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Co-operation and/as Participant Observation: Reflections on Ethnographic Fieldwork in Morocco

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Abstract

This contribution carves out the co-operative foundations for ethnographic fieldwork, and participant observation in particular, by reflecting on the so-called 'entry to the field' as well as the establishment of rapport between ethnographer and interlocutors. Drawing on my fieldwork experience in the Moroccan High Atlas, I propose to understand the ethnographer's delicate position as being both apprentice and expert simultaneously. Focusing on this relation enables methodological reflections on the workings of ethnographic research, the necessary co-operation of 'researcher' and 'informants', and the involved media practices. To take this tension seriously makes another insight possible: that the ethnographer, too, is being observed and under constant scrutiny. In this light, successful ethnographic research is possible precisely when successful conditions for mutual exchange and interaction can be situatively created and maintained. It is therefore a process of continuous co-operation that is mediated and necessarily involves media and even produces a range of different media practices.

1. Introduction

This is a methodological reflection on the foundations of doing ethnographic fieldwork. It is not, however, another discussion of 'how to do ethnography properly' or a guideline to realise one's own ethnographic

research. Rather, the aim is to explore ethnographic research regarding the aspect of co-operation[1] between 'researcher' and 'informants' as well as the interconnection of co-operation and participant observation. In order to do this, I am drawing on ethnographic material from my own fieldwork in the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco. I wish to investigate some situations, in which forms of co-operation become tangible in the specific fieldwork context. This paper is also not proposing a contribution towards the question of how to best ethnographically approach 'the media', but tries to proceed the other way round: by describing and reflecting on the situated practices of creating rapport and the mutual creation of what ethnographic research is all about, I also want to draw attention to media and media practices that are both embedded in and co-produced by the ethnographic research process itself.

Ethnography is the primary intention of anthropological knowledge production: the process of arriving at a description of social practices. In order to achieve this, researchers immerse themselves in a society, community or context, produce descriptive data, and render the collected data intelligible for readers or fellow academics. 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, but also discourses, and standards of valuation (cf. 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 the 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 a necessary distance.

Status and feasibility of observation and participation, as well as their temporal and spatial limitations, have been a topic of ongoing discussions, particularly since the development of digital media technologies and global circulation spheres. A possible divide between a somewhat 'classical ethnography' and a '(digital) media ethnography' is misleading, insofar as it suggests several clear-cut methodological implications, and even differences. In my opinion, this fails to recognise the necessary open and dynamic character of ethnographic research in general and its methodological pluralism-opportunism, which is oriented both towards the relevancies of the research context and the relation of people vis-à-vis the ethnographer. I am inclined rather to follow scholars who suggest not making (digital) media the exclusive focus, but perceiving them as part of people's everyday life and worlds (Pink et al. 2016) to achieve "holistic contextualizations" (Miller 2017). The emphasis of the ethnographic approach resonates with a now pioneering work in the field of anthropology of media, which postulates: it is ethnography that 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 et al. 2002: 2). Practices of engagement may shift, for instance when engaging in participant observation of digitally mediated communities, and the notion of 'presence' has to be brought into question. But if content analysis, usage surveys or 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 in terms of how they are brought to bear and as something intermediary and mediating; which is why they have to be ethnographically traced *in situ* (Bender/Zillinger 2015). It is in situated practices and engagements that

media are realised and being actualised. In order to arrive at an ethnographic description of media(ted) practices and analysis that takes the complex realities of local everyday life seriously, it is important to 'follow the mediators'. Therefore it is preferable to adopt an open concept of media as a basis, not thinking of media as a fixed object, but as an interlinkage and mediating potentiality (or *agency*) that enables connections and builds relations – also and 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 naturalised) agencies involved, a cyclical consideration of the co-production of social, technical and personal variables is at stake that make up media and from which corresponding classifications are created" (Schüttpelz 2013: 58, author's translation).[2]

The 'access' to 'the ethnographic field' should be understood as the design or creation of social contexts that make the ethnographic research possible in the first place. Thus, an ethnographer is not just 'entering' ethnographic fieldwork, but continuously and co-operatively producing and establishing the ethnographic research conditions in a mutual manner. 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, author's translation). According to Charles Goodwin, co-operation 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), which puts co-operation at the very foundation of sociality. Consequently, mutuality and commonality play a central role: 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 to each other. This is especially true for the ethnographic research process.

