

*The Anti-Crisis*

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Living under the sign of crisis

I penned an entire manuscript, intentionally avoiding the term “crisis” as a specific historical reference and as a specific concept with heuristic value for my research. Of course, in the introduction to the book, I do explain my reticence about term – or the ways in which my research is a critical engagement with that notion.

Since the time of writing the book, I have been having conversations with people about emergencies and catastrophes – all the while wondering to what extent these events constitute crises.

In conversations with colleagues working on transformations in the concepts and techniques of American security, for instance, I was made aware that the idea of “preparedness” postulates “crisis” as our future (cf. Andy Lakoff).

Then I received an issue of the French weekly magazine, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, where I was warned “*La Crise*”. The news magazine describes this condition of crisis as *l’angoisse devant l’avenir* (anguish in the face of the future). The main article explains how the French middle class has been experiencing a constant regression in its socio-economic status – *la fracture sociale* that has made crisis, at least in the French popular imaginary, a permanent state of affairs since the late 1970s.

Perhaps this situation of permanent crisis is a mirror of certain parts of Africa, its former colonies?

But can one speak of a state of permanent crisis? Is this not an oxymoron?

We have been talking about crisis with respect to the African continent for about 20 years now.

Of course, in Braudelian terms, this is still the duration of an event.

The point I’d like to make is not that “the crisis” is the norm, but rather that “crisis” has become normalized through specific (historical) manners of conceptualizing what now constitutes efficacy (efficacious action) and through specific ways of engaging with a transmogrified regional political economy (in the Chad Basin).

Because we use crisis today in a rather unreflective way, it is worth noting that, for Marx, crisis was postulated as endemic to a system – that is, from a logical point of view. For Marx, crisis involved contradictions in the internal relations of a structure, the teleology of the resolution being thus already implied in that same structure or system. The crises of capitalism were necessary conditions for its renewal. Here, temporal difference is of course denied. (logic – structure)  
(Note: general determination of crisis = abstraction, double existence of the commodity form, autonomization of the value form. Discord – discordance des temps – arises between production and circulation).

In neo-classical economic theory (late 19<sup>th</sup> c., Vienna, Alfred Marshall), which is ultimately behaviorist in its approach, theories of marginal efficiency – that is, investment behavior given beliefs about future rates of return – is pegged as the factor inducing crisis in what is seen to be an autonomous market. (again: crisis as future)  
Neo-classical theory doesn't seek to theorize crisis or to posit it as a mode of explanation; instead, policy is seen as the means by which one can overcome the conditions of crisis (eg. under-consumption) so as to return to the normal functioning of economy, temporal unity being once again affirmed.

The etymology of “crisis” is the Greek root for discrimination or decision; it designates a turning point or a moment of decisive change. Greek physicians referred to crisis as a clinical measure of transformation of a condition (critical moment at which point disease either becomes chronic or resides), a mode of narration that was displaced to the narration of time such that crises became turning points (in history). In this sense, crisis is a rupture. (see Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*)

If crisis is a rupture in the normal functioning of economy and/or state, it is fair to say that it can only be thought from within a notion of the unity of history. Not being able to demonstrate the unity of history, I've thus chosen to think about so-called crisis in terms of transformation. What is it producing? What are its effects? These are the defining questions of my research.

### Anti-Crisis

When I arrived in the Cameroon in the late 1980s, people often lamented “*j'ai la crise*” (I have the crisis), intoned in the way that someone would say, “I have a cold.”  
This condition was the subject of an article I co-authored in the early 1990s, which sought to go beyond the crisis as a statistical event or in terms of socio-economic indicators, to go beyond the crisis in terms of linear cause and effect so as to consider the ways in which “crisis” becomes an imperative, a device for understanding how to act effectively in situations that belie, for the actors, a sense of possibility. (*l'angoisse devant l'avenir*)

In the early 1990s, a new drink appeared in the roadside stalls where one could habitually purchase the three main soft drinks: Coke, Sprite and (my favorite) Fanta, all made in Nigeria with high doses of glucose syrup. These familiar brands were replaced by a very pale yellow drink: murky water with a spoonful of sugar and some lemon juice (insipid). The drink was called *anti-crise* (the anti-crisis).

