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L'eau d'Azraq (Jordanie) : un lien fluide entre l'État et la société

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WATER IN AZRAQ (JORDAN): A FLUID LINK BETWEEN STATE AND SOCIETY

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Connections of power

Azraq is a small village of approximately 10 000 inhabitants located at the very heart of an extensive trans-boundary, renewable groundwater basin in the northern part of the Eastern Desert of Jordan¹. Once referred to as « a glimpse of heaven » (Mountford, 1965: 51) owing to its luxurious marshes, today it constitutes « little more than a truck stop » (Luck, 2010) in an impoverished, sandy environment. Having witnessed radical ecological and socio-economic changes due to over-extraction of water from the basin, it is now classified as a « poverty pocket » in dire need of development conducted through governmental support (MoPIC, 2012).

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¹ Azraq basin can be described as a topographic depression that covers an area of around 12 414 km² of which 94% is located in Jordan, 5% in Syria and 1% in Saudi-Arabia (see Figure 1) (Alraggad & Jasem 2010: 1057). Azraq village is situated at the lowest point of the aquifer.

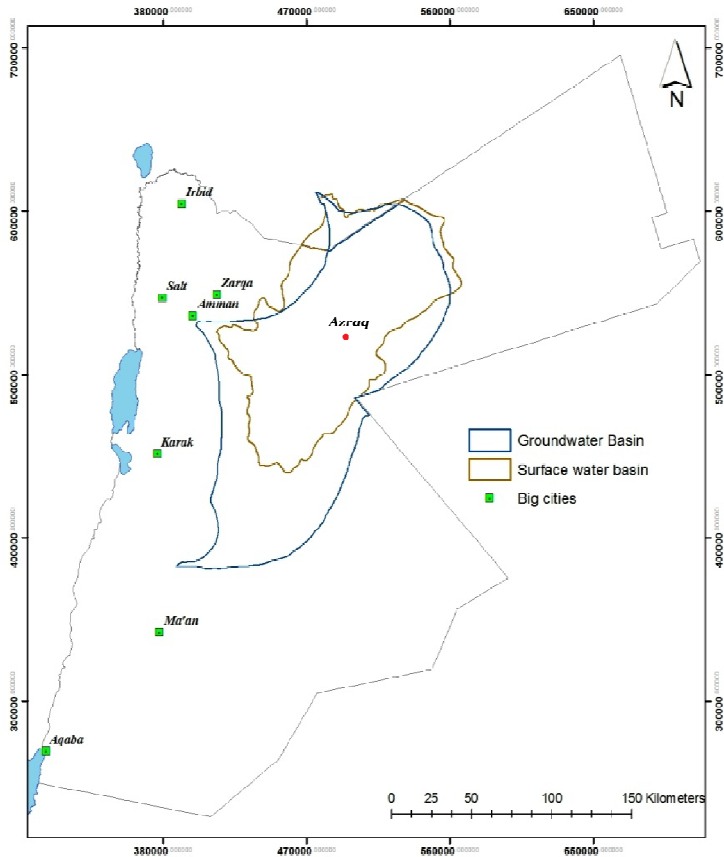


Figure 1. Azraq Basin
Map modified after Ministry of Water and Irrigation
open files 2010. Courtesy of Dr. Marwan Alraggad.

Taking this context as its starting point, this paper aims to explore the role of water as a crucial medium in the drawing and consolidation of the contemporary relations between the Jordanian government and Azraq's inhabitants. In the first part, the paper gives a historical narrative of the intensifying articulation of the

emerging modern nation-state of Jordan in Azraq through a new « material network » of meters, pumps, pipes, valves, etc. (Strang, 2004; Kaika, 2004). This part is concerned with unfolding and changing relations accompanying the realisation and implementation of this new hydro-infrastructure on which the inhabitants increasingly came to rely for their water supply. The second part examines the ways in which the relation of the local inhabitants with the central government is actualised *within* the household as the site where people interact with water on a daily basis. It explores the ways in which the inhabitants challenge and aim to (re)shape their particular relation to the Jordanian government through their everyday practices and interactions with water.

