

Simon Holdermann

# GUIDES OF THE ATLAS



An Ethnography of Publicness,  
Transnational Cooperation and  
Mountain Tourism in Morocco

[transcript] Media in Action

Simon Holdermann  
Guides of the Atlas

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and Mountain Tourism in Morocco

**[transcript]**

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## Acknowledgement

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Immiq simmiq azikshim olghum tikint

The above was one of the first proverbs I learned. It literally means that a camel can be fitted into a cooking pot only little by little, and only piece by piece. Any task, no matter how big, can be accomplished, if one just takes it slowly and in small steps. It is a joking way of saying that anything is achievable with just enough persistence. This book was my camel, and at some point, I almost got the impression that I had been cutting off too many big chunks in order to accomplish my task. And inevitably, now that I am writing this acknowledgement, I have the feeling that far too many other parts of the camel should have found their way into the pot as well.

During the process of writing, this book seemed more and more like a living thing; evolving and changing. Maybe it is just the same for every author and every attempt to write a book, but this is what I found in my first experience: This book started as vague idea, as a project, and as an uncertainty. There were guidelines and a framework, but not much more in the beginning. I “finished” my time of fieldwork without the feeling that I had finished. Similarly, I finished my dissertation thesis and submitted it in to the University of Cologne, and I did not feel quite finished either. I felt exhausted and relieved. Happy even, a little later. But finished? While thinking and re-thinking parts, abstracts and ideas that went into this manuscript and book, I now believe, in retrospect, that such a feeling of “completion” or “having finished” is completely illusory. Perhaps that is the beauty of it. While there are certainly moments of ac-

accomplishment, where one feels truly finished, it feels almost impossible to have put down on paper everything I wanted to say and everything that was going on in my head. Moreover, if I had started to write this book at any other point in time, I am sure that the outcome would have been slightly different. Writing this book is, thus, somewhat coincidental, contingent, and uncertain. That is why, in a way, I do not consider it as a completely finished piece of work, but rather as a documentation of my line of thinking, researching, and reasoning at that certain period of time. Even as I finish writing it, the book continuously keeps (re-)writing itself in my head. To borrow an anthropological truism: if a gift keeps on giving, a book—or more precisely, ethnographic research—keeps on demanding.

Many people have contributed to this book. I cannot possibly name all of them and all the details and aspects of the ways in which they have supported me. First and foremost, and I really do not know to put this in words properly, I would like to thank the people of Zawiya Ahansal from the bottom of my heart for making this book possible: the people, interlocutors, research partners, friends, who welcomed me in their midst. It has been a truly overwhelming experience. Above all, I would like to mention the staff of Amezray SMNID and ACF. Without their support and willingness to share their work with me, none of the below could have been developed. Thank you, Youssef and Medina, for having my back, Sidi Amahdar for your wisdom, Ayoub, Hassan, Bahemu. I do not know I would have started my stay without you, Ismail. Thank you for your friendship. Mohamed (Bahelu), thank you for your impressive unreserved compassion and support. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for teaching and encouraging me, for being a family to me in the absence of my own: Said, Tuda, Baba Moh, Ati Fadma, Baba Hamou, Ati Daha, Ati Aicha. Bouchra, Sanaa, Ayoub.

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Finally, many friends and family have supported me along the way. Through the depths of my repeated writing exile you have helped me wonderfully, thank you, David, Marlene, Jona, Martin, Jari and Paul. Thank you, Seb, for always being there! Thanks, Paps and Anita, for your never-ending support. Without the Bavarian writing exile, this book would surely have one chapter less, thanks Mam and Andreas for the surprise packages and impulses to push through. With all my heart, I thank you, Anja. I cannot think of anything more I would like to ask for than this: to grow with you together. Carla, I dedicate this book to you.

### Note on transliteration

Since I am not a trained Arabist and this is primarily an anthropological study, the transliteration of Arabic and Tamazight terms does not follow an official linguistic transcription. Rather, I have adopted the terms as they appear in the relevant literature, or used the common English way of writing Tamazight phrases, which was also used by my interlocutors. Linguistic impossibilities or errors in the transliteration are entirely my own fault and I hope that interested and informed readers will nonetheless be able to recognize and make sense of my use of foreign-language and emic terms.

I use the following notations for letters of the Arabic alphabet that have no clear equivalent in the Latin script:

خ: kh

ع: ʿ

غ: gh

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

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### **Research Focus: New Media, New Publics and Situated Scaling**

This book is an ethnography of social-technological transformation processes in the High Atlas of Morocco. These processes include various aspects of political-economic, infrastructural, and socio-cultural change. In order to understand these lines of change historically situated and contextualized, the book explores the media-technologically supported processes that restructure social practice. In particular, and as part of a cooperation project with socio-informatics, this means zooming in on media, mediation and mediators as well as the new forms and gradation of publicness they trigger, shape and reflect. Thus, I have set out to analyze the varieties of media practices concerning the organizational work and transnational collaboration that take place there. In this context, the negotiation processes of various actors to increase their scope and forge new cooperative relationships are both an ongoing achievement and promise to successfully navigate the unfolding transformations.

The main questions that drive this work, and to which it seeks to provide answers, therefore revolve around how transnational influences and changing socio-economic conditions are brought to bear locally. More systematically, these are questions about the *scaling work* of the actors themselves within their multiple networks of relationships. Scaling work is my attempt to analytically capture, what these actors are in a very practical sense doing: How do they make ideas and concerns connectable and



compatible, how do they translate and integrate them into the local context of the High Atlas? What are the spaces of possibility and structural shifts involved?

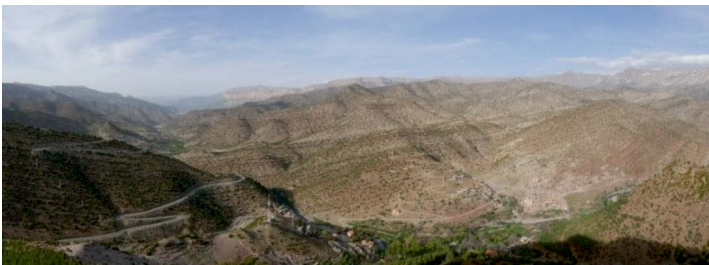
The theoretical appeal of the concept of scale has gained some traction in anthropology in recent years (see among others Strathern 1991; Tsing 2000; Latour 2005b; Carr/Lempert 2016). In the course of this work, I understand scale as a combination of translating, working out, adopting, embedding, and contextualizing circulating imaginaries, discourses, and concerns on different levels—for and in specific situations and arrangements. Consequently, the *global* seems to become *local* as a result of engagement and negotiation. On closer inspection, however, both concepts (global and local) turn out to be incapable of adequately and analytically capturing the processes. Indeed, they seem to dissolve, as ethnographically neither the local nor the global can be grasped—but merely a situative amalgamation of both. This leads to the question: What are the affordances of scale-making? How do actors make and unmake connections for their various concerns and goals?

This is not so much a matter of making plausible and filling in pre-figured models or concepts of *media* and *public sphere* with ethnographic material. Reversely, it is necessary to ask what these concepts actually mean for the context and selected regional case, elaborated on the basis of the empirical circumstances. More precisely, and in particular, the following questions arise from these considerations, that have oriented the present research: Which media practices can be observed? In what way, with what motivation and for what purposes are the various groups or stakeholders involved in producing, enacting and employing them? Which infrastructural arrangements and lines of development become visible? If new forms of cooperation supported by media technology put existing values, views and practices to the test, how is in this process publicness produced or contained for different concerns? Which (new) alliances have been forged, which resources mobilized in order to win new cooperation partners and to make own interests and concerns connectable and compatible for a wider public?

Thus, the main interest lies on the resources actors in the High Atlas draw on to accomplish scale and administer change. These resources

can be social, technical, material and imaginative. In sum, then, this book follows a praxeological approach that considers the affordances that shape local practice at certain locales and the social institutions that enable and confine them as much as they are themselves reconfigured through time. The argumentation of the present book can be unfolded along three terms: In the High Atlas, scale-making—and transformation more general—is *territorialized*, which emphasizes the materialities of place and locality that need to be taken into account in dealing with resources. The actor's scaling work is *socialized*, in the sense that the actors are dependent on dense networks of social relations to draw on, but are also changing them at the same time. Finally, instances of scale-making present themselves as processes of re-infrastructuring, in which rising public concerns are encountered by embedding, standardizing and *institutionalizing* them in particular organizational arrangements or administrative procedures. For the specific region of the High Atlas, development cooperation, NGO work, and especially tourism are areas that have been particularly influenced by these processes of transformation and, in turn, have helped to shape them. In a similar and yet different way, practices of scale-making can be found in all of these contexts, as I will argue in the course of this book.

*Figure 1: Panoramic view of the valley in the High Atlas*



## A Valley in the High Atlas or When is Periphery?

The High Atlas Mountain range covers an area of about 160 000 square kilometers, amounting to 22.8% of Morocco's territory.<sup>1</sup> This region where I did my fieldwork is considered by policy makers and tourists alike to be *remote*. This is both a relational and awkward term, whereby it is not quite clear which concrete information it contains, and yet at the same it time conveys a very clear normative meaning. The follow-up question should therefore always be: From whose point of view is it remote? In comparison to what?

The valley consists of four main villages inhabited by a total of between 11,000 and 12,000 people of the Berber or Amazigh community<sup>2</sup>, which is considered the indigenous people of North Africa. A more conclusive number as would be derived from a census, for example, is not available, for no such census are carried out. The administrative buildings and the market (*suq*) are located directly on the river and at the end of the road that leads from Azilal, the main town of the province. The administrative center of the valley is basically a little settlement of official buildings and the Suq between the villages of Agoudim and Amezray. The oldest settlement, Agoudim, can be found just south of the administrative center, Amezray, is located a 20-minute walk away, if one follows the

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1 <http://www.tourisme.gov.ma/en/tourism-territories/atlas-vallees> (last accessed, 25/07/2018).

2 There is an ongoing discussion about the appropriate use of the term *Berber*. Unlike other languages, the term is not pejoratively connotated in English. I also want to take seriously the emic perspective: what and how my research partners, interlocutors, and friends would use it. They themselves would use Berber, Imazighen, Ishelhin interchangeably. Sometimes *Ishelhin* would convey more the sense of a shared language and specific cultural aspects (as dancing *ahidus*, not *ahwach*...). *Imazighen* sometimes had a more pan-Amazigh political ring to it, as being one North African indigenous people. *Berber* would seem slightly more universal in its applicability. All those slight nuances seemed to not always and strictly apply. I decided to use *Berber*, sometimes alternatingly *Amazigh/Imazighen*, thus following the main thrust of English-speaking scholarly contributions.

river north from the Suq. Both are central villages, both next to the river, and both connected to the access road. The third village, Taghia, is further south along the river, behind a gorge and nested within steep mountain walls. It is about one and a half hours away from the administrative center on foot, and cannot be reached by car. Tighanimin, the fourth village, is a one hour walk from the administrative center and Agoudim to the east, at the foot of the mountain range. It is the furthest southeastern extension of the valley. The dirt road leading there from the administrative center was widened a couple of years ago and can now be used by cars. In addition to these four villages, there are a number of smaller settlements scattered in the side valleys or along the hills beneath the high plateaus that border the valley to the east and west. To the north, the river runs out of the valley with slowly flattening mountain ranges until it finally flows into the Bin el Ouidane reservoir.

*Figure 2 & 3: View of central valley, Suq in the front, Agoudim in the back (left) and Amezray (right), with its ighrim, from the riverbank*



With reference to ethnographic research in Morocco, Clifford Geertz famously took the position that the “locus of study is not the object of study. Anthropologists don’t study villages (tribes, towns, neighbourhoods...); they study *in* villages” (Geertz 1973: 22). Moreover, the following descriptions have not fallen out of time nor should they be read as in any way natural, original or authentic, but always as already part of the changing life in the mountains. The question then becomes: how one can

understand something as spectacular as profound change? Moreover, one should bear in mind that actions in a particular place are typically perceived by those involved as simply living life. My attempt to tackle this conundrum entails giving detailed descriptions that show what it is to live everyday life and make a living in the chosen research area. By doing so, I seek to bring specific aspects of change into view, namely a change that sets itself apart from the conditions that were themselves already in constant change and flux prior to my arrival.

The villages in the valley—like many places in the High Atlas—radiate a graceful beauty. The houses have the same colour as their environment use stones and natural materials from the local area to blend into the mountain slopes that surround them. In some places, especially in Agoudim, the houses are built so close together that at first glance it is not immediately obvious where one house ends and the next begins, if one roof forms the foundation of a house or terrace above, or whether a winding path is a village street or a house entrance. For my own part, I stayed in Amezray, with a married couple and their three children, the husband's parents, his uncle (on his father's side, *3mmi*), aunt, and grandmother, who all lived in the same abode.

In terms of its distance from—and infrastructural connection to—larger cities such as Azilal, Beni Melal or Marrakesh, the valley is rather cut-off. The regional road R302 is the only central access road and reaches Zawiya Ahansal at exactly the point where it leads furthest into the High Atlas. The road leading from the west into the High Atlas from Zawiya comes to a standstill here, offering no means of continuing either east or south. Crossing the High Atlas—as one would, for instance, with the national road (N9) from Marrakesh to Ouarzazate—is not possible here.

The barren and often rugged mountain landscape coheres with an image of seclusion. Generally speaking, mountains are often considered wild and unconquerable. Yet, the mountains are a habitat and have been for hundreds of years. This includes mountain ranges, gorges, and seemingly impassable and fruitless terrain. The remote and barren nature often attributed to the mountain environment can obscure the fact that

many have made it their home, and created the conditions to flourish in it.

*Figure 4: Houses in the valley*



## Transformations

The region is subject to profound transformation. Indeed, local people are often quite aware as to what precisely must change for improvement to occur. In an interview given in Southern Morocco, Thomas Lacroix states the point quite well:

*Qu'est-ce qu'il faut pour que ça change le village?*

Le gens, ils sont sans travail, qu'est-ce qu'ils vont manger? S'il y a une usine ou bien un autobus, ou s'il passe un train ici, c'est mieux. Ça changerait, ben oui. Ici, c'est comme ça, c'est la montagne. (Lacroix 2005: 149).

As this excerpt suggests, wage labour and transportation are particularly desirable constituents of change, both in the High Atlas and else-

where. In the valley that is the focus of this book, infrastructural improvements and development have been occurring for about a decade now. Only in the last five to ten years have houses been connected to water and power lines been installed, while a secondary school was built in Amezray. The school, in particular, has led to the construction of more and more houses and an increase in migration from the surrounding areas to the central villages. Broadcasting towers for mobile internet are equally only a couple of years old. For the whole region, two ambulances and a small medical station have been installed. Infrastructural changes and integration into the expanding global economy provide the backdrop for an increase in touristic activity, and this equally applies to rural areas.

For many aspects of life, however, the trip to Azilal is obligatory. As the main town in the province, it has a hospital, pharmacies, gas stations, a police department and a number of other regional authorities. The journey from the valley to Azilal, a distance of a little more than 80 kilometers, takes about two hours by car. By public transport, a small minibus, it takes between three and three and a half hours. The main access road to the valley was paved with asphalt in 2014. There was previously only a dirt road. The trip, which was only possible with off-road vehicles at that time, could take between six and eight hours.

Newly paved roads and broadened mountain passes now enable more and more regular transportation with minivans and pickup trucks. As a result, there is more passenger transport, while the journey to the district town has become shorter and is offered at more regular intervals. All these developments have accelerated up existing transportation procedures to a certain extent (Wajcman/Dodd 2017; Duclos/Criado/Nguyen 2017). Yet the chosen mode for covering a particular distance is not based solely on punctuality nor in accordance with the clock-time of a particular transportation schedule. Social ties and the maintenance of relationships are crucial. The better the social relations, the better the transportation. Waiting as well as knowing or calling the right person are basic mobility practices. If someone wants to travel from the valley, they call the driver of a minibus or pickup truck. The driver, in turn, gives the person a pick-up time and location, if there is room. Similarly, at the bus station in Azilal for public transport to

the mountains, seats can be reserved with the bus driver. Normally, however, you simply go to the station, buy a ticket, and wait at your seat. Departure occurs when the bus is full or the driver no longer wishes to wait. The same is true for collective taxis (*grands taxis*), where planning mainly entails a spatial dimension, as travelers simply have to be at the right spot. Time, in this instance, plays a subordinate role. As such, one could well claim that space, rather than time, organizes thought and practice as regards transportation in the High Atlas Mountains. The predominance of time over space in discourses on modernization (Rosa 2005) is thus subject to a certain challenge here. However, *forms of modernizing* are becoming increasingly palpable in the rural areas of the High Atlas.<sup>3</sup>

In the context of critical discourse on modernization—and in settings like workshops and colloquia of our Collaborative Research Center—the project I participated in was repeatedly subject to questions on the meaning of scientific intervention and the actual necessity of a trans-disciplinary cooperation project between German universities and a Moroccan organization *per se* (see chapter two). There was a clear moral undertone to some of these questions: Were we really motivated by a desire to bring technology and the internet to the people in the High Atlas? Were we aware of our responsibility and the very likely negative effects of our research activities? Who would pay for this project? In a number of

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3 Such dynamics extend, of course, beyond this particular area. Transportation is an interesting marker of modernization schemes. Within the three and a half years of my PhD studies and since my first visit to Morocco in summer 2016, I have witnessed: the renewed expansion of the access road from Azilal into the mountains as far as Ait Mhamd from one to two lanes and; the renewal of a nation-wide fleet of grand taxis. While my first trip from to Azilal in a grand taxi was in an E-type Mercedes—very much typical for that time—in September 2018 all such vehicles had been replaced by more recent models with seven seats. Similarly, when the new airport terminal in Marrakech was opened in 2016, a new shuttle bus service introduced, and a public bike rental system implemented. Of course, Morocco's hosting of the United Nations Climate Change conference in November 2016 most certainly had a part to play here.



interdisciplinary academic discussions, many questions arose that revealed dichotomous thinking along the lines of traditional/modern or un(der)developed/developed. This, again, touched on the moral status and political implications of the project: Whose intention was it to bring technology there and in whose interest? Was it not problematic and paternalistic to bring people into contact with technology and to then investigate their behaviour? This almost went so far as to imply a critical laboratory set-up for the proposed project. The problematic aspect of this take on the proposal was the foreclosure of agency for the local people. Furthermore, this assumption holds that locals are unable to exercise their own autonomy. As such, the assumption denies them the pursuit of their own interests, the formulation of their own positions, and the capacity to take action. Similarly, this critique revealed prevalent notions of the physical research area as a secluded and closed authentic cultural arena, and as a harmonious structure, which our initiative from the outside would only serve to disturb. As such, this perspective completely ignored centuries of mobility, exchange, and interconnection.

The analytical shortcomings of these notions concerning relative *underdevelopment* is that they do not adequately account for the contradictions and inconsistencies of recent transformation processes. One such example is the conditions under which mobile phones are used in the economically weak and supposedly *backward* mountain region of Morocco. The speed of mobile data reception, which varies between 3G and LTE, is higher in the High Atlas than in many rural areas of Germany. Of course, it is not a question of proving that people live comparably *modern* lives in Morocco to those in Germany, say, but rather of indicating that these realities are perceived by many as *surprising* or exceptional, or at least remarkable. This is so because the assumed (and implicitly attributed) *state of development of others* would not suggest this. The critique we were confronted with at the beginning of our research project—although a welcome invitation to reflect on our own principles and perceptions—often reproduced even those very dichotomies and notions of progress and development. To explain this with insufficient information fails to grasp the point satisfactorily. Rather, the everyday understanding of a world of different *stages of development*—and

the assumptions that go along with it—seem to express themselves particularly saliently here. In contrast to the actual complexities of Moroccan life, the imagined circumstances here are much more strongly determined by a deep-seated perspective of deficits, precarity, and even hopelessness (Ferguson 2006).

Despite the valley's seeming remoteness, the region has always been connected by passing caravans from the Sahara. Moreover, it has been a center for nomads, who would come with their flock to the nearby summer pastures and for pilgrims, who would visit the sacred tomb of Sidi Said Ahansal. Remarkably, as early as the 1960s, there were even turbines in Agoudim, which generated electricity with river water. This was due to the French army, which had a military and administrative foothold there at the time of the protectorate. Since then, homes belonging to families from the holy lineage—who possessed special political importance for the French—had been supplied with electricity. Later, turbines were used to supply other households in the valley before the national power grid finally arrived in 2012. People also used solar panels together with car batteries to generate and store small amounts of electricity for individual households. Those are the markers of *modernization*, which can be found throughout the High Atlas: roads, electricity and running water as well as refrigerators, televisions, and telephones. For all the critical discourses I had previously perceived, this was the very empirical *mélange* in which my research took place and which oriented and shaped my perspective and research questions.

## Doing Ethnography

*Doing fieldwork* is a kind of initiation ritual for anthropologists-in-the-making. As such, ethnography—the process of arriving at a description of social practices—is the primary intention of anthropological knowledge production. To achieve this, researchers immerse themselves in a society, in a community, in a context, producing descriptive data, and rendering the collected data intelligible for readers or fellow academics. Ethnography is an artisanal endeavour, which comprehen-

sively challenges the researcher's own body and biography. It takes time and commitment, sometimes even sacrifice. Only with time and shared experiences will it be possible to work out commonalities, build relationships and eventually produce ethnographic insights. As ethnography focuses on human (inter)action and puts it at the basis of knowledge production, it is in itself a proponent of practice theory (Ortner 1984). This is by no means a process of coincidence. Understanding human practices through ethnographic research means continuously working on that understanding and negotiating it. To understand such practices, ethnographers themselves have to enter into practice with an open mindset, awareness, and a receptivity toward both mutuality and commonality. Fundamentally, is the ethnographer's task to forge cooperation.

Ethnography involves different types of data and the use of different media formats and technologies. The central question thereby is how lived social and cultural reality is (re-)produced, maintained and made meaningful. Therefore, ethnographers have to consider everyday situations, practices, and interactions, as well as discourses and standards of valuation (Sanjek 1996; Lüders 2010). Ethnographic fieldwork is not a methodologically fixed approach, but rather method and product simultaneously. As a flexible, processual research strategy, it offers researchers a framework to oscillate between their own immediate fieldwork experience and the analysis. Participant observation is inextricably linked to ethnographic fieldwork. It describes neither *pure* observation nor *pure* participation (Atkinson/Hammersley 1994). The aim is to generate as much proximity as possible to social phenomena and practices, while at the same time maintaining necessary analytical distance from full immersion and distorting biases.

### **Cooperation and/as Media Ethnography**

The status and feasibility of observation and participation, as well as their temporal and spatial limitations are the topic of several ongoing discussions, particularly since the development of digital media technology and global circulation spheres. It would be misleading to

suggest a divide between a somewhat *classical ethnography* and a (*digital media ethnography*) insofar as this divide would suggest several clear-cut methodological implications, and even differences. In my opinion, this would constitute a failure to recognize the necessary open and dynamic character of ethnographic research in general. Nor would such a divide do justice to methodological pluralism-opportunism of ethnographic research, which is oriented both towards the relevancies of the research context and the relationship between people and ethnographer. I am rather inclined to follow scholars who suggest that we not make (digital) media the exclusive focus, but rather perceive such media as part of people's everyday lives and worlds (Pink et al. 2016) and as achieving "holistic contextualizations" (Miller 2017). The emphasis of the ethnographic approach resonates with a pioneering work in the anthropology of media, which postulates that ethnography can "help to see how media are embedded in people's quotidian lives but also how consumers and producers are themselves imbricated in discursive universes, political situations, economic circumstances, national settings, historical moments, and transnational flows, to name only a few relevant contexts" (Ginsburg/Abu-Lughod/Larkin 2002: 2). Practices of engagement may shift, for instance, when engaging in participant observation of digitally mediated communities, whereby the notion of presence must be critically examined. But if content analysis, usage surveys, and macro-perspectives are not sufficient to study media in their situated form, ethnography is the approach of choice.

Moreover, studying social practices, human culture, or local worlds inevitably includes media and mediations (Mazzarella 2004). Media and media practices, in turn, become understandable primarily with regard to how they are brought to bear and as something intermediary and mediating. This is why they have to be ethnographically traced *in situ* (Bender/Zillinger 2015). It is in situated practices and engagements that media are realized. In order to arrive at an ethnographic description of media(ted) practices—and an analysis that takes the complex realities of local everyday life seriously—it is important to *follow the mediators*. It is thus preferable to adopt an open concept of media as a basis, rather than thinking of media as a fixed object. It should be considered an interlink-

age and mediating potentiality (or agency) that enables connections and builds relations, especially in ethnographic research settings. As such, media cannot be reduced to either discourse, intermediary, signal, or information. Rather, “[b]etween the social, semiotic and technical (and partly naturalized) agencies involved, a cyclical consideration of the co-production of social, technical and personal variables is at stake. This makes up media and it is from this that corresponding classifications are created” (Schüttpelz 2013: 58, my translation).

Access to the *ethnographic field* should be understood as the design or creation of social contexts that make ethnographic research possible in the first place. Thus, an ethnographer is not just entering ethnographic fieldwork, but continuously and cooperatively producing and establishing the ethnographic research conditions. Ethnographers and their interlocutors, or more precisely the people with whom they will jointly produce their ethnographic knowledge, enter into a “complex process of cooperation” (Breidenstein et al. 2015: 62, my translation). According to Charles Goodwin, cooperation can thereby be understood as “public social practices that human beings pervasively use to construct in concert with each other the actions that make possible, and sustain, their activities and communities” (Goodwin 2018: 7). In this way, “building our own actions with the very same resources used by others *we inhabit each other’s actions*” (ibid.: 11, italics in original), which puts cooperation at the very foundation of sociality. Consequently, mutuality and commonality play a central role; they are in constant dialogue. Through the juxtaposition of concepts and by engaging in situated practices, what is relevant and meaningful is mutually made and mutually shown between ethnographer and research partners or interlocutors. This is especially true for the ethnographic research process.

## Inversion

Much has been written about the notion of strangeness or radical alterity as an epistemological key feature of anthropological knowledge production. Without wanting to enter this comprehensive discussion fully, I want to use it as a background to argue that the importance of common-

ality—a specific kind of mutuality, so to speak—should not be neglected, in particular when starting fieldwork. In order to illustrate my point, I would like to put greater emphasis on the *other*, so to speak, of participant observation, that is, *being observed* oneself. Observing and being observed are a manifestation of mutuality and is essential parts of the foundation of both the apprentice-expert relationship and ethnographic research in general. As Richard Rottenburg—who draws on Fritz Kramer’s *inverse anthropology*—puts it:

“The basic elementary experience of anthropological fieldwork is that contrary to one’s own intention and self-awareness as an observer and learner, one is initially made the object of observation oneself. In the course of this often destabilizing experience, it becomes immediately clear that one’s own understanding of difference takes place mainly through the passive experience of being observed, rather than through active observation.” (Rottenburg 2001: 42, my translation)

After all, I was the *intruder*. Therefore—and unsurprisingly—one is observed precisely because there are aspects of oneself that are unfamiliar or appear strange to those in whose environment one finds oneself. Whether this is the crucial epistemological moment of anthropological fieldwork or not, it is followed by a mutual search for commonalities. It is through this search for commonality that a rapport is established and relationships are formed as well as, eventually, cooperation.

What is more, the relevant objects of ethnographic research and forms of mediation ultimately co-produce themselves. By design, ethnographic research is more than just *information extraction*. It is rather “necessarily done in the company of man”. The ethnographer “needs the active cooperation of the people if he is to succeed in his work” (Casagrande 1960: X, italics added). Ethnographic research is intrinsically cooperative because the ethnographer is not able to gain insights alone. “Facts are made [...] and the facts we interpret are made and remade”, as Paul Rabinow (1977: 150) makes clear. I might also add, in closing, that the mutual co-production of ethnographic facts is the achievement of an—often mediated—process of active cooperation.

## Outline of the Book

Following this introduction, chapter two will serve as thematic entry and describe the establishment of a computer club in the High Atlas. To this end, two German universities work together with a Moroccan community-based organization. The chapter traces the beginning of the project, focusing in particular on the opening and the first workshop sessions that took place at the computer club. Motivations for the project as well as some of the implications of the appropriation process will be discussed. This is also a work-in-progress report, as the project is currently in its second term. Another aspect of the chapter is to situate myself and the project in which I was associated, and to make it transparent as a starting point for the research. The project work was ultimately the lens through which I learned about the valley.

After chapter two set the stage, chapter three provides a stocktaking. It will present working and organizational methods of active NGOs in the valley. To some degree, the valley can be understood as a playing field, in which these NGOs are increasingly shaping the conditions for a succeeding everyday life. The NGOs hold crucial intermediary positions and translate ideas, models, and practices from a field of development cooperation to a local setting. Through their successful project activities and individual commitment, they also offer an alternative to the long-standing way of life in the High Atlas.

Chapter four, then, functions as a brief historical and contextualizing insertion. This adds a deeper level to the findings already described by outlining the background against which the multilayered development processes stand out very clearly. This insertion substantiates the still relevant orienting capacity that local kinship ties and concepts of a historically grown relationship to the state have also for the current time. This also allows to derive a tentative argument: Although many parallels to questions of development and modernization are being negotiated in a wide variety of places around the world—and at times seem to take on quasi-universalist characteristics—there are enormous particularities that, in this case here, can be traced back to the social ecology and specific locality of the High Atlas.

Chapters five, six, and seven, then move more in the direction of concrete example cases of how actors use various strategies, techniques and mediations in an attempt to create an outcome that is favorable to them from the transformation processes that are taking place. In all cases, this involves creating connectivity and/or expanding contact zones for strategic goals, collaboration and influence. Chapter five provides the detailed description of the implementation of a new water supply system for the village of Amezray, under the responsibility of the local NGO. Chapter six takes a closer look at the local field of mountain tourism, which is a relatively young but extremely lucrative field of activity. The chapter ties the transformations back to the figures of the guide and the saint, thus carefully sketching the outlines of a tectonic shift in social strata. While dimensions of mediation, different media technologies or the question of publicness resonate in all chapters—and are made explicit in several instances—chapter seven tackles digital media technologies head-on. Here it becomes quite explicit how the actors intend to face the volatility of Moroccan mountain tourism through their skillful weaving of cooperative networks and scaling work, i.e. also by resorting to digital media technology.

Between the individual chapters, there are small additional ethnographic insertions, which serve as a sort of parenthesis to supplement the book's line of argumentation by adding personal, anecdotal accounts. These insertions do not fit directly into the thread of the chapters, but are therefore not incoherent, but complement the ethnographic density of my narratives. At least, I hope that this desired effect will occur with the reader.

One last note is necessary. All names of persons appearing in this book have been changed. The names of the places and also of the organizations described, on the other hand, I have left unchanged. This results in the somewhat peculiar effect that, of course, persons familiar with the area or local people clearly will know for the most part who is being talked about. Nonetheless, I decided to do this because, on the one hand, I wanted to protect the individual persons a little bit and not expose them directly, even if they had given me their consent for it. On the other hand, I wanted to enable a certain multiplicity, because at least in



part, thoughts, actions or statements, even though they were made by exactly one person, may well be understood as a *pars pro toto*: referring to a shared local body of knowledge and experience, which could also be brought forward by other interlocutors in a similar way.

## **ethnographic parenthesis A }**

### **Mutualities of Arriving**

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With this, I try to make transparent the processual nature of creating relationships and following everyday life in the High Atlas. Over time and in a respectful, curious, and caring way, I was accepted into a family life with an intensity and sincerity that overwhelmed me. Something I could have wished for, but which was at no point my own choice alone: a starting point to get to know the interdependence of locality, history as well as kinship and friendship relations.

*When I arrived at the family I stayed with, I faced a problem that I had been theoretically aware of, but that now demanded a practical resolution: how was I supposed to establish rapport or to start creating relationships with people, when I was not yet able to speak the local language properly? I had been learning the Moroccan Arabic dialect (darija), but I had only a rudimentary knowledge of some Tamazight phrases. Making conversation and getting to know people for me meant asking about interests and biographical details. Getting to know one another also usually involves sharing stories about oneself and about one's personal views. This was not an option, not at the very beginning at least, without a broad language foundation. So, everyone became my teacher. As talking about complex topics or exchanging information was difficult, I mostly inquired about the meaning of words and tried to pronounce them correctly. I was cheered when I remembered typical phrases and used them at the right moment; on other occasions, I was encouraged to study harder when I could not say a word or phrase properly that I had already been taught. Quite self-explanatory, language and meaningful communication was an issue right from the start and most conversations revolved around language itself. To interact with other*

*people meant spending time together and creating a common experience, without navigating through conversation topics. The engagements rather fulfilled a social and relational purpose and in that reminded me of the interaction that Bronislaw Malinowski (1923) once coined “phatic communion”.*

*Getting an idea and a feeling for the place and people was a lengthy process. It involved many different people, situations and contexts. The children of the family were indispensable and amazing: they constantly told me stories, although I was not able to grasp all of them, they showed me their toys, shared their favourite songs and the homework they had to do for school. They took me on guided tours through the village, showed me their favourite spots, the family’s fields and walnut trees. Also, they were the ones laughing at me when I said something wrong or acted weirdly, for instance, when I did not make greetings properly or struggled to eat couscous with my hands. While they explained to me some card games, I showed them some magic tricks with the cards or made coins disappear. Altogether, these were some of the ways with which I tried to become and grasp part of everyday life, although still lacking essential language skills.*

*However, the process of getting to know the place and people was by all means not one-directional. In fact, especially the family I lived with, but not only them, watched and observed me closely, because they too wanted to get to know me and to learn who they were dealing with; to judge who and how I was as a person. During my first evening at the family’s house, obviously, all eyes were on me. We were having tea in the living room. Because I was sitting cross-legged on the floor that was covered with carpets and I did not stretch my legs in a more reclining position like the other men, I must have given the impression that I was a little tense, which I probably was. Pillows were handed to me, so that I could make myself more comfortable, which I did or at least tried. The atmosphere was cordial, yet I could also sense a certain nervousness among all those present. This was the very first instance, where I realised that the whole context and situation of ‘being there’ was not only new for me, but also and quite clearly for all the others; I was new. Consequently, the way I talked, interacted with the children, drank my tea, sat at the table or ate tajine were all subject to observation. Learning some recurring important phrases in Tamazight and doing greetings properly were the first essential steps in showing that I was learning and respecting conventions or customs. This also applied to encounters outside the family in the village. By using the proper greetings, with handshakes and salutations, I was able to demonstrate*

that I was different from the occasional tourists coming through the valley. Later, this applied even more when it came to the ahidus.

The local dance of ahidus is an important part of Amazigh culture in the High Atlas that is performed during important festivities. Men and women dance collectively shoulder to shoulder in a huge circle. Each dancer moves and is moved by the others to polyrhythms of drumming and clapping. The songs usually take the form of call and response. One part of the crowd chants the first line, while the other are following call. The drums (agnza or talunt) are handmade from wood and goatskin. The participants of the dance usually bring their own instruments or join in without. The interplay of moving, singing and drumming constitutes a skillful performance that has to be learned carefully in resonance with the others. Altogether, it puts people in a rhythm and enables them to resonate with one another. As I was able to join in, properly dressed with a jelaba, and sing along with some of the songs, people that I had not really met before congratulated me amusedly for “knowing” or “having learned” the ahidus.



## Chapter 2

### A Computer Club for the High Atlas

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This chapter delineates the cooperation networks through which I came to be familiar with the High Atlas Mountains, and the valley of my ethnographic research in particular. Getting established in the valley was thereby not a lone endeavour—as so often appears to be the case in classic ethnographic accounts in the discipline of anthropology—I was instead associated with a research project. This necessarily framed the way in which people perceived me as a newcomer, but also the way in which I perceived the valley. It somewhat pre-determined my starting point in the valley. Precisely which people I talked to and lived with was therefore not arbitrary, but the result of a *cooperation in the making*. I could thus draw on the support of particular people on the ground and a small—though subsequently more expansive—network of relationships, each of which helped me to settle in. These cooperative relationships set me apart from the usual *iromin* (Western people), who would come to the valley as tourists. It was thus also easier to explain the purpose of my stay. Explaining that I was learning the language, trying to understand how people go about their everyday lives, and writing a book on the topic, would often leave certain questions unanswered, if the reactions of my interlocutors were anything to judge by. Saying that I was part of a project and working together with a local association put me on the local map, so to speak. Moreover, it showed that I was involved in contributing or giving something back to the community, sharing know-how about technology and supporting local school children. Over the course of the following pages, I will describe the emergence of this

cooperative project between a research team from two German universities and a local Moroccan association, reflecting on the motivations for the project and discussing some of the implications. I thus provide an overview of the kind of cooperation that was actually created, thereby setting the stage for the rest of the book. Through this cooperation, the research project became an active player in the local field of development cooperation, and a part of the socio-economic interrelations of the valley.

### Cooperation in the Making

In early April, I was sitting together with Mohamed, the president of the local association Amezray SMNID, and Ouleid, as well as three colleagues from the University of Siegen; Thomas, Daniel and Lisa. My university colleagues had recently arrived in the valley and were staying at Mohamed's *Maison d'Hotes*. On the beautiful terrace overlooking one of the villages' *igherman* (ancient granaries), the group was discussing how to work together in the future over tea and biscuits. The researchers from Germany spoke English, which Ouleid translated into Tashelhit for Mohamed. The driving force for our cooperation together was to establish a so-called *computer club*, with the aim—as Thomas from the Siegen delegation put it—of creating interest and enthusiasm for the “worlds of possibilities that can be opened up through computers and the use of technology. This resonated with the SMNID team, who viewed the use of smartphones and computers as a pressing issue for the younger generations in particular. In fact—and as Mohamed and Ouleid pointed out—a lot of young people already had access to devices, but would use them “in negative ways.” During the meeting, Mohamed expressed his hope that through the project these issues would be rectified, or “corrected”, by teaching the youth of the valley “how to use technology in a positive way: to market their projects, learn about new apps and so on.” With the signing of a contractual cooperation agreement between the two parties, which had been prepared by the University of Siegen, the meeting marked the official starting point for the joint project. It is worth noting

that as an active member of the project, I was also remunerated for my work.

The interdisciplinary research team consisted of academics from the German universities of Siegen and Cologne. The University of Cologne researchers had a background in social and cultural anthropology, while those from Siegen came from *socio-informatics* (see Wulf et al. 2018), which—broadly speaking—is a specific type of human-computer interaction research. Our shared research interest centered on: the question of how media technologies and the media practices that surround them can be positioned within the transformation of the mountain region in the Moroccan High Atlas; and what role these technologies play in generating new possibilities for action, consensus and dissent, as well as in shaping and mobilizing varying publics in this process. The socio-informatics part of the project would design and implement socio-technical (infra)structures in the form of a computer club, the activities of which were determined by the findings of existing empirical research. The anthropological research team, on the other hand, would observe which forms of cooperation arose through the use of media technology on the ground, and how these related to local political and socio-cultural events and arrangements.

The region was selected as it seemed particularly well suited to tackling the research question. It was strongly structured in terms of kinship and characterized by profound socio-economic, infrastructural, and technological upheavals. At the same time, there was a significant body of available literature for local reference. As such, an analysis of both the transformation processes and the formation of transnational links was possible. The aim was to take a historically situated and contextualized approach to reconstructing and describing the lines of change on site. We would then be able to explore which specific processes are supported by media technology and how these would restructure local social practice. To this end, an analysis of the potential and limitations of changing media practices for civic cooperation and political mobilization would be necessary.

Already before the meeting in April, the cooperation project was taking shape. Contact between representatives of Amezray SMNID and the



German research project team had been established almost a year prior, including several exploration and preparation trips in which the parties explored the idea of a joint project. I had briefly visited the valley in summer and returned with my colleague Daniel in October, when he conducted a preliminary workshop with children from the Amezray SMNID tutoring program. Additionally, some basic conditions for the cooperative project had already been determined by the funding logic of research projects. In order to secure public funding and make the project possible as part of a Collaborative Research Center, the German researchers had to submit certain documents, namely: a proposal detailing the scope of the project; a research plan; and a financial plan. The intention for extreme openness about the desirable course of the project, as well as mutual negotiation in terms of how to proceed jointly thus reached their systemically predetermined limitations before the project had even begun. Justification vis-à-vis public funding also necessitated a formal cooperation agreement; a document which listed the agreed sum for the purchase of technology and for the operation of the computer club (i.e., for electricity costs and salary for the project coordinators of the local association). Notwithstanding these rather rigid structural guidelines, the conceptual orientation of the project nevertheless made it possible to address emerging concerns, wishes, and discussion points and to negotiate them together.

The establishment of a computer club served different purposes simultaneously. For one, it is an approach taken directly from the socio-informatic methodological toolbox. The computer club, framed as an *intervention*, is primarily intended to produce academic knowledge that illuminates the general understanding of technology and the process of appropriation. Yet, at the same time the intervention is meant to have an empowering effect for local users. The efforts of stakeholders from the Global North to work together with local actors and contribute to the improvement of existing living conditions in the Global South made of the intervention a development cooperation project. As such, it necessarily engendered the ramifications—intended or otherwise—that projects in the field of development cooperation so often entail.

The intervention in the High Atlas was initially planned to span a period of four years. These four years were to include exploration, establishment of the computer club, the professionalization of coordinators, and an initial evaluation. After this first phase, the aim was to continue the project for another four years and thus expand the structures that had been jointly created up to that point. The project proposal itself formulated the preliminary expectations of the researchers as follows: the computer club should—in theory—serve as an option or offer of empowerment for the population. In addition, the establishment of the computer club should provide an opportunity to participate in debates and discourses (both online and offline) from which the local population may otherwise have been excluded. The local community should be provided with the opportunity to appropriate media technologies such as tablets, cameras, GPS devices or laptops in project-specific work—alone or in small groups and supported by the project coordinators of the local association. However, the focus should be first on children and women who had not previously had the opportunity to come into contact with different media technologies. Women in the High Atlas over the age of 35 rarely had access to school education as children and were therefore often illiterate. It was hoped that this target group in particular could be reached and supported with the computer club.

The concept of the computer club has its origins in the computer clubhouse approach established in Boston in 1993 (Aal et al. 2014), later growing into a worldwide network (Resnick/Rusk/Cooke 1999; Kafai/Peppler/Chapman 2009). The original clubhouses were built around the idea that children and young adults could learn by designing and building personally meaningful tools and artifacts. In the setting of socio-informatics ICT (information and communications technology) interventions, computer clubs are supposed to function as intercultural learning environments. They are established to foster learning, cross-cultural understanding, respect in culturally and socially diverse neighbourhoods, and to provide access to ICT and other related technologies, such as 3D printers and e-textiles that would otherwise be difficult for local people to obtain (Rode et al. 2015). In the computer club projects that had been realized by the socio-informatics researchers up to that

point, participants met once a week and conducted various projects by using technology to varying degrees according to their needs. These projects would range from creating games using a piece of software called *Scratch* to playfully learning the basics of coding, 3D-printing, and how to upcycle using garbage. In the case of computer clubs based in Germany and targeting migrants, different topics regarding everyday life in Germany also came up during the sessions. These included writing CVs, establishing guidelines on how to find an apartment, or learning the German language. Overall, the computer club concept aims to empower participants by encouraging them to work with technology in a more productive way that is not focused on mere consumption.

During the April meeting, Thomas, Daniel, and Lisa repeated their ideas concerning the computer club. They tried to translate the concept, method, and procedure both of the computer club approach and of overarching socio-informatics research into comprehensible terms. They were conscious, however, of not making too many demands or insisting on particular specifications in terms of how they imagined the cooperation partners should run the club. “The computer club is not mainly, nor exclusively, about computers. It’s also about many different tools, digital and otherwise,” they said. “The main purpose is not to teach people computers. If they learn to, that’s great, but the main purpose is to give people certain tools, to use however they want—or for a project they themselves develop.” The underlying concept here is the so-called *maker idea*, emphasizing the individual’s ability to create things using technology. Hence, “we’d like to show and encourage the participants to see computers and technology as useful tools that might be integrated into their everyday lives.” And here is where the epistemological objective of socio-informatic research comes into play. Or, in the words of my colleague: “we ourselves are interested in how people handle these things: cameras, tablets, and audio recorders.”

From the start, they were quite transparent in presenting the almost activist nature of their approach and the moral claim of their own research with the computer club. Yet they strove to find a dialogical and respectful way of dealing with the project partners. They emphasized the openness of the project. Thus, their priority was for members of the lo-

cal association (SMNID) to bring their ideas to the table and to make the project their own. Furthermore, they were eager to avoid any kind of interaction reminiscent of top-down project management, and they intended to develop a shared vision of whom the computer club should be for and how it should be run.

Despite some unanswered questions, Mohamed and Ouleid were looking forward to the project, which was about to “fill a big gap,” as they put it. “We need informatics, we need technology in our association; [...] we’re sure the project is good and will help the community in general.” Asked about his opinion and estimation as to who might be interested in coming to the computer club, Mohamed said that in the beginning the club should probably not be completely open. Only a few people would be interested right away, and this would increase once the project was up and running. He proposed to progressively address different groups of potentially interested people: first school children and educated young people, then government staff and “the older generation of educated people,” whereby educated meant literacy, not digital literacy. Now working in public administration or as teachers, such people would already be using computers in their offices, but only be familiar with the very basics. “They would like to improve their skills in *computering*,” as Mohamed put it. Another group later then, would be girls and young women of the “new generation, now in school or coming back from university and helping their moms and in their house.” They could support their families by using technology to learn more about textiles, for example, or to market the carpets or weaving products their mothers made. In addition, people working in tourism could also be targeted at a later date.

The German researcher team welcomed the outline provided by SMNID in terms of how to move forward with the project. The team considered it very important not to interfere too much. They wanted to create a casual, friendly atmosphere—with a certain degree of informality rather than mere openness—that would invite partners to take responsibility in shaping the project from the very beginning, rather than feeling obliged to fulfil particular expectations. As the research team saw it, the local association knew best. They knew the people, the language, and the

sensitivities across the valley. The researchers were eager to respect and value their expertise. In this regard, it turned out to be helpful that the procedure had not been defined in small steps beforehand.

With the funds and guiding principles provided by the socio-informatics researchers, the local association should run the computer club autonomously. Discussing the organizational basis, Mohamed pointed out that a single local coordinator should be responsible for the project at all times, thus ensuring continuity. After an initial period of two or three years, a further coordinator could potentially be introduced. The researchers agreed and asked if SMNID already had a coordinator in mind, which led to a short interruption of the meeting. On the spot, Mohamed took out his phone and called a man Ouleid had suggested and he considered a suitable candidate, who was working elsewhere in the Atlas. The man accepted Mohamed's offer to become coordinator and arrived back in the valley the next day, ready to meet the German project partners and receive further instructions for his new position. The choice for coordinator was thus made by Amezray SMNID. The researchers only inquired about the educational background and prior experience of the candidate—his language skills in particular.

Language was critical insofar as the researchers wished to continuously know how the computer club was progressing and what kind of activities would take place. For them, English was the working language for project business. If the coordinator, too, had spoken English—which he did not—it would have been advantageous for direct communication. However, it was not necessary as the coordinator would be interacting, first and foremost, with local participants in the computer club. Exchanges between the partners at the project management level would continue to take place in English, with translation, or occasionally in French for written documents such as the contract. At the same time, this galvanized Ouleid's role as intermediary and gatekeeper even further, as he was the only representative of the partner organization with an advanced command of English. He thus took over translating accordingly. He would also take over internal project communication as a kind of *liaison officer*, that is, as project manager on the part of SMNID.

The oscillation between formal requirements on the one hand and the more informal coordination on the other would continue throughout the course of the project. It became apparent that university research projects are staffed and structured differently than those of larger non-profit organizations or national development agencies. Moreover, there were no standardized processes or institutionalized quality management to draw on. This had certain advantages, such as the familiar and personal feel of daily project business as well as a greater degree of cooperation and flexibility in shaping the course of the project. That this was less the case for planning at the level of project management could clearly be seen in the process by which the project coordinator was chosen. The date and process for the opening of the computer club—which will be discussed in more detail below—provided further evidence of this disjuncture. Indeed, it was a pattern that persisted throughout the project insofar as decisions were often made ad hoc via in-person discussions, despite discussions of the relevant topics often having occurred many weeks prior. Moreover, such decisions did not typically lead any clear delineations as to what course of action would ensue.

In the first official meeting, some areas of contradiction had already become apparent. SMNID voiced their expectation that hands-on IT knowledge and programming would take center stage in the computer club, with the improvement of job prospects as the main objective. Hence, working people would be assisted in their existing job routines, and other participants—school children in particular—would be given the tools to find well-paid jobs and begin their paths toward promising careers after finishing school. While for the social-informatics scholars the *maker idea* was the guiding principle, acquiring tools and skills in dealing with technology was a desired side effect. Orientation toward this outcome was evident in the interaction of the students with very different topics and personally-meaningful projects (Aal et al. 2015).

It also became clear that there were latent differences in the assumed timeline and desired publicity of the club. The researchers were well aware that the project could only get off the ground and gain momentum rather slowly, that is, that the number of users would increase

over time. Nevertheless, there was not so much an expectation as a hope that the opening of the computer club could have immediate and profound effects. This was a club that in theory could be an open space for all from the very beginning, with possibilities and options for everybody, depending on their interests. Mohamed and SMNID seemed more tentative and cautious. As far as they were concerned, the club's integration into existing local conditions could only be expanded very carefully. The networks of obligations in the High Atlas were too fragile, and there was too much potential for conflict in the development of new resources.

