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Thèse de Doctorat (PhD), Uppsala University (Suède), 2011

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Résumé

This study explores public health and education provision in Niamey, the capital of Niger, by merging the ethnographic study of public services with an anthropological analysis of the state and of local politics. Based on anthropological fieldwork carried out in a group of neighbourhoods in the periphery of Niamey, the study highlights the political dimensions of public service provision in a local arena where international development interventions and national plans meet local realities and where a wide range of actors and institutions, discourses, meanings, and practices are mobilized in the offering of and the regulation of access to public services. It focuses on the political, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of public service provision, too often hidden behind contemporary buzzwords of development such as community participation and decentralization that dominate global debates about education and healthcare in developing countries. The study brings forth the strategies of urban residents in dealing with daily challenges in the consolidation of service provision and in education and health-seeking trajectories. It shows that access to a satisfactory treatment of illness or a successful school career is premised on the ability to navigate on the medical and education markets, which are made up of a plurality of providers and of official and unofficial costs and transactions. Further, these public services engage different actors such as community committees, traditional chiefs, local associations, the municipality and elected municipal councillors, emergent leaders, NGOs, and international development aid. The study demonstrates that despite the uncertainty of state support in health and education provision and a widespread dissatisfaction with these public services, the image of the state as service provider is reproduced on a day-by-day basis through local efforts at securing public services.

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