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Sud de l'Éthiopie*

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WATER OWNERSHIP AS FORM OF PASTORAL ADAPTATION: THE CASE OF THE GARRI OF SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA

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In the semi-arid lowlands at the border between Ethiopia and Kenya, a main feature of water management among Garri pastoralists from the early 2000s consists of private water points, at the detriment of communal wells as practiced previously. At these water points, elders' authority to oversee watering activities is weakening, and the watering order is defined through personal negotiations and brokerage. Pastoral institutions, which used to regulate water access at communal wells, are losing relevance among these groups.

Yet the type of private property now practiced by the Garri is not equal to a shift from « communal » to « private » resource. It does not imply an exclusive authority to use and dispose of water, and it does not correspond to a diffusion of non-cooperative behavior among herdsmen. This change in ownership rights does not fit with the situation based on a structure of individual benefits and collective costs which Hardin described as « tragedy of the commons » (Burke, 2001: 451; Hardin, 1968: 1244).

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Ownership concerns management system and not merely water resources. Entitlement to water rights is granted according to the herder's position within Garri society, considering his involvement in personal relations and multiple social networks, at the intersection of clan and lineage affiliation, commercial and political alliances. This is a case where « ownership » and the opposition public/private are less important than local agreements and the decision-making process (Bakker, 2008: 245).

From the early 90s the Ethiopian government promoted the privatization of natural resources, namely land enclosures, as a political strategy to bind nomadic groups to government's control. Drawing on the idea of resource management as a social and historical process (Mosse, 1997: 475), the article argues how change in ownership rights concerning water usage allows Garri pastoralists to detach natural resource management from external interference. In my analysis, what makes a water point « private » among the Garri is a wider margin of decisional independence from government officials and international development actors. At least for some herders, a new ownership regime enhances Garri's control over natural resource usage, and social relationships which evolve around them.

The case of private hand-dug wells among the Garri invites us to consider that water is embedded in social relations between different actors. Local arrangements regulating water access distribution are contextual, highly flexible, and adapted to a changing social and ecological environment. As we will see, the good exchanged at private water point is not limited to water: social, political, economic and kinship relationships are negotiated through water arrangements too¹.

Water and ethnic relations: historical accounts

The Garri live in southern Ethiopia, northern Kenya and southern Somalia. They practice pastoralism (mainly camels, sheep

¹ This article is based on two fieldworks (2008 & 2011) carried out in Moyale and Hudet area of Ethiopia, Somali Regional State, as part of a PhD in Anthropology at Saint Denis - Paris 8 University.

and goats), occasional rain-fed farming, and are involved in various commercial activities. They speak both Oromo and Somali languages² and, according to oral traditions, they migrated in Liban district of southern Ethiopia in the late nineteenth century, where they came into contact with the Oromo Borana (Kassa, 1983: 3; Sato, 1996: 275-9).

From the sixteenth century the Borana were a dominant military force in what is now southern Ethiopia. Relationships between local populations were characterized by fluid ethnic boundaries, with institutionalized forms of mutual support. Strong neighborhood ties resulted in the adoption by the Garri of Borana social institutions regulating water usage, and in particular of the role of the *abba herega* (« father of the watering order » in Oromo), a local officer appointed by village' elders to supervise access distributions at communal water points (Oba, 1996: 121).

Development of contemporary water management and ownership among the Garri is impossible to understand without an historical review of modes of land appropriation since colonial times. In northern Kenya and southeastern Ethiopia, British administration imposed limitations to nomadic movements by establishing grazing areas allocated to different ethnic groups. This contributed to break natural resource-mediated political linkages, which served as bases of social organization and control, and to facilitate the administration of local people living in rural areas.

The enforced crystallization of societal boundaries effectively halted the peaceful means of contact and exchange [...] which had once bred familiarity. In the place of extensive contacts came an emphasis on community identity separate from that of neighbors, and with a need for increased self-reliance, « tribalism » was promoted (Sobania, 1990: 14).

In 1975, a Land Reform was implemented by the Derg regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam which imposed at local level a new administrative structure based on grass-roots units known as Peasant

² The Garri are the most important of the pre-Hawiya Somali clans (Lewis, 1955: 26-27). In southern Ethiopia, they are occasionally distinguished with different names by the region in which they live (Kassa, 1983).