To start with school children as the target group for the computer club thus made sense for two reasons. First, working with and supporting school children had been SMNID's previous mandate. They already had a tutoring program in place, including premises, organizational experience, and two teachers or tutors for different groups of school children. Preparing children for a more successful educational path should of course also include the use of media technology. Hence, integrating the computer club project into these existing structures fit very well. In a word: the target group had already been targeted before. Second, supporting the children of the valley tended to generate goodwill rather than scepticism. SMNID considered it important to introduce this new partnership and its resources to a wider public slowly and carefully. By incorporating the resources through the tutoring programme for school children (and thus into the children's existing work), the opening of new lines of conflict ought to be avoided. Approaching the expansion of the project in this fashion would prove that the endeavour was not for profit. It would be clear and acceptable to those in the local community that improving the future prospects of local children was absolutely worthy of support. To open the club immediately to all interested parties, however, would likely entail having to negotiate questions of participation and distribution with local stakeholders: who is allowed to benefit and on what terms? Choosing school children represented both a safe testing ground that SMNID knew how to manage, and also a way of containing potential friction. Ideally, it would prevent scenarios in which self-interested individuals would seek to personally benefit from the programme.

One such scenario would be a tourist guide using the devices from the computer club to gain socio-economic advantages for themselves without necessarily offering any further benefit to the rest of the community. This said, this example would also constitute an intended use scenario for the computer club as far as the Siegen research group was concerned.

### **The Approach and Research Interest of Socio-Informatics**

Having examined the initial steps of the cooperation project in the preceding section, I shall now provide some additional background on the socio-informatics approach as well as some of its theoretical and methodological foundations. The question thereby is how this type of intervention works and what the guiding ideas behind it are.

During the time I worked together with the socio-informatics researchers, I learned that the workshop sessions and small projects that would take place in the computer club were always context-dependent. Other ongoing research projects or upcoming conferences would often orient the themes and topics. “At the beginning of an intervention, we proceed quite exploratively,” they explained. “The intervention itself is a first step in the scientific process. A first step that must be figured out as we go along.” Once the intervention was under way, it would drive academic knowledge production while simultaneously functioning as a case study.

As the case study progresses, the use of media becomes more focused. This may include: directions or instructions on handling media technology; education on the use of particular media; or redesigning media by developing apps for example. The intervention may also transition from a case study to a design case study, whereby more emphasis is put on creative or formative aspects. The socio-informatics intervention usually follows a three-step process that can be condensed into the following formula: first understand what is happening on the ground; then take creative action and thirdly; evaluate or test the designed approach.

The documentation and presentation of this process and its outcomes represents the central scientific rationale of socio-informatics.



Through joint work, observation, and the reports of coordinators or supervisors on the ground, these case studies produce potentially usable data; specifically data that might elucidate how machines change (social) interactions. Critical incidents tend to be of particular interest for later analyses, as errors often yield fruitful insights that can then find their way as *findings* into academic discourse via scientific publications. Somewhat surprisingly perhaps, scientific papers in the field of socio-informatics do not necessarily deal with computers or media technology, but the processes and procedures they involve.

The approach is based on a series of preliminary considerations, central to which are questions of power relations given that interventions often entail a claim for empowerment. One central influence to the socio-informatics' interventionist approach is *participatory design* (PD), which at its core deals with these questions of power (Bratteteig/Wagner 2012; Bannon/Bardzell/Bødker 2018). Since the very beginning, the goal of participatory design has been to value and include cooperation partners in various computer clubs as experts for the appropriate dissemination of media technology. These partners participate in the development of technological tools, infrastructure, and processes in accordance with the relevant socio-cultural contexts and local needs (Mainsah/Morrison 2014).

The appreciation of social and cultural conditions and the wish to follow and examine the actual *appropriation in the real* has been further systematized in another participatory approach known as *grounded design* (Rohde et al. 2017). This method seeks to anchor its design objectives and intervention considerations more fundamentally in empirical contexts and findings. As such, prevailing social practices are given greater weight. Studies of this type typically consist of overlapping studies of appropriation processes—how participants acquire the skills to use technology independently—and empirical context studies—participatory design and the study of ICT tools. Design case studies that avail of a grounded design approach “are directed [...] toward the needs and desires of practitioners. From this point of view, satisfied actors whose practices have evolved toward a better quality of life are testimony to a successful project. On the other hand, these experiences and

designs need to be documented and reflected on as part of the academic endeavour” (Stevens et al. 2018: 34).<sup>1</sup>

The motivation and driving force behind design case studies are thereby twofold:

[...] (1) supporting evolving practices and evolving social challenges and (2) developing new (basic) technological opportunities that may be employed to such ends. Grounded design explores new technological opportunities in the context of a certain domain of practice, as well as the challenges involved in studying the novel technology’s fit with and impact on actual local practices over time. (Stevens et al. 2018: 42)

The scientific and scholarly contribution derives particularly from a comparative perspective and the documented collection of case studies carried out in a variety of contexts. These take the form of a layered portfolio, which can serve as the basis for productive academic exchange in terms of how the approach plays out in different contexts. In this sense, both approach and practice are experimental. It is not paramount to achieve a certain outcome, and precisely because of this juxtaposition of case studies, there is greater focus on the implementation of the projects themselves than on a quantifiable or qualifiable achievement of a specific overarching goal. This distinguishes design case studies as interventions from other projects and organizations in the field of development cooperation, which often use elaborate measurement systems to track their financial or technical aid effects. There appears to be a great onus on making impact quantifiable to thus justify one’s work.

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1 Concerning expected outcomes and the qualification of such: “With regard to investigation into appropriation, high-quality research offers long-term, in-depth, and honest empirical observation of the way the use of artifacts changes the related social practice over time. In this sense, it does not matter whether the introduction of the IT artifact affords changes in social practice that were anticipated during IT design. We would argue that the most interesting results emerging in this phase are those associated with unanticipated appropriation moves” Stevens et al. (2018: 35).

As was previously stated, the approach and method of socio-informatic research are based on normative claims. They are, above all, concerned with mutual learning and empowerment, and they favour a practice-oriented approach to computing, which mostly combines processes of *infrastructuring*.

The concept of infrastructuring has proven useful in the discourse of socio-informatics, as it serves to frame an understanding of how computer tools and technology artifacts are used within a broader practical context. Infrastructuring attempts to convey the “social, organizational, educational, and technical processes (design and redesign, implementation and introduction, adaptation and adoption, combination and recombination) through which complexes of technological artefacts become integrated into practices as taken-for-granted technical resources” (Lee/Schmidt 2020: 204, see also Star/Bowker 2002). Simultaneously it aims to open up the conceptualization of design activities rather than restricting them to professionalized endeavours (Pipek/Wulf 2009: 457). Infrastructuring is about “designers and users appropriating technologies in support of local practices, such as providing local data for specific community interests” as well as “creating the resources for the configuring and reconfiguring of socio-material environments in which new practices may emerge” (Wagner 2018: 267-268).

Infrastructuring is also an interesting term beyond the context of computer hardware.<sup>2</sup> With its practice-theoretical foundations, the term is a stark reminder that—despite appearances—technological infrastructure does not constitute an eternal monolith, but is instead subject to constant change and re-evaluation (see Star/Ruhleder 1996). With this perspective in mind, we may shift our focus as to how infrastructure (in the sense outlined above) comes into being, how it is shaped, and how its preservation through ongoing maintenance efforts actually shapes social constellations. Moreover, infrastructuring may be an intended, promoted, and driven course of action. In the framework of socio-informatics approaches, it may explicitly be understood and

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2 And it also holds an interesting analytical potential as a heuristic tool, as I have attempted to outline in the chapter five.

envisioned as an *intervention*. It thus becomes a mode of research that “requires researchers and community teams to take action and make change” (Hayes 2018: 306). Through this interventionist foundation, insights can be gained and made productive for wider social contexts and communities. Academics gain expertise that, in turn, justifies and legitimizes their own research projects and procedures, endowing them with the status as agents of change.

If the practices and concepts of *others* are prioritized in the formation of one’s own theory and action or intervention practices, this also entails a reduction in the centrality of one’s own prejudices and preconceived ideas. In this way, a potential space can be created for considering, negotiating, and shaping the course of the project as both open and processual from the very outset. These dynamics are reflected in the participatory approaches of socio-informatics. In theory at least, these attribute a central role to joint negotiation with local actors at all points of intervention, given that the design requirements and means for implementation are based on empirical events in the given research field.

## **In the *Field*, Between Disciplines**

*Empirical events* and *field* are terms which make an anthropologist-in-training (such as myself at the beginning of the project) sit up and take notice. I considered the foregoing elucidation of the concepts *infrastructure* and *interventions* to be necessary as they differed from my own understanding of what I was doing in Morocco and how I would proceed with my research. Being part of a transdisciplinary research project while simultaneously having my own methodological toolbox and theoretical questions in mind was not easy to navigate, especially in the beginning. In the following section, against the backdrop of the socio-informatic intervention described above, I will sketch out which methodological questions inform anthropological research as I understand it. In doing so, I interweave aspects of my own positionality with regard to *field access* but also my role between different disciplinary positions, project partners and claims.

## The Field

There is an ongoing discussion on how to conceptualize and methodologically understand *the field* of anthropological research (Gupta/Ferguson 1997; Candea 2007). I perceive the field—as I do ethnography itself—as a constellation of interrelated conditions. However, in the case of this book, the elusive field involves a very concrete location: a valley in the High Atlas Mountains in Morocco. More specifically, my research took place in two central villages: Amezray and Agoudim.

Firstly, the field was determined and to some extent bounded by the general research question. In my case, it was also shaped by the research project within the framework of the Collaborative Research Center 1187 *Media of Cooperation*—in the context of which I carried out my research and in whose employment I served as a research assistant. In this context, three layers of research—overlapping but distinct—emerged as the potential focus of my fieldwork: First, a *classical ethnological* field work situation in a mountain village—or rather in a valley—that is categorized as being strongly structured in terms of social ties and kinship. This functions, as far as possible, by describing and understanding the realities and conditions of people's everyday lives in a holistic sense. Second, a focus on media technologies in everyday situations and practices, together with the associated question of how new forms of publicness are produced; and how both aspects relate to the broader context of “development” and transformation of the entire region. Third, the cooperation of stakeholders from the fields of anthropology and socio-informatics, both in terms of their claims to research design and intervention, and their practices *in situ*.

One component of this interdisciplinary research environment was the fact that I did not have to *open up, access*, or produce my field of research as a lonesome anthropological adventurer, as is occasionally the case in the almost mystifying narratives of certain methodology chapters in anthropological research. Rather, I was operating within the conditions of an existing cooperation project. Even if I wanted to resist and distance myself from this, it would have been impossible for me to not be associated with my colleagues and the research project outlined above. It

was thus a matter of inhabiting this connection and accepting that I was principally perceived as being part of these relationships of cooperation. For my colleagues from the socio-informatics division, I was the local expert for socio-cultural questions and—thanks to the language skills I had acquired—an important intermediary for the documentation and evaluation of the work they did there. For other stakeholders and the cooperation partners SMNID especially, I was considered an expert on ICT issues and a representative and intermediary in terms of cooperating with the relevant German research institutions.

However, this was advantageous in that it did help to explain my purpose of being there, i.e., my intentions and goals in conducting research. Of course, at times I still had some difficulties in making clear what my research was about and why anyone “back home” should be interested in what I had to say about the High Atlas. However, I came neither alone and empty handed, nor with the sole purpose of producing anthropological knowledge. Rather, I came as part of a cooperation project that represented a new resource. From this point of view, I also came with the ICT tools and the media technology that the socio-informatics division provided to the local association.

This touches on a contradictory topic: ethnographers as resources. It could be argued, to a certain degree, that anthropological researchers should always be a resource for the people they are working with, or that they should at least present themselves as such if they hope to develop a functional rapport. Anthropologists have more typically been accused (mostly by people outside the discipline) of representing a continuity with colonial abuses of power, by extracting local knowledge and perspectives without offering any real compensation. This claim tends, however, to disregard too readily that interlocutors, or any people *vis-à-vis* the ethnographer, for that matter, do have agency themselves.<sup>3</sup> In point of fact, when it comes to establishing a rapport, the power

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3 Here I do not want to be misunderstood as relativizing the justified criticism of anthropology's colonial entanglements, which certainly need to be problematized, nor do I want to cast doubt on the general necessity of intensive reflection on ethnographic research, i.e. on one's own role and positionality.

relations may in fact be inverted, as is indicated by Paul Rabinow for example. In the following reflection, Rabinow alludes to a leader in the community where he was doing research, who

decided that *I was a potentially valuable resource*, and that either I would work with him and be under his influence or I would not work there at all. His scenario anticipated that his tactics would scare everyone else away, so he could make me a generous offer of lodging and hospitality in his settlement. Several months later, he did make me such an offer. By then, I was firmly and productively ensconced in a web of relationships which I had no desire to break. I would have been happy to add him as an informant. But they were quickly sabotaged by the men with whom I was now working. *I belonged to them*, and they were not going to permit someone else to horn in. (Rabinow 1977: 89, emphasis added)

I take this as a reminder that mutuality permeates research relationships and interactions, even though power asymmetries may be at play. As regards my own research environment, there were certainly consequences to coming to the valley as part of the project. Belonging to a project with SMNID structured the way I entered the valley—though this was not necessarily my intention. In a manner of speaking, there was no onus to *access* or make *my field* for myself. Instead, the field *made itself accessible* to me. The local association organized my accommodation with a family from the village for example. At first the association had suggested that I stay in a guest house. I then inquired whether it would be possible for me to live with a family, so that I could improve my language skills and participate in everyday life in the High Atlas. Not surprisingly, the family I eventually stayed with were very close with the local association. The father of the family was also an important deputy and assistant to the president of the association.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, apart from various stays of

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4 Many experiences and a lot of “thick participation” (Spittler 2001) of the everyday activities were only possible because I was both received and, to a certain extent, integrated by such wonderful, cordial and appreciative people. The sincerity and intensity with which I was received into this intimate network of so-

several weeks with my socio-informatics colleagues, I was alone there for the majority of the stay. From 2016 to 2019, I spent a total of roughly 16 months in Morocco, including: a one month exploration trip; a stay in Fes for a two-month language course and; a total of 13 months fieldwork in the valley, including one unbroken stretch of 10 months.

### Neither One nor the Other

When SMNID and the German researchers were discussing the course of the project, my own role came up. The group was deciding which tutors would be in charge of running the computer club. The researchers from Siegen had just given some examples of possible activities and work samples for this, after which Mohamed asked: “The focus will be on training the tutors at first. But now you only have one more week here in the valley. What about the training? Will Simon—who is staying here longer—take over the training of the coordinators in the future?” One of the Siegen researchers answered, “well, ... [pause] very good question [pause; then directed at me] what do you think? Could you handle it?” In several respects, my colleague’s answer was more revealing than was first apparent. The training of the coordinators had not been exhaustively planned in advance, and not much time had been allocated to it in general. It was evidently not precisely clear what exactly my contribution to the project would be and it was conceivable that I could take over other areas of work for which my involvement was generally welcome.

Before I left for Morocco, they did not formulate any particular expectations in terms of my role in establishing the computer club, nor regarding my research more generally. Given the shared project, research interests partly overlapped, despite the two separate disciplines.

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cial relationships and which for me has come to mean a lasting and deeply felt connection is still difficult for me to put into words; I am profoundly moved by it. For this same reason, I decided against stylizing the family into a prototypical but very personal symbol of life in the High Atlas. I am convinced, however, that through some of the experiences I had with the family and which are described selectively, the proximity of shared life will become tangible.



Hence, I was “the man on the ground,” as my colleagues put it, providing “this observation data that you are collecting anyway.” The request for my on-site observation was related to the question of how the computer club would commence as a practice in terms of how users acquire skills or make use of the resources made available to them (appropriation). Users were often seen by designers as passive consumers, obscuring their potential active role as co-producers. Guiding questions of my colleagues to me could therefore be: “How is the computer club actively used by the users? What do they do with the computer club and media technology in general? How precisely do they use it, for example: what happens during individual sessions? Do they do anything that designers did not foresee? Why do some things work well, some poorly? What exactly does the appropriation processes look like?” Observations from *inside* the computer club or during sessions would, of course, be central, yet those from *outside* or around the club would also prove very useful. In short, my contribution would consist in facilitating an understanding of the framework within which the intervention was happening and, thus, delivering so-called contextual data. The insights provided would ideally help to connect events within the computer club to a wider view of the local social environment. As one colleague explained, my insights would be useful in providing context “if, for instance, some children cannot make it to computer club sessions because they are needed for work in the fields.”

I took a rather *wait-and-see* approach to the situation and was thus latently passive in accordance with my self-prescribed perspective of participant observer. I did not so much engage in processes of organization or guidance within the framework of the computer club itself, but rather endeavoured to be approachable as an intermediary or translator, of sorts, between the worlds of the valley and socio-informatics. Admittedly, however, I had neither the comprehensive expertise or authority to speak for one or the other. On the one hand, I had no background in socio-informatics and had never been involved in establishing a computer club. On the other hand, I was just learning how things were done in the valley. Indeed, in line with what I believed was imperative, I was far from

arrogating to myself any form of representation or ascription regarding the socio-cultural realities in the High Atlas Mountains.

Of course, I was not always in complete control of my time and at various moments my time and energy both were monopolized by one of these worlds of the other. This was the case when I was asked by representatives of SMNID to answer organizational questions about the course of the project, for example, or when I was requested to pass on information to my socio-informatics colleagues. I was also assigned an expert role in dealing with media technology and was consulted for trouble shooting. When children in the computer club were stuck on the computer or tablet, for example, I was called for help. At other times, acquaintances of the family I was staying with would come to the house so that I could resolve their tablet or smartphone issues. They would ask the father of the family as he had such devices himself, while I was asked as I was known to be involved in the technology project. The fact that I was in neither one camp nor the other initially led to diverse interactions and irritations, but it also gave me impulses for my own ethnographic work. Ultimately, this work became more interventionist than I had first anticipated.

From a certain point of view, anthropological research could be considered an interventionist practice in itself. That is, if we take seriously the claim that anthropological knowledge production is more than mere data collection, consisting instead of knowledge and experiences that are mutually and cooperatively brought to the fore in field work through: the joint creation of relationships; the establishment of interpersonal connections; and the negotiation of precisely the end to which knowledge is being gathered at all. It is an intervention into the situated practices, meanings, and lives of people in real life situations. This is especially true for anthropologists engaged in the field of development cooperation, as Annemarie Mol reminds us: "The effects of science do not come after the facts. That something is altered (organized, staged, manipulated, experimented with) is a precondition for finding facts in the first place" (Mol 2014: 102). Moreover, Mol stresses that in this context, ethnographers

and anthropologists do *not* write for the people they are living and working with, but for an academic or informed public.<sup>5</sup> As such, research

does not stay outside its fields of study but interferes with them. However much we used the term 'observation', our work is not done through our eyes only. There is talking, travelling, trading. Things take time—not just our time, but also that of technicians, translators, research assistants, experimental subjects and our so-called informants. 'Truth' depends on collaborative work. (Mol 2014: 102)

With these explanations in mind, it is clear that anthropological research is thus always already *intervening*. As a discipline, however, anthropology is not as comfortable acknowledging this as is socio-informatics. The difference stems from the fact that socio-informatic researchers actively seek to bring about change, to empower, and to offer practical and technological solutions to social problems. Anthropology, however, aims to provide detailed descriptions and comprehensive analyses of social situations and contexts. Anthropologists typically seek to elucidate problems, rather than offering concrete solutions. By bringing together theoretical backgrounds and methodologies from both anthropology and socio-informatics, our project in the High Atlas aimed at both generating mutual benefits and uncovering new problems. The most important dimension of the project is a commitment to openness and a desire to transgress disciplinary boundaries.

Given that media and technology are mostly regarded as culturally neutral, a cooperative intervention project—together with productive dialogue on the ideas of socio-informatics—could indeed prove highly beneficial for anthropological research and theory. Using media technology as a common denominator for cooperation creates common ground between the two disciplines. In turn, this may even contribute

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5 This gives rise to different kind of questions concerning solidarity and gratitude. As Crawford aptly puts it: "How can I pay people back for this? A collaborative project like this makes it difficult to know who is owed what, and yet these mostly illiterate villagers have, in effect, given me a career." (Crawford 2008: xiii).

to the creation of a common space from which a more reciprocal rapport and intercultural encounter can emerge. Coming together around the issues of the computer club, actors create a sort of community of practice driven by mutual interest. As such, power relations and hierarchies—always present in ordinary fieldwork contexts—may equally be attenuated. After all, engaging with an object that is to be assembled and produced in common represents an inherently processual research situation. Ethnographic research could thus be enhanced by such a cooperative engagement in that this could circumvent certain inequalities that usually go along with the classical anthropological research setting, namely that it is primarily—and often exclusively—the researcher who has an epistemological interest.

Anthropology—or to put it more precisely, ethnographic fieldwork—may well seek to contribute to socio-informatic research. It may do so by providing *meta-research* according to grounded design terminology in order to empirically contextualize an intervention for instance. In such scenarios, the following two observations—the first of which is especially salient for the field of development cooperation—are worth considering: Firstly, “when the question is one of intervention, and accountability generates pressures that some kind of success story be told for funding agencies, anthropological concepts [...] are stripped of complexity and made into discrete objects that can be manipulated for specific objectives” (Das 2014: 60). Caution must be taken that anthropological research does not become a science of auxiliary and justification. Secondly, even despite interdisciplinary collaborations, the research goals of the two disciplines are ultimately irreconcilable. Anthropology aims at a *thick*, critical-analytical description, whereas socio-informatics aims at an intervention that offers a solution to a (socio-technical) problem or an improvement to a specific situation as well as the aggregation of case studies. To state it somewhat simplistically, this means that the former strives to assume the role of a passive but curious bystander who would very much like to leave everything as they found it. The latter, on the other hand, hopes to be an active, intervening designer who leaves a positive mark. The only way out of this impasse is

by means of active cooperation with local partners and participants as acknowledged experts on their own (social) reality.

## A Place for Technology

In order to create amenable conditions for cooperation, we needed to address various challenges concerning our respective expectations, language and communication, and the legal framework of the project. Some of these issues could be addressed and resolved at the very beginning, others persisted throughout the course of the first project phase. Certain organizational issues were central for getting the project started. These included brainstorming *maker-oriented ideas* for possible workshop designs and the general training of both tutors and coordinators for the computer club. In the following section, I describe the official opening of the computer club, which was a critical and formative moment in the project lifecycle. I then turn to the training of tutors and share some insights on the first workshop sessions. The guiding question here is how the learning process at the computer club worked and what the context variables were.

### Opening the Computer Club

After our first gathering in April, we met on the following day in the new association building (*maqar*) at 09:00. An official opening of the soon-to-be established computer club was to take place at 10:00. As the opening had only been agreed and scheduled on the previous day, there was little time to advertise the event. The group had also been very busy in the lead-up to the date. While the researchers set up their technical equipment, two groups of children from SMNID's tutoring program arrived at the neighbouring premises of the associations' older building. One of their teachers began explaining the plan for the opening while the other prepared tea and set out biscuits on tables. Together with the SMNID staff, the researchers used nails to attach a white bed sheet to the recently plastered wall, which would then serve as a screen for the pro-

jector. On one window, they hung curtains that had been sewn by two French women from a partner organization. The new *maqar* building had recently been completed and though the ground floor was usable, the upper floor was still under construction. The furnishings were still somewhat provisional. A lockable wooden cabinet, in which the new technical equipment would then be stored, was the only piece of furniture that had been bought new. School desks and white plastic chairs from the old building completed the furnishings.

In addition to about 65 children from the tutorial classes, there were almost a dozen adults present, most of whom either worked in the local administration or as teachers in the government school. First, Mohamed introduced the association Amezray SMIND and its work. Then Thomas introduced the project and the group of researchers from the University of Siegen. He explained that computer club projects already existed in other countries, such as Germany, and emphasized that they were not just about computers, but about the creative use of different technology depending on the relevant context, idea and project. Lisa then shared examples of a project in Palestine, which focused on recycling and upcycling. Mohamed followed up on this and spoke in more detail about the topic of waste, in which he also tried to generate some more participation and to make sure that the children understood the importance of the topic for the High Atlas. Finally, Daniel concentrated again on the valley and reminded everyone of the short workshop that had already been held the year before. During his previous visit—during which the possibility of cooperation between SMNID and the University of Siegen was explored—he also created two videos about his stay, as an example of what could be done with the technical equipment and the computer club. The videos showed places from the valley as well as some of the children who were present in the room. Afterwards, I said a few words to show that I belonged to the project—after all, I had already been there for a few months—and to explain that I would be staying in the valley longer so as to observe how the computer club was developing. After the presentations, the children were allowed to try out the technology. Various cameras, tablets, laptops, and GPS devices were spread out on several tables. Taking photos and selfies was a particular hit, not only for the

children, but also for some of the adults present, given the presence of a new Polaroid camera that directly printed out small pictures. All the while, SMNID staff distributed tea and biscuits, first to the adults and then to the children.

At the beginning, and during the introduction of the project, I had the impression that the presentation was going over the heads of the mainly young, school-aged children and teenagers. It was geared more towards an older, informed audience, as there was a lot of input, a lot of talking and the content was, to an extent, somewhat abstract. But even when it became more practical, as with the examples of upcycling from the project in Palestine, I could not help but thinking “everyone must be asking themselves what this has to do with technology and computers.” The translation of the do-it-yourself claim and the maker-idea as a way of appropriating technology seemed to me to be quite demanding, although my colleagues from Siegen made a real effort to make the connection in simple words. Nevertheless, the children were familiar with sitting still and listening from their own learning context, as frontal teaching was the most common mode of instruction. Despite the large number of children present, the atmosphere was very calm and concentrated, perhaps even expectantly tense. The films that Daniel screened after the long lecture loosened things up a bit and allowed spontaneous expressions of enthusiasm. Earlier, Mohamed had also tried to lighten the reverently quiet atmosphere and reminded the audience that they could not learn anything if they were shy. When it came to trying things out, the mood changed abruptly and after a short period of hesitation, the atmosphere became very exuberant, cheerful, and loud.

It was fascinating how quickly the children got to grips with the technological tools and machines, even if they had never before used them. One young boy, for example, inspected a digital camera first with some scepticism, obviously trying to hold the device correctly with due care. I showed him where the shutter release button was as he could not identify the available buttons. After he had taken the first photo and it appeared on the display, his tense face suddenly lit up. With freshly gained self-confidence, the pictures started coming thick and fast—in all directions, everything serving as material—until a friend had to

insist that the boy hand over the camera, almost snatching it from him. For me, this scene illustrated the potential of the *just doing it* approach, especially compared to classic training scenarios in which the correct handling or required operation is explained from a theoretical point of view. Ultimately, the focus then shifts towards fostering confidence in trying things out and not being intimidated by the unfamiliar feel or the fear of breaking something. This approach entails sparking interest and enthusiasm for computers and the use of technology in a playful and experimental way. There is an underlining conviction that the computer ought to be a means to an end, not an end in itself.

The opening boosted our motivation given that things were now finally getting underway. At the same time, it was relatively quiet in terms of its impact on the wider community, possibly because the organization of the event and the arrival of the German researchers had each occurred at quite short notice. The fact that the date was not fixed several weeks in advance—as might have been expected—also meant that SMNID had only one day to advertise the opening and invite possible guests. In sum, the two German project leaders were absent, as were certain members of the SMNID board, there was no promotional material, and only a few members of the association plus a few adults from the area were present. There were equally no representatives from the other active NGOs that SMNID collaborated with.

In a way, SMNID's efforts to reach the general public actually limited the horizon of the opening, which was more of an internal opening event rather than a presentation directed at a large attendance. As such, it was fitting that we received no welcome from political dignitaries or representatives of the local administration, as may otherwise have been expected for the opening of projects with greater media impact. The reasons for this were unclear. Perhaps it was simply not considered a priority at this early stage of the project. It may have been due to the insufficient notice given. Or perhaps SMNID had deliberately decided to keep the event small as they were both uncertain what to expect from the project and unclear as to what impact a larger event may have had at this early stage.



I was initially under the impression that the structure of opening was as spontaneous as it was due to insufficient planning. Before the first guests arrived, each of the project partners made short-term preparations, in an effort to demonstrate to one another their willingness and ability to cooperate. It is perhaps somewhat typical for certain decisions to be taken last minute at such events, yet the list of constraints was extensive: The technical devices and equipment were not yet available in their entirety, or to the extent planned, as shipping was complicated by regulations concerning computer batteries. The researchers thus brought PCs, tablets, and cameras from Germany to Morocco in their suitcases, with the obvious limitation of the amount that could be brought as well as the general difficulty of getting equipment through customs. Tablets and laptops still had to be set up and central applications had to be installed. Sockets, lamps and curtains in the recently completed premises were installed the day before and no additional tables or benches had been purchased yet. The newly delivered equipment cabinet had arrived in time, but had to be assembled in the absence of a professional carpenter. The coordinator, who was supposed to be in charge of the club, was not yet back in the valley due to a last-minute appointment and could therefore not be officially introduced. It seems to me that these problems could have been avoided with more diligent planning.

It is not that these problems posed any threat to the project, of course, nor were they so profound as to create a controversy. Rather, they were inconveniences that particularly stood out to me. It should be noted that most of them were easily disregarded given the desired openness of the project organization. The opening event was fortunate insofar as there was no conflict of organizational modes, whereby one would involve advanced organization, the other greater space for spontaneity. Instead, all participants worked together on the spot to develop the procedure *in situ*. Everyone seemed to be aware of the fact that the project needed time to develop the desired momentum ("*Eigendynamik*") as well as a certain degree of composure in terms of the organizational process. What we had achieved at the opening brought the whole group

together and thus constituted a first milestone in establishing good communication and collaboration for the burgeoning project.

## Getting Started

After the opening, several details still had to be clarified: When would the training for the future coordinators take place? What would the workshop sessions look like? Who should be invited to participate in the computer club? And how could ideas best be received from the very heart of the community? The training sessions and instruction of the soon-to-be coordinators took priority in the days after the opening. Initially, we briefly considered whether the whole SMNID board should take part in the trainings given their general desire to have a deeper understanding of computers, but the project partners then agreed to focus on the future coordinators in a smaller setting.

Over the course of the following days, there were training sessions with the soon-to-be coordinators, usually in periods of 90 minutes to 2 hours, mornings and/or afternoons at the computer club. The first sessions with children from the tutoring program were scheduled for the following week, before the researchers from Siegen were due to return to Germany. Three tables were arranged to form one group table, on one side the two remaining socio-informatics researchers Lisa and Daniel (Thomas had already returned to Germany earlier), on the other the two designated tutors: Mustapha, who was the newly appointed coordinator, and Aziz, who also taught children for SMNID's tutoring program. Ouleid—the project manager of SMNID—and myself sat on the third side. The fourth side was left empty and would be occupied by the president of the association during his sporadic visits. Daniel and Lisa were the only ones with their MacBooks—the others used notebooks and pens—on the table in front of them and were constantly typing away. In combination with the seating arrangement, this left no doubt as to their expert role. At the first meeting, the coordinators had also fetched the new laptops, but then quickly folded them up again and put them aside, because the hands-on part would only take place at a later training session.

Occasionally the project manager would not stay the whole session as he worried that his attendance could be intimidating or counterproductive insofar as the new coordinators would be anxious to avoid mistakes and thus not ask questions that would otherwise be beneficial. This did not seem unjustified, as it turned out. However, it posed another difficulty concerning language barriers and communication. Ouleid was our English translator, and while his absence may have led to a more relaxed atmosphere, the language barrier became a problem, which was all the more frustrating given the objective of helping the tutors, and answering their questions. With one tutor, we communicated in English as he knew a little, with the other we spoke in broken French. My own Tashelhit language skills were not yet advanced enough to offer much in the way of help with specific vocabulary.

The training content primarily consisted of a short ride through the methodology and theory of socio-informatics. It was very cursory and based on many work samples followed by a guided trial and error process, rather than systematic instruction on the devices or specific applications. It was important to highlight to the participants that empowerment and doing/making things in a group setting were core tenets of the computer club, in contrast to the lonesome consumption of the internet café. The coordinators were asked to think of themselves as being part of a “community of learners, where we all learn from each other.” Thus, they would be tutors that supervise, accompany, and support, rather than teachers in the sense that they necessarily had to be experts on all things IT. “You should strive towards helping to support the participants,” as Daniel put it, “you will be guiding them as well as the ideas they develop.” Hence and how he added, a “classroom setting, with chairs and tables in rows facing a whiteboard” was not as desirable as setting up group tables that would enhance a more “constructive environment toward working and learning independently.” This prelude set the stage for the hands-on sessions that followed. “Gaining confidence” and “breaking away from frontal teaching and lecturing” were key phrases. The group started using the devices, taking pictures and transferring them from the camera to the laptop, and editing a small film.

“It’s in German,” exclaimed Ouleid as they opened the laptops on the second day. Not only the operating system, but the pre-installed applications as well. The Siegen researchers changed the language settings for applications to French. However, this was not possible across the board. Because of the license regulations, the operating system could not easily be changed. Even after installing a new language pack, some areas of the system language and system settings remained in German. Similarly, the German keyboard layout on the laptops could not be changed. While this was a slight hurdle in terms of using the devices intuitively, it did not have a dramatic effect on the overall use of the applications and the general functionality. The socio-informatics scholars showed the tutors the applications they deemed most necessary for running computer club projects, such as software for word processing, editing pictures or audio, as well as creating movie snippets, and learning how to programme. There was no in-depth instruction on the various applications or detailed explanation of the functions, which made sense as this would have taken a great deal of time—and would have perhaps even contradicted the underlying self-learning focus of the computer club. Nevertheless, it may not have been the kind of instruction or training the soon-to-be-coordinators had expected. Daniel repeatedly encouraged them to actively participate in the learning process, “you just have to go to YouTube, type in type in ‘edit photos with Gimp’ or just ‘Gimp’—or any application we’ve just opened, for that matter—and you’ll find many tutorials and videos that help you understand the application and specific the functions.”

After a week of what I would call *accompanied experimentation* or trying out, including the creation of small work samples with the different devices and software available, we then began the workshops with children. The first task was for the children to take pictures, transfer them to laptops, and save them in their own folders. The two Siegen researchers behaved very reservedly, almost passively, to let the coordinators actively engage in their role as tutors. This was a little easier for Aziz than for the other teacher, as Aziz had already worked as a teacher in the tutoring program. He was, however, more used to the frontal teaching setting. It was clear during the first sessions that the tutors were doing a good job of tackling the technical devices and setting an example for

the children, yet the methodology had been disregarded to a certain extent. Here the Siegen researchers would have liked to see more structure: “children need a clear framework from the beginning, otherwise they don’t know what to do and where to go.” In general, the atmosphere in the computer club was reminiscent of a classroom and was characterized by a very respectful, almost authoritative, relationship between tutor and children, rather than representing a more interactive situation of communal learning. If a constructive approach of *working it out for ourselves* was to be the main focus, a framework would be needed that allowed and encouraged this, something for which methodical tips had proven themselves helpful in other contexts. However, the methodological knowledge for this freer kind of guided collaboration does not by any means come naturally and this should, perhaps, therefore have been an even stronger part of the training. Even when alternative methodologies are taught to the tutors in greater detail, implementation is far from straightforward and can have a disruptive quality. After all, it is a matter of putting one’s *standard truths of good education* as well as one’s tried and tested templates to one side.

During the first sessions it had also become apparent that the composition of the group could change on a daily basis. A month after the first session, Aziz and Mustapha conducted a survey to identify the children who were interested in the computer club project and to organize them into groups. The groups were important in order to come up with a weekly attendance plan given that the interested children were in different classes and thus had different schedules. After all, the computer club was intended as a supplement to regular school lessons and had to be organized according to the availability of the school children. The coordinators identified 49 children, about a fourth of them girls, the rest boys, from grades three to seven for which the appropriate attendance times had to be determined. There were usually between seven and 15 people at each session, and the attendance list was never full. One limiting factor was the available technical equipment, which was always used by several children together and this, in turn, became increasingly difficult when there were more than three or four children sitting at one laptop or tablet. Depending on the grade, the learning content also dif-

ferred. A distinction was also made between *sessions*, which had particular training content and were based on thoughts of a sort of curriculum or learning objective. And *free sessions*, where the participants could use the devices on their own, which generally meant playing small mini and flash games or watching films that were provided by the two coordinators. Older teenagers or young adults were not initially invited as the computer club had started as a children's space. Only much later, at the end of the first project phase, did a women's group become part of the program.

*Figure 5: Training session with the coordinators of the computer club*



## Appropriation

Asked about the worst-case scenario for the computer club and the project, the socio-informatics researchers answered: “the worst sce-

nario for us, which seems very unlikely, would be that the machines are so badly maintained (*kaputt administriert*) that after a very short time they are no longer usable. The most basic working level for the project is that the machines are working and that there is some basic technical knowledge to ensure this.” Although the training of the tutors was based precisely on this, the fact that Daniel and Lisa would initially only stay for two weeks and that it was not exactly clear when they would return was not entirely reassuring. Nor was it particularly reassuring that the rest of the technical equipment had not yet arrived and would also have to be brought to the valley. We were quite worried about this at the beginning, especially because the low level of digital literacy among participants made it all the more important to supply more intensive training and closer supervision. The fact that the project manager at SMNID, Ouleid, had a firm grasp of how to use the equipment was advantageous but the two tutors could not exactly be described as *tech-savvy*. Neither was in possession of a smartphone and each had only come into contact with computers quite briefly in the course of their studies. The idea that computer and technology skills can be acquired through learning-by-doing, through use and creative handling, however, presupposes a solid knowledge of at least the very basics. If participants are lacking even the most elementary skills, such as copying and pasting, or maximizing a window, the question arises as to whether preliminary training is indeed essential for all participants before they can begin developing their own project ideas.

This touches on the central issue of the actual learning process in practice, the first central empirical insights of which have been discussed in detail elsewhere (Rüller et al. 2021; Rüller, Aal/Holdermann 2019; Aal et al 2018). Appropriation refers to the

active and creative process in which users develop their social practices against the background of the newly created possibilities for acquiring information and communications technology (ICT) artefacts. This appropriation process is highly contextualized, i.e. different users and social systems may appropriate the same ICT artefacts in very different ways. (Rohde/Wulf 2011: 211, my translation)

Access to tablets and laptops is central for the level of digital literacy. For children and young people in particular, the learning curve rises very quickly. Swiping and typing on a smartphone screen, for example, were intuitive for them, while using the mouse and keyboard was more of an irritation and even proved quite difficult for some. This speaks to the fact that although smartphones were used by many people in the valley, computers and laptops, on the other hand, played little or no role in people's everyday lives. When I asked the children at the computer club what they wanted to do with the devices, they would generally answer "Facebook" or "WhatsApp." Other applications or functions seemed to be little known, as became clear as the computer club progressed. For instance, the folder function on the machines—how files were saved and stored—was a mystery, as was the fact that a browser was necessary to surf the internet or that homepages and search engines existed: in short, that the internet was not limited to Facebook or WhatsApp constituted a veritable news flash to the participants. Of course, many of the adolescents already owned a smartphone. One girl, for example, came to the *maqar* during a session hoping to use the internet with her own smartphone. Internet access usually had to be bought through vouchers for data traffic at kiosks or shops, so the idea of a free Wi-Fi connection at the computer club was very attractive. The coordinator explained that there was no internet yet, but that the girl was welcome to join the sessions. This was apparently of no interest to her: she had a smartphone herself.

The computer club was integrated into the local association's existing tutoring program for school children, and they then took responsibility for implementation.<sup>6</sup> The researchers had expected creative work to occur on a project basis. In reality, the appropriation process was guided by an approach whereby knowledge was imparted by the teacher, or tutor to be more precise. It was the local association's opinion that this should continue to be the case. For the tutors, this approach represented a way

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6 Only through the logic of NGO work described in the next chapter—with which the integration and involvement of the computer club are closely connected—will the extent of the question of appropriation be fully comprehensible.



to ensure that they could meet the association's demands for substantive tuition and to underpin the quality of their own teaching. For SMNID, the target group was clearly school children. For the responsible SMNID staff, children were the future; they were still willing to learn new things. At the same time, those responsible on the cooperation partner side were convinced that there first had to be training and clear learning objectives, before more open and project-oriented activities could be introduced. They held that only in this way could children and young adults be furnished with the basic knowledge that they needed for their future paths. Furthermore, it was only in this way that there could be a professionalized educational framework in which the work and activities of the computer club could be distinguished from the leisure activities of smartphones and tablets (especially with WhatsApp and Facebook), and thus be classified as "meaningful".

The association also did not arrange for an internet connection or local Wi-Fi network in the locality of the computer club to be set up. They gave technical reasons for this, but later also voiced concerns that internet use may be difficult to effectively supervise. This again could cause problems. If, as was feared, younger participants accessed and shared pornographic content, this could have serious consequences for the association's reputation and negatively impact its current and future operation. Even if the worst-case scenarios were not to materialize, there was a general concern that free internet access would simply undermine the meaningful time of self-formation by allowing kids to play games and surf the internet at their leisure. Here, it is worth noting the inconsistency given that even without internet access, there were times when children could freely use the devices, mostly by playing games or taking pictures.

What I had initially and primarily interpreted as a consequence of poor communication and lack of planning was—as it turned out—an expression of much more deep-seeded dynamics. For the researchers now back in Siegen, the project was one of many, and they each equally had teaching commitments, and (publication) projects of their own. In other words, the human and financial resources to closely and intensively supervise the project were not available to the extent that one

might have hoped. The fact that there was so much focus on self-administration, and experimentation with media technology was, ultimately, a pragmatic necessity in terms of how the project was managed.

This raises an interesting question, which unfortunately cannot be answered conclusively here as the project is still running and has not yet delivered a clear outcome: Do the Moroccan project partners consider this invitation to *do it your way* a positive expression of autonomy, partnership, and equal co-creation on their own terms? Or is it rather perceived as a deficit of commitment, guidance, and support—perhaps even as an unfulfilled obligation—given that the training measures did not quite occur as expected? Where is the boundary between necessary accompaniment and autonomy?

In other words, it would only be possible for the project to develop its own dynamics and momentum—which the project partners hoped for and encouraged—if the foundations for communication, transparency and commitment were also in place. Otherwise, there was a risk of reproducing asymmetrical relations of colonial power, and making of the project a mere opportunity for the researchers to advance their academic careers, thus reneging entirely on its emancipatory potential. In this scenario, the local partners have little or no part to play at all, instead being *left to themselves* or even becoming passive extras in the narrative of the research project's academic success. By (voluntarily or involuntarily) legitimizing the German researchers' work, the local cooperation partners risk being instrumentalized. This form of structural paternalism can only be successfully avoided if the agenda and goals of the local partners themselves are given the space to take priority. Successfully navigating these dynamics, without merely *playing politics*, is enormously difficult and potentially constitutes a significant achievement if successful.

The appropriation practices of the local association deviated in certain aspects (frontal teaching, focus on school children) from the expectations of the researchers as formulated in the project proposal (project work and the maker idea, with open access). The more political aspirations of the project proposal became rather more developmental and educational given how the project partners ran the computer club. It would thus be understandable at this juncture for those who had

put together the proposal to wish to intervene and steer the project in the envisioned direction in order to ensure its success. After all, those running the project were deviating from the prescribed course. At the same time, taking control in this way would contradict the participatory approach with which the intervention project was supposed to proceed. The German researchers chose not to take control in this way, instead accepting the contradictions and various unfulfilled expectations. Rather than formulating hard guidelines, they decided to respect the autonomy of their partners.

Nevertheless, the structural power relations that are inscribed in such research projects became visible (see Holdermann/Aal 2019). These developments also highlighted the frictions that result from different expectations and approaches. Ultimately, it was and is a question of constantly evolving together and negotiating the conditions under which joint work can occur. In order to reverse this power dynamic and also to promote more dialogue-based cooperation—while at the same time providing impulses for joint project work—the researchers organized for the Moroccan project partners to come to Germany. During their two-week stay, a common understanding of joint project work would be raised to a new level with both the concept of the computer club and the university-based research process discussed in much greater depth.

## **Conclusion**

How can we best classify the partnership between the German research team and the local association? What kind of cooperation are they engaged in? What kind of public does the computer club produce? It is, no doubt, a partial public that is confined and somewhat restricted, given that the space was not initially open to everyone, but was instead—under the management of SMNID—directed at children and adolescents. The project has been woven into the existing relationships, patterns and working methods of the local association and thus provided them with a new resource, and a new means to achieving their goals, namely to improve living conditions for local residents. Additionally, the computer

club project conferred the association's work with renewed legitimacy in the eyes of the community. Crucially, we as a German interdisciplinary research team have become part of these local references, paths of expectations, and commitments. We have thus become players in a complex and conflicted endeavour to contribute to the development of a mountain region in the High Atlas. As for my own research, my process of becoming familiar with the valley was enmeshed in the developments of the computer club. The lens through which I viewed the area was critically informed by these cooperative relationships.



## **ethnographic parenthesis B }**

### **Relativity of “Too Much”**

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*Occasionally the daughters of the household would ask me if they could use my smartphone, to listen to and watch a favorite song on YouTube or to research some information for their homework on the internet. One day, they had a different objective. “What is it, you want to do?” I asked the older one. “I just want to have a look at something”, she replied. A bit curious, I handed over my phone and looked over their shoulders. Then it became clear that today they had set their minds to doing research on fashion. Inspired by one of the leading actresses of their most favorite TV show, a soap opera that was aired around prime time, they were eager to find pictures of similar dresses and shoes. They were stunned by the variety of cocktail dresses and high-heeled shoes and sandals they could find. Clothes and accessories, I hasten to add here, which cannot be bought at the weekly Suq in the valley. Hence, they looked at me in some disbelief when I said that in some places there were even shops where you could order such fashion items directly via the internet and which would then be shipped and delivered to your doorstep.*

*Once their mother noticed what her daughters were doing and looking at, she laughed and shook her head in disapproval. Then she fixed me with her eyes and said insistently: “They always want more and more. More of such unnecessary things. But already they have far too much stuff...”*



## Chapter 3

### The Scalability of a High Atlas Valley

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This chapter deals with *NGO-ization* as a mode of life in the High Atlas. In the whole valley, as I have been told, more than 40 associations are registered. They have diverging motivations, interests, and number of members. Most of them seem to be dormant or inactive. Only a handful are active and doing visible work in the valley. Most of them are community-based organizations (CBO) that organize projects concerning the village in general, such as renovating or expanding the mosque and irrigation channels, organizing public transport for school children and public circumcision ceremonies, or providing drinking water. Besides the local associations or CBOs there are a few non-governmental and non-profit organizations active in the valley that are based elsewhere. Some are from other parts of Morocco, some from outside Morocco. As with the recent and profound infrastructural changes, the number of NGOs has markedly increased in recent years, contributing to the transformation of the High Atlas valley. With their work, they have taken on a significant new role as mediators and representatives for various concerns directly related to shaping the conditions for everyday life in the valley.

First, I will introduce the two main organizations that were important for my work on the ground, the local association *Amezray SMNID* and the US American NGO *Atlas Cultural Foundation (ACF)*. For the sake of the argument here presented and to take into account the chronology of their origins, I will delineate each separately. Though each has its own working model, the two can only be separated analytically. At the time of



my research, they realized almost all major projects in close combination and with a certain orderly division of labor. As a Moroccan community-based organization, SMNID was mainly responsible for the coordination work with public agencies while as a US American NGO, ACF was mainly tasked with addressing international volunteering groups.

## Development I: Helping for Progress

Almost thirty years ago now, James Ferguson and Arturo Escobar showed—in their distinct but complementary ways—that development aid and its procedures and processes are (compelled to be) rather dysfunctional. Ferguson (1990) intriguingly argued that the system of development aid produces results that are not initially planned and on occasion not even intended. At the same time, they contribute to a fundamental depoliticization in their respective fields of operation. He thus calls it an *anti-politics machine*. Escobar on the other hand, set about deconstructing the hegemonial discourse of development, which in its historical formation is “giving rise to an efficient apparatus that systematically relates forms of knowledge and techniques of power” (Escobar 1995: 10).

The field of development cooperation is permeated by questions of power and involves various dynamics and actors, such as: communities or societies that want or *need* to develop; elites; experts; and donors who—more or less collaboratively—assume the task of bringing about development. The field equally includes models, ideas, and solutions with which such development is to be achieved. In other words, the peculiarity of development can be thought of as a “*synthèse entre les aspirations d’une élite, les attentes d’une population et les conceptions des bailleurs de fonds*” (Lacroix 2005: 148). Beyond dealing with and problematizing development as discourse, recent scholars have shifted attention to development as a social phenomenon (Sardan 2005) and have highlighted that the seeming coherence of development is first and foremost the achievement of a variety of practices (Mosse 2005; Yarrow 2011). The turn to a more ethnographic approach towards development as practice “constitutes an explicit attempt to reveal the moral and social worlds in

which ideas of development are made meaningful" (Yarrow/Venkatesan 2014: 8). This, however, does not simultaneously constitute an apologetic or uncritical turn, but places the critical engagement as result of "a negotiated outcome of development practice" (ibid.).