Anti-crisis was the remedy to economic hardship in an economic sense (cheap alternative) and also in the sense of a medicine or even a potion that one drinks to become immune to disease, bullets or love.

Made on the streets and at home, anti-crisis was part of unregulated trade. Many an anthropologist would see anti-crise as an instance of the informal market, ingenious modes of getting by, and savvy local manners of responding to the wrath of global markets. These views are valid. However, anti-crise was a sign of the ways in which crisis became a part of the life world, a point of resistance but also a clear demonstration that resistance can only be devised from within the system. A response, an antidote, and thus the profession or acknowledgement of, and accession to, a particular condition.

During ten years of fieldwork in the Chad Basin, what I discovered was not a parallel political economy that emerged as a response to so-called “crisis,” but rather emergent arrangements that, through their combinatory effects, served both to propagate the exercise of certain aspects of state power and to institute novel politico-economic relationships.

### Emergent political economies, not peripheries

My research was conducted on the national borders of the states comprising the Lake Chad Basin (Chad, northern Cameroon, northern Nigeria, the Central African Republic). Essentially, I studied effects of unregulated economic activities (smuggling) and highly organized gang-based road banditry.

At very basic level, my work shows how those involved in unregulated commerce and road banditry found a significant mode of accumulation in the region (Lake Chad Basin).

It can be best thought of in terms of two guiding themes:

- 1) economic citizenship
- 2) the pluralization of economic regulatory authority

I understand economic citizenship to comprise the fiscal relationships instituted between individuals or communities and the state. I refer to this concept and these relations because I am ultimately interested in better understanding how the economically productive subject is to be governed as a citizen (cf. N. Rose; P. Miller on the mobilization of the consumer in post-Fordist political economies).

I have approached the topic of economic citizenship through the study of what is known as the *incivisme fiscal* movement in Cameroon, which involved civil disobedience directed toward or involving the realm of fiscal relations and economic regulatory authority – hence the play on words = fiscal disobedience.

I arrived in the Chad Basin (Cameroon, early 1990s) at the onset of serious conflict. This movement – led by various groups forming an opposition bloc to the regime of Paul Biya – was called Opération Villes Mortes (dead cities campaign), labeled “incivisme fiscal” by the regime – sought, in very explicit terms, to undermine the regime of its fiscal base through general strikes, the refusal to pay taxes, the use of clandestine services, etc. At the heart of this contestation was “tax” and especially, for merchants and traders, the license to trade or to establish a commercial enterprise (*la patente*).

What was most striking was heterogeneity of discourse.

Without entering into the details, suffice it to summarize by saying that claims made for:

1) decreased state interventions : less onerous taxes, fewer instances of imposition, less heavy-handed methods of collection; as well as for  
2) increased state interventions : to protect local markets from the influx of “foreigners”; to ensure public salaries, which create demand; and also increased “access to the market.” The latter (ubiquitous) was in fact expressed as “le droit du marché” : the right to a market.

Language of rights (return).

Briefly: “droits” signifies “taxes,” as well as rights and obligations. (Lots of semantic slippage). As argue in book, the way rights were perceived and mobilized in argument or in political mobilization was inherently related to the ways in which fiscal targets have been qualified (historically) as such.

Generally, *droits* has been articulated in terms of rights of access: one pays taxes so that one has the right to access certain markets, or the privileged relationships that ensure exchanges and accumulation. Tax is often signified in local parlance as a “price” (*le prix*); it is the price to pay for the right of access. In the contestation (1990s) reference to “rights” invoked tensions between divergent understandings of obligations and entitlements.

