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Draft Paper for

ECAS 2011 - 4th European Conference on African Studies

Uppsala, June, 15<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> 2011

## **When Water Leaves the Market. Gifting and Social Redistribution of Water**

### **Introduction**

By stating that ‘water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognized as an economic good’ the UN’s Dublin Statement on Water (UN International Conference on Water and the Environment 1992) defined water as a commodity and was used by neo-liberal scholars and bankers as central legitimation to privatize water.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank strongly pushed countries to privatize their water supply systems aiming on full cost recovery while coverage should be extended. Privatization, however, did not fulfil the objectives, especially failing to improve the situation of the poor (Budds and McGranahan 2003; Hall and Lobina 2007; Castro 2008; Bakker 2010). Giving the market the lead in water distribution provoke significant resistance from affected people (e.g. Bond 2005) and international activists (e.g. Bakker 2007).

The debate about the correct role of the private sector was probably the most dominating one in the literature on water provision since the 1980’s (Loftus 2009: 955). In the past years the narratives take into consideration that commodification of water is ‘not a singular, momentous, irreversible and universal transformation of water, [but] that commodification can be both transient and partial’ (Page 2005: 295). The perspective taken in these works is on the scale of the city, depicting a temporal transition of water supply systems and policies, which move between states of provision, with a various relevance of market principles. Privatization of public water providers, and the installation of meters in public or private systems makes water increasingly a commodity, whereas the introduction of conditionalities for private companies to provide water to poor neighbourhoods, or the implementation of block tariffs like in the South African Case (Bond 2006) partially decommodifies it.

By postulating the hydrosocial cycle (Linton 2008; Swyngedouw 2006; Budds 2009; Bakker 2003), reflecting the ‘incorporation of water’s social relations alongside its physical materiality’ (Budds 2009: 420), political ecology is continuously moving towards a more holistic understanding of urban waterscapes. The passage of water is followed from the natural resource through distribution systems to the consumers, illuminating the political

and social processes involved. The perspective is still biased towards formal sector water provision. The informal sector as a crucial water provider is partly taken into consideration, but mostly for expressing infrastructure failure, only. The individual household is considered being final consumer of water, who is served by the formal system or not, and who is interacting with the system, through protest, illegal connections, payment or resistance to payment, etc. The function of water transfers between households is completely ignored in the narratives. In Khartoum these transfers are significantly practiced, and I assume certain relevance in other African cities, too. If existing, these kinds of transfers allow weak performance of the formal system, and therewith interlink scales rather than being purely locally significant phenomena.

In this paper I will present two different biographies of water. From the moment any commercial water enters the house it moves into a decommodified state. If the water is further channelled to neighbours the water either takes the form of the gift (Mauss and Bourdieu, or it is redistributed (Polanyi and Sahlins).

It is defined within in the context of the local social system – the neighbourhood – how this water is transferred, rather than by international paradigms and their implementation through governments and water corporations. Both, the local society is shaping and is shaped through their interaction with water. It is this scale to be considered, to better understand urban waterscapes as a whole.

### **Biographies of things – moving between society and the market**

The terminology of (de)commodification as well as the term commodity itself is ambiguous. Not every thing is automatically a commodity, but it has to be made a commodity through social processes. Marx states that ‘to become a commodity, a product must be transferred to someone else, whom it will serve as a use value, by means of exchange’ (Marx 1962 [1890]: 55, own translation).

The most obvious sphere of this exchange is the market, where the exchange value of the commodity is expressed in monetary terms. It gets however contested for exchange in which money does not play any role. In the case of barter things are directly exchanged with each other, but the exchange value is still clear for both transaction partners. In line of J. Carrier goods in these transfers are commodities. ‘The objects are alienated from the transactor: they are not especially associated with each transactor, nor do they speak of any past or future relationship between transactors. Instead, such objects are treated solely as bearers of abstract value or utility’ (Carrier 1995: 20). By this he distinguishes transfers of commodities from those of non-commodities which do not underlay the logic of the market, but are motivated by personal relations and the social structure of society. I will use this distinction, acknowledging that it is contested and that it has some limitations, since a transaction can contain both elements, e.g. in purchasing a good above market price in a friend’s shop.

Commodification and de-commodification are the processes that change the commodity nature of a thing. We have to clearly distinguish between changes of a *type of thing* – the water in the city – and the changes of a *specific thing* – a drop of water.