In the valley where I conducted my own fieldwork, development cooperation issues have become so salient as to be impossible to ignore. Here, however, development cooperation unfolds less as a playground of an *aid industry* involving nation states and supranational actors, but rather as based on the initiatives of committed individuals. Nonetheless, initiatives do take place within the framework of global and mostly neoliberal policies. The driving force behind these initiatives is the preceding diagnosis of a lack that needs to be addressed. This questionable perspective of deficiency is closely linked to notions of development, especially in relation to the Global South and most notably in Africa (Ferguson 2006).

How this perspective expresses itself locally is suggested by notes from my research journal: "they decided to help them". *They*, referring to a French couple that together with several people from the village decided to become active and to help. *Them*, that is people of the High Atlas, and in particular the village of Amezray, where I lived and conducted my research. When noting down the remarks, I was sitting in the multi-purpose building of the association Amezray SMNID. A board member of the association was speaking to a group of students from an American school who were visiting the valley as part of an intercultural learning and volunteering program. The program included a meeting with the village's major association, to learn about their work and their motives for starting the association. The board member continued: "...they helped them, because they saw a lot of things they did not have... they were in need of a lot of things and projects". Taken on its own, the statement presents a characterization of a community, which appears to be primarily defined by a lack or by an absence. Comparing this absence with one's own life world or lifestyle creates motivation and reason enough to become active: to get involved in other people's lives and seek to improve their living conditions. On the one hand, it expresses the profound empathy of the French couple with the people in the High Atlas but it also

operates with a fundamental hierarchical divide that cannot be dissolved by the aid provided.

What, then, does development mean for the valley? In this case it means, above all, a widespread *NGO-ization*, that is, the emergence and growth of associations of different interest groups in the region for the most diverse concerns. But it is also the formation of a specific constellation of people, both local and transnational, who have made it their task and purpose to bring about *progress*.

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The local association Amezray SMNID is a community-based organization, comprised only of people from the village of Amezray. It was founded to organize the interests of the villagers and bring forward improvements of the living conditions. Quite directly, the name of the organization speaks to its motives and the overall objective: *s-mnid* being an adjective/adverb in the local Berber dialect of Tashelhit. The word *mnid* translates to “in front of”, “before”, or “ahead”. The *s* is a preposition that is added as a prefix, expressing movement and directionality. It roughly translates as “to”. Put together then, the term *s-mnid* can be translated as “forward”, “towards what lies ahead”, or also (towards) “the future”. The association would translate it into French as: “*vers l'avant*”.

The relationship established by association president Mohamed with a certain French couple played central role in founding the association. Mohamed had previously worked as a mountain guide in tourism and had become friends with the couple in the course of their touristic visits and hikes through Morocco. Ever more regular visits followed, which eventually led to the foundation of a French association, *Les Amis du village Amezray* (referred to hereafter as AVA). The couple was determined to support the people living in Amezray and wanted to contribute to improve the living conditions. They thus founded AVA together with some friends in early 2003, a private association of *classical* development aid. They started “helping” by collecting donations in France and bringing these to the valley. They consisted both of monetary donations, as well as clothes, books, other materials. The idea was that working together suc-

cessfully and sustainably necessitated the creation of a Moroccan NGO. After Mohamed had promoted the idea among the inhabitants of the village and had explained the objectives, he and 19 representatives of the village founded Amezray SMNID in August 2003, only a few months after the French association had been created.<sup>1</sup>

After its creation, the association grew steadily and implemented a variety of different projects concerning the areas of education, health, economy, agriculture, environment, and culture. Overall, as mission statement states, the association was founded “*avec l’objectif d’améliorer la qualité de vie*” in the region. Once a year the association holds its general assembly to which all members are invited and where full account is given concerning the realized projects and the financing. Already in 2005, more than 150 members attended. The association consists of a board, which is headed by the president and which includes other crucial positions such as a secretary and treasurer. The general assembly functions as a setting for the review of past, and the planning of future, activities. It is a space in which to evaluate the urgency, feasibility, and appropriateness of suggested projects. Finally, small votes occur to determine which new projects should be realized.

The projects that the association started with were initially financed completely by the French partner association, while the necessary work was carried out by Amezray SMNID. The first projects were mainly water-related infrastructural improvements, such as building water tanks for the main village and a number of adjacent settlements as well as enforcing the main irrigation channels. They had been built mainly with stones and soil, and thus had to be renewed regularly. Partly rebuilding them with concrete meant securing the water supply for the village’s agricultural production. Other governmental and non-governmental actors would later contribute to financing particular projects.

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1 Tellingly enough, the associations logo consists of a schematic map of France, in which a knotted rope unwinds or unties towards the lower part of the logo (representing the southern part of France) and reaches beyond the borders of France. Thus, the close relation to France becomes apparent and images of *pulling on the same rope* and even *handing a lifeline* come to mind.

This included an apiculture project, for example, where materials and knowhow were transferred with a view to hosting bee populations and producing honey. The beekeepers could sell the honey on regional markets. In a similar vein, livestock was donated to economically weak families who could then breed the animals for an additional source of income. These projects aimed at improving the living conditions of the community by introducing and supporting economic opportunities with a mid to long-term perspective. Thereby, people should not just receive help or charity, but be supported in working for themselves and thus “helping themselves” more sustainably.

This was part of national development schemes that the Moroccan government promoted and implemented all over the country and largely followed principles of community-driven development.<sup>2</sup> In 2005, the Moroccan state had launched its *Initiative Nationale pour le Développement Humain* (INDH), the central development program, which in the wording of the World Bank is a “nationwide social inclusion program aimed at fostering social development and cohesion while furthering more open governance” (World Bank 2017: 1). Change and improvement concerning the “conditions of poor and vulnerable groups” should be advanced “through enhanced economic opportunities, better access to basic services, and improved governance” (World Bank 2017: 1). For the period between 2005 and 2011, INDH had a financial volume of 14 billion Dh, which according to the report financed more than 22,000 activities, translating into the number of 5.2 million beneficiaries reached (World Bank 2017: 2). In 2011, the second phase of the initiative was launched<sup>3</sup> and—with constitutional amendments in the same year—the decentral-

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2 This included national programs such as the *Programme d'électrification rural général* (PERG), *Programme d'approvisionnement groupé en eau potable des populations Rurales* (PAGER), or *Programme national de construction de route en milieu rural* (PNCRR). See for instance Lacroix (2005: 161-167).

3 The third phase of the initiative (2019-2023) was announced by the king in July 2018 and officially launched in September of the same year. See <http://ww.indh.ma/chantier-de-regne/#discours> (last accessed, 24/08/2019).

ization agenda and mechanisms for greater participation by “citizens and associations” were further promoted and fostered (Bergh 2017).

In direct comparison, however, the contribution of the state development initiative was significantly lower than that of the highly active French association, AVA. From early on, SMNID also started to support the education of school children, by donating books, notebooks, pens, and school bags. Members of the association would also occasionally give French lessons during their stay. Collaborating with AVA also opened up a new distribution channel through which local products could find new buyers. In this way, carpets made in the valley were sold in France. The two associations even set up fixed-price tables to ensure transparency and a regulated procedure. Eventually it financed the construction of a building in the village that was supposed to function as multi-purpose center for Amezray SMNID. It was furnished and then used to hold meetings, store materials, and for educational workshop sessions. It contained the association’s office and even a small library.<sup>4</sup>

Before the state expanded the power lines, and before electricity reached the valley, mostly gas lamps lit the living rooms. Both associations therefore installed a water-driven turbine near the river in 2007 to produce electricity for the village of Amezray. Households were thus supplied with electricity and the purchase of other electrical appliances such as refrigerators and televisions increased. Amezray SMNID also realized other infrastructure projects, such as the construction of a pedestrian bridge over the river, the fortification of water sources for the semi-nomadic pastoralists, or the construction of staircases in the village that made paths over steep slopes more accessible.

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4 At the same location, later another multi-purpose building was added to meet the increased demand for premises in order to be able to organize tutoring sessions and workshops. This new building housed the computer club (see chapter two).

## Paradigms of Development Policies: Decentralization and Participation

Here it is fitting to include Sylvia Bergh's study on development politics in Morocco, in order to be able to put the association's work into a comparative framework. The study focuses on decentralization reforms and participatory approaches in the context of rural development programs and their impact on local governance.<sup>5</sup> Based on an analysis of 50 community-based organizations, Bergh provides an intriguing overview of their policies and workings.<sup>6</sup> As to why local people start an association of their own, she gathered the following:

Regardless of the true impact of donor policy on the creation of associations, many interviewees cited providing basic infrastructure in their village, such as potable water provision, as the main reason for establishing an association. Several created their association as a response to others being created in neighbouring villages. Sometimes this was cited in connection with the resulting ability to request a service such as drinking water from the government. Others put it more directly as the need to be a legal entity in order to implement projects. As one interviewee put it, 'Even the *makhzen* (here used in the sense of government administration in general) won't talk to you if you don't have an association in your village. If they have a project to give to a

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5 Bergh herself is an advocate for a participatory approach to development that she wishes to re-politicize. This may stem from her own experience as practitioner in the field of development cooperation with the World Bank. She makes her conviction quite explicit by writing that she aims "to strengthen the case for truly transformative development based on popular participation, and to promote the view that development should be seen as a process of structural change in society rather than as a series of deliberate (outside) interventions" (Bergh 2017: 38).

6 Right at the beginning she specifies that almost half of them were not pursuing projects or were not active at all during her research stays (see Bergh 2017: 172). This is reminiscent of my own context, where on paper there are said to be a large number of associations, but very few are active.

village they always want to communicate and work with an association.' Several other interviewees made statements to the same effect. (Bergh 2017: 169-170)

Besides that, Bergh stresses that political considerations or personal ambitions may also be reasons for founding an association. Further, she lists the variety of projects that she observed. She separates the major work of the organizations into social, infrastructural, and income-generating projects:

- commune-wide circumcision campaigns
- vaccines and medicine
- awareness-raising campaigns on AIDS and prostitution
- maintaining the school buildings
- sporting events for children
- literary classes for women
- forums on rural tourism
- celebration for Amazigh New Year, study of the ancient rock engravings, Tamazight language classes and theater plays
- drinking water provision
- irrigation networks
- road tracks
- mosque construction or upgrading
- local garbage dump (Bergh 2017: 173-175)

Concerning the projects with which associations try to generate income, according to Bergh the findings suggest that one should be cautious in evaluating their capacity to raise local living standards in the long-term. Among those projects she names: textile work and weaving (especially for women); planting of fruit trees; bee-keeping; donating livestock to associations or people; and tourism activities. In the aforementioned introduction we encountered some of these same points.

For Bergh, many of those income-generating projects entail something she calls *management problems* and she elucidates this with an ethnographic example of planting fruit trees:



[...] when the trees are planted on forest domain, the association needs to agree with the water and forestry services how the profits will be shared. This is the case in Tassa Ouirgane [one of her field sites, S.H.] with the carob trees planted with the GTZ. In other cases, the tiny size of farming plots in the mountain areas mean that fruit tree distribution is simply not appropriate. However, they can still be useful to the association, as this example from the association in Tiziane [another field site, S.H.] shows: ‘We took the trees and we sold them to others and we made a list of the people we gave them to (so that we can show the list to the DPA in case they come to inspect the trees). Because it’s better for the association to sell the trees in order to have money to do something else. (*What did you do with the money?*) We bought the pipes to connect the households to drinking water and we repaired the mosque. There were people who didn’t have land to plant the trees so it was better for them to sell them to someone who has land and who has access to irrigation water. That way they won’t die.’ (Bergh 2017: 177-178)

This somewhat lengthy consideration of Bergh’s study is intended to show how flexible, pragmatic, but also diverse the local manifestation of rural development can be (see Vasantkumar 2017). What is important in contextualizing my own descriptions is that the valley of Zawiya Ahansal is by no means an exceptional case when it comes to questions of development cooperation, NGO activity, and underlying ideas and logics of how to “progress” economically. The recourse to Bergh’s findings makes it clear that larger development schemes—such as decentralization and participation—form the policy frameworks in which NGOs in Morocco (must) operate.

Where the depth of Bergh’s study suffers somewhat, however, is the connection of individual CBOs with other (transnational) actors, something that is particularly impressive in the case of Amezray SM-NID. The association focused its initial work and projects on the village of Amezray. Later on, and especially after they had started working together with the US American NGO Atlas Cultural Foundation (ACF), the two central villages of Agoudim and Amezray became the main locations

for implementing projects. In fact, SMNID and ACF designed projects in such a way that the projects would either benefit both communities and the wider valley equally, or would be realized in both villages. From then on, most projects were jointly financed and implemented by the Moroccan association (Amezray SMNID), the French NGO (AVA), and the new US American NGO (ACF). Subsequently, the American NGO would replace the French NGO as the largest donor.

## Development II: Restauration and Education

The Atlas Cultural Foundation (ACF) was founded by an American architect in 2009 after repeatedly coming back to the High Atlas Mountains and the particular valley for vacation. Struck by the natural beauty of the landscape and people, she was puzzled by the lack of heritage preservation. The once prestigious saintly houses and granaries (*ighrim*, pl. *igherman*) were slowly falling apart and only as ruins continued to tell a rich and powerful history. This then, was the motivation to start engaging in the region in the first place. In order to start doing work on the ground, three things were indispensable: raising funds and finding donors in the US; getting official documents and admissions from the Moroccan state authorities; and finding local cooperation partners.

The first restoration of an *ighrim* was carried out by ACF together with SMNID and AVA in 2009 and 2010. The building—located in Amezray (upper village)—was constructed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with earth, mud, stone and wood, as was typical for the south of Morocco.<sup>7</sup> It had allegedly been built by a descendant of the valley's founding father, who himself has been an important figure for the history of the valley. The *ighrim* functioned as a fortified communal granary, where grain and other materials were stored or animals housed. In addition, it was used for defense in armed conflicts with neighbouring communities or even with the French army during the time of the protectorate. The other

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7 All the buildings are said to have been originally built by craftsman from the territory of the adjacent Ait Abdi territory or from even further south of Morocco with the help of local workers.

*ighrim* of Amezray (lower village), which had historically served the same purposes, was restored in 2013.

Figure 6: Restored *ighrim* of Amezray (upper village)



In 2011, however, ACF received a statement of partnership from the Moroccan Ministry of Culture in order to manage the restoration of the historic structures of the buildings. The first building was restored in Amezray, while the second—located in Agoudim—was restored in cooperation with the Moroccan Ministry of Culture in 2011 and 2012. In contrast to the village of Amezray, the *igherman* in Agoudim had not been commonly owned as there had been more than one granary for the main village settlement<sup>8</sup>. In fact, four *igherman* were built in Agoudim, as there were four important families who could trace their direct lineage to the founder of the valley. The heads of the respective sacred lineages occupied extraordinary social positions, which was also reflected in the representative buildings. Besides storing goods, materials, and livestock, the *igherman* were also used to host and accommodate

8 For clarification, two *igherman* can be found in Amezray due to the two main settlements of the village: one for the upper and one for the lower village.

pilgrims who come to the valley in order to visit the tomb of the founding father Sidi Said. The other *igherman* were then restored in 2014/2015, in 2015/2016, and the last and oldest one in 2017/2018.

Hence, in the course of almost ten years, all of the six *igherman* of the main villages were renovated and restored by the associations. In a certain way, the restoration, with which AFC and SMNID began their cooperation, touches on an issue that Mandana Limbert has raised for Oman: through this work the organizations have slowly become “part of a national project on heritage and local customs” (Limbert 2010: 123). In the case of Zawiya Ahansal, however, it is not (initially) the state that drives this ‘heritage-ization’ forward. On the contrary, the state is, so to speak, urged to participate by the activity of the NGOs.

There has been a tremendous effort both to realize the reconstruction work itself, but also to create the organizational foundations and conditions to make the work possible in the first place. Getting the reconstruction work in motion meant starting a non-profit organization from scratch. Successful work was only possible through a solid mutual relationship with the local community. Thus, the *igherman* were all restored in cooperation with the local Association Amezray SMNID and partly with the financial participation of AVA and the Moroccan government. The greater part of the funding for the restorations was provided by fundraising and donations from private donors in the USA. Finding the right cooperation partners in Morocco and getting reliable contacts was thereby not always easy or without friction and conflict. Throughout the years of engagement in the valley, however, the organization was able to forge very strong personal and professional ties to the community. The most important of these was most probably the close friendship between Miriam, the founder of ACF, and the sheikh of the *taqbilt*,<sup>9</sup> who at the same time represented a crucial link to the official Moroccan authorities and to the interwoven social fabric of the valley. The president and her family had eventually moved to the village and were living next

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9 The term “tribe” is a contested concept, but which nevertheless has a significant relevance for the region. In the following I will rather refer to the emic term *taqbilt*.

to the sheikh's. Staying and living in the village themselves thereby let them become a part of the community, which contributed greatly to the acceptance and recognition of the work the NGO was doing.

The organization has offered and realized a range of different projects, always in cooperation with Amezray SMNID and often with other partners or experts from Morocco or abroad. Together with architecture students from a US university, to which ACF's president, Miriam, was well connected, a community refuse furnace was planned and constructed in 2014 and 2015. The project aimed to reduce littering around paths, roads or in the river for example. The refuse furnace would then provide a solution for disposing of rubbish in an orderly process without resulting in such toxic fumes as are produced by private waste incineration. As a second step, rubbish bins were to be distributed in the main villages and a weekly collection scheme introduced. The idea was to have Amezray SMNID assume responsibility for emptying the bins and transporting the waste to the disposal facility. SMNID obtained the permission from the Moroccan Ministry of Forestry to build the garbage furnace away from the villages on their land. Accompanying this, awareness campaigns were launched to educate the community about the dangers and health risks of waste and to inform them how to handle it appropriately and in an environmentally friendly manner.

A similar project concerned the creation of community laundry wash station that was realized with the same cooperation partners between 2014 and 2016. In both Amezray and Agoudim, stations were designed near the river, which received water from existing irrigation channels and which were planned in such a way that the effluent water would seep through a natural filter layer of vegetation and rock and not flow directly into the river, thus polluting it.

Apart from the pragmatic improvement of living conditions, the main concern of SMNID and ACF was education. This was also based on an underlying ideology that became more prevalent in the valley, due to the mediation of the NGOs. To state it plainly, this ideology consisted of the growing affirmation of a *promise of modernization* that would ultimately improve living conditions: education, and individual initiative could lead to social advancement and new prospects opening

up. In this context, a tutoring program was set up in 2012, first with one teacher and then with a second who joined the program in 2013. It was in this context the computer club was later integrated (see chapter two). The objective for the program was to support young school children, in particular, who were experiencing substantial difficulties during their first years at school. The reason for this was that teachers—distributed throughout the country by the Moroccan government—often did not speak the local Berber dialect, only Arabic. This meant that, besides the corresponding school subjects, the children were initially confronted with the additional difficulty of having to follow the language lessons. Since not all parents had gone to school themselves, and others did not perceive education as paramount, supporting the children with learning or doing homework was not something that all families could relate to. The tutoring program was intended to improve the starting conditions for all children to successfully benefit from the positive aspects of the education system. Most of the pupils in both villages regularly took part in the private lessons and the success of the program could subsequently be measured in figures: In spring 2015, Agoudim and Amezray pupils had the highest test scores in the province—an enormous increase considering that the valley used to have one of the lowest test scores before.

The educational offering was (somewhat accidentally) bolstered by occasional interactions with tourists and volunteers who came to the valley the one hand, and (much more deliberately) with additional English lessons for older pupils on the other. The latter was offered by the association's staff from winter 2014 on, when the usual seasonal tourism tasks were not on the agenda and the staff was therefore less busy. The English lessons were also further expanded in summer 2017 with the support of the US embassy in Rabat: the embassy granted a fund to pay for teachers and to finance materials for an English Summer Camp lasting several weeks. In summer 2018 the second edition of the Summer Camp took place.

### Development III: Intercultural Learning and Transnational Volunteering

Besides the involvement in community projects, the association's main area of activity was intercultural learning programs. These programs were mostly set up either with other associations, such as organizations offering intercultural exchanges and voluntary services, or with educational institutions, such as schools or universities from Morocco or the USA, which had an interest in such educational excursions as part of their curricula. However, they also included community projects, that is, the non-explicit intercultural learning programs, mostly involved the help of volunteers or was often coupled with a community service program. ACF functioned as broker for those intercultural or volunteer exchange programs. In consultation with the respective institution, they put together the program, which could range from a few days up to four weeks, and took care of the entire organization. They offered an all-around carefree package for the visitors or volunteers, so to speak.

Every group ACF would bring to the valley—such as for instance an American School class with their teachers and some staff—had to be officially registered with the local authorities. First, the staff members of the organization had to provide an official announcement letter (*ikhbar*) about the planned program. Second, the staff had to list the detailed personal information of everyone participating in the exchange program. This included, for each individual, their full name, date of birth, occupation, gender, nationality, home address and passport number with its issue and expiration dates. Third, they had to give a detailed overview and description of the planned program. The staff listed all activities and scheduled time for each day of the entire stay. After compiling the documents, they sent all of them to the caid.<sup>10</sup> The official announcement letter as well as the other documents were usually signed and stamped by the local Moroccan association Amezray SMNID that worked together

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10 Caid translates roughly as “leader” and is the designation for a local governor in Morocco.

with ACF. The former mostly functioned as a liaison with the official authorities, who wanted to be kept informed at all times.<sup>11</sup>

The intercultural learning aspect of the project occurred mostly through different building blocks: guided historical tours, providing information about the area, way of life and culture in the High Atlas; similar walks focusing on other topics, such as agriculture or water supply. These were partially carried out with local responsible persons for the respective areas and included: research tasks; question and answer sessions with the sheikh; and crash courses on important expressions and phrases of the local Berber dialect. In addition, the organization promoted a very hands-on approach. Intercultural exchange was also to take place and function through bodily experience and physical work. Enormous attention was thus also paid to volunteer work. This meant that the participants took part in gardening or working in the fields, helped with construction work or the completion of community projects, and supported the teachers in tutoring or even planned and conducted small workshops themselves. There they taught languages (English or French) or mathematics in a playful way, and played together with the children and teenagers. In addition, there were activities of daily life which the participants of the program could occasionally take

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11 There is an abundance of stories—the validity of which is difficult to judge—of foreign non-profit or charitable organizations operating in rural Morocco that did not in fact work on community projects or in the field of development cooperation, but tried to missionize and spread Christianity. This is strictly forbidden by Moroccan law and the authorities are said to have expelled the involved persons from the country immediately. I think it is safe to say that though state services often seem rare—indeed almost invisible—in rural and mountainous areas of Morocco, it has ears and eyes everywhere, and is prepared to enforce its sovereignty. In addition, to ensure the smooth and safe course of the program, the authorities provided a police officer that would accompany bigger groups. The officer would wear civilian clothes and was housed in the same place as the visiting group. Rather than monitoring or controlling the activities of the program, he was present as a precaution and expression of support by the authorities, I was told. Moreover, this appeared reasonable as only two auxiliary forces of the Moroccan army were stationed in the valley to guard the office of the caid, but there were not usually any police.



part in or watch, such as weaving carpets, and preparing tea or food. All activities were always accompanied, if not carried out, by staff members of the associations, and they were responsible for advice and permanent translation.

Contrary to the seeming remoteness of the valley, during the main tourist season, from March to October, the valley appeared almost buzzing with volunteers. In 2017, the association organized the program for 16 groups, all but two of them were volunteers from different US American schools worldwide. In 2018, one of the busiest years for the association ever, they hosted 21 groups, out of which 19 were volunteers, again the majority of them were students from the US. In around 80% of the cases, the groups consisted of between ten and 20 participants, only in the remaining 20% was this less. However, these figures apply only to ACF programs. SMNID additionally organized similar volunteer programs on occasion. As a consequence, during the summer holidays in particular, the number of educational programs was so high that over a period of several weeks, activities or workshops took place on a daily basis. These were aimed at local children and young people. Yet at the same time the success of those projects was also dependent on the students' presence and will to participate in the offer.

## Brokers of Change

NGOs and their practices are themselves contested spheres, reflecting lines of conflict and processes of negotiation in society at large. Amezray SMNID and ACF are examples of how local interests and problems are connected to a transnational level and *vice versa*. Transnational topics and/or models are then retranslated and re-referenced to the situations and contexts of the particular locality in the High Atlas. The commitment and expertise of the US American founder of ACF and SMNID's amicable donor relationship with AVA, respectively, are at the same time the prerequisite for successful work, yet they can only be brought to bear in their local and social embeddedness. The associations act as intermediaries that link concerns to a wider world and therefore tie new

networked relationships with potential partners. Decisive for this are the two key figures of the respective associations: Mohamed, the president of SMNID and Miriam, the founder of ACF. In this intermediary position, they convey, both explicitly and implicitly, ideas of a good and successful life in accordance with global standards, as well as a possible path to this progress. This occurs, for example, through the professionalization of working methods, the development of financial resources and the establishment of new contacts. They assume a double function of brokerage, both with their associations as new forms of institutions in the particular locality of the High Atlas, and their biography and roles as individuals.

To take an analytical look at the roles of Mohamed and Miriam, and the wider implications of their work, the figure of the broker is quite fitting. Brokers—who themselves work in zones of translation—entail a promise of social mobility and multiple connections. They are “both product and producer of a new kind of society” (James 2011). As middlemen and catalysts, in various concrete manifestations, they facilitate flows and make connections. This culminates in their advantage of “enhanced information and control their networks provides about opportunities, practices and resources” (Stovel/Shaw 2012, see also van Leynseele 2018). Beyond this, brokerage implies a hinge function that connects different levels or authorities while serving to advance a particular project. In the High Atlas Mountains, brokers mediate above all between competing ways of life. Through their own biographies and the work achieved with their organizations, they describe alternative ways of shaping one’s future path. Moreover, with his own biographical story, Mohamed provides a sort of template and guidance for this, as will become clear below.

### **Tourism as Parallel Structure**

Successful activity in the field of tourism is central for the work of the organizations. Organizationally and systematically speaking, there is a difference between SMNID as a community-based organization that facilitates community projects and makes use of state support mechanisms, and ACF as an NGO operating in Morocco, which engages in a

wider variety of development practices. First and foremost, the different organizational methods and communication structures should be mentioned here. At ACF, value is placed on transparency and a structured way of working, especially with regard to strict scheduling and clear and equal communication, which is achieved for example by holding regular employee meetings. Hierarchies ought to be as flat as possible in order to support mutual commitment and personal responsibility. As an NGO that relies on donations from the US, ACF has a accountability obligation to funders. SMNID, by contrast, is organized much more hierarchically, in the sense that information flows down and decisions are always made by the president. When work is delegated to others, it is often perceived as a loss of influence and/or oversight. Spontaneous phone calls between staff and the president were more common than regular coordination meetings or committee work. At the same time, it is the president who is responsible for ensuring that work is done in the best interests of the local community, i.e., addressing concerns, responding to criticism, and providing ongoing support.

In practice, however, both organizations aim at similar objectives and their working methods are very closely intertwined. One decisive factor for successful work seems to be whether and to what extent perspectives can be created with which one can secure an income in the longer term—not only for the community, but also for the staff and organizations themselves. This requires either a certain degree of entrepreneurial success in advance, which can be used to secure the implementation of community projects, and which can potentially be expanded; or, it requires additional, external donors, through which longer-term structures can be set up in order to allow the successful coordination and implementation of community projects. Non-profit community projects are thus based on the economic success of the people facilitating them and on how skillfully social relations can be developed into cooperation networks.

This becomes particularly clear when one looks at the parallel tourism structure of the organizations. In addition to their non-profit work, both had a touristic branch, which provided tourist services either in close cooperation, or independently of one another. The intercultural

learning program and voluntary work was often combined with a touristic component. The touristic part involved, for instance, several day-long hikes through the mountains, sightseeing tours to major Moroccan sites or urban centers, and recreational activities at the ocean or in the desert. Staff members of the respective associations would not only work on coordinating community projects or volunteering programs, but also as tourist guides. Similarly, additional workers would be hired in both areas, for example as construction workers on community projects, or as muleteers on a touristic hiking trip. Moreover, Mohamed, the president of Amezray SMNID had been running a hotel where guests on intercultural programs for US American universities, for example, would regularly stay. As for their touristic branch, ACF created an officially licensed travel agency registered with the Moroccan authorities called *Atlas Cultural Adventures (ACA)*. One reason for the success of ACA is the involvement of the founder's husband, who had been a sponsored mountaineer. This profit-oriented parallel structure of SMNID and ACF was instrumental to cross-financing their non-profit work and to providing for their own income.

Attracting volunteer groups was quite lucrative. At least so much so that there were imitators trying to set up similar programs. While there were other successful players in the field of tourism in the valley (see Chapters 6 and 7), mountain tourism was for the most part either transit tourism or related to tours in the wider high mountain region. In addition to a few domestic tourists, volunteering groups represented a first substantial part of tourism, facilitating the accommodation of guests in the valley for a longer period of time. The distinguishing feature of ACF/ACA, apart from a high degree of organizational professionalism, was undoubtedly the fact that Miriam, due to her own background, was able to target groups of people and institutions that would have hardly been possible for any other comparable actors in the valley. She was able to address a wide international circle of potential (and comparatively well off) customers, such as international schools or US American universities as well as English-speaking outdoor enthusiasts. Previously, the focus locally was primarily limited to France or a French-speaking clientele. The

opening of the valley to the English-speaking world was largely enabled and driven by ACF.

### Personal Ties, Transnational Links

At the time of my research, Amezray SMNID was one of the most active and well-known associations in the region. By successfully implementing projects, it had had worked with many partners over time and had constantly expanded the net of cooperative relations. These cooperation relations can also be understood as the result of the president's skillful brokerage and the successfully acquired partners who, in turn, give ever greater legitimacy to the work of SMNID and Mohamed. Such partners have included: governmental agencies such as the *Initiative Nationale pour Développement Humain* or the *Fondation Mustapha V pour la Solidarité*; non-governmental organizations like the private Moroccan *Association des Amis de Zaouiat Ahansal pour le Développement de la Montagne*; a French artist collective called *Fantastique* and, of course; the *Atlas Cultural Foundation*, which has also become an important player in the region itself. *Arconic*, an aircraft group based in Casablanca, Morocco, and the German *universities of Siegen and Cologne* were recently added to the list of cooperation partners.

Together with AVA, Amezray SMNID may initially have been misconstrued, on occasion, as a private initiative of engaged individuals. This may, in turn have led to misperceptions of the respective organizations representing the *development* or *aid industry* in the sense of a more intertwined set of national and global policies of development, including financiers, implementing agencies, and practitioners (Gardner/Lewis 2015; Mosse 2013). Nevertheless, the objectives and working methods of both SMNID and ACF have been informed by underlying ideas of how help can be given and collaboration be achieved with a view to improving the living conditions of the community in question.

In order to realize community projects on the ground, SMNID and ACF rely on concepts and procedures that have their origins primarily in the center of a global *development industry* and not in the localities of actual implementation. In most instances, these are "traveling mod-

els” (Rottenburg 2009: xviii; Behrends/Park/Rottenburg 2014) that are applied in different contexts, offering the same ideas and mechanisms to seemingly similar cases and attempting to translate them to local conditions. The focus is often on the technicalization of a problem, which then enables solutions and answers to be found through rational decision-making processes and targeted planning (cf. “rendering technical,” Li 2007). From a critical point of view, this is often accompanied by a tentative disregard of local knowledge in favor of *rational expert knowledge* (Green 2014; Yarrow 2011; Mitchell 2002)—which generally emanates from the Global North, often with *Western* connotations. It is, to some extent, precisely these concepts and the kind of accumulated expert knowledge that finds its concrete translation in SMNID’s and ACF’s working methods.

The fact that they can carry out their skillful broker function—mediating ideas, concepts and procedures on how to *progress*—is also due to the experiences of the individuals involved. To be this active and successful is certainly also due to the diligence of SMNID’s president, Mohamed, and his well-established connections and contacts. The president was among the first of the village—and valley even—that went to secondary school. He studied several semesters at university, before he took a different path and switched to tourism. He was among the first generation to benefit from the nation-state education system<sup>12</sup>, which had previously had no basis in the mountains. Individuals such as himself were thus able to achieve their social and economic advancement through tourism. Many of them, in turn, were later involved, in one way or another, with SMNID or did occasional work for the organization. Mohamed, together with his brother, grew up with his uncle, who was a respected man in the village. Mohamed’s path toward wide-spread respect and influence with his work as a certified mountain guide. For over twenty years, he led hiking trips and tours throughout Morocco, coming into contact with many different people, principally French tourists. This contributed to the development of his personality, worldview, and

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12 Here we are talking about only five or six men around Mohamed’s age from the village, who attended secondary school.

language skills. Unlike many men from the village of his or the previous generation, he did not marry in the village or valley. He and his wife met in a tourist setting and subsequently lived in Marrakech, where their children would go to school. They would then spend their summer holidays in Amezray. Moreover, with his income as guide, he was able to build a hotel in Amezray, which offered the most comfortable accommodation in the valley. Based on his own experience, he geared the establishment towards tourists from outside of Morocco, adhering to “Western standards”.<sup>13</sup> His brother also runs a *Riad* in Marrakech. With his level of education and his professional success, Mohamed was different from virtually all his peers in the village. The difference was especially strong compared to those who continued to follow the way of life and subsistence agriculture that had been common in the valley in the past. Moreover, his level of education and his career path proved indispensable to the founding of his association.

The association is not only a respected and successful organization, built on Mohamed’s previous work with the community. For Mohamed, the association is also a veritable personal success. It enabled him to become both economically successful as well as to gain importance in terms of socio-political standing. It is quite remarkable that though he was an orphan, had to walk to school Azilal for lack of transportation, and did not belong to a former saintly family, he was able to achieve what he did: to find a connectivity with different social worlds in order to expand one’s own possible options and prospects.

Proof of his successful capacity to make connections can be seen in the invitation he received to participate in a televised discussion on the national television station (Channel 8: *Tamazight*) in April 2017. Together with a moderator and two other men—a politician and a president of another NGO—the topic of medical care in the rural and mountain areas was discussed. Mohamed brought in everyday examples from the valley.

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13 This is underlined by the fact that the local caid occasionally used the hotel for official meetings and business lunches or dinners. No other restaurant or location in the area was of a similar standard.

He appeared quite competent and serious. Repeatedly he made statements that met with approval. For him, the problem of medical care consisted in the lack of doctors, ambulances, and adequate hospital wards. Where there were any at all, they could only be reached by helicopter. Moreover, this problem could not be considered in isolation as these were ultimately problems of neglect, i.e., a lack of development and infrastructure. Only with roads, electricity, water, and better infrastructure could medical care be adequately ensured. He argued that hiring more ambulances would not help if the roads were not improved so as to provide access to more remote areas. In addition, Mohamed suggested creating a regional medical center. All three men engaging in the discussion eventually agreed that there was an urgent need for such, and that there should be a special minister for the concerns of the mountain regions. After all, the tasks, demands and realities of life there would not be at all comparable with those of the plains. A newly created political office would then provide these regions with the specific attention they urgently need.

The talk show appearance of Mohamed highlights three interrelated points: First, the influence and importance of his position as president of the association; second, his insights in terms of his own perspective on the living conditions in the High Atlas as well as his use of the narrative of the absent state, which is a powerful means of raising and addressing concerns that, in turn, broadly resonate with residents in remote areas; third, Mohamed's framing, which anticipates the positioning of the association—as an actor and stakeholder—vis-à-vis the state.

It was not only Mohamed who had gained socio-political influence through his work with SMNID. Other board members and so-called *educated people* (university attendees) were also well respected. Though educated people may be young, they would hold influential positions within organizations and the community more generally.<sup>14</sup> To a certain extent, this has also challenged the gerontocratic hierarchy that has been so important in the social and political organization of the region. Though the

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14 This was not exclusively restricted to an affiliation to the NGOs, but applied equally to positions held in local government or school system.



opinions of the younger generation have become increasingly influential for particular issues in certain working contexts, the gerontocratic principle was and has remained of fundamental importance, especially with regard to family and household.

Associations are reliant on the commitment of educated individuals as tutors, translators, and other staff members. Indeed, they promote the necessity of education for a successful individual career, thus, consolidating the position of the eventually strengthening the *educated class*.

## Demands of the Future

The work of the NGOs in the valley becomes understandable above all against the background of desires for a good life, for which these associations stand as advocates and representatives. With the transnational connections they foment, the convictions that inform their project work, and with the way they organize, NGOs contribute to a discourse on the demands of the future. This discourse motivates individuals and the work of the associations equally and entails an amalgamation of tropes such as a need for development, for aspirations, and for economic opportunities. In short, it revolves around the following questions: How can the valley become more visible, integrated into the circulation of economic capital, exchange, and opportunities? How can it be connected in such a way that actors, the state, companies, tourists, and volunteers place it on their map? How can it be scaled up from something easily overlooked to a meaningful engine with significant benefits for everyone? Ultimately, it is through this significance and visibility that people's desire and orientation toward the future in this corner of the High Atlas are formed.

Modernization is an uneasy term and its analytical purchase comes with certain baggage.<sup>15</sup> Yet modernization is also an ethnographic cate-

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15 As an eclectic selection from a wide variety of important contributions see, for example: Comaroff/Comaroff (1993); Gaonkar (2001); Kahn (2001); Bhambra (2007); Appadurai (2008).

gory. As such, an ethnographic approximation of modernization delineates quite specific dynamics in terms of everyday life in the High Atlas. With the profound infrastructural improvements of having a paved road, electricity and running water, distinct changes of everyday life become possible. Here I am referring to the pragmatics of modernization in the particular locality. It is hard to deny the benefit of storing fresh meat in a refrigerator rather than in a wooden cupboard. It can be life-saving to have paved roads on which an ambulance can bring a sick person to the nearest hospital, even if it is a two-hour drive away. It is reassuring to receive a phone call from a wife and mother and to know that she will not return home today but the next morning because she was surprised by a violent thunderstorm while herding sheep in the mountains. Those quite specific improvements—roads, electricity, running water, a fridges, televisions, and mobile phones—are imbued with the notion of modernization.

*Figure 7: Herding sheep in the mountains*



However, I am not interested in necessarily referring to these occurrences as modernization. Neither do I wish to engage in judging to what extent this process constitutes a positive, desirable, or inappropriate version of modernization. I understand these things as the materiality of change taking place in the High Atlas, and it is certainly true to say that this change is linked to ideas of improvement and progress—as controversial as the discourses around these terms may be.

### **Livelihood, Aspirations, and Economic Opportunities**

Many stories from the past that older men and women have told me were primarily about renunciation and poverty. Money played no role at all, nor was education—where available—particularly important. Ahmed, the head of a household, told me for example, that he and his younger brother had already been herding sheep at the age of eleven or twelve. Not for monetary payment, but for bread. Once he had taken on half a day's march in order to get a handful of grain from a distant relative for a work order. Back home in the late afternoon, he had then grinded the grain and made porridge. Tomatoes, or a selection of fresh vegetables or fruit hardly existed back then, nor could one have afforded them where they did exist. There was mostly grain and a potatoes available. According to Ahmed, sugar and tea had been around since he was small, but they were by far not as ubiquitous as today. He described vividly how he was captivated as a child by the sweet smell of tea, which was prepared only rarely on special occasions and would then spread through the village as a sugary mist of exceptionality.

The economic significance of agriculture has also changed, especially small scale agriculture. Owning a significant amount of farmland or animals is no longer necessarily synonymous with being relatively wealthy—that is, *significant* in local terms rather than in comparison to industrial agricultural operators or livestock farmers and nomads with herds of more than 500 animals. Owning one's own agropastoral resources is generally not economically adequate for a comfortable living. For this, money is necessary. With no industry or companies present, however, jobs are scarce. There are only about three fields with

well-paid job opportunities: working in or for the local administration; as governmental teacher; or in tourism. For all three areas either good contacts and/or a certain educational level are necessary. Additionally, mobility is key given that teachers' working location, for example, is determined by the central state administration. Tourist workers are equally expected to travel as necessary. Indeed, even soldiers or police officers have no ultimate say in where they will be stationed.

Equally, people have been leaving the region permanently or temporarily to work as labor migrants on nation-wide construction sites for many years. Migration to urban centers such as Marrakech, Agadir, and Rabat has also been significant for some time. Currently, a small proportion of families have two homes, one in a larger city where they live most of the time, and one in the valley where they live on holidays or during the summer. Of course, *l-brra*, the Moroccan Arabic term for “the outside” (Elliot 2021), represents an imagined place of longing, but without unfolding all too pragmatic consequences in the High Atlas. Remarkably enough, there is no transnational migration from the valley that is otherwise considered particularly significant for Morocco (Berriane/Haas/Natter 2015a).<sup>16</sup> At the time and to my knowledge, only one person from the whole valley lived in France with his family most of the year.

Still, the younger generation between 16 and 25, in particular, is more and more absent for the better part of the year: younger individuals go to boarding school or university; while those who are slightly older, mainly men, have found work elsewhere. As such, it is generally only men that have the opportunity to migrate for seasonal labor on construction sites or to leave the valley permanently. Several young adults told me, for instance, that they would love to stay in the valley, but there was just no money for them there. That was perceived the biggest problem.

For young women, leaving is not generally an option.<sup>17</sup> They usually live patrilocally in the family household, unless they move into the homes

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16 For the relation between village, migration, and state in regarding development, see Lacroix (2005).

17 For the role of women and gender in Morocco see for instance Kapchan (1996), Sadiqi (2003, 2014), Becker (2006), and Newcomb (2010).

of their husband or husband's family after marriage. Even young women that went to university and lived in the city during that period of time would return to the valley afterwards. Thus, they were more constrained by social expectations and restrictions than their male peers, yet they are rather likely to be the driving forces behind new opportunities and improving living conditions in their region. For the valley at least, this appeared to hold true. There was a small group of six young women, many of them the first female graduates of universities in the whole valley, that founded a cooperative for women in summer 2016. They were able to successfully secure funding and cooperation from state agencies (including the Ministry of Forestry, some national Moroccan agencies and the *German Agency for International Cooperation* GIZ). Two years after the cooperative was formed in October 2018, 116 women from the region had already joined the cooperative, producing mainly products such as thyme, saffron and carpets, which were then marketed and offered for sale by the cooperative. At one of our meetings in the office, I asked one of the founders of the cooperative: "What do you wish for, what do you hope to see in five years from now?" She looked at me, started giggling and made a gesture as if she was throwing money around while she replied: "At that point, we'll be a huge, successful company." Becoming serious again, she added that so far the whole two years had been intense work without much in the way of financial recompense. Of course, she said, it had been completely out of the question for her not to come back after finishing university. After all, as the only daughter, she needed to be there for her mother.

Although there is also a need for renovation and construction work in the valley, it is not a field of employment in which a regular annual income is available. Of course, there are opportunities to earn something with such work for some people. There are also a number of so-called craftsmen (*ma'llm*) in the valley who are regularly hired for construction work, i.e. laying concrete and doing masonry. Depending on the amount of work involved, they usually work with one or sometimes several auxiliary workers. While the *ma'llm* knocks the stones to the right size and sets up and bricks wall, the worker brings in material like stones, sand or mortar.

Two other areas where people are earning their money are still to be mentioned: transportation and gastronomy. For the former, there is a distinction to be made between the drivers of minibuses for local passenger transport and those of off-road vehicles (*lbikup*). The minibuses take the same route daily, in the morning to Azilal and back in the afternoon, or on the other route to Tillegouit and back. As the driver of a pick-up truck, however, the routes are not specified. In order to transport spare parts, materials and products, the drivers are often on their way to larger cities such as Beni Mellal, Marrakech, Casablanca, sometimes with a stopover in Azilal. In a way, the drivers are their own logistics companies that can be hired to deliver certain goods. This means that their field of activity and their clients vary. While some take on more regional transports—fodder or animals for example—others have regular customers to whom they are available. In addition, the drivers also operate as taxis whereby they follow their own pre-determined routes but also offer a space in the driver's cabin or on the loading area for a fee. Moreover, there was also one *grand taxi* for the whole valley. The foremen of the local taxi stands in the regional towns or cities coordinate taxis and potential clients respectively. However, from the valley outwards or for personalized routes, one could deal with the driver directly.

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In the foregoing section, I have given an overview of the economic perspectives in the valley as intertwined with their social preconditions. Particularly when only limited means and resources are available, life can become a “breathless race to keep up with the demands of the future” (Schielke 2012: 53). These demands of the future are expressed in an expanded connectedness—through paved streets and reception of the mobile network and mobile Internet—and improved availability of services in terms of electricity, water supply, education and medical care. Indeed, consumer goods, especially refrigerators, televisions and mobile phones, are more important still. Taken as a whole, Samuli Schielke's writings on Egypt are relevant here and need only be translated into the local context of the High Atlas. Refrigerator, television, and

phone “all are significant markers of a lower-middle-class aspiration to live according to the standards of the world” (ibid.: 45). In a similar sense, Shana Cohen speaks of a global market integration, essentially a process of establishing “a universal economic structure through the implementation of uniform reform policies, the domination of neoliberal ideology, and the global production of consumer culture” (Cohen 2004: 3). While studying the urban center of Casablanca, she asserts the rise of a new global middle class, or rather, the claims and aspirations to become part of a global middle class, while at the same time young people are increasingly distancing themselves from civic participation and the national sphere.

Especially for the rural areas of the High Atlas it seems to me that adopting the concepts of class and neoliberal market integration can be somewhat problematic. The question is: what kind of market integration do we actually find there and to what extent it is synonymous with integration into a capitalist mode of production—if at all? Kalyan Sanyal (2007) argued that for the case of India there exists an area or domain outside of capitalist production; an informal area of *non-capital* economy.<sup>18</sup> He analyses this with the term *need economy*, which is subsidized by a transfer from the domain of capital (often in the guise of development and welfare schemes). Hence, it is through policies of governmentality, depoliticization, and post-colonial capital’s logic that people are marginalized and excluded. This perspective at least calls into question the assumptions that far-reaching integration into capitalist modes of production must go hand in hand with the improvement of local economic perspectives, and the extent to which the expansion of distribution chains and available goods heralds an expected economic transition.<sup>19</sup>

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18 Sanyal perceives post-colonial capitalism as a complex of capitalist and non-capitalist that “extract the story of underdevelopment from the narrative of transition and reinscribes it within a non-historicist framework with the claim that poverty and underdevelopment is the outcome of the arising of capital rather than a residual of the pre-capitalist past” (Sanyal 2007: 255).

19 Conversely, Sylvia Bergh’s conviction seems to support the idea of a necessary and favorable transition on a policy level that would arguably intensify eco-

However, what appears to be accurate and applicable for the High Atlas is the above reference to aspirations and newly raised necessities. Opting out of the demands of the future and living “according to global standards” does not seem to be an option at all. It seems not to be a question of if one is going to take part, but only of *when* it will finally happen. This resonates with several encounters I had with people in the High Atlas, including a woman who proudly showed me her new fridge in a house where the floor was neither tiled nor made of concrete but plain soil. There was also a man who invited me to his house, where he lived with his wife and children. It was located further away from the central villages and he had built it himself, though he admitted—somewhat abashed—that there was neither a toilet nor running water. He quickly added that God willing it would come soon. In other houses, some of which were furnished with imposing tiles and abundant carpets and pillows, television sets or occasionally flat-screen televisions were displayed centrally.

More objects and achievements than before have become important for a successful and accomplished life. In turn, different resources and means are important to acquire such objects and reach such achievements. The possibility of earning money does not open up for everyone, nor is it necessarily desired by all. Clearly, these diverging desires for economic improvement could (re)produce inequalities and contradictions throughout the valley in an intensified manner. Despite modernization schemes and local changes, differences in the country are vast. Ways of life in urban centers like Rabat, Casablanca or Tangier are different to those in the mountains. Becoming part of a global middle class seems more likely or feasible for many people there than in the mountains. An open set of questions remains: What does it actually mean to desire to

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conomic integration. Analyzing Moroccan development policy, she criticizes “the councilors’ narrowly conceived development priorities. They are very much focused on basic infrastructure provision in their constituency villages, rather than on developing a commune-wide vision for economic growth, e.g. by attracting private investment, which would in turn increase local tax revenues and the ability to provide public services.” (Bergh 2017: 127).



live by global standards? By whom are those standards set in the first place? Who attempts to adopt and implement them and according to what agenda? Considering the economic opportunities in the valley, it is again necessary to take into account the NGOs. They represent the main actors and drivers of progress as well as of ideas and measures for the improvement of basic living conditions. At the same time, it is they themselves who, as employers, offer local people economic prospects.

*Figure 8: Watching television in Taghia*



### **Organizational Structures between Qualification and Confrontation**

For ACF staff members, the success of the organization was a promise of future economic security. Due to the organizational characteristics, an initial clarification is necessary here: SMNID and ACF worked very closely together. However, only ACF hired staff in the sense of a contractually regulated employment relationship. Even though some of them also worked or were involved with SMNID, they all lived in the

valley (with the exception of the assistant program manager who lived in Marrakech). The organization provided job opportunities in the very area they had grown up, where otherwise jobs were very scarce. This was especially true for the young staff members, Ouleid and Ali, who started to work for the organization after graduating from university. After spending their college years in Beni Mellal, living in shared flats or student housing, they returned to live in their family home where they could still put to use the English language skills they had attained. They would likely have been able to find another job elsewhere. It would have certainly meant moving away from their family home again and emigrating to Beni Mellal, Agadir, Marrakech, or further afield. While working in the organization they also had the chance to slowly develop more skills while professionalizing on the job. The same is true for the teachers that SMNID employed for the tutoring program. They had the chance to use it as a springboard for other jobs. Two of the long-time teachers even became official teachers in elementary schools.

