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**INNOVATING STATE PRACTICES:
MIGRATION, DEVELOPMENT, AND STATE LEARNING
IN THE MOROCCAN SOUSS**

This paper chronicles the radical transformation of rural electricity provision in Morocco during the 1980s and 1990s. It demonstrates how a collaboration between emigrants that heralded from the Souss region of Morocco and the national government produced unanticipated innovations in basic infrastructure provision and transformed an area of Morocco long considered resistant to development into a hub of economic growth. Drawing on this history, the paper argues that the relationship between remittances and development needs to be reevaluated: remittances transformative effect on local economies depends on how they are constituted through the actions of local communities and government. Furthermore, those constitutive actions are most likely to produce innovations when the actions focus on the practices of infrastructure provision rather than on negotiating and policing the boundary between state and non-state actors.

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The relationship between migration and development has received renewed attention of late. As migrant remittances worldwide have risen to stratospheric levels, topping \$100 billion in 2003, the aggregate role of countless small transfers of money in national economic growth has become impossible to ignore. Development scholars have produced a spate of increasingly sophisticated models of how remittances impact economic performance, as well as a growing body of qualitative analyses on the ways that transfers of money, but also of knowledge, social networks, political influence, and even cultural values affect economies of migrant-sending countries. Likewise, policy makers have rushed to apply the insights those efforts have yielded to design policy that directs migrant resources to uses where they can have the greatest positive effect on economic growth. However, both the emerging literature on migration and development and the policy initiatives that stem from it depend on two assumptions that may undermine their effectiveness. First, they share a particular view of migrant resources – both monetary and non-monetary -- as fungible and unchanged by their transfer across space and context, as well as by their movement into particular spaces and contexts. Second, they share a definition of the state as distinct from society, and they view the state as acting *on* society through policies deployed to promote certain economic or social outcomes.

These two assumptions create the illusion that constant vectors of mechanistic causality govern the relationship between migration and development: migration is portrayed as having a predictable set of outcomes for development given local institutional constraints and opportunities. The reverse is also true; development is theorized to affect migration in foreseeable ways given existing institutions as well as the structure and makeup of migration flows. These assumptions about migrant resources and the state, as well as the causal models they support, obscure a set of deep social processes from view: they block out the processes through which migrants, their communities, and the state together weave the relationship between migration and development into a single cloth, making the evolution of those two dynamics interdependent and often indistinguishable. More importantly, the assumptions conceal how these social actors, including the state, learn and innovate as they plait migration and development together in new ways, often in ways that the actors themselves could not have imagined at the

outset. Through on-going processes of social learning and innovation, these social actors are continually amending-- even fundamentally transforming -- migration patterns, local cultural, political and institutional conditions, and local trajectories of economic development, wreaking havoc with the variables on which the causal and impact models of the relationship between migration and development are based.

This essay turns its attention to the social processes that the two assumptions about migrant resources and the state conceal. Out of a consideration of the ways in which migration communities and the state mold the relationship between migration and development, I suggest that a practice-based theory of learning and innovation explains when those social processes may lead to positive social and economic change. Furthermore, I argue that that this practice-based perspective on learning and innovation offers a crucial view of how the state, including the social actors and institutions that constitute it, appreciate and understand the social fields where the state can act, and how they use those insights to craft policy. In short, I examine the social practices of state learning through which both migration communities and the state forge a synergistic relationship between migration and development. Understanding the practices of state learning is indispensable for policy making in this realm: without a clear grasp of the on-going processes through which social actors – states chief among them-- link migration to development, states have little hope of designing policies that can engage with those processes in ways that are meaningful and sustained. Instead, they will remain limited to policy interventions that are formulaic and designed to act on a target group or dynamic that, due to the social processes that create it, is not only constantly moving but is also constantly changing.

The Moroccan Souss, a narrow valley pinched between the two chains of Morocco's jagged Atlas Mountains, has over the past forty years grown thick with the social processes that link migration and development. In Morocco's political cartography, the Souss was for most of that period placed squarely outside the boundaries of what policy makers cynically termed, "*le Maroc utile*" – literally the useful Morocco of the kingdom's coastal cities. For decades, this agricultural region suffered egregious neglect in a policy framework that favored urban Morocco over the precarious agriculture in the kingdom's Amazight heartlands (White 2001). Compounded by geographical

isolation, a highly inequitable land tenure system that concentrated the richest tracts in the hands of a few, and the slow strangulation of a drought that was becoming endemic, the Souss' predicament had produced some of the worst human development indicators in the Arab world. In response to the dismal economic prospects of the area, as well as to not-so-subtle government pressures, out-migration became a structural feature of the local economy. Soussis—as locals are called – migrated to Morocco's burgeoning cities as well as to Europe's industrial areas, and in numbers so large that political commentators in the 1970s and 1980s warned that entire swathes of the region risked being depopulated (Daoud 1990).

Now, the same emigration that was once viewed as incontrovertible proof of the region's economic distress has challenged the crown's political geography. Migrants from the region – and international migrants in particular – are driving a stubborn renaissance that is quietly transforming the Souss' political and economic landscape. Soussi beyond the valley have yanked the boundaries of the “*Maroc utile*” outward to include their arid homelands. In concert with their communities of origin, they have not only elaborated a vision for economic development in the Souss region, but they have also experimented with organizational and technological models to carry it out. More significantly, however, they have brought the state in as a full partner both into the processes of articulating that vision and into the practices of executing it. Soussi migration communities have done more than compel the state to abandon its habit of chronic neglect and to commit both financial and institutional resources to the valley. They have drawn the state into community-generated processes of innovation. In other words, *the Soussis have taught the state how to learn.*

The results of the on-going exchange that the Soussi migration communities have established with the state have been dramatic. The Moroccan government has connected villages to basic infrastructure and services at rates that would have been inconceivable even as recently as the mid-1990s. Tens of thousands of households that until a few years ago depended on candles and firewood now enjoy reliable access to electricity, and the hum of electric-powered irrigation pumps can be heard in the early mornings as orchards and fields – some of them on land newly reclaimed from the drought-- are irrigated (ONE 1999; www.one.org.ma). Thanks to the ongoing, if sometimes contentious,

collaboration between the state and local communities, schools for boys and girls have been established at unprecedented rates, staffed and well-stocked rural clinics have been opened, and weekly markets have sprung up at the intersections of roads that were just dirt pathways until 1998 when hundreds of kilometers of fresh pavement were rolled out to link isolated villages to regional centers (L’Economiste, September 10, 2003; Sajid, Interview, January 2004). Building on the new infrastructure and services in the Souss, local communities in partnership with their international migrants, have set up cooperatives for the export of high-value-added agricultural crops like organic saffron and argane oil, and villages have begun experimenting with boutique ecotourism. The Souss is increasingly forging linkages with the global economy through trade and services, over and above the remittances that it had already been receiving for decades. Soussi communities and migrants have turned the state's reluctant redrawing of the political map to widen the area of the “*Maroc utile*” into a self-fulfilling prophesy.

In addition to recasting Morocco’s political geography, the Soussi experiment belies the two assumptions that underlie migration and development frameworks. Contrary to the view that migration resources move unchanged across context, the Soussi engaged with migration resources in ways that would ultimately determine what those resources would become. Additionally, they involved the state in exchanges that were so dense and intimate that they challenged the divide between state and society that migration and development theory maintains. The first two sections of this paper are devoted to examining the two main assumptions of migration and development theory that obscure these Soussi social processes and to suggesting alternative views of remittances and the state. The third section explores some of the processes that generate innovation and the ways they pertain to the state, and suggests how migration communities and the state engage in practices of innovation.

The Soussi migrants began their work in their valley with a focus on rural electricity provision, and this paper follows their lead. The fourth section of this essay retraces how migration communities imagined, planned and built sustainable electricity networks in villages throughout the Souss. The fifth section shows how Soussi migration communities revamped the state’s view of electricity provision by engaging the state in on-going social processes of innovation, and how the new approach informed a

massive rural electricity program the state launched in the late 1990s. The sixth and final section offers an epilogue to the case as well as some concluding implications for theory building in this new field.

Before I continue, a few words on methods and terminology are called for. The case study in this paper is based on several months of fieldwork in Rabat, in the Souss valley, and in Paris from the summer of 2002 through the summer of 2004. The methodology I used was eclectic and varied, ranging from archival research to structured interviews to ethnographic observation. The range of people I interviewed was similarly broad, and included high-ranking bureaucrats, leaders of village associations, and member of migration communities, amongst others. In the paper, when I report the comments made by a public persona – a director of a government agency for example – whose identity is well-known in explicitly public spaces – like the printed media -- and when that person’s remarks were made in his or her capacity as that public persona, I refer to the person by name. In all other circumstances, the confidentiality of the persons interviewed are maintained in keeping with human subjects protocol. If the comments support specific descriptions of the case, the place and month of the interviews are noted even in those instances.

Throughout the paper, I refer to migrants, migration communities, villages of origin and villagers. Clearly, these are categories that overlap, often bleeding into one another so significantly that it becomes impossible to tease them apart. For example, migrants who live part of the year in their villages of origin are villagers in a very material and immediate sense, and those who only return sporadically are villagers in profound symbolic and affective sense. However, for the purpose of telling the story of the case, “migrants” refer to people who mostly live and/or work in areas *other* than their village, either in Europe or in Morocco’s larger cities. “Villagers” refer to people who mostly reside in the village from which the migrants herald, who have either never left or who have returned on a permanent basis. “Migration communities” is used more inclusively to refer to both villagers and migrants, and to the transnational socio-economic space that transnational practices and exchanges have created. The definition of “community” as used in this essay is practice-based: it depends on the practices through which people create their community and define themselves as members of it,

rather than on the specific people that the community includes. This conception is useful for considering communities that migration has stretched across space because it assumes neither a consistent co-location or co-presence, nor an inclusion in a well-defined group that is clearly delineated and contained within socially recognized boundaries. At the same time, however, because community membership in this view derives from participation in a set of practices through which social actors – in this case, migrants and villages, as defined above – develop and share understandings about what they are doing, and about what their actions mean for the welfare and identity of their communities in the present and the future, this definition allows for a certain coherence of the community across space and time (Lave and Wenger 1991: 98).

1. Constituting Resources

The work on migration and development sits at the intersection of a number of different streams of research and analysis: the literature on transnational communities, the literature on globalization and the global movement of resources, the literature on participatory development, and the literature on the state and its role in economic development. From these theoretical traditions, the literature on migration and development draws two defining assumptions. The first assumption is that migrant resources – be those resources monetary (c.f. Orozco 2001), social (c.f. Levitt 1999), political (c.f. Goldring 2002), knowledge (c.f. Saxenian 1999) or network-based (c.f. Portes 1999) – are simply remitted back to communities of origin. The literature documents well how migration channels resources to migrant sending countries and communities, and how the impact those resources have is shaped by local institutional structures and practices (c.f. Durand et al 1996; Chaudhry 1989). It has also shown how those resources change local social and economic relationships and processes. The most recent literature on this topic has been more nuanced in its analyses, and has observed that migrant resources set in motion local transformations that are subtle, sometimes indirect, but profound, affecting communities over time, like a series of mild earthquakes that ultimately redefines the local landscape. These studies, qualitative and ethnographic for the most part, have shown how migrant resources have revamped the architecture of institutions as basic as family and property rights (Kanaiaupuni & Donato 1999; Nuijten

1998), reshaped modes of production (Guarnizo 2003, de la Garza et al. 2002), and shaken up deeply held worldviews (Glick-Schiller et al. 2001). Furthermore, they have called into question the notion that migrant resources flow only in one direction: back to communities of origin. Studies on transnationalism have shown that the resources – money, ideas, networks – move back and forth between different nodes or expressions of a community that migration has made transnational. Moreover, they have shown that the practices of moving resources from one area implicated in the local migration processes to another in themselves create transnational social fields that “exist within but [are] constituted apart from the larger states and societies in which they are constituted” (Smith 1995, qtd. in Pries 2001). However, even these latest studies share the basic assumption of the earlier models: migrant resources are always generated *elsewhere*, and are merely *transferred* back (Hart 2002).

