

COPYRIGHT NOTICE:

**Janet Roitman: Fiscal Disobedience**

is published by Princeton University Press and copyrighted, © 2004, by Princeton University Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.

For COURSE PACK and other PERMISSIONS, refer to entry on previous page. For more information, send e-mail to [permissions@pupress.princeton.edu](mailto:permissions@pupress.princeton.edu)

## Chapter One

### *Introduction: An Anthropology of Regulation and Fiscal Relations*

---

**I**N HIS 1993 televised campaign speech, John Fru Ndi, presidential candidate and head of the main opposition party, the Social Democratic Front (SDF), referred to the ambitions the people of Cameroon harbor for their children. He spoke of the environment and the economy: “The land is rich, we are hardworking. So why can we no longer afford to send our children to school?” Cameroon has some of “the best engineers, doctors, teachers . . . and *bayam-sellam* in the world.” A pidgin term, from “buy and sell ’em,” the *bayam-sellam* are mostly peddlers, itinerant traders, and small-scale merchants generally associated with the opposition to the Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple Camerounais (RDPC), the reigning party led by President Paul Biya. In his address, Fru Ndi urged the people to vote for “change” as opposed to continuity, insisting that thirty years of “terror” has “destroyed the imagination and energies” of Cameroonians. Just after Fru Ndi’s speech, a campaign advertisement run by the incumbent, Paul Biya, also made reference to “the ruined economy.” Cameroon had been “brought to its knees,” declared Biya. This, he said, was a result of “vandalism” and “banditry” committed and inspired by the opposition, insinuating that the *bayam-sellam*, who largely follow the opposition, participated in their own economic demise. Against images of street violence, mass demonstrations, charred cars, and smoke-filled streets, Biya asked, “Is this change?” This footage was ostensibly taken during the mass strikes and demonstrations of the opposition-led “dead cities,” or Opération Villes Mortes, campaign. But it is not clear whether the smoke-filled atmosphere was caused by burning cars and tires left in the wake of demonstrators or rather by tear gas sprayed on the latter by the police and army. A Mr. Gassagay then appeared on screen to withdraw his candidacy. As leader of the Front National du Progrès (FNP),

## CHAPTER ONE

“for youth,” he explained that he was stepping aside “in the name of peace.” He was choosing “peace over wealth.”<sup>1</sup>

This choice between peace and wealth seems to be archetypal insofar as it partakes in the perennial history of social mobilization for redistribution. And yet despite its generality and durability, the specificity of such an option is, of course, found in local histories; its terms are not universal. This book is an attempt to appreciate the terms of that history and thus to understand the nature of present-day conflict and change in a particular part of the world. Today, references to “wealth” and “peace” structure debates in Cameroon, and in the Chad Basin more generally. To a great extent, these debates can be described as controversy over historical understandings of, on the one hand, *the appropriate or legitimate foundations of wealth* and, on the other hand, *the forces that transgress or destabilize representations and idioms of sociability and unity*.

At a very basic level, then, this book is about the work of historical inscription of truths about wealth creation and sociability. This involves, in part, continuity of practices, of modes of representation, and of narrative acts. However, while often efficient, the process of historical inscription takes place in a heterogeneous field. The possibility for variable and conflicting appropriations of concepts and practices is thus part of what defines a power situation and makes the exercise of power a ceaseless endeavor, being reactualized in myriad situations and against all other possible ways of rendering particular ideas and judgments conceivable. Furthermore, such situations often occasion moments of rupture or intense disagreement about appropriate and valid behavior insofar as they entail the redefinition and refiguring of key concepts that regulate social relations. In that sense, although this is a story about historical inscription and its effects on a particular community of people, it is also an account of the creases and fractures that can be discerned by tracing the various sources of political vocabularies and conceptual domains from which economic notions have arisen.<sup>2</sup> History implies contingency, and the very fact of heterogeneity means that concepts about the economy, or of the economy, are shot

<sup>1</sup> It was rumored that this party (FNP) was created by the party in power (RDPC) to compete for the young voters who were drawn to the opposition (SDF). In his withdrawal, Gassagay transferred his support to the ruling RDPC. These presentations were made on Saturday, October 11, 1993, the night prior to the presidential elections, on CRTV, Cameroon.

<sup>2</sup> I am taking my cue here from Foucault’s work (1979b, 1989, 1991) on the political genealogies of economic categories (e.g., “welfare” or “interests”) and practices (e.g., statistics) in his writing on how, in the eighteenth century, population became the “terrain par excellence of government” and political economy emerged as a new form of power. Original accounts of the emergence and institutionalization of political categories that become essential regulatory mechanisms have also been put forth by Meuret 1988; Miller and Rose 1990; Daly 1991. Their work has greatly inspired my own.

through with multiple histories.<sup>3</sup> While ever present, the latter are most evident to us in times of conflict, when the terms of logical practice are interrogated and the intelligibility of the exercise of power is not necessarily taken for granted.

This point becomes clear when one considers, for example, how economic concepts and institutions, such as tax and price, are political technologies that serve to constitute “that which is to be governed” or, in this case, a field of regulatory intervention based on a set of presuppositions about the nature of economic life and economic objects. Such political technologies are mechanisms that render aspects of social life both intelligible and governable. They are thus not simply instrumental methods for obtaining or assuring power; they are, rather, the very material form of power itself.<sup>4</sup>

### Claims to Wealth: Incivisme Fiscal

My fixation on the problem of regulatory authority arose, quite frankly, because the topic was thrown up to me by the people among whom I lived. From 1992 to 2002, I lived, during various extended periods, in the northern part of Cameroon and in N’Djamena, Chad.<sup>5</sup> This part of Cameroon tapers into a slight triangle, pointing up to Lake Chad and thinning out between the economic weight of its westerly neighbor, Nigeria, and the explosive power of its incessantly warring eastern neighbor, Chad. The northern region of

<sup>3</sup> I make a distinction between discourses *of* the economy, which are productive and are constitutive of the very field of “economy,” and discourses *on* the economic, which refer to that field. Economic truth is produced in the very inscription of the boundaries of “the economic,” as Foucault argued in his demonstration of the historical—and hence contingent—construction of the limits of “the disciplines,” or the domain of “economics” per se, from the other social sciences. It is also a matter of inscribing that truth in the material world. See chapter 6 (“Échanger”) in Foucault 1966; and see Tribe 1978; Hacking 1983; Tomlinson 1983.

