

Marie MONIMART – Abstract for Addis Conference – the Future of pastoralism in Africa

THEME: Social difference and pastoralism – youth, gender dynamics

In Eastern Niger, the Diffa region, cross border with Chad and Nigeria, offers a wide ethnic and ecological variety – from the Sahara desert North to the Lake Chad South. Diverse groups of mobile pastoralists – Arabs, Fulanis, WoDaaBe, Tubus, Budumas, share the same space, face the same constraints due to changes in climate, economy and politics, but develop much differentiated answers. Strategies such as mobility, cattle management, response to market variability, innovations, adaptation to policies are diverse, with variable efficiency.

The transformations of gender and generation social relationships are crucial to the responses, and change astonishingly quickly. The different ways of space occupation are constantly changing, including strategies of fixation and/or accentuation of mobility, of securing new spaces subject to growing competition (such as the *terra firma* liberated by the dramatic withdrawal of Lake Chad) or of the control over their main residential zone, sometimes challenged or threatened. Gender relations are affected, sometimes positively, opening to pastoral women new opportunities of capitalization and new spaces of power. The first ones to be affected by the general degradation of their livelihoods, pastoral women's support to a new lifestyle in pastoral areas, mixing tradition and modernity, is one crucial leverage for the future of pastoralism. Women are keen on technological innovations breaking their isolation, such as cell phones, they want to develop new relationships with their husbands – with a more equitable sharing of decisions and responsibilities, and for everyone, a less austere livelihood. New values – such as the priority given to quality of life, comfort, information, communication, contacts with the urban milieu, education, birth control, women's role in collective institutions – are developing with their strong commitment.

The youth are vectors of modernism. Their mastery of technologies still new in the Diffa pastoral environment - such as cell and sat phones, 4x4 vehicles, their spatial and professional mobility linked to a forced diversification of their activities, their easy contacts with the urban milieu and with the foreign countries where they migrate, turn them into real change agents. They position as new actors, better educated, well informed, listened to and supported by the previous generations who respect them for new knowledge useful to the whole group and non mastered by the older ones. The usual conflict between generations is sometimes transforming into new solidarities, under the pressure of the essential adaptations to changes. The young married couples form a new entry point to support sustainable strategies. New values are developing, within an astonishingly modern vision of another pastoral livelihood, mobile, efficient and open to the world, constituting the best guarantee of a peaceful and sustainable occupation of those arid and coveted spaces. One major challenge is that the importance of this stake is understood and supported by politicians and developers.