The continuing qualification and professionalization of staff was something the founder and board of ACF had to come to terms with themselves. They took on the challenge of developing their staff and providing them with prospects. As such, they introduced feedback meetings and yearly evaluation talks. This opened the opportunity for the staff to re-negotiate their salary or working conditions. Quite successively, the organization introduced social services for their employees and registered the jobs with the Moroccan government, thus providing them with social insurance. Besides these social security benefits, the organization also offered ongoing education. For instance, they organized a wilderness emergency medicine course. Several tour guides from another organizations offering volunteer services, intercultural exchange and tourism programs around the world also took part in the course. The costs of running the course were split between both organizations involved as one paid for accommodation and food, while the other paid the instructor, who was flown to Morocco expressly for this purpose. It was the second edition of an expensive program that others working for, or with, the organization had already completed a few years ago. Over

the course of one or one and a half weeks, students learned the basics of emergency medicine.

Despite the favourable working conditions and job opportunities, staff were not always exclusively content. In particular, overlapping aspects of organizational structure, communication, and remuneration were grounds for occasional dissatisfaction. Conflicts over the fair share of profits or adequate participation in benefits were certainly the most pressing issues. It would be true to say that with continuing work experience, the self-confidence and aspirations of employees naturally grow. If the salary does not reflect this development, conflicts may arise. The reason for some of the employees' dissatisfaction also derived from the double structure of the organization, which further complicated matters.

The two employees Ali and Ouleid, for instance, who were employed by ACF with a salary financed via the non-profit branch of the organization (a respectable sum by local accounts) were also working on projects for ACA—the sports and events division of the organization. This was the founder's own company and, in contrast to ACF, it was profit oriented. Much more money was generated there because the offered tours were aimed at *Western* tourists and were, thus, not cheap. Basically, the problem was not directly related to the work of ACF. Ouleid and Ali felt that they did not benefit from this fairly, if at all. As ACF employees, they also did ACA work without receiving the additional compensation they expected. Here, it is important to stress that it was not a question of being paid or not (because they were certainly paid), but first and foremost about expectations. It is also a question of perspective: both had learned a lot in recent years, but they also knew how much money was in tourism and how valuable they and their language skills were. At times, they had the impression that there was not enough exchange regarding their current situation and future prospects. Having been around a while, they increasingly got the feeling that the salary had simply not changed accordingly. I frequently had the impression they were impatient to achieve more and improve their socio-economic situation. At some point then, they addressed the issue and stated their dissatisfaction. This led to a set of meetings, or *employee discussions* as they were called, involving negotia-

tions between staff members and the board, which resulted in a raise and a better social insurance. The organization also supported the staff members in obtaining their official guiding license with the Moroccan authorities. Being a certified guide in Morocco is a very promising business opportunity. Moreover, it constituted a sort of culmination of the organization's efforts to supply their employees with better qualifications. It was also a success story for the employees themselves given that they had started at an entry level, so to speak, assisting and translating, and ultimately climbed the ladder to eventually become fully-fledged guides.

Another problem concerned the hierarchy and communication structure. This affected different areas of the NGO, particularly cooperation with Amezray SMNID. After several years living in the village, the founder of ACF, Miriam, no longer spent her time exclusively in the valley. She traveled back and forth between Morocco and France, where her family had resettled and her daughter was attending school. In her absence Mohamed, Amezray SMNID's president, had apparently been asking the others to work on his behalf. Yet Mohamed too, was often absent as he and his family also lived partly in Marrakech. Despite mobile phones, email and social media, this already complicated transparent communication between all parties involved. On one occasion, Ouleid had been working for Mohamed. When Miriam learned of this, she had told Ouleid he ought to inform her next time he worked for Mohamed. For Ouleid, this was a reason to feel hurt he told me, because it was stated in his contract that Mohamed was effectively his superior should Miriam be absent. He was acting in accordance with his contract while being exhorted by Miriam to keep her informed, he thus felt misunderstood and unjustly treated. This was not a very serious issue that would have had significant consequences, of course, but it illustrated the occasional sensitivity of the staff to their working environment. Yet the vast majority of the work with employers, employees, and customers was harmonious and everybody appeared quite satisfied. Eventually, dissatisfactions and communication problems—which are so typical for many working environments—were also communally discussed and resolved.

For one employee in particular, however, friction remained. Although he welcomed the raise in his wages and also received his guiding license, Ali grew more unhappy with his prospects. During most meetings I had with him, when he was at home and not busy with volunteering or tourism programs, the topic came up. He repeatedly raised doubt regarding the value of his work and his presence on the team, wondering if he was paid fairly and according to his skillsets and commitment. He was set on making a change he said. His doubts were also fueled by the fact that he constantly compared himself with other employees, and was also highly critical of how work was delegated. Basically, the problems arose from the fact that there were different tasks and programs, which in turn were more or less profitable, both for the NGOs and for the staff. It was in this arena that he did not feel like a respected and valued employee. I had learned about the facts described above during my stay in 2017. When I returned to the valley almost one year later, Ali had resigned from ACF. He had been trying to start a new business of his own. He wanted to take over the transportation of groups from Marrakech to the valley for the volunteering and tourism programs. However, ACF had their own cooperation partners and were not overly willing to replace them. For him, this was coherent with his existing impression: that he was not treated with respect. As a certified guide, he wanted only to work in the sports and activity sector. The teaching activities in the NGO were never his preferences, he explained. He would also earn a lot more as a full-time guide now that he worked for an international travel agency. As he told me in English: “a fixed salary is the biggest obstacle to becoming really rich.”

Even if the above descriptions of some lines of conflict only have a minimal influence on the daily work of the organizations, they are a point in case. Conflicts can be insightful and made productive in terms of gauging participants' concerns, which ideas and positions need to be reconciled, and what is at stake. Here it becomes clear that an organization like ACF is faced with the problem of growing and expanding in a sustainable and socially acceptable way. Not only does the board have to operate successfully—and possibly also with additional mechanisms such as the parallel structure of the organization—in order to be able to

continue working on community projects. The organization must also involve and support its employees, provide them with further qualifications and offering them a future. Especially in a very local and confined setting, this is a task that should not be underestimated: reputation and prestige inevitably depend as much on the work an organization does as on how those responsible treat local employees. Especially with regard to financial issues such as the fair distribution of profits and appropriate participation, the field of development cooperation has been said to be characterized by an *economy of suspicion*<sup>20</sup>, which actors must navigate with caution. This applies, in particular, to those actors that have acquired a particularly influential social and political position through their work and economic resources. The fact that ACF and Amezray SMNID only carry out joint community projects is seen in this light also as precautionary measure.

Whereas the above focused on ACF's role as an employer, the last section will take a closer look at SMNID to shed greater light on its position in the structure of collective cooperation in the valley. SMNID operates as a competing form of organization to the long-standing institution of the village council (*jma'a*), which has been an important organ of regulation, negotiation and work organization for the community. The rise and growing significance of SMNID is grounds for consideration of its wider political ramifications. Has the association taken over and replaced the work of the village council? The village council or assembly prominently pervades the political-ethnological literature on Berber communities (Rachik 2001; Venema 2002; Scheele 2009).<sup>21</sup> Analytically

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20 I borrow this term from Bierschenk/Sardan (1997: 459), which in my opinion speaks well to the conflict situation presented. However, I would like to refer here only to the term as an analytical and descriptive tool for my own ethnographic findings; and without transferring too much of its empirical foundations and ramifications—as both authors invoke the term in the context of central, sub-Saharan Africa.

21 However, there are also more cautious voices regarding the composition and role of the *jma'a*, emphasizing above all the kinship-structured component and a more pragmatic configuration, which seems to me difficult to dismiss, especially for the region of my own research in the High Atlas: “French ethnog-

speaking, I would not set the NGO in strict opposition to the village council. The *jma'a* no longer seems to be the sole form of representation of political hierarchy and structure on the village level. However, it is not a question of either/or. Rather, in Amezray they appear to be parallel and complementary institutions which manage different areas of work and organizational activities.<sup>22</sup> Where there are overlaps, this is negotiated carefully.

The *jma'a* also does scaling work by linking local questions back to temporal solidarity, historical conditions and customary knowledge. However, in comparison to the NGOs, this scaling work lacks orientation toward the future and has no potential connectability. It is precisely the multiple possibility of generating and making use of connectivity that seems to be the characteristic feature of NGOs and their hinge function. A crucial interface thereby is necessarily the official authorities and state agencies.<sup>23</sup> Occupying these intermediary positions can also mean becoming entangled in a web of mutual social responsibilities and obligations, which is particularly significant and relevant in terms of what has been written about Moroccan authority (Waterbury 1970; Hammoudi 1997). This also means that it can be strategic and critical

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raphers tend to elevate the *jmaa* into a specialized political institution with defined roles and functions. In fact, the *jmaa* did not constitute a specialized political body, but was simply the extension of the patriarchal kinship system. It was not so much a well-defined institution as a mode of expression of solidarity of the small agnatically based group; it had no regular meeting days and no hierarchy. It functioned through tacit agreement of the whole group." (Vinogradov 1972: 76).

- 22 The village council is primarily responsible for land law and land ownership issues, which is particularly necessary due to public or communal land ownership, i.e. land belonging to the *taqbilt*. Administration and supervision of transactions concerning the land is therefore of paramount importance. The same applies to questions of agricultural land use and the joint organization and regulation of irrigation. The specific organizational practices of the association will be illustrated with regard to a new water supply system in chapter five.
- 23 An oppositional or even subversive attitude towards the state is thereby nothing one would be willing to afford and that would certainly be very counter-productive for successful work.

which information is passed on, which tasks are delegated, and to whom. The accumulation of information, responsibilities, and tasks are the expression of—and yardstick for—a position within a hierarchy, and with respect to political influence and power. Aspects of patronage or clientelism also affect the work of NGOs in the field of development cooperation.

At first sight, there appears to be a clear difference in that the *jma'a* is based on kinship structures, while an association—including a board of directors and general meetings—suggests other standards for its organization and composition. These standards are rather oriented towards the required work as well as the efficient performance and fulfilment of these than towards social obligations. Indeed, Amezray SMNID is very transparent with its work. During the general assembly or in other occasional discussion rounds members can debate on pressing topics and envisioned projects. As far as everyday decisions are concerned, however, decisions are taken by the president. He is kept informed about the progress of projects and has an authority that corresponds neither to flat hierarchies nor delegation of work assignments to employees acting on their own responsibility. Contrary to what might be expected from the external presentation as an NGO, there are also no regular scheduled meetings of the members. Central members of the association are in regular telephone contact with one other, and above all with the president. Otherwise, small discussions take place privately or on *suq* day where they are discussed individually with the president or within a small group. Employees have no clear or regulated working hours and—apart from scheduled engagements, when tourist or exchange groups are expected—are potentially always available for tasks assigned to them by the president.

With ACF, however, the situation is very different. Communication is more systematic, meetings are held regularly with employees and work is delegated with a higher degree of personal responsibility. In addition, the founder is keen to maintain a professional working environment with contractually agreed wage work and clear working hours. I hasten to stress again that the working conditions are generally considered very favorable and the partnership between both NGOs runs



seamlessly for the very most part. Nevertheless, from time to time, it becomes tangible that opposing ideas and work routines are in constant individual negotiation. As a tendency, these are contrary forms of management and work.

Forms of contract labor and transparent procedures of making one's own work accountable, in meetings, general assemblies, performance reviews, or employee dialogues collide with an obligation to maintain constant and mandatory availability. As a consequence, it often appears that the loyalty expected is of greater value than critical debate or proactive task management. Adherence to this dictum thus ultimately serves to successively establish and expand one's own position in the hierarchical network. The contradicting modes of organizing work are exemplified by *conflicts over resources* and the scepticism of employees as to how they ought properly to participate.

## Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to delineate the general lines of development in the region, and the concrete projects of the NGOs involved, as well as their impact and the strategies of various participants. It should now be evident that local resources are being used in new ways to participate in transnational interconnectivity and to negotiate what it means to shape a *global Moroccan modernity* within the social fabric of the particular locality in the High Atlas. Although not necessarily explicit, this process is embedded into decentralizing and participatory approaches of grander development schemes. While in the narratives of funding agencies, these imply a progressive procedure, they are also well capable of supporting social ties of obligatory relations and patronage.<sup>24</sup> However, what becomes evident from the case of the High Atlas is that the issue is not government implementation of standardized development policies. Rather, it is a question of the individual initiative in the form of a

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24 In their slightly different versions and emphasis, Bergh (2017: 234) and Lacroix (2005: 152-153) also point to this.

skillful and binding integration of different actors and participants on diverging levels. It is therefore a question of forging forms of cooperation that are flexible to different interests and can be adapted with the greatest possible benefit. Specifically, such cooperation should benefit both the people responsible for the NGOs as well as those whose living conditions are subject to improvement. It is individuals themselves who transfer and translate these ideas and options to different contexts, making them scalable.

By connecting with new partners, engaging in distinct forms of self-organization, and endorsing individual responsibility, SMNID and ACF have created the appropriate conditions for various community projects in the valley, from restoring the *igherman* to establishing a volunteer program. The two organizations have tied local needs and concerns to globally circulated ideas of a good life and models of how to achieve them. SMNID and all participants involved, are effectively scaling up the valley. They are placing it in a wider sphere of exchange as well as in contexts that previously played only a minor role in how people encountered the contingent affordances of everyday life in the High Atlas. The formulation *scaling up a valley* proposed here emphasizes—in terms of a practice-theoretical approach—that the intermediary position itself, as well as the surrounding concerns, forms of connection and translation, have not only grown historically but are produced situationally. *Progress*, here, is thus a result of the scaling work of the actors—Mohamed and SMNID in particular.



## **ethnographic parenthesis C }**

### **Baking or Learning?**

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*Together with the women of the household I was sitting in the kitchen when the two daughters returned home. In spite of the school holidays during the summer, they were learning throughout the morning—as part of a voluntary tutoring program organized by an NGO. For this reason, they had neglected tasks which they should have taken over in the household. Their mother Zahra was somewhat annoyed and complained about their unwillingness to do the things she asked them to do. While studying was good and important, there would be other things they needed to learn and take care of, she said. For example, she continued, they still would not be able to bake bread properly, unlike herself when she was their age. This could be undoubtedly understood as an accusation, raising all the obligations and meanings for the care of the family that are implied with baking bread. “How do you imagine what it will be like, if you have never learned how to bake bread properly, she asked her daughters. As if one day there would be bakeries in the village selling bread...*

*The mother touched on things that she held important in order to run a household, to raise a family and to fulfil the role of being a good wife and mother. For her those were things of significance that she wished to pass on. She herself did not have the chance of going to school, her reading skills were very rudimentary, and she did not speak Arabic fluently. Being in her thirties, she was just born slightly too early to benefit from the school system. Her daughters would have the best education and considerably more opportunities compared to any former generations growing up in the High Atlas. These opportunities also entail possible frictions and misunderstandings. They may involve a new skillset or tasks about which previous generations do not necessarily have knowledge or experience about. How*

*will they navigate these changes? And beyond that, which of the structural and infrastructural changes will have what impact on their actual lives? And to tie it back to the statement from the beginning: Would it mean that they will not live up to their role as women if they cannot, or, no longer have to, bake bread?*

## Chapter 4

### Saints & Segments

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#### **Ethnographic Approximations of Moroccan Rurality**

The purpose of this chapter is to put the previous (and subsequent) descriptions into context. While I intend for the detailed ethnographic descriptions in each part of the book to provide (or infer) all the necessary references and theoretical implications, the aim here is to set a somewhat broader framework. A framework that situates the book within historical debates and opens the arc to current issues in the study of Morocco. The presentation is inevitably incomplete and cursory. For readers who are themselves familiar with research on Morocco and/or the MENA region, the following pages may offer little more than an explanation of the thought process behind my own thematic engagement. For all other readers who may not have such a profound historical or thematic background, this brief contextual chapter will hopefully enable them to read and understand my descriptions and analyses with greater depth.

Like many regions of the Southern Mediterranean and the Global South—if not all of the contemporary and increasingly multifaceted networked world in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century—Morocco is characterized by processes of profound socio-technical restructuring. Because of its spatial proximity to Europe and the ever more global interconnectivity and interdependence, the transformation processes of Morocco are of particular significance and interest. This becomes apparent immediately when one considers that since the 1960s Morocco has been a country with a high number of emigration by global

standards (Collyer et al. 2009; Berriane/Haas/Natter 2015b). Without job opportunities and promising future perspectives, migration is and remains one of the few but drastic alternatives (Cohen 2011; Fassin 2011).

Not surprisingly, Morocco plays an important role in the political arena, which is expressed, for example, in its relations with the European Union and through the financial support that the EU provides to Morocco.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Morocco increasingly plays a key role in the context of migration movements and the externalization of the European borders (Garcia Valdivia 2018, Forbes; see also Silverstein 2005). At the same time, there has also been a growing economic collaboration, such as the prestigious energy project *Noor*, within which a huge solar park and power plant was built near Ouarzazate—with immense international financial participation “including \$1bn from the German investment bank KfW, \$596m from the European Investment Bank and \$400m from the World Bank” (Neslen 2016, *The Guardian*).

Religious aspects are also part of political consideration. As such the Moroccan state has been actively promoting a specific and liberal form of Islam, that both is supposed to answer the threat of Islamic extremism (Wainscott 2017) and to display the country as reform-oriented and thereby as ‘modern’, or in other words, in accordance with the contemporary (Thörner 2017, *Deutschlandfunk*). These developments point to something that has faded into the background in many discussions on the issue of migration to Europe—especially on the European or *Western* side, as Youssef Courbage and Emmanuel Todd have indicated:

While there is growing concern in Europe that a fanatical Islam is spreading on the continent that cannot be integrated into a Christian culture, we must note that the real cultural shock is taking place in a Maghreb where immigration to Europe has shaken values. (Courbage/Todd 2008: 94, own translation)

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1 For an overview see, for instance, from the proceedings of the European Commission: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/countries/morocco\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/countries/morocco_en) (last accessed, 19/09/2019).

Central to the socio-cultural context of the Maghreb and the articulation of political interests is thereby the role of the autochthonous population group of North Africa, the Berbers or *Imazighen* (sg. *Amazigh*). For Morocco, the political efforts of the Amazigh movement culminated in the recognition of the Berber language *Tamazight* as a national language within the framework of the constitutional reforms of 2011 (Crawford/Hoffman 2000; Crawford 2002; Silverstein/Crawford 2004; Crawford 2005; Silverstein 2013; Pfeifer 2015). Nevertheless, the negotiation of an Amazigh identity and positionality vis-à-vis the Moroccan state remains an ongoing process and political, partially dissident struggle—which is sometimes responded to with state repression, as has become apparent in the recent waves of protest and arrests in Northern Morocco's Rif mountains (Jebnoun 2019; Rachidi 2019, Foreign Policy).

Although the Moroccan High Atlas is also considered *Berber territory*, it has tended to be rather absent from current political discourse. This has much to do with its perceived rurality and remoteness – without the associated connotations of insurgency as in the Rif. However, the High Atlas is a classic site for political anthropological research on segmentary societies. (Fortes/Evans-Pritchard 1940), which became particularly renowned through a monograph by Ernest Gellner (1969). This is also the main reason for choosing the region as location for this research and the computer club project (see chapter two). Gellner's ethnographic descriptions and the discussion of them by other anthropologists conducting research in Morocco have triggered important theoretical debates and provided impulses for the discipline beyond the regional focus of Morocco.<sup>2</sup> Due to the availability of a rich ethnographic literature on the re-

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2 There are many anthropologists, later on quite renowned, who have done research in Morocco and then intervened in the debate on the analysis of the political and social structure of Moroccan society. As a selection of important representatives and contributions, see for example Waterbury (1970), Geertz/Geertz/Rosen (1979), Eickelman (1976), Hammoudi (1980), Hart (1981; 2000), Rosen (1984), Combs-Schilling (1989), see also Westermarck (1926) and Berque/Pascon (1978).



gion, transformation processes can be traced and analyzed in important historical depth.

In addition, three recent ethnographies have dealt, from different angles, with questions of those transformative processes concerning Berber communities. I briefly want to present them here. First, David Crawford (2008) describes the economic upheavals and consequences for the rural areas of the High Atlas. His general concern has been a cultural analysis that takes into account the fundamental conditions and necessities of a material world. In doing so, he emphasizes “the perspective of people at the interface between local, longstanding forms of social organization and the ‘new world order’” (Crawford 2008: 6), which he understands in terms of globalization and capitalist economics. The inequalities that also result from these transformations are counterbalanced, to give a concrete example, by the way in which people in the village of his research put to use the concept of lineage. He thus traces the transformation of village life by going beyond dichotomies such as “local” or “global,” and proposes a rethinking of social structure and temporalities in this context.

Second, Katherine Hoffman (2008) explores discursive practices of identity preservation and how political claims are articulated to make Berber culture a visible and recognized part of Morocco's self-understanding. To this end, she focuses on the interplay of language and locality, especially the rural area of the “homeland” (*tamazirt*) in the Southern part of Morocco. Especially during rituals and celebrations in the urban centers and contexts, Berber culture is positioned against the prevailing Arabic. According to Hoffman, the most genuine form of Berber culture and language can still be found in those rural and mountainous areas that form a kind of last cultural refuge not affected by Arabization. She identifies a feminization of that “pure” or “original” Berber culture and language. It is primarily women who, compared to men, have to perform the demanding reproductive work. While, on the other hand, it is mostly men who migrate to regional centers or cities and learn Arabic or French as a part of this. Women, in particular, remain in the villages and thus also remain mostly monolingual. Consequently, Hoffman concludes, the preservation of traditional texts

and songs is mostly guaranteed by women in rural regions (ibid.: 76-79). To a certain extent, rural areas are conceptualized here as a reserve or resource (see Hauschild 2008: 217-218). A resource to deal with changing living conditions. A resource to possibly link and recalibrate long-standing ways of how people live, work and think with new and different influences and the demands, longings and desires.

Third, Judith Scheele's ethnography (2009) can be understood as a complementary, but also somewhat contradictory contribution. She invites us to fundamentally question any sort of pristine *originality* of a Kabyle village and its socio-cultural characteristics. She approaches the village as something highly elusive and emphasizes its multifarious potentials as background for identification and interconnectedness. She offers an intriguing account of a Algerian history that is politically negotiated: She shows how different actors and institutions are challenging spatial and social positions in the village. Her study is, thus, a fine-grained ethnographic insight into the successively fragmenting life worlds in contemporary Kabylia:

The village has never been bounded, independent and autarchic, and the ability of the village community and of individual villagers to establish connections with the outside and to mediate outside ideas and resources has always been fundamental to village life. This does not mean, however, that the village is a mere passive receptacle of 'foreign' ideas and goods. On the contrary, on their arrival in the village, these outside ideas are scrutinised, reinterpreted, and submitted to village norms and rules, until they become virtually undistinguishable from their new surroundings. (Scheele 2009: 148)

Further, she stresses "the interdependence and fuzziness of all the categories used, including those of 'local' and 'global', to the point where their heuristic value seems questionable" (Scheele 2009: 150).

These recent ethnographies on rural spaces of interaction in North Africa show how territoriality is brought to the fore in the multifariously networked societies of montane regions, locally and *in situ* (see also Mulet 2018). They revolve around aspects of socio-economic and transnational influences that appear to become ever more pressing, and

point towards an increasing fragmentation. Thereby they only occasionally, if at all, touch on the role of media technology and publics.<sup>3</sup> By including new media practices and theorizing forms of publicness, this book attempts to make a contribution to an existing research gap.

*Figure 9: Agoudim, with its four igherman, and Sidi Said's tomb on the right, just outside the village.*



## **Of Saints and Arbitration**

There is a rich ethnographic preoccupation and a significant historical depth with Morocco (for an overview see Rachik 2016). Here, I want to focus on the accounts of Ernest Gellner's field work in particular as a historic context and background for my own research. This is at the same time an ambitious endeavour that necessarily has to be limited. It is, however, indispensable in order to make sense of the profound changes that have been occurring in the region of the High Atlas where

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3 Most notably here is the treatment of language and songs and their public performance in Hoffman's study.

my research is located. As my own fieldwork took place in the exact same region, where Gellner conducted his ethnographic research some sixty years before, his descriptions and analyses represent an important point of reference for this work. A point of reference that provides an important historical perspective on the ongoing upheavals in the region. This recapitulation then, aims at presenting some of his main ethnographic insights as backdrop and foundation for an understanding of the transformation processes.

In his ethnography Gellner describes the way of life and the function of saints (*igurramen*, sg. *agurram*) in the High Atlas. They are “holy” because they are descendants of Sidi Said Ahansal, who is said to have descended from the holy prophet Muhammad and according to legend founded *Zawiya Ahansal* at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Because of this the whole lineage of the *Ihansalen*<sup>4</sup> possesses a divine blessing (*baraka*) which is expressed, among other things, in prosperity as well as in a number of magical abilities—which is especially potent in the *Igurramen*. As Gellner remarks, the role and function of the saints, however, becomes only clear and understandable, embedded and in the context of the surrounding “Berber tribes”. Since Gellner is unable to identify a central political institution or a state-like structure with a clear hierarchy and authority, he dedicates his attention to the theorizing of the prevailing social and political structures. His central question is how without a state order and (political) stability can prevail in such an extensive mountainous territory with a considerable population. This is where the analysis of the relationship of the *Igurramen* to the surrounding tribal groups appears decisive to him. All the more so because, according to Gellner’s own assessment, at the time of his fieldwork Morocco was divided in two: into an area of central state organization (*makhzen*), which encompassed above all the coastal regions and was inhabited mainly by Arabs; and the

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4 Conceptually *Ihansalen*, the descendants in male lineage to Sidi Said Ahansal, are distinguished from *Igurramen*, possessing holiness qua inheritance, and *Shurfā*, descending patrilineally from the prophet Muhammad. Logically, the terms may overlap.

rural and mountainous areas with a mostly Berber population, characterized by the absence of a state sphere (*siba*) (Gellner 1969: 1-5). Gellner is interested in how social cohesion is created and maintained there, in the '*bled es-siba*' (the area of state absence). This question is aggravated by the fact that the different tribal groups share different livelihoods, some living pastoral-nomadic, others as sedentary small farmers with livestock. Due to scarce ecological resources in the barren mountain regions and the additional transhumance that is being practiced, centers of conflict arise which make negotiation urgently necessary. Gellner's main focus thus lies on the relationship between spiritual and political authority, as well as in the establishment and preservation of social order and political stability.

For Gellner, the key to this order lies in the segmental organization of High Atlas society, i.e. "the 'balancing' and 'opposition' of constituent groups" (Gellner 1969: 42) of which this society consist. These segments are of equal rank and form a tree-like structure resulting from the unilinear (here patrilineal) descentance. According to Gellner, this structure enables a balance of power, and constitute—especially upon external threat—a flexible formation of alliance and solidarity. In addition, Gellner emphasizes that a segmentary society is characterized by the fact that segmentarity is the exclusive or sole principle of order and organization. It is "nearly all that occurs" (*ibid.*).

Against the background of segmentarity, the role of the saints becomes clearer: The Ihansalen have a patrilinear genealogy, but in contrast to the rather egalitarian or acephalous surrounding tribal groups, they are characterized by a hierarchy. As special possessors or recipients of *baraka*, the Igurramen functioned as religious experts, intermediaries between God and believers. This gives them a special religious and socio-political status, which also goes along with considerable wealth. Due to their exceptional position within the community, they assume an important role as arbitrators and mediators—being of elementary importance in the face of potential conflicts and feuds (Gellner 1969: 104-114). These conflicts can be attributed above all to the geographical and socio-economic conditions prevailing in the region. For the home of the saints and place of their influence is located exactly where transhumance

leads to disputes over pasture land to be cultivated; and where territorial claims of different tribal groups give rise to several lines of conflict. In summary, Gellner notes: “The separation of powers in which the pacific and judicial-appellate authority of the saints complemented that of the elective, feud-involved secular chiefs, saved the region from political tyranny” (Gellner 1969: 301).

During my own research, I realized that Gellner’s accounts are still known in the valley. I encountered several people, who answered “ah, like Ernest?,” when I said I wanted to write a book about the valley. The *sheikh* even told me about a visit by Gellner’s son who wanted to see his father’s former place of work. At the same time, it was raised that not all aspects of Gellner’s descriptions were complete or accurate. Particularly the detailed historical treatment and presentation of the *taqbilt* of the Ihansalen, provided by Magali Morsy, can be seen as an important complementary and corrective source (Morsy 1972, 1984). In contrast to Gellner’s descriptions, the so-called laytribes, i.e. the non-holy segments of the *taqbilt*, also find more consideration in her descriptions. Still, and as will be discussed in the next section, Gellner’s work played an important role in the anthropological discussions on Morocco.

### Segmentation as Indicator for the Gradation of Publicness

Lineages are a daunting topic to explain [...]. While lineages have a long and contentious academic history, they are hard to evoke ethnographically because [...] they have no enduring corporal existence. Lineages do not work together as a whole, they do not eat or sleep together in the same room, they do not own herds in common, you cannot find their leader or ask what any one of them wants to do because lineages are an idea, a practically evolving idea about who is related to whom, who owes whom solidarity, and who has authority among the people connected by this sort of solidarity. (Crawford 2008: 107)

The relevance and significance of the *lineages* for Morocco becomes particularly apparent against the background of colonialism and the

French protectorate. The key question or puzzle for European scholars and political decision makers of that time was how to explain the fact that the Kingdom of Morocco had been able to achieve such political stability without a centralized or federalized state system. And what groups and regions had alliances and political relations with which others and, above all, on what basis?

Edmund Burke (2014) convincingly shows how the so-called “Moroccan Islam” is by no means just a given ahistoric occurrence, but in fact deeply intertwined with the French effort to conciliate the protectorate. Referring to manifold historical sources Burke is able to demonstrate how the rich ethnographic accounts from 1900 onwards were derived of the political endeavour to create a Moroccan colonial archive. Archive is understood here as a kind of extensive knowledge production directed at administration and governance—ultimately aiming at the submission and/or assimilation of Moroccan society. This had the consequence of bringing forth a particular set of discourse on Moroccan culture, society, and religion.

Particularly with regard to the Berbers of the High Atlas, there were initially considerable gaps in ethnographic research. These could hardly be closed by transferring knowledge from the colonial contexts of Algeria to Morocco, as had been attempted by administrators. Noteworthy is, how later on anthropological research by British and American scholars partly contributed to the continuation of colonial knowledge after the decline of the French protectorate. Even the political elites in Morocco, first and foremost the monarchy, employed the seemingly ahistoric Moroccan religious culture for their purpose—especially in “delegitimizing the opposition” (Burke 2014: 199).

Burke also regards the allegedly clear dichotomy between *siba* and *makhzen* that was associated with *Berber* and *Arab*—which I touched on when recapitulating of Gellner—and that informed much later theorization about Moroccan society and culture. He attributes its origin partly to weak ethnographically founded research. Indeed, even early French writing on Morocco perceived “Morocco as divided irrevocably between *bled el makhzan* and *bled es siba*” (Burke 2014: 75). Here two quotes from Burke’s comprehensive genealogical study are worth being included at

length, as they allow for a crucial understanding of the concepts and their classificatory potential. Namely, already by the beginning of the twentieth century

[...] most of the main elements of the Moroccan colonial gospel had emerged. It consisted of three interlocking binary formulations. First, Morocco was conceived as divided into two realms: one where the Moroccan central government (the *makhzan*) was supreme, taxes were collected, governors governed, and laws were respected; and a second, where the central government was impotent, and unruly tribes devoted their time to feuding and banditry. Under the rubric of *bled el-makhzan* and *bled es-siba* (the 'land of government' and the 'land of insolence'), a portrait of a regime emerged in which neither side was able to gain the upper hand. Closely interwoven with the division of Morocco into two realms was a second binary division according to way of life. In this formulation Morocco was divided between its sedentary and its nomadic populations, neither of which was able to impose its will on the other. Finally, there was the split between the Arabic- and the Berber-speaking populations. Moroccan history was portrayed as the eternal struggle between Arab *makhzan* forces and Berber *siba* dissidents. (Burke 2014: 80-81).

In this context he quotes from a research report by Emond Doutté, which had appeared as early as 1901:

The expression of *bled el-makhzan* opposed to that of *bled el-siba* is incorrect, for all of Morocco under different forms and to varying degrees undergoes the action of the *makhzan*... While a European might interpret the persistent conflict between the *makhzan* and the tribes as mere anarchy, all this is not disorder, but an order; in this apparent chaos all the living forces ended up by finding an equilibrium: the play of classes and of parties of all kinds resulted in a kind of social stasis that constitutes a durable state, as much in the tribes as in the cities. [...]



As much in Morocco as in Algeria the ethnic division of natives into 'Arabs' and 'Berbers' is a vain distinction, because no criteria can be invoked on which to base this distinction. One can find Arab speakers who used to speak Berber and vice versa, just as one can find nomadic and sedentary populations among both groups. (Doutté 1901: 166, as cited in Burke 2014: 21)

This, however, resonates with the analysis that Gellner is about to propose some 60 years later. Although he updates and expands the findings of the Moroccan colonial archive to an important degree. He introduced the importance of segmentation and genealogically transmitted spiritual hierarchy as well as *baraka* as mediating and stabilizing force on a local scale. But here one should take a look a little further back in history. For in fact Gellner did not primarily draw on the French colonial archive for his work, but drew its inspiration from the reading of Ibn Khaldun. Gellner referred extensively to Ibn Khaldun's sociological and historical insights into the cyclical structures of rule and socio-cultural dynamics of North Africa as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century. That this concept was later adopted and instrumentalized by the colonialists as Burke argues, is not in dispute. However, a discussion of the pre-colonial and post-colonial continuity of the dichotomy *siba/makhzen* and of the dialectic described by Ibn Khaldun between state and segmentarity remains a topic for future work. In fact, Ibn Khaldun's theoretical framework, even in its reinterpretation by Gellner, appears to have become one of the few possibilities for a non-Eurocentric social anthropology of North Africa (and Arab countries).<sup>5</sup> In a way, this conceptual foundation also runs through the cases of this book.

Even after the independence of Morocco and the formation of the modern nation state (Miller 2013), the discussion about the concepts of the tribe, the segmentary lineage and of both the distinction between *siba/makhzen* and Arab/Berber has continued (Gellner/Micaud 1972; Hoffman/Miller 2010). Questions about the significance and determining force of the lineage and concept of segmentation in Moroccan

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5 I would like to thank Erhard Schüttpelz for bringing this point to my attention.

societies sparked a sustained debate, during which Gellner later underlined his point of view:

[...] what turns a society into a segmentary one is not simply the application of this universally familiar principle, but the *near*-total absence of *any other* mechanism or institution, notably of a concentration of authority and institutional enforcement, in other words, of a state. What makes a society segmentary is the heavy load placed on that principle, and the availability of named and ritually sustained groups which help the principle to operate. (Gellner 1995: 826)

As a response to Gellner's notion of lineage, Paul Dresch (1986) suggested to differentiate between segmentary lineage theory and segmentation. Whereas the former refers to instances of kinship relations that are ethnographically manifest for group interaction and solidarity, the latter concept indicates *relations between relations* (Dresch 1986: 309). As a deep-rooted explanatory model for cultural and social expressions segmentarity remains relevant, because it refers to the community's value system, without functioning as deterministic structure. Similarly, Wolfgang Kraus wants Gellner's theoretical contribution to be understood as a "a formal model of logical relations which does not claim to describe social reality" (Kraus 1998: 16).<sup>6</sup>

Those understandings of segmentation and lineage are closer to what will be serving as backdrop for this thesis. Indeed, it does not seem appropriate to explain everyday social practices exclusively by employing the lineage or segmentation. However, they are not obsolete either. A possible way, then, is to understand them not as "concrete things-in-the-world, but inchoate cultural models—mutable, multi-part models that are integrated and artfully applied in fluid social contexts" (Crawford 2008: 91). Following this, the task for ethnography or anthropological scrutiny is not to define them in universal form. Also it is not the question "whether lineages do or do not exist in Berber

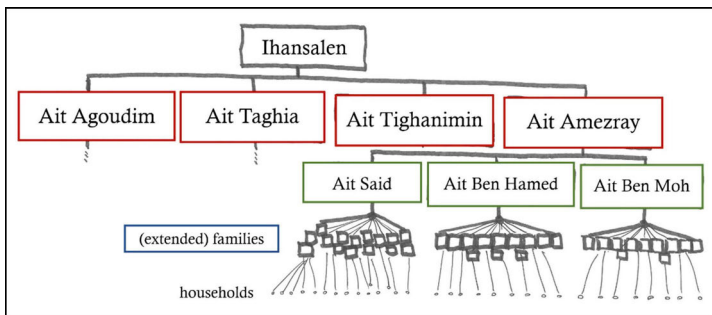
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6 It would seem, however, that Kraus is rather inclined to a revitalization of the more traditional positions of the segmentary theory.

society, but instead what villagers do with the idea of segmenting lineages. In Tadrar [Crawford's field site, S.H.] what people do with lineage affiliation is organize public labor" (ibid.: 96).

Asking what villagers do with it means taking seriously that segmentation still might play a decisive role. The task, then, is to show where this is quite concretely the case. For the context of this book, I understand segmentarity—probably similar to the role of kinship as a whole—as a means to organize cooperation. While in Gellner's time it probably represented the exclusive form of organization, today other forms have been added: the state, NGOs or associations, individual business ties. Obviously, the ways, concepts and practices of these forms of organization differ. Areas that used to be entirely shaped by kinship and social structure of the *taqbilt* are increasingly governed by the bureaucratic and legislative processes of the state. Others, such as the water supply to households, are provided by even newer institutions such as NGOs. Nevertheless, the segmented form of organization remains relevant, especially in terms of the relationship between social ties and varying access to land: Pastures, partly shared with nomads; agricultural land and land nominally belonging to the *taqbilt*; as well as the maintenance of irrigation canals.

Figure 10: *Taqbilt of the Ihansalen, schematic structure*



At this point it is appropriate to introduce some terms that are relevant for understanding the social fabric and organization in the region, particular of the High Atlas. First, I should note, there are the organizational and political bodies of the Moroccan state. On a regional level the most important representative of state and king is the *caid*; then there are the *sheikh* (level of *taqbilt*) and the *moqqadem* (level of village), who are representing the tribal organizational structure, so to speak, but are to a degree the extension of the Moroccan state on the local levels. In parallel, there is also an elected president (*rais*) for the municipality. Briefly and cursorily, this should indicate that there are different political offices at different levels that play a role, each with its own historical reasons and specific scope of duties. But here I want to concentrate on the *taqbilt* and the relevance of the lineage for the understanding of social organization.

*Figure 10* illustrates the schematic organization of the *Ihansalen*. The first level represents, thus, the whole *taqbilt* that encompasses the entire valley; and that indicates the common (patrilineal) descent from the founding father Sidi Said Ahansal. The next level (red boxes) comprises a subdivision of the *taqbilt*, i.e. four different branches of the lineage that also refer geographically to the four main villages of the valley.<sup>7</sup> Every one of these branches again entails further bifurcations of the lineage, which resulted at some point in the progression of time. In the table they are indicated (only) for *Ait Amezray*. For Amezray, there exist three different *ighsan* (sg. *ighs*), which literally translated means “bone”). They are named after further removed ancestry families and are, remarkably enough, not necessarily anymore the surnames of any of the families living in the village. These *ighsan* are then further divided into three groups of extended families, sometimes also called *idudan* (sg. *adad*, literally “finger”), but usually referred to plainly as *l'aila* (family). This level of “patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal, and agnatic extended family constitutes a fundamental unit of Berber life; it is the basic domestic, economic, and legal

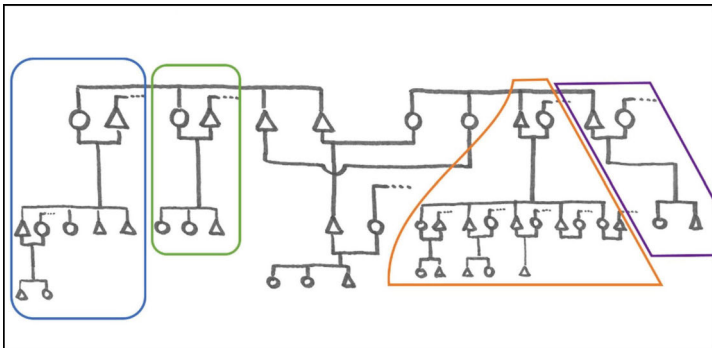
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7 The names of the villages are Agoudim, Taghia, Tighanimin and Amezray. The Tamazight word “Ait” is a kinship group designation, usually also part of a person’s surname, and translates into “men” or “people” or “family of.” For a more detailed presentation of the valley, see part one.

entity” (Hoffman 1967: 47). In Amezray these three groups consist of between 12 and 15 extended families. This means that each extended family is associated with one of the three *ighs*. However, the extended families vary in size and extent. It is safe to say, however, that usually extended families constitute more than one household.

This is illustrated in *figure 11*. It represents the example of one extended family from the village of Amezray. In total the extended family is spread out, so to speak, across five households; four of them are indicated with the coloured frame boxes, the fifth is the center family. The household, also referred to as *tigmmi* (house) or sometimes *takat* (oven, see also Crawford 2008: 9, 30), is the smallest unit of the nuclear family and represents also an economic organization.<sup>8</sup>

*Figure 11: Example of the different households of one extended family*



8 Here I hasten to add, that women do not take on their husband's surnames upon marriage, even though they move to the house of the husband's or his family. Thus, although constituting and founding a new and own household they to a degree stay attached to their patrilineal extended family. Still, to be precise, the households that the women are constituting (blue and green frame, in figure 2), do in fact belong to another extended family—that is their husbands'. Here I did not make this fine-grained distinction in figure 2, as I just wanted to indicate how extended families split up into individual households.

Furthermore, extended families can, in fact, become quite big and wide-ranging in Amezray. A good example for this is the extended family of one of my main interlocutors and friends, Mustapha, which we will encounter again later. He belongs to one of the biggest families in Amezray. His father has thirteen siblings, a huge number, but not a rarity in earlier decades. Going back a generation, even his grandfather had six siblings. The vast majority of them live either in the village or in the surrounding area. Thus, Mustapha has quite a number of close relatives. This gives an indication of what it means to refer to the region as being structured by the ties of kinship and the social relations of close family.

Let us briefly consider the relationship between kinship or family and geographical locality. Since both are conveyed to some extent in the term *taqbilt*, it seems instructive to take a closer look at the distinction between *taqbilt* and a district (Hoffman 1967: 59-60). So, they both represent an organizational category for bounded localities. And as already mentioned, the *taqbilt* itself entails geographic and spatial qualities. However, the *taqbilt* is simultaneously a logic of belonging as a combination of shared heritage, ancestry and locality. The distinctions, to my knowledge, are in no way clear cut. I encountered people, who were living in the district of the *taqbilt* most of the time, but were not part of the *taqbilt*. Others again were not sharing the same ancestry or descentance of the *taqbilt*, but lived in the village for two generations and thereby had become part of both district and *taqbilt*. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that all of those classificatory terms are to an extent fluid, somewhat ephemeral and elusive, but nonetheless they are there. They do not necessarily determine actions or foreclose relations; but they still serve as model or logic that has the potential of explaining and grounding social ties in a net of shared values.

This is most evident in the organizational tasks, for which the lineage is still put to use today. Every village has a *jma'a* or village council, as already mentioned above. It is a political institution that organizes work and duties within the *taqbilt*. The head of the council is the annually elected *amghar*. He corresponds at *taqbilt*-level to the *moqqadem* (state level). There have even been instances of a *amghar/moqqadem* in personal union. Furthermore, every *ighs* also has a head person, which is called

*babnumur*. That means, that in total there is the *amghar*, head of the council and representative of the *taqbilt* subdivision and his three *babnumur*, each representing their respective *ighs*. Together, and under the auspices of the *amghar*, they manage both the knowledge and the tasks that concern the interests of the *taqbilt*, or more precisely, the *taqbilt* subdivision Ait Amezray. The head of the entire *taqbilt* is the *sheikh*, who is a political player in his own right on a higher level. This organizational structure is important for maintenance of the village's irrigation channels, for the management concerning the matters of the mosque, or religious festivities, or for work on communal land, such as the graveyard or concerning agriculture.

The nested structure of the different hierarchy does come with parallel levels of responsibility. For instance, if an irrigation ditch has been destroyed because of a thunderstorm, the *amghar* is setting the conditions and coordination framework of how the repair work is done. He, then, delegates the mobilization of workforce to each *babnumur*. All the families, which have fields that are connected to the respective irrigation channel are obligated to contribute to the work. Here, of course, size and amount of arable land per family counts. Still, the work is distributed fairly among the *ighsan*. The *babnumur* is responsible to inform the families who are concerned and gather the workforce of his respective *ighs*. So far the theory. In reality, as usually, there can be some exceptions and variations. Foremost, if a family is not able or does not want to provide workforce it can also financially recompensate their part of work.

All in all, this shows, on the one hand, how the lineage and *taqbilt* politics are used and put to work in specific situations and contexts on the ground. On the other hand, if one understands the *taqbilt* as local-political institution, it seems appropriate to analyze it in terms of publicness: with the way it expands or limits certain degrees of publicness according to the concerns involved. In fact, its very structure and organizational procedures suggest a careful gradation of publicness (see Zillinger 2017), including delegation and coordination work, which is brought to the fore situatively: what becomes a public matter to what extent is produced and managed by the actors involved—in the example of irrigation, particularly with regard to the organization

of labour and duties. It is not the whole community that is primarily concerned with the discussion and/or maintenance of certain irrigation channels, but only the part of the *taqbilt* that is affected (in this case, families or households that own adjacent arable land). At the same time, with the increasing importance of alternative organizational structures, foremost the state, transnational NGOs and initiatives of individuals, the predominant position of lineage and *taqbilt* as the authority on regulating everyday issues has been challenged.

Fittingly enough, when on one occasion I asked some men about ways of the *taqbilt*, they voiced ambiguous and contradictory explanations. They were not immediately sure, which families belonged to which *ighs*. And they did not know who the current *babnumur* was. I was referred to another man who until recently held the office of *amghar* and was said to know better. They said that I was asking about quite old (*qdim*) knowledge. One of the men pointed to the four-year-old boy, who was sitting in the group with us, and said: "When Brahim is older, as old as you are now perhaps, he won't even know what an *ighs* or *babnumur* is anymore."





## **ethnographic parenthesis D }**

### **Infrastructural Breakdown**

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- *Water in the bathroom not working—hoses frozen. Water was warmed up for me on the gas stove. Hardly necessary for brushing teeth. But I postponed the morning shower I'd planned. (research diary, 05/01/2017)*
- *Hot water doesn't work. Checked the boiler<sup>1</sup> but it won't ignite. The butane gas bottle is pretty light, it's probably empty. I go to B. who is just in front of the little shop and describe the situation to him, asking him for help. He gets wrenches and keys for the butane box. I carry a new bottle over. After the new bottle is connected, the water still doesn't get warm. There seems to be a problem with the boiler. S. will have to take a look when he gets back home, I am told. I heat up water on the stove in the kitchen and have a bucket shower. For this there is a small black handle bucket, which I usually fill with water in the evening and place on the sink in the bathroom. In the morning the water pipe is often frozen and I take the water from the bucket for brushing my teeth and washing. For the bucket shower I mix hot water from the pot I had on the stove and cold water from the canister. It works quite well, though it takes a bit longer than actual showering. More water comes out of the bucket than out of the shower head and it is evenly warm. (research diary, 13/01/2017)*
- *The water pipes are frozen again due to bad weather conditions. Just quick washes again. Always a bit more complicated and colder than anticipated, and more time-consuming than expected. Regardless, afterwards I'm clean again. (research diary, 24/01/2017)*

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1 Hot water for the tap water and shower was provided by a boiler, which in turn was fired by a butane/propane gas bottle.

For the introductory phase of my research, I was inspired by one quote, in particular, to write meticulous notes:

I teach students in my fieldwork classes to listen and look for two things: first, for the special language used in the location, metaphors, *mots justes*, turns of phrase, and private codes used by one group and not another. Second, for things that strike these groups as strange, weird, and anomalous. What is it that causes them doubt? How may this become inquiry? In this, the strength of field-work is its anthropological strangeness and nowhere is that more important than in the beginning stages of inquiry. (Star 2010: 605)

I thus kept both extensive field notes, as well as more personal diary entries outlining my own feelings and detailing my stay. Shortly after I had arrived for my extended fieldwork during cold January days, the water line froze. The house that I stayed in had the luxury, as it were, of a shower and running water, but during the winter months of ice and snow, the “modern sanitation” was very fragile. . Access to water is one thing, mobilizing it efficiently is quite something else. Those such as myself—an anthropologist-in-training—are used to a functioning shower and consider daily washing with a bucket to be something worth writing about. If it was a problem, it was a problem I had to adapt to. Those excerpts reflect how I personally experienced the breakdown of water infrastructure. And as Susan Leigh Star made clear, infrastructure tends to be most felt in its absence (see Star 1999). However, for the family I stayed with, frozen pipes and failing tap water infrastructure were not the anomaly they were for me. They had recourse to alternative water reserves and sanitation practices that did not rely on tap water. Moreover, the weekly hammam was not in any way dependent on that kind of piped water. It was these first weeks in the snowy mountains that turned my attention—on a very experiential level—to questions of water and infrastructure.

