

Who brings the water?

Negotiating water sector reform in Niger

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Avant mon départ de Niamey en 2010 un agent du Ministère de l'Hydraulique et de l'Environnement me demanda : "alors, est-ce que tu vas nous inviter à ta soutenance? Il faudra que tu loues un cargo pour tout le monde". "Non", continua-t-il, "ce n'est pas possible, avec vos accords Schengen on ne va pas nous laisser entrer". "Je pourrais soutenir ma thèse ici à Niamey", proposai-je. "Non", répondit-il, "ton diplôme ne serait pas validé chez toi. Ils ne font pas confiance aux universités nigériennes. Tu sais, nous sommes 'sous-développés'".¹

¹ Before my departure from Niamey in 2010 a state agent at the Ministry of Water and Environment asked me, "so, will you invite us for your defence? You will have to rent a cargo ship". "No", he continued, "it isn't possible with your Schengen visa, they wont let us in". "I could defend my thesis in Niamey", I proposed. "No", he replied, "they wont accept your degree if you do, they don't have confidence in Nigerien universities. You know we are 'under-developed'".

Abstract

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For over 40 years the water sector in Niger has been subject to constant reform reflecting and accompanying general changes in the construction of the role of the state in provision of public services. This is a process that has closely followed different movements in what can be called global development discourse. Due to dependence on external funds, contemporary reforms continue to be shaped by development cooperation, to a large extent dominated by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRSP), and the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness.

This thesis explores how Nigerien state agents articulate state responsibility in the water sector, thus shaping how policy and practice is conceived of. The aim is to better understand the possibility for Nigerien state responsibility in water service provision in a context of heavy dependence on aid.

The main body of the thesis is based on interviews made with 27 Nigerien state agents in the water sector, as well as on participation in state-donor meetings and workshops between 2007 and 2010. It is argued in the thesis that in order to understand effects of power it does not suffice to analyse governing logics but we have to pay closer attention to the agency of being governed. Meaning, in this case, how the state agents constitute themselves as responsible subjects. The thesis approaches state agent subjectivities through narrative method, analysing how they narrate themselves and the state temporally in terms of choice and control in ways that shape how responsibility is understood. As such the thesis explores the way in which state agents translate the responsabilising logics of development cooperation as well as how they constitute themselves as ethical subjects in relation to the population.

Keywords: Niger, water services, the state in Africa, governmentality, responsabilisation, responsibility, ownership, privatisation, decentralisation, narrative method

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⁵ Patrick Yenga, thank you for your friendship and for making my life in Niamey easier.

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Göteborg 14 September, 2013

Abbreviations

AAF-SAP	African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation
ADB	African Development Bank
AEP	Adduction d' Eau Potable, Water Supply System
AMCOW	African Ministers' Council on Water
ARM	Autorité de Régulation Multi-Sectorielle, Multisector Regulation Authority
AT/TA	Assistant Technique, Technical Assistant
AUE	Associaton d'Usagers de l'Eau, Water Users' Association
BCC	Bureau de Conceil et Control, Bureau for Advice and Control
BPO	Budget Programme Operationelle, Operational Programme Budget
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CGE	Comité de gestion d'eau, Water Management Committee
CNEA	Commission Nationale de l'Eau et de l'Assainissement
CREPA	Centre Régionale pour Eau Potable et Assainissement
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DANIDA	Danish International Development Assistance
DDH	Direction Departemental Hydraulique
DEP	Direction d'Études et Programmation
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DIGOH	Division des Inventaires et de la Gestion des Ouvrages Hydrauliques
DNAEP	Direction des Travaux Neufs d'Alimentation en Eau Potable
DRH	Direction Regional Hydraulique
ESAF	Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility
EUWI	European Union Water Initiative

FIDES	Fonds d'Investissement pour le Développement Economique et Social
FGR	First Generation Reform
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HCRA/D	Haut Commissariat à la Réforme Administrative et à la Décentralisation
HDI	Human Development Index
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
ICWE	International Conference on Water and Environment
IDA	International Development Agency
IDWSD	International Drinking Water and Sanitation Decade
IFI	International Financial Institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INS	Institut National de Statistique
LDC	Least Developed Country
MH	Ministère de l'Hydraulique
MHE	Ministère de l'Hydraulique et de l'Environnement
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MIGA	Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NIGELEC	Société Nigérienne de Production et de Distribution d'Eau et d'Electricité,
NPM	New Public Management
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFEDES	Office National des eaux du sous-sol
PASEHA	Programme d'Appui au Secteur Eau, Hygiène et Assainissement
PASEP	Programme d'Assainissement du Secteur des Entreprises Publiques
PCD	Programme Communal de Développement
PDIL	Projet de Développement des Infrastructures Locales
PEM	Point d'Eau Modern
PNAEPA	Programme National d'Alimentation en Eau Potable et Assainissement
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RDP	Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple

SADRP	Stratégie Accélérée de Développement et de Réduction de la Pauvreté
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SDR	Strategie de Développement Rural
SEEN	Société d'Exploitation des Eaux de Niger
SGR	Second Generation Reform
SNE	Société Nationale des Eaux
SPEN	Société Patrimoine des Eaux de Niger
UEMOA	West African Economic and Monetary Union
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
WDR	World Development Report
WSP	Water and Sanitation Programme
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development

1. Introduction

*Nous sommes un état qui est entrain de sortir la tête de l'eau*⁷.
(Issaka Issoufou, Secretary-General of the water ministry 2008)

It is already hot when I arrive at the water ministry in Niamey early in the morning. People are gathering around the small tea stand in the shadow of the red sandstone building. There has been a power failure, the first of several this day, as any other day in May. Air conditioning and computers are down. Together with the director of the department for studies and planning (DEP), and two of his agents I am leaving for a conference hall on Rue Mali Beró for a two day operational programme budget workshop⁸. Water officials have come from all parts of the country to attend the workshop. They are making conversation outside the building, trying to catch every little refreshing breeze. Soon electricity is turned back on, the air conditioning starts buzzing and the meeting can start. A fatiah (prayer) is led by one of the attending directors from the ministry before a technical assistant opens the meeting. The expatriate technical assistant introduces himself as a member of the ministerial department for studies and planning, which causes some joking comments in the room. Is he a donor? Or is he one of them, part of the ministry?

Preparing for the workshop each regional office has elaborated their own budget in excel and they are now supposed to be harmonised into a joint operational programme budget. The atmosphere is

⁷ We are a state on the way to get our head above water.

⁸ The workshop was planned as the actual elaboration of the programme budget, however, at the time aid had been suspended as a result of political turmoil and the workshop was enacted as an exercise.

animated and the senior officials are joking with each other. Issues such as how many chairs, desks and computers are needed in each office are quickly gone through, the numbers are adjusted without much ado.

Then the meeting moves on to the number of visits each regional office has to do in the field to inspect new works and renovation of old ones, and a heated debate ensues. One regional office has planned for more inspections than the others, eight for new works and six for renovations of old infrastructure. Surprisingly high figures, according to one of the technical assistants. The responsible regional officer, tall and confident in blue bazin⁹ jokingly replies, “[s]ure, the state should stick to its core functions, that’s where we’re heading”. On a more serious note he adds that he knows that private consultancy firms are supposed to do the inspections now, but in his region donors demand that the regional office inspects the building sites every week. Donors seem to have lost confidence in the consultancy firms, he says, and now they want the technical offices (at regional and district level) to do the job.

A regional director with streaks of white in his beard expresses concern about the new wells that are being constructed. The old wells that were constructed by the state owned company OFEDES over 25 years ago are still functioning, while wells built five years ago by private companies are already breaking down. The workers don’t have the same expertise today, he laments, but even more importantly, supervision and control performed by the consultancy firms is substandard. This contribution to the discussion is met with approving murmuring and after a brief discussion the number of inspections to be made by the regional offices is adjusted upwards on the excel sheet.

During lunch break one regional director expresses his regrets that the donors have demanded that private consultancy firms are used for supervision. The consultancy firms don’t do their job properly, while the technical offices are disregarded and thereby weakened, he argues. The problem for the technical offices, he says, is that the state has no money. However, when the consultancy firms don’t do their job properly the donors contact the technical offices of the state and ask them to do the inspections anyway. And when the state agents are engaged and paid by the donors rather than by the state they no longer answer to the state or their director, but to the donor driven project.

⁹ A lustrous fabric for clothes.

The above is meant to provide a concrete example of how state agents¹⁰ in Niger, in a context where water sector reform is highly shaped by development cooperation,¹¹ articulate their role and responsibility in a volatile institutional framework. In the debate over the number of inspections the state technical offices should conduct in the field, the state agents claim their own role and responsibility in water service provision. The use of private consultancy firms to perform certain functions, previously executed by state agents, has come about in a context where policies are formulated as a result of state-donor relations. Due to the heavy reliance on external grants and loans in the water sector, the role and responsibility of the state are heavily shaped by relations of development cooperation and mechanisms of aid and how they take form in reform programmes.

While reform policies are often presented as pragmatic and managerial in policy documents and programmes, the question in the title of this thesis, 'who brings the water?', is intended to place human agency at the centre of water service provision, reemphasising its social and political character¹². Who brings the water has material effects, in terms of if and where a water point is constructed, what kind of infrastructure, how many, with what technology and what kind of contribution from the population, but it also has effects on social relations. Perceptions of who is responsible for bringing the water shape subjec-

¹⁰ I use the category 'state agent' rather than civil servant mainly for semantic reasons, indicating how the narrators in this thesis shape notions of responsibility in relation to the institution of the state and how the state is linked to other governing bodies. In the category state agent I do not include politicians. The term state agent seem to be more frequently used in the African context, than in Europe and the USA where state agents tends to refer to civil servants in the police or security services.

¹¹ Other terms for development cooperation are aid or development assistance. I choose development cooperation since that is how state agents in Niger generally refer to it. It is also the term used more broadly since the conscious effort to try to reshape the relationships involved in aid by changing vocabulary from donors and recipients to 'partners', and from aid to cooperation (Eriksson-Baaz 2001:160). The shift is further discussed in chapter 2 and 3.

¹² The title is hinting at Ferguson's discussion about the place of the idea of human agency in ethnography of Africa. Ferguson brings up Evans-Pritchard's famous account of a granary that fell on an Azande man who happened to pass by and where the important issue to the man was not what caused it to fall (termites) but *who sent the termites*. Rather than focusing on the rationality or the mysticism of the Azande Ferguson points at the centrality of human agency in the man's reasoning (Ferguson 2006:74).

tivities since responsibilities for essential services such as water are part of how people relate to each other, how they relate to place, community and to life itself. The question of ‘who brings the water’ is a matter of the organisation of society. A rearticulation of the role and responsibility of the state in water service provision is a product of and in its turn produces and reproduces ideas about the population and the state. This concerns how they relate to each other as well as to other actors such as donors, NGOs, local authorities and private companies.

The focus on the water sector is particularly interesting because of the particular character of water as essential to the life of the population, as well as how it is tied to the territory over which the state is assumed to have sovereign power. Water services are therefore highly relevant when it comes to exploring the role and responsibility of the state as it concerns core aspects of what is considered to constitute a state in the first place.

In order to better understand the process of water sector reform and its outcome in terms of the possibility for state responsibility closer attention needs to be paid to the way in which Nigerien state agents understand and perform the functions of the state as a result of reform. Hence in this thesis I examine how Nigerien state agents reason around agency and responsibility for water service provision in a context of poverty and aid dependence, and thereby how the state agents contribute to shaping the role and responsibility of the Nigerien state in water service provision.

I. THE POSSIBILITY OF STATE RESPONSIBILITY

Provision of public services, as part of the material well being of the population, is one of the ways in which the state governs its population, and how the state is understood as sovereign (Williams 2000). This is particularly salient in the case of post-colonial states that have often had to struggle to integrate an arbitrarily delineated territory and population. Public services, or the absence of them, may for many people be the only relationship they have to the state¹³. Public service provision is how national politics manifest themselves in the lives of people¹⁴. Non-provision of basic services such as water is at the same

¹³ Except the formal right to vote. Thanks to Sara Kalm for pointing this out.

¹⁴ A professor at Université Abdou Moumouni in Niamey, defended the importance of public service provision as follows: "Our state is still under construction. The know-

time part of how developing states are conceived of as deficient. On the 2013 failed states index, Niger, ranking 18 in total (rank no 1 being the most failed state), is among the worst offenders when it comes to provision of public services (The fund for peace 2013). Only 63 percent of the population was estimated to have access to safe water in 2008 (INS-Niger 2010:70). The country is also at the very bottom of the Human Development Index, HDI¹⁵. Such representations may legitimise donor intervention, whether they act as direct provider through projects to alleviate suffering, or indirectly through public sector reform aimed at responsabilising the state to provide for its population¹⁶.

In Niger, the water sector has been subject to constant reform for over 40 years, reflecting and accompanying overall changes in the construction of the role of the state in provision of public services. Water sector reform has closely followed different movements in development thinking and practice. The Nigerien water sector is heavily dependent on external aid; until recently 90 per cent of investments were covered by external loans and grants. As such, present reforms are to a large extent shaped by the imperatives of the Millennium Development Goals, MDGs, Niger's Strategy for accelerated development and poverty reduction, SADR¹⁷, and the Paris Declaration for Aid Effectiveness and how they take shape in the Nigerien context.

The problem of service provision in African countries has tended to be defined, by scholars as well as in policy documents, in terms of

ledge of public services has to be developed to show people that there really is a connection between them and the state. And this connection is public services. They need to become aware that public services bring something to them, and this awareness could contribute to making them take part in the development of their country" (interview October 2002).

¹⁵ In the 2013 Human Development Report Niger was ranked 186 out of 187 countries (UNDP 2013).

¹⁶ Such representations can, however, also have the opposite effect. When states are represented as beyond redemption intervention may be considered useless. However, it may be difficult to distinguish between the two effects as development cooperation continues to be performed although little faith is given to the potential to improve the situation. As one Nigerien water technician working for a European donor expressed it in an interview I made in 2002: "So the aid that is given is because you shouldn't be able to say look here's a very poor country that is dying slowly, that doesn't get any assistance. They give small sums here and there, but it makes you laugh. It's just to be able to say that they help Niger. And then they make a big folklore on TV to show that they are helping Niger".

¹⁷ A new PRSP, called Economic and Social Development Plan (PDES) was adopted in April 2013, covering the period 2012-2015 (IMF 2013).

internal weaknesses of African states (Winpenny 2003, World Bank 1994, 2003). Hope, at the time of writing Chief Policy Advisor at the Cabinet of the Executive Secretary at the UN Economic Commission for Africa, has argued that efforts made at public sector reform in sub-Saharan Africa, “have been driven primarily by the fact that state bureaucracies in Africa underperform; are invariably too large and corrupt; and lack a sense of responsibility and accountability” (2001:122-123). At times this perception has motivated donors to by-pass recipient governments by setting up parallel administrations in the shape of projects (Moss, Pettersson and van de Walle 2006:8). Increasingly though, donors have come to realise the unsustainability of such interventions as they tend to further undermine weak institutions in recipient countries (Mosse and Lewis 2005). This realisation, together with dominating theories in the field, such as new public management, ‘new institutionalism’ and principal-agent theory (Harrison 2005a, Bately and Larbi 2004, Whitfield and Fraser 2009), has motivated a stronger focus on institution building to engage with the deficiencies of the state and its capacity to provide the necessary environment for functioning markets. Focus on institutional reform has coincided with another insight in the development community, namely the need to build on internally owned policies and programmes. This insight underpins the Paris declaration of Aid Effectiveness and its focus on ownership and alignment of donors to partner country priorities (Paris Declaration 2005), and has become a central theme in development discourse. In Niger, these trends have taken shape in programmes to build capacity and create an institutional framework that allows for the state to assume leadership, as well as in strategies to delegate responsibility to local levels and to transfer several functions to private actors.

While developing states are to take the lead for their own development and public service policies, the way in which they can do so is constrained. For example, policy choices are constrained by conceptions about states in Africa (Abrahamsen 2000, 2004) as well as by theories and strategies for development management that prevail in global development discourse on the organisation of public service provision (Harrison 2005a). Mechanisms of reform such as ownership, delegated responsibility to local actors and transfer of functions to private operators and consultancy firms are shaped by conceptions of states in Africa and how they do and should relate to the population. In the water sector, these reforms all aim at a rearticulation of the

role and responsibility of the state in water service provision in order to create functioning lines of accountability and efficient service provision. To understand the effects of reform this thesis raises questions about the conditions of possibility for state responsibility.

Conditions of possibility is a broad philosophical concept that refers to the conditions necessary for something to appear. If, as in this thesis, we deal with how the Nigerien state appears in its particular configuration it implies looking at the conditions that make that appearance possible. In order to address the research problem I am taking a Foucauldian understanding of conditions of possibility as my point of departure. This means that I see conditions of possibility as the particular discursive instance in which an enunciation is made (Foucault 2002). In so doing I pay particular attention to the way in which the subject is actively engaged in its own appearance through what resembles a choice (Derrida and Roudinescu 2004). It is assumed that the Nigerien state comes into being as it is inscribed in discourse in a particular way that allows one to think about it, and that allows people to act in its name. This approach allows me to discuss how the Nigerien state takes shape through colonial and postcolonial discursive power relations. While this means I do discuss how the state is conceived of by others, the focus is on how state agents themselves engage with discourses about the state and how they thereby contribute to shape how the state can be thought and acted.

II. AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Given the above, the aim of this project is to better understand the possibility for Nigerien state responsibility in water service provision in a context of heavy dependence on aid. The research question is formulated as *how do state agents in Niger articulate the possibility for state responsibility in the water sector*.

With articulated I do not simply mean how the state is put into words and expressed, but how it receives its contextual meaning as it is related to other discursive elements. To ask how the state is articulated implies to investigate how the state receives its meaning through language and practice as it is forged into relation to other governing bodies as well as to the population in such a way as to allow it to act in certain ways (Winther Jørgensen and Philips 1999).¹⁸

¹⁸ Based on discussion of articulation by Laclau and Mouffe (1985). Articulation is also developed by Stuart Hall (1996).

The effects of how the state is governed to take responsibility for water service provision, can perhaps be better understood if we see how state agents reason and respond to reform and how it is shaped by the way state agents position themselves as subjects in relation to others. The state agents' articulation of the state's role and responsibility is seen as part of what constitutes the conditions of possibility for state responsibility, hence what makes it possible for state responsibility to appear and in what form. Rather than seeing state agents as "mechanical conveyor belts of decisions from top to bottom", we need to address administrative organisations as "loci for decision-making at all hierarchical levels" (Schedler 1999:20). It is true that state agents in the administration don't make the overarching decisions, however, the way in which state agents understand state responsibility contributes to shape the way in which water service provision plays out in practice.

In many instances, although far from all, state agents are the ones who are performing the state. This means that it is (partly) through the continuing contact between state agents and the population, and the way in which the state, through its agents (as well as through other actors), intervenes in the lives of the population, that the state is constituted (Sharma and Gupta 2006; Hansen and Stepputat 2001). Even when the state and its agents are absent, in the sense that they are not doing what other actors expect of them, the absence can be understood as shaping the state-population relationship. The lack of research that focuses on state agents' conceptions of state responsibility constitutes a significant lacuna in our understanding of water sector reform.

There are other ways to address the conditions of possibility for state responsibility than through state agents' meaning making processes. For example, through the perceptions of state responsibility among the population. Focussing on the population's perceptions would give a very different picture of what the role of the state should be and of how it is performed. However, the focus on state agents is particularly suitable to improve our understanding of how state responsibility takes shape in a development context. Because, as Bier-schenk and Olivier de Sardan argue, "[i]n fact the precise form assumed by the presence of the state depends on the way in which state representatives interpret their role" (2003:164).

State agents in the Nigerien water sector occupy particular positions in development cooperation and water sector reform. They do so in terms of their possession of higher education. Most of them are

partly educated in Europe, the former Soviet Union or Asia, most of the time financed by development cooperation agencies. Their positions also depend on their access to the French language, the Arabic language, and their development/managerial education, which makes them eligible for their professional positions. In this in-between position they are responsible for implementing institutional programmes in the local context. These institutional programmes are formulated far from people's lives and represent an epistemic discontinuity (Spivak 2004). However, in the implementation process, the agents constantly relate to the needs of the population. The way in which they do so, and the possibility for a dialogic space between the state and the population is, as argued above, an effect of how the state agents interpret their role in relation to the population. State agent narratives are therefore important instances for analysing what is produced in the interplay between development logics and state conceptions of the needs of the population.

The state agents' articulations in the shape of narratives are analysed against the backdrop of current efforts at responsabilising developing states through institutional reform. Institutional reform, as argued, constitutes part of the framework within which developing states are problematised and made into objects of a particular type of reform. The managerial logic of development cooperation assumes subjects that respond to the technologies of government and guarantee the linearity of planning and management. Using a governmentality approach I see the performers of the state, i.e. the state agents, as engaged as active subjects and thus enticed into wanting to reform themselves, by applying managerial tools. Subject, in this thesis, does not refer to the characteristic of being a subject of a particular state but is used in a philosophical sense to discuss the nature of the self. As will be further elaborated in this thesis, I take a poststructuralist perspective on the subject, emphasising how it comes into being through processes of subjectivation and an active engagement with power. It means that there is a meeting point between governing technologies that aim at inducing a responsible behaviour in state agents, and technologies of governing the self, i.e. how the state agents themselves engage with their own reform. As has been argued (c.f. Mosse and Lewis 2005, Bebbington 2000, Watts 2003) the way in which recipients of aid engage with the technologies of government is not straightforward. Hence we need to understand how recipients are active in

their own government through reinterpretation and transformation of policy and practice.

In order to address the research question I have asked 27 state agents in the water administration at central, regional and district level and within semi-autonomous bodies in the water sector, such as for example the World Bank funded Water Sector Project, PSE, to tell me their stories of water sector reform. In their narratives the current mechanisms for reform of public service provision, i.e. ownership, delegated responsibility and transfer of functions to private actors, and the way they shape state responsibility, are made meaningful.

In the analysis of the empirical material I address two sub-questions. First, how do state agents narrate the state and themselves as state agents in ways that make responsibility possible or impossible? Second, what does responsibility come to mean in state agent narratives? In other words, what are they responsible for and what kind of responsibility is necessary and possible in the particular context? The first of the sub-questions is motivated by the importance of understanding how the meeting point between technologies for governing others and technologies of the self, that characterise development cooperation, shape the conditions of possibility of state responsibility in the particular context. For example, in a context of heavy dependence on aid how are new structures for cooperation understood in such a way as to make responsibility possible? The second question is motivated by the way in which the state agents I interviewed conceived of responsibility as not just a matter of instrumentality and how to achieve a set target, but of how they, as state agents, are implicated in relationships with others. For instance, how do their representations of the population and its needs shape their conceptions of what the responsibility of the state must be?

III. INVESTIGATING RESPONSIBILISATION

The context in which the state agents inscribe the state and themselves as actors is characterised by current water sector reform and the underlying explanation of the Nigerien state as deficient. From a governmentality perspective we can see how reform, such as approaches that aim at ownership/leadership by the state over policies and strategies, as well as at delegation of responsibility to local levels and transfer of functions to private actors, are shaped by the logic of responsabilisation.

Understanding responsabilisation as a governmental logic for how to shape the behaviour of states in Africa requires us to look at how their behaviour has been problematised and made into a field of intervention in the first place. In order to do this I use governmentality literature in combination with postcolonial theory. I argue that there are certain regularities to the particular problematisation of African states that underlie mechanisms of responsabilisation. Such regularities in the representation of the state include the artificiality of the state in the African context and its appropriation by local elites, and the effects on the sovereignty of states in Africa, as well as how development assistance has shaped passive and dependent states.

Based on this particular problematisation, current reforms aim to create institutional frameworks for functioning lines of accountability, as well as to create responsible subjects throughout the service delivery chain. As such, these reforms are in line with a general concern with responsibility in advanced liberal society, as individuals, families, households and communities are increasingly to take responsibility for their own lives, and thereby to be engaged as active in shaping outcomes. Responsibilisation works by appealing to the subject to become active in its own government, and thereby also potentially responsible. But it is not just any agency that is desirable, but a particular agency that is conducive to development goals. Techniques of responsabilisation are instrumental in their aim of producing certain developmental effects. However, their workings in particular contexts make their effects far more complex, not least as they are interacting with other narratives as well as emancipatory processes. To explore this complexity and how Nigerien state agents articulate state responsibility for water services involves engaging with different ways of conceptualising responsibility in relation to subjectivity and agency.

As argued, the power of responsabilisation works through technologies of the self. More specifically, in development cooperation, it works through the way in which recipients are actively shaping themselves. Recipients do so by taking subject positions that make most sense to them (Hall 2007). This means that Nigerien state agents do not simply respond to, nor simply practice, techniques of agency and performance straightforwardly in accordance with any governance model. Technologies for governing others and technologies for governing the self are not reducible to the other, and the “interaction is not necessarily always harmonious or mutually reinforcing” (Burchell 1996:21). The way in which state responsibility is understood in the

particular context is not just a result of the implementation of responsabilising mechanisms, but of how state agents see themselves, as well as the state, as agents of choice with control over the outcome of their actions, hence as capable of responsibility.

Responsibility, at its most general is about attributing certain actions to a particular subject. It relies on the construction of a subject that makes choices based on rational reflection, which acts on intention and is in control of its actions and their outcomes. The ability to reflect and make rational choices on which to act intentionally presupposes a subject with certain autonomy and free will (Lucas 1993:30).¹⁹ Moreover, the responsibility for causing (or not causing) an event to happen implies not only an element of control but also has a temporal aspect as the subject is held responsible for something that has happened in the past, thus presupposing that the person who did or did not act is the same today as it was yesterday (Roochnik 2007:15). To study how individuals constitute themselves as responsible subjects implies to ask how they construct themselves discursively based on conceptions of how they can make *autonomous choices*, how they *control the outcome* of actions, and how they make sense of themselves *over time*. To this is added that responsibility is understood as relational. This means that responsibility is an effect of how individuals take and shape subject positions *in relation to others* and how they conceive of the responsibility that is asked of them in the particular discursive position they occupy. These central elements of how responsibility is constituted will be elaborated in the proceeding chapters.

A narrative approach provides me with the tools to analyse how state agents take and shape subject positions that make most sense to them in relation to others, and how they thereby construct the possibility of responsibility relationally in terms of autonomy/choice and control, in the past, present and the future. When I asked the state agents for water sector stories, they presented me with narratives where they themselves, as well as the state, appeared as actors making choices and producing outcomes in the face of constraining and enabling circumstances. The framework for analysing the narratives is more fully elaborated in chapter 4.

¹⁹ Free will is what Anthony Kwame Appiah has called one of the fiercest problems in all philosophy (Appiah 2005:55). I do not engage further with the question of free will here but it returns throughout the discussion on responsibility. Suffice it to say here that the debate between determinists, existentialists and compatibilists is vast.

I wish to point out that I do not question the importance of being able to hold states and state agents responsible and accountable, or the desire to create responsible states that provide their population with water in a just and efficient way. What I am concerned with here is how state agents are relating to the strategies to do so, how they conceive of themselves and the state as agents in ways that shape how responsibility is understood.

IV. CONVERSATIONS AND POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS

This thesis brings together a broad range of literature to which it contributes both empirically and theoretically, as well as methodologically. Empirically it builds on and adds to a rather limited body of work on water service provision in Niger. Scholars such as Mahamane Tidjani Alou (2009), Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (2010) and Elhadji Abdoua Dagobi (Olivier de Sardan and Dagobi 2000), and Hillary Hungerford (forthcoming), have approached Nigerien water service provision, particularly by studying local management structures. Tidjani Alou has also studied state policies and privatisation of water in Niger. While drawing on their works, the focus of this thesis, on the way in which state agents engage with service provision, provides a complementary perspective to the ones explored by the above-mentioned scholars. More generally, the thesis adds to the literature on water service provision, which has tended to pay little attention to questions of how recipient states and their agents understand and deal with externally induced reform. In the particular case of water privatisation there is a tendency to focus on the privatisation of urban water companies as a neo-liberal reform that evokes resistance (c.f. Hall and de la Motte 2004, Yeboah 2006, Bakker 2010). This thesis adds complexity to the privatisation debate by pointing at the diversity of forms of privatisation and thereby the complexity of power relations involved.

Within development literature the thesis builds on and contributes to work that examines and questions the managerial logic of development assistance and thus the continued belief in the linearity of planning, implementation and evaluation (c.f. Bebbington 2000, Long 1992, 2002, Mosse and Lewis 2005, Knowles Morrison 2010). This critique tends to focus on the misguided instrumentality of development practices and how they fail to produce expected results. The

particular contribution here is how the thesis addresses development cooperation from a governmentality perspective (c.f. Li 2007, Watts 2003, Abrahamsen 2000, 2004), but with an empirical and analytical focus on ‘the governed’. By investigating how instrumental mechanisms are made meaningful in a particular context, and how they enter other emancipatory logics, the possibility of distinguishing between instrumental and emancipatory processes is questioned.

This particular approach also contributes to the debate over ownership and the politics of aid (Whitfield 2009, Abrahamsen 2004), particularly through its indepth empirical analysis which demonstrates the not always successful production of certain subjects. My hope is that the study can contribute to development literature by opening up the ways in which state agents in developing countries are understood (as not already known) and thereby contribute to rethinking the way in which development cooperation is performed, and criticised.

In this thesis, the Nigerien state is understood as being in a process of becoming, in the sense that it is never finished but constantly under construction. Understood in this way, the state is a promise in the future, by which we judge its articulations in the present. Through its focus on the Nigerien state as in a process of becoming this thesis contributes to a field of studies concerned with the historicity of post-colonial states (Bayart 1993:xiv, Sharma and Gupta 2006), and their ‘denaturalisation’²⁰ (Hansen and Stepputat 2001), and efforts at opening up our understanding of the state and how it can be approached in empirical work. This means I take a position against explanations of the state that transcend time and space and appeal to ideal types. Instead the focus is on specific configurations in a context of meaning making. The thesis is thus positioned among research that engages with the state, not as ahistorical and autonomous and thereby as abstracted from its social and historical reality, but as relational, and that does so by looking at the social relations that compose the state (Rosenberg in Brown 2006:133). In so doing the thesis responds to the call

²⁰ Denaturalisation implies focusing on the state’s particular historical and cultural trajectory. The authors thus aim to break up the dominating problematisation of states in Africa that tend to produce generalised solutions based on a common narrative of deficiency. As Hansen and Stepputat put it “[i]nstead of talking about the state as an entity that always/already consists of certain features, functions, and forms of governance, let us approach each actual state as a historically specific configuration of a range of languages of stateness, some practical, others symbolic and performative, that have been disseminated, translated, interpreted, and combined in widely differing ways and sequences across the globe” (2001:7).

by Sharma and Gupta in *Anthropology of the state* (2006) and by Hansen and Stepputat in *States of Imagination* (2001), to denaturalise the state and focus on its particular historical and cultural trajectory and analyse it as it takes shape through the perceptions of its agents. As such, the thesis also contributes to the literature on the state in Africa in particular. It does so by questioning generalisations across the continent and the treatment of the state as a unitary and coherent actor that primarily acts in its own interest.

This means I look at the Nigerien state as “a historically specific configuration of a range of languages of stateness, some practical, others symbolic and performative, that have been disseminated, translated, interpreted, and combined in widely differing ways and sequences across the globe” (Hansen and Stepputat 2001:7). This enables a focus on the processual aspects of the formation of public authority and the Nigerien state is here analysed as in a continuous state of becoming through its interpretation and reinterpretation within shifting constraints. As such this study distinguishes itself from governance studies that focus on the neoliberal network state, and/or how the state steers networks, as a condition that characterises all states in the age of globalisation²¹. I build on what Bevir and Rhodes call the third wave analysis of governance (2010:90). However, I see their interpretive take as too local and as paying too little attention to global discourse and how it shapes local meaning making processes. Instead I try to make use of the insights of governmentality studies while avoiding their sometimes over deterministic tendencies, by focusing on the governing of the self and how it shapes the governing structure.

As such, the thesis also contributes to the governmentality literature by focussing on ‘the governed’. Studies that apply a governmentality perspective tend to draw conclusions about effects of power from studying governing structures, while they pay less attention to the way in which the subject engages with power. This thesis addresses a gap in the literature as it opens up for uncertainty and transformation and address the fallacy of reducing the workings of power in development cooperation to relations of domination, and recipient agency to either resistance or compliance. It does so by using a perspective where domination and subjectivation are woven together into a common framework (Blundo and Le Meur 2009:11).

²¹ Bevir and Rhodes (2010) discuss how network governance is told as a modernist-empiricist story of the changing state, against which they elaborate their own interpretive perspective of the state.

By systematically applying a governmentality perspective with a focus on the active role of the subject, to the analysis of empirical material in the form of narratives, the thesis has an important methodological contribution to make. The thesis goes into detail in discussing the methodological challenges of studying processes of subjectivation within a governmentality framework. Responsibilisation as a governmental logic provides a particularly interesting site for doing this because of how, on the one hand, it assumes an autonomous subject that can be held responsible for its chosen actions, and on the other it requires the subject's subordination to ready-made definitions of what constitutes responsible action. To investigate responsibilisation I bring together the discussion on responsibilisation in the governmentality literature (O'Malley 1996 and Dean 1999) with Derrida (Derrida and Roudinsco 2004) and Spivak (1994, 2004) and the way they see responsibility as rooted in our subjective constitution. The methodological contribution thus consists in the elaboration of how the narrative framework can be used to analyse how responsibility is constrained and enabled by the way in which agents describe how they are called into being by different actors and how they respond to that call.

V. OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

This thesis is made up of nine chapters. Chapter 1, the present one, is the introductory chapter where I set the research problem, the aim and purpose and introduce the theoretical perspectives.

In chapter 2 I present a story of how states in Africa have been problematised and constituted as objects and subjects of reform in the literature and in development thinking and practice. The chapter provides the theoretical background for the thesis, how states in Africa are constituted as problems and fields of intervention, particularly how they are made subjects of responsibilisation and are engaged as agents in their own reform.

In the first part of chapter 3, I discuss responsibilisation as instrumental and relational, and explain technologies of agency and performance. In the second part of the chapter, I address the governmental logic of water sector reform and how responsibilisation as a technology takes shape in strategies to achieve ownership, delegation of responsibility to local actors and transfer of functions to private actors. This is where I lay out the discursive context of reform as I pinpoint

the technologies that state agents are confronted with in practice and which they relate to in their stories.

In chapter 4 I make explicit the method of the study and elaborate the framework for analysing the way in which state agents engage with technologies of responsabilisation. In this chapter I also engage with the implications of the theoretical choices regarding what can be said based on the empirical material.

In chapter 5 I present a story of the Nigerien state and water sector reform and hence provide the context within which this study is set. The chapter starts by giving a broader picture of the construction of the independent Nigerien state before it more explicitly presents the water sector and its development over time.

In chapters 6 to 8 I present and analyse the state agents' narratives. The analysis is organised in line with the three mechanisms that dominate water sector reform in Niger, as mentioned above, namely; ownership, delegation of responsibility to local actors, and the transfer of certain functions to private sector actors. It is around these mechanisms reform is organised and subsequently they are central in the state agents' stories. This structure makes it possible to analytically focus on the way state agents conceive of themselves as responsible actors in relation to different actors; in relation to donors; to the population and local communities; and in relation to private actors.

Chapter 6 is devoted to the effort to implement the programme approach as a way to achieve country ownership and here I deal primarily with the relationship between the Nigerien state and the international donor community. In chapter 7 I address the more long-term effort to delegate responsibility from the central state institutions to local actors, primarily local communities. Chapter 8, finally, deals with the transfer of responsibility for certain functions, including construction, operation and maintenance as well as control and supervision, from the state to different types of private actors.

In chapter 9 I draw conclusions from the analysis, both concerning what can be learned about the specific case of water service provision in Niger but also the theoretical and methodological conclusions that are of relevance to the field of development as well as to the literature in which this thesis is placed.

2. African states as a development problem

In most of Africa, the state is not so much a reality as a hope or, less subjectively, a project. It is still in the process of becoming. (Ake 2000:116)

The way the state in Niger is understood in general and in development thinking and practice in particular is shaped by a broader knowledge production about the role and functioning of the state in African countries. This knowledge production has provided the basis for the way in which African states have been made into objects of government through development cooperation. Although the focus of this thesis is the Nigerien state the discussion in this chapter is pursued more generally in terms of African states to make it possible to see the Nigerien state in a broader knowledge/power web. There has been a tendency to draw conclusions about individual countries from general representations of states in Africa.²² This tendency is particularly striking when Africa is written about in the singular, and when generalisations are made based on the exceptional (Meagher 2006).²³

²² For example in his thorough analysis of the 1975 World Bank Country report on Lesotho Ferguson shows how the picture of Lesotho is extensively shaped by the logical fallacy to draw conclusion about individual countries based on the categories within which they have already been classified, such as Least Developed Country, LDC, and on the criteria of those categories (1994).

²³ According to Doornbo's retrospective of the academic debate about 'the African state' (1990) the use of the singular is explained by certain shared features, namely; 1) its post-colonial status; 2) it's a *priori* problematic relationship as regards its territorial jurisdiction; 3) its heavy involvement in a restricted resource base; 4) its still relatively undifferentiated yet ethnically heterogeneous social infrastructure; 5) its salient processes of centralisation and consolidation of power by new ruling classes; and 6)

According to Olivier de Sardan the tendency to make quick characterisations about the state in Africa is partly a result of a discipline that is mainly based on “documentary analyses, statistical data, short investigations, brief field trips, and not on long stays in the field and intensive empirical data” (Olivier de Sardan 2008:39-40).

The purpose of this chapter is not to discuss ‘the African state’ as such but to look at how the institution of the state in Africa has been problematised in the literature and in development thinking, how it has been produced as a field of knowledge and intervention.²⁴ I do this using a governmentality perspective. The governmentality perspective provides me with the tools to analyse the problematisation of states in Africa and the elaboration of techniques of government. At the same time it provides a framework for understanding current mechanisms of reform as a result of a particular way of conceptualising the subject in development discourse. It means that this chapter is not a complete literary review of work on the state in Africa but an argument that there is a particular discursive formation that shapes the way in which the state in Africa is understood in a development context. The purpose is hence not to criticise scholars for doing and being wrong, but to point at and discuss the effects when individual scholarly work enters into a broader field of knowledge about African states. For that purpose, I rely on other scholars who have written about representations of Africa, the state, or states in Africa, such as Mudimbe (1988), Abrahamsen (2000, 2004) Inayatullah and Blaney (2004), Harrison (2004b, 2010) and Chandler (2010), to discuss what I see as a prevailing narrative of African states.

After a brief introduction to how I use governmentality in this thesis, I start by showing how African states have been conceived of as problematic, particularly in academic writing. I look particularly at how states in Africa are understood in contrast to the European model, highlighting stories of the artificiality and appropriation of the state by local elites. This leads to a discussion about the story of states in Africa as lacking sovereignty. Thereafter I discuss how these problematisations take shape in the formulation of development thinking and practice in relation to African states.

its pervasive external context and dependency (1990:180). Several features which are brought up in this chapter.

²⁴ It means that when ‘the African state’ is used in the singular in the chapter it is done in order to point at the way in which it is represented as such, not that there is actually such a thing.

Governmentality

Originating from Foucault (1991), the concept of governmentality has been developed (Dean 1999, Rose 1996, Barry, Osborn, Rose 1996, Burchell 1996, O'Malley 1996, Hindess 1996, Lemke 2002) and applied in a number of fields. It is increasingly used in the postcolonial context (Bayart 1993, Hansen and Stepputat 2001, Appadurai 2002, Chatterjee 2004, Sharma and Gupta 2006, Blundo and Le Meur 2008) and in the field of development studies specifically (Ferguson 1994, Abrahamsen 2004, Watts 2003, Gupta 2001, 2012, Li 2007).

The term governmentality is used by Foucault in a dual sense, first as the 'art of government' in general, that is as every calculated effort to conduct behaviour, whether one's own or that of others. Government in this sense refers to regulation of conduct "through the more or less rational application of the appropriate technical means" (1991, Hindess 1996:106). Government is conducted both directly, and indirectly by affecting the ways in which individuals regulate their own behaviour.²⁵ Governmentality then, refers to rationalities of government, to the fields of knowledge and logics that shape the way in which certain aspects of behaviour have been problematised at specific points in time (Rose 1999:21), and the elaboration of technologies of government. These problematisations and the need for solutions themselves contribute to knowledge production about the subject to be governed. In order to elaborate solutions for how to improve the subject it must first be made intelligible. For example the representation of African states as a problem that requires attention and solutions has set off an important production of knowledge of which this thesis is a part.

As 'conduct of conduct', governmentality should also be understood as the encounter between techniques of governing others and techniques of the self, thus pointing at processes of subjectivation. As such the governmentality perspective provides a framework for simultaneously studying processes of domination and subjectivation (Blundo and Le Meur 2008:11).

²⁵ The meaning of government is distinguished in Foucault's perspective from its usual contemporary meaning, i.e. that of the institution of *the* government as the highest authority in a state. One important implication of this is that according to Foucault's definition, power in the form of government has no single centre, it is not only practiced by the state, but in its form as 'conduct of conduct' it can be practiced by different actors, in the case of water services in poor countries it is performed by donors, private companies, schools, the family, village chiefs, community organisations and individuals (Burchell, Gordon and Miller 1991).

In its second sense, governmentality refers to a historically specific art of governing that is related to the emergence of the modern state and the focus on governing bodies and individuals within a bounded territory.²⁶ I pay attention to governmentality in its historically specific neo-liberal form of rule that “seeks to govern... through the regulated choices of individual citizens, now construed as subjects of choices and aspirations of self-actualisation and self-fulfilment” (Rose, O’Malley and Valverde 2006:147). This neo-liberal form of government is relevant in order to understand the governing logic of development cooperation. I argue that there has been a shift from development policies that focus on providing the right conditions for responsible behaviour, in terms of macro-economic policy, to a focus on governing the behaviour of subjects and states, by appealing to their desires, for the purpose of development.

What does it mean more specifically to talk of the governmentality of development cooperation? It means that in order to understand development cooperation and the way it takes shape in programmes and strategies requires an investigation of the problematisation to which development is the answer. It means examining how certain fields of society and certain groups of people are constructed as problems that need to be addressed in order for development to be possible. To employ a governmentality perspective on development cooperation thus means looking at who and what is to be developed, by whom, why, how and to what ends according to a particular rationality (Rose, O’Malley and Valverde 2006).²⁷

²⁶ For thorough elaborations of Foucault’s genealogy see Dean 1999, Rose 1996, Rose and Miller 1992, Hindess 1996.

²⁷ It is important to point out that in Foucault’s genealogy of forms of power sovereign power, biopower and governmentality are not following chronologically upon each other but are simultaneously active and overlapping and it is important to explore their specific configurations (Foucault 1991). Although governmentality is at the centre of attention in this thesis there are important elements of sovereign power and biopower active in these processes, such as in the sovereign decision over who should be given access to water and who should not, and in the way different ways of accessing water shapes different ways of life (Hellberg forthcoming).

I. PROBLEMATISATION OF THE STATE IN AFRICA

In this section I discuss the problematisation of states in Africa. I do so by treating knowledge production about states in Africa as a discursive formation with certain regularities. These regularities are considered relevant for understanding how development cooperation that addresses states in Africa works. According to Foucault, a discursive formation consists of statements between which certain regularities can be identified (Foucault 2002:123). Every statement enters into relationships with other discursive elements. It takes place in a field of 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 making other statements possible (Ibid).

The point is thus not to discuss the accuracy of different representations of states in Africa but to point at regularities in the way African states are problematised, primarily in academic writing. Based on the thoughts of Mudimbe (1988), I argue that Africa, constructed as the fundamental other of Europe, is conceived of as inevitably deficient. I thereafter continue to discuss how the problem of African states has been identified as their artificiality and the way they have been appropriated by local elites. These representations are closely related to how states in Africa are understood as lacking in terms of sovereignty, which shapes the way in which the states are made into objects of government. The section ends by presenting another line of thinking about states in Africa that emphasises the historicity and particular trajectory of each actual state.

The construction of deficiency – a colonial legacy

The problematisation of states in Africa in development thinking needs to be understood in the broader context of the construction of Africa as the underdeveloped other and the colonial tendency “to organise and transform non-European areas into fundamentally European constructs” and to evaluate them against the European model (Mudimbe 1988:1). The creation of Africa as a deficient other was central to the legitimisation of colonisation and the civilising mission. “[W]here Western civilisation was presented as the universal end state in a modern teleological narrative” (Stern 2011:34). Difference is what continues to legitimise development cooperation and its hierar-

chical relations of power as well as the implied universality of certain knowledge.

The notion of development has deep roots in Western civilization and intellectual history, a history that provides a continuity between colonial and development discourse²⁸. This continuity has been analysed, primarily in terms of the construction of the difference between Europe and the rest (Said 1997 (1978), Mudimbe 1988, Young 2001, Escobar 1995, Ferguson 1994, Azar 2006, Abrahamsen 2000). Where 'the hinterland' has been defined as fundamentally 'other' in relation to the European centre, and as such inferior. The difference has been characterised by binary pairs such as masculine and feminine, rational and irrational, culture and nature, epitomised in the distinction between modern and traditional (Mudimbe 1988:4).

The subordinate of these defining pairs is what is understood as different compared to the male, white, rational and modern norm. At the same time that which is defined as different; such as femininity, blackness, irrationality and tradition, has often become the very explanation for the lack of development. As development was seen as characterising Europe the explanation for failure to live up to the European model was searched for within the other societies, in the way they were different from Europe. In his work *Reason in History* Hegel even placed Africa outside of history since it showed no ideas of freedom, justice and progress (Mbembe August 8, 2007, cf. Bayart 2000:217).²⁹ Traditional cultures have been seen as barriers to development as they constitute obstacles to entrepreneurship and social mobility. Traditional social relations and the favouring of kin have been considered a clog on the free market and political democracy. As a consequence of such thinking the presence of tradition was considered as hindering the modern from appearing and taking root. Difference thereby inevitably also implies the inferiority of 'the other' in terms of how it is assumed to prevent progress and the welfare of

²⁸ Talking of a development discourse does not mean that it is uniform and invariable (Abrahamsen 2000); it is rather flexible and diversified. However, despite variations, there are basic regularities to which all development thinking and practice relate in one way or another that makes it possible to talk of a discursive formation. The most fundamental regularity in development discourse is the construction of poor countries as deficient but potentially equal, and the moral imperative to intervene on their behalf.

²⁹ For an interesting continuation of his thoughts read Nicolas Sarkozy's speech at the *Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar*. (Sarkozy 2007)

populations and society, creating hierarchies of development (Mudimbe 1988, Inayatullah and Blaney 2004).

In *The Invention of Africa* Mudimbe argues that the idea of evolution from tradition to modernity is based in the idea of difference, but at the same time promises sameness based on the European norm (Mudimbe 1988:8). So while the colonial enterprise depended on the representation of difference and inferiority, the discourse included a possible future represented by sameness as the colonised areas became modern. Equality was promised, but only through assimilation, i.e. through elimination of difference (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004:10)³⁰. From a European perspective Africa, and subsequently 'the African state' has never ceased to be subjected to comparison with the European model. The classical European state, upon which Weber based his definition of the ideal state, "is the model for all modern states" (Jackson and Rosberg 1986:3), thus establishing European universalism (Hill 2005:148).

Being judged by another system of value, Africa could never be evaluated as a subject in its own right (Mudimbe 1988). As sameness is reduced to the achievement of the ideal European model it becomes impossible. The European model is an ideal rather than a reality, which 'the other' has to live up to, but cannot, while European countries don't have to live up to the ideal since they provide the very model against which difference is constructed. The temporal dimension of African 'otherness' in relation to the West, where tradition was a pre-modern stage, creates the expectation of progress (Stern 2011:34-35). Sameness can thereby be safely placed in the future, as a promise that governs behaviour in the present, and thereby provides a strong conditioning force.

In development thinking this construction of deficiency of Africa is of central concern. Several authors have analysed the emergence of a particular development discourse after World War II, taking President Harry Truman's inaugural address in January 1949 as the point of departure (Escobar 1995, Rist 1997, Abrahamsen 2000). As Abrahamsen states, the speech "introduced the term 'underdeveloped areas' and marks the launch of the global effort to develop the world and eradicate poverty" (2000:15). As has been shown in several works on de-

³⁰ In the system of indirect rule difference was accepted, but in certain spaces where it was controlled and contained. Contained in separate spaces difference did not pose a threat to the colonial rule, and there was no promise of equality within the same political space.

velopment discourse the fundamental difference between the West and the rest is being perpetuated through the construction of third world countries “as the first world’s underdeveloped other” (Abrahamsen 2000:xi), and thereby as essentially lacking. The construction of certain absences is the very legitimating foundation of development practice.

According to Abrahamsen, 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 etc, has three effects. First, it reduces the differences between countries as they appear homogenous in their deficiency, second, it legitimises 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 legitimises uniform solutions to the perceived deficiencies. In addition, the representation of deficiencies in developing countries reinforces an image of the opposite in developed countries, further legitimising their right to intervene and to act upon the former (Abrahamsen 2000).

The construction of the absences and deficiencies of African states has varied depending on changing circumstances and shifts in the problematisation of the ‘developing’ subject. Lack of economic growth, modernity, and lack of ‘technical knowledge’, have been complemented by the present perceived deficiencies which justify the good governance agenda³¹ such as lack of democracy, rule of law, malfunctioning institutions, lack of political will (Abrahamsen 2000:18). While Abrahamsen analyses the continuity of the deficiency logic, in what she sees as development discourse’s current narration of underdevelopment, as an absence of democracy and governance (2000), in this chapter I point at a complementary narrative, namely of the absence of responsibility. What that means is elaborated throughout this chapter.

Having argued for the centrality of difference in the understanding of Africa I now turn to the specific problematisation of the state as an institution, based on the European model.

³¹ The good governance agenda is promoted by the Bretton Woods institutions in order to address the malfunctioning institutions and democratic systems as part of development efforts (Abrahamsen 2000, Anders 2010)

Artificiality and appropriation of the state in Africa

The suitability and possibility of introducing the European state model in African societies lies at the core of the debate over the subsequent weakness if not failure of states in Africa. After independence there was an initial optimism that state and society in Africa would develop “modern, secular frameworks with all the familiar functional checks-and-balances and appropriate administrative technologies”. The state would be the driver of development (Doornbos 1990:182). However, the high expectations tended to be disappointed. The ‘state in Africa’ had become a problem rather than a solution, something that provoked a vast production of knowledge and a search for an explanation and a solution to its deficiencies. To a very large extent, the explanation has been found in it being an exogenous institution in the African context³² (cf. Davidson in Laakso and Olukoshi 1996:9; Clapham 1994:433; Englebert 1997). As Anders writes, the ‘dysfunctionality’ of African states was considered the result of “an imagined disconnect between transplanted ‘modern’ state institutions and ‘traditional’ African society”, an idea which originated in the modernisation theories of the 1960s (Anders 2010:4, 149).

Roughly speaking, the “modern” state has been seen as unfit for African societies, whether the problem was situated in the inappropriateness of the model and its forced implementation, or in the inability of African societies to ‘modernise’ (Clapham 1999; World Bank 1996; Englebert 1997). African culture, was seen as traditional, and as such considered an obstacle to a functioning state. African culture has been seen as standing in the way of development whether it has been understood as pre-colonial, or regarded as a result of pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial experiences in different combinations (as in Bayart, Ellis and Hibou 1999).

Tidjani Alou has argued that the analysis of the state as a result of colonisation *and* decolonisation in combination has associated the problem of the imported state to its appropriation by African politicians. African politicians are thereby given a relative autonomy (2001:91). Bayart for example has pointed at the historical opportunity for certain local groups to capture the new institutions in their interest (Bayart 1993, Englebert 1997:770). Through its appropriation, or rather reappropriation, the state in Africa has, according to Bayart, taken

³² The term post-colonial state according to Young indicates particularly the “wholesale importation of the routines, practices and mentalities of the African colonial state into its post-colonial successor” (2004:23-24).

a particular African shape through the application of African rationalities of government. Through the appropriation, the imported nature of the state diminishes in importance (1993:260).

The attention that has been paid to the historical and contextual character of states and their negotiation by local elites has tended to focus on the effects on the functioning of the state in negative terms. Comparing states in Africa to the Weberian ideal type of rational-legal power, early studies focused on patronage and tribalism. For instance Médard (1982) adopted Eisenstadt's (1973) concept of neo-patrimonialism to discuss African states (Anders 2010:4). The personalisation and even paternalisation of the state was emphasised (Schatzberg 2001; Jackson and Rosberg 1982). Still with the rational-legal ideal as the point of comparison for African states, authors such as Bayart (1993), Bayart, Ellis and Hibou (1999) and Chabal and Daloz (1999) have looked at the way the elite has captured the state and turned it into an instrument of ethnic and clientilistic networks, and thereby into a complex hybrid (Anders 2010:4). Rent-seeking has been seen either as rooted in African culture and traditions or as an effect of colonial relations and the opportunities for exploitation after independence (Olukoshi 2005:7). Englebert argued that it was particularly because of its exogenous character that the state in Africa failed and showed "[p]atterns of predation, neo-patrimonialism, rent seeking, urban bias and administrative decay" (1997:768).

Political life in Africa, according to Bayart, Ellis and Hibou, was about the management of factional intrigues for personal interest (1999:21). The state was seen as a centre for accumulation and a source of profit for the ruling class and democracy was not able to change the clientilist and prebendary nature of the state (Grégoire 1994:103-107, Van de Walle 2001, Le Vine 2007). The predicament of states in Africa has been described even more sombrely:

In large swathes of sub-Saharan Africa, the capacity to execute any form of policy has quite simply evaporated (Bayart, Ellis, Hibou 1999:19)

To this can be added Chabal's statement that:

Africa since the nineteenth century has been in a state of almost continuous crisis, enduring first colonial conquest, then the 'blessings' of empire, eventually the traumas of decolonisation and, fi-

nally, the gradual but violent deliquescence of the post-colonial political order (Chabal 1994:574).

He continued:

the currently dire political predicament of Africa is nothing but the outcome of the almost complete failure of political accountability, the almost total absence of legitimacy, not just of the state but of politics itself (ibid).

