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Social Responsibility and Enterprise: A Case Study of Les EauxMinéralesd'Oulmes Water Company in the Oulmes Region of Morocco

Kathryn Seibold
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Social Responsibility and Enterprise: A Case Study of Les
EauxMinéralesd'Oulmes Water Company in the Oulmes Region of
Morocco

Kathryn Seibold

Academic Director: TaiebBelghazi

Project Advisor: TibariBouasla

Colby College

Global Studies and Government

Oulmes, Morocco

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Abstract:

As Morocco continues its development efforts, one of the most visible disparities that remains is the divide between urban and rural development. Oulmes, a small town of under 10,000 people in the Khemisset province, is home to Les EauxMinéralesd'Oulmes, one of the wealthiest corporations in Morocco. While this would initially seem to be a major distinction in terms of opportunity for development, the area's economy is primarily agriculturally driven, and by most indicators remains relatively poor. Les EauxMinéralesd'Oulmes has a history of strained relations with the surrounding community following a 1999 strike of local workers. This project focuses on this relationship between Les EauxMinéralesd'Oulmes and its surrounding Oulmes area by examining Les EauxMinéralesd'Oulmes' community intervention programs and conducting interviews to gain an understanding of local perceptions of the company and its policies. Through a series of interviews and discussions with both Oulmes citizens and individuals connected with Les EauxMinéralesd'Oulmes, my research considers the evolving relationship between the corporation, local officials, and residents surrounding the factory and the implications of this connection for the future of Oulmes.

Key Words: Development Studies, Industrial and Labor Relations, Public and Social Welfare

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Introduction:

Before I visited Oulmes for the first time, all I knew of it was that it was the hometown of Sidi Ali, a subsidiary water bottle brand of LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES. However, upon arriving in this small city, I was struck by the visible inequality between the company and the surrounding communities. Despite living on top of one of the most lucrative water sources in Morocco, the surrounding village remains relatively poor. The majority of the local economy is primarily agriculturally driven, and running water and electricity were only recently introduced to many of the homes in surrounding villages.

My curiosity surrounding the relationship between town and company was heightened when I learned that workers at the factory in Oulmes held a strike in 1999, and that now the majority of factory employees are sourced from other regions of Morocco. During my stay in Oulmes, I had the opportunity to visit the LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES factory as well as several businesses that were associated with the company. This made me curious about the degree to which the company's presence is accepted or integrated in the community, and I started to wonder whether residents felt that there was a positive relationship between themselves and LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES.

My initial curiosity grew into this project. I decided to examine LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES's efforts at corporate social responsibility, and how these programs are perceived by the local people. In what ways does LES EAUX

MINÉRALES D'OULMES engage with the Oulmes community, and how do the members of this community feel about such efforts? This project seeks to begin to answer this question, and to determine the implications its answer may have for the future of relations between Oulmes and LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES. I will first present some background information on LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES and the region, as well as an outline of some of the previous literature on the subject of corporate social responsibility and on the Oulmes area itself. In the presentation of my findings, I begin with my understanding of the context of this tense relationship, as informed by my interviews with two men who were employees of the LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES factory prior to the 1999 strike. To identify and understand the community outreach programs undertaken by LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES, I then present an overview of each separate social responsibility enterprise and their role within the community and their relationship with LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES. The most significant portion of my project consisted of meeting with individuals and a focus group of people from the greater Oulmes area in order to begin to define the perceptions of the company by the people that these programs are intended to benefit. As such, this will be the last section of my findings, and will be followed by my analysis of the interview and focus group data that I collected over the past three weeks.

Background Information and Literature Review:

Les EauxMineralesd'Oulmes was founded in 1933 by French businessmen on the LallaHaya source outside of Oulmes. Although it was controlled by the French until 1972,Feu AbdelkaderBensalah is credited as the founder of the company, and is hailed as a visionary leader of the company (Les EauxMinéralesd'Oulmes, 2015). Initially, only the Lalla Haya source was exploited by the company, but today Les EauxMineralesd'Oulmesexploits three natural springs in Oulmes; Lalla Haya (1934), HammouAguemguem (2009), and Sidi AliChérif (1978).Lalla Haya is the company's sparkling water source, while HammouAguemguem and Sidi Ali Chérif are still water sources (Prospectus Summary, 2013).Lalla Haya and Sidi Ali Chérifsprings are named for local saints. The Tarmilat factory produces between 1.5 and 2 million bottles of water per day, depending upon the time of year (Factory tour, March 12, 2015).Les EauxMineralesd'Oulmes is also a part of a larger holding group, Holmarcom. Holmarcom is the parent company of several large enterprises in Morocco across many industries and specializations.