Below, I wish to investigate the practices and procedures that mediate and bring forth mutuality, as a window into co-operation. These are situations, in which two or more people are put into contact or relation with each other. Thus, I aim to shed light on how mutuality, co-operation, and participant observation are connected and similarly constitutive for the ethnographic research process. To do this, I first approach mutuality with the help of the figures of the *apprentice* and the *expert*. Both face each other in alternating dependence and productive tension, which I make plausible by using ethnographic examples. Then, I argue that the participatory observer and ethnographer is also being observed and that this inversion is an often-overlooked crucial part of establishing rapport. At the same time, observation and its inversion are subject to an apprentice-expert relation. This relation as an expression of mutuality and means to establish co-operation, enables us to consider aspects that lie at the heart of the ethnographic research practice. To closely examine these relations and the situated practices that spawn or actualise them provides us with a possibility to grasp the media and media practices that are brought forward in the process of establishing rapport and forging research relations. Through this conceptual detour, some 'media of cooperation of the field' can be identified and brought into view.

2. The Interrelation of Apprentice and Expert

Ethnography is an artisanal endeavour, which also challenges the researcher's own body and biography in a comprehensive way, as it can only be accelerated or sped up to a certain degree. It takes time and commitment, sometimes even sacrifice. Only through time and shared experiences will it be possible to mutually refer to each other, work out commonalities, build relationships and eventually produce ethnographic insights. As ethnography focuses on human action and inter-

action and puts it at the basis of knowledge production, it is in itself a proponent of practice theory (cf. Ortner 1984). This is by no means a process of coincidence. Understanding human practices through ethnographic research means to continuously work on that understanding and negotiate it. In order to understand human practices, ethnographers have to enter into practice themselves – with a mindset that is open, aware, and receptive for mutuality and commonality. It is the ethnographers' to forge cooperation. To examine mutuality, which lies at the heart of ethnography and the establishing of rapport in particular, it is useful to translate it into an apprentice- expert relation. At first glance, it seems obvious that in the course of establishing rapport ethnographers assume the role of an apprentice, as someone who wants to learn language, customs, practices – immersing themselves into 'another culture'. It is therefore the 'informants' and people who basically co-produce ethnographic knowledge together with the researcher that take on the role as experts. However, these roles are neither fixed nor pre-ascribed, but situatively brought to the fore.

Jean Lave dedicated a whole book to the relation between apprenticeship and ethnographic practice. She conceptualises researching *as* learning and as both empirical and theoretical. She goes as far as saying that "we are all apprentices, engaged in learning to do what we are already doing" (Lave 2011: 156). If apprenticeship refers to the processual and relational character of social interaction, it is exactly what mutuality is all about. What Lave does not consider explicitly in her work, but what is equally part of a relational process of apprenticeship, is the role of the expert, the one who teaches, shows or explains to the apprentice how and what to learn. It is therefore this interrelation between the apprentice and the expert that I want to emphasise here. In considering specific research situations along the lines of particular apprentice-expert relationships, one gets a glimpse of the ways in which mutuality is being shaped – as well as how and by which media and media practices it is mediated.

Below, I will illustrate some ethnographic examples of how apprentice-expert interactions might unfold and how they contribute to the research process, in my case in the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco. I will reflect on my own positionality during the early stage of my extended fieldwork, where I inhabited both roles in different situations, often simultaneously.

“Imiq s-imiq ald tisind” – Little by little you’re going to learn it!

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 information about oneself and about one’s personal views. This was not an option, not at the very beginning at least. So obviously everyone became my teacher. 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. These were all ways of how I was able to become a part of everyday life, although still lacking essential language skills.

Simultaneously, most conversations revolved around language itself. 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. When I tagged along with some of the family members' daily routines, such as watering barley fields or herding sheep, I realised that it had become our primary mode of conversation. They would point at something and give me the corresponding vocabulary. In doing so, I learned numerous names for animals, tools, plants and other related subjects, like the weather for instance. I was always carrying a little notebook and pencil to write down new words or pieces of information. Sometimes taking notes was quite difficult as I was told new words faster than I could write them down. Additionally, I learned names for plants or tools that I was not even quite sure how to translate into English or German in the first place. There are only so many trees or tools whose names I can memorise – even in German.