Associations, renamed *kebele* after the fall of the Derg in 1991. Through this system, the Derg nationalized all land and promoted a villagization programme from 1985. Educated people appointed by the government were sent from urban centers to work in the *kebele* in the countryside to implement the reform. These officials were responsible for distributing land and providing usufruct rights based on central guidelines³.

The *kebele* administrative units, based on a peasant-derived model of organization, were extended also to pastoral areas disregarding local arrangements regulating access to water and pasture. In this way, it imposed a territorially-based structure of administration which marked a shift to a new mode of domination, settlement of nomadic groups being the overall aim of government policies (Gadamu, 1994: 73). In 1984 *kebele* units facilitated the logistic of the first national census in Ethiopia, and « nomadic household » was the conventional unit of statistical surveys. This contributed to the deterioration of relations between pastoral groups and government officials, because local population associated the enumeration of humans and livestock with new movement restrictions or with taxation (Watkins & Fleisher, 2002: 331).

Kebele authorities attempted to replace the functions of traditional leaders related to the control of natural resources, namely water and grazing land, and to suppress the coordination of households' migration across administrative boundaries. The Garri inhabiting the village of Chilanko, located 150 km east of Moyale, recall this process very clearly.

In past time elders ruled in Chilanko. At first, even newly introduced *kebele* didn't take decision without elders' agreement. But these days *kebele* leaders have their own bureau, they close the door and decide some things. They decide without the elders, and

³ In the highlands, land was distributed using a standard model of 80 families and 800 ha of and for each *kebele*, with a wide margin of local adaptation; sale, lease or inheritance of land was officially prohibited (Hogg, 1997; Helland, 2007: 5).

due to this, respect towards traditional leaders have reduced (author's interview).

Government officials were able to gain a more influential role in the decision-making process which defines the calendar of opening of traditional dry-season water wells (*tula*), as well as definition of dry-season communal grazing land known as *katana*⁴ among the Garri. Moreover, *kebele* leaders started to endorse allocation of land enclosures to nomadic households in order to implement settlement policies. These enclosures, known as *kallo*, are fodder reserve for dry seasons located around the settlement, and were initially managed by community members of one or more villages. Under *kebele* supervision *kallo* started to be given to individuals, whereas a village was « the minimal territorial unit entitled to make and "own" *kallo* » before (Tache, 2000: 55; Napier & Desta, 2011; cf. Bassi, 2005: 145 on the *kallo* institution of the Borana).

Water and development in southern Ethiopia

In the eyes of local population, the authority of *kebele* officials resulted even stronger as they controlled the distribution of humanitarian aid, famine relief and the coordination of development interventions. Humanitarian aid and relief started being implemented in Ethiopia during the drought of 1973-75 (Helland, 1982: 241). Since then, international organizations have become a strategic actor alongside with state authorities as far as natural resource management is concerned. In remote areas of southern Ethiopia, the logistical and bureaucratic support of the *kebele* administrative system allowed national authorities to reinforce their hold over rural populations, using humanitarian aid as a means of extending state control. Water development was the main tool to

⁴ This practice consists in demarcating a 10 km wide grazing areas which is closed to animals during rainy season. Its borders are known by all the community members, who are responsible for keeping the cattle away from *katana* area during rainy season, and eventually reporting to the *kebele* leaders whereas somebody is found grazing his animals without permission. *Kebele* leaders, pastoralists and the elders jointly define dates of opening and closing of *katana* reserve.

attract settlements, and infrastructures such as schools or health facilities were constructed alongside new water points.

A feature of development interventions that needs to be analyzed in detail is the construction of cemented underground reservoirs to collect run-off water locally known as *birkeds*⁵. According to Cossins, first *birkeds* were constructed by Somali Isaaq in Somalia in 1952 and in 1954 in those areas at the borderlands between Ethiopia and Somalia where permanent water is limited (Cossins, 1971 in Gomes, 2006: 22; Sugule & Walker, 1998).

At this kind of water point, maintenance is easier compared to traditional wells. Ownership rights are defined according to financial investment in excavation works, and those who contributed have wide margin of decisional autonomy in distributing water access. The construction of *birkeds* was regulated through local agreements known as *xeer*, a political contract governing dispute resolution among different lineage groups which is common both among the Somalis and Ethiopian Somalis (Lewis, 1994; Menkhaus, 2000). These occasional and flexible contracts « contribute to the formation of socio-political units which are never definitively fixed, instead remaining fluid » (Djama, 2010: 108). *Xeer* agreements were mainly concerned with preventing overuse of grazing land due to uncontrolled construction of new *birkeds*.