In this view, migrant resources are not altered by their trajectory; they arrive intact to impact a receptive locale, be the locale in question a community or a nation. Based on this understanding of migrant resources as traveling unadulterated across space and into a locale, migration and development literature has relied on an impact model to assess how migration affects the economic development of sending areas (Hart 2002; Guarnizo 2003). The overwhelming concern in the field has been to hone those models so that they might better assess, explain, and predict the effect that migrant resources have on communities or countries of origin (c.f Taylor 1992).

Not coincidentally, the overwhelming concern of governments designing policy in this area has been to develop policy tools that enable them to channel migrant resources to uses where they might have the most positive impact. Implicit in these policy efforts is the analogy of migrant resources – especially monetary remittances -- as flows, and that like any flow, the perception is that the resources can be rerouted without it altering them in any way. Most of the policy experiments directed at remittances, for example, have followed this logic. On the whole, they have attempted to accomplish one of two things: first, to increase the volume of remittances flows by lowering transaction costs and removing any friction that was obstructing their movement, and second, to divert some portion of remittances flows away from household consumption, often viewed as “unproductive,” to investment or savings in the country of origin, uses viewed

as productive catalysts for economic growth. In none of these policy initiatives is the action of the state viewed as changing the good transferred: money is money is money, supremely fungible and its material essence impervious to change. (Torres 2001; Iskander 2004).

The Soussi experiment with community development and with rural electrification in particular indicates that this perception of migrant resources as immutable across context is inaccurate. Rather, their experience suggests that resources generated through migration are *constituted* through the actions of people. The way that migrants, communities, and the state engage with the resources determines not just their value, but what they are intrinsically. Resources are not just passively received; they are made.

This is an insight that is already well developed with respect to the movement of knowledge across contexts, across institutions, and across space. Research on knowledge transfer amongst organizations has shown that knowledge is situated; it is embedded in local languages, practices, routines and social relationships (Kogut & Zander 1992). Many scholars have taken that observation further and have argued that knowledge is in fact part and parcel of those languages, procedures, relationships and routines. They posit that knowledge is enacted through practice, and has no meaning or value separate from the actions or contexts in which it used (Lave et al. 1991). Knowledge as codifiable and abstract as mathematical formulas, for example, are only intelligible and useful when related to social contexts; numerical concepts that are their building blocks depend on socially constructed understandings of quantity. As Lave and Wenger observe in their monograph on learning and knowledge transfer, “any ‘power of abstraction’ is thoroughly situated, in the lives of the persons and in the culture that makes it possible” (1991: 34).

As a result, epistemologists increasingly maintain that it is impossible to separate knowledge out as a good that can be picked up and moved from one organization to another (von Hippel 1994; Cook 1999, Orlikowski 2001). They suggest that knowledge is in fact so interdependent with the act of knowing that they are often indistinguishable (Lave et al. 1991; Wenger 1998). They argue that because knowledge displays this situated quality and because it exists through practice, it undergoes a transformation

when it is transferred from one situated context to another, one that is so fundamental that that it ultimately changes basic aspects of the knowledge being transferred (Bechky 2003; Lave et al. 1991). Observers of this process are referring to more than the slippage of translation, where certain concepts are truncated or lost because the palette of another (literal or practice) language cannot capture them; they are referring to more than the clumsiness of making tacit knowledge explicit, a process that hopelessly blunts subtle understandings in order to encode them (Polanyi 1967). What they are pointing out is that the way that people engage with knowledge in order to communicate it in a situated context different from their own alters what that knowledge actually is (Bechky 2003). Knowledge is not transferred; it is *transformed*.

Many of the resources that migration makes available to migration communities may seem more materially tangible, more fixed – and less elusive – than knowledge. However, as the discussion of the Soussis experience with community development will illustrate, even though the money, social networks, and political leverage migration generates appear more concrete, they share the same situated and contingent qualities of knowledge (Zelizer 1997; Hart 2002). Just like knowledge and the act of knowing, what those resources are, intrinsically, depends on the ways they are enacted and woven into practice (Giddens 1984). Vivian Zelizer forcefully illustrates this contingent and situated quality of seemingly concrete resources in her study on the relationship between the social and economic values of money. She argues that even material resources like money that rely on the appearance of having a constant, objective worth for their usefulness in society and in production acquire value only through the social interactions in which they are used or invoked symbolically. She posits that money is so profoundly inscribed by the social and cultural ways in which it is used that one cannot accurately refer to money as being a single currency. In fact, she concludes that to capture money's social and economic functions, it makes more sense to talk about money as a social medium with multiple currencies, some of which are “as unexchangeable as the most personal and unique object” (1997:17). What is true of money in conterminous social, economic and geographic contexts is even more so of money in migration communities where the repeated exchange of resources is what weaves communities together across space. The money that a migrant sends home to support his wife and children, for

instance, expresses and maintains familial relationships and identities that are different from the relationships and identities communicated through money sent for the renovation of the village mosque. The remittances in this example, earmarked for different functions, will have different symbolic and material value, and people in the local community will engage with those resources in ways that reflect that difference in value. As a result, the monies will have distinct ramifications for the social and economic trajectory of the migrant's village of origin.

In addition to being shaped by the way people engage with them locally, migrant resources – even those as material as money -- are transformed by the practices people use to move them. They are subject to the same processes of metamorphosis in transfer that knowledge is. Whether a migrant sends money in cash to his wife through a middleman from the village or through a formal banking institutions will inform the material and symbolic worth of the money in fundamental -- and dissimilar -- ways. Dispatching funds through the middleman may act as a means of communicating trust and the value placed on community solidarity, and may ultimately transform the money remitted into a resource that reinforces community ties. As a result, the social networks strengthened in this transfer may well affect the migrant family's welfare in ways just as significant as the goods purchased with the money. By contrast, sending money through a bank may give the migrant access to a host of financial services that may otherwise have been unavailable, enabling the migrant and his family to make investments that may benefit them over the long term. For the migrant's wife, collecting funds from a formal institution may change her status in the family and community, or may prompt her to acquire new skills, like improved literacy, that may give her greater autonomy. Her actions would demonstrate another feature of migrant resources: those who are ostensibly "transferring" migrant resources are not the only ones shaping those resources. They share that influence equally with those who are ostensibly "receiving" them (Hart 2002).

Given the contingent and situated nature of migrant resources, understanding the *processes* through which migrants, their communities of origin, and ultimately the state, shape the resources that migration makes available may reveal more about why migration affects sending areas in the ways that it does than the impact models that have become so popular of late in the study of the relationship between migration and development.

2. The State as Practice

The second assumption in the emergent literature on migration and development stems from the definition of the state. In a view that migration and development literature shares with much of the scholarship on economic development, and on participatory governance in particular, the state is portrayed as a freestanding institution that is conceptually and actually distinct from society. Its role is to perform a set of core functions-- among them tasks such as guaranteeing the peace and ensuring the functioning of the economy-- which are portrayed as unchanging and independent of historical context (Hansen & Stepputat 2001). These basic assumptions have remained relatively constant even though opinions about the manner in which the state can best carry out these functions have diverged, with views, as well as the policies they have produced, ranging from full state management of the economy to the *laissez-faire* of the Washington consensus.

In carrying out these functions, the state remains distinct from society, above the messy fray of situated everyday practices. The state is represented as an institution or set of institutions that are separate from society, and is portrayed as having an existence autonomous from society even while it is dependent on society for its *raison-d'etre*. (c.f. Evans 1995). The representation of the state as separate from the social world is pervasive even in accounts that portray the state as beholden to a specific set of (usually class) interests; indeed, observers of the state have noted that the ability of the state to garner enough legitimacy to act on behalf on a given set of interests depends on its separation from those interests and from the society on which they seek to impose themselves (Ollman 1992; Burawoy 2003). As a separate and autonomous institution, the state acts *on* social dynamics: it directs transfers, it facilitates exchange of property, it controls or enables the movement of people. In that endeavor, the state may act on the most intimate aspects of people's lives, and may intervene to affect minutia of everyday exchanges to achieve a policy goal. Ultimately, however, in this representation of the state, its actions always remain analytically and materially distinct from the dynamics it seeks to manage.

The literature on participatory governance amends this view of the state somewhat by showing that the state will from time to time open up its activities to non-state actors, carrying out its functions in partnership with local communities (c.f. Fung & Wright 2003). However, the decision to make its boundaries temporarily permeable is always the prerogative of the state, and the state is perceived as devolving power to the populace, even “activating” its participation (Ostrom 1996). Relatedly, while the participatory governance literature notes that opening the state up to public participation makes for a more effective and accountable bureaucracy (c.f. Moore 1989; Ackerman 2004) and may even contribute to the development of more creative and responsive policy solutions (c.f. Thompson 1995; Tandler 1997), the initiative to innovate and to institutionalize any fundamental changes in the way the state performs its functions always comes from the heart of the state itself (Michener 1998).

In essence, this conception of the state reduces it to a black box with its internal processes obscured (Hansen & Stepputat 2001). That the state acts on social dynamics, and has profound impacts on the economic and political trajectory of specific locales or nations is well theorized. The social practices that produce those state actions on social dynamics is less examined, the processes – as opposed to the policies-- by which the state affects those dynamics having been lost behind the opaque sides of the box. Likewise, partnerships that the state forges with non-state actors are amply documented, as well as the significant positive effects those partnerships can have. However, the everyday exchanges and the situated practices on which those partnerships depend are too often elided from the analysis. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, state innovation and its impacts are carefully researched, but the processes that produce that innovation are generally overlooked. The research on state innovation focuses on the advance once it has already manifested itself as a state policy or a defined state action, leaving behind the murky amorphous processes through which new areas for state action are perceived and understood, as well as the processes through which ideas for effective interventions coalesce.

To understand how the on-going exchange between migrant communities and the state transformed the Souss valley, I argue that a more fruitful way of conceptualizing the state is to view it as a set of practices. In an approach inspired by Giddens’ structuration

theory (1984), defining the state as made up of a series of repeated practices breaks open the black box of the state and reveals the processes through which the state affects migration, development, and the relationship between them. In this structuration-based view of the state, the practices of the state, situated in specific historic and political contexts and relationships, bring the state as an institution into being (Mitchell 1992). State institutions – external entities and internal schemas -- exist only when they are enacted through repeated social action. Laws, policies, even institutions that appear as solid as government bureaus exist only through the actions of people, and acquire meaning through those actions. The policy – or the rule, as Giddens would put it – is, at any given time, what the practice has made it.

This conception of the state balances on the edge of a razor sharp contradiction. On the one hand, the characterization of the state as practice blurs the distinction between the state and non-state actors. Non-state actors participate in state practices on a daily basis; through their actions, they enact the institutions of the state. They create the state that governs their lives (Foucault 1991). The state acts *through* society and social dynamics - through the very people and practices that enact the state-- and not *on* them. On the other hand, not all the practices that enact state institutions are claimed by the state. Not all practices qualify as policy. The boundary between state and society may be supremely permeable but it does exist.

However, in the state-as-practice view, the creation of the boundary between the state and society is itself a state practice. Furthermore, exactly where that boundary is drawn is highly political. Analyst of this shifting boundary, Timothy Mitchell (1999) argues that the uncertain yet powerful distinction between the state and society is produced through ongoing political processes – or practices -- and that those very practices generate resources of power that make the distinction between the state and society seem natural and incontestable. The situated everyday practices that produce the state simultaneously create the illusory effect of the state as a structure that is separate and autonomous from society, and the socially embedded and situated practices that enact it are conveniently shoved into the black box, once again allowing for the representation of the state as acting *on* society.