In the café, conversations would proceed similarly. On one occasion, I was sitting there drinking tea by myself, when a man approached and joined me. I had met him briefly before, but so far we had only exchanged typical greeting phrases. Now he obviously wanted to make conversation. We talked for two hours without really talking about ourselves or about anything related to common interests or preferences. I learned new words, taken from our immediate surroundings or everyday life, and some phrases. Despite not exchanging any personal information – that is fundamental in the usual kind of small talk I was socialised with in a German and English speaking context – we were able to create a connection. I was baffled by the fact that, after these two hours, I really had the feeling that I had got to know this man to a certain degree, although I reminded myself that I had not explicitly learned anything personal about him. For him, it was obviously also not an annoying situation he had just endured for two hours. I showed sincere

appreciation in that I kept asking questions and at the same time noted down his answers. In short, I was learning from him and I made him an expert of his language and culture the same way he made me an apprentice in this context.[3] We were able to spend time together and create a common experience, without navigating through conversation topics. Our engagement fulfilled a social and relational purpose and in that reminded me of the interaction that Bronislaw Malinowski once coined 'phatic communion' (cf. Malinowski 1923).

The language issue is quite obvious. However, in the following months, I also found myself in other contexts and situations where I adopted the role of an apprentice. Reflecting on it now, it seems to have been a kind of automatism. The state of being an apprentice was the mode of engaging my ethnographic research, especially because I tried to avoid thinking along pre-fixed theoretical ideas or conceptual structures. Instead, I wanted to be led by the practices and relevancies of the people with whom I did my fieldwork. This necessarily meant considering everything as important and noteworthy.

I learned how to bake bread, prepare tea and cook *tajine*. I learned what it is like to follow the fasting rules of Ramadan and to work in a field harvesting barley under the midday sun, when there is no water. I helped on construction sites and learned how to build houses, erect walls and maintain irrigation ditches. Most importantly, as an apprentice, I was taught how to sing, dance and even beat the drum. 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 bring their own instruments. The interplay of moving, singing and drumming constitutes a skilful performance

that has to be learned carefully in resonance with the others. *Ahidus* is therefore an excellent example for the interrelation of apprenticeship, mutuality (dancers) and media involved (language, songs, drums, clothing). Altogether, it puts people in a rhythm and enables them to resonate with one another.[4]

Counting as an expert

Reflecting on my fieldwork experience, with all I wanted and needed to learn, it seemed fitting to me to perceive this research *as* an apprenticeship. Still, while being an apprentice may have been the primary mode of ethnographic practice, there were certain occasions and situations that made me simultaneously an expert – sometimes because of my expertise or biography, at other times because of assumptions.

Coming back to the example of language, initially I was first and foremost a language student. At the same time, being fluent in German and English, I was also a resource for others to learn a foreign language, or at least some phrases. Inquiring about Tamazight words often involved a reciprocal moment, in that my interlocutors would ask me their meaning in English or German. With friends that taught me Tamazight phrases, I had a 'deal', agreeing that I would teach them some English in return. The family I stayed with saw and made me an expert of studying. In the evenings after dinner, I would usually sit in the common living room and revise some vocabulary or take notes about the day. From time to time the children were encouraged to take me as role model and also study hard. They, in turn, would regularly show me their language skills, for instance in counting in English or naming the weekdays, or would take their own schoolbooks and join me in studying.

After meeting a younger man several times at the weekly market (*suq*), he asked me if I would teach him German, now that I was 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 inter-

ested. For me, it was clear that I could learn much by becoming his German teacher – or, to put it differently, taking on my role as a language expert. We met once a week for an hour in a communal room used to tutor schoolchildren. I would write down German words or phrases on a piece of paper and give a translation (mostly into *darija*). He would copy what I had written down and add some remarks for proper German pronunciation. Again, rather than sharing personal information, it was working together on and with language that established a relationship.[5] After a week or two, other interested people that had learned about the 'newly offered' German crash course joined in. So, for several weeks, I taught a class for three to four students.