In order to frame my research, it also seems prudent to examine previous literature and theory on corporate responsibility and water source ownership in Morocco. As this research is a case study of an individual company, there are a number of generalized thematic topics relevant to my subject that have received substantial attention in the past. There has been a wealth of literature on the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR), both theoretically and in practice. It is difficult to choose one

definition for corporate responsibility, as it takes many forms and often differs from company to company. A 1979 article by Archie Carroll gives a very broad understanding that “the social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time,” and defines a framework within which a corporation can take socially responsible actions, which he denotes as corporate social responsiveness (1979). Other authors have considered the motivation behind corporate responsibility programs, including legal, ethical, and social dimensions of reasoning (Panwar, Rinne, Hansen, & Juslin 2006). One major deficiency in the current literature on corporate social responsibility programs is the lack of diverse case studies. The globalized economy created “an increase in the scale of the social impact of business,” and as such it should follow that more globally-focused literature be produced on the subject (Uyan-Atay, 2014).

It is also important to consider previous research that has been undertaken specifically on LES EAUX MINÉRALES D’OULMES. The majority of previous literature on this company has to do with the hydrogeological composition of the area (Wildemeersch et.al. 2010), or the geochemical composition of the thermal waters of the sources exploited by LES EAUX MINÉRALES D’OULMES (Cidu&Bahaj 2000). I was unable to find any academic literature on the labor composition or history of the company. This situates my project in a unique position; not only does it concern a

particular case study that has not been fully addressed before, but also examines corporate social responsibility in an area of the world that has been lacking in this type of literature up to this point. My consideration of this company's community engagement will hopefully provide an interesting and useful addition to the existent literature on corporate social responsibility in the Middle East and North Africa.

Methodology:

In order to obtain the types of interviews necessary for this research project, I spent nine days in Tarmilat, the village outside of Oulmes in which Les EauxMineralesd'Oulmes' factory is located. I lived with the family of my translator, who also helped connect me with the people I hoped to interview. I chose to conduct interviews and a focus group because my project seeks to measure individual perceptions, but also requires more individualized knowledge and opinions to give it a more balanced perspective. All but one of my interviews were conducted with the help of a translator, and as such I relied very heavily on the information she provided about the responses of my interviewees. She did not translate the exact words of each interview subject, but instead listened to their answers and gave me a general summary of their thoughts in English. My focus group proved especially difficult for my translator, as it was impossible to translate each contribution when more than one participant spoke at once. When this happened, my translator gave me a very general overview of what they were discussing, but was not always specific about which people

took each side of an argument. Despite this limitation, I believe I was still able to understand the nuances of each interview, and did not lose the most important aspects of my interviewees' answers in the process of translation.

Although I was able to find a translator to help me to bridge the language gap, it should also be said that language bias definitely figured into the research I was able to produce. Although I can understand a fair amount of French, and am beginning to learn Arabic, I am not proficient enough in either of these languages to either conduct a nuanced interview or read a detailed article or source written in French or Arabic. Due to this bias inherent in my lack of fluency in another language, I was somewhat limited to English language sources, with a few exceptions where I was able to translate some French language sources.

Initially, I intended to begin my research by interviewing an official at the Tarmilat factory in order to gain a better understanding of the official views of the company in relation to its social responsibility programs prior to actually speaking with representatives of these programs. I assumed that the easiest person to speak to would be the man who had given me a tour of the factory previously, and seemed fairly comfortable speaking candidly about the factory's relationship with the local Oulmes population. However, upon arriving in Oulmes, it became clear that this interview would not come as easily as I had hoped. My translator, Yattou, reached out to the man

I wanted to speak with, Ibrahim¹, in order to schedule an interview. At first, Ibrahim agreed to meet with me, but when Yattou called him again to confirm our meeting time and place, he would not return her calls, and later refused to meet with me. We later saw Ibrahim at the Hotel des Thermes, where I was conducting an interview, and he told Yattou that he was afraid to speak to me here. As he still did not want to speak to me, I cannot do anything but infer what that might have meant, but, at least in some capacity, Ibrahim was uncomfortable speaking to me about the company he worked for in the presence of other people who were affiliated with the company.