The picture that was painted was of states in Africa as ‘the heart of darkness’ (Conrad 1899), what has been called the pathologisation of the state, or Afro-pessimism (Blundo and Le Meur 2008:23).

As shown above the state in Africa is represented as an externally formulated model imposed from outside, captured by a rent-seeking elite. Moreover, its economic and financial dependence on the exterior,³³ motivates Bayart to talk of the extraversion of the state (Bayart 1989).³⁴ These representations have consequences for the explanation of the state’s lack of control over territory and population. There was an initial concern with the capacity of the newly independent states to penetrate society and extend the power of the state over territory and population, which was seen as an effect of the artificiality of the state in the African context.³⁵ Brown refers to the debate about the artificiality of the state and argues that it has led to “the weakness or absence of the state in African societies today” (Brown 2006:121). The response was to strengthen the state and its control. This provoked an analytical concern with whose interests were served by the extension of the state. This concern was as a result of the increasing problematisation of the nature of the state and its appropriation by the new bureaucratic elite. There was thus a hesitation as to whether the autono-

³³ Marxist dependency theory emphasise the impossibility of autonomy as a consequence of the workings of global capitalism and neo-colonialism (Anders 2010:149).

³⁴ According to Bayart strategies of extraversion were a deliberate choice by states in order to compensate for their failure to extend their power over territory and population (1993:21). Hence he sees Africans as active agents in making themselves and their societies dependent (ibid: 24).

³⁵ In *Strong Societies and Weak States* (1988) Migdal compare Third World states to established ideal capabilities of the state to “penetrate society, regulate social relationships, extract resources, and appropriate, or use resources in determined ways” which defines strong states. (Migdal 1988:4 in Hill 2005:145).

misation of the state in Africa was actually desirable or not (Doornbos 1990).

Representations of practices of corruption, nepotism, mismanagement and human rights abuses have earned African states the label “states without citizens” as they are seen to “exist only for themselves and their own beneficiaries, excluding the vast majority of the population” (Abrahamsen 2000:3 referring to Ayoade 1988). In practice this has been discussed as a form of privatisation of the state for personal and factional interests. Moreover, the extraversion of the state (Bayart 2000), together with the lack of accountability of bodies such as the World Bank, which had a powerful role in formulation of national policies, has contributed to the conceptualisation of African states as particularly insensitive to the needs and pressure of their citizens (Laakso and Olukoshi 1996:45).

These narratives of the artificiality of African states and their disconnect from the population have effects on understandings of sovereignty, to which we now turn.

Sovereignty of African states

Sovereignty is here understood not as something that exists *a priori*, but as a construction. Sovereignty is seen as produced with particular meanings under specific historical circumstances, particularly in relation to intervention practices. Different meanings of sovereignty affect how states are understood and acted upon (Weber 1995:7, cf. Bartelson 1995, Walker 1993). The notion of sovereignty, how it is understood and used, is also part of how states construct themselves in relation to other institutions and governing bodies (Biersteker and Weber 1996:2).

From the outset, the sovereignty of independent African states has been questioned. While anti-colonial struggles and the institution of independent states promised the ideal of sovereignty and self-determination, the newly independent states (in most instances) are seen to have remained heavily dependent on, and controlled by, former colonial powers (Young 2001). Dependency theorists such as Samir Amin, contributed to establish African states as lacking in terms of sovereignty by arguing that states in Africa had little autonomy in relation to the world economic system, and were therefore trapped in neo-colonial relations (Bayart 1993:7). New African rulers have been narrated as to having to face the problem of governing arbitrarily de-

lineated territories and heterogeneous populations at the same time as they were, as Harrison argues “locked in to a Western-centred global political economy” (Harrison 2010a:12).³⁶

Inayatullah and Blaney write that the establishment of a society of sovereign states gave force to the idea that final authority should rest within each independent community, and that each community was in this sense self-determining (2004:146, cf. Williams 2000). There is thus a clear separation between inside and outside, and responsibility for the welfare of the population is placed inside the state as part of sovereignty. African sovereignty can be discussed on the one hand in terms of self-determination and autonomy, i.e. as they are recognised by other states, what has been called *de jure* sovereignty or external sovereignty. On the other hand, sovereignty is also about the governing of territory and population (in such a way as to be recognised by other states), or what has been called *de facto* or internal sovereignty. It has been argued that the newly independent states in Africa were granted sovereign status despite their inability to govern territory and population (Migdal 1988; Jackson 1990; Clapham 1999; Herbst 2000). According to scholars arguing this case, few African states are considered to fulfil the requirements of sovereignty. They are not considered capable of governing territory and population, nor are they independent.³⁷ This to the extent that Africa has been regarded as “the region of the world with the least sovereign control by individual governments” (Edozie 2004:149).

David Chandler has argued that there has been a shift in meaning from sovereignty as an absolute quality in terms of right to self-determination, to sovereignty as a variable quality in terms of capacity (2010:48). Jackson was important in developing the idea of sovereignty as a capacity (Jackson 1999:433). The term ‘quasi-states’ has been used to refer to states that have been admitted as members into the

³⁶ With the Charter of the Organization of African Unity (1963) and the Charter of the Economic Rights and Duties of States (CERDS) adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1974 sought to reestablish and even extend the scope of sovereign rights. But with little effect. (Clapham 1999:523-524).

³⁷ Bayart, Ellis and Hibou emphasise the progressive devaluation of Africa in international diplomacy since the 1970s. A loss of importance that together with an economic and financial crisis resulted in “a stark erosion of effective sovereignty in almost all the states of the region, which are submitted to an increasingly rigorous conditionality by aid donors in the course of structural adjustment programmes” (1999:2-3). This led Jenkins to discuss interventions in African states as a second threat to sovereignty, which is the result of the inability of states to govern in the first place (Jenkins 2002:486).

international system although they don't fulfil the requirements militarily or economically (Clapham 1999:524-525). There is considered to be a 'sovereignty gap' between *de jure* and *de facto* sovereignty (Duffield 2007:171). The term 'quasi-states' was introduced by Jackson to draw attention to the absence of "many of the marks and merits of empirical statehood", particularly in Africa (Jackson 1990:1). It was subsequently complemented by the idea of failed states (Helman and Ratner 1992-1993, Gros 1996, Clapham 1998, Jackson 2000).

Sovereignty has thus become a problem that pertains to African states. More specifically, the problem is defined as the gap between formal (*de jure*) and empirical (*de facto*) sovereignty. Aid and development assistance, particularly with a focus on state-building, have been concerned with achieving 'empirical statehood', or what Jackson has called positive sovereignty, as opposed to formal, or negative sovereignty. The shift in meaning of sovereignty, Chandler has argued, has enabled a legitimisation of intervention as a way to strengthen sovereignty (in terms of capacity), while at the same time paradoxically limiting the autonomy of the target state (2010:45ff).

Williams has shown how sovereignty has been closely connected to other norms associated with the rise of modern nation-states in Europe. Most importantly here, "the possession of sovereign statehood became intimately linked to the pursuit of material well-being and economic development" (Williams 2000:557). States that are formally recognised as sovereign are considered ultimately responsible for the welfare of the population, e.g. through the provision of services such as water. Development cooperation activities aimed at public service provision can in this context be seen as efforts to enhance the capacity of states to perform certain functions, namely functions that are considered to define them as sovereign states. Being considered a public good³⁸ and an essential service makes water a central concern for the state. Although there are different perceptions regarding how provision should be performed, there is a general agreement that states are responsible for promoting and protecting life, but also for managing and enabling human resources in such a way as to promote development (Grindle 1999:128). And they are expected to be self-reliant, i.e. to rely on their own resources and efforts to do so (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004:129). It is clearly stated both in the Monterrey Consensus

³⁸ A public good by definition is non-excludable and non-rival in consumption and it requires some amount of extra-market management to effectively and efficiently serve social objectives. See further discussion in chapter 3.

on financing for development³⁹ (2002) and the report from the World Summit on Sustainable Development, WSSD, (2002) that “each country has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development”, and the WSSD report adds that “a critical challenge is to ensure the necessary internal conditions for mobilising domestic savings, both public and private, sustaining adequate levels of productive investment and increasing human capacity” (WSSD 2002:43, 83).

The questioning of the sovereignty of states in Africa articulates with the discussion in the previous section about the artificiality of the state in Africa and its capture by local elites and therefore its distinction from society. This characteristic gives states a private character as they are considered to represent a small group in society rather than the whole population, and has contributed to further undermine the idea of sovereignty in Africa. While *de jure* sovereignty is considered to have made it possible for the elite to appropriate the state for its interests in the first place, the efforts to achieve *de facto* sovereignty legitimise the emphasis on improving administrative and technical capacities and to safeguard them against political interference (Chandler 2010:51).

Chandler continues to argue that autonomy (self-determination) is not the end goal of such a process, rather that autonomy was considered to be the problem that caused the lack of empirical sovereignty. As will be argued further on in this chapter, autonomy is still the end goal of development cooperation although it is an autonomy that is conditioned by target states’ capacity to self-regulate, more specifically to internalise the mechanisms of external regulation. A self-regulating state is a responsible state, in the sense that it evaluates its behaviour in the past according to approved standards, and lets that evaluation shape behaviour in the future accordingly. The sovereignty of African states has thus become a question of self-regulation/responsibility rather than self-determination (2010).

Graham Harrison has opened up for a different way of approaching the problem of sovereignty in relations between donors and African states by questioning the internal/external distinction. Based on his work on development cooperation in Tanzania, he talks of a sovereign frontier, rather than sovereignty as a boundary (Harrison 2004:11). There are specific articulations of sovereign frontiers where lines between inside and outside are blurred. They are so because the struc-

tures for cooperation are becoming more complex,⁴⁰ but also because certain agents cannot be situated easily on either side of the dividing line. There is no clear demarcation between who is performing what in relation to the population. This means it is possible to talk of a zone of sovereignty with different actors co-constituting sovereignty, rather than of external imposition on national self-determination. This is what Harrison refers to as postconditionality and Duffield discusses in terms of contingent sovereignty (Harrison 2004:25-26, Duffield 2007:31). Talking of sovereign frontiers rather than boundaries, where donors and international financial institutions become 'part of the state itself' (Harrison 2001b:669), and inside cannot be distinguished from outside, it becomes relevant to ask what happens to the understanding of responsibility?

What I have discussed so far is how states in Africa have been problematised (primarily by academics) as necessarily different and deficient as compared to the European model. These representations shape the way in which states in Africa are understood in development thinking and practice and hence how programmes and strategies are designed to address the problem. The problem to be remedied is states' disconnect from society and their inability to govern their populations and territories for the purpose of development. The autonomy of the elite has been considered to be the problem, and the state must now be linked up with other actors in such a way as to enable self-regulation and hence to produce state responsibility for the welfare of the population. The questions of how and to what ends and according to what rationality it should be governed are addressed in the next chapter. But before I turn to how African states have been dealt with in development thinking and practice, I first pay some attention to scholars who look at states in Africa from a different perspective, namely by focusing on their particular historicity and the way in which they work, through empirical and ethnographic studies, a field of work to which this thesis aims to contribute.

Emphasising the process of becoming

The analysis of the deficient state in Africa relies on the image of the state as an ahistorical entity, "a universal function of governance", that is distinguished from society and acts from above on it. Focusing on

⁴⁰ An interesting example is the use of mentoring in state-building as in the case Afghanistan. (Rosén 2011)

the historical trajectory of the Nigerien state and analysing the state as perceptions, presence and activity allows us to understand the state in a process of becoming rather than as a failed replica of the model of governance and sovereignty in the West. Hansen and Stepputat in *States of Imagination* (2001), pursue an approach to the state, which aims at its denaturalisation, focusing on its particular historical and cultural trajectory. They thus aim to disrupt the dominating problematisation of states in Africa that tend to produce generalised solutions based on a common narrative of deficiency. As Hansen and Stepputat put it "[i]nstead of talking about the state as an entity that always/already consists of certain features, functions, and forms of governance, let us approach each actual state as a historically specific configuration of a range of languages of stateness, some practical, others symbolic and performative, that have been disseminated, translated, interpreted, and combined in widely differing ways and sequences across the globe" (2001:7).

In a similar fashion, Sharma and Gupta argue for the benefits of an anthropology of the state, focusing on the "cultural constitution" of the state, namely, "what the state means to its people, how it is instantiated in their daily lives, and where its boundaries are drawn". This is studied through the everyday routine bureaucratic practice of the state through which it is reproduced, and through which social inequalities are produced and maintained (Sharma and Gupta 2006:11-13). Sharma and Gupta explore the possibility for an anthropological perspective to "further our understandings of the state as a multi-layered, contradictory, translocal ensemble of institutions, practices, and people in a globalised context" (Ibid:6, cf. Ferguson and Gupta 2005, Gupta 2012). Using a governmentality perspective, they describe the proliferation of governing bodies and how society is rendered governable, allowing for government at a distance (referring to Rose and Miller 1992).

The same ambition guides another group of scholars who focus on the state in Africa and how it takes shape through everyday practices (Bierschenk 1997, Olivier de Sardan 1997, 2008, 2010, Tidjani Alou 2008, 2010, Blundo and Le Meur 2008, Anders 2010). Olivier de Sardan has argued that there is a need for empirical studies "devoted to [the] 'actual' daily functioning" of African states as complex social processes (Olivier de Sardan in Blundo and Le Meur 2008:39).

One important effect of the focus on practices is that it opens up for discussions about what is state and what is not, something that the

literature on the state in Africa has often failed to do.⁴¹ The empirical contributions in *The Governance of Daily Life in Africa* make Blundo and Le Meur point at the multiplicity of actors involved in public service delivery, and argue for example that “there is no longer any public service in Africa whose deliverance does not include the greater or lesser involvement of the four following instances: the state administrative services, the development administrations, the ‘community-type’ organisations and private operators” (Blundo and Le Meur 2008:15). As mentioned above, Harrison has problematised the notion of sovereignty as demarcating a clear boundary and pointed at the blurring of the inside/outside distinction (Harrison 2004).

Tidjani Alou emphasises the Nigerien state’s continuous efforts to institutionalise and appropriate the control over the territory by putting in place a bureaucracy and new norms to legitimise it and universalise it. A trajectory that is neither determined nor straightforward but results from a specific historical process (Tidjani Alou 2001).

In the case of developing states, development thinking and practice often heavily influence the trajectory, and the different ways in which the problem of states in Africa have been made into objects of reform acted upon by IFIs and development agencies. In the following I continue this discussion by focusing on how the problematisation of African states have made them objects of governing in development thinking and practice, hence shaping specific trajectories.

II. DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE AND THE STATE

In order to see how states in Africa are made into objects of reform I now pay attention to how their problematisation is translated into development programmes and strategies. I make a brief overview of how the state has been related to in development thinking and practice, with emphasis on a shift in how the developing subject is approached, and the way in which responsibility and responsabilisation have be-

⁴¹ Lund talks of twilight institutions arguing that the closer one gets to a particular political landscape, the clearer it becomes that many institutions have a shadowy, twilight character (Lund 2006). The state is often represented by a multiplicity of institutions - not only are the multiple layers and branches of institutions which call themselves state (judiciary, the territorial and municipal administration, the customs service and police, the various extension agencies and so on) present and active to various degrees, but so called traditional institutions which have been bolstered by state-sanctioned recognition also vie for public authority (Lund 2001:862-863).

come central elements of the workings of development. I do this because responsabilisation is the development framework to which Nigerian state agents relate when making sense of their role and responsibility.

It is important to note that what are portrayed here are general and overarching tendencies that mainly represent dominant thinking and practice within the World Bank, and the IMF. These overarching trends have been supported to various degrees by bilateral donors, but sometimes also strongly opposed.⁴²

The state – frontrunner and obstacle

Following independence in large parts of Africa in the 1960s, donors accompanied African states in their grand development projects⁴³. In the water sector this translated into large and small infrastructure development projects, run by the state with little or no involvement of the population. In his analysis of development discourse in the 1970s James Ferguson argued that at the time, development planners saw the state in apolitical terms, as a provider of services, a facilitator of economic growth and a keeper of the peace. The state was depoliticised and little account was taken of its exercise of power (1994:194). It was considered to be the role of the modern state to penetrate and change traditional society through the process of modernisation (Bayart 1993:7).

As mentioned above, the early post-independence period was dominated by modernisation theorists who saw the disconnect between the modern state and ‘traditional’ African society as transitory, as something that could be overcome with the right interventions. Progressively, African countries were expected to go through the same steps of evolution as the European countries had, only much faster. Development was to be achieved through the elimination of difference, i.e. of that which was understood as ‘traditional’, as compared to the model of the ‘modern’ at the centre of which was the state.

⁴² One example is privatisation of water companies, a strategy that has been promoted by the World Bank but opposed by certain bilateral donors who apply a different logic to the provision of basic services.

⁴³ For example, in Niger France maintained an important presence, and soon after independence other actors such as Le Club du Sahel, l’Institut du Sahel and the UN Sudano-Sahelian Office engaged in Nigerian development activities.

It didn't take long though, before state-led development in Africa became subject to critical scrutiny. Rather than being the frontrunners of development, states became increasingly regarded as the primary obstacle (Hettne 2010:43). As discussed above, African states were regarded as artificial constructs appropriated by elites, lacking legitimacy and failing to govern population and territory. Development assistance was accused of benefiting autocratic regimes and local elites rather than populations stricken by poverty (Burnell 2002:475). The heavy critique directed at autocratic regimes coincided with a growing concern in the development community with basic needs and poverty alleviation, rather than a strict focus on state-led economic growth. With the debt crisis, the state as an institution was further delegitimised as a development actor. Formal sovereignty had granted African states relative independence and supremacy. However, their capacity to perform as sovereign states became questioned and formal sovereignty crumbled with donor conditionality and the imposition of structural adjustment programmes, by the International Financial Institutions, IFIs (Clapham 1999:533, cf. Harrison 2004:31).

In 1981 the World Bank published its famous Berg report, *Towards Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa*, which focused on excessive and inefficient state intervention as the main cause of Africa's economic problems (Harrison 2005:1303). The African developmentalist state was narrowly interpreted "on the basis of a one-sided theory of rent-seeking/ -generation" (Ibid). Following the economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s there was a broader questioning of the involvement of the state in the economy, and an expansion of neoliberal policies throughout the world. Development increasingly became a question of implementing a free-market model and 'rolling back the state'.

Conditionality was often used to push the implementation of the "right" kind of policies. Development agencies, primarily the IFIs but also some bilateral donors, were exercising a form of disciplinary government on African states. They did so by trying to set up what they considered a necessary, and sufficient, framework to allow free market forces to do their work (Williams 1996). Macro-economic and political frames were established to contain the behaviour of the state (in order to create market confidence), while bilateral aid increasingly bypassed state structures, and directly addressed poor people. A first deconcentration and privatisation of public functions was initiated, sometimes by design but often by default as public institutions were

weakened by adjustment policies (Tiemago 2000, Mosse and Lewis 2005).

The neoliberal agenda of the structural adjustment programmes and associated policies has been well researched (see. Easterly 2002; Stiglitz 1998). As critics, and later also the IFIs themselves have pointed out, the SAPs largely failed to produce the intended outcomes, and often also undermined the capacity of states to provide public services (Tiemago 2000). The explanations for this are several and have contributed to important self-reflexivity, to be further discussed below.

The critique of development – instrumental and emancipatory

The early 1990s saw a growing disillusionment, (what has been called the ‘development impasse’ (Shuurmann 1993) with development assistance. A widespread critique was directed from a multiplicity of actors against the failed interventionary policies of donors as well as states. The ‘failure’ of development was explained in different ways which were all important to understand the conditions of possibility for current mechanisms of reform.

Initially, the International Financial Institutions tended to explain the failure of the SAPs to produce the intended outcome with the non-compliance by recipient states to ‘proposed reform’ (cf. Gervais 1997, Stiglitz 1998:8). From a different perspective, critique focused on the inappropriateness and lack of contextualisation of the programmes (Long 1992, Pietersee 2001). The problem, in both cases, was considered to be the imposition of externally formulated programmes and strategies without the involvement of the developing subject itself. This was seen to have caused resistance against policies that were not locally adapted.

There was also a growing realisation that change cannot be imposed from outside. From post-colonial and post-development critics and scholars came more hard-core accusations against Western imperialism and the inability to go beyond the grand narratives of modernisation and its destructive effects on local ways of life (Escobar 1995, Shiva 1997, Esteva and Prakash 1997, Illich 1997, Rahnema and Bawtree 1997). However, the post-development perspective and its call for an end to development has been severely criticised from a post-colonial perspective. First, for romanticising a state of poverty and denying people in ‘developing countries’ access to the benefits of

development and modernisation (Eriksson Baaz 2002, Ferguson 2006). But also for failing to go beyond dichotomised categories, and representations of the non-west as an unspoiled state of origin and authenticity (Eriksson-Baaz 2002).

From within development studies and practice, a concern was growing with the workings of aid, the impossibility of the linearity of planning, implementation and evaluation (Long 1992, Bebbington 2000, Crewe and Harrison 2000), the representation of the poor as well as aid workers themselves (Eriksson Baaz 2002) and not least the necessity of functioning institutions for successful liberalisation and privatisation (Stiglitz 1998). Increasing critique focused on certain procedures and mechanisms of the aid business itself, such as the representation of success (Mosse and Lewis 2005, Duffield 2007) and the bureaucracy of aid (Easterly 2002). Moreover, the importance of politics and power relations, the informal rules of the game and the messy actualities of life were recognised (DAC 1997 and DFID 2005 in Duffield 2007:176). There was thus a recognition of an increasing need to understand local institutions, which required better contextual knowledge.

These different perspectives on the causes of failure resulted in new ways of problematising development as well as new practices of development cooperation. This further problematisation of the state as development actor occurred in combination with an increasing reflexivity within the aid community, so that we can talk of ‘reflexive development’ in the sense that there are continuous evaluations and strategies for improvement of government/development⁴⁴.

Self-reflection at this point led to “‘thicker’ notions of conduct” (Harrison 2011:444). Setting up a model framework for correct conduct had proven insufficient and there was an increasing focus on, and an elaboration of, techniques for shaping rational behaviour in order to increase predictability (ibid). In focus was the recipient of aid as an effective agent moulded not just by its own society but also made dependent on aid and thus deprived of ‘natural’ energies and dynamics. As the World Bank stated already in 1991 “[t]he Bank has now embarked on the more realistic albeit more long-term and difficult

⁴⁴ When Nederveen Pieterse writes about reflexive development he is referring particularly to the task making development practice self-conscious by drawing attention to its character as a politics of difference, which is a more critical conception than the one used here (2006:72).

process of helping governments take charge of their own management” (World Bank 1991:1).⁴⁵

Reform became less a question of deciding whether or not to privatise or to introduce market measures, but how to make privatisation work and how to make markets function. Harrison talks of this as a shift from first generation reform (FGR) characterised by “compulsory adjustment to market ‘realities’, to second generation reform (SGR) that included good governance, political will, ownership, partnership, involvement with social policy, reform of state/agent behaviour. Harrison argues that the second generation implied “broader projects of social engineering” (Harrison 2011:81).

Neoliberal reform in the shape of structural adjustment programmes had caused both political and social turmoil as well as negative economic effects and suffering (Tiemago 2000, Gervais 1992, 1995). The explanation, however, was not necessarily that the policies were wrong but that institutions in target states and the way in which they shape human interaction were inadequate (North 1990 in Chandler 2010:88-89).⁴⁶ As a consequence, institutional reform became a primary concern for development cooperation. As an example of the shift in the World Bank from first to second generation reform (FGR and SGR), there was an increasing focus on the institutional framework within which the market should and *could* work, hence with “the *nature* of state action” (Harrison 2004:18). Following from the new problematisations of states in Africa, we can see that reform became

⁴⁵ This resonates with what president Barak Obama said in his speech at the MDG +10 meeting in New York 20 years later, in September 2010, where he declared the US policy on global development. We will seek partners who want to build their own capacity to provide for their people. We will seek development that is sustainable./.../ we will invest in the capacity of countries that are proving their commitment to development./.../ In other words, we’re making it clear that we will partner with countries that are willing to take the lead. /.../ Now, every nation will pursue its own path to prosperity. But decades of experience tell us that there are certain ingredients upon which sustainable growth and lasting development depends.

⁴⁶ As expressed for example in the *Investing in Development, A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals*, produced by The Millennium Project, headed by Jeffrey Sachs, it is stated that there are four reasons for shortfalls in achieving the goals; 1) poor governance, 2) a poverty trap (the problem of poverty is poverty), 3) pockets of poverty, and 4) specific policy neglect (UN Millennium Project 2005:29ff). It is indicative that all those reasons for failure are inside the developing state. There is no mention of the relation to a globalized economy, nor to levels of inflow of funds from outside, as additional challenges. These are thus the problems that are identified as crucial to deal with, and they require a change in both attitude and behaviour.

both a matter of implementing the right type of institutions and doing so in ways that would bridge the disconnect between the model and the local context by making the particular reform the choice of the recipient state and population, for example through mechanisms of ownership.

One crucial concern, from a neoliberal perspective, was that aid as well as the welfare state had created passive and dependent individuals and collectivities. The institutional framework had shaped people and recipient states to make choices that did not lead to development. Instead it was assumed that the displacement of the caring welfare state for the self-caring individual or association of individuals would release people's energies and efficiency (Dean 1999:62-63, Eriksson Baaz 2001:176). Releasing people's energies was not about creating autonomous subjects but about directing energies properly in order to benefit development. It is of importance that the theoretical framework for understanding state behaviour at this point, particularly within the World Bank, was primarily new institutionalism. New institutionalism, with its element of rational choice, focuses on "people's motives and actions as dependent on particular institutional settings" (Bevir and Rhodes 2010:35). Autonomous choice for which people can be held responsible, in new institutionalism, is thus a product of government, rather than the other way around (Dean 1999; Chandler 2010:75-76). Therefore the role of institutions was emphasised as enabling both "markets and individuals to efficiently make decisions" (ibid). The right institutional norms and incentives have to be constructed in order to make individuals as well as collectivities make the right choices. The approach to the state and institutional reform was essentially based on "rational choice modelling of officials' behaviour, new public management theories of administrative reform, NPM,⁴⁷ and a market-conforming version of 'new institutionalism'." (Harrison 2005a:1309)

⁴⁷ New Public Management – in vogue since the 1980s. The term first used by Christopher Hood in the article 'A Public Management for All Seasons?' in 1991. Batley and Larbi defines it as "a set of particular management approaches and techniques, borrowed mainly from the private for-profit sector and applied in the public sector. It is sometimes perceived as an ideology based on the belief in the efficacy of markets and competition, and in business-like management ideas and practices (Batley and Larbi 2004:41). "Rather than focusing on controlling bureaucracies and delivering services, public managers are now responding to the desires of ordinary citizens and politicians to be 'the entrepreneurs of a new, leaner, and increasingly privatised government', (Denhardt and Denhardt 2000:549). Included elements in NPM "1)

At the same time, there was a similar critique but from a radical and emancipatory perspective. Pointing at the silencing effect of the power of aid, this strand of critique emphasised the need to focus on local knowledge and initiative (cf. Chambers 1994, Long 1999). The critique came from African communities and leaders, for example expressed in the Alternative SAP Framework, but also from the donor community, particularly NGOs. It focused on local agency and voice, and was promoted by people who expressed a belief in achieving genuine empowerment and ownership by getting rid of power (Kapoor 2005).

The radical and emancipatory critique had a legitimising function and helped create a broad acceptance for what came to be dominated by a development and deepening of neoliberal policies and strategies. Approaches that promoted ownership, participation and empowerment were elaborated to improve development practice. The possibility of doing so, and the remaining problem of hierarchical relations have been thoroughly debated (Kapoor 2005, Eriksson Baaz 2001, Abrahamsen 2004, Whitfield 2009, Cooke 2008). The point to be made here is that the translation of the critique into programmes of reform has been shaped by the reliance within major development institutions on new institutionalism and new public management. This means that the tools have to a large extent had an instrumental focus. This displacement of meaning concerns how ownership, partnership and empowerment become means to achieve certain ends, for example development, according to a certain understanding. As such approaches to achieve ownership, partnership and empowerment are promising the autonomy of the subject, but on the condition of its subjection to, and internalisation of, certain self-regulating mechanisms that are expected to lead to desired outcomes. These responsabilising tools sit well with the representation of states in Africa as lacking responsibility. However, this thesis problematises the assumption that it is possible to produce expected effects, and particularly so with instrumental mechanisms of responsabilisation. Instead the thesis emphasises the impossibility of distinguishing between instrumental and emancipatory strate-

the adoption of private sector management practices in the public sector; 2) and emphasis on efficiency; 3) a movement away from input controls, rules, and procedures toward output measurement and performance targets; 3) a preference for private ownership, contestable provision, and contracting out of public services; and 5) the devolution of management control with improved reporting and monitoring mechanisms” (Hope 2001:120). Heavily influenced by public choice theory, principal-agent theory and transaction cost economics.

gies and goals when they are given meaning and take shape in particular contexts.

Moreover, it is important to note, as Rose, O'Malley and Valverde do (2006), that because there are neo-liberal elements, (such as responsabilisation), to a development program it would not necessarily be just to call the activities of all donors in Niger essentially neo-liberal. Such a claim would simplify the understanding of development thinking and practice, and be reductionist when it comes to analysing different forms of power at work in development cooperation. It is important for understanding the effects of development cooperation in particular contexts that we see that neo-liberal rationalities work together with other rationalities, such as the critical and emancipatory rationalities mentioned above.

In this chapter I have argued that states in Africa have been problematised as lacking responsibility, which legitimates responsabilisation. Responsibilisation aims to direct the choices made by the state through mechanisms of self-regulation. In the next chapter I discuss in more detail the neoliberal shift mentioned above, with a focus on how it has taken shape in current water sector reform. As we will see water sector reform in Niger is being shaped according to the logic of responsabilisation. Accordingly it is characterised by a paradox between an autonomous subject that can be held responsible for the outcome of its choices and actions, and its subjection to certain pre-defined ways of exercising autonomy through self-regulating mechanisms. This paradox, I argue, is central to the way individuals are constructed as responsible subjects.

3. Water sector reform as responsabilisation

It means we first have to love to work. And when they know you would love to attain the goal [MDG] then they can help you. (Yahaya, director of a district water office)

As we saw in the previous chapter, the shift in focus in development thinking in the late 1990s implied a closer engagement with strengthening the state to shape behaviour conducive to development. The 1997 World Development Report, WDR, *The State in a Changing World* made the case that “[a]n effective state is vital for the provision of the goods and services – and the rules and institutions – that allow markets to flourish and people to lead healthier, happier lives”(1997:1). And the 2004 WDR *Making Services Work for the Poor* stated that “[s]ocial equity and fundamental human rights suggest a responsibility for government but leave open the ways of discharging that responsibility” (2004:34). Hence, the state has regained a central position, but its particular role is up for negotiation. However, the negotiation is to a large extent constrained by the surrounding discursive formation. The 1997 WDR concluded that societies must accept a redefinition of the state’s responsibilities, namely the reduction of its functions to “the fundamentals” (1997:17). This was to be done partly by “involving citizens and communities in the delivery of core collective goods” (1997:3), and also through contracting out state functions to private operators. By this means it was argued that the functions of the state would be adjusted to its capability. In turn, this was expected to allow the state to strengthen its capacity to perform its fundamental tasks in a responsible way.

Current reform of the Nigerien water sector is fully in line with the argument of the WDRs cited. In line with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, major donors are restructuring their assistance from project aid to programmes in order to strengthen the role and capacity of the state through country ownership in the Nigerien water sector. Moreover, Nigerien poverty reduction strategy establishes “the progressive transfer of responsibilities from state structures to the local authorities and the private sector” as a central concern (PASEHA November 2006:22). In this chapter I look more closely at how the mechanisms of ownership and the delegation of responsibility to local and private actors are working as technologies of agency and performance (Dean 1999) with the aim of governing the state to govern responsibly, and thereby producing specific types of subject and legitimate ways to act.

This chapter starts with a discussion of how responsabilisation is thought to work in development thinking and practice, through technologies of agency and performance. At the end of the discussion I argue that we need to conceptualise responsibility as relational in order to understand what responsabilisation comes to mean in any particular context. Thereafter I discuss the three mechanisms for water sector reform in Niger mentioned above: the programme approach to achieve ownership; delegation of responsibility to local actors; and the use of private actors to perform different functions in the service delivery chain.

I. RESPONSIBILISATION

As a technique, responsabilisation is not just about creating possibilities to hold someone responsible but also about creating responsible subjects. Responsible as an adjective here means that the subject accepts that it may be held responsible (have to bear the consequences of its actions), that the subject keeps that possibility in mind and lets it shape behaviour accordingly (Lucas 1993:11). This means that government in the form of responsabilisation, works through technologies of the self (Rose and Miller 1992, Dean 1999). As Rose writes, advanced liberal rule seeks to govern “through the regulated choices of individual citizens, now construed as subjects of choices and aspirations of self-actualisation and self-fulfilment” (Rose 2006:147).⁴⁸ As

⁴⁸ Such a close engagement with the subject is what has motivated Harrison to talk of neo-liberal social engineering, aimed at producing subjects that are conducive to

we saw in the previous chapter development cooperation is increasingly a matter of implementing mechanisms for producing self-regulating developing subjects, whether individuals or states.

Responsibility at its most general has tended to be about attributing certain actions to a particular subject for which it has an obligation of moral or legal character. To be held responsible is to be required to answer for one's actions. This logic relies on the construction of a particular type of subject. Attributability of an action to a subject for which it can be held responsible implies a subject that reflects, acts on intentional choice and is in control of its actions and their outcomes. It is based on the assumption that the individual could have acted differently, i.e. on the individual as agent (Winther Jørgensen 2003:75). The ability to reflect and make rational *choices* on which to act intentionally presupposes a subject with some degree of free will (Lucas 1993:30, Winther Jørgensen 2003). Causality, i.e. the responsibility for causing (or not causing) an event to happen, requires *control* over events. Moreover, responsibility has a *temporal* aspect as the subject is held responsible for something that has happened in the past and for doing otherwise in the future, thus presupposing that the person who did or did not act is the same person today as they were yesterday and will be tomorrow (Roochnik 2007:15). The subject who can be held responsible in this idealised form is hence a stable, acting self with a free will to make choices, who is in control of events that lead to a certain outcome. If we transfer this logic to the state, state responsibility requires a stable acting and sovereign state.

Consider the way we usually think about responsibility for policy, strategy and reform by actors such as development agencies, states and local authorities. It is generally assumed that policies are intentionally formulated by an institution which although it has to take its historical, political and economic context into consideration is nevertheless capable of making autonomous choices based on rational reflection. When decisions have been made, implementing agencies take

development (Harrison 2010a). Chandler, although applying a Foucauldian perspective, finds the use of the term neoliberal problematic in this context since it is used in a different meaning as compared to the way the term is generally understood, particularly in the development context, it can be added. Instead Chandler prefers the term post-liberal governance, the 'post' indicating the shift, or even inversion, of the meaning of certain concepts such as sovereignty (Chandler 2010). While I prefer to remain with the term neoliberal it must be pointed out, as both Harrison and Chandler do, that it in this context is understood as something different from the return of classical liberal economics.

control of the process after which evaluation is made and actors held accountable. Responsibility becomes a matter of answerability and accountability for the outcome of set goals. In this sense responsibility is instrumental and fragmented; each actor is responsible for a limited task for the purpose of the efficient achievement of set goals.

To be responsible is, as argued above, not just to be responsible for a decision but for an act with outcomes. This means that to be responsible one must not just be able to choose, but also to act and to control events and their outcome. Take the ownership agenda as an example. The prominence accorded to ownership is a response to the critique that development assistance has deprived recipient states of agency and control. Ownership thereby promises both choice and control. The programme approach⁴⁹ as a technique for achieving recipient ownership aims at allowing the state to take charge of planning and implementation through an element of control.

Control over events and outcomes require calculability as the basis for planning. To construct a responsible state by way of control thus has consequences for how society must be organised in such a way as to enable calculability as well as to allow for determination of the future. In development assistance this is translated into capacity-building, introduction of statistical systems and institutions for statistical calculation and technical planning tools for results-based management. These systems will simultaneously make it possible for the state to control the planning and implementation process and make it possible for the state as well as the population and donors to evaluate the outcome.

The way in which responsibility is constructed also has a temporal dimension as it relates back to past actions and events as well as it relates forward to future expected actions and results. Being held responsible, is a matter of being made to answer for actions and words emitted in the past as well as to change in the future. This logic, as previously argued, presupposes a stable self-identity over time. If we look at state responsibility in this sense, where the state is held to account for its past actions as well as called to respond in the future it assumes the continued stable existence of the state. To take the Millennium Development Goals, MDGs, as an example, their specific purpose, to be able to call to account the state for their implementa-

⁴⁹ As a general approach I use the term programme approach throughout the thesis. This is also justified by the fact that the state agents themselves use the term “ap-proche programme”.

tion, assumes that the state remains stable throughout the set period. We can assume that ruptures will occur during the designated time that may free the state from some responsibility (for events not under its control) yet not from what has been performed during periods of relative stability. The timeboundedness of the MDGs was acclaimed particularly for enabling accountability and for making states (rich and poor) compliant as they would risk being shamed on the international scene. This is how responsabilisation is intended to work, by shaping choices and behaviour in the present through a commitment to a particular future. Responsibility for performing a task/obligation implies improving ourselves based on our previous faults, from which we have learned and will now transform. It is a responsibility directed towards the self, for self-improvement, to secure a desired future.

The responsible individual, according to this logic, is not the classical liberal individual with an inherent propensity for reason, but one whose freedom/agency is conditioned by its subordination to structure (Dean 1999:165). It means that the meaning of freedom and autonomy has shifted from the liberal meaning of a pre-existing natural state to its neoliberal sense as an artefact (Hindess 1996), a capacity and a duty⁵⁰. There is thus a paradox in the way that responsibility is understood, as on the one hand made possible by autonomous choice, and on the other requiring the subjection of choice to the systems of value of others/society (Diprose 2006).⁵¹ In practice the paradox takes the shape of technologies of agency that aim to enable choice, and technologies of performance that aim to regulate those choices.

⁵⁰ Chandler has discussed the same shift in how autonomy in terms of sovereignty has changed meaning, particularly in the case of post-liberal statebuilding, where he emphasises the shift in the meaning of sovereignty from an absolute and pre-existing quality to an effect of intervention and statebuilding. Rather than maintaining its initial meaning of autonomy and self-determination, sovereignty becomes understood as capacity (Chandler 2010).

⁵¹ This paradox has been dealt with by Derrida in his discussion of Nietzsche's understanding of responsibility. Responsibility, Nietzsche argued, assumes an autonomous subject capable of making independent choices, while in the moral/legal sense responsibility constitutes a disciplinary system, where the subject has not chosen freely what to be responsible for (Diprose 2006).

Technologies of agency and performance

According to Mitchell Dean technologies of *agency* – “seek to enhance or deploy our possibilities of agency” (Dean 1999:196). Within technologies of agency Dean distinguishes between technologies of citizenship and of the contract. First, technologies of *citizenship* are about self-esteem and empowerment, and include the instruments of *voice* and *representation*. The governed are engaged in government as active and free citizens, with a stake. In development thinking, the elaboration of technologies of citizenship is related to a critique of the exercise of power by donors over recipients, as well as to the neoliberal critique of the paternalist state, and aid dependency. People, as well as the state, are considered to have been deprived of active engagement and voice, hence the focus on partnership through ownership and delegation of responsibility to retrieve that voice and commitment (Dahl 2001). This logic can be transferred to various actors, for example the water ministry and its agents are supposed to be represented and take part in, even be the leader of, the elaboration of programmes, such as the water sector programme, and thereby to feel they own their policies and strategies, hence to feel they have a stake and thereby take responsibility for them. The population is to be represented by community organisations, and heard in consultation with the state (and donors), and to take an active role in the management of the water sources for which they are made responsible. Technologies of citizenship, to make actors feel they have a stake in a particular outcome that benefits the group, are used in public sector reform to induce loyalty, motivation and competence, in individual state agents.⁵²

Second, technologies of agency include the setting up of *contracts* between governors and governed (Dean 1999:167). In the water sector in poor countries it can be between donors and the state, between the state and private companies or community organisations among others. While in Niger responsibility for managing water infrastructure was first delegated with little actual regulation involved, there is now a form of contract between the state and the local community whereby infrastructure is provided on condition that certain criteria are fulfilled that stipulate a responsible management. This means that the local community is expected to manage responsibly because the right con-

⁵² Loyalty is essential in the core public sector it is stated in WDR 1997:92, “[l]oyalty promotes staff identification with an organisation’s goals and a willingness to take a longer-term view of responsibilities”.

tractual agreement has been set up, and its enforcement is credible, rather than as a result of their inherent capacity to act responsibly. Similarly technologies for inducing responsible behaviour among state agents include codes of conduct, that take the form of contracts. They are intended to bring about a stronger allegiance to the nation-state and, hence, a commitment to the national interest rather than to personal and sectional interests; thereby producing civil servants who are “vigilant, upright, honest and just” (Hope 2001:130-131). Contracts are often related to some system of awards and punishment. The contract provides a strong conditioning force as it requires the agreement of the governed to undergo certain reforms to optimise their behaviour and receive the benefits of contractual implication.

Technologies of *performance* are indirect means of regulating agencies by providing the conditions for calculation; targeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation with the purpose of optimisation of conduct. Technologies of performance function as a way to shape how the subject (as a result of technologies of agency) make choices. According to the tenets of new institutionalism, as well as in new development management, the best way to encourage the subject to make rational choices is considered to be through market logic (Dar and Cooke 2008). Rational choices are supposed to be made on the basis of a calculation of profit and loss. The propensity for rational choices is not considered inherent, but needs to be encouraged through a range of policy mechanisms, such as: “the increased use of contracts within the state, expanded costing and monetisation of state patrimony, agentisation, the introduction of stronger incentive mechanisms for public servants, the introduction of results-oriented management and output-oriented budgeting, and the introduction of new technologies of personnel and financial management that establish stronger signals of incentive and sanctions for individuals” (Harrison 2005a:1309). This way, reform agendas have increasingly become a question of the creation of a “certain kind of self who is motivated, efficient, transparent, and accountable in ways that personify the ideal of a market agent” (Harrison 2010b:445 referring to Williams 1999). The purpose of technologies of performance is to provide the indicators that allow for comparing performance over time and space, as the basis for incentive structures and systems of accountability at all stages in the distribution chain. Certain performances, e.g. provision of water, number of wells built and managed, the Millennium development water target, are made objects of scrutiny and shape behaviour

through “naming and shaming” (Rydin 2007:612). Corporatisation and privatisation of public services where performance is supposed to be the result of a real or quasi competitive situation constitute other types of performance technologies. (Dean 1999:168-169).

In the development cooperation context, the above-mentioned criteria for performance management are not presented as outright conditionalities, but rather as a promise of inclusion and freedom (ownership and access to aid) are granted to those who fulfil the requirements. We can see how development cooperation and the good governance agenda have been made into a fictive market where states are expected to adjust behaviour based on calculations of benefits and costs. The responsibility for exclusion from the system of aid is located in the state and its failure to compete efficiently by internalising performance criteria. While donors have tended to put the blame on the recipient before, the same logic is now to be internalised by the recipient, and thus to induce responsible behaviour. As we will see, the transfer of responsibility to local actors has a similar logic.

What is particularly important here is the way technologies of agency and performance stand in relation to each other, i.e. how they come to combine the assumption of an autonomous responsible subject and the necessity of its subjection to certain criteria. This tension is played out in different ways in the mechanisms of ownership and delegation of responsibility to local and private actors as they are conceived of and practiced in water sector reform.

Responsibility as relational

In contrast to the way responsibility is made sense of above, in ethical and philosophical debates about responsibility “the isolated individual self as ‘the transcendental presupposition of agency’, has been “dethroned” (Darling-Smith 2007:4). Instead, responsibility is understood as “inherently relational”, and the possibility of a sovereign subject that acts on free will is being questioned (Levinas 2003, Darling-Smith 2007:4). Taking such a position requires us to probe into how responsibility is intrinsically woven together with how we come into being as subjects in relation to others. So let me briefly explain what that means.

Even if we take the subject to be relational rather than autonomous, the question of free will and agency returns as there are different per-

spectives on how free we are to construct ourselves and others and how our creativity may be constrained to the point of determination.

The stance taken in this thesis is that we do not create meaning out of nothing but in relation to others by applying the means of language. We can understand this process from a foucauldian perspective. Meaning, according to Foucault, is discursively constructed in the sense that discourse shapes what can be said and what cannot, and what are established to be true and false statements. Discourse is a formation of statements between which certain regularities can be identified (Foucault 2002:123).⁵³ As we recall, discourse about developing states and their agents thus provide conditions of possibility for them to emerge as subjects at the same time as it constitutes a constraining force in terms of how they can be understood, act and be acted upon.

What then happens to the possibility of responsibility if our choices are discursively constrained? If responsibility depends on agency this means that responsibility, which depends on an ability to think about ourselves as agents who make choices, is an effect of how we are constituted and constitute ourselves discursively in relation to others. Agency and choice, from this perspective, are not a matter of autonomy from structures but of the particular way in which we are inscribed as agents in relations with others.

Responsibility can be understood as intrinsically related to how we come into being as a response to a call. Derrida writes about the call that precedes us. Responsibility, he argues, only makes sense as part of the experience of inheritance since responsibility is assigned to us, and hence inherited (Derrida and Roudinesco 2004:5). Spivak is also particular about the call from the other (Spivak 1994), building on Levinas argument that responsibility for the other is rooted within our subjective constitution. That subjectivity is formed in and through our subjection to the other. We come into being when we choose to respond to the call from the other.

This means that when we assume subject positions we do so based not just on an abstract discourse but in relation to what the other asks us to become. The response that is asked of us becomes, in Spivak's words, at the same time a question of 'responding to' in the sense

⁵³ Every statement enters into relationships with other discursive elements. It takes place in a field of 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).

“give an answer to” a question (to be answerable) and of ‘answering to’ in the sense of “being responsible for a name” (Spivak 1994:22).⁵⁴ I take “being responsible for a name” to mean that we become responsible for the name we are given (who we are asked to be), and respond to. The name we carry, the being we become, is a result of how we read the call of the other and try to respond to it. We assume responsibility for the one we become, for how we understand ourselves in relation to the other. Responsibility is, in this sense, an effect of the process whereby we enter into community with others (for what we take the name to mean). When state agents identify themselves as state agents they do so in relation to others, and what others ask of them to be; other state agents, the population, politicians, in developing countries development administrators, even the state, everyone with whom they enter into relations as they become state agents.

If we look at responsibility from this perspective, autonomy of choice as a prerequisite for responsibility is not a question of whether we are actually autonomous or not, but of how we constitute ourselves as capable of autonomous choice in relation to others. Similarly, control and causality as prerequisite for responsibility become not just a question of access to resources and knowledge. Instead, we need to be concerned with how state agents conceive of themselves and the state as having control over implementation. Such a concern raises questions concerning how external and internal factors are understood as enabling or constraining. It may for example concern climatic factors, absence of private operators or population growth. How constraining factors are understood and made use of has effects on responsibility. We may be relieved of responsibility by claiming not to be in control, for example by attributing the outcome to someone or something else than the self. The responsibility for achieving the Millennium Development Goals is attributed to the particular state, however, a number of intervening factors such as the availability of loans and grants, population growth, unrealistic targets and other events are attributed responsibility for the state’s inability to achieve the goals by Nigerien state agents, thus relieving the Nigerien state from some of the responsibility. This in turn has effects on how the state can be held responsible and bear the consequences for unachieved targets. The ability to

⁵⁴ Spivak’s text consists of a discussion about Derrida’s *Of Spirit*, about responsibility and deconstruction that opens up for a reading of World Bank practices in Bangladesh. I here try to extract notions of responsibility from that text to enrich my own discussion.

hold someone to account is not just a question of the actual possibility of control but of how that person is understood and understands themself as in control or not.

The temporal aspect of responsibility, i.e. how we answer for the past and commit to a certain behaviour in the future, requires that we construct *fictions of responsibility*. "The ability or power to 'extend' a sense of self into the past and project it into the future, to bridge the gaps by knitting together various memories and expectations into a coherent package" (Roochnik 2007:21). Nietzsche has called the way in which temporality shapes responsibility a disciplinary system. "This creation of memory and anticipation constitutes the capacity for responsibility: the capacity to respond, act, and promise, the capacity to commit the self to a particular future and, through a selective memory, to own in that future a past self, word, or deed that is now present" (quoted in Diprose 2006:438). To take responsibility for the self implies saying 'that is who I am', or to say 'I did it', by looking backwards selectively, but also to be prepared to amend our identities and change our behaviour in the future. To answer to a requirement to do something about 'who I am', and 'what I do', in the future, is to give a promise that forecloses the future. This promise about who we will be in the future shapes who we are today through our understanding of causality, to decide goals, to make ourselves calculable and computable in such a way as to enable the promise (Nietzsche 1967:58 in Diprose 2004:438).⁵⁵ To understand the possibility of responsibility thus includes understanding how the narratives of the self are played out temporally.

Understanding responsibility as I have described above means we cannot take the effects of the responsabilising logic for granted. Rather, this thesis argues, we need to investigate how responsabilisation takes shape in particular relationships, by the people who make sense of themselves and their responsibility in relation to others in a temporal structure. The framework for my analysis is laid out in chapter 4. The rest of this chapter is dedicated to elaborating the responsabilising logic as it takes concrete shape in the mechanisms of ownership and delegation to local and private actors.

⁵⁵ To Nietzsche sovereignty and true self-responsibility (as opposed to self-responsibility as a moral obligation and therefore not by choice), was possible when "the individual or state... becomes its own measure of value... and so is a genuinely responsible and free agent with power over him/her self and his/her fate" (Nietzsche 1967:59-60 in Diprose 2004:438).

II. WATER SECTOR REFORM

Ownership

All the partners, whether the developed countries or the... agreed that programme approach is necessary in order to responsabilise the administration. (Rabiou, high level agent at the Nigerien water ministry)

The meaning of ownership in development thinking is rather vague and is one of many concepts that has been criticised for being ‘conceptually elusive’ (Harrison 2005b:243). The concept of ownership gained its present form with the OECD/DAC policy document *Development Partnerships in the New Global Context* (1995) (Eriksson Baaz 2001), but partnership and ownership had been under debate for a longer time. For example it was emphasised by the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation (AAF-SAP), in 1989.⁵⁶

The ownership agenda can be seen as a response to several strands of critique of aid practice. Many critics, including the AAF-SAP mentioned above, have emphasised the infringement on recipient state sovereignty that externally formulated development policies and conditionalities have implied. Moreover, aid dependency was considered to have deprived recipients of ‘natural’ energies and dynamics. The aid-dependency critique and the focus on self-help that remains prevalent in development thinking were expressed by the American administration already at the time of the Marshall plan (Bräutigam and Knack 2004). (For critiques of some of these assumptions see Eriks-

⁵⁶ In the AAF-SAP, adopted on April 10, 1989, at the joint meeting of African Ministers of Economic Planning and Development and the Ministers of Finance held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, it is stated that *It is essential that, henceforth, contry programmes for the alternative adjustment with transformation process in Africa should be and remain the primary responsibility of African governments and people within the context of a new partnership. It is the responsibility of the international community to support such programmes. This is a fundamental departure from current practice in which external development agencies play a principal role in the formulation, design and implementation and monitoring of adjustment programmes in member states. The gradual erosion of sovereignty implied in the growing role of officials of international financial and development institutions and donor agency in policy design, implementation and monitoring without any accountability to the people of Africa will be reversed by the adoption of the implementation and monitoring strategy outlined in this chapter.* (Maloka 2002:293-294)

son-Baaz 1999, Abrahamsen 2000, Kapoor 2004, 2005). Ownership has emerged as an effort to place the recipient state in the lead, enhancing its agency, while at the same time having a responsabilising function.

In former World Bank President Wohlfenson's 'Proposal for a Comprehensive Development Framework' he emphasised that "countries must be in the driver's seat" (Wohlfenson 1999 in Chesterman 2007:8). Ownership had by then become the guiding light for most donor agencies. In 2005 ownership was established as one of the principles of the Paris Declaration for efficiency in aid, with the purpose of making local actors take the lead in their internal processes of change (Paris Declaration §14 and 15).

In the formulation of the Paris Declaration, ownership takes an instrumental shape. This means that the desired leadership/ownership is a particular one that serves a certain outcome, namely a responsible and accountable state that can guarantee the effectiveness of aid. While recipient country ownership is the first principle of the declaration, it is couched in a framework that emphasises the importance of "strengthening partner countries' national development strategies and associated operational frameworks (e.g. planning, budget, and performance assessment frameworks)" as well as the commitment to take action against the "weaknesses in partner countries' institutional capacities to develop and implement results-driven national development strategies" (Paris Declaration §3:I, and §4:1). It was not until ownership became a means to an end, which was the increased efficiency of aid, and hence development, that it seems to have gained real importance.

The central issue of contention around the concept is the possibility of 'true' ownership, considering the power relations involved in development cooperation (Fraser 2006, Whitfield 2010). 'True' ownership would imply the possibility for the recipient state to freely choose its own policies and strategies. Such a claim relies on the assumption that the recipient state has a pre-existing autonomy that can be restored. From such a perspective there is a contradiction in the notion of donors 'helping' 'partner countries' to 'own' a given strategy (Chesterman 2007, Eriksson-Baaz 1999). Critics argue that the new mechanisms for increasing the efficiency of aid imply an even deeper penetration by the donors into the structure and decision making of the state, hence further restraining the sovereignty of the recipient state (Jenkins 2002, Pender 2001, Cooke 2003). It has also been argued that

conditionality still prevails, just in another form, as the World Bank and IMF boards have the right to veto PRSPs, and multilateral and bilateral donors still use the possibility to withdraw funds (Fraser 2006, Craig and Porter 2003).⁵⁷

Instead of analysing ownership in terms of the capacity of different actors to exercise power, Abrahamsen suggest that the ownership agenda be analysed as a form of advanced liberal rule that produces “specific forms of legitimate action and agency”, through a promise of freedom and inclusion (2004:1453, see also Weber 2004). Rather than a question of whether ‘true’ ownership is possible, the central concern is how ownership works. To do so implies questioning the assumption that there could be a free and autonomous subject, whether individual or state. Rather, the argument is that we need to understand how ownership works to produce a subject whose ability to make choices isn’t a pre-existing natural state, but a product of certain relations of power. If looked at from a governmentality perspective, as Abrahamsen does, we can see how ownership becomes another way of governing developing states through responsabilisation.

