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Boko Haram and Lake Chad
An Extension or a Sanctuary?

Christian Seignobos

In January 2015, Boko Haram ravaged Baga Kawa, a village on the southern bank of Lake Chad. After the April 2015 election of President Muhammadu Buhari, the Nigerian government emerged from its apathy and, despite a still faulty military apparatus, sought to recover territory from Boko Haram. Nigeria asked neighboring Cameroon, Chad, and Niger to contain Boko Haram's excesses on their respective borders. However, only Chad was authorized to give chase. A land crisis hit the shores of Lake Chad, formerly an unparalleled center of economic development. In addition, indigenous groups demanded control of the area, a situation Boko Haram would exploit as it tried to rally the population of the former Bornu Empire under its aegis. Boko Haram's irruption in this swampy land, a place so unruly that no past or present form of government has ever succeeded in controlling it, represents a real threat to the region. What will happen if Boko Haram turns the lake's shores into a refuge?

Keywords: Boko Haram – Bornu – Chad – Lake Chad – Refuge – Borno State

Boko Haram, in the face of the response of the states to its insurgency, has had to come up with new strategies and identify potential hideouts. The Mandara Mountains (Seignobos, 2015), near Boko Haram's oldest bases in Maiduguri and the Sambisa forest, presented obvious refuges for the sect. In fact, Boko Haram sited its initial puppet caliphate in the Mandara foothills, at Gwoza, until the Nigerian Armed Forces took the town on March 27, 2015.\(^1\) However, Boko Haram significantly changed its strategy with its assault on Lake Chad in early 2015. We begin this article by tracing Boko Haram’s evolution as it confronted the Chadian Armed Forces, and those of Nigeria and Cameroon, in attempts to retake territory prior to the establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). Next, we analyze the Boko Haram irruption in the Lake Chad basin. Why there? Was

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the movement simply expanding into new territory or seeking an impregnable refuge? Whatever the reason, Boko Haram’s presence will indisputably have repercussions on the region.

Chronicing Boko Haram in 2015

We base most of what follows on media reports and interpretations of events made by interviewees and informants living in country or nearby. We counter-balance this reliance on media-sourced facts with specific historical contexts to shed light on this still uneasy “immediate history.”

The sequence of current events. The Chadian Armed Forces, having a right-of-pursuit granted by Nigeria, intervened on January 16, 2015, commencing a series of attacks on Boko Haram. The group’s fighters suffered significant losses and altered their tactics at the end of March. Until then, according to a Cameroonian Rapid Intervention Force officer, “They [Boko Haram] prepared attacks [in Cameroon] with infiltrators who identified our defenses and routines before their fighters swarmed in on motorcycles, each carrying two or three men.” At present, the motorcycle-riding fighters harass and slip away. The Chadians, with their columns of Toyota Land Cruisers, see themselves as the undisputed masters of mobile warfare; however, they fail in their pursuit of Boko Haram motorcyclists who disappear into the bush along hair-thin trails. Thus, the Chadian military systematically destroys suspicious motorcycles.

Children attending madrasas (Koranic schools), which Boko Haram are said to control, take on the role of “chouffs” (assistants) and messengers. During battles, they cry “Allahu Akbar” in the background to distract adversaries while an attack takes place elsewhere. At the rear of the battle, the children set fires and gather the fruits of pillage. Others epitomize model child soldiers. As direct armed confrontations decrease, Boko Haram’s “chouffs”—particularly girls—get involved in terrorist actions; in an hyperbole of subterfuge, they even carry out attacks within attacks. For example, in Kerawa, Cameroon on September 3, 2015, an initial suicide bomber targeted the market, opening the way for a second girl to attack an adjacent garrison. On September 20th, Boko Haram used the same tactic: two suicide bombers targeted the big Sunday market at Mora. Once spotted, they detonated their bombs before reaching the market, limiting the number of victims. By multiplying the number of attacks by 12- to 16-year-old girls carrying improvised explosive devices (IEDs), as in

1. It may have been decisive if Gwoza’s military occupation had continued, coupled with attacks against Boko Haram fighters holed up in the nearby hills or scattered along the Madagali-Mubi-Yola highway in the western Mandara Mountain foothills.

2. The bi-weekly L’Œil du Sahel, the best-informed Cameroon newspaper covering the country’s north, tried to keep a record of Boko Haram abuses, and presents summaries every few months (See edition 673 of January 29, 2015).

This map shows Boko Haram bases and operations in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon; the arrows indicate where the group crosses borders and exerts pressure on nearby populations.
Maiduguri, Fotokol, and Damaturu, Boko Haram demonstrates how well its bush camps-cum-madrasa have indoctrinated hundreds of children over the past two years.\textsuperscript{4}

The recent change in strategy does not appear to affect terrorist attacks; their modes remain the same. In July 2015, for example attacks targeted Christian populations on the outskirts of Maiduguri (July 3), churches in Potiskum (July 5), mission buildings in Jos (July 5) and drinking establishments in Fotokol (July 12), in an attempt to police public morals. As with the July 10 and 11 N’Djamena attacks, Boko Haram’s military and political objectives remain unequivocal. However, most of the attacks on markets and mosque forecourts, motivated by the same purifying rage, remain unexplained since we do not know anything about the targeted communities. If we had an accurate reading of these events’ objectives, we would be in a better position to follow the sect’s progress and obstacles.

For example, we believe that we have some tangible elements to explain an attack in Maroua, Cameroon. On Wednesday, July 22, 2015, around 3:30 pm, two young female suicide bombers detonated their bombs: one at the central market in front of the ruling Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement (CPDM) offices, the other in the old quarter of Gada-Mawol in Barmaré; busy with Hausa traders, the attack wounded many and resulted in 14 deaths. The meaning of the first attack is clear. As for the second, it targeted the Hausa, who are reluctant to follow in Boko Haram’s footsteps.

On Saturday, July 24 at around 9:30 pm, a suicide bomber blew herself up between two bars, including Le Boucan, the most popular venue in the Pont-Vert neighborhood of Domayo; the attack killed 20 and wounded 60. These establishments serve bilbil (millet beer) and are run by Tupuri, Mundang, and Giziga brewers. The Christian and animist customers mostly belong to these same ethnic groups. A significant contingent of soldiers and officers in the Boko Haram-fighting Rapid Deployment Force and police also come from these ethnic groups. By identifying ethnic lines as they are spontaneously applied to daily life in Domayo, we can clarify Boko Haram’s message to Maroua residents.