Due to my difficulties scheduling an interview with a representative from the company, I was forced to change my original plan, and interviewed representatives of three of Les EauxMineralesd'Oulmes' social outreach programs first. I completed interviews with the director of Les EauxMineralesd'Oulmes' Al-Man Baa School, a representative of a farm owned by Holmarcom, and the director of the Hotel des Thermes. To get the perspective of a person currently affiliated with the company, I spoke with a laboratory supervisor, electrical engineer, and the source manager from LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES's factory in Tarmilat and asked them the same questions I had intended to ask Ibrahim.

My project also rests on a very heated history between the Oulmes community and the factory following the 1999 workers' strike, and as such I wanted to ensure that I

¹ Name has been changed to maintain anonymity

took a holistic vision of this past into account when writing my paper. To cover this perspective, I spoke with two former employees of the Tarmilat LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES factory who were still engaged with the company when the strike began in 1998 and 1999. One man continued to work throughout the strike and retired last year in 2014, while the other was actively involved in the strike and did not return to work at the factory after the strike's end. I chose to interview two such men because they were able to offer two different experiences with the same event, and therefore two different viewpoints from which to view the company and its relationship with the community today.

The last part of my research in Oulmes was my focus group. My original plan was to have two separate focus groups, one male and one female, of local residents of varying ages and relationships to LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES in order to get a wide array of opinions and perspectives on the company's presence in the community. However, as I was relying on my translator's relationships and contacts to put together this focus group, I could not put together the kind of focus groups I had hoped for. My translator managed to find me a group of local residents to speak with, however she was not able to meet most of my specifications regarding the diversity of the group. My focus group consisted of six men, all under the age of thirty, one of whom was not from the Oulmes area, and therefore unable to comment much on my questions for the group. I recognize that this is far from representative of the Oulmes community, as it

did not include anyone who would have been present for the workers' strike in 1999, or any women. This is a serious shortcoming in my project, but due to the time constraints of this research period, I was unable to organize further discussions or meetings to account for this deficit.

Unfortunately, this same gender bias figures heavily into almost all of my data. All but one of the people that I interviewed were men (the only woman I spoke to was the director of Hotel des Thermes), because the vast majority of the people who work at the LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES factory are men. According to an estimate given by one of my interviewees, only about eight women currently work in the factory (Said, interview, April 20, 2015). Due to the male-dominated nature of the company I am studying, it would have been statistically difficult to find a female employee to speak with, especially due to my dependence upon my translator's connections and friendships to find interview subjects. It is important to acknowledge that the opinions expressed by my interviewees overwhelmingly come from a male experience and perspective, and that due to my time constraints and lack of language skills I was unable to arrange a more diverse and representative group of community members and employees to participate in my project.

I had also planned to conduct one final interview with Miriam Ben Salah Choukroun, the president of LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES and the Confederation Generale des Entreprises Marocain. I thought that she or a member of her

staff would have been able to contribute to my project and confirm my knowledge of the official company policy on social responsibility. However, the short amount of time in which I could conduct interviews proved to be limiting and prevented me from arranging this interview. After my stay in Oulmes, I traveled to Casablanca, and visited the CGEM in hopes of meeting someone that could put me in contact with Ms. Ben Salah after my internet searches yielded no contact information. I met a woman at the CGEM who gave me the email address of Ms. Ben Salah's personal assistant, and asked that I email this woman to arrange a time for a meeting of some kind. However, after I sent this email I received no reply as to when I would be able to get an interview, and ran out of time in which I would have been able to include such an interview in this project. While this interview would have been an excellent way to round out my collected data, I do not think that its absence in any way harms my findings or restricts my conclusions.

Presentation of Findings:

I have decided to divide my findings into categories based upon subject matter, rather than dividing them by interview. I will begin with the history of the 1999 workers' strike at the Tarmilat factory as related to me through two interviews with employees of differing involvement in the movement. I will then present a profile of the community engagement programs that LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES provides to the community, and an analysis of their place and role in the community according to the information I obtained by interviewing the people in charge of these enterprises. Finally, this paper will consider local Oulmes residents' perceptions of LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES and how these views may or may not have been impacted by LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES's efforts to engage with the community.

