park guards, a woman from a village in these remoter areas noted in 2010 that, "Guards are the only form of protection we know. We don't have other things like gendarmes here."

With a change in national leadership in the 1980s, political support for Waza National Park began to weaken. At almost the same time, wide-spread financial crisis across Cameroon meant that there were fewer state officials in place, and because of greatly reduced salaries, government officials were more willing to finance or engage in extra-legal activities, or to be paid to look the other way. As a result, in the late 1980s and 1990s Cameroon's borders became active sites for banditry, smuggling, and unregulated trade (Burnham 1996, 160; Issa 2004; Moritz 2005; Roitman 2005). Waza National Park, located very close to both the Nigerian and Chadian borders, was affected by the rise in crime during this period, but the crimes that the park saw were mainly concentrated along the one paved road that served as its western boundary. This road linked the regional capital Maroua with the large northern town of Kousseri and Chad's capital N'Djamena (see Figure 1).

Highway robbery was the most lucrative form of crime in northern Cameroon in the mid-1980s and 1990s, and thus bandits (*les grands bandits* or *coupeurs de route*) focussed their efforts across the region on ambushing people driving on the main roads or cash-laden market-goers (Seignobos 2011a; interviews 2010). By the mid-1990s roadways had become the site of an all-out "war" with *coupeurs de route* (Le Messenger 1994; Pideu 1995; Soudan 1996; Dorce 1996 cited in Roitman 2005, 155). Waza visitors and staff were subject to this road-centric violence. Several Cameroonians were killed near the park in car-jackings and robberies during this period. During this time, the western edge of the park--the edge defined by the paved road--was known as a place used by highway bandits to hide out and find provisions (Djarma 2002, 86). Even Badjoda, one of the park's strictest managers, was caught and robbed by the *coupeurs de route*

in this area during this period. Due to this insecurity, Waza National Park was essentially closed to tourists in mid-1990s (Djarma 2002, 87).

In the late 1990s, Cameroonian President Paul Biya created the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) and charged it with focussing on the “hot zone” between Waza and Maltam—a town along the Waza road (Djotie 2008; Seignobos 2011a). The appearance of the BIR may have stanching some of the aggressive criminal activity along the Waza road, as did the advent of Western Union and Express Union, institutions that allowed people to travel without carrying large sums of money (Issa 2010; Seignobos 2011a, b). As Issa (2004) points out, however, banditry is an opportunistic phenomenon that can adjust rapidly to the circumstances at hand.

While the appearance of these BIR units and money-transfer services calmed banditry in some parts of the country—especially along paved, arterial roads and near cities—it pushed banditry into other, more remote places accessed by unpaved or secondary roads. Commenting on the changed spatiality of crime in the Far North Region, a government official in charge of public safety reported in 2010 that, “Before, it was only attacks on cars. But now bandits are going into the bush to steal cattle and other things.” Commenting similarly on this spatial shift in crime, a villager stated, with the advent of the BIR on the paved roads, “they [the highway bandits] no longer cut the road, they go into the bush and take the children of the nomads” (Kelly Pennaz Interviews 2010; Ahmadou 2010).

Rural and unpopulated spaces like Waza National Park’s interior, and its northern, eastern, and southern borders were placed in particular peril because by the mid-2000s these areas were essentially unguarded. Despite brief international and NGO funding, monies for infrastructure and guarding for the park had almost entirely dried up by the early 2000s. Lack of road infrastructure, vehicles, appropriate (or functional) weapons for guards, and other basic equipment made guarding nearly impossible. This state of affairs continued to deteriorate as the park entered the 2010s: park guards lacked a vehicle for patrols, they wore home-made uniforms and carried old, often non-functional weapons from the second World War (MAS 36). Guards would often only patrol if they could catch a ride with researchers or visitors. Some would be dropped off by the park manager (if his vehicle were functional and available) and walk back to park headquarters. Others would set out on foot or bicycle, an arduous task at any time of year, but particularly when temperatures rose over 35° C.