## Chapter 5

### (Un)Making Connections

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In this chapter I am concerned with water. To be more precise, I am concerned with the restructuring, or indeed, the *'re-infrastructure'* of the water supply in the village of Amezray. Although this is a quite specific "ethnographic moment" (see Strathern 1999), I will approach it in a broader and more holistic way. In doing so, I want to obviate my thinking on what water is and what it means in this particular context (cf. Krause/Strang 2016; Krause 2018). The leading question is: What are the social practices, technological preconditions, and political forms of organization that underpin how people engage with water and how a water supply system is implemented? To answer this question, I draw mainly on ethnographic material while providing context by drawing on recent literature concerning the infrastructure of water.

My focus is on the village of Amezray where I and many of my main interlocutors, research partners and friends lived. Moreover, Amezray SMNID, the main association I was working with during my stay in the valley was equally based there. It just so happened that I was present when the association began working on a new water supply system. I ended up sitting in assemblies convened by the association in order to inform the community about the project, its goals, and scope. Friends of mine would also explain certain aspects of the project to me, and I equally witnessed the installation process of a new water connection and water meter in the house where I was living. I realized that I was looking at a new research focus for my dissertation project, led by the empirical occurrences of the particular locality in the High Atlas.

Despite my focus on Amezray, I will also be talking about the water situation of the neighbouring village of Agoudim. I include the latter case for two main reasons: First, Agoudim was the first village to develop a local and largely self-sustained water supply system. It had experienced a longer history of problems, conflicts, and expertise in implementing such a water system. Second, it was clear from the beginning that in order to implement the new water supply system in Amezray, those in charge would do well to heed the advice and expertise of those responsible in the neighbouring village. As such, I took the view that in order to fully understand the water supply system in the valley I had to combine the two cases.

This chapter thus proceeds as follows: First it will focus on the infrastructural side of water provision, examining practices of irrigation where people direct and redirect the flow of water for their everyday purposes. But water also has a structuring function with regard to spiritual practices and the mythological foundations of the valley. Here, water becomes more than an object of use or a commodity. Instead, it possesses special qualities of a social medium in that it washes around and connects cultural archives of thoughts and histories, socio-technical arrangements, and reservoirs of situated practices. The second section will deal with the fact that it is precisely the availability of and access to water as a common good—especially in the field of development cooperation—that makes water a political variable: it is a measure of progress, a claim, and a call for action. This will set the stage for the following main ethnographic section concerning the implementation of the water system—with all its granular organizational practices—in Amezray, which I analytically reformulate as the issue of making a public. The section revolves around different forms of connections, such as the connection to a new water supply, connections to another forms of (self-)organization and administration, and connections to a global flow of ideas as to what constitutes a *good* and successful life.

## Water Infrastructure

Infrastructures, as Brian Larkin states it, “are built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space” (Larkin 2013: 328). What is more, they make up “matter that enables the movement of other matter” and are simultaneously “things and also the relation between things” (ibid.: 329). They are determined not only by their materiality and architecture, but also by their fundamental relationality. They are the condensation point of techno-political, socio-cultural as well as symbolic-semiotic processes. As a relational concept, then, the question is *when*—not *what*—an infrastructure is and how it “becomes infrastructure in relation to organized practices” (Star/Ruhleder 1996: 113).

Technologies and infrastructures of water raise questions of politics (see Conca/Weinthal 2018; Venkatesan et al. 2018; Rasmussen 2015) as well as questions of governance—particularly given that access to clean water and water scarcity are increasingly salient policy issues (Woodhouse/Muller 2017; Bakker 2010). Recently, literature drawing on political ecology, science and technology studies, and anthropology has shown that supposed natural infrastructures of rivers and their water flows are in fact also made and remade between contested social and political fields (Carse 2012, 2014; Barnes 2014). In Egypt, for instance, this means that the everyday practices and technologies concerning the Nile both guarantee water flows and mediate politics. Egyptian water appears as “embedded in and generated by multi-scaled social, cultural, economic and political relations” (Barnes 2014: 25). Water is embedded in a variety of relations and turning our attention to water infrastructure can thus help us understand those relations. Conversely, it is water’s material properties which enable infrastructural assemblages to function the way they are supposed to (Björkman 2015). Looking to the example of urban Mumbai, it is “pressure”, as Nikhil Anand (2011) claims, that ensures the correct functioning of a complex system of tubes and pipes in terms of providing drinking water.

The role of pipes and tubes can also be specified in this respect. A pipe or tube is not only part of a larger water supply system, for example,

but “is attached to techniques of regulation, audit, and administration” (Larkin 2013: 335). It is worth quoting Larkin a little further here: “[The pipe’s] material form is transposed from a hollow tube to digits on a budget and words on a page, and all these forms—as hollow tube, as number, as series of letters—are pipes” (ibid.; see also Jensen 2016). Simultaneously, water management does not merely become political at some particular point or with a certain event, but is rather itself constitutive of the political. Both Anand (2017) and von Schnitzler (2018) stress that water infrastructure hinges on its socio-political context and its particular historicity. In their examples, South-African apartheid is inscribed into today’s infrastructural arrangements while the first establishment of Mumbai’s water infrastructure—which is still used today—can also be said to have helped consolidate the British Empire’s colonial state. Thus, hierarchies, power relations and exclusion can be mapped out in water infrastructures.

For the High Atlas, pipes or water meters can hardly be called an expression of persistent colonial entanglements. It is primarily their prolonged absence that tells a story. However, from a historical perspective, similar processes for North Africa have been analyzed using the term *hydroimperialism*. This refers to the process by which “hydraulic knowledge, and water management practices both revealed and reproduced unequal power relations predicated upon an expansionist *mentalité*, whether political or economic in orientation” (Pritchard 2012: 592, original emphasis). As such, these practices “facilitated and realized France’s colonial project in the Maghreb” (ibid.: 593).

In summary, the focus on water and its infrastructure allows for an analytical approach to questions of politics and, more generally, to questions of the relationship between state, society and the individual. Infrastructural projects—including water supply systems in particular—constitute more than mere historically specific sites of materiality and political contestation. As tokens of modernity, they come with a certain promise and an orientation toward the future. Such a project is in itself a “sociotechnical imaginary” (Jasanoff/Kim 2015). This is intended as a critical reminder that the “materiality of technoscience [...] is surely implicated in the stability and instability of social arrange-

ments, but just as important are the belief systems out of which those materialities emerge and which give them value and meaning” (Jasanoff 2015: 22). Further, this suggests that infrastructural or technological arrangements—not unlike a water supply system I might add—serve “a doubly deictic function, pointing back at past cultural achievements and ahead to promising and attainable futures, or to futures to be shunned and avoided” (ibid.).

In the ethnographic material that I wish to unfold hereafter, the association that is responsible for the new water supply therefore becomes a promoter of the temporal properties of this infrastructural and socio-technical re-organization—whether it wants to, or not. Hence, I am adhering to the analysis of infrastructure’s temporality for this particular case in the High Atlas. I provide, thereby, a critical examination of what Akhil Gupta aptly refers to as “the role that infrastructure plays as an index of modernity and symbol of development” (Gupta 2018: 68). This temporal characteristic of infrastructure, representing “the possibility of being modern, of having a future” (Larkin 2013: 333) is accompanied by its poetics as well as its potential “[to mobilize] and affect the senses of desire, pride, and frustration, feelings which can be deeply political” (ibid.). The “promise of infrastructure” (Anand/Gupta/Appel 2018) can thus only be grasped within the political to which it is deeply linked. Governance and political rationality as well as fantasies and expectations around infrastructure are mutually referential.

An intriguing illustration of this can be found in a chapter of Mandana Limbert’s ethnography of an Omani town: “Changing water distribution practices, made possible by oil revenues and encouraged by discourses on development, have naturalized the introduction of pipes, electric coolers, and diesel and electric pumps as a necessary part of development” (Limbert 2010: 133)—and of Oman’s project of consolidating the nation state. In said chapter, Limbert describes three cases of *progress* concerning the organization of the water supply and the negotiation processes that arise from it. She investigates how specific technologies or infrastructure—in her example a water pump—become the past and only the reminiscence of an earlier way of everyday life. This affective infrastructure, then, enters the *landscapes of memory*, which



are cultivated and preserved by nostalgic practices, for instance by recording the sound of the old water pump.

The foregoing presentation of literature on water infrastructure was intended to provide the context in which I wish to unfold my ethnographic account. It should become clear thereby, what is entailed when I talk about the *re-infrastructure* of the water supply and the surrounding everyday, organizational practices in the High Atlas.

## Liquidity of Everyday – Water as Social Medium

Generally speaking, access to water is not a pressing issue for the main settlements of the valley in the High Atlas. By virtue of the surrounding environment, it is taken as a given. The focus here is rather on the maintenance of water flows and the distribution of water. Water may mobilize an array of different everyday practices. Irrigation, for example, is like any water supply system in that it relies on various hydraulic technologies and involves particular socio-political arrangements. This is where specific organizational practices and material preconditions come into play that point beyond the respective manipulation of water flows necessary for functional water distribution. It would seem that water inherently has certain infrastructural aspects or qualities. Indeed, precisely because water is for the most part mediated through technology, infrastructural issues surrounding water are always a fundamental issue when it comes to water provision.

## Directing Water's Flow

Infrastructure must be maintained. This is also true of irrigation, a specific form of water infrastructure that is central to life in the High Atlas, and which in many places is still characterized by *agropastoralism*. The flow of water must be secured and managed in order to properly irrigate fields and provide a basis for life. Throughout the whole valley, one of the most striking views are the green terraces on either side of the river which exist anywhere there is space to create them. To facilitate this

agricultural use, irrigation channels (*targa*) that redirect the flow of water through rivers are crucial. These channels often run through the villages, spanning considerable distances and opening up secondary channels that occasionally branch off from the main network. They are used both for the irrigation of farmland and as a general source for withdrawing water. The channels constitute common property rather than belonging to individual persons or single households. To be more precise, particular canals—or sections of canals—are collectively maintained by people with adjacent or connecting arable land.<sup>1</sup> The irrigation system is a delicate and complex arrangement for organizing and managing common resources and functions with the help of sophisticated technologies. There are, of course, certain rules and routines that regulate their utilization and maintenance.

This topic has been extensively covered in anthropological literature. As William Kelly reminds us, irrigation is “more than an act of hydraulic engineering. It requires institutional arrangements [...], is economically important [...], politically significant as a source of power and leverage [...]; and it is of considerable social consequence because it defines patterns of cooperation and conflict” (Kelly 1983: 880). In 1972, Clifford Geertz compared the so-called *traditional* irrigation systems of his main research areas: Bali and Morocco. The former he classified as *wet*, the latter as *dry*. His research in Morocco examined the plains on the foothills of the Middle Atlas, not too far from the major city of Fes. Geertz notes that in Morocco (and in contrast to Bali) there is no structured and collective utility. Instead, he identifies “individual rights” and “contractual obligations” (Geertz 1972: 34) as ordering principles in organizing irrigation. Indeed, he sees a “precise and elaborate system of customary property law” (*ibid*: 32) in place. Geertz postulated that the absence of intricate irrigation channels and of corporate social groupings and political structures to regulate and administer the management of irrigation may be explained by the specific location of his research. For the Algerian dessert—a location that Geertz might have classified as *dry*, too—Judith Scheele (2012, especially the first chapter) shows how in a

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1 See also chapter three and four.

setting of increased interconnectivity nomadic actors indeed sophisticatedly and under considerable investment laid out irrigation systems in order to actively make oases and thus places or hubs of exchange and power. Further, recent ethnographies exemplify how the detailed study of irrigation systems provides critical insights into social practices and entangled politics of everyday life in mountainous regions. Such ethnographies show how these socio-material arrangements become a matter of contestation (Gelles 2000, for the Peruvian highlands), and how they function in demanding socio-economic change (Baker 2005, for the Western Himalaya).

*Figure 12 & 13: Irrigation channels on different levels next to the river*



To a significant extent, David Crawford's (2008) conclusions concerning the Central High Atlas are equally applicable to the valley in which my research was conducted. Crawford shows that the maintenance of irrigation channels is a practical—and indeed unavoidable—everyday activity. Yet it also shows that the way these activities are carried out is both particular to the region of the High Atlas Mountains and Berber culture. His research traces how with recourse to kinship ties

and long-standing ways of categorization working tasks are distributed and thereby inequalities challenged. He is thus able to convincingly argue for the continued importance and valuation of segmentary social logics for organizational purposes and for conceptions of fairness (Crawford 2008: 83-88, 102-111).

Back to the valley of my own research: A number of dwellings on the terraced slopes next to the river also have small gardens (*turtid*) where people grow herbs, tomatoes, and onions, or occasionally figs, peaches and almonds. Such gardens need to be watered manually. For this purpose, a water basin is often built on the premises, at a point of elevation above the house or garden. The basin collects rain water and water that is pumped up from the river or water channels. This necessitates an electric or gasoline-powered water pump and a system of hoses, tubes, and pipes of some description. The decision to implement such a small-scale watering system is typically taken by members of an individual household. This same household must then be able to deploy the necessary resources. Constructing a water basin requires the financial means to pay for workers and materials, and the craftsmanship to independently build and seal it. To fill a basin of this sort, an inflow is required. To this end, a pump shaft is installed in the immediate vicinity of a water channel, serving as a reservoir for the water basin next to the house.

During one of my daily walks through the village, I met Ayoub, the eldest member of his household, who was standing on a concrete shaft, about 1.5m deep. He was dressed in his blue overalls, with mud stains all over his back and arms, scooping mud out of the shaft with a shovel. There was an inlet from the water channel through which the pump shaft would usually fill continuously with flowing water, were it not blocked for maintenance, as was the case at that moment. The drained pit gave a view of the pump, which sends the water up the hillside into the water basin above the garden. To operate the pump, power cables were stretched over bushes and along a slope from the family's house. It was not particularly systematic but it worked well. Once Ayoub had finished shovelling, the shaft filled with water several times. Ayoub cleared the concrete wall of the remaining mud with a sponge as best as possible. His wife Aysha as-

sisted him by emptying the bucket with the scooped mud water and by opening or closing the water inlet from the channel to the shaft.

Ayoub repeated this process every four months or so, he said. Mud and sludge would build up otherwise and this could clog and damage the pump. The water flowing into the shaft via the inlet came from the river and was led through irrigation channels consisting of crevices dug directly into the soil. As such, the water always contained lesser or greater quantities of sediment, depending on the weather. The small gardens near the houses were only possible because of this delicate system, prone as it was to breakdowns or failures at different points. The effort behind these little feats of engineering was not visible at first sight, but the work involved soon became clear to me: such as, first the availability of needed materials for building, having access to spare parts, ensuring power supply for the pump, and securing the inflow of water through well-built and constantly looked-after channels. All for the flow of water.

### **The Spiritual and Mythical Relationship with Water**

Irrigation in the High Atlas is intertwined both with segmentary logics and with everyday religious practices. To illustrate this, let us return to Ayoub's maintenance work for a moment. As Ayoub was servicing the pump shaft, his wife Aysha arrived holding a piece of cardboard with some white powder in it. Ayoub paused for a moment, still holding his shovel loaded with sludge. Aysha took some of the powder between the fingertips of her right hand and said something very quietly, almost inaudible. This was followed by a louder exclamation of "bismillah". She then began sprinkling the powder, first over the pump shaft, then Ayoub's shovel and the sludge which had been accumulating next the shaft. She Reached into the cardboard box again and with two swift movements spread the rest of the powder over the mud. She turned the cardboard over and tapped her fingers on the back to make sure she had removed the residue. When she saw my puzzled face, she began to laugh. She explained to me that the powder was a mixture of salt and flour, then still giggling, she said something else that I did not fully understand. I asked if it had something to do with her belief and blessing (*baraka*). She con-

firmed and thanked me for being aware of this belief and for using the word “baraka”. Meanwhile, Ayoub had already resumed work. He showed no intention of commenting on the situation nor explaining the proceedings any further. Before I knew it, the whole thing was over.

I shall not include a general discussion on the importance of water to religious life and practices (see, for instance, Bradley 2012). However, I do want to briefly touch on two further ethnographic accounts regarding the spiritual dimension of water. Firstly, it is said that spirits or demons (*jinn*, pl. *jnun*) may dwell near water, especially by night. On one evening, I accompanied Fatima to the irrigation channel in order to retrieve a goatskin, which had to be watered for further processing. Upon approaching the channel, Fatima suddenly said what sounded like a short prayer or a protective verse. When I asked her what she had said, she answered vaguely that she had tried to “avoid collisions.” I questioned her further and it became clear that this protective formula consisted in asking God to help her not to bump into any of the *jinn* that were likely to be next to the water.

Secondly, the ritual of washing before prayer is mandatory in Islam, and this is equally applicable in the High Atlas. Usually, a small pot for boiling water is used to do the washing. For the mountainous region, however, there is one notable variation in the practice, which is the use of a specific stone (*taymum*)—as is mentioned in the Quran—rather than washing with water. In the High Atlas region, the stone in question—the *taymum*—is quite common. It is round and smooth, about the size of a pomegranate, and thus cannot be completely enclosed in both hands.

Another spiritual dimension of water are the regular gatherings and types of communal celebrations called *barok*. Large baroks are held at least three times annually, though smaller ones can occur at other points in the year. The first happens in spring and the second in late summer around the time of the walnut harvest. The third usually takes place in autumn, once the season of heavy rainfalls and thunderstorms has passed. It is a time when the irrigation channels have to be cleaned and repaired due to clogging with mud and stone or other damage. The barok consists of a communal meal, at which a religious blessing is said by the Imam. During the gathering, new men are elected to take care of the irrigation

channels for the next year. Sometimes baroks can also be held sporadically, taking place either at the valley's water sources (*ighbola*) or next to the villages' water tanks (the significance of which we shall examine further along). Thus, the maintenance and commemoration of the irrigation systems and technologies of water distribution have a special value.

Water also plays a part in the founding myth of the valley: The founding father, Sidi Said Ahansal, had been sent by his former teacher to found his own lodge, accompanied by a donkey and a cat. He made his journey through the mountains but just as he was at today's village of Amezray, the cat jumped down from donkey on which it had been riding—this was the godly sign indicating that Sidi Said Ahansal was to found his settlement here. But he was not the first person in the region. The area had been already inhabited. At first, he and the inhabitants got along well together, until certain disputes arose that eventually led to serious conflict. With the help of Dadda Atta, Sidi Said ultimately decided to drive the hostile former inhabitants out of the valley. Since first reading Ernest Gellner's rendition of the story, it has been told to me in much the same way many times over:

The friction over land leads him to call Dadda Atta, ancestor of the Ait Atta, by telepathic means. He needs to call seven years seven months seven days and seven hours. When at last Ait Atta and his retinue arrive, the river is in spate, and the Ait Atta are obliged to wait three weeks. Then Sidi Said Ahansal with a wand causes the river to open, and the Ait Atta cross it, with dry feet! (Gellner 1969: 290-291)

As a sign of appreciation for Dadda Atta's help, Sidi Said granted him and his men seasonal use of the pastures. This provides the mythical foundation for the alliance and cooperative relationship that continues to link the *Ihansalen* and *Ait Atta* to this day. It is also a basis for the transhumance of the semi-nomadic and nomadic groups of the Ait Atta. For them, the privileged use of certain grazing lands (*agdal*, Ilahiane 1999) on the plateau during the summer months is fundamental. Traveling hundreds of kilometers and often with very sizeable flocks, they arrive in need sufficient pasture for the season.

Interestingly, the river always implies a certain recalcitrance and a certain force of which Sidi Said would avail to demonstrate his spiritual abilities and his sacred power. Yet the legend also refers to the very particular constellation of the local ecology and environment. It designates the area as favourable and—on occasion—volatile: favourable given the suitable conditions for an agropastoral lifestyle; volatile because of the floods that occur after the heavy rains of the winter months. The torrents (*aqqa*) that roll down the barren hills into the valley can have devastating effects. Access roads become impassable due to the stones, debris, and mud that come washing over the fields near the river resulting in diminished crop yield. Whole sections of irrigation channels are torn away and destroyed by the water.

What Gellner's account does not mention, however, is the true extent of Sidi Said's intimate relationship with the water of the valley. It was Said who created the springs next to the river. With the blessing of God (*baraka n-rbbi*) he prodded his stick into the ground and immediately began drawing water out of the soil. He repeated this movement seven times—the same onomatopoeic accompaniment which was equally made by the older man as he told me the story—"Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap". He created a new spring with every tap of his stick. The astonished people surrounding him began to shout: "Enough! Enough! That's enough!" (*safi, baraka!*). The springs were located in the immediate vicinity of Sidi Said's lodge, not far away from where his tomb is located today. Even nowadays, it is common to visit the springs on important religious holidays, life-cycle festivities such as weddings (*tamghra*) and circumcisions (*akhtan*), or as part of the pilgrimage to Sidi Said's tomb. These visits typically serve to commemorate saintly deeds, though they may also simply be motivated by a desire to seek refreshment in the cool and crystal-clear water.

Water thus has a specific mythical significance for the valley and is generally important for the High Atlas region as a whole. However, it also plays a socio-ecological role that is worth examining. The High Atlas can be considered one huge water storage facility for the neighbouring arid plains and is the main watershed for a significant part of the country. Many rivers have their source here and are fed by the precipitation-



rich autumn months and the snowfall in winter. There are no glaciers, however, as the snow and ice melts during summer months, temporary streams of meltwater form. At the same time, the High Atlas is a barrier and meteorological divide that blocks out the hotter and more arid conditions of the Sahara. The High Atlas thus constitutes a very complex but also sensitive hydrological system that is particularly vulnerable to the rapid shifts of climate change (Boudhar et al. 2009; Marchane et al. 2017; see also Schilling et al. 2012; Tekken/Kropp 2015).

In contrast to some parts of the High Atlas Mountains and other arid regions in Morocco, access to water in the valley is guaranteed. The river and springs even provide water beyond the immediate vicinity of the High Atlas itself. The villages in the area are spread out according to the availability of water, or as one member of the local association explained to a group of American students during an intercultural workshop: “In the High Atlas, if there’s a village, there’s a spring.” Not surprisingly, during Morocco’s time as a French protectorate, the French colonial army did choose *Zawiya Ahansal* for their administrative foothold in the mountains nor did they opt for the present-day municipal capital Azilal.

Moreover, the saints (*igurramen*) and descendants of Sidi Said equally had a special relationship with water as it formed part of their extraordinary position among the inhabitants of the valley. Indeed, they once had servants that would fetch water from the quasi-abundant sources, which would then be warmed over fires for hot showers or baths. Needless to say, they were under no particular onus to be economical in their usage. We can thus see that here, as elsewhere, hierarchy and power are integral to the historical relationship between local people and the surrounding ecological conditions, particularly when it comes to water.

### “Dwla Makaynsh” – Water as Politics

The government agency *Office National de l’Électricité et de l’Eau potable* (The National Office for Electricity and Drinking Water, or ONEE) is responsible for water supplies throughout Morocco. Provision of water is not the exclusive purvey of the public agency, however, as Moroccans

predominantly get their water from wells, springs, irrigation channels, and rivers. It is also provided to some extent by water usage associations and by private individuals or organizations that sell water. This is especially the case in many of the mountainous areas in the Central High Atlas, which are not connected to the national water supply. In 2004, self-provision accounted for 38 percent of Morocco's water supply, that is, "households, businesses, and villages securing their own water supply from surface or ground water sources" (World Bank 2006: 21).

The prevailing sentiment as regards state services in the High Atlas was rather explicit: *dwla makaynsh*—as I repeatedly heard in the Moroccan Arabic dialect—"there's no state here" or "the state is absent". This is as true for the villages described in this section—Agoudim and Amezray—as it is throughout Morocco. For many local people, the same equally applies to the state's provision of (medical) care or its mandate as a welfare state in terms of education, labour conditions, and subsidies on food or animal feed, for example. Nor are these opinions anything new, given that state authorities have long considered the mountains of the High Atlas to be remote and quite simply beyond their sphere of influence (*bled as-siba*). Social mechanisms of self-governance and self-organization have always been important here. These long-standing dynamics are accompanied by quasi-cooperative approaches to self-administration, which go along in particular with the more recent infrastructural developments undertaken by the central government.

In Amezray, the association SMNID had begun an independent project in 2005 to supply the village with water. Although it was one of the first projects to emphasize the importance of the water supply, it was ultimately not implemented satisfactorily. The pipes were not laid carefully enough, which meant that the water at the tap was very hot, particularly in summer. The quality of the drinking water had suffered due to the long distances it was travelling, partially in pipes laid above ground. Additionally, the water tank that had been installed was often empty, providing insufficient water to local households. As a consequence, water taps were frequently dry. The water tank had to be replenished by way of a pump, which in turn, had to be fuelled and operated manually, requiring both physical labour and financial resources.

This was problematic because SMNID was funded by donations and worked on a non-profit basis. After all, SMNID issued no charges for the water used. Part of the project's funding was private and issued by French donors who had founded their own association to support activities in the area after having visited the valley as tourists. However, as far as the Moroccan state was concerned, the project was entirely independent, devoid of any governmental participation. Indeed, it was not until the project had gotten off the ground that contributions from state-run national agencies were made.<sup>2</sup> At the time of my arrival in the valley, many people attended to their own water supplies—as they had always done—rather than relying on tap water.

Let us now turn our attention to SMNID's motivations in establishing the project back in 2005. At a meeting shortly after the association was formed, the members concluded that one of the most basic needs of the village was drinking water. Up to that point, water from the river was used for washing clothes, for irrigation, and as drinking water. However, the river could flood and become muddy during the rainy season, rendering it unfit for drinking. The inhabitants of the village then had to walk at least thirty minutes to get water from more distant springs. The need for improvement in water provision was thus seen as an urgent point on the agenda of local living standards. Moreover, SMNID was convinced that by delivering tap water to houses, overall sanitation would be improved and families would be better equipped to deal with daily hygiene. Households would thus have the possibility of building toilets and bathrooms in their homes, which in 2005 were essentially non-existent. The hope was that a new water supply system would enhance irrigation and facilitate the installation of small gardens in front of people's houses, preferably with decorative plants. The water was not intended for agricultural purposes, however, and was not to act as a supplement to the irrigation channels. The usage rules—monitored by a specific committee—also precluded using the water for construction purposes, especially from May to October. Washing clothes was only permitted when

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2 For a more detailed view of the association and their cooperation with official and other non-governmental actors, see chapter three.

absolutely necessary. All of the above restrictions speak to the scarcity of available water.

As mentioned above, the project fell short of its expectations. In spring 2017, however, it became clear that the failed project might be given a new lease of life. The precursor for this was the expansion of the valley's secondary-level boarding school, which necessitated the construction of an additional water reservoir and a new main supply line. With this expanded water supply infrastructure for the school provided by the government, SMNID was able to capitalize and make a fresh attempt to renew the water supply in the village, or to use a somewhat ambiguous phrase, to *modernize* the potable water service. Eventually they obtained the mandate to proceed.

In addition to the existing justifications for the water supply project, another factor had come into play. It was rumoured that water provision in the district town of Azilal might be handed over to the private supplier Amendis<sup>3</sup>, and the suspicion was that this arrangement would eventually be extended to the surrounding regions. There were concerns that the prices for the water supply would increase enormously if the private supplier was awarded the contract. SMNID thus argued that they themselves should assume responsibility for the administration of the local water supply. They claimed that they could supply drinking water more inexpensively and thus spare the village the high costs of privatization.

## A History of Water Infrastructure

In the neighbouring village of Agoudim, a community-based association had been taking care of the village's potable water service for some time already. As such, their story offers a comparative and complementary perspective. On one afternoon in October 2018, I met with Abdullah—the

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3 Amendis belongs to the Veolia Group, a French multinational corporation, and is a subsidiary of Veolia Maroc. In 2018, the Veolia Group supplied 95 million people with drinking water worldwide (see <https://www.veolia.com/en/veolia-group/profile>, last accessed, 09/08/2019). Amendis is especially active in the Northern part of Morocco around Tangier.

president of the association—to learn about their work. We walked along the main sites for Agoudim's water supply to get as full a picture as possible of the infrastructure involved; the office, springs, pump house, and water reservoir. During the tour, Abdullah frequently alluded to the new project in Amezray. He said he had shared experiences and estimated that SMNID would introduce similar measures in Amezray, especially in terms of technical measures.

Abdullah worked two jobs. He was employed by the district government and paid by the state (*dwla*) as a flood and river commissioner, to which end he had a small office building of about six square meters next to the bridge at Suq. He was tasked with taking daily measurements of the water level, even during the feast of sacrifice (*eid al-kbir*), he said emphatically. A state institution had been monitoring and keeping records of the large rivers in the country since approximately 1982. Abdullah communicated with colleagues downstream in Tillegouit by radio—thus avoiding any dependence on the telephone network—as to whether everything was in order and what the (river) conditions were like. This monitoring was necessary because of the heavy rainfall in the mountains, which could lead to torrential floods that would gradually affect the river. Whilst there might be heavy rain in Agoudim, Abdullah explained, the sky could be bright and clear further downstream. If masses of water surged downstream, it would take people utterly by surprise and put both them and their property in danger within the space of only three to four hours. Tourists camping near the river were particularly at risk, Abdullah said, and younger tourists from bigger cities, in particular, tended to be short-sighted and careless, occasionally camping directly in the river bed.

Precipitation was also measured by a radar station in the office building, which was powered entirely by car batteries. In addition, colleagues or officials from Beni Mellal would come at least once a month to measure the velocity of the river and calculate how much water was passing through. The same inspectors would also check the quality of the water to ensure it was safe to drink. In response to my question about water quality and possible problems with pollution—especially because almost everyone now used synthetic washing powder when doing their laun-

dry at the river bank—Abdullah replied that despite this, impairments would only be minor (“*shwiya*”). He claimed, there would be no problems.<sup>4</sup> Needless to say, water quality was crucial, not just where the river ran close to the springs, but all the way downstream.

Abdullah’s second job consisted of volunteer work for the water association of Agoudim. He was a founding member of the association as well as its president. When he was still at university, he had been approached by the local community and asked—recalling it, he made it sound like he had been almost urged—to establish a local association. The lack of tap water was unacceptable (“*hshuma*”) given the river and springs that were so close to Agoudim, he had been told. At that time, the government had not put any structures in place—physical or otherwise—for water provision. *Dwla makaynsh*. Abdullah had initially been approached because he was the first person from Agoudim to go to university. He had initially declined the request, intent on completing his studies. After some reflection, however, he decided otherwise. I joked that when problems arose in the past, the *igurramen* were asked for help, but it seemed this had changed. Indeed, taking care of this problem would almost make him an *agurram*. Abdullah laughed and agreed: “times have changed (*ibdl loqt*),” he told me, “*igurramen* are no longer important the way they used to be, other things are relevant today.” In times gone by, the *igurramen* were treated like kings, they would have had vast lands and great wealth, and many people in their service, Abdullah continued. They had no need for tap water, as their servants would simply walk to the river and fetch it for them. They were the only people in the valley who had the luxury of showering with water heated in a large pot (*mokrash*).

Quite accustomed to luxury and an extraordinary position in society, the *igurramen* were somewhat left behind by changing times. Neither they nor their children studied diligently at school and were conse-

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4 My question had the background that on the one hand the argumentation of some NGO projects runs along the line of reducing water pollution by structural measures like wash places. On the other hand, the resumed work in a nearby mine was explicitly suspended with reference to a risk to water quality.

quently not among the first in the village to go to university. Abdullah's family, by contrast, were not of the sharific *holy* lineage. According to Abdullah, they were instead subject to the same hard work as all the other “formerly ordinary” people. One could thus claim that the *igurramen* underestimated the significance of education as an economic and socio-political resource that would offer a new generation of Moroccans a stable future. It is worth specifying that by *education* I mean the education system of the emerging Moroccan post-colonial nation state, along with the type of knowledge it produced. Other forms of knowledge—particularly regarding the more symbolic and religious aspects of life—were always within the *igurramen's* area of competence.<sup>5</sup>

Our first stop on the water tour was the pump house. Built by the municipality in 2012, it was located upstream at the entrance to the village, close to the riverbed. The water reservoir (*chateau*) was the first installation to be built as part of the new project and was situated a few hundred meters away from the pump house on a hill above the highest-placed houses of the village. This was where the main pipes bringing fresh drinking water directly from the source to the chateau would lead. The construction of the chateau was funded and carried out by the state but it was initially set up in the absence of a pump house. In addition, the construction itself was of extremely poor quality. After a short time, the cement floor and the foundation of the chateau became porous and crumbly, causing the chateau—tasked with holding water—to leak and slowly release quite a lot of water directly back into the ground. To address the issue, members of the local community saw to repairs on the chateau. The association in Agoudim then took it upon themselves to build a pump house. At first, the pump operated with a generator, which could be acquired through state subsidies and powered with petrol. Given the lack of petrol stations in the valley however, this choice of fuel was somewhat impractical and it had to be sourced from the district town of Azilal. In practice, this meant giving fuel canisters and the appropriate fee to local minibus drivers when they left on their daily

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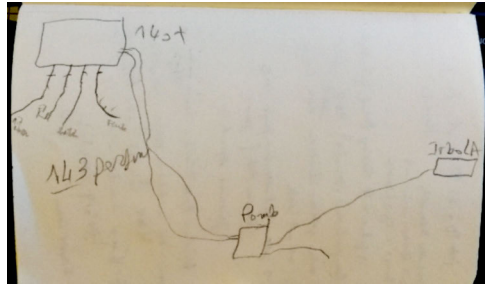
5 This also resonates with some of the issues touched on in chapters four and six.

route in the morning. They would then return with a full canister in the evening. In addition, the pump had to be switched on and off manually. Running the pump and filling the water reservoir thus constituted quite a cumbersome process. Moreover, the price of fuel rendered the whole operation rather expensive. Abdullah complained that the government had clearly not thought the idea through. In 2015, the association took it upon themselves to switch to electrical power. They also integrated a floating level indicator (*flotteur*), which automatically switched the pump on or off depending on the water level of the chateau, thus reducing the amount of manual labour necessary for the overall operation. This equally entailed installing an electricity meter in order to connect the pump house to the power grid. The meter, in turn, was activated with a rechargeable prepaid card, as was then the case for most electricity meters throughout the valley. A power line was laid, running from the pump house to the chateau on the hill and thus enabling automatic operation with the new level indicator. The association envisioned setting up an office inside the small pump house in the near future as they had been operating theretofore either from the office building where Abdullah worked for the district government, or in private residences.

Under the pump house there was a smaller water tank which was equipped with another floater. The water was brought in from the source with pipes that ran either along the riverside or on the riverbed itself. It then collected in the first water tank at the pump house. When the pump house water tank would fill water would escape into a nearby irrigation channel (*targa*) through a drain pipe. The water from the tank was then pumped via a large pipe to the main water tank above Agoudim that had a capacity of 140 cubic metres (*ton*). From the main chateau, there were a total of four main lines: the first supplied the households in the section near the village exit towards Taghia; the second supplied the center of the village; the third supplied the entrance to the village from the Suq; and the fourth supplied the Suq and the public buildings in the administrative center. All in all, 143 households were connected to the water supply system.



Figure 14: The president's schematic drawing of Agoudim's water supply system



The beginning of the project was followed by increasingly serious problems such as burst pipes or broken water meters caused by excessively high water pressure. With the water tank elevated on a hill, there was a build-up of hydrostatic pressure and the water flowing downhill could thus reach pressures in excess of the maximum permissible operating pressure. As such, pressure regulators (*regulateurs*) had to be purchased and installed—one for each of the four main lines leaving the water tank. However, these were not paid for by the state despite considerable acquisition costs. Abdullah explained that in their plans for the promotion and development of the water supply, the state authorities had clearly only considered standards based on urban conditions: they had no notion whatever of conditions in the mountains.

The springs feeding the water supply of Agoudim were located outside the main village, some distance up the river. At several spots, the water bubbled up through the gravel and large stones on the surface of the ground. The source water then immediately merged with the river. At first glance, it was not clear just how many different springs were on the riverside and how many were in the middle of the river. One spring, in particular, was located on the far side of the river and had been surrounded by a concrete wall, which was designed to prevent contamination of the water supply. This is where the main water supply line—which initially ran inside a concrete water channel—began.

Abdullah and I crossed the river and started our journey back toward the village, walking on the old irrigation channels that ran alongside the water pipes. It was here, down at the springs, that Abdullah recounted the legend of Sidi Said Ahansal to me.

### **Water Infrastructure as National Development Policy**

The case of Agoudim—described above—as well as that of Amezray—following below—resonate with more general lines of development politics in Morocco. A recent study by Sylvia Bergh (2017) suggests that infrastructural projects—and projects of water provision in particular—are a primary focus for community-based organizations in Morocco. Among the total of fifty organizations she surveyed, more than half were working on water-related projects such as potable water provision or—less frequently—irrigation. They often also received basic funding from other national or international NGOs and private donors (Bergh 2017: 175). Water-related projects continued to play a central part in future infrastructure projects:

Potable water provision dominates the agenda of future projects for about 20 associations—the sub-projects here range from digging wells, building water reservoirs, and installing or replacing pipes to connect the individual households to a network, to installing meters so as to be able to bill every user according to his or her consumption, and combinations thereof. Irrigation infrastructure works (both the building of irrigation water reservoirs and the cementing of irrigation canals) are a future priority for 16 associations. (Bergh 2017: 180)

The presence in Morocco of multiple CBOs involved in water provision and development-related projects attests to the centrality of these issues in national policy. In rural development programs as well as in local politics and governance, there has been an observable shift towards decentralization and participatory approaches (see chapter three). As a result, the consequences of those reforms and the policy of decentralization can also be observed in terms of the provisioning and management of wa-

ter supply as these increasingly involve expanded engagement on a local level (see also Hughes/Mullin 2018).

On the one hand, the increasing activity of NGOs and CBOs are congruent with the general policy of decentralization. On the other hand, there have been very different repercussions beyond the policy level. As stated above, there is a widespread belief among local people that the state does not care and is, in effect, absent. As such, the delegation of the water supply to a CBO is not perceived as a positive outcome of successful government policy, but rather as evidence of state incapacity to adequately satisfy its public obligation. Of course, *absence of the state* means something very different today as compared, for example, with the 1960s when Gellner conducted his research here. For him, the absence of the state's organizational sphere was, so to speak, proof of a practical form of anarchy. Today, by contrast, it is undeniable that state institutions and security agencies in Morocco are present in even the most remote parts of the country. The state is largely responsible for structuring socio-political life—albeit to a lesser extent in the mountains than in the urban centers. Moreover, under the patronage of the King, multiple aid programs react to emergency situations distributing relief supplies such as blankets, oil, sugar, and milk to rural or mountainous regions—though never, it is worth highlighting, in the absence of appropriate media coverage. However, this clearly falls short of the structural foundations that ought to be supplied by a nation state with a welfare system.

Despite these diverse initiatives in local self-organization of water, certain examples of state-run provision do exist. For instance, a water truck would distribute drinking water to people and animals of the neighbouring *Ait Abdi* plateau where—in contrast to the settlements of the valley—access to water is a critical issue. Considering the presence of springs and a river, the distribution of water in the valley was a different matter. Here, distribution is not a prerequisite for access to water. It is, however, a political question, and self-government a local answer to it. Consequently, connecting the households in Amezray to a new water supply system is permeated by questions of politics and publicness. In the following I will describe how this new water distribution is put into place and which practices are part and parcel of bringing it into being.

## Cooperative Self-Government – Water as Public

Discussions on water distribution for Amezray and the project to renew the water supply system began in summer 2017. In June, the first open meeting was held in the association center in order to inform the community. The assembly was advertised with notices displayed at the Suq and next to shops, for example. News then spread through word of mouth. The association board had already prepared an information sheet with preliminary guidelines and rules for the project while the association management presented the price policy on which they had agreed. The board members of the association sat at two tables pushed together in front of a crowd on white plastic chairs. In total, around sixty men attended, often the heads of households or the eldest sons.

All in all, the meeting focussed on whether Amezray SMNID should take over the central government's mandate to provide drinking water, a motion that required a majority to pass. First, the specific costs to the inhabitants of Amezray were explained. This was followed by a report concerning the legal circumscriptions and regulations for the project. In the ensuing general discussion, questions and objections were principally raised about the costs. The association management were eager to explain that the costs were comparatively low. They provided various calculations and projections as well quoting passages from provisional regulations, which were then discussed in detail. Discussions were generally conducted calmly and thoughtfully though certain points did lead to somewhat tumultuous exchanges as sceptics were asked to be reasonable. In response to objections over supposedly excessive costs, it was argued that water would still be available at the river if necessary. Customers, as such, would thus be in full control of their consumption and associated expenses. In the end, only five or so men were still reluctant to give their approval.

With majority support confirmed, the project quickly moved forward, and necessary materials such as tubes, connections, valves, water meters, cement, and iron lattice doors were soon purchased. Meanwhile, SMNID received the first official registrations for the new water supply to be provided as official documents, signed, stamped, and returned.

The registrations required formal approval by the local government authority, i.e. the local administrative office. Gradually, the supply lines were repaired or laid anew and the first households were connected. By the end of September, 34 households throughout Amezray had been connected to the new water supply, after which the number stagnated however. It appeared that a relatively large number of households were hesitant to make the necessary investment—particularly the cost for the initial set-up was considerable—despite the positive reception at the initial meeting.

The local association had now assumed responsibility for water distribution from the government. They were building reservoirs, laying pipes, and installing water meters and local households, as such, were now connected to *more-than-infrastructure*. For our purposes here, the guiding questions are thus: What politics are at stake in this infrastructure for water provision? What socio-technical arrangements are brought together to form this collective of a water supply system and: What are the material-semiotic consequences of re-infrastructure a common good?

I propose an interpretation of the events that takes water itself as the point of departure. Yet the re-infrastructure of water supply is not exclusively about water provision. It builds on existing conditions and existing infrastructure, reworking the relations toward and around these. This is also why I find the term *re-infrastructure* more suitable than *re-structuring* or *infrastructure*. In fact, the newly introduced supply system does bridge access to water in that it renews methods of water distribution.<sup>6</sup> It does not, however, exploit the resource, nor does it produce the water, but rather transforms it. At the same time, the new water supply does produce something: it produces new subjects and a new promise for the manifestation of a future in the present, a promise of a coming change that will be effected through self-determination and self-governance. At the same time, it cannot be extricated from the conditions of

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6 For instance, it partly built on pre-existing infrastructure such as the water reservoir.

its genesis, namely the neoliberal tendencies of national policy: decentralization of organization and the redistribution of responsibility.

In the following ethnographic description, I give an account of the related implementation work and organizing necessary for the new water supply system. I trace which technical capabilities were employed, which forms of bureaucratic management were enacted, and which processes of standardization were initiated.

*Figure 15: Mustapha reading the water meters in Amezray*



### Reading Water Meters

We begin with Mustapha, the Amezray SMNID's main person in charge of the new water provision project on the ground. Mustapha was a friend with whom I spent a lot of time in the village who then also become my main interlocutor for the project. Before proceeding with a detailed description of his organizational tasks, however, we need to consider how Mustapha came to be the main organizational and technical contact per-

son. His role should be compared to that of Agoudim's water association, Abdullah, whom we encountered at the beginning of the chapter. Abdullah was able to carry out his association work on a voluntary basis given his income as commissioner of river affairs. How does Mustapha's story compare?

Mustapha is the oldest and only son of a rather important family. Indeed, his extended family is one of the biggest in the region. In contrast to other younger people that inhabit respected positions in the association, Mustapha did not attend university, nor did he look for work in Marrakech, Agadir, or further afield, choosing instead to remain in the area. The fact that he was engaged to be married at the time of writing likely played a part in this decision. Before his involvement with the water provision project, he had been working in a hotel at a recreational destination about a two-hour drive away. He was then asked if he wanted to work in the tutoring program of SMNID and ACF. He was first appointed as one of the tutors and was then made responsible for running the computer club. As such, his position was partly funded by the cooperation project between the University of Siegen and SMNID, that is, the project in which I was equally involved. Mustapha continued at this post after beginning work with the water project.

One day, I walked with Mustapha to Amezray's lower village, where he had to read the water meters and record the amount of water used per connected household. He carried a digital camera, a list of connected households, and a pen. The surnames on the customer list were not arranged in alphabetical order, but chronologically according to when they were connected. The list had grown to 84 households, thus comprising the majority of the village. Equipped with the knowledge of a man who had known the village and its inhabitants his whole life—with extended family ties to many of them indeed—Mustapha had devised a route by which all households could be surveyed in the shortest or most practical way. First, we went upstream, across the fields, to the most remote side of the village. From there we meandered through the narrow streets of the village to visit all relevant households, taking small detours to more exposed houses on the edge of the main settlement. The households a little further downstream, on the other side of the river, were not on

Mustapha's schedule for that particular day, nor were the households from the other part of the village, Amezray's upper village. Though this trajectory roughly corresponded to Mustapha's route, it was feasible that he had cut some households out so as to shorten the journey for my benefit. The distances, after all, were not insignificant. Indeed, in the hot midday sun, they were quite tiring. On occasion, I was unable to refuse Mustapha's request to simply wait for him as he ran along paths to the edge of the village or even up the slope to read the water meter of a somewhat more secluded house.

At one point, a schoolboy passed us as we were standing at a house below the main access road. After greeting the boy—who he of course knew—Mustapha asked him to do us a little favour. He showed the boy the water meter of the house we were standing in front of in some detail: the water inlet and the clock were set into the concrete of a box with a small steel door and padlock. Even with the doors closed, one could still see the water clock. Pen in hand, Mustapha showed the schoolboy which were the relevant numbers. He then told him to walk to a house above the road for us and read the meter there. Though still under construction, the house already had a water meter and a connection to the new water system. Water was important for the bricklayers working there—especially for mixing mortar and cement—a water connection saved them a great deal of time and effort. The boy ran away and proudly returned with a number a few minutes later. We thanked him and moved on.

Reading meters was not always quite so straightforward. The meters themselves had a small protective cap made of transparent plastic, which often had to be lifted out of the way, as dust or dirt would gather on them, or light would reflect off them making it difficult to see. The customers themselves were supposed to secure their meter boxes with a padlock, though some did not deem this necessary. As such, Mustapha needed to retrieve the respective keys to read the meters. Moreover, certain customers would cover their meters with plastic bags or other material to guard against dirt—or possibly prying eyes. This equally made accessing the numbers impossible on occasion. Mustapha's usual procedure was to slide through the steel grid of the door with his ballpoint pen and fold up the protective cap. If the meter was covered, some additional prepara-



tory work would be necessary. Mustapha attended to these tedious tasks with stoic patience and skill. He would poke through the grids with one hand or a pen until he reached the water meter and worked the cover to read the digits.

Because the water meters were often installed on house walls or at the entrance—in contrast to my own rented apartment for example—Mustapha could access them from the outside without the help or assistance of the customer. He needed neither to retrieve the key, ring the bell, or even make an appointment, all of which would make the undertaking more cumbersome and time-consuming, particularly because of the endless invitations to tea that he would be obliged to decline. Instead, Mustapha's method gave him a certain degree of autonomy. This does not imply, however, that he would do his work entirely in secret. From time to time, customers would see and approach him. I happened to accompany him at a point when most meters had been installed only a few days or weeks prior. Not surprisingly, many customers had not yet received their first bills and were both curious and a little nervous as to how much water they had used and, thus, how much they owed. The customers we met were almost exclusively women—proof of the gendered division of household activities—who would thus first exchange the usual greeting phrases and then ask: *rbbi, Mustapha, mshta?* The question that was at times expressed in an almost imploring tone translates loosely as: “please, Mustapha, how much does it cost?” Mustapha's response was always willing and friendly, revealing that—frequently contrary to expectations—it was not a huge sum that would plunge the household into debt.

Only one reaction to Mustapha's presence was more common than the enquires into water costs: the invitation to tea. This bedrock of Moroccan hospitality, which is cultivated with particular gusto in the mountains, saw almost every customer we met—or indeed neighbours or people we encountered on the street—ask if we would not take a cup of tea. For this, they would typically make a fist with their thumb pointing upwards, then raise their elbow and rotate their fist and thumb downwards in a pouring gesture. If one accepts, of course, the offer of hospitality is fulfilled. After some time in Morocco, it became clear to me that even

though you could theoretically accept the person's invitation, one just does not always want to. The two occasions on which Mustapha and I did accept the offer were with close acquaintance or extended family.

### Quality Management

In addition to reading the meters, Mustapha also monitored the quality of the recently laid pipes and newly connected and installed water meters at new customers' homes. To do this, he carried a digital camera with him, which he used to document defects or work requiring improvement. He was, so to speak, responsible for both quality management and maintenance. During his tours, he paid painstaking attention to whether the supply service standards set by the association were adhered to. At the same time, he was the contact person—whether by phone or in person—for emergencies, repairs, or complaints. Given that he lived in the area and took care of a lot of water provision issues, it would be no exaggeration to call him the *face of water provision*. Indeed, he was often called *bo aman* (roughly translated to “water man”). The extent and diversity of his responsibilities underlines SMNID's commitment to professionalism and customer satisfaction.

Mustapha did not work by himself. He reported any new information or problems directly to Mohamed, the president of the association, who was kept up to date of all new developments. Many decisions, however, were either made by Mustapha or had to be approved by him. As for the installation and maintenance of the water meters, this was carried out by Hamid, who was the only electrician and plumber (*blombi*) employed by the local authorities. The connection of many new households to the new water supply constituted a significant additional workload to his day-to-day business, given that he took care of all the villages in the valley. Both carrying out installations as well as procuring and organizing materials were time-consuming activities and additional unskilled workers or craftsmen were hired for some of the work. Specifically, this work involved the laying of supply lines, for example—for which many meters of soil often needed digging up—or the bricking in of the steel grid doors behind which the water meters were installed.