Although heterogeneous in their details (see book), their claims can be distinguished in two ways:

- 1) as citizens, they have the right to access commercial exchanges whether or not they can pay tax or permits. This, in effect, would give them the means to pay their dues; the realm of unregulated commerce was thus associated with the right to engage in commerce *regardless of means*.
- 2) others insisted that the fiscal relationship establishes the very grounds for citizenship: by enacting the transfer of wealth to the state, one accedes to the rights and obligations inherent in the status of the citizen. Tax = founding transfer of wealth.

By immediately setting forth this context of indetermination, I rejected interpretations (which were current at the time) of this contestation in terms of political opposition to the state or the consequences of a failed state. (return)

In exchanges with participants in the Villes Mortes/incivisme fiscal campaign, I became increasingly aware of the fact that, for local people, the relevant question was not the outright refusal or rejection of state authority or even of state regulatory authority. Instead, disagreement centered on the very intelligibility of the exercise of this form of authority – not the mere fact of its existence or its enactment, but rather the ways in which it is qualified or characterized (its precepts).

I tried to explore debates over the principles of justification for their engagements as well as varying manners of problematizing certain economic relationships (fiscal) and economic categories (tax).

In some ways, this approach is consistent with Luc Boltanski's notion of *une épreuve* (cf. Boltanski and Thevenot, *De la justification*), or critical moments during which the concepts, metaphorical relationships or qualifications that serve to theorize or justify particular politico-economic relationships are apprehended as logically incongruous. Such moments do not entail dissonance between meta-narrative and lived experience, but rather involve the matter of intelligibility of certain devices or categories in the negotiation of situations – situations in which contending principles are evaluated against one another (eg. tax as a founding economic transfer establishing rights versus recourse to rights as a means to access wealth so as to absolve obligations such as tax).

Without wanting to assume or presuppose what “tax” or “price” signify – and then merely proceed to an analysis of contemporary resistance to fiscal authority or fiscal relations – I first sought to clarify the normalization of specific (historical) manners of defining public wealth (as opposed to private) as well as what are deemed legitimate modes of extraction – both of which establish the bases for the fiscal domain (*fiscalité*) today.

In sum, I wanted to learn not only about the ways in which historical institutions induce certain forms of behavior (the fiscal regime of truth incites people to pay taxes once a year), but also how they establish the limits of what is considered reasonable practice.

I won't answer or address all aspects of this question today.

This last point brings me to my second topic: the pluralization of economic regulatory authority, which is a process involving the institutionalization of new economic regulatory relations.

Through this process, citizens of the Chad Basin are subject to various – state and non-state, or official and unofficial – figures of regulatory authority. Indeed, “tax” is potentially effected in many sites and by various people.

As I noted earlier, I conducted research on the borders of the countries that make up the Lake Chad Basin, most notably among traders and smugglers, as well as highly organized road bandits.

These networks constituted by these exchanges are connected into the regional and international markets in small arms, money and document counterfeiting, and smuggling of petrol, stolen vehicles, ivory, gold, hardware, electronics, cigarettes, and dry goods. Often, these exchanges take place with a limited amount of capital investment, traversing short distances, such as a mountain pass that marks an international border, and making use of a small number of social and political contacts for their success.

But often they involve quite significant capital investments, crossing several national borders, such as in the case of small arms or the trans-Saharan trade in American cigarettes, and requiring the support or complicity of well-placed financial and political personalities.

Today, the realms of unregulated commerce and road banditry represent two, related frontiers of wealth creation in a region that has no viable industrial base and is not even an industrial periphery, or a site of outsourcing for manufacturing or services.

“Economic refugees” have migrated to the borders where they serve as transporters, guards, guides, *passeurs* and carriers in the domain of unregulated commerce.