Between April and June 2015, just before the rainy season, the Chadian Armed Forces expelled Boko Haram from northern Nigerian towns, from Damasak near Diffa to northern Borno State, particularly Dikwa, where Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram’s spokesman, took refuge for some time. Chad’s

\textsuperscript{4} It is difficult to estimate how many of these camps there may have been. The Cameroon Army dismantled one (Reuters, December 22, 2014). Near Guirvidig, 75 kilometers to the northeast of Maroua in the Musgum Kalang area, 84 children aged 7-16 of Musgum (Mandara) and hill tribe ethnicities were arrested along with 75 adult instructors. The children were locked up in the Maroua jail before being released following pressure from human rights organizations. On September 22, 2015, joint Cameroon and Nigerian forces attacked Banki, a large, vacant former border market that Boko Haram used as a base. The armed forces killed a number of jihadis, took others prisoners and dismantled. The military also released 241 hostages, who had been held for more than a year; however, the military report did not specify who among them were indoctrinated young people committed to carrying out attacks. This seems to have been repeated in other conquered bases in Nigeria, including Sambisa and Wurge near Gambaru.
army fought hard to “liberate” the towns before falling back on positions along the border. The army does not occupy the territory it regained. Cooperation with the Nigerien army leaves much to be desired: the Chadian Armed Forces had to retake the same targets to disperse Boko Haram a second time. This occurred in both Dikwa and Kukawa, former capitals of Borno kingdom. We must admit that even though Boko Haram “conducts operations that lack rational strategies,” counter-attacks by the Chadian Armed Forces and Rapid Intervention Force on Cameroon’s border appear even more unmethodical and untimely.

The 2015 rainy season began only in late July, and brought a new dimension to the fight against Boko Haram. As in the pre-colonial past and even during the peak of the colonial conquest, military operations pause during the “wintering” period, an obsolete term from the colonial military vocabulary designating the rainy season. Trucks and four-wheel-drive vehicles cannot navigate the roads; even Boko Haram’s motorcycles run into difficulties in the lowlands. The soil of this cross-border region, where the land is dedicated to a sorghum monoculture, features expanses of waterlogged clay soils from Firki to Borno and the karals (enclosures) of northern Cameroon.5

While conventional armies observe the “wintering truce,” Boko Haram, judging by its continued incursions, appears to ignore it. The group even increased attacks on the Nigerian border to the south of Waza in the region known as the waaloje (wetlands). On August 5th, fighters attacked the dissident village of Tchakaramari, resulting in seven dead and 135 kidnapped. Mass kidnappings continue along the border, especially since Cameroon has not been granted the right of pursuit.

Further east, in Yobe State on August 13, Boko Haram surrounded the village of Kukuwa Gari. A nearby small river was overflowing at the time and carried away about 150 fleeing residents, according to reports. During the rainy season on the vertisol plains of Borno, Boko Haram groups swapped their useless motorcycles for horses and surrounded dissident villages, opening fire, and sowing confusion among residents, as in Baamu on Friday, August 28th. Village leaders, often religious figures (in this case the imam and his son) were killed together with 56 others. In the days following, the group executed four in the neighboring village of Karnuwa, and seven in the mosque of the Arab village of Am Bagda.6

Given the increase in Boko Haram attacks on horseback, on September.7 On September 8, 2015, Nigerian military authorities forbade the use of horses in Borno State, seeking the support of traditional chieftains in upholding this prohibition. Henceforth, the army would shoot riders—assumed jihadists—on sight. The military interpreted Boko Haram’s use of horses as a sign the group faced difficulties in obtaining fuel and motorcycles, signaling a nearing end to their assaults. The security concerns about motorcycles now include horses: anything and anyone not traveling by bush taxi, truck, or protected convoy is suspect. In Nigeria and northern Cameroon, innumerable tragic mistakes
involve people shot as they rode motorcycles to remote fields. Someone carrying a sack of rice may be accused of being on their way to replenish a Boko Haram faction in the bush. For more than two years, this paranoia has paralyzed the economy of whole regions (Issa et al., 2014).

In April 2015, Muhammadu Buhari, a Fulani-Hausa originally from Katsina in the north, was elected president in Nigeria; a former general, he had held power from 1983 to 1985. He had troubles forming a government, compounded by difficulties reforming the army after a series of dismissals on July 13, 2015, and trying to make battalions operational under the command of non-corrupt officers.

The Nigerian government has always been aware of the situation in the northeast of the country. Speaking of Boko Haram, former President Goodluck Jonathan (2010–2015) remarked that their bases had been spotted and could be eradicated. However, the tools of repression, which had become so unreliable by that point, could not be engaged on the ground.

A rumor spread that President Buhari was taking advantage of delaying tactics to negotiate a call to arms among some Boko Haram “bases” through ulemas (religious leaders) from Nigeria and other origins. However, in every speech, President Buhari continued to excoriate Boko Haram as a “bunch of idiots who are far from Islam,” threatening them with extermination unless they stop their attacks. Buhari created an army operations center in Maiduguri, while Nigerian forces, supported by South African mercenaries, occupied long-identified Boko Haram camps. Most camps had been deserted and their hostages abandoned; hundreds were liberated in the Sambisa Forest (April 29–30, 2015). The military repeated the same operation on August 4. These actions are now mentioned as part of government propaganda about reconquered territory.

In the current withdrawal phase, most of these Boko Haram bases, or what Rapid Intervention Force officers call their “military regions” (six about the Cameroon border), reduce personnel or disappear altogether. The fighters—usually auxiliaries—go dormant, hide their weapons, return to townships and villages, rejoin their protective communities, and become ordinary and harmless people once again. Meanwhile, the “permanents” i.e., the more professional, better equipped members ineligible for any form of amnesty, retreat to remote and more easily defended areas.

5. These consist of vertisol, a black montmorillonite clay that swells in the rain. During the dry season, countless cracks mark the soil due to drying and shrinking.

6. Since March 2015, Boko Haram has attacked Shuwa Arab villages in eastern Borno suspected of siding with the Arabic-speaking Chadian army. This is the counterpart to the harassment suffered by Kanuri villages in Cameroon on the border with Nigeria and those located around the Diamaré area known as sirata. They also affect the Kanuri communities of gaw (professional hunters), who have mostly become traditional health practitioners (Seignobos, 2011). At the beginning of 2015, there were numerous arrests and abuse of gaw in around Petté, especially in Jaoundé; security forces accused the gaw of providing “mystical” assistance to some Boko Haram groups.

7. During the rainy season, news from the remote bush takes several days to reach the Nigerian media. Some presumably never reaches it at all.