Mostly when the water discourse refers to (de)commodification, water is considered a *type of thing*. Page states for his work that de-commodification ‘does not refer to a particular item or quantity of water, but water in general in a particular place’ (Page 2005: 295). The totality of water in the system is moved through (de)commodification away from or towards the logics of the market. In the *Social Life of Things* Appadurai (1986) uses the terms<sup>1</sup> slightly differently. Commodification does not refer to the type of thing, but to the society. ‘To the degree that many or most things in a society [qualify as commodities], the society may be said to be highly commoditized’ (Appadurai 1986: 16). Accordingly, de-commodification and commodification for him are processes that change the functioning of the social system.

In both approaches the perspective is set on an aggregated scale, delivering a generalization of the relevance of market logics in the social system or the water supply system, respectively. The narratives on water management rest on this level. Appadurai, however, goes one step further and looks at the ‘commodity phases of the social life of any thing’ (Appadurai 1986: 13). By that he builds on Kopytoff’s (1986) notion of biography of things in which ‘certain things are seen as moving in and out of the commodity state’ (Appadurai 1986: 13). Using this perspective allows us taking into consideration, that water supply is not necessarily restricted to a flow between the producer and the consumer, only. When water passes an intermediary actor, the same water can get redefined and can change the degree by which it underlays the market. To allow a clear distinction to the present water discourse, I will not use the term (de)commodification, for the changes a drop of water experiences in its social biography, but rather phrase it in line with Appadurai, who says a thing *moves in/out the commodity state*.

From an economic perspective moving something out of the commodity state, involves certain costs. Henderson (2004) analysed in an inspiring article the passage of food items which were produced for the market, but which are obtained by a food bank for free distribution to those in need. With entering the food bank goods are stripped their commodity identity. The costs for it are carried by those redefining the thing. Through that they ‘gain a new life, constituted by a complex set of mediations and surrogate movements, and they gain this life precisely at the point where Marx says the life of the commodity should end’ (Henderson 2004: 490). Removing the commodity identity is not an automatic process it requires a motivation which works against the logic of the market.

Water flowing between neighbours follows a very similar trajectory than cans distributed through food banks. The social life of water is contained in the hydro-social cycle. The water providers produce water, and transfer the natural resource to the social sphere. They add value in form of extraction, treatment and transportation and move it into the commodity

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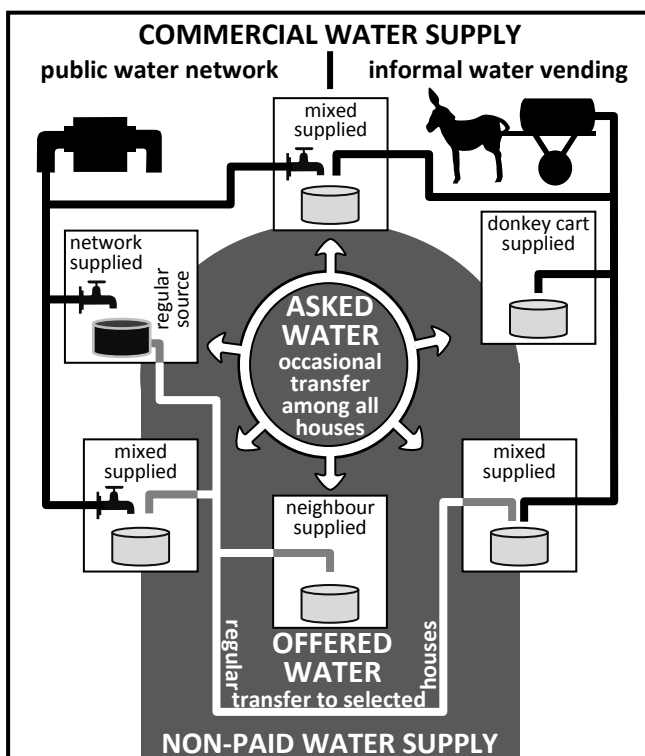
<sup>1</sup> Appadurai terms it slightly differently as (de)commoditization. The terms are used simultaneously in the discourse, while (de)commodification is predominantly used.

state in which it is delivered to the customers against payment. Through consumption some water moves out of the commodity state, reflecting a typical lifecycle of a commodity. Other water, however, has a second life. In the following chapters I will analyse for the case of a settlement in Khartoum why and how people extend the biography of water by transferring it for free to their neighbours.

