Postcards of Us: 
Moroccan Textiles on the Global Market

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# POSTCARDS OF US: MOROCCAN TEXTILES ON THE GLOBAL MARKET

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For Mom,  
who let me go,  
and for ‘Umi maghrabiya,\textsuperscript{1}  
who let me stay.

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\textsuperscript{1}“my Moroccan mom”
\textsuperscript{2}“many thanks”
Abstract:

*Postcards of Us: Moroccan Textiles on the Global Market* explores the experiences of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative of Tarmilat, Morocco as it engages with the global market for artisan crafts. The nature of the global market is that of interconnectedness between producers and consumers who are vastly separated by differences in geography, nationality, language, class, education, culture, and role in the market. “Place: National and Local Contexts” discusses the embeddedness of informal settlements like Tarmilat in local, regional, national, and international power structures, capital flows, and responses to economic globalization. Tarmilat is one of countless communities throughout the world whose informality separates them from the State-sponsored benefits of citizenship, including infrastructural development and protection under the law. This transnational grouping of people is known as the Fourth World. “Power, Dependency, Autonomy” outlines the history of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative in Tarmilat and suggests an analysis of the intertwined nature of charity and dependency in contemporary development initiatives. Charity-as-development generates relationships of dependency between developing communities and sources of First World charity. These relationships of dependency in development initiatives threaten the sustainability of development projects and serve to legitimize the systems of power that many of these initiatives strive to dismantle. “The Work of Weaving” unpacks the local social implications of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative and describes the place of the cooperative in the lives of cooperative members and in the social life of the Tarmilat community. The economic mode of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative represents a counter-hegemonic model for development in a global capitalist system. “Global Contact” analyzes the role of First World consumers in the lived realities of producers in the developing world and describes interactions between the Women’s Weaving Cooperative and tourists who visit Tarmilat. Cooperative members construct an estranged intimacy with a network of tourist visitors and First World consumers. At its conclusion, *Postcards of Us* approaches a critique of contemporary development discourses and their relationship to hegemonic global capitalism, suggesting revisions to intellectual discussions of development and challenging individuals to think critically about their role in the global market.
The End as Beginning: An Introduction.

And so it ends.

The process of writing works such that by the time you conclude, your thought processes and motivations have mockingly somersaulted away from your original hypothesis, and the literature available on your topic expands exponentially once you’ve prepared to write a final draft. So it is that, now that I have a mostly-complete thesis project sitting before me, I have no idea where to begin. The end is as likely a place as any.

The first time I left Morocco, in December of 2005, the Muslim world was celebrating the commencement of the *hajj* season. One of the five pillars of Islam, *al-hajj* is the Muslim pilgrimage to the Kabba in Mecca. The *hajj* is an expression of ultimate submission to Allah; a return to the location where the Prophet Mohammed challenged the status quo of Arabian paganism, rid the Kabba of idolatrous statues, and established the religion of the final and complete prophecy. *Al-hajj* is a return to the beginning. In the airport at Fez, waiting to check in for my 5 am flight home, I watched as rows of elderly Moroccan Muslims prostrated themselves in prayer and prepared for their 21st century pilgrimage – a non-stop flight to Medina, Saudi Arabia. The one-room airport rustled in the stillness of early morning with the sound of white cotton robes accommodating the physicality of Muslim prayer; robes signifying that an individual has embarked on the *hajj*, generating a habit of the sacred which shields from the profane. I was struck by the poignancy of the moment; as this religious community prepared to embark on the ultimate fulfillment of their relationship with their god, I was preparing to leave Morocco, ending my semester abroad and a significant journey in my own right. We were all returning home.
The months I spent studying abroad at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco (AUI hereafter), were, in many ways, purposefully orchestrated to find an opportunity. Upon my return to Haverford College, I wanted to apply for a Center for Peace and Global Citizenship international summer internship. In my mind it made sense to return to the only place outside of the U.S I had ever spent time living, traveling, working, and learning the language. When I studied Arabic, I studied with the intention of becoming as conversationally proficient as possible. When I traveled, I imagined myself living and working in the various towns and cities I visited, seeking civic institutions and NGOs where my elementary French and Arabic comprehension and desire to contribute to the improvement of socioeconomic conditions in Morocco might fill a niche. It wasn’t until I met Karen Smith, the chaplain of the university and an American expatriate living in Ifrane, that I discovered the perfect opportunity for a CPGC internship less than 5 km from AUI.

Smith made fairly regular contact with the international students, majority American, while we lived and studied at AUI. Those who were practicing Christians found, through her, a community of international and Moroccan Christians who met regularly for worship and fellowship and who offered emotional and spiritual support to students. For the rest of us, Smith was a bottomless wellspring of knowledge about Morocco and Moroccans, and particularly about how to live in Morocco as an American. Through my interactions with one international student who was particularly close to Smith, I learned of her involvement with a small village of indigenous Amazighi Moroccans living just outside of Ifrane. I emailed Smith to ask about the nature of her relationship with this community and to inquire about any opportunities that might exist for me to return to Morocco and work there. Smith was enthusiastic about my proposal and invited me to accompany her on her next visit to Tarmilat.
One evening in October of 2005, during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, Smith drove a pair of high school volunteers from the Hand-In-Hand Association, a Moroccan AUI student and me to the village of Tarmilat. The short ride was quiet; we had all been fasting throughout the day and were silently counting down the minutes until *f'toor*, or breakfast. Our arrival in Tarmilat was welcomed enthusiastically – as I soon learned, visits from Smith meant cash payments for the sale of textiles produced by the local Women’s Weaving Cooperative. While Smith and the other students transferred payments to the cooperative manager, a short middle-aged man with bright eyes and an easy smile, I looked around in guarded disbelief. We had driven not more than 10 minutes from the elite, manicured university and the meticulous resort town of Ifrane into the midst of houses built from mud, stone, and refuse, into a community that did not have electricity or running water. Never had the state of socioeconomic inequality in Morocco been more poignantly, painfully clear.

As we sipped delicious *harira* soup in the manager’s home, finally breaking our fast, I asked Smith to discuss with the manager the possibility of my living in Tarmilat and working with the Women’s Weaving Cooperative during the following summer. She explained that I had the opportunity to apply for a grant from the college in America where I studied, that I was interested in paying a Tarmilat family a stipend to live with them, and that I wished to work with Smith, the manager, and the cooperative. The manager laughed uproariously, slapped his knee, and whistled through his teeth – all signs of amused incredulity. He asked me why I would want to live and work in Tarmilat. I said simply: “‘Uhib al-Maghrib. ‘Ureed ‘an ‘usaid. I love Morocco. I want to help.” At that, the group sat quietly, contemplating the shells of our hard-boiled eggs and enjoying the steamy warmth of our bowls of soup. The conversation turned back to the manager’s bookkeeping and the current state of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative.
As we prepared to leave, the cooperative manager shook my hand and said something to Smith. She translated, saying that the manager extended his welcome to me and hoped that I would be able to return to Tarmilat the following summer. I smiled and replied with the pan-Arab phrase of noncommittal hope: “Insha’allah. God willing.”

Between October of 2005 and February of 2006, I wrote, scrapped, rewrote, and finally submitted a proposal to Haverford College’s Center for Peace and Global Citizenship. Called “Rugs to Riches: Developing Microenterprise in Tarmilat, Morocco,” this twenty-page document outlined my intentions to live in the informal squatter settlement of Tarmilat and to work with the community’s grassroots development initiative, the Women’s Weaving Cooperative. In addition to the internship, I stated my intention to use this opportunity to conduct fieldwork and to collect data for my senior anthropology thesis. On paper, the proposal appeared more than possible, even confident. When my proposal was accepted and the grant funding awarded, my feelings about returning to Morocco and to Tarmilat took a 180° turn. I began to worry about how I would live without electricity, without running water, without even a pit latrine; about how
I would communicate across my limited Arabic proficiency; about whether I was compromising my health and my safety; about whether I was actually welcome in Tarmilat; about whether my project was even possible.

When I did finally arrive in Tarmilat in June of 2006, it felt as if the community had been collectively holding its breath, waiting to see if I would actually show up and what would happen when I did. Smith accompanied me to the village and introduced me to my host family and to other members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative. After settling me in, Smith withdrew, and I was left to my own devices: the simplicity of my Arabic training; the awkwardness of unfamiliarity; the question of what to do next. The next few days passed in this hazy state of externality. Feeling as though I were being held apart from the community, I reverted to my anthropological training and concentrated my efforts on the mythical process of achieving ‘rapport’ with Tarmilat. Clifford Geertz describes a similar experience he shared with his wife upon their arrival in Bali. In “Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight,” Geertz discusses how he and his wife were initially ignored when they arrived in a Balinese village, saying “we were nonpersons, specters, invisible men” (1973a:412). Not unlike Geertz, it became clear to me how much more the community of Tarmilat knew about my personhood than I know about their community: “the indifference, of course, was studied; the villagers were watching every move we made, and they had an enormous amount of quite accurate information about who we were and what we were going to be doing” (Geertz 1973b:413). Ten days after Geertz’s arrival in the Balinese village, a police raid of a local illicit cockfight provided him and his wife with an opportunity to express their commitment to the community (1973a:414). Instead of presenting police with their official papers, thereby ‘playing the anthropologist card,’ Geertz and his wife did exactly what the rest of the local villagers did: they ran and hid.

“Seeing me and my wife, ‘White Men,’ there in the yard, the policeman
performed a classic double take. When he found his voice again he asked, approximately, what in the devil did we think we were doing there. Our host of five minutes leaped instantly to our defense, producing an impassioned description of who and what we were, so detailed and so accurate that it was my turn, having barely communicated with a living human being save my landlord and the village chief for more than a week, to be astonished…. The next morning, the village was a completely different world for us. Not only were we no longer invisible, we were suddenly the center of all attention, the object of a great outpouring of warmth, interest, and most especially, amusement” (1973a:415-416).

In Tarmilat I waited only a week to attract police attention. On the evening of my seventh day in the village, two men associated with the gendarmerie arrived in Tarmilat and interrogated me in Arabic and French as to my personhood and my business there. Men, women, and children from Tarmilat looked on as I insisted in frantic Arabic that I was a friend of Karen Smith, who has numerous connections among local officials; that I was paying a family in Tarmilat in exchange for satisfactory room and board; that I was funded by Haverford College in the United States; and that I was working for Smith and the Women’s Weaving Cooperative and conducting research for my undergraduate thesis. Unsatisfied, the gendarmes wanted to know why I hadn’t registered with Ifrane’s Office of Tourism and why I wasn’t lodging with Smith or at a proper hotel in town. I responded by promising to register with the Bureau d’Estranges but insisted on my commitment to living and working in Tarmilat.

Later that same evening, another state representative arrived in Tarmilat and conducted a more extensive interrogation. My host mother invited him into her home and, as we spoke, other people from the Tarmilat community began trickling in to squat in the gas lamp-light behind me. This representative’s method of questioning was rapid-fire – I quickly fell behind, flustered, confused, and embarrassed. Sensing my frustration, people from Tarmilat began to fill in my silences, insisting on my right to live among them, to work with them, and to learn from them. The community’s long history of state antagonism and interference played out before me as people from Tarmilat defended not only my right to exist in their space, but also, implicitly, their
own rights to the space and land they occupy. Later, many individuals would express gratitude for the complimentary way I described my experiences in Tarmilat thus far, as if my willing insistence to live in Tarmilat directly challenged the views of the state that this village was a vagrant, base, polluted, and unsafe grouping.

As Geertz experienced, life in Tarmilat was different for me from that point on. The following morning people joked with me about the interrogations, a group of teenagers sat and tirelessly drilled me on Arabic vocabulary, and I was invited to partake in the tasks of daily life in Tarmilat. While I was the butt of many jokes for the next few weeks, I turned the tables by paying rapt attention to Tarmilat’s use of language and especially to the joking discourses among women in the cooperative, and was soon mocking the men of the community along with the best of them. I slowly gained rapport, first with the youngest children whose vocabulary and speaking abilities matched my own, then with the teenagers, then among the women of the cooperative, and finally among the remaining families in the community. My acceptance was rooted, circumstantially, in my willingness to respond to the antagonism of local authority in the same way anyone else living in Tarmilat would. I gained rapport through chance rapture.

Anticipating the difficulty of conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Tarmilat, Morocco, due to knowing little about the community and even less Arabic, I turned to Geertz’s writing on “thick description” for methodological inspiration. Geertz’s matter-of-fact answer to the question which too often plagues academic anthropology departments - “’What does the ethnographer do?’ – he writes” (1973b:19) – ensured me that, despite my shortcomings, I would be able to accomplish something worthy of an undergraduate thesis during my time in Tarmilat. Especially dear to my heart is Geertz’s explication of Gilbert Ryle’s “thick description,” arrived at through his anecdote on winking and twitching.

“But the point is that between what Ryle calls the ‘thin description’ of what
the rehearsal (parodist, winker, twitcher…) is doing (‘rapidly contracting his right eyelids’) and the ‘thick description’ of what he is doing (‘practicing a burlesque of a friend faking a wink to deceive an innocent into thinking a conspiracy is in motion’) lies the object of ethnography: a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures in terms of which twitches, winks, fake-winks, parodies, rehearsals of parodies are produced, perceived, and interpreted, and without which they would not (not even the zero-form twitches, which, as a cultural category, are as much nonwinks as winks are nontwitches) in fact exist, no matter what anyone did or didn’t do with his eyelids” (1973b:7).

For Geertz, the act of ethnography is located in the descriptive, interpretive distinguishing between formless occurrences and culturally-defined events, behaviors and gestures. His model situates the entity of culture as a primary text, which is then read, revised, and performed by the primary actors – the social and cultural natives. According to Geertz, the best an anthropologist can ever expect to achieve is to read the primary text of culture over the shoulder of the cultural native, to observe the performances of primary actors, and to record an interpretation of things and events as one experiences them. "An anthropologist's work tends, no matter what its ostensible subject, to be but an expression of his research experience, or, more accurately, of what his research experience has done to him" (Geertz 1968:vi). Geertz so obliterates the myth of objectivity, reducing or elevating (depending on one’s relative position) the act of ethnographic anthropology to an art of subjective interpretation.

Given this foundation, it is difficult for me to outline an explicit methodology that I enacted during my second stay in Morocco. In fact, I had a much clearer picture of what it was I should have been doing during my time in Tarmilat when I left in August than when I arrived in June. While I started the summer with a few basic questions – how did the Women’s Weaving Cooperative come to be?, how does it function in the local community?, how is the local community embedded in Morocco’s larger, national experience of globalization?, and what is the relationship between the Women’s Weaving Cooperative and the local tourist industry? – each approach to an answer generated an exponential host of new questions, wonders, frustrations,
false leads, and uncharted intellectual pathways. Given these realizations, I can simply say that I lived for ten weeks with a family in Tarmilat and wove alongside cooperative members in an effort to understand the experiences of a completely grassroots development initiative in today’s global and hegemonically capitalist market. Because of my home stay arrangement, it was virtually impossible for me to spend quiet, reflective time alone; my field notes reveal the ad hoc manner in which they were compiled, often in the last weary moments of the day, by lamp-light.

Arguably, my immersion in the life and activities of the community shifted the traditional balance of participant-observation to observant-participation, and I often struggled to maintain a clear separation between my objectivist, ethnographer self and my subjectivist, human being self. To complicate matters more, I spent the first half of the summer struggling to enlarge my feeble Arabic vocabulary and limited communicative abilities, often relying on my interpretations of nonverbal communication to reach some explanation of what was happening in and to the Tarmilat community during the summer of 2006. Following the leads of nudges, whispers, jokes, arguments, celebrations, and defeats, I have constructed my own interpretation of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative’s past experiences, present status and future possibilities. So, in the pages that follow, I attempt to distinguish for you the difference between winks and twitches in Tarmilat, particularly as they relate to the Women’s Weaving Cooperative’s entrance into the global market for handcrafted goods from the developing world.

Given this methodological framework, the problematic of ethics has largely framed the way I think about my research project. First, I recognize that as a white American student and an academic, I entered Morocco and Tarmilat near the top of a steep social hierarchy. My position in this localized global hierarchy of social status allowed me to gain a uniquely intimate access to life in Tarmilat. I walked directly into the homes and lives of the people there, using Moroccan
dirhams to lubricate social tensions and to open doors that would normally be closed to outsiders. I have also taken liberal interpretive license while writing the story of the Tarmilat community and the Women’s Weaving Cooperative. Given my linguistic shortcomings, it is impossible for me to be sure that my interpretations are accurate. Furthermore, the work of writing itself reduces the lived realities of the people in Tarmilat to a finite number of base categorizations, and it would be impossible for me to capture and comprehend the totality and nuance of Tarmilat’s situation in this paper. So far as writing is rendering, it is also necessary reductive. This brings me to the problematic of representation, and of what to do with the information I gathered during my time in Tarmilat. I’ve decided that using my knowledge about the Women’s Weaving Cooperative in Tarmilat to introduce a nuanced critique of contemporary development discourse is a meaningful way to put this privileged information to work. Significantly, I am not comfortable with assuming that I have true informed consent from the individuals in Tarmilat whose often intimate stories I tell in this project. When I considered the problematic of representation, and how central the concepts of visibility and identity are to my argument against neo-liberal capitalism, I made this compromise: individuals are not identified in the text of this project, to preserve some level of confidentiality. Individuals are, however, identified where they are represented in pictures, so that the reader can associate a name with each face, thus bearing in mind that this is the story of real individuals living in a real community in Morocco.

Theoretically, my approach to studying Tarmilat’s artisan cooperative is an attempt to explore the relationship between Structure and Agency, as concepts, within the network of relationships which makes the work of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative possible. The four chapters of my thesis – Place: National and Local Context; Power, Dependency, Autonomy; The Work of Weaving; and Global Contact – focus on four layers of the interlocking webs of
interpersonal, human relationships and interactions which are the fundamental social infrastructure of the global market. These human relationships and interactions exist within a framework of diverse cultural, social, political, and economic realities: a Structure. For my purpose in this thesis, I refer to the possibilities for human action or inaction within these realities as Agency. More specifically, I attempt to map the relationship between Structure and Agency onto four informing questions: first, what is the economic mode of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative; that is, is this a capitalist initiative, or does it follow some other economic model? Home-based craft production for local use, which occurred prior to the most recent wave of economic globalization in the 1970s and 1980s (see Nash 1994), is described as non-capitalist in nature (Cook 1993:66, see also Duncan 1999). What happens when these same craft producers in the developing world enter into the global capitalist market is a transformation of the craft product into a commodity; as Cook observes, locally-produced crafts take on an “exchange value” in the transformation of their “use value” from that of a utility item in the local context to that of a souvenir or artifact in the global context (Cook 2004:121). Some theorists locate the emergence of a capitalist mode of production at the producers’ valuation of their own labor as a commodity (Cook 2004:126). Others describe noncapitalist modes of local production as those in which craftspeople own the required tools and raw materials for their trade, control the labor output, execute the full production process, and have control over exchange and distribution (Duncan 1999:216, see also Milgram 1999). Exploring and problematizing this structural question of economic mode leads to the necessity of situating local producers in the economic system.

My second question, then, relates to agency: how do the members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative identify as producers in an economic chain of production and
consumption? How do they conceive of their labor? Do they experience exploitation as producers in the capitalist global market? It is first crucial to recognize that the local economies of small, informal communities such as Tarmilat throughout the developing world are being significantly affected by the demand for an increasing diversity of products, the transformation of production methods, the entrance of new producers into the market (such as women), new methods of acquisition and consumption in the market (particularly as a result of telecommunications), and increased contact with a democratizing body of consumers in the global economic system (Cook 1993:61). These market transformations simultaneously threaten and make more necessary the economic subsistence activities of developing communities (Nash 1994:7). While some argue that producers in the developing world represent an unrecognized and “underpaid labor reservoir that is helping fuel the expansion of craft capitalism in the emerging global economy” (Duncan 1999:197), other scholars challenge us to imagine artisans as “thinking, acting persons whose poverty is not repeatedly undermining their capability to change their situation” (Milgram 1999:225). Indeed, “peasant producers” are as much “capitalist entrepreneurs and producers” as they are “dependent on [market] forces beyond their control” (Nash 1993a:145). When telling the story of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative of Tarmilat, I try to maintain a balance between recognizing the immense structural obstacles which threaten the success and sustainability of the project while also revealing the possibilities for action which are embedded in these structures.

Because the effects of the market are not limited to people, but extend to places and things, I also explore the extent of market commoditization in the Women’s Weaving Cooperative and the Tarmilat community. What is the affect of the capitalist global market on locally produced goods? What is the scope of commoditization and how does it affect local
cultures and local communities in the developing world? Local craft objects produced for exchange on the global market undergo a significant shift from “production for use to production for exchange” (Messick 1987:219), which means that “the exchange system of the past that involved transfer of goods, especially woven goods, from village production to regional wholesale/retail markets is now influenced by global concerns” (Breu 1999:244). Many scholars are concerned that the commoditization of local art is akin to “the commodification of ethnicity” (Cook 2004:192) or the sale of culture itself (Nash 1993a:144). Others express worry that the power of market demand to dictate product design will transform locally produced art objects into meaningless, mass-produced souvenirs, devoid of their original cultural authenticity and significance (Breu 1999:243). Many writers also express the concern that commoditization of local art will result in the formation of an exploitative, merchant-intermediary class (Cook 1993:72) and that the expansion of capitalist market relations into the developing world will exacerbate regional tensions and deepen socioeconomic inequality (Cohen 1998:np). Because commoditization transforms the meaning of the product, the investment of labor in the product, and the relationships of product exchange, it is crucial to understand the interplay between Structure and Agency in the context of capitalist expansion in the developing world.