Historical Context of Community Relations:

As was stated earlier in this paper, it is difficult to find an official history of the 1999 workers' strike in Oulmes. Therefore, my understanding and the basis of this paper's presentation of the strike is defined largely by the two interviews I had with former employees of the LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES factory. One man I spoke with, Said², worked at the factory during the time of the strike, but ultimately broke from the strike movement and continued to work in the same position once the strike had ended. The second man I interviewed, Omar³, participated in the strike and

² Name has been changed to maintain anonymity

³ Name has been changed to maintain anonymity

decided not to return to work once it ended. Given these two testimonies, I will present each side of the events of 1999, and try to discern a clear understanding of the actual details of the workers strike.

The way that Said tells the story, the strike began in 1997 or 1998. At this point, the strike was primarily lobbying for the rights of workers rather than trying to stop the factory's operations. The main demands of the workers were an increase in pay, payment for housing, and transportation to work. The strike began to escalate in 1999 when the members of the strike decided to stop working for about an hour each day in protest, and eventually this escalation is what caused Said to separate himself from the movement. He said that officials at the factory had agreed to meet the demands of the workers one at a time, but that the people involved with the strike were not willing to wait for these demands to be met, and before a timeframe could be established for these rights to take effect, they began to prevent people from going to work. In order to prevent workers from going into the factory, strike members set up a tent of some type in front of the factory door so nobody could get in. Said also described some of the abuse that he and other workers who refused to take part in the strike faced during this time period. In the middle of the night, a group of workers tried to set his home on fire and succeeded in burning his barn to the ground. He knew of other people who were intimidated in other ways or had cars vandalized by participants of the strike.

During this time, the Tarmilat factory was shut down for about three months. Ultimately, LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES got the police involved in order to reopen the factory by telling them that a large shipment of water was about to face its expiration date. In order to prevent LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES's supply from going to waste, the police burned the tent to the ground, effectively reopening the factory for business. For some time after the factory reopened, police also set up roadblocks to assist the company in getting shipments of water out. The main leaders of the strike were also sent to prison for short terms of about four or five months. The officials at the factory gave workers a deadline of two months to return to work if they so wished, and according to Said about one hundred employees went back. Over two hundred decided to stay out until the leaders were released from prison, and in doing so missed the two month deadline and were unable to return to their previous positions.

Said said that for a while after the strike ended, the operations at the factory were simpler, and that the company slowly began to bring in workers from another plant in Casablanca. Over time, he also started to notice that fewer and fewer people working at the company were from Oulmes. He cited the advancement of technology as another cause of there being fewer workers from Oulmes at the factory; new machines for five liter bottles of water can produce 30,000 bottles in one hour, and the company now has 9 machines. Said remains hopeful for the future of the company though, and says that

he knows that the company has begun to hire young men from the Oulmes area again, as the memory of the strike begins to fade and older workers from the region begin to retire (Said, Interview, April 20, 2015).

Omar's vision of the strike differs in several important ways from Said's version of this period of time. Before the strike, Omar was a machine operator at the Tarmilat factory. He was involved in the strike from the beginning, and says that the strike began in response to a desire for higher wages. The way he saw it, the company was making more and more money, but the employees were still being paid very little, so he and the other workers wanted the company to pay them more for their contributions to the company's success. He said that the workers arranged a meeting with officials from the factory in order to present their demands, but that nothing came of this meeting. According to Omar, the strike initially consisted of workers arriving for work but not operating the machines in order to halt production. He says that after this, the factory brought in the police, who hit the workers who refused to work and asked them to leave the factory.

Omar's timeline is the same as Said's; the factory stopped working for three months, and once the police got involved and the factory reopened, the workers were given a two month grace period to return to work. According to him, 208 people left their positions at the factory following the strike, including himself. He said he was afraid to return because he was afraid he would go to prison, as he had been a fairly

important member of the movement. He was also dissatisfied with the company's response to the workers' demands, and as such felt no desire to return. Like Said, Omar also observed the shift in the composition of the LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES factory workforce following the strike. By his estimation, only about fifteen percent of the factory's workers came from the Oulmes area following the strike, and the rest were brought in from other areas. He was also under the impression that these workers from other areas received cars and houses in order to attract them to the positions in the factory (Omar, Interview, April 19, 2015).

