

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

The world is no stranger to wildlife trafficking. Humans have taken part in the hunting, smuggling, and near eradication of species for centuries for various reasons such as medicine, trophy hunting, and wildlife trafficking (Aisher, 2016). In many cases, wildlife trafficking has led to the endangerment, potential extinction, and even the evolution of certain animals. However, before delving further into the topic we must first define what exactly is wildlife trafficking. According to the World Wildlife Crime Report of 2016, wildlife trafficking is an area of organized crime that has become a significant threat towards many species of plants and animals (UNODC, 2020). This illicit trafficking has particularly been focused on a number of plants and animals that have been placed on the protected animals list by the Convention on Illegal Trade in Endangered Species and Wild Flora, otherwise known as CITES (Peters, 2017). The very definition of the issue being a transnational crime emphasizes reach of the crime itself, in that it crosses state lines, regions, and even continents, making it a global issue. This issue is constantly evolving over the years, however there is no denial that the issue at hand is a serious global issue, yet the global community tends to sweep it to the side in order to address other equally as important issues such as climate change and pandemics. Wildlife trafficking is a global issue, one that if not addressed and prevented soon may cause detrimental changes to the earth.

In order to properly understand the true severity of wildlife trafficking on the earth and its ecosystem, it is first important to break down what exactly the ecosystem is. The ecosystem comprises all living and non-living things on earth and their equal importance. The global ecosystem consists of the ecosphere which is all life (animals, humans, plants), air, soil, and water that exists on earth. Within this ecosphere exists the anthroposphere, which is totality of human presence, creations, and actions. In international relations, each component of the global ecosystem is seen to impact the other (Walpole, Merson-Davies, & Dann, 2011). Humans and their creations have the ability to positively or negatively impact the environment and wildlife through industrialization or modernization, just as the environment and wildlife could impact humanity as there are many natural poisons that exist or even predators that may harm humans. However, the protection of the global ecosystem and all its components are important to the survival of the earth, especially when they are negatively impacted by the actions of humans such as can be seen in the case of wildlife trafficking.

Animals and plants are both equally as hunted in the transnational crime of wildlife trafficking, however the trafficking of animals in particular has severely impacted various areas of the world, especially the continent of Africa (Felbab-Brown, 2018). Though the entire world is at risk, Africa has been increasingly vulnerable to wildlife trafficking in recent years. In regards to the issue of wildlife trafficking, why is it important to single out and focus on Africa? Africa is one of the largest continents in the world and comprises 54 countries, 6 time zones, and 6 different ecosystems including savanna grasslands, mountains, and deserts. This large variety in

environments allows for an extremely diverse population of wildlife species to thrive within the continent such as penguins, lions, elephants, and pangolins. The combination of this wide array of wildlife species and vast spans of land allows for many animals to become vulnerable to hunting, poaching, and wildlife trafficking. Many individuals, civil societies, organizations, and states work hard to create wildlife sanctuaries and conservations in order to protect these animals, however they can only do so much against the violent and vicious nature of wildlife trafficking. Africa itself faces many struggles in addition to this as over 400 million people that reside in Africa are living in poverty (Hamel, Tong & Hofer, 2019). In total, these people represent over 70% of the world's population that are currently living below the global poverty line. Poverty brings about various issues as many people are struggling to survive and thus often turn to whatever means necessary to make a living, this includes participating in wildlife trafficking. On the other hand, as much of Africa is in poverty, the people are unable to obtain enough resources to aid in protecting the wildlife at these wildlife conservation areas or otherwise. Though there are many initiatives and donations that have been created to aid in the upkeep of these conservation areas, they are often not enough for those in charge to allocate accordingly towards the wages of the workers, the security systems (such as fences and cameras), and even weapons. Africa is in a dire situation in regards to wildlife trafficking and it is important for the world to take note of these conditions and take action against these issues.

Africa is a continent that is heavily impacted by the issue of wildlife trafficking. As one of the largest continents in the world, Africa is home to thousands of different

species of mammals and birds. This abundant diversity in wildlife makes Africa a prime target for poachers, hunters, and traffickers. In the past decades, African elephants, rhinoceros, and pangolins have become the prime targets for wildlife traffickers due to steady demand for tusks, horns, and scales to be used for either jewellery, art pieces, or for consumption as traditional medicine. Though scientifically, there has been little to no evidence of these animal by-products successfully curing illnesses or building immunity, the market for these ingredients continues to increase causing these animals to become endangered and often on the brink of extinction (UNODC, World Wildlife Crime Report 2020). The vast presence of wildlife trafficking in Africa allows for it to be a significant case study in the research regarding the effects of wildlife trafficking on the regional ecosystem as the continent has been plagued by this issue for decades.