Starting from the early '80s, international organizations promoted the construction of new *birkeds*. Access was limited to those herders inhabiting the same territory defined through the administrative boundaries of the *kebele*. Development actors failed to acknowledge the cultural dimension of *birkeds* as well as the role of the local agreements regulating the construction and usage of these water points. Planning of development interventions was reduced to water's quantitative and technical dimensions, and this resulted in heavy ecological consequences: new water points excavated in the framework of development schemes determined an

⁵ Technically the Somali name for this water point is *berkad* (singular) or *berkado* (plural).

overuse of grazing land resources in dry- and wet-season pasture areas, due to excessive water spots all over the grazing lands (Helland, 1998; Kassa, 2001).

Image 1: construction of an underground reservoir among the Borana.
From Coppock, 1994.

Private cisterns are more widespread among Somali than Borana groups. To give an example, in Shimbirale, a small settlement located at the border between Ethiopia and Somalia, the number of *birkeds* was increased from 3 in 1974 to almost 50 in less than twenty years (Gomes, *op. cit.*). This type of water facilities spread out among Somali groups in southern Ethiopia, and Garri pastoralists started to gradually adopt *birkeds* management also to regulate access to communal wells (*ella*), where elders were traditionally responsible for solving disputes related to water rights and defining the watering order through the appointment of a local officer (*abba herega*). From the early 2000s, private hand-dug water points are a major feature of water management among these groups. This kind of water points, the structure which is very basic, combines the characteristics of *birkeds* (water run-off catchment) and shallow wells (*ella adadi* in Oromo language), as they can be

excavated nearby small seasonal streams, where it is assumed that there is groundwater⁶.

New pastoralist landscape in southern Ethiopia

Following Somalia's defeat in the war against Ethiopia for the control of the Ogaden region in 1977-8, most of Garri people living in southern Ethiopia were forced to flee to Somalia, where they spent almost ten years in UNHCR refugee camps before returning to Ethiopia towards the end of the 1980s. This experience reinforced their access to Somali political space⁷, which had already been employed in the 1960s and 1970s to obtain military and financial control in their local conflicts within Ethiopia (Adugna, 2010: 51-56; see also Bassi, 1997). The repatriation of the returnees coincided with a serious drought in 1991 and 1992, and pressure on pastoral resources increased even more. Sometimes Somali Garri were forced to resettle in areas where no water sources were available, or where vegetation was not suited for camel rearing. This resulted in new incentives for the construction of private hand-dug water points.

Moreover, the refugee experience favored the diffusion of a new perception of humanitarian and developmental actors. Those Garri who repatriated in Ethiopia got used to a system based on individual refugee entitlement, and «tended to look towards the

⁶ Normally these water points are constructed in clusters and location for digging is selected following an assessment of existing ones. As excavation begins, the identification of a limestone locally known as *katchawa* confirms the presence of water in the basement.

⁷ Even if further research is needed on this subject, it is worth emphasizing Garri's familiarization with Somali pastoralist social institutions, and in particular *xeer* political contracts. Among Somali pastoralists, social organization develops in relation to land and water sources, and clan and lineage commitments are «intimately bound up with the distribution of rights to land and water» (Lewis, 1994: 139). Recent reports testify that *xeer* agreements may be set up between groups «structurally distant in the genealogical charter» (Gomes, *op. cit.*). This means that contemporary practices of water management through private water points serve as a means for re-constructing Garri social and political organization.

staff of international organizations for administration rather than government officials » (Kassa, 1996: 122). In the framework of repatriation schemes and creation of new settlements for those refugees who returned in Ethiopia, international organization financed the construction of new private *birkeds* assigned to beneficiaries selected in collaboration with *kebele* official.

