

Implementing the MDG Water Target in Niger: a Post-Colonial Perspective

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“We resolve further: To halve, by the year 2015, ... the proportion of people who are unable to reach or to afford safe drinking water”. (United Nations Millennium Declaration §19)

By 2001 the water sector in Niger had been subject of development interventions for many years without much improvement of water availability (PRSP 2001). Structural adjustment and restructuring of state companies did not prove very successful and after an investment stop in 1996, water sector plans were incorporated into Niger’s macro-economic development framework and its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, PRSP. Improvement of basic social services, including water, education and health, is one of four pillars in Niger’s PRS (PRSP 2001). It is primarily through the PRSP that the Millennium Development Goals, MDGs, are being operationalized, in close cooperation between Niger’s UN Country Team and the international financial institutions, IFIs. Presently, the MDG water target, Target 10¹, constitutes the prime framework for policy and expenditure in the water sector.

Progress has been made due to strong injections of new funds but the probability is still small that Niger will meet Target 10 by 2015 (Rapport National sur le Développement Humain, Niger 2004). Despite measurable improvements, the question of viability and sustainability of water sector reform is still a crucial issue, not least considering previous failure of interventions in the sector. While the most important question is inarguably to improve access to safe water, it must be recognized that the process of doing this is highly political, involving relations of power that shape the means and the outcome. Considering that the MDGs are formulated within a broader development discourse, and its particular relationship between the representation of development countries and economic practice, by which their meaning is constrained (Escobar 1995, Abrahamsen 2000, Crewe & Harrison 2000), it seems relevant to ask what effects interventions in the water sector will have this time. Hence the focus of this paper is the process of implementing Target 10 in the local Nigerien context, and it seeks to argue for the productive use of a set of conceptualizations in postcolonial theory, such as translation, resistance and hybridity to better understand the process and its effects.

One way to analyse the effects of global development discourse, both in terms of constraints and new possibilities, is to look at the way it is translated at the local level. This

¹ There are eight Millennium Development Goals, all with subtargets and indicators. Goal 7 is to secure environmental sustainability, including target 9-11. Target 10, which is the focus of this paper, is to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation. The issue of sanitation will not be dealt with here.

has been thoroughly done in a number of case studies at local community level (Bebbington 2000, Escobar 1995, Gupta 1998), however, it is rarely done at a national official level. It is my argument that officials within state and development institutions charged with the implementation of Target 10, translate, redefine, displace and recode the dominant development discourse through a process of incorporation, negotiation and contestation. This is not done in a coherent way, but is rather highly contradictory. There are individual as well as communal rationalities, and the officials take a number of different positions in relationships within development cooperation.

The argument of this paper is finding its inspiration from a Foucauldian conceptualization of power as productive. Power relations are modes of action where certain actions or practices structure the space for other possible actions or practices. Power is stronger the less it is perceived as oppression, and the more it seduces. The continuing power of development, despite all the critique and impasses, lies in the attractive goal of poverty eradication. But according to Foucault it is equally important that power is exercised over subjects who act themselves, in whom it induces responses, reactions and possible inventions (Foucault 2000:340-341). The point is that the dominant development discourse that surrounds and constrains the MDGs builds on the relationship between the representation of developing countries, in this case African countries in particular, and the liberal market logic. This discourse is practiced in development interventions and the translations officials make of the dominant discourse are the result of a line of endless encounters with interventions, colonial as well as postcolonial.

When World Bank officials argue that calling their practice neo-colonial is simply emotional and nothing the Bank should concern itself with they may be mistaken (Republican 070309, Interview with Jamal Saghir 2005). The very act of calling their practices neo-colonial is a form of resistance, which has effects on the process and outcome of World Bank interventions. This is not to argue that the donor's just need to understand the recipients better in order to improve development assistance, but to question the way we look at development as an intentional activity, in terms of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, key concerns in the MDG discourse. Recognising the limitations of development interventions it becomes important to see how something else, i.e. alternative, hybrid, internally owned, paths to change are made possible, rather than to evaluate the success or failure of interventions based on indicators predetermined at an international level. Through translations and the production of hybridities, a certain kind of resistance is performed. The process of translation is a way to deal with relations of power, to resist, but resistance cannot be idealized as pure opposition to the order it opposes, it rather operates inside the structure of power that it both challenges and helps to sustain. It is not the kind of resistance that leads to liberation movements, it is not something new in the sense of leaving behind the old, but it is *beyond*, using Bhabha (out of context) it "renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present". While development strategies such as the MDGs try to pin down the future based on production of knowledge of the past and present, the representation of the past and the present are transformed at the local level through the process of translation whereby the future becomes an open question (Bhabha 2006:10-12, 314)².

Below, after a short discussion about the discursive formation surrounding the MDGs, I will discuss the process of translation through a set of themes that emerged from a reading of interviews made on a study of water sector reform in Niger, while the implementation of Target 10 had just started. The discussion is based on an open-ended group interview with four Nigerien officials involved in the implementation of the MDGs, one high

² It shall be noted that I am removing conceptualizations from the context in which they have been formulated and use them in a different context under different circumstances.

official at the Ministère de hydraulique et de l'environnement, a senior engineer at the municipality of Niamey, and two officials working with water services provision, one in a UN organization, and the other in a European development agency. In addition, other interviews made during the same study, have been consulted.