The latter are joined by “military refugees” born out of military demobilization programs. In Chad, for example, the 1992 military demobilization program, which involved approximately 27,000 men, led to the recycling of soldiers into the small arms market, for which they have contacts and expertise. Often they “enter the bush,” as they say, working as mercenaries or as road bandits with organized groups of under- and unpaid soldiers as well as the unemployed.

To simplify for the purposes of presentation:

Military personnel and customs officials look to rents on fraudulent commerce because they are more attractive than, and often a necessary complement to, their official salaries. Military personnel double as customs agents so as to benefit from one of the most lucrative economic sectors in the region. In Chad, known specifically as the “douaniers-combattants” (customs official-soldiers), who have an ambiguous public-private status. What we see is that transactions and redistribution that once took place via the single-party state or in the realm of public works projects are now being deployed via private means, or semi-private means.

This has led to the blurring of the lines between civilians and the military.

On the bridge that spans the Logone River – denoting the border between Cameroon and Chad and entry to the capital of Chad, N’djamena -- customs official said: those who cross the border “can be summoned by diverse people in civilian clothes or in uniform. The multiplicity, the incoherence, the mix of uniforms brings on confusion. It seems that we’re dealing with a blurring that is voluntarily maintained because it is part of a logic of accumulation created and maintained by the security forces who round up their monthly pay in this way.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> December 8, 2001, Kousseri, Cameroon.

I describe this blurring (or even maintenance) of the civilian-military distinction as a process involving the emergence of commercial-military enterprises (the garrison-entrepot).

Local people now find themselves implicated in relationships with numerous figures of regulatory authority of both official and non-official status.

These figures of authority compete with instances of national regulatory authority.

Payments made to ensure access to international and regional markets, essential commercial and financial relationships, and protection all serve to formalize various kinds of traffic, be that of small arms crossing the desert or petrol smuggled through a mountain pass. This makes such activities less unpredictable both in terms of logistics and revenues.

Therefore, paradoxically, this situation is very often perceived as a source of economic security – a situation which gives rise to the institutionalization of unprecedented forms of economic transfers and economic regulatory authority.

That is what I mean by the pluralization of regulatory authority.

These collaborations lead to a hierarchy of bosses and workers that form a well financed but somewhat ephemeral labor market. Those involved put great emphasis on the idea that these activities are a form of “work,” (to be contrasted, in their minds, with fraud or theft). It is “work” because it involves predictable sources of employment and revenues.

An “ex”-road bandit describes this as follows:

[...] *Were you the head of a gang?*

No, no! I played various roles in the attacks I participated in. I carried the sack of spoils (*le sac du butin*). I assured the gang leader’s security. I recuperated the arms after an operation. I participated in the planning of an attack. I never commanded. I didn’t have my own group. You know, to have your own group, you have to have the means and the relations.

*What means? What relations?*

You have to buy arms, give something to the guys before going to the attack, pay for their food, lodge them for days somewhere, pay informers who go to the marketplace to identify people who’ve made a lot of money, etc.

*And the relations?*

(sigh of aggravation) I told you that I don’t know everything. The leader (*le chef*) of the team, sometimes he’s someone I’ve never even seen before. My prison friends would take me to him and after an attack sometimes we’d never meet again, not even at the marketplace. In the Central African Republic, I had a chief [gang leader] who later became my neighbor in the [agricultural] fields! There were two guys working in his fields with whom we’d done operations.

[...]

*What relations does the chief of the gang need?*

Are you naive or are you doing this on purpose? Do you think that you can do this kind of work without protection? For example, the chief who had his fields next to mine, in one operation we got a lot of money. I don’t know how much exactly, but between the money we found, the jewelry, the watches, etc., the booty (*le butin*) came to something in

the millions [of CFA]. We were 15 or 20 people, I can't remember. I got 150,000 CFA. Well, it's sure that the leader got one over on us since, for himself, he kept millions. But afterwards, when I saw him in the fields cultivating, I understood that it was the man in the car who kept most of it.