« *The sultan is not here* ». *Participation and political isolation among the Garri*

With the end of the Derg regime, the Federal Government, which took power in 1991, favored the crystallization of ethnic identities in the framework of Ethiopian « ethnic federalism » (Kefale, 2010: 617). It is important to highlight here the shift from the post-colonial period, when no recognition was accorded to tribal/ethnic criteria, to the '91 administrative reorganization of Ethiopia in different Regional States alongside ethnic borders. The demarcation of Somali and Oromia Regions implied a reallocation of natural resources on the base of ethnicity, which exacerbated conflicts between Oromo and Somali groups. For the Garri, described as « half Somali half Borana tribes » in colonial accounts (French, 1913: 430), affirming their Somali identity on the newly federal restructured political arena became a sound strategy for claiming access rights to grazing lands and water sources in their local disputes against the Borana. Moreover, the possibility to be included into repatriation programs and benefit of humanitarian aid and development initiatives constituted another important incentive to clearly identify their ethnic association.

The shift to a new political setting altered the relationships between Somali traditional authorities and the central state. In Somali Region, the Ethiopian Federal government adopted a mode of political control which consisted in appointing local clan elders in order to contain and resolve ethnic conflicts. Local elders were engaged in « mediating between government administrators and local communities, [...] monitoring of emergency operations programs (such as food distributions) and the dissemination of government policy » (Donovan & Regasse, 2001 *in*

Hagmann, 2007: 39). In Hudet, Garri elders are also engaged in advocating the abandonment of pastoralism among nomadic groups.

Government can mobilize elders, who are sent to the villages in order to motivate villagers to shift to town, construct a home, educate their children, get health services, clean water and relief – in other words, to change their way of life (author's interview).

The appointment of Garri elders as « peacemakers » or government's agents, as it is the case in Hudet area, discredited their reputation among local populations, and compromised their legitimate authority, which is traditionally concerned with conflict mediation and settling disputes related to natural resource usage.

Co-optation of Somali elders in the framework of the federal restructuring of the Ethiopian state almost coincided with the advent of « participatory development » as the dominant legitimate paradigm of international aid. The shift to a « participatory approach »⁸ met the need for a new legitimization of development planners addressing the perceived failure of the top-down development model which characterized big-scheme interventions in the '80s. In a process of weakening of central state and empowering of regional governments, new uses of « ethnic group » and local political authorities can be highlighted. The same local authorities, who were previously considered an obstacle to the modernizing vision of the Ethiopian nation-state, are now regarded as strategic local partners for both national and international actors.

Development agencies started to look at elders as legitimate community representatives, without considering their ambiguous position in the eyes of Garri pastoralists, determined by the fact that they had been mobilized by the government to mediate local conflicts and campaign for the sedentarization of pastoralists. This perception also applies to Garri clan heads called *Sultans*, who act as spiritual leaders and have a stronger decisional power than the

⁸ Anthropological studies pointed out the risk of idealizing traditional culture which is inherent in participatory development projects, and the importance of recognizing social embeddedness of local environmental knowledge (Mosse, 1997: 483; Sillitoe, 1998: 223).

elders. This political representative is involved in negotiations with government authorities at national and federal level, and is considered as being « concerned with government affairs instead of community problems » (author's interview).

Practices of water management reflect these dynamics at local level. New ownership rights undermine the elders' role as key referent for mediating inter-ethnic and clanic relationships and governing the political life of Garri pastoralists. At private water points clan or lineage memberships is only one among many criteria that a well owner can follow in defining the watering order. Moreover, the spread of this kind of water points participates in reproducing kinship relationships without elders' interposition, as the ownership of water point is transmitted from the man who excavated to the sons.

There are other reasons behind Garri claims concerning clan or lineage membership, which should not constitute a reference criterion for water access distribution at all. The greater room for decision which characterizes management of private water points has to be understood by taking into account increasing pastoralism drop-out rates, and number of people (mostly young) who decide to abandon a nomadic lifestyle and move into urban centers to attend school or search for a job. This implies growing difficulties for people who belong to the same family or lineage to have the manpower needed to look after animals. This point has been confirmed by the possibility of hiring people belonging to other lineages or families in order to graze and water animals. It is worth noting that the process of social change within Garri society can be observed by taking into account the development of a new form of water point ownership, and the diffusion of hired labor beyond domestic or lineage relationships to run pastoral activities. New ownership rights, disentangled from clan or lineage membership as a binding criteria to grant water access, reflects a new form of social organization and labor division in Garri society, where sedentarization and strong connections with urban centers play a crucial role. Thus a widespread perception is found among the Garri pastoralists that traditional social obligations granting watering

rights based on clan or lineage membership can develop into a burden rather than an asset.

In 2010, the Water Office of Somali Regional State in Moyale *wereda* (district) carried out a census of water points which for the first time took into account private hand-dug ones (see Table 1).