Implementers 'in-between'

As I was doing a study on water sector reform in Niger an image emerged of how officials working with water sector reform in development cooperation make sense of the context and circumstances under which they work, and it raised questions concerning the effects of the discourse they produce. State officials, central administrators, Nigerien officials in UN and cooperation agencies, charged with the responsibility to implement the Millennium Development Goals in Niger, occupy important positions where the way they make sense of development discourse contribute to its particular constitution in Niger. Bhabha discusses spaces where translation occurs as 'in-between' spaces, and the officials that are discussed in this paper occupy particular 'in-between' positions in development cooperation, in terms of their possession of higher education, the French language, the Arabic language, and the internalization of the idea of development, which are properties that make them eligible for their professional positions, placing them between the donors and the targeted receivers, i.e. the poor. As such they have the experience of cultural dislocation, and of constantly relating to imagined borders of time, space and culture. That means they relate to representations of tradition, modernity and postmodernity, to representations of Niger and Africa and their inclusion in or exclusion from the global system, to being Nigerien and African, to being Muslim, just to mention a few imagined borders in relation to which they navigate. Occupying this position they are regarded as almost developed, but not quite. Despite the attributes that give them their position they are not recognized as equal partners in cooperation, they cannot participate on the same conditions, they do not have the right to the same salaries, to four-wheel drive cars, to all the privileges of expatriate experts and consultants, nor is their capacity recognized, respected and made use of. In this 'in-between' space in development relations they translate the dominant discourse, whereby they elaborate "strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation" (Bhabha 2006:2). Translation is made in a communicative space, what Bhabha calls a Third Space, where the spaces of those communicating are gathered to produce meaning. This Third Space represents both the general conditions of language as well as the specific performative and institutional strategy in which the statement is made (Bhabha 2006:53), i.e. its discursive embeddedness. The MDGs can thus be seen to receive their meaning in this Third Space, in the process of translation. I will now shortly discuss the discursive formation that surrounds the MDGs, i.e. the performative and institutional strategy in which they are formulated as a statement that constitute part of the discursive embeddedness that contribute to give them their meaning.

The discursive formation

The MDGs are considered unique in the way they are quantifiable and time-bound, as well as in the joint efforts and hopes that are invested in them. They are "the most broadly supported, comprehensive, and specific poverty reduction targets the world has ever established" (UN Millennium Project 2005). The Millennium Declaration and the Development Goals constitute the latest global effort to come to terms with the problem of development, with special focus on poverty, on a global scale. They are a direct continuation of the International Development Targets, IDTs, that were formulated by OECD's Development Assistance

Committee, DAC, in 1995, although taking into account the critique against the latter for being an initiative from the rich OECD members and thus lacking the participative aspect, as well as of the UN conferences of the 1990s. As such it is an effort to take into account the views and interests of the poor countries, and of emphasising ownership of the poverty reduction process. Furthermore, it is argued that they put people's lives rather than growth at the centre, that they provide a framework for accountability at several levels, and address developing outcomes as well as input from rich countries (Black & White 2004, Fukuda-Parr 2004:395)³. It is emphasised that achieving the targets will require important injections of new funds into poverty reduction processes, and the Millennium Declaration was followed by the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, 2002, which produced the *Monterrey Consensus*, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development, WSSD, in Johannesburg the same year, which resulted in *The Johannesburg Plan*, as well as the report by the Millennium Project *Investing in Development, A practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals*. In the water sector these are complemented by particular initiatives such as the Millennium Project Task Force on Water and Sanitation report *Health, Dignity, and Development: What Will it Take?* the Camdessus-panel report *Financing Water for All*⁴, and the EU Water Initiative, EUWI. Major commitments have been made to substantially increase the volume of development assistance in order to reach the targets, although less has been accomplished so far. In the above mentioned strategies a broad consensus has been established, among donors, think tanks and policy institutions, on economic and policy measures needed to achieve the goals and attract the necessary funds, a consensus which has been widely accused of neoliberalism (Bond 2006, Antrobus 2005, Saith 2006).

These international strategies constitute the closest network of statements surrounding the MDGs, within a broader development discourse. As a statement Target 10 takes place in a field of other statements, of which it is a part, to which it relates, and through which it is made possible, and as it takes place in such a field it contributes to make other statements possible (Foucault 2002:123). Where regularities can be identified between a number of statements, Foucault talks of discursive formations (Foucault 2002:134) Thus Target 10, as a statement, is made possible through its position within development discourse, and as such contribute to continuity and change. Even by some of its most optimistic proponents it is recognized that the MDGs are not a new strategy, but rather a new instrument for mobilizing action, "their newness is not attributable to their content but to how they have mustered political consensus on common objectives" (Fukuda-Parr 2004:397). I am concerned with a particular regularity within development discourse which constrains the MDGs in general and Target 10 in particular, i.e. the relationship between the representation of developing countries, African countries in particular, and economic practice, and the way it constitutes a way to exercise power over developing countries.

Strategies to achieve Target 10, such as the Task Force Report, *Financing Water for All* and *EU Water Initiative*, are based on the representation of a set of deficiencies, in developing countries at large and particularly in the water sector. In *Financing Water for All*, as well as in the EUWI the root of the problem in the water sector in poor countries is the defects in "governance", reliance on foreign aid, lack of political commitment, arbitrary political interference, and that the sector is prone to corruption in societies where it is endemic

³ It is interesting to note that Goal 8, of global partnership, which focuses on the responsibilities of developed countries is the only Goal that are not quantifiable and time bound, and thus lack the claimed accountability effect.

⁴ *Financing Water for All* is a report produced by the World Panel on *Financing Water Infrastructure*, appointed by World Water council and headed by Michel Camdessus, former president of the International Monetary Fund, IMF.