While the boundary between state and society may be a political fiction, it matters a great deal in real life. What is considered “state” and what is considered “society” shapes people’s lived experience in integral ways and determines the resources to which they have access. Put plainly, those practices on the state side of the state-society boundary enjoy an aura of legitimacy and neutrality, and consequently are shielded from political challenge; critically, they are also defended with the significant material and political resources at the state’s disposal (Mitchell 1991). Property rights issued and recognized by the state, and codified in state practice through state certified land title documents, for example, benefit from the state’s enforcement, whereas informal land ownership arrangements do not. Even if the informal arrangements are considered as more legitimate by the communities in which they exist and are invoked in practice far more often than state-defined property rights, the state can overturn them with relative impunity (Razzaz 1993). Indeed, the history of the Moroccan countryside is heavily scarred with incidents in which the state of the French colonists and then of the Alawite monarchy has dispossessed poor farmers of their land on this basis (Lugan 1992).

Although the divide between state and society is drawn with an emphatic hand both in politics and in much of the scholarly literature on the state, state and society are intertwined in ways beyond the practices that weave the two spheres together. They depend on one another for their definitions: the definition of what the state is depends on a mirror definition of what constitutes society. By acting in society, state practices draw a boundary around the social sphere, determining what is society and what is not – defining what is outside society, undeserving of state actions to ensure its basic reproduction and welfare. In the case of the Moroccan Souss, the state’s practice of delimiting society was very political, and for the Soussis themselves, very poignant: they were unequivocally excluded from society. In the post-independence Morocco, they were excluded from the “Maroc utile” and from the modernity and economic growth that the state was explicitly working to promote in its coastal cities. This exclusion continued a historically entrenched pattern of marginalization: ever since the establishment of an Islamic Kingdom in Morocco in 788 A.D., the Central High-Atlas Mountains and their valleys have been classified as the *Bled es-siba*, a term that has meant everything from

“wilderness of the infidels” to “autonomous regions” depending on the historical moment and political context. (Lugan 1992; Dalle 2001; While 2001).

For migration communities in the Souss, this deliberate exclusion on the part of the state was compounded by an exclusion one that grew out of the way the state, made manifest through state practices, conducts the business of statehood. As James Scott points out in his treatise on state practices, the state always seems to be “the enemy of ‘people who move about’” (1998:1). He argues that this is because the communities that migrants stretch across spaces by moving are illegible, even incomprehensible, to the state. As Scott explains, migration undermines “[the] state’s attempt to make a society legible, to arrange the population in ways that simplif[y] the classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion” (1998:2). For a series of historical reasons that begin with agreements the Moroccan government signed with European governments in the 1960s and 1970s authorizing them to go to specific areas of the Kingdom and recruit workers, international migrants are legible to the Moroccan state. The state is able to perceive and understand emigrants as a group of individual, atomized workers for export, oftentimes accompanied by their families, but who are otherwise suspended above specific local Moroccan context. In fact, over the last forty years, the Moroccan state has developed sophisticated policies and institutions -- including financial institutions, cultural foundations, and media outlets – that not only explicitly defined emigrant workers as Moroccan by virtue of their allegiance to their king and their nation, but also actively cultivated nationalist loyalties and identities while firmly discouraging sub-national or tribal identification of any kind (Iskander 2004a; Brand 2002).

However, unlike the atomized international migrants that the Kingdom targeted with its policies, *migration communities*, made up as they are of multiple social spaces located in very disparate geographical and political contexts, have been hard for the state to read. The state been unable to discern the ways in which local spaces are part of transnational socio-economic fields with any consistency. Nor has the state been able to perceive how dense and rich are the situated practices and relationships between migrants and villagers, and the coherence those practices have lent to communities anchored in a constellation spaces, many of which are outside the Kingdom’s territorial jurisdiction. Even more challenging for the state than reading migration communities has been

conceptualizing, and then implementing, policy in local spaces that are, in their everyday practices, profoundly transnational.

As the case discussion will show in greater detail, the migration communities of the Souss chose to promote the development of their villages and their region through practices that were very clearly defined as the purview of the state. The rationale for their decision was immensely practical: the egregious lack of basic infrastructure and services in the area hamstrung their efforts to promote economic development. However, their decision was also deeply symbolic. By appropriating practices associated with the state, they established themselves as a realm where the state could and should act. They made their spaces visible and legible to the state. They staked their claim as members of society. As one migrant activist working in the region told me, “we want to take the state by the hand and bring it here. We don’t have the resources the state does; we can never accomplish what the state can. What we want is for the state to do the work of the state *here*. Once the state takes responsibility for something – like providing electricity – there is no need for us to continue [doing that]” (Interview January 2004).

Once the migration communities made themselves visible to the state – once they brought the state “by the hand” – they helped the state comprehend *how* to implement policies in communities that migrants made transnational (in the case of international migrants) or transregional (in the case of internal migrants). They engaged the state in on-going exchange helped the state think through how to conceptualize policy in communities whose basic activities of economic production, as well as social and cultural (re)production, were often fragmented by vast geographical distances. Although the interactions between the state and migrant communities were more contentious than amicable, they provided a means for communities and the state to design collectively (if not collaboratively) state practices that were not only suited to the particular needs, constraints, and opportunities that characterized migration communities in the Moroccan Souss, but that were also remarkably innovative. The following section offers a theoretical lens that reveals why.

3. Innovation and the Learning State

In a prescient critique of the ways that states make policy, Don Schon (1971) argued that governments cannot solve new public problems unless they also develop the ability to learn. He advocated the idea of government as a learning system that “undertakes a continuing, directed inquiry into the nature, causes, and resolutions of our problems” (1971:116). Furthermore, he proposed that the state had to design the institutional processes for itself “through which new problems can continually be confronted and old structures continually discarded” (1971:116). However, Schon coupled his insight with the lament that governments—especially the American Federal government that was the focus of his study—displayed a “systematic failure to learn.” He attributed this chronic failing to the fact that governments seemed wedded to the practice of using an experiment model, as developed in the physical sciences, to make policy. In this “rational/experimental model,” the state identifies social problems, develops policy interventions according to certain hypothesis about the social problem at hand, applies those policies and measures its outcomes to decide whether or not, and under what conditions the “social experiment” should be “replicated” (1971:122). His main criticism of this model is that it obscures the “barely visible process through which issues come to awareness and ideas about them become powerful.” By the time governments apply their scientific method of policymaking, the understanding of what the social problem to be addressed has already congealed, “the issues have long since been identified, ideas for a solution have long since been available, sides have been defined and taken” (1971:123). He argues that the only time governments are shaken out of their stubborn adherence to the experimental model is when they face an institutional crisis. In a Kuhnian take on policymaking, events on the scale of the Vietnam War or the social movements of the 1960s present the state with clear evidence that its institutional model is not working. At that moment of crisis, the state is jolted into looking for new ideas on the margins of society, ideas that until then had been perceived as unreasonable or that the state itself had tried to squelch precisely because they seemed *too* reasonable.

Schon’s critique of the state and its policy-making practices is echoed in Piore and Lester’s most recent work on product innovation (2004). Although their research focuses on how companies innovate in product design, their insights about how

innovation happens complement Schon model of the learning state in important ways. Piore and Lester observe that companies privilege analysis in product design and production. They define analysis as rational problem-solving: much like in the experimental method of policy making described by Schon, a problem is identified, broken down into a series of discrete and separate components, and the resources are applied to each of those components to solve the problem, at which point the components are brought together in an optimum combination as efficiently as possible.

In addition to analysis, Piore and Lester observe that companies engage in a process of interpretation, and that it is on this process of interpretation that innovation depends. They characterize this process as “a conversation among people and organizations with different backgrounds and experience” trying to reach a common understanding about the possibilities and constraints that both technology and the market generate for product development (2004: 53). They portray these interpretative conversations as adventures in ambiguity, both in terms of their content and their process. As participants bring distinct and often mutually unintelligible meanings and perspectives to the conversation, the dissonance between those meanings and perspectives create misunderstandings and confusion; the dissension in meanings steeps the exchanges in ambiguity. Likewise, the conversations in which the process of interpretation occurs are unpredictable, sometimes even unwieldy, both in its form and duration. As they explain, “Interpretation is an open-ended process, ongoing in time, perhaps with a beginning but with no natural end. Unlike people engaged in problem solving, the participants in a conversation often have no idea where their discussion is going when it starts, and even if they do, the actual direction may turn out to be quite different. Indeed, in retrospect they many not be able to say exactly how the conversation evolved as it did” (2004: 53). Significantly, Piore and Lester celebrate this ambiguity and argue that it is precisely this blurriness of meanings that is makes interpretative conversations generative, ensuring that the exchanges that they support allow new insights to surface. “It is the ambiguity that makes the conversation worth having, not the exchange of chunks of agreed upon information,” they conclude (2004:54). As participants wrest a common language, built on well-defined concepts, from the initial Babel-like confusion, the interpretative conversation yields new ideas. Much like the marginal ideas in Schon’s analysis that are

incorporated into state structure at moments of crisis, the ideas generated through the interpretive processes can then be incorporated into a firm's analytic methods and be turned into a marketable product.

While the parallels between Schon's view of the learning state and Piore and Lester's understanding of innovation are compelling, a key difference divides them. In Schon's theory, the problem to be solved is visible, if not well understood, and the idea for how best to address it is out there, even if on the margins. The challenge of a learning state, therefore, is to develop a system that can incorporate those ideas before the institution is fractured by crisis, or before those ideas become so obvious and mainstream that they have become obsolete. In Piore and Lester's view of innovation, the problem to be solved is not clear at all, and thus, the ideas to address it do not exist anywhere in a fixed form, not even on the margins. Stated differently, it is not just that plausible answers to a given questions have yet to be developed, but it is that the question itself does not yet exist in any clear form. In their view, both the problem and the idea – or the question and answer -- emerge from interpretive conversation. They are held in the spaces of ambiguity inherent in language and linguistic exchange, and the on-going and iterative process of conversing allows them to be articulated. In the process, they become visible and precise, and can be applied to analytical problem solving. Based on this observation, they conclude that companies -- and by extension, economies – interested in fostering innovation have to create and protect conversational settings where people can engage in interpretation. “The interpretive spaces do not grow up naturally in market economies. They must be created; and once created, they must be cultivated, renewed and enriched” (2004: 9).

In their exploration of the processes of innovation, Piore and Lester rely heavily on the analogy of language, and emphasize the role of linguistic exchange as the medium of discussion in interpretative conversations engaged in for the purpose of arriving at new understandings and developing a set of shared meanings. However, Lave and Wenger monograph's on apprenticeship and situated learning (1991) suggests that this accent on language may elide important practice-based processes of innovation and knowledge production from the analysis. Paralleling Piore and Lester's view of interpretation, Lave and Wenger argue that learning is a process “that takes place in a participatory

framework, not in and individual mind,” and while it is shaped by the different perspectives participants bring to the practice of learning, “it is the community...who ‘learn[s]’” and not the individual members of the community (Hanks 1991: 15). Just like the process of interpretation, they also describe learning as the social processes of developing new meanings intelligible in a community of practice. However, they situate this process of generating insights and shared understandings in a broader set of social, economic, and cultural exchanges that do Piore and Lester. In their view, learning is not situated in exchange through language or even exchange through specific explicitly pedagogical practices, “as if it were some independent reifiable process that happened to be located somewhere.” For them, “learning is an integral part of social practice in the lived-in world” (1991:35). In other words, learning – and by extension knowing and innovating – are part and parcel of the practices through which people engage with their social world and with the material resources to which they have access. These processes are “located in the relations among practitioners, their practices, the artifacts of that practice, and social organization and political economy of communities of practice” (1991: 122).