If we look at the logic behind the ownership approach we see that rather than exercising power through conditionality, donors operate through a promise of inclusion and expansion of freedom whereby the recipient country is offered incentives to engage in its own reform, to want to be free (Abrahamsen 2004). As Rose claims, the power effects of self-regulation do not answer to a simple logic of domination (Rose 1996). Ownership opens a space for the now ‘active agent’ to act. To analyse how the ‘active agent’ makes use of that space is important in order to understand ownership in its context. Doing so helps us avoid simple assertions of success and failure based on assumptions of donor impositions, lack of political will, lack of capacity and of civil servants who are “preoccupied with their own rules and practices rather than promoting, protecting, and serving the public interest; and, generally, being too corrupt and intent on maintaining their own patrimonial and territorial interests” (Hope 2001:128). The meaning of ownership, as it is understood here, is a result of the mechanisms used

⁵⁷ Gerhard Anders makes an interesting analysis of ownership and conditionality in IMF and World Bank practice, where he breaks down the loan agreement process in order to show how it is possible to reconcile ownership and conditionality by making the borrowing government responsible for setting the conditions of a loan. (Anders in Mosse and Lewis 2005)

for its achievement as well as how the mechanisms are received and made use of by the recipient state.

Reinscribing the state as agent

Referring to Dean, Abrahamsen discusses how the “recipient is reinscribed as agent, which requires new technologies of power”. As a technology of agency, ownership works in several ways. It engages the state as a free and responsible actor, as a state, that has the right to determine its own policies. Ownership thereby speaks to the desire for self-esteem and empowerment among the performers of the state.

In the logic of the Paris Declaration⁵⁸, ‘ownership’, at its most general level encourages “[p]artner countries [to] exercise effective leadership over their development policies, strategies and co-ordinate development actions” (Paris Declaration section II). It implies that the recipient state is given a *voice* in development cooperation that it has often been refused. This is particularly so, when donor countries commit to align themselves with partner country policies and strategies. One of the main mechanisms for achieving recipient country leadership is the programme approach, which is meant to replace the organisation of aid in projects, and which will enable the state to take control and lead its own development. It has been recognised that fragmented project aid deresponsibilises the state (Mosse and Lewis 2005, Batley and Larbi 2004). When the state is excluded, the route of accountability is undermined, it becomes impossible for the state to have a coherent water policy and to control interventions and actors in the sector. The state may also be diverted from its primary task of securing access to water by the heavy workload it takes to comply with different donor conditionalities and procedures (Batley and Larbi 2004).

Moreover, the programme approach promises an inclusion of state agents into the activity of water service provision, from which they often have been excluded during the era of project support. Through inclusion and systems of incentives, state agents are to be made to feel they have a stake in the activity, creating loyalty and occupational pride, “an *esprit de corps* (Manor 2011:8). The voice of the administration is further to be enhanced through frameworks for dialogue between donors and the administration, which will ensure coordina-

⁵⁸ As discussed the logic does not appear for the first time in the Paris Declaration – the declaration is one crucial statement within the broader discourse on these matters.

tion of all activities in the sector, but also supervision by donors of the activities of the state.

The Paris Declaration, as well as the particular programme that aims at achieving the programme approach in the Nigerien water sector (PASEHA), take the form of a contract between the parties. In the Paris Declaration the five principles are specified in terms of the commitments of the 'partner country' and the donor respectively. The 'partner country' commits to exercise leadership, but also to translate "national development strategies into prioritised results-oriented operational programmes as expressed in medium-term expenditure frameworks and annual budgets". The latter is a performance indicator that will be evaluated and for which the 'partner country' can be held accountable. The 'partner country' thus exposes itself to the risk of not getting access to funds or being allowed to exercise leadership over the use of those funds, which in itself is expected to induce a results-oriented behaviour. The contract thereby gives the state a stake in the implementation of the principles of the Paris declaration and the PASEHA. Other contracts through which recipient states commit to responsible behaviour are PRSPs and HIPC. Inclusion into these contracts and the aid or debt reduction they promise is premised on developing states' self-regulation into "good reformers" (Harrison 2004). According to this logic, poor states should be targeted by donors, not as failures, but as holding the potential for development in their hands.

Internalisation of performance management

Country leadership, the Paris declaration states, requires capacity building as well as "mutually agreed frameworks that provide reliable assessments of performance, transparency and accountability of country systems" (§19). Recipient countries contractually commit to public management reform which includes "planning, financial systems, human resource management, reporting and accountability structures, data and information systems to inform decision-making, and adequate record keeping" (UN Millennium Project 2005a:100). This system requires that the state has overall control and responsibility, which motivates the shift from a fragmented implementation of projects to a coherent programme in the sector. The third principle of the Paris declaration is "managing for results", based on performance indicators and the establishment of monitoring frameworks to which the donors can align themselves. Progressive increase in recipient country owner-

ship relies on a gradual internalisation of performance management that allows for results oriented control.

Refined tools for performance management are taught to state and municipal staff through workshops and training as well as through the continuous presence of technical assistants (TA). The TAs are there to support the quality assurance of progress and financial reports, calls for tender, work plan, budgets, manuel de procédures and consultancy reports, and at the same time perform a control function (PASEHA Novembre 2006).

What we see is that in practices of ownership, technologies of agency and performance are thought to work together in a productive mix. Gradually the 'freedom' of the recipient state is expanded on the condition of its subjection to performance management. Agency grants the freedom required to be called into account, while performance management is what makes monitoring, evaluation and comparison possible.

Rather than assuming that technologies of agency and performance are successful in producing certain subjects, we need to empirically explore how the agents of the 'partner country', who are implementing policies and strategies, conceive of ownership and its promise of agency and inclusion. What effects do their conceptions have on how they see the possibility of a responsible Nigerien state, and how they see technologies of performance as enabling the state to take control over planning and implementation.

I now move on to look at the second mechanism of responsabilisation discussed in this thesis, namely the delegation of responsibility for certain functions in the delivery chain to local actors.

Delegation of responsibility to local actors

Well, the role of the state changed when the state decided to re-sponsibilise primarily the populations benefiting from a modern water point. (Rabiou, high level agent at the Nigerien water ministry)

Delegation of responsibility to local actors takes many different shapes. In Niger, it primarily takes the form of delegation of administrative and management tasks to local communities, sometimes in the shape of community based organisations or user associations, (CBOs), in combination with formal decentralisation. The concern with local

community based development in development discourse generally, was initially part of alternative development perspectives, where empowerment and participation were emphasised. Participation was promoted as a means to let people express their needs and was a response to critiques of the disempowering effects of aid (Chambers 1994), but had been more broadly accepted in the development community by the 1980s (Mohan 2002:50). In 1979, participation was defined by the UN as ‘sharing by people in the benefits of development, active contribution by people to development and involvement of people in decision making at all levels of society’ (UN 1979:225). Soon the same principles were introduced and mainstreamed in donor and IFI thinking and practice, although by now shaped by a mainstream development discourse. (Parpart 2002:338-339).⁵⁹

The promotion of participation in the water sectors in Africa was a reaction to the failure of service delivery in the shape it took in many African countries after independence, namely with the state as sole provider (Pritchett and Woolcock 2008:149). Pritchett and Woolcock state that

Systemic failures led to a revolution in thinking about water supply – that incorporating local knowledge was important, assessing local demand was important, and creating open, transparent conditions of supply was important. In water supply, the shorthand was that water projects had to be more participatory at every stage – involving beneficiaries in design, construction (usually with cost contributions to demonstrate commitment, and maintenance (again usually with some cost recovery) (2008:158).

After the publication of the Berg report (1981), and its attack on the dysfunctional state, involvement of civil society became a central aspect of the World Bank’s reform agenda in Africa. Local community participation and empowerment became part of the rearticulation in development thinking of the role of the state in African societies. One

⁵⁹ From a Critical Managerialist perspective, Cooke has discussed the prevalence of the managerialist discourse in World Bank documents. He particularly showed how participation within a development management framework has become a matter of managerialist participation. Managerialist participation, he argues, is what characterises the shift in development management away from the state as sole provider of development (Cooke in Dar and Cooke (eds.) 2008). Rather than marking “the abandonment of modernisation theory in its narrow state-as-vehicle-of-planned-development definition” it establishes the “extension of the modernising project to new locations” (Dar and Cooke 2008:10).

of the solutions was to bypass the state largely excluding it from service provision by linking donors directly to local communities. However, this has proven problematic and there is now a broad recognition both that states are ultimately responsible for providing services, and that they are needed in one way or another to produce efficient and equitable service delivery (Pritchett and Woolcock 2008:166).

In Nigerian water sector reform, delegation of responsibility to local actors includes simultaneous processes. In rural areas it has included delegating responsibility for management of water infrastructure and service provision to local communities, either through community based organisations or through a combination of private actors and user associations. Urban areas are covered by the private water company. These processes have since 2004 been complemented by formal decentralisation through the establishment of municipalities that become formal owners of the water infrastructure with the administrative obligations this involves.

Water service provision is constituted by a long chain of different services and functions. Just to illustrate, some of the involved functions are: planning and programming; construction; contracting; supervision of works; management of installations (or regulation when management is privatised), including repairs and renovations; supervision and oversight. Transfer is also made to a range of bodies, from deconcentrated state agencies to municipalities, NGOs and local communities.

Much of the debate on decentralisation as well as on participatory approaches has concerned the often taken-for-granted positive effects of transferring power and responsibility to local authorities and non-governmental actors, and the tendency to see these as merely technical procedures. Critique has been directed at the assumed endogenous ability of local communities to govern themselves, and the lack of consideration of politics as well as lack of attention paid to the important role of the state (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2003, Bardhan 2002, Cleaver et al. 2005, Manor 2011). One crucial issue that has been under-emphasised is the effects of new organisational principles on relations between 'traditional' power structures, and the importance of village chiefs and modern forms of rule through the establishment of municipalities.

This section does not engage in the debate over what mix provides the best governing structure for a certain desired outcome, but is rather concerned with delegation of responsibility as a governing logic with

responsibilising effect on the range of actors involved in water services delivery. In the following we see how responsabilisation is directed towards the population as well as towards the state.

Engaging the population in water service provision

Proponents of participatory development argue that “[l]ocal people know best what they need and what is viable in their surroundings, and their participation is what enables projects to be adapted to realities and therefore have the best chances for continuity and success” (Ben-Meir 2005:465).

Participation works through technologies of agency in the shape of voice, citizenship and empowerment. In water service provision this means that the local population is engaged as active and free subjects with a stake in the organisation of water services. In practice people are allowed to express their needs in community based organisations, in consultations over type of infrastructure and pricing of water with the municipality and the deconcentrated bodies of the state. Moreover, the population function as providers when management of installations as well as monitoring and evaluation is transferred to local communities. This means that the population is engaged both indirectly as power is devolved to local authorities and the population acquires ‘political capacity’ to engage with politics (Manor 2011:10), as well as directly when they are implicated in service provision.

Members of the population are empowered as *citizens*, as the public good becomes something in which they have a stake. On the one hand it is argued that participatory development will “advance local and national self-reliance”,⁶⁰ through “self-help, self-governance, and independence from external control” (Ben-Meir 2008:464). By transferring responsibility to the local community, the community is assumed to be liberated from dependence on the state (Hope 2001:124). In this narrative the external expert is displaced by the local popula-

⁶⁰ Self-reliance is conceived of as desirable for target populations such as poor rural communities, the social sector, thus creating a biopolitical distinction between different kinds of life (Duffield 2007:18-19, 68). Parts of the population who has entered the ‘market sector’, where water is provided by large scale water companies are included into a system of solidarity, where their costs for water consumption provided through modern systems are reduced through economies of scale and cross-subsidisation. The adjustment of appropriate technology to small rural communities means that they will be provided with the infrastructure they are considered capable of managing within their limited means, i.e. at the most basic level cement wells.

tion, which is seen as best suited to determine how it should govern itself (Jütting et al 2005:627-628). As the water users and the communities are engaged as active citizens with a *voice* and a *stake* in their own government delegation is to have responsabilising effects. *Voice* gives them the possibility to express their preferences, it appeals to their agency and hence to their commitment to the water management system. They have a *stake* in its functioning, as they will pay the price of any failure. Therefore they are expected to make responsible choices when it comes to water management.

In order to commit the beneficiary population to the new installation, to make them feel they have a stake, they are required to contribute to the construction of the infrastructure, either financially or with manual labour. The purpose of community participation in the construction of infrastructure, whether financial or physical, is to create a sense of ownership and "client power", i.e. in the sense that the users are supposed to demand more from the provider (either themselves, private operators and/or local and central government) if they consider the works as theirs. Non-contribution or implementation of certain criteria can lead to their exclusion from the national water provision, i.e. the refusal of the state and/or municipality (or donor) to extend and/or renew infrastructure to the particular community (Jaglin 2002 in Cleaver et al. 2005:19).

This is an economical way of governing; local government and community organisations will (if lines of accountability are functioning) be directly affected if water service provision does not work well. It is assumed that they will bear the direct cost for inefficiency and lack of effectiveness, (WDR 1997:121). This process of responsabilisation has been called an "unloading" of public services onto self-reliant communities and selves (Sharma and Gupta 2006:21). Thus indicating that rather than empowering the local population, delegation of responsibility confers legitimacy on moves which relieve the state of obligations and increase the precariousness of already vulnerable groups in society.

As we will see, the logic of delegated responsibility is negotiated in each particular context. State agents make sense of the possibility of the population performing responsibly as well as making sense of the responsibility the state has in relation to the population.

Contractual implication

In water sector reform, technologies of agency, i.e. the implication of the population as citizens with a stake in their own government, takes the shape of “contractual implication” (Donzelot 1991b in Burchell 1996:29). Contracts set the criteria for the inclusion of the population into the national water services system. Due to the heavy infrastructure costs in the water sector (especially in Niger with its particular geological character), poor communities cannot afford their own installations and continue to depend on the state for initial investments. Investments are made on condition that the community subjects itself to certain management methods and criteria. In Niger the community (through a general assembly) is required to open a bank account, create a water users’ association, contract a private operator and introduce a water tariff. This means that freedom is expanded, in terms of access to water and responsibility for its management, on condition that the community submits itself to these criteria.

This unloading of responsibility for provision of public services, as mentioned above, is implicated in systems of governance. It does not necessarily imply a reduction of the role of the state but a reconfiguration of it. For example, in combination with the establishment of municipalities, community participation potentially increases the presence of the state in the lives of the population. Ferguson has analysed “[s]ervices which serve to govern”, referring to the way in which the state aims to gain political control of previously uncontrolled areas (1994:253).

Setting up municipalities, deconcentrated bodies and community based organisations will help bring water to the people, but only in so far as the people are made governable at the same time. They become governable in the sense that they can be reached by the state, which can then produce statistical and other types of knowledge about them in order to calculate solutions for their government. Technologies of agency and contractual implication may thus have responsabilising effects on the state as they provide certain preconditions for making rational and responsible choices.

Responsibilising the state

Delegation of responsibility aims at reconfiguring the way in which the state engages with the population and at increasing its subjection to risk through upward and downward accountability. The purpose of delegating responsibility, in combination with decentralisation, is thus

to deal with the disconnect between the state and the population that is seen as a fundamental problem of states in Africa.

Local representatives are expected to respond more swiftly to the needs of the population when they are not bound by the need for approval of higher authorities. By bringing certain activities closer to the population and into the hands of elected local representatives, the population (with its acquired 'political capacity') is now expected to demand performance from local elected officials. This, however, assumes that municipalities have their own budgets and resources (Manor 2011:3).

The pluralisation of government through contracting out can also have a restraining function on the state. Accountability is enabled as the state binds itself by contracts with municipalities, local communities and private companies. In relations between the population and local and central authorities, the regulating functions of the contract depend on democratic accountability and functioning systems of rule of law. In the absence of functioning lines of accountability other measures for responsabilising the state structures are used. For example, as the population formulates its needs and these are verified by the state, the needs enter into the programme budget of the state and become a negotiating tool and performance criteria in state-donor relations.

While local participation and decentralisation mean that the central administration is relieved (or deprived) of some of its tasks, the proliferation of local units and actors requires increasing resources to be devoted to regulation to avoid the spread of local corruption and elite capture (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2003:147). The state is thereby engaged as agent, not as provider but as regulator. When ownership responsibility of infrastructure is transferred to local communities, it is argued in the World Development Report (2004), that upper-tier policymakers would have greater incentives to use fiscal instruments, benchmarking, and regulation to promote improvements. The state is considered less likely to hold itself accountable than to hold others accountable (WDR 2004: 164, 177). The separation of roles is hence supposed to enable or improve systems of checks and balances.

However, there is a gap between the way community participation is supposed to operate and the way it operates in practice (Desai 2002:117). In order to understand what delegation of responsibility means in any particular context, it becomes relevant to ask how it

shapes the way in which state agents understand state-population relations and with what effects on the possibility of state responsibility and on what state responsibility comes to mean. How do state agents understand the delegation of functions to local and private actors as shaping the agency of the state and how the state can control the outcome of policies and strategies? And not least, how do they conceive of the population in ways that shape how reform can and ought to be implemented and what role the state agents need to play in the lives of the population?

In the last section of this chapter I now turn to the transfer of state functions to private actors.

Transfer of functions to private actors

The 1990s and early 2000s saw heated and sometimes violent contestation globally around the privatisation of water service delivery. To a large extent the controversy concerned the handing over of public water utilities in the South to private, often multinational, water companies based in the North. The conditionalities of the World Bank, in combination with the GATS agreement negotiations, sparked fear of a transfer of water politics into the hands of large corporations. Escobar has discussed this process in terms of ‘capitalisation of nature’ (1996) and Swyngedouw in terms of ‘accumulation by dispossession’, that is, the expansion of capitalism through incorporation of resources, people and activities into its realm (2005, see also Harvey 2003). The focus on the expansion of capitalism and the predatory behaviour of multinational corporations has been complemented by a concern with the crucial role played by politics and the state in the transformation of the meaning of water. The transformation is a process whereby the social value of water has been downplayed on behalf of its economic value, and it has been declared an economic good in international fora, for example in the Dublin principles, formulated in 1992.⁶¹

What makes water a public good? According to Karen Bakker water becomes a public good with the “industrialization of water supply”. By that she means the organisation of water supply under public utilities during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Making water public through this process was usually a shift from community-controlled water-supply systems, and in its turn enabled the eventual

⁶¹ Taken by water experts at the International Conference on Water and Environment (ICWE) in Dublin, Ireland, in January 1992.

privatisation of public utilities when states and municipalities were considered to have failed. This process, however, concerns large-scale water systems and looks different in contexts where water services are still in, or have been returned to, community control. A public good by definition is non-excludable and non-rival in consumption and it requires some degree of extra-market management to effectively and efficiently serve social objectives. A private good on the other hand can be left to free market forces and its allocation can be determined by consumer preferences. However, water is rivalrous and there are social objectives to its allocation that market forces cannot manage. Instead, Karen Bakker argues, economists and social scientists increasingly define water as a common-pool resource "from which it is difficult to exclude access, but the consumption of which by one individual can reduce the benefits for others" (Bakker 2010:30). However, privatisation of service provision is feasible without defining water as a private good as long as the state keeps certain regulatory functions, for example the setting of tariffs, and quality control. This arrangement relies on the classical liberal distinction between the resource and the service, i.e. the transformation of the resource through labour. As one financial and administrative director at Niger's private water utility company, SEEN, expresses it: "In some countries, not here, but in some countries people think they do not have to pay for water at all. Because water is a gift from God. /.../But God has not built treatment plants, God has not built networks, God has not installed the connections so someone has to pay for all this" (interview October 2002)⁶². Although water services can be privatised and there is a prevailing consensus that it must be treated as an economic good in order to prevent overuse and abuse, the understanding of water as a public good remains central, both in the sense that it needs extra-market management to enable its efficient allocation for social purposes, and that the

⁶² When I made interviews concerning the privatisation of SNE in 2002 the question of religion in relation to the privatisation of water came up a few times. One high level agent at the water ministry emphasised that being a muslim it was against his religion to put a price on water. Doing so he seemed to want to emphasise the extent to which the privatisation of SNE was an abusive imposition by the World Bank. In contrast, a workers union leader who was opposed to the privatisation argued that it was completely compatible with Islam to privatise water, since it was not the resource but the service that was privatised. By using a classic liberal argument he thereby seemed to emphasise the compatibility between Islam and modern economic practices.

state is ultimately responsible for making sure that such efficient allocation occurs.

Privatisation has been strongly advocated in the water sector for decades and plays a prominent part in central documents such as the Monterrey Consensus and the Camdessus report *Investing in water for all* (Monterrey Consensus 2002, Winpenny 2003).⁶³ Although I find the critique against privatisation and the concern with how it shapes social relations highly important, the debate about privatisation in the water sector has tended to be oversimplified. The debate has tended to hide both the complexity of the power relations involved and the diversity of forms of privatisation in the sector, and hence it has failed to capture the effects of privatisation on social relations.

Privatisation, or private participation in the water sector, is often justified in terms of a postulated increase in access to management expertise and private investment (Winpenny 2003, COM 2004), as well as the introduction of incentives in the operations of infrastructure services (WDR 2004:165). However, access to expertise is not preconditioned by privatisation, and private investment is not necessarily its result. Private investments in the water sector in developing countries have been rare, and when they occur it is often with guarantees of reduced risk, by the state itself, by the International Development Agency, IDA or by Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency, MIGA, through various creative contract constructions (Swyngedouw 2005).

Nevertheless, privatisation remains a major priority in water sector reform, both in urban and rural areas. Its attraction in development thinking and practice seems to lie not in its liberalisation of markets⁶⁴ nor in its assumed capacity to attract funding, but rather in its capacity

⁶³ The Monterrey Consensus was the outcome of the Monterrey Conference, the United Nations International Conference on Financing for Development, 2002. The Camdessus report was produced by a group headed by the former managing director for IMF, Michel Camdessus, and made concrete proposals for how to finance the achievement of the water MDG.

⁶⁴ The role of markets in water service provision is limited. Both in large scale urban systems (where the small number of large companies even cooperate on contracts in some cases) and small scale rural systems the number of providers to compete for contracts is often limited, contracts are long term and important costs are involved in changing provider. The market logic may have other effects but does not necessarily provide conditions for the most efficient service provision. This argument concerns exploitation and service provision, the situation may be different when it comes to contracting out construction of infrastructure where there tend to be a broader range of companies who compete for contracts on local markets.

to transform social relations. Privatisation is thought to have responsabilising effects, to produce responsible actors, through, introduction of risk and functioning lines of accountability.

Privatisation is usually defined as “the transfer of operational control and responsibilities for government functions and services to the private sector – private voluntary organisations or private enterprises”. (Hope 2001:125) It includes commercialisation, joint ventures, sale, management contracts, leasing out of assets, and concessions to operate and finance. Transfer of public responsibility can be further divided into several different forms of privatisation of various functions in the delivery chain, to different types of actors.

To begin with, privatisation can take very different shape in urban and rural areas. In Niger, and many other developing countries, large state and/or municipal water companies have limited their activity to urban and semi-urban areas, which through privatisation to large-scale private companies have been reconceptualised as the market sector. Rural areas tend to remain defined as social sectors, since important public intervention is required to secure and maintain access to water for poor households with little purchasing power. Water management in rural areas usually also becomes a vehicle for other goals, such as empowerment and promotion of the local private sector (Rép du Niger PNEAPA 2009).

The chain of water services delivery is long and there are many functions traditionally performed (or not) by the state, the privatisation of which affects the role and responsibility of the state. The chain of delivery includes: planning; construction and extension of water infrastructure; management, maintenance and direct service provision; contracting; supervision and monitoring of new works; support and advice; social engineering such as sensitisation; accounting; monitoring, reporting and regulation, with the chance that I have still missed some.

Different types of functions and contracts also engage different types of actors. Apart from multinational water companies they involve: international consultancy firms, national water companies (construction as well as management), national consultancy firms, individual operators and repairers and NGOs.⁶⁵ The state usually keeps indi-

⁶⁵ The involvement of NGOs in competition for construction and management contracts is increasingly made by design, while initially it was often by default due to the absence of the state or the unwillingness of international donors to deal with the state.

rect responsibility for ensuring that the service is delivered adequately (Batley and Larbi 2004:126). "[I]ndirect roles include tasks such as analysing policy options, setting standards and monitoring their enforcement, raising and allocating finance, managing budgets, contracting, regulating and creating incentives for private producers" (Batly and Larbi 2004:126).

This complexity in the organisation of the delivery chain shows that simple labels of private or public provision are inadequate (cf. Bakker 2010), and highlights the need to look at particular articulations of water service provision, how they are formally organised but also what type of roles different actors assume in relation to each other.

Privatisation as responsabilising

Privatisation as a technology of *agency* works on the whole range of actors involved in the delivery chain. The user is responsabilised as consumer rather than citizen. Accountability of the private provider is expected to come from the consumer's option of 'exit' from the provider/user relationship, which is supposed to function as a technology of *voice* (WDR 2004). However, this argument has limited validity in the water sector since the 'exit' to an alternative provider usually means either resorting to untreated water where it is available, or to expensive water provided by water vendors. The water company is therefore rather to be made accountable through the *contract* to the contractor, whether the state or a local authority, who can choose to renew the contract or not. User/consumer voice must therefore be directed at the contracting authority rather than the private operator. It therefore requires functioning lines of accountability.

As a technology of agency, privatisation is also directed at the performer of the particular function that is transferred from public to private control. Through commercialisation, public enterprises are assumed to subject themselves "to roughly the same conditions and signals as a profit-maximising firm operating in a competitive market. It yields positive results" (World Bank 1991:xi). The logic of replacing bureaucratic chains of command with contractual and market relationships is to make actors self-regulate or subject themselves to the juridical enforcement in case of failure to comply with the contract. Juridical enforcement as well as self-regulation on the market requires transparent contractual relationships to make incentives and *performance* measurable in order to motivate responsible behaviour.

The governing function of the contract and its reliance on performance indicators contribute to shape a particular regulated autonomy for the state through what Rose calls “the apparent objectivity and neutrality of numbers” (Rose 1996:57). The focus on numbers in contracts, targets, indicators, performance measures, monitoring and evaluation, makes it possible to have oversight of performance from a distance. In so doing, numbers allow the recipient state as well as other implicated actors a certain control and autonomy “of decisional power and responsibility for their actions”. The role of numbers in contractual implication is to enable both the state and private actors to perform, as well as to control each other. Moreover, accountability is enabled through ‘neutral numbers’ and supposed to ensure democratic control of service provision by the public actor as well as the private. The long distance between the central state and the population provides an impediment, which motivates delegated responsibility and decentralisation as argued in the section on delegation above.

Through the market logic the “powerful incentives of profit and loss” are introduced, it is assumed (Batley and Larbi 2004:36). Batley and Larbi describes it well: “[m]arketising the delivery of public services is seen by its advocates as further freeing managers from the encumbrance of public service conditions. Within the framework of commercial contracts, goals and objectives can be specified, and managers freed to act flexibly and entrepreneurially to achieve given ends, focusing on the satisfaction of consumers rather than obedience to rules of procedure. As argued above, the consumer logic is often not functioning in the context of water services, but replaced by the contract. Instead, principal-agent relations are clarified through more direct and specific contractual relations between government (as principal) and independent operators (as agents)” (Batley and Larbi 2004:127).⁶⁶

In addition to this, ‘responsibilisation’ of the agencies and agents that are either privatised or through commercialisation directly subjected to market relations, privatisation is intended to have certain effects on the administration as well. The state, just as the private company, subjects itself to the technologies of performance of con-

⁶⁶ Principal-agent theory is a rational actor theory concerned with how to construct the right incentives to make the actor behave in a way that increases the utility of the principal. Tony Killick has used the principal-agent theory in development thinking to explain the failures of conditionality (Killick et al. 1998, discussed by Whitfield and Fraser in Whitfield (ed) 2009:34-36).

tracts. Enforcement of contracts is usually not just entrusted to the juridical system in the country, but also to the donors who finance the privatisation. For example, the World Bank acts informally as regulator in the relationship between the state and the privatised water company in Niger. The failure of the Nigerien state to perform according to the contract can result in a withdrawal of funds from the sector (World Bank 2007).

The contract promises development in the future, whether it is in the shape of functioning water service provision, or private sector development. The promise is intended to shape responsible behaviour in the present. The overarching goal of development is not expected to induce self-regulation in itself, since the agents tend to be interpreted in terms of self-interest. Rather, the contract and its performance criteria are deemed necessary in order to shape responsible behaviour.

Privatisation as a mechanism of development cooperation can also have a governing function through a promise of inclusion. The preference among donors to cooperate with private operators or actors performing according to the profit motives and market principles has the function of distinguishing between those who are allowed to act and those who are not. It is thus intended to have a self-regulating effect as the agent and/or agency is enticed into acting responsibly, according to performance criteria, in order to be included into the activity of water service provision.

The contract and performance management, as we have seen, aims at shaping actors to become self-regulating, as well as to enable accountability. However accountability does not just rely on the presence of contracts and performance indicators, but also requires functioning lines for holding actors accountable. One of the main deficiencies of states in Africa as they were discussed in chapter 2, has been considered to be their disconnect from their populations. Privatisation of state functions has been considered a further de-linking of the state from its population. However, as a responsabilising logic privatisation can also be considered a way of re-engaging the state in water service provision.

Re-linking the state

In a context where the state has become less able to perform its redistributive role and resources are severely limited, “the ‘privatisation’ of the state entails a dispersal of the state’s governance and redistributive

functions to non-state and charitable organisations” (Sharma and Gupta 2006:22). There are different perspectives on the extent to which neo-liberal reform has led to the hollowing out of the state. On the one hand there is a critique that the proliferation of actors in public service delivery, and the expansion of a governance network, undermines “the ability of the core executive to act effectively” (Wright and Hayward 2000 in Bevir and Rhodes 2010:85). Others argue that the state has reasserted its capacity to govern through delegation and regulation (Pierre and Peters 2000 in Bevir and Rhodes 2010:86).

It is the purpose of the Paris Declaration to improve the capacity of the state to govern the dispersal of state functions by making the state responsible and in control through the ownership process. While there has been a tendency in the debate to see privatisation as a de-statisation of government (Rose 1996:56 in Sharma and Gupta 2006:22.), what is attempted, at least in theory, is rather a re-statisation of government, more particularly, a re-linking of the state and non-state actors through contractual implication to perform water services responsibly and efficiently (Foucault 1991 in Sharma and Gupta 2006:22). It is what makes ‘government at a distance’ possible through the logic of having others do, *faire-faire*. Privatisation does not necessarily lead to a demise of regulatory and steering obligations for the state; rather, Lemke argues, it has to be regarded as a reorganisation or a restructuring of governmental technologies. (Lemke 2009:14). Whether privatisation leads to the hollowing out of the state or a strengthening of the regulatory functions of the state is shaped by context and must be contextually analysed.

Sharma and Gupta emphasise the varying positions from which different states enter into what has been referred to as the erosion of the Keynesian welfare state as a result of globalisation. Many states have never had the capacity to perform the role of the welfare state. In a similar vein, Chabal questions the notion that privatisation in Africa should imply a threat to sovereignty. He writes, “the notion that a state which possesses so few of the attributes of ‘sovereignty’ should continue firmly to be viewed as such is puzzling”. Chabal continues “there is little analytical gain in arguing that the state in Africa is now ‘privatised’, since this would imply that it was properly institutionalised in the first place, which is hardly the case”. (Chabal 2000:829). While Chabal questions African states’ convergence with the model in the first place, Sharma and Gupta urge us to ask how the state takes

shape in each particular case and what sovereignty and privatisation come to mean in the particular context (2006).

As we have seen, purely anti-statist neoliberal reforms have been substantially nuanced and there is a new focus on the role of the state in broad based development (Havnevik 2006). Yet, as Harrison writes, the state is supposed to respect its "place in the division of labour" and retreat in cases where the market carries out the activities itself. In the case where the private sector is not yet sufficiently developed to do so, "the state is responsible for these services *and* the construction of conditions in which the private sector can carry them out in the future" (Pinto 1998, quoted in Harrison 2005b:247). Not only is this quite a heavy task for a developing state, it has a clear governmental logic. Responsibilisation works through the state's desire to attract private companies and to create the regulated autonomy that is considered essential for efficient water service provision. Privatisation becomes a promise that shapes behaviour in the present. Hence, the state is not only reformed through privatisation, but must reform in order to privatise successfully. According to this logic, the failure of privatisation is the failure of the state to provide the necessary preconditions for success.

I have in this chapter discussed institutional reform in the water sector as a responsibilisation of the state and other actors through technologies of agency and performance. I have shown how the main mechanisms of reform, namely ownership, delegation of responsibility to local actors and transfer of functions to private actors, work according to this logic. The point has been to show how these reforms aim to shape the state as one actor among many into responsible performance of its 'fundamentals' in functioning lines of accountability. Telling the story like this, there is a risk that the system of governance appears far too homogenous and dominant. I have therefore (to some extent) pointed at the discrepancies within the ongoing debate. It is against the backdrop of the responsibilising logic of water sector reform that I will analyse the way in which state agents articulate the possibility of responsibility. In the next chapter I lay out the methodological framework for addressing the possibility of responsibility.

4. Analysing responsibility: Methodological considerations

*Truth of the matter was, stories was everything and everything was stories. Everybody told stories. It was a way of saying who they were in the world, it was their understanding of themselves. It was letting themselves know they believe the world worked. The right way and the way that was not so right. (Harry Crews in *The Wrong Eyed Jesus*, documentary film by Andrew Douglas (2003))*

I. METHOD

Conditions of possibility concern the conditions necessary for something to appear. The conditions of possibility for state responsibility are here understood as the way in which the state is inscribed in discourse and how it is acted upon through different governing technologies. This includes how state agents, as performers of the state, inscribe themselves and the state as responsible or not, and in what way. To answer the research question *how do state agents in Niger articulate the role and responsibility of the state in water sector reform* I analysed state agent water sector narratives. For that purpose, during three field trips in Niger, between 2007 and 2010, I conducted interviews with 27 state agents in the Nigerien water sector.

Narratives

The purpose of the interviews was not to get pictures of ‘reality out there’, but to focus on the personal narratives given by the people I interviewed, whereby they construct meaning of events in particular situations (Stern 2006). There are different ontological perspectives

from which to use narrative method. Narratives can be defined in a broad sense as "discourses with the clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people's experience of it" (Hinchman and Hinchman in Elliot 2005:3). There are four important elements in the above definition. As Elliot states, it means narratives are chronological, they are meaningful and they are social. Fourthly, they convey something about the world and/or people's experiences of it. Based on the theoretical perspective of this work narratives are understood in the constructivist rather than the naturalist sense, where the latter takes the narrative as a true representation of actual events and experiences, while the former focuses on narrative as meaning making activity. (Johansson 2005:215-217, 223).

This study takes narratives to be part of the formation and maintenance of the self (Elliot 2005:123). Narratives are seen as one of the ways in which we construct our identities, as part of the process of subjectivation. They are therefore an important site for analysing the way in which state agents engage with governmental logics, and the meeting between technologies of governing others and technologies of the self. It is in this meeting point that the contextual meaning of responsibility takes shape.

Technologies of the self (Foucault 1988) are specific techniques and practices "through which subject-positions are inhabited by individuals". Examples are writing diaries or other forms of 'narratives of the self' (Hall 2007:322) In other words, the construction of identities as the "temporary attachment to [discursive] subject positions" (Hall 1996:6). So narratives of the self are instances where subject formation takes place, where lines of distinction are drawn. Different types of narratives about the state and about the performance of the state in water service provision then seemed to provide opportunities to approach the process of constituting the role and responsibility of the state.

Subjectivation is one of the ways through which we try to create relatively stable identities for ourselves, while at the same time dealing with change. Time and causality are important aspects of this process as the present is rationalised through constant reinterpretations of the past, as well as projections of the future. The present becomes possible and intelligible through these reiterations of the past (Elliot 2005:126). Furthermore events in the narrative are connected in a causal way. Just as important is the evaluative aspect of the story, i.e.

the significance given to certain events and the moral point or intrigue of the story (Johansson 2005:333). Stories then are ways in which we understand where we come from, who we are and how we came to be that way and, not least, where we want to go.

Narratives, just like discourses, are not free-floating isolated stories, but always relate to, are shaped by, adhere to or stand in contradiction to other narratives, which may be authored by the same person, by others or collectively. More broadly they are discursively embedded (Bhabha 2006), which includes the institutional context in which they are performed/told. I asked state agents to tell me water sector life stories, which in most cases meant that they placed themselves centre story. The point was to analyse these narratives as processes of subjectivation in their discursive contexts, or as Elliot phrases it, the interplay between 'public narratives' and the production of new individual ones (Elliot 2005:129).

In this thesis, narratives were analysed as articulations of responsibility, whereby responsibility was constructed as the narrators were creating a relatively stable identity for themselves over time, while at the same time dealing with the possibility of change. Understood as such, the narrative is not representing responsibility but evoking it as the subject comes into being in the interview situation. To be consistent with the narrative method I use the term 'narrator', rather than respondent or interviewee, to denote the state agents I have interviewed.

Selection of participants

The narrators in this thesis are mainly state agents at the Ministry of Water⁶⁷ and related ministerial bodies at the ministry's regional and district offices. The particular focus on state agents in this thesis provided a rather strict frame within which to select participants for interviews. During my first field trip in 2007, I mapped the organisation of the water sector in Niger. The water ministry had been reorganised in early 2007. Conducting the mapping, I identified the departments within the water ministry as well as at the regional and district level that were of importance to the study. At the ministry and the regional level, I chose to focus on the departments that are directly involved in the planning and implementation of water policies. This means I did

⁶⁷ From 2010 the Ministry of Water and Environment.

not conduct interviews with agents at the level of support functions dealing with human resources, economic administration and documentation and archive. I instead concentrated mainly on the departments for urban and semi-urban water supply, for rural and pastoral water supply, as well as the department for studies and planning and the juridical department. These departments are the ones that plan and implement programmes and strategies, and also the departments engaged in negotiations and meetings with donors in the sector.

Moreover, I identified a number of state agents who had held important positions within the administration and now held positions at central semi-autonomous institutions dealing with policy implementation in the sector. These institutions include: *Projet Sectoriell Eau*, a World Bank funded long term project, closely tied to the ministry, *Centre Régional pour l'Eau et l'Assainissement à faible coût*, CREPA, a regional interstate centre for access to water and sanitation at a reasonable price, and *Société Patrimoine des Eaux de Niger*, SPEN, the state-owned company in charge of funding and infrastructure in the urban sector.

During two consecutive trips I interviewed 27 state agents (26 men and one woman⁶⁸) ranging from highest to lowest level within the administration, as well as five agents in semi-autonomous organisations. These five agents are all employed by the ministry initially and categorise themselves as agents of the state.

I started my work at the ministry of water by introducing myself to the Secretary-General who directed me downwards in the hierarchy. I interviewed directors and heads of divisions, mid-level agents and a few lower level agents. Due to the employment stop in public administration in 1993, most state agents in this study, with a few exceptions, have been working in the sector for around 20 years. As such, they have covered a range of positions within the public water sector, gradually being promoted to higher positions. Although most of the narrators are currently working in the capital, all of them have initially been appointed positions in the different regions and districts of the country, in line with the policy of rotation. Several of them have at one point been appointed by the ministry to work in donor projects and have later returned to the administration. Their long histories in the sector and their participation in development projects mean they

⁶⁸ There are few women working in other positions than secretarial. However, there are more women working as technicians at regional level, than at central ministerial level.

have long experience of the different trends and shifts in development discourse as well as of a continuous development encounter.

State agents evidently cannot all be grouped together. The position they occupy (formally in the administration), their history in the sector, and the way they relate to the global governance agenda has effects on their possibility to speak, in the sense that they can talk about their experience in a way that makes sense to other state agents, donors and other actors (Spivak 1988). It matters on what hierarchical position they are, it matters how long they have been working in the sector, whether they have been working in development projects or not, whether they have received their position as a result of their membership in a political party or not. These elements and others shape both how they themselves engage with other actors, and how they are perceived and acted upon by others. While the narrators in this study all belong to the privileged group of Nigeriens who have an employment within the state, the extent to which they can 'speak' in the context of development cooperation varies, and will be explored in my analysis of the empirical material.

Conducting the interviews

I conducted interviews during three field trips. A first pilot study was conducted in November 2007, the main field work was done in October and November 2008 and a follow up-trip was made in May 2010.

I began each interview with an explanation of my project and gave the state agent a short summary of the project in French. I explained who I was and the purpose of my research. I emphasised that I was not representing a donor or NGO of any sort. Yet a few agents still tended to treat me as if I were at least potentially a future donor. (The effect on the interviews of how the state agents perceived me and my role is discussed in the final section of this chapter).

When I did the pilot study, I started out by asking questions on a set of themes I had identified as part of the implementation of the MDGs such as ownership, decentralisation, privatisation and pricing of water. I asked the state agents to comment on the particular policies and their relevance and suitability in the Nigerien context. At that point the focus of the thesis centred on the MDG water target and the translation of its principles locally. The material was interesting but somewhat disappointing at a first reading. The interview texts were mainly reproducing the global discourse on water sector reform.

To understand how state agents in Niger shape the meaning of global discourse I realised that I would have to ask questions in a way that enabled them to relate to the reform personally in their role as state agents. As theoretically, I became increasingly concerned with processes of subjectivation as a way to approach how discourse is transformed in the particular context, life stories became a possible way of approaching the state agents.⁶⁹ During my second and main field study my intent was therefore to ask for water sector life stories. I asked for stories over time in which the state agents included their own stories in the sector. This gave me a rich material from which to analyse their construction of state responsibility.

Hence, at my second and main round of interviews I began the interview by asking the state agents to tell me their personal histories in the water sector. Very few were reluctant to do so, some gave a brief account of their different positions, while others engaged in long stories of their engagement, their relationship to the hierarchy as well as to donors. I thereafter asked the state agents to tell me the story of water sector reform. In many cases it didn't take more to get the narrator started and they engaged in up to 30 minutes long stories including institutional reform as well as their own role and experience thereof. Other times they were more hesitant, asking what story I wanted. I then indicated a starting point such as 30 years ago, when water was provided by the state owned company OFEDES, which would initiate their stories. After the first few interviews, three themes emerged as central: the delegation of responsibility to local actors, the introduction of private actors and the current implementation of the programme approach. This was quite unsurprising as the same themes also come forth in policy documents and strategies as the main areas of reform. After I had decided to focus my study on these three themes (they largely correspond to my initial themes related to the implementation of the MDG water target, as mentioned above), I started to help direct the interview in cases where one or two themes were not brought up by the narrators themselves. I thereafter explicitly asked them to define the role and responsibility of the state and how it had changed over time. I ended each interview by asking the narrators to imagine the future in the water sector. Finally, I asked whether they

⁶⁹ For a methodological discussion of how experiences in the field can provide input that makes the researcher change theoretical and/or methodological perspective, and the importance of being open to such pivotal moments, see Stern (2006), and Ackerly (2009).

could imagine a future when Niger would no longer need the support of donors.

What do they talk about when they talked about the state? Or rather, what do I analyse when I say that they talk about the state? In the interviews I did not define what I meant by the state, and the narrators did not ask me to, although the questions explicitly concerned 'the role of the state'. Most state agents seemed to interpret 'the state', as 'l'Hydraulique', i.e. the water ministry and its offices at central, regional and district level. When they did so they sometimes talked about the formal institutions and texts that define the role and responsibility of the state, but they also talked about themselves and their activities as the state. One state agent explicitly talked about the state as 'them'. In his narrative the state is the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Development Cooperation, where the overarching decisions are made that provide the framework for the activities of the line ministries.

Interviews (with few exceptions) were conducted during working hours, in some cases after the five o'clock prayers that round off the working day. Two interviews were conducted in a café in the evening, all others were conducted in the offices of the agents. Some of the mid-level agents share offices with their subordinates, which is why a few interviews were conducted in the company of others.

The atmosphere at the ministry was accommodating and I was always well received. In no case was I denied an interview, but I had to chase some of the agents who were extremely busy trying to combine work with family obligations. Doing so, I also had to spend a lot of time in reception sofas and outside the ministry at the tea stand, talking to other visitors, secretaries and passers by, including donors, technical assistants, foreign engineers and national entrepreneurs. All of these encounters contributed to the study, as they provided context and other stories that shaped my reading of the core interviews. As they provide a broader frame of reference, they give an indication of whether a particular story line is specific to the agents of the ministry, or if it is more widely spread. Informal conversations also provide keys for analysing the narratives produced in the interviews that are somewhat shaped by the formality of the interview situation.

The interviews lasted between one and two hours. Some of them were interrupted by urgent matters or prayers and, in such cases, were resumed later. After the interviews (or during interruptions) I made notes on the context, the atmosphere and other reflections on the in-

interview situation, such as their reactions to certain questions and their attitude towards me. I conducted the interviews in French. As French is the official language and the language used in education as well as in offices and meetings I do not think that it caused any limitation in terms of how the state agents were able to express themselves concerning their work. However, it means that the answers I received were expressed in the institutional language of the state and it is important to understand the implied limitations. French is taught in schools and spoken as a second language by people with an education. It is also used by the administration, in business and some media. In urban areas people who lack education often have a basic knowledge in French. There are a number of domestic languages in the country, of which Hausa, and Zarma are most widespread, with Tamjeq and Fulfulde following.

My French is fluent, but there are limitations to my ability to analyse interviews made in a third language in a different cultural context. I dealt with this in three ways. 1) I transcribed the interviews myself in the evening after the interview. This is a process that I found to be invaluable as it constituted a close first reading of the interview text, which provided opportunity to reflect deeply on the meaning making process of the interview situation. 2) In cases where I was uncertain of the meaning I sought clarifications, either from Nigeriens in my surrounding or from the narrator during our follow up meeting. 3) The process of translating quotes to English provided an additional challenge, but also an occasion to return to probe the meaning of the particular quote in dialogue with narrators and other Nigeriens.

I also use a few complementary interviews/conversations that were not recorded. On some occasions I wrote down complete quotes and in those cases they have the same status, and are analysed in the same way as recorded interviews in the analysis.

Participating in meetings

I took part in three formal meetings during my field work. The first one was a meeting between staff at the water ministry and Danida, the Danish aid agency, which also included representatives from the ministry of health, private consultants and from semi-autonomous bodies in the sector. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the organisation of the second phase of the Programme d'Appui au Secteur Eau,

Hygiène et Assainissement, PASEHA.⁷⁰ The second one was a workshop for state agents where they elaborated the operating programme budget and aggregated information from the regional to the central level. The meeting was attended by state agents from the district, the regional and the central levels, including the two technical assistants at the central level.⁷¹ Finally, I attended a consultation framework meeting between the ministry and the donors.⁷² Observations and quotes from these meetings are analysed as instances where state agents create subject positions for themselves and the state in concrete negotiating situations, in relation to each other and in relation to donors. These three meetings constitute part of how the state is performed as they constitute examples of where the role and responsibility of the state is negotiated, where planning takes shape and global policies meet local needs and perceptions through the state agents. I took very close notes but also discussed my observations and interpretations with involved agents afterwards, to avoid misunderstandings because of my lack of inside knowledge of the processes. The meetings are treated as narrative events where the narrators inscribe themselves as agents.

First reading of the interview material

My intention during the first reading was to lay the groundwork for analysing how the state agents articulate state responsibility in relation to the three interconnected processes of achieving ownership, delegating responsibility to local actors and introducing private actors. I read the interview material as narratives, as explained above. I decided to dedicate one chapter to each of the themes. I did so because it enables me to make distinct analyses of the three reform processes, although they tend to overlap. Moreover, it allows me to deal separately with how the state agents constitute responsibility in relation to donors, to the population and to private actors. To some extent the themes are overlapping and cross references are made between the chapters.

A thematic narrative approach emphasises the importance of reading parts of stories in relation to other stories, rather than reading the story in full (Johansson 2005). I found this a suitable method since the focus here is not on the individual lives of the narrators, but on certain aspects of water sector reform. However, the thematic approach and

⁷⁰ PASEHA meeting for evaluation and formulation of phase II, November, 2008

⁷¹ Operational Programme Budget workshop 2011-2013, May, 2010.

⁷² Consultation framework meeting May, 2010.

the full story approach are not mutually exclusive; it is possible to discuss the thematic quotations in the context of the whole story. I worked with complete stories initially to look both for general overarching themes, turning points and explanations, as well as for individual logics that can only be analysed based on the complete story. My focus on temporality as an important aspect of how responsibility is understood and my intention to analyse how responsibility is made sense of over time in the narratives, made it necessary to work with the complete stories.

The first reading of the material provided input for my third visit in Niger, where I attended meetings and conducted follow-up interviews. During the second and third trip to Niger I presented the state agents with transcripts of the interviews and encouraged them to comment on and discuss them. During the third visit, I presented some of my initial interpretations and analysis of the narratives. My interpretations produced very different reactions and the responses are analysed together with the other material. Some agents agreed with my interpretations, while a few objected. I came to have explicit conversations with some of them about their own position as well as the positions of other agents. I discuss one such example in detail at the end of chapter 6.

The first reading and the questions it raised shaped the theoretical discussion about responsabilisation and responsibility and the elaboration of the framework for analysis of the empirical material.

Selection of quotes

How I selected the quotes and who gets to speak in the analysis deserves some attention before I present my analytical framework. I first went through all the interviews and organised them according to the three overarching themes. I selected portions of text where the narrators either talk about the topic explicitly or where I thought what they said would be of relevance for an analysis of the particular theme. Within each theme, I looked for a common storyline, as well as for deviances from the main storyline. I also looked explicitly for parts of texts that are relevant to an analysis of responsibility as it is elaborated in the analytical framework below. The specific quotes were then selected, either because they confirm and illustrate well a shared storyline, or because they provide a deviance that points at different ways of conceptualising responsibility.

The result is that some state agents are more visible in the analysis than others. This has four main reasons: 1) they represent a shared storyline but are more well spoken and manage to illustrate something in a particularly interesting way, 2) they give a broader and fuller story and cover aspects that other agents do not, 3) because they tell the story differently, and 4) it may be that someone is particularly well positioned to talk about a particular topic.

When I argue that a quote represents a shared storyline, I have thoroughly gone through the material afterwards to make sure that this is the case. When a quote does not represent a shared storyline I have pointed that out. There is even one case where only one state agent talks about a topic that I find interesting enough to still bring into the analysis. It concerns the connection between the state and the physical resource of water in chapter 7. There is not one narrative, but many, of state responsibility, and it has been my intent to bring out different meanings rather than presenting a coherent whole.

II. ANALYSING RESPONSIBILITY

I now turn to the analytical framework and explain how I analysed responsibility in the narratives. The story from the programme budget workshop that introduces this thesis shows how state agents negotiate the role and responsibility of the state in water service provision. It brings to our attention how the state agents relate to demands made by donors, and how the demands shape how the possibility of state responsibility is understood. We also see how the claim that private consultancy firms perform poorly opens a space for state agents to negotiate inclusion into certain activities in the service delivery chain from which they have been previously excluded. As these examples indicate, to ask *how state agents in Niger articulate the possibility for state responsibility in the water sector* involves asking how they shape subject positions (for themselves but also how they shape a position for the state) in ways that make responsibility possible or impossible, i.e. how they imagine themselves as responsible subjects/state agents in relation to others. The research question is therefore addressed through two specific sub-questions. First, how do state agents narrate the state and themselves as state agents in ways that make responsibility possible or impossible? Second, what does responsibility come to mean in state agent narratives? In other words, in the narratives: what

are the state and the state agents responsible for, and what kind of responsibility is necessary and possible in the particular context?

In order to analyse how the state agents shape themselves as responsible subjects/state agents I break down responsibility in line with the discussion in chapter 3. There, I showed how autonomy/choice, control and temporality shape the way we understand responsibility, as well as how they constitute aspects of responsabilisation as it is practiced through technologies of agency and performance. To focus on these aspects allows me to see how the instrumental purpose of responsabilisation is shaped by the way in which the state agents constitute themselves as subjects.

In the following paragraphs, I further lay out my analytical framework, i.e. the questions posed in my analysis of the empirical material. I explain how the narrative structure is particularly relevant for analysing responsibility. Thereafter I present the framework and how the elements of autonomy/choice, control and temporality, as well as how responsibility is an effect of how we come into being in relation to others, are addressed in the material. To deal with responsibility, as not just determined by governing structures, but shaped by state agents themselves, I also discuss how I address responsibility as not fully determined by discourse, i.e. how it takes specific shape in the particular context.

The narrative structure of responsibility

Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan argue that “[i]n fact the precise form assumed by the presence of the state depends on the way in which state representatives interpret their role” (2003:164). One way of analysing the state agents’ interpretations of their role and responsibility is through narratives whereby they inscribe themselves as subjects in the discourse about what the state is and should be. The temporal aspect of the narrative also functions to ‘re-historicise’ policy and implementation, i.e. to show how the formulation of policy and its implementation is shaped by how it is made sense of in a historical context (Lewis 2008:561) Through narratives it is possible to address the cultural production of governance through everyday understandings of state activities and responsibilities (Ibid:562).

Narratives provide a relevant frame for understanding responsibility. I quote Hannah Arendt:

As agents, we are involved in a web of relationships in which our identity is distinctive and fluid; in which the question about our past, where we come from and to whom we belong, is dealt with. As agents, our present and future moral and political responsibility finds its form and space in distinctive narratives. These narratives make it possible for us to learn to act and find our place in a basically plural situation in which the narratives differ and can be exchanged, where narratives make life possible because they may give space to all human experiences and the changing historical contingencies are confronted. Both in our speech, that is, our narratives, and in our acts, we may enact our moral responsibility in a twofold condition: that of 'equality and distinction' (Arendt 1958:175, cited in Mosse and Lewis 2005:207).

My intent has been to explore, through narratives of water sector reform, how state agents engage with responsabilisation through technologies of the self, through constituting themselves as subjects with a certain room for manoeuvre, and thereby how they shape conditions of possibility for state responsibility. A narrative analysis is particularly suitable for exploring my research questions because of the way that narrative structure enables a reading of how the state and state agents are inscribed/inscribe themselves as agents who make choices (whether autonomous or not). Narratives also contain the elements of causality (control over outcomes), temporalisation and signification of events, all of which structure responsibility (Appiah 2005, Diprose 2004). Narrative analysis allows me to, on the one hand, analyse how the state agents inscribe themselves as subjects in ways that shape responsibility and, on the other, to see how they open up for other possible ways of understanding state responsibility in the Nigerien water sector.