Elephants have once upon a time been known as one of the most hunted and trafficked animals in the world in the past decades, mostly in regards to trophy hunting, poaching, and the illegal trade of tusks. In 1989, there was an official ban on the legal sale of ivory by organizations such as CITES, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the African Wildlife Fund (AWF). The ban had many positive effects in the protection of elephants, however it did not stop the illegal trade of ivory and tusks (Williams, 2016). These tusks are either used as art pieces or jewellery, however a major cause of the wildlife trafficking of elephant tusks has been traditional medicines which many believe to hold healing properties. Such practice has affected the environment. Research in Mozambique has found that there are many elephants that have been born without tusks, an evolutionary response to the mass poaching occurring in the

continent. Though being born without tusks created a lower risk of poaching for elephants, it also created a few disadvantages to the elephant's livelihoods. Tusks are primarily used to dig up underground water sources and to be able to strip bark from trees, both of which are crucial to their diet. Though being born tusk less would prevent them from being hunted, it could also be detrimental to their survival. If more and more elephants are born without tusks, it is believed that eventually fertility will lessen over time, which could potentially lead to the extinction of the species (Duke, 2021).

On a larger more all-encompassing scale, wildlife trafficking affects the world ecosystem. According to Wanda Felbab-Brown, the levels in which the world is experiencing the loss of species is alarming and constantly increasing due to the intense demand for animals, plants, and wildlife products. As a result, we are seeing not only the endangerment of species, but also the potential extinction of them. This issue is one that is not often talked about, however in the scope of things it, just like climate change, has the potential to cause detrimental irreversible implications on the global ecosystem that threatens not only us as human beings, but the existence of the world as a whole (Felbab-Brown, 2018).

In the past few decades, much attention has been brought towards the issue of climate change with rising concerns on the effects of global warming on our future should we not make changes today. However, the rate of species extinction today is nearly one thousand times the historical average which is a global ecological catastrophe that could cause major changes in our ecosystem (Felbab-Brown, 2018). In nature, each animal and plant plays a necessary role in its spatial habitat, which is

the space they occupy in an ecosystem. An example can be seen simply in how lions hunt wildebeest, this maintains the population of the wildebeest, ensuring they are not taking over the territory and allows the lions to survive. The essential population control limits the amount of grazing done by the wildebeest, which allows for there to be enough for not only them, but all the other animals in the area (Walpole, Merson-Davies, & Dann, 2011). Thus we can see that each animal serves its purpose in the ecosystem, if one species in particular were to suddenly go extinct due to poaching, hunting, or wildlife trafficking, then it would alter the ecosystem as a whole. The entire habitat would be thrown out of balance and the animals would either have to adapt to the new changes or they may completely abandon the area and migrate.

In the International Relations theory of Green Political Theory, there is the key principle of the rejection of anthropocentrism, which is the notion that believes that human beings are the most important entity. Instead, the theory promotes the idea of ecocentrism in that there is an independent value of ecosystems and all living beings. In short, human beings are only one part of the ecosystem, however what happens when instead of living harmoniously and protecting each other we begin to attack each other? Wildlife traffickers, poachers, and illegal hunters are all human beings committing acts of terror against innocent animals for money. Wildlife trafficking, should it continue at the pace it is today, will slowly but surely cause great damage towards the animals, their population, their habitats, and the ecosystem as a whole. We, as human beings, are living in an era of environmental crisis that we ourselves are causing. This era is defined by the rapid decline of biological diversity and major environmental changes

that are inseparable from humans (Aisher, 2016). This is why, at its core, the issue of wildlife trafficking is a global issue that could potentially damage the Earth to a point of no return should it not be given the attention it requires to prevent such events.

Recent studies have been conducted in regards to the connection of the endangerment of a species and the impacts it has had on the local community. The Pangolin, an animal native to Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, has been noted to be the most trafficked animal in the world. The animal is largely trafficked for consumption and use in traditional medicines. In some countries, the Pangolin's scales are believed to be a cure for ailments as minor as acne to fatal ones like cancer. Due to this belief, the pangolin is highly sought after in parts of the world such as China where a kilogram of scales sells for nearly \$1,000 (Aisher, 2016). This high demand for pangolins has led them to becoming endangered, which unfortunately has created an even higher demand for even greater prices. The rarity of the species has altered the already fragile ecosystem of the mountains in which they inhabit. Locals have begun participating in the illegal trade as they have seen how valuable the animal is to so many people, leading there to be an even greater threat towards the pangolins. The people who had once regarded these animals as being valuable in the spirit realm have turned their backs in hopes of providing for themselves. This could lead to the true extinction of the pangolin should the illegal trade continue to escalate and conservation measures are not taken.

In regard to other animals, elephants are not the only animals in Africa hunted for medicinal purposes. Rhinos have been hunted savagely for their horns for years, leading to not only the endangerment of the species, but the people protecting them.

Wildlife conservationists and park rangers risk their lives every day in order to be able to protect animals and ward off poachers. (Anderson & Jooste, 2014). However, there have been many incidents in which poachers murder entire groups of rangers in order to carry out their trafficking. Africa is the second largest continent in the world and comprises of vast untouched areas for animals to roam. This in turn makes it extremely difficult for rangers to protect the animals and yet also easy for the poachers to hunt, kill, and traffic these animals and their parts. The issue of wildlife trafficking goes beyond being an environmental issue, it threatens the survival of species, human life, and the security of states. Much research done in regards to wildlife trafficking highlights the links between the wildlife traffickers, organized crime rings, local groups engaged in civil wars, and various other human actors that all aim to profit off of the death of these animals. This is why wildlife trafficking is a global issue on an environmental scale, survival scale, and a non-traditional security scale.