Migrant communities in the Souss were able to set in motion such a profound transformation of their valley because they opened interpretive spaces. Furthermore, the spaces that they opened included the state in meaningful ways, and allowed for on-going iterative exchange. They were able to do this by engaging in practices that were explicitly closely associated with the state, and were, in fact, a major source of the state legitimacy. As a result, the interpretive spaces they created spanned the boundary between state and society. They opened and institutionalized in-between spaces that were implicitly collaborative and where the distinction between state and society that is so pivotal in the construction of the state-through-practice was momentarily erased. As a result, conversations that, in other contexts, were truncated by conflict were able to maintain the ambiguity that Piore and Lester argue is so necessary for the emergence of new concepts and new practices.

However, the medium of exchange in interpretive spaces was not confined to language, or even proxies for language like drawings, maps, or prototypes. As Lave and Wenger would have predicted, the media of the conversation included the situated

practices through which migrants, villagers, the state, and even international agencies engaged with the resources that migration made available. The same practices through which migration communities and the state were constituted migration resources became the primary language of the interpretive discussions.

Through an account of the rural electricity project that Soussi migration communities launched in the early 1980s and the state rural electricity programs that it informed, the following sections describe how these interpretive spaces and conversations-in-practice came into being, and how the migration communities and the state innovated together through state practices.

4. Getting Power

Imagining Electric

The changes that were to emerge in the Souss began in a valley much further north, in the south of France. Argentière-la-Bessée, a small town in the shadow of the French Alps, grew up around a plant of one of France's largest aluminum processing outfits, Péchiney. A major recruiter of immigrant labor during the “*trentes glorieuses*” of France's post-war expansion, Péchiney was by the 1980s suffering the slow decline that had afflicted French heavy industry since the oil shocks of 1974. After trying and failing to cope with successive paroxysms of economic crisis through repeated downsizing, Péchiney was finally nationalized and restructured in the mid-1980s. As part of reorganization, sixteen Péchiney plants were slated for closure, and the Argentière plant was amongst the first to be dismantled. To cushion the massive layoffs this entailed, Péchiney—now a quickly shrinking but politically accountable parastatal -- extended start-up funds to former employees so that they could establish small firms in the region. The idea was to rescue Argentière from economic disaster and to create a small-firm based economy that might become as vital as the small firm clusters in the north of Italy that received so much press at the time. (Daoud 1997)

Among the workers who were laid off in the firm closure were fifty-four North African immigrants. When they lost the jobs that had kept them in France, they decided

to return to their countries origin rather than try and rebuild their lives in Argentière. They approached Péchiney for the funds to start up small businesses in their communities of origin. Pechiney refused, insisting that the funds were tagged for the development of the Argentière valley. The migrants countered that they had equal rights to the aid since the award was in fact a form of severance pay. The immigrants took Péchiney to court, and after a protracted legal battle, Péchiney was forced to disburse the same funds to the immigrant plaintiffs as it had to the rest of its workforce. The North Africans, over half of whom were Moroccans from the Souss, began planning for their return. (Daoud 1997; Mernissi 1997; Interviews, M/D, 2004)

The plans the migrants had were modest: they wanted to make marginal agricultural improvements to family land holdings, open grocery stores and gas stations, and set up small agro-processing firms that produced for local markets. Although small in scale, the migrants' projects were nevertheless impossibly ambitious. Most of the migrants were of rural origin, and would be returning to hamlets without electricity, running water, passable roads, or telephone lines. The disconnect between their plans and infrastructure available in their villages of origin was irreconcilable. (Daoud 1997)

In order to address these obstacles, the returning migrants, already organized because of their legal battle with Péchiney, formed an association under French law. They called it "*Retour et Développement*," – Return and Development. All of the migrants in the group had long contributed to community projects in their villages of origin, sending money for such things as the renovation of the village mosque or the digging of a new well. This time, however, they wanted with to turn their attention to the structural issues that produced the stubborn poverty in their home regions; they wanted to generate a new dynamic of community development. More concretely, they wanted to pave the roads, set up the electricity networks, build the wells, and erect the telephone lines that would turn their plans for return from pipe dreams into projects.

How to accomplish these goals became the next challenge, and *Retour et Développement* served as an interpretive space where possible approaches become clear. In the end, the members of the group decided to pool a portion of the start-up funds they received from Péchiney in order to fund infrastructure and service projects. They also began to draw the villagers living in their communities of origin into their deliberations.

Lahoussain Jamal, the group's founder, remembers urging the villagers to join the migrants of *Retour et Développement* in their efforts: "You have to get involved, the state won't do anything for you. Let's take the initiative ourselves. With your participation and ours, we can breathe life back into our villages" (qtd. in Daoud 1997: 20). (Daoud 1997; Mernissi 1997; Interviews, M/D, 2004)

Because the majority of the members of *Retour et Développement* were from the Souss, and from the province of Taroudant more specifically, they decided to launch their experiment there¹. Imgoun, a small village hugging the slope where the Souss valley rises to meet the Atlas mountains and Lahoussain Jamal's birthplace, was chosen as the group's first project site. The association -- renamed *Migrations et Développement* (M/D) after it became clear that the obstacles to returning and setting up a profitable enterprise were more intractable than first thought -- conducted an informal assessment of village needs. They asked villages about the problems they faced and found that these were many, each one compounding the last: over-grazing and deforestation leading to desertification, retaining walls for cultivated terraces in such serious disrepair that the steppes were being washed away in the rains, wells briny and dry from overuse and neglect. However, the migrants' questions also revealed that the villagers' top priority was getting electricity. Electric power would enable them to access technologies to address the environmental degradation that was aggravating rural poverty, as well as allow for other significant improvements to their quality of life. As a M/D recalls, "The villagers told us: without electricity, we can't do anything." (qtd. in Daoud 1997:19).

Migrants shared the villagers' desire for electricity, but for reasons that had more to do with the dislocation they experienced as migrant workers in European industrial settings than with the day-to-day conditions of life in the village. When I asked why electricity, the migrants I interviewed told me, "because of our children." When migrants returned home for their yearly vacation, their children, raised in European cities, rebelled at the prospect of spending weeks in an isolated hamlet that had no electricity, and thus, none of the easy entertainment (in the form of televisions, stereos etc.) that they were used to. For many migrants from the rural Souss, the "vacances" became the cause of a

fight, replayed year after year. Through their arguments with their children, the migrants I spoke with said that they saw their villages through their children's eyes, and what they saw made them feel humiliated. They saw villages abandoned by the state for forty years, crumbling under the weight of decades of policy neglect. For migrants who remembered the promise the Moroccan state seemed to hold for all of its citizens in the years after independence, not being able to refute their children's portrayal of their villages as "backward" and "poor" was a betrayal that cut to the quick. (Interviews, Taroudant, December 2003 – January 2004)

Imgoun's was not alone in its predicament and the Moroccan government's track record on rural electrification lent credence to the migrants' sense of having been abandoned. Sixty percent of Morocco's population is rural, and at the time that *Migration et Développement* began its work in the late 1980s, no more than a fraction had access to electric power. While data for the 1980s is sketchy at best, it indicates that rates of electricity access were abysmally low, with rates estimated at anywhere between 4 to 18 percent. The data from the 1990s is more reliable, having been drawn from a series of government and aid agency studies. Although they still display some variation, with the Moroccan National Office of Electricity estimating that only 21 percent of rural Morocco was connected to electricity in 1994, and with the World Bank measuring that access as somewhat higher at 25 percent, they clearly indicate that the rates of electrification for rural Morocco lagged far behind those for similar income countries in the region (ONE 1999; World Bank 1990). By 1990, Algeria had achieved 70 percent coverage and Tunisia was close behind with 60 percent (World Bank 1990). The Moroccan government explained away its poor performance in this area by noting that its administrative structure made the provision of electricity dependent on local revenues (World Bank 1990). In the early 1980s, prodded by the World Bank, the central government embarked on a rural electrification program, but by all accounts, it was a Potemkin-village of a scheme, a half-hearted effort with little impact: between 1982 and 1996, the state hooked up a measly 70 villages to electricity per year on average (ONE 1999). At that rate, it would have taken Morocco over 300 years to provide electricity to its 34,000 villages (Butin 2004 interviews). As the former director of the National Office

of Electricity, Driss Benhima, tersely conceded, “between 1960 and 1990, it [rural electrification] was not a priority.” (Daoud 1997: 40)².

The approach that *Migrations et Développement* (M/D) took to supply Imgoun with electric power was both experimental and experiential. It was a product of a highly participatory process of “innovating-by-doing” that involved M/D, its migrant constituents, villagers, as well as the European funders and collaborators that M/D recruited for the project. As these actors worked together to set up a system to supply Imgoun with electric power, they literally and figuratively felt their way forward in the dark. Out of the ambiguity inherent in a process that was very interpretive emerged a model for electricity provision -- and for community development initiatives more generally -- that none of the actors involved could have anticipated.

The “innovating-by-doing” happened in the way those migrants, villagers, and their international partners engaged with the resources that migration made available to the community. Their interpretative discussion occurred through *practice*: the actions through which they related to the funds, networks, technology and knowledge that migrants channeled back to their douar was the language of their exchange. In the process, they did more than just influence what effects the resources would have on the village; they molded what the resources themselves would in fact be. In doing so, they drew intensively on local assets; they used local materials, local knowledge, local forms of social organization, even local conflicts, to determine what form the resources would take. However, the technological model for electricity provision and the social institutions to support it that emerged as a result were not strictly local: these innovations were situated in the practices that created them-- practices would ultimately span regions, countries, technologies, languages, and most importantly, the boundary between state and society.

² One bureaucrat at the ONE explained the urban policy bias as regarded electricity provision to a journalist investigating rural electrification in the mid-1990s as follows: “Isn’t it heretical to want to connect isolated douars to electricity, when we don’t even know for sure that they will still be inhabited in 2000? Is it necessary to prioritize dispersed settlements? Cities are growing, urbanization is a dynamic process. Any policy intervention ultimately modifies the human landscape” (Daoud 1997: 41).

Poles and Wires: Technology-in-practice

Through social networks that the migrants who would eventually become M/D established during their mobilizations against Péchiney, M/D contacted the Agence Française pour la Maitrise de l’Energie (AFME) in 1986 about the possibility of setting up solar-powered water pumps in Imgoun. The leadership of the AFME – a French governmental agency for energy management now called the Agence de l’Environnement et de la Maitrise d’Energie (ADEME) – had ties to the CFDT (Confédération française démocratique du travail), a federation of labor unions that had locked horns with Péchiney. Members of M/D had been involved in union organizing during the prolonged battle with the aluminum magnate, a struggle that was quickly reduced to successive rounds of concessionary bargaining. By the time the migrants of M/D had lost their jobs and had begun exploring energy options for the village, the union boss of the CFDT, Michel Roland, had been named president of the AFME.

The migrants’ project piqued the interest of the AFME because the agency had already been commissioned by the Moroccan National Office of Electricity to study the provision of decentralized solar power to rural areas. For the AFME, Imgoun represented a potential site for a pilot project. In the AFME, the migrants of M/D found an experienced partner to help them capture the energy to reach receding underground water tables cheaply, turn parched terraces into fertile soil, and save, if not reclaim, lands from spreading desertification. (Missaoui 1996, Daoud 1997; Butin 2004).

