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The role of women in the changing family and social organization of Ahamda pastoralists (Central Sudan)

Barbara Casciarri

This paper is an attempt to analyse the changing role of women in the socio-economic organization of a Sudanese pastoral group¹. In this context the process of sedentarization and of significant change in Ahamda society is examined through the role of women, from the point of view of their position as it relates to economic and social structures and with the necessary consideration to their change of status in the overall society. With respect to the analysis criteria, I find it quite legitimate to observe change through a gender approach. As most of the Arab and Muslim pastoral societies (Tillion 1966, Peters 1978, Asad 1970, Marx 1987, Oxby 1987), Ahamda society is founded upon a gender dichotomy which creates an opposition between private and public, domestic and extra-domestic domains. From the social (i.e. sexual) division of labour, the separation between male and female spheres (implying segregation and weak self-determination on the woman's side) fashioned the forms of economic and social organization, the political life of the group, up to its symbolic expressions – it could be enough to look at the dominant agnatic ideology, which provides the conceptualization of society, where the symbolic expropriation of women takes place. As some scholars pointed out (Nelson 1973, Broche-Due, Garfield and

Langton 1983, Oxby 1987), general research on pastoral peoples and, more specifically, about their ongoing processes of change, has often neglected to take duly into account the role of this gender diversification, giving priority to the analysis of the social system as a whole. Nevertheless, any detailed picture of pastoral socio-economic structures denotes a gender-based differentiation with respect to participation in both production and social reproduction (Dahl 1987a, b). Case studies show that males and females in pastoral populations are often affected by processes of change in different ways and degrees (Ensminger 1987, De Bruijn 1995). Since the gender distinction is so important, as a comparative analysis of field-research data shows, we can not avoid supporting a global view of socio-economic formations without a further analysis of the inner dynamics that ensue from what seems to be a common hinge of pastoral social structures.

After a general description of Ahamda socio-economic structure, I then get to the core of my topic by presenting a comparison between two patterns of the role of women in socio-economic life: the woman of the desert camp and the woman of the settled village. By analysing the changes of women's role in

the settlement process, I conclude that, in reality, women's segregation in the domestic sphere and their dropping out of the production processes increase with sedentarization. I also underline the fact that cases of women working outside for wage labour are still extremely rare. Since this could appear as "anti-economical" behaviour, I try to find a further explanation in some political and cultural dynamics that interact with strictly economic constraints. Even if my observations concern particularly the case of the Ahamda and come from my field data about them, I try to make reference to the debate developed on similar dynamics by social scientists who have worked on other pastoral societies.

General notes on the Ahamda economic and social system

The Ahamda are a Muslim, Arabic-speaking, pastoral group of Central Sudan. Like most of the northern and central Sudanese tribes, they emerge from the fusion of Arab nomadic groups, coming from Egypt and the Red Sea, with the autochthonous populations (Beja and Nubians). From the conquering populations they inherited, besides language and religion, the main features of their social structure. The whole society conceives itself as a group of agnatic kin, all descended from the eponymous ancestor Hammed. This greater group, called *gabila*, i.e. "tribe" (which shares collective ownership of the territory, expressed in exclusive rights over water resources and grazing lands), is segmented into various patrilineal lineages, called *fari*, i.e. "branch", which are segmented further into groups of *awlad*, i.e. "sons" (the extended family of three generations depth corresponding to the domestic unit of the camp, the *fariq*). An

overall genealogical (agnatic) system, conceived as the basis of the economic, social and political organization, is the idiom expressing such a structure, both by linking the group with the ancestors from Saudi Arabia, as well as with the other Arab Sudanese tribes, and explaining the relations between the sub-sections of the tribe itself. Like their Arab cousins, the Ahamda practice preferential marriage with FBD and basically express a strong tendency towards agnatic endogamy².

