



Water in Africa: Hydro-Pessimism or Hydro-Optimism?

Água em África: Hidro-pessimismo ou Hidro-optimismo

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Implementing water justice : optimism and pessimism from Johannesburg and Khartoum

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or Hydro-Optimism

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« pessimismo dell'intelligenza, ottimismo della volontà » « pessimism of the intellect, the optimism of the will »

Ordine Nuovo, 3-10 avril 1920, Discorso agli anarchici.

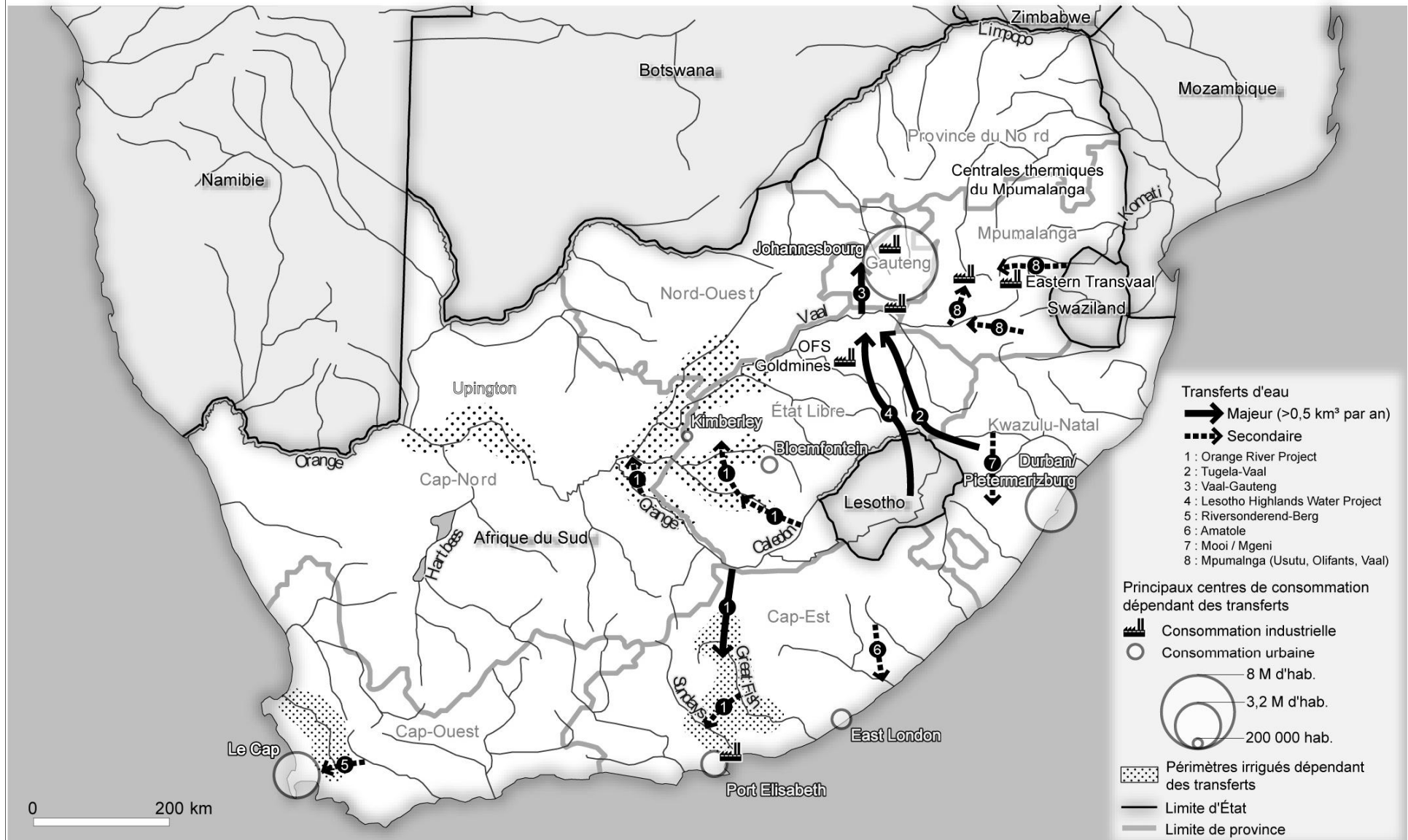
Lettere dal carcere, lettera n°139, 1929.