By the middle of the first decade of the twenty first century, guarding in Waza, and particularly those areas distant from the park headquarters on its western border, had essentially stopped—unruliness reigned in the park. As a result, Waza became a refuge for all manner of people seeking to carry out extra-legal activities. These people sought to take advantage of this now empty land, forcibly cleared of people and local authority by the French colonial government, an effort that was later violently enforced by the independent Cameroonian government (Kelly 2015). As a nearby park resident interviewed in 2010 stated, “The bandits hide in the

bush. They hide in nature where there is uninhabited space. The park provides them with a place where there is no one.” Yet another man who carefully traced the five shiny scars of bullet holes that had riddled his body while driving a bush taxi to the neighboring village’s weekly market over the last few years said in 2010, “Now there are a lot of them [bandits]. There was even a group that came [to the village] to ask for fish to cook. Now, if they [bandits] aren’t in the park, where else would they find peace?...All these people came from the park.”

In the 2010s, the idea that the park had become a refuge for bandits was expressed not just by the local population living around the park but also in the interviews with village leaders and government officials. One of the most important traditional leaders in the region stated in 2010, “The park has become a refuge [for bandits and poachers]. Inside the park there is insecurity.” A government official responsible for security at the national level also acknowledged that Waza National Park was being used by bandits in 2010 as did the former mayor of one of the larger towns near the national park. He observed, “Waza is used by bandits to attack people” (Kelly Pennaz interviews 2010). Ahmadou (2010) made similar findings in his interviews with pastoralists around this same time period.

The loss of management of Waza National Park had a profound impact on local populations—leading to constant feelings of insecurity and fear on the part of villagers on the park’s boundaries, as well as amongst pastoralists who habitually used the area during this time period (Kelly and Gupta 2016). By 2010-2011, pastoralists stated that they felt as though the insecurity in the region was getting out of control (Kelly Pennaz interviews 2010; Moritz and Scholte 2011). These sentiments were understandable—a good number of these people had experienced the brunt of this insecurity, bearing scars, debilitating losses of hearing from beatings, bullets lodged in their bodies, and the pain of lost family members and horrific experiences as hostages held inside of the nearby Waza National Park. Bandits had started targeting pastoralists—kidnapping their children for ransom, thus forcing them to sell tens of their cattle on livestock markets to get their children back. During this period pastoralists avoided the areas where they believed the bandits were operating from, including the eastern edge of Waza National Park. The constant threat of large-scale theft also greatly worried many of the pastoralists interviewed near Waza National Park in 2010-2011. One man expressed this constant worry eloquently, saying, “We are people of cattle. We do not do agriculture. We do not do commerce. We only have cattle and if those are taken from us what will we become? We are like a tree that has been cut and dried and is being burned. In the morning there will be nothing left” (Kelly Pennaz interviews 2010).

While the social and security costs of the ‘unruliness’ of Waza National Park in the 2010s were distressing, so were the ecological impacts of lost park management and a vacuum of authority. Wildlife populations in Waza National Park had seriously declined due to a series of Sahelian droughts (1973-1975 and 1983-1985) as well as due to the construction

of a dam that blocked water-flow into the park in 1979. Nearly three-quarters of the park's antelope population was lost during this time, but wildlife researchers concluded that these antelope losses between 2002-2012 were not due to variations in rainfall. Rather, these losses were attributed to poaching and persistent disturbance and competition resulting from massive pastoralist livestock incursions into the park during this period (Scholte 2013).

Elephant populations showed different dynamics. By the late 2000s (2009-10), elephants that had once frequented the park (over 1,000 individuals in the late 1980s/early 1990s, [Tchamba 1996]) increasingly migrated northwards to Kalamaloue National Park, southwards towards Kalfou, and eventually into Chad. By the late 2000s very few elephants remained within the park (Scholte pers.obs. 2000s). While wildlife biologists can only speculate as to why elephants chose to leave Waza National Park during this period. They surmise that the park became too dangerous for elephants because of elevated poaching by regional and local natural resource users during this period, or perhaps they left as more and more livestock encroached on the park's pastures (Tumenta et al. 2010; Scholte 2014). Along with this collapse in wildlife, tourist numbers steeply declined from 10,000/year in the mid-1980s to fewer than 4,000 in 2012.