In the following I distill the explicit questions I posed to the material in relation to autonomy/choice, control, temporality and responsibility as responding to a call. These elements of responsibility will be dealt with in all of the analytical chapters, yet, not in a perfectly consistent way. This is because different aspects of, for example, autonomy/choice are relevant in understanding how responsibility is constituted in relation to donors, or in relation to the population, or to private actors. However, all questions will be systematically addressed and I will return and discuss them at the end of each chapter as well as in the concluding chapter.

Finally, I end this part of the chapter by explaining how I address contextual transformation of the meaning of responsibility.

Autonomy/choice

As was argued in chapter 3, agency and choice are not a matter of autonomy from structures but of the particular way in which we are inscribed as agents in relations with others. The question is thus not whether or not there is choice, but how subjects understand themselves and others as actors capable of choice, which shapes how they see the possibility of responsibility.

When reading the narratives I ask:

- How are autonomy and dependency of the state understood by state agents and how do their understandings shape how they see the possibility of choice and responsibility?
- How do they conceive of the state as an actor capable of choice when it comes to particular reforms that shape its role and responsibility, such as ownership and delegation of responsibility to local and private actors? For example, the narratives addressed the programme approach and the shift in how decisions are made as a consequence of development cooperation. The new organisation structures the way choices are made in a context of heavy dependence on aid. The programme approach as part of the effort to achieve country ownership appeals to the state and its agents as agents of choice at the same time as it involves a closer formal presence of donors in decision making.
- Ownership implies that the state takes the lead for formulating and implementing policies and strategies. In a context of dependency on aid where donor preferences need to be considered, how is leadership rendered possible in state agents' narratives? how is it shaped by the way in which agency and dependency are understood?
- Moreover, delegation of responsibility implies a change in the role of the state and its relationship to other actors: how does delegation to local and private actors shape how the state agents see the state, and themselves as agents of choice, capable of responsibility?

Control

If we see control not just as access to resources and knowledge, the ability to hold someone to account is not just a question of the actual possibility of control. Rather, we need to be concerned with how state agents conceive of themselves and the state as having control over implementation and outcomes.

- How is the state conceived of as in control or without control in the interview texts?
- How has the ability of the state to control the outcomes of policies and strategies changed over time according to the narratives?
- What are the impediments to control? For example, how are external and internal factors, such as climatic change and population growth, narrated as enabling or constraining the ability of the state to control the outcome of policies and strategies.
- Both the programme approach and the delegation of responsibility promise control through performance management and contractual implication. How do state agents see these reforms (including the proliferation of actors in the sector) as shaping the way in which the state can exercise control?

Temporality

Paying attention to the temporal structure of responsibility, allows me to analyse how state agents make sense of the possibility of state responsibility over time and project it into the future. It is a matter both of how responsibility for the past is constructed, but also how the past is narrated in order to make sense of responsibility in the present and future.

- How is the present role and responsibility of the state made sense of in light of past events such as shifts in state-donor relations? What events are given significance and what events are omitted?
- What effects do explanations of past events have on understandings of the present and the future possible role and responsibility of the state?⁷³ For example, many of the narratives addressed how initial delegation of responsibility to local actors failed as water infrastructure soon broke down in the villages. How does such a narrative shape how the possibility of responsibility in the present is understood.
- How do the state agents attribute responsibility for past failures and how does this attribution shape the way they conceive of how responsibility is possible in the future, for example through contractual implication and the presence of the state in the local context?

Responsibility as responding to a call

The way in which state agents conceive of themselves and the Nigerian state as agents of choice with control over outcomes, and as taking responsibility for the past by promising to change in the future, is not just a matter of the way certain tasks and functions are attributed to them as state agents. Rather, as argued in chapter 3, we become responsible as we enter into community with others. We become responsible for who we are asked to be and who we respond as. The being we become, is a result of how we read the call of the other and try to respond to it. To analyse how state agents articulate the possibility of responsibility implies analysing not just how state agents conceive of autonomy/choice, control and temporality, but also how they conceive of responsibility relationally.

- How do state agents conceive of themselves as state agents in relation to others? In the narratives, how is their role and responsibility constrained by the other's gaze. For example, in their narratives the state agents frequently talk about how they are perceived by

⁷³ I analyse the material in relation to my reading of Nigerian history, news paper articles and interviews and conversations, accounted for in chapter 5.

donors and other state agents, for instance as self-interested and unable to manage finances.

- How do the state agents read the call from the population in ways that shape what the responsibility of the Nigerien state and its agents is and should be? In the narratives, representations of the population rationalises particular roles and responsibilities for the state, and constrains what it must imply to be a Nigerien state agent in the water sector. Similarly, representations of external actors as well as Nigerien private companies shape the role and responsibility that is required by Nigerien state agents.

Resemblance of a choice

The role and responsibility of the state for water service provision is clearly formulated in policies and strategies. However, the way in which it takes shape in the Nigerien context is not straightforward but a result of how state agents articulate the role and responsibility of themselves and the state. Here we can see responsibility as inherited, as assigned to Nigerien state agents. Derrida has explained how we can understand inheritance as never completely transferred but as an imitation, an iteration (because of the distance between that which we receive and the meaning we can possibly make of it), whereby responsibility is necessarily transformed, and thereby unique and extraordinary (Diprose 2006:439).⁷⁴ The distance opens up a moment of undecidability in which choices are made. Undecidability should not be mistaken for indeterminacy. Rather undecidability is a regulated tension in the sense that it is constrained by discourse (Norval 2004:112). We inherit responsibility, as a moral system or as a technology, yet as we appropriate it, as we enter into the meaning-making that is required of us as historically situated subjects we “choose, we prefer, sacrifice, exclude, let go and leave behind” (Derrida and Roudinesco 2004:5). This means that the choice is not a completely free choice but an effect of the regulated tension. The reaffirmation that the act of inheriting implies “both continues and interrupts, resembles (at least) an election, a selection, a decision” (Derrida and Rodinescou 2004:4).

⁷⁴ Can be related to Foucault’s argument that “what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed upon us and an experiment in going beyond them” (Foucault in Rabinow 1984:50).

Transformation is in this sense inevitable as the response is at the same time inherited and new. We can understand this resemblance of a choice as the agency of being governed, as the way state agents, governed through development cooperation, transform development discourse in the local context.

- What then does state responsibility come to mean in the context of Nigerien water sector reform? In the narratives I look for the resemblance of a choice,
- How do the state agents talk about responsabilisation and responsibility in ways that may be different from that which is assumed in development policies and strategies.
- When state agents reaffirm responsabilisation they do so in a regulated tension. What does that regulated tension look like? For example, they draw on the promise of ownership in the Paris declaration, as well as representations of the population. In what ways, drawing on what representations and discursive elements, do the state agents open up responsabilisation for negotiation in ways that make sense to them in the particular Nigerien context?

III. REFLECTIONS ON RESPONSIBLE RESEARCH

From a perspective of responsibility as relational we might see the research process, the interviews, the reading and writing as a process of coming into being. Doing so also raises questions as to the responsibility implied in the research process.

The interview as coming into being

The narratives produced in the interview situation are informed by how the agents position themselves personally and professionally as well as by how they position themselves in relation to me and the questions I ask. In other words how they inscribe the self/subject as character in the narrative in the particular situation (Stern 2006:184). This is both the whole point of doing this kind of study and its main problem. The obvious question is what is possible to say based on the interview about anything other than the interview situation as such

(Alvesson, Sköldberg 2001:98). It has been argued that this depends on the questions asked in the interview, and the extent to which the narrators are given space to formulate unguided answers (Elliot 2005:25). Still, they will guide themselves in relation to what they perceive is my position, or the position they want to convey to me in that particular instance.

For example, colleagues have commented on quotes in the text where state agents do not express critique against donors, by arguing that I may only get what the state agents want me to hear. I dealt with this problem by treating the narratives as whole. When I noticed that a state agent did not express critique that I expected, it became relevant to see if the same agent expressed critique in another context, thus indicating whether the agent was just saying what he or she thought I should hear. Rabiou, for example, was often silent where I expected opinions, but on the other hand he was very outspoken in other instances as well as in relation to donors, which I observed in ministry-donor meetings. He also actively pursued issues where he thought donor representatives had overstepped their boundaries. In the interviews Rabiou seemed to relate to me as someone who needed to be taught, who needed to have things explained, and he did not hesitate to correct me when he thought I had misunderstood. It is in this broader context that I also read his silences. Meaning that I noticed when something went unmentioned in a narrative. It is not a matter of detecting something that the narrator keeps from me, but trying to analyse what is said also in light of what is not. For example, when donor imposition is not mentioned in a narrative, what does that mean?

The narratives do not represent the 'true' views of the narrators, but it is still important and relevant to reflect on the way in which the state agents relate to me in the particular interview. Considering that I analysed state agents' narratives as how the state agents make choices in relation to discourse, as effects of power, how can I make claims about the meaning of the choices they make in producing their narratives? The choices are constrained by the specific discourses that shape the interview situation, but also by all the discourses the state agent drew upon in narration. This means that what was narrated was produced in a regulated tension (Norval 1999:112), which, as argued above, should not be mistaken for indeterminacy. The challenge was how to analyse the regulated tension. How do I know the discourses they draw upon? How much do I need to know about their discursive embeddedness? These questions are particularly pertinent and com-

plex to deal with as the narrators draw on cultural discourses that for example understand autonomy and sovereignty differently from the academic literature. I have to recognise that the call, who they want to present themselves as in relation to me, is ungraspable (Spivak 1994:19-23), because we cannot know the other and its world in full, and that what I read and write is not a result of their discursive embeddedness but of mine.

If we see the interview situation in terms of the way we set ourselves to work as a response to an ungraspable call this requires me to pay attention to the stage where we read the other in a way that produces our own response. In the interview situation the state agent in front of me is reading me to set themselves to work, while I do the same. I cannot escape the implication of my position as an outsider, and the roles that are attributed to me, not least as the “purveyor of knowledge and the producer of text” (Long 1992:269). Moreover, the people I interview relate to me based on characteristics such as gender, skin-colour, being Swedish, a possible expectation that I may one day be a purveyor of financial support. Their response to my call must then be understood as not what they are but who they want to be and who they think I want them to be. It means they make sense of the state and themselves as the actors of that state, as well as individuals, Nigeriens. They create narratives of the state as responsible, potentially responsible, or not responsible at all, or they answer to the question why the state has not acted responsibly. They are well aware of how state agents in Africa are often read stereotypically as corrupt, patrimonial, incapable, self-interested. And it is a discourse within which they write themselves as well as other agents.

As I see it, the calls to which they respond are specific in each interview situation and may even change during the interview as the relationship between the narrator and the interviewer evolves, and as the regulated tension that shapes what can be said shifts. However, the calls are also more general. Recall the story with which I start the acknowledgements in the beginning of this thesis where one agent asked if I would invite them all to the defence. That small story indicates how global power relations with a colonial history shape the relations between me and the Nigerien state agents.

However, this should not be taken to mean that the power relations are in any way simple, only that the relationship is enmeshed in a larger power/knowledge web. In this case the narrators were experts in their field, sometimes persons of power, and I was there at their good

will. They chose to let me in or not and they chose what they wanted me to hear and what they wanted to keep silent on. Often I found that they were taking a teaching position in relation to me, wanting to confront what they might have perceived as my prejudices about the state, about aid and about state-donor relations. They were arguing with what they thought was my point of departure, which differed between interviews.

Finally it needs to be taken into account that not only is the call to which the narrators respond specific to the interview situation but it is not just my call they hear. Maria Stern writes that there are at least four subjects present in co-authoring the text. The researcher and the narrator, the broader community that the narrator is talking to, and finally the broader community that the researcher is writing for (Stern 2006, Squire 2008:44).

Complicity and responsible hearing

The process of hearing covers the whole research process from defining a problem, through interviews and analysis of the material. My interest in the research problem of this thesis, namely the possibility of Nigerien state responsibility, emanates from a concern with a statement frequently made by state agents and other water administrators during my first study in Niger in 2002, that “as a poor state we have no choice”. This whole thesis is an attempt to better understand what that means and what effects it has on the possibility of the Nigerien state in the water sector. This means that there was an initial concern with hearing which underlay the organisation of the study although it wasn’t theoretically informed at that point.

Responsibility, Spivak argues, is possible in the intermediary stage between that call from the other, that is ungraspable, and the setting-to-work of ourselves, i.e. the decision (or the resemblance of a decision) whereby we come into being in relation to the other (Spivak 1994:19-23). Seeing it this way urges us not to close off the other and its uniqueness into something that we know and can know but to take responsibility for the other’s alterity. Yet, “we must continue to know, and to make known”, Spivak writes (1994:25). We must know in order to respond, and we must acknowledge our complicity in producing knowledge about the other. This includes the obligation to remind ourselves how we are written, through the writing of the other (Spivak 2004). It means I must acknowledge my complicity with the discourse

on state agents as I produce knowledge about them. Taking this seriously, and paying close attention to that intermediary stage between the ungraspable call and the setting-to-work (my response) I may also open up for a response, in the shape of research, that cannot be known in advance. This implies an obligation to defamiliarize myself from ready-made assumptions about the 'subject' of study when trying to hear what the state agents say.

So how *do* I hear? This study has from the outset been inspired by postcolonial theory and a concern with the problematique of the type of study I am doing and its colonial heritage. Mudimbe writes in *The Invention of Africa* (1988) that scholars working with Africa cannot do so without relating to Africa as a colonial construct, either confirming it or questioning it. Working with state agents in Niger I cannot escape the stereotype of them as corrupt, patrimonial, self-interested and lacking capacity, a problematisation that motivates the governing of them in the first place. It constantly haunts me when doing the interviews, reading and analysing the material, as well as discussing it with others.

Writing about donors' reading of the subaltern in Bangladesh Spivak asks "Is there no lesson there at all to learn? Is the subaltern transparent?" and she continues "[t]here is, according to the view I am discussing here, no gauge of intention, but rational expectations, logical self-interest, reason written by something confusedly called European common sense" (Spivak 1994:62). Asking the same question here, is there no lesson there at all to learn? I am attempting to go beyond the interpretive frame of self-interest to make other readings possible. As stated above, this had implications for how I went about my field work, but it also shapes my analysis of the material.

When doing my fieldwork I chose to start with interviewing the state agents in order to get their stories as a form of baseline, from which other elements were analysed. The state agents themselves have brought up issues of corruption and of state agents receiving their positions based on their connection with political parties. These stories were inevitably present when I listened in interviews and read the material. While I cannot escape this aspect of the research process, being aware of it and reading carefully may somehow make the reading and writing more responsible. At the end of chapter 6, I engage with one of those situations in detail.

Weaknesses in emphatic listening during the interview became evident during the transcription phase and could both be assessed and

dealt with in follow-up interviews. Emphatic listening has been discussed by Christine Sylvester as part of emphatic cooperation in field work. It refers to a way of listening to others without pushing and directing, and thereby to open up for stories that are seldom heard (Sylvester 1996). I found the process of transcribing valuable to deal with such weaknesses, because of how repeated listening and relistening to the interviews forced me to reconsider my initial interpretations. This was done because questions that were given importance by the narrator could have been overlooked and hidden as a result of my follow-up questions and probing.

Finally, I am writing this thesis on the basis of what I have already decided I am interested in. Despite my attempts to listen, and to be open, and to avoid ready-made assumptions about Nigerien state agents, the thesis is the result of what I have found interesting and I am liable to not hear that which lies outside my area of interest. Just as my pre-understanding of water sector reform guided my listening in the interviews it has shaped my reading and the way in which I write the thesis to speak to different audiences, decision which I need to take responsibility for.

In this chapter I have gone far in making explicit my framework of analysis. I have done so based on a conviction of the importance of being transparent and invite the reader to assess the basis on which I make claims about effects of power and processes of subjectivation. Laying out the questions I have posed to the material in detail serves the function of crystalising and making visible the link between the theoretical framework and the empirical analysis. Before we turn to the analysis, I will in the following present a narrative of the Nigerien context to which the state agents relate in their narratives, and against which I make my analysis.

5. The Nigerien state under construction

The state, it is a continuity. (Élodie, agent at the Ministry of Water)

This chapter presents the context of my study, namely water sector reform in Niger. It starts by giving a somewhat broader picture of the construction of the independent state. This is important for the analysis, as it constitutes part of the past against which state agents give meaning to water sector reform. The chapter thus provides the background against which the interviews are analysed. The content of the chapter is to a large extent motivated by issues that have come up in the interviews and have seemed to play important parts in state agents' narratives of the state.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first deals briefly with the construction of the independent state, which involved the establishment of the state's control over territory and population under conditions of poverty and dependence. In the second half of the chapter, I outline developments in the water sector based on a review of secondary literature, a close reading of policies, strategies and laws, and supplemented by information from interviewee narratives. The second part starts by providing the historical context of water service provision and then looks more closely at reform since the new millennium.

I. THE INDEPENDENT NIGERIEN STATE

Since colonial times, Niger has often been described as a country without much value. In accounts of Nigerien history, it seems as if French interest in Niger was nothing but geopolitical (Fuglestad 1983, Salifou 2002). France had considered the territory to be one with little

resources and much resistance, and therefore attracting few investments. In 1903 French Lieutenant-Colonel Noël wrote that Niger *is a territory of sacrifices, a necessary ill that we bear perhaps to escape an even greater ill...* (Idrissa 2001). While France invested in the development of its coastal colonies Charlick (1991), among others, claims that investments in Niger were made just to keep total misery away in order to avoid social disruption.

Until World War II, France had governed its colonies based on “the principle of colonial self-sufficiency”, with exceptions when droughts and other difficulties caused human suffering that was unacceptable to the population in metropolitan France.⁷⁵ Development policy and practice begins in Niger with the change in French colonial policy, first declared at the Brazzaville conference in 1944, where the French acknowledged that “they were under a moral obligation to assist their colonies, and that it was time for France to apply some of the principles of 1789 and later revolutions in the colonies as well” (Fuglestad 1983:xx). The constitution of the fourth French republic, of 1946, led to the abolition of the colonial empire and the establishment of the *Territoires d’Outre-Mer*, (the Overseas Territories) as an integral part of the republic. The Nigeriens and other former subjects of colonial France were now entitled to become French citizens (although very few actually did), although only formally equal to the people of metropolitan France. The new policy was a solution to the problem of keeping the empire while simultaneously abolishing direct colonial rule. As such it responded to heavy criticism by metropolitan French people as well as to the claims of the *evolués*⁷⁶ of the colonies. The new policies pursued by colonial France created an opportunity for state-planning and state expenditure for economic and social development (Fuglestad 1983).⁷⁷

Development cooperation after independence

Despite the abolition of direct rule, the struggle for independence continued in the overseas territories. In the late 1950s France offered par-

⁷⁵ For example France’s inactivity in the face of the 1930/31 Sahel drought sparked critique that led to an investigation (Salifou 2002)

⁷⁶ Term used to refer to French colonial subjects who were considered to have assimilated to accept French values and behaviour, often working in the civil services (Le Vine 2007)

⁷⁷ *Fonds d’Investissement pour le Développement Economique et Social* (FIDES).

tial independence, which Niger accepted in 1958⁷⁸ after a referendum. Hamani Diori, leader of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain, RDA, in Niger, and a member of the French National Assembly, had succeeded in mobilising the traditional chiefs to support autonomy within the French overseas territories rather than full independence. In 1960, Niger gained full independence together with the rest of the French West African colonies and Hamani Diori stayed in power and maintained the close links between Niger and France.

After 1960, political independence was concretised in development programmes, run by the state, at the same time as the state was being constructed. The government organised its work around three prioritised goals: national unity, improvement of the living conditions of the population and real independence. In order to achieve those goals, focus was put on expanding production and exporting crops such as groundnuts and cotton. Because of a lack of professionals, Niger still had to rely to a large extent on technical assistance from their old colonisers (Yamba 2001).

Growth was rather remarkable in the first years of independence and in 1965 Niger covered its budget from internal resources (Gervais 1992). External assistance started essentially in 1966 in the form of projects which focused on introducing modern methods in agriculture. Methods were rather uniform throughout the country and were based on experiences made elsewhere under very different circumstances. Among the main actors were C.I.L.S.S, Le Club du Sahel, l'Institut du Sahel and the UN Sudano-Sahelian Office. Heavy investment in agricultural products caused severe degradation of the environment in terms of deforestation and soil erosion. Furthermore, the reliance on agricultural products made the droughts of the late 1960s and early 1970s devastating to the national economy. The droughts lead to a massive intervention by aid organisations and new actors in Niger as well as in other Sahelian countries.

At the end of the 1970s Niger experienced another few years of strong economic growth. This was triggered by booming uranium demand,⁷⁹ increased aid as a result of the drought in 1973, and a few

⁷⁸ Of the French West African colonies only Guinea voted for full independence.

⁷⁹ Uranium is Niger's number one export product. Yet, since the beginning partly state owned French Cogema, (later Areva) has been exploiting the resource, with limited profit for the Nigerien state, and even less for the local population. Niger has several times tried to renegotiate the prefixed price with little success until the second half of the 2010s, with President Mamadou Tandja who opened the market for permits of exploitation.

years with sufficient rainfall to enable good agricultural output. The revenues from uranium sparked public spending and when uranium prices fell in the early 1980s Niger continued the same policies, funding their spending with loans, as they expected the lower prices to be temporary. However, uranium prices remained low. In 1977/78 the income from uranium extraction covered 40 percent of the state budget, but only 6 percent in 1992/1993.

Niger started to reform its economy in the 1980s as a consequence of the creditors' refusal to grant new loans except with very stringent conditions. Initially this was done without assistance from international organisations in the form of a stabilisation programme. These efforts finally made Niger eligible for IMF programmes, but at the same time reforms contributed to diminished GDP (Gervais 1997, Lund 1997). The first Structural Adjustment Programme, SAP, was introduced for the period 1986-1987, and was extended with a Public Sector Adjustment Programme, PASEP, (Salifou 2002).

Due to the harsh situation and reform of the economy the state, when President Seyni Kountché was in power, began to seriously reduce its engagement in grand development programmes. Instead, the state promoted diversification and small-scale projects, which could be executed quickly and demanded fewer human and material resources (Salifou 2002:1).

In 1987, Niger was hit by another serious drought with devastating consequences for the population as well as for the state, which was still waiting for positive results from the reforms. In this situation, there was no space for the state to start investing to relaunch the economy, and by 1990 it had stopped doing so. While some efficiencies were achieved as a result of the SAP, it also resulted in higher costs for some essential services such as health and education, which had previously been free of charge. Several of the para-statal companies were deficit, the state had for some years failed to pay for services executed. Moreover, the SAP required a reduction in number of civil servants, as salaries had become the greatest expense for the state. While the ratio between public administrators and the population was far less than in neighbouring countries, its cost remained a problem (Tiemago 2000).⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Tiemago argues that the problem in Niger was not too many employees within the administration, and a decrease would severely diminish the functioning of the state. The problem was rather that the tax base was insufficient to support any size of functioning administration (Tiemago 2000). However, the logic of the SAP is that

The late 1980s saw social conflicts of a sort that had not been prevalent in the Nigerien society before. Students and civil servants took to the streets, eventually forcing president Ali Saïbou to allow democratic reform and a National Conference⁸¹. One of the main demands from the protesting students and the unionists was the rejection of the SAP. The union claimed that the government hid its incapacity and incompetence behind the SAP, an argument used in the fight for multipartyism and the attainment of the National Conference in 1991 (Tiemago 2000).

The National Conference decided that the country should suspend the SAP⁸² (Gervais 1997, Lund 1997). There was a belief that Niger would be able to finance development through the mobilisation of internal resources (Alkache interview 2002). After the conference, the World Bank cut its aid and the economic situation turned from bad to worse. Lavigne Delville and Aghali Abdelkader argue in their study that one reason the plan of the national conference failed was that the internal austerity measures that were required did not materialise. The refusal of the elite and the public service to accept the terms made the endeavour impossible, which meant that politics was once more dominated by attempts to access funds from the IFIs (2010:60-62).

Although the National Conference had refused some of the conditionalities of the SAP, the transition government started to negotiate an urgency programme with the IMF already in January 1992. Just like the first generation of SAP, the IMF now demanded reductions in employees, stopped automatic recruitment from university to administration, and limited university grants. The new SAP contained practically the same conditionalities that had been refused by the conference (Maignan 2000:70-72). The newly-elected government of 1993 continued discussions with IMF and the World Bank, who sent a mission to Niamey to re-establish “the road to growth” (Salifou 2002).

In 1996 general Maïnassara Baré took power in a military coup. As a consequence several bilateral donors suspended their cooperation

civil service costs should be related to the tax base and not to the need of the country to develop. (Lienert and Modi 1997).

⁸¹ Several countries in francophone Africa underwent democratic reform in the early 1990s. As part of that process many of them organised national conferences with Benin as the first example and model to follow (Le Vine 2007).

⁸² The national conference didn't explicitly reject the SAP but set the conditions that there would be no reduction in employment, study grants and the workings of the public administration, which in reality, being in total contradiction with the demands of the IMF and the World Bank, implied a rejection.

with Niger. However, cooperation soon resumed as elections were planned and the country concluded a new Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF), leading to the launch of new cooperation with the World Bank. In this way Niger resumed its relations with its former “partners” (Salifou 2002).

The 1999 “coup”, and the military take-over after the murder of President Baré, again led Niger’s international partners to withdraw their assistance. When democratisation was quickly initiated and a stabilisation and structural reform programme supported by IMF and the World Bank was implemented. The outcomes of the programmes were measured positive. A full Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme, PRSP, formally committing Niger to the MDGs, was agreed in January 2002. In April 2004, Niger reached the Completion Point under the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative, which gave the country access to important debt relief (Pinto Moreira and Bayraktar 2005:7-8).

The point of telling this rather repetitious story of successive new beginnings is to elucidate the difficulty the Nigerien state has encountered in trying to get beyond such beginnings.

For some years in the beginning of the new millennium, Niger was known as the poorest country in the world, occupying the bottom position on the Human Development Index (HDI). As one Nigerien water official working for a European NGO expressed it in 2002,

You cannot call Niger a developing country because we are not developing.

Since then, however, Niger has advanced a few steps on the HDI. There has been an increasing flow of development aid into the country. Both as a response by donors to democratic improvements, but also as a consequence of the HIPC initiative and important debt reductions. As a land-locked, least developed country, LDC, that is highly exposed to climatic and environmental hazards such as drought and locust invasions, Niger is also entitled to special MDG strategies and investments.

Despite the set back of the drought of 2005, other changes have affected the momentum in the Nigerien economy. These include, increasing revenues from uranium extraction, the diversification of exploiters that has put an end to French *de facto* monopoly, new uranium findings, the newly started oil refinery in Zinder, the second bridge over the river Niger in Niamey, and the beginning of the construction

of the Kandadji dam. The last one a development project that has been in the pipeline for the last 20 years, which will improve both energy provision and irrigation for agriculture.

The backlash came in 2009, and it might be that the increasing revenues from uranium and the economic momentum contributed to the ambition of the president at the time, Mamadou Tandja, to cling to power by trying to extend his mandate and make an exception to the limitation of two possible terms in office. His breach of the constitution and dissolution of the constitutional court, as well as the parliament, led to the military coup in February 2010. A group of militaries around General Djibo Salou took power with the promise to restore democracy, and eventually organised elections in early 2011 that were considered sufficiently free and fair by external observers. Again Niger is set for a new beginning with what that means for the redefinition of the state and the administration. The prime minister, Brigi Rafini, has already declared the intention to modernise the public service and to set the basics for good governance (Roue de l'Histoire n° 560 du 18 Mai 2011).

Niger's political history indicates that to stay in power requires maintenance of stability and at least a minimum of control over the economic situation. Under the dire economic circumstances in which Niger finds itself, stability has to a large extent been dependent on the ability to maintain good relations with external partners, thereby guaranteeing continuing influx of funds. The major priority of the foreign policy has thus been to seek cooperation with all states, without discrimination, making foreign policy and cooperation policy closely linked (Mamadou 2001). This gives a certain character to Niger's (as well as other developmental states') role in international relations, or the global political economy. As Dagra Mamadou writes, Niger positions itself on the international scene primarily to benefit from necessary assistance, a policy called "diplomatie de développement" (Mamadou 2001).

Central-local relations

Since independence, the Nigerien governments have elaborated reforms for creating a local base through decentralisation and popular participation. The first administrative decentralisation was made in 1964 with the establishment of regions, yet with little effective implementation. The one party rulers from independence until the Na-

tional Conference have in different ways tried to consolidate their power in local communities. They have done this in primarily two ways: through relations with the traditional village chiefs,⁸³ and through setting up and engaging with different representative associations. At the time of independence, Niger's first president Hamani Diori, had relied on the support of the traditional chiefs. He continued to choose ministers in accordance with their capacity to affirm themselves as leaders in a local political space. Most of them were chiefs or came from families of chiefs (Idrissa 2001). Diori also tried to engage the population in the development of the country in a cooperativist way. He thereby wanted to affirm the support of the rural population in times of increasing opposition following the 1972/73 famine (Olivier de Sardan 1999:152). Diori also established in each village a committee of the party (Ibid:148).

President Kountché⁸⁴, tried to base his *Société de développement* on the Samariya, neighbourhood, village and ward associations, and on local cooperatives (Salifou 2002, Olivier de Sardan 1999:147, Ibrahim 1996:55). The Samariya were engaged to organise collective works, to maintain the villages and to organise interaction between villages. The explicit purpose was to make them organs of democracy and development by uniting the Nigeriens "in a government neither capitalist nor socialist, distanced from political parties and working for economic development and social well-being" (Salifou 2002). Olivier de Sardan writes that the authority of the Samariyas came from above, from a charismatic national leader. He argues that fear of repression played its part, but that it cannot in itself explain the activities of the Samariya that took place at this time (1999:147).

During the initial attempts at democratisation in the early 1990s efforts to strengthen central local relations took new shape as the constitution of 1992 placed decentralisation at the centre of reform. In 1995, a High Commission (Haut Commissariat à la Réforme Administrative

⁸³ Niger is considered unique in the way it still builds on the institution of chiefs, with their colonial heritage, as the only local power in rural areas until decentralisation became effective in 2004. Prior to 2004 the decentralisation process stopped at district level, leaving the privileges of the chiefs intact, except in urban communes. During the colonial period the chiefs were appointed by the colonial power, and in periods after independence they have been appointed by the executive, who can also make them leave their position. The chiefs are under the orders of the prefect and sous-prefect. Despite their colonial heritage they are called 'chefs traditionnelles' thus relying on a precolonial legitimisation (Olivier de Sardan 1999:140-142).

⁸⁴ President 1974-1987.

et à la Décentralisation (HCRA/D), was established to implement administrative reforms and decentralisation and the decentralisation law was adopted in 1996. The law organises the country into regions, districts and municipalities.

Elections for a limited set of communes were held in 1999, but were annulled as the party in power, RDP of Mainassara Baré, lost. Soon after, the regime was overthrown by the military, which arranged presidential elections quickly thereafter. Decentralisation then became one of the conditions for several donors to resume the cooperation they had suspended as a result of the 1999 coup. After the transition to democratic rule, a new strategy for decentralisation was formulated and the law was promulgated in 2002. Decentralisation also became one of the main pillars of the first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, (Olivier de Sardan 2004:3-4). Municipalities have been established and the first elections were held in 2004.

Most of Niger's development partners are in one way or another supporting the decentralisation reform, not least through their support to the municipal development plans, PCD. However, the reform has been difficult to implement, not least due to lack of human and financial resources. Some municipal administrations consist of little more than a mayor and a secretary, sometimes even without office (Vogt and Vogt 2005).

Despite continuous efforts, the Nigerien state has failed to penetrate and control local level society (Tidjani Alou 2008). During Kountché's reign in the late 1970s and 1980s, this was exacerbated by the SAP. It had the contradictory goals of reducing public spending and the budgetary deficit while at the same time improving the functioning of public administration. 'Less state but better state', did not have the intended effect, but rather undermined the potential for good governance (Lund 1997, Tiemago 2000). Tidjani Alou argues that the incapacity of the state to impose itself on its territory and population has led to its functions being taken over by other forms of organisations (Tidjani Alou 2001), such as donors and NGOs (Olivier de Sardan 1999). The state is still to a large extent struggling to appropriate and institutionalise control over the territory by putting in place a bureaucracy and new norms to legitimise it and universalise it.

Concluding that the local chiefs and development projects constitute the main institutions of local power, Olivier de Sardan discusses the absence of the state in peoples' lives, and its practical abdication from functions such as realisation of infrastructure, land regulation

and promotion of economic and commercial policies. The state exists, he writes “because its institutions and its agents are visible”, but it has become an empty shell. Instead projects are filling in for the insufficiency and malfunctioning of the state, but thereby also underlining and reproducing the weakness of public functions, as they create “micro-para-states” (Olivier de Sardan 1999:163). In this context, the projects constitute the only instances of administrative functionality and formal management. Their local management units play a para-public function and a second source of local power, next to the chief, with resources to distribute (2004:10).

Having given this brief outline of the trajectory of the independent Nigerien state, in the next section I focus particularly on water service provision. I do so by first by giving the background, and then paying more attention to the reforms since approximately 2000.

II. WATER SERVICE PROVISION

The state as provider

Traditionally, constructing a well in Niger is a strong symbolic and political statement of anteriority in a territory.⁸⁵ However, it is customary that new arrivers should be allowed free access. The “maîtres du puits” are therefore frequently block chiefs or village chiefs and the wells are both private and public, or neither. This means that management has often been a matter of good will on the part of the initiators and the users (Olivier de Sardan and Dagobi 2000).

In the period directly before independence modern wells were constructed by the colonial administration,⁸⁶ and afterwards by the independent state. Access was free, but sometimes a small contribution to the construction was required, in the form of initial investments, manual labour or providing the staff of the state agency or the subcontractor with food and drinks. Planning and implementation was conducted without any involvement of the population, and was primarily based on technical considerations (Vogt and Vogt 2005:18).

⁸⁵ Traditional wells still play an important role in parts of Niger where the state or the donors have not invested in modern infrastructure.

⁸⁶ In 1951 the first local office for water and mines was created in Niger, financed by the newly instated *Fonds d’Investissement pour le Développement Economique et Social* FIDES. J.O. n 239 du 1er janvier 1951 (Rep du Niger avril 1999:96-98).

In 1964 Office des Eaux du Sous-sol, OFEDES, a state owned company, was created (J.O n 64-019 in Rép du Niger, MHE, 1999:100). OFEDES was responsible for all aspects of water management for household use, including operation and maintenance. Or as Abdou Hassane, a senior Nigerien water engineer said “[t]o be honest, OFEDES was really the ministry” (Tidjani Alou 2008:321). In 1969, a committee for water and electricity charged with urban water provision was constituted as part of the Nigerien company for distribution of electricity and water, NIGELEC (Décret n 69/43 du 22 janvier 1969 in Rép du Niger, MHE, 1999:105).

Wells built during this early phase of expansion of access to clean water were known for their high quality, as a result of “scrupulous respect of technical norms and the very close supervision accorded by OFEDES” (Vogt and Vogt 2005:18). Adherence to the technical norms has gradually vanished. The ministry of water took over responsibility after OFEDES was dismantled, and quality standards were upheld for some time, but with the engagement of private companies for construction and the decreasing capacity of the state to provide high quality technical supervision quality has faded (Vogt and Vogt 2005:18). Yet, OFEDES wells are still known in the sub-region for their high quality, and state agents still refer to them with professional pride.

During the first decades after independence wells were strictly the business of the state, which both constructed them and was responsible for maintaining and repairing them. Much of this responsibility fell on the village chief or the canton chief as representatives of the state at the local level. When wells with pumps were installed, the same arrangements continued, and the role of the chief was strengthened since he held the key to the pump (Olivier de Sardan and Dagobi 2000:155).

From the outset, water was also a prioritised area for external aid to Niger. Between 1970 and 1980 43% of aid in rural areas was directed towards hydraulic projects and installations (Decoudras 1990:94). The first UN conference on water was held in Mar del Plata in 1977, where the stage was set for the launching of the International Drinking Water and Sanitation Decade, IDWSD, 1981-1990 (Rép du Niger, MH, 2009:5). The IDWSD led to a significant increase in external investments in the sector.

The first Ministry of Water was created in 1980 with the task of elaborating an action plan for the IDWSD. A great number of different

installations were constructed. To begin with mainly cemented wells to serve the population and the cattle, then small wells with manual pumps were introduced. With the increase in the types of infrastructure, the task of operation, repair and maintenance became overwhelming for OFEDES.

Successive regional workshops were held in the early 1980s, where the decision to transfer management to the local level was made. The transfer was to be accompanied by a social programme and the establishment of water management committees (comité de gestion de points d'eau CGE) at village level.⁸⁷ The decision was also made that water would no longer be free and that the right to water would also imply an obligation to maintain the water point. Tidjani Alou argues that these changes were indirectly caused by the state financial crisis. The financial crisis weakened the state, made external actors take advantage and “circumvent [the state] by promoting new rules for the management of water resources in the villages in addition to providing finance” (2008:322). Until the adoption of the water regulation in 1993,⁸⁸ there was no legal framework for water services.

Restructuring of the water company

The same logic of disengaging the state permeated the first SAP, which Niger accepted in 1986. A year later, in 1987, the World Bank Public Sector Adjustment Programme, PASEP, was launched. OFEDES was one of the companies on the list of public enterprises to be privatised. Among other measures PASEP included the reduction of the workforce in public companies by 3000 (Liman Tinguiri 1990:83-84). This reform thereby further reduced the capacity of the state to fulfil its responsibilities. However, OFEDES was never privatised, instead a new state owned company, Société National des Eaux, SNE, was created in 1987 and the role of OFEDES was “trimmed down”. The water division within the water and electricity company, NIGELEC was also merged with the new state owned company (République du Niger, MHE, 2001:25). SNE was made responsible for development of the urban sub-sector, including improved water services cov-

⁸⁷ Still in 2005 the social programmes are considered inadequate for the task. (Vogt and Vogt 2005)

⁸⁸ At the same time a Master Plan for Water Resources Development and Management was elaborated with the support of UNDP in order to capture the achievement during the IDWSD.

erage and ensured good management of the resources (R ep du Niger, MHE, 2001:9).

In order to regulate the relations between the state and its companies a new juridical framework was established, with the aim of guaranteeing the independence of the latter. However, the autonomy of the company was never achieved and SNE failed to manage its finances, partly because the state did not pay for its water consumption.⁸⁹ The SNE management structure was changed nine times between 1989 and 1998 as a result of the turbulent political situation during the 1990s. Despite these difficulties, in technical terms SNE was considered to have performed relatively well in a sub-regional comparison (World Bank 2001).

By 1996 the SNE was no longer considered a credible recipient of external funds, and reform was demanded by some of the donors who invested in the sector. After Maïnassara Bar e's government resumed relations with the IFIs, Niger adopted a new national macro-economic development framework in 1997. The new framework included commitments to privatise and restructure parastatal companies, among them SNE. The unions demanded the cancellation of the privatisation programme but Bar e was determined to push it through. The Ministry of Privatisation and Restructuring of Enterprises was created in 1999, and a project was set up for each sector to design particular models and forms of contract. However, the coup in 1999 and the killing of President Bar e led to the suspension of the economic restructuring programme until after a new round of elections, and the adoption of Niger's first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

After a few years of formulation, Niger opted for a model of public-private partnership in the water sector. The patrimony (the resource and the fixed capital) is still in the hands of a state owned company, Soci et e Patrimoine des Eaux de Niger, SPEN, through a concession with the state, while water service provision is by a private company, Soci et e d'Exploitation des Eaux de Niger, SEEN, which has a 10 year lease contract with SPEN and the state.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ The Ministry of Finance pays water bills for all state institutions, including for example hospitals.

⁹⁰ SPEN is supposed to attract funds in the form of grants and loans for expanding access to water in urban areas. SEEN is only to a limited extent investing its own funds. The ministry is in charge of negotiating prices with SPEN and SEEN, both the user price and the price that SEEN gets for every unit of water delivered, p/e. Initially Veolia, the private company that won the bid, held 51 percent of the shares in the company, the Nigerien state 5 percent, the workers 10 percent and Nigerien investors

There was a lively media debate about the privatisation in the 1990s and early 2000. Accusations were made by unions and newspapers, that the reforms constituted a recolonisation of Nigerien resources, and an infringement on Nigerien sovereignty. Others, including a number of managers and politicians defended the reform (Hamid Ahmed, le directeur de la cellule du programme de privatisation, (Maman 1996)). Consumer organisations, meanwhile, have continued to express concern over increasing prices and have attributed these to privatisation.

Delegation of rural water management

In 1997 it was legally established that “[p]ublic water points belong to the communes where they are situated. The management of these water points will be the responsibility of the local communities who need to take on the management and maintenance of the water point through the creation of water management committees” (décret n97-368 du 2 octobre 1997). Soon, however, many installations delegated to community management in rural areas were breaking down and often the communities were unable to repair them due to a lack of resources. Several explanations for this have been suggested, the most prevalent being that the involvement of the village chief in management led to mismanagement of funds, with money for repairs diverted to other purposes.⁹¹ A second explanation was that villagers continued to consider the infrastructure the responsibility of the state, and therefore did not take responsibility for it. De Sardan and Dagobi (2000), in their analysis of local water management in Niger, point at the absence of a notion of common good as the water infrastructure in the villages traditionally belonged to the village chief, and hence was private property (although access was customarily free).

the remaining 34 percent The primary goal was to break even. This was accomplished in 2006. The state has improved its payments for water consumption but not sufficiently, and access to water has improved significantly, even exceeding the goals set at the start of the project. The privatisation has been supported by a World Bank project, the Water Sector Project (PSE). In 2007 the water sector project was considered the most successful in the World Bank’s Niger portfolio. (World Bank 2007)

⁹¹ In the 1998 revision of the Régime de l’Eau, it was added that the water management committees were to be created under the guidance of village and tribal chiefs.

The problems were particularly acute in the case of systems such as the small water system, mini-AEP,⁹² that generate more funds and are more expensive to repair. While seasonal or occasional collection of resources has been predominant as means for mobilising funds for maintenance and repair of wells and boreholes, the introduction of more complex and expensive systems such as the small water system led to the introduction of user charges for water.⁹³ Increasing local financial resources led to problems of financial management in local communities (Tidjani Alou 2008). A new management system was therefore introduced in villages of more than 2.000 inhabitants, that have the right to a small water system.

To address the problem of mismanagement of funds operation and maintenance was to be delegated to private operators. After a pilot project was judged successful, delegation to a private operator has now been made general and conditions have been set up for villages to obtain a small water system. Four criteria must be fulfilled in order for a village to qualify to receive new installations or have their old ones renewed (in the case of small water systems): 1) a water users' association, AUE, must be put in place, 2) a national bank account with 250.000FCFA must be opened on behalf of the population for each small water system, 3) the villagers must agree to pay for water, and 4) management must be delegated to a private operator.⁹⁴ In villages of less than 2.000 people, where wells and boreholes are the most common type of installations, management is still organised in water management committees, CGE.

⁹² The small water systems began to be constructed in 1998-99, as part of the project of Conseil de l'Entent 3 in the zones of Tillabéry and Dosso. In order to manage the new installations a new structure was set up, i.e. the water users' associations (interview with Idrissa 2008).

⁹³ By the time the small water systems were introduced the necessity to pay for water had been established on an international level in the Dublin principles, 1992, to which the central documents of the Nigerien water ministry align themselves.

⁹⁴ The process of expanding access to water in a decentralised system is thus closely tied to the process of privatisation. However, still in 2008 it was a practice and not a law. Several state agents expected delegation to be made obligatory in the new water law. However, the water law of 2012 does not make delegation obligatory but maintains the possibility of different ways of organising water management (Rép du Niger 2012).

III. WATER SECTOR REFORM 2000-

The democratic elections after the 1999 coup set the scene for new opportunities. After several years of complicated international relations, donors and IFIs returned, Niger's debt was significantly reduced, the PRSP was prepared and the MDGs promised increasing aid and a coherent approach. Despite setbacks such as a locust invasion and the 2005 drought, the first decade of the new millennium created a new momentum for Niger, which included the renegotiation of the uranium contracts, new concessions, investments in an oil refinery, a cement factory and the long awaited Kandadji dam as well as the second bridge over the Niger river in Niamey.

At the same time, the decentralisation initiative was reinvigorated, a new strategy was formulated and the decentralisation law was promulgated in 2002. Decentralisation also became one of the main pillars of the first PRSP (R ep du Niger 2002a). The first elections were held in 2004, and the reform slowly began taking shape. By the time research for this thesis began in 2007 the urban water sector was increasingly covered by the new public-private partnership and the ministry focused on the rural and semi-urban sectors as well as sanitation. In 2005, the Paris Declaration for Efficiency in Aid was signed and several donors began changing their way of working in the country.

The central administration

As discussed above, by 2000 the urban water sector had to a large extent been detached from the national administration. The ministry is still in charge of some planning and oversight as well as determining the price of water. Since 2006, the sector has reached financial equilibrium but is still threatened by the state's incapacity to pay for its water consumption.

Water in rural and semi-urban areas is covered by programme 8 of the Rural Development Strategy (SDR)⁹⁵, of 2003. As a consequence of this division between the urban and rural sector, the water ministry was reorganised once again in 2007.⁹⁶ The technical departments⁹⁷

⁹⁵ The SDR is a SWAp (Sector Wide Approach), which defines a programme approach applied to a specific sector.

⁹⁶ In the 2007 reorganisation an overarching department of drinking water, and a department of sanitation were added to the organisational structure. The ministry was reorganised again in 2010 after the military coup, again turning it into the Ministry of Water, Environment and Fight against Desertification.

were divided into one department for urban and semi-urban water and sanitation, one department for rural services,⁹⁸ and one department for water resources, accompanied by a number of supporting departments, including the central department for studies and planning, DEP. Each central department is represented at the regional level, Direction Régionale Hydraulique, DRH, and the regional office has at least one representative in each district, Direction Departementale Hydraulique, DDH, who work directly with the prefect who is heading the regional administration. The representative at the district level is the one who implements the politics of the ministry and who follows the municipal development plan of the mayors.

The SDR has the objective of progressively moving from a project logic to a programme approach and programme budgeting. This approach, it is stated, will allow the state to connect the strategic poverty reduction goals of the government and the objectives, results and activities of the sector through mid-term budgetary frameworks, and to prepare the administration for budgetary sector support. There is thus an effort to create coherence and control in the water sector and to enable Nigerien ownership. In this way, the programme approach is conceived as a tool to improve the effectiveness of aid, as formulated in the Paris declaration, through ownership, alignment, harmonisation, results-based management and mutual responsibility.

In 2007 the Danish cooperation agency Danida, a major donor in the sector, granted the government of Niger FCFA 9.2 billion, to support the implementation of the Programme d'Appui au Secteur Eau, Hygiène et Assainissement, PASEHA (2007-2009). PASEHA aims at strengthening the capacity of the water ministry, and the Ministry of Public Hygiene and Sanitation to allow them to implement pro-

⁹⁷ The technical work was previously organised in a department of inventories and management of hydraulic works, DIGOH, and the department for new drinking water infrastructure, DNAEP.

⁹⁸ The urban water system covers towns with more than 10.000 inhabitants, while semi-urban water covers towns between 2.000 and 10.000 inhabitants, and rural refers to smaller villages and pastoral areas. This division is also reflected in the choice of technology used. While cement wells and bore wells with hand pumps are used in rural areas, small water systems are used in semi-urban areas, and water supply systems in urban areas. Semi-urban areas are managed together with urban areas in the organisation of the ministry, but are also part of the programme approach which is related to the rural development strategy.

gramme 8 of the Rural Development Strategy (SDR) on water and sanitation.⁹⁹

The PASEHA consists of two elements. First, strengthening of capacity at the national level at the Ministry of Water and the Ministry of Sanitation to allow them to implement the sectoral policies and strategies in line with the MDGs, the SDR and the ongoing decentralisation. Funds are allocated to education, equipment and technical assistance. The second element is to improvement of access to water and sanitation in the regions of Zinder and Diffa.

The programme also aims at strengthening the communication and dialogue between the government and its national and external partners through joint annual reports in the sector. In the description of element 1, it is stated that to meet its challenges and tasks, the ministry must be/have: an organisation capable of responding to its tasks and mission, an optimal management of its personnel, a motivated and educated personnel, agents who are capable to take its new task as support and advice to municipalities, a system of delegation, a support structure for professional communication and national diffusion of politics, strategies, manuals, directive, and other instruments necessary for the execution of the national program (PASEHA Nov 2006).

It is concluded in the PASEHA that the capacity of the Nigerien state structures in the water sector are very weak. The weakness is stated to be all-pervasive and to concern everything from planning and supervision to investments. The problem, the PASEHA states, is a result of the lack of operational capacity at the disposal of the administration, as well as of deficiencies in organisation and of human resources capacity (PASEHA Nov 2006:27). It is intended that capacity should be built during the first phase of the programme to enable the implementation of a programme budget in the second phase.

The Ministry of Water is 'project owner' (the *maîtrise d'ouvrage*). More particularly, the responsibility for the programme rests with the department for studies and planning (Department of studies and planning, DEP).

It is clearly stated in the Manuel de procédures administratives, comptables et financiers, that the units of the ministry, at central and deconcentrated levels should be responsible for implementation and will serve as 'project supervisor' (the *maître d'oeuvre*). The Secretary

⁹⁹ The first part of the programme covers the period 2007-2009. A second period was being negotiated in 2008 but suspended due to the irregularities committed by the Nigerien president in 2009.

General is to coordinate the work. Project supervision can be partially delegated to external bodies (consultancy firms) when required. Supervision is supposed to be performed by the ministry (Rép du Niger, MH, 2008b:13).

Workshops are held regularly with ministry agents to introduce new performance management and budgeting tools as well as to address issues of corruption. If successfully implemented, capacity building is expected to enhance the agency of the administration in terms of its ability to manage those technical tools.

A steering committee was planned in the PASEHA, while the operational coordination was the responsibility of the Secretary General, and the units of the ministry. The steering committee was to be composed of the Secretary General of the Ministry of Water, and of the Ministry of Sanitation, and representatives of the Danida office, the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the High Council of the local authorities, the Rural Development Strategy secretariat, the donors, and the CNEA. It has the task of deciding the strategic orientations for implementation, follow-up and evaluation. It should also approve work plans and annual budgets, provide coordination, work towards achieving synergies and assure dialogue with all donors, follow up on the progress of the programme, approve annual implementation reports, approve and operationalise the recommendations of the annual reviews, order, examine and approve audits and implement recommendations, order review missions, and formulate recommendations to bilateral consultative meetings (PASEHA Nov 2006:59-60).

The consultation framework was to examine and approve projects and budgets for the steering committee, follow up on the advancement of the activities, examine progress reports and financial report, monitor the implementation of the decisions taken by the steering committee and approve terms of reference for studies (PASEHA Nov 2006). The Swiss development agency has been selected as lead donor for the water sector. Together with the ministry the lead donor plans and organises the meetings. Most donors in the sector, with few exceptions, participate in the meetings of the consultation framework, whether they are fully adhering to the programme approach or not.

Monitoring and evaluation are crucial instruments of the PASEHA. Initially Danida contracts an auditing firm to undertake conditional audit of the project and to produce annual audit reports. In parallel with the external audit, national audit procedures are to be gradually

put in place. There is an ambition that these elements should be internalised and managed by the recipients themselves.¹⁰⁰

The national process of planning and budgeting is to be replicated at the regional level by the regional offices, DRH. As decentralisation becomes effective, planning and budgeting is to be made at the municipal level and the deconcentrated offices of the state are to focus on functions of support/advice, coordination, arbitrage and control (Rép du Niger 2008c:11). A common financing mechanism is to be defined (Ibid:12).

The efforts to achieve state leadership in the sector are also illustrated by shifts made in the new National Programme for water service provision and Sanitation (PNAEPA) (Rép du Niger, MH, 2009), as it replaced the Master Plan for Water Resources Development and Management¹⁰¹, (2000). The PNAEPA establishes that the users (the sub-national authorities, particularly the communes and the state) have the 'project ownership' while the private sector and the NGOs, and the technical offices support the 'project owner' by guaranteeing the 'project supervision' (Rép du Niger, MH, 2009:7) In the Master Plan, there was no specification of 'users', and the technical offices were not included as 'project supervisors' (Rép du Niger, MHE, 2000:3.5.3 a-b) The new document thus emphasises the role of the state and its services in the activity of water service provision, as compared to the former.

Decentralisation and deconcentration

Nigerien water sector reform includes both decentralisation in the sense of devolution of decision-making power to the newly installed municipalities and their elected mayors, and of deconcentration in the

¹⁰⁰ The reports and reviews requested in this single programme are many. The requirements the first year are: one start off review; start off report; four financial reports (every three months); one follow up report. Second year: evaluation of programme approach and advancement of decentralisation; preparation of PASEHA 2; one classic audit; four financial reports; one follow up report and one annual report. Third year: one annual review of performance of the sector; one final evaluation; four meetings for preparation of PASEHA 2; two classic audits; one performance audit; four financial reports; one follow up report; one annual report and one final report. (PASEHA Nov 2006) A technical assistant concludes that the ministry do produce all those reports but they stay on the bookshelf because even the donors do not have the time to read them (interview 2008).

¹⁰¹ Schema directeur de mise en valeur et de gestion des ressources en eau du Niger (2000)

sense of tasks being transferred to the regional and district water management offices (central authority branches). Decentralisation and deconcentration of water services thus concern the roles and responsibilities of the deconcentrated services of the state, Direction Régionale Hydraulique, DRH, and Direction Departementale Hydraulique, DDH, as well as the municipalities and local communities.

Law 2002-13 (Rép du Niger 2002b) concerning the transfer of competences to the regions, districts and municipalities determined that the municipality is responsible for the construction, planning and maintenance of public wells and standpipes, and participate in production and/or distribution of drinking water (Rép du Niger 2010a:21). Project ownership is delegated to the municipality, which is also the owner of the water infrastructure in its territory. The municipalities are to formulate the needs, finance investments and guarantee management and control. The mayor is also to have the role of arbitrator in the relationship between the local management organisations, such as water management committees (Commités de Gestion d'Eaux, CGE), water users' association (Associations des Usagers de l'Eaux, AUE) and private operators. The establishment of water management committees and water user organisations can also be seen as part of this process.