Table 1. Moyale Wereda Water Office, Somali Regional State (data 2010)			
Type of water point	Working	Not working	Total
<i>Birkeds</i>	37	4	41
Pond (constructed by the government)	42	12	54
Pond (constructed by the community)	99	36	135
Pond (private)	147	87	234
Private Hand-dug well	254	69	323
Hand pump*	10	3	13
Motorized bore hole*	13	3	16
Solar scheme*	2	5	7
Roof catchment	7	4	11
* A water committee appointed by the government is in charge for distributing water access and maintenance. At pond access varies greatly and is free in most cases. Participation in maintenance work is required.			

This classification of water points does not refer to a single criterion, as different morphological characteristics and management rules are considered together without distinction. Above all, the bias of government's perspective on trends in water development results from the fact that communal wells are not considered at all: nowadays, these water points are less relevant in number compared to private ones.

International organizations refer to these data for planning development projects. Those who financed the construction of a water point can ask the *kebele* leaders to expand or refurbish it (for example by constructing a drinking trough for cattle) using development funding. This means that private water points can be selected as « beneficiaries » of development projects. Network of personal relationships constructed through water access distributions can be used to influence *kebele* leaders in selecting which water point will be renewed. In contemporary relationships with development actors, the form of private ownership of water points proves to be a suitable strategy to « intercept » international funding (Olivier de Sardan, 2005).

How water is distributed at private water points

Change in local agreements concerning water rights distribution maintains its own specificity compared to the more general process of privatization of pastoral resources, and in particular to the diffusion of land enclosures (*kallo*) destined to small scale agriculture (both for subsistence or for sale in urban markets) or farming activities. Among the Garri, *kallo* is strongly criticized, while the spread of private water points is strongly supported. The practice of private land enclosure is criticized because it prevents the possibility of installing a camp during the nomadic movements and, more generally, because it implies an unequal access to land. As I was told during my fieldwork by a Garri herder « we don't support *kallo* because it benefits only one person ».

In fact, if it is possible to identify an « owner » at private water points, this does not mean that he enjoys exclusive water rights. He has priority to water his animals and a wide margin of autonomy in defining the watering order. Moreover, there may be one or more owners, depending on the number of people who financed excavation works, as we will see hereafter.

During dry-season, access is distributed on the basis of a system of three days. The first two days are « reserved » to the owner, who can water his livestock and decide to give access to

other herds. During the third day, the water point will be open on a « first come, first served » basis to other herders who have « reserved » their turn. Herders are supposed to « reserve » their turn far in advance, even before the arrival of the dry season. During the first two days, criteria that can be « used » to define watering order are many (in particular inter-marriage relations, but also other kinship links, neighborhood, economic agreements, political alliances). Overall, water access distribution results from daily bargaining and negotiations. Through water, long term reciprocal relationships are reaffirmed and constantly adapted to specific needs and agreements among herders, which does not concern exclusively water, but may be related to other issues i.e. herding camels or recruiting hired labor to take care of them, organizing maintenance works of a water point, preserving of collective grazing areas (*katana*), coordinating of migration during rainy season, cooperating in commercial activities, sharing information about conflict. From this perspective, water rights became a local language to shape social relations. They constitute a flexible tool to manage a network of reciprocal obligations among pastoralists based on mutual trust, where the reliability of the water point owner in assigning access and respecting the watering order plays a key role.

It is almost impossible to be denied access to water at private water points. Due to various criteria governing access distribution, herders can appeal to different relationships in order to claim water rights. Disputes related to the watering order may arise; at the same time conflicts do not remain limited to personal quarrels among herders. The possibility of obtaining access has to be calculated by taking into consideration the whole complex of private water points which are found in a given locality. Shifting from one water point to another means that problems related to the watering order are settled at a communal level and this in turn minimizes tensions related to water access distribution.

The choice of the water point is thus conditioned by the availability of water, but also by the quality of social relations with the owner. In this way, the reconfiguration of water rights,

characterized by a wider margin of decision-making autonomy for the person who built the water point, reproduces and actualizes at the same time the « water to the needy » principle, and the historical relationships of mutual help and water solidarity among pastoralists, according to which « rights in water are never so developed as actually to restrict access to water » (Hogg, 1990: 25). If, as Aklilu and Catley report, traditional social support through *zakat* and gifts is decreasing in Ethiopia's Somali Region and becoming « a thing of the past » (2010: 35), personal commitments and water contracts based on mutual trust and complying with the watering order can be considered as an extension of pastoral « solidarity » in modern conditions.