Interestingly, just as global attention has swung in recent years towards Waza National Park in light of the poacher-as-terrorist narrative, the use of the park itself for terrorism, banditry, and large-scale poaching seems to have diminished as use of lands *outside* of the park by extremists has increased. As Figure 1 clearly shows, Boko Haram activities have not been recorded within Waza National Park (ACLED 2016). In an interview with Paul Scholte in 2016, Mr. Ndjida, Waza's current warden, explained that Boko Haram avoided the park because of the increased presence of BIR along the Waza road on the western side of the park. Though in 2010 pastoralists in the Logone floodplain described their anxieties about child and herder kidnapping around and within the park—those abducted being held hostage inside of Waza National Park—these same fears were not reflected in interviews conducted in 2016 (Ahmadou 2010; Ahmadou et al. interviews 2016). Instead, the war raging on the borders of Nigeria and Cameroon was of greater concern. Interviewees noted that, currently, hostages are taken to Nigeria for various reasons, not into the park to await ransom (Ahmadou et al. interviews 2016). Pastoralist concerns over 'bandits' (*kalluBe*) or kidnappers (*fasoBe*) in the park have now shifted to fears of the extreme violence of Boko Haram outside of the park. "*Boko*", short for Boko Haram, is spoken with connotations of great evil and terror (Ahmadou et al. interviews 2016). Indeed, Waza National Park has now become something of a refuge for pastoralists seeking to escape the violence that rages outside of its boundaries. Today, pastoralists flee to the eastern side of the park, an area where only five years ago they noted that banditry was most concentrated (Kelly Pennaz interviews 2010-11). Further, poaching is not of great concern as now there is truly little left to harvest (Figure 2).

What this history shows us is that Boko Haram is not responsible for the drastic wildlife decline in Waza National Park, nor is it solely responsible for the insecurity in the area. All of these trends have much longer histories than the international media has chosen to portray. Banditry, kidnappings, large-scale hunting, and illicit natural resource collection have all been present in the Waza region for decades. The violence visited upon local natural resource users, against tourists, and against the environment in 2010-11 was the product of historical socio-economic, geo-political, and political shifts that culminated in a collapse of National Park management. This created a space emptied of authority where criminals could operate with impunity. Waza National Park—a protected area once designed to quell 'unruliness' in this border region of Cameroon, became an unruly site in and of itself in the mid-2010s when it essentially became a no-man's land (Kelly 2015). This longer history of unruliness may make Waza seem like a perfect fit for the "poacher-as-terrorist" narrative. Yet this narrative does not work here—we lack any evidence that Boko Haram are using the park for anything more than ad-hoc hunting or transit. Furthermore, far more violence is occurring outside the park than within it.

### A LACK OF EVIDENCE

The most obvious problem with the poacher-as-terrorist narrative in Waza is the park's lack of wildlife. With historical declines in the park's wildlife, Boko Haram's ability to support themselves from poached ivory is unlikely given that the population of elephants in this region is quite low—indeed, few have existed in the area since the late 2000s (Scholte et al. in prep.; African Elephant Specialist Group n.d.). The harvest of these animals is likely to be opportunistic or ad hoc and small-scale at most. Indeed, when Paul Scholte interviewed Mr. Ndjida in 2016, he said nothing of ivory poaching in Waza National Park. Mr. Ndjida reported that apart from a single case of poaching wherein a lion was killed by suspected Boko Haram members in January 2015 for fetish purposes, and the use of the park for short durations for transit, Boko Haram either are highly dispersed within the swampy parts of the park or have not used this protected area at all.

It seems far more likely that Boko Haram use cash from ransom from kidnapping and profits from stolen cattle as a way to maintain themselves. Kidnapping for ransom is a means by which the Boko Haram gains access to money quickly. According to the Africa Research Institute, the Boko Haram have carried out approximately 490 kidnappings on Cameroonian soil since 2013 (De Marie Heungoup 2017). Cattle are also critical to the maintenance of Boko Haram operations. The typical herd has around 50 cattle, each with a price of 100,000 FCFA (around USD 175). Thus, the total amount gained by the capture of a single herd is would range from between USD 8,000 and USD 10,000. In our interviews, pastoralists in the Far North reported that multiple herds were stolen in each Boko Haram attack—one group losing 10 herds in a single attack, with total losses estimated at over USD 100,000. This is far more than would be gained from the odd ivory tusk which is worth at most USD 2,200 (price estimate

INTERPOL; UNEP Report 2015). Moreover, cattle are far more prevalent in the Far North than elephants. A security source who was investigating the issue in the Far North noted that this area was the epicenter of cattle theft, and that “between 800 and 1,000 heads of cattle” were taken by Boko Haram every week for six months (Tilouine 2016). However, this evidence was not as widely reported as the poacher-as-terrorist narrative tended to be during the period during which reports such as “L’Ivoire de Boko Haram” were being written.