### **The neighbour's water is free of charge**

Individual households are central water suppliers in the research area, a neighbourhood in peri-urban Khartoum. Before water can flow between neighbours it has to be obtained from one of the two commercial water sources existing. A household supplying his neighbours is an intermediary in the water supply chain, rather than a producer.

There are two possible primary water sources a household can access for both, for own consumption and for giving to his neighbours. In 1991 people were resettled from several informal settlements in Khartoum to the research area. Deep wells and water towers were constructed with NGO support and informal donkey cart operators started to deliver water against cash to the population. This system is still in place although in 2007 a ground water



fed network was built by the public water corporation to which all inhabited plots where immediately connected to.

With the construction of the network, neighbours turned to be an important water source for individual households besides the network and the donkey carts. In 4 clusters guided interviews were conducted with the total population. 39 of the 59 households do not manage to cover their daily consumption from the network, since water production is insufficient. The uneven relief as well as legal and illegal modifications of household connections and the installation of sucking pumps in several households made water access

very heterogeneous on small scale. Having people with sufficient or even with abundance of water living next to people who have to buy water at high cost from the informal water vendors, strongly fostered the flows of water between neighbours. Out of the households who do not manage their complete consumption from the tap, 18 % consume all their water from neighbours, which they either get delivered by hose or take by jerrycan. 28% cover a significant share of their consumption and 21% still occasionally take water, for example

when they cannot find a donkey cart. Hence in total 67% of all water poor households consume more or less regular their neighbour's water.

Prior to the network, people were already consuming water from their neighbours. And still today some of the water taken from neighbours was purchased before from an expensive water vendor. This mainly was and is the case in emergency situations for small quantities only. If we look at the economics of this transfer it becomes obvious, that inter-household transfers of purchased network water are more likely than transfers of vendor water. The donkey carts sell water by unit. Therefore, if a household gives a jerrycan of this water to a neighbour, this jerrycan carries the same economic value than water directly purchased from a donkey cart operator. The loss of the giver equals the savings of the receiver.

Due to the flat rate tariff, every additional drop of water coming out of the tap has not to be paid to the water corporation. The use value of this drop for the water rich household is very little, whereas its use value for the water poor neighbour equals the cost of purchased donkey cart water. If we assumed this society working by full marked logics, the neighbours would start trading this excess water with each other. A negotiation would lead to a price below the one of the donkey cart. Both households would benefit: the supplier by having a profit and his customer by lower unit prices.

However, a neighbourhood is not a shopping centre. Despite of the mutual benefits, people would never offer nor ask for payment in water exchange, regardless if this was excess water or purchased by high cost.

Although there is water in abundance in some houses, this water is not to be misinterpreted as a pure public good, implying granted access for everybody. Firstly, giving this water to others contains some limited costs. Half of the water supplying households sucks water out of the pipe by generator operated pumps. For the pumping of additional water fuel has to be purchased. In houses where water is manually transported into a barrel, water exchange leads to a queue in front of the tap during the few hours when the network is operated. The tap owner normally fills his barrel as equal member in the queue which requires much more time than if he would deny access to others. Having people on the plot is a disturbance in a society where people strictly defend their privacy by a 2.5 meter high wall surrounding the plot. Occasionally people destroy the mud walls by not closing the tap which causes repair costs. The costs of giving water are much lower, than the benefit of receiving this water, but these costs exist, hence they are a strong argument for not to give, assuming no return taking place.

Secondly, water is scarce. There is surplus water in many households, but there is less surplus water than needed to supply every neighbour. This demands a certain selection about whom to give. Rivalry is also significant on an aggregated scale. Additional consumption from some taps leads to a decrease in pressure and hence to lower flow in other houses.

Thirdly, the tap is owned by one specific person. Through paying the water corporation the household becomes the legal owner of the water. Lastly, the tap's location on private space protected by a wall makes exclusion of people legal and easily implementable. Within inter-household exchange water takes much more the nature of a rival and excludable private good, rather than a public good, but however it restrains from the logics of the market: it is never paid for.

Water flows between neighbours can be differentiated into two types. The first type – which I call “asked water” – is a transfer initiated by the person in need for water. This was the only type of water exchange before the network came, but it is still widely practiced. People request others to let them fill their jerrycans from their barrel or their tap. The second transaction type differs by the initiation. Households with water surplus invite people with weak connections to take their “offered water”. A big proportion of the water is transported the same way than asked water: manually with jerrycans. But if the surplus household operates a sucking pump “offered water” is transferred directly by hose to the barrel. In this case the neighbours' access to water gets very comfortable but completely free of charge. On the first glance it is the best way to access water.