<sup>4</sup> This perspective is greatly influenced by Foucault’s writing on liberalism as a modern form of political intervention, or what he called the arts of political rationality. It is important to signal the limits of the relationship between the context of my work and Foucault’s interest in liberalism as an ethos of government entailing a particular and historically contingent approach to the problem of government. Evidently, liberalism and neoliberalism are historical arrangements that have emerged and evolved in very specific historical circumstances, which have not obtained in the same manner and with similar results in the Chad Basin. Nonetheless, Foucault’s approach to the conditions of possibility for the emergence of specific forms of political reason, especially his *methods* for understanding the limits and objectives of government, have been inspiration to my own approach. Cf. Foucault 1989: 99–120. And refer most notably to Rose and Miller 1992; Barry, Osborne, and Rose 1996.

<sup>5</sup> Maroua, northern Cameroon: July 1992 to August 1992, October 1992 to December 1993, and October 2001 to June 2002. N’Djamena, Chad: January 1997 to November 1997. The term “northern Cameroon” is a formulation from the early days of French colonization. While this was not an official administrative cadre at that time, the term came to refer to an

Cameroon is the home of the late Ahmadou Ahidjo, who presided over the country through the one-party state, the Union Nationale Camerounaise (UNC), from 1958 to 1982. Ahidjo rose to power in the wake of almost a decade of armed struggle for decolonization, which makes Cameroon somewhat of an exception on the African continent (cf. Um Nyobe 1984, 1989; Mbembe 1989, 1996). The nationalist movement failed in its endeavor, leading to the installation of personalities who had been long-standing or were newly formed clients of the French government, many of whom came from the northern part of the country. During this time, the fairly arid savanna region of the north, which depended largely on groundnut and cotton production, benefited greatly from financial advantages accorded to northerners, such as nonguaranteed bank credits and contracts for public works projects. Ahidjo retired from the presidency in 1982, leaving his place to Paul Biya through a constitutional succession. In 1984, tensions between the northern-based old guard, still led by Ahidjo, who had retained the presidency of the UNC even after his retirement from state power, and the newly installed regime led by Biya resulted in a coup d'état. The attempted putsch failed, and Biya consolidated power by ousting northern political figures and by forming, in 1985, the RDPC, which replaced the UNC as the only legal political party in the country (see Bayart 1979, 1986). The RDPC has retained its hold on power up until today, despite recent modifications in the political landscape.

One of the most significant of these changes occurred in 1990, when independent political parties were legalized in Cameroon. This was a response to pressures from international donors, whose interventions increased during the late 1980s with the dramatic downturn in the once very prosperous economy, and the emergence of a national movement demanding political reforms.<sup>6</sup> While the legalization of opposition parties was accompanied by plans for multiparty elections and increased freedoms for an independent press, the Biya administration refused to respond to certain demands of the opposition. The call for a national conference to devise a new electoral code

---

administrative entity in 1961. In 1976, the Northern Province covered 35 percent of the national territory and included about 29 percent of its population. In 1983, the Northern Province was partitioned, forming the three provinces of Adamawa, the North, and the Extreme North. Today, the Extreme North Province includes an estimated 2,838,000 people, and the town of Maroua, where I lived, is inhabited by an estimated 396,000 people (Seignobos and Iyebi-Mandjek 2000: 61; and see Paba Salé 1980). Most of the conversations and interviews referred to herein were conducted in either French or Fulfulde (Fulani), or a mix of the two. Some interviews near or in Chad were conducted in Arabic or Kanuri. Hamidou Bouba, Saibou Issa, and I undertook translations to French. All translations from French to English of conversations, dialogues, or published materials are my own.

<sup>6</sup> Pressure from donor institutions followed the signing of a stabilization agreement with the International Monetary Fund in 1988, the rescheduling of debt with the Paris Club in March 1989, and agreement on a World Bank Structural Adjustment Loan in May 1989. The

and revise the constitution in keeping with political reforms was most notably ignored. Nevertheless, Cameroonians pushed for change in their spring of 1991 (see Champaud 1991; Noble 1991; *Africa Confidential* 1991a, 1991b; Monga 1993; Kom 1993; Roitman 1996). In the face of the regime's intransigence, the declaration of a state of emergency that put seven of ten provinces under military administration in May 1991, and in the context of extreme conditions of austerity, the National Coordination of Opposition Parties and Associations organized the Opération Villes Mortes campaign. On May 26, 1990, a pro-democracy rally was organized by the leader of the SDF, John Fru Ndi, in response to the legalization of multiparty politics and concomitant delays in the authorization of this same party. Similar demonstrations followed in other towns and cities. On the whole, Opération Villes Mortes entailed a strategy of civil disobedience, which involved a prolonged general strike, work boycotts, the refusal to pay taxes, and the use of clandestine services to deny taxation.

The Biya regime dubbed the movement *incivisme fiscal*, thus indicating that participation in the pro-democracy movement and refutation of certain instances of state power represented "uncivil" fiscal practice, being beyond the pale of civic behavior. The regime thus countered the movement by posing the question of who is a legitimate citizen. In the face of that rather extensive interpretation of the campaign, the opposition remained explicit about its aim: to undermine the fiscal base of the regime, which was said to utilize public monies in ways that did not benefit the populace. This interpretive battle is both the point of departure and the structuring theme of this book. As I observed the unfolding of this struggle between the state and its citizens, it became more and more clear to me that the pertinent question was not the outright rejection of regulatory authority or fiscal authority. Instead, I seemed to be witnessing disagreement over the *intelligibility of its exercise*. In an effort to understand the terms of that disagreement, I chose to study the ways in which tax, price, and even ideas about licit wealth and licit modes of appropriation have emerged and transformed historically in northern Cameroon, taken as part of the historical region of the Chad Basin.<sup>7</sup> Instead of assuming the nature of "tax" or "price," and hence simply analyzing contemporary resistance to taxation and fiscal authority, I attempted to clarify the ways in which certain forms of economic extraction have become normalized as part of fiscal relations. I asked certain questions: How has the right

---

histories of Cameroonian prosperity (until 1985–86) and subsequent indebtedness are recounted in *Marchés tropicaux et méditerranéens* 1976, 1988; EDIAFRIC 1984; World Bank 1989a, 1989b; *Nord-Sud Export* 1989, 1990, 1991; van de Walle 1993.

<sup>7</sup> While "the Chad Basin" is a fairly vague geographic concept, I use it here to refer to the area comprising northern Nigeria, northern Cameroon, Chad, and the Central African Republic. This is a working definition based on my research preoccupations.

to a part of people's wealth become an acceptable idea? How have specific forms of wealth been construed as legitimate targets of regulation? How have particular economic concepts, such as tax and price, emerged in a discursive field that engenders certain forms of power situations, including debt? How has the right to extract wealth via violent means (e.g., seizure) come to be deemed acceptable practice at certain moments in time, while it is rejected at others? Through these questions, I sought to understand not only how these historical institutions (tax, fiscal relations, the fiscal regime of truth) induce certain kinds of behavior (giving over tax once a year) but also how they establish the very limits of what is considered legitimate or reasonable practice.