*Wait a minute! Who is the man in the car? This is not the first time I've heard people talk about a man who comes in a car just after an attack.*

Oh! I can't really say. In any case, we threw all the arms and the spoils into the trunk of the car. Those who had military uniforms also threw them in. We dispersed and then I got my part in the evening, at the rendez-vous.

[...]

*And the man in the car?*

I never saw him again. But I'm certain that he went back to the city.

*Because he lives in the city?*

Obviously! If it was someone from one of the villages around here, I would know him! A car in a rural area, that doesn't go unnoticed.

*What does the man in the car who comes from the city and makes you risk your life for a pittance represent for you?*

You're the one who says that it's a pittance! Do you know what a civil servant's salary is in the Central African Republic? What job brings in 150,000 CFA for no more than a half-day's work?<sup>2</sup> (*white-coll salary*)

The assertion that theft is work is not unique to mercenaries and road gangs.

The linkage between salaries and taxes speaks to the question of the means to access resources that would either allow one to fulfill his fiscal obligations or, as others see it, to achieve their rights as citizens.

*I want to understand better. The man in the car -- Between him and the President Ange Félix Patassé (of the Central African Republic), who is most useful to you?*

I pay my taxes to Patassé. The man in the city gives me the means to pay Patasse's tax. Patassé sabotages the state; he steals from the Central African Republic, which is already very poor, and starves the people. My employer [gang leader] both fills in and rectifies (*combler*) the theft created by Patassé. (...)

*So, in conclusion, you are unconditionally devoted to the man who allows you to take care of your family, whatever the provenance of the resources?*

I was. I told you before; I paid by going to prison. Me, I never attacked a poor man. What would I take from a poor man? I am sure that the merchants and others who fall into our attacks are people who earn their money illicitly.

*Illicitly?*

Yes.

*Why?*

They buy cheaply; they sell at very high prices, without respect for Islamic rules of commerce. They don't pay the charity tax. Those who don't want to pay the *zakkat* [Islamic charity tax], we take up the responsibility to take it from them. It's a charity payment on their fortune, a revenue tax.

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<sup>2</sup> November 14, 2001, Meiganga, Cameroon.

*So you replace the state tax services! Is that legal? Is it legitimate?*

Legal? Surely not! As for legitimacy, it is not for you or anyone else to tell me how I should assure my survival.

Although Bakaridjo refers to “Islamic rules of commerce,” and “the charity tax,” all coupeurs de route are not Muslims; many are members of the flourishing independent or Pentecostal churches, some practice several religions, and some do not recognize monotheistic traditions. I chose to refer to his comments because he speaks quite directly about “tax,” explaining that his exercise of the charity tax is effected both as a critique of the state as well as a critique of the merchant elite. Bakaridjo claims to steal from the state in light of the state’s negligence. But he is not stealing from the state itself and does not maintain that stealing is a means to take vengeance on the state or to resist it effectively. Bakaridjo’s explicit claim is that he steals to pay “Patassé’s tax,” referring thus to a transfer and a link between his levies and the state’s impositions.

The displacement of “tax” into a semi-public realm is such that unregulated commerce has become the very *raison d’être* of the police, gendarmes, military, and customs services.

The view that unregulated commerce is essential to the functioning of the civil service is a reflection of the fact that, since the late 1980s – structural adjustment, but also privatization of state-owned firms, which has ostensibly generated money – such activities have become a primary source of rents, leading to a displacement of the sites from which the state enacts transfers.

### Is the public-private displacement “crisis”?

I want to comment on a particular “crisis” readings of the phenomena I just described. In the Africanist literature, crisis now refers to either severe economic hardship or so called “state failure.”

The first instance (economic hardship) is denoted by periods characterized by certain statistical indicators (relatively low GDP, high poverty levels).