Over the past century, an abundance of studies have been written on the waters of Azraq. These have predominantly examined water in biophysical or managerial accounts considering water as a « thing ». In these accounts, water is presented as an object whose relation to and with society increasingly necessitates – as is often claimed – the mediation of the state through intensified control over its specific quantities, flow directions, quality, productivity, etc. However, these studies overlook the ways in which water itself is an important relational mediator between the two entities – state and society. Indeed, water, as Mosse has concluded, often serves as « a medium of state-subject, state-citizen relations » (2008: 947). Important to recognise is that these relations are never power-neutral and that they are essentially a set of connections made through processes of access, distribution and utilisation of water (Mitchell, 2009). Historicising this assemblage of connections then brings a more profound understanding to relations of power and its penetration into the home.

This paper draws on Foucault's relational understanding of power. More precisely, and in line with Ekers and Loftus's proposition, power is understood as « an effect of dispersed socio-natural relations » (Ekers & Loftus, 2008: 709). Important in this particular understanding of power is first that « power is exercised through networks, and individuals do not simply circulate

in those networks; they are in a position to both submit to and exercise this power » (Foucault, 2003: 29); and second that the emphasis is on socio-natural relations rather than solely on the human. Consequently, it is understood that through the act of opening the faucet to bathe, clean, cook, wash, water the garden or drink, one enters into a myriad of power relations that lie behind the mode of water supply. These acts are not mere habits but are socially constructed methods of interaction, which link the state with villagers in Azraq. Looking at these mundane activities, this paper seeks to respond to a more recent call in the academic literature on water, power and politics – predominantly in the field of geography – for a shift in focus from « the grand displays of power represented in large-scale engineering works » to the more subtle workings of power within the « intimate practices within the home » (Ekers & Loftus, *op. cit.*: 709-710). In accordance with Foucault's assertion that the exercise of power is to be found « at the places where it [power] implants itself and produces its real effects » (Foucault, 2003: 28), one needs to examine the site within which the encounters with water are most apparent: the domain of the mundane practices of everyday life. The field of anthropology, as Strang (*op. cit.*) has shown, is ideally placed to do so. This article posits that such an approach allows to demonstrate how people's everyday practices with water – having become a material means of power through which the state intervenes in people's lives – reveals how one deals with, thinks about and relates to this controlling entity.

The material presented in this paper is based on participant observation and extensive informal interviews conducted over the course of three months in 2011 and 2012 amongst the Druze community in North Azraq that constitutes the majority of Azraq's population. Additionally, formal interviews were conducted with members of the Chechen community that inhabit South Azraq. These two communities, culturally quite distinct, are equally positioned in the government's water distribution network. Besides the Druze and Chechen, there is an important presence of different Bedouin tribes that are not considered here due to their relatively

recent settlement. Some Bedouin settled in the course of the 1970s, others only as recently as the first years of the new millennium. The Bedouin have a different relationship to the oasis' waters – the marshes of Azraq being a seasonal resting and drinking ground for some of these tribes during the past century – while others have no relation to the marshes until very recently.

The subtle confluence of state and village

Before Jordan, there was Azraq

The contemporary history of sedentary Azraq dates back to the beginning of the 20th century with the arrival of two communities seeking refuge in the vicinity of Azraq's marshes: the Druze and the Chechen. The former have their origin in Jabal Druze (also referred to as Jabal Al-Arab) in the Hauran region in the southwest of contemporary Syria, from where they were forced out following the uprising against French colonial forces in the 1920s (Firro, 1992: 298). They fled to Azraq and occupied the castle near the northern springs and pools where they later established the village now known as Azraq as-Shomali (North Azraq) or also Azraq Druze. The Chechen come originally from Chechnya in Russia and are Sunni Muslim. They abandoned their homeland for fear of religious and cultural repression that would follow the communist revolution in Russia and settled at the edge of the southern springs and adjacent marshes (Nelson, 1973: 60). There they established Azraq al Janubi (South Azraq) or Azraq Shishan, seven kilometres south of Azraq Druze.