1. Pessimism and optimism in global, « hegemonic » water discourses in 2008

- Pessimism of the intelligence : « water crisis », « global water scarcity », « water wars »...
- As opposed to optimism of the will :
- « Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation » (MDG), « Free basic water », access to water as a constitutional right.

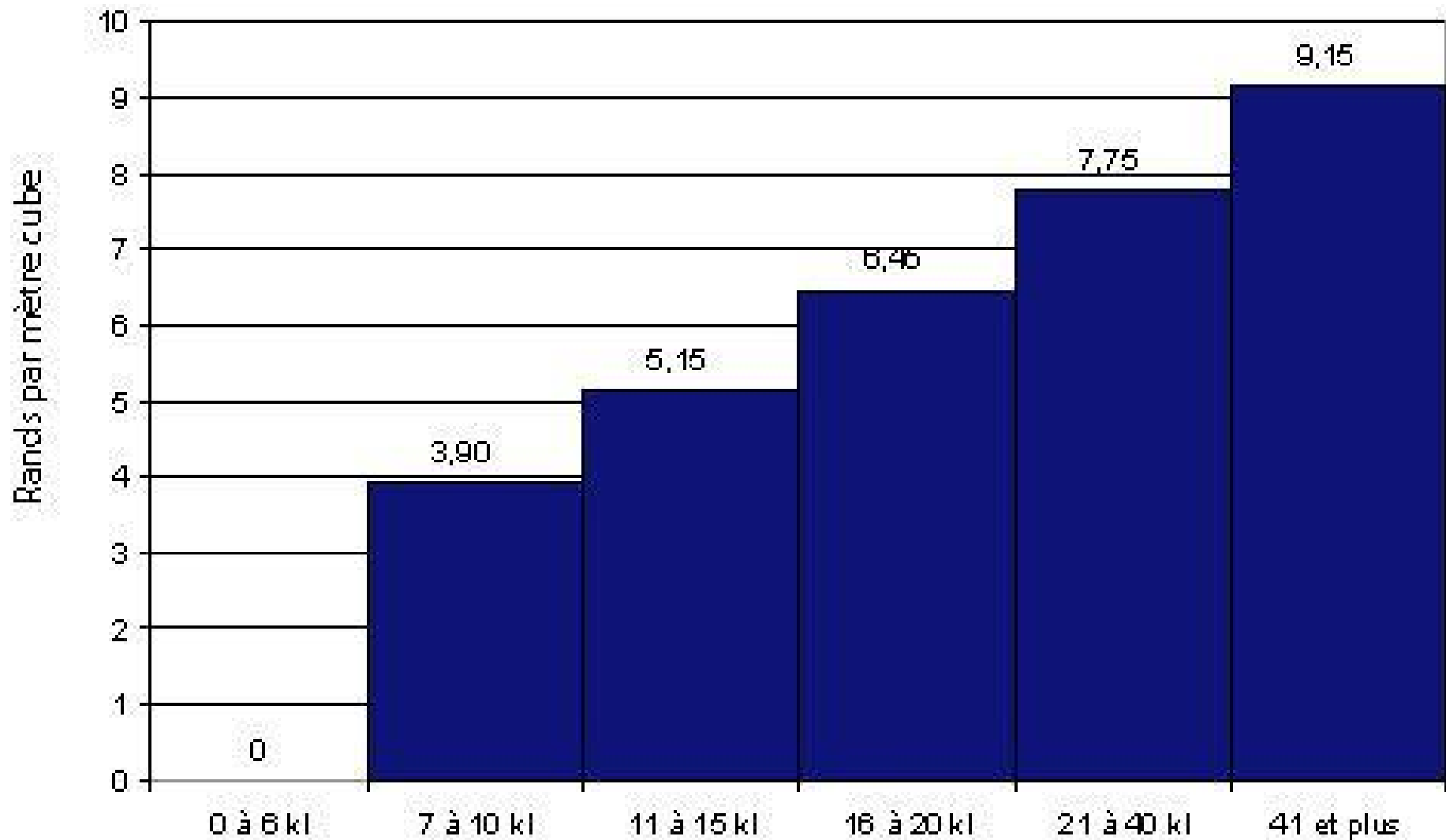
In Johannesburg. « pessimism of the intelligence »