8. This is not to say that highwaymen and cattle rustlers have disappeared. Whether independent criminals or claiming to be members of Boko Haram, they mainly afflict the yayrés, or grassy plains, and seek shelter in Chad when necessary.
This new situation poses problems for a Nigerian government in attempts to encourage Boko Haram supporters to defect. After yet another disappearance of Abubakar Shekau, rumored “wounded in his leg and arm” and replaced by near-unknowns, such as Mahamat Daoud, uncertainty remains about the movement’s chain of command. More than ever a question arises: who speaks for Boko Haram? Kashim Shettima, governor of Borno State, is said to have made great efforts to identify moderates within Boko Haram great efforts to determine who may be moderates among Boko Haram adherents. President Buhari has also seemed to take this line when he visited Paris on September 16, 2015.

**Boko Haram: the strengths and weaknesses of a suburban and bush Salafism.** Boko Haram has never abandoned its reticular, networked system of spatial control in favor of a state-like continuous and hierarchical one. Its field of mobility has followed the highwaymen camp model (Chauvin and Seignobos, 2014). Boko Haram draws its strength from a religious power free from any hierarchy; cells acting as “bases” of varying size react to the same stimuli and bring about the same consequences (Seignobos, 2015). Although the most varied forms of development may create these bases, seditious religious movements characterized by this type of leaderlessness always prove most difficult to subvert and destroy.

With Boko Haram, nothing exists behind the scenes: no political leader or economic interests pull the strings. Boko Haram makes up for a lack of trafficking income or external support through extensive looting, and kidnapping, especially women and children. In the 1990s, cross-border highwaymen operating in Cameroon, Chad, and the Central African Republic employed forms of temporary bondage. Shackled hostages transported goods, did laundry and cooked, just as in Boko Haram bases. Hostages have become the wealth of these penniless jihadists. Even if fighters try to levy zakat (taxes), they are too poorly organized to plan taxation properly, so it seems closer to racketeering.

Without wishing to slip into demographic explanations, we argue that Boko Haram owes its existence to a rapidly expanding population segment. Hundreds of thousands of young people under age 15 in Niger, northern Nigeria, and Cameroon, while not exactly street children, live outside the control of overcrowded families. In recent decades, youth have found autonomy at ever-younger ages. These mostly uneducated youth seek physical work in urban markets. In the evenings, they head to impoverished madrasas, where they sometimes find a meal. Through their mallums, these schools maintain links with local mosques, unfinished but with good sound systems. Some of these madrasa may affiliate to larger mosques. Thrown into proselytism and religious debates and ready to follow the preacher of the moment, young acolytes often gravitate to the most radical.

Boko Haram supporters emerge from mosques and also from within the vast network of markets, bus stations, and bus or bush taxis driver pools. They
practice all trades; especially those that are semi-legal. In 2012–2013, observers estimated that one third of all motorcycle smugglers operating along the Cameroon-Nigeria borders were Boko Haram supporters (Kleda 2015).

Boko Haram also recruits new converts among hill tribes, butchers, minibus loaders, and motorcycle-taxi drivers. Boko Haram naturally prospers in mosques and markets. How can governments defeat this conspiracy when controlling large markets and small mosques proves equally difficult? Nigerian and Cameroonian governments seek to regulate Islam from the top down; they also try to get a grip on the large Friday *ju’maare* (prayer meetings). Governments can entrust the task to traditional chieftains who officiate in their name and nominate imams. For this reason, Boko Haram wages merciless war on the chieftain-imam pairing, considering both subjugated by an impious political power. The *imamat*, answerable only to government, is not an authority within a pyramidal structure. What can be done about the *juuliirde* (neighborhood mosques)? In Maroua alone, there are almost 600. The Cameroon government, following Nigeria’s example, seeks to close them all down. Could this not lead the faithful to establish clandestine and therefore wholly uncontrollable meeting places?

We lack space here to examine the popular, suburban aspect of Boko Haram that takes issue with the religious establishment, particularly in Maiduguri (also known to locals as Yerwa), the seat of many renowned Koranic schools. Even though, most of the *goni*, today designated as *ulemas* (religious leaders), follow Wahhabism, they are very hostile to Boko Haram and its bloody methods. Often descendants of patrician families, religious leaders support the actions of the *Shehu*, the Sultan of Borno, and the city’s Civilian Joint Task Force, the local equivalent of Cameroon’s *comités de vigilance*. This suburban resistance meant that Boko Haram’s attempts on Maiduguri after July 2013 failed. Boko Haram’s suburban aspect is also apparent in northern Cameroon.

Are Westerners condemned to incomprehension? Boko Haram issues press releases made of conventional imprecations and which seek to demonstrate the sect’s place in the sphere of globalized jihadism, but provide very little information. We see in Boko Haram’s determination to create a caliphate and affiliate itself with ISIS an ideology of rupture not only with neocolonialism but, more radically, with the West. In parallel, the sect exalts the past, but which past? The endogenous character of Boko Haram, largely composed of Kanuris and Bornoans, is established. Although the Kingdom of Bornu has disappeared, its symbolic grandeur and founding pedestal, namely Islam, remains unique in a largely animist world. Colonialism put a damper on the dream that

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9. This is the meaning of John Campbell’s August 2015 article entitled “Boko Haram’s Shekau Replaced? Not so Fast”.

10. Another group of fundamentalists, the Tarabiyya, preceded them; they sought to emancipate the status of imam from political power, namely the Sultan himself, which fitted well with a Sufi Islam (Adama 2005, p. 317-318). Their demands broadened after 1968, a time of occasional regional religious troubles; these formed the springboard for more violent movements, such as the Maitatsine and finally Boko Haram.
a Bornu Empire, reinvigorated by a new wellspring of faith around Lake Chad, could encompass the former Bilad al-Sudan to lead the *Umma* (all Muslims). Such a dream was not the sole preserve of Kanuri intellectuals (Tijani, 2005); the Beriberi, also known as the Kanembu-Kanuri in the broader sense, also share this vision. They experienced a kind of religious surge, a veritable conflagration of which: Boko Haram is only the most visible and violent component. This religious proliferation and the confusion it creates makes it difficult to decipher Boko Haram still. During the colonial conquest, Rabah Zubayr, a Sudanese warlord, had defeated Bornu; it seemed to have reached its historical endpoint. What greater cause could there be than to take up the only story that matters, namely advancing the *hakimiyya* (God’s earthly kingdom)?

Meanwhile, Western observers maintain moralistic and emotional analyses of Boko Haram events. With this patronizing attitude toward African societies, in this case supposedly jihadist, Boko Haram remains a second-rate enemy. These Islamic madmen are held to mean only gratuitous cruelty and inherent monstrosity. Outrage takes the place of reflection, testing the limits of our analytical framework. The limits of our analytical framework are thus tested, and we may feel at a loss for understanding, unable to grasp why Boko Haram can be so popular in several societies of Lake Chad.11

The second pitfall in analyzing Boko Haram lies in rejecting the religious element. Local official discourse has taken up Western rhetoric about Boko Haram, making a single economic argument that poverty in the movement’s areas of origin and a lack of opportunities for the youth underpins the sect. However, many regions in similarly pitiful condition do not produce armed revivalist insurrections.