At the time of their settling, Azraq was a vibrant oasis where water was abundant and readily available through surface waters fed by springs or shallow groundwater. Located in the midst of an otherwise sere and arid environment, here was an open-air freshwater source that bore a unique ecosystem upon which the communities directly relied. Water for domestic use was mostly carried from the pools to the houses, although occasionally a well was dug next to the house. Bathing, washing and leisure activities

such as swimming² were all performed in the marshes that beckoned millions of migrating birds to its shimmering ponds along with gazelle, ibex, rabbits, and other mammals that greatly enhanced the villagers' diets. Moreover, their diet was supplemented with fish from the ponds and wild plants growing in and around the oasis that were also used for medicinal practices.

In addition to the native animals present at the oasis, the Chechens had brought water buffalo with them and similarly the Druze brought cows that both integrated into the Azraq wetland and provided a source of yogurt, cheese, meat, and milk. Neither of the two communities practiced large-scale agriculture although a few – predominantly in South Azraq due to the location of the village and better soil conditions – may have had a small vegetable and fruit garden. Most vegetables either came from Syria where some Druze still cultivated lands on a seasonal basis, or were obtained from Bedouin caravans that brought dried tomatoes and other supplies with them. The latter were bartered with salt extracted from Azraq's saline water bodies within the mudflat.

With time, the communities' engagement with the oasis flora and fauna became more intense and allowed them to create and sustain their own living. Amongst these different communities, no serious conflicts existed with regards to water customs and, although the water was never theirs legally – water has always been stipulated as « state property » (Salman *et al.*, 2006: 116) – there was no significant government interference restricting their use of water. Indeed, during the formative years of Jordan's state-building from the early 1920s to the late 1940s, only limited attention was given to Azraq's exceptional environment and waters. This is not to state that the villagers of Azraq escaped the incorporating forces of the emerging nation-state of Jordan – such as the intensive land programs aimed at expanding and consolidating emerging state authority as well as to secure its financial viability

² Within the Muslim Chechen community, men and women had their own separate swimming pool. Within the Druze community, swimming was mainly a male activity.

(Fischbach, 2000) – but that governmental attention, especially when it comes to water policies, was foremost directed west towards the Jordan and Yarmouk rivers (Haddadin, 2006). One exception was the pumping of water from Azraq to Safawi under guidance of the British in 1945, using the redundant Iraqi Petrol Company (IPC) pipeline. This was stopped shortly after Jordan gained independence in 1946.

The relative autonomy and independence from state supervision and interference allowed the villagers the space and time needed to adapt to Azraq's distinct hydro-ecological milieu to which they related on a direct basis, independent of governmental guidance or restrictions.

The nationalisation and domestication of Azraq's water.

After Jordanian independence in 1946 the country experienced a demographic shock having to absorb Palestinian refugees following the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. This incited the government, assisted by international actors, to direct its policy towards achieving wider social development and economic growth through the agricultural development of previously uncultivated lands (Arrighi de Casanova, 2009: 7). Subsequently, by the mid-1950s, Jordan's water sources, including Azraq's, became subjected to extensive investigations by (predominantly international) hydrologists, civil engineers, and geologists that produced the first statistical hydrological data on groundwater flows along with recommendations and proposals for its usage and potential development in Jordan (Haddadin, *op. cit.*; Hemsley & George, 1966: 85). A Chechen village elder discussed one such project sponsored by USAID in the late 1950s to establish a channel from the oasis for agricultural production in the Azraq area:

They made four studies to measure how much water comes from underground. Twice every day an employee [went] and measured the water level to see what the level of the water is. They put like a special gate to see the amount of water that comes out to make a channel for agriculture.