Pastoralist voices help to further dismantle the claims that Boko Haram is using Waza National Park for wildlife poaching. Pastoralists are some of the groups most vulnerable to attacks by Boko Haram because of their valuable cattle herds and lack of governmental support or protection. Thus, if any group would be especially wary of places frequented by Boko Haram, it would be pastoralists. Yet Nigerian and Cameroonian pastoralists who regularly use the Waza Region as a site of dry-season grazing shook off any suggestion that the park was a base of operations for Boko Haram, or that the wildlife within somehow funded Boko Haram (Ahmadou Interviews 2016). These pastoralists reported in 2016 interviews that the eastern border of Waza National Park remains relatively safe even as many of the towns and fields outside the park on its western border area have been ravaged by Boko Haram (see Figure 1).

Contrary to pastoralist interviews performed in 2010 (Kelly 2010-11) when the park was a major source of insecurity for these groups, none of the 2016 pastoralist interview respondents described the national park as being dangerous. Indeed, many pastoralists fled Nigeria for the Logone Floodplain (partially located within the park) and stayed along the eastern border of Waza National Park—the region furthest from the Nigerian border and the encroaching Boko Haram. As one pastoralist in this area stated, “There is security here.”

The lack of sustained use of Waza by Boko Haram may be explained by the lack of sedentary populations within the park, as well as by the lack of roads found there. Plundering villages for food and supplies has been Boko Haram’s *modus operandi* from its inception (personal observations 2014-16; Searcey 2016). Since the French colonial creation of the park in the 1930s when the area’s resident populations were largely displaced, the park has remained relatively empty of villages, making the park unattractive to Boko Haram. Furthermore, until the early 2000s the park had a regularly maintained road system, but with the park’s collapse in management, these roads have fallen into disrepair or disappeared. This change has made the park an uninviting place to traverse, particularly in the center of the park where the rough, black clay soils destroy tires and make travel extremely slow and arduous. Thus, it is unlikely that Boko Haram would seek to enter this area for any reason.

## WHAT IS AT STAKE?

### A focus on wildlife over humans

The fight against the poaching of innocent elephants to fund extremist activities is an easy narrative for political pundits,

conservation NGOs, and the international news media to champion in order to argue for increased militarisation and securitisation measures in protected areas. It is an idea that travels and sells well (see Büscher 2014). However, the un-sexy truth may be that cattle, stolen from pastoralists who are ignored by state governments, are funding Boko Haram, not wildlife products. Though reports like Moreau and Wenger’s (2016) *L’Ivoire de Boko Haram* do not deny that resources like cattle may contribute to Boko Haram funding, their focus on wildlife products above all other sources is troubling. In this section we highlight that focussing on ivory poaching in places like Waza has important moral and material consequences.

For one, a focus on the terrorist-as-poacher narrative obscures the detrimental impact that Boko Haram is having on human populations in the region outside of Waza National Park—mobile and sedentary. By dwelling on the killing of now nearly non-existent wildlife populations within an already severely degraded national park, the Cameroonian government and international organisations like the United Nations avoid recognising the suffering of people they would rather ignore. Embodying ‘unruliness’ themselves, pastoralists move across state borders and within nation-states making them hard to tax, conscript, count, and educate in a standardised fashion (see Scott 1998). Indeed, Waza was formed by the French Colonial Government to help control such movements (Arrêté no 71, 24 March 1934; Arrêté no 264 9 September 1935; Arrêté no 297 30 July 1938; Mbenkum 1997). Thus, it may be that the state and international organisations prefer the poacher-as-terrorist model to one that involves deeper engagement with these itinerant pastoralist groups. Furthermore, focussing on pastoralist cattle rather than wildlife does not jibe with many western imaginings of ‘wild’ Africa that may have greater political traction in the global north (Adams and McShane 1992).