The attraction for young people to Boko Haram is too easily be explained by the premiums or salaries paid upon entry into its ranks. Officers of the Rapid Intervention Force and the Cameroonian gendarmerie reach the same conclusion almost word-for-word, in interviews. In some reports, officers are made to say what the interviewer wants to hear, even in the otherwise high-quality report ordered by Archbishop Samuel Kledo (Maroua, February 5, 2015, p. 12): “The children of the poor no longer need to take civil service exams in Cameroon. The government denies us entry to public service jobs where we can earn CFA 100,000 while Boko Haram, with no entrance exams, offers us CFA 300,000–400,000.” These state exams, a major issue in post-independence Cameroon, are the object of a long-standing dispute between the North and South of the country. Under President Ahidjo (1960–1982), the government recruited candidates for public service positions by competitive entrance exam at Grade 9 level for those living in the North, and at high school graduation level for those living in the South, where students were more educated. When this was changed, it led to outrage among both parties: for the South that the measure existed at all, and for the North that it was repealed. Hence the spurious argument: you did not want to help the North, so its youth was lured by Boko Haram. This is part of a wider North-South controversy in Cameroon that
now incorporates Boko Haram and mixes unspoken thoughts with recriminations that have been recycled since independence (Pommerolle, 2015).

Observers are condemned to construct the portraits of Boko Haram supporters from the outside. Who will write the biographies of these jihadis? Boko Haram has shown itself a poor governor of the spaces under its control. It exercises power through pillage and destruction of trade routes, bridges, and telephone pylons; sometimes, it practices a scorched-earth policy. Exceptionally, on Lake Chad, some Boko Haram supporters recently seem to dream of returning to working for themselves, trading fish and engaging in the pepper trade on the banks of the Yobe River.

Boko Haram Chooses Lake Chad
Lake Chad: a refuge, a recent African Babel, and a lawless area. One must know the basic features of Lake Chad to understand its benefits for Boko Haram. The so-called Greater Chad condition has a depth of 282.3 meters last seen in the mid-1950s, which gave way to a Normal Chad condition, with a depth of 280–282 meters. The two interconnecting north and south basins record maximum depths of 5.3 and 2.7 meters respectively. Since 1973, the lake has known a Lesser Chad condition, in which it comprises several separate stretches of water separated by shoals, including the Great Barrier that divides the two basins. The 1,700 km² of open water faces the mouth of the Chari River and overflow on all sides in permanent or seasonal marshes. The surface can thus extend up to 13,000 km², although that is rarely taken into account in satellite images. If the Chari River runoff falls below 15 km³, the northern basin ceases to be fed and the lake is called the Lesser Dry Chad (Lemoalle, 2015).

Marsh vegetation covers most of the lake. Submerged fossil dunes colonized by aquatic plants form islets. The archipelagoes are fringed with common reeds (*Phragmites australis*), cattails (*Typha domingensis*), and papyrus (*Cyperus papyrus*), while ambatch trees (*Aeschynomene elaphroxylon*) grow on the edge of the open water. The reeds and papyrus detach, forming floating masses that the Harmattan pushes along until they cling to islets or ambatch forests and form *kirtas* (floating islands). Fishermen have colonized hundreds of *kirtas* along the open water fringe.

The difficulty of moving through the wetland’s shifting labyrinth of vegetation and the lake’s cross-border character have made it a lawless zone under both colonial and national administrations. Constant oscillations between flooded and dry states affects the mobility of the lake populations. Each village

11. Apart from a few demonstrations, such as the march in support of the army of February 28, 2015 in Maroua (a rally against Boko Haram initiated by northern journalists working for *L’Œil du Sahel* and reframed as part of an official mechanism), no other specifically Muslim protest has been recorded to date. The Cameroonian Association for Inter-Religious Dialogue (ACADIR), officially created in 2006, brings together Christian and Muslim clerics. An ACADIR Charter for the Far North was drafted in June 2015. Religious dialogue was initiated and led by Catholic priests. The wider Muslim world is not involved.
shifts from wetland to dryland over the course of the year, migrating based on the varying condition of the lake but keeping the same toponym regardless of their location. Thus, successive administrations have proved incapable of precisely mapping the settlements of these “lake nomads” right up to the most recent attempts.

No serious census can be taken here. In addition, the fear of tax levies linked to census registration systematically caused populations to flee. In response, colonial administrators organized “demographic tours” without tax registrations; they also conducted “economic censuses” of a somewhat subjective nature. At independence in 1960, the period known as the “domestication” of populations, particularly kirdi (non-Muslims)—a leitmotif of the 1930s—was still underway around the lake, at least on the Cameroon side. Clearly, the marshland setting effectively protected local populations from external aggression. Some documents, including films shot in the 1950s, before independence, describe the exceptional originality of this setting and its inhabitants, home to unique types of lake boats, canoes and rafts made of ambatch, a lightweight and spongy wood, and the Buduma’s kadey (papyrus). At the time, two types of users met on the lake and crossed paths on kirtas: Buduma coastal traders, and Borno or Kotoko fishermen. Three decades later, the lake’s southern shores have become one of the most racially and culturally mixed areas in all of Africa. In 2005, surveys conducted on the island of Kofya opposite the mouth of the Chari suggested that 70 different ethnicities lived there (Seignobos, 2015, p. 70).

**History has moved faster on Lake Chad’s southern shore since 1973.**
The great drought of 1973, and a similar one in 1984, initiated the Lesser Chad phase; the concentration of open waters and tidal range led to a growing influx of fishermen/agriculturalists. The lake also attracted nomadic pastoralists who are used to adjusting the time spent in transhumance to the seasonal availability of aquatic grasses.

In 1976, the lake population stood at 0.7 million. By 2013, it had risen to 2.2 million, with most people clustered along the southern shore. On the cusp of the 1980s, people from the southern hinterland of the lake were joined by seasonal groups of fishermen, some from West Africa, and livestock farmers from the adjacent Sahel area. All the groups developed a new system for resource use based on a mobility attuned to the annual variations of the Lake. The population existed created a clever system for resource use based on mobility and linked to annual variations in the size of the lake.