(Winpenny 2003:9-10). The act of defining poor countries in terms of what they lack; lack of development, lack of capacity, lack of political commitment, lack of ownership, has three effects. First, it reduces the differences between countries as they appear homogenous in their deficiency, second, it legitimizes a number of actions and interventions in the lives of those who are lacking, and third, against the backdrop of the two first effects, it legitimizes uniform solutions to the perceived deficiencies (Abrahamsen 2000). In addition, the representation of deficiencies in developing countries creates an image of the opposite in developed countries, thus further legitimizing their right to intervene. These particular deficiencies in the water sector are supposed to be remedied through a focus on ownership, partnership, participation, decentralization and empowerment in different forms at different levels. The idea of ownership and partnership in particular has been brought forward to create a more equal relationship within international aid. It means that local actors are supposed to take the lead while external partners support their efforts to take more responsibility for their development. It is to a large extent based on the idea of aid dependency as a condition that hampers the effect of aid (Eriksson-Baaz 2001). As it has been analysed by Abrahamsen (2000) and Eriksson-Baaz (2001), ownership and partnership have a double function as they reproduce the representation of deficiencies in developing countries, and thus legitimize the continuation of interventions and conditionality by “development partners”, the establishment of market solutions in particular, e.g. Public-Private-Partnerships where the private “partner”, always represented as efficient, strong on management capacity, will lift the public “partner”, which is represented as lacking the same qualities (Winpenny 2003, COM 2004). There is thus an inner contradiction that disables these concepts. Except from the double standards involved in the focus on these concepts, such as claiming ownership of PRSPs while they must still be formulated in a way as to be approved by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, IMF, ownership and partnership is further invalidated through the limitation to solutions within the market logic.

It has become impossible to set the MDGs outside the market liberal agenda, which traps them in the constraints of the past, still placing the issue of growth rather than human lives at the centre of poverty reduction (Saith 2006). This became evident with the formulation of the Monterrey Consensus and the Johannesburg Plan (Bond 2005), NGOs in Monterrey rejected the consensus “because it failed to challenge the fundamental tenets of neoliberal globalization” (Barton 2005:8, NGO Statement 2002). The liberal economic rationality has a constraining function both as Target 10 is formulated in a context where water is defined as an economic good and market principles are regarded as crucial in its effective allocation, where market principles are the means by which development cooperation tries to deal with the lack of political will and lack of institutional capacity, as well as a consequence of the strategies to attract funds. The costs of reaching Target 10 have been debated, but according to the Camdessus Panel global investments required to meet it was around USD13 billion /year. It has been claimed that the figure is either too high or too low. Regardless, the enormous amount of money needed has generated a consensus on the need for innovative strategies to attract funds. Public funds are not considered sufficient, private investments are needed, but they have been withdrawing from the sector and therefore the solution is to use official funds, i.e. development grants and credits, as catalysts to attract private capital to the water sector in developing countries (COM 2004:6, Winpenny 2003). On the other hand it is stated in *Financing Water for All*, that “[t]here is a risk, ... that a major increase in the availability of grant aid for water projects would ‘crowd out’ commercial lending and discourage water authorities from becoming more financially self-sustaining” (Winpenny 2003:24). The logic is self-referential, as market principles are regarded as technical tools to achieve Target 10, they become an end in themselves.

Last but not least it is of central importance that the MDGs are to be achieved through each country's Poverty Reduction Strategy and through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, HIPC, with all the conditionalities involved, and with the focus on macroeconomic reforms in PRSPs. It has been argued that the economic reforms inherent in the PRSP process, and the focus on servicing debt and cutting public expenditures, stands in direct contradiction with a number of goals, including goal 7, and target 10 (Barton 2005:8).

Even if discourses should not be seen as uniform and invariable, but flexible and diversified the MDGs and their implementation through the PRSPs have probably contributed to make the development discourse more homogenous than it has ever been, through its emphasis on centralisation, coherence, and coordination, as well as the increasing focus on monitoring, control and mechanisms for correction (Abrahamsen 2000:29, Hall & de la Motte 2004:3). However, using conceptualizations from post-colonial theory such as translation, hybridity and resistance, enables a focus on agency, and the way people constantly negotiate their own positions within the discourse, whereby they destabilise it, stretch its borders, find room for manoeuvre within its constraints. It is to this process and the local context of Niger we now turn.

Incorporation, negotiation and contestation

Location

In this year's Human Development Index Niger has been surpassed by Sierra Leone and is at present rated as the poorest country in the world (HDI 2006). 63% of the population is considered to live below the poverty line. From independence from French colonial rule in 1960 Niger was an authoritarian one-party state until the early 1990s (Gervais 1997, Ibrahim 1994). Due to high uranium demand on the world market Niger experienced periods of economic prosperity and social stability in the early 1970s to the mid 1980s, despite the severe droughts that struck the country. This period was followed by a number of heavy drawbacks such as the collapse of the uranium market, the enforcement of the Structural Adjustment Programs and the devaluation of the FCFA, which caused economic depression and social turmoil, not least because of the great cuts in public spending (Gervais 1997, Ibrahim 1994). But in the early 1990s a multiparty process was initiated and a National Conference was held in 1991 where it was decided that the country should suspend the SAP (Gervais 1997:97) as there was a belief that Niger would be able to finance development through the mobilisation of internal resources, as a result of what was considered an improved budgetary situation (Alkache interview 2001). The democratization process was followed by a sharp decrease in total aid inflow, from 1990 to 1995 aid was cut by half with severe consequences for the country, (Gervais 1997:97)⁵. After elections in 1993 the prime concern for the new government was the economic crisis and a second round of SAP was negotiated, but continued unrest, including two coups and Tuareg rebellions, meant that economic programmes didn't take off until new democratic elections had been held following the 1999 coup, in the form of a Poverty Reduction Strategy, PRS and the Heavily Indebted Poor Country Initiative, HIPC. The general evaluation of Niger eight years after the return to democracy is that considerable progress has been made towards macroeconomic stability, but that there are still many obstacles to sustainable poverty reduction and growth. The prime obstacles are considered to be "lack of natural resources and a degraded natural environment,

⁵ The rejection of the SAP was combined with a refusal by the strong union parties in the Conference to concede their privileges, thereby maintaining the status quo in basic economic policies, benefiting the urban population at the expense of the rural population (Gervais 1997:98-99).

high population growth rate, low institutional capacity and limited international competitiveness (World Bank Report No: AB2336).