Without having a professional account of the events or an official company discourse present in my findings, it is impossible to say that either of these is the entire truth of the events of the 1999 workers' strike in Oulmes. However, it is possible to synthesize these two stories and allow that these overlaps are more than likely quite close to reality. Both Said and Omar agreed that the fundamental demand of the strike was an increase in wages for workers, as they were inconsistently low when compared with the amount that the company was making. Their accounts differ in their portrayals of the actual actions involved in the strike; while both say that protests initially involved stopping the machines in the assembly line, Said's version of the story did not account for police brutality towards participants, and Omar omitted the vandalism and intimidation carried out by strike members. These omissions are understandable, given

the respective positions of both men. However, these discrepancies also raise concerns about the completeness of both records of the strike.

The timeline in each of these stories was also identical. Both men stated that the factory was closed for three months, and that after the police became involved to reopen the factory, all employees were given a two month time period in which they could return to their positions at the plant. They both also discussed similar estimates of around 200 people who chose not to return to work following the strike, and that several leaders of the strike were arrested following the factory's return to functionality. Said and Omar also observed that the factory began to source more workers from outside of the Oulmes region, and that eventually the ratio of Oulmes residents to non-residents reversed.

Profile of Social Outreach Enterprises:

Given this history of tense relations between corporation and community, it is important to consider the efforts that LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES undertakes to engage with the people surrounding their factory. I began my examination of LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES's corporate responsibility efforts by visiting the company's two main enterprises in the community (Al-Man Baa primary school and Hotel des Thermes) and interviewing an employee at each of them.

I conducted my first interview with the director of Al-Man Baa School in Tarmilat. In this interview, I discussed the role of the school within the Oulmes

community and the role that LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES plays in the management and operations of the school. Al-Man Baa School opened in August of 2002, and was completely funded by LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES. It is a private primary school for children from pre-school age through around age 12. The school was built to cater to the children of employees at the factory. The director said that because a lot of workers at the factory now come from far away, the school incentivizes people to bring their families to Oulmes. Without the promise of a good education for their children, not as many people would be willing to move their family to a rural area for work.

The director also described the school as a “social project” of the president of the company, Miriam Ben Salah. It aims to help students in a rural area get a good education, as the public schools in Oulmes do not have as many resources as the Al-Man Baa School. In addition to the children of factory employees, some of the children of local government officials and policemen attend Al-Man Baa, and the school also accepts two or three students from the surrounding area each year that would not have been able to afford their education otherwise. LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES pays for all of the books, supplies, and instruction at the school, so all students attend Al-Man Baa free of charge. When asked how the school helps the local population of Oulmes, the director also spoke about the school’s tutoring program. LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES pays for the school supplies and tutoring for children who

attend the public primary school that boards children from surrounding villages. While the majority of tutoring for public school students focuses on mathematics, the school also helps with tutoring in Arabic, French, and some English (for children attending other private schools (Director of Al-Man Baa School, Interview, April 13, 2015).

The other LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES business that I visited was the Hotel des Thermes. The hotel is owned by LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES and operated under its discretion. On LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES's website, it lists the hotel as one of its social engagement programs (Les EauxMinéralesd'Oulmes 2015). The website justified their support of this institution as a way of promoting rural tourism and attracting visitors to the region. This piqued my interest, as I had not previously thought that a hotel could be seen as a mechanism for pursuing social responsibility. When I met with the director of the hotel, I asked her who generally comprised the clientele of the hotel. She said that while anyone is welcome to stay in the hotel, most of the people who stay in the hotel are affiliated with LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES in some way, especially people who work for the company. My translator told me at this point that there is also a group housing arrangement provided by the company, so people who are originally from out of the area tend to live in this building, rather than in the hotel if they are working there for an extended period of time. When asked how LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES is involved in the operations of the hotel, the director replied that the company makes the rules for the

hotel, and the staff of the Hotel des Thermes must follow these guidelines. She also believes that the hotel has a pretty good relationship with the community.