The Ahamda territory lies in the semi-desert area east of the main Nile and north of Khartoum. Their economy is traditionally based on nomadic herding (of camels, goats and sheep, few cattle) complemented by seasonal rain-fed cultivation of *sorghum*. According to their pattern of nomadization, they move into the desert grazing lands during the rainy season and they return to the west, close to the Nile, by the coming of the dry season. By the end of the 1960's and the beginning of the 1970's, when the ecological situation of the area began to deteriorate, a settlement process started and it became almost definitive by the time of the great crisis of 1984-1985.

Ecological crises (resulting in deterioration of water and grazing resources, loss of herds, lack of rain-crops, drought and famine) are one of the main causes of Ahamda sedentarization. But to properly understand this process we have to consider the interaction of other factors, such as State pressures towards settlement of nomadic tribes, the attempt to involve their economy in a national and international market (Khogali 1983, Salih 1990), the attraction of expanding urban centres – agricultural villages of the Nile but mostly the city of Khartoum. This settlement process is not homogeneous: some groups have earlier chosen the way of sedentarization and they settled in permanent villages near the Nile; other

groups have rather chosen to stay in the desert inner area, even if they live in almost settled camps. For the latter, pastoralism (together with rain-fed cultivation) remains the main economic activity (though with lower incomes), whereas the former groups, settled near the Nile, get more strongly involved in wage labour activities outside the tribal territory, even if they continue to practice a kind of transhumance and to invest their cash revenues in herd purchase. Anyhow all the Ahamda still view themselves (and are viewed by the others) as 'arab' – a term that in the Sudan strongly opposes nomadic pastoral peoples to sedentary agricultural peoples (Delmet 1989). Before describing the role of women in Ahamda society, I state in advance that, for analytical purposes, the differences between the two patterns (the desert camp woman and the settled village woman) polarize a more complex situation of a nomadic-sedentary *continuum*. I also remark that, as far as women living in the desert groups still based on pastoralism are concerned we find almost the same picture concerning the past as we do for the recently settled women living now in sedentary villages.

The Ahamda woman of the desert camp

Little girls start to work early, almost at the age of 5-6 years; their tasks concern chiefly the grazing of small flocks, the supplying of water from *hafir*³ or from wells, the collection of firewood and of grasses and plants used for hand-manufacturing. In this first phase of life, girls' activities do not differ a lot from those of young boys of the same age. But as they grow up, while boys are oriented towards the outer main activities of herding and agriculture, girls begin to be in-

troduced to all those activities connected with the domestic sphere: the preparation of meals, the transformation of milk products, the grinding of *sorghum*, etc. Beside these activities connected with the daily household management, other skills in the local production of manufactures are included in the female activities, such as weaving of animal hair and of vegetable material and the manufacture of pottery. Moreover, women take care of the small flocks left near the campsite and often do the milking. In some cases women have also a part in the rain-fed cultivation, normally in harvesting, if the fields are not too far from the camp. Another important task is the building, management and care of the tent, which is entirely left to the women. From an early age, the working day of the woman is filled with various activities, chiefly concerning domestic duties as well as some herding and agricultural tasks. For married women, the rearing of children is added to this hard work.

The age at marriage of the nomad woman is still quite low, between 12 and 14 years. Usually the young bride has no right to refuse her suitor (especially if he is her FBS). The marriage negotiations are a matter between men and the final decision is taken by the bride's father (sometimes together with her *a'mam*, i.e. paternal uncles). The bride's mother usually get the *mahar* of her daughter and, even if her advice is requested, her refusal alone can not prevent a marriage desired by the men. The actual role of the mother is in trying to get a higher bride-price. By tradition, after the marriage, the husband resides with his wife's family, for a maximum period of two to three years, but at least until the birth of the first child.