Finally, the nature of the global market is that of interconnectedness between producers and consumers who are vastly separated by differences in geography, nationality, language, class, education, culture, and role in the market. What is the relationship between the Women’s Weaving Cooperative and the global, First World consumers who purchase their textiles? How can we discuss the relationship between global producers and consumers more generally? What is the role of charity in First World consumption of locally produced or fairly traded goods from the developing world? What responsibilities do global consumers have to global producers in a
hegemonically capitalist system? Many writers have noted the paradoxical relationship between industrialization, which flooded local markets in the developing world with manufactured goods, and the reciprocal increasing demand for hand-crafted goods in the industrial world (Stephen 1993:26, Nash 1993a:49). It is the search for singularity, for “handmadeness,” in the midst of homogenous industrial production that fuels the global market for handicrafts (Nash 1993b:10). Furthermore, the expansion of tourism into the developing world has generated a significant demand for cheap craft souvenir goods that are easy to produce and are either useful or are imbued with a certain symbolic or aesthetic value (O’Brian 1994:165). The Women’s Weaving Cooperative differs significantly from other artisan communities in that the cooperative members frequently have the opportunity to meet with tourists and First World consumers and to make direct transactions face-to-face with them. It is personally significant for me to explore the relationship between producers and consumers in the global market because I believe that the invisibilization of production and anonymity in consumption is what allows horrific levels of exploitation to persist under global capitalism. While the scale of the global market allows for the invisibilization of producers, I challenge consumers to realize the personhood and lived reality of global producers and to recognize that, in hegemonic capitalism, consumer choice can be social action.

Believing, as Geertz did, that “small facts speak to large issues” (1973b:23), I hope that the ensuing story of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative of Tarmilat speaks not only to your interest in artisan communities in the developing world, or local responses to globalization, or grassroots development initiatives, but to the necessity of situating yourself in these global chains and personal linkages. I hope that, in the pictures and words I write about Tarmilat, you find a bit of yourself reflected. For in the increasing economic integration of world markets, we
are all, as individuals, implicated in the economic lives of others, and of each other. Approaching capitalist hegemony from an urbanist perspective, Henri Lefebvre asserts that the solution to capitalism’s structural violences is to seek “the possible in the real.” As you read Postcards of Us, I invite you to imagine the alternate possibilities embedded in our contemporary, shared, global reality.

My host brothers (from left) Wahid, Hemza and Hassan welcome you to Tarmilat!
CHAPTER ONE – PLACE: NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXTS

Squatting in the King’s Backyard: The Creation of Tarmilat.

If you leave the city of Ifrane traveling in a southeasterly direction on the Michlifen Road, you will encounter, only a kilometer or so outside the city’s limits, the palatial complex enjoyed by King Mohammed VI and his family and associates during the summer months, at which time Ifrane is transformed into the lush Middle Atlas tourist hub for many of Morocco’s wealthiest ministers, government officials, businessmen, and other members of its privileged upper class. The palace can be glimpsed from the road, looming behind wrought iron fences, a wall of hedges and trees and other manicured flora, rising up out of its Middle Atlas landscape. Men dressed in forest green coveralls disappear into the beautiful verdant landscape over which they labor. His Majesty’s seasonal domicile is the last tourist attraction on this stretch of Trek Michlifen. Soon after leaving the palatial complex you will notice the sidewalk ends, and you are left walking on the pebbly edges of a road where imported cars zoom by at speeds of 60 to 80 km per hour. On either side the cedar forest is contained by tall fences, but if you are vigilant, you may meet the eyes of a young shepherd with his herd of sheep and goats and his pack of semi-feral sheepdogs, defiant of the demarcation of property in his quest for the Middle Atlas’ disappearing grazing land and fresh water sources. On your left, perhaps four kilometers outside of Ifrane, you will see the sign, in French and Arabic, for the Tarmilat water treatment facility. On your right, now a mere five kilometers outside the city, you may stumble upon the village that has adopted this toponym as its own. The land Tarmilat occupies is government land; King Mohammed VI’s land. Tarmilat is a rural squatter settlement.

The village of Tarmilat is a collection of single-level, one-room homes constructed of found natural and discarded resources built into the craggy surrounding landscape of a clearing
in the Middle Atlas Mountains. The style of these homes is reminiscent of the tents inhabited by Morocco’s small remaining population of transhumants: longer than they are wide, with a central entrance doorway, built too low to the grand to stand upright in. In contrast, the sky-scraping steel power line towers surging electricity into the city of Ifrane run straight through Tarmilat’s terrain. The community is comprised of approximately twenty families, some connected through intermarriage but otherwise apparently unrelated, who rely on the surrounding terrain as grazing land for the herds of sheep and goats they shepherd. For our purposes in this work, we will consider families, or households, as “activity groups, most often composed of members of the nuclear and extended family, whose members are usually co-resident (cooking and eating together) and who usually ‘share activities such as production, consumption, reproduction, and transmission of property’” (Milgram 1999:225). Based on his experiences with home-based workers in La Chamba, Colombia, Ronald Duncan asserts that the household itself is an economic unit, and that social cohesion in the community stems from this fact.

“The economic logic of La Chamba is focused on developing social capital by supporting the household and not on accumulating economic wealth. Since the household is tied together in work and poverty, each person is critically needed for what they can contribute to household subsistence, and the residential unit as a whole is more tightly bound together” (Duncan 1999:206).

In Tarmilat, not only the individual households but the entire community is bound together by these ties of subsistence, resource distribution, reciprocity, and need.
Through conversations with Karen Smith, an American expatriate living in Ifrane who has been instrumental in the functions of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative (see below), I learned that the previously transhumant families living in Tarmilat were gathered and relocated there by state agents. The community has existed in its current location for approximately forty years and was brought together to care for the sheep of wealthy herdsmen. According to earlier writings by Smith, “They [the people of Tarmilat] make their living by ‘ksiba,’ caring for animals belonging to wealthier people on land owned by the state but allotted for livestock raising” (Smith 2004:np). Thus, we discover that the animals for which the Tarmilat shepherds care, even live alongside, are not theirs at all, but are merely subunits belonging to wealthy herd-owners who “sharecrop” their herds to shepherds without sheep. June Nash cites “the encroachment of capitalist enterprises in the territories of agropastoal and hunter-gatherer cultivators, and the reduction of consumption resources in national as well as household budgets with debt financing resorted to as a regular stratagem” as two causes of the loss of subsistence reserves and the ruination of subsistence lifestyles (1994:12). These threats to economic subsistence activities lead to the creation of economic strategies such as ksiba among communities like Tarmilat worldwide. “The increasing penetration of capitalist relations into rural economies, the debt crisis that led to a generalized recession in the 1980s, and the neoliberal reforms and globalization of the economy have precipitated a drop in the income of rural populations with a consequent deterioration of living conditions” (Rosenbaum 2000:85). Moreover, the people of Tarmilat encompass the kind of interstitial social identity of peasant-worker described by Douglas Holmes in his work on peasantry in northeast Italy. Neither entirely industrial nor entirely agrarian, entirely urban nor entirely rural, “worker peasantries appear to develop out of the exigencies of rural livelihood which favor the integration of a variety of productive involvements rather than the creation of narrow occupational identities.
Concentration of capital, the presence of a significant land-poor as opposed to landless population, and endemic under- and unemployment, served as the structural preconditions for this adaptation” (Holmes 1989:56).

Within Morocco’s experience of economic liberalization, Tarmilat’s conditions of informality (or land-poverty), increasing reliance on the cash economy, and lack of methods for generating a cash income are the precipitating structural conditions for the community’s current interstitial circumstance.

My preliminary sketch of Tarmilat’s history is based on field research as well as general knowledge of Morocco’s colonial experience and post-colonial legacy. When Tarmilat was formed forty years ago, in the mid-1960s, Morocco was celebrating a decade of independence from French protectorate administration. This colonial administration introduced Western economic notions of capitalism, the facilitation of sovereignty through land seizure, state control of resources, and new consumption tastes and habits differentiated by economic class (Clancy-Smith 1999:29). Ultimately, the French regime in Morocco initiated a process of sedentarizing Morocco’s diverse transhumant and seasonally mobile populations as part of the wider colonial project of establishing sovereignty in the modern era (Becker 2006:20). One account of the Ait Kabbash, an indigenous transhumant group in southern Morocco, asserts that by the 1960s “most nomadic Ait Kabbash had folded up their tents and built mud-brick villages on what had been their traditional grazing territory…. These towns were built near water supplies found under the desert’s sand dunes, providing water to drink and to irrigate newly planted crops of wheat and vegetables. Despite making the transition to sedentary lifestyle, Ait Kabbash women still kept small herds of sheep and goats, traversing the landscape looking for fodder rather than letting them graze” (Becker 2006:20).

Lila Abu-Lughod tells a similar story of the Bedouin of Egypt’s Western Desert. Like Morocco, Egypt harbors a post-colonial history of “inspection, conscription, detention, control of movements, registration, and taxation” policies implemented by the Egyptian state in order to “integrate’ the Bedouins of the Western Desert into its domain” (Abu-Lughod 1990:43). In her
observations of Bedouin resistance, Abu-Lughod describes the ongoing antagonism between the Egyptian state and Bedouin communities who remain resistant to complete sedentarization (1990:43). Abu-Lughod asserts, drawing on writings by Foucault, that the resistance of Fourth World communities like the Bedouin in Egypt’s Western Desert is internal to the structural systems of power that exist, and that evidence of resistance can be used as a diagnostic of these power relations (1990:42).

When sedentarization is not enforced by the colonial or postcolonial state, it often results from economic necessity. The combination of colonial regulation of access to cities with the concentration of colonial resources in urban areas incited an exodus of rural migrants into cities. In many cases, these cities lacked the infrastructure to accommodate such dramatic population growth, resulting in slumification (Davis 2006:51). In French North Africa, “…the French tightly regulated the movements of rural labor while consigning African town-dwellers to grim peripheries” (Davis 2006:53). Seven years of anticolonial warfare in Algeria’s countryside displaced 50% of the rural population, which migrated to the cities and settled in bidonvilles after independence was achieved in 1962. Beginning in the 1970s, slums came to be “seen as threats simply because they are invisible to state surveillance” (Davis 2006:111). State-sponsored slum clearance, such as Morocco’s Slum-Free City program (see below), came to be equated with fighting crime and delinquency in urban populations. Not unlike Egypt’s Bedouin, many slum dwellers resist forced relocation, bemoaning the “loss of community…, increased isolation and loneliness” associated with state relocation programs (Davis 2006:64).

There is no reason to think that this initiative of sedentarizing transhumants in North Africa ended with the fall of colonialism, and it is quite possible that the case of Tarmilat represents proof of the contrary. The people of Tarmilat maintain a strong ethnic, linguistic, and
cultural connection to their indigenous *mshlaha*, or Amazighi, identity. After achieving independence from France in 1956, the Moroccan administration “suppressed public expressions of Morocco’s Amazigh [indigenous] heritage and instead promoted a homogenous Arab identity for the nation” (Becker 2006:178).

“Since independence, urban migration and arabicization, among other factors, have diluted the strength of language, tribal affiliation, and geography in maintaining Amazigh identity. Younger generations, particularly in urban areas, that regard themselves as Berber in origin may still speak Arabic at home. The state enforces this dilution through laws and cultural circumscription, for instance, the law that prevents families from giving children Amazigh names” (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:91).

Only recently has this official program of Arabicization been challenged by Amazighi identity groups; in 2001, King Mohammed VI established the Institut Royale de la Culture Amazigh and now allows for greater use of *Tamazight* languages in media and education (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:94). Significantly, Morocco’s indigenous populations bear an unequal portion of the country’s burden of underdevelopment. In 2003, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racism and Discrimination found that “in Morocco, Amazigh regions have a standard of living that is largely inferior to that of other regions. Worse, Moroccan authorities have taken it upon themselves to maintain, indeed to accentuate, the economic and social marginalization of these regions, targeting particularly the localities considered the most rebellious [autonomy-seeking]” (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:101). Amazigh territories complain of abandonment, desolation, and pauperization due to inequality in the distribution of state resources (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:102).

I conjecture that common interests in Morocco’s agribusiness industry and the local government coincided on the issue of how and where to settle the particular community of former transhumants that now lives in Tarmilat. Since many of Tarmilat’s families have relatives in Ifrane and other nearby villages and towns, it is likely that these families were local to this area of the Middle Atlas region. Regardless, this community of families was “brought
together” and resettled on government-owned land with the purpose of shepherding wealthy herd owners’ sheep and goats. The logical reason for allocating this particular parcel of land, which is sparse upon first inspection, is precisely the cold water spring which allowed for the construction of the water treatment facility mentioned earlier and which provides the community with a free source of potable water.

This explanation, while feasible, is riddled with holes and questions. What existed in Tarmilat prior to the gathering of these families there? Why was this site chosen specifically? Is this arrangement ‘on the books,’ or was it arranged informally and illicitly? Who are the actors in this case: whose herds are the Tarmilat shepherds caring for, and what government policies made it possible for them to settle in Tarmilat? What say did the Tarmilat families have in this arrangement? How did they become shepherds without sheep? Who is this arrangement ultimately benefiting? Is this arrangement actually connected to the forced sedentarization of transhumants in Morocco, and how is it related to contemporary urban slum-clearing projects such as King Mohammed VI’s “Slum-Free City” program?

I hope to find answers to some of these questions in the future. For the purpose of this paper, I want simply to use this thin but poignant history as a background for Tarmilat’s entrance into the global tourist market for local art which is soon to come. Two generations after the settling of Tarmilat, an American expatriate named Karen Smith accompanied Moroccan student members of the Hand In Hand volunteer association on their visit to Tarmilat to complete an assessment of community needs as an act of charity during the Ramadan fasting season. The Women’s Weaving Cooperative was formed as an outcome of this initial contact. Here, I intend to discuss this association as the result of interpersonal interactions, and as a local institution in which human relationships are imagined, formed, developed, contested, and strengthened across
differences of wealth, education, nationality, geography, and purpose. From the experiences of this small weaving cooperative in rural Morocco, I also intend to critique contemporary discourses of participatory development that too often neglect to mention the very tangible webs of human relationships which render participatory development possible and sustainable.

“Your shack is too close to the forest”: Community-State Relations.

In mid-July, at the hottest time of the year in Morocco, construction started on my host family’s barraaka jadida, their new home. In my naïveté and excitement about witnessing the construction of a barraaka, I failed to immediately understand the greater implications of my host family’s move. Significantly, their home was relocated from a plot nearest the forest and on the frontier edge of a cluster of barraakat to a more isolated location, closer to both the dirt access road and the paved highway to Michlifen.

The kitschy joke about Morocco’s geology is all in the name: More Rock-o. While large rocks and small boulders are plentiful throughout the Middle Atlas region, it is labor intensive to extract them from the ground and to haul them. In defiance of gender roles but with the amused acquiescence of my host family, I insisted on helping gather rocks for the base of the walls in the barraaka jadida, most of which we extracted from the turf which later became the floor inside the barraaka. In a manner both resourceful and sensible, rocks and boulders were excavated and pulled from the earth and...
placed in four piles that surrounded the site, and the ground on this site was leveled in the process. Four shallow trenches were dug around the perimeter of the site and the largest boulders were placed in them to form the foundations of the walls. On these were stacked large and medium-sized rocks, and into the remaining cracks were wedged the smallest rocks. Rather than carefully placing one layer of rocks above the other, like bricks, men dropped the rocks forcefully into existing grooves in the walls and shuffled and nudged them into place, thus assuring the stability of an arrangement of materials meeting at irregular surfaces. In this manner, the piles slowly evolved into four chest-high walls. My experience in lifting and watching others lift these large rocks revealed why: it was both unnecessary and, without mechanized construction equipment, physically impossible to lift these large rocks any higher.

The immense natural supply of rocks in the Middle Atlas region contrasts poignantly with official efforts to protect the disappearing indigenous cedar forests. Finding and harvesting the necessary length and quality of timber to form the roofs on barraakat like those in Tarmilat is a challenging task, and one in which the resourcefulness of the community can again be seen. When the stone piling walls of the barraaka jadida were complete, men began to dismantle the original structures belonging to my host family and harvest them for materials. Beginning with the least necessary structures first, they removed the plastic miika sheeting from the roof of the nuwella, the barn in which the donkey is kept. Beneath the miika were eaves made of large cedar branches taken from the

Drinking mid-afternoon atay tea at the sight of the barraaka jadida.
nearby forest years before. In a day’s work, this lumber was uprooted from the nuwella and hauled by donkey to the site of the barraaka jadida. Any nails that could be salvaged were saved in the process to be reused in the new construction. This process was repeated with the kurii, a larger and better insulated barn where the horse and goats were housed, and eventually the barraaka qadima (old house) itself was dismantled to be scrapped for parts.

The recycled timber from my host family’s original homestead was used to construct the frame and roof of the barraaka jadida. Over this frame was stretched plastic miika sheeting, nailed in place under tin shingles made from flattening large food cans salvaged from the zabella, the local city dump. My host family’s resourcefulness in using recycled materials to construct what eventually became an expanded and upgraded version of their original home was what struck me the strongest throughout the entire construction process:

Tuesday 18 July 2006: “Now at the new barraaka all of the wood skeleton has been erected and the miika and tin roofing is being applied. The other day [my host brother] was chopping up old rubber boots and shoes…. the tabs of rubber are placed between the miika and the nails so that strong gusts of wind don’t tear the miika off where it is nailed to the roof!”

Ifrane being the site of many restaurants and hotels catering to upscale Moroccan, European and American tastes, the local zabella is full of useful refuse. The use of flattened food cans as a building material, in addition to the more usual corrugated sheets of metal, are what resulted in the colloquial name for Morocco’s squatter camps: les bidonvilles, the cities of tin. At times, the formality of life in Tarmilat – the routines of work and leisure, the camaraderie among
community members, planning and taking trips into town, the observance of holidays and rituals - made it easy to forget that one was living in an informal settlement. The circumstances surrounding the relocation of my host family from their original homestead to a plot nearer the Trek Michlifen became a poignant marker of the vulnerability of informal communities like Tarmilat under the authority of the State.

Tuesday 18 July 2006: “[My host mother] was crying earlier today, but I think it just has to do with the move. From what I can tell by her conversations, the move was forced – someone with jurisdiction over the land (furestee?) told them that everything up to [the neighbor’s] kurii has to be moved. This includes [my host family’s] entire compound. I don’t know what’s going on – maybe a reforestation project? – but [my host mother’s] proximity to the forest is linked to her move.”

This passage from my field notes was later confirmed by a visit from three state officials, who came to Tarmilat from Ifrane to oversee the construction of my host family’s barraaka jadida. My host mother then explained to me that these officials had set a deadline for the relocation of their homestead due to its proximity to the nearby cedar forest. Reforestation is a significant part of Morocco’s environmental development goals. Increased attention to the disappearance of native cedar forests throughout the Middle Atlas region has recently focused
blame on Morocco’s rural populations, who depend on the forest as a resource for construction and fuel. Additionally, a long-standing drought and overgrazing in Morocco has led to the decimation of local ground flora in the Middle Atlas region, necessitating the use of forest flora as food for pastoral animals. According to a comprehensive report concerned with human development in Morocco,

“…rural populations, often lacking basic infrastructures, with a low quality of life and living in fragile areas, depend in their day-to-day lives on the exploitation of natural resources. The concurrence of this precarious situation with the extreme variability of climatic conditions resulted in ecosystem disturbances and environmental instability, which could in the long term, cause irreversible damage. Excessive pressure on natural resources beyond their capacity for renewal has exhausted or strongly reduced that capacity. This in turn has aggravated poverty. Such a vicious circle runs the risk of leading to situations where poverty will prevail, with resources irreparably exhausted or degraded. There is a conflict between the immediate individual (the user) and the collective interests; a conflict which has consistently been managed in adversity and which has generated another conflict between the individual who consumes and the administration which controls, protects and sanctions” (Future 2005:24).

During my fall semester abroad at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane in 2005, I had the privilege of attending a hike in the Middle Atlas environs of Zaouiat Sidi Abdessalam guided by Professor Bachir Raissouni, the Executive Director of the Center for Environmental Issues and Regional Development. Professor Raissouni continually pointed to evidence of forest grazing and exploitative timbering and explained that, as long as the needs of rural populations were not met by modern infrastructure, Morocco’s environment would suffer.

Still, it is not entirely convincing to think that this forced relocation was motivated solely by local officials’ concern for the natural environment. After all, Tarmilat is located in a protected area set aside by the state specifically for the raising of livestock. While the community is dependent on the natural environment as a resource, the above anecdote detailing the construction of a new barraaka indicates just how resourceful community members are in reusing whatever material goods they can. Instead, I find this episode revealing of the internal
power dynamics at play in the relationship between the Tarmilat community and state officials. Just beneath the surface of formal complaints, official visitations, bureaucracy and environmentally-minded development goals are the entwined tensions that characterize the relationship between informal populations and the State. On the one hand, there is evidence to suggest that Tarmilat’s existence as a village is part of a wider State initiative to settle transhumant populations and to employ their labor in a way that is connected to Morocco’s liberalized market economy. On the other hand, Tarmilat is one of countless communities throughout the world whose informality separates them from the State-sponsored benefits of citizenship, including infrastructural development and protection under the law.

As both an informal community and a community of ethnic Amazigh indigeneity, Tarmilat is part of a transnational grouping of people which Nelson Graburn refers to as the Fourth World.

“The Fourth World is the collective name for all aboriginal or native peoples whose lands fall within the national boundaries and techno-bureaucratic administrations of the countries of the First, Second, and Third Worlds. As such, they are peoples without countries of their own, peoples who are usually in the minority and without the power to direct the course of their collective lives” (Graburn 1976:1).