The deficiencies and various shortcomings—which Mohamed documented on our tour and explained to me—mainly concerned two areas. First was the water meter, which was located between the central supply pipe from the water chateau and the water pipes of each house. Some customers would use the water connection to operate several taps and washbasins in several rooms, others had only one single tap with washbasin, while others still had one central water station in front of or next to the house. For houses with multiple taps, the water meter was installed in a recess in the house wall as outlined above. If there was one water point, by contrast, the water meter was accommodated in a small free-standing, brick house. Both constructions were identical, in that the main pipe on one side and the pipe to the house on the other were set in a solid concrete foundation. The recess or niche in which the water meter was located would be covered with brick or concrete on the inside and was closed to the outside by a door made of a steel grid. The craftsmanship would vary from case to case and Mustapha occasionally had to make a complaint and request a rebuild.

This became necessary if, for example, the water pipes had not been properly set in concrete, if the inner lining of the niche had not been set with due care, or if the mortar frame had not been well plastered. If the door was smeared too much during plastering, this equally constituted grounds for complaint. While these were mainly aesthetic issues reflecting on poor craftsmanship, shortcomings concerning the pipes were more severe. Neglect here could directly compromise the association's reputation, not only because such problems would prove costly for customers, but because significant deficiencies could raise the question as to whether SMNID were up to the task. The effect on customer satisfaction of unexpected additional costs was further compounded by the establishment of a one-off connection fee to cover materials and labour, as well as the existing operational costs in monthly usage and consumption.

Mustapha also mentioned the financial conditions under which the work on the water installations had been effected, and which went some way to explaining the sub-optimal standards. The workers were not paid per hour but per task. This meant that for every pipe laid and for ev-

ery water meter connected there was a fixed rate of around 60 Dh. As such, it was not particularly important how long they took to do each job. Preparation and connection of the equipment were not carried out under identical conditions. Preparation involved digging ditches for the supply pipes or preparing the water meter recess including the concreted steel lattice door. Those works were mainly done by workers under the guidance of the district installer Hamid, while the connection of the equipment was carried out by Hamid alone. With the workers paid at a fixed rate, Mustapha continued, they would of course try to make as many connections per day as possible. In addition, the volume of orders—particularly at the beginning—favoured quick work that was often inaccurate. After some initial scepticism, the number of orders rose rapidly, and all those who had registered for a new supply system were to be connected as quickly as possible.

However, some households requiring connection were situated a little further away from the village center and/or the main supply lines. The amount of work required to connect them was thus higher. Longer trenches had to be dug, and partly in places that were more difficult to access. If workers wanted to retain the same rate of pay, they had to work more quickly still so as to cover these greater distances. Quick work rarely meant quality work, Mustapha concluded. As a result, shortcomings were more frequent and of greater consequence for these houses.

One household on our tour, above all others, exemplified this dynamic. As far as Mustapha was concerned, the shortcomings were serious. Not only was the recess for the water meter badly constructed, the pipes leading to the somewhat remote house were mostly exposed. This was veritably sub-standard. If the work had been done properly, the pipes would have been at least 30 cm underground, and covered with straw or manure (*ghobar*). Mustapha reminded me that exposed water pipes could easily suffer much greater wear and tear. The material could become porous due to the strong sunlight in summer or snow and ice in winter. Moreover, during cold weather, the pipes would freeze much more quickly.

While we were inspecting the deficiencies, a woman came up to us from the house. She pointed out to Mustapha that there was a leak where the water meter was connected to the main pipe. Mustapha talked to her about the work that had been done and documented the shortcomings with his camera. After we had said goodbye and set off to continue our rounds, Mustapha pulled out his mobile phone and immediately called the president of SMNID. When informed of the serious deficiencies, the president would confront the commissioned workers and arrange for rectification, Mustapha said.

At the end of our tour in the early afternoon, we had read and compiled the meter readings of around two thirds of all connected households, the others would be read the following day.

### **Documents and Papers as Media of Professionalization**

Once all meters had been read, Mustapha could take the next step. He had to transfer all data to his database in order to both archive the meter readings and to calculate customer consumption based on the differences against the previous month. For this office work, Mustapha usually sat down in the association's multi-purpose building (*maqar*), where he could store and lock the documents securely, as well as availing of the necessary technology to prepare accounting. Above all, there was a printer.

For the accounting procedure, there were two central documents: the consumption notification (including invoice) and the receipt. On the consumption notification, customers would find the central information at the top: the number of the water meter, full customer name, and the billing month. Underneath this, there was a table showing in detail how the monthly invoice was composed. First, the amount of water consumed was quantified in cubic meters, followed by the total consumption since the beginning of the service, the new total consumption including the current month, plus the consumption of the current billing month (i.e. the difference between the old and new meter reading). The price for the current month was then also displayed. Further down, the operating costs and possible arrears or reminder fees were

listed if payment was overdue, as well as the invoice date and the total invoice amount.

Mustapha created these notifications of consumption for each customer on Microsoft Word. Although he would use a template for each customer in separate documents, he had to create an updated version every month and add the changing parameters manually. He had created an Excel spreadsheet, the master list so to speak, in which all connected households were listed with name, water meter number, connection date and monthly meter readings. However, this list was not used as a digital database with which an automated generation of invoice or serial letters could be carried out, as is the case for example with various accounting software. Once Mustapha had transferred all the meter readings to his Excel spreadsheet and then copied these new data into the respective individual customer invoice, he could print out everything. Two notifications of consumption for two separate customers were printed on one A4 page at a time after which each page would be cut in two to separate the notifications.

The second central document for billing was the receipt, i.e., a form that was later filled out by hand. Only the current billing month at the top was digitally edited in the text processing program. Furthermore, the receipt had to include the customer's first and last name, the number of the water meter, the amount paid and the date. For this purpose, corresponding fields were left blank on the form, which Mustapha would complete later in the billing process. Once he had printed out a receipt and invoice for each household—here three receipt templates would fit on one A4 page for printing—they were also separated and then stapled together into a small receipt booklet. The receipts consisted of two parts with identical information. While the left part of the receipt was detached and given to the customer upon receiving the payment, the right part would remain with the association and be archived. Mustapha prepared all receipts by manually writing down all necessary information twice on the receipt. Only the field for the date would remain empty. The part of the receipts that went to the customers differed from the part for the association in that it additionally contained association's official seal and the manager's signature. This meant that after all receipts had

been printed, stapled, and completed, they also had to be stamped and signed. With a total number of 84 households at the time of my stay, this was a considerable amount of work for a single person to accomplish. It was hardly surprising that reflections on how to reduce and partially automate the workload soon followed.

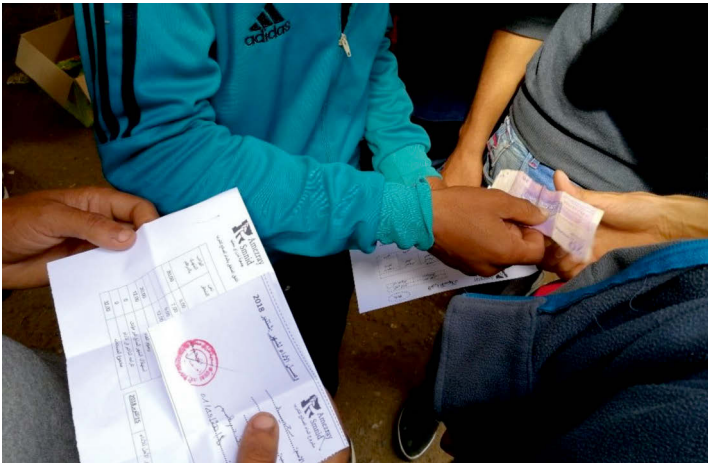
When I was with Mustapha at his office a few days later, he expressed an interest in finding a better digital solution for his office work. Amezray SMNID would soon adopt the accounting system of Agoudim's water association, he told me. The system was the result of several years of experience and had proven itself very useful. I was unable to determine if this had been planned for some time already or if mutual support between the two associations had been discussed in advance. I knew only there had been an exchange between the two associations as regards accounting procedures at the beginning of the project in Agoudim. I had been told that both associations would basically use the same accounting procedure. Amezray SMNID was thus able to benefit from the pioneering role and expertise of the Agoudim-based association. The relationship between the two associations had been very positive in general and Agoudim-based association had been glad to share its knowledge. Nonetheless, I was somewhat mystified as to why the more sophisticated digital system had not been adopted from the outset.

## Costs and Pricing

For new users of the water system, there was a one-off connection fee of 1,300 Dh, and here it is worth repeating that connection was completely voluntary. From the very beginning, SMNID strongly promoted the new project with a view to improving life for the entire community. Their vision was not initially shared by everyone. Above all, paying for something—and potentially paying quite a lot—that was previously free, did not strike everyone as an improvement. Association members were primarily tasked with allaying these fears during the introductory meetings, which was also reflected in the fact that many households initially refrained from connecting to the new water supply system. Indeed, the

remaining sceptics were only reconsidering connection once the association had launched a discount campaign for a specific period up until the end of Ramadan 2018, promising reduced connection costs. Those who had signed up straight away were either avid supporters of the project, financially rather comfortable, or themselves members of the association.

*Figure 16: Paying water bills on the Suq*



Monthly charges for water consumed were staggered. The association justified this by explaining that the aim was to reduce water consumption whilst raising awareness around potential wastage. There were four different price levels: if consumption was between one and six cubic meters, the cubic meter cost five Dh. From the seventh cubic meter up to and including the 12th, it then cost seven Dh. From the 13th cubic meter up to the 20th, it cost nine Dh, and from the 21st cubic meter up and above it cost 12 Dh per cubic meter, which was the maximum rate. To this were added the operating costs, which came to 12 Dh per month. I was assured on several occasions that this operating or working fee was



not a fee in the proper sense, particularly considering the fact that the association functioned as a non-profit with the express aim of serving the community. The fee served to create a reserve fund to deal with technical issues or repairs, as well as paying commissioned workers. Moreover, both income and expenditure would be clearly outlined at the annual general meeting.

### The Accountability of Water Transactions

If a household or customer was unable to pay a monthly bill, a supplementary fee was incurred. At the end of the month, customers had 15 days to pay the outstanding invoice. After that, ten Dh would be charged. If the customer failed to pay in the course of the subsequent month, the fee would increase to 20 Dh for the second month. If the customer again failed to pay in the third month, the fee would then rise to 30 Dh. After three months of non-payment, the customer would be disconnected. Although strict regulations were in place, the payment date was not completely inflexible and exceptions could be made for late payment under certain circumstances.<sup>7</sup> This can largely be explained by the fact that payment occurred in person: the consumption notices and invoices were handed over to the customer personally and payment occurred directly between Mustapha and the customers—typically the head of the household or one of his sons. In terms of payment, there were neither bank transfers nor any other means of technical mediation such as would confirm punctual payment (or a lack thereof) with computational precision.

Moreover, as Pascal Mulet has meticulously shown, taking on credit (*kredi*) was a common everyday practice in the High Atlas (Mulet 2018: 121-130). All small shop (*tahanut*) owners or vendors at the weekly Suq

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7 Agoudim used the same penalty fee system. The Agoudim-based association's president, Abdullah, assured me that no one had ever been cut off for failure to pay. On the contrary, customers were generally grateful to have been spared trips to the river with donkeys and canisters, and were thus quite willing to promptly square their bills. It is worth pointing out, however, that each of the associations structured their pricing system somewhat differently.

use their own accounting systems in order to keep track of outstanding debts. For example, small weekday purchases at the shopkeepers are added together and paid in full on the Suq day, typically once a week though intervals can vary. Similar agreements are entirely conceivable in an attenuated form when it comes to settling water debts. On several occasions as I was walking around the Suq with Mustapha, we would encounter customers and Mustapha would ask about their monthly consumption or outstanding payment, I would overhear them responding that they had no money with them. Other times, they would simply take note of the information and then suggest paying the outstanding amount the next day or on the following Suq day.

To state the case explicitly, people do not appear to take advantage of the flexibility in the payment system to compensate for their ailing finances, either by delaying payment or seeking to avoid payment *tout court*. What is decisive for this rather relaxed and rational economic transaction is that it fundamentally occurs in the context of a social interaction. Indeed, ensuing attempts to standardize—or *bureaucratize*—the payment and billing process did not cause any radical change in how transactions, debt, and monetary exchanges were dealt with on an everyday basis.

Let us now turn our attention to a slightly more detailed examination of the billing and payment process. As should already have become apparent, Monday, Suq day, was the paradigmatic day on which those interactions took place. Not only is this the primary day for grocery shopping, it is also a day for transactions where economic, social, and political dynamics of daily life are explicitly negotiated.

On Suq day Mustapha would typically get ready early in the morning—unless, of course, last minute invoices took up more time than expected. Mustapha would wear a red shoulder bag with two compartments inside. One of the compartments held a small case which functioned as cash box. Behind it, in the other compartment, he carried the invoices and receipts—stapled together into small booklet or placed between the pages of a book. Once at the Suq, however, Mustapha would keep these invoices and receipts in his hands most of the time, only sporadically placing them back in the bag now and then. Throughout the

morning, Mustapha would walk around the Suq to meet customers (or their contact persons) and present them with their monthly accounts. Some customers were employed on Suq day themselves and Mustapha would find them at their stall or shop. Partly, however, he simply strolled back and forth until he would run into the next customer. He seemed certain that he would encounter the respective contact person sooner or later.

This was generally how it was when I accompanied him. We would take a path from Amezray that ends at the Suq shortly after a last slight ascent directly next to the first buildings higher up, walking for about 20 minutes all in all. No sooner would we pass the first stall belonging to a customer than people would begin to shout, “Oh, the water man!” (*awa bo aman*) and approach Mustapha to examine their bills. Soon a small group of mainly younger men would gather around Mustapha. While he was busy looking for the corresponding consumption notifications in his documents and distributing them to those around him, some of them were already pulling out banknotes, others were heading to their fathers or the heads of the household with the bills, returning shortly afterwards to make payment. Mustapha was required to do a great deal of multi-tasking at this juncture: he had to keep track of the bills given out, collect money, and hand out change at the same time. He would then fill out and sign the corresponding receipts and pass them on to the appropriate contact person. In addition, news and curiosities were exchanged, jokes were made and plans for, say, midday appointments for football matches were discussed. From time to time, he also had to attend to meetings with board members of the association or facilitate water-related documents in correspondence with the local municipality. Indeed, Mondays on the Suq would be so busy for Mustapha that he regularly had to skip lunch—widely considered the most important meal of the day.

The foregoing ethnographic accounts offer several starting points for further theorizing and analysis. In what follows, I focus on the repercussions of implementing/re-infrastructuring the water supply system in Amezray. I examine their impact on the community and their potential to both transform a socio-technical arrangement, while arguably also

transforming the people themselves and their way of living vis-à-vis official institutions and the state.

### Water Supply as New Standard

Management procedures and bureaucratic practices were a central project of the new water supply system. These involved the implementation of standards, as well as the use of lists and documents. All of the above comprise situated interactions and practices of producing mutual accountability and displaying regularized responsibility. As Lawrence Busch reminds us:

Even as standards are technical rules, they are also compromises among diverse values, themselves drawn from different worlds or orders of worth. Standards are attempts to fix values, to embed them in particular products, processes, persons, practices, and organizations. Standards construct publics since they implicate various persons up and down the value chain, as well as those in networks that surround it. At the same time, standards determine how power and other social goods will be distributed among persons and things. But if standards are and must be about the distribution of social goods, then they are also about the means of governance. (Busch 2011: 268)

As such, it is reasonable to understand the implementation of the new water supply system in Amezray as an effort to set a new standard. Specifically, it is a standard concerning water that points well beyond its material and technical properties and that is related to ideas and values—as well as the management—of a common good. Here, standards become a site for the *civic*, of which Busch considers drinking water a part. To wit: “Civic standards do not take the viewpoint of buyer or seller but focus on creating and measuring the qualities of *public goods*” (Busch 2011: 253, italics in original). “[M]oreover, standards in the civic world are often, perhaps always, collective” (ibid.: 254).

This points beyond the mere hedged and local situation towards the broader scale of the political issues raised by our case, though I am not convinced of the accuracy of the term *the civic* for the High Atlas. It is

clear to me that in its situatedness, citizenship is multi-layered, contested and ambiguous (see for example Holston 2008). After all, what exactly is meant by *civic* or *citizenship* and how do they contribute to our understanding of the context?

For the High Atlas, I would argue that the water supply infrastructure does not produce the state. On the contrary, it rather consolidates a long-standing semi-autonomy that has frequently been ascribed to the region in historical analyses. I am also wary of the argument that the re-infrastucturing of the water supply produces citizens. However, it does put people into a renewed, managed relationship that revolves around issues of water. For this, the term *hydraulic publics*, conceptualized in a recent paper by Anand (2018), seems more suitable.

### The Publicness of Water Politics

The term *hydraulic public*, as applied to the case of Amezray, speaks directly to the consequences of implementing the new water supply. In seeking to re-infrastucture water provision and the state's official mandate, SMNID brings about water as an *issue*. Water thus becomes a new type of concern affecting the community with a public soon forming around it. The circumstances differ, specifically, because drinking water had previously been the responsibility of individual households or extended families, tasked with fetching and storing their own water from the river. The association then assumed responsibility for provision, laying pipes, installing water meters, and acting as intermediaries and water mediators. The resulting water supply infrastructure necessarily comprises the human and non-human collective that produces it. Moreover, based on the delegated responsibilities and obligations, it involves coordination such as interactions and transactions between the community and the association, or between the association and government offices. These interactions are mediated and facilitated by documents, artefacts, and procedures. The hydraulic public of the High Atlas is distributed through these various practices. This public is less than the *Moroccan public sphere* or a *community of strangers*, but more than the individual household or extended family. To a significant

extent, people actually know one other, and community here generally entails face-to-face interactions. The same cannot be said for any such pertinent interaction with the state. For it is not the absence of water, but the absence of water distribution, the absence of tap water, that is taken as evidence of state negligence.

Let us take a look at the concept in a little more detail. For Anand, hydraulic publics are publics:

brought into being by the material and intimate political commitments to care about the enduring consequences of water distribution in Mumbai. Publics are situated and plural. They are formed around and by the materiality of the water network and its situated, regular, partial breakdowns in everyday life. Water infrastructures form and are formed by publics for whom water is a matter of life, and a matter for life. These publics emerge not only through associational relations between humans, but also through the various material infrastructures that are claimed, extended, and withdrawn through projects to govern the city. Publicness therefore is not just an effect of human sociality, a political form that associates in already formed material worlds: publics are constituted through the distributed materialities that structure the city's water infrastructure. As publics emerge through the situated materialities and designs of the hydraulic network, these more-than-human arrangements of the hydraulic network create enduring if unstable forms whose politics continue to matter after they have been constituted. (Anand 2016)

This understanding of publics differs from classical conceptualizations of a *public sphere*<sup>8</sup>, as neither “expansive and deterritorialized” nor “only organized and mobilized against the state and corporate capital” (Anand 2018: 169). Referring to the work of Nortje Marres, he understands this

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8 For a discussion of the *public sphere* see Habermas (1962), Calhoun (1992), and Warner (2005). More recent discussions of the public sphere problematize the alleged stability of *public* and *private* see Cody (2011), or point to publicness *after* (Berlant 2011) or *beyond* (Morris 2013) the public sphere, see Hirschkind/Abreu/Caduff (2017).

form of publicness as closely related to questions of relevance. It is a public that “appears as a ‘community of the affected’” and that “is constituted, collected, and gathered by the shared consequences of water distribution” (Anand 2018: 169). Although Anand himself does not elaborate on the groundwork of Marres in detail, I consider this to be useful here for the further development of my analysis and for making a substantiated comparison.

The idea of the *affectedness* in Marres—an important feature of how a public becomes such—has a certain affinity with the Latourian notion of *matters of concern*. Latour argues that “we might be more connected to each other by our worries, our matters of concern, the *issues* we care for, than by any other set of values, opinions, attitudes or principles” (Latour 2005a: 4, my italics). It is—as Marres writes in an earlier paper—those issues that “spark a public into being” (Marres 2005). Drawing on a pragmatic perspective put forward by John Dewey, she goes on to state that

a very wide range of human actions may lead to the emergence of a public. Dewey posits that it includes all actions ‘whose consequences extend beyond those [...] directly concerned,’ ‘so that they may affect the welfare of many others.’ In that case, Dewey says, ‘the act acquires a public capacity.’ [Dewey 1991[1927]: 13] This we could say is Dewey’s definition of a public affair. When such an affair emerges, a public must get involved in politics if its effects on people’s lives are to be addressed. It is the emergence of an issue that sparks public involvement in politics. Dewey says it literally: ‘[T]he essence of *the consequences which call a public into being* is the fact that they expand beyond those directly engaged in producing them.’ [Dewey 1991[1927]: 27]. (Marres 2005: 214, original emphasis and quotations)

In *Material Participation* (2012) she develops this further, offering an empirical foundation with which to understand object-centered publicness. Consequently, a public consists both of subjects and discourse as well as technology and objects, or systems take part in such a public. She thereby emphasizes “the normative capacities of *things* to activate and mobilize publics” (ibid.: 35), while refining the notion of issue-publics insofar as she asserts that “to consider problems of relevance is to re-

sist the assumption that issues and issue communities are somehow objectively given” (ibid.: 54).

This perspective then makes it possible to account for the conditions, mechanisms, and interactions that bring forth an issue and its public. This is particularly useful in freeing us from the obligation to directly introduce grand concepts such as *state*, *citizens* and *public sphere*. The specific debates and connotations they entail could very well obscure empirical findings. Marres and Anand’s *public* displays an intention to follow ethnographic material and explicitly determine exactly what these concepts are supposed to designate *in situ*. It considers how such concepts are produced, negotiated, and maintained. As a public concern, water is accompanied by media circulation, political organization, and processes of claim-making.

Anand is interested especially “in kinds of semipublic spaces in which these claims are made and generated. As subjects make claims to water in the public-private offices of city councilors, they blur boundaries between domestic spaces and the political order that constitutes them” (Anand 2018: 157). This speaks to the critique of the *classic* conceptualization of the *public sphere* that has questioned the validity of the concept especially for Muslim majority countries (Salvatore/Eickelman 2004; Salvatore/LeVine 2005). It has also shown that different forms of publicness exist, comprising more intimate (Herzfeld 1997; Soysal 2010) or semi-public forms, for example (Cody 2011). It further resonates with the argument that a *public* is an achievement of the actors themselves, who are well able to carefully modulate—expand or contain—the degrees of publicness for different interests or contexts and on different scales (Zillinger 2017).

Focusing on hydraulic publics, as such, helps to localize the claims, contestations, and negotiations of the everyday politics around it. It points to how and through which practices the issues are shaped and put forward, and how they not only create publics but are remade as—and in—political disputes. In Anand’s account it is not hard to see how and why water and water infrastructure become, or always have been, political. They serve to address inequalities and contest the authority of state government. The distribution and infrastructure of



water represent the political. Yet, they also become *practically political* insofar as citizens claim their rights and protests are articulated by and through them.

The case of the High Atlas differs from that of Mumbai (Anand) on one crucial point however. Namely, the desire is not to oppose the state with certain demands or the invocation of specific rights. Considering the relationship between the state and the valley, or the CBO Amezray SMNID, to be more precise, political mobilization and expertise do not seem to lead to a direct confrontation with the state. Instead, they aim at self-administration. Political implications arise from the very delegation and coordination work of re-infrastructuring water. These activities become highly political as the provision of water is a common good and ideas of participation and progress are thus engendered in its distribution. Within these are questions of how precisely one imagines a good life in the future or how, indeed, one wants to live at all. As such, the re-infrastructuring of water taps into imaginaries and discourses that exceed the mere provision of water or the political negotiations and claims towards a common good. Ultimately, it is a matter of negotiating change and improvements in living conditions. So long as water quality of the springs and the river—and thus the village's existential livelihood—is not threatened by mining companies as it was in the past the (general access to) water is not contested. But as a centrally managed and distributed good, as a commodity and token of modernity, the new water-supplied-water contests the long-standing communal way of relating to and dealing with water. At the same time, it is a point of condensation for a number of very different arguments or interests connected with it, ranging from existential, pragmatic, economic, and identity-related issues.

Amezray SMNID received the mandate for water provision based on its past experience and community work and thus became an important actor, a node in a political network. It thus took responsibility for what was previously a government mandate. Of course, this cannot be an overtly subversive act given that it is still beholden to the rules of local and municipal administrations. It does not constitute a hydraulic *counter public* (Warner 2005). On a different scale, the outsourcing of

state services forms part of a national—if not global—policy scheme of decentralization and participation. What is more, it also means that the CBO—or rather the association's responsible personnel—is well able to expand their political influence and importance, thus consolidating their powerful positions in the local context. In this way, the policy of decentralization might even play into more clientelistic forms of cooperation (see Bergh 2017).<sup>9</sup>

How, then, can the ramifications of the new water supply system be summed up? What does the process of re-infrastructuring water in the village of Amezray produce? First of all, it brings together—and puts into relation—an array of different participants, materials, and discourses; on different scales that have become visible in the above description of their social and organizational practices. This produces an issue that people relate to and that is charged with ideas and values of improvement, progress and a better life. The water supply, thus, concerns and affects people. While they can still fetch water as they always did, their new water connections shift water provision out of the realm of the household or extended family toward a bureaucratic *modern institution*. In addition to tap water, such households thus receive the promise of becoming part of a different mode of existence—one, indeed, that is fit for the future. This, in any case, is the motive that drives the local association SMNID. They have dedicated themselves to the transformative potential of infrastructural development for the benefit of the entire community. Of course, this transition does not occur ad hoc, nor does everyone have an equal part from the outset, despite ambitions for such.

The new water supply produces exclusions or at least makes distinctions and hierarchies apparent. On the one hand, it produces a consolidation of influence and socio-political status for (members of) the association. On the other hand, it marks those arbitrarily or involuntarily left

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9 Here it would be interesting to examine in more detail precisely how the the rather recent organizational forms and political structure of CBOs relate to the arguably specific characteristics Moroccan of hierarchy and authority (Waterbury 1970; Hammoudi 1997).

out, and in socially and economically weak positions (who is *not* connecting to the water supply, and why). The new water provision demarcates the line between administrators and customers. A shift can also be observed from water use to water *consumption*. It becomes differently measured, calculated, and—to a certain extent—commodified (see Ballestero 2015), despite the fact SMNID functions as a non-profit. As a result, improvement and work come at a price: self-reliance is superseded by new forms of marketesque entanglement and dependency. Pipes, meters, and taps, as well as the necessary bureaucratization and payment system all promise participation in a contemporary and *modern* lifestyle. At the same time, a new biopolitical link between people and water has been established.

## Conclusion

The foregoing chapter described the process of re-infrastructuring the water supply of Amezray. It took as starting point both the historically grown connections of the particular region of the High Atlas Mountains to water and the conviction that scrutinizing water and its surrounding infrastructural arrangements provides insights into broader aspects of social life. Based on the ethnographic material presented—namely a detailed description of the social and organizational practices that constitute the water supply—the chapter discussed the re-infrastructuring of potable water not only as a transformation of the community's relationship to water, but of the politics of water in relation to the state.

Those implicated in the system are brought together as a hydraulic public. They thus have the potential to become different kinds of subjects. Where previously households had been self-sufficient in their acquisition of water, they have become customers and, thus, *modernized*. The local association, thereby, produces its own intermediary position as a civil society actor. As a hinge joint of civil society, the local association has framed the newly created public concerns within their own organizational practices, and thus succeeded in institutionalizing them. Connecting households to a new water supply system is therefore also,

as it were, a connection to the promise of a *good life*, whereby one is ostensibly well positioned for the future. Moreover, the new form of water provision represents a local mode of self-organization, one that establishes a connection to the nation-state via new forms of representation and legitimation.



## **ethnographic parenthesis E }**

### **Personal Everyday Water**

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*For myself water was one of the main issues I was concerned with, before my first visit in the valley, but not as a topic of scholarly inquiry. I was not sure what to expect, if and to what extent water for drinking and sanitation was available. Before my departure I took two notable precautions, besides a well-equipped first-aid kit, I packed a water treatment agent from an outdoor equipment store. These were chemical compounds in two different vials, which, when a few drops of each were mixed, sterilized a certain amount of water after an application time. Because I did not know whether I would be able to buy bottled water at all time, this measure seemed rational. Very quickly it became clear that the access to water and the possibility to buy drinking water was not a problem at all. Not being a huge fan of gastrointestinal infections and with the nearest hospital a roughly two-hour serpentine drive away, I decided nonetheless to be careful in the beginning. Thus, for the first months I mixed my own purified water, using either tap water or water from the river. Gradually I began to drink untreated water on a regular basis, until I stopped treating my own water at some point. After all, everyone else drank the tap water and river water, too. Especially for the people who felt responsible for me and always wanted to know me in the best of health, it was more reassuring that I did not drink tap water at first—just to be on the safe side. It became a well-taken point of reference when later I would tell that my stomach (maeda) was adjusted now and I would drink water just like anyone else. Which at times caused some cheerful surprise. This certainly was a fact that would earn its place in a typical anthropological arrival story of how the anthropologist slowly becomes more acquainted with people, place, and culture. Offering water, in a café, restaurant or at someone's home, was common. Occasionally others would inquire, with the*

people I was accompanying or with myself, whether I could drink it at all, after it was offered to me. For tourists or other Iromin were apparently known for drinking their own water and being very careful and reserved with the collective water bottles. Mostly, these collective water bottles came in two ways. Either, as former plastic bottles for mineral water, lemonade, or oil and holding anything between one to three liters. In addition, individual glasses or cups were usually placed on the table. Or, as water barrel or container with a screw-on lid standing at a central spot in the middle of the room. For these, there was a handle cup—often made of plastic and often tied to the container—with which the water was scooped out of the container and then also drunk.<sup>1</sup>

Besides being indispensable as drinking water, water serves many more purposes in daily life. For baking bread, preparing and cooking dishes such as Tajine or bean stew (lubia) it is just as essential as for making tea—perhaps the single most important and central culinary component in Amazigh Morocco. It is a common opinion, especially and not surprisingly in the mountain regions themselves that nowhere does tea taste better than in the mountains, where the water is clearest and freshest. And at no time is plain water more delicious than during Ramadan. The breaking of the fast every evening became a special event not only because of the variety of food that had been prepared, but also because of the water. After the quiet midday hours it became livelier on the streets again in the evening, because from everywhere mainly children rushed to the river or to the irrigation channels to fetch fresh and cool water. This fresh water was considered tastier than the water from the tap or that was kept in kitchens and homes. As for me it was the first Ramadan to fully participate in, I was struck by the bodily experience. Before dinner I was instructed to refrain from drinking too much, and to eat first instead. Drinking too much would cause the stomach to fill quickly, so it was explained to me, and thus preventing me from eating properly, which was more important after a whole day of fasting. When the time came to finally drink I would become

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1 Sharing one communal glass or cup, either in public places such as restaurants or at home, was also topic in health workshops organized by the NGOs active in the valley. The aim thereby being to provide for medical and hygiene education in order to raise awareness about the origin and spread of potential infectious diseases. One lesson to take away from these workshops was the use of a personal water cup.

*quite enthusiastic, for the joy and amusement of all present. This led to a recurring phrase that lasted throughout the Ramadan period: during Ramadan, water is way more delicious than a Tajine (yuf nu aman tajine)!*





## Chapter 6

### Guides of the Atlas

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It is worth noting that no special explanation is required why there should be a village in this position at all: Zawiya Ahansal is not one of those places [...] where religious faith and human ingenuity triumph over an adverse and unfavourable natural environment. On the contrary, the environment is favourable, indeed charming. Sidi Said Ahansal had chosen his place well, and it is in my view destined, when roads become adequate and the rise of national income in Morocco creates the demand, one of the favoured tourist centers in the Atlas. (Gellner 1969: 168)

The importance of this specific region of the High Atlas Mountains goes back to its historical importance as a religious place. When Ernest Gellner visited the area in the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s to do research for his *Saints of the Atlas*, he was fascinated by the extraordinary role of saints. Through their own kinship relations as direct descendants of the founder of the settlement and *zawiya*, they could identify themselves as descendants of the Prophet himself. Because they belonged to this *holy lineage*, they occupied outstanding social positions. Their wealth as well as political and religious authority was displayed, for instance, by the large castle-like houses (*igherman*). In contrast to similar buildings throughout the High Atlas which primarily served as communal granaries, every *holy family* owned their respective *ighrim*. These historical testaments are still admired today, as evidence of the former prestige of the saints and their supra-regional significance.

Where Gellner undoubtedly had seen saints as the striking feature of the specific socio-cultural configuration of the area, what I saw—when I started my fieldwork almost sixty years later—was tourist guides.

One, but surely not the only, reason for this was related to my own positionality. My main contacts in the beginning of my stay were working for the local NGOs and simultaneously as tourist guides and interpreters. Especially in the first weeks, I joined them in their daily routines and activities, or “went-along” as Kusenbach would have it (cf. Kusenbach 2003). They took me with them, showed me around, and explained to me the surroundings and local dynamics. They were professionals in taking care of me, having experience in working with tourists and guests. As we spent more time, however, the rather professional relationship was gradually replaced by friendship. The few people who knew about my connection with the project and the local association would immediately know how to place me. The interactions and topics of conversation were somewhat different from the ones I had with people who did not know me at all. For them I had to be a tourist and obviously was treated as such until I or my friends could elucidate the purpose of my stay and my affiliations.

On one of the very first days since I had arrived in the valley, I accompanied Ouleid to the weekly Suq. Ouleid was the main facilitator and project coordinator on our partner’s side. He was in his early twenties and had just finished his bachelor’s degree in English literature and cultural studies. He had then been recruited by the US American NGO ACF that was very active in the valley. Because he lived only a few houses away from where I stayed and also had relational ties to the family members, I became quite close with him. At the café above the Suq, there was a meeting of the recently founded *Association d’Alpinisme* that I was allowed to attend. In this association, people who owned guesthouses, worked as guides or were otherwise involved in tourism joined together as a collective, in order to collaboratively achieve objectives that would be difficult to achieve alone and thus benefit together from the overall tourism

of the region.<sup>1</sup> In total, eleven men gathered in the café's separate room on plastic chairs around two tables covered with washable, flower-patterned tablecloths. There were overlaps with some of the men who were also involved in other associations. Biscuits were served, tea poured, and after a short round of talking and joking during which Ouleid introduced me, the association's president officially opened the meeting. One of the spokesmen was Hamou, who ran a guesthouse at the end of the central village and worked as a guide. He presented an idea for a marathon event, which would run right through the High Atlas and that he developed with a well-known marathon runner from Morocco. Ouleid explained to me afterwards that although Hamou could probably organize the event himself, based on his expertise and contacts, he was determined to get the association on board. The involvement of the association would not only add more substance to the attempt to win further cooperation partners, but would also enable him to make use of the connections that some colleagues in the association had with the authorities as well as their experience with official paperwork and organizing. Hence, in the course of the meeting the members of the association discussed the feasibility of the project and what could be contributed. It was more about general questions of feasibility, i.e. which tasks would have to be carried out and distributed, and about the possibilities and the extent to which individuals (like Hamou), and the association, but also officials had to be, or ought to be, involved. One month later, at a further meeting that was also attended by the well-known marathon runner Ibrahim, the members presented the ideas—which had been provisionally agreed upon—to representatives of the local district administration.

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1 The mission statement of the association, which can be viewed publicly on Facebook, is specified as follows:

- Establish the integration process of Zawiyat Ahansal into the rest of the world by popularizing tourism and by preserving the cultural heritage and traditions of Zawiyat Ahansal.
  - Promote tourism programmes, sports, and activities in Zawiyat Ahansal.
  - Develop close relations with international organizations of the same type.
- (last accessed, 08/01/2019)

What struck me during the meeting was the fact that all the men present wore outdoor clothing or equipment in some way. I saw sports or hiking footwear, hiking pants and fleeces or functional jackets, sunglasses and sport watches. This was remarkable enough to become an entry in my field notes by the end of the day. Especially as it significantly differed from the habitual way of dressing in the region that I had witnessed theretofore. The men often would wear either cloth trousers or jeans and sneakers, sandals or simple rubber shoes, a shirt and sweater and over it a jacket, blazer or more classical: a *jelaba*. The difference was probably so striking because the standard clothing was more in muted colours of dark blue, dark green and brown or grey; whereas the typical colours for outdoor clothing are very bright or even neon colour combinations. What became clear in the course of my stay was that those men involved in tourism did not only wear this outdoor clothing for hiking or touring occasions. Rather they wore it on an everyday basis. With a few minor exceptions, like festivities or the sporadic choice of the more classic *jelaba* outfit, I have never seen them without at least some outdoor gadget or garment—this counts for all of the guides or men active in tourism that I got to know in the region. However, I do have to make one small observation: Some people other than guides also wear outdoor clothing. These men—without limitation—fall into the category of “educated people” as Ouleid would call them using the English phrase. That is to say, they have attended a secondary school or university and they may have one of the few well-paid and respected occupations such as in local administration or as teachers. Furthermore, outdoor garments are also part of the bonus scheme, if you will, for employees of the US American NGO. As the company owner is sponsored by a prominent outdoor company, now and then clothing of that brand (second-hand and new) is given to the employees.

All this made me think of Pierre Bourdieu's notion of distinction. Distinction, thereby, is not something that has to be intended in the first place.<sup>2</sup> Rather, it always refers back to the social position that individu-

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2 Bourdieu reminds us that “[t]hose who are held to be distinguished have the privilege of not worrying about their distinction; they can leave it to the objec-

als hold and, according to Bourdieu, is always already embedded in the demarcation efforts of different social classes.

Struggles over the appropriation of economic or cultural goods are, simultaneously, symbolic struggles to appropriate distinctive signs [...]. The dynamic of the field in which these goods are produced and reproduced and circulate while yielding profits of distinction lies in the strategies which give rise to their rarity and to belief in their value, and which combine [...] to bring about these objective effects. 'Distinction', or better, 'class', the transfigured, misrecognizable, legitimate form of social class, only exists through the struggles for the exclusive appropriation of the distinctive signs which make 'natural distinction'. (Bourdieu 1984: 249-250)

I do not want to suggest all the implications of the Bourdieuan theory for this case here. However, it does not seem too far-fetched to understand the tourist guides as heralds of a new class or *mountain bourgeoisie*, as should become somewhat clearer in the following. For now, I would like to take up the emphasis of the connection between consumer goods, their public display, and their feedback on questions of social stratification. Outdoor clothing is not easy to find in Morocco, especially in the mountainous areas. At the small weekly market in the area, outdoor clothing is completely absent, and is rarely to be found at the regional market in the district town. The next specialized store is a Decathlon, located in Marrakesh.<sup>3</sup> More expensive outdoor equipment or leading

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tive mechanisms which provide their distinctive properties and to the 'sense of distinction' which steers them away from everything 'common.' Where the petit bourgeois or nouveau riche 'overdoes it,' betraying his own insecurity, bourgeois discretion signals its presence by a sort of ostentatious discretion, sobriety and understatement, a refusal of everything which is 'showy,' 'flashy' and pretentious, and which devalues itself by the very intention of distinction." (Bourdieu 1984: 249).

- 3 There were 13 Decathlon branches in Morocco, with a second store in Marrakech that was opened at the end of 2018 (<https://www.decathlon.ma/c/214-nos-magasins>, last accessed, 12/01/2019). In the summer of 2016, there were only four stores in Casablanca, Marrakech, Tangier, and Mohammedia, when

international brands are for the most part not available at all—and if anywhere then in the main cities of Casablanca or Rabat. I would argue that it is appropriate to interpret outdoor clothing both as an indicator of purchasing power as well as status symbol and an expression of a mimetic practice: namely the desire and aspiration to belong to a global community of travel enthusiasts and adventure seekers. As such, outdoor clothing is a publicly visible marker that either displays economic success and a certain status in that its bearers are able to afford more expensive and other-than-usual clothing. Otherwise, it functions as a uniform and, as such, as seemingly obvious evidence that one is active in the tourist sector, belongs to a certain social strata and has both a particularly open mindset as well as a certain level of education. If outdoor clothing is not necessarily a guaranteed sign of economic success, it at least reflects individual ambitions fed by the entrepreneurial promise of success in the tourism industry in Morocco. As such, it is not surprising that younger men and adolescent boys who are determined to make a career in tourism have started to dress accordingly.

This introduction to outdoor clothing as a distinguishing feature in the region serves as a preamble to the ensuing focus on the place of tourism in the High Atlas. Initially, I had not planned on doing research on tourism. Rather, I wanted to take in the situations and relevancies I would find upon my arrival. To an certain extent, I did not choose tourism as topic, but it presented itself with a certain inevitability right from the beginning. Partly, this was because of the contexts in which I found myself, being close to guides or people working in tourism who have had an experience in talking to “Western foreigners” (*iromin*, Sg. *aromi*). They also had the language capacity to do so—and of course also the intention to start a conversation in the first place, in order to gain a potential client. To begin with, arriving at my destination meant using touristic infrastructures like transportation and accommodation. Tourism after all has become a central mode of earning income and

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Decathlon announced to open another 26 stores with an investment volume of 163 million Dh throughout Morocco (<https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2016/07/191008/decathlon-open-26-new-stores/>, last accessed, 12/01/2019).

thus an integral component of everyday life in the High Atlas. Moreover, tourism was inevitable, because of the mere fact that I was there—a visibly different *aromi*. Being an *aromi* is basically identical with being perceived as a tourist, with the exception that in certain places one may occasionally be presumed to be an aid worker. In this pre-figured situation, which Pascal Mulet calls “situation touristique” (2017: 188-192), the ethnographer is faced with the constant challenge of distinguishing themselves from tourists and of dissociating oneself from touristic practices, in order to simultaneously make research intentions plausible and comprehensible.

As my opening vignette about the association meeting shows, tourism was present—almost omnipresent indeed—from the very beginning. After the meeting I noted in my journal “this event and its organization process (but obviously tourism in general) could be really promising in understanding the reality of life in the High Atlas.” Tourism is a rather recent socio-economic development in the area and it undoubtedly opens some key questions. The most important ones for me—to which I want to offer some insights and possible answers in the following chapter—are: How does tourism fit into the long-standing forms of political and social organization of the particular region in the High Atlas? What changes does tourism accompany or announce? To address these questions, I will proceed by first echoing the state’s official—and rather ambitious—ideas about tourism before providing ethnographic descriptions of the varieties of touristic practices, their historical entanglement, and an in-detail account of the realization of the marathon event (following chapter), which we already encountered at the above association meeting. Finally, I will offer a way of tying those aspects together in a more generalizing analytic interpretation.



*Figure 17: An older man from a “holy” lineage watching the preparations for the Ultra Trail*



### **Tourism as Political Imaginary of State-Run Modernization**

While tourism can be eye-catching and may seem omnipresent to an observer that has arrived from the outside, it also constitutes a central mode of everyday life and a basis for subsistence in the region. An increase in touristic activity—including in rural areas—occurs against the backdrop of infrastructural changes and necessary integration into the expanding global economy.

That is not to say that those changes solely created the conditions for local forms of tourism, or that they are responsible for it at all. By the same token, tourism did not trigger those infrastructural changes. But both certainly go hand in hand. Tourism is a prominent expression for ideas and plans of (economic) development and policies towards *modernization*, understood as the maxim for development projects, and which

aims at raising the standard of living. Furthermore, it becomes apparent that there are different levels or aspects of transformation: economical, infrastructural and socio-political, all of which overlap and contribute to the field of tourism. Thus, for the Moroccan government, tourism is a key industry to be managed and promoted on a large-scale level.

## History of Tourism, Development and the Moroccan State

To compete for tourists, a location must become a destination. To compete with each other, destinations must be distinguishable, which is why the tourism industry requires the production of difference. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 152)

From the perspective of national policy, tourism is a probate means for development (George/Mair/Reid 2011). In this context, tourism is promoted and supported in order to facilitate the modernization of economically weak regions, that is, regions without industries that would contribute to the overall economic strength of the country. Since the 1970s, the Moroccan state's intention to upscale their touristic offer grew. The state thus began systematically opening up and promoting tourist locations (Kagermeier 1999; Almeida-García 2018). Since then, Morocco has become a popular tourist destination. In 2015, more than 10 million tourists visited the country, more than 50% of which were Europeans. The three countries from which the majority of the tourists came were in descending order: France, the USA, and Spain.<sup>4</sup> In a recent IMF country report from 2019, the tourism sector is stated to contribute to about 6,5% of the gross national product (International Monetary Fund 2019: 40).

The mountainous region of the High Atlas already began to play a role as a tourist destination in the time of the French protectorate, when French people living in Morocco discovered the mountains as holiday areas. International tourism, however, did not emerge until

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4 Although the sheer number of tourists is not necessarily an sufficient indicator for long-term economic growth, see Bouzahzah/El Menyari (2013).

after independence and then became interwoven with formations of national modernization. From the 1980s on, the Moroccan state launched programmes—within the framework of a Moroccan-French cooperation—which also targeted the mountain regions of the High Atlas.<sup>5</sup> The aim of the first programme *Project Haut Atlas Central* (PHAC) “was to create new impulses and economic foundations for improving the living conditions of the local population through the three sub-areas of livestock farming, handicrafts and tourism, thereby also alleviating the problem of a rural exodus” (Lessmeister 2008: 35, my translation). Mountain tourism was thus integrated into the very state development scheme that had a decisive influence on the work of the local association mentioned above. At the same time, this was intended to support *soft tourism* for the rural mountain regions (Boumaza 1996; Ait Hamza/Popp 1999).

Along with ongoing programmes for modernization and infrastructural development—which we have encountered in previous chapters—the Moroccan government has recently been setting new goals for the future development of tourism in the region. Regarded as an economic engine, the aim is to further ameliorate the standard of living. The goals for the year 2020 were: to reach “1.8 million tourist arrivals (against 880,000 in 2010)”; to provide “additional bedding capacity of 10,600 beds in order to reach 26,600 beds (hotel and similar)”; and the “creation of 39,000 direct jobs.”<sup>6</sup>

Given my interest in learning about the history of tourism for the valley, I sat down with the sheikh and asked about tourists visiting the area. In front of us stood a decorated tray with a large teapot and ornate glasses, almonds, walnuts, peanuts, and homemade popcorn (*turift*). In the background, the shrill sounds of a children’s show that was running

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5 In his historic account, Lessmeister explicitly names “the municipalities of Tabant, Abachkou, Zaouiyat Ahansal and Kelâat M’Gouna” (Lessmeister 2008: 35).

6 According to the Ministry of Tourism as stated on their website, <http://www.tourisme.gov.ma/en/tourism-territories/atlas-vallees> (last accessed, 25/07/2018).

on the flat-screen television in the corner of the room occasionally made themselves heard. The sheikh himself had been working with tourists, before becoming sheikh.<sup>7</sup> He told me a story about once walking all the way from Demnate to the valley in two days, when he was younger and stronger. Usually, the route would take between four to six days at least.

His earliest memory of touristic visitors, he said, was from to the mid-1970s. A truckload full of alpinists had camped down at the river next to the village of Agoudim. They were definitely not French, he said, they were more likely to be Polish or German. He knew only that they were hiking and looking for nearby climbing spots. According to the sheikh, actual tourism only really started somewhere between 1980 and 1985. Before that there was no comparable hiking, trekking or tourism. In the beginning, basically all tourists had been French. He could not remember if in those early years other nationalities had travelled to the region. American tourists only started coming since ACF, or to be more precise, since its founder Miriam, had been active in the valley. Since then, he said, the languages spoken by tourists had also progressively changed from French to English. According to the sheikh, English is more important nowadays, given that so many tourists visit the valley from different countries.

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7 Although his house included a guesthouse, it was run by his son rather than by the sheikh himself. The distinction was crucial, marked, and regularly emphasized. This resulted in a contradictory use of language. Guests or tourist groups were therefore accommodated “at the sheikh’s” (“*and sheikh*”), or to be exact: “in the guest house of the sheikh’s son”. As sheikh, he had different business and tasks to attend to. Here, the sheikh is the highest local contact person, mediator and arbitrator. Also, to be sheikh is to represent the *taqbilt* and hence to serve the common interest of the *taqbilt* public. This means that very careful attention is paid to separating the individual and private sector areas from the sheikh’s office. It would be problematic, indeed unthinkable, that the sheikh should gain advantages for himself at the expense of his office. The fair handling and equal distribution of resources are basic elements of customary Berber politics.

## Tourism, Anthropology, Pilgrimage

It is not difficult to see that anthropology and tourism have a special relationship. After all, ethnographers are travellers, too. But they usually hasten to show, prove, or justify that they are neither reporters nor tourists.<sup>8</sup> There is one further similarity between ethnographers and tourists, which is the protagonism of own bodies and biographies in travelling. Travelling goes hand in hand with the formation of their personality. Both are interested in seeing or *learning* something. However, I do not wish to artificially exaggerate the similarities here. Although individual motives and motivations are certainly multifarious<sup>9</sup>, each ultimately has a fundamentally different intention for their journey. For the former, it is about knowledge production, for the latter it is a question of leisure. Correspondingly, their gazes also develop differently along their respective trajectories. Most importantly, “the tourist gaze” (Urry 1990) searches for, and is seduced by, *authenticity*<sup>10</sup>—a category that has been frequently discussed in a considerable body of literature on tourism (see for instance Cohen 1988). Authenticity is often achieved when something appears incomprehensible (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 11).