As for the ownership and management of goods (especially animal wealth), there are some variations depending on the economic condition of the

family, but it is not unusual for women to own at least small animals (goats and sheep), often offered by their close relatives on the occasion of infibulation and marriage ceremony. Even if these animals are herded together with the husband's and the woman does not have complete decision-making power in their management, they are still considered as the woman's property and she can take them back in case of divorce or widowhood. Even the tent and all its furnishing are considered women's property: in practice men have no house of their own and they live, for the first period of their life, in their mother's tent and after marriage in their wife's.

It is possible to observe that, even if the final decision-making power in the management of production, revenues and general organization of camp life, is a male matter, women take a major part in production processes and their importance in this field is not ignored. It should also be noticed that, with respect to the total labour-time and final productivity, women have a greater part than men in general economic activity: while an adult man, who has enough adult sons and young man-power to take care of the different activities, hardly needs to work and his only concern is decision-making, on the contrary a woman, young, adult or even elderly, is always overworked.

The Ahamda woman of the settled village

In the case of sedentarization, the picture is quite different. Some of the traditional activities disappear, others continue but in a different form and some new activities take place. With the loss of the importance of pastoralism, women no longer have a real function in herding activities: with the shift from nomadism to

transhumance, only men take care of herds; women and most of the household members remain at the permanent village while some men and the herds move into the grazing lands of the desert after the rains. Women can, at the most, take care of the small head of livestock which are left at the camp for daily requirements, but it is usually young men who are committed to this task. Even in agricultural activities, women are dropped from the productive processes: where there is still some form of rain-fed cultivation, it is the task of men, during the transhumant period, to work in the fields, as the latter are far from the settled village. It is the same in the case of irrigated agriculture in the lands near the Nile.

The domestic sphere remains strictly female, even if with some changes: the supply of daily household needs (meals and watering) becomes easier, thanks to the presence of mills which provide ready flour – the grinding of *sorghum* was considered by women as one of their harder daily tasks – and to water-pumps or canals near the villages which frees them from the heavy task of fetching water. But the settled life imposes new demands that make the women's labour-day as full as before: the cleaning of the house, the washing of clothes, the greater care for children who, excluded from productive processes like the women, become autonomous later compared with nomadic children⁴. Moreover, where there are village schools, children are taken away from the family and they do not represent anymore a supporting labour force for the domestic unit. Nevertheless, the age at which young girls start working remains unchanged (girls are not usually sent to school) but in this case their time is devoted only to domestic activities. Manufacturing activities too (pottery and weaving) tend to disappear, owing to the presence of market goods.

Even if these activities were further work for the women, the production and selling of manufactured goods were a way for women to be more influential in the household economy.

With respect to marriage customs, it is not unusual, even in settled situations, to have very young brides. But even if 12-14 year-old girls are still considered as being at the "ideal" age to be married, there still are factors which contribute to a higher age at marriage. On the one hand, in most cases the herd capital (which before represented the main wealth allowing men to marry) is now very reduced and contributes to a general pauperization of society. On the other hand, sedentarization results in the assimilation of the marriage customs of agricultural, sedentary and urban groups: these customs involve heavier expenses (and of course availability of cash), higher rates of *mahar*, the introduction of a more important dowry (with clothes, shoes and many other items), more expensive wedding ceremonies, a higher cost of the dwelling, that men have to support due to the disappearance of the tent. As most young men (no longer able to rely on the family animal capital) are forced to look for outside jobs, some often marginal, precarious and badly paid, marriage has become very hard for younger generations; this fact leads to an increase in age at marriage or sometimes to a monopolising of women, as second or third wives, by the few wealthier men. Only a few years ago it would have been inconceivable for men in their thirties (and even more for women in their twenties) not to be married, today it is a normal (even if regretted) situation. It is difficult to estimate the effects of such a trend on a quantitative level, since it is still too recent a process, but it is certain that within a few years the increase in the age at marriage (and then of the age at the birth of the

first child) will lead to remarkable changes in the demographic structure of family units. With respect to the changes in marriage customs, we finally remark that the temporary residence at the bride's relatives' (which was viewed as an advantage for women) is almost disappearing and usually the bride is immediately moved to the husband's house. As for the decision-making power of women in the matter of their marriage or that of their children, there does not seem to be a real evolution in comparison with the weak traditional self-determination.