To investigate the feasibility of a solar project in Imgoun, M/D and AFME conducted an extensive diagnostic survey of energy usage in the village. The study yielded two unexpected findings. First, gas-fueled mechanical pumps did not represent Imgoun’s primary energy consumption by any stretch. A popular investment among international migrants, motorized pumps were a lightning rod for some of the socio-economic changes migration had wrought in the village: the remittances that migrants sent home not only dramatically widened disparities of wealth in the small community, but also modified the opportunity structure in the village, so that the ability to invest and cultivate land in a sustainable fashion, without degrading its arability, became contingent on international migration. While families with water-pumps could irrigate their crops with enough regularity to turn a profit, their neighbors without motorized access to water

had to rely on fickle seasonal rains and on wells that were being drained by indiscriminate pumping. The noisy machines were widely maligned as the energy gluttons of the douar.

Instead, to the migrants' and residents' surprise, the M/D-AFME study found that the village's largest energy consumption was at the household level, with butane gas and candles used for lighting and audiovisual use, and wood used for cooking. Wood usage represented 80 percent of their energy household consumption, with about a quarter of the wood used scavenged from the local area. The two poorest income deciles of the village, however, relied much more heavily on found wood, harvesting rather than purchasing over 50 percent of the wood they used. The second unanticipated finding was that households were spending an average of 30 percent of their income on energy, or around 80 to 100 Dirhams. (Missaoui 1996; AVEC 1994; Daoud 1997).

The study showed that providing Imgoun with electricity was both more urgent and more viable than anyone had thought. Hooking households up with alternate sources of energy for cooking was the only way to prevent the rapid deforestation that was turning the surrounding landscape into a bald wasteland. Moreover, with households already devoting so much of their income to purchased energy, more in fact than urban residents, the villagers could afford most of the costs involved in setting up and maintaining a local electricity network (Jamal email 2004).

Other villages had done it. Douars throughout the Moroccan countryside had patched together electricity networks based on local generators. In fact, external consultants working for the National Office of Electricity estimated that in 1993, about 2000 villages had set up informal electrification schemes (Butin et al. 1993). However, the networks suffered from two serious shortcomings. First, the community-funded systems used equipment of a quality that was so poor that electricity provision was sporadic, and eventually broke down permanently. Additionally, low-hanging cables, too weak to carry the voltage that passed through them, along with faulty connections and no circuit breakers, created dangerous conditions that were not infrequently fatal. Second, informal electricity networks tended only to serve those who had contributed funds for their construction – between 20 to 50 percent of residents by most estimates (M/D 1993). Poorer families, excluded from service, continued to forage for wood with the same

intensity, aggravating already rapid deforestation. (Butin et al 1993; M/D 1993)³. For M/D and Imgoun, the challenge, therefore, was two-fold: to create a network that was affordable, reliable, and safe, and to ensure that all villagers had access to the electricity it provided, regardless of their ability to pay.

M/D's contacts with French electricity providers enabled Imgoun to overcome the technological hurdles this challenge involved. Through the AFME, M/D forged a relationship with Electricité de France and with a non-profit set up by EDF employees, called Codev and later renamed Electriciens Sans Frontières. EDF provided Imgoun with its extensive technological know-how. M/D had so captivated Codev with the project and technological puzzle it represented that the organization sent 37 volunteers to the Moroccan village to build the electricity network. The idea was that they would donate the tacit knowledge acquired through years of experience to come up with a solution that would fit Imgoun specific constraints. However, that is not quite what happened. Knowledge was not simply transferred to the village, traveling like the electricity that was their trade along the networks the technicians had forged with M/D.

Instead, Imgoun actively constituted the knowledge the French technicians brought with them. Through its topography, its people, and its bold resistance to state norms, the village shaped and reformulated the technological expertise and concepts of Codev. In concert with the EDF electricians, they arrived at a technological solution that fit the needs of a small hamlet huddling tightly on an arid slope rising to the Atlas mountains.

Even before the EDF technicians arrived, conversations with M/D ruled out a number of technological options. For the M/D-AFME study, villagers identified not only their current uses but also how they would consume electricity were it to be made readily available, making clear that household appliances would represent an ever-greater proportion of electricity consumption. After consultation with Codev, Imgoun abandoned the idea of capturing solar or wind energy, opting instead to rely on a generator, which unlike the more environmentally-sound solutions, could provide an

³ During the nineties, M/D received numerous requests for help from villages that had independently set up their own electricity networks. Within a few years, their networks had fallen into disrepair, and had become non-functioning. They approached M/D for assistance in setting up a new network that was based on the technological and social model that M/D would design in Imgoun.

alternating current better suited to household electronics (Jamal: Email correspondence 2004). Once the village had committed to a technological course, an iterative exchange between the technicians and the villagers determined what form the technology would take locally. The conversations occurred in the planning phases, but also continued through the construction when the villagers sweated alongside EDF electricians to erect the distribution network, and in the evenings, when the French visitors' stayed in villagers houses, shared their meals, and followed in their daily rhythms.

The exchange was powerful for all involved. It reached beyond technological conversations to touch and transform the preconceptions that the French and the Moroccans had of one another. As Lahoussain Jamal, M/D's director, recounts: "At the end of the project, two EDF employees came to see me. They said that, members of the National Front [a French far-right party with a forcefully anti-immigrant platform], they had joined the project to mock it and show it up. But they were so impressed with the reception that the villagers had given them and they understood just how much local families relied on immigrants for their livelihood. [After their stay], they decided to tear up their [party-membership] cards" (Daoud 1997:24). He also recalled that migrants from the village who had spent over two decades abroad without ever entering a non-immigrant household also crossed new thresholds when they returned to France and were invited to the homes of the EDF volunteers. (Daoud 1997; Mernissi 1997).

Ultimately, the electricity network diverged significantly from both standards set by the Moroccan National Office of Electricity and by the EDF itself. The dimensions of the network and of the physical structures to support it were based on the real and projected electricity use in the village, and were therefore smaller than the norm. Thinner than usual cables were strung on poles that were only six meters tall instead of the required ten. The poles, stripped eucalyptus trunks, were bought locally, and substituted for the mandated concrete columns. Electricity was transmitted along this network at a frequency one-third the intensity of the industry standard. After the project, Jamal reflected on how the perception of what technological options were viable shifted with the Imgoun project: "The standards of the National Office of Electricity were too draconian. They imposed them on the villages. In the end, even EDF found that they were excessive and that they did not take technological evolution into account. Certain

technicians argue that poles can be as short as 4 meters, that you can reuse old materials, reduce the size of the transformers, introduce new technical options that are more adapted to a rural setting” (Daoud 1997: 37). The rough poles and slack wires that now wove through the village, rudimentary though they appeared, represented a significant technological advance. They embodied a new way of thinking about rural electricity provision.

Organizing development

While the design of a functioning electricity network that was adapted both to the budget and topographical constraints of Imgoun and villages like it was an impressive feat all on its own, the social institutions that migrants and villagers established to carry out the project had a far greater impact for long-term economic development.

In the initial planning phase of the electricity project, before it was even fully conceptualized, M/D organized a village association in Imgoun. Made up of local villagers, the association played a dual role: it fulfilled the analytic, problem-solving tasks necessary for the construction and maintenance of an electricity network, but it also opened up an interpretive space that supported on-going innovation and ensured that Imgoun’s electricity network would only be the first in a series of creative efforts to promote economic development.

The logistics that the association managed were quite extensive: it participated intensively in the pre-project surveys; it organized the reception and lodging of the French volunteers who came to erect the network; and it collected 40 percent of the costs the project, from households in the village and from their migrant members in Europe and in Morocco’s coastal cities. The association redistributed community funds, setting up a sliding scale and no-credit loan scheme amongst village households so that those families that did not have the means to contribute to the network’s construction could still be connected to electricity. After the network was put in place, the association also took charge of maintaining the network and collecting fees, which -- in keeping with the principle that all families in the village should have access to electricity, regardless of income -- were based on ability to pay. Additionally, the association trained and employed two semi-skilled literate young people to service the generator daily and to

make sure that the network remained functional and safe. (M/D 1993; Daoud 1997: 44; Interviews: Taroudant, January 2004).

However, despite how much the project depended on competent logistical management for its execution, migrants and the local villages viewed the interpretive function of the village association as more significant. They valued it as a vehicle that would set a development dynamic in motion and sustain it over time. The association was designed to provide an institutional space where villagers could take stock of their needs, together imagine a different future for themselves, and then articulate that future and the concrete steps that they had to take to get there. In effect, the village association would provide a setting where the villagers and the migrants could together engage in the conceptual and interpretive processes that underpin development. As the founder of M/D reflected, “It’s by acting that we build a pedagogy of development, starting from the motivations of the villagers and not imposing it from outside. Right from the first project, a participatory dynamic is set in motion with the creation of a village association” (Daoud 1997: 26).

Over time, it became a place where a conceptual link between different needs and different projects to address them was discussed. In Imgoun, conversations about the electricity network led to the envisioning and then planning of an irrigation system powered with the soon-to-be available electricity, which in turn led to the idea and creation of a cooperative for the export of high-quality organic saffron. Discussions about the cooperative for a product harvested by women turned the villagers’ attention to women’s low literacy levels, and out of that exchange, the idea to found an informal school for adults, primarily for women, surfaced. Out of the interpretive discussions in the association emerged ideas and plans that previously would have seemed unimaginable. These plans, and certainly the conceptual links between them, did not pre-exist the discussions; rather, they grew out of the on-going iterative exchange that the associations held, and out of the practices of bringing project after project into being.

In addition to a forum for conceptual development planning, the association became a tool of self-government through which the village set up the additional institutional mechanisms it needed to carry out the projects it planned for itself. In Imgoun, the institutions the village decided to put in place were quite fundamental. To

collect funds for future projects, the village association levied a tax on each household based on the amount of electricity the household consumed. The funds were then deposited in an account that the association would draw on for larger development projects (either with M/D or independently), but also for smaller community expenses, like the village celebrations on feast days.

Although its organization was spearheaded by the migrants of M/D, the village association represented a re-invention of a very local practice. It was, in essence, a new take on the *jema'a* (plural: *jema'at*), a traditional council of elders that had for centuries governed the management of communal resources in Amazight villages in the Souss region. Often celebrated as an indigenous form of proto-democracy, the *jema'a* elected its leader each year and most decisions were made by consensus (Gellner 1969; Mernissi 1997; Haas 2003). Vested with the legitimacy that the participatory process afforded it, the *jema'a* had also acted as the representative of the village as a whole in its dealings with the central authorities. Historically, Morocco's Amazight tribes had always enjoyed a high degree of autonomy from the central sultanic state, which could never bring them fully under its control, despite repeated and often famously murderous raids on Morocco's interior. Outside the rarified setting of the Kingdom's imperial cities, the rule of the sultan had to be secured through negotiation rather than by force. In the central high-atlas region of Morocco and in the Souss valley at its heart, the sultan bargained with *jema'at* for the allegiance of those they represented, offering self-government, an exemption from tribute, and other concessions in exchange for provisional loyalty. (Hans 2003; Mernissi 1997). In pre-colonial Morocco, this "domestic diplomacy," as one scholar of Morocco's political history has dubbed it (A. Radi qtd. in Mernissi 1997), afforded Amazight villages wide latitude in the government of their own affairs. In the more laudatory accounts of the *jema'a*, this very local and independent form of self-government is what allowed the Amazight tribes to survive and profit in a harshly austere natural environment, and maintain a strong cultural and political Amazight identity despite centuries of efforts by the central authorities to "Arabize" them (Mernissi 1997).

