S.V. Kostelyanets. Review of Brachet J., Scheele J. (Eds.) The value of disorder: autonomy, prosperity, and plunder in the Chadian Sahara. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

The Value of Disorder: Autonomy, Prosperity, and Plunder in the Chadian Sahara strives not just to draw up an anthropological, socioeconomic, and political landscape of the Borkou-Enned ti-Tibesti (BET) region in northern Chad, but in doing so follows the newest trend in African studies appropriate to the field: it looks into the past, present and future of Africa through an African-centered lens. The authors, perhaps, even take this approach a step further, with a focus on this micro-region of marginal global importance in the continent's backwater as a subject rather than an object of history; they have brilliantly demonstrated how geography, natural conditions and cultural traditions of its people – mostly the Tubu but also some cohabiting groups – have made the region a "half-world" – disconnected and aloof yet critical to the stability of neighboring areas, Chad and even the Sahara as a whole.

The book is written by two authors – Julien Brachet, a researcher at the French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development (IRD), whose research interests include migration networks, transport systems and trade, and Dr. Judith Scheele, Director of Studies at the School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS), who focuses on exchange, mobility, and local and regional interdependence in the Sahara. In 2012, the two France-based authors carried out an impressive twelve-month field study in Chad, principally in the town of Faya-Largeau in the north of Chad, but also visiting Cameroon, which resulted in a series of scholarly papers and eventually in the reviewed book.

As the authors aptly point out in the introductory chapter, the Sahara and the Sahel have attracted immense academic interest in recent years due to the events of the Arab Spring, proliferation of Islamic terrorism and the involvement of Western militaries to address the ensuing instability. Within the dominant historiographic paradigm, however, northern Chad remains a through-passage for extra-regional forces with little agency of its own. J. Brachet and J. Scheele successfully argue for the return of agency, at least in the academic sense, to the people of the region.

There are eight chapters in the book (including the extensive *Introduction* and *Conclusion* sections), broken into numerous sections. The book has excellent organization, structure, and flow; every chapter boasts a thorough introduction and conclusion of its own, and each subchapter has an easily discernible focus, as well as an objective.

Introduction lays out the theme of the book, with its five subchapters devoted correspondingly to what seems to be the five main cross-cutting approaches and factors of the research: a departure from the "trans-Saharan perspective" (p. 8), which had dominated most of the previous scholarly work on the region, and a turn to its endogenous history; a deficit of sources, in particular local, on the history of this "blank area", which made the present academic endeavor so difficult; the persistence of exogenous negative stereotypes about the residents of BET – the Tubu people; a suggestion by the authors that these stereotypes are upheld by the Tubu themselves, who have even come to take certain pride in their image of raiders and predators; and, finally, a consideration of the aforementioned

Костелянец Сергей Валерьянович | sergey.kostelyanyets@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0002-9983-9994
Для цитирования: S.V. Kostelyanets. Review of Brachet J., Scheele J. (Eds.) The value of disorder: auton-omy, prosperity, and plunder in the Chadian Sahara. Cambridge: Cambridge Univer-sity Press, 2019. // Антропологии/Anthropologies. 2021. № 1. С. 164-167. https://doi.org/10.33876/2782-3423/2021-1/164-167

difficulties as constituting a social phenomenon in itself that deserves scholarly attention, with the authors focusing on the "remoteness" of BET and its "negative connectivity" (p. 39) as some of the principal determinants of the region's course of development for centuries.