Suffering underrepresentation and underdevelopment, Morocco’s rural indigenous population remains cynical about efforts of the state to foster development and feels detached from the benefits of sovereignty and liberalization, culminating in a “lack of identification with the state as an institution that represents their needs and ambitions” (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:53). The efforts of King Mohammed VI, embodied in the National Initiative for Human Development, to combat poverty in rural areas “through developing infrastructure, social services, and support for income generation” (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:39) have not yet been extended to communities like Tarmilat, whose very informality criminalizes any infrastructural development in the eyes of the
state, thus rendering such development impossible. The following anecdote regarding King Mohammed VI’s Slum-Free City program, launched in 2004, further reveals the antagonistic relationship between the state and informal citizens:

“’King Mohammed VI lifted the hopes of his most impoverished subjects last year when he toured Casablanca’s sprawling slums, home to a dozen suicide bombers who had blasted targets across the city. The monarch said he was appalled at the conditions and vowed to raze the shantytowns, promising new housing for an estimated 150,000 people…. Almost 18 months later, the tin-roofed shacks and squatters’ colonies are still here. While a few families have been relocated, the most visible change is a freshly built police station that keeps a closer eye on the slums’” (Cohen and Jaidi 2006: 5, quoted from the Washington Post 4 October 2004).

The web of interactions encompassing Morocco’s efforts to liberalize and to develop the necessary infrastructure to compete in the world market include, on one level, branches of the United Nations; the World Bank, the IMF, and other international financial institutions; the leaders of Western countries and aid agencies; and on another level, Moroccan government actors; leaders of Moroccan political movements; and local, grassroots community organizations. Each of these bodies are embedded in inter- and intranational flows of power and resources (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:6). It is, perhaps, the local networks of politics and resources that are becoming increasingly essential to the nation’s economic and human development goals.

“We can see the rise of social and political spaces from the Atlas Mountains to the bidonvilles of Casablanca that are distinct from the modern nation-state. These spaces form through an intersection of international, national, regional, and local networks and interests. They take shape through the sending and receiving of funds from migrants across Morocco, the Arab world, and Europe, and links to both national and international organizations and institutions” (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:148).

The operational autonomy and relative success of these local services and political organizations “challenges the notion of national development and the capacity of the state to represent all communities” (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:148), thereby opening a frontier of possibilities for new development initiatives.
At the time of my host family’s relocation, the activities of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative and Karen Smith’s philanthropic advocacy were generating increased local attention to and, perhaps, questions regarding the legitimacy of the informal settlement of Tarmilat. This kind of attention, when directed to a rural settlement like Tarmilat, challenges Morocco’s image as a poster child of IMF and World Bank-motivated economic achievement and UN-acclaimed human development. Rather, Tarmilat is evidence of all that the Moroccan state has yet to achieve for its citizenry. Furthermore, the increasingly visible efforts of the weaving cooperative, coupled with Smith’s advocacy work, bring into question the rights of this community to have access to certain basic infrastructures, including electricity, sound housing, and running water, as well as more advanced resources, including education and health care. The ultimate status of the community is bound tightly in questions of citizenship, as many people in Tarmilat do not possess national identification cards; human rights, as Tarmilat’s informal status renders them cut-off from the most basic of resources and infrastructures; and legitimacy, as Tarmilat’s history reaches forward to encompass a third young generation and its relationship to Smith, an influential local expatriate, blossoms.

In light of these social conditions, I interpret the interactions between local officials and my host family which resulted in the relocation of their homestead to be one manifestation of a State exerting its authority over an undefined citizenry. Discussing the plight of informal populations and settlements, Hernando de Soto reflects,

“In the course of time, some of these [informal] settlements have come to be governed by an exceptional legal system which can be regarded as the authorities’ improvised response to the problem, with the result that, while residents may receive title to the land – but not ownership of the buildings – they are also subject, for a period of time, to a number of limitations on the exercise of their rights” (1989:17).

In a sense, the forced move was a very tangible way of keeping the Tarmilat community on its toes; of keeping them from getting too comfortable, too settled. The message conveyed is that
while Tarmilat exists outside the realm of formality in Morocco, it does not exist outside the reach of the law. When it comes to who has final jurisdiction over this land, the answer is clear: the land is owned by the state, and the Tarmilat community is not entitled to any sense of ownership that might result in further settlement or infrastructural development.

In the fall of 2006, the community of Tarmilat experienced another reminder that the reach of the law into their lives is decidedly one-sided. I received this email from Karen Smith on Saturday 7 October:

“Subject: K---- and A---- were beaten and robbed

Dear Sarah,

I hate to have to write you this, but I wanted to let you know that K---- and A---- were beaten and robbed on Thursday night. The whole community of Tarmilat came by my house yesterday to tell me (though I wasn’t home) on the way back from taking A--- to the hospital. Then I called A----, and W---- and I went out there.

All kinds of people were at the house; it was like someone had died. I think the whole community felt the injustice of it all and their vulnerability as Morocco's poor….

The police had not come to take the police report when we got out there, so I called them. They were out to take the report within 45 minutes. (If a foreigner calls things happen... sigh)….” (email to author, October 7, 2006).

Though I have removed many of the personal details from the email, the portion that is crucial to my point remains: despite the community’s calls for help from the police, no one had arrived in Tarmilat to take a report of the event until Smith herself made a call. Only with her intervention did this occurrence receive any attention from the proper authorities, and even this attention cannot guarantee justice or protection for Morocco’s vulnerable poor.

Tarmilat’s informality renders the community defenseless against exploitation, powerless to seek resources, and invisible to greater Morocco. As a result, Tarmilat’s relationship to the state is embedded in a steep power hierarchy which allows the state to intervene when and how it chooses, while the people of Tarmilat must comply or suffer certain consequences. If the state
decides your barraaka is too close to the forest, you must move it. Yet, when you need the assistance of state-sponsored authorities, they ignore your pleas for help. In recent times, Karen Smith’s attention to this community and the mounting success of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative have increased Tarmilat’s interaction with state officials and others involved in Ifrane’s local economy and tourist industry. As Tarmilat’s involvement grows, and others become aware of the conditions there, so does its legitimacy. Tarmilat’s growing interactions with Smith and with the local tourist economy are likely to cause increased tensions in its relationship to the state. As we will see, it is communities like Tarmilat that bear the brunt of the negative consequences of Morocco’s national efforts to liberalize and globalize.

**Marché diel Tarmilat (“Tarmilat’s Market”).**

The members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative observe the Muslim Friday Sabbath by not weaving in the *menaashij* (literally, “place of weaving”). While they do pause from their recognizably productive labor, the domestic rhythms of each household demand daily attention, and the women are not without work even on the Sabbath. Fridays in Tarmilat are for relaxed productivity, and the women seek to use Fridays to accomplish enjoyable collaborative tasks together. Housecleaning and home improvements, shopping at the marché or Ifrane’s weekly souq, washing laundry, and preparing warp threads for the coming week’s new weaving projects are examples of activities that the women would save for Fridays.

One Friday morning, a member of the weaving cooperative came to visit my host mother and me in our barraaka. My host mother was still cleaning up from that morning’s *f’toor* breakfast, and I was entertaining her youngest son. Our visitor turned to me and asked, “Wash timshee m’aana ‘illa marché liyawm? Are you going with us to the market today?” Enthusiastically I nodded, exclaiming “am-Marché fii Ifrane zwiin. The market in Ifrane is
nice.” The visitor, a woman of renowned wit and sarcasm, threw back her head and laughed; my host mother smiled knowingly at me. Once she had recovered from her fit of laughter, the woman took me by the shoulders and led me outside, pointing northeast. “Mashi marché diei Ifrane,” not the market of Ifrane, she explained, eyes gleaming. “Marché diei Tarmilat.”

Tarmilat’s market is a football field-sized landfill less than a kilometer northeast of the village. Out of sight behind a mountain ridge, it is a steep hike down into the valley where the town of Ifrane dumps its refuse. The source of much of Tarmilat’s building materials, clothing, food storage and water porting containers, and other material goods, the zabella, or dump, is literally a free market of exchange between the residents and visitors of Ifrane, who act as producers, and the community of Tarmilat – the consumer.

Seeing the zabella supplied an answer to one of my more embarrassing questions – that of where the Tarmilat families acquired so many of their material possessions and building materials, and how they could afford them while living in such impoverished conditions. Each time one of my host brothers returned to the barraaka with a new possession – for the older boys, new jackets, hats, pairs of jeans, broken cell phones, and pairs of shoes; for the younger boys, new toys, outdated and torn magazines with flashy pictures, and empty shampoo bottles – I couldn’t help but wonder where and how they had acquired it. The zabella was also the source of a fiercely competitive underground economy involving kids who gathered scrap metal and
glass bottles to trade to a man in the community, who compensated them with candy, cakes, bubble gum and other treats. (No doubt this man was cashing in the bottles at the marché in Ifrane and selling the scrap metal to a dealer, as occurs in the U.S.)

As an avid thrift-store shopper, yard-sale bargainer and dumpster-diver, trudging through the piles of refuse in the zabella in search of one useful knickknack or another was almost a familiar endeavor. While I don’t think the women in Tarmilat quite understood or believed my explanation that similar activities exist in the U.S., my enthusiastic searching conveyed to them that I both comprehended and was up-to the task. Parts of the zabella are set aside for organic refuse, and these areas are managed by a state employee who actually sets fire to them in order to keep decomposing refuse from accumulating and becoming a sanitation problem. In other areas of the zabella can be found separate piles of plastics, glass, and metals. It is here that the women spend the greatest amount of their time searching for suitable finds: large plastic bottles once containing olive oil, orange juice, or other cooking ingredients are salvaged and cleaned for porting water from the spring; glass jars retaining their lids are used for storing leftovers, salt and other spices; large metal cans once containing olives, tomato paste and other foods are used for boiling water or are flattened to use as shingles (see above). Discovering these perfectly distinguishable piles of plastic, glass, and metal materials made me realize that Ifrane’s recycling program, spearheaded by the efforts of the Center for Environmental Issues and Regional Development at Al Akhawayn University (see above), is not really working to improve Morocco’s waste management standards: although they are collected separately, the zabella is the common fate of refuse and recyclable materials alike. Yet what is a set-back in the efforts of Morocco to modernize and environmentalize its waste management system is also a resource to a rural community who salvages useful goods from among the refuse.
Dubbing the local dump “Tarmilat’s Market” shows that people in the Tarmilat community do share a sense of humor about their otherwise unlaughable living conditions. Unfortunately, the community’s acceptance of its own socioeconomic reality is not shared by broader Moroccan society, and the refuse-foraging activities of informal communities like Tarmilat are socially regarded as subhuman. In *Planet of Slums*, Mike Davis observes, “Constant intimacy with other people’s waste… is one of the most profound of social divides. Like the universal prevalence of parasites in the bodies of the poor, living in shit, as Victorians knew, truly demarcates two existential humanities” (2006:138). Disregarding the economic structural violence which forces people to resort to refuse-foraging, the State regards informal communities like Tarmilat as social parasites feeding on society’s castoffs. Behaviors like refuse-foraging are a source of the State’s sanctioned disgust with squatters; a disgust which, I believe, allows the State to treat these communities as subhuman and therefore lacking basic human rights.

On our return from the zabella, the woman who teased me earlier in the day stopped frequently to pick the leaves of certain scrubby plants. She showed me which were ground and ingested for digestive health, which were boiled in a tea to cure a headache, which were mixed into a paste to ease a toothache, and which were good to use for starting a fire in the bread oven. We all took a break at the spring to wash our hands, feet, and faces and to catch a cool drink. Like many other rural communities throughout Morocco, the rhythm of consumption in Tarmilat is still very reliant upon the available offerings of the environment and tied to the consumption habits of wealthier Moroccans. The resourcefulness which I lauded earlier is seen quite poignantly in Tarmilat’s consumption of post-consumer products. The experiences of that day
are, for me, a poignant reminder of Tarmilat’s embeddedness in the local environment, local flows of goods, and Morocco’s national experience of globalization.

Now classified by the World Bank as a lower middle income country, Morocco’s contemporary relationship with the global market was initiated during the French protectorate, which accelerated industrialization, expanded commerce, and created an urban working class and a loyal consumerist middle class (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:xii-xv). During the period of economic modernization in the 1970s, the ruling regime in Morocco concentrated on a series of domestic economic and social policies codified in a series of relatively unsuccessful five-year plans. The regime’s control of economic diversification, modernization and social investment prioritized economic growth over social development, resulting in the polarization of resources coming into Morocco and concentrating them in urban areas while rural areas went comparatively underdeveloped (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:35). “For reasons ranging from continued concentration of income to inadequate progress on social issues such as education, Morocco at the end of this period found itself heavily in debt and ill-prepared for the next development ideology – integration into the global market” (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:35).

Morocco’s efforts to modernize economically were intimately entwined with policies to preserve the stability of the regime. After King Hassan II survived two coup attempts in the 1970s, the state used economic growth to invest in the loyalty of a burgeoning middle class “that would equate its interests with state legitimacy” (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:36). Morocco became a classic case of the urban rich getting richer at the rural poor’s expense, and the economic structure of the country polarized around the urban-rural divide. By the end of the 1970s, households earning the lowest 40% of income dropped in percentage of total consumption from 18% in 1959-1960 to 12% in 1970-1971. The number of individuals living in poverty rose by 1.3 million between 1960 and 1977, including a million in rural areas. The rural poor did not benefit from continual...
Analysts attribute the absence of economic benefit in rural areas of Morocco during the 1970s to the structure of land ownership, population growth, and inadequate public investment in rural infrastructure.

In response to the end of the Cold War in the 1980s, at which point many countries in the developing world lost their global bargaining power and reliable sources of development aid, Morocco abandoned the modernization and import-substitution policies popular in the 1970s in favor of implementing an IMF-designed structural adjustment program (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:11). The increase in Morocco’s medium- and long-term debt from 19.6% of GDP in 1975 to 84% in 1983 initiated negotiations with the Club of Paris in the early 1980s, which resulted in the beginning of Morocco’s structural adjustment and market reform program, thus ending the post-Independence strategy of import-substitution domestic production. The devaluation of the Moroccan dirham, reduced customs fees, the elimination of export taxes and import restrictions, and decreased state-sponsored public sector expenditures led to an increase in Morocco’s budget deficit from 3% to 4% of the GDP by the mid-1990s (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:38). The net result was a negative effect on the living conditions of the poor, who were reliant on public sector social services for sustenance. Inconsistent levels of economic growth and the decline of public intervention over the period of the 1970s to the 1990s corresponded with high levels of poverty and unemployment, particularly in rural areas, such that “Morocco found itself at the center of debate about why successful implementation of reform did not translate into accelerated economic growth, economic diversification, or improved social indicators” (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:37). New negotiations with international financing institutions resulted in policies focused
more on the administrative and social problems that were holding Morocco back from achieving its overall development goals.

According to World Bank and IMF neo-liberal ideology, integration into the global economy was a panacea for poverty in the developing world (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:16). While Morocco has “accelerated integration into the global market in order to jump-start economic growth… free trade agreements with the European Union and the United States until now have not yielded the increase in exports and foreign currency necessary to push Morocco into a better economic position” (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:40). Despite King Mohammed VI’s new commitments to human development and political liberalization, 80% of jobs are concentrated in an Atlantic megalopolis called the Kenitra-El Jadida corridor, and the rural poor still depend on “favorable weather, availability of basic services such as electricity and roads, and investment in agriculture” to subsist (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:39). These developments are recognized in a general report called “The Future is Being Built and the Best is Possible: 50 Years of Human Development and Perspectives to 2025,” produced by Morocco’s top experts in many fields:

“With urbanization, the monetarization of exchanges, the generalization of the market economy, the relative progress in the areas of health and education, access to modern media, exposure to new ideas and models conveyed by the world, Moroccan society has adopted or developed new modes of living, work, consumption and behavior…. The rural world stayed largely excluded from these dynamics, both in terms of economic human development, and in terms of social transformation. The disparities between city and country appear more and more obvious and call for a dual social and
According to this same report, three-quarters of Morocco’s five million poor live in rural areas (Future 2005:19). Significantly, women in Morocco bear a disproportionate burden of the state’s policy failures, as “the worsening economic situation, the rural-to-urban migration, and the male out-migration are factors creating the need for women to earn cash income (Galal 1995:50).

Furthermore,

“although the Haut Commissaire de Plan contends that poverty rates have dropped since the end of the 1990s, or when they reach[ed] 19%, to approximately 14% in 2003, these statistics mask the number of people living just above the poverty line who are still in a vulnerable position, socially and economically. In 1999, this figure had reached 25% of the population” (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:142).

For informal communities like Tarmilat, even state investment in infrastructure and agriculture cannot assuage the experience of poverty and underemployment. Favorable weather and the contents of the local dump are their most reliable sources of subsistence.

In a more general critique of what he calls the ‘anti-politics machine,’ James Ferguson locates planned development projects within the existing bureaucratic hegemony of state power. For Ferguson, the “authorless strategy” of economic development functions significantly within an existing common sense – that of centralized state power and free-market capitalism (2002:401).

“The thoughts and actions of ‘development’ bureaucrats are powerfully shaped by the world of acceptable statements and utterances within which they live; and what they do and do not do is a product not only of the interests of various nations, classes, or international agencies, but also, at the same time, of a working out of this complex structure of knowledge” (Ferguson 2002:400).

According to Ferguson, who studied the implications of a ‘failed’ development project in Lesotho, the theoretical underpinnings of a planned development project must meet certain criteria: it must be “aboriginal”, such that it may be evidently transformed by incorporation into the modern world through the introduction of macro-infrastructures; it must be “agricultural”,

such that it may benefit from technological provisions and other technical improvements; it must “constitute a national economy”, such that the program supports the notions of planned nation- and sector-based economic programs; and it must be “subject to the principle of governmentality”, such that a “neutral, unitary, and effective national government” is the central agent of the development plan (Ferguson 2002:402-403). Implementing a planned development program within these criteria ensures that the success of the program perpetuates an existing hegemony – that of the benevolent state and the inevitable supremacy of global free-market capitalism. Given these conditions, Ferguson argues for the re-characterization of state-sponsored services from the products of a “‘government’ whose purpose is to serve” to “‘services’ which serve to govern” (2002:404).

Throughout his work in Lesotho, Ferguson found that “…the ‘development’ apparatus in Lesotho is not a machine for eliminating poverty that is incidentally involved with the state bureaucracy; it is a machine for reinforcing and expanding the exercise of bureaucratic state power, which incidentally takes ‘poverty’ as its point of entry – launching an intervention that may have no effect on the poverty but does in fact have other concrete effects” (2002:406).

It is from precisely this perspective that I ask you to revisit the story of Tarmilat’s original creation, the relationship between the Tarmilat community and state officials, the role of police in King Muhammed VI’s Slum-Free City planned development program, and the broader experience of Morocco’s rural population and Morocco’s national development initiatives. Moreover, it is necessary to consider what happens when planned development programs fail, or, from Ferguson’s perspective, who is served by the failure of development initiatives? The answer lies in the hegemonic framing of development: to perpetuate the power of the state and the inevitability of global capitalism. Planned development programs deal not with the lived realities of people in the developing world but with the “technical” problem of apoliticized poverty:
“By uncompromisingly reducing poverty to a technical problem, and by promising technical solutions to the sufferings of powerless and oppressed people, the hegemonic problematic of ‘development’ is the principal means through which the question of poverty is de-politicized in the world today. At the same time, by making the intentional blueprints for ‘development’ so highly visible, a ‘development’ project can end up performing extremely sensitive political operations involving the entrenchment and expansion of institutional state power almost invisibly, under cover of a neutral, technical mission to which no one can object” (Ferguson 2002:407).

As long as poverty is treated as a “technical” problem harboring “technical” solutions which affects a homogenously anonymous body of Others, planned development programs will only succeed in expanding the antagonistic surveillance and control of the state into communities struggling under the burden of hegemonic capitalism. While the work of hegemony, particularly capitalist hegemony, is to annihilate the imagination of alternate possibilities, local communities throughout the developing world are taking the project of development into their own hands. Local communities are imagining alternate possibilities to their lived realities, realities in which poverty is not a technical problem but a very tangible source of marginalization, suffering, and oppression. The Women’s Weaving Cooperative is the outcome of one such collaborative process which sought to establish a collective imagination of the desirable within the collective imagination of the possible.

The solar panel on the roof of this *baraaka* provides enough electricity to power a small TV or a small lamp. The challenges of stark living conditions in Tarmilat are met with creativity and ingenuity.
CHAPTER TWO – POWER, DEPENDENCY, AUTONOMY

A Christian’s Act of Ramadan Charity.

As the rebellious progeny of World Bank and International Monetary Fund-designed econometric, one-size-fits-all models of development, contemporary development projects are, on the whole, more dynamic, smaller in scale, and increasingly attuned to local needs. Yet there is still an industry-wide tendency to organize, hierarchize, regulate and quantify the works of development projects embedded in a network of multilateral donor organizations, state programs, NGO initiatives, and grassroots efforts. Finally, there is the daunting bureaucracy of economic endeavors in the developing world; the paperwork alone is enough to swallow many grassroots efforts without the lifeboat of, at the very least, a local NGO who will train project leaders in the preparation of the paperwork, or better, take on the task itself.

Given this model, the Women’s Weaving Cooperative occupies untamed territory in the jungle of economic development. In accordance with Tarmilat’s informal status, contact between the state and Tarmilat is adversarial in my experience; given Tarmilat’s proximity to electricity and water sources, the fact that the community is cut off from such basic infrastructures is only one indication of its antagonistic relationship to the Moroccan state (see above). While Morocco is the recipient of aid money from the World Bank, the IMF, and other donors, and has also been hailed as a poster-child of the IMF structural adjustment programs of the 1980s, rural communities like Tarmilat do not share in Morocco’s economic and infrastructural development and suffer under an unequal distribution of these resources, which flow through entrenched, post-colonial currents directly to urban centers. Despite the large number of NGOs working in Morocco to improve the living conditions of women in rural areas, Tarmilat slips under the radar. Instead, working with Tarmilat to organize and sustain a
grassroots development project is an after-school volunteer club from the local private American high school and their advisor, Karen Smith.