As for the ownership status the situation seems to have changed rather negatively. Because of the general pauperization and decrease in animal wealth, it is becoming rare for settled women to own animals. Another change full of consequences is the transformation of the habitation: the tent – traditionally the woman's property – is usually replaced by a mud or brick house in the style of the Nile village dwellings. In this case the building of the habitation (together with its property rights) become a male matter. Moreover, integration into the cash economy and the extension of market goods, has led to the virtual disappearance of female production of manufactures. All these elements deprive women of the possibility of management of the household economy.

Why Ahamda women do not work "outside" ?

As we have seen, sedentarization of Ahamda society has led to significant changes in basic economic structures. The main factor, *i.e.* the loss of importance of herding activities, has some consequences:

1. Because of the loss of herds and the deterioration of the desert ecosystem, the

domestic unit can no longer rely solely on traditional pastoral and rain-fed agricultural activities for its subsistence.

2. The chosen solution is a diversification of the labour activities of the group: some of the adult males practice transhumance while the rest are pushed into searching for wage jobs in the sedentary agricultural centres, in the city of Khartoum, or sometimes abroad. The monetization imposed by sedentary life is also a factor.

3. Because transhumance itself is not so productive and because the wage labour found by ex-pastoralists of a marginal type, precarious and badly paid (Sorbo 1985), the pauperization of society becomes progressive.

These elements could make us assume that such a set of phenomena – the weaker influence of the men now working outside, the general pauperization, the need for a greater cash income to support the family – should lead women to enter the labour market, together with an increase in their autonomy and socio-economic weight in the household (Michael 1991). In reality this does not happen. Women seldom work "outside" the domestic domain and the tribal territory (or for cash incomes), and when this happens, it is in very particular cases only, as we will see. The effect is what we could call an "anti-economic" behaviour: also poorer households refuse to allow their women to work outside, even though they are aware of the importance that a further salary would have. Moreover, with the change of the economic system, women lose their former central role in the processes of production and the households have a potential of labour force (children, women in general and young women who marry later) which is unproductive but at the same time consuming⁵.

The explanation, offered by the Ahamda themselves, for keeping women

out of wage (or simply extra-domestic) labour even in conditions of severe poverty, is linked to the sense of honour, which is one of the ideological hinges of many pastoral and Arab-Muslim cultures (Holy 1989, Bonte 1991). Honour – that is "what is earned by men and is lost by women" (Bonte 1987) – makes it inconceivable for women, and particularly for women still of marriageable age, to become involved in outside work that takes them out of their husband's and agnates' control and puts them in contact with "strange" men (Bourgeot 1987). With respect to the cultivation work, whereas before it was possible for women to work in the rain-fed fields close to the campsite together with their domestic unit members, now women are not allowed to get involved in the activities on the agricultural irrigated lands near the Nile, not even as occasional farm-labourers. Even herding activities, in which nomadic women's role was basic, become impossible, when they involve a removal from the domestic group, as in transhumance, or an approach to sedentary market places. Even stronger is the opposition to other kinds of work (which sometimes and elsewhere represented emergency resources in times of crisis) such as the employment of women as servants in wealthier villages. The idea that to allow their women to work outside would bring the group dishonour, is strictly linked to the identity that the Ahamda strongly want to preserve; this, they feel, distinguishes them from the "loose" people of villages and towns, who they view as having a lower status (from the ethnic, moral and religious points of view) than the nomadic 'arab.

But other dynamics contribute to preventing women coming out into the labour market – dynamics that in this case are more related to national political trends than to local cultural behaviour.