Over the vast floodplains, fishing, herding, and farming formed a perpendicular sequence up from the lake banks as the waters retreated. Fishermen set up gura (Malian-type trap lines) that run for several kilometers. These dumba (dams) advance as the water retreats, closely followed by cattle. In less than two decades, pastoralists have adjusted their behavior by herding their cattle (zebus) into deeper water, reaching to the dewlap and beyond, to better
exploit these aquatic pastures of perennial grasses. Behind them, contingents of crop farmers advance, employing mobile motor pumps to draw water for irrigation. However, overall this remains a modest form of agriculture.

These fertile, silty clay soils need no fertilizers and yield a double annual harvest of maize, sweet potatoes, and cowpeas. Farmers also grow sugar cane, gourds, okra, onions, and tomatoes. The flexibility of agricultural, pastoral, and fishing practices that share the same space has led this region, one well-connected to the city markets of Maiduguri and N’Djamena to the south, to become a major food supplier.

However, for several years now, this cornucopia and its pioneering, pragmatic form of land management has been under threat. Along the southern shores, no authority can regulate an increasingly acute competition for land. Despite their ambitions, neither the government, nor the traditional powers, nor, least of all, the commercial and political elites. The southern shores, always under threat from raids by island-dwelling Buduma, remained empty until the early 20th century. To the north, by contrast, both the Kanembu on their polders and the Buduma (also called Yedina) on their islands put forth their ancient land right and have so far successfully defended them.

With peace during the colonial period, the chiefdoms of the southern hinterland attempted to expand their influence as far as the lake; these included Maiduguri sheiks in Nigeria, the Kotoko sultans of Afadé, Makari, and Goulfēi in Cameroon, and several Arab chieftains. Independence changed little; the lake banks remained open and alkali (chiefdom judges) resolved occasional conflicts. Rural municipalities recently established in Cameroon have held jurisdiction over land conflicts since 2009; however, they struggle to assert their authority in the face of opposition from chieftains.

Along this part of the lake, “everything is cloudy and unstable,” from the territorial boundaries of jurisdictions to their very legitimacy. New urban entrepreneurs who advocate the mechanization of farming and acquire tracts of land, causing prices to skyrocket, exacerbate the problem. Commercial elites that finance mayoral and sultan election campaigns invest in livestock and agriculture. Some try to replace the multi-purpose floodplains with exclusive use for landowners; thus, they threaten intricate connections between fishermen, crop growers, and pastoralists. Therefore, since 2009–2010, the current system has reached its own limits (Rangé and Boureîma, 2015). How can land access rights be formalized? In fact, no one demands formalization; each group prefers to seek its own advantage from the general lack of clarity. In

12. Colonel Jean Chapelle, then assigned to N’Guigmi (Niger), created his Kadey fleet to control the north-Nigerien basin, describes these elusive place names in his memoir (1987, p. 172).
13. We refer to the 8mm films shot by the last French overseas administrator in Kousseri, Jean Jerusalem (1957–1958), now digitized by the audiovisual services of IRD/Bondy.
14. The last observer of the lake, Charline Rangé, a doctoral student of agronomy whose research was conducted under threat from Boko Haram, was smuggled out of the Lake area by the Rapid Intervention Force in February 2013 following the kidnapping of the Moulin-Fournier family. She extracted pages from her field notes appear in the Atlas du lac Chad (edited by Magrin, Lemoal, and Pourtier, 2015).
To understand the assets that Lake Chad presents to Boko Haram, one needs to examine its physical and human geographical characteristics. The two interconnecting north and south basins record maximum depths of 5.3 and 2.7 meters, respectively. Since 1973, the lake has been in Lesser Chad condition; this comprises several stretches of water separated by shoals, including the Great Barrier that divides the two basins. Open waters (1,700 km²) face the mouth of the Chari River. Seasonal and permanent marshes that expand on all sides extend the surface area of open waters; difficult to record using satellite imaging, the seasonal expansion can reach a total area of 13,000 km². The difficulty involved in moving through the wetland’s shifting labyrinth of vegetation and the cross-border character of the lake have always made it a lawless area.
Unlike Cameroon, Chad has always faced Nigerian encroachments on the lake, with skirmishes reported on islands such as Tetewa, which faces Baga Kawa.

In 1987, the government established an administration and a police force. Following an adjustment to the Cameroon-Nigeria border, Cameroon recovered “its” part of the lake; it created a new Darak district in 2004, a move not universally welcomed. In 2006, this author personally witnessed deep community tensions in Darak as the numerous and entrepreneurial Hausas competed with Shuwa Arabs and Bornouans in the same market niches. The rivalry between their respective languages was particularly evident in the Darak market. Use of the Hausa language and Arabic began very recently. In 1976, the only languages spoken on the lake were Kanuri and Kanembu; closely related, the Buduma also spoke them. Today, the Kanuri language is quickly losing status as a *lingua franca* in favor of Hausa; this confirms the Hausa’s social and political domination. Until 1973, the lake’s ports, such as Baga, were mostly populated and run by the Kanembu, Kanuri, and Buduma; they consider themselves the native people of the lake as do the Yobe River Kotoko and Mobeur.

The Yedina still preserve their tripartite agronomic system on the lake, using the islands for fishing, agriculture, and raising livestock, especially cattle and their famous Kuri cows. Each Yedina clan owns above- and below-water islands. The Yedina have retained extraordinary records of their lake heritage; whenever an island reemerges, the owners rush to recover their pastures and levy taxes from foreign fishermen. Although the Yedina have lost their monopoly on coastal trade around the lake, they strive to protect their archipelago’s pastures from the intrusion of pastoralists who arrive from the lakeshore; the Yedina fear that they will not always be able to prevent such incursions.

After independence, on the Nigerian side of the lake, Yedina chieftains were placed under the authority of Mobeur or Toumagri (Kanembu) district chiefs from the shores. With the transition to the Lesser Dry Chad phase after the northern basin dried out in the 1980s and 1990s, the Nigerian Yedina were forced to emigrate to the Chadian archipelagos around the Great Barrier. However, when water levels rose in the new millennium, the Yedina recovered their former lands.

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15. Unlike Cameroon, Chad has always faced Nigerian encroachments on the lake, with skirmishes reported on islands such as Tetewa, which faces Baga Kawa.

16. The Nigerian army is Hausa-speaking and communicates in Hausa, including written notes to local government area (LGA) administration. Meanwhile, the Niger army, once Zerma-speaking, has switched to Hausa.
For the past fifteen years, fishermen have experienced a crisis of their own. They mostly belong to native communities: Bornouans, Yedina, Kotoko, and Arabs. They assemble seasonal laborers who sometimes have traveled from afar. Hausa increasingly make up the skippers and large fish traders, having found ways to subvert traditional and elected authorities to draw power away from master Bornouan and Kotoko fishermen. For example, the Hausa now assert the right to control the trap dams.