### The Concepts and Targets of Regulation

This problem of legitimacy can only be addressed if the economy is apprehended as a political terrain. Because conflict over regulation and redistribution means taking issue with the very rules that organize and govern economic life, such strife can only be understood by examining the very conventions that give rise to the concepts and objects of an economy. In Cameroon today, debates over the nature and legitimacy of certain economic relationships (e.g., fiscal), categories (e.g., the informal sector), or events (e.g., *incivisme fiscal*) all involve interpretive battles over political vocabularies or notions of propriety, equity, justice, and social order. These controversies structure the plot of this text. In that sense, this book is about the material effects of representations. It aims to explore the relations between representational forms and social practice, or how economic truths and “true” economic practices—being *dans le vrai*—are produced in and through a discursive field of concepts and objects. This is a matter of studying, as Paul Rabinow puts it (1986: 240), a “regime of truth as an effective component in the constitution of social practices.”<sup>8</sup> It illustrates how historically specific discursive domains that establish social order, the natural state of society, the free individual, or the peaceful community inform manners of conceptualizing the economy. Nevertheless, this attempt to trace the historical constitution of economic categories and economic practices is not an effort to show how “culture” informs the objectification of the economy. Even though the pitfalls of culturalist explanations of social life have been spelled out ad infinitum (Marcus and Fischer 1986; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988; Appadurai 1986; Bayart 1996), economic practice and economic rationalities are still often depicted as being

<sup>8</sup> See especially Rabinow 1986: 238 for an elucidation of Foucault's reference to being “*dans le vrai*,” or “in the true,” an ultimate reference to Georges Canguilhem, and refer to the appendix to Foucault 1976: 215–37; 1980: 131–33.

induced by culture, or as being influenced by particular “cultural backgrounds” or symbolic repertoires. And culturalist readings of economic life have been given new vigor with the emergence of debates about “globalization” and the new wars over values (as is evidenced in Huntington 1997; Bourguinat 1998; Méda 1999; for a critique, see Roitman 2000). This approach is of course problematic, since it slights the heterogeneous practices and regimes of signification that constitute the worlds of any individual or community. As we know, reference to a person’s or to a community’s “culture” is in many ways nonsensical, since all persons and communities take part in synthetic and seemingly contradictory symbolic practices (religious, ritual, linguistic) and manners of affiliation.

To avoid the hazards of such reductionist explanations, I pay specific attention to the point that practices and concepts (economic or otherwise) have histories. By looking at the institutionalization of certain concepts and practices—for instance, the institutionalization of “tax” and “price” in Cameroon—we can glimpse the various ways in which specific economic concepts and metaphors have been assumed and performed by local actors. And by studying the institutionalization of these concepts or historical institutions, we see how their practices involve various modalities, or how they are both assumed and yet also disputed as forms of knowledge, which carry political and socioeconomic consequences for those involved. Instead of presenting representations and metaphors of the economy as an underlying generative system that induces behavior and leads to certain forms of organization, I show how, despite their efficacy, they tend to instability due to their fundamental ambivalence as institutions or political techniques. I thus try to respond to a difficult question: How does one delineate the emergent?<sup>9</sup> An answer depends upon rupture as much as continuity. It presupposes another question: In what domains are metaphors and representations *not* evident or *not* embedded over time?

In many ways, this work is a contribution to a history of the present, or an effort to demonstrate how a specific situation has become logically possible. Not an attempt to “explain” the present, this work seeks to discern a contemporary problem (see Rabinow 2003).<sup>10</sup> Specifically, it hones in on the manners in which people in the Chad Basin problematize their own relationships to economic regulatory authority, fiscal relations, and the concepts of economic regulation. In that sense, this book strives to delineate the contemporary limits of reason with respect to economic regulatory

<sup>9</sup> Put to me by Paul Rabinow during the seminar “The Production of Modernities” at the University of California, Berkeley, October 16, 1996.

<sup>10</sup> Not concerned with the “meaning” of contemporary events, this work nonetheless does not have the ambition to delineate contemporary problem spaces, an enterprise that is of another epistemological order (see Rabinow 2003 for elaboration).

authority in the Chad Basin. Instead of turning about the bottomless problem of the ontological status of particular practices or concepts—such as tax, price, wealth, debt, work, citizen, subject—it seems more worthwhile to look into the matter of their effects, or what they are producing in the world today. It is an inquiry into the productive nature of specific events. Such an endeavor asks, as I do, what is new (or not new) about regulatory authority, fiscal relations, and fiscal practice? What is new about recently articulated claims to wealth? And what is new about manners of representing peace? Answering these questions means taking note of the effects of power, or the ways in which the exigencies of discursive formations, conceptual frameworks, and specific rationalities are taken up by subjects who are “caught up in a power situation of which they themselves are the bearers” (Foucault 1979a: 201; cf. Foucault 1990 [1978]). It is about how human beings become subjects of particular kinds of knowledge, and how they become subjects to themselves. This is not merely a matter of domination over subjects, or the ways that individuals are structured by forms of knowledge and technologies. It is an inquiry into the ways in which techniques of the self are part of the very process of domination. It is clearly about what transpires when power is exercised over people, but power is not its ultimate object of inquiry. As Foucault said so plainly, “It is not power, but the subject, which is the general theme of my research” (1982: 209).

To circumscribe that problem, I take *incivisme fiscal* to be an event.<sup>11</sup> In other words, as a moment of struggle, it is a productive event in which the concepts, metaphoric relationships, and suppositions that serve to theorize and hence delineate the most appropriate means and ends of power are challenged, reviewed, and reconfigured. Although a moment of political conflict, it cannot be reduced to the mere jockeying of social groups for control over material resources. Disagreement over the intelligibility of regulatory power and fiscal relations goes to the heart of the problem of power by questioning the modes of classification and standards of evaluation that give order to hierarchies of value and establish the logics of practice.