Evolution of the role of abba herega among the Garri

The owner's priority rights in the watering order as well as his decisional autonomy in distributing water access vary greatly depending on the water point. In the village of Mubarak, change in water point ownership can be observed by taking into account the evolution of the role of the *abba herega*. As we saw previously, this Oromo term refers to the officer supervising the watering order. This role has been « adopted » (and « adapted ») by the Garri, and continues to be an important reference for the analysis of contemporary practices of water management among these groups.

In past times, one *abba herega* nominated by the elders was responsible for the maintenance and coordination of watering activities on all the water points in Mubarak and surrounding areas. The establishment of new water points led to an increase in the number of *abba herega*. In this regard, two possible configurations emerge, depending on the number of people who provided financial support for the excavations. If several people financed the construction, three *abba herega* are in charge, each one referring to a group having right to water. Out of the three, a single *abba herega* is appointed as spokesman according to the consensus and mutual trust. It is worth noting that through the *abba herega*, those who financed the construction of the water point become the « owners » of one of the three days. During this day, they will have priority access and authority to assign water rights to those herdsmen who

asked to bring their animals. This system ensures that Garri herders can be « owners » of one or more days at different water points. At the same time, pastoralists may decide to turn to a different *abba herega*, or they can apply to obtain access to the same water point on different days, depending on the specific personal relationships at stake.

This means a break from elders' control compared to the period before the spread of private water points among the Garri, when clan or lineage membership was an important, almost exclusive criterion to grant watering rights, and the elders were the main referent for mediating clan and lineage relationships and settling disputes related to natural resource management. Water still continues to mediate relationships for re-constructing a political and social body. Based on negotiations and daily bargaining among herdsman, water access distribution works as a flexible tool to extend social, economic and political networks beyond clan and lineage boundaries. In this way, diffusion of private water points allows Garri groups to reproduce and actualize the network of social relations which historically constituted pastoralist social systems in these regions, where « every pastoralist [...] was the center of a unique cluster of personal relationships entirely different from that of every other man » (Sobania, 1990: 3).

Water payment and pastoral change

Water access at private water points can be purchased in cash, despite water payment – as well as the definition of the role of the *abba herega* – is extremely variable from one water point to another. In the village of Mubarak and surrounding areas there is a difference between types of animals. As for camels, access is granted at each watering session after an exchange of goods (often some liters of milk) without any money being paid. As for cattle, a herder who demands to water his animals is required to pay an amount of money (100-200 Birr⁹), which will entitle him with water rights during the entire dry season.

⁹ 1 Ethiopian Birr (ETB) = 0,04 euro in November 2011.

Water payment in cash reflects increasingly strong interconnections between Garri society and regional market economy. Nowadays, the Garri are involved in various commercial activities which mobilize hired workforce and combine stock-rearing and commerce, as they play a major role in controlling unofficial cross-border trade between Ethiopia and Kenya¹⁰. Besides, one should consider the high rate of sedentarization and increasingly stronger linkages between people living in rural areas and those who settled in urban centers. The construction of a private water point may result from the mobilization of social and economic resources both in rural areas and in urban centers. This practice can be thus considered as a mean for reinforcing the « structural continuity » between urban and rural area, which has been described as one of the most significant aspects of Somali pastoralism (Lewis, 1994: 123). This point was confirmed during the research in the town of Moyale, where some Garri who were previously engaged in herding activities in rural areas now say to be still involved in pastoralism « even though they live in the city ». At the same time, the extension of these social and economic connections between rural and urban environment changed significantly over recent years, and goes far beyond regional scale¹¹.

Although water access can be purchased in cash, the type of exchange is complex and not limited to monetary value. In southern Ethiopia, wells network historically operated as an « information device » that allows pastoralists to better coordinate their economic activities and migratory movements. What characterizes the new system of private water points is that information is shared

¹⁰ Goods traded from Ethiopia to Kenya are live animals, livestock products, other food items, *chat* (stimulant green leaves) and gold, while manufactured or processed items dominates commercial inflow from Kenya to Ethiopia (OSSREA, 1999).