For a long time, large traders responsible for the exploitation of the open waters have built large motor boats, financed shore seine and purse seine, and advanced money for fishing expeditions. They outfit small entrepreneurs reliant on family labour and engage in moneylending, a practice prohibited by Sharia law. In the minds of other populations, the Hausa ethnic group has become confused with capitalist exploitation of fishing and agriculture; the capitalist model is seen as promoting exclusive access to land and water. The term “Hausa” now designates the traders and skippers from cities of northern Nigeria who have taken over the trade in the lake’s principal wealth for profit more than it does the descendants of former Hausa states. The term also applies to small-scale Hausa-speaking fishermen who, equipped with individual motorboats, arrive on the lakeshore by the hundreds to loot it. This is the same phenomenon of appropriation denounced by indigenous peoples. One cannot understand the irruption of Boko Haram in the lake area without this understanding of its historical and economic context.

Rapid population buildup that—without exaggeration—has proven resistant to all control, combined with a fear of elite land-grabbing and Bornouans and Yedina economic marginalization, have created a backdrop of deep unease. Thus, some locals sees Boko Haram’s violent irruption in the Lake Chad Basin not as a solution, but at least as an opportunity to recover farming, grazing, and market spaces, and—more prosaically—discharge debts and profit from disorder to engage in looting. Therefore, some residents around the lake wish for Boko Haram’s arrival. This runs counter to a common refrain about Boko Haram: that the sect only prospers on soil marked by poverty and ignorance. The lake represents abundance, a surprising economic success on the part of what observers until recently referred to as the “informal sector” or the “intermediate sector.”

The January 2015 massacre in Baga Kawa: message and consequences.
A violent Boko Haram attack on Baga Kawa in January 2015 surprised many; fighters burned that town as well as sixteen surrounding villages of agriculturists/fishermen. Western television stations constantly replayed photos downloaded from Google. It is said that there were 2,000 victims, but no official count verifies this figure. Built on a peninsula, Baga Kawa was the largest port and boatyard of Borno State, an immense souk mixing market stalls and houses full of all kinds of manufactured goods. The township was wholly dedicated to the dried and smoked fish trade and transport of natron from Kanem. Founded
by the Kanembu and Kanuri, Baga Kawa become a Hausa town over the past two decades, even though Hausa had made up less than 5% of the population in 1976. The Hausa have monopolized trade in smoke fish, wood, and salt, diverting part of Maiduguri’s trade routes to Kano. Hausa-speaking fishermen predominated in neighboring villages.

Was the attack on Baga Kawa a long-awaited uprising by rights holders using Boko Haram to recover “their” lake? A Boko Haram campaign against usurious Hausa traders—abducted, ransomed, and even killed—had preceded the group’s military-style action, winning the fishing communities’ appreciation.

That same January, President Idriss Déby of Chad cleared the route to the capital, N’Djamena via Maiduguri, responded to Boko Haram provocations on the opposite bank of the Chari River in Kousseri, and addressed the disturbing condition of the trading community in N’Djamena, won over by fundamentalism. However, his greatest motivation for taking action stemmed from Boko Haram’s threat to the lake—the untouchable, vital Lake Chad, the country’s lake. More than half the lake’s surface area lies in Chadian territory while bordering other countries. Furthermore, the lake is on the doorstep of N’Djamena. If, through Boko Haram, the northern Kanembu joined forces with their southern Kanuri Borno cousins, the very nature of the struggle with N’Djamena would change.

Opponents of the government in N’Djamena have always found refuge in the Lake Chad Basin, including troops loyal to Hissène Habré in 1990–1994 and other Chadian army rebels. The latter, still holding the Birni Goni, Bachaka, Kaswa Mariya, and Nimeri islands north of Darak, indulge in trafficking and earn a living as they protect fishermen from competitors.

How do Boko Haram fighters circulate among thousands of islands and a labyrinth of wetland vegetation without collusion? Officials immediately suspected the Buduma/Yedina. Some claim that they raided Hausa fishing fleets

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17. One case in point could be the fatoma, persons who act as middlemen and hosts to the “foreigners”, namely the fishermen and traders. Involved in all transactions, they act as certified witnesses. They are also known for practicing moneylending. In the 1960s, they were only Yedina and Kanembu, but they were joined a decade later by Kanuri. They may now have been supplanted by the Hausa and their dynamic economic practices, though to what degree remains unclear.

18. On May 1, 2013 in Baga Kawa, the Nigerian army unleashed repression against Boko Haram, killing about 200 people and burning over 2,000 houses (Human Rights Watch, “Nigeria: Massive Destruction, Deaths from Military Raid,” www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/01); the media broadcast satellite images of the scene without, however, revealing the names of the districts and communities affected. From then on, the residents of Baga Kawa were forced to cooperate with the army.

19. Since its foundation, Fort Lamy, the colonial capital of Chad, later N’Djamena, saw Borno traders and later Bornouans and Hausa, run its commerce and cross-border trade. Over the past two decades, religious leaders from Borno have targeted the community. Many observers do not doubt that Boko Haram now resides in the heart of N’Djamena’s central market.

20. The Chadian government’s focus on the lake creates a deep divergence between France’s regional military objectives and those of Chad. Operation Barkhane, hosted in N’Djamena, wants Chad to become more involved in Libya, a country closely controlled by N’Djamena. Libya’s cross-border Tubu groups do not threaten Chad, unlike Boko Haram. However, on August 25, 2015, the French President, speaking at an annual conference of ambassadors, declared that France was willing to grant riparian countries’ requests to help fight Boko Haram.

21. We note that the Kingdom of Bornu belong to the Kanem-Borno; the alifa of Mao in Kanem remained the vassal of Bornu Shehu.
alongside Boko Haram between Baga Kawa and Wulgo in January and February 2015. Locally, 12 to 17 meter canoes, built from planks, plywood, and reinforced with PVC pipes, are fitted out with 25–40 horsepower outboard motors. Boko Haram fitted out several these in the style of traditional lake boats, with reed awnings that protect from water reverberation and above all prevent the boats from being spotted from by aerial surveillance. These craft can carry up to one hundred passengers and one or two dozen motorcycles. Around the lake, motorcycles remain a Boko Haram weapon: violence no longer arrives only from the road as fighters ambush people from the bush. Large canoes can launch detachments of motorcycle commandos. Flotillas of smaller, less than 8-meter vessels even accompany some flagships. The motorcycles, more flexible than bush taxis, can connect with the canoes from the most basic of piers.