My interviews and focus group with individuals from Oulmes and the surrounding area also brought to light further contributions that LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES makes to the community. Almost every individual (who was not associated with the company) that I spoke to mentioned that LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES makes payments every three months to Oulmes' local government officials. The source manager that I spoke to, Abdu⁴, explained these payments as their compensation for use of a government-owned resource. As natural resources such as water are publicly owned in Morocco (USAID 2013), LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES must pay for access to and use of the water springs that make up the sources exploited by the factory. My understanding of these payments was that they functioned almost like a tax, and as such the company did not have jurisdiction over how their monetary contributions were used by the local community government.

The amount of these contributions seemed to change with each person I spoke to; some claimed it was 2 billion dirhams per year, others swore it was closer to 1 million. The timeframe of these payments was also very unclear; some of my interviewees believed these payments were annual, but most of them believed it was every three months. I think a large amount of my confusion came from the translation of numbers

⁴ Name has been changed to maintain anonymity

into English, and also into amounts that I would understand. Everyone gave me the paid amount in “millieurs,” a unit that I was unfamiliar with. If I have translated it correctly, 1 millieur dirhams is equivalent to 1 billion dirhams, but I could never get a clear answer from anyone as to whether this translation was correct or not. The general estimates that I received from a few of my interviewees are included in the chart below:

Name ⁵ :	Claimed amount of Donation:
Hassan and Rachid	1 billion dirhams every three months
Abdu	2.2 billion dirhams every year
Muhammad	20 centimes for each 1 L bottle produced

Regardless of the exact amount of this payment, all of my interviewees seemed to be in agreement that the people of the community did not see all of that money. When asked how this money went towards improving the community, some common projects were cited as the products of the LES EAUX MINÉRALES D’OULMES payments to the community government. A football stadium is being constructed down the road from the Tarmilat factory, street lights have been installed, and roads in Oulmes are being reconstructed and paved. Most people also mentioned several festivals that have taken place during the past few years; music festivals, traditional cultural festivals, and the like. Despite these visible improvements or contributions, almost everyone I spoke with

⁵ Names have been changed to maintain anonymity

alluded to possible corruption in the local government. Abdou, the source manager I interviewed, said he believes that the officials in the community see the benefit rather than the people of the area, and made it seem that whatever money was given to the community government was not adequate to enact real changes in the Oulmes community. He also mentioned that since LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES does not control what is done with the money, it is harder to keep track of how it is spent (Abdou, interview, April 18, 2015).

Local Perceptions of Les Eaux Minérales d'Oulmes:

The final portion of this paper is devoted to examining the local perceptions of LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES that I was able to gather during my ten day stay in Oulmes. All of these observations come from my interviews and focus group conducted during this time, and reflect pure opinions of my interview subjects.

While my project specifically aimed to speak with residents of the Oulmes community, I also had the opportunity to speak to two men who worked at the LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES factory in Tarmilat, but were themselves from Rabat. Despite being from out of town, their positions within the company allowed them to speak intelligently on the relationship between company and community. When asked what they knew about LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES's engagement with the surrounding area, the first man, Hassan⁶, said that there were a lot of conflicts in this

⁶ Name has been changed to maintain anonymity

relationship, which is why there are now more workers from outside of Oulmes than inside of it. His coworker, Walid⁷, responded by saying that the company has, in fact, begun to hire more people from the community again. Both men think that the company's efforts to engage with the community (which they cited as the money given to the local government each month) have been successful, because the relationship has calmed somewhat in recent years. However, there are still many people who hope to work in the factory, as LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES has not recruited enough people from the community yet.

Despite being a more homogenous focus group than I would have liked, the focus group yielded some more diverse opinions on the connection between corporation and town. One common theme that was expressed by the men of my focus group was that the Oulmes region benefits from the notoriety that LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES brings to the area. They expressed the view that because the water company was famous, it brought fame and pride to their city and the surrounding villages.

In terms of the evolution of the relationship over time, the men reiterated the same time line that was expressed by the two workers I spoke with. The relationship was good prior to 1999 when the majority of the workers were still from the surrounding area. The connection between the factory and the local people went sour

⁷ Name has been changed to maintain anonymity

when the strike began in 1999, and in the years following the strike the relationship was decidedly in poor shape. However, as the memory of the strike has begun to fade and people who were working there at the time have begun to retire, the company has started to mend its relations with the local people by hiring youths into positions at the factory. One of the most talkative members of the group, Mahmood⁸, hailed this as a big change in the relationship and a step in the right direction. However, Mahmood was also very quick to say that the only relationship that was changing was the one between the people and the factory, and that the relationship between the local government and the factory was the same as it had always been. Here he also alluded to the local government as profiting more than the people in the area from the factory's presence.

