

Concluding Remarks: Creating Connectivity

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.