Continued theft, trauma, fear, and violence *outside* of the park have pushed many pastoralists to seek security both within Waza National Park and in areas adjacent to its eastern edge (Moritz and Ahmadou 2016). Having to quickly adopt unplanned and unknown migration routes, some of these pastoralists are suffering the difficulties of adapting to new seasonal grazing areas. These unplanned migrations have caused pastoralists to suffer considerable livestock losses due to exhaustion and disease. Further threatening their livelihoods, the closure of the Nigerian border in 2014 and the massive influx of Nigerian pastoralists’ cattle into Cameroon have devastated the livestock market as prices have plummeted due to this glut. As Moritz and Ahmadou’s (2016) team found, before Boko Haram’s arrival, there were many markets for cattle in the Far North. Pastoralists remember these markets as peaceful and joyful places for meeting, sharing news, and doing business. Now there remains only a single market for the sale of cattle for Nigerians, Chadians, and Cameroonians—Bogo, located in the Far North Cameroon Region. Before the advent of Boko Haram (and the subsequent collapse of the Nigerian Naira), cattle could be sold at 100,000 FCFA (approximately USD 160), but today the same animals are sold for less than 20,000 FCFA (approximately USD 30).

Simultaneously, transhumance taxes levied on Nigerian pastoralists by local authorities have increased by over 700% since the closure of the Cameroon-Nigerian border. Traumatized by extreme violence against themselves, their families, and their friends while struggling to maintain their livelihoods and ways of life in the shadow of the poacher-as-terrorist narrative, these pastoralists remain invisible to the UNHCR and to the Cameroonian government (Moritz and Ahmadou 2016).

### Avoidable Ecological Degradation

Focussing on the poacher-as-terrorist narrative, rather than seeking to provide security and assistance to pastoralist groups, may also lead to avoidable ecological degradation within Waza National Park and the wider ecological region. Without security, Nigerian and Cameroonian pastoralists and their cattle have poured into and around Waza National Park as well as other parks around Northern Cameroon (Scholte interviews 2016). According to Waza's warden, the number of cattle in and around the park has doubled since 2015. The incursions of those cattle (who directly compete for food with some of the park's remaining mammal populations) are most frequent on the eastern side of the park, furthest from the Nigerian Border (Scholte Interviews 2016). Thus, the large migration of displaced pastoralists seeking security may further affect an already declining mammalian population. The current insecurity has limited wildlife biologists from continuing wildlife counts and other surveys in and around Waza National Park since May 2014. These scientists suggest that the effects of this influx of people into the Waza region may mirror the impacts of violence and unrest on wildlife and vegetation seen in Chad, Central African Republic, and Sudan in the 1980s, 1990s-2000s as pastoralists flooded into conservation areas in those regions fleeing violence (Scholte et al. 2016).

### Militarisation: More Environmental Degradation, More Violence?

As Duffy (2016), Elliot (2016), and others point out in their critiques of the poacher-as-terrorist narrative elsewhere on the

African continent, discursive practices have material effects. Military groups are used to enforce conservation policies, while conservation officers are militarised. As issues of poaching become synonymous with issues of national security and anti-terrorism, no measures are too extreme, particularly in inherently vexed, unruly border regions that cause national and international anxieties on their own.

Such a trend is found in the actions of US representatives of the Department of State in Cameroon. During a week-long trip across Cameroon to promote the battle against Boko Haram in April 2016, the US ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, took part in the burning of 2,000 ivory tusks that were collected from all parts of the country in Yaoundé, Cameroon's capital city. In her remarks at this event, Power said to a group of high-level officials as well international and national journalists, "While protecting our invaluable biodiversity should be reason enough to combat these illicit networks, let me offer another reason: the criminal networks that profit from trafficking fuel corruption and generate funds that can be used to fuel other dangerous activities that pose a serious security threat, including terrorism." In this speech she calls for the further militarisation of Cameroon's conservation guards saying, "Local eco-guards and rangers are often outnumbered, outgunned, and insufficiently trained. That must change and we must find, collectively, the resources to ensure that they have the capabilities to do the job that so many in Cameroon want to do" (Figure 3).

That same month, US Ambassador to Gabon, Eric Benjaminson praised Cameroon's ongoing efforts to use military action to "flush out poachers" at an anti-poaching workshop in Libreville (Benjaminson Remarks April 3, 2016). Notably, neither Power nor Benjaminson mentioned the plight of pastoralist groups in the affected regions, nor showed any interest in resolving the cattle-theft or kidnapping within those groups to limit extremist activity.