- 1) Typically (simply), economic crisis has created a sort of void in which unregulated activities have emerged – analyze their emergence in terms of a vacuum. Insufficient; cannot account for the relationships I describe.
- 2) The appearance of new resources and new forms of wealth ALSO gives rise to such activities. During colonization, the groundnut and cotton industries involved the trucking of goods and money across long distances, which were targets for those pursuing the *quête monétaire*, or the quest for currency to pay tax; today, the construction of the oil pipeline through Chad and Cameroon involves the circulation of brand-new SUVs, satellite phones, computers, and cash, which has inspired a similar *quête monétaire* – but also the *very perception* that there is an novel resource to be exploited (cf. Russia, Caucasus).

The second instance (state failure) is described as the state’s incapacity to ensure the functions of state. State failure is thus explained – quite tautologically – by the failings

of the state. Generally, this view is concerned with the integrity of a rational-legal bureaucracy; state failure is now commonly referred to (following Weber) as a “legitimacy crisis,” which is now an official indicator for analysts at the World Bank for designating “failed states.”

It is unclear from whose perspective “legitimacy” is being defined. That aside, state failure is seen as a defining condition from which one can merely note and discuss the nature of pathologies.

As the conversations I report indicate, those engaged in the realm of unregulated economic activities and banditry are critical of state economic *regulatory* authority, but not of the state more generally. Theirs is a critical engagement with aspects of state administration or state-based authority (fiscal authority), but not necessarily a rejection of the state as an institution (we witness intense forms of protectionism and nationalism and we note no revolution). Clearly, this situation needs to be thought about in terms of a distinction between a regime and the state as an institution, but legitimacy crisis readings are not clear on this.

Those who I spoke with don’t make the case for legitimacy crisis, but rather argue for the redistributive aspects of these activities:

Moto-taxi driver: (Professional Association of Moto-Taximen)

Together – that is the police and the moto-taximen – we exploit illegality. Even when you have all your papers in order, you’re in illegality because the motorcycle is illegal. ...The police themselves close their eyes; they can always find an infraction to ticket. Today, we have representatives at each crossroads, leaders who negotiate with the administration when there are problems. ...So that the system can continue to function properly, it’s important that there are people in violation because, if everyone was in line with the law, the authorities – the police – wouldn’t gain their share and then they would suppress the motorcycles on the pretext that they cause accidents, that we are hoodlums. Today, maybe we are hoodlums, but we are hoodlums who help sustain families and contribute to the wellbeing of agents of the force of law.<sup>3</sup>

Raison d’être: law cannot exist without illegality

Likewise, those I spoke with don’t put forth “Robin Hood” type myths about their exploits or those of their patrons. It is true that those involved in highly organized road banditry constitute a professional class and their activities involve redistribution as much as criminality (as in Hobsbawm’s depiction of “social bandits”). But they themselves do not see their actions in terms of philanthropy, social justice, or rebellion. While Robin Hood is said to have stolen from the rich to give to the poor, bandits and those involved in unregulated commerce in the Chad Basin are financed by the rich and steal or traffic as a way of entering into the labor market and participating in a particular political economy. Rather than constituting an “anti-society” (Hobsbawm) composed of a contained and oppositional moral universe – or what is more frequently referred to as a distinct moral economy – bandits, smugglers, and traffickers seek a certain mode of integration by partaking in a recognized political-economy – prevailing methods of

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<sup>3</sup> December 2001, Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

governing the economy, which are typical to most states in the world (customs fraud and granting no-bid contracts to well connected businesses are not particularly African affairs).

Contrary to most observers, most people involved in unregulated commerce in the Chad Basin don't focus exclusively on the "absence of the law" when elaborating upon their own forms of reasoning. (the absence of the law being typical to legitimacy crisis interpretations)

They are quite explicit: their activities are illegal. But they comment upon the reasoning that leads one to engage in illegal practices or, more precisely, to maintain the status of illegality.