The central power has always pushed for the settlement of nomads, who are considered as a part of society escaping economic and political control (Asad, Cunnison, and Hill 1976, Salih 1990) and potentially opposed to the constitution of a national structure. The new government, in place since the *coup d'état* of June 1989, replaced the traditional councils, *majlis*, formed by *sheikhs* and elders, with the *lajna sha'bia*, popular committees. The latter have control of the distribution of rationed goods, but they are also conceived as a means of control which warrants the enforcement at the local level of the Islamic Law and the conforming of smaller communities to the national ideology for the "right" functioning of society. In such a context women's behaviour becomes obviously one of the main targets, and this fact increases the degree of domestic segregation of women settled in the villages.

However, some cases of Ahamda women involved in wage labour outside the domestic unit do exist, but such cases represent an isolated reality and normally concern women with a somewhat particular status. In the cases I have analyzed, it is particularly widows who cannot marry again (because they already have children) and whose children are not old enough to work for them. Usually they come from another village and then they do not have the economic support of an agnatic group. For similar reasons another category of working women is that of divorced women, especially the ones who have children to support⁶. In such cases the choice of work is mainly restricted to employment as daily-workers in the irrigated fields near the Nile or a form of petty trading in foodstuffs not locally available, which are purchased in the town and sold at the small market of the village. These women fall into a category for which the control of the agnatic group is weaker

and the loss of honour is socially less important; their status of women without husbands (sometimes without close agnates), who most probably will not marry anymore, make them in some way "out of category"⁷. The other rare cases of wage-earning females concern elderly women coming from very poor households, who sometimes take part in agricultural activities or sell pottery and woven goods. This latter case is linked both to the sharpening of economic status differentiation between households and the weakening of the mutual obligations of solidarity within the lineage households.

With respect to the evolution of women's status in the change from nomadism to sedentarization, it can be noticed that the situation is getting worse. As we have mentioned, both changes in the economic framework on the one hand, and political and religious pressures on the other, noticeably increase the segregation of women inside the house and in a more restricted domestic sphere, which is no longer directly linked either with the main productive activities or with a cash economy. The removal of women from production processes, in which they were heavily involved in pastoral nomadic life, reduce their centrality to the whole society (Duffield 1981, Ensminger 1987). Moreover the time made available by the disappearance of traditional activities does not become "free time" to be managed in an autonomous way, because it is normally taken up by tasks inside the house (the new experience of entertaining in the house, the greater care of children and other household members, the more complex preparation of meals due to changes in dietary habits, etc.). The weakening of women's self-determination is underlined also by the almost complete disappearance of forms of female property: as we have mentioned, in the settled situation it becomes unusual

for women to own livestock. Moreover, the change in habitation pattern results in the new dwelling being built, paid for and owned by men, whereas the tent used to be the exclusive property of women. It is not by chance that older women, who were nomadic for most of their lives, often refuse to give up their tent for a mud house when settled in a village.

As for the assumed greater freedom enjoyed by women because of the frequent absence of men for work reasons, the process is not actually automatic: even if the male presence is weaker, at the same time there is a greater degree of social control by the larger group of relatives who are also settled in the village as there are more domestic units within a village than there were in a camp. In the absence of the husband, an equally strong control upon women is practiced by his brothers, father's brothers or more distant relatives.

Of course it is not my aim in this paper to naively celebrate an assumed liberation and actual self-determination of nomadic women. As we have seen, there remains in Ahamda society a strong dichotomy between male and female worlds and a clear expropriation of women as both producers and reproducers (Meillassoux 1975). We see, rather, a sort of graduation of levels in this general feature and field research allows us to observe that the role of women inside the traditional economic and nomadic structure seems to guarantee her an higher level of autonomy and influence in the management of life. Evidence of this can be found in the fact that women who have undergone the change from the nomadic to the settled situation do not hesitate to state that, from a subjective point of view, life in the desert was generally better for them, despite some of the modern conveniences (water-pumps, schools, some social services) that amel-