This means that Cameroonians evaluate the allegedly impending choice between peace and wealth against the register of various claims to truth about the economy, economic relations, and regulatory authority. These claims make up a heterogeneous field, the state now being one among many contenders for unconditional authority over fiscal relations. And while sources of truth about the economy are always and everywhere heterogeneous and emergent—that is, economic knowledge about and of the

<sup>11</sup> On the construction of narrative and the event, cf., for example, White 1987; Trouillot 1995. For a brilliant interpretation of the productive nature of an event—the failure of the French Second Republic and the emergence of “society” and “the social” as preeminent political references—see Donzelot 1994.

economy is always organized against other, contending orderings—the discontinuity of regulatory authority has been exacerbated by the effects of economic collapse, national economic and political reforms, and the evident inefficacy of the predominant narrative of “economic development.” Cameroonians perceive a lapse in the material potential for, and guarantee of, social mobility, which implies skepticism about representations of that possibility and that assurance.<sup>12</sup> This involves uncertainty about continuity, immutability, inevitability, and the natural quality of sources of wealth and prosperity and the putative progress of “development.”<sup>13</sup> One might say, then, that the attenuation of social obligation inherent in certain forms of exchange and the concurrent suspension of confidence in the efficacy of state regulation and social mechanisms of redistribution indicate that certain historical understandings of the nature of wealth and wealth generation are no longer taken for granted. This is part of what I outline in the following chapters. This particular story is about the Chad Basin, but it reflects the more general point that “crisis” on the African continent is not simply a failure in an overarching structure of explanation or metanarrative (cf. Ferguson 1999). It is also, or perhaps more so, the destabilization and transformation of modalities for the self-regulation of society.

Contrary to appearances, the nationwide *Villes Mortes* campaign was not an amorphous uprising for some kind of dramatic “change.” Nor was it the tide of “society” rising against the wall of “the state” (to refer to the classic Clastres 1989). Instead, citizens took issue with the nature of their economic relationships to the state; they questioned the legitimacy of regulatory authority, the logical bases for fiscal interventions, and the very concept of wealth as a public versus a private good. Furthermore, their modes of questioning and their forms of resistance were not unlimited. The contours of dissent were delineated by the very conceptual limits of the theories and practices that have defined the histories of regulation, fiscal practice, and the fiscal subject in the region. The chapters that follow pay specific attention to the histories of those theories and practices in order to surmise the

<sup>12</sup> I am implying that representations of economic organization and its implied teleology are as significant as the actual effects of material redistribution, since, regardless of real social and economic mobility, the understanding that life according to the logic implied in such organization will bring rewards is part of the efficacy of such representations. This point is developed in Mbembe and Roitman 1995.

<sup>13</sup> Some see this as a general crisis in the metanarrative of economic development as modernization. For one example, cf. Ferguson 1999. However, the interpretive power of abstract universalism and linear causality has been in question for several decades. And the crisis in the universalist pretensions of the narrative defining capitalist development as unambiguous linear progression and the privileged signifier of modernity has been the topic of commentary on the nature of post-Fordist forms of production and exchange (Offe 1985; Lash and Urry 1987; Jameson 1984; Harvey 1989). Despite these treatises, the desire for certainty about economic development as modernization is alive and well on the African continent, as Ferguson notes.

contemporary effects of historical modes and sites of regulation. In particular, I outline the possibilities for enunciation today by tracing out the various ways in which targets of regulation have been circumscribed through and in power relations over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In consequence, this book is fashioned through a series of moves that bring to the fore crucial moments in which particular targets of regulation have been circumscribed as such. In each case, I explore how political rationalities associated with specific forms of power (e.g., the nineteenth-century Muslim jihad, French colonization) have given rise to a logic of economic governance that, while institutionalized over time, has had to constantly reinvent itself in its effort to domesticate potential targets of economic regulation. This includes the institutionalization of what I refer to as the “tax-price” complex, which founded French colonial power, as well as the circumscription of “the slave” during the nineteenth century Muslim jihad and of “the floating population” (*la population flottante*) during French colonization as particular forms of wealth and targets of regulation. These moments inspired—and were inspired by—intense conflict and debate over legitimate modes of alienation and appropriation, such as seizure and taxing. They also involved debate and struggle over the nature of wealth and property, such as spoils captured in conquest and the French franc. And they posed questions about the limits of productive versus unproductive space, as represented by the frontier or “the bush.” The particular manner by which “tax-price,” “the slave,” and the population flottante were institutionalized as economic categories and targets of regulatory authority has had specific effects on representations of wealth and legitimate modes of seizure and appropriation, as well as resistance to such acts.

To take the case of tax-price—and to simplify for the time being—the materialization of French colonial power occurred, most obviously, through the institutionalization of *l'impôt*, or the head tax. The latter presupposed the insertion of French currency into circuits of exchange as well as its imposition as a primary referent of value. This meant that the colonized were to evaluate goods and exchanges in terms of certain equivalents based on the metropolitan measure of wealth. Hence the institutionalization of the *impôt* during colonization necessitated the establishment, at the same time, of a particular notion of price so that Cameroonians would become consumers of the French monetary sign, as opposed to other signs of value that circulated and underpinned various social hierarchies in the region. This particular notion of price was instituted at the same time as the colonial head tax, such that price figured as a necessary complement of tax and was objectified at this time as part of the discursive field of economic regulation. Tax-price became a political technology that exemplified the materialization of colonial power in its fiscal form. Through it, Cameroonians became

both consumers of colonial currency and sources of European monetary wealth, or the fiscal subjects of French colonial empire. This meant that they assumed the idea of the French colonial administration's right to a part of their wealth, as well as the notion that certain things represented "private" wealth, and that they could be translated into "public" wealth. This act of translation took place through the tax-price precept, or the targeting of price as an object of regulation to ensure tax. For instance, the colonial authorities were critical of local accounting techniques, such as rounding up and bargaining, because they settled on "wrong" prices. In hopes of assuring "true" prices, the French authorities applied pricing policy, or price controls, which set forth the idea of consumer protection. In the application of this policy, local people took up a particular political rationale, and they did so seemingly *for themselves*, since pricing policy was formulated as consumer protection. The fiscal subject thus emerged as the consumer-taxpayer.

Obviously, during colonization, the tax-price complex was not inscribed on a blank slate. Like the French franc, it was subsumed by, and articulated with, extant and contending modes of evaluation and competing monetary signs in the region. These included the signs of wealth and value associated with past conquests, such as seizure and tribute, which were critical to the slave states and jihad; the institutional remnants of prior European colonial powers (e.g., the German mark, the British sterling); and regional networks of exchange and redistribution that were inherent to the larger political economy of the Chad Basin. Because of this, and as the refractory history of the institutionalization of tax-price reveals, the boundaries of value presupposed by the French colonial regime of value were constantly undermined and altered. The very integrity of colonial regulation was uncertain, since the French governed the economy defined by the newly instated borders of present-day Cameroon in the name of what was then deemed not only the penultimate paradigm of social order but also the most serious potential source of disorder: national unity within colonial empire. Colonial power governed the economy in the name of national integrity even while—or surely because—that very integrity was by no means assured (as indicated by Joseph 1977; Bayart 1979; Mbembe 1996). Thus the constant work of regulation—and even its *raison d'être*—has been to circumscribe and govern the social elements that have historically summarized sources of instability with respect to price, subversion with respect to tax, and transgression with respect to national identity. During the colonial period, that social element was pegged by the authorities as the "intermediaries," or the population flottante, which emerged with tax-price as a specific category and a primary target of regulation.