How and when the Yedina associated with Boko Haram remains unclear. As often occurs with fundamentalist groups, Boko Haram, led by ulemas under Mohammed Yusuf, went “back to the land” on several farms in the Diffa area in 2002-2003. English-speaking chroniclers of Boko Haram describe this as “the Kannamma episode.” Boko Haram may have gained the support of local populations during this period. However, the sect’s curious pairing with some Yedina intrigues observers.

The southern Lake Chad basin. A group of more than 20 Boko Haram fighters sails along a papyrus grove on an outboard canoe, in front of an ambatch forest. The long boats can transport men and motorcycles, the jihadist group’s preferred mode of transport. Long plastic pipes reinforce both sides of the canoes. Boko Haram finds a favorable terrain for launching its attacks in this shifting labyrinth of wetland vegetation and border-crossing lake. Drawing by Christian Seignobos (2015).
None of the kingdoms around Lake Chad—not Kanem, Bulala, Borno, or even less Baguirmi—have stopped incessant Yedina flotillas of kadey from attacking the lake shores. The first sub-Saharan African Muslim kingdom emerged in Kanem in the 10th century and asserted its faith over the course of the 12th century. However, the nearby Yedina, in their impregnable reedy domain, only recently adopted (in the early 20th century) a version of Islam their neighbors still find dubious.

We also remain poorly informed about the Yedina clans that align with or even declare allegiance to Boko Haram. Among the major Yedina factions, the most numerous (35%) Guriya, present mainly in Bol canton, and the most aristocratic May Bulwa (25%), concentrated around Kiskra and “Nguigmi-Est”, remain suspicious of Boko Haram. Meanwhile, the Guriya’s major rivals, the Majigojiya (20%) from the northern archipelago, and even more so the Bujiya (20%), dotting Bosso and the Nigerian islands, prove receptive to Boko Haram’s propaganda. However, among this population of 75,000 to 80,000, the clans’ fragmentation increases the uncertainty of our speculation; we essentially base our view on Boko Haram’s movements and actions across the islands. The armed group’s attacks occur west of a line between Bol and the mouth of the El Beid River in Wulgo.

On the lake, the military and political organization of Boko Haram proves especially opaque and its operating strategies highly improbable. Thus, why did Boko Haram attack Ngouboua, a Chadian village on July 8, 2015, the home to 3,000-4,000 inhabitants near the Great Barrier, and burn everything, including stores? From which inland bases does Boko Haram’s command originate? It appears scattered: Boko Haram’s lawan, sometimes described as “emirs,” a term that describes their dual role as preachers and war entrepreneurs, let their allies carry them along in pillaging campaigns. By harboring and guiding Boko Haram groups, will the Yedina, who understand how the lake works, return to their earlier “lifestyle,” as geographers still described it in the 1950s? Formerly, these island societies were structured around kella (war chieftains) who were in constant rivalry, but always ready to join forces to engage in robbery and piracy (Verlet, 1967, p. 30); they went as far as signing agreements to divide up the lake shores into raid territories (Urvoy, 1949, p. 124). In view of this past and the fact that they are newcomers to Islam, were the Yedina predisposed to embracing the violent Salafism of Boko Haram?

The lake, “empty” once again, hosts populations that have recovered their one-time mobility as both aggressors and victims of raids. The will to

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22. For Carbou (1912, p. 109), “the Boudouma have generally remained fetishists while adopting certain Muslim practices.” Bouquet (1991, p. 247) shows that their Islamization can be attributed to colonial peace: it allowed Kanembu mallums to crisscross the islands. The Mobeur claim they were an “instrument of God” in the Islamization of these “island savages.”


24. Based on water level variations, the Yedina know the state of the bahr (water channels), passages, and shoals, and can calculate how difficult a journey will be.
Far from being an ethnic map, this drawing shows the cosmopolitan character of the people living around Lake Chad. In 1976, the lake population stood at 0.7 million. By 2013, it had risen to 2.2 million, clustered along the southern shore. Seasonal groups of fishermen, some from Western Africa, and livestock farmers from the adjacent Sahel join permanent residents from the lake’s southern hinterland.
Some see in Boko Haram’s movement to the Lake an attempt to secure a better access to aid and weapons from Libya via Niger. All observers seem to fear that, with time, Boko Haram connects to the outside world (Tull and Weber, 2015).

Is Boko Haram seeking a refuge in the northern basin? Beginning in April–May 2015, Boko Haram appeared to want to settle in Lake Chad’s northern basin, along the border of Niger, Chad, and Nigeria. We suppose neighboring populations would support such a move: those in Diffa have long been thought to back the Boko Haram cause. Niger could represent the weakest link among the four countries bordering the lake. Furthermore, given the cross-border nature of the environment, containing Boko Haram would be more difficult, if—as in the past—riparian governments disagree about expelling Boko Haram from the lake area. Some of the sect’s subgroups fear this promised coalition and, seeking a reprieve, would take refuge near the lake.

As of June 2015, the northern basin holds water, as it has since 2000. However, during a previous dry phase, a new plant, Prosopis juliflora, an invasive, low-value mimosaceae escaped from a reforestation project, and a steppe plant, Calotropis procera, colonized part of the lake. The dead forest of Prosopis, with its tough wood covered by water, has made the lake almost impenetrable. The thorny, bushy trees have a spreading crown that lasts a long time, even when dead; when the trees collapse, they create above-water grottos and tunnels.

Boko Haram’s intrusion into this part of the lake clearly caught Mahamadou Issoufou’s government in Niger unaware. He reacted hastily to a brutal aggression on the island of Karamga north of Bosso on April 25, 2015, when 60 soldiers were killed alongside many Mobeur villagers.

On the lake, the conflicts labeled as involving Boko Haram cut across many other local issues. Between 1984 and 2000, water disappeared from the northern basin; Fulani pastoralists and, in wetter areas, Mobeur farmers occupied the area. Bourtoungo, Gadira, and Karamga, centers of the fish trade, became livestock markets. With the water’s return, Yedina bulama (village chieftains) rediscovered their islands and went back to fishing. Driven by the dream of a Buduma district independent from Bosso, the Yedina forced the crossing of Malam Fatori in Nigeria, at the mouth of the Komadugu Yobe River.
This map shows the 2015 cross-border sites of fighting and clashes with Boko Haram, movements made by its armed groups, and the attacks they perpetrated. It shows where Boko Haram has gained control over the lake and potential settlements. Over 2015, Lake Chad has provided a refuge and staging area for the movement’s groups and a strategic area on the border of four riparian countries from which the groups project armed violence across the region.
Mobeur to return to their lakeshore lands. The central government then ordered everyone to leave the islands. This forced displacement, too swift (only three days) and poorly planned in terms of moving and rehousing families, was nearly a disaster (Carayol, 2015). However, the Yedina’s attachment to their livestock, perfectly adapted to rich island pastures but not arid shores, drove many herdsmen to remain; thus, they risked being accused of complicity with Boko Haram. The Nigerien government assumes that Boko Haram wants to make this part of the lake its refuge (Carayol, 2015). In these conditions, the Mandara Mountains might represent only a secondary refuge, unless neither the lake nor the mountains reflect Boko Haram’s strategic choice of bases.