iorate material conditions in settled life. Such a perception is reinforced by the feeling of having been deceived about the advantages promised by sedentarization. In practice, owing to the present political and economic crisis in the Sudan, the "modern" advantages offered by settled life are often an illusion: water-pumps do not work without fuel, schools lack materials and teachers and planned social services are not actually operative. As far as women working outside are concerned, we cannot observe a change in their status, due solely to the fact that they get out of the domestic sphere to gain a cash income. In fact, as we have seen, such cases often concern situations of particular poverty and of harder conditions of life. Moreover, women working outside are not set free from the load of traditional domestic work – it is still inconceivable for a woman not to take care of children and house – so they have the double burden of wage activities outside and of domestic work at home.

Social scientists have dealt with the question of the transformations with respect to the status of women in the passage from nomadism to sedentary life. Some of them consider that sedentarization normally corresponds to an enhancement of women's position in the whole society (Nelson 1973, Chatty 1978, Olmsted 1975). The observations of the Ahamda context confirm that, as in certain other cases (Boulding 1977, Beck 1978, Digard 1981, Duffield 1981, Ensminger 1987), sedentarization processes rather bring about a general debasement in women's status; this is seen mainly in the loss of control over economic resources in terms of participation within the changed productive system, the decline of female commodity production due both to expansion of market goods and the integration in the cash economy and the almost complete disappearance of outright ownership. In addi-

tion to these general trends, in some contexts similar to the Sudanese one, it is possible to note the effects of a strengthening of ideological and political pressures (such as Islamic revivalism) that make the exclusion of women from public life a goal of social control. The question should not be viewed in terms of saying which one of these two different assumptions about effects of sedentarization on women's status is the right one. It should rather be a question of admitting that there is not one sedentarization process as a universal phenomenon or that the passage from nomadism to sedentism does not have automatic consequences; this is the reason why it is necessary to make a detailed and contextual analysis of the interlocking levels in such a complex process.

Conclusions

In this paper I attempted to observe the ongoing change in a pastoral society through an analysis of women's roles in the passage from nomadism to sedentary life. We have seen that, though some elements persist – the exclusivity of the domestic domain to women, the hardness of a working-day filled with tasks from morning to night, from youth to old age – there have been some noteworthy changes. These changes concern chiefly the involvement of women in extra-domestic activities linked to production processes, the female right to property and the degree of sexual segregation. Women's personal perceptions show that it is not only the anthropologist's view to say that sedentarization brings forth a debasement of the female condition, the loss of every sort of autonomy for women in determining their own lives and the worsening of their condition inside the overall society.

We have also noticed that in a condition of general pauperization, the attitude preventing women from getting involved in extra-domestic wage-labour may appear as anti-economical. We have found two factors as constraining in this stronger segregation: the sense of honour to preserve and the strength of religious ideological pressure – that is a political pressure in the present Sudanese context. These two factors ought to be added, as explanations of the ongoing process, in the analysis of the dynamics of economic and social transformation.

The analysis of the Ahamda case through the changing roles of women point out the necessity of taking into account three kinds of assumptions if we are to formulate observations on the dynamics of changing processes among pastoral peoples. Firstly, since we all notice the importance in pastoral societies of a sexual division of labour (in the economic sphere as well as in the social, political and symbolic ones), it may be necessary not to neglect gender inequality and its evolution, together with all the elements of the global social structure which are linked to this basic feature. Secondly, we should pay attention to the interlocking between gender-based and class-based differentiations (Bourgeot 1987, Oxby 1987), especially in the analysis of change, where social and economic stratification are two of the common trends. The analysis of global economic changes cannot avoid noting the interplay of inequalities within the household (gender-based) and between households (class-based) (Dahl and Hjort 1979, Dahl 1987a, b). Thirdly, we should not overlook the suggestions emerging from the discussions of social scientists about pastoral peoples and the ongoing transformations of these societies; these suggestions prevent us from taking a simplified view of such societies, which have been considered for a long time as remote, iso-