The events of the 1990s revealed the recursive nature of this constant work of domesticating supposedly destabilizing social forces. During the

Opération Villes Mortes campaign, or what was castigated as incivisme fiscal, the basis of the state's claim to a part of people's wealth was brought into question. Through this event, the idea of the state's right to a part of citizens' wealth was challenged. However, rather than an outright rejection of the principle of the fiscal relationship, people made claims to the guarantee of access to wealth, or the means to pay tax. In doing so, they raised the question of the very foundations of wealth in the Chad Basin today. The post-colonial regime's response to that problem has been consistent with the political rationale of consumer protection—even in spite of recent economic liberalization programs, which eradicated official price controls. Certain practices, such as price bargaining, and certain economic agents, such as the intermediaries and itinerant traders, have thus remained targets of disciplinary authority, since they are deemed contrary to consumer protection and a particular vision of what constitutes “reasonable profits” or economic justice. But, to a large extent, local people no longer judge the state's regulation of this behavior and these economic agents according to the logic of consumer protection. Historically located as the sources of price instability and tax evasion, the intermediaries and the peripatetic—or the population flottante—are increasingly perceived as critical agents in the process of wealth creation. Furthermore, their recourse to rounding up, bargaining, and negotiation is not necessarily perceived as economically problematic—the source of inflation; illogical and premodern; anticonsumer—since these practices are often viewed as the very means to account for social and economic differences, and hence promote certain forms of economic redistribution.

Debates that arose out of incivisme fiscal centered upon this question of how best to determine price, or the most just price. I argue that they also raised questions about relations of dependency and debt that are inherent to pricing mechanisms, or manners of establishing value. The debts, the social obligations, and especially the socioeconomic inequalities that are induced by particular manners of establishing “the just price” have come under scrutiny, being seen by some as normal practice and yet rejected by others as inappropriate. These divergent opinions reflect disagreement over present modes of redistribution and the means by which socioeconomic differences are inscribed through particular economic concepts and their attendant practices. To illustrate this point, I look at what people now refer to as “unsanctioned wealth,” or wealth that is generated in exchanges that take place outside the confines of official regulatory relations. In elucidating the signification of that concept for people in northern Cameroon, I explore the ways in which wealth generation can be viewed as either normal and just (sanctioned wealth) or deviant and inequitable (unsanctioned wealth). Today, there is not much consensus about these distinctions in Cameroon and the Chad Basin, especially since international borders,

the frontier, and the bush have become important sites of economic accumulation and socioeconomic mobility. Many of those who partake in economic activities based in these unregulated spaces subvert extant patterns of redistribution; they exercise claims to wealth through violent means, such as seizure and *razzia*, thus insisting upon the right to wealth through conquest and asserting that spoils are licit forms of wealth. They demonstrate that debt and social obligation are not necessarily insolvable situations.

This controversy over the nature of licit wealth reflects contemporary transformations regarding the frontiers of wealth creation and the very foundations of wealth. Since the nineteenth century, historical representations of the foundations of wealth have included the slave, the intermediaries, the population *flottante*, the civil servant, the citizen, and so forth. Rather than a linear succession, these categories are constitutive of the discursive field of regulatory objects, having emerged and receded at various moments in time. Indeed, their vacillations, which reverberate through the following pages, are indicative of the ways in which regulatory authority in this region has been an unstable mode of power—hence its constant efforts to govern the frontiers of wealth creation, which include the literal frontiers of the country as well as the conceptual frontiers of the economy. This last point is underscored herein at myriad points, all of which indicate how the foundations of wealth and the targets of regulation are inscribed in an ambivalent space. The latter is most often referred to as “the bush,”<sup>14</sup> but it is more generally indicative of various forces that have been historically located as those that transgress or destabilize sociability, the national economy, and national unity. These include, once again, the intermediaries as well as the heterogeneous and amorphous category of those who work the borders: the population *flottante*—or Fru Ndi’s “*bayam-sellam*,” Biya’s “*vandals and bandits*,” and Gassagay’s “*youth*.” But they also involve, for example, military personnel doubling as customs officials and armed road bandits working for highly organized gangs. These are, for the most part, underemployed, unemployed, and dispossessed people who have been claimed by various parties and for various reasons as the driving force behind the rise in unregulated economic activities. The representation of this category of people in terms of certain paradigms of social order is inherent to the ways they are represented as economic agents. They are theorized by local people either as the very source of subversion—and hence represent criminal, illegitimate economic activity; the transgression of national borders and national identity; and the demise of the nation-state—or, to the contrary, as economic empowerment and change, thus representing productive, rational economic behavior, national renewal, and even democratization. Ultimately,

<sup>14</sup> Referred to by locals as either “*ladde*” (Fulfulde) or “*la brousse*” (French).

these various representations interrogate the logics of redistribution and regulation, which are at the heart of contemporary debates in the Chad Basin today.

### **Dispossession and Wealth Creation: The Ambivalent Grounds of the Fiscal Subject**

When reflecting on the ways in which redistribution works through regulation, I came to think about the very nature of wealth in the Chad Basin. As noted earlier, I have thus asked questions about how “things” are circumscribed as “wealth,” representing a particular form of value, and how some forms of wealth have come to be defined as “licit” (slaves at one point, European currency at another). I ask how certain forms of wealth move in and out of “licit” and “illicit” status, such as “spoils” in former slaving economies and now in economic activities related to banditry and war. And I inquire as to how specific manners of appropriation and authority, or the right to a part of people’s wealth defined in particular forms of value, have come to be accepted as valid in some moments while they are contested in others. This brings me to the problem of subjectivity: How is it that those subjected to fiscal interventions and regulatory authority become, to repeat, “caught up in a power situation of which they themselves are the bearers”? How are the exigencies of regulatory authority, and power situations more generally, taken up by its very subjects?