Both types of water access follow very different logics and have different functions in the social fabric of the local community. In the following two chapters these functions are analysed.

### **Offering water – gifting water to friends**

‘Our Neighbour saw us trying to stop a donkey cart to buy water. He stopped us and said: Do not again bring water by donkey cart. This is the tap and this is the motor. Every day we operate it. Take the water you want. This was the first time.’

By this statement the water rich household offered a long-term water transfer to the neighbour, which was happily accepted. The daily physical transfer of water is only the implementation, of what had been defined between the donor and the donee before.

Offered water relationships are always characterized by a big difference in quality of the water tap, hence, an unequal access to the public network. However, having this discrepancy does not automatically lead to regular water transfers between the houses.

A. lives in the neighbourhood since two decades. Over time a very intensive relationship among the neighbours in his street was established. People know each other very well, they know about their problems and they help each other, the women regularly meet during the afternoons to have coffee and the children grow up together. A. is proud of *his* street and that people are cooperating together. After installing a water pump he started to supply water to four neighbours close to him: his daughter, a neighbour who lives with him since 20 years and to two households who just recently moved in. He supplies all households in reach of the length of his hose that either did not manage yet to get connected to the network, since they recently constructed their house, or have an insufficient water tap.

The water given to the old friend is part of different flows of things between the two households, which were continuously taking place during the past years. This include for example the help of the sons of the water receiving household in repairing and operating A's generator. A. has big interest in keeping this characteristic of the street. By offering water to the new neighbours, he invites them to join his network. People in the street acknowledge A's generosity and he is perceived as a highly respectable person.

In another street exactly the contrary happened. All population in that area rather recently moved in. Of the first two families who constantly settled down six years ago, B. is operating a sucking pump, and is regularly supplying the other household. The other plots around are characterized by a high fluctuation. Most people live here for less than 2 years and hardly any tap gives water at all. Their water situation is much worse than in A.'s neighbourhood. They nearly exclusively purchase their water from donkey carts. Neither B. nor his wife actively offer water to these neighbours, despite that they are fully aware of their desperate water situation.

B. moved with his young family to this area after he married. His parents just live a few streets away. There he is still integrated in a neighbourhood system with old friends of his childhood and his family. In his new street, he has much less interest and willingness to invest. He says fluctuation of people here is too high, which makes it complicated to establish relationships. Beyond that he is very sceptical towards the new neighbours especially towards two households, inhabited by single young men, only. 'We do not want our women to connect to anybody. [...] There are some people who are not good.' The second example shows that offering water is not an automatic reaction of water rich households if neighbours are suffering from water scarcity.

Neighbourhood relations consist per definition of two proximities a spatial and a social one. The relations are constructed through the everyday exposure to each other in 'the neighbourhood', fostered by the small distances. They can become very close, which sometimes gets materially symbolized by leaving a passage open in the characteristic wall surrounding each plot, which prevents others strictly from entering and even to see what is going on inside. Neighbourhood relations are not restricted to direct neighbours, but take – depending on the person – different diameters, mostly covering people from the own and surrounding streets. Offered water transfers are both influenced, by spatial and social distance. The best friend living three streets away will not be offered water, since the hose is too short and carrying takes too much effort.

Social distance is the quality of the relation between the neighbours. Neighbour is not equal neighbour: intensiveness of their relations range from non-perceived up to very close cooperation. Most of the intensive relationships exist between people who share a long history and define themselves as good friends.

Living together for a long time is a foundation for such an intensive relationship, but it is neither a guaranty nor a precondition. The same holds true for other household

characteristic like ethnicity, kin, religion, having children in the same age, political affiliation and sympathy.

Offered water between neighbours is one of many flows between neighbours. They do not only consist of material goods and consumables (food, building materials, electricity), but also of access to borrowing (construction tools, cooking utensils, and money), of manual support (house construction, generator operation, children care, cooking, and household work), of mutual appreciation (expressed through visits) and of nice words (exchanged through greetings on the street).

With the network entering the area water became predestined to play a central role in flows between neighbours. On the one hand, giving water creates some costs for the supplying household. On the other hand the recipient household can make savings, from not having to purchase water from expensive vendors, which are bigger than the expenses of the donor. If we assumed both households being one system, the exchange would benefit this system in total, since the value of water is increased in the passage from the donor to the recipient.