However, at the time this research was completed in summer 2012, most municipalities lacked capacity to perform these functions and there were no water officials on municipal level in rural Niger. These functions therefore reverted to the regional and district offices. The latter were created in 2002 with the stated goal to bring the administration closer to the population. In the urban water sector, the state owned company, SPEN, which is the primary actor, is not yet represented at regional level, which has lead users to turn to the regional offices that in their turn address SPEN.

The role of the deconcentrated offices is to guarantee the conception, elaboration and implementation of the water policy, national planning and prevention and control of pollution and nuisance (Rép du Niger, MH, 2009:7).

According to the new guidelines the water users' associations (AUE) are not 'owners' of the infrastructure since the infrastructure belongs to the municipalities. The water users' associations are now to act as representative organs that defend the interests of the users (Rép du Niger, MH, 2010a:23).

In villages of less than 2.000 inhabitants, where wells and boreholes are the most common type of installations, management is still by water management committees (CGE)¹⁰², which contract someone to do repairs. However, if a new well is constructed or an old one renewed in an area where there is already a water users' association (AUE), they take charge of the new well too.

In villages of 2.000 inhabitants or more, with the right to a small water system or an autonomous water post, PEA (Poste d'Eau Autonome), the private operator, the water users' association (AUE) and the municipality enter into a contract with each other, whereby the water users' association represents the interests of the population. The municipality will also contract a Bureau for Advice and Control (BCC) funded by water tariffs, to follow the process and support and sensitise the water users' association during one year after the installation of the new infrastructure. Until the municipality has the necessary capacity, the regional offices of the ministry are to take on the task of doing so. The private operator handles the money but can only access the bank account with a signature from a representation of the water users' association.

Another important aspect of recent reform is that village chiefs and their family members are not allowed to be members of the water users' associations and the water management committees, nor are they allowed to influence the election process in the general assembly. This is an effort to circumvent the intricacies of power relations in the village. It is assumed that by this means committees and associations can maintain a higher degree of neutrality enabling them to work for the common good via self-interest.

Decentralisation is an integral part of the programme approach, because rather than creating a classic project-based budget, which is a compilation of projects and programmes, the programme approach requires all initiatives to be integrated in one budget. The budget should be based on the needs of the population, which must be defined on the ground, i.e. at the lowest operational level, which is the municipality through their municipal development plans (PDC). The state offices: central, regional and district, are to work with the municipalities in order to construct the programme budget.

PASEHA contributes to both deconcentration and devolution, and argues that activities supported by Danish assistance should be based on participatory local approaches (PASEHA Nov 2006:44). The pro-

¹⁰² Mandated with the adoption of Decree No. 97/368/PRN/MH/E, 2nd Octobre 1997.

programme is designed to take the process of phased devolution into account. When it comes to deconcentration, the programme is designed to assist the state to strengthen the capacity of the deconcentrated services. Financial responsibility will gradually be transferred and to enable this the state is to put accountants in place at the regional level. The programme will also support the transfer of competences to the local level and strengthen the regional and district offices to accompany the municipalities in their delivery of infrastructure. To achieve this end municipalities should cooperate and participate in call for tenders as well as in supervising construction of new infrastructure (PASEHA Nov 2006: 51-52). The decentralisation also includes significant capacity building at all levels.

The establishment of municipalities has complicated the power relations in local communities. While village chiefs have constituted the main local authority they are now supposed to work alongside the mayors. In the case of water infrastructure, this has caused some conflicts. Village chiefs accuse mayors of taking the credit for building infrastructure with tax money that the chiefs have collected, and of charging money for authorising wells without doing the preparatory work, which should involve the traditional chief (interview with Mouhamédia Siliman, chef de tribu, in SEEDA 2000). One mayor, on the other hand, complained that the chiefs do not hand over the taxes that they are supposed to collect on behalf of the mayor. He said that when a chief doesn't hand over the taxes his village or block will be excluded from further service provision, such as the construction of wells. The mayor argues that this is his only means of applying pressure on the village chiefs since he doesn't have access to the police (interview with mayor in small rural municipality 2008).

In interviews with state agents, the interference of chiefs in the management of water infrastructure is referred to as one of the main reasons the state decided to delegate operation and maintenance of village infrastructure to private operators.

Delegation/privatisation

Delegation of operation and maintenance to private operators was first introduced by various development projects. This was judged successful and made mandatory in villages of more than 2.000 inhabitants where small water systems provided the water. According to the programme guidelines, the purpose of delegation is to professionalise

water extraction through financial and technical autonomy and to allow the water users' associations to represent the users and not be preoccupied with technical and financial issues (Rép du Niger, MH, 2010a:36). It is recognised that delegated management of public services doesn't eradicate all the problems of management, but in the programme guidelines it is stated that in comparison with direct community management, use of contractors leads to increased functionality, improved savings and more accessible information (Rép du Niger, MH, 2010a).

Privatisation is not required systematically in the villages. It is required in cases when there is a need for investment or where there is a crisis of confidence or mismanagement (Rép du Niger, MH, 2010a:42). In 2009, 43% of rural systems: (small water system, autonomous water posts, and pastoral pump stations), were estimated to have been delegated to private operators (Rép du Niger, MH, 2010a:13). In other words, much management has remained in community hands.

While delegation of management is a transfer of what used to be a function of community based organisations, other types of delegation concern functions formerly performed by the state. Most importantly, other types of delegation concern supervision and control (part of project supervision), as well as the construction of new infrastructure and the renewal of old. In the latter case, the private company SEEN have implemented much of the extension of the network in urban areas in accordance with the lease contract. SPEN also contract some of this work to other companies. In rural areas, the municipalities will become responsible for contracting companies, however, the transfer of responsibility, resources and capacity has not yet been effective and contracting is still conducted either in projects or by the ministry and the regional offices. In either case, contracting is regulated at central level.

When it comes to supervision and control, the programme guidelines say: "A private actor (consultancy firm) is generally mandated by the 'project owner' to provide supervision, follow-up, control and coordination of execution of works entrusted to companies". It continues: "Within the frame of investments made by the state, this function of 'project supervision' is generally exercised by the deconcentrated services of the water ministry" (Rép du Niger, MH, 2010a:17). The programme approach has given the ministry more direct control over investments which implies that functions such as project supervision

can legitimately be performed by the technical offices of the state rather than by private consultancy firms. ‘Social engineering’¹⁰³ is generally entrusted to private actors (consultancy firms and NGOs), but can also be performed by the future municipal water and sanitation services.

IV. MDGS AND STATISTICAL COVERAGE RATES

Access to water is measured according to the criteria set during the International Drinking Water and Sanitation Decade, IDWSD, 1981-1990.¹⁰⁴ The millennium development goal (MDG), to halve by 2015 the proportion of people who lack access to water in Niger is set at an 80 percent coverage rate in rural areas and 82,5 percent in urban areas. The goal is decentralised, meaning it is broken down to regional and the municipal scales.

Important progress has been made since 2000. In rural areas access has increased from 51,1 percent to 62,5 in 2007, while in urban areas access has increased from 64,4 to 82 percent in 2007. However there

¹⁰³ Social engineering, according to the programme guidelines, includes to support users and local actors in making information accessible and explaining principles for public water services. It also includes assistance to the project owner when establishing public water systems and contracting out management functions (Rép du Niger, MH, 2010a:17-18).

¹⁰⁴ Definition of a modern water point (PEM): Every installation realised or constructed according to standards, which provides water in an acceptable quality (established by the ministry of health) with an effect of at least 0,5m³/h. According to the criteria of IDWSD, the water need is established at 25 litres per day per person. Considering a minimal effect of 0,5m³/h it is decided that there should be one PEM/250 habitants. The norm is that every administrative village, no matter what size has the right to 1 PEM, every village with at least 250 habitants has the right to 1 PEM, every village with a population less than 250 habitants with a distance of more than 5km to another PEM has the right to a PEM. Villages with a population between 250 and 750 habitants have the right to 1 PEM/250 inhabitants, Every center with a population between 750 and 2.000 inhabitants has the right to a simplified small water system, and one small water system for every population center larger than 2.000 habitants. (Rép du Niger, MH, 2008a:9-10)

In urban areas the coverage rate is calculated on the assumption that one private connection covers 10 persons, and one public standpipe cover 250 persons/faucet, i.e. a public standpipe with two faucets is estimated to cover 500 persons. (Rép du Niger, MH, 2008a:39). In pastoral zones coverage must be calculated differently and is under discussion.

are important regional variations in both cases (Rep du Niger, MH, 2009:17-18).

Niger's population is increasing rapidly, which has serious effects on access to water. While the PNAEPA (2009:15) refers to the census of 2001 when the Nigerien population was approximately 11 million, in 2011 it was already estimated at 15 million, giving an annual growth rate of about 3,3%. Just to maintain the same level of access in percentage terms would thus be a considerable challenge.

The Millennium Development Goals are considered unique in the way they are quantifiable and time-bound, and as such they have sparked an enormous production of statistics. 'Correct' statistics is absolutely crucial for the efficient use of results-based management, as well as for safeguarding equitable distribution.

In the reorganisation of the water ministry in 2007, a statistics department was established, charged with the task of improving the system for calculating coverage. Different actors such as SPEN, the regional offices, UNICEF, Institut National de Statistiques, INS, had previously calculated coverage differently and the figures were not reliable. The method used by the ministry to calculate coverage rates before 2007 was considered misleading, as it established the geographical coverage rate. It measured localities with at least one water point and aggregated this to the regional level. However, it might be that some communities have a 100 percent coverage rate, while others might have as little as 20 percent, as the method ignored local divergencies and didn't take functionality into account. The problem was thus twofold: lack of correct information, and an inappropriate system of calculation.

The first problem has been addressed through a huge operation, involving district offices and municipalities, in collecting the correct information, including with regard to functionality. Workshops are held where district officers (who act as representatives for the municipalities which lack sufficient human resources) are taught the new tools for calculating statistics, and at the same time gather the information. The new data are then introduced into the programme budget, and provide the basis for prioritisation.

When it comes to the methods of calculating coverage, three complementing methods are used in an interim period. The geographical coverage rate is complemented by theoretic access rate, i.e. access/population, and with effective access rate which also takes functioning into account (R ep du Niger 2008a). There has been some polit-

ical resistance towards changing the method of calculation since it could decrease the coverage rate from over 60% in 2008 to around 40%, and that in the middle of the process of trying to achieve the MDGs. One agent at the department of statistics argued that it would be impossible politically since “[i]n the middle of the MDGs you can’t suddenly tell the head of state that we are really at 40%”. It would under-represent the progress that has been made since 2000.

In the first part of this chapter I have shown how the construction of the Nigerien state has taken shape in close relation with donors and the country’s reliance on external support. This story provides background for my analysis of state agents’ rationalisations of current reform, both when it comes to the relationship between the state and the donors, and with regards to central-local relations. In the second half of the chapter I have outlined developments in the water sector with a particular focus on reform after 2000. I have dealt with current institutional reform aimed at ownership and delegation of responsibility to local and to private actors. As stated initially, this provides part of the frame of reference against which I do my reading of the state agents’ narratives. As such this framing both limits the reading of the narratives, but also makes it possible.

6. Negotiating ownership

If now we have the free choice, and the...how to say it... we have been given the autonomy to take care of our own problems/.../Now we have everything in our hands. (Wada, director of regional office, 2008)

One of the prime concerns of the Nigerien water sector reform is to achieve responsabilisation in the sector through country ownership. As we recall, the process to achieve this is dominated by the shift in organisation of bilateral and multilateral development cooperation from projects to programmes. The shift and the form the programme approach is taking in Niger has been elaborated in chapter 3 and 5. In this chapter I look at how state agents reason and respond to this particular shift and the consequent effects on how the responsibility of the state can be understood.

The chapter is organised as follows: I first discuss how the state agents conceive of *autonomy* and dependence, and the effects on how agency and *choice* can be understood. The following section deals with the narratives of the possibility for the state to *control* the outcome of its activities before I return to and look more closely at the possibility of *leadership* to see how a negotiation over the state as 'owner' is opened up. I look particularly at how the promises of the new organisation of development cooperation are used to shape the room for manoeuvre of the state and its agents. Finally I deal more thoroughly with the question of *who* can speak and hence *who* performs ownership, with what effects on the possibility of responsibility.

I. AUTONOMY AND DEPENDENCE

It [the policy process] is a type of interdependence. Everyone contributes. (Gado 2008)

The implementation of the programme approach in Niger has meant that structures for dialogue between donors and the administration are set up as part of the ministry structure. While state donor dialogue has been rather informal, it has now been given a more permanent character as part of the organisational structure of the state. This way of enabling recipient ownership and donor alignment indicates that donors come closer formally to policy decisions and planning. At the water ministry in Niamey a set of mechanisms have been established, most importantly a consultation framework and a steering committee. Practically all policy and strategy documents are elaborated in collaboration with one or several donors, or consultants. In addition, there are two European technical assistants who work at the ministry, guiding as well as evaluating the reform process.

Lamido, a mid-level agent at the ministry comments on the new structures for state-donor relations, particularly the consultation framework, by explicitly saying that:

It is a good thing that the donors are inside the state through the consultations. It gives us the possibility to express our needs in the meeting room at the water ministry, in discussions between the state and the donors. (Lamido 2008)

Lamido's statement implies that the consultations not only give the donors access to decision making at the ministry in a formal way but that the ministry gets access to the donors and can express its needs. While in his narrative the former system is represented as if the state did not have the possibility to express its needs, the new system thereby implies an inclusion of the administration into the planning process, and into the functioning of the state.

However, consultation frameworks as such are not new, only their formalisation is. Élodie, a senior agent at the ministry working with planning in close cooperation with donors explains:

It is not new for us. Before, there were other frameworks for meeting. But they weren't formalised. Now it is really formalised, between us and the donors. Instead of me going away to see the Dan-

ish cooperation about an issue I have a meeting every two months. You see. Where I can present my problems. (Élodie 2008)

Formalisation in Élodie's narrative becomes a formalisation of the blurring of the line of distinction between the state and the donors, a formalisation of a sovereign frontier, as Harrison puts it (2004b). If we read the two quotes from a perspective where the sovereign state is understood as autonomous and self-determining, they seem to indicate a state that deviates from the ideal in the sense that it is lacking sovereignty. Another agent, Labo, explicitly questions such a contradiction between donor influence and sovereignty:

There is not necessarily a contradiction between donor influence and sovereignty. It is a type of complementarity and a working condition demanded by the situation. (Labo 2010)

Labo's narrative indicates a pragmatic approach to the sovereignty of the state that is widespread in the state agent narratives, at least when they are talking about state/donor relations on an overarching level. The narratives may differ on certain details, as is discussed further on.

Rather than considering these quotes as contradicting a particular understanding of sovereignty, the point is to see what the new structures for organising sector work and state-donor relations come to mean in their context. Lamido, Élodie and Lado tell their stories in a context where development cooperation and expatriate personnel have always been a part of the state agents' work. To understand the meaning given to the new structures, one needs to take into consideration the historically embedded state-donor relations, such as the fact that there has always been external involvement in the governing of the water sector.

The 'new' structures where the donors are increasingly 'inside' the state may need not therefore be perceived as a threat to a possible sovereign state. Rather, in contrast to the recent past where other actors, such as NGOs and donor projects, have been more prominent than the state in shaping and implementing water service provision, Labo and Élodie seem to see the new structures as promising an inclusion of the state in the the government of water service provision.

Interdependent future - a shared responsibility

The discourse of national sovereignty is often used in recipient country politics to object to unwelcome interventions, yet it seems to be a contingent discourse that is played out when it performs a certain function. Among state agents in the water sector in Niger, sovereignty is generally downplayed, and treated with pragmatism. Self-determination, self-sufficiency and independence were not part of the narrators' imaginary. I ask the state agents to imagine the future and they all include the donors as a central part, even in a longer time frame. One mid-level agent at the ministry, Omar, says:

I try to see the future in a happy manner. Where we have the commitment from the donors and the new approach advances. We put our hope in going together with the donors and with the necessary tools that have been elaborated. (Omar 2008)

The hope for the future, in Omar's narrative, is the commitment of the donors. His image of the future, as well as that of most state agents, seems to indicate that what is envisioned is not a future where the state manages without donors but dependence in a shape that allows the state to function. Wada, a regional director, also emphasises the presence of donors in his vision of the future:

Well, I think we have a future in terms of water provision. Where everything will work. Moreover, we have the donors with us. (Wada 2008)

In these quotes a happy future is one where the donors support the water sector. Often, but not always, the unwillingness to imagine a future without the donors is largely attributed to Niger's economic situation, as in the following quote by Ali, a lower level agent:

"It isn't easy/.../If Niger had the resources we wouldn't await the donors to achieve the MDGs, we would have done it a long time ago. So, a perspective where we are not in need of the donors? No, it doesn't exist. Not from my perspective anyway". (Ali 2008)

Although the state has made important economic commitments in the sector, increasing its internal funding by 5 billion FCFA¹⁰⁵/year to 35 billion, the water sector is extremely costly and the funds required to meet the MDG are estimated at 246 billion FCFA. Increasing revenues from uranium mining, oil and the cement industry are expected to increase the financial potential of the state itself. This prompts me to explicitly ask the state agents whether they could see a future without donors. A few state agents respond that it is possible that in the very long term Niger will be able to finance its water sector to a larger extent. Hima, a mid-level agent, says:

It is possible that when Niger can manage its mine resources independently it can diminish its external dependency. (Hima 2008)

However, most agents see a decrease in reliance on aid as relative and not absolute. The limitation to possible imagined futures is explicit in this statement by Bilal, a high level agent:

I don't know if a country on its way to development can allow itself to imagine a future without the technical and financial partners. I don't wish for it. It is difficult for a state to be self-sufficient. We cannot say that we don't need others. I don't wish it. We must accompany each other. (Bilal 2008)

When I return to discuss this issue at my third visit, all state agents I talk to, with one exception, talk about the Nigerien state as a state that functions in close relationship with donors and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future, although they describe that relationship in slightly different ways, as discussed below.

So what does this inability or unwillingness to see a future without the partners do? The state that emerges in the narratives is not a state that strives to be self-sufficient, but rather one that requires the presence of donors to function. Dependency provides the condition within which the narrators shape subject positions as state agents that make sense to them.

While the economic motive is central in the way many state agents conceive of continued dependency in their narratives, others dress it differently. Below are two quotes, from Hima and Idrissa, both mid-

¹⁰⁵ The Fcfa has a fixed exchange rate in relation to the euro, 1 euro = 655,9 Fcfa. The state has increased its investments from approximately 7.5 million euro to 53.5 million euro. Total investments needed amount to 375 million euro.

level agents at the central administration, where they emphasise international interdependence rather than a one-sided dependence by Niger on others:

I will tell you something. It is the donors who need Niger. Even if we are at 100% [coverage rate] the donors will continue to need us, and we will continue to need the donors. Globalisation cannot stop at a system where people don't need each other. (Hima 2008)

Yes, if you look, what is about to happen, I think it is a global change that will come. We will not see it, but the ones who come after us, after our grandchildren, they will see it. Now the African countries will help Europe. We will help you. Maybe in a 100 years everything will come from Africa towards Europe. That's what the change will look like. (Idrissa 2008)

Although they do it in different ways, both these quotes place Nigerien dependency in a broader picture of global interdependence. Either, in Hima's case, in the context of globalisation where countries and people are increasingly interconnected across space, or as in Idrissa's narrative, where positions and relations will change over time. Dependency becomes not a deviance but a way to be part of the global, and of history. The particular position is neither determined nor fixed over time, but contingent on a particular context.

While the debate over ownership has often been about what it implies in terms of increasing autonomy for recipient states, the important question here is how ownership works as a form of governing where agency is a result of a particular dependent situation, rather than the result of autonomy. Interdependence is what makes it possible to imagine a future Nigerien state that provides its population with water. To a large extent the narratives present a state that can only perform if the donors are sufficiently committed, as in Wada's story:

[W]hat is the current rythm of the donors. Are they at the same pace as we nationals. Where we want to go fast because of this system, these new development dynamics. Because I have noticed that the partners are going easy easy, concerning the millennium goals. They are there in an anxious way, going towards the programme approach... There is a certain distrust. And that doesn't help the country to go firmly towards the goals... I think that may

*put a brake on the achievement of the millennium goals in 2015.
(Wada 2008)*

In Wada's narrative, the insufficient commitment shown by donors will prevent the state from profiting from the new development dynamics to achieve the MDG. Interdependency points at a shared responsibility, as made explicit by Karimou, a mid-level agent at the ministry:

If the North... this is not a ministry agent who talks, but an African citizen. If the North, I will say the rich countries, buy our primary material at its right price, if there are no structures set up somewhere to fix the prices of our primary material, intermediaries who suck the blood from our unfortunate population, then we could certainly do a lot. I am not saying that we are white as snow, the citizens of Africa, but there are people who have courage, and the willingness to do something for Africa. Really, we Africans have responsibility, but so do you. (Karimou 2008)

In Karimou's reasoning interdependence seem to call into being a mutual responsibility and solidarity globally, based on the past as well as hopes for the future. This means that while the Nigerien state is engaged as an agent, responsibility is dispersed. In these stories, rather than being responsible for outcomes, the state and its agents are responsible to do what is possible within the constraints of development cooperation, and within the constraints of global political economy, as indicated by Karimou.

The point here has been to analyse how state agents conceive of the Nigerien state in terms of autonomy and dependence. However, the relations of dependency are not coherently narrated. In the following section on agency I discuss how these relations are understood differently because shaped by power from different positions. This has effects on how notions of autonomy and dependence shape perceptions of the possibility to exercise choice and agency and hence to perform responsibility.

II. AGENCY AND CHOICE – INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

There is a difference between the narratives when it comes to how the state agents talk about power relations within development cooperation and the way the Nigerien state and its agents can exercise their agency and choice. It needs to be pointed out that this difference seemed to correlate with the position state agents held within the ministry. The higher they are in the hierarchy the less likely the agents are to say that the Nigerien state is dominated by donors and the more likely they are to characterize the relationship as harmonious. This difference has been indicated elsewhere (Thörn forthcoming 2014, for the reverse relationship see Mateos 2010). The quotes in the first section are from senior agents in mid/high level positions, and the quotes in the second are from agents in mid/lower positions.

A synergetic cooperation

It is a type of synergy that is necessary. Others come with new ideas, synergy, join forces. That's how it is done now. (Nouhou 2008)

In contrast to what Lamido stated earlier in this chapter, few agents actually place the donors 'inside' the state, they rather place the donors firmly outside the state. From the following narratives we learn that it is possible to make clear lines of distinction when explicitly talking about the boundaries of the state, and at the same time naturalise donor presence and make it an integral part of the functioning of the state. When asked to define the role of the state in water service provision Amadou, a high level official, makes the donors an integral part of that definition:

I think that in the domain of water the state must assure first and foremost, a perfect knowledge of the hydraulic situation in the country. Must know, if there is an intervention, where the technical and financial partners should be directed. We have to safeguard that the interventions integrate the concern to solve the disparities within regions and between regions. Hence, the state must be there to say, look, this is the hydraulic situation in Niger. This is where I want the partners to invest in order for Niger to move forward together. (Amadou 2008)

When Amadou is asked to talk about the changing role of the state in the water sector, his definition includes the presence of the donors in the activity of water provision. Despite the necessity of donor presence, it is clear in the quote that the state must have the knowledge to direct those who perform in the water sector in accordance with its policies. A state that is defined by its dependency can still be imagined as the expert on, and owner of, its own policies.

In Gado's narrative, reform is achieved through close collaboration, as in the following quote:

The work is done jointly with the donors, who work in synergy with the administration to implement the different programmes that are elaborated, above all elaborated with their contribution. (Gado 2008)

In his narrative Gado doesn't place the donors within the state, rather the opposite. Yet, despite the clear distinction he makes between state and donors, the donors are closely involved with elaborating the policies and programmes together with the administration, and that work is done in synergy. Moreover, the synergy between the state and donors that is portrayed in some of the narratives is seen as an improvement, compared to previous arrangements, as in the following quote by Bilal:

A consultation framework has been established between the state and the development partners. It is a framework where everyone expresses their problems. The state expresses its problems, the technical and financial partners express theirs and they discuss to find a solution. So it is really a partnership, rather than donors who... So we are testing the programme approach. It means that ... everything is coherent with an implementation plan for the MDGs that has been elaborated at the ministry. So now we manage in partnership with the donors, contrary to before when they came with their money and said "well, I want to invest here or there". (Bilal 2008)

It should also be taken into consideration that during the second half of the nineties, much of the development assistance to Niger was suspended due to political and social unrest. Several state agents express gratitude that the donors are now back to support Niger, and the state agents express hope that the donors will continue their engage-

ment, as described above in relation to imaginaries of the future.¹⁰⁶ As was argued in chapter 3, there is a tendency in strategies, which seek to achieve ownership, for the instrumental logic to overshadow the emancipatory aspect of appealing to the agency of the state. The above quote, as well as Lamido's argument that the programme approach allows the state to express its needs, point at the difficulty of distinguishing between instrumental and emancipatory ambitions and to manage their effects. This will be further discussed below, under the heading 'Leadership'.

As indicated by the above quotes, donors influence the work of the administration in various ways, both directly and indirectly. They influence the work directly through the negotiations within the formal structures of the administration, but also indirectly when strategies are elaborated together with donors, and through the use of Northern consultants in the development of policy and strategy documents.¹⁰⁷

Élodie, emphasises how strategies are elaborated together with donors:

As I told you, we are elaborating... Now, in reality it is an exchange, for example in the consultation framework, where we will discuss with the partners. Together we will see what must be put in place. You see. But otherwise, openly, all the... You cannot say that, look here what has been chosen, no. (Élodie 2007).

While in the interview text Élodie points at the collaborative process whereby decisions are made, he still argues in his narrative that the state owns its own policies. In the same way, Rabiou, a high-level agent, in his story frequently emphasises Nigerien ownership of policies and strategies, while he at the same time points at how those policies and strategies take shape in close collaboration with donors:

In the case of the implementation of the Paris declaration on aid effectiveness the countries of honour, that is the Northern coun-

¹⁰⁶ This is an important factor when considering how they relate to present donor relations in their stories. Everything negative is placed in the past, and the present is painted in bright colours.

¹⁰⁷ An example: the route of decision for the new water code is that every report is first sent to the donors, then there is a workshop around it, a consultation framework discusses it and then a review is made. After that it is discussed in regional workshops and in CNEA (which includes donor representatives), before being finalised (Omar 2010).

tries, they have committed to align themselves to national procedures/.../So, if our politics, we have elaborated our strategies, if they are convincing, the Northern countries are ready to align themselves to what we are doing. To our procedures, to our methods. (Rabiou 2008)

He continues to say that he thinks the donors are ready to commit, because:

Even this, [the rural development strategy, SDR] it's not hazardous, because it is together with consultants from the north we have elaborated all that. (Rabiou 2008)¹⁰⁸

There are several instances in the state agents' stories where the same rationality is expressed. In Rabiou's narrative it seems as if the ministry can very well be considered 'owner' of a strategy that is elaborated in collaboration with consultants from the North to conform with the demands of the donors.

Rabiou's statement can be understood as an expression of a less dichotomised perspective on dependency and autonomy, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Rather than being an indirect way by which donors exercise power over the policy formulation of recipient states, the use of Northern consultancy firms becomes a matter of choice in the quote. The state exercises its own freedom when it engages the expert and binds itself to its expert advice (Rose 2006:159). According to that interpretation, the administration willingly subjects itself to the criteria of the donors and internalises them. This is partly how the programme approach is supposed to encourage the recipient state to perform responsibly and show the willingness to reform, which in turn provides justification for donors to align themselves with its policies and strategies.

The above quoted narratives portray state-donor relations as being rather harmonious, where policies and strategies elaborated with donors are narrated as intentional choices, and where power relations are down played. However, there are important variations between different agents and sometimes even within one agent's narrative. These variations depend on a number of factors including how the narrators

¹⁰⁸ However, in a later conversation Rabiou emphasises that it is the state that formulates the strategies and the documents – where northern consultants come in is where principles formulated on a global level need to be clarified. He is very firm on this point.

relate to me and what discourses they draw upon in a particular instance. In the following section, I look more closely at instances in narratives where power relations are emphasised.

Cooperation as imposition

The statements above all come from mid- and high-level agents in the central administration implicated in the process of planning together with the donors. Agents further from the rooms where the ministry and the donors meet have tended to tell narratives where donors are more frequently represented as external *and* as intruding, imposing and threatening sovereignty. Sometimes they talk of donor impositions as belonging to the past and sometimes they consider impositions inevitable in the future as well. The theme of donors imposing policies is most prevalent when agents talk about different forms of privatisation and the reduction of the role and presence (even if theoretical) of the state in the lives of the population. One regional director, Wada,¹⁰⁹ tells me that the private consultancy firms were forced on the Nigerien water services by the donors. Donors had justified this move in terms of the underperformance of the regional water offices, but Wada argues that this was because they had been under-resourced. The private consultancy firms, he continues, are financed through water user fees, money that could just as well have gone to the regional offices to perform the same activity, which he claims they do much better than the consultancy firms (Wada 2010).

Idrissa, another mid-level agent at the ministry, expresses a similar viewpoint:

The consultancy firms are the fault of the donors, because you¹¹⁰ have demanded it. Although it is the state that has the expertise and know best how to do the job. (Idrissa 2010)

But the state accepts it? I ask. Idrissa responds as follows:

The state hasn't accepted. They have us stuck. We have no money, we can't say anything. (Idrissa 2010)

¹⁰⁹ This is taken from a conversation that was not recorded which is why it is not quoted but summarised.

¹¹⁰ Occasionally Idrissa half-jokingly addresses me as donor, 'you' in this quote refers to me as a possible representative of a donor.

The presence of technical assistants, TAs,¹¹¹ is also narrated, by some agents, as an imposition by donors, as in the following quote by Cissé, the only high level agent at the ministry who is very explicit in his critique of how donors abuse their positions:

We don't have the means to say no to it. We are obliged to accept although we don't think it is good. (Cissé 2008)

Cissé evaluates the effects of the use and behaviour of TAs as follows:

Obviously it has a negative effect, if you don't have confidence in someone. It bothers the agents here. They [TAs] come here, they are educated here, and they become experts on the backs of others. It makes it difficult to cooperate. (Cissé 2008)

The critique against the imposed presence of technical assistants is often also related to a question of capacity and expertise, just as the quote above about the consultancy firms. State agents claim that donors demand that private consultancy firms and technical assistants are used, as part of capacity building and the transfer of competence. Hima, a mid-level agent says:

They used to call it a transfer of competence. It's for the education of the national staff. While very often they send experts who have the same education. How do you want someone with the same grade to educate you? Who has the same grade and come to educate you on the reality of your country. Is it realistic or not realistic? Well, it is possible because we're in need of the funds. (Hima 2008)

¹¹¹ The identity of the technical assistants is interesting. When they talk, they sometimes refer to themselves as part of the ministry by constructing a 'we', while the donors are 'them'. Other times they clearly position themselves outside the ministry, particularly when they make evaluative judgements about 'their' capacity. At the BPO workshop, one of the technical assistants began by introducing himself and the other TA as part of a 'we' of the department for studies and planning, DEP, which caused some murmur and jokes in the room. The character of the TAs is contested also among state agents. One high level official calls them "the famous technical assistants", who are working as spies for the donors. He laughs and says it is a caricature. And then he adds that the TAs are at the ministry and say they are there for the sake of the ministry, to help technically, and then they go to the donors in the evening and have dinner and say this person says this, this one is red etc...(Cissé 2008). However, some of the other agents are much more favourable towards the TAs.

Although the agents readily agree that there is a lack of capacity in terms of resources, human, material and financial, they argue strongly that there is no lack of know-how among state agents. The capacity deficits that are acknowledged are explained as consequences of an economically precarious situation and of political choices such as the exclusion of state agents from practicing their tasks.

The negotiation taking place at the operating budget programming, BPO, workshop, (presented in the beginning of the introductory chapter), is another example of how the use of consultancy firms to perform certain functions is questioned. While Hima and the state agents at the BPO workshop emphasise the capacity of the Nigerien state agents, Rabiou expresses another rationality when he defends the position that the state should perform certain activities:

[b]ut why has the state created its agencies? It is because they should work, right? If someone else should do the work in the place of the agencies they won't do anything then. Still, the state has created its agencies because it has felt the necessity and the utility of these agencies. (Rabiou 2008)

These narratives readily lend themselves to the conclusion that the state agents are defending their own personal interests as their jobs and authority are threatened. However, I find the interpretive frame of self-interest insufficient to understand what the state agents say in their narratives, and I think we can learn more from paying attention to what subject positions the state agents create for themselves. What is it that is being threatened by the privatisation of certain functions, and by the presence of expatriate 'expertise'? Neither Wada, Idrissa, Hima or Rabiou find themselves in positions where their personal jobs are threatened by the use of consultancy firms. Rather, their critique seems to imply a claim that there is internal capacity and expertise within the Nigerien state. Or in Rabiou's case, he questions the use of consultancy firms on the basis of what the state has defined within the realm of state agencies.

The superiority of external expert knowledge is contested, particularly in Hima's and Cissé's quotes. We can understand both of their statements, not only as challenging the value of expert knowledge, but also challenging the notion that the TA role is to provide expertise and suggesting rather that they are instruments of domination who constitute an insult rather than assistance. Dependency and the presence of donors is still not questioned, but it is the way in which certain donors

exercise power in these relations, by excluding the state agencies from performing their functions, that is criticised.

By representing development cooperation as imposition they both emphasise their own capacity for responsibility and question the instrumental logic and smooth implementation of responsabilising techniques. It means they claim capacity to perform the state responsibly, but argue that the way development cooperation is organised undermines the possibility to do so. Questioning the state as an agent of intentional choice they also absolve the state from responsibility for the choices made and their effects.

As we will see later on in this chapter, as well as in chapter 8, the use of consultancy firms to perform certain state functions is a particularly contested area. Not because of its responsabilising logic, but particularly because the state agents argue it is a measure that is dere-sponsibilising the state as it prevents the state agents from performing their properly assigned functions.

So far I have dealt with the way in which dependency and donor presence is naturalised in different ways from different positions. In the next section I treat how and in what shape responsibility can be imagined in terms of control over outcomes in such a context of dependency.

III. CONTROL

To be able to perform responsibly and to be held responsible for an event means that the one who is responsible must be able to act and control outcomes and events. Control simultaneously both promises and demands responsibility. The Paris declaration and the PA-SEHA¹¹², take the form of contracts whereby the Nigerien state is promised the possibility of control at the same time as it commits to self-regulation through performance management.

The programme approach particularly inscribes the recipient as being in control of policies and programmes and thereby as responsible for its own destiny. This is achieved in the programme approach by providing structures for producing and managing information and planning that enable performance management and self-regulation. Elaborate methods for calculating rates of access to water in a decen-

¹¹² Programme d'Appui au Secteur Eau, Hygiène et Assainissement. Institutional reform programme between Danida and République du Niger. For more detail on the programme see chapter 5.

tralised system are expected to give the state access to necessary information that makes it possible to plan and budget for the sector, as well as to monitor and evaluate, which will allow the donors to align themselves to national policies and strategies as well as to monitor and evaluate performance from a distance.

How then do the state agents explain the lack of control (and thereby lack of responsibility) that legitimises development cooperation in the first place? And how do they imagine control in the future? What effects does this have on how responsibility is conceived of?

Outside the control of the state

National policy documents suggest that important factors determining water service provision are beyond the control of the state (Rép du Niger, MH, 2009) a point which is also made in the state agents' narratives. In terms of water as a natural resource, Niger is depicted as well endowed with water.¹¹³ However, the ground water is unevenly distributed across the country and is expensive and technically difficult to exploit in many locations. As a result Niger remains heavily dependent on rainfall for its water supply, and is therefore vulnerable to climatic variability. Djibrilla explains:

Today in Niger we can do everything, make everything, all the nice models. But we have one constraint that we don't control, it is the rain. The rain, if it doesn't fall it is a catastrophe. It is not the Nigerien budget that will solve that; that will fill the hole. It is there permanently, we have to live with it. That is why, the natural constraints that we have, due to climatic variability, alone, can destroy a lot of efforts we make continuously, but that are not seen. That too is a given that we should not loose out of sight when a study of development is made, or when projections are made. (Djibrilla 2007)

In Djibrilla's narrative, Niger is presented as a victim of natural circumstances over which the state has no control. According to state

¹¹³ Apart from the substantial flow of the river Niger, and the decreasing volume of the Lake Chad, groundwater is stated to account for 2.5 billion renewable cubic metres per year, of which 20% are currently exploited, and 2,000 billion non-renewable cubic metres (Rép du Niger, MH, 2009:3) At a meeting these figures are ridiculed by ministry staff and TAs as outdated.

agents, such circumstances negate the efforts invested by the state and donors.

Djibrilla and Zeinabou raise uneven distribution of water resources across the country as another challenge to the state, in terms of maintaining 'national cohesion'. Equal distribution is now a prioritised goal to be achieved through the decentralisation of the MDGs.¹¹⁴ To even out the geographical differences in access further complicates the task for the Nigerien water sector, as it is trying to live up to its obligation to the population as a whole.

The increasing population is presented by the narrators as an additional challenge for the state. The population has increased from 5.6 million in 1980 to 14.2 million in 2009 (IMF 2009). Just to cover that increase in terms of water access is a huge task, which some state agents in the water sector present as a great obstacle to attaining the MDGs:

We were, if you take 1990, the base year for the MDGs, I think we were around 7 million inhabitants in Niger, I don't know, now we are 11, 12 million. The population is increasing rapidly. So no matter the effort, you will lose more time catching up with the population increase than to increase access. (Salissou 2007)

In the narratives, the Nigerien water sector is considered to be well prepared to perform its task. Djibrilla, describes the state as having evolved and become aware of the challenge due to its vast experience of dealing with turmoil, both political and economic. Previous experiences have placed Niger in a difficult situation, but have also provided it with all the preconditions it needs to get out of what Djibrilla calls "a losing game". Although the scene is set for the state to perform its part, the challenge is presented as immense and the achievement of the goal is depicted as being outside the control of the state:

When this plan was elaborated in 2006 we had to construct 22636 modern water points. And 1000 small water systems. And we have to repair 7000 modern water points and 525 small water systems, between 2006 and 2015./.../ For sanitation we have to construct during this period, 2006-2015 37412 sanitation installations. Per

¹¹⁴ Meaning 80% coverage should be achieved in every municipality and not just on national level. The initiative is attributed to the minister of water in 2007-2009, Tassiou Aminou.

year. It's per year. [expresses surprise] So, it's per year starting 2007./.../ It is enormous. (Rabiou 2008)

The extent of the task as it is told by Rabiou, and several other agents, makes it impossible for the state to succeed. The task is just overwhelming. However, several narrators express hope. The economy is emerging, state agents hope that uranium and oil exploitation as well as investments in new infrastructure and cooperation with China may create more favourable circumstances for successful reform. An expression of political will also induces hope, and donor engagement and democratic reform are credited with contributing to this.¹¹⁵

The image presented to me in 2007 and 2008 of the role and responsibility of the state is thus a hesitantly optimistic one, although with reservations regarding factors more or less outside the control of the state such as climatic variability, population growth, and financial crises. Compared to 2001, when many state agents expressed a sense that they had 'no choice' as policies were the result of conditionalities by donors and IFIs, the increasing optimism at the end of the decade seems to create the possibility of imagining a certain responsibility. In the rest of this section I focus on how the state agents narrate the possibility for control in the future as opposed to the past, particularly in relation to the organisation of aid.

How the state lost control in the past

The state agents' stories revolve around how the state and its services have been deprived of responsibility as a result of how aid was organised after independence when the state should have stepped up to its new role. The organisation of aid in projects, the narrators tell us, is the main cause for a malfunctioning administration in the water sector.¹¹⁶ A Nigerien working for a European development agency argues that the projects were even worse than the structural adjustment programmes, SAPs, in terms of their effect on the functioning of the state. Many agents describe the project approach as irrational, over costly, inefficient, as deresponsibilising the state, and disturbing national cohesion. The fragmented way of working generated by multiple pro-

¹¹⁵ Not unequivocally though, as we will see further ahead.

¹¹⁶ It is a general representation of the accumulated effects of projects, yet, most agents present particular exceptions to that rule, referring to projects that work almost as programmes and where there is more of a partnership between donors and the state.

jects deprived the state of control of the sector and thus, according to the agents, deresponsibilised it.

Several agents emphasise lack of information as an important factor explaining why the state had not been able to perform properly, as Idrissa explains:

As I said, if everyone [the donors] work in their corner the state has no control. The state doesn't succeed to control. If you ask today at the ministry how many boreholes have been provided, we don't know. We don't know. There are NGOs that come and construct wells and we don't know where they have made them. We don't have control. Today the number of works, they will tell you there are X installations. Someone else will say, no there are Y, and a third one will say there are Z. (Idrissa 2008)

Idrissa depicts a state that has no control over the provision of water. It lacks information regarding where installations are constructed and in what number.¹¹⁷ In Idrissa's narrative, the donors and the NGOs are separate from the state, they act independently and by doing so deprive the state of control. Without knowledge, Idrissa argues, the state cannot be properly performed. Donor preferences are also used as explanations for the uneven coverage rates across the country, as in Tidjani's words:

At the level of the region for example, there are certain regions that have a coverage rate of 80 percent and others which have 30 percent. And each country, for example Sweden, has its preferences and wants to invest in the Maradi region... and that's not good. Because it has created.... the regions don't follow each other. They are not at the same level. (Tidjani 2008)

Tidjani argues that without control over information, and subjecting itself to donor preferences when it comes to distribution of interventions across the country, the state has not been able to create a coherent system for national water service provision. Several agents review their experience of project approaches critically, as for example Rabiou in the following:

¹¹⁷ In the BPO workshop the absurdity of the situation becomes evident as certain villages have up to four dysfunctional wells, while other villages have none.

[T]he project approach has shown its limits. The projects, the management units particularly, were excessively expensive to the state. When we have looked at the management units, the cost of the units, of the activity of the project management units in the rural sector it was three times the budget of the five ministries in the rural sector, together. It is enormous. And on top of that, the project approach deresponsibilises the administration. Why? Because the project is there, it has a steering committee that is there, that has all its enormous funds, while the state offices have no funds. When the project is finished the classic agencies have to take over, you see. Why? To take care of a large number of pumps that are broken....(Rabiou 2008)

In Rabiou's narrative, the state has not been in control of how funds have been used in the sector. Rather, the organisation of aid in projects has deprived the state of control over available financial resources as the costs of the projects have been enormous. The exclusion of the state and its agents from certain phases of the project thus contributes to the state's lack of control. Rabiou comments on the project approach as follows:

Creating the management units, you can imagine, I am responsible for a division of the ministry but I am on the side in my corner, there is a project unit that has all the resources, who does everything. Me, at the most they invite me when they need a list of the villages where the project can intervene. They ask me to make a list, I make it, I give it to the project, that has everything, its sociologists, animators to do the awareness raising, the one who contract borehole companies, pump companies and all. Me, I am there, they invite me to receptions to see the works, that's it. If the project ends, it's over. We balance the reports, all the post implementation tasks. And there are no resources to do that job. You see. (Rabiou 2008)

Moreover, the projects provide no continuity in the sector, but rather they generate a separation into different phases, which causes problems for the state. When the projects finish they do not take care of, nor provide funds for the post-project phase. Moreover, responsibility requires an actor that is stable over time. Fragmentation and lack of continuity, as Rabiou talks about it, prevents the state from taking responsibility for sustainability in the sector.

In Rabiou's narrative the projects perform tasks that should have been the responsibility of state agents. Rabiou talks of himself as only playing a symbolic part, as being excluded from the role that belongs to him, as a state agent.

Amadou, a top-level agent describes the state as hierarchically subordinate to the projects as they become excessively powerful:

project management units were put in place, and we could see that those units, with the resources at their disposal, became more powerful than the agencies of the state. (Amadou 2008)

In this account, the resources at the disposal of the project management units far exceed the resources of the state and places the units in a superior position in relation to the state offices. Bilal calls the project management units *gluttonous*, as they consume resources that could have provided people with access to water. Hima gives an example:

I give you an example. If there is a technical and financial partner who gives us 5 billion FCFA, of that 5 billion perhaps one billion 200 million will be used to pay for a consultancy firm to do the supervision and control of the work. While in reality, the supervision and control of the work is done by the agents of the water ministry. All the work is done by the ministry and its agents. The consultancy firms are just there to coordinate a bit, do their monthly report, on the basis of the information provided by the technicians. When it would have been better to spend that billion on constructing another water point. (Hima 2008)

In the following quote, Élodie, expresses critique in relation to what used to be, instead of what is now:

When you take certain project operators sometimes they think they are superior to us. At one given moment for example, we as the DEP¹¹⁸, generally we, when we want information it is difficult to get the agents to provide us with information. You see... There are even project coordinators, even the minister, it is a bit difficult, it is very rare that they reply to him to give him certain information. (Élodie 2008)

¹¹⁸ Department of studies and planning.

The state structure is described here as having no power over the projects, the management units are practically autonomous. Élodie tends not to express critique against donors, and frequently talks about *true partnership*, but here he relates to his experience of working as a project coordinator. In his narrative the project coordinators (state agents), as well as ministry agencies, and even the minister, were excluded from the activities of the donors and the NGOs¹¹⁹. The stories rather coherently present the projects as means of undue domination and exclusion of the state and its agencies.¹²⁰

These narratives provide a rationalisation for the failures of a dere-sponsibilised state in the past as it was narrated as having been deprived of control over information as well as implementation and financial management. Moreover the narratives provide opportunities for, if not a reversal of, at least some alleviation of the relations of domination and for preventing exclusion of the state from its central activities in the future.

Imagining control in the future

In the light of the picture given in the quotes above, of the organisation of aid in projects in the past, most agents present the programme approach as the solution to the problem of control in the future,

So it is the choice of Niger to apply the programme approach. And in any case it is also at the international level. The different... all the partners, whether developed countries or developing countries, agreed that to responsabilise the administration we have to choose the programme approach, which responsabilises the agencies of the state. (Rabiou 2008)

Rabiou is placing the state in charge of the situation. In his perception the Nigerien state has chosen the programme approach and the choice is legitimised by the fact that all the partners have agreed to

¹¹⁹ Making the same point in their narratives several state agents bring up a conflict between a branch of the Doctors without borders and the Ministry of Health that was going on at the time. The branch of Doctors without borders was threatened with being banned from Niger as they had refused the minister of health access to their camp where they provided help to undernourished children.

¹²⁰ Although there is a coherence here, it may stand in contradiction to other sections within narratives.

responsibilise the state agencies. In his view, responsabilisation of the administration is the purpose of the reform.

As discussed in chapter 3, the Paris declaration and the PASEHA are contracts that promise the responsabilisation of the state at the same time as they require an internalisation by the state of performance management that allows donors to govern from a distance. The programme approach promises control, as summarised by Idrissa:

With that [programme approach] we know, we control, not only on the level of finance, and not only on the level of output. It makes it possible to control the installations, the constructions and the financing. With the programme approach the state manages well. (Idrissa 2008)

Against the picture given of the past (previous section), Idrissa, in his narrative, now seems to reclaim the role of state agent, and the role of the state in development and water service provision. He tells us that, for the state to be responsible, to manage well, it must also be in a position of control¹²¹.

However, a few mid-level state officials express hope of improvement, but at the same time hesitate a bit, emphasising the need for the government to commit to its engagements. Khamada explains:

The programme approach is good if the question of responsibility is solved. If responsibility is taken. But if it is to individualise things and the directors try to make it a family affair it will not work. (Khamada 2008)

Despite such hesitation, the logic of the programme approach as opposed to the project approach seems to provide a space where state agents can envisage a certain position for themselves and the administration as potentially in control and responsible. They do not envisage this being achieved through a transformation of themselves but

¹²¹ To achieve the control that Idrissa talks about, a major process has been set to work to produce the correct information and to put it to use with the help of performance indicators and technical tools for results-based management. Workshops are held with the newly installed mayors to collect information and to teach them about new methods for measuring access. Visits to the field are organised to control the work of the municipalities.

rather through a transformation of development cooperation, which will provide more space for agency.

From the narratives we learn that explanations of deficiencies in the past open a space for imagining the present and the future differently. State agents conceive of the possibility of state responsibility in new ways, both when it comes to the possibility of expressing voice in state/donor relations and when it comes to the possibility of controlling the outcome of policies and strategies. There seem to be a commitment to the promise of a new possibility of performing the state, both in terms of voice and control, hence to shape 'responsible' state agents. At the same time the new opening may be productively used by the state and its agents to negotiate the terms of their role and responsibility in the water sector in a way that is not fully dominated by development discourse. In the following section I examine how state agents make use of this new opening.

IV. LEADERSHIP

The logic of the ownership approach is that, in order to feel responsible for its policies and programmes, actors representing the state must feel they have chosen those policies and programmes. Furthermore, it must be possible to hold the state, its agencies and representatives, responsible for their actions. Above I discussed how state agents narrate the state as an agent of choice in different ways. Some agents explain that they are enabled to act through a synergetic cooperation, others that they are deprived of agency and choice through donor impositions. In the agents' stories, the programme approach becomes a source of hope, both in terms of the funds it will bring, but also because of the space it provides for the agents to act responsibly and hence to perform leadership in the sector. Wada says that:

if now we have the free choice, and the...how to say it... we have been given the autonomy to take care of our own problems/.../Now we have everything in our hands. (Wada 2008)

What then does free 'choice' come to mean in the context of the programme approach in the Nigerien water sector? As we recall from chapter 3, the programme approach involves a progressive, phased approach. First the donors build the capacity of the state authorities (here, in particular the ministry). Then the state authorities demon-

strate the capacity to lead in the context of programmes. Once this capacity has been demonstrated assistance may take the form of budgetary support. Several donor representatives I talk to question the leadership of the water ministry. In French they are using the expression ‘force de proposition’. In this section I discuss the possibility of leadership as a result of the programme approach.

When particularly asked, several agents are firm in their assertions that the administration shows leadership. Recall the quote by Élodie, a high-level agent, who states that the ministry has not chosen its preferred form of support, whether sector support or budget support because:

As I told you we are elaborating, really. Now, in reality it is an exchange, for example in the consultation framework, where we will discuss with the partners. And together we will see what must be put in place. You see. But otherwise, openly, all the... you cannot say “Look here what has been chosen”, no. (Élodie 2007).

In this explanation by Élodie, of how cooperation and decision making works, he emphasises how decisions are made together with donors. For the state to express a prior choice seems to be out of the question. Élodie’s statement can be read in several ways. It may indicate that he is simply adjusting to the current institutionalisation of dialogue forums, and expressing a loyalty, to this. It may also suggest that the state is simply so enmeshed in its role as beneficiary of aid, that its voice has been quieted. Finally, it can be seen as an expression of what the Nigerien state is today: a state that expresses its will in dialogue with donors.¹²²

Some agents talk of a lack of leadership, but when they do so it is in terms of others lacking leadership rather than themselves. One agent, Wada, explains that critique against current development practice is seldom articulated, neither to the donors, nor between the agents to each other.¹²³ He thinks there is a fear of expressing opinions that are critical of the donors. There is a mentality in Niger, he says, where people are so focused on receiving the money that they do anything, accept anything and don’t dare to raise their voice.

¹²² It is also possible that Élodie is avoiding to pronounce himself on the issue as it might be better for the ministry to have fonds commun, while the ministry of finance might want budget support, thus making it a contentious issue.

¹²³ This is taken from a conversation that was not recorded which is why it is not quoted but summarised.

However, there are agents in the administration who can be seen as creating room for manoeuvre and space for leadership. As we will see in the following example from a meeting I attended between the ministry and Danida. This took place during the elaboration of the second phase of the water and sanitation programme, PASEHA. At that meeting a proposal developed by consultants was debated and several minor but interesting negotiations took place.

One discussion concerned the allocation of funds, where 6% of the PASEHA budget was dedicated to capacity building and 9% to technical assistance, which was considered an imbalance by senior officials and the secretary general.¹²⁴ Although the budget post for the TA was left untouched, in the end the Secretary General decided that 'not yet allocated funds' should be dedicated to capacity building to remedy the imbalance.

The Secretary General, together with two other officials, further argued that the donors must support the state to reach a level where the task they have taken on can be performed. For example, there must be stationery, there must be toner and paper in the printer, they argued. In line with their general policies, a Danida representative declined to support the recurring costs of the administration. The Secretary General argued that the state has made great improvements and wants the donors to appreciate its efforts and have confidence in the state. When the consultant who formulated the document argued that there was no use discussing what cannot be discussed, the Secretary General answered that no rules are cut in stone. "It is a matter of negotiating power", he stated.

These minor debates can be seen as a way in which the state is engaged in small decisions to create a sense of voice while the important decisions are made elsewhere. Still, these are the issues that line ministries *can* negotiate and they have effects in terms of how the state is performed. Not only do they have effects in the meeting room, but they have effects on the small means by which the state's functioning is determined. The possibility of the state to perform its role is shaped

¹²⁴ The Secretary General and other participants in the meeting protested against the high costs of technical assistants in the second element of the programme, related to the regions of Diffa and Zinder, which exceeded several other important costs. Of the total cost of the PASEHA 2007-2009 element 1 central level, of FCFA 1.154.761.848 (approx 1.760.000 euro) the technical assistants cost 686.400.000 (almost 1.050.000 euro), i.e. more than 60 percent of implementation costs (PASEHA October 2006:61).

by its access to certain resources.¹²⁵ But these negotiations can also be argued to create ‘a sense of agency’, i.e. a possibility to act by bringing about something new that was not there before, such as donor funding of recurrent costs.

More importantly, the consultants who did the elaboration of the second phase of the PASEHA suggested the delegation of responsibility for infrastructure provision, including planning, financial control and project supervision, to private consultancy firms¹²⁶. Rabiou, a high level agent, began to speak and brought up what the consultant’s report said about project supervision.¹²⁷ Rabiou claimed those functions should be performed by the state since the purpose of the programme approach was to responsabilise the agencies of the state, to delegate them to private actors, Rabiou argued, was a contradiction.