Johannesbourg et les transferts d'eau en Afrique du Sud



« Optimism of the will »

Prix de l'eau à Johannesburg selon la quantité consommée



In Khartoum « pessimism of the intelligence »

Image of scarcity



Rapidly increasing population





Optimism of the will

An example of free water access in Khartoum

- Going back to Gramsci :
- « pessimism and optimism are common and vulgar thoughts », but they can be used as a method to solve questions.
- « In all cases, I think about the worst hypothesis, (..) and then I mobilize all my will to overcome the obstacle ». (*Lettera* n° 139)

2. Pessimism of the intelligence in urban water management.

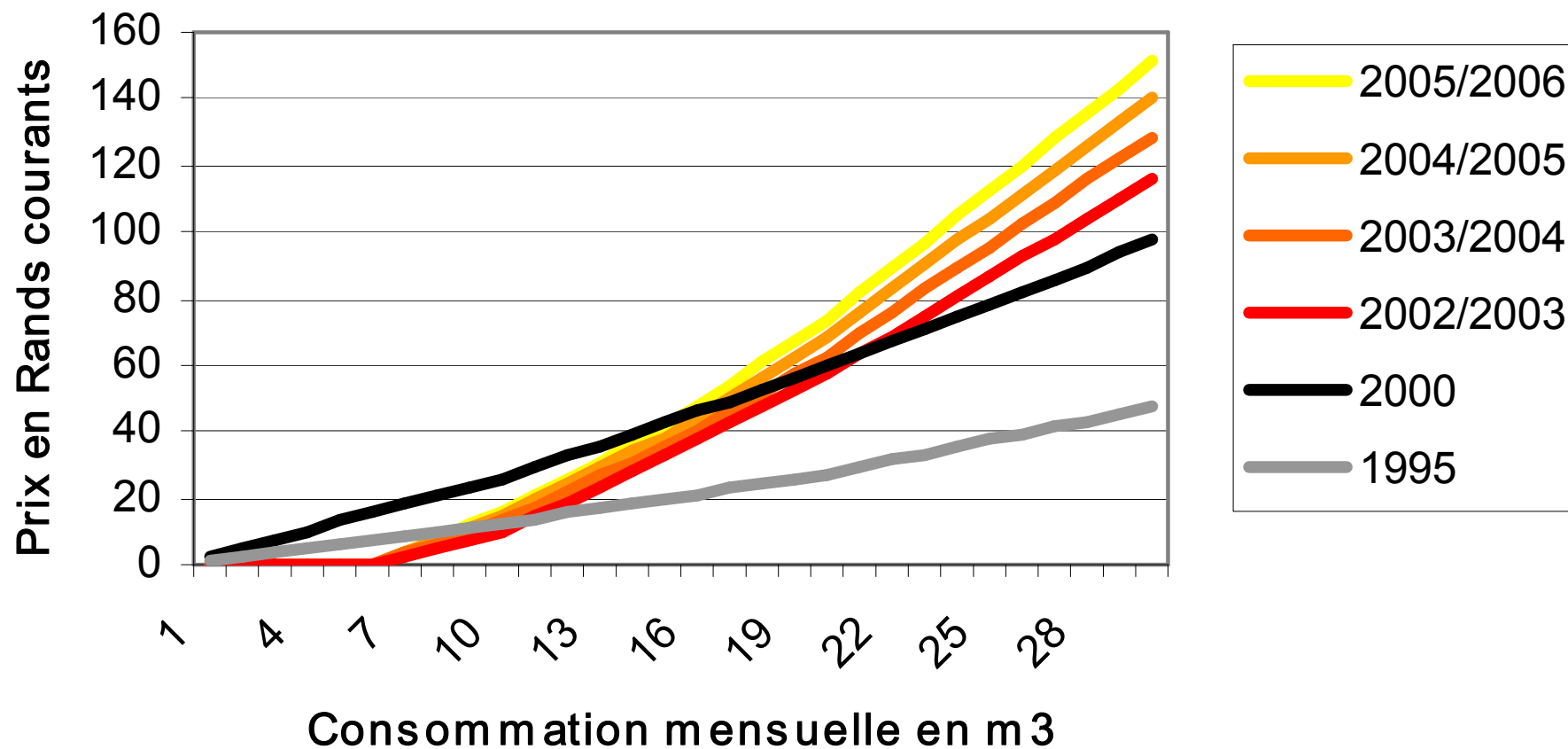
- « examine the worst hypothesis » in urban water management :
 - * pricing
 - * inequalities
 - * scarcity.