One of the men also discussed the impact that the strike had on the relationship between community and LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES. He said that it had an enormous impact because it not only soured the relationship, but many people were unable to find jobs after the strike left them jobless. For some of the older members of the workforce, this meant that they did not receive the pensions they had had at LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES, and suffered because of this.

When asked how the relationship should improve, one man brought up the issue of unionizing. According to this man, since the strike unions have been repressed by the company, making it difficult, if not impossible, for the workers to advocate for their

⁸ Name has been changed to maintain anonymity

rights. He cited this as a key change to be made to improve things. The men also talked about how the company should do more for the community at large, rather than only their employees. No one disputed the fact that employees of the factory are treated very well; their retirement pensions are excellent, their children get to attend a great private school for free, and pay has improved since the 1999 strikes. However, one of the men in the group said that the company's involvement with people outside of the group of their employees should also benefit from the presence of such a wealthy company in their community.

Some men expressed the opinion that the factory should do more to hire men and women from the community. Mahmood, however, said that this was not the job of the factory, and that in order to see the improvement in relations that they all wanted, youth should be more proactive about searching for work. One of the other men retorted that in order to not drive youths to seek work in other areas, the company should make more of an effort to hire from the community. Overall, I was impressed at the diverse array of opinions and views expressed by a very homogeneous group of people.

Conclusions:

Given my limitations with regards to time and resources, I think that it would take more interviews and diverse surveys of people in order to make more generalized conclusions about the Oulmes community. My sample size was small, and only

included people that were, in one way or another, associated with my translator or her family. Future research should be carried out in order to make a more comprehensive portrait of the public opinion regarding LES EAUX MINÉRALES D'OULMES and its corporate social responsibility policies.

Regardless of any limitations of my data, I believe that several important conclusions can be drawn from this research. I was surprised to learn that the memory of the 1999 workers' strike still figured so prominently of local peoples' discussion of the company. Despite having occurred over fifteen years ago, both the company and local people still seem to remember the strike and its events like it happened recently. These details also impact the way that people discuss the company to this day. When people discuss the relationship between company and community, the strike is brought up as a primary example of the strain that has plagued this relationship.

While there has been a fair amount of strain in this relationship, it is also clear from everyone that I spoke to that the relationship between community and corporation is in the process of undergoing serious changes. While many of my interviewees stressed that the relationship was still not perfect, most of them were quick to point out that the factory has started to hire people from the community again within the last six or seven years. People are beginning to see a more vivid possibility of working at the factory than had been possible since the strike. However, this change is coming very slowly, and it would be naïve to say that it was now simple to get a job with the factory as a local resident. One man I spoke to in my focus group said he had been trying to get a position at the factory for over a year, but he had been unsuccessful because he lacked a connection to the company. So, while the passage of time may be healing some of the ills of this relationship, there is still much to be done to completely mend these frayed ties.

This also brings up another important aspect of the company's presence in the Oulmes region: its ties with the local government. Throughout my interviews, the involvement of the local government was brought up again and again. There ran a common thread of blame on the local government for much of the unpleasantness between the local people and the company. I was very surprised at the number of allegations of corruption amongst members of the local government that were brought up throughout my interviews. The way that corruption was discussed, it seemed almost implicit that not all of the money that went into the local government would not make it to the people it was intended to benefit. I wish that I could examine this corruption further and understand the extent to which it impacts local governance, but this would require a separate project entirely. Many of my interviewees suggested that much of what would help to improve relations between the community and Les EauxMinéralesd'Oulmes would have to come from the cooperation of the local government. They did not see sustainable development or improved opportunity for local residents without local government officials changing their ways and consciously encouraging a more transparent and helpful relationship with the community.

It would seem that this is almost a larger issue than the role of Les EauxMinéralesd'Oulmes within the community. From everything I have observed throughout my research, the factory treats its workers pretty well, and it does a fair amount to help the community as well. While the relationship between the factory and local Oulmes residents still needs much improvement, I now believe that none of this improvement can occur without an explicit effort on the part of the local community government to foster this better relationship. If the municipal government does not change, there can be no real mechanism for meaningful change in the relationship between Les EauxMinéralesd'Oulmes and local Oulmes residents.

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