When Smith’s husband received a job in the computer science department at the new American university in Ifrane, Al Akhawayn University, in 1995, they decided to pack up their belongings in Kentucky and commit to expatriation in Morocco. Ordained as a reverend, Smith later became the AUI campus chaplain. In this capacity she began working with the Junior Hand-in-Hand Association; a student volunteer organization located at the private, English-instruction Ifrane School for grades K-12 and the sister organization to the Hand-in-Hand Association at the college. In the late fall of 2004, during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, Smith and the members of the Junior Hand-in-Hand Association undertook part of a regional project to assess the living conditions of local communities in need. The purpose of the survey was to establish a list of communities who would benefit from, and were interested in, receiving food donations during the fasting season. With this survey of needs in hand, Smith and a small group of students traveled the few kilometers to Tarmilat. In Smith’s words,

“We came to know the shepherds of Tarmilat as our university's Hand in Hand association surveyed the poorest communities of Ifrane in preparation for distribution of food for Ramadan. I went with the university's high school chapter of the association to assess needs in this community right outside our city. Seeing the difficult situation in which they live close-up, our students were moved to take more significant action to help them improve their living conditions” (Smith 2004:np).

From that first visit, a relationship was initiated between Smith and the students and the community at Tarmilat, one that would quickly result in a new and proactive relationship between the Women’s Weaving Cooperative and the global market of exchange. Understanding the next steps that Smith, the students, and the community of Tarmilat took towards that end is crucial, as they were formative of the cooperative and its experience of production for the global market. First, according to Smith, was the recognition that more could and should be done to improve the living conditions in Tarmilat than to drop off a food donation during Ramadan.
Smith and the students made a commitment to that end, and shared their desire to help with the community. The second step was to consult with the experts. In order to gain a better understanding of life in Tarmilat, as well as to hear ideas from the community about how improvements might be made, Smith and the Junior Hand-in-Hand Association organized a series of three community meetings in Tarmilat. The first focused on allowing the community itself to talk and to brainstorm the possible kinds of projects which might work for Tarmilat. (It is my understanding that the emphasis in these meetings was on establishing a project that would generate a reliable cash income for Tarmilat; thus, other forms of sustainable development projects that would lessen Tarmilat’s dependence on a cash economy rather than increasing it, such as a community garden, probably did not find outlet.) At the second meeting, a decision was reached about what kind of project the community would undertake with the help of Smith and the student volunteers. At the final meeting, logistics were finalized, and the Women’s Weaving Cooperative of Tarmilat was born (Smith 2004:np).

To get the cooperative off the ground, Smith and the Junior Hand-in-Hand Association agreed to purchase twenty sheep – one per family in Tarmilat – to be fattened and sold during the feasting holiday of Aid al-Kebir. The capital raised from this initial enterprise was used to purchase more sheep to be fattened and sold in the same manner, ensuring a future source of reliable income for the families in Tarmilat. The long-term project involved paying four women from the community who remembered menshij, the art of Middle Atlas weaving, to teach other interested women how to weave textiles. Smith and the Junior Hand-in-Hand Association provided the women with the raw materials they would need to start weaving and rented an unused barraaka in Tarmilat for the women to use as a menaashij, a place of weaving. They also committed to marketing and selling these textiles through networks at the university and school.
Since the beginning of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative in Tarmilat during Ramadan of 2004, Smith has, to her credit, made good on all of these commitments and more. While the student volunteers of the Junior Hand-in-Hand Association are often in the foreground of efforts surrounding the cooperative, Smith advises these efforts, maintains the balance sheet, and pulls the necessary strings. Based on my conversations with Smith concerning the Women’s Weaving Cooperative, her endeavors have included organizing fundraising efforts at the Ifrane school, AUI, and among local and state officials with whom she has contacts; advocating on behalf of the Tarmilat community in favor of gaining access to free medical services at the Azrou Centre, a clinic partially staffed by physicians who work at the infirmary at AUI; organizing excursions for exchange students and other international visitors in Ifrane to visit the community and the cooperative in Tarmilat (efforts which usually result in robust textile sales); bringing textiles from Tarmilat with her to sell to friends and associates in the U.S. on her biannual visits; mediating conflicts within the community and between the community and local officials; producing marketing materials for the cooperative, assisting in management and establishing local contacts in the tourist industry of Ifrane; navigating the bureaucracy of registering the cooperative as a business to facilitate the legal exportation of textiles; and, most recently, advocating for the construction of a schoolhouse in the community to accommodate the need for education and literacy programs. The cooperative has recently endeavored to

Smith, center right, discusses how she is choosing textiles to sell in the U.S. with cooperative members.
become independent of Smith’s philanthropic aid (see below), which she offers *pro bono*. The obvious danger of all of her efforts on behalf of both the cooperative and the community is simply that they will become increasingly reliant, perhaps even dependent, on her for the goods and services they need to subsist.

Charity has an interesting place in the history of economic and human development initiatives. As early as 1837, the Godavari Delta Mission in India targeted its missionization at the ‘untouchable’ caste of women and pauperized weavers, providing occupations in lace making in exchange for conversion to Christianity (Mies 1982:30). The early example of colonial missionization, which did contribute to the social and medical infrastructures of colonized territories, is linked to the more contemporary relationship between charity and development. In his work with Inuit in the Canadian Arctic, Nelson Graburn observes that when the prices for fox pelts fell and Inuit could no longer rely on the fur trade as a reliable source of income, a missionary founded the Sculptor’s Association in the 1950s to capitalize on the growing popularity of Inuit soapstone carvings among tourists in Canada and to provide artisans with a viable economic alternative (1976:40,48). In La Esperanza, a squatter settlement outside of Guatemala City, an American woman who became personally involved in the lives of mothers who brought their children for treatment at a local clinic “soon realized the desperate need of women for income-earning activities. Mothers checked on their children’s development month after month, but they worried about how they would keep their children healthy under such distressing [economic] conditions. Thus, the idea for an income-generating program was born” (Rosenbaum 2000:96).

There are a number of problems with development’s discourse of charity. The most obvious is that it strips developing communities of their circumstantial agency; in other words,
rather than working with communities to create a locally sustainable development initiative, charity-as-development assumes that local people are incapable of taking action towards the goal of development. The result is that donations of money and other forms of easily transportable capital are dumped on developing communities without a sustainable infrastructure with which to direct that money and capital towards developmental goals. Another problem with charity-as-development is compassion fatigue: First World donors simply become overwhelmed with the insatiable needs of developing communities, and their attention span allotted for concerns in the developing world is not well-suited to seeking sustainable, long-term solutions but rather to meeting short-term needs and then considering these problems solved (Moeller 1999:9). Charity-as-development also generates relationships of dependency between developing communities and sources of First World charity, such as that which is growing between the Women’s Weaving Cooperative and Smith.

One unassuming outcome of charity is the reduction of communities in need to a position of dependence on the donations and assistance of others. In addition to threatening the sustainability of development initiatives, relationships of dependence reinforce the power hierarchy between development workers and community members. These power relationships are inseparable from other locally socialized hierarchies which situate whites, foreigners, members of the upper class, and even aid workers in a position of power over local communities. Furthermore, charity-as-development often relies on private, transnational activities which bypass the role and responsibility of the State, simultaneously absolving it of its responsibilities to developing communities and chafing those whose power is constituted in the clientelist structures that exist throughout the swollen bureaucracies of the developing world. The social implications of these power relationships frequently result in the stifling of local opinions and
local knowledge, however inadvertently. Relationships of dependency in development initiatives threaten the sustainability of development projects and legitimize the systems of power that many of these initiatives strive to dismantle.

Speaking from her own experiences of working with artisans in Nepal, Rachel MacHenry asserts,

“The relationship between facilitator and craftspeople must be long term. Changes must evolve slowly with the full participation of and input from the craftspeople. Inevitably, an outsider is seen as an ‘expert’ rather than as a collaborator. Only through working together over time can these expectations and barriers be broken down and a more collaborative and mutually rewarding relationship develop” (2000:42).

While the Women’s Weaving Cooperative has increasingly adopted management responsibilities for the organization, their dependence on Smith for marketing, networking, and sales are indelible. Given the reality that the Women’s Weaving Cooperative has only existed since 2004, more time may be needed for the cooperative’s reliance on Smith to subside and for the relationship between Smith and the cooperative to become more collaborative than clientelist. As long as these dependencies persist, the cooperative will never be independent from the charitable handouts of Smith and her network of supportive textile purchasers, and the cooperative project is not sustainable. The key to the cooperative’s success is first to achieve the full participation of members in decision-making processes, and second to establish a more sustainable, collaborative relationship between Smith and the cooperative.

In my opinion, the appropriate place of charity in development is on the side of consumption. Where cooperatives are initiated, managed, or aided by charitably-minded people from the industrialized world, they often rely on contacts and networks of like-minded consumers to move their products and to support cooperative members.

“As an alternative to capitalist structures, artisan collectives often provide access to services not otherwise available to low-caste women and provide access for craftspeople to reach international markets. The
Fair trade and consumer solidarity networks in the U.S. contributed to the success and sustainability of UPAVIM, an artisan cooperative in La Esperenza (Rosenbaum 2000:103). While structuring development initiatives as cooperatives renders them fair-trade friendly, registered cooperatives also benefit from government assistance and loan approval that individuals would otherwise not have access to in many countries (Cohen 1998:np). Thus, structuring development initiatives as cooperatives capitalizes on the image of cooperatives as democratic economic institutions and uses this image to tap into socially conscious consumer networks in the industrialized world. In the contemporary reality of the hegemonic capitalism, consumption is about more than interaction with the global market: consumption can become a form of social action. Christine Eber describes “activist consumerism” as

“the work of university students and others concerned about social justice [which] has opened up a new market niche among people whose primary motivation for purchasing products from marginalized producers is to support these people in their struggle for social justice. When people purchase from this perspective, they are usually willing to buy whatever the group they support produces. These kind of buyers trust that they will find a use for the products and that what the products may lack in refinement, they make up for in heart” (2000:52).

Particularly in these more contemporary examples, the role of charity in a development initiative is often linked to the structure of the initiative itself, and to networks of supportive consumers in the industrialized world. More often than not, charitable development initiatives take the form of cooperatives which market their products to socially-conscious consumers in fair trade and trade solidarity networks.

The purpose of critiquing the role of charity in development initiatives is not to criticize the philanthropic efforts of development workers, nor to devalue the model of the cooperative as
an idealized working environment for the world’s underprivileged, but to raise a warning flag about the limits of charity to meet all needs. Given the place of charity in development, what becomes of the agency of local communities? How would lessening the charity component of development allow us to conceive of more sustainable development initiatives oriented to long-term transformation? What responsibilities do First World consumers have to producers in the developing world, if any, that are masked by the dehumanizing characteristics of global hegemonic capitalism? While it is outside the scope of my ability to fully analyze the relationship between charity and development in this project, I think this is a crucial aspect of the development process for anthropologists, development workers and others to explore more fully.

The Women’s Weaving Cooperative of Tarmilat, Twice.

With start-up capital from the sale of fattened sheep as well as Smith and the Junior Hand-in-Hand Association’s fundraising efforts, wool purchased from the souqs in Azrou or Mrirt, looms constructed of salvaged and natural resources, and a newly-designated communal space in which to work, the four women who remembered the art of *menshij* weaving began to teach others. A skill that had long lay dormant in Tarmilat, menshij was revived as the means by which the members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative would generate a reliable cash income for their families and the Tarmilat community.

For its first year, from the late autumn of 2004 until mid-December of 2005, the Women’s Weaving Cooperative experienced consistent growth in production, membership, recognition, and sales. The structure of the cooperative itself was modeled by Smith after a similar local development project in the Amazighi settlement of Tattouine, near the city of Midelt, where four Franciscan sisters use their contacts in Morocco’s tightly woven Christian network to market textile products made by women in the settlement (Smith 2005:1). In March
of 2005, Smith brought four women members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative, the cooperative’s manager (the son and husband of two cooperative members), and four members of the Junior Hand-in-Hand Association to meet the women weavers of Tattouine and to discuss the workings of their grassroots development project. Smith describes this encounter:

“We were moved at how the women we brought [from Tarmilat] immediately found companionship with the women working there, a sorority of struggle and hope. …The Tarmilat project manager fell right in with… their managers, learning from them tips on organization, management, and bookkeeping. We watched as the women of Tattiouine proudly unrolled and displayed the rugs they had worked on over the past two weeks. The women of Tarmilat almost visibly gained confidence as they saw what these women were doing; they were sure they could do this” (Smith 2005:1).

Following this excursion to Tattouine, the women of the weaving cooperative in Tarmilat invested greater faith in the possibilities of their development initiative. A series of simple decisions allowed the structure and functions of the cooperative to finally congeal and set. For instance, at Smith’s recommendation, the Women’s Weaving Cooperative agreed to standardize the size of the hanaabil rugs and bags they produced, thereby regulating the quantity of woolen yarn consumed in each textile. Lacking instruments of measurement, cooperative members use their bodies as tools to measure the size of their textiles: the length of a rug is three lengths of the forearm from elbow to fingertips plus the distance between the tip of the thumb and the tip of the index finger when stretched in an L-shape (called hand-length hereafter); the width of a rug is two forearm-lengths plus a hand-length. A bag is constructed from a single textile that is two forearm-lengths plus a hand-length long and one forearm-length wide: one forearm-length of textile is folded up onto the second forearm-length and sewn in place along the open sides with the fold forming the bottom of the bag, and the remaining length of the textile forms a flap enclosure that hangs over the opening of the bag.
Standardizing the size of their products also allows members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative to standardize the amount of wool each member consumes to produce one textile, the cost of producing a textile, the labor expended to produce a textile, the time required to produce a textile, and – logically – the final cost of the finished product. Early textiles of standard size were weighed, as the weight of a textile is equal to the weight of the wool used to produce it. Smith averaged these weights and multiplied this figure by the average cost of wool, which is sold by weight at the weekly souqs in Azrou and Mrirt, to determine the cost to the cooperative for producing a single textile. Sharing her strong conviction that the expenditure of time and skilled labor also deserves remuneration, Smith helped the women members of the cooperative to estimate the length of time it takes to produce a rug or a bag. Uniquely from many other craft-producing cooperatives in the developing world, the final costs of textile goods
from the Women’s Weaving Cooperative of Tarmilat includes not just material costs but also compensates the women for their time and labor.

The Women’s Weaving Cooperative is able to manage its finances in a casual manner, a factor of its small size and its locality. Membership regularly peaks at around a dozen members who all live in the Tarmilat community. In its first incarnation, the manager of the cooperative, a man widely considered the most literate person in Tarmilat on account of his elementary school-level education, was responsible for labeling each of the textile products with a masking-tape tag listing the woman’s name who created it and the standard price of 400 Moroccan dirhams (approximately US$45) for a rug or 100 Moroccan dirhams (approximately US$12) for a bag. This manager maintained a rough inventory of how many textiles were produced and sold by each member of the cooperative. The first manager of the cooperative did not collect dues; instead, the women themselves would coordinate an equal contribution for all members towards the cost of purchasing wool. The women members take turns going in pairs on trips to the souqs in Azrou or Mrirt; time-consuming, labor-intensive, and expensive excursions which are made on an as-needed basis.

Smith also maintains an inventory of the rugs and bags she collects from the cooperative to sell during events at AUI and the Ifrane School or to bring with her to the U.S. Whenever Smith sells a textile, she removes the tape tag listing the name of the artisan and the cost of the textile and places it on an inventory sheet, ensuring transparency in her accounting. She accepts both Moroccan dirhams and U.S. dollars as payment for the cooperative’s textiles, and always converts any dollars she receives to dirhams so that she can pay cooperative members cash for their sold products in a timely fashion. The women receive cash on the spot for any products sold to visitors on-site in Tarmilat. Smith also holds a small sum of money belonging to the
cooperative which was generated through fund-raising; she has used it to pay for the marketing posters and pamphlets she designed, as well as to pay the original owner of the barraaka that is now owned and used by the cooperative as a *menaashij*, a place of weaving. Given these considerations, the Women’s Weaving Cooperative began as less of an economic cooperative and more as a social organization united in an effort to generate a reliable cash income for the community. Should the cooperative grow, however, it will likely be necessary to formulate stricter bookkeeping policies and to regulate the processes of collecting dues and distributing sales proceeds.

When Smith was preparing to leave Morocco for a trip to the U.S. in the winter of 2005, she met with the women to collect rugs and bags they produced for her to sell through her personal networks in the States. She could tell that something was amiss; the women did not express the usual level of excitement inspired by Smith’s trips to the U.S., from which the women could anticipate high sales and profits. At this point in time, no one was willing to reveal to Smith what was wrong. It was not until two months later, in February 2006, that some of the women members of the weaving cooperative approached Smith in their own time and on their own terms. Cornering her at her table at Le Diamant Blanc, a restaurant popular with tourists in downtown Ifrane, a small group of representatives from the Women’s Weaving Cooperative explained that many of the women did not want to continue working under the current manager. They accused him of not dividing the profits from textile sales properly and claimed that he was paying his wife and mother, both members of the cooperative, for the sale of rugs and bags that they didn’t produce. As a result, other members of the cooperative were not being compensated for the sale of their textiles. The most extreme accusations claimed that the manager was simply
pocketing money he skimmed from the women’s profits, and that he sold rugs and bags for costs above the agreed-upon prices and pocketed the difference.

Because it was assumed, at the time, that all women in Tarmilat were illiterate, the Women’s Weaving Cooperative lacked any kind of constitutional documentation regarding how conflicts within the cooperative should be addressed. Feeling betrayed by their manager, the seceding members of the cooperative turned to the one person outside of the Tarmilat community in whom they invested great trust and respect: Smith. Taking it upon herself to meet with and collect statements from the two parties involved – seceding members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative on the one hand, and the manager, his family, and a few remaining members on the other – Smith adopted the role of mediator in addition to her responsibilities for marketing and merchandising. Throughout a series of meetings between Smith and the two parties, two things became clear: first, there was not enough hard evidence to convict the cooperative manager, who denied the women’s accusations of theft and money laundering; but, second, the shared conviction among members of the cooperative that the manager was dealing with them unfairly had resulted in a catastrophic breach of trust that could prove fatal to the young organization.

The suggested solution from the community was for Tarmilat to host two competing weaving cooperatives, one spearheaded by the seceding members of the original cooperative, and the other a continuation of the original cooperative under the same management. With both parties looking to her for resolution, Smith announced that she would continue to work with only one weaving cooperative in Tarmilat, and that she would choose – democratically – to work with the cooperative which had the highest membership.

Given the situation, this decision exhibits brilliant comprehension of local context on Smith’s part. Explicitly siding with one party over the other had the potential to cause a
permanent rift in the Tarmilat community at large, for which Smith is an important source of both economic and social capital. Siding with the manager of the original cooperative could have forced women to return to working under his management, thereby submitting to unfair treatment out of economic necessity. Siding with the seceding members of the cooperative could have resulted in the exclusion of an entire family from the Tarmilat community and from access to much-needed community resources. By declaring that she would recognize and work with only one weaving cooperative, and that she would base this decision on membership levels, Smith provided the women of Tarmilat with an opportunity to choose to organize themselves and to take the power and responsibility of managing their economic initiative on their own terms, without explicitly incriminating the former manager. They seized this opportunity with great abandon.

Together, the seceding members of the original cooperative addressed each other’s concerns about the accountability of cooperative management to members and transparency in the accounting of cooperative funds. It was agreed that the cooperative should have two co-managers, which the women more or less elected from among themselves, so that the powers and responsibilities of management were not all invested in one individual. In addition to these co-managers, the women decided that the cooperative should have a treasurer whose job it was to manage and report on cooperative funds, to collect money from members for wool purchasing, and to receive and distribute money from textile sales. The position of treasurer is filled by a young woman who recently married into the Tarmilat community from another village and who has a secondary-level education, making her not only more educated than the former manager (who was presumed the most literate person in Tarmilat), but also perfectly suited for a job that entails maintaining membership records and inventory lists.
In the end, most women from the original project ultimately chose to join this second incarnation of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative. Since this secession, new members have joined the cooperative, and much of my early summer in Tarmilat was spent crouching alongside these women, our untrained fingers fumbling over warp threads as an experienced weaver sang out our pattern counts over the din of weaving and chatting in the menaashij. As we will later see, this second Women’s Weaving Cooperative has undergone exciting expansions in membership, product style, and access to local markets after less than a year since the divisive conflict. What is crucial to understand now is the centrality of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative to Tarmilat, and to see its embeddedness in other local relationships, conflicts, and flows of reciprocity and obligation.

First, it is important to note that there is not one family in the main settlement of Tarmilat that is not connected to the cooperative by at least one woman member; for many families, multiple generations of grandmothers, mothers, and daughters weave in the Women’s Weaving Cooperative. As a result, it is impossible to separate the proceedings of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative from those of the rest of the community. As a political body in which power shifts – in which power can be gained, lost, shared, usurped, exerted, and abused – the Women’s Weaving Cooperative is a main venue through which families in Tarmilat navigate access to resources both inside and outside the settlement. The irony is that the cooperative is now entirely managed and staffed by women. In a patriarchal society such as Morocco’s, it is the women in Tarmilat who not only provide a much-needed economic resource to their families and to the community, but who also negotiate relationships of power between each other and, thus, between each other’s families within the community. When the cooperative is stable and
prosperous, even the donkeys in Tarmilat are treated generously. But when the cooperative suffers, no one is immune.

When I first arrived in Tarmilat in mid-June of 2006, I was aware that the cooperative was undergoing a transition in management and organization, and Smith had warned me that this would have ramifications at the level of social life in the community. Her hope was that the novelty of my presence would be enough to mediate the anger and distrust on the two sides. She suggested that I spend time visiting with the former manager of the cooperative, who was originally supposed to be my host-father, and that my attention to the family would inspire other members of the community to do the same. Instead, and unknowingly, Smith’s decision to arrange a new home-stay for me with one of the new co-managers of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative situated me politically on their side of the social and political rift. I was not a salve to put out the burning embers of the conflict; I was fuel.