Past articles discuss the importance of wildlife conservation, the wrongness of wildlife trafficking, and how ultimately the extinction of these animals could alter the ecosystem drastically. However, there has been a limited amount of research connecting all three of these factors and the long term effects of the trade on our ecosystem and our survival. The world is currently facing many problems; however, this particular issue appears to be lost as it is seen as being one of many problems that must be dealt with. The research done in this project, should it succeed, may hopefully shed light on the gravity of the issue and the measures we as individuals, states, and as a global community must take to prevent any further damage.

The issue of wildlife trafficking is once again a global issue, it is an issue that is so big it encompasses each and every one of us as we make up a part of the ecosystem we are damaging. However, the issue itself is rarely regarded with the urgency and severity as other issues like climate change, pandemics, and terrorism. This research aims to bring more awareness to the issue as a whole to hopefully mend this oversight even on a small scale to eventually aid in bringing change to the world, attention to the issue, and motivation for the world to act and react.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

Based on the information provided above, the author suggests the following research questions:

1. Why is wildlife trafficking underrated as a global issue?
2. How does global wildlife trafficking affect regional ecosystems in the case of Africa?

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The objective of the research is to understand the severity of wildlife trafficking as a global issue as its effects cross borders and impact animals, people, and societies all around the world. The research aims to uncover the reasons why other global issues are given priority over the issue of wildlife trafficking even though it impacts the world

on many levels. This will be done through examining various factors within the issue such as the crime sector, wildlife extinction, and how wildlife trafficking ultimately creates a rift in the ecosystem that may not be able to fixed. Furthermore, the research hopes to uncover ways in which the world and the global community could highlight the importance of tackling wildlife trafficking through either stronger security measures, education, or punishments to ensure that we as a global community can continue to exist and protect not only ourselves but each and everything existing in our ecosystem.

The research also seeks to uncover how this non-traditional security threat impacts the environment and understand how and whether or not this non-traditional security issue threatens the sovereignty and safety of states or even bordering states. The research will discuss the connections between various types of non-traditional security issues such as wildlife trafficking, poaching, and the pandemic.

#### **1.4 Research Significance**

The research conducted will provide a greater understanding on the issue of wildlife trafficking as a global issue that must be taken as seriously as other non-traditional security issues such as terrorism and climate change. This particular research topic is significant as the issue, if not addressed, could ultimately endanger and alter the ecosystem as a whole which would impact the lives of each and every living being in the world and would create a threat to our survival. The research will be beneficial in enriching the minds of the readers by increasing their awareness of the

issue at hand and encouraging them to support efforts in wildlife conservation to aid in ending wildlife trafficking. Though the research conducted has focused on the continent of Africa, wildlife trafficking occurs all around the world to various degrees and impacts multiple communities and ecosystems. Southeast Asia, for example, is home to many endangered and sought after animals such as tigers and pangolins that are prone to wildlife trafficking, and if these animals are not protected it could lead to their extinction. This research will hopefully play a role in increasing interest in the topic at hand and hopefully inspire further research in regards to the topic with a focus in different countries and continents to create a greater field of knowledge that may once again not only aid in preventing wildlife trafficking but ending it completely as education may only be once step in the right direction but it is a significant one. The study will also contribute to the existing literature on the topic which will enrich the knowledge in the field of International Relations.

### **1.5 Structure of Thesis**

This thesis contains five chapters. Chapter one consists of an introduction to the research topic of wildlife trafficking as a global issue. The chapter also provides a brief overview of the scope of the research as it presents the research questions and the objectives of the research.

Chapter two of the research details the literary, theoretical, and conceptual framework of the research. This chapter discusses prior research done on similar topics that has had an influence on the decision to create the research. This chapter also

discusses the overarching theory of the research which is the International Relations theory of Critical Theory, Global Ecology, Critical Security Theory and the concepts that stem from the theory.

Chapter three consists of the methodology of the research. The chapter discusses the qualitative approach to research. It also details the research methods that have been used in the research which are the case study and the critical research method.

Chapter four of the research details the analysis of the research which is broken down into several subsections that lead towards the conclusion of the research. The chapter has been divided into two main sections that aim to answer the respective research questions of; (1) Why is wildlife trafficking underrated as a global issue? And (2) How does wildlife trafficking affect regional ecosystems in the case of Africa? In order to do so, chapter four begins with an exploration of the topic of security and wildlife trafficking as a global security issue. The chapter then goes on to explain the research findings as to how wildlife trafficking has impacted humans and the environment and why it is an issue that should be prioritized and not underrated as a global issue. The second half of chapter four focuses on the topic of regional ecosystems and researches the impacts wildlife trafficking has had on the regional ecosystems of the three case studies of Malawi, Kenya, and Cameroon.

Chapter five of the research paper comprises of the conclusion of the analysis of the research as a whole. The chapter answers the two research questions and also provides recommendations made that have accumulated throughout the entire research

process in regards to further research, policy recommendations, or actions that can be taken to help end wildlife trafficking and protect our ecosystem.