Offered water is a physical flow between two counterparts and it is based on their relationship. They are integrated in mutual exchanges of different goods and services. On the one hand there is no direct compensation for these transfers, like in market exchange or barter, but on the other hand the transaction is integrated in a fuzzy system of giving and taking. Water turns to be a gift which is compensated over time through counter gifts from the neighbours.

### **Asking for water – everybody has a right to water**

The household B. from the previous chapter underlined his disinterest in neighbourhood relations by not offering water. Never-the-less, some of his water is occasionally consumed by his neighbours including the ones he dislikes most. He explains that ‘they can take water if they want, we leave the hose outside to water the trees and we do not guard it’.

This example shows the difference between offered and asked water. Members of household B. do not offer water to people, since they are not interested in intensifying neighbourhood relations, but in the same time they do not prevent those people from taking, who come to their house and ask or even just take.

If people ask for water they preferably ask neighbours with whom they share intensive relations. However – what is important for the distinction between offered and asked water – interviews also showed that in absence of socially close water rich households, people do ask for water at any house even at those to which they are not related to. Some people regular request water at another person’s house without even knowing the names of the people living there. Vice versa house owners do not necessarily know where the child lives, which is standing with his bucket in the queue of waiting family members and close neighbours. Even between neighbours, who say that they dislike each other, and themselves define their social relationship as non-existent, which means that they reduce interactions to



greetings on the street and visits for death, birth and marriage ceremonies, asked water is transferred.

In these transfers water flows from water rich households to those who are constantly or temporarily short of water. The social constellation of some households shows that the transaction is not necessarily integrated in reciprocal gift giving. It is often clear from the beginning, that in the local social field no compensation for this water is foreseen.

Many people explain with a counter question, why they are giving water to people: 'How can you prevent people from taking water?' For them positively responding to requests for water is indisputable and mostly they can give further explanations.

With stating that 'we as Sudanese are good people' they offer culture based altruism as the underlying motivation. Some continue with a geodeterministic argument. As a result of the dry Sudanese environment and the fact that water is a human need, giving water to thirsty people is crucial for survival. Others argue with religion. They say that 'grass, water and fire' are special. By that they refer to a hadith which states that 'Muslims have a common share'<sup>2</sup> in these three things. Linked to this hadith is the interpretation that excess sale of water is forbidden (Caponera 2001: 95) and also that 'water is a community resource, to which all, rich and poor have a right' (Faruqui 2001: 2).

Giving water on request has been internalized by the local society into their habitus. It is a rule which is enforced by social sanctions. One man constructed a deep concrete covered water hole in front of his plot, managing some limited water flows at an elevation where hardly anybody else gets any water at all from the network. Neighbouring children took power over the hole. Whenever water started, they immediately formed a queue and brought most of the water to their houses. The owner was left with so little water, that he had to cover most of his own consumption from vendors. He was dissatisfied with this situation and the financial burden attached to it. One day he told the children that they should wait until he filled his barrel. In the next days he felt that people in the street stopped greeting him. Afraid about his reputation he backed out from taking water and re-established the previous status-quo. Other people who are giving asked water agree that stopping would have very negative impacts on their social standing, and that they would never dare to do so.

In the absence of conscious as well as unconscious returns, asked water transfers are unidirectional. In these transfers (water) wealth is redistributed from water rich to water poor households. It levels inequalities in the local waterscape.

### **For things to move, no market is required**

Offered and asked water are both transferring the same thing (water) on the same scale (between neighbours), but the mechanisms of these stage in their biographies are very different. For the differentiation the work of Karl Polanyi can give an entry point.

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<sup>2</sup>Abu-Dawood: Hadith Nr. 3470, cited from (Faruqui 2001: 2)

Like in the water discourse, he is not specifically considering the trajectories of things. He compares different societies by the social embeddedness of their economic system. The state of embeddedness is the result of a 'double movement' in which 'the principle of economic liberalism, aiming at the establishment of a self-regulating market', is opposed to 'the principle of social protection aiming at the conservation of man and nature as well as productive organization' (Polanyi 2001 [1944]: 138).