Experiences that trigger perceptions of authenticity are, thus, frequently advertised by the tourist industry and travel agencies in commercials, brochures and on their websites. Moreover, both the tourist industry’s promise and tourists’ expectations imply that this is especially likely to be found within a cultural exchange and experiencing life

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8 For an overview and accounts concerning the relationship between anthropology and tourism see, among others MacCannel (1976), Nash (1981), Graburn (1983), Smith (1989), Nash/Smith (1991), and Stronza (2001).

9 Needless to say, both can simply represent a kind of wage labor.

10 This is an intentional intensification. Of course, it may involve other equally important aspects that blend into an individual perception of authenticity, such as seeing and experiencing something beautiful or impressive, which contributes to being able to unwind, enjoy and above all to be amazed. For this reason, tourist travel has been analyzed in terms of religious ritual and spiritual experience (Graburn 1983).

worlds perceived as *radically other* and *different* (Bruner 2005; Cole 2008; Comaroff/Comaroff 2010; Schnepel/Girke/Knoll 2014). In this context, local cultural practices and customs—when tailored to the expectations and demands of a tourism industry—have been analyzed regarding aspects of folklorization and commodification. Or to put it more precisely, analyses of this topic have looked at the promise of commodification and danger of over-commodification or selling out of culture (Bunten 2008). More recently the focus has increasingly shifted to imaginaries of tourism and the ways these are embedded in tourist interactions (Salazar 2013; Salazar/Graburn 2014; Andrews 2017). This includes the inversion of the perspective as well, that is, the perception of locals with regard to their visitors (Evans-Pritchard 1989).

Thinking tourism together with pilgrimage is another common theme in anthropological literature (Badone/Roseman 2004; see also Turner 1973). This is important for this section insofar as the valley and its *zawiya* have always been a center of religious pilgrimage. This was due to the significance of the valley's founding figure. The founder constitutes the starting point for the sheric lineage, to which the *taqbilt* of the Ihansalen—and some descendants in particular—still claim their origins today. Pilgrims come seasonally to visit his tomb. However, tourism to the region did not precisely replace pilgrimage. Apart from its spiritual dimension and the strengthening of the religious reputation of the saintly lineage, there has always been an economic side to pilgrimage. Pilgrims have brought gifts, animals, and money. In this respect, tourism in the region has surpassed pilgrimage as the most significant economic activity with regard to income opportunities. The hypothesis of this section, which I will develop in the following, takes up the economic dimension of tourism and its importance for the local social dynamics. This hypothesis holds that touristic entrepreneurs are now able to combine the social prestige and political influence that arise from the profitability of the tourism business, something that was not possible in the past. However, the cultural capital resulting from the religious significance of the sacred line of descent is still present. In a certain sense, a fragmentation and re-stratification of local society can be observed, which no longer merely follows from its own historical

preconditions and contexts, but increasingly results from (partially conflicting) interactions with external, globally circulating influences.

We have seen that tourism constitutes a setscrew for economic development and state attempts to modernization. Tourism brings together different actors, beliefs and resources. For this particular valley in the High Atlas, it is no novelty to see people visiting from outside the valley or further afield. The difference is that today these visits occur under other auspices. There are still pilgrims who visit the *zawiya*—the tomb of Sidi Ahansal—and stay with the *holy families*. And they still legitimize the special position of those who can be located within the saintly lineage. The pilgrims contribute to the social and cultural capital that these families or persons embrace—to avail of another Bourdieuan terminology. From a strictly economic perspective, however, the relatively the new kinds of visitors, i.e. tourists, are more lucrative. To a considerable extent, tourism has given many people a chance of accumulating economic capital—to avail of another Bourdieuan term—thus accomplishing a degree of social advancement that had not been feasible in prior decades. This is based neither on religious nor historical relationships, but on one's access to—and will to avail of—mechanisms of national modernization, specifically regarding education, development, and entrepreneurial thinking. In the absence of other industries, tourism is a significant alternative for the picturesque rural areas of the High Atlas. It is not enough for a place in the mountains—as the opening quote suggests—to appear attractive, it is crucial that it becomes—or can at least be referred to as—a special *destination* in order for tourist activities there to thrive.

As we shall see over the following pages, this involves a range of scaling and media practices. The basic prerequisite and the starting capital for tourist enterprises, however, are undoubtedly the landscape and the mountain scenery. The specific sense of remoteness and the only recent connection to roads, electricity, and transregional markets function as a unique selling point in the realm of tourism. This stands in stark contrast to the aspirations and desires of the people living in the valley (as we have seen in foregoing chapters). Here, we can already identify a fundamental contradiction: while the aspiration to participate in a global Moroccan

modernity is at the center of development efforts, the perspective that Morocco, or the High Atlas in particular, has just not yet fully 'modernized' at this point represents a decisive reference to pervasively cultivated tourist imaginaries. To complicate matters even further, it is precisely the recourse to the ostensible originality of the *not-yet* that advances and successively accomplishes the connection to certain standards as well as participation in broader national and transnational publics.

Thus, in the following section, I aim at foregrounding the role and perspective of local tourist entrepreneurs rather than focusing on *the tourist* or tourist imaginaries in an isolated approach to motivations and experiences of travel. I intend to shed light on the ways in which people (try to) engage in tourism and what means, objectives and procedures they create along with it. Thereby, I seek to make tangible the opportunities, limitations, and consequences of tourism for the High Atlas community and to contribute to a better understanding of those multi-layered processes. I will start by looking at the varieties of tourism practices on the ground.

### **Guides, Gear and Guesthouses: Varieties of Tourism Practices**

The field of mountain tourism in the High Atlas is comprised of a variety of dynamics, forms and practices. It is simultaneously constructed and emphasized on a local level, yet it links actors and materialities on different scales. Various forms of media and of relations come into play in order to participate in the touristic game. In what follows, I wish to give an overview of those situated processes by singling out four aspects.

First, I concentrate on *the guide* as the specific, performative embodiment of the touristic entrepreneur in the High Atlas. It will be my aim to shed light on his<sup>11</sup> way of working and their pivotal position. Second, I

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11 I decided against using 'they' here for the abstract figure of the guide, to convey that guides, who operated in the touristic field of the High Atlas, had been exclusively male. Of course, women were part of the tourism sector in general, but I never encountered a female guide.



will turn to *the guesthouse*. My aim will be to show that the type and profitability of the guesthouse is to be understood in its connection to the extended network of which it is a local expression. Thirdly, I will deal with the *volunteers* who come into the valley as part of a specific tourism economy. Here I will establish a link to the work of the local NGOs and capture the contradictions between this form of tourism and its involved tourist imaginaries. Fourthly and lastly, it will be my aim to put *the others of the local touristic field* into the picture. Such individuals cannot be considered as key tourist figures but are no less central. Here, the following critical questions must be posed: For whom can tourism actually represent a viable economic option? Which exclusions does it produce and how can its local and social significance be evaluated?

Before I continue, however, I must mention one important distinction and explain how I intend to deal with it later. In Morocco, and in the High Atlas in particular, there is a difference between official and unofficial guides, as well as official and unofficial guesthouses. To begin with, the former distinction: There are two types of official guides. The *Guides des Villes et Circuits Touristiques* (GVCT) are officially certified for guiding work in cities and historic heritage sites, whereas the *Guides des Espaces Naturels* (GEN), focus on the natural environment and landscapes, like mountains, the desert and along the ocean. The certification covers all of Morocco and official guides can, thus, potentially work all over the country. In contrast to this, unofficial guides are commonly restricted to the area in which they live and the immediate surroundings. However, they may also advertise their activities and use Facebook pages and other websites. To be an unofficial guide does not imply an obligation to act in secret. This is especially true in the mountain regions, where the probability of running into an official inspector in the middle of the High Atlas—on a multiday hiking trip for example—is extremely low. The main trouble arrives if something happens unexpectedly, especially if an (international) tourist is injured while in the care of an unofficial guide. This scenario is mainly voiced by official guides, who are frequently crit-

ical of the unofficial guides.<sup>12</sup> I had the impression that this dislike was not related to anything economic, but to a belief that it would be dishonest—and indeed sneaky—for anyone to fool innocent guests into thinking they were a guide and expert on the region.<sup>13</sup> Precisely because their activities are mostly limited to their home region, these unofficial guides are, in fact, genuine experts and no impostors in the sense of *faux guides* or tricksters. They know the routes and resting places of the High Atlas, can provide materials and gear. In short, they are thus well positioned to offer a successful touristic tour.

The dynamics for guesthouses are very similar. Simply because a guesthouse does not have an official permit does not mean that a tourist can necessarily identify such a guesthouse at first sight. Most of the time there is absolutely no difference in terms of the catering, accommodation or service.<sup>14</sup> Concerns voiced to me about unofficial guesthouses were usually of a similar nature: if something happened—i.e. if tourists

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- 12 Surely, their jobs depend on their good reputation. If too many negative incidences occurred where unofficial guides were involved, this would reflect negatively not only on the unofficial guides but on the whole mountain tourism sector in general and thus negatively influence the work of the official guides. In this context, one can understand why many of the guides strongly maintain the distinction as a marker of security and quality.
- 13 Interestingly, my own experience with touristic entrepreneurs in other parts of Morocco (especially the cities like Fes and Marrakech) was quite different from the High Atlas as far as honesty and the protection of tourists is concerned. The argument that I frequently encountered was as follows: Every person is blessed with their own mind, and it is thus each person's responsibility to use their own faculties. However, many tourists did not use their heads at all, and were instead gullible. They wanted to believe what they were told. Contrary to all common sense, they would willingly believe that they had been personally offered a ceramic bowl of Sidi Mulay, for example, where logically speaking this was clearly improbable. The problem was that many tourists acted and thought with their heart and not with their head. Nobody could be held responsible for this but the tourists themselves.
- 14 The equipment and management of different guesthouses varies of course but this is not necessarily related to the question of (in)official status.

became ill or were to be hospitalized because of poor hygiene—the owners would find themselves in great trouble. If the unofficial work came to the attention of the state authorities as a result of such events, there would be serious legal consequences and prison sentences for guides and guesthouse owners alike.

I will confine myself to this particular difference for the moment. While there is a clear legal distinction, being official or unofficial in the High Atlas was of very little actual consequence for the everyday lives of those working in this field. For people in the area, local mountain tourism offers a lucrative source of primary or additional income to official and unofficial guides alike. Any such, there is no analytical value in maintaining the distinction: it is of no use in the argumentation of the following chapter or in understanding local touristic practices more generally. In fact, both official and unofficial tourist entrepreneurs have largely the same approach and engage in the same kind of work and practices.<sup>15</sup>

## The Guide

“For the year 2015, 2,759 official tour guides were recorded in Morocco, of which 78% were guides for the *villes et circuits touristiques* (GVCT) and 22% for the *espaces naturels* (GEN)” (Observatoire du Tourisme Maroc 2015: 35, my translation). To obtain the qualification as a mountain guide, which is carried out in the valley *Ait Bougamez*, it was mainly men from the surrounding region that were initially trained.<sup>16</sup> They often knew the region

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15 This does not mean to sweep under the carpet or naively gloss over the fact that the access conditions and risks for the various actors and tourist entrepreneurs are not identical.

16 Even before the official state-run certification programme started, some people did work as guides. With the introduction of the certified course, an educational level (*lbac*) was also defined which was to be used as an entry criterion. This constituted an insurmountable obstacle for older guides, who had already been working in tourism, but had never been to secondary school and were thus excluded from the possibility of achieving the newly introduced official certification.

very well anyway and had a special connection to their homeland, which was a touristic resource and which often gave a feeling of authenticity to hiking tourists. In 1992, the ANGAMM<sup>17</sup> became the first professional mountain guide association in this field. Later, the number of participants as well as their educational level increased (Lessmeister 2008). This led to a steadily growing number of guides and an increase in competition among them, which even resulted in a temporary suspension of the official programme in order to limit the number of graduates and guides.

Guides incorporate different roles into their professional personality. They are translators, instructors, teachers, cultural brokers, and entertainers at the same time. They are in close contact with tourists, often spending several days or even weeks together with their clients, and are thus the actual faces of mountain tourism—for some tourists probably even the faces of Morocco.

Being a local person from the region and a good cultural broker is a true resource. In this context, I was struck again and again by the extremely important role of Ouleid, a guide and one of my main interlocutors in the valley. Ouleid was a crucial figure in mediating, translating and building bridges between different worlds through his know-how, experience, and language abilities. On one occasion with a tourist group, I noted down in my research journal:

He seems to me to be a central hinge, invaluable to the valley and tourism there. He talks to the women in French, then translates it for the girls into Tashelhit. From time to time he also switches to English with other students at the tables in the other corner of the room. And then on the side explains things to me, too, using English or Arabic. (field notes, 23/03/2018).

However, guides struggle to fill this role without any assistance. They are professional service providers who are embedded in a nested set of cooperation relations. Above all, they depend on intermediaries, particularly

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17 Association Nationale des Guides et Accompagnateurs en Montagne au Maroc.

travel agencies and tour operators. They work in a diverse field of activities, which results from the cooperation they engage in. As such, they may be hired by an agency to guide and take care of package holidays that include various sights or tourist destinations throughout Morocco. They may work together with local partners who book them mainly for hiking or skiing trips in the area or on Morocco's highest peaks. They may participate and oversee humanitarian or development projects. In this context, they primarily guide groups of high school or university students from the Global North in the local form of volunteering tourism—a mixture between educational work, community service, and intercultural encounter. As experts for adventures, they may also provide hiking or climbing gear, information and maps about available climbing spots, or accompany visitors on climbing tours.

Many guides try to maintain contacts with previous clients and tourists, especially through social media. These individuals could spread word of their touristic experience<sup>18</sup>, and this could well pay off for the guide in that he might eventually win new clients. As such, social media practices can be relevant for a guide to further improve personal income opportunities. For this purpose, the following other possibilities are available, all of which aim to exclude one or even several intermediary key functions or to fulfil these functions for oneself. On the one hand, a guide can establish and open up his own guesthouse. He may try to integrate this into his ongoing work, to recruit guests during his activity as a guide. It is also possible, after consultation with the tour operator or the travel agency, to adapt the touristic programme so that the guesthouse becomes part of the programme.<sup>19</sup> Under certain circumstances, it may be possible to plan hiking tours of several days through the High Atlas in such a way that accommodation in the guesthouse can function as a starting or finishing point, or at least as an overnight stay for a

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18 A tourism experience as *authentic* experience of an *other* culture.

19 Usually, the tour operators or travel agencies are in charge and are hire the guide. With competition in the field of guides, there might not be too much leverage on the average guide's side. However, this largely depends on the guides personal contacts and cooperation network.

stage of the tour. A guesthouse also offers an opportunity for former guides, a kind of retirement provision, in order to be able to continue to earn an income if the required physical strength is no longer available or if it is no longer possible to lead tours independently due to illness. On the one hand, the guide can set up his own travel agency in order to come into direct contact with tour operators and take over a larger part of the organizational and coordinative work. However, the most lucrative option in this respect is to avoid all intermediaries. This means that if the guide coordinates individual tours or programmes directly with tourists and takes over the complete organization by themselves, the whole endeavour will be more profitable.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, these different possibilities cannot be strictly separated from each other. While for some guides these opportunities are not available, others have the possibility of combining them quite pragmatically.

Guides can increase their market value and improve their salary by standing out from the competition and earning a language qualification. Completing the certification course to become a mountain guide requires a thorough knowledge of French. If the guide can speak other foreign languages fluently, it is a unique selling point. English and Spanish are especially in demand, while languages like Russian, Japanese or German are becoming more and more relevant due to the increasing differentiation of tourists.

The point of language qualification also touches some of my personal experiences in the valley. After meeting a younger man several times at the Suq, he asked me if I would teach him some German, now that I was obviously staying for longer. He was a guide and worked all over Morocco and as he told me, he regularly led groups of German-speaking tourists. I did not hesitate in answering that I would, of course, teach him if he was interested. We met once a week for an hour in a communal room used to tutor school children. I would write down German words or phrases on a piece of paper and give a translation (mostly into *darija*). He would copy

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20 This is of course something that takes a lot of experience, many resources, and reliable partners.

what I had written down and add some remarks for proper German pronunciation. He wanted to be able to at least learn some basic phrases and important expressions during the period in between the main tourist seasons. After a week or two, other interested people that had learned about the “new offer” of a German crash course, and joined in. Thus, for several weeks, I taught a class of three to four students, all of whom were involved in the field of tourism.

### The Guesthouse

In order to examine the institution of the guesthouse, I would like to invoke once more the above distinction between *location* and *destination* regarding tourism. I will use these categories to classify two different types of guesthouses in the region of the High Atlas Mountains where I conducted my research. Ultimately, when it comes to tourism, location is paramount. I thus perceive of *destination* as referring to a place whereby a specificity and difference are expressed that single the place out from others, perhaps rendering it unique in some regard.<sup>21</sup> For our purposes, this feature derives largely from the geological formation of the mountain landscape. By contrast, with *location* I designate a tourist site that lacks this specificity and difference that serve to single out. However, this does not imply that the place cannot be beautiful or that there cannot be a certain uniqueness and/or authenticity to it. Still, the destination has somewhat more to it, and perhaps this something is its *genius loci*.

The strategies and practices that make a guesthouse at a tourist destination touristically successful are not the same as those that make one at a tourist location successful. It is against this background that the distinction between the two categories gains analytical value. By presenting two different, the effectiveness of this analytical distinction will become more palpable. One is located in the village of Taghia, the other in the center of the valley. As a form of textual representation, I will present the

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21 It is not decisive at first what causes this specificity, it may be the phenomenology of the landscape, the sensed environment, personal or cultural characteristics.

guesthouses as an ideal synthesis of the distinctive characteristics. This does not mean that these are fictional accounts, but that the description is condensed to one somewhat ideal-typical guesthouse at a time.

First let us consider the similarities. While guesthouses<sup>22</sup> are increasingly being upgraded, offering double rooms with en suite bathrooms and western toilets, the standard is still more simple and more akin to mountain cabins rather than bed and breakfasts or hotels. Dormitories are common, in which several single beds are placed, each with its own bedding. Shared toilets and showers can be found in the corridor. There is typically a large lounge which serves as a living and dining room. In addition to the typical regional breakfast, consisting of tea, bread, oil and butter, jams, spread cheese and eggs, the guesthouses offer dishes such as tajine, bean and lentil stew, or omelets. There are regional products for sale, which are either produced by the owners themselves or by relatives and neighbours. These include, in particular, various types of carpets and some typical souvenirs. The owners of the guesthouses organize transport mobilizing and utilizing their respective cooperation networks into which the guesthouses are integrated. Since the guesthouse owners themselves or their sons are active as tour and mountain guides, they also keep some materials and gear available for camping on multiday hikes or for climbing tours. In the absence of such, they can make arrangements accordingly.

Taghia is a hotspot for rock climbers. The village is situated at the southern end of the valley, behind a gorge. The terrain reaches an altitude of as much as 3000m in the middle, with almost vertically sloping rock walls. This outstanding scenic and geological feature alone is the attraction par excellence and what makes Taghia a definite tourist destination. There are few, perhaps no comparable places in the world. The routes are very long and challenging and draw an enthusiastic international community of semi-professional to professional climbers. Taghia has no supermarkets, pubs or bars, and only a few establishments offering accommodation. It can only be reached by a one-and-a-half-hour

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22 The guesthouses are locally called *gîtes d'étape*, most of which also hold a logo of the *Grand Traversée de l'Atlas Marocain* (GTAM, see Ait Hamza/Popp 1999: 197).



walk, for which pack animals are typically used to transport supplies. The place radiates an authentic, honest and adventurous charm. Due in particular to the somewhat laborious journey to Taghia, day trips are the absolute exception and almost impossible for people who go there to climb. This increases the need to stay overnight. There is no elaborate tourist infrastructure nor *sights* to be seen. The vast majority of tourists who stay in Taghia hang on the rock face during the day and stay in the guesthouse in the evening. Although there is a certain number of Moroccan tourists who come to Taghia during the summer months, who are not interested in climbing, the vast majority are international climbers.

The first, for lack of a better term, ideal-typical guesthouse focuses on the climbers. Commonly they are quite relaxed and do not look for a high degree of comfort or anything luxurious. The target group of international climbers is not very large, but there are regulars and enough visitors such that the guesthouse need not worry about elaborate publicity campaigns. It need only ensure that it can be physically found. The guesthouse is run by a family, the father is in charge while the extended family is involved. Women of the family prepare the food; sons, nephews and friends are involved in transportation with pack animals and accompany tourists to the climbing routes or on climbs. It is the son, Hassan, for example, who is more active on Facebook and tries to promote climbing and hiking trips. For this, he tries to approach a different market segment, if you will, and appeal to a broader range of people interested in sports and outdoor activities. The professional climbers that come do not usually need climbing partners or guides, as they can both read the route maps for themselves, and typically bring their own equipment. They are also usually less interested in several day long hiking trips through the surrounding mountains. As such, they are quite lucrative for the guesthouse, but not a good or reliable resource for Hassan, who will soon make a name for himself as a guide and earn more. At the same time the work in the guesthouse is not so adventurous and promising for Hassan. And there is a lot of work to do, especially in the months of the high season. Sometimes the distance between Taghia and the Suq has to be covered daily, sometimes even several times a day with a mule, in order to receive tourists or to get food and supplies.

The center-valley does not have a comparable pull for international tourists. While the High Atlas is wonderfully picturesque and can certainly be perceived as a tourist destination, touristically speaking the valley is a place like many others. If it serves any tourist function, it is that of being a tourist *location*. This does not mean that no tourists visit the area, however, but those that do are predominantly only passing by on their way through the High Atlas with their caravans, 4x4 vehicles, or bicycles. Alternatively, they pass through the valley as part of a multiday hike that traverses the High Atlas, in which case they prefer to camp in the mountains, rather than spend their nights in villages. Tours such as these are organized centrally by a travel agency or a tour operator and do not employ external touristic operators unless it is absolutely necessary as this of course reduces their own profits. As such, the guesthouse in the center of the valley must devise something to achieve regular occupancy.

In terms of the owner of this second ideal-typical guesthouse, the first and most important point is that he is not only the owner but also a tourist guide. He opened the guesthouse after accruing several years of experience working with tourists and accumulating the necessary financial resources. As with Taghia, the guesthouse in the center-valley is mainly a family business, with only a few sporadic helpers, most of whom are members of the extended family. Through his activity as a guide, the owner has formed cooperative partnerships with individuals who in turn send tourists to his guesthouse or recommend the guesthouse to others. Regular guests who come back periodically are of greater importance still, however. On the other hand, he also plans tours—on his own or in partnership with other tour operators. These include the standard multiday hiking tour through the High Atlas (for which the equipment and gear is kept in the guesthouse itself), desert tours or canyoning and rafting tours that are provided together with partners who then supply the materials. Such tour programmes then also include some overnight stays in the guesthouse or place the starting or end point of their trip there. In other words, the guide can include the accommodation costs in the flat rate for the programme and is paid in his function as a guide at the same time. All this involves more intensified publicity work. Additionally, it is crucial to maintain good

contacts with travel agencies and tour operators. If the owner of the guesthouse were to simply wait for tourists to appear at his doorstep, he would most likely be unable to make a regular and sufficient income. This is the case because there is significant competition and he does not hold a monopoly over the activities concerned. Thus, the challenge for touristic entrepreneurship in the High Atlas is not only to master French or other foreign languages, acquire specific guiding knowledge, or diversify touristic offers, but to actively shape the conditions of the touristic encounter.<sup>23</sup> This is especially true if one is not associated with a national or international travel agency, or if one is not—as they are—operational throughout Morocco, having instead only one guest house in a particular locality. Ultimately, the local guesthouse cannot simply be transferred to other tourist destinations in the same way that travel agencies can shift their focus and redirect tourist flows.

One recent and quite lucrative way of attracting tourists is to team up with the NGOs of the valley, who engage in intercultural exchange programmes that often include volunteering or community service. For those programmes, accommodation for their groups is required, and they are reliant on the existing guesthouses. Being part of cooperation networks thus raises the question as to who can set the terms. If the guesthouse is exclusively booked by other tourist entrepreneurs who organize and manage programmes, the latter a strong position in negotiating the terms of their commitment *vis-à-vis* the guesthouse owner. It is at the same time an expression of what is most pivotal but most challenging to manage and consequently what is reflected in the financial share: to reach and attract potential clients and make them come and stay at one's guesthouse. Not surprisingly then, I once heard the owner of the guesthouse complaining to a guide and friend of his that he was not quite satisfied with what he received for the accommodation of a volunteer group. He would have liked to increase the prices

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23 Not many tourists (at least in comparison with the flow of mass tourism that is present at Morocco's major sights and locations) arrive to the mountains by chance. If they visit the High Atlas, they often do so as part of a touristic programme or guided travel group.

for his cooperation with the respective NGO. However, because prices had been the same for a very long time, he was not sure how he could approach the responsible persons of the organization, particularly as they were unlikely to be very enthusiastic about the idea. Thus, he did not engage in any direct conversation on the topic. After all, he did not wish to jeopardize the relationship from which he profited.

## The Volunteers

Remaining with the distinction of *location* and *destination* for a moment, it would be reasonable to say that volunteering is a specific way of attracting visitors or clients to a location, that is not yet a destination—or that is supposed to become a destination due to the cultural experience and community services it offers. In this sense it is a specific form of tourism, a volunteer tourism or *voluntourism* (see Garland 2012). Thereby voluntourism, combines aspects of humanitarian and community work, but at the same time constitutes a touristic business model. Moreover, for the valley an overlap is produced between an NGO's non-profit orientation and the former's focus on profits. As I have illustrated above, this is also reflected in the organizational structure of the NGOs involved. Two crucial aspects arise with the endeavour of organizing and offering volunteering tourism programmes: First, volunteering involves a hierarchy. To put it bluntly, it mostly means that volunteers from the Global North or from otherwise economically solid milieus of a particular country come to the Global South or to regions of countries that are economically weak and often perceived as *backward* and in *desperate need of help*. If it is a question of coming into contact with potential clients from the Global North or from well-off segments of a particular society, international agencies have an advantage. Second, such international agencies cannot simply begin a volunteering programme arbitrarily in whichever location they see fit. They rely either on trusted cooperation partners on the ground or must themselves be on site. Here in the High Atlas, both are true.

When the US American NGO, ACF, began offering volunteering programmes, they were only able to do so because of their previous commu-

nity work and because of the respectful relationship that they were able to forge with the local community theretofore. In addition, the volunteering programmes usually go hand in hand with community work or, at least, partially refinance it. For example, the construction of a bus stop or work on the multi-purpose building of the local association, which was decided upon by the participating organizations was accompanied from time to time by volunteers. However, this work would always be embedded in intercultural learning and exchange programmes in which the groups were brought into contact with pupils. In doing so, an attempt was made to provide an insightful and appreciative perspective on the differences and cultural characteristics of the High Atlas. This was especially the case for school classes from private schools in urban centers in Morocco. These often included pupils who had never visited the rural mountain regions before, and one has to acknowledge the high relevance and importance of this awareness-enhancing and multi-layered exchange.<sup>24</sup>

The types of volunteering also depend on the group. Logically, a school class with teenagers takes on other tasks than those of a group of university students. Especially in the latter case, the focus is usually on joint learning. Mostly, the volunteers then teach some French or English to the school children. This also reflects the focus for the local associations, for which the tutoring programme is central, because education is regarded as essential for the future of the children of the valley.

The programme for the volunteering group is determined beforehand and may also be coordinated with the other institutions involved, such as schools or universities. This allows an individual focus to be set.

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24 The groups from other parts of the world were more problematic as they sometimes gave the impression that the programme and the High Atlas served only as a backdrop and template for reflecting on one's own privileged position. The programmes presented selected aspects of local life *pars pro toto* for general inequality and poverty. Sometimes the programmes on the ground were also connected with attempts to make the most of this special experience and use it for personal growth. For instance, one group decided to integrate into their week in the valley a *digital detox*. They wanted to use the period to abstain from their usually abundant use of smartphones and media technology.

The multi-purpose building (*maqar*) of the local association in Amezray provides an important location for teaching activities. It was in this building that I took part in various activities involving a group from the United States. The programme took place in the approximately 40 square meter room. The organizers of the programme, that is, the accompanying guides and staff, set up four group tables in the room and placed white plastic chairs around them. For this purpose, they used the building's usual furniture. If the tables were not enough, additional ones were occasionally carried over from the neighbouring association building, which was a great deal older. At each of the group tables there was a group of volunteers. The pupils from the valley then also spread out to the corresponding group tables. Most of the local students came from Amezray, some from Agoudim and some from more remote settlements, who lived in boarding schools or with relatives because of their time at school. Every thirty minutes the groups of pupils would rotate. One of the two guides who supervised the programme recorded the time.<sup>25</sup> In between, there was a common break after half of the planned time, in which tea, biscuits, and peanuts were offered. That afternoon, the first group of volunteers painted and worked on small projects with the children, while the second group explained the planets in the solar system in English and showed small pictures about geographic topics. The third group held playful vocabulary training using games like charades or hangman. The fourth group used the existing media technology in the multi-purpose building. Here the pupils were asked to type a short introduction of themselves into a word processing programme on laptops and tablets.<sup>26</sup>

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25 Sometimes, two different activities on the scheduled programme occurred simultaneously. Gardening would occur in the community garden while language lessons with schoolchildren were taking place. The volunteers were then divided between the project work, with the guides and supervisors also split up accordingly.

26 Here our own research and cooperation project between the University of Siegen and the local NGO was integrated into the existing working formats, including the volunteer tourism (see chapter two).

Ouleid, one of the guides who was also working with the computer club project had introduced the programme and media technology: “This, the cameras and computers is very new for them [local pupils]. It is part of a new project we included in our tutoring activity. The kids really like it. They like to take pictures and use the tablets and computers. Learning how to type is not only fun, it is also very important for them.” A little later, when the activities in the groups began at the respective tables, a (nonlocal) supervisor of the group instructed those who were at the technology table: “Remember that you should not expect so much from the children. They don't know that much about it yet. The best thing is to explain everything to them as you would explain it to your grandparents.”

Due to their experiences in working with local craftsmen on construction sites as well as teaching and playing with school children, the volunteers were usually very enthusiastic and moved by their time in the valley. The typical ceremony for last evening, whereby the organizers would usually hold a farewell party (*lhefla*), contributed a lot to this. The celebration consisted of a dinner and a combination of different typical Berber cultural activities. The female volunteers could have their hands decorated with henna<sup>27</sup>, and there were various typical clothes that they

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27 After one evening I noted down an interesting side note in my research journal. It speaks to the contradictions of such an intercultural programme and display of culture. It also puts myself, and the understanding of my own positionality at the time, into context: “Some of the teenage girls, perhaps between 16 and 18 years old, pull out their smartphones and google (image search) for henna motifs. They then show them to the young woman from the valley who is doing the Henna and ask her to do the same for them. I find this both amusing and absurd. Instead of learning from the young woman (so to speak, an expert in henna and definitely of the local custom and culture) and asking how henna works and seeking to learn and understand how to behave towards her, the girls instead ask for a reproduction of a google image for aesthetic reasons; the whole *painting the volunteer's hands with Henna* seems to become very shallow (which to some extent already has a folkloristic and culture marketing character to me). Where there could be a situation of intercultural understanding or interested exchange, the situation seems to become a mere service relation between customer and service provider, similar to showing the hair-

could wear. Clothes were also provided for the males. Sometimes two people were chosen from the group to mime a couple of lovers, so that a typical wedding procedure could be performed. The evening culminated in a musical performance by a local *ahidus* group, which ended in a lively joint dance. Although I myself did not take part in the whole volunteering programme of the groups, the organizers would always officially invite me to the last big party. By no means was it confined to the group of volunteers alone. Many people from the village would come by to join in or watch the lively hustle and bustle, arriving when the evening had progressed further—at the latest, when the guests were dancing *ahidus* together. For many, it was a welcomed opportunity to indulge in the *ahidus*, which was otherwise only excessively danced at weddings.

### The Others of the Local Touristic Field

Certainly, other people are crucial for a successful touristic programme. This includes cooks, or muleteers who accompany guides for hiking tours, as well as merchants or suppliers for the guest houses and people working in passenger transportation. Besides, different guides have different networks of co-workers or contract workers, who are often part of the wider network of relatives. However, as Hassane Monkachi (1994) has shown for a neighbouring valley in the High Atlas: the families that successfully engage in tourism are those that were better off to begin with. Poorer segments of society do not necessarily benefit from tourism, often not at all.

During one tourist activity which involved hiking through the High Atlas landscape, I found myself alongside Sidi Rachid, ambling along on his mule some distance behind the main group. We started to chat about living in the valley and about his family. Rachid told me that he had five

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dresser the latest trendy hairstyle, which you want to acquire and wear just as well as the model in the example you provide. Probably I am too judgmental with my observation, after all it is certainly very nice to have your hand painted with something you like. However, the apparent lack of interest in the actual activities of the young woman painting the Henna overshadowed this for me.”



children and asked if I could take him to Germany sometime. “*Mrhaba bik*” I answered, that he was welcome any time. He wanted to know whether there was work there he could do, such as gardening. “Sure,” I said, “there are gardeners. The problem is usually getting a visa and working papers to be able to travel and then to find a job in Germany.” I wanted to know if he earned enough by working with tourists. It was okay, he replied, but also very unsteady and insecure: “Sometimes you work a week, then you have to wait another month (*bqa ayur*). In winter there was no work at all, only in spring and summer.”

He preferred to live and stay in the valley he was born. After all, I knew that being from a formerly saintly family he enjoyed a certain social and religious prestige there. He said he liked it there and we both agreed that it was nice and more beautiful than many other places. I concluded from this that he would prefer a seasonal or migrant job, it seemed to me he would want to earn money in Germany, then return to his family and home.

A phrase a guide had told me shot into my head: a “fixed salary is the obstacle to actually getting rich.” With his qualifications and as a certified guide, he could well allow himself to think like that and even question his fixed salary in favour of self-employment as a guide. A fixed salary—at least this was my interpretation in that situation—would offer exactly the security and consistency that Rachid wished for. Tourism appeared as a complex and contradictory field. As an member of the holy lineage, Rachid still owned some land in the area, which neither he nor his immediate family worked on themselves. In the *ighrim* of the family, they stored grain and it was partly used as a stable, or sometimes as accommodation for pilgrims when they came to the tomb of Sidi Said, Rachid told me. While talking, it became apparent that he could not make great economic leaps on his own, or through individual initiative—despite his family name and social reputation. After all, he was addressed in everyday life by everyone as *Sidi*, a remnant and marker of the holy families as well as expression of respect. But his heritage did not guarantee a regular income that would contribute to a wealthy position comparable to former descendants of the saintly lineage decades ago. He was dependent on other touristic entrepreneurs to work as muleteer.

Volunteer tourism also gave rise to economic opportunities for other actors that were not directly working in tourism. A most illustrative example concerns the playing and performing of the typical *ahidus*, which involves music and dancing. One *ahidus* group came from the village of Amezray and was supported by the local association Amezray SMNID. The association helped the foundation with providing financial aid for some of the main equipment. In order to become a professional folkloristic<sup>28</sup> group, instruments (usually handmade) together with typical festive clothing and accessories are important. At the same time, the association became the main client for the group. Thus, the group was hired for touristic programmes, most importantly the farewell parties of volunteer groups, or other festivities such as the official opening of the new multipurpose building or in the context of the tutoring programme for the local children. The groups for such performances usually consisted of around eight to ten men,<sup>29</sup> and were offered food

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28 Here I do not wish to imply that these performances were a mere virtual cultural display geared towards tourist expectations. In fact, whenever I asked people from the *ahidus* group or outside of it, they would insist that there was only one *ahidus*: *ahidus* itself. If one plays it, beating the drums shoulder to shoulder in a circular formation, it was the same wherever it was performed and whoever participated. Still, embodied skills and practice were necessary playing a crucial part in the end result. Also, there were different degrees of beauty to the *ahidus* that had to do with participation and commitment as well as the variety of songs that were sung.

29 There is a core group of responsible persons for the *ahidus* group as well as some additional persons who sporadically join the team. This is because not all members of the *ahidus* group are present in the valley at all times, due to own working arrangements or travel. However, the men are all from Amezray. Historically, people mastered masonry and crafts while also playing and dancing *ahidus*. This is especially the case in Amezray, and not in Agoudim. The reason for this is that Agoudim was the village of the main lodge and saintly houses. In the past, the saints did not dance and not work on construction sites. This is the source of the work ethic emphasized by many people from Amezray. It was a special point of identification that they claimed for themselves and still regarded as distinguishing them, to some degree, from their neighbours. In a certain way, opinions or knowledge in the two villages differed as a result of historical reasons: In Amezray there was knowledge and expertise on construc-

upon finishing in addition to their payment. It was good extra income doing a job that could mostly be very entertaining.

Not surprisingly, such a group was also formed in Agoudim. As a result, the allocation of performances became more complicated. Of course, the group from Amezray had priority if the volunteer groups were organized by the local association. They were the first choice unless the members were absent. Sometimes, however, the other group was also employed, such as when the US American NGO, ACF—whose activities were mainly in Agoudim—took over the organization of a group. To some extent, it was a question of carefully navigating between expectations and obligations. The assumption that the NGO could be deliberately benefitting certain actors and excluding others could become problematic for successful community work. Given the limitations of the resources available, including everyone as much as possible becomes rather complicated and there is a constant possibility of friction and conflict. Thus, it was in the interest of the NGO to avoid giving this impression. This they can do by involving different actors and integrating them as cooperation partners.

This also applies to tourism entrepreneurs who try to adapt or essentially copy programmes such as volunteering, which shows its effectiveness in attracting tourist groups and generating income. One guest-house operator, for example, tried to do just that and ultimately had to ask the established players to run the programme for him. He simply lacked the expertise and the resources to realize such an undertaking on his own.

Let us now examine some more general questions concerning competition in the valley. Although tourism is a lucrative field of activity, different stakeholders benefit differently from it. This may seem a trivial observation, but it is a central question in a region with only few job

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tional procedures and working techniques, while in Agoudim had a reputation and knowledge for dealing with religious, legal and political issues. Nevertheless, this is not to be understood as a strict absolute separation, but only a general tendency. Nowadays, it has clearly become more differentiated, even though there are still more master craftsmen to be found in Amezray.

prospects and where tourists are therefore a limited resource over which conflicts may well arise. This is all the more relevant because tourism is at the interface of individual initiative, social network relations and recourse to local customs and environmental circumstances. The questions of tourist business relations and competition throughout the valley are also addressed by the following remarks made by a guide named Hamou. Sitting in the lounge of his guest house, I interviewed him about his experiences and assessments of the tourism sector in the area:

*Simon: Do you need a permit in order to run a guesthouse?*

*Hamou:* Yes. There are, in fact, two different ones. If you don't have an official permit for your guesthouse, this can—besides difficulties if something should happen to the guests—cause problems with the other competitors. For example, if one of your rivals knows that you don't have a permit, there may be a dispute. He may say: 'you don't have a permit but work and take away my rightful guests and clients'. However, this is not a problem for Zawiya. The whole valley is like a family ("bhal l'aila whada").

*Can you talk a little bit more about competition?*

There is not much work-based competition or disputes here at all. In [a neighbouring valley], on the other hand, it's different. There are many minor conflicts and problems among the different guides and guesthouse owners. The difference is communication. Here, for example, you talk to each other every Monday on the Suq and continue to dialogue with one another. Here, it is like friends, like a family ("imdukul, bhal l'aila"). Therefore, there is no real envy. In comparison, the neighbouring valley is also larger. And the people are generally a little more mean and envious of each other ("khaiba shwiya").

Taghia is a good example. There are two Gites that have permits. However, a total of 6 different Gites work side by side. Four Gites

have no official permits. Nevertheless, there is no problem. The competition (“munafasa”), which exists in Zawiya Ahansal, is good and productive (“zwina, ihla”). You have to try to bring the tourists here and attract them. This is possible, for example, if your rooms are good and the food is especially tasty. Then someone else either has to be better already or become better. That’s good. It’s not like bad competition (“ikhkhan”) where untrue rumours (“tbergig”) or other campaigns are used to discredit people and ruin the business. That is not the case here. This is about having a good relationship—also with your colleagues. You help each other if someone has many tourists and needs equipment like chairs. Here you can borrow it from each other.

So, if you work well and sincerely, there will always be work for you (“deba, ila nta nishan, ghadi tkhddm”).

Here it becomes visible how Hamou is evaluating the work in the valley. There are always differences of opinion and scepticism, of course, or cases where people become jealous. However, perhaps above all two comments from the interview are crucial. On the one hand, the field of tourism entrepreneurs is quite bounded and fairly manageable. Different actors have each found their own niches for themselves, or cooperate on larger endeavours, so that there is no glaring competitive situation in which touristic actors seem to be existentially contesting over another’s resources or even threatening one other. On the other hand, the reference to being one big family at the same time emphasizes harmony. Of course, it may also be the case that Hamou refrained from talking negatively about other people. While the possibility that Hamou was hiding certain grudges against competitors cannot completely be ruled out, the parallel to what has been described as characteristic of Berber politics is present nevertheless (cf. Gellner 1969; Kraus 1998; Rachik 2016: ch. 15). Namely, this alludes to a Berber aspiration to ensure equality on various levels, which may well be present here. In fact, the *taqbilt* of the Ihansalen is much smaller than the surrounding ones, and is also historically rather bounded towards a common center that links everyone closely together.

In this light, it also seems plausible that competition in the valley is kept to a minimum, and alliances are foregrounded.

The topic can be summarized as follows: The variety of tourism in the High Atlas relies on social relations, political regulations, and media-technological innovations. All of which are collectively produced in continuous negotiation. Regarding local tourism practices, it becomes clear that tourism cannot be understood as an isolated entity; hence, it is helpful to consider it in a larger context. Tourism can function as goal for aspiration and a space for possibilities that had not existed in prior decades given that people are now creating and shaping the conditions to make a living in unprecedented ways.

### Saints of the Atlas?

Having proceeded through a detailed account of the field of tourism in the High Atlas, let us now return to the initial observation and comparison: “Where Gellner had seen saints, I saw guides.” What role do the saints play? My argument is that the religious and historical components of Zawiya Ahansal are central. The *igherman* of the holy families and the pilgrims who regularly come to the valley are still vivid expressions of this.<sup>30</sup> I do not wish to give the impression that the guides have replaced the saints. Rather, I suggest that we understand the undisputed supremacy of the saints as having been somewhat differentiated and

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30 The arrival of these pilgrims has meant an increasing importance both in terms of how this arrival is presented in the media and in terms of how immaterial heritage is administrated according to *modern* working methods. At such an occasion when pilgrims arrived in the valley and visited Sidi Ahansal's tomb, for example, I was asked by an *agurram* to take pictures for him because I was on the road with my digital camera. The pictures were meant for his own documentation of the pilgrims' arrival and at the same time also for an association, which had been founded by representatives of the *holy families* for keeping of *traditions* and the promotion of their spiritual and cultural heritage.

transformed.<sup>31</sup> Also, in the eyes of many local people, there are no more saints, but only the remnants of the importance and power of bygone days. This refers mainly to the practicing saints, so to speak, in political office. For it is indisputable that their descendants are, after all, representatives of an important sacred lineage. But whereas the saints previously accumulated all three Bourdieuan forms of capital in their special position, today their particular cultural capital is no longer a sufficient guarantee that they also stand out economically.

What does it today mean for someone from a saintly family to comply with the obligation of one's lineage? In order to show one's exceptional position, it may be equally important to be successful in tourism or, of course, in other economic sectors. Success is always considered an expression of having a particular divine blessing, or *baraka*. Economic success may even be more desired and needed because the pilgrims are no longer the primary bearers of resources. Other resources have emerged. Foremost, it is the secular visitor, in the person of the tourist—and the region's advancing integration in an interconnected global economic sphere—that bring resources. But while some conditions have changed, others remain: One example is the institution of the sheikh, who belongs to a holy lineage and still functions as arbitrator, handling disputes or different kinds of public and private issues. He is also a moral institution as a deputy of state authorities. Not surprisingly, however, he has a very close relation to the American NGO, his brother is a guide and his son owns a guesthouse.

Apart from the organizational structures that had not existed in Gellner's time, the difference between now and then is that guides are considered *educated* and *wealthy*, having achieved respectable social positions. They even function as arbitrators, complainants or plaintiffs against grievances or abuses, such as in the unlawful use of building

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31 Besides the respectful address with the name prefix 'Sidi' that is common for members of the saintly lineage, I only witnessed a handful of situations where someone was directly addressed as *agurram*. It was more frequent to hear it stated as a sort of joke, suggesting rather a sentimental evocation of the term and not necessarily a respectful awe.

land owned by the community, or structural changes to public buildings that violate traditional construction methods.<sup>32</sup> This was an area of responsibility that was once reserved for the saints not only with regard to religious matters, but also for everyday political questions. It now appears that the guides may also be addressed in matters that concern a general public.

I do not want to imply that religion or kinship is not important anymore. I also do not want to be misunderstood as making a kind of Weberian argument about secularization and rationalization in the region. I do want to stress in this brief analysis, however, that the opportunity for more individualistic approaches to making a living have changed, as have opportunities to creatively devise ways to modify the conditions for staying in an otherwise demanding environment. Whereas in earlier times, one's own role and options were mainly determined by family ties, today the foundations and options that allow upward mobility are changing—perhaps even in the sense of a dawning new *mountain bourgeoisie*, although only the future will tell. Again, this is not to say that it is possible for everyone. Yet, for some, the possibilities are entirely new and this is accompanied by a slight shift in what counts as valuable and desirable.

To sum up, one could say that religious heritage is not a guarantee for economic success and political influence anymore. Still, economic success becomes the primary means for gaining social status and political influence and tourism, in turn, is the expression of this shift. The exceptional socio-political position *qua* birth right (saints) has been challenged by examples of individuals rising to comparably influential socio-political positions due to their work in tourism.

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32 That is, to name just two instances that I have experienced first hand.





## Chapter 7

### Digital Hospitality<sup>1</sup>

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As I have shown above, a significant aspect of the ongoing transformations in the High Atlas is the new economic opportunities that have emerged in the region, principally as a result of tourism. Digital media technology contributes to this transformation in general, and is influencing local tourism practices in particular. Any analysis of these processes of socio-technical restructuring and transformation must therefore be recalibrated in light of the dissemination of *new* or digital media (Coleman 2010; Hirschkind et al. 2017). For this purpose, the following chapter will focus on a trail-running event in the High Atlas. This may seem like an odd example of digital media given that running is a rather physical experience. The focus, however, will not be on the event as a touristic or sporting event, but rather on the trail-running event as a mediated, circulated, and digitalized phenomenon with its own socio-cultural and historically specific preconditions and ramifications. Hence, I attempt to carve out the specific media and data practices which are necessary for the trail-running event to be realized in the first place and through which the organizers can scale different issues and concerns for different contexts and with varying scope.

I will analyse the *Zaouiat Ahansal Ultra Trail* (ZAUT), and mountain tourism more generally as an expressions of—and drivers for—socio-

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1 A revised version of this chapter appeared as: Holdermann, Simon (2021) "Digital Hospitality. Trail Running and Technology in the Moroccan High Atlas", in: *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 146, pp. 27–52.

technical restructuring in Morocco.<sup>2</sup> I will start by describing the ZAUT as the latest, non-state-driven, individual innovation strategy in Moroccan mountain tourism. Next, I will address the implications of digital media for scaling work and public reach, as well as the corresponding data that translates topography into a digital format. I then put the three thematic areas of tourism, digital media and hospitality into conversation with one other, in order to introduce the concept of *digital hospitality*, suggesting that digital media and data practices are becoming an increasingly crucial part of how the relationship between host and guest plays out in the tourism of the High Atlas Mountains.

### On Media and Hospitality

Before turning to the trail-running event, I present some prior reflections on media and hospitality that serve as background for the argument below. Media in research along the southern Mediterranean shore has recently been discussed in two major respects: first, mass-mediated communication with regard to political and religious reforms (Hirschkind 2006; Spadola 2014); and second, the influence of social media in relation to struggles for greater political participation (Salvatore 2011; Gerbaudo 2012; Jurkiewicz 2018) or their impact on intimate social relationships (Costa 2016; Costa/Menin 2016). More generally, the contemporary anthropology of media emphasizes ethnographic investigation into digital media's specific formation in particular contexts (Horst/Miller 2012; Bender/Zillinger 2015; Pink et al. 2016; cf. Mazzarella 2004). Along these lines, I review digital media technology from the perspective of its consequences and implications *in situ* in order to investigate and articulate the wider processes of transformation of which they are a part. However, as I argue throughout this book, digital media technology is not a prefabricated entity that changes all conditions when

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2 The trail-running event was run by research partners and friends whom I met during my stay. I witnessed the planning and organization of the first event and actually participated by running in the second edition a year later.

implemented. Rather, digital media are made and remade by the people in whose environment such media are implemented.