The Secretary General supported Rabiou and emphasised that the purpose of the programme approach was to responsabilise the administration, which requires that state agencies take responsibility for project supervision. It should not be a matter of discussion, he stated. He further demanded that the perspectives of both the ministry and the Danish development cooperation officials be clearly stated in the report. And if Denmark was not ready for the programme approach, that should also be stated, he said.

The consultant’s position and formulation in the report suggests an unreflecting commitment to keep circumventing the technical offices and the administration of the state through the privatisation of its functions. The Secretary General, on the other hand, argued for an active role for the agencies of the state in the provision of water services in the regions. Rabiou comments on the meeting afterwards,

¹²⁵ In the report *Investing for Development* (UN 2005a:198) it says: “Although long-term sustainability and capacity building in the poorest countries require support for recurrent costs – such as salaries and maintenance – donors have historically refused to support them, thus preventing any hope of *true* sustainability”. – the logic of not supporting recurrent costs is basically that it is the state’s proof of commitment to reform, notwithstanding the presence of resources or not.

¹²⁶ Maître d’oeuvre, according to the report is a professional who realise for the purpose of a client (maître d’ouvrage), advice, studies and guidance of work, consisting mainly of conceiving of a project; prepare call for tender, direct the work realised by the companies, verify the conformity of their execution, control payments and assist the client for the reception of the works (Rép du Niger 2010b:4).

¹²⁷ This debate concerns the same issue that was discussed at the BPO workshop referred to in the introductory chapter.

What was proposed by the consultant for PASEHA 2 [concerning project supervisor] is a drawback. We have told them, we have explained our perspective, what we understand by project supervisor. But they modify the concept. /.../ You saw the reaction of the Secretary General. He told him [the consultant] to write what we have said. Obviously, we have understood that he [the consultant] had had instructions from someone else to make the changes [referring to Danida staff]. What they want is to delegate the responsibility for the infrastructure to consultancy firms from the North. We've said no, that belongs to the past. Technical assistants alright, in the programme technical assistants have been included. But what they have proposed is something else. It is not the programme approach. It is the project approach that has returned in another form. It means the offices of the state are there but they don't do anything. All the things the regional administrations should do they've said no, we'll leave that to consultancy firms. Why a consultancy firm when the administration is there? (Rabiou 2008)

What Rabiou and the Secretary General do in the meeting, and what Rabiou does in his narrative, is to claim power over the definition of what the programme approach should be. By doing so on this particular issue, i.e. the delegation of project supervision to private actors, he also claims an important role and responsibility for the state to play in water service provision. They make this claim in the light of how past experiences of the projects are understood as having dereponsibilised the state. This negotiation of the implementation of the instrumental logic of the programme approach hence seems to have an important emancipatory potential as the promise of responsabilisation is taken seriously by Nigerien interlocutors.

Rather than accepting inclusion based on compliance with donor demands for privatisation, they claim power over definition of what ownership in the shape of the programme approach means. By pointing at the exclusionary practices of the previous approach, they claim another kind of responsible inclusion – as active agents. This, I argue, shapes how it is possible to think of the state in the sector, including how it is possible to think of the state in relation to the population in terms of responsibility.

Having analysed how state agents negotiate the meaning of responsibility in the context of national ownership in their narratives, in the final section of this chapter I engage more closely with the question of

whose voice can be heard in development cooperation, and how these voices are shaped by the way in which different positions are inhabited.

V. WHO CAN SPEAK AND WHAT CAN BE SAID?

As discussed above, responsabilisation in the shape of leadership requires voice. State agents may (or may not) exercise such leadership in a way that is not already inscribed in the discourse about development cooperation. However, the question of the extent to which voice is used and by whom is complex and requires further attention.

Some agents are critical about what they describe as a fear among other agents to speak out. Wada tells me the following story of how an agent from a European cooperation agency questioned the methods of the ministry's technical agents when they travelled around in the villages to conduct sensitisation workshops.¹²⁸ In Wada's narrative the donor representative thought the budgeted fuel costs for transport were too high, and he thought the villagers should take the trouble to come to the regional office for the workshops. No agent in the room objected, although they knew that the villagers would never walk that distance, nor find the money to pay for transport to meet donors who want to impose something on them. At this point in the story Wada intervened and explained the situation to the donor representative who was persuaded and changed his view. Wada ends the story:

If I hadn't said anything, the other state agents in the room would simply have erased the clause from the contract although they knew how important it was, only because they are afraid to contradict the donors. (Wada 2010)

Wada explains that the recipient state agents tend to just say what the donors want. This makes me raise questions concerning who can speak, both within the administration and to donors, but also what can be said, two questions at the centre of the ownership debate. It was argued above that we may see certain openings where the state agents can use its voice and negotiate the terms of the development cooperation relationship and thereby shape the nature and extent of their own responsibility. However, the way state agents can speak and what they

¹²⁸ Summarised because too long to quote.

can say depend not only on their professional position, but also on how they shape their subject position more generally.

I will give an example. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, there are different stories of current state-donor relations, where some agents describe a rather harmonious relationship and others emphasised the coercive nature of the relationship. On my third field trip for this project I had follow up conversations with agents I had previously interviewed. I ask them to reflect on these different positions. Idrissa comments on my observation by explaining that:

The ones who say that the donors do not impose are the ones who have been politicised. The ones who accept. Technicians who become politicians are dangerous. They tell the president that everything is fine. (Idrissa 2010)

First of all it should be noted that ‘politician’ is not meant in its literal sense, but used by agents to refer to state agents who have received important positions within the ministry as a result of their membership in political parties, and need to take political considerations into account in order to keep that position. In Idrissa’s narrative, the political position is dangerous because of how it makes state agents adapt to what they think can be said in relation to donors. As they have become politicised they tend to accept donor impositions as well as adjust what they tell the president.

Idrissa continues by telling me a story about a new water system in a city with a very difficult geology and continuous water problems. In 2010 China had just constructed a new water system and a state agent, from Société Patrimoine des Eaux de Niger, SPEN, controlled it. He actually knew his job, Idrissa tells me, and he should have warned the ministry that the system was dysfunctional. Instead he reported that ‘it will hold for fifty years’.¹²⁹ Idrissa continues to say that:

After two years it is now broken and there is a serious water problem/.../. Just because he was afraid to tell it the way it was. If he had made the warning it could have been corrected. Now people have no water. They [‘politicians’] are dangerous. (Idrissa 2010)

I ask him if the agents talk about this between themselves. He answers:

¹²⁹ Summarised because too long to quote.

We talk. But the ones who tell it the way it is are the ones who don't have the right to speak. The ones who have the right to speak, they don't say anything. The one who tells it the way it is, is the technician who relies on his value as a technician. Not as a politician. The donors have to work with them. (Idrissa 2010)

Idrissa makes a distinction between the agent technician, and the agent politician. The technician relies on his value as technician, but the ones who get promoted to positions where their voice matters become 'politicians' and no longer tell things the way they are. The 'politician' is thus made complicit in a malfunctioning water sector, as in the Zinder case above. Idrissa himself, and his fellow technicians, are presented as victims, both of donors and of 'politicians'.

Politics has ruined the public services, Idrissa says, and it is the fault of the donors who brought democracy.¹³⁰ When I ask if it was better during the military reign, he says that even the military have to become 'politicians' now. In the light of narratives of a well functioning public service in the 1970s, the introduction of democracy *and* privatisation (as a result of donor imposition) are narrated by Idrissa as explanations for the current problems (on an institutional level). While Idrissa doesn't develop his argument, another high-level state agent, Zeinabou, argues that:

It is possible that a military dictatorship could manage better, but we are a democracy and I am not for dictatorship. I am for democracy where people can express themselves freely. But it is a mess, the state is mixed with the individual. Too many people are employed, there is nepotism. What is missing is the rigour of the state, that's the source of the problem. (Zeinabou 2008)

In Idrissa's narrative, the democratic system has made people sensitive to political considerations, which has had consequences for his own professional situation. With his 25 years in the sector, and considering his current position, he thinks he should logically have been promoted to director. Instead a person who is rather new at the ministry and much less qualified has been given the position. He learned of

¹³⁰ Another high-level agent says Niger had impeccable management. *Niger started to have problems with the path towards democracy. There were many lapses at this time... but in earlier times Niger was well managed (Djibrilla 2007)* At the same time this process has given the country much experience which to Djibrilla explains why they are now ready to take on the challenges they face.

this on the day of our conversation, and Idrissa's frustration was palpable.

I returned to the question why some agents claim that the donors impose policies while others do not during my third meeting with Hima. Before our meeting, and as a result of the reorganisation of the ministry after the military coup in 2010, Hima was promoted. In his earlier narrative of water sector reform, he referred several times to the privatisation of certain state functions being imposed by the donors. In his new professional position he talks instead about development cooperation as a site for compromise. To talk about imposition is too tedious, he says. When I comment that he had talked in precisely those terms, he laughs. According to him, people who say that donors impose themselves have never set up a project.

When I ask him why he and others become defensive on the topic he says:

It is because we feel we need to defend the sovereignty of the state.

As we talk about what I saw as a change in his representation of the relations of development cooperation he smiles and says:

Perhaps I have already become a politician [referring to his new professional position]. (Hima 2010)¹³¹

Hima jokes about himself having become a 'politician'. Does he do just what Idrissa describes when technicians become 'politicians'? When he comes into a higher professional position where *he is allowed to speak*, he changes his story about both donor-state relations and about privatisation of supervision and control.

How can his positions be understood? It may be that the subject position he is taking for himself in his new professional role requires him to defend the sovereignty of the state. This doesn't mean to literally defend the sovereignty of the Nigerien state, but to defend the representation of it as sovereign and thus as capable, as owner of its own strategies, as leader in the formulation of policies and strategies. He is entering into a professional position where he will personally engage in dialogue with donors, a situation which may not be tenable unless it can be understood as a site for compromise rather than im-

¹³¹ This conversation has not been recorded but his statement is literally quoted.

sition. In this position it may no longer be relevant to make a clear distinction between autonomy and dependence.

What is significant here is how Hima and Idrissa shape positions and possible agency for themselves and others. How do the respective positions of Idrissa and Hima shape their agency, as well as that of the state? It is possible to argue that Hima is self-governing in a position where his agency and the possibility of him exercising responsibility relies on the internalisation and reproduction of the logic of development cooperation. Idrissa's position, on the other hand, can be seen as one from which he can destabilise the discourse of aid as cooperation by 'telling it the way it is', although in a context of speaking not to donors, but to his fellow agents¹³². Idrissa points at the hierarchical order and questions it, while Hima does not, and thereby reproduces the discourse of development as cooperation. It is possible that he is performing power, at the same time as he is creating a space for agency.

What have we learned?

How do state agents conceive of agency and choice in relation to autonomy and how do they conceive of state-donor relationships as shaping agency and choice, and hence of the possibility of responsibility? From the narratives we learn that the donor presence is naturalised and that rather than imagining autonomy the agents reframe dependency in a way that allows the possibility of agency. Dependency is rationalised as a shared responsibility for the future, necessitated by a precarious economic situation, and legitimated by globalisation and increasing interconnectedness across space, as well as the possibility of shifting positions over time. These rationalisations seem to allow agents to claim a shared responsibility and solidarity.

Dependency, as it is narrated by the state agents, is the condition under which the state works. However, the state agents do not tell a coherent story. Instead, cooperation can be understood as either inclusive or exclusive both depending on the position from which it is narrated. Some state agents emphasise the synergy with which donors and the state cooperate. However, the state agents who narrate a harmonious relationship tend to be mid- and high-level agents who are directly engaged in dialogue with donors. There are other agents who

¹³² It should be noted though, that he frequently refers to me as a future donor representative.

rather tend to narrate cooperation as a set of practices, which tend to exclude the state and allow the donors impose their will over the state. These state agents see lack of capacity being used to justify practices which exclude the state. However, their explanation is that the way that aid practice undermines the state is the main reason for deficiencies rather than any internal capacity issues. This explanation provides a strong claim for internal capacity to be acknowledged and for the state to be included in water service provision activities.

How then, do the state agents relate responsibility to control and how is the state narrated as either being in control or lacking control? In general the state is narrated as having done what it can under the circumstances. However, factors outside of the control of the state, such as water endowments, climatic circumstances and population increase, as well as the organisation of aid in projects relieve the state from at least some of the responsibility for poor access to clean water by the population. The state agents describe the earlier project modalities as having deprived the state of control in terms of information, planning, use of funds, continuity and activity. Against this background the programme approach promises a bright future where the state is in control. A change is imagined as a result of a transformation of development cooperation, rather than a transformation of the state and its agents. This notwithstanding, the state agents anticipate being able to act with more freedom and anticipate the state being able to take more responsibility. There is some hesitation though, mostly among junior agents, who are unsure whether the prescribed procedures will be followed by the administration.

What then, can we learn from the narratives with regard to the meaning of state responsibility? What do the state agents take responsibility for? From reading the narratives we learn that state responsibility in the context of dependence and poverty, is considered to be a matter of being able to perform certain functions that are considered central to being a state, and that can be imagined in the foreseeable future. This means they are responsible for providing people with water rather than for autonomous decision making. Furthermore, the state agents imagine state responsibility as the ability to perform state functions in continuing cooperation with donors. While this means taking responsibility for the process of developing, rather than for becoming developed, this imagination provides a certain room for manoeuvre and may enable state agents to take leadership, and to negotiate what the role of the state should be.

7. Delegation of responsibility to local actors

If the state constructs something, in return you must maintain it. Because the state constructed it for you. (Salissou 2007, high level state agent)

Delegating responsibility for water services management to local communities has been a long term process in Niger. As we recall from chapter 3, to delegate responsibility to local communities has been seen by its proponents as a panacea for states that fail to take responsibility for service provision. Enabling the population to have a voice and giving it a stake in the management of water service provision is considered to have a responsabilising effect on the population as well as on the state. Critics, however, argue that delegation has merely implied an off loading of responsibility by the state to a population that lacks the resources to execute delegated functions. In their narratives the Nigerien state agents weave together the promises of delegation with their representations of the population and what role and responsibility it required from the state and its agents.

This chapter, like the previous one, is concerned with how state agents talk about the reform. As such the chapter does not provide an assessment of the reform, nor does it seek to make comment on the accuracy of narrator accounts of the reform. It looks at narratives as cases of meaning making, and examines how narrators create positions for themselves that make sense to them.

This chapter is organised as follows: I start by looking at how the decision to delegate responsibility to local communities is made sense of in terms of choice and intentionality and how the state appears as an actor that deals with emerging problems in a pragmatic manner.

Thereafter I focus on the issue of control and how delegated responsibility is seen to shape the possibility of the state taking responsibility for water service provision. In the second part of the chapter I focus on how the state agents in different ways place the central (and regional) state at the centre of water service provision, as owner of the water and as provider for the population.

Before starting it is important to point out that the element of the reform which involves delegating responsibility to local communities concerns the rural sector, and to some extent the semi-urban sector, whereas water service provision in the urban sector is managed by the privatised national water company.

I. CHOICE, INTENTIONALITY AND PRAGMATISM

How do the state agents narrate the choice and agency of themselves and the state when it comes to delegating responsibility to local communities? In this section I look at how the state agents tell the story of delegation, focusing on how they narrate the rationale for reform. This is done both to see how the state agents conceive of the state as actor in this process, but also to see how they make sense of shifts in ideas about what the role and responsibility of the state should be. As we will see, pragmatism is the common thread that binds the stories together. The subject position the state agents create for the state is one that adapts rationally to harsh circumstances to the best of its ability.

From the idea of a welfare state to a focus on core functions

The changed role of the state? Yes, well, you know we have moved from a welfare state that did everything. Everything was expected from the state. To a state that focuses its interventions on the essentials. (Amadou 2008)

In the introduction to his narrative, Amadou, a high level agent who has worked for the water ministry for more than 20 years and has occupied several central positions, expresses the view that Niger used to be a welfare state. In Amadou's narrative, it was a welfare state in the sense that the state was expected to take comprehensive responsibility for welfare. What is important is not what his story tells us about what the state was actually like, but how his narrative of the past

shapes his view of the present. Rather than being an ideological choice, the move away from the welfare state model was a rational response to experience and circumstances. A welfare state that was responsible for 'everything' made sense at the time, but as his story unfolds the state showed its limits and the reform process is narrated as an 'evolution' achieved through learning by doing under certain circumstances. In a similar way Djibrilla states:

At the time the state told the population "don't touch, the infrastructure belongs to the state". So noone could touch it, even when it broke down, it was the state that came. The state maintained wells and boreholes. The state maintained and so the population was used to always having the services of the state. (Djibrilla 2007)

The state in Djibrilla's story was all-encompassing, effectively excluding the population from engagement in management of the water supply and related services. At the same time, the Nigerien state was not able to successfully perform the role of a welfare state in the water sector, in the sense that it was not able to guarantee access to safe water to the whole population. Nevertheless, in Djibrilla's and several of the other state agents' narratives, it is as if the state did perform in a distant past. Although the state did not manage to fulfil the role of the welfare state, the narratives point at the shift from the *idea* of a welfare state to a state that focus on essentials, as Amadou puts it in the above. The fact that the state did not perform, does not mean it was not expected to, nor that it might not have been successful had the circumstances been different.

Looking back, the state agents talk of a state that was considered the owner of infrastructure, and was therefore exclusively responsible for its maintenance. The state inhabited an exclusive position in water service provision. This means that making water services work today is not just about filling the void of a deficient central state, but a matter of changing the conceptualisation of what the water infrastructure is, who it belongs to and who can and should take care of it, and therefore also how responsibility is conceived of in the relations between the state and the population. I will return to this issue at the end of this chapter, because the position of the state, in the centre, as owner and provider of water, continues to shape the way that some agents make sense of service provision in the present.

The narrators talk about state-led development during the early decades after independence as having been justified at the time, considering the extremely low access to safe water. Hima explains as follows:

The water points that were created, their maintenance was taken care of by OFEDES.¹³³ It was a state company. ... At that time the number of water points was limited. The essential thing was to give water to the maximum number of people. Water, I say simply water, to the maximum number of people. When IDWSD [the international decade for water and sanitation] started, around 20 percent of the population had access to improved water. It was necessary to act quickly. It was necessary to come to the villages. The people were not engaged, it was the state that came, that would provide a water point. (Hima 2008)

The urgency expressed in Hima's narrative provides one rationalisation for the all-encompassing role of the state and its responsibility to act. Another agent, Illya, sets the particular form of the state in a broader historical context. He explains:

Our states are relatively young. They are practically creations... it is not the same process as in the occident for example. So, considering the context when our states were created, according to me, a certain strong presence by the state was necessary to set the structural base or even a social minimum, it was in any case necessary to give the state the attributes of existence. (Illya 2010)

Illya's quote rationalises the all-encompassing state in a broader sense. In his story the strong presence of the state was necessary in order to enable the Nigerien state to become established. If Niger could do it all over again, it would have had to do the same thing. Hence it was a necessary result of the particular postcolonial situation.

Although a state that performed all the functions in the water sector would be inconceivable in contemporary policy dialogues, as well as in state agent imaginaries, and a disengaged population would be similarly unthinkable, several agents talk about it as logical at a certain point in time. In Hima's narrative this was a time when state agents were highly qualified with extensive experience of working with water service provision, as he explains in the following:

¹³³ Office des Eaux de Sous-Sol. For more detail see chapter 5.

Ten or fifteen years ago implementation was by technicians from the Ministry of Water, who were just supported by technical assistants, by technical advice that were put in place by the donors. I think that at the time the agents of the ministry were very well trained. Because they were always in the field. (Hima 2008)

Hima also takes professional pride in the OFEDES wells that were of very high quality and are still praised and widely spread in the sub-region:

The OFEDES wells that you have heard about, the large wells, they have been constructed here, by our office. And they are exported to countries in the sub-region. (Hima 2008)

Just like Hima, many narrators describe developments that were promising but that for different reasons were halted.

The subject position that is created for the state is as an ambitious and rational state that responds to the needs of the population and the circumstances within which it acts. It takes responsibility for using methods that were justified at the time, such as the urgent need to move swiftly, the necessity to give the state the attributes of existence as well as the absence of a private sector that could perform (as we will see later). They seem to take the responsibility for the state Niger attempted to be. However, as we learn from the narratives in the following, this type of state soon showed its limits.

Delegation of responsibility as pragmatic

It was first during the international decade for water and sanitation, IDWSD, 1980-1990, that the construction of modern water points really took off with the influx of donor funds. With the heavy investments brought by the IDWSD, the number of water points increased and maintenance became a problem. Amadou explains as follows:

There were many constructions and the resources of the state started to decrease. With the result that the state could no longer guarantee the maintenance of the infrastructure. (Amadou 2008)

By stating that “the state could *no longer*” guarantee maintenance, Amadou indicated that it once had. That was in a particular situation when there had been very few water points. What becomes clear here,

and in several of the other stories is an image of a newly independent state that faces its limitations, rather than a state that fails to manage. In Amadou's narrative, the state repeatedly responds in a rational way to different limitations that emerge. Amadou and several other agents tell me that the state responded by holding regional workshops, where it was concluded that the population must contribute for management to be effective. Amadou explains:

So we evolved from the notion of a right to water for all to the notion of a right to water for all but with an obligation that the beneficiaries of the water points also maintain them. (Amadou 2008)

In somewhat differing ways, the state agents describe the shift in the role of the state and its withdrawal from certain functions as being the result of pragmatism. In the context of a situation of poverty where the resources and capacity of the state were insufficient it was rational and necessary to reform the role of the state. According to Tidjani, OFEDES would inspect all water points every year or every second year but with the increasing number of water points this became impossible. In Hima's narrative, the infrastructure kept breaking down, the state came back to repair it and then it broke down again. Like Hima, many of the narrators note that the exclusion of the population from the process implied a problem:

And in the process we noted that there were insufficiencies because the population wasn't involved, neither in the choice of the type of water point they wanted, nor in the implementation. So we said, "Ah, we have to involve the population". (Tidjani 2008)

Here, Tidjani narrates a responsiveness on the part of the state to new realisations. He continues to explain how sociologists were now brought in to inform the population that the infrastructure was built for them and that they would have to maintain it.

The new organisation, with increased involvement of the population, is presented in the narratives, as a pragmatic solution to a situation where there was no other choice. Different types of organisation of water service provision emerge as adaptations made by the state on the basis of an analysis of current insufficiencies, and of the situation in which the state finds itself, rather than an ideological position regarding what the state should be. Delegation of responsibility at this point in time was rational in order to "make the machine work"

(Djibrilla 2007). Different reforms are explained as adaptations to emerging circumstances, progressive learning and improvement. Within those constraints the agents tell us that reforms are the result of rational analysis of the particular situation. What is presented then is not an irresponsible state causing failure, but a responsible state responding to difficult situations and finding solutions. In the narratives, the reduced role of the state thus seems to be a result of necessity rather than choice. Salissou, talked about the national workshops, held in the early 1980s, where the delegation of responsibility for maintenance to local communities was discussed:

Well, in fact, it wasn't even question of people agreeing or not. The thing imposed itself. It is necessary that the beneficiaries have a role in maintenance to make it work. If not, if they refuse things will continue to break down. You see. Because it was practically imposed. In fact it wasn't a question of agreeing or not agreeing. (Salissou 2008)

In Salissou's narrative *the thing imposed itself*, and the state had to respond by delegating management. If people had refused, they would have ended up without water. Not because the state failed but because people did not take care of the water infrastructure. The delegation of responsibility for management and maintenance thereby emerges as natural, and the population would have to take care of the water because they would also be the ones to suffer from management short-falls.

The absence of an active subject in Salissou's quote is interesting as a marker of depoliticisation. It hides the politics of allocating responsibility for functioning water service provision and the state's offloading the responsibility onto the local population. Instead, the problem "imposed itself". In other stories, the state is the active subject that reacts to an untenable situation. A few agents involve the donors as drivers in the process of delegating responsibility. For instance, Hima explains the first attempt at delegation and the establishment of water management committees as being a result of donor demands:

The partners, at the time we didn't talk about technical and financial partners, we talked simply about donors. We say donors.¹³⁴ They said "no no, listen, we won't always come and inject money like this. We have to find a mechanism that allows us to secure the water points once they are constructed". We asked what? They said you have to create water management committees.... The donors said ok, now we start to see that people are ready to take charge of the new constructions but the problem of maintenance must be solved. So, then they came back with new approaches. The new approach was what? We changed from water management committees to water users' associations. Why? Simply because they wanted to introduce private actors into the management of the small water system. Because when the private operator is in place there must be a water users' association that has statutes and regulations. (Hima 2008)

In Hima's narrative the state had realised the problem with infrastructure that kept breaking down, but the donors are cast as the actors with the possibility of choice and the ability to drive change. The state follows and implements what the donors ask for. Hima relates this in a matter-of-fact way without questioning or evaluating these relations. He did not question the delegation of responsibility. Later on in his story, the reform emerges as rational, as it is set in relation to the representation he makes of the population. In other parts of his story he is not afraid to criticise donor demands, so he does not uncritically accept all that the donors propose. Instead, he paints a picture of the need to implicate the population in water management as being self-evident.

It is still indicative that Hima is in a minority among the agents who explain the reform as being a response to requests made by the donors. There are others, such as Illya and Djibrilla, who point at a general trend in international development discourse regarding the role of the state, without identifying the donors as being responsible for setting the agenda. In Illya's and Djibrilla's narratives, Niger is narrated as one among equals who are constrained by global trends. However, Hima maintains that the Nigerien state evolves together

¹³⁴ The terminology of partners has not completely taken over in the vocabulary, most agents alternate between partners and donors. A few agents who are more critical towards donors seem to consistently use donors, others who want to portray a more harmonious relationship consistently use partners. Others, such as Hima, explicitly point at the shift.

with the donors, “it is a way of functioning”, as argued in the previous chapter. It is worth pointing out that the policies and strategies that are being implemented are in most narratives explained as being the result of an internal process of learning, while they are at the same time narrated as perfectly compatible with the latest trends in development management. This creates a position for the Nigerien state not as different, as deviant or as opposed to global discourse but as being the same, yet facing particular constraints.

The state agents as resilient

Rather than taking the lead in shaping its water sector strategies the state that appears in the stories is a resilient state. As Hima says, the delegation of responsibility to local communities has evolved in a particular way, “[w]e are progressing through experimentation” (Hima 2010). The state is not narrated as driving its own destiny, but as evolving as a result of circumstances beyond its control, and responding to a situation of poverty and donor demands. As Idrissa puts it:

That’s the donors, now and then they change. “Voilà, that system isn’t good, we have to change to another one”. It means today, every second year, third year, they will find another system, and we have to change. “That has to be changed, now you have to have SDR”.¹³⁵ We cannot stop them. They will say, “Ah, that doesn’t work anymore”. I don’t know what they mean by not working... It affects the work a lot. Because when you start something, and you are mid-way, they tell you “Ah, you have to change”, it’s no good. Now you say you are going to the hospital, half way there, I say Stina, come back. Is that good? To say what? If when changing, I tell you what to do, you leave once and don’t come back, that’s fine. But you leave again and when you come to the door I say, Stina, come back again. That’s the problem. That’s why I say they will always continue. We have to complete a process to see if it is good or not. (Idrissa 2008)

The experience of constantly changing strategies in Idrissa’s narrative implies that the state agents always expect and adapt to changes “that practically impose themselves”. Responsibility for what comes

¹³⁵ Rural Development Strategy.

when a process is completed becomes less relevant than being able to adapt to change.

Amadou gives expression to the resilience of the state in a slightly different manner, by pointing at how delegation is a result of the need to adapt to straitened circumstances:

Water is a right according to our constitution. It means we have to make sure that the limited funds that we have, the few funds that are placed at Niger's disposal, we have to make use of them in a rational manner. That is the role of the state. (Amadou 2008)

In Amadou's account, the role of the Nigerien state in the water sector seems to be to respond to situations in such a way as to make the most of limited opportunities. The resources at its disposal are severely limited and unpredictable because of the uncertainty of flows of aid. Marou makes a similar comment about his experience in the field:

It is in fact the reality of things that bring forth certain solutions, people reflect, they find mechanisms to be able to manage a certain situation with the money they have. And their capacity. It is the situation that is real, that imposes it. Nothing else..I think it is the situations in the field that obliges people to struggle through. While waiting for better days. (Marou 2010)

Again the state and its agents are taking responsibility for the problems that emerge. They do so in a resilient way, dealing with the uncertainty of the future. The way the agents make sense of how the state has taken responsibility in the past feeds into its promise to be responsible in the future by managing problems pragmatically.

When the performance of the Nigerien state is about responding to difficult situations at any given moment, then choice and intentionality becomes displaced by necessity and resilience. The ambition to responsabilise the state becomes destabilised as in their stories the state agents do not seem to take responsibility for not achieving the goals, but for the effort made. The agency and responsibility of the state and its agents conceived of in the narratives comes forth as a function of the state's current position, over which it has little control. The state agents seem to be conceiving of a responsibility for 'being developing', i.e. for how the state acts in that marginal space of un-

derdevelopment (Mudimbe 1988), rather than for a future goal of development.

In the following section I pay more attention to the element of control, both the control that is promised by the programme approach and to how the state agents conceive of control and how this shapes their conception of responsibility.

II. CONTROL

To be responsible, the one making a decision must also be able to exert control over outcomes of that decision. In this section I look at how the state is narrated as being more or less in control of the outcome of policies and strategies. This particularly concerns how the delegation of responsibility to local communities shapes the ability of the state to control service provision. I also look at how the agents narrate control as a function of the state.

Offloading responsibility – losing control

As was discussed in chapter 3, delegation of responsibility and the withdrawal of the state from local service provision has been argued to be a matter of creating self-reliant populations (Duffield 2007:18). Local self-reliance as a development goal becomes particularly important when the state is expected to fail to execute the functions assigned to it, and/or when donors for different reasons want to avoid supporting the state and prefer to address themselves directly to local communities.

In Niger, the initial attempt to make local communities manage their water points was made in the mid 1980s. However, that communities had to rely on themselves did not necessarily lead to self-government as expected. In several of the agents' stories, handing over the infrastructure, appealing to the population's agency and sense of citizenship in order to make them self-governing in terms of water did not produce the expected effect in many cases. Rabiou states, [s]elf-government, it is true, has shown its limits"¹³⁶ (Rabiou 2008)

While this initial move implied a direct disengagement of the state from some of its assumed functions, subsequent reforms have includ-

¹³⁶ In the quote Rabiou refers to small water systems, not to manual pumps. The funds collected in small villages with wells equipped with manual pumps were according to Rabiou not important enough for self-government to be a problem.

ed a requirement for the state to engage closer with setting up an organisation that will govern the population to govern themselves properly. While the state is still responsible for initial investments in infrastructure, the water management system is gradually transferred to local communities and municipalities. The state agents tell the story of delegation to local communities as the creation of an uncontrollable situation with consequences for how new solutions are conceived of. As we will see the agent's representations legitimise a certain logic of government and responsabilisation of the population. However, in the second part of this section we learn from the narratives that the ways in which the population is represented have other effects as the narratives legitimise a closer presence of the state agents in the lives of the population.

Delegation to local communities is generally rationalised in terms of the limitations of the state. Idrissa explains as follows:

Because if the state doesn't disengage, it will not work. Today, if I construct a borewell for you, you are there, you use water, but you don't care for the water point, if it breaks down, I have to come back to repair it. That cannot work. It means other villages will not benefit. That is why the state has said no, every village has to take care of its own water points. (Idrissa 2008)

The first initiatives to delegate responsibility to local communities, during the 1980s, are represented as natural and rational in the state agents' stories. However, according to the narrators, at the time little consideration was given to the effect of local politics on the management of water. As the state agents' narratives proceed, they bring up problems that arose with local management. The narrators primarily give three interrelated reasons for the failure of community management of water infrastructure: first, a lack of ownership, second, village chiefs who abuse their power, and third, the inability to govern village chiefs due to the absence of relevant legislation.

First, the villagers are considered not to have taken ownership of the constructions and treat them as their own. Several agents talk of the villagers as still considering that the infrastructure belongs to the state:

In the villages the population doesn't come together to manage their common resources. They still think that water infrastructure belongs to the state. (Joseph 2008)

Like Joseph does in this quote, many agents emphasise the lack of a sense of ownership of the infrastructure and comment on how the population expect the state to do everything, or at least that they expect someone else to maintain it. Whether Rabiou relies on experiences from Nigerien villages or on assumptions about the tragedy of the commons (Hardin 1968), he emphasises the inability of local communities to manage public goods:

It is true that it [community management] doesn't work everywhere, because when you say that it is a public good noone seriously works to preserve it. (Rabiou 2008)

The narratives indicate a resistance among the population to becoming self-governing, and hence to carry responsibility in case of failure.¹³⁷ More importantly for this thesis is what the state agents do with the representations of the population as evading responsibility. By contradicting and questioning the possibility and benefits of community management, the state agents legitimise other possible ways of governing. As we will see, these include, privatisation, and/or a closer state presence.

The position articulated by Rabiou, that noone takes care of that which is public, can be expected to shape the possibility of imagining responsible local management of common goods in the future, as well as the possibility for functioning systems of private management.¹³⁸

The second line of argument used by the narrators to explain the failure of delegating to local communities involves, village chiefs being made the culprits for failed water management. They are cast as abusing their power and embezzling funds, or using them for other productive purposes, such as buying seeds. It was Wada who brought up *other productive purposes*, and seemed to express an understanding of the difficult situation of poverty in which many village chiefs find themselves. Most narrators however, are not similarly sympathetic. As a consequence of the reported inability of village chiefs to manage

¹³⁷ I am grateful to the participants at the ADHOC (Analysing Discourse: Hands-On Conference) workshop, at the Department of Child and Youth Studies, Stockholm University, June 14-15 2012, for pointing at this possible interpretation.

¹³⁸ Tidjani Alou (2008) has shown how in some cases delegated management can potentially lead to an increased understanding of water as a common good. Yet it does so under particular circumstances where the organisation of delegated management has been performed successfully due to responsible leadership in the village.

funds, infrastructure deteriorated and no funds were available for renewal and repair. Djibrilla explains:

They empty the cash-box and when the installation breaks down they have no money for renewal. So we were back to square one, the state had to intervene again. Just because a minority monopolise and embezzle the funds. (Djibrilla 2007)

In this framing of the problem the state has to come back and repair as local management fails. A few exceptions to this story are provided. Rabiou, for example, argues that the villagers failed to maintain the water infrastructure because the material for repair was not made available to them. In other words he holds the state responsible for this failure. However, in general, the communities and the chiefs in particular are held responsible by the state agents for not managing to take proper care of their water points.

The explanation given in the stories such as Idrissa's below is that lines of accountability did not work. This, he argues, was because there were no performance contracts and no enforcement. Because of the lack of regulation, and the strong position of chiefs in Nigerien society and politics, the chiefs or committees could not be brought to justice for mismanagement. Idrissa expresses it as follows:

So a village chief, even if he spends the money you cannot bring him to justice. To whom? He is the judge. So he embezzles the funds. And if it breaks down the pump is there, closed, and people don't have water. (Idrissa 2008)

Idrissa, Djibrilla, Rabiou and Joseph, and several other agents, point at the lack of control caused by initial delegation of responsibility, and the consequences for people's access to water. As a consequence of this perceived lack of control, a system is required that enables control to be established. However, rather than creating, or returning to, a system where the state controls directly, a system consisting of technologies that produce self-regulation by local actors, is put in place.

Services that serve to govern – contractual implication

Representations of the limitations of the state and the failure of local actors to self-govern legitimize the introduction of risk and the evalua-

tion of profit and loss as a responsabilising technology. Idrissa continues:

That's why we have said that we need to take someone [a private actor] who is there. Who, even if he makes a mistake, the village chief can talk to him. That's what has been put in place. And in addition this organisation must be strengthened by putting in place an association that represents the population, that oversees the work the man is doing. And that association also monitors what the private operator puts in the bank account. (Idrissa 2008)

In Idrissa's story, as in several others, the delegation of management to a private operator seems to be a self-evident choice. As such, the alternative of regulating local management is silenced. Hima comments in a similar way:

Because if money is embezzled the water management committee will not be brought to justice because there is no regulation. You cannot deal with them. So they [the donors] said well, listen, that is another lacuna. There is no water law, there is nothing. So create water users' associations that are recognised at the Ministry of Interior Affairs and entrust management to a private company. Now we know where responsibility lies in case of embezzlement. (Hima 2008)

What is required as a solution, according to the narratives of Hima and Idrissa, is the separation of functions and mutual regulation of each other. The local population is to be responsabilised through the application of governing techniques in the shape of contracts with private operators and as clients of a commercial actor rather than as citizens. The 'traditional'¹³⁹ hierarchies in the villages are to be side-stepped by excluding the chiefs from water management and by introducing a private operator who is expected to self-regulate based on calculations of profit and loss, and who is controlled by the water users' associations. In Idrissa's narrative the chiefs have to be avoided because the population will never turn against the chief and report misbehaviour, and the only way to avoid the chief is to introduce a private contractor. What comes to the fore in the narratives is a contextualised rationalisation of the responsabilising logic.

¹³⁹ Traditional in quotation marks because of different histories, in many cases they are the result of power structures put in place by the colonial power (Mamdani 1996).

As I urge Karimou to reflect on other possible solutions he says:

Well, in reality there are only two obvious solutions. Either one adopts the first solution where people are expected to be responsible. That people know what they want, and management structures are set up. But that's it. That is the option we started with. We could see that sure, people buy water, but when it comes to the management structure there is embezzlement of funds. As a consequence people have said well, can't we seek another option and sign a contract with a private operator. Because in the contract there are all the necessary clauses, technical management, financial management, everything is in the contract. (Karimou 2008)

Karimou presents the new governing logic as a self-evident solution. It is self-evident in a situation where people cannot be expected to be responsible.

As we recall from chapter 5, in order to get a new small water system, or to get the old one renewed, the Nigerien villagers must agree to four criteria.¹⁴⁰ They must establish a water users' association, contract management out to a private operator, introduce water fees and open a bank account with an initial financial contribution to future maintenance costs. Inclusion into the national water services system in terms of getting a water supply system or renewal of an old one thus requires acceding to the criteria the state demands of them. In the case of smaller villages, inclusion relies on the ability and willingness to contribute financially by placing a certain amount of money in a bank account for future maintenance and to contribute labour in the construction of the infrastructure.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ The system was elaborated through donor driven pilot projects during the 1990s and when considered successful they were universalised in the national water policy. The system particularly concerns the installation of the mini-AEP, small water towers that supply a larger population (in villages of more than 2000 inhabitants) and that are expensive to repair. The funds that need to be collected through water fees and managed for the benefit of the sustainability of the system are therefore important. Yet, in line with the argument of the previous chapter about the blurred lines between state and donors where the state is 'enabled' to govern at a distance the question can be asked who is governing at a distance? Local self-regulation is possible under certain conditions of freedom set by the state together with donors, thus resulting in an entanglement of government at a distance implicating donors, state and local population.

¹⁴¹ Different donors have different requirements when it comes to pricing water and making financial or physical contributions. They thus contribute to distinguish between populations based on the arbitrariness of zones of preference.

As indicated by Hima below, the contract emerges as a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion. The contractual implication is made a condition for being included into the sphere of state responsibility for water service provision. Hima explains:

There were many places where the infrastructure had broken down but where we set the condition that we would repair it for you on condition that you accepted contracting out of management. (Hima 2008)

In Hima's account, contracting out of management to the private sector becomes a condition for inclusion. But it should be noted that privatisation of management as described here, is not forced on the population but only introduced on condition that the population should *want* it. In a similar manner Ousman,¹⁴² a low level agent working frequently in the field, tells me how the initial financial contribution that the village must place in the bank account is more than many villages can afford. In such cases the state representatives organise workshops to make the population understand that they have to contribute. Ousman says that, sometimes the villagers are able to contribute half the amount and it has happened that he himself has approached the mayor to ask if he can contribute the other half. However, the mayor cannot do that, Ousman states. Most of the time the village wants the well but cannot pay. Ousman says, he cannot go back to the ministry without a paper or a request for construction of a water point. This means that the village has to sign a non-acceptance paper, stating that they don't want a well. It can be difficult to persuade them to do that Ousman says, since they do want the well, and he has had to try different strategies to make them sign.

Hima's words above, paint an image of a state that responds to communities that show willingness to reform. Ousman's story is more complex and indicates the violence involved in contractual implication as the villagers have to agree to be excluded from water service provision on the basis of their inability/unwillingness to contribute the requested sum.

In the narratives of Hima and Ousman, as well as in several other state agents' narratives, state responsibility for water services becomes limited to people who accept the system of self-government through

¹⁴² This is taken from an interview that was not recorded which is why it is not quoted but summarised.

contractual implication. Communities that do not accept the criteria can thereby be argued to exclude themselves and the villagers themselves are then made responsible for their lack of access to water.

However, although the state agents show a general acceptance of the governing logic of the management criteria, this issue becomes more complex when related to the context of poverty and perceptions of whether local authorities and the water users' associations are considered capable of performing their roles in the new set-up.

The necessity of a present state

The logic of responsabilisation does not exist in a vacuum. Its meaning is shaped by the context and by how the state agents perceive the population and make sense of its needs. On the one hand, as shown above, these representations are general and concern the inability of the population to self-govern. On the other hand, they are complemented by individual stories of experiences in the field, particularly by state agents who are working close to the population. In these narratives, a need for a state that is present in the lives of the population, in order to control the outcome of water service provision, takes shape.

Wada describes the population in the following terms:

Ignorance reigns in Africa. If you don't come back over and over again to tell them and explain to them why they have to sweep around their well they won't do it. (Wada 2010)

In Wada's narrative, just as in many of the state agents' narratives, the population, the local community and even the municipality, are generally represented as uneducated or with insufficient education. For example, the low level of education, one agent, Joseph, argues, is the reason that people expect the state to do everything and do not realise that they must make their own contributions. Since the population's participation in management is required, they are thought by the agents to need thorough sensitisation to understand their role and also in order to be able to safeguard their own interests in a system where they are delegated the responsibility for managing private operators by monitoring that they follow contract agreements. Wada also complains that the donors are not very interested in financing sensitisation although they know that it took time and resources in their own home countries.

Citing a lack of capacity and resources at local level, the narratives give expression to a need for a direct presence of the state in the lives of the population. Idrissa is hesitant regarding the capacity of the water users' associations to perform their roles:

We train them but they don't have a sufficient level. Because in the village you don't find people who have the level... they might have just the lower grades or might never have been to school. So we train them but they forget their mandate. But we are always there. (Idrissa 2008)

In the narratives the lack of capacity of the population and the consequent risk of abuse requires a continued presence by the state to guide and follow up the functioning of service provision.

The village has to be trained to understand that the work is for them. And that they should never leave the companies to do things their way. Because when the infrastructure breaks down it is them... it falls back on them because they are the ones who will lose out. So when they understand that we will visit once a week or every third day to ask the committee if the private operator respects the regulation... (Yahaya 2008)

As indicated by Yahaya's words, the presence of the state does not just emerge as important because of a lack of resources and competences, but because of the intricate relations between the population and the private operators. The images that were used by state agents to explain the failure of the first effort at delegation return when they express hesitation concerning local self-government after recent reform.

One way to improve management, according to official policies, is to avoid the involvement of the village chiefs. However, such assumptions, it seems, are contradicted in the state agents' narratives, particularly among those agents who work directly with the population. For instance, Tidjani argues that the exclusion of the chiefs from the organisations doesn't mean they cannot influence management:

But with democracy we have arrived at setting the chiefs aside. So the population will put in place its organisations. And these organisations are controlled by the population. If there are problems, if there is embezzlement of funds the population will summon them to

the chief. But we have noted that although the leaders are not in the organisations they still have a lot of influence. And generally the funds that are gathered are still not enough. (Tidjani 2008)

In Tidjani's narrative, the influence of the village chief doesn't wane despite the implementation of a system that is constructed to bypass them and to be based on instrumental relations of accountability. Instead, in the narratives, relationships, as well as lack of resources and capacity, continue to shape the way water management is played out in the local communities.¹⁴³

In the narratives that concern practical examples, the state is narrated as never leaving the population to fend for themselves. If the funds the community has collected are not enough the technical offices will make an effort to find the rest, in Ousman's story above. What is required is that the villagers show a willingness to contribute. Both Yahaya and Wada tell stories of how they intervene to solve the small problems that emerge.¹⁴⁴ As regional and district officers, the agents emphasise the direct contact that the state actors have with the villagers. They tell stories of how the villagers turn to the technical offices with their small problems, instead of to the municipality or the private consultant, and how the state agents do what they can. They thus point at the important role the state personnel have to play in the lives of the population, and how representations of the gap in a functioning of the formal organisation (due to poverty, ignorance, and village politics) creates a space for state agents to perform an informal role. This may

¹⁴³ Side story: In 2008 I met a mayor, who had been mayor since the municipality was established in 2004. He told me about his problems with the village chiefs. The chiefs, he said, are responsible for collecting the taxes and handing them over to the municipality. However, several chiefs refused to hand the money over. Since the mayor had no access to police or other judicial resources he used infrastructure as a means of pressuring the village chiefs. If they did not hand over the taxes he would not allocate new infrastructure or carry out repairs and renovation in that particular village. His story is a vivid example of how the water infrastructure and access to the service are important in local politics and power relations.

¹⁴⁴ In contrast, at the operational programme budget (BPO) workshop the state agents were making an exercise on how to prioritise between villages when allocating new infrastructure based on size of the village and number of functional and dysfunctional water points. Here the logic of inclusion and exclusion was prominent. Karimou explains that there are small villages with several water points built by NGOs that have broken down. When one breaks down another NGO comes and builds a new one. And in those cases "it is no use for the state to intervene. They don't even take care of the existing water points", Karimou reasons.

create an arbitrariness in the way the population is governed to govern water service provision.

Wada, concludes a story about a conflict he had to solve in a village in his role as regional director:

That's the population. That's the villagers. You see... If you don't understand you will accuse them all of not wanting [it to work]. It is in their interest, they understand, but they always have small problems between themselves. And that's the village, therefore people don't manage to pronounce themselves, even when it comes to choices. In the village they will never come forward and clearly tell you what they like and what they don't like. It has to be you, and via small issues they will understand if they really they like something and you will push to make them accept that. But if you leave them to themselves they will play with you, whether they like or... the same person today will tell you what he likes, then you come back and he will say no, I haven't said that, I have said... (laughter) You see. (Wada 2008)

To be able to make choices and express oneself is necessary for the responsible citizen in the new organisation of service provision. However, in some of the state agent narratives, such as Wada's, the villagers are not able to do these things, which provides a justification for Wada's presence. The local population, in Wada's narrative, evades being easily governed by impersonal contracts. While in many narratives bypassing the intricacies of village politics is provided as a justification for contracting out management to private actors, it also provides a justification for a particular close and personal presence by state agents in the lives of the population. They cannot be left alone, but the state agents, Wada tells us, need to be there and learn to understand the villagers, as if they were one of them:

You have to act as if it was your own village in order to understand them. (Wada 2008)

The village that takes shape in Wada's narrative becomes impossible to govern from a distance through assumedly impersonal and technical modalities. His own role as state agent becomes particularly important. If state agents maintain a close presence and behave with sensitivity, the villagers can be guided (or pushed) in the right direction.

On the other hand, according to Wada's narrative, the state also needs to be present as a constant threat in order for the population to act "responsibly". Every month the private consultancy firm that provides advice and control (BCC) reports to the regional office:

Then everyone is scared. So, the state always has a watching eye on everything. 'They are there. They have put someone to watch us'. (Wada 2008)

In Wada's narrative the state needs to be locally present in person, where the person representing the state must be demonstrably more powerful than the local, non-elected elite, including religious figures. Successful implementation and communication according to Wada, is a 'question d'homme', i.e. depend on the personality of the agent.

Several agents also emphasise the inability of external actors, whether they are donors or technical assistants, to understand village society, thereby highlighting the need for the Nigerien state agent in particular¹⁴⁵ as an intermediary between donors and beneficiaries:

Experts who do not know the context run the risk of failing to achieve set targets. If, by chance you take a consultant that doesn't know the local reality, that doesn't understand the social context. Particularly today with decentralisation. A consultant that isn't familiar with the history of the population. That's what I mean by anthropology and sociology, it is difficult to learn. Generally the ones who do it, they say, listen we'll take a foreign expert and connect to a national expert. (Hima 2008)

In his narrative, Hima talks about the insensitivity of expatriates to the logics of the local population, just as Wada does in the previous chapter. In their stories the Nigerien state agents are needed in order to *hear* the population, and to care for it as if they were from the same village.

James Ferguson (1994) and Ilan Kapoor (2004) separately argue, that representations such as those above, of a population lacking in capacity, reproduce red tape and power, and can have the effect of legitimising patron-client relationships. However, learning from Wada's story, I would argue that rather than just seeing such representa-

¹⁴⁵ It could be argued that *Nigerien* is more important than *state agents* in this combination, but in the interview I am referring to with Hima he makes this point particularly in the donor/state agent relationship.

tions as expressions of how state agents legitimise their self-interest, it is meaningful to understand these narratives as part of a long history, with a heritage of colonisation and modernisation, of representations of the population. As such, these representations become the way in which the state agents conceive of the call from the population (as the state agents make sense of the call within a particular discourse) and how they construct their responsibility as state agents, including their possibility to control the outcome of state interventions in a context of poverty and ignorance. These representations thus allow them, even compel them to act in a certain way. It is important to point out, that such representations of the needs and capacities of the population are not separate from, but shaped by how the population has been represented in donor discourse.

The above is part of what state responsibility comes to mean to Nigerian state agents in the particular context of poverty and marginalisation. Other factors that contribute to the meaning of state responsibility in water service provision relate to how the service is linked to the physical resource, and how the state is conceived of as the provider of water, to which we turn now.

III. THE STATE BRINGS THE WATER

As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, the meaning of water is interwoven with notions of sovereignty, both as a resource within the territory of a state (although it is often shared), and in terms of how the state governs the resource and provides water as an essential service for the benefit of its population. The provision of water services thus has a particular character that distinguishes it from, for example, education or health. How water is understood in relation to the state is important in this chapter, as it shapes notions of what type of responsibility can be delegated to local actors and what needs to remain under state control. In the narratives three aspects concerning the relationship between water and the state are emphasised. The first two are closely related and concern who has the right to, and responsibility for, the resource, as well as who has the right to and responsibility for the infrastructure. The third concerns the role and responsibility of the state for providing the population with water. Here representations of the population and of the relationship between water and the state provide the basis for negotiating the space for state responsibility, and

for negotiating what is inside and what is outside the remit of the state.

As such, the narratives point at the complexity of unloading responsibility and at the same time attempt to find ways to govern efficiently. I start by discussing who emerges in the stories as having the right to and responsibility for the resource and the infrastructure. I then look specifically at the role and responsibility of the state in relation to providing the population with water.

*Who owns the water?*¹⁴⁶

The concept of project owner (maître d'ouvrage) is at the centre of negotiations over responsibility between different actors in the water service delivery chain. It regulates the question of who brings the water, i.e. who finances and plans investments, as well as who owns the infrastructure, for example, the well. In 1997 it was declared that the water infrastructure belonged to the territorial authorities (Rég du Niger 1997), i.e. sub national governmental structures including the municipalities, districts and regions.¹⁴⁷ The 2009 National Water and Sanitation Programme document states that:

The users of water infrastructure, the territorial authorities, particularly the municipalities, and the state have the project ownership and are supported by the private sector, non-governmental organisations (NGO) and the technical offices that provide project supervision. (Rég du Niger, MH, 2009:7)

This is as specific as the definition of ownership, both in terms of project ownership and ownership of the infrastructure, gets in official sources. So let's look more closely at what these imply. Although the concepts of project owner and project supervisor (maître d'ouvrage and maître d'oeuvre) have been in use for a long time, it is just recently that there has been an effort to clarify their legal status. In February 2010, a provisional report on the matter was written by two consult-

¹⁴⁶ To avoid confusion I want to point out that ownership here concerns who is the proprietor of the resource or the infrastructure, as opposed to the metaphorical use of 'ownership' in the previous chapter where it refers to ownership over policies and strategies as a responsabilising technology.

¹⁴⁷ The municipalities had already been conceived of although they were not established on a national basis until 2004.

ants.¹⁴⁸ The consultant report is concerned with how to create the framework for delegation of project ownership in line with directives of the West African Economic and Monetary Union, UEMOA, and with general trends in the subregion (Rép du Niger 2010b).

The consultants' report concludes that there is no single official definition of project owner but that the project owner can rather be identified by their functions and obligations. According to the definition suggested by the consultants, the project owner is the "physical or moral person¹⁴⁹ who has the right to construct and *who is the owner of the construction* (my italics); who acts in its own interest and can sign one or several contracts in order to realise the works". (Rép du Niger 2010b:4).

The infrastructure is thus according to policy documents *owned* by the project owner, i.e. the entity who ordered and paid for its construction. The project owner, however, can be the central state or the municipality. At the same time, making the users 'owners' of the infrastructure is a crucial element of the responsabilising logic as it is supposed to give them a stake in its management. Joseph explains project ownership in the following:

In fact the infrastructure belongs to the local authority. Because it belongs to the municipality. But the municipality is an electoral system, they elect their mayor. Which means it is the people's property. Because they have elected the mayor. And if you say that the patrimony belongs to him it means it belongs to the community. You see. It is for the community. It isn't for the state. The state has fulfilled its commitment. The state creates the infrastructure that provides drinking water. The state places the infrastructure at the disposal of the users, the municipality. Because for us, it is really conferred to the population. (Joseph 2008)

In Joseph's narrative, the community is the ultimate owner of the infrastructure because of how it relates to the authorities that have the formal ownership. In a similar way Wada explains that the beneficiaries are the owners:

The ownership of the physical works as such, it has to be left to the beneficiaries. They are the ones who directly manage and do eve-

¹⁴⁸ Within Projet de Développement des Infrastructures Locales (PDIL) and Bureau National de Coordination (BNC). Reg no. 03-03-2010. (Rép du Niger 2010b)

¹⁴⁹ An entity, usually a group, with legal status.

rything. Who are occupied with it, who use it. So, it is for them, but they aren't, this population itself is the property of an authority, of an administration, and the administration to which the population belongs is the municipality. You see. There is property in property. It is a group and a sub-group. (Wada 2008)

I would like to draw attention to two particular issues in relation to these quotes". First, in Wada's just as in Joseph's story, the community is the owner because of how it is related to the authorities. In Wada's quote the village is the owner, but only as far as it belongs to an authority, i.e. the municipality. The population is the property of the municipality, and hence enwrapped in layers of authority, as the municipality is also the state. In Joseph's story the community is the owner because they are the ones who elect the mayor, so what belongs to the mayor, belongs to the community. Hence, the allocation of responsibility is made based on the interlinkages between the population and the authorities, although in slightly different ways.