The embeddedness of economic system highly depends on the principles on which the exchange in a specific society is based on. Beside the market Polanyi determined 'two principles of behavior, not primarily associated with economics: reciprocity and redistribution' (Polanyi 2001 [1944]: 49). I will elaborate on these principles in the following two chapters where I will argue, that water offers are reciprocal, whereas asked water is redistributive.

### **Gifting sustains interpersonal relationships**

Conceptualizing offered water under the notion of reciprocity requires that 'today's giving will be recompensed by tomorrow's taking' (Polanyi 2001 [1944]: 53). Polanyi's work on reciprocity was very much influenced by the debate on the gift started by Marcel Mauss' renown 'Essay on the Gift'(Mauss 1990 [1923]; Adloff and Mau 2005: 17). Both compared the modes of exchange between what Mauss called 'archaic societies' with today's societies. According to Mauss reciprocity is the driving force behind gift exchange. Gifts 'in theory [...] are voluntary, in reality they are given and reciprocated obligatorily' (Mauss 1990 [1923]: 3). This statement contains two central principles. Firstly, a gift is neither free nor altruistic; it has the function of an investment in a future return. Secondly the gift is a circular social principle. A gift is compensated by a counter gift, which itself demands for another gift.

For Godbout and Caillé(1998: 18) 'the gift is nothing less than the embodiment of the system of interpersonal social relations. To do away with it would be to risk having societies that are radically desocialized'. Following this line of argumentation the gift circle is central in the establishment and constitution of neighbourhood relations.

A neighbourhood can be conceptualized in line with Bourdieu's theory of practice as a social field, containing subfields on different scales with the lowest level being the relationship between two households, only. Within these fields social interaction takes place through transfer of capital. However, it is 'impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory' (Bourdieu 1986: 242).

Beside economic capital Bourdieu utilizes social, cultural, and symbolic capital as means of exchange between people. Gifting immediately becomes a bidirectional exchange of capital. The obligation of the donee to reciprocate the gifted water, which Mauss highlighted, is directly compensated with social capital. As social capital it can be stored over time, until it

might be reciprocated by a counter gift from the previous donee, like through support in house construction or food.

As explained above the gift flows between neighbours are very diverse. Returns on the inter-household level can hardly be seen as a direct reciprocity for a specific gift, but rather as an element in the continuous gift circle on which the neighbour relation is based on.

In some cases gift relationships are imbalanced through unidirectional transfers of economic values from a predominant donor to a predominant donee. The rationality behind continued giving, despite that the donee is not fulfilling her obligation to reciprocate, can be found in the notion of symbolic capital. 'This kind of prestige is the result of a recognized disinterestedness' (Caillé 2001: 25). A neighbour named his son after another neighbour who continuously supported his family. By this he underlines his gratitude and valuing the generosity of his neighbour.

Symbolic capital is not necessarily restricted to the scale of the two households, but it also impacts on the person's reputation in a wider public. Being recognized as a generous person is said by people to be one of the conditions for accessing jobs like in the mosque or in the field of local politics.

If people are asked for the compensation they get for gifting water, they will just laugh, and say that there is none. According to Polanyi 'reciprocity demands adequacy of response, not mathematical equality' (Polanyi 1957).

In his later work Bourdieu framed the gift under what he calls *illuso*. By this he takes its 'dual truth' into consideration. On the one hand it follows certain logic of exchange, on the other hand it is experienced as a 'refusal of self-interest, egoistic calculation, and an exaltation of generosity' (Bourdieu 1997 [1996]: 231). The *illuso* makes the difference between gift exchange and market exchange. The people are rewarded for their gifts, 'but the rule of the game [...] is to act as if one did not know the rule' (Bourdieu 1997 [1996]: 232). The gift is therefore produced by a social habitus, which orders people to establish good relations to their neighbours. Personal interests however are secretly transported in the process.

Despite that gifting water is not necessarily balanced in economic terms, it carries an intrinsic motivation to gift water. The establishment of working neighbourhood relations are a value in itself, which benefits the giver in future counter gifts and increase in his reputation. To gift water is however a voluntary decision of the potential giver, which also reflects his interests in neighbourhood relations.

### **Redistribution of Water – a collective responsibility**

To respond to asked water, is by far no voluntary act, it is a duty. This duty to give is a central aspect in Polanyi's conception of redistribution.