These studies, and the plethora of data they produced, contributed to the cognitive creation of the Jordanian state as sovereign over the country's water resources, insofar as the

government became responsible for the health and well-being of its citizens and for the soundness of its national economy. They reinforced ideas of what was considered proper usage thereby discouraging alternative uses of water. Moreover, these studies fostered the idea that Azraq's waters were a national resource that could be distributed to various locations within Jordan's territorial borders. Indicative of this was the pumping of water from North Azraq to Irbid, a town in northern Jordan, when the latter fell short of municipal water by the early 1960s. This Azraq-Irbid pumping scheme imposed the first restrictions on access to water, as bathing or washing practices were now forbidden in the newly fenced areas adjacent to the pumping station. It equally reduced the springs' outflow to the adjacent marshes, causing the distal parts to recede and dry up (Hemsley & George, *op. cit.*: 74). However, neither of the communities made major complaints about the pumping or its effects, as overall access to and usage of water was not impeded.

On the contrary, water was now brought directly into people's houses: the government had not asked the local inhabitants' permission prior to instituting the Azraq-Irbid pumping scheme, yet the late King Hussein did hear the people's request to install water pipes into their houses. Moreover, the king granted every household a daily amount of two cubic meters of water for free, acknowledging people's special relation to the water in a country where the inhabitants of big cities already had to pay for their water provision³. This free, domesticated water spurred the creation of gardens containing crops such as olives, grapes, fruit trees and vegetables, especially in North-Azraq whereas until then gardens had been rare.

In the course of the 1970s supplying water to its rapidly expanding population became an increasing challenge for the state. To quench the water demand wrought by intensifying urbanisation in Jordan's northern city centres, plans were made by 1977 to tap

³ Today, only a very small percentage of the households still enjoy the privilege of free water. With time, it is bound to disappear, as it cannot be handed down from generation to generation.

water resources from distant places, Azraq being one of them (Haddadin, *op. cit.*). Accordingly, wells were dug and a network of pipelines was implemented to transport water to Amman as of 1981. This hydro-infrastructure that would increasingly challenge « existing notions of how water should be controlled, managed, and used », connected the centralized state authority to the country's periphery and « extended government control into the most intimate domains of daily life, such as the home » (Bender, 2008: 843). Indeed, the pumping scheme epitomised a significant moment in the water history of Azraq as reflected in the following statement of a Chechen elder that well represents the opinion of many villagers:

After 1980, the government began to control the water of Azraq and they put means on every house to calculate how much every house takes water. [...] Since 1985, full control of water of the government, the drinking water authority, and they established the Ministry of Water [...].

The « control » that is referred to here, denotes the fact that water distribution networks were taken from the hands of the local council in Azraq and were placed under the Water Authority of Jordan (WAJ), newly established in 1983 (Haddadin, *op. cit.*: 41). The latter started to charge for the water provision in Azraq during the second half of the 1980s. This sudden water fee demonstrated to the people of Azraq that they too would become subject to a new rationality in which a previously ungoverned social sphere would now be re-imagined into a calculable site for governing (Von Schnitzler, 2008).

As WAJ expanded its role in controlling access to water in Azraq through expert knowledge of water flows, distribution and maintenance of water infrastructure, and government water policy, it instigated a gradual re-organisation of the power structures imbedded within the flow of water.

*As the wetlands go, so goes Azraq*⁴

Although the water level in the oasis began to drop as early as the 1960s, it was especially state pumping from 1983 onwards,

⁴ Luck T., 2010, September 30. « As the wetlands go, "so goes Azraq" », *Jordan Times*. Amman, Jordan.

combined with the impressive growth of estate-farms in the same period, which caused the groundwater table to fall drastically. In less than two decades the Azraq oasis had disappeared: by the end of the 1980s the springs in North Azraq had dried and by 1992 the last spring in South Azraq ceased to flow as well (Dottridge & Abu Jaber, 1999: 318).

The over-pumping thus severely modified the socio-natural fabric of Azraq and in the process also changed the forms of access to and control over water. The only water now available to the villagers was that supplied through the government network, as indicated clearly in the following comments of a Druze elder:

Now it's from the pipes, from the station. We drink water like the people in Amman, from the pipes here. And you know before the water was on the top of the ground, when you make one meter or one and a half meter, you find the water and you can plant anything. Now we haven't, you depend on the ground wells and it costs too much money.