¹¹ During my stay in Addis Ababa, I met a Garri businessman who provided financial support to water development activities in rural areas around Moyale. Interestingly, it was also during this meeting that I could get some insights on « local knowledge » related to water points management and the three days system which has been discussed previously.

horizontally among herdsmen without the interposition of the elders, and cannot be easily accessed from outsiders: this contributes to counteract limits in herders' decisional flexibility in the relationships with government officials and development organizations.

Finally, new water arrangements enter in correlation with the construction of new legitimate authorities within Garri society. Among Somali pastoralists being « important », having their role recognized at communal level and defending their reputation depends on their capacity to comply with personal commitments, and respect mutual relationships of trust which may be constructed through water access distribution. As Menkhaus says: « The rise to a position of influence and eminence is based not on hereditary status but on a lifetime of earned reputation as effective negotiators, trusted mediators, moving orators, or wise and pious men » (*op. cit.*: 185-6).

Among the Garri, re-construction of social linkages at private water points contributes to legitimize new influential roles in the assembly which decides all important public matters, as well as in the relationships with *kebele* leaders and NGO representatives.

Conclusion

In this article attempts have been made to understand change in water rights by focusing on the greater flexibility and decisional autonomy characterizing access distribution at private water points. The property regime adopted by the Garri is neither purely « private » nor « communal ». Rather, it is a combination of public and private elements, and of communal and individual elements (Benda-Beckmann, 2001). Personal relationships between pastoralists ensure this organizational flexibility, which allows them to adapt water rights to changing social and economic conditions. In fact, change in water rights reflects the need to reconfigure social relations among a range of internal and external actors (state authorities, neighboring groups, humanitarian and development actors), thus participating in remodeling Garri ethnic identity.

Change in the ownership regime of private water point among the Garri coincides neither with a process of water privatization nor with its commoditization, as social relations engendered through water access distribution go far beyond water payment. This invites us to put into perspective the analysis which considers payment-based water access as a mere « source of vulnerability » for poorer households in Ethiopia's Somali Region, as it has been suggested (Devereux, 2006).

Analysis of how access is distributed at private water points reveals that interests of well owner are embedded in watering rights granted to external users through personal agreements. Water contracts may be contextual or repeated over time, can refer to different types of relationships (based on kinship or not), and can be object of monetary exchange. This in turn actualizes historical form of prestige among Somali pastoralists, where « the ethic of reciprocity and of mutuality is paramount [...], loyalty to one's kin, pride, dignity and "name" are highly valued » and ultimately more important than possession of wealth (Lewis 1994: 128).

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Summary

In the semiarid lowlands of southern Ethiopia, water development initiatives historically served as a tool for promoting the settlement of nomadic groups, aimed at strengthening the government's authority over remote territories and local populations otherwise difficult to rule. This included the construction of private underground reservoirs financed by humanitarian organizations from the early 1970s. The proliferation of private hand-dug water points among the Garri cannot be considered as a simple result of external imposition aiming to discipline and transform local realities. The particular ownership regime that will be discussed here reflects the local history of natural resource usage and mediates current interactions with state authorities, humanitarian and development actors, thereby participating in remodeling Garri ethnic identity.

Key-words: development, Ethiopia, ethnic federalism, pastoralism, water.

Résumé

La propriété de l'eau comme forme d'adaptation pastorale: le cas des Garri du Sud de l'Éthiopie

Dans les plaines semi-arides du Sud de l'Éthiopie, les interventions pour l'aménagement hydrique ont historiquement fonctionné comme un moyen

de promouvoir la sédentarisation des groupes nomades, dans l'objectif de renforcer l'autorité du gouvernement dans des territoires reculés et sur des populations difficiles à maîtriser. Ces interventions ont inclus la construction de réservoirs souterrains privés financée depuis le début des années 1970 par les organisations humanitaires. La diffusion des points d'eau privés creusés à la main chez les Garri ne peut pas être considérée comme le seul résultat d'une imposition externe visant à discipliner et transformer les réalités locales. Le régime de propriété privée que nous discutons dans l'article reflète l'histoire locale de l'usage des ressources naturelles et sert de médiation dans les rapports avec les autorités étatiques, les acteurs de l'humanitaire et du développement, participant ainsi du remodelage de l'identité ethnique des Garri.

Mots-clefs : développement, Éthiopie, fédéralisme ethnique, pastoralisme, eau.

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