The democratic process since 1999 and the implementation of the PRS, together with the HIPC, have resulted in increased multilateral and bilateral assistance in general and in the water sector in particular. The HIPC has made funds available for the Special Programme of the President of the Republic, in which rural water projects plays an important part. Niger is furthermore part of the Millennium Project special comprehensive strategy for Africa, it is a top priority MDG country, and a candidate for MDG fast tracking. The World Bank has awarded Niger a USD48 million dollar credit for a Water Sector Project in 2001 and additional funding in 2006 as it has been recognized by the result-based Country Portfolio Performance Review, as one of the most successful operations in the World Bank's portfolio in Niger (Report No: AB2336). In total the budget of the Water Sector Project was USD73 million and was composed of contributions by the International Development Association, IDA, Banque Ouest Africaine de Développement, BOAD, Agence Francaise de Développement, AFD and Chinese Development Cooperation. Still, the probability is considered small that Niger will meet Target 10 by 2015 (Rapport National sur le Développement Humain, Niger 2004). The goals have been set at 61% access in 2005, and 78% access in 2015. Taking a 3,3 percent population growth rate into account, it is estimated that a total of 4,8 million people must get access to water in order for the target to be achieved and that the cost is USD28,8 million per year until 2015 (Rapport National 2003:33). Problems have been identified in terms of coherence, and there have been calls for countrywide medium-term sector programmes as a necessary tool to link policy and implementation – which requires that all major funding of the sector supports one coordinated policy and expenditure framework under government leadership (Mehta, Fuglesnes & Virjee 2005:244). A National Commission of Water and Sanitation, CNEA, is supposed to take care of the coordination of the sector and the interveners when it has been put in place (SIE 2004:6).

The above is part of the context in which Target 10 is to be implemented and which the Nigerien officials charged with the implementation relate to. What follows is an exemplification of the way particular aspects of the discourse surrounding Target 10 are translated, redefined, displaced and recoded. The quotes are from an open ended group interview with four Nigerien officials involved in the implementation of Target 10, one high official at the Ministère de hydraulique et l'environnement, a senior engineer at the municipality of Niamey, and two officials working with water services provision, one in a UN organization, the other in a European development agency. The following analysis starts with one of the recurrent representations of Niger's very limited political and economic room-for-manoevre, which is followed by a discussion divided into four themes where one could argue that the Nigerien officials in one way or another translate the dominant discourse surrounding Target 10.

Renewing the Past

The act of translation, which is a way of relating to the present, implies a renewal of the past. There are thus a range of local narratives of the past that are used to construct a discourse of the present. The event of the National Conference in the early 90ies is a recurrent story, among the officials whose accounts I will discuss here, as well as among academics, trade unionists and other officials. When the episode is told, Niger is represented as the only African country that dared to resist the World Bank and reject the SAP, and for that they were severely punished. The event is represented as an overt and courageous act of direct resistance against the repression of development intervention and the system of economic and social

rewards and punishments of the Structural Adjustment Programs. They do not talk about the disastrous economic situation in the country or about the internal struggles over the economy and the way the strong actors, mainly the Unions managed to maintain their privileges. Instead the story places Niger as a victim in the global economic system, without the power to determine its own faith, still, with the pride of having made the brave effort. This is a recurrent theme which can be argued to have particular functions, the most striking function being that it continuously disables the ownership agenda, and it displaces the MDG emphasis on accountability as it removes the state's responsibility towards its citizens, it thus makes it possible for the state to refer to externally conditioned policy reforms in order to defend unpopular political decisions or failed reforms. This does not necessarily imply a collision between the government and the citizens of Niger as making sense of being the poorest country in the world together with what is perceived as domination by external actors, and an intrusion on sovereignty, not seldom referred to as neo-colonialism, can create a certain sense of solidarity internally. Solidarity founded in victimization and suffering may as Bhabha writes become bound against oppression (2006:274). An illustrative example of this is the response to the privatisation of the national water utility in 2001, which was a consequence of World Bank conditionality, whereby Veolia (Vivendi) a French multinational took over urban water management through a ten-year lease contract. The external pressure for privatization and the representation of the French management of the water utility as neo-colonialist, can be seen as creating a basis for loyalty and support between politicians and the trade-union in relation to the external intruder/French management, *les blancs*. Another example is the reaction by an engineer at the water company when he installs a subsidised water connection to the gardener's hut in a minister's garden at the outskirts of Niamey, as he says, "Who in Niger is not poor? Everybody are poor here, even the officials"⁶. When everybody is poor, who are the subsidised connections for?

The point is thus that the understanding of Niger's marginal position and of development cooperation as domination can create a position for Nigeriens in general and in this case for officials in particular, from which to think and act, which has an effect on water sector reform, as well as on the broader political scene.