Accompanied by two young women from Tarmilat with a gaggle of children leading in front and trailing behind, I was paraded back and forth in front of the ex-manager’s compound under the auspices of porting water from the spring. As we passed, one of the girls who spoke a few words of English and French would point at his small, isolated cluster of barraakat and whisper, “Bad. Très mal. No go. Gliss m’a-naa (stay with us). Hum mamuziyensh (they are not good [people]).” Women from the cooperative warned me not to eat food or drink tea prepared by the ex-manager’s wife, whom they claimed was an enchantress (or, less flatteringly, a witch). When I was first guided around the settlement and introduced to families, my tour conspicuously lacked a visit to the ex-manager’s family. His children did not play with the rest of Tarmilat’s youth. His wife and daughter never visited the menaashij, never came to borrow a breeka lighter or a chunk of hardened sugar broken from the cone, nor took trips to the spring
with other women from Tarmilat. The only exception was his mother, the oldest living woman in Tarmilat, who spoke only Tamazight and smelled like burnt, brittle candy. With another of her sons to help her, Ito Kabiira (Old Ito) would brave the trek from her barraaka to ours, leaning heavily on a cane to relieve pressure from her arthritic knee. She carried raw eggs in a scarf on her back, which she gave to my host mother in exchange for my massages, ace-bandage wrappings and pain-killer dispensings. In pain, gratitude, and grief, she would apologize to my host mother and kiss my head, all the while calling me bintii, daughter. With combined pity and respect, the women of the cooperative welcome visits from Ito Kabiira, who invariably carries with her finished textiles from her own loom and the looms of her daughter-in-law and granddaughter. In good faith, the Women’s Weaving Cooperative adds these textiles to their inventory and passes money to Ito Kabiira when they sell.

In response to the Women’s Weaving Cooperative’s monopoly over Tarmilat’s American, the ex-manager retaliated by tipping off the gendarmerie and police to my presence there. Within a week of my arrival in Tarmilat, men associated with Morocco’s national guard, Ifrane’s local police and other officials paroled the village and waged an onslaught of inspections, bureaucratic proceedings and interrogations. In desperate Arabic and broken French, I attempted to explain countless times that I would be living in Tarmilat for two and a half months, that I was funded by Haverford College, that I was familiar with Ifrane from having studied at AUI, that I was working alongside Karen Smith (whom they knew), and that my living arrangements in Tarmilat were made by conscious choice.
Given the existing relationship between Tarmilat and the state, detailed above, it was impossible for my interrogators to understand why a young, educated, American woman would choose to associate and live with an unregistered, unkempt, impoverished group of squatters on the outskirts of such a beautiful tourist destination such as Ifrane. Each time I declined their offers to pay personally for me to stay in one of Ifrane’s star-rated hotels, the gendarmes and officers would simply shake their heads, click their tongues in disapproval, and, handing me back my papers, grunt: “Li’briti. As you like.”

Despite his instigating, the ex-manager was never present at any of these encounters between myself, my host-family, other community members and local officials. It was always understood that he was watching from his barraaka, and when the encounters were over, the comedic woman mentioned above would turn in the direction of his compound, wag her fist, spit, and mutter curses under her breath – much to everyone else’s amusement. His silence was broken during a final visitation when he strode down the hill towards our group, grabbing my papers out of the gendarme’s hands, shaking them in his face, and yelling in impassioned Darija. The gesture was so threatening that for once I felt less safe with a person from Tarmilat than I did with the gendarmes. The ex-manager was waging a kind of custody battle, vying for his rights to me as a resource and as political leverage within the community. My host-mother and other members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative decided to present the conflict to their final arbiter – none other than Smith herself. During a meeting at her house that included the ex-manager and his wife along with my host-mother and many other members of the cooperative, it was finally agreed that it was in my best interest to stay with an active member of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative. Under Smith’s satisfactory arbitration, the custody battle for Tarmilat’s American was put to rest, and I did not receive any further surprise visits from officials in Ifrane.
While the conflict over the ex-manager’s conduct created rifts between families in Tarmilat, it also colored the early experiences of the second Women’s Weaving Cooperative. Betrayal was the original sin from which this second cooperative sprang forth, and the consequent limits of members’ trust in each other is evident in the cooperative’s proceedings. The distribution of wool purchased with cooperative funds, collected in equal amounts from each member, is a process whose structure is the direct result of the former manager’s dishonesty and whose proceedings are wrought with tension and wary distrust. On days when women travel to the souqs in Azrou or Mrirt in search of suitable wool, members of the cooperative will begin keeping a lookout for the women returning from the souq in the mid-afternoon, after the main meal of the day. The women are looking for two reasons: first, they need to know when the women return from the souq so that they can be present at the cooperative gathering when the wool is distributed. Second, they are looking to see what other purchases these women are carrying back from the souq, to be sure that personal purchases were not made with cooperative funds. The Women’s Weaving Cooperative is a haven of conspiratorial thinking, and it is snidely suggested that women traveling to the souq will claim that the price of wool was high so that they can purchase less wool and use the remaining cooperative funds to make personal purchases. As such, any personal purchase that seems out of the ordinary is subject to interrogation by members of the cooperative.

When the women return from the souq, members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative gather at the menaashij and begin unpacking the wool and inspecting its quality. The treasurer or another of the semi-literature young women in Tarmilat will begin listing every cooperative member’s name; this list will be read over again and again, like a kind of local incantation, to be sure no one’s name has been inadvertently omitted. When everyone is satisfied with the list,
each type of wool is separated into equal piles, one for every member listed. The Women’s
Weaving Cooperative purchases all natural wool which comes in shades of white, brown, gray,
and black; each member receives an equal portion from each type of wool. This separation is
approached meticulously; because of the construction of the menaashij, only three or four
women can stand comfortably with room to walk around at any given time, so these women
separate sections of woolen yarn and place them in piles on the floor of the menaashij while the
rest of the women squat along the walls and watch. Clicks of disapproval are met with an
indignant “Shnoo?! What?!”, and smaller and smaller sections of wool are shifted from pile to
pile until the three or four women working on the distribution are satisfied. At this point, other
members who have been watching from the sidelines take turns walking through the menaashij
and inspecting the piles, regulating each for equal distribution of the wool’s quality and quantity.
It is common for minor disputes to arise at this point in the distribution process, but the true in-
fighting begins when names are assigned to the piles.

Once everyone has agreed that each pile of woolen
yarn is equal and that the name of each member, present and
absent alike, has been recorded in the list for distribution, the
names are torn into individual slips of paper and placed in a
large cukot cooking pot. After indicating a pile of wool, one
co-manager will hold this cukot high and out of eyesight of
the treasurer, who stirs the slips of names and chooses one at
random to be assigned to the designated wool. Once a name
has been chosen, that slip is placed on top of the designated
pile of wool, and the co-manager and treasurer move on to
another pile. This designation process is complete when every pile of wool has a name, and thus every cooperative member has been assigned a pile of wool. Although everyone has agreed that each pile of wool is equal in quality and quantity, and although the process of assigning each pile of wool to a cooperative member is completely randomized, arguments inevitably arise throughout this part of the wool distribution process. Ranging in rancor from half-hearted squabbling to profane accusatory outbursts, these arguments are, on the one hand, part of the nature of people working together and sharing resources – but, on the other hand, also a likely outcome of the betrayal experienced by these women in the former cooperative. Such a breach of trust in a small cooperative and a small community has far reaching consequences; it will be long before all is forgiven, and even longer before all is forgotten.

The political and economic experiences of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative in Tarmilat are hardly unique. Other artisan cooperatives in the developing world exhibit similar growing pains in the form of internal conflicts and, in some instances, complete collapse. In Mexico, the proliferation of artisan cooperative in the 1950s and 1960s was sparked by a nationalist government initiative to satisfy global demand for tourist and hand-crafted goods by commoditizing Mexico’s indigenous identity. Government-founded and funded artisan cooperatives were uniformly trained by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) and Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia and generated regional hubs for the tourist craft market (Nash 1993b:146,147). However, their failure to meet the economic needs of all of Mexico’s indigenous communities led to a retaliatory rise of indigenous, grassroots artisan cooperative organizations.

“The object of all the cooperatives formed in Teotitlán since 1986 has been to gain economic, political, and cultural rights in the community, in regional artisan associations, in relation to government institutions, and in the global market as independent artisans…. Members consistently express their long-term goals as trying to help
out their families through earning income, receiving respect and reasonable wages for their work, being able to sell their textiles directly to consumers without merchant intermediaries, providing support for one another in their daily struggles, and working together to promote their work in as many places as possible” (Stephen 2005:219).

Unfortunately, these grassroots initiatives sometimes experience difficulty in competing with the original government-sponsored venues; once such cooperative, the Artisan’s Society of Santa Ana del Valle, was founded in 1987 to capture part of Teotitlán del Valle’s monopoly on the regional textile market. Not unlike the Women’s Weaving Cooperative, the Artisan’s Society has been “plagued with infighting” and has failed to gain competitive access to the international market for textile goods, a challenge which reflects in the low demand for Santa Ana textiles and resulting low capital returns (Cohen 1998:np). Other obstacles facing female artisan cooperatives in particular include male dominance of productive industry and capital, the unequal distribution of production knowledge and skills among members, illiteracy and a reliance on male interlocutors, government bureaucracy, lack of organizational skills and knowledge of the market, restricted mobility of women in public spaces, and the competitive mentality of the capitalist market (Mies 1982:162,166).

The emergence of informal women’s production and credit associations in the 1970s and 1980s was a response to the macroeconomic transformations of that era, which increased economic pressures on rural agriculturalists and increased demand for female productive labor (Tripp 1997:244). In “Participation as a Means to Community Cooperation,” B. Chetkov-Yanoov describes the attributes cooperatives as “voluntary membership, democratic decision-making or control, self-management, egalitarian distribution of earnings, and a high degree of member participation and involvement” (1986:23). Chetkov-Yanoov claims that “as a local (sponsoring) group begins to evolve… residents are attracted to attend sessions, take increasing pride in being recognized as members of the group, gain familiarity with its values and
procedures, learn how to communicate with increasing accuracy, and choose to join in an informal division of labor” (1986:31). Yair Levi explains that cooperatives are not just advantageous organizations for the improvement of living standards, but can also “help members to achieve self-fulfillment as individuals in terms of participation, initiative, decision-making and exercising influence in their work and in their communities” (1986:8). Over time, cooperatives can transform into political bodies, thus contributing to the politicization or conscientization of their members (Peiris 1997:59). According to this model, the role of the development worker is to “[move] in non-directive ways, such as asking searching questions, and waiting for suggestions to emerge out of group process. The development worker moves slowly, waiting for normal citizens (who may have little knowledge or experience) to learn how to participate in a self-help effort” (Chetkov-Yanoov 1986:32).

In Panama, the *mola*-producing cooperative, Los Productores de Molas R.L., grew out of a 1967 Peace Corps initiative with the goal to provide women with a reliable income-generating activity (Tice 1995:101). While Los Productores de Molas faces the common obstacle of gaining access to capital, the cooperative is viewed by women members as a way to engage with a local and regional economic development initiative, to contribute financially to agreed-upon projects, and to support women’s interests through involvement in a Kuna ethnic political body (Tice 1995:102). Los Productores de Molas serves as a forum for the sharing of product design ideas, practical knowledge of the market, and production skills, including how to use a sewing machine (Tice 1995:106). The success of the cooperative is credited to its reduction of the use of intermediaries, lowering production costs by purchasing raw materials in bulk from wholesale distributors, diversifying its line of products, improving product quality through the sharing of
production knowledge and skills, and increasing the value and demand for hand-sewn mola textiles (Tice 1995:114).

Based on her work with weavers in Nepal, Rachel MacHenry cites cooperatives as alternatives to the capitalist structures of production (2000:43).

“No matter how formally or loosely organized, they [cooperatives] all deal with common concerns: ensuring a fair return on work, support for members, safe working conditions, availability of pooled or purchased raw materials, and access to viable markets. They also function as a crucial link between the capitalist Western market and the local socioeconomic structures that are based on family and community ties and on ethnic affiliation or geographic location” (MacHenry 2000:29).

Beyond their economic imperatives, artisan cooperatives function as important political and social institutions in local communities. They provide a safe feminine space where the common language of the local community is spoken, and the flexibility of cooperative attendance and production policies allows women producers to still attend to their domestic and familial responsibilities (O’Brian 1994:189). Furthermore, cooperatives can serve as venues which fulfill other social needs of a community, including providing care for children and the elderly, organizing literacy and training programs, providing access to medical care, performing religious and cultural services, and serving as a source of community insurance (MacHenry 2000:31). In other words, “in addition to the improvement of material living standards, cooperatives ‘…help members to achieve self-fulfillment as individuals in terms of participation, initiative, decision-making and exercising influence in their work and in their communities’” (Stettner quoted in Levi 1986:8). Finally, the close relationship between labor and production results in increased perceptions of self-worth, confidence, and social mobility among cooperative members (MacHenry 2000:33).

Barbara Grünenfelder-Elliker calls cooperatives “total institutions” in which “culture and behavior, that is ideology and action, are at work in a development process” (1998:355).
Originally used to describe prisons and mental institutions, Erving Goffman’s concept of the “total institution” refers to “a system in which a bureaucratic staff compiles a localized collectivity to act for certain ends” and in which “there is a basic and essentially antagonist split” between that bureaucracy and the collective (Hillery 1963:785). In most applications, the term “total institution” is used to describe social institutions characterized by high levels of control in which one body, the bureaucracy, attempts to dominate the collective (Hillery 1963:789).

However, when Foucault describes the total institution of the penitentiary, he locates the power of domination in the prisoner collective itself. In “Panopticism,” Foucault describes a system of “visible and unverifiable” surveillance in which “the inmates [are] caught up in a power situation of which they themselves are the bearers” (Foucault 1995:201). Likewise, I see the members of the Women’s Weaving Collective as functioning in a collectively-policed system in which members themselves are the bearers of pressure to be productive. I do not think that Smith, for instance, acts as a bureaucratic class which enforces a production quota or which regulates the activities of the cooperative, but rather that the cooperative is situated in a local context of economic necessity and community initiative which is self-motivating and self-perpetuating.

While the concept of the total institution has traditionally been used to describe a total system of inhumane domination characteristic of penitentiaries and asylums, I do not think that Grünenfelder-Elliker is calling on this rather dark intellectual history. This model of the total institution is more applicable to Ferguson’s concept of planned development as the ‘anti-politics machine’. Rather, I think that Grünenfelder-Elliker is alluding to the unique abilities of cooperatives to act as more than economic institutions, and to be spheres for the renegotiation of local political, social and cultural realities.
Artisan cooperatives in the developing world must find a successful balance between the positive attributes of cooperative production and the challenges that arise for this mode of production in a capitalist global market. Grassroots cooperatives create safe spaces for women in which to speak indigenous languages, to promote multi-generational learning, to exercise democratic decision-making processes regarding organization and function, to seek fair prices for artisan products as well as for women’s productive labor, to allow for domestic production which enables women to fulfill their domestic responsibilities, to expand access to markets for artisan products, and to generate a local sense of community action (Eber and Rosenbaum 1993:168). As a local political body, the artisan cooperative can promote participatory development and greater achievement through collective action, the development of new sustainable organizational patterns, a shared sense of ownership and responsibility, the use of indigenous or local expertise, and freedom from external intervention and assistance (Peiris 1997:59). The remaining challenges and obstacles for artisan cooperatives include the recommitment and reprioritization of women’s time and labor, resulting domestic and community tensions, infighting, illiteracy and lack of understanding of the market, limited access to capital, government bureaucracy, exploitation by middlemen and other intermediaries, and economic and social risk (Eber and Rosenbaum 1993:169).

Cooperative members (clockwise from left) Zahara, Meriem, and Aicha laugh together as they prepare a new loom in the menaashij. Internal disputes are generally resolved by the necessity of cooperative and communal labor.
CHAPTER THREE – THE WORK OF WEAVING

Labor: Birthing and Killing a Textile in Moroccan Weaving Discourse.

Textiles in Moroccan weaving discourse are living things, birthed and killed, imbued with a soul and blessed for an afterlife. In an industry historically dominated by women laborers (Galal 1995:61), this “discourse of weaving” is a public expression of a uniquely feminine “subordinate discourse” in patriarchal Moroccan and North African society (Messick 1987:211). The process of weaving a textile in Morocco once included the associated rituals of birth, life, and death, but this feminine re-/productive discourse has dissolved throughout much of Morocco in the wake of industrialization and mechanization (Messick 1987:211).

As an art, menshij weaving is labor-intensive, time-consuming, and commands meticulous attention. The demands on the body are vast and include strength, endurance, flexibility, nimbleness in the fingers, and strained eyesight. Time spent on menshij must be scheduled around the various primary domestic responsibilities of women: folding the bedding and preparing the barraaka for day-time use in the morning, cooking the three main meals and two tea breaks of the day, preparing packed midday meals for the men before they leave for work in the fields, dressing and looking after children, washing the dishes and disposing of food scraps and sullied water, gathering and porting water from the spring back to the barraaka, laundering clothes and linens, and caring for unweaned animals are just a few of the common tasks that fall under women’s purview on a daily basis. Because the domestic responsibilities of each member of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative vary from day to day depending on the composition of her family, individual members spend different amounts of time throughout the day weaving in the menaashij. The commercialization and commoditization of crafts in the developing world has led to a reorganization of women’s domestic labor in the past two or three decades, in which
young, unmarried women and elderly women in the family care for children and the household while the family matriarch produces crafts for the market (Tice 1995:124). Given this fact, it seems that female production for the market in the developing world is associated with female reproduction, as unmarried or prepubescent women and post-menopausal women are relegated to labor in the domestic sphere. Similarly, cooperative members who have teenage daughters are able to delegate most of their domestic labor and can spend much of the day weaving, while others, like my host mother, must complete all of their tasks early in the day and can only weave for a few hours between the main midday meal and the evening tea served when the men return from the fields. In families without daughters, such as my host family, there is no one to whom the matriarch can delegate her daily responsibilities, and they can easily consume all of her waking hours.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, its demands on women’s time and physical labor, menshij weaving is also a greatly communal effort. A Moroccan textile begins with the construction of the vertical loom, the structure of which is intimately entwined with the built form of the transhumant goat-hair tent or the barraakat of Tarmilat. The frame of the vertical loom is formed by two standing posts, called uprights, which are lashed to the wooden ceiling beams of the tent or barraaka and have two to three-inch notches cut into their bases. Uprights are made of rough-hewn timber found in the local forests. The remaining structure of the loom – composed of three 2x4 wooden beams – is involved in the process of winding the warp threads.

Ideally, the process of winding warp threads, the fixed threads which run vertically on a vertical loom, involves the labor of three cooperative members. Warp winding “determines length of eventual textile and also separates two sets of warps which, on the loom, define the openings of the shed and reverse shed into which wefts will be inserted” (Messick 1987:212).
Two metal stakes, similar to the kind used in the game of horseshoe, are driven into the ground or the mud flooring of a barraaka at a distance equal to the length of the final textile. On each stake is tied a pair of twine strings marked with spit and charcoal or the makeshift green dye of crushed leaves, indicating the width of the final textile. A woman is stationed, seated or crouching, at each post, and holds a marked twine string in each hand.

A third woman holding a large ball of hemp-like twine ties an initial knot around one of the posts and then walks between them, bending at each end, winding the twine elliptically around the two posts. As this woman winds the warp threads, the seated women each slip one of their strings under the warp thread and twist it between the pair of strings. In this fashion, one woman winds the warp threads while two other women maintain separation between the warp threads. When the pairs of strings have been twisted up to the mark, indicating the width of the textile, the seated women signal that the warp winding is complete.

At this stage, three 2x4 beams, likely salvaged from the zabella, are brought to the site of the warp winding. Two women lift the warp threads from either post and hold them while a third woman inserts a beam at each end, dividing the front warp threads from the back warp threads. In this process, called beaming, one woman holds the solid beam designated the top, while a second woman stretches the warp threads until they are taught and then bounces the bottom beam, pocked with a row of evenly spaced drilled holes, up and down in the air – a process which neatens all of the warp threads and ensures that they have been separated properly.
“Stretched between the two beams, the warp is then examined for correct spacing and struck with a bamboo pole to insure evenness of tension in the threads” (Messick 1987:212). Finally, a third solid 2x4 beam is placed on top of the bottom beam, sandwiching the warp threads. With these two beams are pressed together, the top beam is rolled toward the bottom beams such that the warp threads are wound around it tightly and evenly. Wound around this beam from top to bottom, the warp threads can now be transported into the menaashij to complete the construction of a vertical loom.

In pre-industrial Morocco, the processes of warp winding and beaming were strongly associated with a weaving discourse of birth and labor. A chunk of sugar cone and a coin would be placed beside winding warp threads and then in front of a woman who recently gave birth, a ritual which intended to make the future textile “sweet” and bless it with good fortune (Messick 1987:213). Blessings were spoken over the warp threads throughout the warp winding process. These warp threads are also the feature of a ritual mimicking labor:

“A significant enactment occurs just prior to mounting the warp wrapped beams on the loom uprights. A weaver raises her skirts, straddles the warp and beams lying before her, and then walks over them. A physical anticipation of a coming ‘birth’ and a direct confrontation with the weaver/mother’s sex, this act is supposed to further increase the future aztta’s ‘fear.’ ‘Birth’ itself, referred to as such, occurs once the beams are attached to the uprights, the heddle pole is secured, and a bamboo that had been holding the two sets of warp threads apart is pulled out” (Messick 1987:213).

It is at this stage and through this ritualized birth that Moroccan textiles are said to acquire souls. As with human reproduction, the point of birth of a textile is also the point at which men and boys are exiled from the proximity of the loom, rendering the menaashij a uniquely female reproductive space.

Once in the menaashij at the site of the new loom, the top beam is unrolled and the warp threads unwound until the length of the warp threads matches the height of the loom. The top beam, with the remaining length of the warp threads still wound around it, is then lashed to the
top of the uprights forming the frame of the loom. The two bottom beams are separated so that the bottom of the warp threads can be sewn onto the notched bottom beam with strong strips of plastic, a process which maintains even tension on the warp threads and holds them in place. Finally, the two bottom beams are pressed together again, with the solid beam on top, and are lashed loosely on either side to the bottoms of the posts. When the top beam has been set to the artisan’s satisfaction, she then puts considerable weight on each end of the sandwiched bottom beams by stepping down on them to maximize the tension of the warp threads. With her foot still on one end of the bottom beams, the weaver lashes this side securely into place and then repeats this process on the other side.