By the time M/D began its work in the Souss, however, the *jema'at* of the valley seemed fated to become relics of the past. Socio-economic changes in the valley had seriously eroded their husbandry of natural resources in their villages. In an irony that

was not lost on many of the migrants I spoke with, most of these changes were due to the intensive migration from the regions since the 1960s. The remittances migrants sent home, substantial by local standards, upset the local socio-economic hierarchy. The local distribution of wealth, especially in the form of land ownership, was one of the central principles around which the *jema'a* was organized. While participatory in its process, the *jema'a* was not egalitarian in its make-up. Its membership was restricted to male members of land- or water-owning clans, and the council was often dominated by the wealthier families represented (Haas 2003). The decisions the *jema'a* made regarding water and land-usage, as well as the assignment of community labor, often reflected the vested interests of its members, imposing on landless sharecroppers a disproportionate share of the burden of maintaining terraces, irrigation canals, and wells, and so on, without affording them the corresponding usage rights of the resources they kept up through their labor. (Hans 2003; Missaoui 1996)

Starting in the late 1970s, families that had been landless and marginalized for generations began buying land with the income that migration earned them. As new landowners, they pressured resistant *jema'at* for membership, and the ensuing contests damaged the legitimacy of the traditional councils. Migrants complained that the institutions were “un-democratic” and non-egalitarian, and that they favored a historically landed elite; they began to challenge their authority in ways large and small, through direct confrontation as well as through the quiet disregard for the *jema'at*'s edicts. They circumvented community rules about water use in particular, investing in motorized water pumps to irrigate their lands, many of the tracts newly purchased. They refused to contribute their labor to maintain community infrastructure like retaining walls and irrigation canals, paying others to sweat in their place. Unheeded, the *jema'at*, vital community institutions for centuries, fell into disrepair, and with their decline, the delicate ecological equilibrium they orchestrated was thrown off-balance. In Imgoun, by the late 1980s, hills covered in dense forests only existed in the memories of elders, and with surface streams and irrigation canals parched by the advancing desert, water could only be found deep underground for years at a stretch. (Daoud 1997; Haas 2003; Interviews, Imgoun, January 2004).

In addition to the economic upheavals caused by migration, a series of political events in Morocco's modern history seemed to presage the end of the *jema'at*'s role as relevant institutions in village governance. After the French brutally defeated the Amazight resistance to their rule in the 1930s, the colonists brought Amazight tribes to administrative heel, firmly incorporating them into colonial administrative structures, dividing up their lands into rural municipalities and taking over the management of some communal resources, especially water. The Alawite King inherited the French colonial governance structures after independence, and deployed them to govern the Berbers regions with as firm a hand as possible. However, the Moroccan tradition of domestic diplomacy between Amazight tribes and the sultanate eventually resurfaced, only under a more provincial and clientelistic form. Negotiations with the central government were replaced, at least in part, with negotiations with local representatives of the central authority, and "domestic diplomacy" veered precipitously toward the reinforcement of self-interested alliances between local elites and municipal bureaucrats. The moral authority which gave the council's decisions binding weight in the villages was squandered in enough cases to make the *jema'at* of the Souss valley generally suspect. (Haas 2003; Mernissi 1997).

The migrants of M/D resuscitated Imgoun's *jema'a* by re-imagining it. In several important respects, the village association was closely patterned on the *jema'a*. It reproduced the *jema'a*'s participatory decision-making processes and its practice of reaching conclusions by consensus. It fulfilled the *jema'a*'s traditional function of communal resource management, which quickly grew to include those resources created through development projects, like the new electricity network, and it served as the village's interlocutor and negotiator with the state in matters pertaining to village development projects.

However, the migrants modified the institution in several important ways. First, membership in the village association was extended to all villagers, regardless of wealth, land ownership, social status, or age⁴. Migrants and locals were invited to participate in meetings and in decision-making, and the association set its meeting schedule around

⁴ Although women were always formally welcomed to participate in the village association, patriarchal social pressures and gender norms in the village made difficult for women to attend meetings. This has recently started to change in several village associations.

migrants' yearly return so that their participation would be more than symbolic. As M/D's description of village associations in an internal evaluation of its rural electrification projects—Imgoun and the several dozens that followed—reveals, toppling locally entrenched socio-economic hierarchies was how integral a part of the association's role in community development:

Associations allow for the management of collectively-owned equipment and for the envisioning of future projects while, at the same time, balancing the power between the young and old. In the traditional system [the jema'a], village elders, strong because of their experience, had the power to decide what should be done in the village, and the younger villagers had to obey those decisions even if they did not seem adapted to reality or to current needs...[T]he association enables everyone to get involved in the development of the village, and reduces the hierarchical inequalities between rich and poor, between young and old. (1993)

The interpretive conversations that had always taken place in the traditional councils were opened to include a more diverse set of voices and wider range of perspective. They were broadened to include the fertile ambiguity and generative conflict that Piore and Lester argue is so crucial for the articulation of innovative ideas.

Second, the migrants formalized the association, registering it as a legal entity. In 1989, Imgoun incorporated its village association under the Dahir number 159 of 1957. In doing so, migrants and local villagers made their association both visible and legible to the government. That is to say, they made the state formally aware of the activities in which they were engaged, officially notifying it of the social mobilization upon which their electricity network was built. They also translated their activities into a concept that the state could understand – into an institutional design that the state had, in fact, codified with the passage of the 1957 Dahir.

But 1957 seemed very distant in 1989, when the country was groaning under the weight of Hassan II's repressive dictatorship. After the political unrest of the mid-1970s and of the early 1980s that threatened to unseat the King from his throne, the central government eviscerated opposition parties and press, and tightened the vice around the non-government organizations that managed to survive during "*les années de plomb*" – literally, the leaden years – of absolute monarchy. For Imgoun, and for the villages that

followed, to register their village association with the state at that historical moment was nothing short of a bold affront to the authority of state.

Their audacity was met with determined state resistance, but it was not met with outright refusal or even targeted repression. This was because the villagers had clear legal ground for their action. “It filed all its paperwork, did things by the book” remembers a French electricity engineer involved with M/D. “For that reason, it encountered a lot of political opposition from the local government at first.” Municipal authorities attempted, in the case of Imgoun and in the case of several villages that followed, to intimidate the villagers instead into dissolving their association. The villagers’ response was they were not responsible for the association – that it was a migrant initiative. “We told them, ‘the migrants set it up. They’re in France now. You’ll have to go talk with them.’” Their strategy played on the transnational character on the village: while the association was registered in Morocco, the villagers placed it symbolically in a geographical space and jurisdiction that was outside the government reach.

Harassing migrants was not outside the repertoire of state strategies to maintain control. By all accounts, the Moroccan government had an elaborate surveillance network in receiving countries, especially France and Belgium. Moroccan labor and human rights organizations in France still maintain records of the Moroccan state’s attempts to intimidate emigrants who tried to organize around labor or human rights issues, either in Morocco or in France. Their documents show that the Moroccan government resorted to myriad tactics of intimidation, including, but not limited to, the confiscation of passports when migrants returned for their yearly vacation (which made it impossible for migrants to return to their jobs in Europe legally), targeted auditing of migrants at customs and with respect to land ownership and tax issues, and on a few occasions, arrest and disappearance. (ATMF archives, Paris, Documents dated 1981-1985). However, persecuting migrants for organizing the provision of basic infrastructure that the state had so far been unable or unwilling to provide and for notifying the state formally, according to legal procedure the state established, of the association that they set up to manage the new service was too fragile a charge for the state to take direct action. It would have ultimately undermined the state’s legitimacy in the valley, still frail

after the riots of the early 1980s. As a result, the local government tolerated Imgoun's village association, although it maintained a watchful eye over its activities. (Interviews, Taroudant, December-January 2004).

***“Tâche d’huile”*: Spreading innovation**

The technological model that the migration communities developed for energy provision, as well as the social model of the village association, quickly spread to the villages surrounding Imgoun. An elder from a village not far from Imgoun summed up the mechanisms by which this happened: “Imgoun is across the way, just there. We saw that they had electricity. At night, it was all lit up. We went to *Migrations et Développement* and told them come bring us electricity too” (Interview, December 2004). M/D members use an analogy to describe the spread of the technological and social models they elaborate: they say that it works like a drop of oil on a piece of paper that quickly widens far beyond its initial circumference.

The oil stain soon became an oil slick. By 1996, M/D had worked with over 70 villages to set up electricity networks, and had a waiting list double that number. While the organization worked with villages to tailor their network to their topographical and usage needs, M/D did impose a series of conditions for its participation. The most important of these was that villages had to create and legally register a village association. The association had to be inclusive and function according to a participatory decision-making process; it had to collect 40 percent of the cost of building the network from local residents and from migrants; it had to manage the logistics of the network in a manner that ensured that all households got access to electricity regardless of ability to pay; and it had to join the other village associations created as a result of M/D's intervention in a federation of village associations. By the mid-1990s, there were close to 200 federated village associations in the Souss valley, many of them self-taxing, and all of them carrying out development projects ranging from electric provision to the building of potable water networks to informal schooling.

The oil stain not only spread throughout the valley, but also leaked into state's approach and method for rural electricity provision. During the early 1990s, the state in a discreet – even sometimes indirect -- exchange with migration communities in the Souss

observed how the technological and social models those communities had developed functioned in practice. Very soon afterward, the state would appropriate many of the migration communities' innovations, re-inventing them all, much like the migration communities re-invented the *jema'a*, and would apply them to a massive national rural electrification program launched in 1996. The next section details the exchange that occurred between migration communities and the state in the interpretive space created by the shared practice of what is typically viewed as a state function.

5. Innovating the state

The interpretive space that allowed migration communities and the state to engage in a conversation about state practice unfurled across the political boundary that divided state and society at a moment in Morocco's history when the crown's policies made that boundary extremely charged. While the exchange between migration communities and the state was very political, both in the content of what was communicated and in the participatory form that the conversations took, it was never overly confrontational. It never became a standoff between "society" and "the state." Instead, the focus on practice diffused tensions, and allowed the conversation to hold enough ambiguity about what the problem and solutions were for creative ideas to emerge. The ambiguity also made the authorship of the ideas impossible to identify with certainty, and afforded the state enough political leeway to integrate those ideas into policy without appearing to capitulate to political pressure.

Conversations-in-practice

The conversations that would allow for the articulation and exchange of ideas and that changed state practice in electricity provision began indirectly. They occurred, at least initially, through intermediaries who were involved both with government schemes to provide rural electricity and with *Migrations et Développement's* efforts to build a village electricity network. By and large, these conversational middlemen were French consultants deployed by the French government to provide Morocco with technical assistance in the design of rural energy solutions. Because of their agencies' ties to organized labor and in particular to the union that had supported migrants in labor

disputes with Péchiney (see above), the consultants became aware of the migrants' experiment with rural electricity provision and several individuals soon began collaborating with them on a volunteer basis. Consultants from Agence Française pour la Maitrise de l'Energie, working with the Moroccan government since the early 1980s to study its rural electricity needs, were the first to serve as a conversational bridge between M/D and the state. Approached by M/D for help, they became involved with the electricity project in Imgoun when it was still in the planning stages, and through their consulting work, filtered back to the state the insights that emerged from their conversations with the migrants, the local villagers, and EDF. As a consultant who worked both with the Moroccan Ministry of the Interior and with M/D recalls, the exchange of ideas "was informal, indirect. It's difficult to establish a formal link. The information passed through people rather than through institutions" (Butin, Interview, August 2004). (De Grommard, email correspondence 2004; Boyer, Interviews, January-March 2004)

Over time, the conversation with between the migration communities affiliated with M/D and the state evolved in two seemingly contradictory but ultimately complementary ways. First, they became more direct: representatives of migration communities were invited to participate in government meetings on how to reform rural electricity provision, and second, the indirect interpretative space that the consultants had helped open was formalized. Both of these two trends happened in the context of a government scheme designed to explore innovative electricity solutions for isolated rural areas.