I conducted my ethnographic research within the framework of a wider project, together with socio-informatics scholars and a local Moroccan NGO, that involved setting up a Computer Club and working with information and communication technology (ICT) in an educational setting.[6] As part of the project, we organised workshops sessions that revolved around the hands-on appropriation and usage of media technology. Even when I only wanted to attend these workshop sessions or do participant observation, I often became involved more actively. Because I was attributed a comprehensive understanding of media technology as I was affiliated with the project that also provided the technology, I was approached with questions on the topic or requests to explain the handling of some devices or software – although I was not there as a trained human-computer interaction scholar, but as an anthropologist. Even outside of the workshops, where it was not necessarily obvious for people that I had this affiliation, I was approached for some technological advice. At first, I was attributing this to the fact that I was from Germany – in a somewhat colonial perpetuation of knowledge hierarchies. However, I learned that people approach other people whom they know or assume can help with certain technical matters. The main reason for this is having a higher education and therefore more (assumed) expertise. For instance, when I was sitting in the café

with friends, those with a university degree were from time to time approached by men to help them with their mobile or smart phone. Some of these requests were about changing the working language of an Android application from English or French into Arabic, to help them activate their sim card or set up their new smartphone. I also was on people's radar for similar questions.

Furthermore, I was able to help the project manager of the affiliated NGO to launch a new website as well as film and edit image videos. I would not describe myself as an expert in these areas, but I had done both for personal use before. Additionally, I had the software and the laptop with sufficient computing power to seamlessly edit films. I had known the project manager since my first visit to the High Atlas, but he had always been the expert – an expert of the language, but also of Amazigh culture or regarding project-related organisation. This role reversal was a fruitful addition to our relationship as equals. It made me feel that I could give something back, in a reciprocal and practical way.

To summarise, there are many ways in which a researcher becomes an apprentice or expert in the process of ethnographic fieldwork. Reflecting on ethnography along the lines of apprentice-expert relations helps focus on instances in which mutuality takes shape. These processes are always specific and situated, and never identical. These situations draw on a variety of media and mediation that enable the apprentice-expert relation: language, body, artefacts, technological devices, playing cards, notebooks, music, songs, drums, and videos.

3. Being Observed: The Participant Observation's Other

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 commonality – a specific kind of mutuality, so to speak – should not be neglected, in particular when starting fieldwork. In order to illustrate

my point, I am emphasising participant observation's other, which is *being observed* oneself. Observing and being observed is a manifestation of mutuality and is an essential part of the foundation of both the apprentice-expert relation and ethnographic research in general. As Richard Rottenburg, who is drawing 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 destabilising experience, it becomes immediately clear that one's own understanding of difference, rather than through active observation, takes place mainly through the passive experience of being observed" (Rottenburg 2001: 42, author's translation). After all, I was the 'intruder'. Therefore – and unsurprisingly – one is being observed, precisely because there are things that are not familiar or appear strange and different. This – whether it is the crucial epistemological moment of anthropological fieldwork or not – is followed by a mutual search for commonalities. And it is through this search for commonality that rapport is being established and relationships are formed – as well as eventually co-operation.

I want to give some more examples to explain what I mean: all of the examples mentioned above could also be described as moments of being observed – simultaneously while being an apprentice or expert. Before starting my fieldwork I was expecting to go 'into the field' to learn something about a particular set of practices, way of life and culture. Instead, after my arrival I had the impression that, first of all, and maybe to achieve an understanding, it was me who was being observed – and who was got to know. This is not so say that it has to be one or the other. Quite obviously, it is a simultaneous process in which, I might add, the passive figuration of 'being observed' becomes active, and this seemed to be far more important than what I had been taught in methodology classes at university.

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.* 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.*

Another facilitator that helped to get to know each other was football. Children, teenagers and men were equally enthusiastic about football. By going to the café to watch matches of the favourite teams, FC Barcelona or Real Madrid, and participating in the regular matches on the village's football field, commonality through unifying interests was created and maintained. Communal participation is where being observed becomes significant: through the interplay of being observed and mutuality, common interests and connections can be identified that, in turn, enable the development of relationships and the estab-

lishment of rapport. In this, media play a decisive role – media understood in a very broad sense as vehicles for interaction and mutuality. What is more, the relevant objects of ethnographic research and forms of mediation are ultimately co-produced themselves. The interplay of media and media practices involved and the ones mutually being made constitute together some 'media of co-operation of the field'. Participant observation therefore draws primarily on mutuality as well as media and media practices in a co-operative form.

