Chapter 4
Saints & Segments

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 21st 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.[1] 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 (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.[2] 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 re-
     search 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 Kabylian 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.[3] 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 14th century. Because of this the whole lineage of the *Ihansalen*[4] 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 *Shurfa*, 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) descendance. 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 occurance, 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 14th 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).[5] 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 under-
lined his point of view:

> [...] what turns a society into a segmentary one is not simply the appli-
> cation 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 under-
stood as a "a formal model of logical relations which does not claim to
describe social reality" (Kraus 1998: 16).[6]

  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 con-
texts" (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
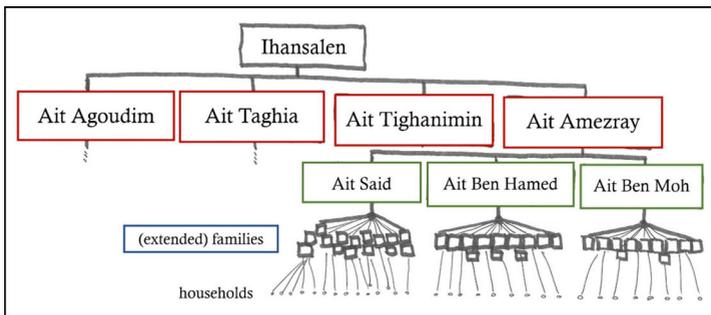
At this point it is appropriate to introduce some terms that are relevant for understanding the social fabric and organization in the region, particular of the High Atlas. First, I should note, there are the organizational and political bodies of the Moroccan state. On a regional level the most important 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.[7] 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 threegroups 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 fith 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.[8]

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

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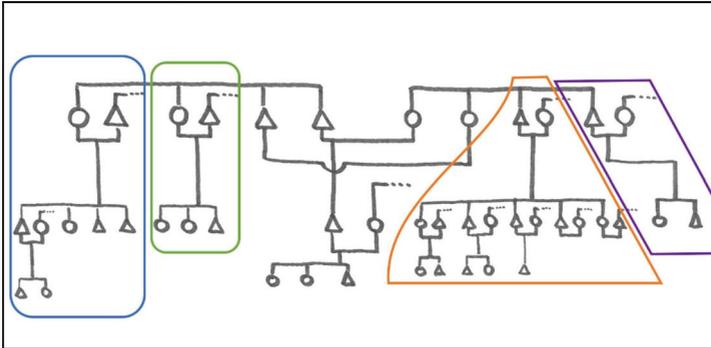
8   Here I hasten to add, that women do not take on their husband's surnames upon marriage, even though they move to the house of the husband's or his family. Thus, although constituting and founding a new and own household they to a degree stay attached to their patrilineal extended family. Still, to 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 where e 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 descendance 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 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."