Second, when the population is defined as the owner by some of the state agents, it is in a particular sense, namely as Wada says, because they are the ones who manage and use it. In Joseph's narrative this is because "they have to take care of it".

Several other agents talk of the state as project owner. Idrissa explains as follows:

Project owner, it means it is the owner of the water point. That's it. The owner of the works. It is for whom? It is for the state. That's what project owner is, so it is the state. Because it is the state that will go seek financing to realise the infrastructure. That's what owner means, that's what project owner means... (Idrissa 2008)

In Idrissa's narrative, the state is the owner, and thereby the project owner. The water infrastructure is primarily the state's because it is the state that mobilises the funds to construct it.¹⁵⁰

Idrissa's narrative and Tidjani's below indicate that what is delegated is a particular form of ownership, since some prerogatives remain with the central state. What is transferred is rather *most of the*

¹⁵⁰ The long term goal of the rural development strategy, SDR, is that each municipality set up its own municipal development plan and that they mobilise their own funds and work directly with donors. Although this effort is at the stage of initial capacity building and formulation of development plans the long term goal is thereby to make the municipality fully project owner.

rights and obligations *to act as owner*. The meaning of project ownership thus seems to be disrupted and this disruption opens up for a negotiation concerning how the state relates to the population via the water infrastructure. The state, as owner, remains the provider of water, and ultimately responsible for water provision, hence at the centre of governing. This way of distinguishing between juridical ownership of the infrastructure and the rights and obligations to act as owner (as a responsabilising technique) may be particular in the case of water because of how the infrastructure is connected to the resource.

In his story, Tidjani (despite the different use of project ownership and supervision that he makes) points at the character of water as central to understanding this complexity, where water belongs to the sovereign sphere of the state:

Project ownership is provided by the population. According to the texts. According to the water law. So, and the project supervisor is the one who implements the works and that's the state. The state thus provides project supervision and the population provides project ownership. Project ownership is management. Taking control. Because when a bore-hole is constructed it is the project supervisor who implements it. So it's the state that implements. It remains property of the state. (I raise an eyebrow) Yes, yes, it remains the property of the state. Because the state can use, for example if there is a village, if there is a village close to Niamey and there is a bore-hole there, which the population is using, the state, if it needs to, can use it to pump water to provide the city of Niamey. The state can say that "I take back my infrastructure". (I raise an eyebrow) Yes, yes, I take back my infrastructure. Because I have, I haven't given you the infrastructure but I have given you permission to use it. So, the infrastructure belongs to the state... Water is like gold under the surface of the earth. It is like uranium. So wherever it is it belongs to the state. And that is project supervision. It is the state that constructs water points but when the water points have been constructed the state says "Ah, now the population just has to use it".¹⁵¹ (Tidjani 2008)

¹⁵¹ It is only the groundwater that belongs to the state, rainwater can be private. I.e. **Article 17**: Every land owner has the right to have at their disposal rain water that falls on their private land. Ponds and lakes created by rain water or flooding that are on private land constitute private property. (Rép du Niger 2012)

Here Tidjani clearly states that the water infrastructure is the property of the state, because of the particular physical and limited nature of water, as well as its necessity for the existence and organisation of the state as provider. The financial aspect, as emphasised by Idrissa above, is also of importance as we will see. Both in its character as a physical resource connected to territory and in the heavy investments required in the sector (for example when water is found 700 metres under the surface) distinguish water services from other public services, such as education or dispensaries and clinics. Project ownership, according to Tidjani and Wada, implies taking control and managing but it is not a property right as such. It is represented rather as a function to be performed by the population. More importantly, in Tidjani's words, water *wherever it is, it belongs to the state*, as part of its sovereign patrimony. This is important in the context of delegated responsibility, as I argue above, because of how it may shape the way the state relates to the population via the water infrastructure, and how certain behaviour is enabled and constrained. A similar function is filled by the assertion that the state is ultimately the provider of water.

The state as provider

I ask Idrissa explicitly *who brings the water*, and he answers:

It is the state, because the state takes the loans, the state organises projects and programmes and invests to cover the needs. The state educates people. (Idrissa 2008)

The state, to Idrissa, is the provider of water. What is delegated is responsibility to take care of and manage the infrastructure. Many agents talked about how responsibility for the infrastructure is handed over to the population at a ceremonial inauguration and how it thereafter is up to the population to take care of it on behalf of the state. But the state is the provider and the guarantor of the public good:

And now at the reception the project owner [the ministry] has to accept the water [approve its quality]. Because we need to assure people that we, we protect the people. You cannot give the water just any way. And you can't allow them to take water from any well. You have to guarantee that the water is safe. (Yahaya 2008)

The ceremony makes visible the fact that the water infrastructure has now been handed over to the population and the state takes responsibility for it being safe to drink. For some agents it also seems to symbolise the gift of the infrastructure/water from the state to the population. Wada told a story of a village where a village member abused his role in relation to the water point and its management. At one point in the story the water point had been handed over to the village by Wada, who said to the population:

From now on it is on your account, for you to take care of. It is your child. Because a water point is like a child, you have to take care of it. (Wada 2008)

But the village failed to manage it well, he says, and, as the representative of the state, he came to take it back:

But now as they have failed I went there to tell them, you see, that child there you have said it is for you, it is for you. Now see how someone [a person abusing his power] is bothering you. You have never told me and now you see who it really belongs to. It belongs to Wada.

In his narrative, Wada calls on the agency of the population not as separate from the state, but because they act in the name of the state (as in the quote that opens the chapter), for the common good. The metaphor of the child is particularly strong in terms of what it indicates about responsibility and the trust the state places in the village by asking it to care for the child/infrastructure. It is not a gift in the sense that it is given once and for all, but the ties to the state/maker/parent remain. In this way Wada seems to reconcile the authority of the state with the commitment of the population as citizens and indistinct from the state and *therefore* responsible for the common good. By doing so he constructs a particular type of responsibility between the state and the population that is manifested in the water infrastructure. It means that while the state for pragmatic reasons implements policies to make the population self-governing, some state agents continue to conceive of the state as the one who brings the water.

The guarantor of safe drinking water in the stories is always the state. Several agents also portray the state institutions as the ones the population turns to in case of problems. Yahaya says that the popula-

tion first turn to the water service at regional or district level “because it is direct, the villagers can come and contact us when there are problems. Then we inform the BCC”, i.e. the consultancy firms that are charged with advice and control.

What do the state agents do, we might ask, when they emphasise the role of the state as provider, and water as a gift from the state to the population? They can be seen to create a certain relation of reciprocity through the ceremony and the gift, that on the one hand legitimises the delegating of responsibility to the population, but also provides a possibility to affirm the role of the state and the state agents in the lives of the population.

I want to end this discussion with yet another quote from Wada when he talks about the problem of making the population take responsibility for management of the infrastructure and service. I ask him if the villagers know that the infrastructure actually belongs to the state and whether that is the reason that they don't take responsibility for its management. He answers:

Yes, because they always know they can have problems with the state. That's it. That's the villagers. They lack, I tell myself sometimes, it is the level of education. They aren't well enough educated, open to understand that what belongs to the state belongs to the population. Because the state is what? The state is abstract. So we all are, you are the state, I am the state. But when it comes to their problems they will say no, that is for the state. And it is always to escape responsibility. But the state is everybody. And what belongs to the state belongs to everybody. So it is on well defined levels until someone finally takes care of it. Instead of several it comes to a point where it goes down, goes down and finally say ok, you take charge of that in the name of the state. But know also that you too are steered by someone a bit above. It means when you fail there is someone who will tell you, listen what I have given you there, before it was in your hands it belonged to the state. So if the state gives it back to you it is to responsabilise you because he will... he has other things that he also wants to take care of, and therefore he leaves it to you. And you too have someone below you to whom you can say, well I take care of this and you take care of that. That's it. That's responsibility. So everyone at their level will say it is for me. But in reality it is for the state. But unfortunately it is abstract, the state is everybody. (Wada 2008)

In Wada's story the state is not primarily a unitary actor, it emerges as an idea and a relationship. The water point is everybody's responsibility because it belongs to everybody and the state is the guardian of that property and of the responsibility *because the state is everybody*. To be included in that *everybody* means to have and take responsibility *in the name of the state*. In Wada's narrative, to separate yourself from the state on the other hand, to say *no, that is for the state*, is to escape responsibility.

What have we learned?

How do the state agents conceive of the state as actor of choice in the case of delegation of responsibility for water management to local communities? Concerning how the state is conceived as responsible for reform we see how the agents narrate the state as adapting rationally to particular constraints. In the narrative structure, the state appears as having acted responsibly in the past, as well as in the present, as it has proven capable of rationally analysing circumstances and adapting when "things impose themselves". The narratives indicate a state that is not the driver of change, but one that is responsibly adapting in a situation of poverty and dependence. This image reinforces the one that came out in the previous chapter on ownership of the state as responsible for managing the marginal space of being developing, rather than for becoming developed.

What do the narratives tell us about how reform shapes the possibility of responsibility? How do the state agents consider that reform shapes the way in which the state can control water service provision? What are the impediments to control? From the narratives we learn that delegation initially implied a loss of control as the governing technologies and supporting structures were absent, and the population is represented as having been unable to assume control over water services. In the narratives this legitimised a controlled system for local management of water, and the introduction of criteria for inclusion into the national water system. These criteria are expected to have a responsabilising effect as they shape the behaviour and choices of the population. We see in the stories how a new type of state, a responsible state focused on its core functions, requires a new type of population, namely a population that can make choices, express itself and demand things on the basis of contracts, and who can evaluate risk properly.

However, the way in which the state agents represent the population (hear their call) in the stories of practical experiences in the field revolve around the inability of the population to take responsibility. The population in the stories is one that is shaped by ignorance, local politics, lack of capacity and resources. This population, the narratives tell us, requires a certain type of state, a state that is present, that tells it to sweep around the well, that makes sure it controls the private operator properly, that tries to understand local situations by becoming as one with the villagers. From the narratives we learn that while the responsabilising logic is presented as rational in the stories, when set in a practical context by state agents who work closely with the population these logics are less self-evident. The marginal space of under-development legitimises a continued presence of the state in the lives of a population that is not yet capable of responsible self-government. Moreover, the particular character of water as a physical resource that belongs to the state contributes to maintain the state at the center of water service provision.

8. Delegation/privatisation – the transfer of responsibility to private actors

When we introduced the private operators it was because in the villages the water management committees had shown their limitations. They weren't able to manage. (Irissa 2008, mid-level agent)

The question in the title of this thesis, “*Who brings the water?*” is partly motivated by an argument frequently made by proponents of private sector involvement in water service provision, namely that it isn't important who brings the water as long as people get access to it (cf. Segerfeldt 2003; Winpenny 2003). It is an argument that aims to appease critics in the often heated debate over privatisation in the sector, and to depoliticise the issue rendering it merely technical. In the narratives we will see how the reform is both depoliticised and politicised depending on how it relates to the understanding of what the state can and should do.

In this chapter I start out by discussing how the term privatisation is avoided in the narratives, and how the terminology of delegation is enabling for the state as actor owing to linkages and interdependence, rather than *autonomy*. I then look at how certain transfers are narrated as responsible *choices*, as a prelude to analysing how the state agents see the consequences of transfer of certain functions to private actors. I look at how they conceive of privatisation as shaping the *agency* of the state and thereby its ability to act responsibly, before I approach the question of *control* in a similar manner. There are important differences between involving private contractors in operation and construction and involving consultancy firms in monitoring and supervision. I therefore organise the chapter accordingly, dealing with

construction and operation and maintenance by contractors in the first part of the chapter, and monitoring and supervision by consultancy firms in the second part.

I. NAMING AS A DEPOLITICISING ACT

That's what we call it but in reality it isn't a privatisation. As a habit we talk about privatisation but in reality it is the reform of the sector. (Salissou 2007)

This reform which the people on the street call the privatisation of the national water company... (Abdoulaye 2008)

As the two excerpts from the state agents narratives' indicate there is a reluctance among certain agents, particularly high level agents working with urban water supply, to call the urban water sector reform privatisation. This despite the fact that it involves the separation of the former public water utility into two units and the transfer of responsibility for production and distribution of water to a private actor. In both quotes the narrators suggest that those who use the term privatisation display a lack of knowledge. It is a term that would be used by people in the street, rather than by informed agents of the state.

After meeting a hostile reaction when asking about privatisation during my first interview in 2008 I decided to avoid the term and use *restructuring* or *introduction of private actors* when I posed my questions. It became striking to me how the state agents talked about both urban and rural water sector reform without using the term privatisation. In the case of the urban water sector the term was used only once without the kind of reservations made by Salissou and Abdoulaye above. Only one agent refers to the delegation of management in the rural sector as privatisation, and one agent, Hima, refers to the use of private actors for supervision and control as privatisation. Apart from that the term privatisation is conspicuous by its absence.

Similarly, in the report "Getting Africa on Track to Meet the MDGs on Water and Sanitation 2007", an initiative by AMCOW, ADB, EUWI, UNDP, the World Bank and WSP (WSP 2007),¹⁵² the

¹⁵² African Ministers' Council on Water, AMCOW, African Development Bank, ADB, European Union Water Initiative, EUWI, UN Development Programme, UNDP, the World Bank and Water and Sanitation Programme, WSP.

reform of the water sector in Niger is referred to as a reorganisation of the water utility into two separate units. Privatisation is not used to designate the shift. This choice of terminology has the effect of turning particular policy choices into technical matters and thus depoliticising them.

Depoliticisation can also be the effect of naturalisation of certain policy choices. There is a tendency, among the same state agents, to talk about the state focusing on its core functions as performing the *usual* role of the state (Gado), or that the state has *returned* to its core functions. As Illya explains:

Since the Paris declaration, and a bit before that, we have started to introduce at the level of the state a return to the core functions to enable the transfer to private actors, the non-governmental sector and others. (Illya 2010)

When the state agents talk about the usual role of the state or a return to core functions, the reform of the state to one that focuses on its core functions is naturalised in time and space. The state *that does everything* (Amadou) on the other hand becomes the exception in these two, as well as several other, stories. As was discussed in chapter 7 the all-encompassing state was seen as rational in a particular time and space but also had its logical end at a point where its capacity was reached or exceeded and responsibility therefore was handed (back) to society.

Following a similar reasoning the transfer of functions formerly performed by public actors in the rural sector, as well as the transfer of responsibility for project supervision¹⁵³ to private actors is referred to as delegation of management, and delegation of supervision, rather than privatisation, and the private operators are referred to as “delegates”. Karimou’s and Tidjani’s narratives indicate the overlap below:

So, there are three actors. There is the mayor, who is project supervisor, who signs an agreement with the water users’ association to control the delegatee, the private contractor. There is the water users’ association, and the delegatee. (Karimou 2008)

¹⁵³ Maître d’oeuvre.

So, instead of community management we are tying it together by shifting to delegated management or management by a private actor. (Tidjani 2008)

Avoiding the term privatisation and using the term delegation can be argued to have two effects; as argued above, it avoids the political quagmire of privatisation; but it can also be argued to emphasise two other things. First, the continued role and responsibility of the state that remains at the centre of government. Second, the close interconnectedness between the different actors rather than their separation. When the state agents refer to the reform as delegation they thereby indicate a re-linking of the state to private and local actors, rather than a de-linking of the state from provision of services. Rather than letting go of certain functions delegation indicates that the state uses a range of bodies for purposes of government of the population. It does so according to the logic of *faire-faire*, which is the term used in Niger for having someone do something, thus emphasising the hierarchal relationship between actors. By using the term delegation rather than privatisation the state agents places the state as an actor in water service provision, they maintain the state as centre of responsibility and as necessarily in control over the private sector actors to whom functions are delegated.

Does it matter what the reform is called? It matters as a depoliticising act, but it also matters because of how the relations between the state, the private actors and the population are imagined and how responsibility is understood.

Against this background I now turn to narratives concerning process of delegating responsibility to private actors.

II. DELEGATION AS RESPONSIBLE AND RESPONSIBILISING

In this section I analyse how the state agents narrate the possibility of responsibility in terms of agency and choice. First, as they narrate themselves and the state as subjects endowed with degrees of choice and intention when it comes to the decision to involve private actors in the different functions of construction and urban and rural service provision. Second, as they narrate the different reforms as shaping the possibility for the state to act responsibly.

To choose to privatise

In the state agents' narratives the rationality for transferring functions to private sector actors varies depending on which function is under consideration. While the transfer of construction emerges as natural in the narratives and seems to require little explanation, transfer of operation and maintenance in urban as well as rural areas is legitimised as necessary and pragmatic but also as intentional and carefully considered. The different functions are discussed in turn below.

Construction of infrastructure

Initially the state-owned company OFEDES was in charge of constructing water infrastructure. Gradually, however, the function was transferred to private constructors and the company was liquidated. The national water company SNE (after the 2001 privatisation the privately owned company SEEN), has continued to construct infrastructure, but the use of private contractors has gradually increased. This transfer is generally paid little attention to in the state agents' narratives. When it is mentioned OFEDES is placed in the past together with the type of organisation of water services where the state was expected to perform all functions:

... the state shouldn't execute. We have known periods when the state executed. Like the Office des eaux de sous sol, OFEDES. It was a state company that constructed water infrastructure. The state dismantled the company because the private sector is much better at playing the role of constructor of water infrastructure. (Amadou 2008)

In Amadou's narrative, the decision to transfer construction to private companies appears as self-evident, because *the state shouldn't execute*, and because the private sector is better at *playing the role of constructor*. The decision doesn't require more explanation to him. Tidjani similarly typifies how the state actors narrate this change:

The institution, OFEDES, was liquidated because they said it is a state institution and the state cannot construct infrastructure. So private companies were created. Individual companies, truly private companies. (Tidjani 2008)

In Amadou's narrative, infrastructure construction is not the responsibility of the state. In Tidjani's the state does not have the capacity to construct infrastructure, considering its other obligations. In his narrative Tidjani also refers to globalisation and the expansion of capitalism as a factor. It is unclear whether "they", as in "they said", in his story refers to external actors or to the Nigerien government. While in Amadou's story the transfer emerges as self-evident, "they said" in Tidjani's narrative, together with his reflections on the influence of globalisation and expansion of modern capitalism,¹⁵⁴ indicate that he refers to a discourse about the transfer as self-evident, while he maintains the option to be hesitant.

However, considering the scope of the task to construct water infrastructure for an expanding population OFEDES is generally narrated as lacking the capacity and resources to do so. Therefore the transfer is necessary and even a matter of survival of the sector:

The private companies are really a question of survival for the water sector. (Cissé 2007)

By transferring construction to private actors the state has taken responsibility for becoming what the Nigerien state ought to be, according to the narratives, namely a state that focuses on core functions. The decision appears in the state agents' stories as necessary and as a result of the particular constraints the Nigerien state faces as a poor country, and also as a rational choice made by the state.

The national water company

In the late 1990s and early 2000s contestation over the privatisation of the national water company (SNE), was fiercely debated in the media and by the workers' unions and groups for consumer rights were rallying against it. As we recall from chapter 5, the privatisation was criticised for being imposed as a conditionality by the World Bank and recurring struggles ensued. However, in 2008 privatisation of the national water company emerges in the state agents' narratives as a pragmatic choice made by the state, motivated by its dysfunctional management and a lack of investment. Demands, by external funders on the Nigerien state, to reform the sector are seen, by some agents, as an important catalyst for the state's decision to privatise. Nevertheless,

¹⁵⁴ See quote below.

the decision *how to privatise* emerge as a result of internal reflection and of the state's own volition.

Zeinabou is a high level agent with over 20 years of experience in the sector. He was highly implicated in the process of privatising the national water company. He explains the rationale for privatisation during the second half of the 1990s as follows:

The privatisation was a conditionality to access the financial resources from the donors. The donors said 'we will contribute if the sector is viable'. This means the tariffs had to be acceptable, the state had to pay for its water consumption and respect its commitment to provide the population with water. 'If you want to access the resources, that's what you have to do'. /.../All the donors had abandoned the sector because of mismanagement. /.../It wasn't privatisation that was the condition, but the viability of the sector. There are countries in Africa who did not accept privatisation, but that was during structural adjustment. They increased the price of water and the state paid its bills. Countries that have money don't have to privatise. (Zeinabou 2008)

Privatisation according to Zeinabou was not the first hand choice for the Nigerien state. Zeinabou, Cissé, Gado and Abdoulaye, who were all involved in the privatisation process¹⁵⁵ tell stories of how the state explored many other solutions to improve viability, but finally only the option of privatisation remained. Privatisation, in Zeinabou's story, was the only way to raise tariffs and to make the state respect its commitments, such as paying for its water consumption, because, as indicated at the end of the quote, Niger had no money.

Two reasons for privatising stand out in the narratives; poverty and lack of funds in the sector and the inability of the state to manage water service provision. What emerges is a state that takes responsibility for the condition in which it finds itself by making necessary choices and thereby shaping a better future. As such it shows capacity for responsibility as it responds, acts and promises a different way of acting in the future.

Gado explicitly emphasises that decisions were voluntary:

¹⁵⁵ It should be pointed out that three of them were in high positions when these decisions were taken, meaning both that they had insights into the process that most others did not, and that they were particularly invested in these decisions.

The state has disengaged from the urban water sector to hand over management to structures that it has voluntarily put in place. (Gado 2008).

As does Abdoulaye:

But I can tell you that to privatise, it is seriously part of the sovereignty of the state. (Abdoulaye 2008)

Gado and Abdoulaye indicate a performativity of sovereignty, as they tell a story of the Nigerien state as sovereign in its decisions. But it is a particular sovereignty, namely a negotiated sovereignty of the sort that is accessible to a poor state. I particularly ask Gado about his emphasis on the voluntariness and he repeats that it was the state's choice to privatise, that it was not forced on Niger.

But the state had to do it because of the economic situation. The decision was more pragmatic than ideological. (Gado 2010)

"Can a poor state not be ideological?" I ask, and he responds as follows:

Ideology is something else. Everybody has their ideology, even a poor state. Then comes poverty. But all have their ideology. I may be poor today, but I might get rich tomorrow. Ideology is not connected to the money. (Gado 2010)

Gado emphasises that the Nigerien state has its ideology, although in practice the state is constrained by poverty and has to make pragmatic choices. In several other narratives state agents stress that Niger negotiated a type of privatisation that was in line with ideas about the role of the state in water service provision that were prevailing among state agents. Hence the state's choice and intentionality are emphasised, indicating that it takes responsibility for the decision to privatise.

In 2008 privatisation is described as a success. The image presented is of the state as having performed its responsibility by studying and negotiating the particular solution that was found suitable for Niger. As in Abdoulaye's narrative:

Because it is our sector, we know it well. Did Niger achieve everything it wanted in the decision that was made? I say yes. On the paper, I say yes. We have got what we wanted. (Abdoulaye 2008)

The claim that Niger got what it wanted in the privatisation is made in several narratives, and is exemplified by the continued central role played by the state in the sub-sector. As Gado says above, despite poverty everyone has their ideology. Among the specific aspects that Niger fought for in the design of the privatisation reform, emphasised by the narrators, is the importance of retaining ownership and responsibility for the infrastructure in the hands of the state. As Djibrilla describes:

Concession was not chosen because it doesn't benefit the state. So we had to consider what to do, what choices to make in the reorganisation. What would benefit the state? And when I talk about what would benefit the state I mean what would benefit the population. (Djibrilla 2007)

Another important factor was to keep responsibility for setting the tariffs, as in Abdoulaye's and Zeinabou's narratives:

When you take the problem of Gabon, it has made a concession. The concession presupposes that you place everything in the hands of the private sector business, who seek funds, who invest and who set the tariff. We cannot agree with that. After all, water is a social sector, you see? When investments are to be made by the private sector we have thought that they can set the price they like. But if it is the state, the state can ask for subsidies, through bilateral aid for investments./.../ You cannot leave everything to the private sector. (Abdoulaye 2008)

You know, in the reform we say that the state is responsible for the tariff policy. A state that respects itself doesn't crush its population. So, we ensure that the cost of water is in line with the expenses the company has, and the capacity to pay. Off course it would be better if water could be for free, but since it is almost impossible the state safeguards the level of the tariff. That's why in the reform it is the state alone that is responsible for the tariff policy. Not the companies. (Zeinabou 2008)

In their stories both Abdoulaye and Zeinabou emphasise how the Nigerien state has managed to elaborate a type of privatisation that is compatible with the Nigerien state's principles for how water should be provided. And in Abdoulaye's story the state has done so by making a number of studies in the West Africa region to learn from other examples and finally choose the form of organisation that suits Niger. The position they create for the state is as a rational agent, which under certain constraints, make well considered and informed choices of what it thinks most benefits the population.

Operation and maintenance of rural water supply

As elaborated on earlier, the working principle is that in order to get new water infrastructure or renewal of old ones local rural communities have to accept four criteria. Those are; to sell water; to open a bank account with an initial sum of money for repair; to engage a private operator; and to create a water users' association to oversee the activities of the private operator. Communities that successfully manage their water infrastructure, or that are served by cement wells or borehole wells where revenues are considered too small for private management to be viable, are not subjected to the four criteria.

As with the privatisation of the national water company discussed above, the delegation of operation and maintenance of rural systems to private operators is narrated as pragmatic and rational in the face of the perception that community management in general has proven to have its limitations. This has been thoroughly discussed in chapter 7. One agent, Tidjani, gives expression to another reason for private involvement in rural water management:

And on the other hand... with what we call globalisation there are international trends towards strengthening the private sector. To modern capitalism. Socialism is disappearing. It means we are part of... we are forced to have a policy to strengthen the private sector, taking the limited means of the state into consideration. (Tidjani 2008)

In Tidjani's narrative, and in several others, private management is not just a rational solution to local problems with service provision, but a constraint placed on Niger as a result of globalisation and the spread of capitalism. In the above, Tidjani points at the complexity of, on the one hand, finding the best solution for water services in the particular context, and on the other, a very different objective which is

private sector development. This has implications for the capacity of the state to attain development goals, and hence on its responsibility for the failure to do so. In Tidjani's narrative the state is less adapting to country-specific constraints in the water sector and more subjected to global trends because of how the policies of the Nigerien state are shaped within a global discourse. In most narratives these two processes emerge as mutually reinforcing.

The decision to privatise the functions of operation and maintenance, as well as construction, largely emerge as rational choices by the Nigerien state. The state they narrate is a state that is constrained by external factors and by its implication in a global context, but within those constraints it is narrated as making pragmatic, intentional, and carefully considered choices.

Stories of how privatisation shapes agency and responsibility

As we recall from chapter 3, the transfer of functions to private actors is intended to have a responsabilising effect on the state as the separation of roles and contractual implication constitute constraining forces on the state as well as on the private actor/provider. Through the contract the state commits to certain activities for which it can be held responsible. How then do state agents conceive of delegation of different functions as shaping the agency of the state and with what effects on the possibility of responsibility. As in the section above I first discuss construction and thereafter urban and rural operation and maintenance.

Construction of infrastructure

The privatisation of construction shapes choice mainly because of how it limits the option of letting the technical offices of the state construct infrastructure. However, the state agents all adhere to the logic that private companies should construct the infrastructure and see the development of the private sector as crucial for the successful achievement of the MDGs, hence for the state's responsibility to provide the population with water. At the same time the private constructors are represented in several narratives as insufficient in numbers and as incapable of performing the task properly, with the same high quality once produced by OFEDES. Representations of insufficiency and lack of capacity in its turn have consequences for how the state

agents see the ability of the state to perform its role as provider of water.

First, according to some state agents, to this date the private sector in Niger does not have the companies to implement the goals, as in Abdoulaye's and Karimou's narratives:

[F]rom the point of view of competition, the companies, here in Niger, there were basically no companies that were capable of implementing the extension project. Because the sector had seen no development for more than ten years. There had been no work. So the companies were mainly oriented towards other domains, not the water sector. (Abdoulaye 2008)

But even if the money was there, where is the material means to achieve the goals? Because it means we have to mobilise a lot of companies. At national level we don't have that many companies that work in the water sector. Where is the qualified work force to do it? (Karimou 2008)

And in Salissou's:

The private sector isn't sufficiently developed to make it work. The companies, we have few companies that have the capacity to implement, for example the MDGs. I think you will look at the calculation, maybe more than a thousand water points have to be constructed every year to keep the pace. Even if we have the money required, do we have the companies that can do it? (Salissou 2008)

Another concern raised by several state agents is the capacity of the companies to perform. One problem debated at a meeting between a German development project and the contracted companies is that the only ones who have the capacity to respond to the calls for tender are regional businessmen and traders, who have the capital to invest and take risks. They are, it is argued, not capable as construction companies, and in the black-eyed pea season construction work will have to rest because they have more urgent trade matters to attend to.

The actual quality of the constructions is yet another concern. Some agents praise the high quality of the old OFEDES wells in comparison to newer constructions by private companies.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ The high quality of the OFEDES wells is widely recognized and the method spread throughout the subregion (Vogt and Vogt 2005:18).

I will tell you something. The OFEDES wells, as you have heard, the wells with a large diameter are wells that have been designed here, by our own office. And that have been exported to countries in the subregion. You see. But who does that, it is our own staff today who have made them. (Hima 2008)

At the Operational Budget Programming workshop I attended, it was argued that the old wells that were constructed by OFEDES 25 years ago are still functioning, while wells built five years ago by private companies are already breaking down:

...the ones executing today don't have the same expertise... (Mahamadou at BPO 2010)

The choice to let only private companies construct emerge as preventing the state from achieving set targets, such as the MDGs, as the limitations of the private companies makes it impossible for the state to provide the population with water.

The national water company

In contrast, in the narratives of the restructuring of the national water company, privatisation emerges as the factor which allows the Nigerien state to function and perform its responsibilities. Privatisation constitutes the condition of possibility for the Nigerien state to act as a responsible state and for its agents to imagine that it will be able to provide for its population. Abdoulaye, who worked closely with the reform explains the motivation for privatising SNE:

That which made the state privatise was primarily that the sector hadn't seen any investment for over ten years. That was a very important element. Moreover the state didn't pay its water bills. Its consumption of water. So the company was falling to pieces because the unpaid bills at the time were around 7 billion FCFA when the revenue was around 4 billion... So, that's why what was envisioned was to create a sector that was self-financing. It had to do without all the subsidies from the state. But if they came, all the better. But they shouldn't be counted on to finance and develop the sector. Therefore, one of the objectives that were sought was to

attract a private company that knows well, how to say, to exploit the water supply system in the urban context. (Abdoulaye 2008)

The idea according to Abdoulaye was thus to create a system independent of the state, that would be self-financing in order to guarantee production of water services. A new state company, SPEN, was charged with responsibility for extensions of the network to new users.

Privatisation, in Abdoulaye's narrative allows the state to perform responsibly in the urban sector because it separates the state from certain functions that it is unable to perform, such as financial and organisational management. Since the state is unable to perform these functions the responsible thing to do, because it will safeguard access to water for the population, is to transfer it to an actor that *knows well how to exploit the water supply system*. Hence, in their narratives the state agents subject themselves to the responsabilising logic of privatisation. A state company such as the SNE is not considered to be able to hold the state to its promises in terms of financial management in the way the private actor is.¹⁵⁷

In Abdoulaye's narrative poverty, and the inability to pay the water bills, emerge as the reason financial management must be separated from the state, in order to guarantee the population access to water.

Zeinabou makes a similar argument and adds that the state is incapable of managing:

If the state had its own resources, and was capable of managing the company, privatisation would not have been necessary. Even now there are problems. (Zeinabou 2008)

In his narrative, Zeinabou seriously criticises the state's ability to manage, particularly under democratic rule, because of the state's lack of rigour. Democracy, Zeinabou continues,¹⁵⁸ is what causes nepotism as each party favours its own members in negotiations over allocation of positions in the administration.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ The World Bank and the Water Sector Project, PSE, plays a crucial role here, since the funding of the sector is dependent on the attainment of financial equilibrium. This means that the donors provide a regulatory function when the relationship between the private actor and the state is not expected to be able to do so.

¹⁵⁸ As does Idrissa, see chapter 6

¹⁵⁹ It should be mentioned here that after the national conference and the first democratic elections in the early 1990s there was a complex cohabitation between the

Whether for managerial reasons or for financial reasons, the Nigerien state emerges as being in need of being kept to its commitments and responsibilities by another actor, which is the private company in this case. Abdoulaye expresses it as follows:

If the texts are there, that engage the responsibility of the state, that engage the responsibility of another actor, and that somewhere there is an arbitrator who watches it all. That is something that is well prepared, dynamic, that advances. But if it is the state alone, it is not evident that it will work. (Abdoulaye 2008)

It seems as if more than seven years after the reform the meaning of the privatisation of urban water supply is being closed off among state agents. It has been established as a way in which the state has successfully shaped its own behaviour. The state thus emerges as taking responsibility for its condition of 'being developing' (for the difference 'being developing' implies, and the way it leads to failure of water services provision) and to shape present behaviour through the promise made in the contract. One aspect is important for this interpretation of closure, namely, the declaration of the privatisation as a success, and the recognition of the water sector project as one of the most successful in the World Bank's portfolio in Niger (World Bank 2007). Financial equilibrium has been reached and several of the targets for expanding access have been achieved, even before the targeted deadline:

Actually, financial equilibrium has been achieved. Since 2006 the sub-sector has been self-managing. Without support from the state, but with investments that SPEN manage to attract through aid and through bank loans. That's how the financial equilibrium has been achieved. The situation is now really stable for the urban water sub-sector. (Gado 2008)

Today we have achieved financial equilibrium. It means that in a near future the Nigerien state doesn't have to indebt itself to provide the population with water./.../ the machine has been made functional, automatic, it turns. (Zeinabou 2007)

president and the prime minister who represented different parties (constructed on the basis of the French system), and a competition over who should appoint the managers of state owned companies ensued, with the result that they were replaced frequently, not least at the SNE.

In the case of the national water company the decision to privatise as well as the outcome are narrated in a way that enhances the image of a responsible and rational state which cares for the population. In the stories, privatisation allows the state to function, and enables it to perform as a state because it constrains the choices of the state.

Operation and maintenance of rural water supply

Since responsibility for operation and maintenance had already been delegated to the local communities the introduction of private actors in rural water supply is not directly related to the performance of the state but to the performance of water management committees. It thus doesn't affect the ability of the state to act as operator, but it shapes the way the state agents can imagine the state as successfully governing local water service provision from a distance. What is at stake here is what will allow the state to govern local water management. As has been argued in chapter 7, state agent narratives suggest an inability of the state to govern local communities due to local politics and the position of local chiefs, as well as to lack of resources. In light of such representations, in the narratives the introduction of the private sector actors creates a possibility for the state to govern. It does so because it introduces the governing logic of profit and loss, as stated by Idrissa:

So the money is there. And now that money, who will take it and put it in the bank? It isn't the village chief. Because if it is given to him it is the same thing. So the chief has to be avoided. So, how to avoid the chief? We must take someone who is a private business-person. Whose job it is. Because if it is your job you won't let someone take your money. Because you know that you live off it. So you will take care of it. (Idrissa 2008)

Hima, on the other hand, points at how privatisation makes it possible for the state to allocate responsibility, and to hold the operator accountable:

...when money had been embezzled the management committee weren't brought before the court because there were no official written regulations. You could not deal with them. They [donors] said, listen, that too is a lacuna. Because there is no water law, there is nothing. So go and make an association that is recognised by the Ministry of Interior Affairs. And management is entrusted to

a private company. Now we know where the responsibility is in case of embezzlement. (Hima 2008)

In Hima's narrative privatisation allows the state to govern from a distance in a way that it could not be imagined as doing when water services were governed by traditional hierarchies. It is interesting how the absence of official regulations and the introduction of the private operator tied by a contract are closely connected. In Hima's story there is no law to rely on in order to bring the chief or his children, nor the water management committees, to justice, nor does he imagine one. Instead, for regulation to be possible requires the involvement of other actors. In the narratives of the Nigerien state agents, the reform becomes a way for the state to manifest its presence through delegation of responsibility and the regulation that it enables.

In the case of operation and maintenance in urban as well as rural areas the transfer of functions to private actors is thus narrated as what allows the state to take responsibility by being present in the lives of the population as it enables the provision of water to the population.

III. CONTROL – AT THE CORE OF THE STATE

The centrality of control in the context of private sector involvement, concerns how the state controls the outcome of reform in terms of transfer of functions to private actors, as well as how such a transfer affects the ability of the state to control service provision. Privatisation is supposed to enable the state to control water service provision through the contracting out of services and the introduction performance criteria, which are also directed at controlling the behaviour of the state.

The private actors emerge in the state agents' narratives as providing the potential for control in two ways. First, through contractual implication and performance management because now it will be possible to see for example who is responsible in case of embezzlement or failure to provide safe water, and to bring the person to justice (Hima above). At the same time the population is responsabilised as consumers to hold the private actor accountable. Second, because of the introduction of risk and incentives in terms of profit and loss to maintain the infrastructure properly (Idrissa above).

However, according to the narratives, the logic of having others act in the name of the state through delegation does not release the state

from the burden of ensuring that specified outcomes are achieved, quite the opposite. Wada states:

The private sector actor always remains a private actor. He has first and foremost a business hat on, and cares about whether the work is profitable or not. (Wada 2008)

The proliferation of private actors in the sector, the narratives tell us, requires an improved control function. In the urban sector the function is performed primarily by the Multisectoral Regulation Agency, ARM, while in the rural sector and in the case of supervision of construction, a number of actors are involved and the negotiation over responsibility and who should perform these functions is far from settled, as we will see in the following section.

The capacity of the population to control the private operator

As we saw in chapter 7, the way in which the state agents represent the population in their stories, as outside the control of the state, legitimises the involvement of the private actor in management. The local community organisations are transformed from management committees to control organs in the shape of water users' associations, AUE. As Amadou states:

Now we leave it to the population to manage, we organise them and delegate management. An operator is chosen and the population is there to ensure that the operator performs its task. (Amadou 2008)

The population, that in the narratives does not succeed to manage its own water service provision, is now expected to control the private operator. As Idrissa explains:

Now the forth condition is the AUE [water users' association], that on the level of the village represents the population. To see if the operator performs its role well or not. Or if he makes money from the population. Or if the price of water is not too high. So, we have said that at village level there has to be an association of six members who will control the private operator. (Idrissa 2008)

As we saw in the section above, this logic is generally adhered to by the state agents in principle, and this component of the reform is narrated as a responsible choice made by the Nigerien state. However, from the narratives we learn that the water users' associations are not considered capable of performing the control function. I ask Idrissa explicitly if the water users' associations have the capacity to control the private operator:

To begin with, these associations don't have the capacity. Because even when it comes to training, we train them, but they don't have the level. Because in the villages you don't find people who have the level... I might fail primary school, or perhaps I haven't even been to school. So, we train them, but they forget their prerogative. But we are always there. Rather the consultancy firms, after installation, they follow the associations for one year to train them. It works now, because we have the BCC in place. It is the BCC that controls the operators now. (Idrissa 2008)

In Idrissa's narrative, like in other agents', the villagers are lacking sufficient capacity to control the private operators. A support structure, with private consultancy firms acting in a control and advisory function, the BCC, are put in place as further discussed below. The point here is that the logic of delegated management and separation of roles is complicated in the stories because of how the population is represented as lacking sufficient capacity, and also because of how the actors relate to each other. One issue in this regard is the way that a lack of training and capacity opens up for the possibility of abuse, as in Wada's narrative:

Now another problem is that private management started unfortunately, which was a problem of sensitisation. You know, at the beginning we prioritised local private operators. Thinking that this would facilitate things. Unfortunately they were mostly traders, often illiterate. They think like shopkeepers who are motivated by selling and profits. This caused all sorts of problems. When there was a break down the mechanics or electricians billed the village two times, three times, because they didn't pay attention. And often, instead of recruiting according to contract they use the AUE, [water users' association]. 'Since the AUE is already there, well, the secretary of the AUE can be my secretary at the same time. At

the end of the month you collect the money and bring it to me. You see. That is another problem with ignorance. (Wada 2008)

Similarly, a lower level agent, Ousman, with much experience from the field tells a story of how a contracted repairman tried to trick the village chief into believing that the price of a new filter was 200.000 FCFA, instead of 20.000 FCFA. He says that it is common that repairmen abuse their position in this way. Yet he didn't report the repairman. "Because what happens then?" he asks rhetorically, "someone else will come, who might be even worse than the first one". Instead he says he corrected the repairman and hoped he would improve. According to Ousman, the problem may also be the reverse. The repairman makes a repair at a cost of 5.000 FCFA but the village only pays him 2.000, because they say they are family. Ousman says that this might not even cover the travel costs, so the contractor will not want to go to that village again. The problem, Ousman concludes, is often not mechanical or technical, but social.¹⁶⁰

The narrators thereby justify the creation of a further institutional layer to supervise and support local actors engaged in trying to make the reform work on the ground.

Privatising control over local management systems

In the National Water Programme, PNAEPA, the supporting structure consists of the establishment of Bureaus for advice and control, BCC. The BCCs are private consultancy firms, hired by the regional water office, paid by the water tariff, to support and control the local management units.

As stated initially, the use of consultancy firms for performing control functions is more contested than the transfer of construction and operation and maintenance. In the rest of this section I look at how the state agents narrate the privatisation of control as shaping the responsibility of the state.

Advice and control is a role that has not previously been formalised in the functions of the ministry and the deconcentrated offices, and is therefore not formally transferred from the state structure to the private. However, in Wada's narrative some state agents did perform the advice and control function in the past. In his story it is the role of

¹⁶⁰ Ousman talks specifically about small villages with wells or boreholes.

the state technical offices at regional level that is being handed over to the private consultancy companies:

When the technical offices of the water ministry are close by, the villagers come to tell us when the village chief requires money. They tell the ministry and we tell the chief 'be careful, if you touch the money you will go to the police to pay it back'. So they stop. You see. And today, the BCC, it is the work that we did that they will do now. There is a percentage of the income from water that is used to pay the BCC. So it is the same thing, it is the role of the technical offices that is handed over to a private actor. (Wada 2008)

Cissé provides another version:

Before it was European companies who performed the role of the BCC. It is not a privatisation. Now Nigerien companies are doing it. (Cissé 2010)

In Cissé's narrative the private companies are not replacing the state as actor, but Nigerien companies are replacing European ones. Hence, in his narrative, the introduction of the BCCs does not imply a reduction of the role of the state in practice. It rather implies a re-linking of the state, since the Nigerien companies are contracted by the state while the European companies were contracted by the donors in projects.

Generally, when they appear in the state agents' narratives the BCCs provide a possibility for the state to control local structures, as in Idrissa's narrative:

Now we really have control over those people. Because even if the water users' associations don't have the capacity, the consultancy firms are there. As support. They give advice to the private operator, the water users' association, and they also monitor the private operator. (Idrissa 2008)

The transfer, just as in other cases discussed above, tends to be rationalised based on an understanding of the inability of the water users' associations to perform the control function. In Karimou's story another logic is at play:

And afterwards, we said maybe we also need to have another structure to support, control and advice. Not only the water users' association but also the private contractor. Because, well, in the process, we don't want the water ministry to be implicated. As soon as we talk about money it is a bit dangerous that a state office, our technicians can be... we serve as arbitrator. (Karimou 2008)

In Karimou's narrative the introduction of the BCC means that state agents are excluded from performing the advice and control function. They are, and should be, excluded because they are unable to manage the money.

Different views come to the fore on what caused the actual decision to introduce the private consultancy firms. Whether the donors were the instigators or not, the underlying cause, in the narratives, was the lack of resources for the state to perform. While for example Wada and Idrissa argue that the BCCs were imposed by the donors, as in the following:

The BCCs have been forced on us by the donors, since the regional offices have not been able to perform. But it is because the regional offices haven't had the resources. Then the donors have chosen BCCs, that are financed by money from the water users. With money that could have gone to the regional offices to do the same activity, which they would perform much better than the BCC. (Wada 2010)

Karimou contradicts this position by saying:

The BCCs were not imposed by the donors. Advice and control did not work, the state didn't have the human, material or financial resources to do the work./.../The BCCs safeguard the activities of the state. But in the end the state is responsible, and must ensure outcomes. It is its core function. The state has to control the actors, it does not disengage. (Karimou 2008)

In Karimou's narrative lack of resources justifies the introduction of BCCs. Wada, on the other hand, can imagine a system for financing the regional offices similar to the one for financing the BCC, which would allow the regional office to act.

It may very well be that their different positions in the administration shape the way Karimou and Wada make sense of the use of BCC. Karimou, a senior official in the central administration, sees a need to avoid the ministry's technical staff when it comes to handling money as explained above, where he emphasises the role of the state as arbitrator. Wada, a regional director, on the other hand gives expression to the need to strengthen the regional water offices:

We have to make the regional offices work. They have been weakened as a result of the use of the BCCs and other private actors. (Wada 2010)

Wada complains, as did other regional directors at the operational budget programming workshop, that rather than responsabilising the deconcentrated bodies of the state the use of consultancy firms excludes the state agents from performing their role. Karimou, on the other hand is adhering to the old logic of creating a responsible state by exclusion, and bypassing it when money is involved.

Ultimately, responsibility for the functionality of the system, including recruitment and control of the BCC lies with the project owner, who in policies and strategies is the municipality. However, in the state agent stories the effort to clarify roles and responsibilities in policies and strategies meets a context of insufficient resources and capacities. Hima puts it as follows:

Because today, with the transfer of competence, the mayors are the project owners. It means they should be able to search for funding, follow the investments, control what is in place, and follow up on the management of the infrastructure in their area. But who will do all this follow up, who will elaborate the programme, who will elaborate the requests, if there are no technicians at their level. You see, the lacuna that is there. And that maybe will be filled in 20 years, I don't know. (Hima 2008)

Although Hima's story, as many of the others, ends with a positive affirmation that the MDGs will be achieved, and everything will improve, their stories are filled with instances like this, where in the end the lack of resources, human and financial, stand in the way of improvements being made, and the possibility to benefit from reform, in this case in terms of improved systems of control.

We learn from the narratives that the state agents emphasise the need for a control structure to govern the new local structure for water services. The introduction of the BCC is pragmatic considering the lack of resources. However, some agents doubt whether the logic of using private consultancy firms is really self-evident, and would prefer to strengthen the deconcentrated services of the state as they consider control to be a core function of the state. Although they tend to accept the presence of the BCCs, in specific instances they question the rationality and emphasise the importance of the role of the state. In the following we will see how the transfer of another function, namely supervision of new works, is contested more broadly among state agents.

The state as project supervisor

That's what you call project supervisor. It is the technical offices of the water ministry. They are the project supervisors. So they have to execute the programme, it does not mean to do the work themselves, because they will delegate certain things to companies, for example the construction of wells. There is no office at the water ministry that construct wells. It is private companies that drill boreholes and install pumps. But the responsibility for all that rests with an office at the water ministry. That's what you call the project supervisor. (Rabiou 2008)

Rabiou is firm in his statement that the technical offices of the state are the project supervisors, meaning that they are responsible for the project, not for building the infrastructure, but for overseeing how infrastructure is built and for the quality of the water. As we saw in chapter 6, Rabiou was also firm on this issue in the negotiation with Danida, and argued that to hand over responsibility to private consultancy firms would be to go back to the old approach, and contradict the programme approach and its purpose of responsabilising the state. In this section I look closer at how the state agents narrate the role and responsibility of the state for project supervision.

While the privatisation of certain functions is basically a closed affair, as argued above, project supervision is still up for negotiation and the logic of its privatisation questioned. In the narratives it is questioned on the basis of two important factors; first, because of how the private sector and the state sector are represented in terms of capacity;

and second because of how they conceive of the role of the state and the imperative of responsabilising the state.

Capacity

Lack of capacity, in terms of human and financial resources, as we have seen above, is often used in development discourse to legitimise the involvement of the private sector. In this context, however, state agents question the capacity of the private actors and emphasise internal capacity in different ways. Several agents are explicit in their critique of the lack of capacity of the consultancy firms. In the following quote Idrissa is highly critical:

The consultancy firms don't have the competence. They are not up to date and they don't understand the politics either. They don't know the documents. They can't make a call for tender. The state has to do it in their place. And even if they do it we have to do it all over again. But they take the money, they profit. While they ask for all the information and help from the administration. (Idrissa 2010)

In this quote from Idrissa's narrative the private operators are lacking knowledge and expertise. As an effect the state agents, who have to do the work in the place of the consultancy firms are implicitly understood as competent to perform the tasks. In addition, Idrissa's narrative indicates that this particular type of private involvement constitutes an abuse of the resources of the state for the profit of the private actor.

Similarly, Hima provides an example:

If a technical and financial partner gives us, say, 5 billion FCFA, of the 5 billion around 1,2 billion are used to pay the consultancy firm to do the supervision and control of the works. While the control and supervision in reality is done by the agents of the water ministry in the field. All the work is done by the ministry, by its agents in the field. The consultancy firms are just there to coordinate a bit, do their monthly report, based on the information provided by the technicians. (Hima 2008)

In Hima's narrative, the state agents do the work, but they are not recognised for performing the activity of the state. Rather they are circumvented and at least formally excluded. The state agents are

misused, taken advantage of, for the purpose of private profit. The benefits of the profit incentive, in the narratives, become reversed and perceived as unjust. This may be particularly important to the state agents considering their meagre salaries.

Wada brings up a similar theme as he says that:

The consultancy firms are never fully staffed so they pay the agents of the regional offices to do the job. They engulf them. The state agents with education financed by the state. They say that the regional services are defecting but then they use them anyway (Wada 2010).

When the companies pay the state agents to do the job for them they are abusing the resources of the state because they engulf them (fagocité), and make them unavailable to the state. Wada's statement that the consultancy firms use the agents of the regional offices seems to imply a questioning of the claim that the regional offices are defective, at the same time as it points at double standards of the consultancy firms and the donors. In both cases the state agents become the victims of unfair accusations as well as being abused for the purpose of profit. Taken together Hima, Idrissa and Wada indicate that the use of consultancy firms for project supervision is an obstacle to the state's ability to perform control functions in the sector. Because the state has to do the work of the private actors who lack capacity, and who use the staff of the state to perform their role.

A growing questioning of the capacity of the consultancy firms to do their job can be seen to have led to more concrete negotiations over the inclusion of state agents into the functions of project supervision. At the operational budget programming workshop, described in the introduction to the thesis, one regional director argued for more frequent inspections to be conducted by the regional offices. One of the technical assistants reacted to the diverging figures in the regional plans. The regional director (Ibrahim) laughed and said that sure, the state should devote itself to its core functions, that is the direction in which they are pushed. Consultancy firms are supposed to do the inspections, he said. But in his region the donors demand that the regional office conducts one mission a week. They have obviously lost faith in the consultancy firms, he said, and now they want the technical offices to do the job anyway. Who demands it? one of the technical assistants asked. The donors in the region, Ibrahim responded. Although the workshop was an exercise and not the final elaboration

of the budget, it is significant that the number of missions was adjusted upwards as a result of the discussion where several agents supported the position taken by Ibrahim.

The representation of the consultancy firms as incapable, reinforced by the argument that the donors, here given some kind of authority, don't trust the consultancy firms, creates a space for the agents to negotiate their role in a very direct way as it affects the actual activities that the regional offices will perform. In the negotiation the state agents are presented as the experts as well as responsible actors, to be trusted, even by donors.

Hima brings up the question of capacity in relation to consultancy firms in his narrative:

I think there have been significant changes in the implementation of projects financed by the technical and financial partners. 10 or 15 years ago the implementation was done by technicians from the Ministry of Water. Who were just supported by technical assistants, by technical advice. Who were put in place by the donors. I think that at the time the agents of the ministry were very well trained. Because they were always in the field. (Hima 2008)

Hima emphasises internal capacity in his story. Project supervision was performed by the technicians from the ministry, who were very well equipped for the task due to their experience. He emphasises capacity "at that time", indicating that as they were deprived of the experience of working in the field, the transfer to private actors implied a reduction of the capacity of the state agents. The use of private consultancy firms is here contested not only because of its effects on water services, but as having a negative effect on the functioning of the state. Instead, the state agents are represented as potentially responsible if allowed to perform control as a core function of the state.

Responsibilisation

The transfer to private actors becomes irrational in Hima's narrative, as it has no legitimate foundation. In addition to the above, Hima describes the use of consultancy firms as a hierarchical ordering where the national staff are made subordinate to the consultants' external expertise, which he then questions.

It should be noted that Hima does not object to the use of consultancy firms in general, but talks of them as an important complement and also imagines a future when they can be recruited on internal

funds. What he objects to is a particular shape it has taken within development cooperation, where it deresponsibilises the state, as it prevents state agents from performing its core functions.

Wada comments on the same problem, as we saw above, but adds that when the consultancy firms don't do their job properly the donors contact the technical offices to do the job and the donors pay for it. Thereby the state agents no longer respond to the state and their superiors in the ministry hierarchy, but instead to the project actors. This implies for example, that the project actors are first to be informed, rather than the regional office.

In Wada's narrative project supervision should be the formal role of the regional offices paid through their own budget, since when the state agents are used in the projects the regional offices are deresponsibilised. The argument that Wada and other agents make implies a claim for a strengthening of the state institutions, which is promised by the programme approach, but seems to be lost in implementation.