Though water never stopped flowing from the taps in Amman and Azraq, the receding groundwater in Azraq led to the loss of the marshes and with it the ecosystem it sustained. Birds no longer visited the area; cows, horses and water buffalo could no longer be maintained; game and fish were lost and, having to pay for domestic water, many gardens in the villages gradually disappeared. While an international project was set up to rescue the wetlands, the revival of the natural resources within this – now fenced – artificially created wetland, was of little to no benefit to the local population.

Confronted with rising demands, technical limits and political red-lines with regards to water pumping to Amman in the mid-1990s, WAJ had to reduce the amount of water flowing to villagers' homes from seven to four days a week. Recently, during the summer of 2012, this was further reduced to three days a week.

The fact that domesticated water has become a monetized commodity, now located underground and accessible only by motorized pumps distributed and administered by the state, made the traditional subsistence lifestyles of villagers impossible. The gradual imbrication of Azraq in the government-sanctioned water system has been accompanied with locals' increasing dependence

on wage labour through government and military employment or on government welfare.

The fluid capillaries of power in everyday life

Reiterating Foucault's notion of power as *productive*, power should not be portrayed as a negative force, as a source of oppression, imposition or restriction, as nothing more than that « what says no » (Foucault, 1980: 139). Power can also be productive in that it generates new ways of behaving and acting. In this regard, Foucault states « there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised » (*ibid*: 142). Emblematic of this contestation of power are villagers' daily interactions with water as manifested in the home and garden.

The continual uncanny

In Azraq, the fading waters and consequent advancing desert instigated a gradual confinement of water usage to the domestic sphere, i.e. the house and its adjacent garden. The domestic sphere thus presents itself as an ideal place to examine how the described relations between the government and its subjects in Azraq unfold and are constantly invoked through the use of water in everyday life. This is especially so because the supply of water at the household level in Azraq is now entirely administered by the central government and is thus fundamentally « based upon the existence of a set of networks of, and connections to, things and social power relations that exist outside the domestic sphere » (Kaika, *op. cit.*: 275).

As an artefact of modernity, these social and material networks are usually hidden and rendered invisible such that the dweller obtains an illusion of autonomy and independence. Indeed, in their research on domesticated water, both Strang (*op. cit.*) and Kaika (*op. cit.*) emphasize that having water flowing from the tap without temporal, spatial and quantitative limits has obtained a fundamentally normalised character in people's minds and has nourished a deceptive sense of disconnection between what

constitutes the « inside » and the « outside ». However, as both authors also point out, this illusion of an independently functioning household is brutally shattered once the water fails to flow. It is what Kaika, paraphrasing Freud, refers to as « the uncanny » (*ibid.*: 276-277): the moment a dweller is confronted with the power relations that connect his home to wider socio-economic constellations and that, when they fail to function, render the accustomed unpredictable.

Until two decades ago, water in Azraq was supplied to the houses on a round-the-clock basis, but since then it has only been delivered at regular intervals of four days a week. Every Sunday to Wednesday the valve that regulates the domestic water supply in Azraq is left open by the WAJ. It is a regulation closely observed by many inhabitants, especially during summer when water usage peaks and every failure by WAJ to deliver water is deeply felt. Yet, failures to supply water – be it because of technical problems, theft of electricity cables, defective motor pumps or political pressure from Amman – are frequent. Although ruptures in the delivery of water are always most unwelcome, they are never unexpected or unaccounted for: in Azraq « the uncanny » is continual. Contrary to the Western world described by Kaika and Strang where water is expected to flow constantly and therefore « any sudden halt to the supply seems counterintuitive and rather shocking » (Strang, *op. cit.*: 197), « uncanny » moments in Azraq are foremost another confrontational confirmation of the particular power relations that have come to condition daily habits.