Now that the rough frame of the loom has been constructed, the weaver can go to work setting the fixed-heddle rod and the bamboo shed. Both the heddle rod and shed are inserted between the warp threads, and the weaver ties alternating warp threads around them such that the threads cross above the heddle rod. At the conclusion of this process, the shed is removed and replaced above the heddle rod where alternating front and back warp threads cross; when the shed is pulled down, a space opens between the front and back warp threads, and when the shed is pulled up, the warp threads alternate front and back positions. A third rod is inserted behind the heddle rod into the ties that lash alternate warp threads to the heddle; this rod is then lashed to two posts which lean against the top frame of the loom and can be adjusted to increase or
decrease the tension of the warp threads. With the loom fully constructed, the warp threads separated, and the heddle rod and shed in place, the weaver is ready to begin weaving.

The Women’s Weaving Cooperative in Tarmilat has developed a unique weaving style which showcases alternating bands of *sambla* and *zwaaq*. The sambla is a band of monochromatic natural wool, while the zwaaq is a band of colorful woven patterns or designs. Typically in the Women’s Weaving Cooperative, the same zwaaq or set of zwaaq is repeated throughout the same textile. Seated behind her loom, facing the underside of her textile, a weaver in the *menaashij* can brainstorm possible zwaaq or designs aloud, accepting criticism and suggestions from other cooperative members, all the while weaving her initial sambla band. Drawing the shed down and holding it firmly against the heddle rod with one hand, the weaver reaches between the separated warp threads, using her hand as a place holder. Now letting go of the shed, the weaver feeds wool to the hand between the warp threads and pulls this weft thread through, letting excess hang at the edge of the textile. This process is repeated across the width of the textile. When one weft is complete, the weaver takes her *midra*, a heavy iron pounding comb, and pounds the weft forcefully into place. Pounding the weft threads with a midra is a significant part of the weaving process which determines the thickness, regularity, and quality of the textile. With one weft complete, the weaver pushes the shed up and applies pressure to the warp threads above the heddle rod with her hands, forcing alternating warp threads to move forward and backward on the loom. Separating the warp threads with one hand, the weaver takes up the remaining ends of
the last weft, left hanging at either side of the textile, and feeds them through the warp threads. When this weft is complete, she pounds it into place with her midra.

In Moroccan weaving discourse, the textile undergoes a fundamental existential transition when weft threads are woven onto the loom: the textile transforms from male to female.

“The statement made in Azrou [a city in the Middle Atlas region of Morocco, 25 km from Tarmilat] is anchored in the attitude that the object of the craft activity – wool in preparation and then the textile on the loom, the aztta – is alive. It is a being that undergoes a growth, acquired a ‘soul’ (ruh), and has a marked ‘birth’ and ‘death.’ Furthermore, the developing being is a ‘male,’ with the dominant analogy of the craft process being, in my interpretation, the relationship of mother and son. The weaver acts in relation to wool, or more precisely warp wool, as mother to son…. The key to understanding this analogy is the fact that throughout the craft process there is a consistent treatment of warp wool as a developing male. Weft wool, following a separate technical course, takes on a weaker female association” (Messick 1987:212).

Interestingly, although the textile is conceived and born as a male, it matures and dies as a female. Thus, although the initiation of the textile as an economic resource is male, the textile must become female – must be woven and cut from the loom – in order to be sold in exchange for capital for the producer, her family, and her community. The use value of wool is transformed into the exchange value of the textile, which is maximized in its female state.

Stylistically in the Women’s Weaving Cooperative, sambla bands average three to five inches in width and are followed by a zwaaq band. The earliest zwaaq woven by members of the cooperative were derived from the Amazighi tattoo designs on the faces and hands of the oldest generation of women in Tarmilat; while the practice of facial tattooing has waned in Morocco, creative design of textile patterns has expanded. Experienced cooperative members now design their own unique zwaaq patterns, but sharing of zwaaq is common. In fact, many textiles are collaborative efforts between a member who weaves the sambla bands and another member who weaves the zwaaq bands. In these cases, ownership is designated to the member whose wool was used to make the textile, despite the contribution of labor from another cooperative member.
Zwaaq patterns are regular, repetitive, and colorful geometric designs based on warp thread counts. The positive space of the zwaaq is created by using colored yarn as weft threads; the negative space is filled by using the sambla yarn as weft threads. In a zwaaq band, the color of the sambla acts as a background against which the pattern is displayed. Because dyed yarn is expensive to purchase at souqs, members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative have devised a strategy of recycling their own threadbare technicolor woven long underwear by unraveling the yarn and reusing it in the zwaaq of their textiles. Women in Tarmilat wear woolen long underwear in the winter season beneath their skirts and aprons for warmth. The pragmatic resourcefulness of recycling worn long underwear also inadvertently personalizes the textiles produced by the Women’s Weaving Cooperative; each textile is a physical manifestation of the investment of physical labor, creative design, and of personal belonging. The threads which once kept these women warm in the winter now warm the floors and décor of global consumers all year long.

When a textile is complete, the warp threads are cut against the top beam of the loom and the bottom warps are untied from the notched bottom beam. The first time I prepared to cut a textile from the loom, a member of the cooperative brought a small cup of water to me and showed me how to dab droplets of water across the warp threads where they would be cut. She prompted me to repeat an unfamiliar phrase and then showed me how to cut the warp threads with a knife against the top beam of the loom. This ritual blessing recognizes the death of a living textile in
Morocco weaving discourse, in which the “weaver both daubs water across the warps before cutting off the completed textile and utters the testimony of the faith. Removed from the loom, the textile is ‘dead.’ Both the providing of water and the saying of the testimony of faith are done for a dying Muslim” (Messick 1987:215). Cynthia J. Becker describes this ritual among the Ait Kabbash in southern Morocco: “And when a textile is finished and its warp threads are cut, it is believed to die. The textile is splashed with water, just as Muslims wash a dead person before he or she is buried, and the following expression is recited: ‘Drink, loom. You will drink tomorrow in heaven’” (2006:34). While I only witnessed this ritual blessing of the warp threads on a few rare occasions throughout the summer, another ritual celebration was much more common: a particular young daughter of a cooperative member would insist on collecting the cut warp threads of a finished textile and distributing a warp thread to every person in the menaashij. The women would then drape the cut warp threads over the crowns of their heads. The meaning and significance of this ritual was never shared with me, but it was always accompanied with celebratory revelry and joking. One possible interpretation of this warp thread ritual is that it is a simple, silly celebration of the completion of a textile. Another is that the warp thread is meant to imbue the minds of other weavers with design inspirations and new zwaaq patterns.

Cutting a textile from the loom initiates a sequence of finishing touches. The top warp threads need to be knotted and trimmed into a stylish fringe; excess trimmings are then used to add fringe to the bottom of the textile. Excess weft yarn must be trimmed from the underside of the textile. Finally, rugs will be stretched into a rectangular shape and bags will be sewn together; extra lengths of wool are braided to form shoulder straps and are sewn into place along the sides of the bags. After everyone has inspected the finished product for style and quality, it is labeled with the artisan’s name and price, folded up, and tucked into the pile of finished textiles
on the shelf in the menaashij. Rugs are completed in an average of thirty to forty weaving hours, representing a week’s work; bags can be finished in less than ten hours spread across two or three days.

Weaving on a vertical loom is physically and mentally demanding labor. Winding the warp threads requires endurance and flexibility, and constructing the looms requires the exertion of great strength. The arrangement of looms in the menaashij situates them around the perimeter of the room and as close to the walls as possible, leaving no more than eighteen inches of sitting and working space between the wall and the loom for the weaver. One has to crouch, knees bent, in order to work. During the weaving process, increased tension on the warp threads improves the quality of the textile but also demands more effort in manipulating the shed between wefts. Constant contact with wool sucks the palms of weavers’ hands dry and creates irritating welts, while the repetitive pounding motion of the midra results in blisters and calluses. The poor quality of light in the menaashij forces weavers to strain their eyes, and the counts of unfamiliar zwaaq patterns demand mental vigilance. Lacking decent ventilation, it is common for the temperature in the menaashij to exceed 100°F in the summer. Given these working conditions, what is the relationship between members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative and their labor? How do these artisans conceive of and value their labor, and how do they situate this productive labor within the scheme of their domestic responsibilities or reproductive labor?
Unfortunately I do not have a completely satisfying answer these queries. I never had the opportunity to talk explicitly with the members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative about what it means to work or to be compensated for labor. The consideration of labor in the pricing of cooperative products seems to be taken for granted. Nonetheless, the activities of various members in the cooperative provide clues as to how their productive labor is assimilated into their lives. Following Robin Anne O’Brian’s assertion that women producers in the developing world must be seen as “rational actors” who take entrepreneurial risks to meet economic needs (1994:2), I think that a rational interpretation of when and how members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative work can result in a better understanding of how they conceive of their labor. First, the domestic responsibilities of the home and childcare are always prioritized over weaving and work for the cooperative. Without the benefits of basic infrastructure, electricity, and mechanization of domestic labor, the maintenance of the household in Tarmilat is a fulltime occupation in itself, and one that is not recognized as deserving of remuneration. Domestic tasks are delegated to other women members of the family when possible, an arrangement which creates time in a cooperative member’s daily schedule to weave and work in the menaashij. Otherwise, as was stated above, weaving must wait until the members’ domestic responsibilities are fulfilled.

Second, despite the harsh and demanding working conditions of weaving in the menaashij, it struck me how much members of the cooperative actually enjoyed weaving and working together. As we will soon see, the menaashij is a unique space in Tarmilat that services a number of feminine social needs.
beyond housing the communal looms of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative. The situation of looms around the perimeter of the menaashij allows each woman to see the front of the textiles being woven by cooperative members seated across the room from her, an arrangement which facilitates the sharing of critiques, compliments, and suggestions regarding zwaaq work and color palettes. The labor required to construct a loom is communal by nature and helps to facilitate and maintain congenial relationships among cooperative members. As I suggested before, the cooperative is as much a social institution as it is an economic or labor institution, and perhaps even more so.

Third, members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative invest great pride in their final textile products. Finished rugs and bags are passed around the menaashij to a chorus of oohs and aahs, and individual artisans are known by the quality of their work and the intricacy of their original zwaaq designs. Oftentimes, however, the compliments spoken of textiles are shaded by economic implications; textiles are considered more beautiful and more valuable if it is believed that they will sell, or if it is believed that they will be attractive to American and European buyers. My opinion on textiles in the menaashij was taken as the opinion of all American consumers, and cooperative members regularly turn to Smith for suggestions on color combinations, patterns, and sizing. Still, I believe that part of the pride generated by complimenting a cooperative member’s product is linked to that woman’s conception of her own labor and work manifested in the textiles produced by her.

Ultimately, though, the question remains whether or how the women of the weaving cooperative in Tarmilat consider their weaving to be a form of labor, a form of productive work. Were I able to know this, it would help me to approach a second nagging question about the Women’s Weaving Cooperative; namely, does this initiative represent a capitalist, profit-
maximizing enterprise? Do the members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative perceive
themselves as an exploited group at the base of the hierarchized international labor force?
Undeniably, members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative of Tarmilat primarily join the
cooperaive for access to necessary cash capital. Despite the other economic, social, and
political benefits of cooperative membership, the ability to access money as a basic subsistence
need is the main motivation. In addition to integration with women’s other domestic
responsibilities, work flows in the menaashij are largely determined by individual cooperative
members’ cash needs as well as by Smith’s traveling schedule. The anticipation of a celebration,
such as a wedding or circumcision; desire for home improvements, new tools, or new modes of
transportation such as a bicycle; and the need to pay medical or dental bills are all circumstantial
motivators that result in increased production among individual cooperative members. Aside
from saving capital for short term expenses, cooperative members do not conceive of saving cash
for the long term in preparation for unanticipated costs or needs. Thus, when life’s demand for
cash capital wanes, so does textile production. The exception to this rule is when Smith
announces she will be traveling to the U.S., a trip she makes two or three times annually.
Because cooperative members can expect increased sales and therefore increased profits,
production prior to Smith’s travels increases to a frenzied pace. The Women’s Weaving
Cooperative regularly sends Smith off to America with between ten and twelve rugs and upwards
of twenty bags. So, while capital accumulation is not a long term concept, capital accumulation
in the short term is a primary motivating factor for members of the Women’s Weaving
Cooperative.

A second approach to understanding the economic nature of the Women’s Weaving
Cooperative is to consider who controls the modes of production.

“Precapitalist relations are characterized by ownership of the means
of production. For artisans this includes tools such as looms or kilns and raw materials such as cloth or thread, production for person or household use, and control over their own labor. Capitalist relations of production are characterized by lack of ownership of the means of production, the alienation of the producer from the product, and production for exchange on the market” (Tice 1995:10).

Unlike the cottage industry model or the intermediary merchant model, in which women are “invisible producers” whose labor is underreported and not recognized as productive (Clancy-Smith 1999:28), the Women’s Weaving Cooperative maintains full ownership and control over their mode and tools of production. Although Smith manages some cooperatively owned capital, the purchase of raw materials and the ownership and construction of looms is managed entirely by cooperative members. The menaashij was purchased with cooperative funds, loom use is rotated communally, wool is purchased with cooperative funds and distributed equally among members, and individual members own midra and other handheld weaving tools. Furthermore, cooperative members have the complete freedom to decide whether, when, and how much to work. Scott Cook and Leigh Binford refer to this form of non-industrial non-capitalist production as “petty commodity production”:

“…petty commodity production involves production for market exchange, and must also hold (a) that petty commodity producers (typically equated with peasants) either directly produce some of their own subsistence requirements or produce for exchange in order to acquire their subsistence, and (b) that the means of production either are owned by or are under the control of the direct producers – and that production is undertaken by an unwaged domestic labor force drawn from household membership” (1990:9).

From the perspective of who maintains control and access to the modes of production, the Women’s Weaving Cooperative of Tarmilat is not like most other capitalist enterprises, in which access to the mode and tools of production is regulated by private ownership. Furthermore, individual cooperative members’ freedom to decide how much labor they wish to invest in weaving problematizes the notion that these women are members of an exploited, invisible
international labor force. For producers like the Women’s Weaving Cooperative, capitalism’s authorless hegemony is the primary source of exploitation.

The visibility of labor is a crucial notion to explore when considering producers in the developing world within global capitalism. Cook describes the paradox of human labor as “an inalienable property of the human individual that creates alienable things” (2004:135). To this I would argue that labor itself can be treated as an alienable thing when the identity of the laborer is unknown. As Marx argued, when the individual identity of the laborer is fungible within the production process, labor alienation can occur. The value of that alienated labor reappears in the fetishization of the produced commodity. In cruder terms, commodities take on the social value which producers are denied when their identities are invisibilized. Contemporary capitalist hegemony functions to conceal the human identities of producers, particularly those in the developing world. It is the anonymity and invisibility of laborers in sweat shop factories, for example, that prevents First World consumers from realizing the exploitative and inhumane conditions of production which allow commercial entities to keep the costs of their commodities low. Labor invisibility facilitates First World consumers’ patronage of commercial entities which exploit anonymous labor in inhumane working conditions in order to maximize profits.

One counter-hegemonic response to labor invisibility is, simply, to re-visibilize producers. The concepts of visibility and individual identity are central to how Lynn M. Hart distinguishes artisans from craftworkers:

“the notion of the great, genius artist versus the anonymous producer; the notion of the uniqueness of the artistic image versus the repetition and collective nature of the craft image; the notion of reflexivity in the creative process versus the nonreflexive, nonthinking, automatic nature of craft production” (1995:139).

Smith and the Women’s Weaving Cooperative counter the capitalist hegemony of labor invisibilization by assigning credit to each member of the weaving cooperative for the textiles
she individually produces. Every completed textile is tagged with a card containing the artisan’s name, photograph, and brief biography so that the consumer can recognize the precise individual whose labor produced the textile-commodity. The visibility of the artisan-producer reveals that she has an identity, that she is a flesh-and-blood human being. When the consumer can recognize a producer’s identity, she also realizes how her consumption behavior affects the lived realities of the producer. The relationships between producers and consumers within the global market will be further explored in a later section; for now, it is important to know that the Women’s Weaving Cooperative actively associates the identities of producer-members with the textile-commodities they create.

Female labor in Tarmilat and in the Women’s Weaving Cooperative is embedded in global, national, local and personal webs of significance. Female productive labor, such as weaving, must be negotiated around the local demands of female domestic labor, which is not recognized as remunerated work in Morocco. The invisibility of female productive labor relative to male labor is expressed in a unique, feminine, subordinate discourse which conflates the labor of reproduction with the productive labor of weaving in Morocco. Although scholars argue that industrialization is causing this subordinate discourse of weaving to deteriorate, artisans like the members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative are creating new ways to visibilize their labor. In addition to maintaining ownership and control over the means of production, members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative attach condensed versions of their individual identities to the textiles they produce. The freedom of individual cooperative members to produce when and how much they wish, the control of the cooperative over the means of production, and the efforts of the cooperative to counter the capitalist hegemony of labor invisibilization indicate that the Women’s Weaving Cooperative does not constitute an entirely capitalist enterprise. Rather, the
Women’s Weaving Cooperative is a counter-hegemonic organization which acknowledges and functions within the reality of hegemonic global capitalism.

**The Dry Hammam: The Menaashij (“House of Weaving”) as a New Feminine Space.**

In Morocco, space is highly gendered. The public sphere of the street and the souq are male; the domestic sphere of the home is female. Thus, social life in Morocco is considerably segregated along lines of gender but reciprocally integrated generationally. For women, the main social scene is the home, and the main socializing body is the family. The community hammam, or public bath, is one of few exceptions to this rule. During women’s hours, public bathhouses throughout Morocco are transformed into a social space in which women can socialize freely with each other in the public-private dichotomy embodied by the public bath. The significance of the hammam is to equalize the social sphere such that all women are and can act as guests. In Tarmilat, where there is no hammam, socializing between women was formerly relegated to the domestic spaces of individual barraakat. In these social situations, the matriarch of the barraaka must act as the hostess. Moroccan social customs make large demands on the hostess, who is responsible for the comfort of her guests so much so that it effectively prevents her from being active in the socializing process. Thus, the social lives of women in Tarmilat were considerably stunted by the absence of an appropriate public space in which to meet. I interpret the social role of the menaashij to be that of the hammam, as providing a culturally appropriate feminine public space for social interaction among women in the community.

Central to the main settlement in Tarmilat, the menaashij was once a private barraaka that is now transformed into the site of productive labor for the Women’s Weaving Cooperative. Purchased with cooperative funds from a family in Tarmilat, the structure of the menaashij reflects its former use. The only entrance to the menaashij is a low-cut doorway at the far
northeast corner which faces out to a *zreeba*, or sheep corral, and to the mountains beyond. Stooping to enter, one will first encounter a pile of discarded plastic slip-on shoes and a single loom set against the northern wall. Calls of “Salaam ‘Alaykum! Peace be upon you!” and “Le bes? No problems?” rise above the din from behind the eight or nine other looms framing the tight space. The rubbing of shed rods against wool warp threads and the dull but persistent pound of midra combs against wefts provide an arrhythmic song over which the women sing, chat, share critiques, joke, and, most frequently, laugh. In the corner of the mud shelf against the far southern wall, an egg-laying hen clucks and stirs, sending up a cloud of feathers and amusing the young children sitting on the bottom beams of their mothers’ looms. An old *buurshuuwet* rag-knot rug covers the mud floor in the center of the space; in the late afternoon one has to step gingerly over and around a landscape of breathing headscarves, under which young children are napping and gaining respite from pestilent flies. With only the door, a narrow, slit-like window on the eastern wall and another wide window on the southern wall, the quality of light in the menaashij is a dusty hue and the air is heavy, damp with breath and sweat, and still.

The menaashij is the site of many activities in addition to weaving. Women who are between textile projects or who have used up all of their wool until the next trip to the souq still visit the menaashij to card raw wool and spin it into yarn. Carding is done with two wooden paddles studded with tiny nail heads, called *qarshaan*. A handful of wool is rubbed across the spikes of one *qarsh* paddle until the surface is covered; the qarshaan are then rubbed across each other under pressure, forcing the fibers of the wool to align in the spaces between the spikes. This process

![Meriem spins wool in the sunlight from the menaashij doorway.](image)
prepares the wool to be spun and removes any impurities. Carded wool is removed from the qarshaan in thin, palm-sized square sheets which are folded in preparation for spinning. Spinning is done with a single wooden spool rolled against the shin; carded sheets of wool are spun together to a uniform thickness and tautness and the yarn is then wrapped around the spool. This yarn is unwrapped from the spool and wound into a ball when all of the available carded wool has been spun. Carding and spinning wool are also popular activities among women who aren’t members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative but who visit the menaashij during their leisure hours for rest and socializing.

Wool-working is not the only motivation for spending time in the menaashij. The benefits of socializing among other women are an important aspect of how this space is used and how it operates in the Tarmilat community. The menaashij is a safe and socially designated space for women to congregate outside of their private homes but also outside the male public realm. Despite the fact that the menaashij only houses between eight and ten looms at any given time, it is common to find between twelve and fifteen women and their unmarried daughters and other children spending time in the menaashij. Cooperative members who are between textile projects still frequent the menaashij to card and spin wool or simply to interact with the other women from Tarmilat. Even non-cooperative members are welcome to seek respite from the hot summer sun inside the menaashij, where a cup of cold water fresh from the spring can always be found. Feminine activities that are deemed inappropriate for mixed-gender company find a venue in the menaashij: singing, dancing, joking, and discussing politics and feminine issues are just a few examples. Mothers and their unwed or teenage daughters tell sexually charged jokes over the heads of the younger children in the menaashij. Possible marriage matches are discussed and debated. When I first arrived in Tarmilat, women in the menaashij spent a week
or two debating whether or not I was married and teasing me about my culturally unfamiliar, liminal status as an unmarried but sexually mature young woman. Husbands and men from Tarmilat are also a popular subject of complaint and jest. Describing her interactions with village women in Morocco, Susan Schaefer Davis explains, “The lively, intelligent, joking women I knew in this all-female environment were not submissive; that was a particular role they sometimes played” (1992:115). Although spheres of socialization are gender-distinct in Morocco, they are generationally integrated (Davis 1992:116). The menaashij, like the hammam, is one such socializing space.