The implications of the militarisation of conservation in Cameroon, and in Waza in particular, are important to consider. In light of the poacher-as-terrorist narrative, conservation interests can be trumped by national security concerns (Duffy 2015). In June 2011 an unofficial memorandum of



Figure 3

*Press conference of US Ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, on US support to Cameroon to combat Boko Haram (Palais de Congres, 5 pm, 18 April 2016) (Top); Public burning of ivory, Yaounde, in the presence of the US Ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power and Cameroonian Minister of Forestry and Wildlife (Palais de Congres, 4 pm, 18 April, 2016) Photos by Paul Scholte*

understanding (MOU) was signed between Cameroon's Minister of Defense and the Minister of Forests and Wildlife to allow the government's Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) units to collaborate with park guards in eradicating banditry from Waza National Park. Similar collaborations were already occurring in Bouba N'djida National Park at this time. As this MOU was set in place, several people involved in park management in 2011 remarked that they were concerned that the BIR might have negative ecological impacts on the park. These people noted that the BIR, unlike park guards, have no interest or incentive to protect the natural environment within the park. After a spate of elephant killings suspected to be at the hands of a group of Sudanese poachers in Bouba N'djida National Park south of Waza in 2012, over 600 BIR were deployed to that park. As the Warden of the park remembered, rather than engaging with conservation-trained staff there, the BIR had "taken over the park," often excluding the warden and trained eco-guards from their operations (Scholte interviews 2016). These park officials' concerns converge with those of scholars like Duffy (2014) and Humphreys and Smith (2011)—that wars waged in the name of biodiversity can be used by state governments to justify repressive and coercive policies within their borders. Furthermore, some of our interviewees noted that the BIR are heavily armed and thus may ultimately engage in poaching themselves either out of boredom or in search of a meal (Kelly Pennaz interviews 2010). Thus, the militarisation of Cameroonian conservation areas encouraged by the poacher-as-terrorist narrative may actually cause further environmental degradation in the areas that are supposedly to be protected.

Also troubling is the BIR's questionable human-rights record—known for shooting potential suspects on sight, circumventing due process, and practising "selective impunity" in their punishments (Moritz 2005). This lack of due process may mean more problems and potentially more violence for natural resource users in northern Cameroon, not fewer. As BIR and a general military presence have massively increased around Cameroonian national parks, we ask, what new human-rights and ecological questions will arise?

## CONCLUSION

The poacher-as-terrorist narrative is a tempting one. It is rhetoric that sells and spreads (see Büscher 2014; Duffy 2015). By blaming massive wildlife decline on extremist groups such as Boko Haram, the Cameroonian government avoids taking responsibility for the long decline in management of its national parks before Boko Haram arrived on the scene. By focussing attention on Boko Haram, the Cameroonian government and other participating institutions are able to avoid scrutiny of ongoing corruption and profiteering schemes that involve wildlife products within the country. This narrative also allows government officials and international organizations to continue ignoring mobile pastoralists, true victims of Boko Haram. Indeed, resolving the plight of pastoralists is far less politically

enticing than furthering the battle against elephant deaths in the country.

Politicians, NGOs, international organisations like the UN, news media, and conservationists need to look beyond the enticing narrative of poacher-as-terrorist. There are not enough elephants in or around Waza National Park to sustain Boko Haram's operations with profits from ivory. Meanwhile, pastoralist cattle are plentiful in the region and stealing them creates a far more lucrative and far steadier source of income. Focussing on spurious linkages between Boko Haram and ivory in Waza National Park thwarts efforts to protect pastoralists who are already highly vulnerable populations and who have suffered different kinds of violence in this region for decades. In turn, the continued insecurity of these pastoralists is leading to increased environmental degradation in the region as they concentrate in less dangerous areas *en masse* for collective safety. The militarisation of conservation in the region may actually lead to further environmental degradation as protected areas are no longer managed by conservation-trained personnel, and resident personnel may have little incentive to protect the ecological treasures these areas were designed to safeguard.

Security of environmental resources and human security are inextricably linked. As it stands, the poacher-as-terrorist narrative focusses only on maintaining the security of natural resources like wildlife, standing as yet one more example of the West's romanticisation of an 'African Eden' that needs protection *from* humans (see Neumann 1998). The protection *of* humans, the enemy to this Eden, is anathema to such thinking. We argue that the human component must be considered, and even foregrounded in this context, to truly protect national security, human life and property, as well as wildlife populations and ecosystem function.

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