The opening chapter largely focuses on the nexus of nomadic and sedentary traditions of the region's society, which has come to be described in literature as "pastoral-date-cultivating" (p. 49). The Faya-Largeau oasis presents a truly extraordinary case in this regard: abundant water reserves provide for the cultivation of date trees that require little irrigation, investment or labor, with the latter only necessary during the time of harvest, when nomadic "owners" visit their gardens. Libyan migrants introduced some horticulture to the region, but its contribution to food security has remained very limited. The authors narrate the three incursions of historic importance – that of a Libyan Sufi order, which started in 1899, of the French since 1901, and of Libyan escapees from the Italian occupation (1928–1934) of Southern Libya. In the early 20th century, for geopolitical reasons, the region became an arena of global power and competition, which in fact attracted more resources than it could generate itself. Attempts by the French to reform the colonial administrative system and to develop the regional economy in the interwar period were futile for the most part, but Faya (Faya-Largeau) – the administrative and commercial center of the region – greatly prospered during the Second World War when it became the staging ground for allied attacks on Fezzan in Italian Libya. The last years of the French colonial rule in Chad were marked by half-hearted attempts to improve infrastructure and governance and more vigorous ones – to contain Libyan expansionism. In the course of these events, the region developed a certain kind of "war economy", where prosperity depended on the level of military presence and the nature of relations between southern Libya and northern Chad.

A history of BET in the post-colonial period is characterized by nearly incessant wars and rebellions, when the historically difficult relation with Libyan neighbors were further complicated by the tensions between Chad's northern periphery and the central authorities in N'Djamena. In 1965 – the same year the French military retreated from the area – a rebellion broke out in BET. Its foremost cause was excessive taxation by the Chadian government. The authors offer a detailed chronology of the conflict, which ended in the defeat of the insurgents by the combined Franco-Chadian forces in 1971. Next followed the 1973 Libyan invasion of Chad's border areas, which Tripoli claimed as its own. Until the late 1980s the Libyan government would play a major destabilizing role in Chad, supporting various armed groups and factions in their quest to annex parts of their southern neighbor.

The authors further investigate the region's linkages to the outside world and the shifts in local identities against the backdrop of an endless inter-faction civil war, which at times echoed the global fault line of the Cold War. The discussion of what it meant to be Arab or Tubu, Libyan or Chadian, rebel or pro-government – of these overlapping ethnic or cultural, economic or political identities – highlights the ambiguity of the dividing lines between armed factions, local tribes, and even regular Libyan and Chadian soldiers. Both the regime in N'Djamena (made up by that time of former BET rebels itself) and the insurgents in Faya could not count on true loyalties and resorted to political repression; civilians who attempted to flee the war zone faced harsh penalties. The Libyan forces were defeated by the Chadian army (indeed, with the help of the French contingent) in 1987. The defeat appears to have paved the way for peace and unity in Chad under the leadership of President H. Habre, a Tubu from Faya.

However, what emerged was an oppressive autocratic regime, which made excessive taxation, extortion under the guise of "a contribution to the war effort" (p. 123) and tribalism its central pillars. The country was no longer at war, but the regime ruled as if it still were. This did not last long: in 1990, Habre was toppled by his close friend and advisor, Idriss Deby, also a northerner, who has now

remained at the helm of the country for over 30 years. Deby largely maintained political continuity and also inherited his predecessor's troubles: armed rebellions would start regularly, usually led by his close allies from northern Chad. When rebels surrounded his palace in 2008, Deby was only saved by an interference of the French army. The main line of argument follows that rebellion has become a career choice in Chad, and especially in BET; here conflicts start not over the region's scarce resources, but in order to gain the ability to generate and redistribute wealth (p. 131-132).

Next the authors delve deep into the discussion of the agricultural sector in BET. Interaction between sedentarists and nomads is its central topic. It is rooted in historically ambiguous landownership and overall dependence. According to the nomads, the sedentarists are descendants of the slaves who had been entrusted with caring for palm trees centuries ago. The authors question this perspective and consider an alternative theory of the historical complementarity of the two groups, which used to exchange herding services for garden produce. Given the lack of local written sources that could prove one or another claim conclusively true or false, the stronger and better connected nomads seemed to have an upper hand in this dispute.

