

The Power of the Uniform. Paramilitary Foresters and their Auxiliaries in the Periphery of the Transnational Park “W”, Burkina Faso.

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This paper, based on 18 months of ethnographical fieldwork in the Burkinabe periphery of transnational “W” park, scrutinizes the interests, discourses and aspirations of forest agents, who are engaged in the wildlife management in Burkina Faso. Through the study of the reasons why people want to engage and proceed in wildlife management, this paper highlights the value of being a uniformed state servant, at stake for many residents of this area.

In Burkina Faso, the state forestry service comprises both paramilitary foresters, called *agents des eaux et forêts*, and civilian foresters who are called *agents de l’environnement*. Moreover, all foresters depend on local auxiliaries, called *pisteurs*, for the everyday surveillance of natural resources. While the foresters are occupied with the paper work at their offices, they lend out their uniforms and guns to these *pisteurs* in order to do their work in “the bush”. The auxiliaries work according to the forester’s code of conduct and use paramilitary language and behaviour. One could thus say that *pisteurs* are lower ranked paramilitary foresters. Nevertheless, the *pisteurs* are not officially recognized as forest agents and are not on the payroll of the state, which causes tensions between them and their superiors. The study of these tensions contributes to the analysis of what is at stake for African residents when they engage in stately wildlife management.

In the eyes of the residents, however, there is no difference between paramilitary foresters and civilian foresters, nor between foresters and their auxiliaries, although they conduct different practices in their day-to-day work. All of them are called forest guards and share the same professional identity, which is closely linked to the enforcement of natural resource policing and thus to the paramilitary uniform and language. In brief, this paper wants to highlight what exactly makes up statehood for the residents in the periphery of park W, and why it is something to keep at distance or engage with.