Displacement of ownership and partnership

In development discourse partnership and ownership of development projects and programs is stated to be a precondition for the success of intervention as the recipient is activated and made responsible for its 'own development'. The way the result of the National Conference in 1991 is spoken of can be seen to constitute Niger as a country without a choice, and from that position ownership and effective partnership becomes impossible. In the following quote a Nigerien official working with water services provision at a UN organization comments on the decision to privatize the national water utility, made by the government of Niger as a result of the PRSP process, where he says

⁶ The subsidised connections are part of the Water Sector Project, funded by a World Bank credit, and were initially intended for the those defined as *truly poor*, but due to the weakness of income statistics, that distinction has been abandoned, the primary rule now is that the customer must not live more than 30 metres from the main pipe. The logic of the tariff system and the subsidised connections is that the initial costs for a connection excludes a large part of the poor, secondly it is economically rational to connect high consumers as it brings more money, both for new investments and for repayment of World Bank credit. Interestingly, by 2003 the target of 11.200 subsidised connections to be attained by 2006, was already completed. However, the execution of 556 standpoints, directed at the least serviced areas, had not started (ARM Rapport Annuel 2004-2005).

To be honest, we don't have much choice. Since our development partners, particularly the World Bank, that are here, simply control us. They make proposals but they're not really proposals, they are impositions, we have no choice. They tell you, listen, you have to see if you can privatize this company, but you have no other choice. They are going to help but you have to privatize that company, and then you have to privatize that.

What we see here can be understood as a displacement of the “partner” from someone who supports and encourages local ideas and initiatives to someone who imposes policies, and thereby the concept of partnership is invalidated. Furthermore, the no-choice rationality is very strong, no less than four times does he repeat it. It shall be noted however, that this quote refers to the privatization in particular, which was, and still is, a highly contentious issue in Niger. Still, it is a representation that reflects more broadly on development relations. Except from stating the obvious that there is a discrepancy in the partnership discourse, the purpose of focusing on the way it is made sense of by the officials is to argue that it has a function in the implementation process, of transferring responsibility for the policies and their potential outcome, thereby having an effect on accountability.

This needs to be seen in light of postcolonial history and continued interventions in Nigerien life. It shall be noted that since the establishment of the first SAP civil servants, teachers and students have been its strongest opponents, as their positions and salaries have constituted the greatest part of state expenditure and therefore have been threatened by structural adjustment. Furthermore, they, together with the central union, Union des Syndicats des Travailleurs de Niger, USTN, were the strongest forces behind the democratisation process in 1991, and behind the rejection of the SAP (Gervais 1997:93). Thus, these groups have a particular experience of external conditionality. Not because they suffer most materially, but because of the way they continuously have to deal with the asymmetric power relations of development cooperation.

When it comes to ownership the water ministry official comments on the PRSP process thus

A number of experts arrived to make a strategy against poverty, and lots of money was spent on it, a well made document, but then nothing happens and if you return in ten years, nothing will still have happened. The rich countries are dividing the poor countries in different categories and some are simply left out.

National PRSPs are supposed to be owned by the recipient country, and ownership is supposed to be achieved through participation of all parts of society. It is thus argued that integrating the MDGs in the PRSP process should mean better alignment between donor support and inputs with national priorities and ownership (Fukuda-Parr 2004). In *Financing Water for All*, it is stated that “[d]onors, NGOs, MFIs, companies and others can assist, but there has to be real political ‘ownership’ of the effort from host governments as a precondition” (Winpenny 2003:27). Ownership was introduced in World Bank rhetoric in the late 90ies and is supposed to imply that the Bank no longer force their policies on African countries, but that they make their economic knowledge and planning capacity available for governments, who then make independent decisions, over which they will be fully responsible (Abrahamsen 2000:49-54). Rather than a displacement of ownership, one could speak of a replacement, back in the hands of the donors where it has been during the history of development cooperation since decolonization. As ownership is put back in the hands of the donors, represented by the experts, so is responsibility. Apart from stating that the PRSP is not locally owned this quote indicates that there is no belief that it will bring about change. Nothing has happened and nothing will happen.

The last sentence can be related back to earlier divisions of the colonies between the rich countries, as well as the division into the three worlds, into developed and developing countries, least developed countries, LDCs, Heavily Indebted Poor Countries, HIPC, etc. These are categorisations that characterise the way the rich countries have made what are today defined as poor countries into objects of their knowledge and practice, thereby legitimizing interventions, colonial or developmental. The ministry official emphasises the power of the rich countries to define the world, whereby Niger is deprived of the power to even define itself. Niger is not even placed in a category, it is considered to be that insignificant in the eyes of the rich. One of the main representations of difference upon which this categorisation is made is that of capacity and awareness, characteristics that are assumed to be lacking in developing countries and to be present in developed countries, which are discussed in the following section.

Where capacity and awareness is placed

Poor countries are considered to lack institutional capacity as well as capacity and awareness of how to manage water resources (Winpenny 2003, COM 2004). The perceived lack of capacity legitimizes intervention and transferral of capacity from donor countries and institutions to recipient countries, through development assistance and expatriate expertise. A technical engineer working with water services at the municipality of Niamey states,

We have a part in the wealth of Europe but we are left out. We have been forgotten. That needs to be discussed. We have the same education, we are as intelligent but they come here to tell us what to do. They are the experts when they arrive although we are the ones who know the circumstances.