lated and stagnant socio-economic systems, subject to mechanical forms of change. Recent studies and field-work among pastoralists have shown a more complex situation of intertwined factors. We now know that ecological crises cannot, by themselves, explain change within pastoral systems (Bovin and Manger 1990); we also know that such economies, even if marginalized, are more and more interlocked into regional, national and international markets (Salih 1990). Finally, we can say that changes among pastoral peoples are to be properly understood only according to the interplay and interaction of the different dynamics of an ecological, economic, political and cultural kind (Galaty and Salzman 1990).

The Ahamda case too shows that, if we really want to understand the change these people are undergoing, we need to take into account such a multiplicity of interacting factors inside and outside the observed society such as (besides the pastoralist crisis) the national and international economic situation, state pressures on nomads, the specific political situation of Sudan, the fundamentalist revival and the creation and spreading of popular Islamic committees. Even though this analysis is strictly contextual to the Ahamda case, in more general terms it further denotes how pastoral societies, contrary to a stereotyped picture of social immobility, are far from being closed systems and offer a range of adaptive responses to the changes in their ecological, economic and political environments. This we can only perceive through a wider and global analysis of the more integrated levels of their social structure.

Notes

- (1) I carried out my field-work among the Ahamda in five stages between January 1989 and April 1995 (for a total period of 13 months). The core of my research was the analysis of the kinship and marriage system with particular attention to economic structures and processes of change. The data supporting my observations in this paper derive from: a) participant observation during field-work periods; b) conversations and interviews *with* women and *about* women concerning various topics and c) a sample of 18 interviews, with a common pattern of questions, carried out during my last field-work with women of different ages, marital status (unmarried, married, divorced, widows, *etc.*) and background (born in a settled situation, early settled, mostly nomadic, still living in the desert, *etc.*).
- (2) For more detailed description of Ahamda social structure see Casciarri (1996).
- (3) A *hafir* is an artificial depression dug to receive and store rain waters.
- (4) The increase in the number of children per household (resulting from both higher fertility and a lower death-rate) should also be noted: the latter is a common effect of sedentarization (Henin 1969).
- (5) By talking of "non-productivity" or of "low productivity", I do not mean, of course, that women are not active or do not work, but I only underline that the activities carried out by them are more centred on the house entertaining and often in forms neither of primary necessity nor of cash income production.
- (6) Islam prescribes that men are responsible for the subsistence of their divorced women's children, but usually this is not put into practice; the same applies to other religious precepts such as those

concerning inheritance, rules about payment of bride-price, equal right of divorce, etc.

(7) As Meillassoux (1975) points out, often at the end of their reproductive life (i.e. post-menopausal or infertile women), women escape the application of gender-based rules and restrictions, since they are no longer a major target for the control of social reproduction.

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Résumé

Les changements vécus par les pasteurs arabes soudanais Ahamda sont analysés à travers le rôle des femmes dans le contexte des changements qui ont eu lieu dans la structure sociale globale. La transformation de l'économie pastorale et la sédentarisation entraînent la perte progressive du poids du travail féminin dans le processus de production. Les dynamiques politiques et idéologiques du contexte soudanais renforcent la ségrégation des femmes dans le domaine domestique et contribuent à marginaliser leur statut.

Resumen

En el trabajo se analizan los cambios más recientes vividos por los pastores árabes sudaneses Ahamda a partir del rol de las mujeres en la estructura social global. La transformación de la economía pastoril y la sedentarización han llevado a la disminución progresiva de la contribución del trabajo femenino en los procesos productivos. Las dinámicas políticas e ideológicas en el contexto sudanés han reforzado la segregación de las mujeres al espacio doméstico y contribuido de esta manera a la marginalización de su status.

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