Because subjectivity is a fairly amorphous and extremely complex question, it is perhaps best taken in a somewhat limited way. For my purposes, this amounts to thinking about how the fiscal subject is delimited as a target of wealth and how that subject assumes this location as wealth and as a bearer of particular kinds of wealth, to which rights are conditional and contingent. In the context of the Chad Basin, this has forced me to grapple with the ways in which targets of wealth have been fixed both physically and conceptually in situations of constant physical mobility as well as social upheaval caused over the past decades by slaving, conquest, jihad, colonialism, war, poverty, and factional violence. Historically speaking, wealth has been a moving target in the region: cattle, slaves, nomads, dependents, and so forth. With the installation of tax-price as the primary means of regulation and redistribution during colonization, methods of fixing were transformed. And yet, even though the colonizers located the “head” (as in “the head tax” or “the head of the family”) as both the primary source and the primary target of wealth, mobility remained an integral aspect of wealth creation, since local people undertook *la quête monétaire*, or the quest for currency to pay tax, which provoked movement. In that sense, circulation and displacement were reaffirmed as effective modes of wealth creation—as

they have been over the centuries in this region of slaving and trading across the Sahara, where dominion has not always entailed presence. Thus those who have been forced to circulate incessantly for lack of resources are also those who have etched out the frontiers of wealth creation. They thus hold an ambivalent position in the history of regulation, being both expendable and essential to the reproduction and aggrandizement of national wealth and certain power relations. This is one of the subthemes of this book.

Today, the quest for currency continues and is surely exacerbated by newfound political and especially debt relations, such as those inherent to structural adjustment programs and even relations with nongovernmental organizations (see Elyachar 2001, forthcoming; Spivak 1999). Indeed, most people in the Chad Basin are living in a thick web of debt and liability spun out of local, regional, and international relationships. And yet here, at the edge of the desert in the midst of austerity and arrears, one finds a bastion of innovation and mobility. Amazingly, the contemporary drive for deregulation and privatization in an area marked by slaving, ongoing factional fighting, and recent regional warfare has not decimated the possibilities for livelihood. While the dissipation of the material basis of authoritarian rule has forced regimes of the region to undertake economic reforms defined by World Bank structural adjustment programs, these have only aggravated conditions of austerity (*Le Messager* 1993; Lottin 1994; Coussy and Vallin 1996). Nonetheless, having seen the postindependence economic boom dissipate in a matter of years, people not only survive but create economic futures. We find the odd pairing of dispossession and wealth creation, which was, for me, the constant paradox of life in the Chad Basin (as reflected upon in Roitman 1998b, forthcoming b; see also Comaroff and Comaroff 2000).

This paradox is partially produced by men and movement, or men in movement. When traveling through the dusty villages and arid cities of northern Cameroon and Chad, one meets up with a swirl of men—and especially young men—who are perpetually crossing borders, circulating between various national capitals, roaming the expanses of the bush, traversing mountain passes, switching deftly between myriad currencies, exchanging identity cards and birth certificates, and incessantly inventing ways of making money. These people partake in what are generally understood to be unregulated economic exchanges and financial relations. In the Chad Basin, they work alongside *les coupeurs de route* (those who cut off the roads).<sup>15</sup> These are groups of organized road bandits that have become a regional phenomenon linked to transnational flows. Composed of all nationals

<sup>15</sup> This phenomenon became most intense in the 1990s, being labeled a “war” by the press: Soudan 1996; Dorcé 1996; *N’djamena Hebdo* 1997; Pideu 1995.

of the Chad Basin—Nigerians, Cameroonians, Chadians, Sudanese, and citizens of the Central African Republic and Niger—they are connected into regional and international markets in small arms and money counterfeiting. Most important, they establish and participate in a network of economic exchanges and employment relations that found a significant mode of accumulation in the region. Generally interpreted as existing beyond the state or even antistate, their tactics of mobility and misdemeanor are essential to the reconstitution of state power today. As part of the genealogy of that indeterminate and ever-elusive category, the population flottante, those who are on the frontiers of wealth creation in this time of indebtedness and austerity have become new targets of state regulation.

No doubt, these phenomena are rather indicative of the futures of state power, considering that, as in many parts of the world, unregulated markets constitute the contemporary frontiers of wealth creation.<sup>16</sup> In the Chad Basin, the most lucrative of these are based on regional and international networks of trade and finance. While these have historical precedents in the trans-Saharan and east-west Sahelian economies, their resurgence in recent times is in part due to the effective incorporation and novel use of resources derived from international markets. As elsewhere on the continent, the demise of certain markets (e.g., export crop commodities)—allegedly the foremost cause of the marginalization of African economies from the world economy (Callaghy and Ravenhill 1993; Castells 1998: 70–165; Bach 1998)—and the proliferation of certain resources for trade and accumulation (e.g., drugs, small arms) have resulted in a drive for new forms of economic integration (Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou 1997: esp. 18–22). These include high-risk and hence lucrative ventures such as the trade in small arms flowing through Sudan, Libya, Chad, Cameroon, Nigeria, Niger, and Algeria; provisioning of ongoing conflicts in Niger, Chad, the Central African Republic, and Sudan, which involves transiting petrol, hardware, electronics, grain, cement, detergent, and (mostly stolen) cars and four-wheel-drive trucks; the ivory trade centered around Lake Chad and the Central African Republic; the transfer of drugs between the Pakistani crescent, Nigeria, and Western Europe; counterfeiting operations in Cameroon and Nigeria; and large-scale, highly organized highway banditry.<sup>17</sup>

Today, the transgression of physical frontiers (e.g., national borders) and conceptual boundaries (e.g., spoils becoming licit wealth) is critical to

<sup>16</sup> Or what are often quite misleadingly summarized as the “informal economy” (for a critique, see Roitman 1990). On the productive and generative capacities of unregulated markets, see, among others, Bayart 1994.

<sup>17</sup> On Kalashnikovs, see *Jeune Afrique* 1992. On the continental drug economy, see Observatoire Géopolitique des Drogues 1995. On petrol smuggling, cf. Herrera 1998. On highway banditry, see Pideu 1995; Soudan 1996; Dorcé 1996; *N'Djamena Hebdo* 1997. More generally, see Bennafla 1996, 2001; Grégoire 1998.

productive activity and the production of new forms of knowledge about the possibility of such activity.<sup>18</sup> In the Chad Basin, the transgression of national economies and political regimes is a border and bush phenomenon. The political frontier and the economy of the bush are defined by new concepts of wealth (e.g., spoils) and manners of appropriating wealth (e.g., rights-in-seizure). But these are not marginal: these concepts and practices are assumed by those who work the bush and border *as well as* those tending to the state bureaucracy and the national economy. States of dispersion are thus essential to wealth creation and the continuity of state power as much as immobility and permanence, the alleged bases for predictability in economic affairs and the rational-legal bureaucracy.