Moreover, it reveals the extreme porosity between the domain of the intimate household and that of the government – two spheres usually regarded as somehow separate. Unlike past experiences, people's daily household tasks are predicated upon the availability of water provided by the government. Especially women jokingly state that their « holiday » begins the day the water stops flowing as washing, cleaning and gardening activities are put on hold or at a low level until the water arrives again. In this way, the government has become increasingly entrenched in everyday life.

Controlling power inside the house

The constant uncertainty about water delivery described in the previous section has raised many villagers' vigilance: they have come to keep a close account and record of the days when water is to come, the days it has failed to come, for how many days this has been the case, when this last happened, the reasons for non-delivery, the government's (in)actions to prevent it and so on. Clearly, the awareness that the water might not be supplied in due time has prompted people to keep meticulous track of the water's every movement. From Sunday to Wednesday during summer, one of the first tasks an 80-year-old elderly Druze hostess performs is opening her garden valve to assure that the promised water was flowing. It is an act undertaken by many inhabitants since almost all households in Azraq have at least one valve (outdoors and/or indoors) connected directly to the main WAJ pipeline. Contrary to the tap that is supplied from the roof tank which serves as a buffer for the days without water, this valve only allows water use during the four days a week that WAJ supplies water. Yet, people prefer using this valve, which is directly connected to the main pipeline in order to save the water in their roof tanks for the non-supply days⁵. Along with the actual supply of water, the water pressure, which depends on the pressure in the pipelines and fluctuates from day to day, is equally monitored.

This gathered information is not kept to oneself but is widely shared and discussed with others through informal chats that form an important part of the daily interactions between people and that serve as a means to compare and confirm one's experience with the water supply. Even until late in the afternoon or evening, encounters include discussions about the supply of water. Undeniably, water constantly flows through everyday conversations: daily water chats are as common as the more universal daily weather chats. These

⁵ Moreover, the temperature of the water from the WAJ valves is more pleasant. In the summer the temperature of the water in the roof tank rises significantly compared to the rather cool, fresh waters from the WAJ pipelines whereas in winter the latter supplies water that is warmer than that in the tanks (pers. comm. Sami Tarabieh).

conversations aim to gain knowledge about the government's water distribution, to look for consenting opinions and to share information about others' problems and behaviours. Exemplary of this is the round of questions about showering behaviours at an evening family gathering during which the host repeatedly alerted his guests to the consequences of his empty roof tank: no toilet flushing and no hand washing afterwards unless one uses bottled water. This repetitive warning caused questions to circulate round the family in order to find out individual water usage and more particularly individual showering frequencies. At the end it had not only become clear what was considered to be extreme or average showering behaviours but it had also been reiterated that having a roof tank imposed limits to one's shower habits and what these limits were. It is indicative of the « calculative rationality » to which villagers have come to subject their daily water use (Von Schnitzler, *op. cit.*).

This tracking, calculating and talking about the water and the material networks through which it flows are foremost directed at obtaining and maintaining knowledge over the government and its handling of the water. This not only includes the supply flow but also that of the disposal: water flows circularly. Some interviewees understood this very well as they expressed their growing concerns and frustrations over the government's handling of the wastewater. A middle-aged Druze woman explained that the lack of septic tanks or a central wastewater treatment facility has adverse effects on the quality of the groundwater – the same groundwater from which the WAJ pumps.

The fact that so many inhabitants have a striking ability to map the networks through which their water circulates, attests to their urge to understand the governmental water supply on which they now depend. While the acts of monitoring and compiling information about the government's water policies and procedures holds no prospect of directly changing power relations, it nevertheless provides them with a sense of exercising power by controlling what has come to control them. The villagers' repetitive performances of monitoring the WAJ are testimony to the unequal