4. Conclusion

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I relied solely on my notebook and took neither camera nor audio recorder to record first encounters and conversations. It felt strange, since documentation is a crucial component of ethnographic research. To a certain degree, I had to calm and convince myself that there was enough time to 'collect my data' and it was more important to respectfully engage with people and build relationships, before asking too many questions or even taking pictures or recordings. A camera or audio recorder changes a situation and influences conversations. People are sceptical. Thus, I felt relieved and somewhat justified in my approach, when people would ask me "Why don't you take a picture?" Making plausible my reasons for being there and giving others time to get to know me has turned out to be key – and beneficial – for my own observations. Ethnography, after all, is a reciprocal endeavour. By its design, it is more than just 'information extraction'. As ethnographic research "is 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, author's emphasis). Ethnographic research is intrinsically co-operative, 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) stated. It could be added that the mutual co-production of ethnographic facts is an achievement of an – often mediated – process of active co-opera-

tion. As I have argued, the interplay of apprentice and expert is a strong image, which epitomises the relationship of mutuality that may lead to this co-operative outcome. It is (not only, but especially) in situations of learning and showing one another that an inversion and dynamisation of observation occurs, which allows us to find or develop commonalities. These social practices are necessarily drawing on media and mutual media practices, as I have tried to show in some of the above situations. Media and media practices are thereby understood in a very broad sense as 'that which mediates' the ethnographic research co-operation or its objects. In this sense, ethnography is always already media ethnography – at least in crucial parts. This way, through the mutual making of the conditions for establishing rapport and conducting ethnographic fieldwork, co-operation is just another word for participant observation and ethnography in general.

Notes

1 In using *co-operation* instead of *cooperation* I am following Charles Goodwin's argumentation and his direction of thrust, which at the same time should visibly distinguish itself from notions from biological anthropology (see Goodwin 2018: 5–7).

2 "Es geht zwischen den beteiligten sozialen, semiotischen und technischen (und zum Teil naturalisierten) Handlungsinitiativen um eine zyklische Betrachtung der Ko-Produktion von sozialen, technischen und personalen Größen, aus denen Medien bestehen, und aus denen die entsprechenden Klassifizierungen ins Leben gerufen werden" (p. 58).

3 To clarify, I do not wish to sketch an ideal-typical version of an 'ethnographer-informant' relationship. Instead, I want to highlight the specific interaction during which we were 'talking' *without* the kind of information exchange usually required to qualify someone as an 'informant' in the first place. Language and much non-verbal communication opened up the opportunity to interact in a meaningful way, although we were not really able to talk about things. Language was not primarily a means to gain 'information' or 'insights', but an option to build social ties. As such, it functioned as a *medium of co-operation*. Not to be

neglected are the power relations and asymmetries underlying the interaction – i.e. me being a white, German, male academic. Hence, and justifiably, there may have been other and more strategic reasons to hang out with me.

4 This, in turn, resonates very well with Goodwin's definition of co-operation as actions produced "in concert with each other" (Goodwin 2018: 7, see above).

5 This is reminiscent of George Marcus' notion of *complicity* as a concept to investigate into rapport and fieldwork relationships: "What complicity stands for [...] is an affinity, marking equivalence, between fieldworker and informant. This affinity arises from their mutual curiosity and anxiety about their relationship to a 'third' – not so much the abstract contextualizing world system but the specific sites elsewhere that affect their interactions and make them complicit (in relation to the influence of that 'third') in creating the bond that makes their fieldwork relationship effective" (Marcus 1997: 100). I would like to thank Mario Schmidt, who drew my attention to this.

6 The research project B04 "Digital Publics and Social Transformation in the Maghreb" of the Collaborative Research Centre (CRC) 1187 "Media of Co-operation" examines how (new) media technologies and the media practices surrounding them can be understood within the wider transformation processes of a mountainous region in the Moroccan High Atlas and what role they play in creating new options for action or participation, generating consensus and dissent, and thereby forming and mobilising publics.

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