In addition to its feminine social role, the menaashij is a politically charged space. The work and organization of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative is contested, debated, and revised among the women who meet in this space. In such an intimate setting, the role of co-manager and treasurer dissolve and these political debates happen amongst equals. Given the history of the cooperative, discussed above, the relationship of the cooperative to its former manager and of the Tarmilat community to him and his family are also discussed. Relationships are contested and alliances shift as Tarmilat’s local politics and political economy are constituted through conversations among women in the menaashij.

Reflecting the structure’s original purpose, the menaashij is also a highly domesticated space. Morning and afternoon tea and the main midday meal are routinely prepared and cooked using ingredients purchased with cooperative funds which are stored in the menaashij. Any
member of the cooperative and her children are welcome at a meal in the menaashij on any given day. The constant presence of children in the menaashij necessitates the extension of child-rearing practices into this space. Within Tarmilat’s communal context, child-rearing is shared among adult and married women, and it is not uncommon to find a woman bathing, feeding, wet or dry nursing, rocking, or reprimanding a child that is not biologically related to her.

Furthermore, this is the first generation of children in Tarmilat to witness their mothers and other women as politically organized individuals whose economic contributions are recognized as productive and significant. Representing a new fusion between public and domestic space, the reservation of the menaashij for women and children renders it an undeniably feminine space.

As an economic, political, feminine space which defies the public-domestic dichotomy, the menaashij is fertile with social and political possibilities. Members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative have already mobilized through their work with the cooperative, and their on-going discussions about the cooperative, how it should be organized and how it should function are also political conversations. The women of the cooperative have become increasingly informed and critical of their living conditions in Tarmilat, and their activities with the cooperative have increased others’ awareness of their community and its circumstances. The presence of teenagers and children in the menaashij also means that the current generation of youth in Tarmilat is witnessing a local vanguard of female politicization and economic production.
Despite the fact that the menaashij is a significant feminine space, I do not think that the politicization of women in Tarmilat constitutes feminist politicization. The politicking and debating which occurs in the menaashij among women is not explicitly informed by feminine issues, but rather focuses on economic concerns and community politics. There is no shared sense among women in the cooperative or in the menaashij that this project is a feminist one, meant to liberate women in Tarmilat. However, these women do act as economic and political agents, roles that are not typically extended to the female sphere in patriarchal Morocco. In Tarmilat, the menaashij as a space contributes significantly to women’s ability to socialize, discuss and affect local politics, and interact in a feminized public sphere.

Cooperative members from left Aicha, Milouda, and Ito working and socializing in the menaashij.
CHAPTER FOUR - GLOBAL CONTACT.

Postcards of Us.

The second incarnation of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative of Tarmilat is characterized by increased efforts to establish a local market for cooperative textiles. With Smith’s prodding, the cooperative endeavors to relinquish some of its dependence on her marketing and sales by opening a tourist craft niche in Ifrane. New relationships with local merchants and souvenir shops have raised awareness of the women weavers in Tarmilat. However, these new capitalist relationships have also made increased demands on the treasurer and co-managers of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative to maintain a more accurate and up-to-date inventory, listing which cooperative members’ rugs and bags are held by which merchant at which shop. Another challenge is market competition from the city of Azrou, located 25 km southwest of Ifrane, which is touted in tourist guidebooks as the regional hub for Middle Atlas textile sales. The Women’s Weaving Cooperative meets these challenges with an attentive, pragmatic enthusiasm as it hopes to successfully establish a market for textile sales in Ifrane.

Working in an established network of merchants and shopkeepers in Ifrane, Smith advocated for the sale of Women’s Weaving Cooperative textiles in two popular souvenir shops in the center of town. The first, Atlas Souvenir Corner, holds a prime location on the main road leading into Ifrane from the highway and is close to a number of Ifrane’s high-end restaurants and cafés. Compared to other shops in Ifrane, Atlas Souvenir Corner is a large and long-standing...
property containing all manner of tourist souvenirs, from expensive hand-embroidered *kaftan* robes for women and *jellaba* robes for men to the most basic keychains and bumper stickers. While Atlas Souvenir Corner advertises many of its wares as handcrafted, it is clear from the level of standardization in quality and material that many of these tourist crafts are factory-produced. Nonetheless, the proprietor of Atlas Souvenir Corner is of Amazighi heritage and supports the Women’s Weaving Cooperative on the basis of this shared indigeneity. In this capitalist relationship between the shop proprietor and the Women’s Weaving Cooperative, the Amazighi identity of cooperative members acts as a source of artistic legitimacy and generates economic sympathy and support (Stephen 1993:45). One of the posters advertising the Women’s Weaving Cooperative, which Smith designed and printed, hangs near the entrance of the shop; pamphlets explaining living conditions in Tarmilat and detailing the history of the cooperative are available for tourists and shoppers. Bags produced by the cooperative are displayed alongside other woven and leather bags for sale, but cooperative rugs occupy a unique display that effectively draws shoppers’ attention to them.

Smith also arranged for the display and sale of cooperative textiles in a second souvenir shop. Far smaller than Atlas Souvenir Corner, this store is unnamed, but a sign outside advertises what is available for sale: CANDY MAPS BOOKS SOUVENIRS. Located on a road leading out of Ifrane, this shop does not benefit from its location and receives less attention from tourists in Ifrane. Inside, the Women’s Weaving Cooperative rugs and bags rest uncomfortably
between displays of books and maps, snacks and candy, sodas and cigarettes. In my experience, this shop does far more business on its sale of cigarettes, candy, snacks and beverages than it does on souvenirs and crafts. The relationship between this proprietor and the Women’s Weaving Cooperative did not last long, and the women decided to pull their textiles from his shelves.

During the summer of 2006, the co-managers of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative took the initiative to establish a relationship with a merchant in the marché, a daily covered market in Ifrane. This particular merchant is located in a section of the marché designated for the sale of cloth and textile goods, crafts, souvenir items and other tourist needs (such as travel-size containers of toothpaste and shampoo, razors, and other basic items). His stall is crowded with wood and stone carvings of camels and horses, fossils, jewelry, traditional cosmetics (like kohl eyeliner), change purses, sabers, and other popular Moroccan souvenirs. He welcomed the addition of textiles from the Women’s Weaving Cooperative.

The co-managers of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative are responsible for making regular trips to Atlas Souvenir Corner and the marché and to maintain an accurate inventory of cooperative textiles displayed in these two locations. The proprietor of Atlas Souvenir Corner takes 10% from the sale of each cooperative textile, so members agreed to increase the price of these textiles from Mdhs 450 to Mdhs 500 for rugs and from Mdhs 100 to Mdhs 110 for bags. When the proprietors of these shops sell a cooperative rug or bag, they remove the tape strip listing the artisan’s name and price and affix it to a makeshift inventory shift, just as Smith does. The co-managers collect any money from sales on their regular visits, checking that the textiles on display match what is listed on their inventory.
On one such trip, a cooperative co-manager was looking through a rack of postcards while we waited for the proprietor to retrieve his inventory. Waving a postcard in my face and laughing, she exclaimed: “Carte dielna! A postcard of us!” The postcard, called “Une femme Marocaine traditionelle,” depicted a woman in Amazighi dress in four scenes: weaving on a vertical loom, baking traditional *khoubz* bread in a *frran* oven, wearing traditional marriage dress, and riding on a donkey. While the co-managers celebrated their celebrity, I pondered the depicted anachronism of rural life in Morocco. The actions depicted on the postcard as out-dated and traditional are the everyday affairs of life for women in Tarmilat, where the lack of infrastructure forces women to labor over makeshift bread ovens, port water from the spring, and even weave traditional crafts in an attempt to engage with the global capitalist market. The bifurcation of life in developing countries like Morocco, split between the urban lifestyle and the rural lifestyle, associates urbanity with modernity and ruralness with backwardness or tradition.

These merchants and souvenir shops are marketing something other than Moroccan handicrafts – they are selling a sense of authenticity, tangible evidence of an experience that can be packaged, stowed away in a suitcase, and displayed in the homes of tourists from the industrialized world. For an object to be authentic, it must be created without the intention of economic gain; its form derived from a “sacred” or “formal” truth of the local culture (Steiner 1994:101). Under the French protectorate, crafts in Morocco were subjected to a regulated authenticity to promote export sales:

“While these works established and fixed ‘authentic’ patterns in the
form of grid diagrams of knotting patterns, legislation was promulgated setting official standards and instituting an associated state stamp, to regulate such quality features as knot density, dyes, fibers use, and to, in general, ‘guarantee the authenticity of origin, the good quality and indigenous character of Moroccan rugs’” (Messick 1987:220).

According to many craft producers in the developing world, consumers in the West are responsible for the loss of authenticity that accompanies commoditization.

“One aspect of the Western image of Africa which resonates throughout the African art collecting world is the notion that authentic Africans, and by extension authentic objects of African art, no longer exist. Like the societies themselves, contemporary art objects produced in Africa are considered inauthentic approximations of traditional forms, sullied, as it were, by the degenerative impact of Western influence” (Steiner 1994:104).

The role of intermediaries, merchants, and import-export shop owners in the industrialized world in determining authenticity and form of crafts created in the developing world deepens the dependency of artisans on first-world buyers (Williams 1976:275). However, the authenticity of an art object is not its only marketable feature: “…merchants have learned that tourists are also willing to buy ‘folk’ artisanry that does not have longstanding cultural significance” (Chibnik 2000:np). The commoditization of folk art has created a genre of “tourist art”:

“the mass-produced objects that fill the shelves of gift shops in the towns, cities, shipping terminals, and airports…. To a trained eye, the objects are obviously out of character compared with the genuine artifacts… Nevertheless, tourists buy them as mementos of their visit because they are cheap and easy to carry” (Mead 1976:296)

Mass-produced souvenir objects will sell to tourists who care less about an object’s authenticity than they do about its affordability, portability, and personal significance to their travel experience (Graburn 1976:15).

The evolution from local art to craft commodity has largely been shaped by local merchants and intermediaries who act as the liaison between craft producers and consumers. Significantly, the role of the merchant and intermediary occupies a male domain, and female craft producers and artisans are socioculturally excluded from this role in the global craft market.
Acting as a source of knowledge about external market conditions, the local merchant or intermediary “takes an active role in redefining the object’s cultural characteristics. He defines the objects according to their marketability within a larger domestic or international market. Foreign markets affect the shape, surface design, and use of colour. The dimensions of carpets and kilims made by nomadic, semi-nomadic or sedentary peoples are often not suitable for modern dwellings…. Today, proportions of newly made products are standardized to foreign households, having been dictated by the touristic consumer who is seeking a specific product” (Breu 1999:245).

Intermediaries assist local craft producers in responding to the morphological demands of the global market but, in so doing, are greatly responsible for the transformation of authentic local art into mass-produced tourist commodities. This transformation is the culmination of a relationship between artisan producers and intermediaries in which “artisans engage in different aspects of craft production and trade to reformulate global facts into local forms” (Milgram 2000:107). However, a survey of textile producers in Teotitlan del Valle reveals that artisans perceive exploitation perpetrated by intermediaries in unequal economic relationships with artisans: “The persons who earn are the intermediaries who buy from us. When they don’t pay us what our work is worth that is where they are exploiting us” (Cook 1993:72). This process of producing in the midst of cultural alteration or acculturation contorts the capitalist relationship between local producers and global consumers: perhaps local artisans who mass-produce tourist artifacts commissioned by intermediaries are in no better socioeconomic position than pieceworkers the world over (Duncan 1999:202). Discussing the role of craft intermediaries in rural Ecuador, Grünenfelder-Elliker explains:
“The Swiss Development Cooperation sees the control over craft marketing by urban ‘middlemen’ as an exploitative force from which the female artisans have to be delivered through direct access to the export market. That a wholesaler will again appropriate surplus at the retailing end, however, is taken for granted; a cultural and economic assumption of the First World which cannot be subject to change. Marketing in the First World is a ‘profession,’ while small town ‘middlemen’ in the Southern hemisphere are perceived as abusive dilettantes” (1998:195).

Thus, to attribute the degradation of handicrafts and the exploitation of artisans in the developing world to local merchants and intermediaries is to deny the embeddedness of these individuals in a global capitalist system of exchange.

The correlation between handicraft sales and tourism is well established, and regions in the developing world which can attract tourists often foster a craft industry to meet the demand for cheap, authentic souvenirs. In the Oaxaca, Mexico region, Teotitlan del Valle is an economically dominant tourist destination and a hub of craft sales (Cohen 1998:np). Teotitlan’s weavers set the standard for quality in dying, sophistication in patterns, and overall textile design; historically, this area of Oaxaca is known for its textiles (Cohen 1998:np). Local gallery owners in Teotitlan also pay area tour guides to lead tourists to their shops, thus undermining the attempts of other textile-producing communities like Santa Ana from gaining access to the souvenir market (Cohen 1998:np). In addition to dominating the local textile market, merchants and intermediaries from Teotitlan also control and restrict access to the export market for Oaxacan textiles (Cohen 1998:np). Teotitlan’s relative success in the regional textile market is not shared with the textile industry in Santa Ana, and wealth brought in from the textile trade is concentrated disproportionately in Teotitlan (Cohen 1998:np).

Similarly, the city of Azrou dominates the textile market for the Middle Atlas region in Morocco. Tourists are directed to Azrou in tour packages and guide books to find the best quality ‘traditional’ Moroccan rugs at the best prices. Merchants in Azrou also dominate the export of Moroccan textiles. Like weavers in Santa Ana, artisans in the surrounding area of
Azrou, including the Women’s Weaving Cooperative of Tarmilat, have difficulty competing with Azrou’s market dominance. The interplay of history, geography and economy are external forces which are determinate in the capitalist success of artisan commodities in the developing world.

While these relationships with local merchants and souvenir shops in Ifrane have not drastically increased sales of Women’s Weaving Cooperative textiles, Smith is working on an additional initiative: to register the cooperative at the balladia, or city hall, as a business. Traversing this bureaucratic hurdle would allow the cooperative to be recognized by the state as a business and would situate it in a network of tours and tourist shops in the Middle Atlas Region. After registering the cooperative as a business, Smith hopes to put Tarmilat literally on the map as a stop on the ‘adventure tours’ which take tourists off the beaten path on their way from Fes to Michlifen. Using her contacts in the local tourist industry, Smith hopes that tour companies will bus tourists out to Tarmilat, where meetings between tourists and women from the cooperative always result in high sales. However, due to the regulation of tourism in Morocco, tour companies refuse to work with the Women’s Weaving Cooperative until it is registered as a business with the state. Additionally, registering as a business could facilitate regular exports from the Women’s Weaving Cooperative to import-export shops in the U.S. and other countries.

During the course of my stay in Tarmilat in the summer of 2006, I accompanied representatives of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative on more than six trips to the balladia to meet with officials about registering the cooperative. The bureaucracy of registering requires that, first, every registered member of the cooperative must have a Carte Nationale, or national identification card. As not all cooperative members have a Carte Nationale, we failed to breach
the first and simplest of bureaucratic obstacles in the process of business registration in Morocco. Revisiting the antagonistic relationship between Tarmilat and the State, it is also apparent that registering the cooperative as a business would increase the legitimacy of Tarmilat as a squatter community and would tie them more directly to their settlement on government land. In the face of all of these obstacles – difficult relationships with local merchants, competition from the established textile market in Azrou, and the bureaucracy of registering as a business – the members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative remain stalwart in their endeavors to expand the scope and increase the sales of their development initiative. Textiles from the cooperative circulate in the global market like postcards, telling the condensed and sweetened life stories of the women who produce them, and linking First World consumers to producers in relations of market exchange.

**Estranged Intimacy: Relationships with Global Consumers.**

The two co-managers of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative and I made weekly trips to Azrou, 26 km from Ifrane, so that I could use the internet in a wi-fi café and so that we could do some shopping in Azrou’s large, covered marché. We would either walk or hitch a ride for the 5 km trip into Ifrane and then take a twenty-minute bus ride from Ifrane to Azrou. A popular destination for foreign tourists in Morocco, Azrou is featured in most guide books as the hub of textile sales for the Middle Atlas region, and the center of Azrou is crowded with small souvenir shops and rug bazaars. Often, after I had finished my weekly hour of emailing and reading news online, the co-managers and I would take the afternoon to walk from shop to shop, inspecting the quality, make, and design of the textiles for sale. Finding native Moroccan women interested in textiles at souvenir shops is unusual, and the co-managers took advantage of shop proprietors’
attention to tell them about the Women’s Weaving Cooperative and to inquire whether they might sell their textiles in Azrou.

Whenever we passed sun-burned, camera-laden, shorts and sandals-wearing groups of non-Moroccans in Azrou, the two co-managers would turn to me and whisper, “Wash hum merikaniin? Are they American?” Their intense curiosity about the nationality of tourists in Azrou was, no doubt, linked to their relationships with Smith and me, as well as to their experiences hosting American guests of Smith in Tarmilat. In juxtaposition with French, German, and Japanese tourists – all common in Morocco and Ifrane – members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative were quick to characterize American tourists as more generous, more friendly, and more interested in and respectful of Moroccan and Muslim customs. This preference for interacting with American tourists and consumers is ironic given the current relationship between the U.S. and the Arab/Muslim world. I believe this characterization of American tourists by members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative stems from their primary interactions with Smith and her personal associates and family members, whom she frequently brings to Tarmilat to meet the women and to shop for textiles. As compared to producers and merchants who sell souvenir crafts in the towns of Ifrane and Azrou, the women from Tarmilat are largely sheltered from the ‘Ugly American’ tourist and have developed a keen fascination with the American tourist profile they have imagined.

Interactions between cooperative members and American tourists in Tarmilat are poignant.
reminders of the vast distances that can exist between people: distances of geography, of language, of religion, of education, of class, of nationality and ethnicity, and of material possessions and resources. Each time Smith visited with guests during my summer in Tarmilat, the women swarmed over the barraaka used to host international guests and prospective buyers; dusting, sweeping, preparing atay tea and milwe bread, and laying out carpets and bags for sale. Smith’s guests are Tarmilat’s only connection to a growing network of international consumers who interact with Smith to learn about and support the cooperative. These guests are fed the finest quality atay and milwe on the most ornate and expensive – albeit humble – serving tray in Tarmilat. Outfitted with a four-poster bed and a number of floor cushions, the barraaka prepared to host Smith’s guests is arguably the shadiest and coolest in Tarmilat, while other barraakat may reach temperatures of 110°F during summer afternoons. As cooperative members fuss over seating and food service, bewildered Americans gaze in unabashed awe at their surroundings and direct questions to Smith: is it ok to take pictures? how many people live in one house? why don’t they have electricity or running water? where do these people work? where is the bathroom? Invariably, someone will jokingly or seriously complain about the lack of air conditioning or about Tarmilat’s characteristic smell, a mixture of sweat, manure, and heat.

Despite visiting these women in their homes, their workplace and their village, American and international visitors to Tarmilat seem to have trouble grasping the severity of life there. Their understanding of American relations with Morocco is limited to their tourist experiences, the purchase of authenticity. Moreover, in my experience, visitors to Tarmilat fail to connect historical economic relations between the industrialized world and the developing world to the grotesque inequality between their American standard of living and the one endured in Tarmilat. Whereas members of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative welcome Smith’s guests into a
contrived intimacy – they are hosted in someone’s private home, treated to the best food service, and allowed to ask what Moroccans would consider to be invasive questions about the women’s lives with Smith translating – the Americans, these global consumers, maintain a safe intellectual and emotional distance. Despite this estrangement, visitors who do buy rugs express excitement at being ‘involved’ in supporting a community like Tarmilat through their consumption practices. With Smith explaining how any cash income cooperative members make from textile sales allows them to obtain more nutritious food, medical and dental care, and other necessary goods and services, American consumers of cooperative textiles feel entitled to claim an intimate involvement in the lives of cooperative members. Their social action of consumption allows these women to provide food and access to health care for their families. Their purchases allow the community of Tarmilat to survive.

In one particularly intimate moment, the treasurer of the cooperative allowed an American visitor to breastfeed her infant son. The visitor had been touring Morocco in a group whose travels were coordinated by Smith and had been explaining, with Smith translating, how much she missed breastfeeding her own son in America. At this explanation, the treasurer smilingly offered her own hungry son. In Tarmilat, breastfeeding or dry nursing another woman’s child is not uncommon; children are virtually communally raised, and nursing is treated as a necessary activity of convenience. When a child’s mother is not available, another nursing woman or dry nursing is offered to tide the child over. This gesture of communality from the treasurer of the cooperative was, for the American woman, one of great intimacy and friendship. Separated by nationality, culture, language, and class, these women were now bound in a common effort to nourish a global generation of children. Still, the perception of social intimacy was largely one-sided; for the cooperative treasurer, this nursing arrangement was business as
usual, just as welcoming strange visitors into their homes and feeding them food and drink reserved for guests is par for the course of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative. Describing the relationship between lace-makers in Nepal and consumers in the industrialized world, Maria Mies laments, “Both sets of women are housewives but neither of them knows the other. Their actual and real relationship is totally obscured because they are related through the international market only” (1982:64, emphasis original).

The world-wide boom in tourism that grew from the renaissance of transportation technology after the Second World War generated an unprecedented demand for locally-produced handicrafts as souvenirs, exotic tokens to authenticate the tourist experience (Williams 1976:276). In the case of the Oaxaca region in Mexico, the commoditization of local crafts was an explicit facet of the national government’s plan for economic development:

“To capture the interest of tourists, particular features of cultural and material production were commoditized and packaged for sale by the federal government. The ideological package that was and is sold to tourists who came to states with large indigenous populations is based on a homogenized image of ‘Indian culture’ and the material remains of that culture that can be visited or purchased and taken home” (Stephen 2005:164).