This point is especially underscored herein through this review of various, historical modes of governing in the region, which indicates how certain forms of political mediation, such as alliance and tribute, have been inherent to the exercise of power over people and wealth, as opposed to territory. During the nineteenth century, for instance, the exercise of rights over wealth issuing from conquest was not necessarily dependent upon the control of territory; certain rights inhered in states of movement and migration, making the right to spoils licit wealth. Today we witness debates over seizure as an appropriate mode of appropriation and over the nature of wealth that is attained through seizure. As in the past, these debates turn about particular questions: What do movement, migration, and flight signify? What is the status of wealth produced through conquest and raiding? What is the status of the limit zones—the borders and the bush—where such wealth is produced? And what is the status of those who regulate these zones and those who secure livelihood within them? This might be thought of as a pluralizing moment,<sup>19</sup> when the possibilities for reinterpretations of given relationships give rise to novel or modified ones, in this case engendering supplementary definitions of licit wealth and legitimate manners of appropriation. And with that expansion in the field of “the economic,” so also “the fiscal subject” has come to mean new things. This is part of the story that follows: how the citizen’s relationship to the state is being transformed by certain, increasingly prevalent practices of wealth creation (seizure), manners of signifying licit wealth (spoils), and the exercise of power over such wealth (regulatory authority). But in order to tell that story, we have to first consider the forms of power that give rise to and act upon the fiscal subject.

<sup>18</sup> The general point about transgression and creativity has been made by Bakhtine 1990; Simmel 1990; Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Appadurai 1986a; Stallybrass and White 1989. See also Balibar 2001, 2003, on the notion of the national border and the European border, used in the sense of both a literal and a figurative frontier, or a mediation.

<sup>19</sup> This is reminiscent of my previous comments on rupture, although it is inspired by W. Connolly’s notes (1996: esp. 153–54) on the “possibilities of pluralization in the present,” though I do not take up his concern with identities per se.

## The Pluralization of Regulatory Authority

Today the Chad Basin can be described as a region of competing sources of regulatory authority and welfare, or redistribution. On the basis of both official and especially unregulated commercial and financial activities, sub- and transnational regimes of accumulation have come to dominate the Nigerian, Cameroonian, Nigerien, Chadian, and Central African Republic borders. Effective authority over these exchanges and the surpluses that result from them is exercised by an amalgam of personalities associated with the state bureaucracy, the merchant elite, the military, and nonstate militia groups. They form what I have referred to as a military-commercial nexus that has become the basis of livelihood for many people in the region (Roitman 1998a, 1998b, forthcoming a). They manage to regulate local populations and regional exchanges through the exercise of the power to define access to material resources and wealth, to tax the profits of economic relationships, and to establish preeminent authority over certain sectors of economic activity. Quite simply, by controlling access to possibilities for accumulation, they determine the right to work and wealth.

Most often, those who have managed to direct the financing, labor recruitment, and material organization required by these regional networks of trade are able to do so precisely because of their participation in military-commercial relationships that allow them to exercise authority over regional economic activities, essential resources, and local populations. In Chad, one example of these military-commercial figures is what locals refer to as *les douaniers-combattants*: literally, “customs officials–soldiers” or, more prosaically, “fighting customs officials.” They comprise leaders of factions or rebel groups, such as the Mouvement pour le Développement around Lake Chad, and military personnel who find rents on fraudulent commerce more attractive than their official and most often unpaid salaries. These figures of authority compete with instances of national regulatory authority insofar as they have become the final arbiters of enrichment and employment. Through levies and duties imposed on local populations, they establish autonomous fiscal bases. In many respects, they have become the guarantors of economic security and access to wealth for local people in spite of their association with violence.

As one might imagine, emergent figures of authority associated with sub- and transnational regimes of accumulation pose problems for state regulatory authority, since their effective command over certain economic activities, regional or international resources, and local populations puts them in competition with the latter. Nevertheless, while this situation seems oppositional, it does not necessarily imply the demise of the nation-state in the face of nonnational forms of accumulation and power, as is sometimes presumed (as in Held 1995; Zartman 1995; Strange 1996; Badie 1999). As I

show herein, the relationships between the two realms are highly ambiguous; they are often reciprocal and complicitous as much as they are competitive and antagonistic. That is, while antagonisms are manifest when it comes to the state's official regulatory authority over these regional economies, complicity is evident insofar as the state is dependent upon these regional economies for rents and the means of redistribution.

Generally interpreted as beyond the state or even antistate, unregulated economic activities are often quite misleadingly summarized as “the informal economy.” While these economic activities are typical to allegedly marginal spaces, such as international borders or poor neighborhoods, the adjective “informal” is quite inappropriate. As this book makes clear, often such endeavors require and establish highly organized modalities for financing and labor recruitment, and are based on distinct hierarchies of authority relations. Furthermore, the only way in which one can indeed demarcate these activities from the official economy and official state administration is with respect to a particular shared characteristic: that is, circumventing state economic regulation. But this is a matter of a distinction between official and nonofficial, as opposed to formal versus informal. This might seem to be a semantic matter, but it is significant for two reasons. First, quite sloppily, the adjective “informal” has become a catch-all term to describe many economic pursuits and logics that are part and parcel of capitalist relations in both “the West” and “the rest.” Some seemingly informal economic realms are in fact inherently linked to international financial networks (Elyachar 2001, 2002), as well as private strategies for capital accumulation (Hibou 1997, 1999b). Second, the informal economy is often signaled as a residual category; it refers to the physical margins (borders, ghettos), as well as the margins of economic life (smuggling, artisan activities), not to mention the margins of economic theory. Yet these realms and their associated activities are sometimes at the heart of productive economic life. They are one of the few means of accessing hard currency, scarce luxury goods, and state-of-the-art technology, as well as markets in small arms, minerals, gems, and drugs. More generally, they produce wealth in times of austerity and serve as essential mediations between the state and the global economy. As such, they are important resources for representatives of the national economy, providing new rents for the management of both internal and international conflicts and the redistributive logics of national politics. They are also a means of insertion in the world economy (Bayart 1994; Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou 1997; Marchal 1999). Therefore, although some practices associated with emergent regimes of accumulation and wealth might undermine forms of authority defined by the nation-state, they also contribute to its capacity to exercise power over wealth and people. Thus, while these economic activities can generally be signified as “unregulated,” they cannot be described or understood as

marking out a realm distinct from either the official economy or official state administration.