One implication of digital media technology for touristic encounters in the High Atlas is that it revives a familiar preoccupation of Mediterranean anthropology, namely hospitality. Hospitality constitutes a *fait social* in the Durkheimian sense, and as such it conflates questions of giving, reciprocity, power relations, politics, sovereignty, materiality, space and morality (Selwyn 2000). From this point of view, the concept overlaps with other shared but implicit assumptions and elusive organizational principles, such as kinship, honour and solidarity within relations of family, patronage and friendship, all of which have characterized classic studies in Mediterranean anthropology (Boissevain 1979; Gilmore 1982; Ben-Yehoyada 2016). As one of the central founders of a Mediterranean anthropology, Julian Pitt-Rivers has written the most influential text on hospitality (Pitt-Rivers 2012[1977]) through which he not only became hospitality's central theorist, but also triggered a debate that is still relevant today. Below I shall show the pertinence of this debate and suggest that it even plays a central role in Moroccan mountain tourism. Beyond a mere Mediterranean perspective on hospitality, Matei Candea and Giovanni Da Col's (2012) recent introduction to their revitalization of an anthropology of hospitality in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* represents the most comprehensive and skillful genealogy of the subject. The authors have evinced a growing academic and interdisciplinary interest in the topic in recent years, driven mainly by the philosophical reflections of Jacques Derrida (Derrida 2000; see also Shryock 2008; Still 2010).

In the field of tourism, however, the "problem of how to deal with strangers" (Pitt-Rivers 2012[1977]: 501) is not only a problem of dealing with them, but also of appealing to them. This is usually a more delicate question for tourism entrepreneurs as strangers represent potential clients who need to be attracted, accommodated and satisfied in order to compete in the volatile and often precarious mountain tourism industry. To make explicit the question that guides the research in this chapter: I ask to what extent processes of socio-technical restructuring challenge the interactions and possible relationships between guests and hosts?

In the field of tourism research, the anthropological and philosophical horizons of hospitality tend to be curtailed and hospitality reduced to the activity of providing accommodation primarily as a form of business. However, there are some interesting approaches that have made observations about increased mobility and the wider dissemination of information and communication technology (ICT) (Molz/Gibson 2007), or asked how “technologies of hospitality” (Bialski 2012) might challenge and/or change relations of hospitality. This “mobile” (Molz 2007) or “network hospitality” (Molz 2012, 2014), which can be found across social networks, sharing services and online platforms such as *CouchSurfing* or *Airbnb* (Ikkala/Lampinen 2015), presumably presents peer-to-peer versions of hosting and may even come up with new ways for strangers to interact.

*Figure 18: Ultra Trail participants before the start*



While the studies mentioned above have focused on particular media technologies or specific platforms in order to investigate the changing practices, motivations and expectations of hospitality, I will proceed

in the reverse direction. I will focus instead on a touristic event in the High Atlas and on the media technology, publicness, infrastructure, and cooperation that were produced during the event and that went into its realization. As I will argue, however, hospitality will help make sense of these different aspects in the context of the ongoing transformations in the area more generally. Hence, this chapter is less concerned with attempting to define what hospitality is or is not, but rather employs hospitality in order to analyze what is happening on the ground. Thanks to a readjusted focus on cooperation and an approach to media technology that foregrounds social practices, the scaling work of actors will become analytically tangible. This scaling work, in turn, feeds into—and interacts with—the scalar characteristics of hospitality itself.

### **The Zaouiat Ahansal Ultra Trail**

In the High Atlas, local tourism practices constitute an aspiration that had not existed in prior decades. Tourism presents itself as a space of possibilities for the way people are creating and shaping the conditions to make a living in mountain areas. Equally, the Zaouiat Ahansal Ultra Trail (ZAUT) must be situated within this historical context and socio-economic framework. This trail-running event is classified as an *ultramarathon*, an umbrella term for any race beyond the traditional marathon distance of 42.195 kilometres. The Zaouiat Ahansal Ultra Trail is a race consisting of four day-long stages (*étapes*) across the central High Atlas and covering 116 kilometres at a cumulative altitude of 6,400 metres. The total distance is divided between the four individual stages of 17, 36, 37 and 26 kilometres respectively.

Early one September morning in 2018, I stood among the neon-coloured trail-runners at the ZAUT start line. The atmosphere was energized, the excitement palpable. Many of the runners were equipped with high-tech hiking sticks and were activating their muscles with some last-minute stretching exercises or by jumping on the spot. Others took one group photo after another in an atmosphere of joyful anticipation. In total, 38 participants started the run, of whom 33 finished, including

myself. Of the 38 participants, half were (semi-)professional Moroccan athletes. The other half was made up of European sports tourists from France, Spain, and Germany, as well as members of the Moroccan middle or upper middle-class. At least half as many people as participants were involved in the organization of the event. Although I did not really know what to expect, I had felt relatively well prepared... until that moment. At any rate, "*lmohim musharaka*," as many people told me: the important thing was to participate.

On the previous evening I passed by the huge inflatable start/finish gate, collected my start number in exchange for the participation fee at the registration desk, and made my way to a huge nomad's tent where the official briefing for the ZAUT was about to begin. About 30 people, participants and staff, had already gathered there and formed a semicircle, with a few sitting on chairs though most stood. The participants had arrived in the afternoon, most of them directly from Marrakech, where several had spent their first night as part of the complete event package. Hamou, the main organizer, was welcoming everyone over the microphone. He spoke in French, sometimes adding some words and phrases in Spanish. As an introduction, a video of the marathon for the children from the surrounding villages was projected onto a white cloth had been stretched for use as a screen. It had taken place in the morning of the same day. The video was followed by some images from last year's Ultra Trail.

Each stage had a clearly marked route, mostly on mule tracks up and down rocky mountain slopes and across barren high plateaus, with several refreshment points along the way where the runners could refill their water containers. At the end of each stage a camp was set up, including an inflatable start/finish gate, a speaker system, and a kitchen tent. The organizers provided communal tents and the necessary camping infrastructure, but it was also possible to bring one's own tent to sleep in. The accompanying staff transported the runners' luggage and all the materials and provisions in off-road vehicles and pick-up trucks to the daily camp locations at the end of each stage. Early in the morning, while the participants were getting themselves ready, packing up sleeping bags and personal belongings, the staff prepared

breakfast, including different types of bread, tea, coffee, jam, and honey. They then collected the luggage again and loaded it on to the trucks. After the participants had started on the run, the camp was dismantled and groups of staff headed either to the refreshment points or to the next location at the end of that day's stage. Participants would arrive throughout the afternoon. Upon arrival they would take a shower, relax, chat, walk around, eat something, or receive medical care from the two French nurses on duty if needed.

In order to have permission to start on the Ultra Trail, every participant had to fill out a form. Stating her or his address, passport number, and stating that she or he was physically able to participate. Thus, we had to sign a liability disclaimer and thereby assure that we would ourselves take responsibility for such, that we knew the risks included, and that we waived our rights to make legal claims against the organizers in case some self-inflicted injury or other health problem. It was also mandatory to carry 1.5 Liters of water in the form of a water bag or pouch, sun protection such as glasses, a hat, and appropriate footwear.<sup>3</sup> It seriously dawned on me for the first time that this was probably not going to be a leisurely stroll around the High Atlas and was perhaps instead a little riskier than a mere sports challenge that would test my physical limits. After all, I had been training for the event and considered myself in quite good shape. I had even spent the two weeks leading up to the Ultra Trail running around the village, up and down the adjacent hills. I always felt a little awkward going on those runs as engaging in fitness activities of this type was not of much interest to many local people. Indeed, I knew a total of two people in the entire village who I had occasionally

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3 I did not have a proper water bag with me and had until then not necessarily thought I would need it. I had somehow expected a seamless supply situation where drinks would be provided every kilometer. This was rather naïve. Hamou, the organizer, said that there was no way he could let me participate without carrying water. The rules were strict. However, he was quick in coordinating a water bag for me from one of the helping guides. In the end, I did not need to make use of the offer as my friend Mustapha provided me with a bag. It was the same bag he had used when he ran the first edition of the Ultra Trail the previous year.



seen running, namely a government teacher and a man who worked in tourism. Young adults and some men would regularly play football in the afternoon, especially during Ramadan when a major tournament was organized that included many competing teams from different villages. However, a morning jog was quite uncommon. Indeed, it was both unusual and amusing for people who saw me running around in my shorts. Some would ask the non-question “what are you doing (*mai tskert*)?” Others would say “ohh, doing some exercise (*immiq n-riada*)?” When I answered I was training for the Ultra Trail, this appeared to justify somewhat my behavior and I was met with approving nods or an occasional “let’s go (*siir, yallah*)!”

### **Increasing Scope: Publicness and Circulatability**

A local mountain guide and guesthouse owner named Hamou, and Ibrahim—who was a former professional athlete—were the main organizers of the run. Ibrahim was the somewhat famous patron of the event.<sup>4</sup> As a multiple champion of the *Marathon des Sables*, he had organized a number of similar and larger trail-running events in Morocco. Together with a local association for mountaineering and alpine tourism, Hamou developed the idea of creating a trail-running event specifically for this particular region of the High Atlas and got Ibrahim on board. Drivers, assistants for the supply points along the route, helping hands to set up the camp, cooks and kitchen assistants were all indispensable in bringing off the event.

Hamou was only in his thirties and thus did not belong to the very first generation of local guides himself, but his father had already worked as guide, even before the first official national schemes were launched to support mountain tourism. He had also started the family’s guesthouse. For this reason, Hamou too had an intricate historical knowledge of the

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4 Hamou had known from other trail-running events before asking him to help organize the Zaouiat Ahansal Ultra Trail. But even before that, Hamou’s father had known Ibrahim and worked with him in arranging desert tours for tourists.

workings of regional tourism. This knowledge from own biographical experience allowed him to assess how ways of reaching and communicating with tourists had changed over the years.

*Simon: Was the tourism business different in the past?*

Hamou: Earlier it was a little harder to reach people (“f llwl ishqa shwiya”). [...]

In the past, people wrote letters and made inquiries or reservations. You answered them, then they came. In general, there hadn't been that many tourists at that time. Today there are indeed many interested tourists, more than before, but they also send many requests or messages to all possible guesthouses in parallel [via e-mail or via social media]. Then they compare the prices and the answers they get. It has become more complicated.

Local guides like Hamou were well aware of the impact, potential and promise that digital media technology held for mountain tourism in general and for the ZAUT in particular. There was tremendous pressure to make the first edition of the Ultra Trail a success, which Hamou considered absolutely crucial to establish a reputation. From the beginning, an important part of the planning was to create an appealing visual representation of the event, which would not only show a degree of professionalism, but also address and attract possible clients. Only if it could attract a definite and preferably growing number of participants in each of the following years would the ZAUT become profitable in the long term. In other words, the organizers needed to achieve a degree of public awareness as an investment for successfully holding the event in the future. In order to do this, Hamou pragmatically combined different types of media and forms of publication to achieve public visibility and outreach, including a Facebook page to announce the Ultra Trail and make progress with the planning transparent. He and his team even added some participatory elements: for instance, their Facebook followers could vote on the colour of the *finisher t-shirt*. “It's the only marathon where people can decide what the t-shirt will look like,” Hamou told me. In this way, the organizers attempted to establish a unique selling

point as compared with other trail-running events. “But Facebook is important (*mohim*), and not only for this” Hamou continued, “most of the interested people and participants asked about the marathon via Facebook. Only a few called by phone.”

Later in the process they used the social media platform to spread information about the stages and regularly posted calls for registration. Hamou and Ibrahim had been in contact with many of the trail’s professional or semi-professional runners, who made up about half of all participants, calling them in advance, issuing them with invitations and informing them about the run. Trail-running events such as the ZAUT are promising opportunities for aspiring athletes. Even smaller running events could boost one’s prospects of a successful sports career. Other groups, such as one consisting of ambitious French hobby athletes, had registered for the event after it had been posted and shared on Facebook. Participants who did not have any personal ties were also able to learn about the event via announcements and coverage in papers and magazines, as well as online.

Hamou also received support from some journalists and trail-running bloggers, with whom he had previously had contact already while working on other trail-running events in Morocco. The journalists wrote announcements and reports about the Ultra Trail in regional and national newspapers.<sup>5</sup> The bloggers drew on their own networks of trail-running enthusiasts and wrote articles for their respective communities or online magazines in Morocco, France and Germany. The organizers were also able to supplement this by including another classic mass medium in their public relations work, namely television reports.<sup>6</sup> Crucially, Hamou and Ibrahim were able to build on existing social relations

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5 Hamou scanned some of these articles and recycled or rather re-circulated them via Facebook. Interestingly, in doing so, Hamou was simultaneously digitising and archiving the articles, as well as making them available to a purportedly wider and more varied readership.

6 Both the Moroccan television station Tamazight (channel 8) and the private TV station Beln Sports were present at the first Ultra Trail and reported on it. The Ultra Trail was the first sports event in the Azilal region ever to be covered by Beln Sports.

they had forged over the years in order to expand the outreach for their Ultra Trail venture. In addition to the contacts they had already made, Ibrahim's personal popularity was another important factor in facilitating and promoting the ZAUT. Not only did he have athletic expertise, ties with a transnational trail-runner community, and a reputation of his own, he also had organizational knowledge from similar events he had organized in the past. Moreover, he had good relations with the local political administration and media institutions.

The role of media is decisive in this context. In view of situated ethnography, it seems appropriate to think of media technology not as something that is merely used or utilized, but as something that is produced by the organizers themselves. The ability to circulate is both an achievement and an investment. It is not just a matter of using the right media channels, but also of establishing the conditions for cooperation through social practices. In fact, this speaks to a different notion of publicness. As Hamou and his fellow organizers successively planned and held the Ultra Trail, it simultaneously grew as a common concern. Only as an *issue* did the ZAUT become connectable, circulatable, and contestable. The various practices involved created the issue, mediated it, and “sparked” (Marres 2005) a form of publicness around it.

Beyond the questions of *addressability* and *circulatability*<sup>7</sup> and the extent to which the Ultra Trail has been *made* a public matter, a number of central points can be noted. What Hamou needed to do in order to hold the trail-running event was to draw on and successively expand his network of cooperative relationships. He was able to fall back on the resources his father had already built up and developed. As a guide and guesthouse owner, he was able to draw on material, infrastructure, and co-workers—such as two Spanish friends for audio-visual support—as well as cooks, drivers, people working with pack animals and muleteers, many of whom he already had working relationships with from his day-to-day business. It was hardly surprising, then, that the participants

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7 These neologisms delineate the achievement of initially creating the run as a concern, which can be circulated in and as different media formats; and as such can be directed at and address a potentially interested clientele.

were also staying at his guesthouse the night before the start of the Ultra Trail. The local association for mountaineering and alpine tourism was also crucial,<sup>8</sup> consisting of several guides and tourist entrepreneurs from the area who had organized themselves as a collective. All this organizing by means of joining together in an association also contributed substantially to finding further cooperation partners, such as representatives of local administrations, who provided a regional ambulance for the duration of the event, or a brand of mineral water as the main sponsor.

All this suggests that the feasibility of the Ultra Trail was fundamentally dependent on prior assessments of the available resources in terms of (primarily) cooperative ties and potential relationships. To cooperate and to display touristic activities in a digitally mediated form to generate public visibility helps claim a special niche in the tourism business, a niche that represents an advantage over one's competitors when it comes to reaching and attracting tourists, which in turn stabilizes one's position as a touristic entrepreneur. However, from Hamou's perspective, which I have mainly adopted here, this aim or goal need in no way be shared with others who are involved in order to make cooperation possible. In fact, as an event, the ZAUT is both "plastic enough [...], yet robust enough" (Star/Griesemer 1989: 393) to be compatible with the activities of different participants or communities.

To register and contemplate the various constellations of situated practices that contributed to the organization of the event, I suggest drawing on an analytical framework that uses a media praxeological perspective. This means using a broader definition of media as "co-operatively developed conditions of cooperation" (Schüttpelz 2017: 14),

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8 In a sense, it is also comparable to a *special interest lobby*, where tourist entrepreneurs come together in order to jointly and collaboratively achieve objectives that would be difficult to achieve alone. Hamou first discussed his idea at a meeting of the association. Together they assessed the feasibility of the event. In both the first and second editions of the Ultra Trail, members of the association offered their own resources and labour to help (see also chapter six).

that equally involve social, cultural and technological dynamics and are thus embedded in their specific histories and within the particular situatedness of their surrounding practices. In this context, the “[s]cale and scope of media are achievements that are practically accomplished by the actors through coordinating, delegating and registering/identifying” (Gießmann 2018: 98, own translation). On the one hand, this takes into account the mutual entanglement of media and data practices, while on the other hand fruitfully expanding the focus on media to include crucial questions concerning infrastructural conditions, as well as their ramifications for publicness.

Figure 19 & 20: Camp site at the end of a stage (left), finish at lake Tislit near Imilchil (right)



While participants were scaling mountains, Hamou had to *scale up* the event itself in a very different sense. However, this process involves going beyond creating publicity, as it is caught up in a delicate interplay that both brings forth and expands the reach of the Ultra Trail’s media, infrastructure and publicness. Increasing the scope thus also means increasing connectivity. Hamou and others cooperatively developed the conditions for the “mutual making of common goals, means and processes” (Schüttpelz/Gießmann 2015), that is, the cooperation that led to the ZAUT and its situated media practices. They had to make use of an array of different resources including social ties, particular sets of values, and material artefacts. This presupposed careful scaling work by the ac-

tors themselves in order to transfer, expand or limit different issues and concerns to different contexts. As will be shown below, this quality also permeates the relationship between guest and host in the touristic landscape of the High Atlas Mountains.

### Tracking Mediterranean Mountains

For tourism, and the Ultra Trail in particular, the topographical and ecological features of the High Atlas are an important resource. This includes the climate, geology, and biodiversity from which the mountains draw their aura of originality, uniqueness, and attraction. Besides the authentic display of culture and cultural heritage (see chapter six), promotional representations of touristic marketing and tourism imaginaries are generally based on these ecological features of natural landscapes (Salazar/Graburn 2014). Hence, what is perceived to be special about the Ultra Trail—and what the organizers are promoting—is not only the sporting challenge of the race, but precisely the fact that the participants run across the High Atlas. It holds the promise of an exceptional physical experience in an extraordinary setting.

Even in the classic treatise on the Mediterranean, Fernand Braudel does not start off his seminal work with the sea, but the mountains. He sets out to identify their defining features in comparison to the adjacent plateaus and plains, as well as their contribution to Mediterranean history at large. “[The] Mediterranean means more than landscapes of vines and olive trees and urbanized villages; these are merely the fringe. Close by, looming above them, are the dense highlands, the mountain world with its fastnesses, its isolated houses and hamlets, its ‘vertical norths’” (Braudel 1972: 26-27). The Mediterranean area, as he points out on a different page, “has no unity but that created by the movements of men, the relationships they imply, and the routes they follow” (ibid.: 276). And indeed “roads may be steep, winding, and full of potholes, but they are passable on foot” (ibid.: 41), an observation that also applies to the High Atlas.

By its very definition, “trail-running” means to run, or sporadically to hike, on unpaved roads. Especially in mountainous terrain involving

significant ascents and descents, racing on asphalt tracks is rare. Even where wide roads are available, runners prefer small, undisturbed hiking and farming trails. Unusual though it may be in urbanized contexts involving asphalt, there is no doubt that the most direct route across the High Atlas runs along such prototypical trails, which are inscribed in the landscape as expressions of connectivity and mobility, as well as sedimentations of time and memory. They are stabilized by local people who have used them to obtain firewood or to graze their animals, and used seasonally by nomads or semi-nomads who—in the course of exploiting transhumant pastures—have led their oft-substantial flocks from the dry and hot plains in the south to the grazing grounds in the mountains in summer.

Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell (2000) have written a comprehensive history of the Mediterranean, which emphasizes the fragmented, ever-changing and interconnected aspects of its micro-regions. With regard to mountain areas, they write: “Mountains can seem hostile and marginal areas; yet they are actually closely integrated into the patterns of production and communication that abut them” (ibid.: 81). Horden and Purcell’s Mediterranean, like the mountain ranges on its southern shores, has always been connected. In the middle of the ZAUT’s second stage at an altitude of almost three thousand meters, it dawned on me that I was corporally experiencing the phrase “the High Atlas has always been connected.”

The 36-kilometre route of the second stage took the participants through the High Atlas along mule tracks. There was no such direct route for vehicles. In order to reach the location at the end of the second-stage by driving rather than on foot, the organizers and staff had to make a detour of over 120 kilometers.<sup>9</sup> If one were dependent on motorized vehicles and paved roads, as was largely the case in the colonial

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9 In fact, the detours posed an immense logistical challenge. Because the end points of the second and third stages were so difficult to reach by off-road vehicles, staff were split up. While some travelled directly from the first stage to the end point of the third, others only took on work for the second and fourth stages.



imagination and during the French protectorate (cf. El Qadery 2010; Miller 2013; Burke 2014), the mountains would constitute an obstacle and act as a *natural barrier*. However, the High Atlas has always been a source of livelihood and crossing it has always been possible: Especially by nomadic pastoralists and caravans from the south on their way to the trade centers in the Moroccan plains and by the Atlantic or Mediterranean, albeit along mule tracks and narrow mountain passes. Continuing with this perspective, the absence of paved roads does not pose a problem if you are on foot with pack animals and/or your herds. In fact, stories and kinship ties from the plateaus and valleys to places on the southern slope are the clearest indication that the mountains, both in local perceptions and in their tangible consequences, may not have been as naturally divisive as other perspectives suggest. Distance, after all, is relational and depends a great deal on certain cultural techniques and the particular technological structuration of everyday life. It is exactly those contextual practices of mobility that also shape perceptions of what counts as distant or connected.

In order to make the distances, routes and characteristics of the Ultra Trail comprehensible, the organizers increasingly resort to the datafication of the High Atlas topography and environment. This involves the visual-virtual representation of the trail as data and its conversion into various types of translation in the form of navigational data in both a digitally processable GPX format and painted marks on rocks along the trail.

For the general preparatory meeting before the Ultra Trail, as well as before the individual stages, Hamou and his team set up a video projector and screen to display the particular routes. To provide the most detailed account of the routes, they used GPS data, provided an elevation profile, and employed Google Earth visualizations. Before the start of the second version of the Ultra Trail, for instance, Hamou highlighted some minor changes to the previous year's edition and showed some of the altered route in detail. The GPS data for the track had been loaded into Google Earth, so that we participants and staff were flying virtually over the landscape and the stage for the following day. Hamou drew our attention to several dots on the digital route, which was visualized on the

cloth canvas. These dots designated the supply points where staff would hand out water to the runners and which were set up about every eight to ten kilometers. The virtual route on the screen indicated the distance we were to cover the next day, which was, however, also unfolding at the present moment, thus making yesterday's historic mule tracks digitally tangible.

Nevertheless, in order to run the ZAUT and follow its route, the runners did not necessarily have to use navigation technology such as maps or GPS devices, as the course of the trail had been meticulously marked. Signs painted on rocks and regular supply points where staff were waiting, provided sufficient navigational orientation. After the joint start, the field of participants increasingly thinned out and, depending on their pace, the runners made their way alone or in small groups through the vast terrain. Under the scorching mountain sun, I followed the white arrows and splashes of paint in the landscape, which were sometimes supplemented by a white "X" to prevent a wrong turn, and often I met nobody for several kilometers or even hours. When I occasionally did pass a small settlement, men working in the fields or children herding goats, it seemed almost absurd to me. After all, they were not surreal extras in a manufactured authentic tourist experience: they lived here. The virtuality of the route and the backdrop of the sporting event overlapped and collided with the long-standing realities of life in the mountains.

Although the trails and paths through the High Atlas exist, and have existed for centuries, they are not the same for everyone and at all times. The practices surrounding them and their ramifications of the trails and paths vary significantly. Following Tim Ingold (2000), for those who know the High Atlas and their way around the mountains, "the answers to such basic questions as 'where am I?' and 'which way should I go?' are found in narratives of past movement" (ibid.: 237). Hamou had explored the trails and paths of the High Atlas through his earlier work as a mountain guide. He was able to use his regular tourism commitments to acquire experience about possible alternative routes and to explore the general feasibility of the idea of an Ultra Trail. During the initial planning process for the ZAUT he continually orga-

nized multiday hiking trips through the High Atlas for clients in such a way that it allowed him to reassess parts of designated routes for the Ultra Trail. The course was only really finalized once the organizers had walked the final route again both to capture GPS data for the route and to paint the waymarks. In other words, establishing the route, Hamou had to translate it physically and digitally in order to stabilize and fix it. Wayfinding, in this case, closely coincides with mapping it. Thus, both the waymarks as physical representations, and the recorded GPS track as a digital representation, are based on past movements through space, as condensed forms of working out the route as the organizers went along. For my part, in a parallel and methodological turn, I worked the route out ethnographically by “going along” (Kusenbach 2003), or rather *running along*.

While for both the GPS track and the waymarks it does indeed seem to be the case that “to follow a path is also to retrace one’s steps, or the steps of one’s predecessors” (Ingold 2000: 237), the implications of doing so differ depending on who is following on behind. For the participants, running along the Ultra Trail is fundamentally a navigational operation that involves stop-and-go orientation and the particular indexicality of the waymarks.<sup>10</sup> It appears to be a practice of map-using-without-maps, either following the GPS track on the device or following the white arrows as if on a paper chase. Neither a map nor any former knowledge of the landscape are required for successful navigation. The topographical features of the High Atlas do not need a visual representation, as they are corporally experienced as one runs through them. Conversely, the GPS route attempts to translate and represent this physical experience of the topography of the High Atlas into data, thus providing information that subjects one’s experience of the route to anticipation.<sup>11</sup> For the organiz-

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10 Cf. here also the analysis of photo-audio guides as early automated versions of route-calculation (Thielmann 2016). Given recent debates about autonomous vehicles, questions of digital navigation practices (Hind 2019) have become more pressing.

11 Successful navigation via GPS track, however, does not necessitate the visual representation of the topography either. On the sports watch I used in the High

ers and guides, on the other hand, following a path or trail through the High Atlas may well constitute a movement through familiar landscape, drawing on former experience and knowledge. This is not to suggest that for them physical marks, maps and GPS tracks are obsolete, only that they can further draw on historical and experiential levels, so to speak. Here and on both sides, practices of wayfinding are thus fundamentally practices of making connections.

By referring to representation and navigation by means of GPS data, it already becomes apparent that there is a digital element to Mediterranean connectivity and topography. For the organizers of the Ultra Trail, the use of GPS data and altitude profiles is a way of demonstrating their own professionalism and thorough, data-driven preparation, while making completely transparent what participants can expect from the Ultra Trail. Furthermore, this is a new service for (potential) clients, pointing towards a changing relationship between host and guest. For mountain tourism in the High Atlas too, digitality is a condition of possibility, which in turn catalyzes a new set of digital tourism practices.

### Datafication as Professionalization

All media practices are also data practices. Digital media technology goes hand in hand with new ways of creating issues and making them public. For guides like Hamou, digital media practices increasingly include the datafication of one's own environment and everyday life in order to talk about and present touristic activities:

Hamou: Today, there are no pens anymore, everything is digital (*"stilo makhddamsh, deba kulshi l-informatik"*). For example, if you don't have a website today, if someone asks you about it, it's very bad. If they're interested, potential clients can't look it up—it's bad, and they may

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Atlas, the route's visual representation amounted to a blue precipitous line in a blank void, a trail in a mountain terrain without surface or mountains.

not even come. I don't use TripAdvisor or other similar booking portals. Only Facebook. And there are links on some blogs and an entry on GoogleMaps. Because many people use GoogleMaps, it's very good if you also find the guesthouse there.

It is also important to know, for example, how to use GPS and how to record routes, how to create a height profile. Because even the tourists are not as they used to be. They want to know exactly how things will be, when it comes to planning a hike, for example: How many kilometres is that per day? What's the total altitude in meters? How steep is the gradient? In the past, you simply said that the route takes about five hours. That's not enough anymore. Tourists expect more details nowadays.

That tourist expectations of the provision of information have changed is pivotal. Not only does datafication signify a degree of professionalism, which the ambitious touristic entrepreneur is eager to display, it also produces a different standard for communicating about touristic offers, activities, and details. Hamou was explicit about the fact that he perceives how one communicates with potential clients as a central aspect of the tourist's decision-making process:

It's not just the price that counts—whether a Gite costs 300Dh or 100Dh per night, for example. It also depends on how you write to potential clients and how you talk to them. For example, sending a friendly answer with lots of information. And with pictures of the rooms, the food, the guesthouse. So, it depends above all on the strategy.

What is more, to overlook or simply disregard these new expectations concerning standards of information exchange and to fail in the prudent handling of inquiries is the equivalent of sabotaging one's own business—hence the need for a tourism strategy that has to reflect the changes wrought by digital media. To a certain extent, digital media technology puts tourism entrepreneurs under pressure. If a tourist entrepreneur does not participate appropriately, this will most likely become a competitive disadvantage. This means adapting both standards

for information policy and practices of communication.<sup>12</sup> The field of mountain tourism has gradually become digitalized, which has changed how tourists are reached and how information for (potential) clients is provided and presented.

In other words, guests expect *more* or different data, and hosts must see to it that they fulfil these expectations. Pitt-Rivers (2012[1977]) writes that the “roles of host and guest have territorial limitations. A host is host only on the territory over which on a particular occasion he claims authority. Outside it he cannot maintain the role” (ibid.: 514). Although—or perhaps precisely because—it is “founded upon ambivalence” (ibid.: 513), hospitality constitutes a reciprocal but unequal relationship of respectful mutual recognition between host and guest, which allows strangers and locals to engage in interactions with each other for a limited period of time. Commonly, this interaction takes place in a specific spatial setting (in the guest room, for example, or the *parlour*) and primarily involves concern for the physical well-being of the guest. To what extent can these aspects be transferred to the touristic spaces of the Ultra Trail or the virtual spaces of the digital world?

## Towards Digital Hospitality

Without over-emphasizing Mediterranean anthropology’s analytical tool, in the High Atlas Mountains hospitality indeed constitutes an important everyday value and practice. This is particularly cultivated in touristic situations, such as the ZAUT. From registration to transportation and accommodation, the organizers aim to offer a full service

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12 It goes without saying that a prerequisite for this and for successfully attracting tourists is appropriate language skills and a degree of digital literacy. This may lead to a race between competitors in terms of who is first or fastest in appropriating technology and adopting standards. Hamou, for example, is in favour of more ICT-focused and intensive education and training (like most, he has acquired his technological knowledge autodidactically), and he believes that the more satisfactorily one can use digital tools, the greater the competitive advantage in tourism.

package. Accommodation in the camp was simple and the meals rather basic, although there was a greater variety of food than the average breakfast in the High Atlas, which mainly consists of bread and oil. The food for the joint dinner was mostly inspired by Moroccan cuisine and was prepared either by the staff in the kitchen tent or sometimes by partners from the villages where camp had been set up. There was of course green tea with mint and sugar as tea constituted the veritable epitome of Moroccan hospitality. But all in all, the Ultra Trail as a sporting event does not aim to score points with luxurious equipment and comfort, but with adventure, which is what ultimately determines the participants' expectations. Hence, the Ultra Trail aspires to offer a professional organization and authentic impression of the High Atlas to deliver this adventurous experience. This is the basis and motivation for hospitable action.

Besides the actual accommodation and catering, folkloristic elements displaying collective identity and public culture are another crucial part. The end of the last stage included a closing event with music, dancing, and an award ceremony. At the ceremony the main organizers, Hamou and Ibrahim, invited the runners with the best overall times on to a makeshift stage and awarded them with gifts in front of the assembled crowd of participants, staff and guests. The gifts, which included woven garments and carpets, reflected the cultural identity of the High Atlas. Moreover, from the start a rider had accompanied the group of runners, dressed in the robes of the noblemen (*igurramen*) and carrying a wooden treasure chest on a mule, which had the symbolic weight of containing the gifts for the winners. The organizers had also engaged a local music group consisting of men and women all dressed in "traditional" Amazigh clothing. They performed *ahidus*, an important regional genre that combines playing the drums, chanting poetic verses mostly in a repetitive call-and-response pattern and dancing shoulder to shoulder. Typically, this is danced collectively at weddings or occasional celebrations, but for some time now it has also been an integral part of folklore shows on national television channels, as well as in tourist programmes. For some, folklore groups are a way of attempting to participate in the tourist business, that is, in what Michael Herzfeld calls a

“global hierarchy of values” (Herzfeld 2004), without individually being able to become a touristic entrepreneur or a certified guide due to a lack of training, education or resources.

The scope of the tourist services offered, here characterized by both the materials of the infrastructure provided for the Ultra Trail, the means of bodily sustenance and the authentic impressions and experiences of the cultural identity on display convey the degree of successful hospitality. In their successful efforts to revitalize the concept of hospitality, Candea and Da Col (2012) draw attention to Ortner’s work, in which she points out that “hospitality, mediated through substances, does not merely *elicit* co-operative responses but *coerces* them” (ibid.: 9, original emphasis). Furthermore, as Shryock (2004) points out, hospitality constitutes a “field of ritualized exchange in which performance animates and responds to social critique” (ibid.: 36). He argues that among Balga Bedouins in Jordan “hosts must ‘fear’ their guests”, because “[r]eputations are at stake” (ibid.). Hosting someone always entails moral ambivalence, which may even turn negative. Guests can accuse the hosts of not living up to their responsibilities as such, while the guests can be accused of overstaying or abusing their hosts’ hospitality (Pitt-Rivers 2012[1977]; Shryock 2012). Dealing with the perceived radical alterity of the stranger can evoke suspicion, potential threats, and mistrust.

In the tourism sector, this risk presents itself not only as a moral and social conundrum, but as one that can affect economic viability. Tourists are the responsibility of their hosts, who must not only try to meet the expectations of their guests, but also assume their responsibility towards them. It is therefore not surprising that the organizers of the Ultra Trail try to hedge any possible risks. In concrete terms and as mentioned initially, the participants have to sign a waiver, for instance, as a prerequisite for starting the run. They confirm that they are participating in the race at their own risk, that they are in the necessary physical condition to do so, and that they are aware of the health risks involved. The explanation for this is as simple as it is drastic: in this dangerous relationship between these two parties, everything is at stake for the host. Should a serious accident involving tourists occur, it will not only affect the rep-



utation of the tourist entrepreneur, it may entail meticulous—or even repressive—investigations by the state authorities. Hence, to be able to present all official permits and legally sound documents is more than a mere economic necessity, it is an existential one.

Instances of mediation (communication and audiovisual coverage of the event) and datafication (GPS data, elevation profiles) permeated the actual ZAUT run, through which the organizers intended to enhance the quality of their hospitality. But at the same time the touristic accommodation and service is increasingly subject to a *datafied valuation* itself, which complicates the moral dilemma of hospitable relations even further. Nowhere are the benefits and risks of hosting someone for one's own social and economic reputation more closely linked than in the mechanisms of valuation brought about by the recent review processes on social media platforms, apps, blogs or websites. In the context of mountain tourism, they are not only public statements about the quality of particular touristic work and efforts, but also about the potential for further cooperation:

Hamou: If you do good work, you'll earn money. If you are only sleeping, money will not just fall from the sky like rain (*"Iflus maghadish ykun bhal ansar"*). If you are busy, travel a lot, put an effort into brochures, it pays off. And if you are sincere (*"nishan"*).

If, on the other hand, you lie to people or mislead them, it will harm you. There was, for example, one guesthouse in the area that was running well in former times. But now it doesn't work anymore (*"makhdmdsh"*). The owner had lied to people (*"kdub"*). Then it spread by word-of-mouth, blogs, and the internet that this one guesthouse should be avoided.

This is also a new development due to the internet and the increased exchange of information. You must always be careful and completely on guard (*"attention"*). You always have to treat them well, because otherwise [through the available social media] your reputation and thus your business could suffer very quickly. It is even better to let a customer who is unhappy depart the next morning without having to pay anything for the overnight stay. It is better not to insist on the

money so that he is not angry and then writes something bad on the Internet—which a lot of people and the whole Internet could read, and which could negatively influence future business.

Especially with regard to online portals and social media platforms, datafication is widely perceived as an opportunity to reach more people through targeted information in a (semi-)automatized way. However, this automation always has the potential to backfire, as the opaque algorithmic routines at the back of digital platforms may jeopardize the very same touristic business efforts they were supposed to support.

To illustrate this, consider the business of tourist transportation in Marrakech. “I was last year’s best rated driver in Marrakech on booking.com,” Abdelwahed bragged, shortly after I had met him for the first time. He was a full-time driver in his late twenties. His claim, which I could not easily verify, seemed at least a little unlikely, though not completely impossible. Indeed, he worked for a local chauffeur company and was driving a tidy minivan of a European brand. “Positive reviews and comments are crucial in our business. That’s why you always have to be respectful and polite as a driver,” he continued to explain. His company worked exclusively as a sub-contractor for booking.com. Whenever tourists would book transportation together with their accommodation package, booking.com would delegate the transportation request to one of its local sub-contractors. “Disrespectful behaviour leads to bad reviews, and bad reviews are very bad. It can cost you your job.”

He went on to tell the story of his colleague, who had behaved unprofessionally and at times quite disrespectfully. Once he had slandered a client on the phone and proceeded to make derogatory comments to himself about her while she was sitting in the car with him. Unbeknownst to him, however, she spoke fluent Arabic. She confronted him and left an extremely scathing review afterwards. This was not the only such incident. The accumulation of negative reviews—for which he himself was responsible—ultimately led to his dismissal. After all, his reputation—in other words a good online rating—was crucial to his boss: as soon as there are too many negative reviews of the drivers or the company as a whole, booking.com will no longer award any contracts

to the company. If booking.com terminates the collaboration and sacks the subcontractor, the entire basis of the company's business could be lost.

Similarly, owners of guesthouses, and even receptionists, ask customers or clients for comments and online reviews. This is common practice and has increased considerably in recent years. Often, staff openly urge clients to write a positive comment and ask them to explicitly mention their own name when doing so. While bad comments or reviews can have serious consequences for one's socio-economic position *outside* the digital platforms, positive ones are perceived as verifying one's value and degree of responsibility. However, it is not merely a question of diligence and of one's social relations with fellow workers or clients that indicate a successful work ethic, but also the hierarchization calculated by algorithmic operations. Consequently, comments and positive online reviews have become hard currency for touristic entrepreneurship. In short, online reviewing represents an evaluation of the performance of hospitality. Beyond that, it publicly signals the virtue of a host to strangers, who have yet to actively engage in the hospitable interaction at all. Indeed, depending on the rating, they may not even consider doing so at all.

Two further considerations are pertinent here. The first is whether there is still hospitality in Pitt River's sense of *dealing with strangers* when guest and host both face each other as part of an online community via a platform such as Airbnb or CouchSurfing. This is because, in order to log on to such platforms, users have to disclose a lot of personal data about themselves or create a profile. This profile is supposed to convey a degree of knowledge and familiarity, and thus turn the unknown guest into a less strange and even more recognizable counterpart. In addition, there are certain desired manners and (n)etiquettes<sup>13</sup> that can charac-

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13 This spelling is intended to draw attention to the importance of etiquette both online and offline, because etiquette in technology is also referred to as netiquette. These represent a code of conduct that encourages polite behavior and respectful interaction with other users on the Internet, especially in online forums and on social media platforms.

terize such a community, which leads us to our second consideration: Personal information—or an appealing online profile—are also access requirements for the platform, and these are then processed further. They are processed both by the algorithms in the background of the platform and by the users, whose expectations of the (later) face-to-face hospitable interaction are also fuelled by online information and communication. This might affect the morally ambiguous status of the hospitable relations as a whole.

If it is true that “each major ‘event’ of hospitality [...] encompasses a multiplicity of singular events and transactions where altruism and selfishness, trust and suspicion, benevolence and malice are present but never *co-present*,” and that it is “this careful *avoidance of simultaneity* which makes hospitality the locus of moral dilemmas—and generates its peculiarly charged affective space” (Candea and Da Col 2012: 11, original emphasis), then digital media technology might call precisely this into question. Digital media and data practices do indeed have the potential to create the co-presence and simultaneity mentioned above.

To exaggerate, and from a merely provisional perspective, this could suggest that hospitality might be mediated and measured in a radically different way, rather than exclusively elusive or transcending concepts such as honour, grace and religious duty,<sup>14</sup> but also the hard facts of algorithmic truth would then form a possible basis for motivating, driving and sanctioning the host/guest relationship. This would, in turn, also indicate the digitization of a moral dilemma, which has always been part of hospitality. Notwithstanding the full extent of the consequences, hospitality has been influenced by processes of mediation and digitization, too. This is why I suggest the term *digital hospitality*.

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14 Here, Pitt-Rivers’s analysis of the figure of the beggar and their relationship to the sacred and to hospitality should be recalled (Pitt-Rivers 2012[1977]: 506–513), as well as his position on the concept of grace (Pitt-Rivers 1992).

Digital hospitality,<sup>15</sup> then, represents an extension of the relationship between host and guest, both temporal and spatial. In the field of Moroccan tourism, conventional aspects of hospitality have been updated in being digitally connected to an (moral) archive. While long-standing moral implications continue to be crucial, digital hospitality conveys—in a more all-encompassing fashion—the fact that digital media technology is increasingly part and parcel of how hospitable relations are played out. The modes, values and interactions of hospitality relations are not only mediated—to a degree appropriate to the context—but increasingly digitally spelled out and restructured: in *classical* situations of hospitality, specific materialities or substances can play a decisive role. It is not that they have become obsolete, they are merely supplemented. Take, for example, the sharing of food and other commensality, and consider how its meaning becomes amplified or supplemented by way of the following interactions: the (sometimes formalized or even ritualized) drinking of tea, coffee and alcohol together; the sharing of data, such as the provision of GPS tracks; as well as engaging in supposedly immediate digital communication (while adhering to certain technical, informational and semantic standards associated with the type of media chosen for establishing contact). These are among the *substances* that enable and facilitate the exchange between host and guest, thus forming the basis for hospitable relations in the sense of digital hospitality.

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15 I am not referring to the narrower sense of the term as it is frequently understood in the context of User Experience Design, that is, as an attempt to make the virtual experience of an interface, platform or software more intuitive or inviting to the user, thus improving the way users feel *accommodated* when interacting with technology. Cf. Gude (2010), who has suggested the term *digital hospitality* in a computer science context that contrasts strongly with what I propose here.

## Conclusion

The practices of hospitality also contain and enhance scalar characteristics. Through its digitized form, “hospitality’s role as a practical way of shifting scales” (Candea 2012: 43; see also Herzfeld 1987) seems likely to gain even greater and more accentuated significance. A promising “emphasis on scalar analysis” (Herzfeld 2020: 162) in order to map out cultural and social changes should include a perspective that focuses on digital media practices, as I argue in this paper. In practices of digital hospitality, certain types of standards, information policies and forms of data(fication) are conflated, which together not only determine the reputation and level of professionalism of tourism entrepreneurs, but also increase both the scope for addressing potential customers and the likelihood of success in their individual scaling work. Simultaneously this constitutes a tentative advocacy for the ongoing relevance that some of Mediterranean anthropology’s *topoi* do possess as conceptual tools. This presupposes, of course, that such *topoi* are carefully grounded in history and are based on specific ethnographic accounts.

The Zaouiat Ahansal Ultra Trail is an account of individual strategies and struggles in the face of globally circulating ideas that are taken up and modified within a specific context. If scale is the achievement of the actors themselves—an implication derived from Latour (2005b: 183-185)—the place where things become scalable is in and through those situations and practices of cooperation, at the point where the pragmatic forging of new relations—that could pay off in the future—coincides with drawing on past relations and existing social ties. In this way, digital hospitality becomes another crucial element in the efforts of touristic entrepreneurs at scale-making and increasing scope in order to cooperate and make connections within the volatile mountain tourism sector of the High Atlas.



## Concluding Remarks: Creating Connectivity

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This book dealt with the profound socio-technical restructuring and transformation processes of the High Atlas in Morocco. As a result, this book is above all a book about connections and connectivity, as well as about the question of scales and the scaling work of individual actors: This included the connection of a valley and its inhabitants to global standards of progress, development, and the good life. But it also involved the connection of households to a new water supply system. A connection that, among other implications, must be understood above all as a promise of a better future that is already beginning to materialize in the here and now. In addition, this book presented tourist entrepreneur's connectivity to a transnational sphere of circulation of tourist imaginaries, financial resources, and strategic partnerships, through which individual actors can also expand their scope of possibilities – and the preconditions for a successful livelihood in the mountains. I hope that it became clear that intermediary positions and hinge functions play a decisive role in these processes. Actors appear to be effective scaling workers—or brokers of change—when they are able to fill these intermediary positions skillfully.

I actually started my research journey with the very concrete question of how people in the High Atlas use media technology, what role these technologies play with regard to political participation, and how forms of publicness are produced as a result. It was through my extended stay in the valley, and the dynamics and phenomena that appeared to be particularly relevant there, that I realized I needed to look beyond the specific initial research objective: By limiting my research to how people



use smartphones, I felt that there was not too much to talk about. More importantly, I feared that I would miss out on important social and cultural contexts and particularities if I pursued more narrowly defined media technology issues. So, I soon realized that I would have to apply a much broader, practice-theoretical concept of media if I were interested in rather holistic contexts of media use and technology appropriation. In this respect I tried to think of social theory as media theory and *vice versa* media theory as social theory.

Connectivity, then, appears to be more of a phrase from the context of IT and social media, thus linking back to the initial question of the research, which was specifically concerned with media technology and media use. Connectivity, however, not only takes place on Internet platforms, but can also be extended to other areas of life. Connectivity, as well as the scaling work associated with it, provide a framework of analysis that I have laid out in this book in order to understand what is happening at the particular locality of my research. At the same time, connectivity is more than a mere analytical framework; it is the result of people's aspirations and practices as they became empirically tangible to me. Thus, connectivity is also an ethnographic category. If something is connected and thus linked in a new way, this often also means an increase of scope and/or scale. What is special about the practice-theoretical perspective on which this work is based is that the effects of these connections and their consequences and interrelations are understood as the work and doings of actors themselves—that is, their achievement and the outcome of practices. Especially in the challenging environment of the High Atlas, where the conditions are likely to be more difficult for successfully creating connectivity, these achievements appear to be all the more remarkable. They are always a combination of own existing reserves, material and immaterial, and the development of new resources—in the broadest sense, including socio-technical, economic, and symbolic dimensions.

The success and the consequences of many attempts to make connections are however not yet fully foreseeable, and in tendency even contested. The questions concerning the development of the standard of living in the valley, for example, seem to revolve primarily around a kind of class constitution and integration into a neoliberal market

economy, with which success and positive future prospects have been associated. Integration into global markets and the capitalist mode of production has yet to prove to be truly beneficial for the region. The question is: Just because transnational spheres of circulation and globalized supply chains extend into the High Atlas, does this mean that valley is “economically integrated”; and how do people benefit from it? What does it actually mean locally for the future prospects of the people and the desire to belong to a global middle class described in the literature? On an individual level, being able to make connections usually also means engaging in practices of increased mobility, for example in (labor) migration.

As a further form of connectivity, the relationship between the valley to the state is also controversial. It has become evident that Amezray SMNID has established an intermediary position for itself, between the state and local people, with which it has become a civil-society institution—and perhaps as much as produced this particular form of civil society for the High Atlas in the first place. At the same time, this position tends to bring the local association into conflict with the long-standing forms of organization, which tend to be more kinship-based. In part, these forms of organization are integrated into existing working methods of the association, or they at least orient them. Amezray SMNID must carefully delineate its areas of responsibility. The future will show whether these organizational forms will be updated or superseded. In this context, however, it becomes clear that making connections can always be accompanied by recalibrating or even unmaking connections that existed before these new connections were made. Making connections also means preserving existing connections from the past. For example, historically developed values and organizing principles are not necessarily lost. On the contrary, there is a tendency toward continuity, for example in the role of the *taqbilt* or the relationship of the people in the High Atlas to the state.

Finally, I would like to return to the question of how change in the High Atlas can be understood and described. From the ethnographic descriptions and analytical considerations, a three-part understanding of these processes can be inferred: Transformation as *re-shaping* can

be understood in the sense that actors and dynamics of development are adapted locally and that these simultaneously draw on and change local forms of socialization. Transformation as *re-infrastructuring* refers to how emerging public concerns are made through their embedding, standardization, and institutionalization in particular organizational (re-)arrangements. Finally, transformation as *resourcing* is emphasizing the role that both place and social ties play in the allocation and distribution of resources, and thus in the effective territorialization of cooperative relations across transnational boundaries. To be successful in re-shaping aspects of everyday life in the High Atlas, re-infrastructuring a water supply system for a village in the valley, or resourcing new economic opportunities by extending existing collaborative ties: actors in the local context, whether they are the president of an NGO or a tour guide, are interested in increasing their scope and influence beyond the seemingly limited valley; ultimately to cope with conditions of uncertainty and volatility that life in the Moroccan High Atlas entails.

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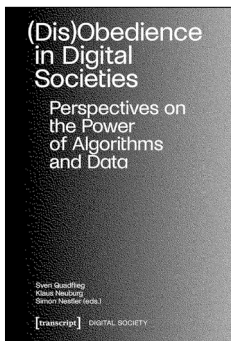
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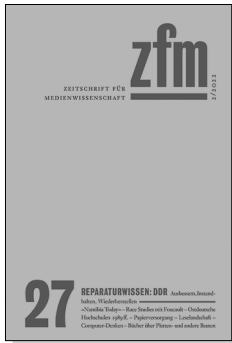
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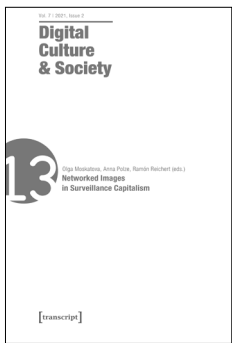
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