Faced with a Boko Haram offensive on the lake, Chad, like Niger, sought to repatriate people living on the lake shores, including the Yedina (again) and several Kanembu villages; the government did this less for the

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**The northern basin.** After 2000, water refilled the northern basin of Lake Chad. Today the basin is home to Boko Haram groups. They thread their way through *Prosopis juliflora*, a mimosaceae that colonized the area during the previous dry phase. Once covered by water, this dead, tough wooded forest of *Prosopis* has made the lake almost impenetrable. These thorny, bushy trees have a spreading crown that maintains its shape for a long time, even when dead. When the trees collapse, they create above-water caves and tunnels. In the background, a canoe is equipped with a reed awning to prevent drones from spotting it.

villagers’ protection than to prevent them from fraternizing with the Islamists. The Chadian administration reported that some displaced island populations accounted for 90% of those moved; it did not specify how many or from which islands. The government wants to implement a scorched-earth policy vis-à-vis Boko Haram. It is readying 1,000 men, drawn from the Chadian security forces and the army, in order, it claims, to “neutralize the insurgents”; this is an ambitious project. This watery, overgrown environment, with four-meter high papyrus, impenetrable ambatch forests, and dense reeds with interwoven roots in no way resembles the Chadian army’s usual theater of operation. At the end of July 2015, taking advantage of lower waters before the heavy rains, the armed forces launched a vast sweep operation from Baga Sola port, fighting on the islands between Baga Sola and Bol, in Medi Kouta, and across the Irbou-Titimiron-Kamgana archipelago. The battles had mixed outcomes: Boko Haram harassed the army in the villages of Medi, Bla Rigi to the west of Bol on July 25, and the army pursued fleeing Boko Haram columns on July 27. At the same time, as the Yedina had done the previous century, Boko Haram attacked the lake’s southern shores from the islands, targeting Baga Kawa, now re-occupied by a garrison, and swooped in on secured villages. In Bundaram, Fish Dam, and Kwatar Mali, Boko Haram fighters stabbed a dozen Hausa fishermen on July 27. The fishermen had fled in January 2015, but returned believing the army would protect them. Other fishermen tried to return to work, since fishing is the only occupation they know that provides a reasonable income. Their convoy of bush taxis left from Monguno, south of the lake; Boko Haram fighters intercepted it on August 4–5, killing 10 and forcing the others to turn back. The same fate befell farmers who tried to recover their stocks and property, as at Dabar Wiya. Will it be possible for them to return to the lake without Boko Haram’s permission? For countries bordering the lake, the nightmare of a Boko Haram headquarters straddling the lake’s two basins is altogether too real.

**Conclusion: Lake Chad: at the heart of a region in limbo**

Might Lake Chad become the military theater of a hidden war, crisscrossed by drones, with unclear naval battles taking place among the reeds and papyrus? Would it be possible to lay siege to the marshes in a war devoid of any humanitarian presence, with camps regularly pushed to the fringes? Would this lead to camps, built with the same tent models and water and latrine access protocols, and the same humanitarian organizations that belong to yesterday’s reality, but that carry on nevertheless, as in Niger (Gagamari and Sayam-Forage), or displaced Yedina camps in Kabalewa and Tournour, where the aid workers encourage children to draw pictures to overcome trauma? In Chad, some camps are set up nearby, in Ngouboua, Allama, and further back, in Baga Sola and Kangaloom, to absorb the pressure of displaced people thanks to villagers who welcome refugees, often distant relations, so as not to “leave them under the trees” and without a roof over their heads.
Over years of armed insurrection, Boko Haram, mainly comprised of Bornouans, has always sought to conquer its area of origin—Bornouans in the broadest sense—fighting on different fronts while trying to extend its religious doctrine to other major nearby Islamic communities, including the Hausa and the Fulani. Boko Haram appears most successful in its birthplace, Bornu: Borno, Yobe, and Gombe States, northern Adamawa, and former lands in northern Cameroon, including the Kotoko principalities and Wandala, a former satellite kingdom. Surprisingly, Boko Haram also appears successful among former animist groups that were to some extent allies to Bornu, and with other groups plundered by Bornu, such as the Musgum.

Boko Haram wages a second battle to rally its neighbors to its branch of Salafism. We only see the violence of this struggle when it encounters opponents or traitors, as reflected in attacks on mosques and markets. This is not the place to attempt a detailed breakdown of relations between Borno and Hausa or Borno and Fulani because Wahhabism has had the same irreparable impact on them all. Nevertheless, we note that, despite their many Boko Haram partisans, these groups generally remain in the background. They are not ready to follow Borno leadership or to embark on the adventure of its caliphate. Boko Haram must export its Salafism to avoid isolation or it will find itself besieged in its bastion, Borno State, by a coalition of regional governments that aim to defeat it.

Boko Haram is caught in an insoluble contradiction. Under the guise of asserting native rights, its struggle in Borno and around Lake Chad proves detrimental to other communities, especially the Hausa. How can Boko Haram rid the lake of Hausa while rallying their populous towns to its cause? When we understand the demographic and economic weight of the Hausa bloc in Nigeria, we begin to doubt that Boko Haram’s Salafism can prevail. Boko Haram, committed to this war, cannot win it, nor can the victors end it. Religious wars remain the most implacable because, in the 21st century, how is it possible to punish those seeking only to obey God?

28. Baga Kawa will become the headquarters for the third sector of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). The first sector is based in Mora, Cameroon, and the second in Gambaru, Nigeria on the border with Cameroon. The headquarters are supposed to be headquartered in N’Djamena.

29. Each of these communities has incubated Wahhabism for decades. On a different scale, the Fulani combine *pulaaku* (ethnic revivalism) with a largely dominant pan-Foulbe religious revival. This was made clear by early 1990s debates held between the various Fulani associations in Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad. In past centuries, the Fulani felt that they had a mission to spread Islam from the Senegal River to the Kingdom of Baguirmi. They produced the largest number of successful preachers, and a multitude of those failed, thus multiplying references to theocratic African kingdoms. Only the mobilization of Fulani communities and their relatives among nomadic Mbororo pastoralists, gradually radicalized in the Sahel across to the forests of the south, could bring together all these Islamist outbreaks; this would relegate Boko Haram to little more than a Salafist peasant revolt.
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