The problem for them isn't the absence of law, but rather to come to terms with the ways that power is exercised both through the law and outside it. This is problematic for the typical assumption (and not demonstration) that this interstitial realm reflects a particular moral economy that delimits a space of independent economics, cultural creativity or political resistance.

As a realm in which one evaluates the nature of *licit* practice, unregulated commerce and gang-based road banditry establish a domain in which people elaborate representations of self-conduct and effective action within a nexus of various and contradictory social institutions that incite them to act. This does not entail reference to a set of stable moral precepts that sanction or prohibit conduct.

The question becomes: What does one make of the road bandits, smugglers of the Chad Basin, who, like us, refer to rules, codes, standards, and precepts that exhibit flagrant internal contradictions?

Not wanting to resolve their contradictions, I took their manners of reasoning to be a particular problem space in which these people live today. This is a space in which questions about what is reasonable or relevant are formulated and framed. This specific problem space (Chad Basin) can be considered "global" not simply because it connects to transnational networks or because it is an instantiation of global phenomena in the local, but more precisely because it demonstrates how economic regulation has become a primary site of problematization in the world today (cf. Rabinow, *Anthropos Today*; Collier and Ong, *Global Assemblages*). By highlighting the distinction between state power and state economic regulatory authority, one can make better sense of the supposed contradiction between the expansion of unregulated activities (contraband and fraud, which seem to indicate a loss of state power), on the one hand, and the continuity of state power in its military forms and in its capacity for redistribution (albeit by unconventional means), on the other.

In some respects, the rise of unregulated networks of commerce and their associated figures of regulatory authority is a symptom of contemporary efforts to ensure the continuity of the foundations of national wealth. Let's take Cameroon as an example. Historically, in this region once colonized by France, redistribution occurred nationally through salary payments that were ensured via external financing. These transfers underpinned the burgeoning civil service and parastatal sectors, providing the material

means for national distribution. Following in the traces of the colonial state, the Cameroonian postcolonial state has been the ultimate nexus of the great majority of salaried activity.

Today, the salary is no longer an inherent aspect of an apparatus establishing and ensuring the basis for economic accumulation, social ascension, and economic redistribution. Economic accumulation, socio-economic mobility, and economic redistribution now must be envisaged outside of the bounds of the certificates and diplomas that once consecrated the educated elite (*évolués*) and the civil servant (*le fonctionnaire*). The civil servant is no longer the centerpiece of national wealth and economic redistribution.

### New figures of wealth and the end of sovereignty

Much of what I have described herein seems to suggest that new, non-state forms of power are emerging in the interstices of the world state system, transforming the workings of the state itself and potentially giving rise to new configurations of political power in the region. Some take this analysis farther, arguing that the situation in the Chad Basin warrants reference to “new sovereigns.” Sovereignty, as a definition practiced in classical political theory and jurisprudence, is supposed to summate the founding properties of “statehood”, it is thought to be constitutive of the state itself and *is thus vested with powers of its own*. This entails the circular reasoning of foundational concepts: the state, as an abstract, unitary object of knowledge and a political subject in international political theory *is* such because of sovereignty; and yet sovereignty is the unrestricted and determining power of the state as a political subject in the system of states.

Sovereignty is a foundational politico-legal concept; it is the defining property of “stateness.”

In spite of its foundational relationship to the politico-legal concept of the state, many observers allege that sovereignty is not necessarily a form of power limited to the infrastructures of the state, postulating that there are now sovereigns other than the state. The latter include financial markets or global capital markets, agglomerations of non-governmental organizations or institutions of transnational civil society. Often, these phenomena are said to be generative of fields of social authority that constitute zones producing new normative arrangements that give rise to differential regimes of so-called rights (cf. Ong). Sovereignty is here reduced to a notion of centralized, norm-producing power.

According to this general description, my regulators may be described as sovereigns. In the Chad Basin, relationships defining the military-commercial complex have been institutionalized over time, and these relations of authority structure practices and induce certain forms of reasoning for those in its midst. But to say that such an emergent domain is a predominant referent for action, understanding, and authority is to speak of the exercise of power and not necessarily sovereignty.