He emphasises Niger's and Africa's contribution to the economic system, and can even be seen to indicate the exploitation of the African continent by the European colonizers. Niger is being redefined as a source of wealth, and the statement can be understood as a claim for recognition of the way Niger has been treated within the global economy. Furthermore, internal capacity is highlighted, both in terms of education and intelligence. The given symbols of authority, the superiority of expert knowledge are contested. We can understand this not only as if the speaker reduces the value of expert knowledge, but as a displacement of the expert into a tool for domination rather than assistance. To take it even further we can understand this as a questioning of the abstraction of knowledge from its concrete object of study. Nigeriens not only possess equal education and intelligence, but also contextual knowledge. We could thus see this as a reversal of the dominant discourse, with the emphasis on internal capacity domination through external expertise becomes all the more irrational and humiliating. Thus, the way the engineer stresses the knowledge of educated Nigeriens can be seen as contributing to create a position for him and others as individual professionals, from which to deal with the asymmetric power in the particular relationship. Representations of lack of capacity and awareness are characteristics which have traditionally been used to place colonies and subsequently developing countries at a lower step on the development ladder. Although it is no longer essentialized, but is represented as possible to overcome through the right development interventions it is one of the dividing marks between developed and developing countries, one of its founding differences. It is noteworthy that the engineer does not claim some other, specifically Nigerien or African knowledge or capacity, it can rather be interpreted as if the position he claims is beyond the kind of difference that is placed upon Nigerien officials from their external *partners*, he thus claims sameness and based on that,

equality. The quote indicates a redefinition of Niger, and its professionals, and thereby a contestation of the representation of difference in the dominant discourse.

This displacement of external expertise and reaffirmation of internal capacity does not just pertain to educated people such as officials, but to Nigeriens as such, including the targeted poor. As a program officer at a European cooperation agency expresses it

Very few donors understand that they need to give sufficient funds for rehabilitation [of natural resources]. ... They make small actions, where the most part concerns a concept I don't like very much. It's a concept that is used much by the sociologists, and it is awareness raising among the population. But they are aware. They know, they live with all the environmental problems, but they don't have the means to change it. That's what they ask for. They already know that the river is threatened.

The statement he makes can be considered a reappropriation of awareness on behalf of the population, and a recognition of their specific knowledge of the environmental situation. It furthermore indicates a transferral of the problem, from a focus on deficiencies in Niger to deficient and insufficient development assistance. The way the programme officer emphasises the internal knowledge in Niger takes away the expertise authority from the donor and he can further be seen as constituting the donors as wasteful when they don't give enough funds for rehabilitation, instead wasting it on awareness raising projects that are considered unnecessary. He indicates that the capacity is there and that the means should be provided in order for it to be effective.

What the officials express in the statements above can be seen as contestations of the dominant discourse and lack of capacity as one of the fundamental representations of difference that function as a legitimizing principle for intervention. An affirmation of internal resources could constitute a basis for mobilization of capacity, as well as a demand for differently designed projects in the context of newly injected funds into the implementation of the MDGs.

Political commitment

Lack of political commitment has been identified as one of the major obstacles to improvement of water services provision in developing countries. It is based on the image of the Nigerien/African politician as acting only in their immediate interest employing clientelist politics, which is illustrated in *Financing Water for All* with the rhetorical question *How many sewage works are named after politicians?* According to the report the water sector is simply not glamorous enough for African politicians to want to engage in it properly (Winpenny 2003). A high official at the Ministry of Water acknowledges that there are internal obstacles to effective use of capacity.

A society that is well managed doesn't need to be privatised. On the contrary, it will support the state. But it is a fact that the state companies are badly managed. Because the responsible, in general it is the political generation, it's a family thing, it is badly managed. And the partners say we cannot keep investing and investing when it is still deficient. We must find a solution and the privatisation was a proposition from the partners. We are free to take it or leave it, it's like that. ... We have the competence but the right people are not put in the right places. That has to be recognized. If you take the national water utility, the DG is changed at least every year. It's not normal. If you go to their meeting hall you'll see, in a company created in 1989-1990, you will see a lot of general directors on the walls.

The speaker can be considered to confirm the dominant discourse and the representation of arbitrary political interference as one of the main deficiencies that needs to be mended, as he states that there are people with the right capacity, but the way politicians appoint managers has ruined the water company. However, clientilism and the *family thing*, seem to belong to a certain political generation, and thus not to a coming generation. From this we can surmise the speaker is positioning himself as he takes sides with donor conditionality and establishes himself as a rational actor as opposed to a certain generation of Nigerien politicians, and their nepotism. Several younger official express the same thing, which can be interpreted as a way whereby they position themselves as separate from those practices. By opposing the old generation of politicians a closeness/sameness with the *partners* is simultaneously established.

There is an interesting glide in the statements by the official at the Ministry of Water and Environment as he early in the discussion states that the privatisation of the water sector was a proposition which Niger could choose to follow or not, but as the conversation continues and the others express their critique he starts to call it an imposition, however, legitimate. While the others can be seen to take a firmly Nigerien position in relation to external domination of development cooperation the official at the ministry expresses less frustration and more understanding for the position of the donors.

Interestingly, little else is said about the responsibility of the Nigerien politicians during the interview. We and us refers to Niger as a country, on very few occasions do the speakers distinguish between the politicians, the poor, or civil servants, apart from those few occasions Niger as a unit is opposed to the donors, or the rich countries, often emphasising the World Bank, and on occasion German, French and Italian bilateral assistance. In the common discourse of the officials it is lacking political commitment on the part of the rich countries that is represented as problematic.

The following is a quote by the UN official

Do the rich want our development? We know how it should be done but then obstructions are raised, customs for example. They are playing with the South as with small children. They invite them to big meetings for nice discussions and then they forget all about it. They tie us to debts that were paid a long time ago. The rich countries must really sit down and seriously discuss what to do.