The scheme – Programme Pilote pour la Pre-électrification Rurale (PPER) – grew out of the failure of the Moroccan government's first targeted initiative to provide electricity to rural households since independence. The National Program for Rural Electricity (PNER), launched in 1982, was by all accounts a disappointing attempt: over four years, the government hooked up only 287 villages, the overwhelming majority of which were in areas that were close to urban centers where the national network was already well established (ONE 1999; ECIL 2000). Even this relatively un-ambitious effort proved too expensive for the government to envision on a grand scale, especially if it were to include villages that were at some distance from the existing electricity

networks (World Bank 1988). Faced with the PNER's disappointing performance, the Moroccan government commissioned the AFME and the Direction of Technical and Scientific Cooperation and Development, an another agency housed in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1987 to create what would become the PPER: a pilot program to experiment with rural energy strategies that did not require villages to be linked to the state network.

The French consultants involved with the project had worked with M/D and brought the migrant activists into the design process for the PPER. This was an exceptional move: M/D activists were the only actors involved in the elaboration of the program that would not participate directly in its implementation, and were also the only Moroccans present who were not affiliated with the government in any way. Nevertheless, the planning documents for the PPER suggest that M/D's experiment in Imgoun, still underway at the time, influenced the strategic priorities of the pilot program. For example, the program design report stresses the importance of conducting a careful micro-study of household electricity consumption and of constructing a network using technology that reflects the village's particular energy needs – a conclusion that if not drawn straight from Imgoun's experience could not have but been informed by it given the extensive discussions on which the program design was based (Royaume du Maroc/AFME 1988; Butin, Interviews, 2004; De Gromard, email correspondence, 2004).

Although the exchange through direct conversation between the state and the migrant activists of M/D ended with the design phase of the PPER, conversation through practice continued for almost a decade. The institutional design of the PPER drew the state into the innovative practices that migration communities in the Souss were developing for electricity provision. In what would grow to over 200 PPER pilot sites, all of them in villages outside the Souss, the Ministry of the Interior, in partnership with French consultants on-loan to the Moroccan government, tried out many of the same strategies – the same practices -- that migration communities in the Souss had developed for their energy projects, often with the help of the very same consultants who worked with the government. They conducted household surveys, used non-standard technological solutions, and relied on community management of electricity networks,

amongst other strategies. In the process of using those practices, however, they also transformed and elaborated on them.

The modified practices for electricity provision and management were then reintroduced into the Soussi migration communities through the French consultants who worked with the government. As volunteers with M/D, the French consultants tried out technological solutions that were still novel in the Moroccan rural context in villages where M/D had erected an electricity network, often before they introduced the technologies into PPER pilot sites. According to the consultants, the M/D villages were useful sites to test the social reaction and use of different technologies because the villages had independent, functioning electricity networks that for rural Morocco were already quite mature. A 1993 initiative to replace incandescent with fluorescent lighting in the homes and streets of Imgoun is one example of such an initiative (M/D 1993a). The technological practices, once tested and transformed in M/D villages, were then applied in PPER pilot sites. Through these exchanges in practice, the PPER provided an institutional structure for the conversations between the state and migration communities to continue. The PPER opened and supported an interpretative space that spanned the state-society boundary.

Ministry of the Interior retained three main lessons from these conversations-in-practice. First, the state recognized that it could use technology that was more adapted to the topography of rural Morocco and less expensive without compromising service or safety. This lesson was just pertinent for rural electricity provision in the mountainous regions of Central High-Atlas as it was for the vast expanses of desert in the Moroccan deep south. Second, because communities already spend a significant portion of their income on energy, buying everything from candles to wood, they were able and willing to contribute funds for the construction of electricity networks. Furthermore, the contribution communities could make was calculated as high enough to make rural electricity provision a profitable activity for the government if the market were big enough to create economies of scale (Butin, Interview, August 2004). However, the state recognized that households' ability to share in the costs of electricity provision was limited by the non-negotiable threshold of their income. (Moroccan Ministry of the Interior 2003; Mossadeq 1996)

Third, the state acknowledged that supporting electricity networks with some sort of social organization was key for those networks to function properly and cost-effectively, especially over the long-term. In fact, the directors of the PPER did not just appropriate the idea that local associations were indispensable for the management of electricity networks, but they went so far as to promote it within the Ministry of the Interior, which was their institutional base, as well as in other Ministries and levels of government. Furthermore, through the PPER, the Ministry of Interior recognized that local associations established to support electricity networks also served as catalysts for local economic development more generally. At a meeting of several Ministries in 1994, the directors of the PPER spoke of the relationship between local social organizations set up for electricity provision and development:

The provision of rural electricity should be seen as a stage in a broader strategy of rural development. ...[B]ecause it depends on local autonomous organization for its use, management, and for its funding, decentralized electricity builds an institutional motor to drive other developmental actions (Berdai et al. 1993).

They went even further to identify local village associations as the most appropriate institutional form for this local social organization, precisely because they could acquire a formal legal status that would afford them a certain degree of autonomy from local state control. (Berdai et al. 1993)

For a division of the Ministry of the Interior -- the ministry that had enforced Hassan II's autocratic reign over the Kingdom for close to two decades -- to advance a perspective that favored independent social mobilization represented a significant break with the prevailing political culture in the ministry. It also represented an implicit acknowledgement that rural communities were vital settings where economic growth and development could occur; it suggested that a redrawing of Morocco's political cartography and redefining of the "Maroc Utile" -- the useful Morocco--was called for. The conversations-in-practice between migration communities and the state had shaken entrenched government views on rural communities, on local activism, and on development.

Institutionalizing practice

In mid-1990s, the Moroccan energy sector entered a crisis so severe it led to a fundamental reorganization of power production and distribution in the Kingdom. As Schon would have predicted, it drove the state to incorporate the lessons it gleaned from the PPER and the conversations that it embodied. However, unlike in Schon's model, those lessons existed not on the margins of society, outside the state, but rather were already a part of state practice in rural electricity provision, and the state codified those practices in policy.

Since the mid-1970s, energy production and distribution was state-owned and state-provided. The ONE managed power production, and distribution and the construction of electricity networks was handled either by the ONE or by the *regie*, an administrative unit larger than a municipality, but smaller than a province. Years of underinvestment in the energy sector, both on capital and on maintenance, led to its progressive breakdown in the 1990s. The drought that Morocco suffered throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s compounded this situation by undercutting production at Morocco's hydraulic power plants, which represented about 30% of the ONE production capacity. A lack of logistical and financial coordination between the ONE and the regimes involved in electricity distribution, most explicitly manifested in the huge debts many regimes had accumulated to the ONE, undermined the financial solvency of the state power producer. With the economy growing at a clip, urban, and particularly, industrial demand was rising and the ONE simply could not deliver the electricity required. After trying and failing to manage the energy shortage with scheduled black outs and brown outs⁵, after its a campaign to get public and private firms to ration their energy usage met with unexpectedly fierce opposition, and after the ONE began to default of its petroleum bills, the state was forced to privatize energy production. It also

⁵ The ONE combined reduced tariffs at off-peak hours for industry with a public relations campaign. The ONE also engaged in heated negotiations with industrialists from 1992 through 1995 to schedule power outages. The ONE set up what it called "vigilance committees" to enforce the electricity usage schedule it had established in Morocco's industrial centers, especially in the Casablanca-Rabat-Kenitra corridor (e.g. Ain Sebaa and Mohamedia). Larger producers complained that the government policies were forcing them to cut production by 30 percent at a time when they were trying to penetrate foreign market. In a trend that worried the ONE, an important proportion of companies in Morocco's major industrial centers (i.e. Ain Sebaa) built independent generators.

privatized a significant portion of urban electricity distribution. (World Bank 1998; l’Economiste, various articles, 1994-1996).

With the privatization⁶, the National Office of Electricity (ONE), that had produced and distributed the Kingdom’s electricity, lost its reason for being. With several thousand employees, dismantling the public sector utility was not a political option, however. Even downsizing the ONE was delicate: the ONE could not lay off its workers without breaking its contractual agreement with the public sector employees. In order to find a new rationale for its existence, ONE had to develop new markets for its services – which after production was privatized were limited to electricity distribution. To stay afloat, the ONE adopted rural electricity as its new mission. Rural electricity distribution had always been part of its charge, but instead of its “hesitant commitment” to the task, as the World Bank characterized it, it now turned to it wholeheartedly. (World Bank 1998; Butin, Interview, August 2004; Bentaleb 2002).

In 1996, the ONE launched a massive rural electricity program, with the goal of linking 90 percent of rural households to the national electricity network by 2010. To meet its ambitious target, the ONE dedicated significant financial and institutional resources to the program – called *Programme d’ Electrification Rurale Globale* (PERG). It restructured its bureaucracy, creating a dedicated division for rural electricity provision and centralizing a number of distribution functions (especially procurement of equipment) previously contracted out to local township in order to achieve economies of scale. It also levied a tax on urban consumers for the program, which it leveraged to secure additional loans from international donors to invest in the initiative. (ONE 1999; www.one.org.ma; Interviews, ONE, Rural Electricity Division, 2004).

In its design, PERG differed significantly from the lackluster rural electricity programs that the ONE had implemented in the past (the PNER I from 1982 to 1986 and the PNER 2 from 1991 to 1996). It adopted several of the strategies that the government had come to recognize as valuable through the PPER, but it modified them to fit the political and institutional concerns of the ONE, and the Moroccan state more generally.

⁶ Privatization resulted in rise of production capacity from 2,400 in 1993 to 3,400 megawatts in 1996 (Belyazid).

Three of the most important lessons from the PPER – about technology, cost-sharing, and social organization -- defined the broad lines of the program structure. First, the ONE deployed a series of “low-tech” technologies to connect villages to the national grid. It revised its standards for equipment, used materials that were less expensive and more readily available in the local market, and reviewed its administrative and training procedures in view of the more accessible technologies that it began using. As an ONE description of the program explains, “Before the PERG, the installations and equipment for rural electricity provision were too luxurious, even compared to rich countries like Canada.... As a result, the ONE has adopted a cost-reduction strategy for rural electricity provision based on the realistic concept of “electricity provision for a poor country” and translated into a search for economies at every level” including “standards,” “technology,” and “investment in human capital and materials” (ONE 1999: 9). Driss Benhima, director of the ONE at the time, clarified what some of those amendments to the ONE’s technological practices might entail, and alluded to the fact that the technological solutions adopted could be tailored to specific village requests: “If we worry less about esthetics, we can quarter the costs. If people want poles that are 9 meters tall, instead of 10.5 meters high, we can satisfy them, we can even go down to 6 meters” (Daoud 1997: 36)

Second, the program drew on the insight that rural household were willing and able to contribute financially to the construction of an electricity network. In the PERG, the ONE covered the expense of linking villages to the national grid through a cost-sharing scheme that required individual households to contribute a portion of the necessary funds. The ONE contributed 55% of the cost of hooking up each village, the local township added an additional 20%, and the consumer bore the remaining 25%, with the specification that for 70% of the villages concerned, that amount should not exceed a threshold of 14000 Moroccan Dirhams (approximately 2002 USD 1,400) to be paid over seven years.

Third, the program reflected an acknowledgment, although very limited, that community management of local electricity networks was important to keeping them functional and cost-effective over the long term. The program mandated some degree of community management, mostly in the form of fee collection from households, which

would then be remitted to the ONE. In cases where the village in question was too isolated to be efficiently connected to the national network and where the ONE provided access to autonomous electricity sources (like hydro-electric or solar power) the PERG envisioned a much larger role for local social organizations. In fact, the program design document calls for a partnership with local groups, among them “associations or federations of associations that have as their goal the support of rural household, the most of active of which is *Migrations et Développement*” (ONE 1999: 16).