Unregulated markets are at the heart of the postcolonial state's endeavor to fill its coffers and finance its constituents. When one considers the magnitude of the drug and small-arms trades, it seems fairly clear that these forms of productivity are by no means marginal; they offer distinct financial possibilities for currency-strapped and insolvent states. Likewise, although arguments persist for the "weak" nature of African states, their "failure," and their marginalization from the international political economy (Migdal 1988; Kaplan 1994; Zartman 1995; Reno 1995; Castells 1998), certain forms of productivity in the margins work against predictions about the demise of state power on the continent. The latter view maintains, somewhat tautologically, that state failure results from the state's incapacity to control national resources; incite industrial, commercial, and financial activity; and provide welfare to citizens. These failings are no doubt evident in many African states. However, my stay in the Chad Basin was not devoid of testimony to the strengths of certain African states, such as Cameroon, Nigeria, and Chad, all of which crushed, redirected, or surmounted rebellions and opposition movements through brute force as well as through savvy political maneuvering and co-optation, proving their respective capacities to monopolize the means of violence (armies, police) and to command at least central parts of the bureaucratic apparatus. Also, bankrupt state bureaucracies have been able to latch onto and even usurp rents associated with the regional exchanges just described. This has in some ways transformed the nature of the state bureaucracy, which now operates increasingly through private means (Hibou 1998, 1999a, 1999b), but it has not necessarily undermined the viability of the state apparatus.<sup>20</sup>

This process speaks to the paradox of the margin and is reflective of my own concern to think "the noncenter otherwise than as a loss of the center" (Derrida 1978: 292). Ultimately, while viewed by most as illegal, unregulated economic activities and violent methods of extraction are likewise described as legitimate; these alleged exceptional practices are elaborated as rational or reasonable behavior. To see them as such, one has to suspend particular judgments, the most obvious being the view that banditry and theft are illicit acts, and that unregulated commerce is a form of corruption. This presupposes, of course, a normative position that is often not relevant to those engaged in

<sup>20</sup> Some might argue that this is true for a regime or government, but not the state. That is, they understand the idea that the continuity of a regime might stem from appropriating the logics of wealth creation manifest in transnational networks, but insist that state sovereignty is at peril due to the lack of authority exercised over such networks themselves. But if these networks contribute to the very viability of state functions (extraction, enabling productive economic sectors, redistribution), they perpetuate the viability of the state as a political institution as much as a particular regime.

such practices. More important, it assumes distinctions between the public and private realms, and between rational and irrational behavior, which are neither universal nor generalized. That seems obvious. Often less apparent in commentary on banditry, theft, and unregulated commerce are the very distinctions between corruption, illegality, and illicit status made by those engaged in such practices. In reviewing them here, I am less interested in the fact that they are pronounced as statuses *per se* (as a *prise de position*), than in the ways in which they relate to one another as a relative ensemble. Those I spoke with in Cameroon and Chad distinguish quite explicitly between illegal activities and illicit practice. They also refer to a set of precepts relating to illegal status and comment upon the reasoning that leads one to engage in illegal practices—or, more distinctly, to maintain the status of illegality. More than viewing it as just an instrumentalist calculation, or a strategy to maximize economic gains or personal interests, they explain this exercise in maintaining illegality in terms of licit behavior, or what they see as the relationship between illegal and licit: being on the margins, but in the norm. In doing so, they respond to certain questions: In what ways do spoils taken in highway raids and contraband procured through smuggling operations constitute licit forms of wealth? In what ways are illegal activities rendered licit practice?

The connection they make between illegal and illicit, or the translation between the two, passes through the military-commercial bind and the nexus of the state. That is, these activities partake in prevailing modes of governing the economy in the Chad Basin. They are expressions of truths about state power, or the relationships through which one governs both populations and the economy. The practice of illegality is an ethics insofar as it is a practice of truth and, consequentially, a manner of self-understanding. In the Chad Basin today, it is likewise a manner of acknowledging truths about the economy and participating in practices of governing the economy.

This opinion runs contrary to many observations about the relationship between regional and especially transnational networks and the state, which presume that regimes of wealth and power such as those described herein are inimical to the propagation of national economics and especially state power. That is, beyond undermining a particular regime, they are said to be new sites of potential sovereignty and hence possible threats to the absolute and unique status of the nation-state. Without necessarily ushering in the demise of the nation-state form, networks of power that seem to parallel or compete with the nation-state—such as financial markets, agglomerations of nongovernmental organizations, or international legal regimes—are said to constitute domains of potential sovereign power (Walker and Mendlovitz 1990; Camilleri and Falk 1992; Brown 1995; Strange 1996; Rosenau 1997; and yet see Sassen 1995; Smith, Solinger, and Topik 1999). However, in the Chad Basin, regimes of wealth and power compete with the nation-state insofar as they undermine official regulatory authority. New manners of creating wealth and

of articulating and exercising legitimate rights-in-wealth have been normalized through the military-commercial alliance described herein. This has given rise to new figures of regulatory authority in the region. These arrangements are part and parcel of the political logics of the state. As I have indicated, they contribute to the viability of state power through the production of rents and possibilities for redistribution. Even more important, the precepts underlying apparently novel relationships, activities, and modalities issue out of, or are consistent with, those practiced in the existing political economy or historical sociopolitical order. What we have is perhaps the dislocation of a political system according to novel economic arrangements, conceptual boundaries, and territorial distinctions: the state of exception—unregulated relations—being the very foundation of a new, fairly stable arrangement.<sup>21</sup> In that sense, while these regimes of power and wealth can be described as novel realms of thought and action—which is part of the story I tell—they are nonetheless inscribed in the same logical, or epistemological, order as that of the nation-state, which is part of the conclusion I draw.

Highlighting the distinction between state power and state regulatory authority serves to make sense of the supposed contradiction between the expansion of unregulated activities—such as fraud and contraband, which seem to indicate a loss of state control—on the one hand, and the continuity of state power in its military forms and its capacity for redistribution, on the other. Whereas state regulatory authority is in crisis on the continent, state power in Africa propagates itself even in conditions of war and bankruptcy.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, by making this distinction, I have been able to explore more specifically the modalities by which state regulatory authority is contested, subverted, and even abetted. State regulatory authority is a principal source of strife in the region of the Chad Basin; in many ways, it represents the point at which the integrity of the nation-state is most unstable. Nonetheless, conflict over fiscal relations between the state and its citizens is less a matter of rejection of its application than disagreement over the intelligibility of its exercise. By taking the incivisme fiscal movement as an “event,” or a productive moment in which the concepts and suppositions that serve to establish the most appropriate means and ends of power are challenged and rethought, I engage in an anthropology of regulatory authority, which ultimately describes the pluralization of figures of regulatory authority in the Chad Basin. This is an effort to understand contemporary disagreement over the intelligibility of regulatory power and fiscal relations and the ways in which that affects people’s ongoing relationships with the state.

<sup>21</sup> A point inspired by Agamben 1997, 1998, to which I owe thanks to Luca D’Isanto.

<sup>22</sup> This seemingly impossible situation is in fact quite logical when one considers economies of war and the politics and social orders that arise therefrom. Cf. Tilly 1985; Marchal 1993, 1997; Bayart 1994.