Pricing :

- In Khartoum : due to inelasticity of water demand, the poorest are pay much more for water as share of their income. (Cairncross, 1992, recent unpublished studies 2008).
- In Johannesburg, due to the free basic water policy, the situation is more complex.

Prix de l'eau à Johannesburg

Détail pour les volumes inférieurs à 30 mètres cubes



For a consumption over 60 m³ per month :

- 5000 R per year = 1,7 % or less of annual income for people earning more than de 300 000 R per year.

For a consumption of 12 m³ per month :

- 300 R per year = 4,2% of annual income of 114 000 households earning between 4800 et 9600 R per year.

Inequalities



- Inequalities in water consumption will remain because :
- * bringing access to poor people is financially unsustainable and will destabilise the whole system and lead to collapse (Khartoum)
- * we need the rich to overuse water in order to subsidise and finance the free basic water policy (Johannesburg).

Scarcity :

- in JHB, the volume of the free basic water policy represents only 25 % of the city consumption, 12 % of the capacity of the water transferred from Lesotho.
- In Khartoum, the flow of the Blue and White Nile exceeds even during droughts 50 km³. The consumption of a 10 millions inhabitants city at european standards should not exceed 2 km³.

- This pessimistic approach has at least one outcome : socialisation of water problems (vergesellschaftung) which is coherent with Gramsci marxist approach.

3. Where can we go from there ? The « optimism of the will » and research programmes.

- Social scientists have an impressive know-how of the « pessimism of the intelligence ». (vital to get fundings)
- For Gramsci, the goal of the « optimism of the will » is quite simple : proletarian revolution and birth of a communist state.
- For a 21st century scholar, it is more complicated.

In most recent research projects about water, at least in France, the « optimism of the will » is somehow hidden.

- One example could be how the « optimism of the will » could influence research programmes, taking into account conceptions of justice in water management.

- Utilitarian conception of justice : a balanced must be obtained between efficiency and universal access, which is the ultimate goal; during the transition, which could last for ever, some may have more and other nothing.
- = > Possible research themes: financial sustainability of the system, « willingness » to pay of the users.

- « Rawlsian » conception of justice: inequalities are acceptable only if they profit to the poorest (maximin principle) . Connections and tariffs should be consequently highly subsidised.
- => Possible research themes : Correcting the anomalies of the FBW policy (Household size, effects of AIDS, rising the limit of free water from 6 to 12 kl).

- Marxist conception of justice : « true » equality is the ultimate goal. Water is only a vector of other form of exploitation.
- = > Comparison between « flows of power and flow of water », study of the social implications of water metering...

- “Procedural conception of justice” : there is no proper way of establishing a just water management system; it could be different according to social patterns, historical heritage, religious belief. The only prerequisite is the existence of a “fair” participation process
- => study on water users associations, civics...

Conclusion

- Gramscian approach on pessimism/optimism could be useful in water policy studies.
- * It helps to clarify the discourses of the major stakeholders.
- * but it is useful also for us to see our own position, our « optimism of our will » (otherwise we won't be in Porto).



Thank you for your attention.