



– Institute's Colloquium –

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Partible sovereignties: Mining and taxation in northern Chad

In the Chad basin, Janet Roitman (2007) postulates a close connection between taxation, government, and the creation of what she calls 'economic citizenship'. If she is right, the exact modalities of taxation are crucial for local conceptualisations and experiences of politics. Based on ethnographic and archival evidence, this paper examines one concrete case in the margins of Roitman's area of study: a natron mine in Faya-Largeau, the main town of Chad's northernmost region, the Borkou - Ennedi - Tibesti (B.E.T.). Historically a natural resource available to all, natron has become, over the last four decades, a highly priced and much contested source of revenue for state officials and 'traditional chiefs' alike. The two are in fact closely related, and their activities, in conjunction with changing transport infrastructures, have arguably created natron as a value in the first place, alongside the (highly exploitative) labour relations that now underpin its production. Taxation in this sense not only creates 'political and economic subjectivity' (if that), but it brings about particular productive regimes; the image of sovereignty that emerges from this is partial, partible, generally unconcerned with 'governance' beyond taxation, and unstable.

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Institute of Ethnology
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Everybody is welcome!