He develops his argument out of the example of hunting societies, 'where the members of the hunting tribe usually deliver the game to the headman for distribution' (Polanyi 2001

[1944]: 51). The headman takes an intermediary position between the persons giving and the persons taking. 'In this setting of stable, hierarchically organized and politically legitimated social relations resources are extracted from some individuals to benefit others' (Ghezzi and Mingione 2007: 17). Redistribution is a mechanism which takes place in many societies. In modern market economies it remains present as the welfare state and in the state socialist societies it even constitutes the integrative principle of the economy (Nee 1989: 663). Polanyi put emphasis on the importance of hierarchies in redistribution. The whole pattern of production to distribution is focussed 'on the chief, the temple, the despot, or the lord' (Polanyi 2001 [1944]: 55). It is the person or the institution that physically collects from one part of society to give to another.

An analogy of asked water to redistribution in hunting societies, as conceptualized by Polanyi, obviously requires an important adjustment of his thought. In water exchange, regardless if offered or asked for, flows of water directly take place between the giver and the receiver. No chief or any other person or institution physically takes water from the rich and gives it to the poor. Not even orders are given by any central power to make these transfers happen.

Despite that water flows from one individual to another, the engine of the process is not reciprocity, which Sahlin summarizes as 'a *between* relation, the action and reaction of two parties' (Sahlins 1996 [1978]: 28). In case of asked water the transfer is unidirectional. The receiver is not reacting to the water he got with a counter gift. A circle is not kept turning.

Redistribution, or 'pooling' as Sahlins synonymously uses 'is socially a *within* relation, the collective action of a group' (Sahlins 1996 [1978]: 28). Looking at the transfer from that angle, allows us to set the transfer within the wider social context, rather than as a transaction between two individuals, only.

The giver is selected by the fact that he has water at disposal, that he is at home and that he lives in proximity of the person. These factors are completely disconnected from the persons' relationships with each other. What makes the giver agree on the transfer is the entitlement a person has to his neighbour's water, rather than whether they are friends or not.

Sen defined entitlements as "the set of alternative commodity bundles that a person can command in a society using the totality of rights and opportunities that he or she faces" (Sen 1983), 754). With this entitlement definition, I follow his later work, in which he gradually restrained from the narrow perspective of entitlements as state-enforced legal rights, only (Gore 1993).

The person's entitlement (his right to water) is based on a social norm (the duty to give) which the society defined over time. This social norm takes the place that the chief has in a hunting society. It redistributes from those who have something in abundance in one moment in time to those who are short of it. Requesting water is therefore a request to the giver in his function of a member of the local society, rather than towards him as an

individual actor. The giver fulfils the duty he has as a member of society. He does it to comply with the norm does not attempt to make the one asking a friend. The right to water is enforced by society. Not giving water on request is not accepted and, if necessary, the norm is enforced by social sanctions.

Polanyi emphasised that redistribution has implications on the social structure of the society, which go beyond the material flows. 'Whether the redistributing is performed by an influential family or an outstanding individual, a ruling aristocracy or a group of bureaucrats, they will often attempt to increase their political power by the manner in which they redistribute (Polanyi 2001 [1944])'. Redistribution therefore can enforce the hierarchy and stabilize the position of the leader. If we apply this correspondingly to the case of asked water, redistribution of water strengthens the social norm to give water in particular and the principles of solidarity in the social system in general, merely than 'only' ensuring water poor people to access a free alternative water source.

## **Conclusions**

Both water biographies revealed a strong rupture at the moment when purchased water is transferred to a neighbour. It moves out of the commodity state and becomes embedded into the social structure of the local society.

While the physical transfer of the water between the neighbours is mostly identical, the underlying social mechanisms are poles apart.

Giving water to people out of own motivation is based on an interpersonal interest of the water rich person. It improves and maintains the neighbourhood relation and stimulates reciprocal benefits, which are not determined on an impersonal market but deeply rooted in the social relations of the two transaction partners.

In contrary requesting water from a person is addressed to the society itself, rather towards the person actually providing the water. The process is a result of the norms and the attached entitlement to water. The transfer consolidates both the norm to give water and the social sense of the community.

Following the passage of water from the producer to the consumer revealed that waterscapes cannot be properly understood, if we content ourselves to look at the water producers, only. Even if our interest might be restricted to the formal system only, we have to consider the transactions on the local scale. The water flowing between neighbours levels water inequalities created through the public system. The inappropriate public performance in the city is concealed through solidarity between neighbours. In the last consequence, formal water supply can continue week performance because people do not accept their neighbours being thirsty.

## Literature

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