power relations embedded in the water supply yet it is precisely through these practices that this inequality is questioned. Through these recurring material and discursive performances of control one obtains knowledge, a kind of knowledge that grants the power to challenge the government's responsibility, eligibility and accountability as water supplier. Indeed, if the WAJ fails to supply adequately, the inhabitants inform those responsible at WAJ or take their frustrations to the *mudīr al qada'* (an employee of the Ministry of Interior who can hold WAJ accountable). Moreover, having been made to live in a socio-ecological configuration not of their own choosing, the villagers search for political opportunities that might garner more influence in water decisions thereby adapting to new political realities of bureaucracy and government. Recent evidence of this is the locals' petition for an upgrade of Azraq's administrative level so as to become an electoral district, which will allow them to send a representative to parliament and will, the villagers believe, not only make their discontent heard but could also lead to changes in their precarious water situation. Furthermore, most recently a petition containing six hundred signatures (Druze, Chechen and Bedouin alike) was sent out calling for the re-installment of a retired local employee at WAJ's office in Azraq. His position – taken over in 2008 by a resident of Zarqa, Jordan's second largest city and a beneficiary of Azraq's water – consisted of managing the distribution of the domestic water supply. It thus represents a crucial position within the decision making process where, although bound politically and materially with little space to manoeuvre, individual decisions on distribution patterns can be – and have been – made based on a profoundly local perception of the inhabitants' needs and concerns with regards to domestic water supply.

It is clear from the observed group of Azraq's local inhabitants that they do not simply conform to their dependency on the government as constituted through water. Their daily repetitive acts and behaviour, no matter how nuanced the defiance, question the power relations imbedded in water.

The gardens of Azraq

The WAJ, in compliance with the policies of the central government, regards potable water as its chief priority, after which come domestic and municipal water, water for industrial use, water for agricultural purposes and, currently rather undefined, water for environmental uses (Haddadin, *op. cit.*). Implicitly, the governmental bodies involved in water management understand domestic water use as water used inside the house for bathing, washing, cooking and other essential human activities. However, individuals interviewed understand the domestic sphere to consist of more than just the house, for them it also includes the « semi-external space » (Strang, *op. cit.*: 207) of the garden.

Gardens in Azraq have a particular geographical and historical configuration. Prior to the drying of the oasis, the Chechens living in South-Azraq had « spacious gardens, beautiful in a wild, informal way, with vines, date palms, eucalyptus, *tamarix* and pomegranates » (Nelson, *op. cit.*: 60). This resulted not only from the village's proximity to the marshes but also because of the fertile soil. By contrast, in Azraq Druze, established at some distance from the oasis, gardens surrounding private homes were rare prior to the arrival of plumbing and free water delivery at the end of the 1960s. This was due to the exceeding amount of time and energy needed to transport water for irrigating the garden and the less fertile basalt ground on which the village is built. Nowadays, gardens in both villages are increasingly rare as water is not only absent from the marshes but is also charged for. Nevertheless, some green spaces persist and plans for new gardens are never far away.

Gardens – today usually consisting of vegetables, herbs, vines, dates, fruit trees, palm trees and, to a lesser degree, flowers – are important to the villagers, foremost because they remain the sole outside spaces for production, where people can exert a particular form of creative agency in their lives and directly engage with the environment when all other options⁶ to do so have vanished with

⁶ Apart from farming which constitutes a whole different dimension of the water problems in Azraq.

the water. In this sense, the villagers' gardens are not so much an expression of control over nature as an act of (re)gaining control over one's own life. To garden is to be productive. One male Druze inhabitant from North Azraq commented on the absence of gardens stating that:

The families now have to rely more on the market but if they have a garden in which to plant vegetables and fruits, they could live from their gardens.

Indeed, villagers' willingness to have their own garden is deeply related to the fact that it raises their ability to meet their needs and thereby decreases their dependency on the market. The disappearance of the oasis by the early 1990s led to a decline in the presence of many of the wild plants that locals once harvested, especially along the fertile beds of the *wadis* (valleys) and along the banks of the fecund oasis. Several interviewees, predominantly Druze women, explained that much of the plant life that once existed was gathered and used as the basis of their diet. While some wild plants and herbs can still be found and are gathered, overall the practice of plant gathering has faded along with the oasis. In light of this, having a garden creates one's own productive oasis in which vegetables and herbs can be grown.