A well-supported thesis by the authors follows that BET locals scorn work and regard it as a "temporary calamity" (p. 153); most of the manual labor in agriculture is now done by immigrants from other parts of the country. It thus seems that the occupational cleavage between the sedentarists and the nomads has become a thing of the past, yet the social cleavage persisted. The authors take on the particularly confusing structure of landownership, which has been shaped by tradition, immigration, conquest, colonialism, and modern politics. A side-effect of this complexity is that, despite their influence and strength, the nomads, who are absent from the oasis for most of the year, are quite vulnerable to land grabs by the sedentarists and have in fact developed a certain fear of "colonization" by the latter (p. 167).

The second economic pillar in BET is the exchange of goods. Just as BET locals are uneager to engage in agriculture, they also leave trade to foreigners. According to the authors, the explanation for this is the same insecurity of ownership: the accumulation of wealth seems futile in the condition of political and military instability. Despite this, Faya has become a commercial hub for most of the exchange between Libya and Chad. A history of trade in BET in the 20th century and a story of an individual trader is followed by a detailed section on the structure and the distribution of proceeds of trade in the region. The following section is dedicated to the discussion of the largest market for BET exports and men who engage in lucrative transboundary trade (and smuggling). The remaining income generators in Faya include the "garage economy" that caters to truck drivers and taxation – both legal and illegal – by various civilian and military officials.

The social fabric of Faya is further explored when the authors provide the meticulous descriptions of cultural and economic aspects of giving and reciprocity, of raiding and banditry, which have remained ordinary or even honorable occupations among the Tubu, of marital and kin relations and socialization patterns, all of which are characterized by personal autonomy and little relevance of reciprocity.

Having illustrated the socioeconomic and cultural reality on the ground in BET, the authors shed light on the political implications of the region's peculiar disarray. These implications are first studied on a tribal level and in an urban setting; the authors demonstrate how the strive for personal autonomy and independence shapes relations with the state, which is considered an "instrument of resource extraction" (p. 44) rather than a source of governance. It comes as no surprise to the reader that violence among all genders in BET has become not just a social norm, but a marker of Tubu ethnicity. Armed violence and warfare, however, are a nearly exclusive realm of Tubu males, who draw their

resources and prestige either from the government army or rebels or from both.

The book concludes with an exhaustive summary, which reiterates the following key theses of the book: that the BET region is simultaneously disconnected from the outside world and extremely vulnerable to it; that its economic structure, dominated by gathering, herding, extortion and predation, has been central in forming a culture in which hard labor is despised, accumulation of wealth is chancy, but crises and wars present extraordinary opportunities. Overall, the book presents a rather pessimistic perspective of BET: emigration has deprived the region of thousands upon thousands of most ambitious, talented, and entrepreneurial people; in addition, many sons of Tubu are recruited and used as soldiers in armed conflicts around the wider region from Mali to Libya to the Central African Republic.

The book will certainly be of great interest to students not only of African studies or social anthropology, but also to experts in Conflict Resolution, as it has essentially exposed root causes of violence and political instability in the area. The depth and scope of this research are remarkable as it leaves hardly any stone unturned with regard to the social fabric of the Faya-Largeau oasis. Indeed, there is much less analysis of the nomadic life of the Tubu, its socioeconomic character, which can be explained by natural limitations of field research in an inhospitable environment yet leaves something to be desired. Nevertheless, the important contribution of the authors to the study of this remote area, which is particularly high due to the utterly non-biased way in which the research has been carried out, make the work a valuable addition to any collection of books on Saharan societies or Africa in general.

Book Review

Kostelyanets, S.V. Review of Brachet J., Scheele J. The value of disorder: autonomy, prosperity, and plunder in the Chadian Sahara. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Anthropologies, 2021, no 1, pp. 164– 167 https://doi.org/10.33876/2782-3423/2021-1/164-167

Sergei Kostelyanets | Institute for African Studies of the RAS. 30/1 Spiridonovka str., 123001 Moscow, Russia.