Just as ownership and responsibility can be seen to be handed back to the donors so is the perceived lack of political commitment to development in general and water sector reform in particular. The answer in this quote, to the rhetorical question posed at the beginning, is obviously no, obstructions are raised and they are tied to debts that are already paid. The knowledge is there, *we* in this case seem to represent a global *we*. But then *they* are the rich countries, which play with the South as with small children. It has been thoroughly analysed how colonial as well as development discourse construct the underdeveloped in general and their politicians and officials in particular as children, representing an early stage in the development process towards mature citizens and political representatives, whereby colonialism and eventually the development intervention has been legitimized. It becomes the task of the developed to educate and uplift the developing countries to a state of responsible and productive maturity, but also to control the excesses of childhood (Nandy 1983:15-16). The child metaphor is perhaps not used as much today but as it has been analysed by Eriksson-Baaz (2001:178) it lives on in the representations of the irresponsible, spoiled and greedy African politician, that needs to be made into a responsible, independent and hard working individual. Here we can see that the stereotype of the child is contested through a reversal. By treating the South as children the rich countries deprive them of their

responsibility, and by rejecting the behaviour of the rich Niger is reclaimed as a mature and sovereign state. Again we can interpret this as if it is sameness, not difference that is claimed, a sameness that should entitle them to the same treatment in international relations. However, he continues, “the rich countries must sit down and seriously discuss what to do”, a discussion in which he does not include the South. In the same sentence the responsibility is thus given to the rich countries, as they are the ones with the power to determine the future. In one sense we can understand this as if the UN official claims sameness and an equal position, while in another he incorporates and accepts the dependent position of the South, and the right of the rich to lead the way. The picture that emerges is highly contradictory.

It is repeatedly stated that due to the dire poverty of Niger the rich countries must commit to their development, by treating Niger with the respect it deserves and by injecting sufficient funds. However, it is recognized that there are internal obstacles in terms of arbitrary political interventions in the sector, which does not, however, require a reduced role for the state, but a new generation of politicians.

Economic practice

We now turn to the issue of economic practice, including privatisation and pricing, and how it is made sense of based on the above discussion.

Madame, I have told you that Niger is a poor country. A poor country that cannot even fulfil the needs of their population. When it comes to provision of drinking water, so if this privatisation is beneficial....”,

This is a quote by the water ministry official, who further states that the privatisation is beneficial because it brings the investments needed in order for people to get access to water. Several other Nigerien officials, at the Water Sector Project, the World Bank, and the Ministry of Privatisation, use the same argument. In this argument there is an interesting silence concerning conditionality. It is as if privatisation as such brings investment. It thus becomes rational on the part of the government to privatise. It is not represented as an imposition. It has been argued that the neoliberal politics of the World Bank to a large extent are internalised by political leaders in poor countries, as they understand that if they do not accept neoliberalism there will be no international financial support. When the implementation of neoliberal politics is tied to aid money it means all other options would be worse as they would imply a reduction of funds whereby governments would be even less able to provide their populations with basic services (Abrahamsen 2000:142). However, although the decision makers and officials in Niger accept the proposed reforms in order to come to terms with the malfunctioning services, regardless of where the blame for failure is put, it does not imply total incorporation. In different ways they contest the dominant discourse, not because they necessarily object to the market logic, but as a consequence of the power relations involved. They object to what Goldman calls “neo-colonial attitudes and practices on the part of those ‘doing the development’ work towards those ‘being developed’” (Goldman 2006:180).

Islam, in particular is used in contradictory ways to make sense of economic practice in water management. On the one hand the high official in the water ministry uses it in a common way as he states that

Religiously I’m a Muslim and we are not allowed to sell water. My religion does not permit me to sell water. But we do it because we don’t have the means. Water is vital. If you take Niger today the number one problem on the road to development is water.

The ministry official can be interpreted as making a rather strong objection against privatisation and pricing water in this quote, on the other hand it can be read as if the poverty situation legitimizes privatisation and pricing. The quote is related to an argument about privatisation as if selling water in Niger was a consequence of privatisation, which it is not. However, elsewhere, in relation to the Koran, it is argued that it is not water that is being sold, it is the service, which is based on the separation between the resource and the service inherent in classic liberal economic logic. In the first case, the Islamic argument can be understood as a reinforcement of the way Niger is being dominated, to the extent that their religious values are violated, and the very lack of power to do anything about it, as “we have no means”. Then on the other hand the modernity of Islam is pointed out as it is described as in agreement with classical liberal economics. The acceptance of the separation of the resource and the service as conducive to the teachings of the Koran could be seen an imposition of a market logic on a global scale, however, it can also be seen as an appropriation of the market logic, where it could potentially be used constructively to design internally owned solutions and internally induced change. It is important not to see market solutions as something external to Nigerien water management in its modern form, but to recognize the space for production of hybridities as a room for manoeuvre within the constraints of the dominant discourse.