Rabiou, like Wada, argues on the basis that project supervision is one of the roles for which the state has created the technical offices. Hence, it is what the role and responsibility *should* be. They thereby draw a line, saying *this is the state*, this is what is required in order for the state to be responsible for water service provision. Below Rabiou comments on the consultancy report that was the basis for the identification meeting for the PASEHA II and where the consultants who prepared the working document suggested that project supervision should be performed by consultancy firms:

But why has the state created the offices. It is because they should work right? If someone else should work in the place of the services they will have nothing to do. Although the state has created the services because it has felt the need and use of those services. So, if they tell me that no, no you have to have private consultancy companies first, it is completely contrary even to the Paris declaration on aid efficiency. Right now they have talked about the management units of the projects and said that aid is not efficient. To make it efficient we need the programme approach. We have to responsabilise the services of the state. (Rabiou 2008)

Hima expresses a hope that with the programme approach the state will be allowed to perform its designated role:

Perhaps now with this approach [the programme approach] they will no longer impose consultancy firms on us. Perhaps they will come and do punctual supervision of what we are doing, give advice in a punctual manner. But not continuously. Not consultancy firms that are extremely expensive for us. Now the implementation of the programme will be made by national institutions. (Hima 2008)

It is the responsibility of the state to provide project supervision, according to Hima and most other agents.¹⁶¹ Ultimately the state and the technical offices will be held responsible for people having access to water, and therefore they must also be allowed to perform that responsibility, Wada says. As was argued in chapter 6, in the case of project supervision the state agents claim inclusion and possibility to act, and in this to take responsibility for water service provision. They make use of the discourses about capacity, as well as about what the state should be and the promise of the Paris declaration to responsabilise the state to claim a particular role for the state. As we have seen there are also agents who point at the inability of the state offices to manage funds, and consequently support donor practices in bypassing the state. However, as we will see in the next section, it is possible to

¹⁶¹ There are a few agents who rather talk about the possibility of improving the use of the consultancy firms, such as Karimou and Illya. Karimou recognises the problem with lack of capacity among consultancy firms, but sees it as being possible to overcome,

It is a problem that the consultancy firms are not doing a good job. It undermines the investment. It is also possible that the one who does the control is badly paid. Then the entrepreneur has the possibility to corrupt. They have to be motivated to do a good job. (Karimou 2010)

In Karimou's narrative this applies to the private company. As we saw above, according to him the same does not apply to the state services. They should, instead, not be implicated when there is money involved. In the following, Illya explains that the market will solve the problems in the long run.

Sure, there are many insufficiencies when it comes to consultancy firms, but it is like... the inexperience of beginners. We will soon have many consultancy firms, and competition will be harder. And then the one who does not perform will not survive. And then we will improve the quality, we will have services of better quality. But for the moment it is a beginning. It is people who have had the courage to tread into unknown ground. Most of them have quit their position as civil servant. Well, there was of course the external financing that allowed the machine to be created to open up this market. But in any case we will have better performance. It's just necessary that the conditions of the market are more rigorous. (Illya 10)

imagine other ways of dealing with the problem of mismanagement of funds.

“Audit us”

Several mid-level agents acknowledge that there is a problem with the management of funds in the state offices. The solution, however, in much of their reasoning is not the transfer of functions to private actors, but a strengthening of the state. As was discussed above, the use of consultancy firms would according to some agents imply a return to a structure that deresponsibilises the state.

Although they do not question the charges of mismanagement, several agents criticise the effects of private sector involvement as it excludes state agents and services from activities, as Idrissa says:

Before, there was work for everybody, but the consultancy firms have taken their place. People from the ministry leave and create consultancy firms. While the employees of the state sit for three months and do nothing. It is frustrating. While the consultancy firms do the job. Because the state agents embezzle, they say. (Idrissa 2008)

The state agents are there, Idrissa says, with no tasks. They have been deprived of their functions because of accusations of embezzlement. Privatisation in this case is perceived as an exclusionary mechanism, which prevents the state agents from performing their role and responsibility. Rather than spending the money on consultancy firms the donors could use their funding to support the regional offices, Wada argues.¹⁶² In his narrative it is possible to regulate the financial management of the technical offices.

In the same context Idrissa talks about the politicisation of the ministry, in the sense that agents are appointed positions based on their membership of political parties. The donor's can't do much about this he says. Because they are not there, they don't know who is involved. But they can try to manage through the agents who are not politicians. With audits every six months to see if the director who said he would build 10 boreholes only has constructed one. They have to follow up on activities, he says.

¹⁶² This is taken from a conversation that was not recorded which is why it is not quoted but summarised.

Similarly, after having listened to Joseph's story about the programme approach I ask him if the donors need to have more confidence in the state, and he responds:

Well, more confidence is needed, yes. But also with more follow-up, evaluation and audit. The instruments must be in place. The instruments for control must be in place. (Joseph 2008)

Mismanagement of funds is discussed by Joseph and several other agents as a risk with the programme approach. Mid-level agents, such as Mamane, point at the need for a strict respect for procedures in his narrative.¹⁶³ Marou, emphasises the need for safety nets:

There have to be audits. Because it is important. It is not to frap someone, no. But audits are useful. It means they will permit people to improve their management system. Because if they know that at that period an audit will be made, or even unexpected audits, surprise audits can be made, without announcing it, they can come, well look we want to know what's going on. And I think that it is a good way to assure the donors that the money they... that the aid is really used in a good way... Because I know very well that there are... I have heard to the left and to the right how people complain "why wait years before they come to make audits". People complain. If for example every year audits are made, I assure you that things will fall into line. But if they have to wait for two years, three years even... people are replaced, people no longer know the procedure and they do what they think. What they imagine... But if there are audits people know "ah, there are procedures to follow", and people are obliged to follow them. (Marou 2010)

Marou calls for audits and seems to accept audit as a tool to manage people's behaviour, to make the system work, as well as a way to assure the donors that the money is used correctly. In Marou's narrative audits would enable continuity in the administration. The promise or the threat of audits in the future would shape behaviour in the present. Since people are replaced and institutional memory is short, in Marou's narrative, other instruments are needed to provide the continuity and stability over time that is required for the performance of responsibility to be possible.

¹⁶³ This is taken from a conversation that was not recorded which is why it is not quoted but summarised.

Marou also says that other agents call for more audits, thus indicating that the state agents are responsible agents who want the management systems to be improved. By calling for more audits he indicates to me that he himself is without guilt. Moreover, without explicitly pointing out people for being corrupt he and a colleague, Mamane, in a conversation indicate that there are superiors who abuse their position. They seem to be drawing a distinction between themselves and high level agents where they themselves stand for the moral and responsible behaviour, which the donors should rely on.

If it is done regularly [audits] ... It is like a disease. If it is continuously followed up you know the state of it and if it worsens you know what medicine to apply. If there is an improvement, all the better. But if you wait for the disease to deteriorate, to grow as you say, and wait for the moment where it has to be amputated when you come to make the control it is of no use, the feet will be amputated that is clear. (Marou 2010)

Here, the amputation can be seen as a metaphor for privatisation, or transfer of responsibility to consultancy firms when the limb/state service has deteriorated to the point of no return. The audit in a public service is as natural, and required, as the follow-up of the process of a disease. This also indicates that audits could have prevented the state offices from reaching the point where privatisation became necessary.

By requesting audits the state agents can be argued to be claiming inclusion into the functions of project supervision. They are expressing a wish to be given the resources and the room for manoeuvre to show that they can take responsibility. A room for manoeuvre that would be opened up by the use of regular audits. They are thus accepting the constraining effects of regulation in order to increase their space for action.

What have we learned?

How do state agents narrate the state as in terms of agency and choice when it comes to privatisation? In general the narratives present privatisation as a pragmatic and rational choice by the Nigerien state facing constraints in terms of poverty and dysfunctionality. Despite these constraints, privatisation in its current form is presented as carefully considered and conducive to Nigerien conceptualisations of what the role and responsibility of the state should be.

The privatisation of construction and management is largely naturalised in the narratives. However, a lack of competent construction companies may prevent the state from achieving set targets such as the MDG, while the privatisation of the national water company and of rural water supply emerge in the narratives as relatively successful ways of enabling the state to function and to take responsibility. Rather than a de-linking of the state from the population, privatisation is conceptualised as a re-linking via the water services, as it is considered to increase the presence of the state in the lives of the population in the shape of functioning water services, thereby increasing the possibility for the state to act (for example by making investments). Preferring to term this element of the reform as delegation to private sector actors rather than privatisation the state agents emphasise the centrality of the state in water service provision. This includes the state having overarching responsibility for the water sector, and not least for controlling the multiplicity of actors in the sector.

How does reform shape the ability of the state to control water service provision? From the narratives we learn that privatisation of certain functions in itself promises control, for example as a result of the responsabilisation that is addumed to arise from the profit and loss motive and the transformation of the population into consumers. The narratives also tell us that the contractual implication enables accountability in a way that it was not possible before. However, lack of resources, human and capital, prevent private operation and management in the rural sector from functioning properly. Moreover, the relationship between private actors and the population does not necessarily become neutral and impersonal, but is shaped by personal relations. According to the narratives, another actor is necessary to guarantee control in the sector, hence the introduction of the BCCs in the national water policy.

In their narratives, in the context of privatisation how is the role and responsibility of the state and its agents constrained by the other's gaze? And what does state responsibility come to mean in their narratives? While the delegation of construction and management is broadly accepted in the narratives the transfer of control (both in relation to management and of construction) is highly contested. To claim control as the role and responsibility of the state the state agents contest the way they are perceived by donors. In their narratives, they claim internal capacity, but also appeal to the need to responsabilise the state,

not least by providing the continuity necessary for responsibility through a consistent use of audits.

The more general conclusions to draw from the analysis in this chapter are first of all, how the transfer of different functions in the delivery chain are understood differently because of how they are considered to shape the possibility of the state to take responsibility for water service provision and to perform the state in the lives of the population. But also how, in the administration, there might be a desire to be able to act and perform water policy, which could also serve as a basis to argue for strengthening the capacity of the state and building an internal structure that would better enable the administration to control the outcome of state policies in the water sector.

9. Concluding discussion

Water sector reform in Niger is influenced by development cooperation and global discourse on how services are best provided, as well as by discourses on how states in Africa fail to take responsibility for providing services and what the best means are for responsabilising them. To come to terms with the problem as it has been defined, techniques of ownership and the delegation of responsibility to local and private actors dominate Nigerien water sector reform. These techniques were partly a response to critiques of donor conditionalities, top-down approaches and dependency on aid that deprive the recipients (whether state or local communities) of responsibility. The form they have taken in policies and strategies, such as the Paris declaration and the PASEHA programme in the Nigerien water sector, have come to give them a mostly instrumental character. They rely on assumptions of rational choice and of the possibility to produce certain effects through linear planning, implementation and evaluation. The reforms have therefore in their turn been criticised, particularly for producing certain neo-liberal subjects (Abrahamsen 2004, Chandler 2010, Duffield 2007). In addition, ethnographic studies have shown how instrumental reforms fails to take into account other rationalities and ways in which reform is contextualised (Anders 2005, 2010, Mosse and Lewis 2005). Instead, such studies emphasise the importance of understanding the particular trajectories that shape how states are made meaningful in particular contexts.

Taken together, this conversation about the governmental rationalities of development cooperation has prompted me to ask how state agents make sense of water sector reform and how they thereby contribute to how the role and responsibility of the state is made possible and played out in Niger. Focusing on meaning making processes, such as how state agents articulate responsibility narratively in relation to

others, the research question was formulated as *how do state agents in Niger articulate the possibility for state responsibility in the water sector*.

This focus has allowed me to problematise certain assumptions that have been questioned before, but that continue to play a pivotal role in development cooperation. The first assumption that is questioned is the possibility of linearity and the use of a rational choice logic to successfully produce certain behaviour. Instead, the study points at the importance of investigating how reform is transformed in the particular context. The second assumption is the distinction between instrumental and emancipatory logics. The analysis rather shows how instrumental tools that tend to appeal to agents as mainly self-interested subjects, receive their meaning as they are embedded in social relations and the way in which responsibility is shaped by how we come into being in relation to others. Third, the focus on how state agents are relationally constituted problematises the often made distinction between resistance and compliance when analysing how state agents relate to, for example, donor conditionalities. The distinction between resistance and compliance and its reliance on assumptions about intentions, interests and effects, tends to hide the complexities of how state agents take and shift between different positions in ways that make most sense to them as they come into being in relation to others.

My research has been driven by a desire to understand how a state is possible in a context of poverty and dependence, and what such a state looks like. Focusing on how reform is contextualised helps us to better understand particular configurations of the state and of service provision. We learn that we cannot design the perfect tools that allow us to capture the difficulties of transformation in processes of implementation. We should not draw the conclusion though, that reform and mechanisms of governing are destined to fail. Rather, this study urges us to learn from those who are to be governed. The narratives in this thesis can provide insight into what state agents find important in order for them to perform the state in relation to the population, to see that there is a logic to how they relate to donors, to the wider population and to private sector actors, that is not reducible to self-interest, and that is shaped relationally.

In the following I recapitulate and develop the main conclusions of the thesis and reflect on the possible implications of the results.

I. THE POSSIBILITY OF STATE RESPONSIBILITY

How is state responsibility narrated?

In the preceding chapters I have analysed how the state agents narrate current water sector reform the programme approach (ownership), and delegation of responsibility to local and private actors, that aim at the responsabilisation of the state. The notion of responsibility and responsabilisation relies on an assumption of a subject that reflects, acts on intentional choice and is in control of its actions and their outcomes. Mechanisms of responsabilisation in different ways appeal to the subject as an agent of choice and control, and as potentially responsible. The purpose was therefore to see how the state agents narrate themselves as subjects of choice and control, hence as subjects capable of responsibility. Not only to see how they do so on the basis of the responsabilising logic of development cooperation but how they negotiate and shape the possibility for state responsibility in relation to others. This involves exploring how the responsabilising logics are contextualised by the way in which state agents shape subject positions for themselves and the state in a narrative structure.

Autonomy/choice

To explore autonomy and choice as elements of responsibility I addressed the following questions: How are autonomy and dependency of the state understood by state agents and how do those understandings shape how they see the possibility of responsibility? In the context of dependency on aid where donor preferences need to be considered, how is leadership seen as possible in the narratives? And how is it shaped by the way in which agency and dependency are understood? How do the state agents conceive of the state as an actor of choice when it comes to particular reforms that shape its role and responsibility, such as the programme approach and delegation of responsibility to local and private actors? How does delegation to local and private actors shape how the state agents see the state, and themselves as agents of choice capable of responsibility? Reading the narratives the questions are analysed temporally, i.e. addressing the following questions: How is the present role and responsibility of the state made sense of in light of past events and promises for the future?

The state agents' narratives articulate a state whose capacity for responsibility is a result of dependence rather than of autonomy. The

Nigerien state and its capacity for responsibility is seen as coming into being as a result of its relationship to donors and the international community. In the narratives dependency provides the condition of possibility to imagine a responsible Nigerien state in a context of severe poverty. Asked to imagine the future of the Nigerien state in the water sector the state agents emphasise the dependence on a shared responsibility. What is imagined is hence not autonomy but the negotiation of dependency in a way that allows the state to act in water service provision. While Bayart has argued that such a notion of interdependence allows African states to employ the strategy of free rider as a first hand option, obliged to live from hand to mouth (Bayart 2000:267), in the Nigerien state agents' narratives interdependence is what constitutes the condition of possibility for the state as a responsible actor. It can be argued that this is the shape the extraversion of the Nigerien state takes, but while Bayart's argument about the extraversion of the African state implied its disconnect from the population, it is argued here that in the state agent narratives interdependence is necessary because it is what allows them to imagine a Nigerien state that is present in the lives of the population through water service provision. At the same time the shared responsibility creates a position where the Nigerien state is not solely responsible for the achievement of development goals such as the MDGs. Rather responsibility is shared as a result of how relations are shaped across space and how they change over time. Possible failure to attain the goals is understood within the context of unequal global economic relations and the dependent conditions of a poor state.

While choice and agency emerge as a result of the way in which dependency is managed the ownership approach provides particular conditions for how dependency can be understood and acted. Fraser has argued that ownership is therapeutic, i.e. "a process of consolation, in which recipients are asked to come to terms with their lack of political agency, rather than to try and overcome barriers to its expression" (Fraser 2006:46). The narratives of the Nigerien state agents qualify Fraser's argument as they emphasise how the Paris declaration and the programme approach promise responsabilisation and thereby open up room for manoeuvre to act and negotiate the conditions of dependence and the terms on which the state is included in the activity of governing the water sector. The instrumentality of responsabilisation is seized and used as a tool for emancipation and increasing the voice of the state agents (some state agents) in relation to donors.

From the PASEHA meeting we learned how, based on representations of the organisation of aid in the past, the Nigerien water ministry seems to be able to claim a certain leadership and political agency in defining what responsabilisation of the state administration means, although within a constrained space. Hence the state emerges as an agent of choices for which it can be held responsible.

It can be argued that the programme approach implies a re-governmentalization of the state. While transnational governmentality (Ferguson and Gupta 2005), or development governmentality continues to be present on all levels in the process of water service provision the discourse of the programme approach and the aim to integrate all development activities within the technical ministries provide a space for the state to govern.

Within the constraints of dependency and poverty the state is narrated as making rational and reflected choices. Reform, such as moving from the idea of a welfare state to a state that focuses on core functions, imposes itself as a result of the limitations of the state in terms of resources, and as a result of donor demands. The state is hence narrated as taking responsibility by making rational decisions, such as delegating responsibility to local actors or transferring functions to private actors, under difficult circumstances. The state emerges as a pragmatic adaptor, rather than the driver of change. The latter is a role allocated to donors or to external circumstances such as poverty and geographical conditions. The responsible Nigerien state is resilient in that it learns to manage and adapt to change. What emerges in the narratives is a state that takes responsibility for 'developing', i.e. for keeping the state working while dependent on the influx of aid, rather than for 'development' as an end goal of its choosing. State responsibility this way, is a matter of managing the marginality of development (Mudimbe 1988).

In state agent narratives, both the delegation of responsibility to local actors and of certain functions to private actors, in the form of contractual implication, significantly shape the state as an agent of choice. Particularly, delegation to private actors emerges as a way to create a regulated autonomy for both the state and the local population. In the case of the state it is narrated as willingly subjecting itself to the governing logic of the contract through the privatisation of the national water company. The failure of the state to manage is narrated as being a result of poverty. Privatisation does not emerge as the first hand choice for the Nigerien state but as a way to manage the state

under conditions of 'being developing', that has rendered the state unable to manage on its own. In the stories, privatisation allows the state to function, and enables it to perform as a state *because* the state thereby willingly constrain its choices. Those are understood as the conditions of possibility under which the poor state can act responsibly, and provide the population with water. At the same time the state agents firmly argue that the type of privatisation put in place is a result of a carefully considered process by the Nigerien water ministry, and hence, its acclaimed success is narrated as the responsibility of the competent Nigerien state.

Similarly, the delegation of rural water management to private actors is motivated, in the narratives, by poverty, lack of education and village politics that make the population unfit to govern itself. Local communities are included into the responsibility of the state on condition that they set up structures for governing themselves to self-govern, such as water users' associations, pricing of water and delegating management to a private operator. The inability or unwillingness to do so places the local community outside the responsibility of the state. These arrangements promise the possibility for the state to govern from a distance in a way it can not be conceived of doing when water services were managed with the involvement of traditional chiefs. Privatisation in the rural context is thereby represented as a way for the state to extend its government into the local realm, and hence to increase its presence in the lives of the population.

As the above indicates, state agents conceive of themselves as state agents in relation to others. To be a bit more explicit on that point, the narratives tell us that choice is constrained by the need for approval by donors, hence by how they read what the donors want the Nigerien state to become. We also see that ambiguities and contradictions in donor discourse are used to negotiate the role of the state, which in some cases exceeds the desires of particular donors. As for example in the PASEHA negotiation. In relation to the population, we see how the state agents represent the local communities in ways that rationalise particular roles and responsibilities for the state, such as the need for a personal presence in the lives of the population.

Control

To analyse control as an element of the articulation of responsibility I have addressed the following questions: How do state agents conceive of themselves and the state as having control over implementation?

How has the ability of the state to control outcomes of policies and strategies changed over time according to the narratives? What are the impediments to control? How do state agents see reforms as shaping the way in which the state can exercise control? Particularly as a result of the proliferation of actors in the sector. How is the present role and responsibility of the state made sense of in light of past events and promises for the future?

The ownership agenda, and the way it takes shape in the programme approach, promises control in the shape of information, planning and evaluation. Against the story of how the organisation of aid in the past deprived the state of control the state agents narrate the programme approach as enabling the state to perform through calculated interventions across the country, hence to take responsibility for national cohesion as well as for the efficient and sustainable use of resources on scales that exceed the individual development project in size as well as in space and time. This is a narrative that justifies the responsabilisation of the state and its agencies, and shapes a desire to be able to exercise control in the sector through performance management, thus producing certain legitimate ways to act.

As above, where I argue that representations of the past and the promise of the Paris declaration enable the state to negotiate the terms of inclusion into the activity of water service provision, the promise of control seems to lead to an internalisation of the responsabilising logic of the programme approach at the same time as it can be used to question certain behaviour by donors and claim a certain role and responsibility for the state.

Narratives of the early delegation of responsibility to local communities in the 1980s point at the complexity between unloading of responsibility and the need for the state to control water service provision. The narratives tell us that initially there was no system of control in place and a lack of resources and capacity as well as difficulties caused by the nature of local politics are used by the state agents to explain why the infrastructure kept breaking down. In light of the representation of the local communities as deficient and unable to manage the water infrastructure contractual implication becomes a rational solution in order to allocate responsibility properly. Contractual implication, we learn, includes certain criteria that are expected to enable the state to govern local communities to self-govern successfully. The contractual implication ideally fills the function of connect-

ing the state and the population through an element of control that promises functioning provision of water services.

Harrison argues (2005a:1311) that “African states have been infused with capacity-building programmes to enhance their ability to ‘see’ societies as agglomerations of citizen-consumer-producers, and international organisations have helped to *produce* societies that conform to this model”. However, the state agent narratives tell us that such societies are not always successfully produced nor do the state agents themselves seem to regard local communities that way. The complexities of village life, lack of capacity in the villages and the nature of relations between the population and private actors, continue to be used to justify a close presence by the state in the lives of the population to control the sustainability of the system. These representations provide an argument to support the state having a substantial formal role and responsibility. However, the narratives tell us that the state does not have that formal role and presence in the lives of the population, and the lack of resources at all levels is seen to produce a responsibility gap.

With delegation of rural water management to private actors it becomes the role of the water users’ associations to control the private operator. However, in line with the general representation of the rural population the narrators represented the water users’ associations as lacking capacity to perform that role. Instead, they told us, private consultancy firms, BCC, Bureau for advice and control, are engaged to accompany the new structure. The rationale, that comes forth in the stories, for using private consultancy firms to perform the control function is basically that the regional technical offices have failed in this role. According to some agents the state needs to be avoided when it comes to management of funds. However, other agents argue that the regional technical offices have failed because they lack sufficient resources. Moreover, they consider the use of consultancy firms to weaken the regional offices. Ultimately, the use of consultancy firms, for performing both the function of advice and control and project supervision of new works, is contested in the narratives. This contestation is on the basis of a lack of capacity among the private consultancy firms, but also on the basis of what the state agents consider should be the role of the state, where control is one of its core functions and what makes state responsibility possible. Moreover, the logic of profit and loss is considered to make the private firm responsible only to

itself, while the state and the water users' associations emerge as being motivated by responsibility for the common good.

Responding to the question in the analytical framework of how state agents conceive of themselves as agents in relation to others. As mentioned, one of the main reasons for donors' preferences for private companies over the state, that the narrators bring forth, is the inability of the technical offices of the state to manage funds. Most state agents agree with that picture but rather than accepting that the technical offices should be replaced by private companies they call for increasing financial control. Regular audits are considered natural and necessary, and are compared to controlling the spread of a disease. Rather than being excluded they ask to be held responsible through technologies of control, and thereby to be allowed to perform the state.

In addition to the above, control has an important temporal aspect as control over the outcome of policies and strategies involves planning, implementation and evaluation. This process implies a sequential order over time, and it also allows for learning from past activities, through evaluation, as the basis for new planning for the future. However, the eternal new beginnings that characterise Nigerien politics in general and water sector reform in particular interrupt the continuity and sequential order that is supposed to enable control, and hence responsibility. One such example is pointed to by an agent who says that the donors always change methods before it is possible to evaluate the outcome. Another example that emerges in the narratives is how staff are always replaced as a result of political considerations. As the work the state agents do is always interrupted, responsibility never materialises and they cannot be held responsible for an end result that is never there.

What does responsibility come to mean?

The ways in which state agents narrate the possibility of responsibility provide a space for negotiating what state responsibility is and should be. In the narratives I have been looking for the resemblance of a choice by asking: how do state agents talk about responsabilisation and responsibility in ways that may be different from that which is assumed in development policies and strategies. Reading the narratives I ask: In what ways, drawing on what representations and discursive elements, do the state agents open up responsabilisation for negotiation in ways that make sense to them in the particular Nigerien con-

text? This also involves how state agents make sense of state responsibility as a response to the call from the other. Often they respond to what they consider is already known (such as lack of capacity, intricate village politics that make the local communities unfit to manage on their own), sometimes they may open up for uncertainty. Three main themes emerge throughout the analysis, namely; responsibility for processes rather than outcomes; responsibility as the ability to act; and responsibility as relational, including the particular responsibility of the state under conditions of poverty.

I have already discussed above how the way choice and control are understood as constrained by external circumstances and donor preferences, makes the state responsible for processes rather than for outcomes over which they have limited choice or control. This means that technologies of responsabilisation may shape behaviour in other ways than intended, and that they rather contribute to perpetuate the marginality of 'being developing', of what Harrison calls governance states, through what Chandler calls post-liberal governance (2010).

However, as Abrahamsen (2004) has argued, the new approach to developing states, as active and drivers of their own reform, require new forms of governing. We have learned from the narratives and the state-donor meetings that these new forms of governing, such as the programme approach and its promise of inclusion, may open up a room for manoeuvre for the Nigerien state to negotiate the terms of dependence and what responsabilisation of the state administration should mean. It is clear in how the state agents deal with the attempt to achieve ownership, as well as delegation of responsibility to local actors and the transfer of certain functions to the private sector, that responsabilisation to a large extent comes to mean *the ability to act*.

In many of the narratives the state is considered to be enabled to act responsibly by the constraints that are placed on it, such as contractual implication with private operators. However, in the case of project supervision the state agents reject the demands of the donors and claim responsible inclusion as active agents. This example shows, on the one hand, how the state makes a decision about what the role and responsibility of the state should be, and control is considered one of its core functions. On the other hand the actual making of the decision, is yet another way of claiming responsibility by exercising leadership with regard to how water services should be provided.

Finally, what Nigerien state responsibility means is a result of how the state is understood relationally. This is the case in relation to the international community as well as in relation to the population.

In short, Nigerien state responsibility is a result of how the state agents make sense of the state as coming into being in relation to donors and expatriate expertise, that have been continuously present in the Nigerien water sector. On the one hand the capacity for Nigerien responsibility is understood as a result of the organisation of aid. But more importantly here, is how the state agents understand what the Nigerien state is in an international context, i.e. as 'developing'. The position of 'being developing' makes the notion of a shared responsibility necessary in order to imagine the Nigerien responsible state.

In relation to the population state responsibility is understood on the basis of the representation of the population and its needs. Here we see how some state agents, on the basis of representations of the population as poor, lacking capacity and ruled by local politics, in their narratives affirm the responsabilising logic of contractual implication. They legitimise the implementation of an institutional programme on the basis of certain knowledge of who the population and the local communities are. However, we also saw how the same representation of the population feeds into how the state agents problematise the possibility of contractual implication as a means to induce responsible self-government. Narrating the call from the population this way some agents argue for the necessity of a present state. More importantly it becomes possible to argue for a state that is personally present in the lives of the population and can hear and understand its needs and desires. This means that in the context of poverty and lack of education that emerge in the stories, state responsibility cannot be reduced to the implementation of impersonal systems of self-government. Instead, in the narratives, the presence of the state and its agents is needed because of how they care for the common good. Ultimately, in the narratives of the Nigerien state agents in the water sector, it is the state who brings the water.

II. IMPLICATIONS

The deepened understanding of the possibility for state responsibility in water service provision in a context of heavy dependence on aid, to which this study aims to add, can hopefully have an impact on the way in which state agents in developing countries are understood and

thereby contribute to rethinking the way in which development cooperation is performed. Although the importance of aid diminishes globally as north-south relationships are changing due to shifting patterns of economic growth, aid will continue to shape the way services are provided in poor countries for some time. Moreover, the effects of current reform will continue to shape how services are provided. Changing north-south relations will also have effects on the role and responsibility of states that are presently shaped by their implication in aid relationships. In such a context it becomes important to understand the conditions of possibility for state responsibility, but perhaps even more important, to see how we need to analyse conditions of possibility in order to be able to estimate what reform will and can produce.

Analysing conditions of possibility implies analysing how global discourse, in theory and practice, is made sense of by the agents who execute reform and whose role and responsibility is to be reformed. It is of crucial importance to understand the discursive embeddedness in which reform is made sense of. Not least, from the narratives we learned that how reform is understood in the present is shaped in light of perceptions of the past and hopes and aspirations for the future. This means that new cooperation, whether in the shape of aid or not, will be made sense of in the light of how previous cooperation and relationships are understood, and what cooperation the state agents aspire to. The tendency among donors to see new phases in development cooperation as 'starting on a clean slate', must be questioned.

The study also shows that it is important to understand how the Nigerien state is shaped narratively by the way it is conceived of as coming into being relationally. Both in a global political economy and in relation to internal constraints and developments. The role and responsibility of the state is negotiated in relation to representations of those relations. For example, how state agents intervene in the lives of the population will be shaped by how that population and its needs are understood.

The Paris declaration established the importance of responsabilisation for aid effectiveness (i.e the production of development effects), yet donors often fail to commit to its realisation, as argued in Accra and Busan (Accra Agenda for Action, The Busan Partnership document). Moreover, several state agents in Niger argue that there is a lack of trust in Nigerien institutions and their capacity to govern. As a consequence the agency that responsabilisation promises is not emerging as swiftly as intended, with effects on the room for re-

sponsible active agents. If responsibility is to emerge it must be taken seriously. So what does that mean? To take ethical responsibility, Spivak argues, implies to not close the other off as already known. Although Spivak may not extend the importance of doing so to state agents, in this thesis I take it to imply to give the recipient state and its agents the benefit of the doubt, of leaving a room for them to articulate what the role and responsibility of the state should be. To do so, requires an acceptance of uncertainty and an element of trust.

Having said this, what are the specific implications of what we learn from the narratives that have been analysed in this study? What might be the implications for responsibility of perceptions of the state as resilient? Seeing the state that way, it becomes responsible for 'being developing', rather than for 'development' in the sense of a defined end goal. This means that the responsabilising effects of technologies of performance in the shape of results-based management and the MDGs are not self-evident. When the Nigerien state is about responding to what is at its disposal for the moment and choice and intentionality are displaced by necessity and resilience the responsabilising ambition becomes destabilised. The state agents don't see the state as responsible for not achieving the goals, but for the effort made. This doesn't mean that the technologies of performance do not shape behaviour, but that they may work in different ways than intended and therefore require different ways of evaluating and holding different actors responsible.

When the state is seen as responsible for processes rather than outcomes, it may be argued that they have failed in the eyes of the results-based management approach. It may also be argued, on the other hand, that this is exactly what the results-based management approach produces in a context of poverty where the means to achieve the results are limited. Results-based management can thereby be seen to perpetuate governance states, and post-liberal governance rather than produce a real shift in how responsibility is practiced.

To imagine Niger as a sovereign state, responsible for 'being developing', where dependency is normalised, is only possible within a discourse about shared responsibility. What do we gain from seeing the normalisation of dependency not just as an expression of aid dependency and hence as producing passive subjects? What if we understand dependency, not as making subjects passive and depriving them of their energies, but look at how active engagement is made possible. On the one hand, a claim to be dependent and functioning suggests

another way of organising international relations beyond the notion of sovereign states with ultimate responsibility for their populations. As such it might imply a call for relating differently to distant others. Where responsibility is shared on the basis of a shared history and shared humanity, rather than within national borders. On the other hand it may be argued that such a perspective implies a politically passive position in the face of unequal global economic relations. Does it function as a legitimisation of post-liberal governance, as Chandler has defined it? Well, it might divert from imaginaries of a revolutionary potential but on the other hand it might point at a moral community beyond national borders that legitimises claims to aid, not as alms but as entitlement. Understanding the relationships of development cooperation in this way stands in contrast to conceptions of aid as limited, time-bound interventions aiming at measurable results. These different conceptions of state-donor relationships may have important effects on how the practices of aid are played out.

What are the implications of how the state agents understand responsibility in relation to the population? On the one hand we see how representations among some state agents legitimise impersonal systems of government in the shape of contractual implication. On the other hand representations of the population rationalise and legitimise a certain presence and behaviour by state agents. If we look at the state agents' representations of the population, not just as a legitimisation of their own position of power in the local context, and if we take the state agents and their stories seriously we may see something other than what is often considered as self-interest and a routine resistance to reform. We can see their representations of the past, present and future as technologies of the self, i.e. of how they make the state agent self possible in the communicative space that development cooperation constitutes. We can see how they bring together the responsabilising logic of development cooperation and the logic of the postcolonial state and its need to perform sovereignty, partly through its central role in the provision of public services such as water.

In the narratives, this leaves a space for state agents at the regional or district levels to play an informal role and hence run the risk of creating an arbitrariness in how control is exercised in the water sector. By looking at how state agents rationalise their relationship to the population we can understand this arbitrariness as a result not just of self-interested state agents who reinforce patterns of patron-client relationships, but as the outcome of how state agents understand their

responsibility in relation to how they make sense of the call from the population and what the population asks of them as state agents to be responsible for. These different ways of ‘knowing the state agents’ must have different effects on how we imagine change to be possible.

Finally, it is important to understand how the state agents conceive of privatisation as a re-linking of the state and the population rather than a detachment of the state from its responsibilities for water service provision. This may very well be an illusory reinforcement of the state. It may be that it confers legitimacy on moves which relieve the state of obligations (Sharma and Gupta 2006:21), and that the state remains an empty shell (Olivier de Sardan 1999:163). However, we also need to understand how this conception can blur the distinction between private companies, water users’ associations and state agencies and complicate the distinction that is considered necessary for functioning lines of accountability.

III. LEARNING THE LESSON

I wish to end the thesis with some final reflections on the challenges of making claims about processes of subjectivation. As discussed throughout this thesis, state agents in Niger, as elsewhere in Africa, are heavily stereotyped as corrupt, lacking capacity, governed by a rent-seeking behaviour and lacking a sense of responsibility and accountability (Hope 2001:122-123). From two very different perspectives state agents are framed as primarily self-interested agents. When states implement donor policies they are accused of being complicit in neoliberal workings of power and acting in their own interest, and when they oppose donor policies, they are accused of in there resistance protecting a gluttonous state, their own patron-client networks and acting in their own interests. Self-interest is presented as both the problem and the solution to malfunctioning states in Africa. Self-interest is what is considered to make them corrupt, and self-interest is expected to make them answer to other incentive structures to shape behaviour properly.

Writing about donors’ reading of the subaltern in Bangladesh, Spivak asks “Is there no lesson there at all to learn? Is the subaltern transparent?” and she continues “[t]here is, according to the view I am discussing here, no gauge of intention, but rational expectations, logical self-interest, reason written by something confusedly called European common sense” (Spivak 1994:62). Asking the same question

here, is there no lesson at all to learn? I am attempting to go beyond the interpretive frame of self-interest to make other readings possible.

I want to make three brief reflections: on the way the state agents themselves relate to self-interest; my own hesitations; and the reactions from others. First of all the state agents themselves tend to talk about each other in terms of self-interest when they oppose a particular behaviour. They talk about other agents who fail in their task because they have political interests. One instance where this became particularly explicit was at the operating budget workshop, where regional directors wanted to take part in the cooperation between the district directors and the central level directors. According to other agents and technical assistants the arguments of the regional directors were a blatant expression of their self-interest, as they wanted to protect their own positions and monopoly on information. This argument had an immediate silencing effect and some legitimate arguments that were made could easily be ignored. Taking what the state agents say seriously I have had to navigate my intention to go beyond self-interest on the one hand, and deal with the state agents' accusations against each other on the other.

Second, despite my intention to take what the state agents say seriously I have tended to make precautions when writing. I have been inclined to declare that a certain statement could be interpreted as an expression of self-interest, or of patron-client relationships although my own interpretation is a different one. I have been prone to do so to show that I am aware of interpretations made by other researchers, but also because I have hesitated as to the validity and legitimacy of my intentions. Yet the intention, i.e. to see what interpretations are possible if we take what the state agents say seriously, is what makes writing this thesis worth the effort in the first place.

The third point concerns the caution I have been given by some commentators not to be naïve since "state agents *are* corrupt, self-interested and incapable". Such comments have increased my concerns about the study but at the same time they have further convinced me of the importance of not assuming we know the other before hand, even when it concerns state agents. I have also on purpose avoided labelling the behaviour of the state agents according to a pre-determined framework of interpretation such as patron-client relationships. Doing so would close off other possible readings of how they constitute themselves as subjects. Instead I have wanted to let the state

agents define what the role and responsibility of Nigerien state is. I have done so because I think there is a lesson to learn.

IV. FUTURE RESEARCH

In this thesis I have focused on how state agents reason and respond to responsabilising technologies in the water sector. In so doing I have excluded other voices and perceptions of what state responsibility is and should be. To better understand the complexities of conditions of possibility for state responsibility it would be worthwhile to engage with how the population as well as local private actors understand the state and its role and responsibility in the water sector. And not least to investigate perceptions and the materiality of how responsibility is performed by different actors as a result of current reform.

In the narratives and the meetings I attended it was clear how perceptions of self-interest and of different forms of corruption among state agents shaped their relations internally within the ministry. Who was allowed to talk, what arguments were taken seriously, and how self-interest was used to silence people and their views came out as a strong conditioning force and would merit further attention.

Moreover, this study makes no effort to investigate the actual material effects of how perceptions of state responsibility takes actual shape in water service provision on the ground. To study how state agents relate to the population and its needs in practice would therefore greatly add to the lessons learned from the present work.

A more general point I want to make is that one might have expected more impact from the repeated message and research findings that show that more attention needs to be paid to the processes whereby policy recommendations and technologies of government take shape in local contexts as the objects of reform engage with and transform them. In many ways lessons have been learned and methods improved. Despite its problems the Paris declaration on effectiveness in aid, is one example of improving the way aid works. Still, as the conferences in Accra and Busan where the Paris declaration was evaluated showed that there was limited adherence to the principles of the declaration among donors, even when recipient states had well functioning systems to align to. This invites two different directions for future research. First, it points at a need to improve our knowledge of how development agencies in particular, but governing agencies in general, use and appropriate knowledge about methods in their field of

activity. Second, and related, it shows how the lesson that scholars working with postcolonial theoretical perspectives have tried to teach us has not been learned. This means that there is a need for further research about the mechanisms that prevent those lessons from taking root and for new and innovative ways of cooperating.

Finally, the question of responsibility in liberal government is still underresearched. It has been theoretically explored and the governing mechanisms have been investigated on policy level. However, there is still fairly little research on how practitioners as well as clients in different types of governing relationships, from development cooperation to public health and entrepreneurial methods in education, make sense of and practice responsabilisation.

SAMMANFATTNING (SUMMARY IN SWEDISH)

Syftet med denna avhandling är att öka vår förståelse av möjligheten för staters ansvar för vattenförsörjning i en kontext som präglas av fattigdom och beroende av bistånd. Efter självständigheten har uppbyggnaden av fungerande system för försörjning av offentliga tjänster, såsom tillhandahållande av dricksvatten, varit central för statens konsolidering i tidigare koloniserade områden. I Niger, som står i centrum för den här studien, har vattensektorn genomgått ständiga reformer i över 40 år. Dessa reformer har i stor utsträckning genomförts i samklang med så kallade globala utvecklingsdiskurser. På grund av Nigers beroende av bistånd formas nuvarande reformer av vattensektorn i stor utsträckning av FNs Millenniemål (MDG), Nigers strategi för fattigdomsbekämpning (PRSP), samt av Parisdeklarationen om effektivitet i biståndet. Dessa strategier inriktar sig på att stärka staters förmåga att ta ansvar för sin egen utveckling. Detta görs dels genom att förstärka statens ägarskap över politik och strategier, men även genom att delegera vissa funktioner till lokala och privata aktörer och koncentrera statens verksamhet på vad som anses vara dess kärnområden.

Målet för det här forskningsprojektet är att undersöka hur dessa ansträngningar att skapa ansvarstagande stater förstås och förhandlas av statstjänstemän i vattensektorn i Niger. Statstjänstemännen är samtidigt de som ska genomföra reformerna och de som ska reformeras. Hur de tolkar och förstår statens roll och ansvar är därmed centralt för hur internationella strategier och nationell politik kommer att omsättas i praktik.

Frågan i avhandlingens titel "Vem kommer med vattnet?" syftar till att betona vattenförsörjningens sociala och politiska karaktär. Vem som kommer med vattnet, dvs vem som har ansvar för olika delar av vattenförsörjningen (staten, NGOs, lokala myndigheter, privata företag, internationella givare, etcetera), har materiella effekter. Det vill säga, det har betydelse för om, var, hur mycket och vilken typ av vatteninfrastruktur som konstrueras, och det har betydelse för om och hur

befolkningen engageras i utbyggnaden. Men vem som kommer med vattnet har också effekter på sociala relationer. Föreställningar om vem som är ansvarig för att förse befolkningen med vatten formar vem vi är och hur människor relaterar till varandra, hur de relaterar till platsen, gemenskapen och till livet självt. Frågan vem som kommer med vatten handlar därmed om hur vi organiserar samhället.

Problem med vattenförsörjning i afrikanska länder har ofta hänvisats till dessa staters interna brister. De har beskrivits som för omfattande, korrupta, och i avsaknad av ansvars-kännande. Dessa föreställningar har bidragit till att givare i vissa perioder har undvikit att arbeta tillsammans med regeringar i mottagarländer genom att sätta upp parallella administrationer i form av projekt. Under senare år har det dock infunnit sig en insikt om att det är ett ohållbart förhållningssätt och att det snarare ytterligare underminerar redan svaga institutioner. Många biståndsgivare och internationella finansiella institutioner inriktar sig därför idag på att stärka staten, samt bygga och reformera dess institutioner. I Niger har det skett genom program för statlig kapacitetsuppbyggnad och skapande av institutionella ramverk, samt organiseringen av biståndet i nationella program istället för individuella projekt. Detta syftar till att låta staten inta en ledande roll för formulering och implementering av politik och strategier. Samtidigt pågår också processer för att delegera ansvar för olika funktioner i vattenförsörjningskedjan till lokala och privata aktörer.

Den problemorienterade forskningen har tenderat att se lösningar och reformer i ett linjärt och instrumentellt perspektiv, där det handlar om att konstruera den rätta processen, från planering till genomförande och utvärdering, för att uppnå önskvärda resultat. Vidare har det ofta antagits att statstjänstemän i huvudsak drivs av egenintresse och reformstrategier har därför ofta centrerats kring hur rätt incitaments-strukturer kan skapas.

I det här forskningsprojektet ifrågasätts flera av dessa antaganden. Föreställningen om möjligheten att producera bestämda effekter genom linjära och instrumentella processer problematiseras genom att studien pekar på hur reformer förstås och transformeras kontextuellt och relationellt av de som ska reformeras. Studien utgör också ett medvetet försök att förstå statstjänstemännens agerande och förhållningssätt till statens och deras eget ansvar bortom egenintresset. Detta görs genom att fokusera på hur de konstituerar sig själva som statstjänstemän i relation till befolkningen och andra aktörer.

Den övergripande forskningsfrågan är därför: *Hur artikulerar statstjänstemän i Niger möjligheten till statligt ansvar i vattensektorn?* För att besvara frågan har jag gjort intervjuer med 27 statstjänstemän inom vattensektorn i Niger, samt deltagit i möten och workshops med deltagare från såväl stat som givare, mellan 2007 och 2010. Intervjuerna utgörs av vattensektornarrativ, dvs berättelser om vattensektorns utveckling i Niger över tid, där statstjänstemännen placerar sig själva som centrala i berättelsen. Den narrative strukturen gör det möjligt att analysera hur statstjänstemännen konstruerar sig själva och staten som aktörer i vattensektorns utveckling i relation till andra över tid. Mötena analyseras som kompletterande narrativa händelser där statstjänstemännen skriver in sig som aktörer på olika sätt och i direkt relation till givarna förhandlar statens roll och ansvar.

För att besvara frågan har jag tittat på hur statstjänstemännen i sina narrativ handskas med olika aspekter av hur ansvar förstås. Att se någon som ansvarig bygger på en föreställning om subjekt som kan göra val och fatta beslut och som kan kontrollera skeenden och deras effekter. Jag har därför analyserat hur statstjänstemännen i sina berättelser konstruerar staten och sig själva som subjekt i termer av förmåga att fatta beslut och utöva kontroll. Jag har också specifikt tittat på hur deras föreställning om statens ansvar är formad av hur de relaterar till andra aktörer, framför allt givare och befolkningen, men också privata företag.

Studiens resultat visar hur statstjänstemännen i Niger accepterar och internaliserar flera av de metoder som syftar till att öka möjligheten till ansvar. Samtidigt använder de dessa och den lokala kontexten samt relationerna till givare, befolkning och privata företag, för att förhandla och forma en specifik roll och ansvar för den Nigerska staten och de själva som statstjänstemän.

När det gäller möjligheten för staten att göra självständiga val för vilka den därmed kan ta ansvar framgår det i narrativen hur den nigerska staten framför allt ses som ansvarig för att hantera sitt beroende av andra, i huvudsak givare, och för att bemöta omständigheter den ställs inför, såsom fattigdom, klimatförändringar, politisk oro och givarnas preferenser. I sina narrativ ger statstjänstemännen uttryck för en stat vars kapacitet för ansvar är ett resultat av hur statens beroende av givare organiseras snarare än av möjligheten att fatta självständiga beslut. Beroendet av givarna utgör själva möjlighetsområdet för att föreställa sig en nigersk ansvarstagande stat i en kontext som domineras av fattigdom. Det har hävdats i forskningen att detta beroende utåt

utgör ett hinder för statens relation till befolkningen. Narrativen pekar å andra sidan på hur dessa relationer gör det möjligt för staten att vara närvarande i befolkningens liv, bland annat genom vattenförsörjning. Delegering och privatisering, (som i stor utsträckning representeras som en anpassning till såväl omständigheter som till givarnas preferenser), framstår i narrativen även de som medel för staten att nå ut i den lokala kontexten och öka sin närvaro, snarare än som en frikoppling av staten från dess ansvar för befolkningens välbefinnande.

I statstjänstemännens narrativ ser vi hur nya metoder för bistånd, såsom programbistånd, vilket syftar till att åstadkomma ägarskap, gör det möjligt för statstjänstemännen att föreställa sig en stat som är inkluderad och aktiv i vattenförsörjningen till skillnad från när biståndet organiseras i projekt och staten och dess agenter utesluts ifrån verksamhetsområdet. Metoder för resultatstyrning begränsar hur det är möjligt att se på en ansvarstagande stat som instrumentellt fokuserad på att producera vissa på förhand definierade mål för vilka den kan hållas ansvarig. Samtidigt indikerar narrativen och de möten jag deltagit i att det löfte om ansvar som de nya metoderna innebär öppnar ett utrymme för staten att agera och förhandla villkoren för sitt beroende av givarna och de villkor på vilka staten involveras i vattensektorn.

Vi ser också i narrativen hur den nigerska statens beroende av givarna rationaliseras som ett resultat av hur ojämlika relationer formats historiskt och i den globala ekonomin, vilket legitimerar föreställningar av ansvaret för bland annat vattenförsörjningen som delat. För statstjänstemännen blir därmed Nigers misslyckande att uppnå millenniemålen inte bara Nigers ansvar, utan ett misslyckande för det internationella samfundet.

När det gäller delegering av ansvar till lokala och privata aktörer ses de reformerna av statstjänstemännen som rationella och väl genomtänkta svar på de omständigheter Niger har befunnit sig i och de begränsningar som staten möter när det gäller vattenförsörjningen. Genom kontrakt med olika aktörer binder sig staten också till ett visst agerande, vilket i statstjänstemännens narrativ framstår som både nödvändig och framgångsrikt för att skapa ansvarstagande i sektorn. Genom att reformerna presenteras som rationella och framgångsrika framstår staten som att den tar ansvar för att anpassa sig till förändringar som i huvudsak påtvingas staten på grund av dess prekära situation. Därmed framstår inte den nigerska staten som en stat som driver en självständig politik för att uppnå mål för vilka den kan hållas ansvarig.

För att förstå hur statens ansvar konstrueras av statstjänstemännen har jag också fokuserat på narrativa uttryck för den nigerska statens kontroll över politik och implementering inom vattenområdet, vilket är en förutsättning såväl för att ta ansvar som för att kunna hållas ansvarig för dess resultat. I narrativen framkommer att den nya organisationen av biståndet i program betraktas som ett löfte att staten nu ska kunna agera genom kalkylerade interventioner över hela landet, baserat på egna prioriteringar. Nya förutsättningar för kontroll framstår därmed som en möjlighet att skapa nationell sammanhållning och hållbarhet i vattenförsörjningssystemet. Detta ses som centrala funktioner för staten som aktör. Behovet av att skapa kontroll framstår också som extra nödvändigt i relation till representationer av det förflutna där organisationen av biståndet i projekt har berövat staten kontroll över sektorn.

Enligt statstjänstemännen är det nödvändigt att staten blir en central aktör i vattensektorn för att den ska ha kontroll över vattenpolitikens resultat. Staten och dess olika avdelningar har under lång tid uteslutits från att utöva sina funktioner när givarna hellre använt sig av privata konsultföretag på grund av anklagelser om korrupcion och bristande kapacitet. I narrativen hävdar statstjänstemännen i stället sin egen kapacitet, och efterfrågar en fungerande revision. Att låta statens verksamheter, istället för privata konsultbolag, utföra centrala funktioner möjliggör också den kontinuitet som är nödvändig för såväl ansvarstagande som för att kunna utkräva ansvar.

Delegering och privatisering av ansvar till lokala och privata aktörer har förändrat statens kontrollfunktion. Istället för att skapa kontroll genom direkt utförande (vilket gjorts tidigare) handlar det i allt större utsträckning om att kontrollera de aktörer som nu är utförare, samt relationerna mellan dessa. I narrativen framkommer olika sätt för statstjänstemännen att hävda nödvändigheten av att bibehålla staten, och dem själva som statstjänstemän, i centrum av implementeringen av vattenpolitiken. När de gäller delegering till lokala aktörer bidrar representationer av befolkningen som analfabeter och involverad i komplicerade lokala politiska relationer, till att legitimera en fortsatt roll för statstjänstemännen i befolkningens liv. Trots att delegering av ansvar till befolkningen framstår som logisk och rationell så ifrågasätts befolkningens kapacitet att hantera och sköta vattenförsörjningen lokalt. Sådana representationer av befolkningen legitimerar en stat som är personligen närvarande i befolkningens liv, och kan kontrollera

att de olika aktörerna betar sig på sätt som krävs för att vattenförsörjningen ska fungera.

Medan de flesta statstjänstemän i sina narrativ uttrycker stöd för delegering och privatisering av t ex konstruktion av infrastruktur och själva utförandet av vattentjänsten så utgör kontroll det område där staten med styrka hävdar sin roll och ansvar. I såväl narrativ som i möten med givare så motsätter de sig privatiseringen av statens kontrollfunktioner. Detta gör de dels genom att hävda statens kapacitet men också genom att hävda att kontroll är en så central del av vad staten är och måste vara, samt för att den ska kunna utöva ansvar och i sin tur hållas ansvarig.

Sammanfattningsvis framträder i narrativen tre mer generella teman om vad statens ansvar förstås vara. För det första framstår den nigerska staten som ansvarig för processer snarare än för resultat, för det andra förstås ansvar i huvudsak som möjligheten att agera, och för det tredje framstår statens ansvar som specifikt i den nigerska kontexten på grund av hur statstjänstemännen ser på sig själva i relation till andra.

Valfrihet och kontroll beskrivs som begränsade av externa omständigheter och givarnas preferenser vilket gör att statens ansvar handlar om att agera rationellt och pragmatiskt inom dessa begränsningar. Istället för att se staten som ansvarig för att uppnå specifika mål, som till exempel Millenniemålet om vattentillgång, framstår den nigerska staten som ansvarig för att hantera processer genom att anpassa sig till omständigheter och göra det mesta av begränsade resurser. Metoderna för att göra staten ansvarstagande riskerar därmed att reproducera mönster av marginalisering, och att bibehålla Niger i en position som 'utvecklingsland'.

Samtidigt visar studien att nya metoder för att uppnå ägarskap kan öppna ett manöverutrymme för den nigerska staten att förhandla villkoren för beroendet och vad en ansvarstagande nigersk stat bör vara eftersom den lovar inkludering av statens agenter och avdelningar i vattenpolitik och strategier, och därmed möjliggör statens och statstjänstemännens agens.

Niger är ett av världens fattigaste länder, vilket formar dels de begränsningar som statstjänstemännen handskas med, men det formar också hur det är möjligt att se den nigerska staten i relation till andra aktörer. Det är tydligt i vissa av narrativen, framför allt hos tjänstemän som har direkt relation till befolkningen, hur representationer av befolkningen som i avsaknad av kapacitet och styrd av lokal politik,

legitimerar en stat som är personligt närvarande i befolkningens liv. På det sätt som en fattig befolkning och en fattig stat beskrivs blir förmågan hos enskilda statstjänstemän att styra befolkningen avgörande för att vattenförsörjningen ska fungera, vilket riskerar att skapa godtycklighet i statstjänstemännens agerande.

I relation till givarna är det tydligt hur de motsätter sig den bild som de anser att givarna har av nigerska statstjänstemän, på så sätt möjliggörs en föreställning om ett ansvarstagande som går utöver den rent instrumentella resultatstyrningen och bygger på föreställningar om vad staten bör göra. En aktivare roll för staten och dess tjänstemän hävdas bland annat med hjälp av representationer av privata företags bristande kapacitet och kännedom om lokal förhållanden och relationer. Vi ser hur de accepterar mycket av den logik enligt vilken staten och tjänstemännen ska göras ansvarstagande, samtidigt som de omförhandlar den i den specifika kontexten och därmed påverkar hur vattenpolitik och implementering tar sig uttryck.

Avslutningsvis visar studien på betydelsen av att vi för att förstå vad olika typer av reformer betyder måste uppmärksamma hur de får sin betydelse i en historisk kontext och redan etablerade relationer. Vidare måste vi förstå statstjänstemän bortom föreställningar om egenintresse. Istället bör vi försöka se hur andra logiker, såsom hur de förstår sig själva och staten i relation till andra aktörer, är centrala i hur försörjning av offentliga tjänster kommer att ta form i praktiken.

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