Most present-day commentary on transnational phenomena often confounds sovereignty and power.

Sovereignty (if it *is* anything) is a condition of unqualified power or absolute authority (ability to decide the exception) whereas power connotes a complex strategic situation. The omnipresence of power is not its unqualified unity. I have argued that the endurance of regional and international regimes of accumulation and power depend upon the normalization of new registers of value and the articulation of rights to wealth that were heretofore deemed asocial or irrational, such as spoils or rights-in-wealth through seizure. However, these seem to be perfectly consistent with those exercised by the state; it is possible that somewhat novel ways of valuing and governing have emerged in the peripheries of the infrastructures of state power, all the while confirming the right and logic of extant modes of conceptualizing and exercising power. Right of state. (*raison d'être*)

By way of example, offshore entities and special economic zones are frequently cited as examples of emergent forms of sovereignty because they supposedly lie outside the bounds of the state and give rise to regimes of rights. But offshore economies (not new!) are juridical innovations; they are innovations of states -- precisely, the sovereign right of defining the exception. (cf. Ronen Palan). During the 1950s-60s, the rise in taxation in industrialized countries was not main cause of proliferation of offshore jurisdictions, as is often assumed.

Ronen Palan shows the complex and varied motivations and contingencies that led to bank secrecy laws, flags of convenience, export processing zones, which were techniques conceived as development strategies by smaller states (Switzerland, Liberia). The advanced industrial countries followed suit: banks and companies took advantage of this offshore economy (1960s: declining rates of profitability pushed companies to seek ways of reducing costs).

States' impetus for Export processing zones; onshore regulation increasingly relaxed in response to their proliferation (deregulation). This development is reminiscent of the rent-seeking African state; as Palan notes, the very principles embedded in the offshore economy became institutionalized in state system.

Following the example of the development of off-shore economies as integral to the state-centric political economy, which did not destabilize the concept of sovereignty, instead of wondering about whether or not new types of sovereignty are in our midst, we should pay attention to the precursory matter of whether or not the intelligibility of the very idea of sovereignty has been destabilized with recent changes in the global political economy. Debates about globalization tend to focus on the problem of the intelligibility of sovereignty insofar as they raise the issue of the status of the nation-state in transnational contexts. But this is not a new problem; it is, in fact, one of the founding debates of classical political science.

In some ways, my account is surely troubling: I do not attempt to describe or define resistance to state power based on an irreducible set of truths as the moral of the story. This raises the question of the nature of critical inquiry.

My account serves to undermine the appearance of unity (e.g. the seemingly stable distinction between public and private is shown to be otherwise – that is, not a single, coherent distinction), which undermines the self-evident nature of such institutions. This affirms the point made by many scholars that citizenship is not primarily realized in a uniform public sphere (cf. Appadurai; N. Rose, *Powers of Freedom*). I try to consider how the language of “rights” has been appropriated -- without necessarily drawing drastic conclusions about the end of sovereignty.

Such consideration necessitates a critical perspective on the hegemony of liberal political philosophy (its concepts, its referents, such as rights, sovereignty) in analyses of the political.

The point is not to show that these terms are irrelevant or “wrong,” but rather to inquire into the ways in which they’ve become regulatory concepts and the consequences of that.

I would like to end point of irony, referring to Koselleck’s account of critique as permanent crisis. While somewhat of a gloss on his complex argument, I want to retain his point that the post-Enlightenment notion of crisis is tied to a particular dualistic philosophy of history in which the moral realm is thought to be distinct from the political realm. The teleology of history is thus posited as the triumph of morality over politics. For Koselleck, the perpetual critique of the self and the world against a standard of reason defines a state of permanent crisis, which is based on a philosophy of history that can only exit from crisis via a break from the past (revolution/utopia).