While folk art generally suffers a limited domestic market, it is increasingly popular among tourists, collectors, merchants and wholesalers (Chibnik 2000:np). It is established that the accompanying increase in production of craft goods during the 1960s and 1970s resulted in increased sales to tourists and middle-to-upper class urbanites (Cook 1993:60), while production for local use steadily declined throughout this period (Nash 1993b:136). Nash observes, “With the influx of tourists, there is a growing market for artisan products, but never sufficient to meet the intensified production of artisans who are increasingly in need of cash” (1994:15). Today, the sale of crafts in the tourist market is immensely sensitive to booms and busts in the local and global tourist cycle, while craft producers are ever increasingly dependent on craft sales as a primary source of necessary income (Milgram 1999:221, see also Duncan 1999, Tice 1995).
The effect of this market on craft form is also apparent, as artisans endeavor to keep up with the whims of first-world consumers to produce desirable products for the tourist craft market (Carlsen 1993:200). In the tourist craft industry, buyers, not local tradition or ethnocultural significance, dictate the design of craft art (Cohen 1998:np, see also Breu 1999). MacHenry describes Nepalese textile design as being vulnerable to the demands and desires of Western consumers (2000:30), explaining how one cooperative textile factory began producing “pastel-colored carpets based on nineteenth-century German wallpaper designs” in order to appeal to their largest consumer base – upper-class Germans (2000:31). Warns Grünenfelder-Elliker, “The problem with craft marketing is that magic does not automatically convert high quality embroidery from the South into a highly priced, well selling consumer item in urban centers around the globe. Access to fast changing fashion designs is predicated upon levels of capital inversion and personal education which continue to elude rural artisans, male or female, because development programs contemplate ‘small business’ credit lines, not global networks, home economics and low key administrative skills, not financial expertise and marketing know-how” (1998:44).

In addition to producing handicrafts that suit the needs and desires of tourist consumers, artisans must also stylize their products to be unique among mass-produced souvenir items (Abramson 1976:257, see also Chibnik 2000). Simultaneously, artisans must meet consumer demands of authenticity and antiqueness, qualities which are defined and redefined in the perception of global consumers (Cohen 2000:130). B. H. Sandelowsky writes of craft producers in southwest Africa, “The method of marketing was described to me: ‘We try to find out what people want to buy.’ Those pieces that sell readily are recarved and those that do not sell are not repeated”
Twenty-five years later in Nepal, textile artisans explained to MacHenry, “‘Our carpet factory will produce whatever will sell’” (2000:31)

The relative economic success of artisans in the developing world is harrowingly dependent on forces outside their control, including regional and national infrastructures serving economic development and flows of people and capital. For artisans in Dupgayl, Nepal, MacHenry describes how the construction of a road dramatically increased craft sales to tourists, while also allowing artisans to experiment with new larger and more complex textile forms which would have been difficult to transport without road carriage (2000: 33). Tice asserts, “Whether craft commercialization is a sustainable income-generating strategy for impoverished indigenous women living in rural areas depends on historically changing external forces such as tourism, political and economic circumstances, and changing national and global patterns of craft consumption…. Craft commercialization must be linked to national-level plans for stimulating tourism and must include marketing strategies that are not tourist-dependent. Most important, craft commercialization efforts and planning must be integrated into wider, long-term, sustainable economic development strategies” (1995:187).

In Morocco, reliance on the tourist demand for traditional textiles is coupled with a failure on the part of the national government to generate capital incentives for industry diversification and competitiveness, and the failure to properly prepare the textile industry for production in a global market dominated by free-trade relationships with first-world consumers (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:33).

My own relationship to Tarmilat and to the Women’s Weaving Cooperative is characterized by this same tension of estranged intimacy. My experience living with a cooperative member and working alongside women in the menaashij for the summer of 2006 culminated in a relaxed familiarity. My conversational Darija advanced quickly for the first half of the summer and plateaued during the second half, such that I was able to communicate basic ideas and to understand most of the conversing, arguing and joking going on around me. At the same time, the women came to understand the limits of my comprehension and speaking and
tailored their communication to meet my abilities. I willingly engaged in as many of the common activities of daily life for women in Tarmilat as I was allowed, and occupied the strangely liminal role of guest-intern-student-daughter. My willingness was met by a guarded openness on the part of the women of the cooperative, who let me partake of most activities in a token, surface way.

I think that the distance, or estrangement, between Tarmilat and me was rooted not in myAmericanness or my limited communication abilities, but in my imminent departure. Life in Tarmilat was an experience of immersion, not dissolution. The passport I wore in a hand-sewn pouch around my neck operated like a shield that prevented my complete entrance into the Tarmilat community. No matter how authentic I strived to make my experience – limiting my eating and bathing to the resources and routines of my host family, wearing the same style of clothing, filling the same family and gender roles, speaking solely in Darija and Tamazight – the fact that I could and would leave at the end of the summer stood between myself and the people in Tarmilat. My disproportionately greater mobility and agency in a global flow of people and capital enveloped me in an impenetrable shroud. In those moments when I most missed my life in America or was most saddened by the reality of leaving Tarmilat, I retreated to reading the four sanity-preserving books I brought with me: Coelho’s The Alchemist, Gibran’s The Prophet, Hafiz’s The Gift, and Rabinow’s Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco. My narcissist inner monologue sympathized with Santiago’s impossible mission, with al-Mustafa’s imminent departure, with Hafiz’s yearning for divine company, and with Rabinow’s honest deprecation of anthropologists and Moroccans alike.

Having returned to life in American, my relationship to Tarmilat and to the Women’s Weaving Cooperative takes on a new estrangement – that of the distortion of memory, and the
hope of an unforeseen reunion. With cooperative-produced rugs covering the wooden flooring of my college-issued apartment, pictures of Tarmilat streaming as a screen-saver on my lap-top computer, and this retrospective work describing my experiences there, my relationship to Tarmilat is now little different from that conjured by other American visitors to this small village in Morocco. This kind of estranged intimacy characterizes the relationship between global consumers and developing world producers, in which the consumption behaviors of consumers sustain the livelihoods of people in the developing world. One of Smith’s most recent undertakings has been to affix a photograph and biography of cooperative artisans to the textiles they produce, so that buyers will know they are making a difference in the life of a real person by purchasing Women’s Weaving Cooperative textiles. This illusory intimacy is what drives the socially-conscious consumerism movement, and these alternative forms of trade are what sustain artisan communities throughout the developing world.

With friends (from left) Mina, Hannan holding Fedwa, Hedda, Fadaela, Milouda, myself, and Nejia holding ‘Abd ‘Ali.
The Beginning as End: A Conclusion.

And so it begins: a new discussion of the possibilities of development which addresses the existing layers of interdependence and real human linkages which are the fabric of economic globalization. Given the story of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative of Tarmilat, what can be said of the relationship between development and globalization, of non-capitalist alternatives to the New World Order, of the role of the State in development, and of the role of first-world consumers in an economic system characterized by an immediacy of human interdependence? Most importantly, what does a sustainable, non-exploitative, and socially and economically empowering development initiative look like?

First, I would argue that economic development initiatives cannot exist in denial of the global market. In the section on “Place,” I outline how the informal settlement of Tarmilat, seemingly removed from the social, political, and economic systems of Morocco, is actually deeply implicated in these systems from Tarmilat’s first conception in the 1960s. It is likely that the location of the Tarmilat settlement on government grazing land outside of Ifrane is an outcome of shared interests between local state officials and regional agribusiness capitalists. Furthermore, and despite its informality, Tarmilat exists within a steep local power structure in which the state is a largely antagonistic presence which consistently challenges the community’s rights to land and resources. One of these resources, the local landfill, ironically fulfills the community’s needs for cheap material goods as a direct result of the state’s failure to maintain an environmentally sound waste management system. The dependence of rural communities in Morocco on the environment’s natural resources, which is perceived as a threat to Morocco’s environmentally sustainable development initiatives, is a direct outcome of the unequal allocation of development funds and the bifurcation of economic development between urban
and rural regions which typifies the developing world. Rather than being external to Morocco’s national experience of development and globalization, rural communities like Tarmilat are at the forefront of the development struggle and bear the brunt of globalization’s economic burden.

Also in the section on “Place,” we see the Tarmilat community confronting the necessity of engaging with a global system of capital exchange, as well as the immediate need for income. The Women’s Weaving Cooperative of Tarmilat developed under these circumstances, with a surprisingly adept understanding of the advantages and challenges of entering the global market. Under Smith’s guidance, the Women’s Weaving Cooperative developed a product and a mode of production that suits the needs, skills, and resources of the Tarmilat community while also addressing a global market niche for handcrafted goods. Whereas the demand for cheap manufactured goods in the developing world has out-paced the demand for locally-produced crafts, there is a reciprocal demand in the industrialized world for handcrafted arts imported from the global south. This global market for handicrafts is also closely tied to the tourist market and to ebbs and flows in tourism to exoticized locations in the developing world. Thus, in order for a local craft-producing organization to be economically sustainable, it must address both the global market for crafts as well as the tourist market for craft-souvenirs. As I discussed in the section “Global Contact,” the Women’s Weaving Cooperative of Tarmilat strives to meet the demand in both market sectors but is challenged by Azrou’s dominance of the tourist and rug export market in the Middle Atlas region of Morocco. While Azrou is featured in guidebooks and on tours as a regional hub for the textile and souvenir craft markets, Tarmilat is literally off the map. It is crucial that Tarmilat be able to register as a business so that the Women’s Weaving Cooperative can begin marketing their products more aggressively, both in the tourist industry in Morocco and in import markets overseas.
The sustainability of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative of Tarmilat lies not just in its ability to engage in the global market for handicrafts, but also in its independence from Smith as a sole source of marketing, sales and promotion. While Smith has done a fantastic job of supporting these women in their economic initiative, the burden cannot rest on her to continue to make market contacts for the cooperative or to promote cooperative products in the local and global markets. At this juncture in the Women’s Weaving Cooperative’s initiative, I would recommend that Smith and the cooperative try to negotiate an externship program with the nearby Al Akhawayn University. Students in AUI’s School of Business Administration and School of Humanities and Social Sciences could have the opportunity to work with the Women’s Weaving Cooperative, a unique grassroots development project not more than five kilometers from the university. In exchange for business advising, service projects and grant writing to support the cooperative, students from AUI could earn university credit, conduct original thesis research, or include an interesting work experience on their resumé. While the Women’s Weaving Cooperative would benefit from the sustainability of a relationship with students at AUI, these elite students could supplement their classroom studies with the hands-on experience of working with a development initiative in Morocco, and Al Akhawayn University can benefit from the public-relations angle of supporting development in the surrounding region. Most importantly, it is crucial for graduates of an elite university like AUI to have a nuanced understanding of the struggles of development and the human consequences of globalization in their own country.

As for the free-market nature of globalization in Morocco, expressed in its numerous free-trade agreements with first-world countries and the unequal distribution of development funds throughout the country, we know now that free-market capitalism only exacerbates
inequalities in the developing world. Profit maximization has been achieved at human costs in the developing world since the liberalization policies of the 1970s and the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s. It is clear, from the existence of subsistence-based, informal settlements like Tarmilat all over the developing world, that the World Bank and IMF one-size-fits-all models of economic development have not worked, and that the concentration of development funding in urban hubs has left peripheral communities surviving on the metropole’s castoffs. Logically, if capitalism is an economic model of capital accumulation and capital concentration, and this model has not been working for the distribution of capital to under-resourced communities in the developing world, then non-capitalist models of economic development must be devised.

The Women’s Weaving Cooperative of Tarmilat represents one working model of non-capitalist production which acknowledges the capitalist reality of the global market. Within the Women’s Weaving Cooperative, certain material, intellectual, and social resources are shared in an unchecked flow of exchange, whereas other material objects and intellectual properties fall under private ownership. The space of the menaashij, the various materials necessary for loom construction, midra tamping combs, food and water, sitting rugs and sheepskins, criticisms and suggestions, and traditional zwaaq textile patterns are examples of the material and immaterial things which women in the cooperative share under cooperative ownership. While wool is purchased in bulk with cooperative funds, equal quantities of wool are divided among cooperative members and are considered private property, as are some midra, knives and scissors, and original zwaaq designs. These items may be used under permission of the owner but are also considered private property. Significantly, the proceeds of rug sales are not divided equally among cooperative members, but rather are attributed to the individual artisans who
produced the purchased rugs. This fluid model of private and cooperative ownership is one aspect of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative which characterizes it as a non-capitalist development initiative.

Perhaps even more significant than issues of ownership are the conditions of labor in the Women’s Weaving Cooperative. The *menaashij* working space and all of the physical materials needed to produce a rug are cooperatively owned by the Women’s Weaving Cooperative. Furthermore, the cooperative does not produce on a contract basis or directly for an intermediary, but instead controls and manages their own system of production, using the work of intermediaries to promote and sell their textile products. The decisions of when and how much to work are made on an individual basis; within the Women’s Weaving Cooperative, members work at different times, at different paces, and with varying degrees of quality and dedication. For some members, weaving with the cooperative is a necessary source of income; while for others, income from cooperative sales supplements the family’s resources. This diversity in approaches to production and the control and ownership over the modes of production exhibited by the Women’s Weaving Cooperative makes this initiative one example of a non-capitalist development project. The balance of resource distribution and ownership within the cooperative was struck on a trial-and-error basis, and I am not suggesting that the Women’s Weaving Cooperative model will be applicable for all other economic projects in the developing world. Rather, I am suggesting that researchers and development workers need to recognize that non-capitalist approaches to development can be successful and sustainable, even under a hegemonic capitalist global economy. To Margaret Thatcher’s assertion that there are no alternatives to neo-liberal economics, I would argue that there are alternatives so long as we can still imagine them.
It is along these lines that we need to reimagine the role of the State in economic development. Under the systems of neo-liberalism and structural adjustment, the State was treated as a fundamental agent of development, and the economic resources of development were supposed to trickle down to local communities from the federal level. According to this development model, the State would establish an infrastructure for development and then withdraw, leaving behind a network of private initiatives including multinationals and NGOs. Yet, in the developing world, the burden of economic and political transformation placed on the State by first-world lenders has generated more obstacles than solutions, and bureaucratically top-heavy initiatives in the private sphere have not engendered much success. Davis quotes Asaf Bayet as saying, “[NGO’s] potential for independent and democratic organization has generally been overestimated. [The] professionalization of NGOs tends to diminish the mobilizational features of grassroots activism, while it establishes a new form of clientelism” (2006:77). As is evident in Morocco, capital flows lead directly to already urbanized regions which benefited from infrastructural development during periods of colonization and external intervention. Thus, the allocation of development resources completely bypasses the rural and underdeveloped regions which are in most need. On the other hand, Tarmilat and the Women’s Weaving Cooperative’s experience of state antagonism reveals that the variable of the state cannot be completely removed from the development equation. In fact, the Women’s Weaving Cooperative will need to register and be recognized by the Moroccan state as a business before it will be able to expand its export capabilities or take full advantage of the local tourist market in the Middle Atlas region.

Rather than treating the State as a primary agent of development, I suggest that we place the State in a position of facilitation. As a facilitator of development, the State can delegate or
share the responsibilities and challenges of social and economic development with NGOs and private organizations that have as their goal to work with citizens to design development initiatives at the local level. The State should provide a framework within which these smaller, more grassroots initiatives can work towards common, nationally shared goals. While local projects can apply to the State for grant funding support or for the fulfillment of bureaucratic processes, the State itself should be concerned with macroinfrastructural development projects, such as the completion of roads and other forms of mass transit, the development of environmentally-sound waste management systems, and the allocation of necessary utilities such as water and electricity. The State should also allocate funding and set national standards for education and health services and should work to make these services available to all of its citizens. Where top-down development initiatives have failed, treating the State as a facilitator of grassroots development projects may prove to be a more effectual model.

If the State is the facilitator of development, then the people are its agents. I believe that placing agency and opportunity in the hands of citizens will lead to the proliferation of grassroots development initiatives which are tailored to the immediate needs and long-term goals of diverse local communities in the developing world. While informal settlements in the global south, like Tarmilat, share a set of certain characteristics, they also vary greatly in terms of geography, access to resources, level of politicization, demographic composition, skill level, and level of engagement with the global market, in addition to an infinite variety of other factors. It is for this reason that I recognize that while the Women’s Weaving Cooperative model may work in Tarmilat, it may not work in similar communities throughout the rest of the developing world. However, if these diverse communities were given the opportunity that Tarmilat has to design a development project to improve their standards of living, I am confident that a similar process of
trial-and-error would lead these communities to a locally-governed project that would increase their access to necessary economic and social resources. Coordinating development initiatives at this local level allows for the creation of development projects which actually address local needs and concerns within a realist framework that is designed by the State. Recognizing the agency of communities and individuals in the developing world requires that we first recognize these people as rational actors who are working in economically irrational circumstances. A decentralized network of global economic development initiatives demands the philosophy that local communities know best what their needs are and how to address them. In the case of Tarmilat, a series of community meetings with a willing facilitator culminated in the creation of the Women’s Weaving Cooperative, which in turn has increased the cash income of the community and enabled it to access greater resources and make increasing demands on the state. Currently, Smith is advocating for the construction of a schoolhouse in Tarmilat to meet the educational needs of the community’s children – a project which would not have come about without the economic and political efforts of the cooperative. Some would argue that investing this much in the agency of local communities is an economic risk, but the greater risk is allowing these communities to languish under a malfunctioning neo-liberal system of underdevelopment.

If the State and local actors were the only two variables in the development process, there would be no purpose in directing the concerns of economic development to people in the industrialized world. However, the increasing integration of global market systems implicates all consumers in the work of development. At its heart, I have argued that the Women’s Weaving Cooperative of Tarmilat is an economic development initiative that is predicated on human linkages; on the real and perceived relationships between producers and consumers in the global market. Through Smith’s efforts to identify the artisans who create the cooperative’s textiles and
to build relationships, however estranged, between first-world consumers and local producers in Tarmilat, there is a reversal of the traditional alienation from labor that occurs under the capitalist mode of production. Rather than fetishizing cooperative textiles as mere global commodities, consumers who purchase rugs and bags from the Women’s Weaving Cooperative of Tarmilat are able to associate the rug or bag they purchase with the identity of the woman member of the cooperative who produced it. In this way, a one-sided relationship is constructed between the consumer who receives a photograph and brief biography of the woman who created the purchased textile. The motivations for first-world consumers to purchase locally produced fairly traded goods can be pushed beyond the realm of charity and into a realm of human linkages.

Under a model of human linkages, consumers in the first world would be conscious of how their consumer choices directly affect flesh-and-blood producers in the developing world. The commodity fetishism that exists under capitalism can only be challenged when formerly anonymous, invisibilized producers obtain recognizable human identities and when formerly alienated consumers can comprehend how their consumer choices are actions which engender real consequences in the lives of real people. First-world consumers need to recognize the great concentration of agency in the act of consumption, and need to understand how consumer choices are responsible for constructing the lived realities of people around the globe. The conscious consumer/fair trade market is an expanding part of the global market of exchange which links consumers to producers in a humanist, rather than capitalist, way. Recognizing the identities of producers in the developing world is an effective way of combating labor alienation and commodity fetishism and reversing the negative human consequences of market integration and globalization.
Under hegemonic capitalism, the role of consumer imagination is restricted to choice, and an illusory choice at that. Projects like the Women’s Weaving Cooperative are reminders that alternatives to the neo-liberal development model are possible – especially when development workers, project facilitators, producers and consumers work together to design an initiative that recognizes the common humanity of everyone involved. A sustainable development initiative is designed and implemented at the local, community level. A successful initiative will respond to demands and changes not only in the global market but also in the needs and strengths of the local community. The sustainability of a successful development project is based on its simultaneous independence from external intervention and partnership with global consumers and facilitators. This kind of project will recognize the importance of working within global capitalist and State frameworks while also operating independently from these systems in order to address the failings of neo-liberal development models in the local community. A successful development initiative works to meet the immediate physical, economic, social, and political needs of the local community, and to maximize the production and consumption choices of the community – a process often referred to as empowerment. The Women’s Weaving Cooperative is well on its way to becoming a successful, sustainable development initiative, but there are still obstacles in its path. Should the project draw strength from the growing network of human linkages that characterize its inception, I believe these obstacles can be overcome. A successful, sustainable development initiative recognizes the dynamic humanity and agency of its actors, first and foremost. This is the best way to begin.
Glossary of Darija Terms

Amazigh: a term for Morocco’s indigenous ethnic groups; also called mshlaha or Berber (the latter of which is considered derogatory).

balladia: city hall.

barraaka: literally “shack”; refers to a building constructed out of refuse. Plural barraakat.

bidonvilles: “cities of tin” in French; refers to informal settlements constructed out of corrugated metal and other refuse.

diel: of, for, or belonging to.

hammam: public bath.


jadiid/-a: new.

ksiba: the occupation of caring for animals belonging to wealthier people on land owned by the state but allotted for livestock raising.

kurii: a large barn used to shelter goats and horses.

marché: daily covered market.

menaashij: literally “place of weaving”.

menshij: the Middle Atlas style of weaving on a vertical loom.

midra: a tamping comb used in weaving to pound weft threads into place.

miika: sheets of plastic.

mshlaha: a local term for Morocco’s indigenous ethnic groups; also called Amazigh or Berber (the latter of which is considered derogatory).

nuwella: a small barn usually reserved for donkeys.

qarsh: studded paddle used to card wool. Dual qarshaan.

sambla: in a textile, a woven horizontal band of monochromatic natural wool.

souq: weekly open-air market.

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3 Moroccan Colloquial Arabic
Tamazight: the language of indigenous Amazighi people in Morocco.

zabella: local city dump; landfill.

zreeba: corral for sheep.

zwaaq: in a textile, a woven horizontal band of colorful patterns or designs.

At work on zwaaq dielii, my zwaaq, so-called because the patterns look like the English letter “S”.
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