The establishment of water as an economic good, and market solutions as the tool for effective allocation, lies behind the new tariff system, and the cost-recovery principle, which are now key features of water service provision in Niger. Through an average price raise of 32% in five years, the national water utility, Société d'Exploitation des eaux au Niger, SEEN, is supposed to have reached financial equilibrium by the end of 2006. Tariffs are the domain of the government but the tariffs were set in negotiations between the government and the Water Sector Project (World Bank) before privatisation in order to guarantee viability of the sector and the attraction of private operators. From the very beginning civil society organisation such as L' Organisation des consommateurs du Niger, Orconi, l' Association de Défense du Droit de Consommateurs, ADDC Wadata, and later on Coalition Équité/Egalité contre La Vie Chère, have been protesting against increased tariffs, too high prices and required deposits for subsidised connections, as well as against the demand that new clients show proof of ability to pay bills. The huge salaries and benefits of the 20 employees at the state company, Société de Patrimoine des Eaux au Niger, SPEN, and the refusal of the management at SEEN to make their salaries and benefits official have also triggered protests. Both workers and shareholders of SEEN have participated in the critique. Former Prime Minister Hama Amadou responded to the protests by stating that “We have signed certain undertakings, and we must keep them” (FIDH 2002:35). Over time protests have increasingly been directed at the French company in hold of the lease contract, Veolia (Vivendi)⁷, and against the World Bank (Hansson 2002, Tchangari 2005a&b). The Coalition Équité/Egalité contre la vie Chère has during 2006 been in negotiations with the government over decreases in prices on water, electricity, gas, and school fees, and with the formation of the new government in 2007, after the discharge of Prime Minister Hama Amadou, a Ministry for the Battle against expensive life (la Lutte contre la Vie Chère) has been established (Republicain 070613). It is an interesting fact although it is too soon to say what it will imply. What is clear though is that policies that have been imposed from outside have what Foucault calls instrument effects, regardless of the success or failure of the intended policy changes, it is crucial to understand what they actually produce, to trace the mutual interactions of immanent

⁷ After the trials against the manager of Vivendi Entertainment, Vivendi Environnement changed name to Veolia in order to separate itself from the scandals (Interview with Maurice Pettata, General Director at SEEN). However, in Niger the name Vivendi is still used, both informally and in the media, which seem to indicate a willingness to retain the bad reputation of the former mother company on the management of SEEN.

and intentional development (Bebbington 2000:515). The representation of Niger's position, the essential character of water and external impositions contribute to create new political initiatives that have effects on water services provision as well as on Nigerien political relations as such.

Another instrument effect is the establishment of a shareholders association in Niger, primarily composed of shareholders in formerly state-owned companies⁸, who have seen a need to organize to protect their interests in face of what they perceive as mismanagement and neo-colonial behaviour by the expatriate managements of the private companies. While the creation of the shareholders association is interlinked with the introduction of the privatisation from outside, it should be regarded as a genuinely Nigerien creation, a response against external domination by appropriation of the means of those in dominant position.

Creation of hybridity in the implementation of Target 10 – Concluding remarks

It has been argued that the concept of hybridity should assume “prehybrid” cultures, and that this implicit assumption is what underlies the tendency to “invoke ideal typical notions of popular practice as the basis of development alternatives” (Bebbington 2000:500). Yet, hybridity should not be understood as a combination of two pre-fixed things, but as that which is produced through the continuous process of repetition of representations of the past, the present and the future. This also means that the concept does not imply a celebration of the local over the external. Furthermore, it is important not to perceive hybridity as the construction of a harmonious consensus, or simply a digestion of diversities, but as a space for relations of power and agonism. In line with a harmonious perspective on hybridity there is a tendency to construct practitioners of hybridities as inherently positive, as standing in opposition to polarization, binaries and labels. Such a construction hides that hybridities as well contribute to constitute polarization and binaries. Furthermore, to a large extent this perspective takes the broader political economy as given, and looks for room-for-manoeuvre within its constraints, and it is important not to overemphasise the possibility of imagining alternatives outside the dominant discourse (Bebbington 2000:514). However, the production of hybridities as those we have seen here also contribute to alter the relations of power and the dominant discourse. Through the representation of *partners* as imposing policies, through the invalidation of ownership and through the displacement and reduction of the authority of the expert the power of the dominant partner is actually reduced, as this discourse provide spaces for resistance. Turning back to Foucault, the power of the MDGs lies in their attractiveness, in their promise of a better future for all, but as they are translated through their performative and institutional context much of their strength is reduced. When actions and practices are defined as domination rather than assistance other responses are enabled. Still, to some extent the officials represent interventions and conditionality as rightful and thus they contribute to the destabilisation as well as the stabilisation of the dominant discourse.

Using conceptualizations from post-colonial theory I have made a reading of a story told by four officials involved in different ways in the implementation of Target 10 in Niger. It is a story of Niger's marginal position in the global economy, external imposition and lack of political commitment from donors, but it is also a story of Nigerien capacity and education, and its ability to incorporate change and improvement in the water sector. It is a story of sameness, on the one hand by expressing understanding for the donors, on the other hand rejecting domination on the grounds of being the same, and it is a story of the need for a new generation of politicians and new political initiatives. I have not tried to reduce the

⁸ Veolia owns, 51% of the shares in SEEN, private Nigerien investors own 34%, the workers own 10% and the state own 5%.

contradictions in this reading – I have claimed that a basis for loyalty within the country, including politicians, is made possible at one level – mobilizing action against what is perceived as an intrusion. On the other hand there is a repudiation of the political generation that is responsible for bad management and in that sense an alignment with the donors. The purpose of this paper has not been to explain the success or failure of the implementation of the MDG Target 10 but rather to call for a better understanding of the process and its outcomes, not only in terms of improvement of water services provision but in terms of what else is produced in the process of translation from the global policy recommendation level to the national context. I have tried to show how the Target is translated through a renewal of the past whereby officials relate to the asymmetric power relations involved in development cooperation. Both individually and communally they incorporate, negotiate and contest certain aspects of the dominant discourse, such as ownership, partnership, capacity building and political commitment. Although it is not done coherently, but often in a very contradictory way, they produce something else out of the dominant discourse, which make the direction taken by development projects, in this case the target to halve by 2015 the proportion of people without access to safe water, uncertain.

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