Importantly, gardens are rarely watered from the roof tank, which makes the four days that water runs unabatedly from the WAJ pipeline all the more essential. This then constitutes another reason for people to complain about ruptures in the water supply, especially in summer when temperatures rise and the consequent need for water all the more pressing. Some people therefore strategize against these time regulations by storing water for the days it does not arrive (cf. fig. 2).



Figure 2. Bottled water from the Waig pipeline
(photograph: Sylvie Janssens)

However, the waters used by the villagers for creating and maintaining a garden runs counter to WAJ's rationality of water as a purely natural resource void of social relations. For WAJ officials, the gardens in Azraq merely embody the useless waste of a precious, scarce natural resource transported through costly infrastructure. As one WAJ official expressed:

They (the people in Azraq) use water not only for domestic but they use it parallel to irrigate the gardens around the house. This is why I think we need to minimize that, this is costly for us: we are paying for electricity, pumping, replacement, for maintenance.

Whereas for the villagers the water running through the gardens represents the ability to exercise personal agency and to regain a sense of control over their lives, for the WAJ, it expresses a « contraflow » that they are unable to direct or control (Strang, *op. cit.*).

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated water's vital role in constructing social relations through its dynamic ability to make connections with, and within, the world through which it flows. It has attempted to historicise the disappearance of the Azraq oasis and the socio-cultural changes the villagers underwent by examining the material networks deployed by the state, and the alternative modes, rationales, restrictions and possibilities it has engendered. Because water is essential for both human and non-human life, the authors have highlighted how Azraq's relationship with the newly formed Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is predicated upon water. As the state gradually expanded its role as the sole legal entity for controlling and distributing water, the population of Azraq became subjected to relations of power manifested through water. Throughout this article emphasis has been put on understanding power in a Foucauldian sense – that power is porous. While individuals are subjected to paradigms of rationality, there are always sites of contestation.

Focusing on the sites where power is manifested has directed attention to villagers' homes and gardens where locals are subjected

to institutionalised hydro-infrastructure, and have come to experience the state in profoundly intimate spheres. While villagers strive for greater economic independence, evoking their subsistence past, they are faced with the reality that even the act of gardening has its limitations. While the government allocates water in an often untimely manner, villagers have created their own body of knowledge surrounding state (in)actions, documenting « the uncanny », recited and codified in daily discussions. Ultimately, water has enabled the government to create a powerful link with the villagers within the most intimate of spaces, a linkage that locals are now dependent on but nevertheless contest.

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Summary

Azraq, a rural village in north-eastern Jordan, was once famous for its luxurious marshes and wetlands but today is starved of water. This paper looks at the role of water as a crucial medium in the definition and consolidation of contemporary relations between the Jordanian government and Azraq's inhabitants. Essentially, this article approaches water as a relational medium through which power manifests itself in the processes of access, distribution and utilisation. The article argues that putting this relationship and the power that flows through it in an historical context allows for a better understanding of people's contemporary interactions with water in the intimacy of the domestic sphere.

Key-words: water, social relations, power, Foucault, Azraq, Jordan.

Résumé

L'eau d'Azraq (Jordanie) : un lien fluide entre l'État et la société

Azraq est un village rural du nord-est de la Jordanie, autrefois célèbre pour ses zones humides et ses marais luxuriants et aujourd'hui désespérément en manque d'eau. Cet article examine le rôle de l'eau comme intermédiaire

essentiel dans la définition et le renforcement des relations contemporaines entre le gouvernement jordanien et les habitants d'Azraq. Cet article aborde essentiellement l'eau comme une médiation à travers laquelle le pouvoir se manifeste, notamment dans les processus d'accès, de distribution et d'utilisation. L'article s'efforce de montrer qu'on peut mieux appréhender les interactions et pratiques actuelles de la population vis-à-vis de l'eau dans l'espace intime de la sphère domestique en historicisant cette médiation et les formes de pouvoir qui lui sont liées.

Mots-clefs : eau, relations sociales, pouvoir, Foucault, Azraq, Jordanie.

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