While the ONE and other segments of the governments, the Ministry of Interior amongst them, admitted the valuable role that village associations could play electricity management, and by extension, in development, it was an observation that nevertheless did not sit comfortably with the regime. Furthermore, the movement of organized, federated, and in many cases, self-taxing, Soussi village associations that began to gain momentum in the early nineties continued to grow throughout the decade: by 2000, not only had close to 300 associations joined the M/D federation, but new (sometimes-overlapping) federations were also emerging in the Souss valley. To control this trend, the Moroccan state, in partnership with the World Bank, created the Agence de Développement Sociale (ADS). The ADS was set up in 1999 as a semi-autonomous government agency to funnel grants from foreign donors – mostly the EU and the World Bank -- to local non-governmental organizations, including associations. Essentially, through the new agency, the state was able to control the type and amount of funding to which associations, and federations of associations, had access (World Bank 2002). Furthermore, the ADS conducted, and continues to conduct, outreach in local communities encouraging them to form associations and apply for funds, thus bringing new associations directly under the state’s tutelage. To carry out this initiative, the government brought in a former director of a local branch of M/D, Ali Amahan, as executive director of the new agency. (Interviews, ADS, 2001)

6. Epilogue

A group of migrant workers, laid-off from their manual production line jobs in France, built a rudimentary electricity network in an isolated hamlet tucked away in the folds of Atlas Mountains and changed the way a nation provided electricity to ten of

thousands of its citizens. The way they accomplished this feat challenges conventional wisdom about migration and development, and about the ways the state can foster synergies between the two dynamics. It calls into question the notion that migrant resources are immutable, unchanged by their movement through space and context, and are generated elsewhere and merely transferred back to receptive locales. To build the electricity network, migrants did not just send resources back to their communities of origin and migration communities did not just passively receive them. Migration communities – migrants and the villagers who never left – engaged with those resources actively and intensively, and in the process, determined what those resources were and what they would become in their village, and beyond. In constituting migration remittances, they cast themselves as protagonists of their own history, and of their own local processes of development, in ways that were far more profound than simply migrants bankrolling community projects or villagers spending the money that migrants sent home. As the director of *Migrations et Développement* explained in a moving reflection on the meaning of participating in development, migrants reclaimed a sense of themselves as members of their communities and of their own agency to envision and create their futures:

The act of doing local development work, that's something very important. Important not only for the village, in what they do and what come into being in the village, but also for their concept of themselves, their personality. Because these emigrants, they are uneasy in France, they feel they have a debt, they feel they are responsible, even guilty of something. When they are over there, they feel like returning, and when they are here, they feel like going back there. They are always in that tension and always between two places. Doing development work, it's revealed to them that they are, that they can be actors. *This is over and above the money that they bring, over and above when they can do, the skills that they have and that they can bring back.* (Lahoussain Jamal, Rapport ECIL 2002, emphasis mine)

Additionally, the ripple effects of the migration community electricity projects beyond their valley and into the corridors of government bureaucracies challenge the prevailing notion of the state as an autonomous actor that is separate from society. By building an electricity network, migration communities engaged in practices that were explicitly associated with the state. Furthermore, they drew state actors into the processes through which they designed and constructed the network, who in turn drew migration

communities into the elaboration of state pilot electricity systems. The practices became so interwoven that they started to interpenetrate and merge, making it difficult to distinguish where society ended and the state began. In fact, the actors in migration community projects and state programs were often the same. Contrary to the view that state acts *on* society, migration communities acted *through* state practices and eventually state institutions to transform their local communities, and the state acted *through* migration communities to develop technological solutions to electricity provision that they would soon apply to rural Morocco in the Souss valley and beyond.

A closer look at the ways that migration communities and the state constituted migrant resources and at the ways they engaged with each other reveals that an intensive and on-going process of innovation occurred through their exchanges. Migration communities on their own, and eventually with the state, opened interpretive spaces through which they coalesced and articulated scattered needs, spoke previously unimagined ideas, made conceptual leaps and connections, and explored different technological solutions to make their ideas manifest. The conversations these spaces held were conversations-through-language but also conversation-through-practice where ideas were engaged and reformulated in the act of carrying them out.

As part of their interpretive exchanges with the state, migration communities made themselves visible and legible to the state. They interlocuted with the state through institutions –village associations – that the state could see and understand. In the process, they brought the state “by the hand” not just to hamlets in the Souss, but to the transnational migration communities of which each hamlet was but one, if important, social and economic anchor. By making themselves legible to the state, they redefined the social field in which the state could and should act, stretching the boundaries of Moroccan society to include not only neglected rural areas but also the people, places, and situated practices that international migration had pulled beyond the Kingdom’s territorial and political borders. This highly political act of making migration communities visible to the state did not go unnoticed: in a move that would have been inconceivable when Soussi migration communities began their efforts, the new king, Mohammed VI, personally visited M/D headquarters and project sites twice in two years (2002 and 2004), which in the Moroccan context qualifies as the apex of legibility. In

addition to making themselves visible in the Moroccan context, migration communities have through their practices and their interpretive exchanges made themselves visible and legible as political actors in the countries into which they have extended. As the director of M/D reflected:

From the perspective of their sense of themselves, they become capable legitimate interlocutors with the country where they find themselves. They are proud of being from somewhere. Before, they were not proud of their *bled*, they hid, they did not really dare. For them, the *bled* was devalued. But the fact that they are doing development work and that they are doing it with others, with French people, in a strong group effort, it gives them back a memory and a culture. The immigrant becomes visible at an international level. He perceives that his culture is not shameful. He appropriates it, and becomes a true actor that represents his country.

In the Souss, migrants and their villages not only have become actors in transnational community development; they have put their transnational villages, with all their multiple locations, hybrid identities, and sprawling economic strategies, on Moroccan and on European political maps, contesting territorial definitions of the nation-state in the process.

The process of interpretative exchange between migration communities and the state that produced such dramatic effects in rural electricity provision were repeated over and over again in number of policy areas. Like a variation on a melodic theme, the exchanges all supported a vital process innovation, but in each case, in a slightly different manner. In Migrations et Développement's community schooling project, for example, the migrant organization approached Ministry of Education about participating in already existing national program for community schooling. The state and migration communities forged a working partnership from the start, one that was both material and pedagogical: village associations and M/D provide the schoolhouse, materials, in-kind contribution to the teacher's income, and the state provides a teacher employed by the Ministry of Education and textbooks. M/D and the village associations complement the curriculum laid out in the textbooks with community-based learning that draws on local realities, cultural traditions, and language (local Amazight dialects). In the interactive practices of teaching and learning, those two pedagogical approaches mix and merge, and the insights drawn from that innovation-in-practice are remitted back to the state through their employees.

The example of road construction offers yet another version of interpretative exchanges with the state. The parliamentary deputy from the province of Taroudant, Mohammed Sajid, approached village associations in 1998 about the possibility of organizing a federation of associations for the express purpose of building roads in the province. While who actually mobilized the associations to form a federation is hotly contested and depends on who one asks, both villages associations and the former deputy agree that the federation was able to apply enough political pressure on the Ministry of Infrastructure (Minster de l'Equipment)-- pressure which they backed with a commitment to contribute 12 percent of the construction costs -- to persuade it to pave over 500 kilometers of roads in the province in three years. And while the new pavement corresponds closely to lines that Sajid claims he drew on his map of the province while sitting in his office, they also uncannily reflect the needs of communities in the valley. Sajid went on to become mayor of Casablanca in 2003 and with his move to the capital, the model of exchange between local associations and the state moved outward from the Kingdom's heartland to its coast, albeit transformed to fit the politician's agenda. In a visit to one of the shanty towns on the outskirts of Casablanca where electricity and potable provision was scant at best, the newly elected major exhorted residents to organize themselves into associations, citing the experience in Taroudant as an example to follow: he affirmed the strategy of villages in township could be "transposed to Casablanca," and that "a citizen who remains outside of the process of community planning can be of no use to his community" (L'Economiste, September 10, 2003).

In addition to using interpretive exchanges with the state as a means to design and construct infrastructure and services in their villages, migration communities also worked to institutionalize their conversations with the state. Having recognized the importance of interpretive spaces in the conceptualization of development, they created formal venues to foster exploratory discussions with the state about the economic future of their region. With the help of the European Commission of Communities and of the European Union, M/D launched two rounds of conversations, one in 1994 and one in 2000, that included village associations, local and central government official, academics, and representatives of various local, national and international NGOs. The conversations were published in full and captured some of the tensions, confusion, and ambiguity in the

exchanges, but they also convey some of the ways that ideas emerged and evolved in the process (Echanges, développement et migrations, 1995, and Rapport ECIL (Evaluation Capitalisation des Initiatives Locales), 2002).

Policy implications

The renaissance of the Moroccan Souss, and the interpretive exchanges between migration communities and the state on which it is based, suggest that new approaches to migration and development theory and policy are called for. In this instance, the theoretical ramifications of the case and the policy recommendations that stem from it overlap. This is because the most important policy recommendation that it offers is that states must think about migration, migration remittances, and their relationship with development in a radically different way. They have to shift from a view of remittances as fixed factors that can be imputed in national or local economic in a straightforward way to a view of remittances as highly mutable, intimately shaped by the ways that social actors engage with them. For states to design policy that forges a relationship between migration and development that is virtuous and synergistic, attention to the process through which migration resources are constituted – to the ways and means through which social actors engage with, mold, and transform remittances is called for. States, at all level of government, must self-consciously view themselves as social actors that can and do constitute migration resources. They must design policy with an awareness that their interventions will not merely direct resources or facilitate their flow, but will define what those migration resources are, in the most fundamental of ways, and in doing so, will determine what migration resources will available to local communities and to the nation as a whole for development.

As the case of the Souss suggests, social actors' on-going engagement with migration resources can serve as a powerful medium for innovation and learning. The conversation through language and practices that occur in the process open up spaces of ambiguity, contradiction and creativity that yield new approaches to nuts and bolts of development – like basic infrastructure provision – but also generate new ways of conceptualizing development. The new paradigms that emerge can stretch to accommodate the strength and constraints of transnational communities, and they can

build conceptual productive relationship between social areas like appear distinct in traditional approaches to economic development. The technology involved in irrigation systems can be viewed as intimately linked to boutique ecotourism marketed using the local ecological identity of the a region. States that want to forge synergistic relationship between migration and development need to nurture interpretative spaces where on-going and evolving conversations through language but also through practice can occur, *whether or not they are the initial architects of those spaces*. Furthermore, for these interpretive conversations –in language or in practice – to realize their generative potential, both state and non-state actors have to support exchanges and practices that traverse the boundary between state and society. Although this essay has posited that this boundary is fictional, it is nevertheless powerful and has important material consequences. Allowing that boundary to be more permeable requires social actors to take a political risk based on a bold political vision of innovation and learning as collaborative and practice-based.

Finally, states also need states need to create institutional options through which transnational communities can make themselves legible to the state. Institutions like the village associations that represented the transnational migration communities in the Souss and engaged with the state on their behalf can serve as important cribs that help state perceive transnational communities as an important social field where the state can act. Transnational communities are fractured, hybrid, and geographically dispersed but highly interconnected communities, and have assets and constraints that are just as complex and recombinant. However, because of the ways that states “read” societies, they can only readily perceive only a reduced number – usually only one – of the communities’ geographical anchors and only limited range of their complexity. Social actors, social groups, and social dynamics that states cannot see, they cannot involve in interpretive conversations. Providing institutional venues through which transnational communities can help – or pressure – the state to see and understand them as the dispersed, multifaceted, and cohesive social spaces that they can often be is the foundation for meaningful state-society interpretative exchanges – the kind of exchanges that make the policy in the field of migration and development uniquely innovative and powerful.

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