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“Daily Bread and the Normative Ascription of Cultural Value in Ahistorical Morocco”

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Abstract

In his celebrated autobiographical narrative, *For Bread Alone*, Moroccan author Mohamed Choukri utilizes *khubz*, an Arabic term referring generically to bread, as a primary point of reference in describing his youthful experience of impoverishment, political marginalization, and emotive frustration in independent Morocco. Paired with anthropology's universal and localized understandings of staple foods as embodiments of culturally constructed meaning, the populist accessibility and empathetic efficacy of Choukri's literary idiom suggests that *khubz* functions as a powerful symbol of normative Moroccan social values. This composition makes an initial overture towards exploring that possibility, sketching out generalized correlations between *khubz* and interlocking dynamics of the Moroccan identity, as well as the normative processes and relationships that continually and reciprocally produce popular values. This study addresses *khubz* and its symbolic significance relative to broad categories of ethnicity, gender, and religion, incorporating considerations of kinship, wealth and status, and communal obligation in an effort to elucidate these associations in a more profound manner. While a propensity for generalization and a dearth of ethnographic data significantly mitigates the explanatory power this piece, conclusions drawn from available resources construe *khubz* as a fertile site for cultivating a more refined understanding of Moroccan values and identity.

An Introduction to *Khubz* via Literary Idiom

“When I was seven or eight years old I always dreamt about bread. And here I am at sixteen still dreaming about it. Am I going to go on dreaming about bread forever?”¹

So unfolds the umpteenth, fleeting rumination of Moroccan Mohamed Choukri, the staid protagonist and provocative author of *For Bread Alone*. Choukri’s rhetorical inquiry, characterized by an emotive despondency that weighs heavily as lead on portions of his autobiographical account, reflects a perception of and a capitulation before the apparently inevitable continuation of his longstanding plight. In an act of remembrance and an exercise of the imagination, the narrator (both as character and creator) calls attention to this perpetual struggle for survival that defines his existence. His acknowledgment of bread as an incessant magnet for his wandering subconscious adds a significant dimension to the reader’s evolving understanding of this foodstuff and further reveals its central positioning in the life of the author. Its reconstitution as a target of ongoing and forthcoming obsession represents bread’s transformation into something greater than the vital physical sustenance of Choukri and his countrymen: as his body wastes away in the streets of Tangier, beaten and starved, the author’s proposition depicts bread simultaneously as the very *raison d’être* of the Moroccan mind.

In spite of the manifold distortions of meaning and interpretation that litter novelist Paul Bowles’ English translation of the original Fus’ha text, certain thematic elements of the narrative lend credibility to Choukri’s portrayal of his *chef d’oeuvre* as a ‘semi-documentary endeavor about a social group.’² Foremost among these literary motifs is, as one might guess, the real and imagined loaf of bread that sustains the self-reflective character crafted by the author. Choukri continuously employs bread as a primary point of reference in compiling a

¹ Mohammed Choukri, *For Bread Alone*, trans. Paul Bowles (London: Telegram, 2006), 96.

² Nirvana Tanoukhi, "Rewriting Political Commitment for an International Canon: Paul Bowles's "For Bread Alone" as Translation of Mohamed Choukri's "Al-Khubz Al-Hafi", " *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Summer 2003): 132

populist and personal account of the prevailing socioeconomic realities that he witnesses and inhabits on a regular basis. Aiming at a more penetrative analysis of this connection, consideration of the Arabic title of the work suggests that the author is preoccupied with a specific sort of bread: *Al-khubz al-hafi*, or 'barefoot bread.' The title makes reference to a common turn of phrase, *khubz haf*, translated literally as 'bare bread' and idiomatically referring to bread consumed as the sole constituent of a meal.³ He deliberately selects this nuanced conception of bread in order to more clearly portray a particular category of socioeconomic experience, defined physically by survivalism associated with systematic inequality, as well as emotionally by the insoluble frustration that commonly precipitates from the persistence of deprivation through time.

The link between *khubz haf* and the meager subsistence associated with deprivation is not unique to Morocco, but constitutes part of the nation's broader Islamic heritage. The connection traces its origins to the norms of hospitality practiced by the tribes of Hiyaz, a western region of the Arabian Peninsula that includes both Medina and Mecca. During the time of the Prophet, it was customary to welcome guests by presenting a condiment, however meager, beside an offering of bread, 'for to do without was consider to be living at less than subsistence level.'⁴ Thus, one may reasonably deduce that Choukri's selection and deployment of the conception of 'bare bread' is intended to elaborate upon the experience of those (including himself) who suffer in a profound state of poverty, uncertain of procuring nourishment and threatened by starvation at every turn.

Choukri employs *khubz* as his youthful recreation's primary point of narrative reference in an attempt to chronicle, expose, and color his experience of profound impoverishment and

³Tanoukhi, 127.

⁴ David Waines, "Cereals, Bread and Society: An Essay on the Staff of Life in Medieval Iraq," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (1987): 265.

marginalization during the 1950's and 1960's He invokes the normative role of bread as a nutritive staple, reinforcing its position as a lowest common denominator among the diverse constituents of an imagined Moroccan nation. Simultaneously, he exploits the symbolic capacity of bread, predicated on its fundamental importance as the source of corporal continuity, to function as a marker of shared cultural understanding. Choukri's motif subsequently becomes a common reference point for the social class that he attempts to document, the Moroccan social nexus binding together distinct experiences of socioeconomic deprivation.

The apparent efficacy of the Moroccan author's usage of *khubz* as an expressive metaphor is predicated upon and reciprocally supports communal understandings of the foodstuff within a broader cultural context. Its literary capacity to function as a primary point of orientation during Choukri's pensive critique of poverty, cyclical political repression, and the emotional experience of marginalization hint at the emblematic role played by *khubz* in Moroccan society. The remainder of this composition is given over to addressing the enormity and complexity of this seemingly innocuous good as a prominent locus of the nation's identity. The notion that *khubz* harbors a significance transcending its nutritive function is cached in and tenuously teased out of the esoteric realism of Choukri's autobiographical account but frankly explicated by various anthropologists of food. An amalgamated and contextually detached understanding drawn from their work serves as the foundation for conceptualizing of *khubz* as a mutually understood metaphor laden with established cultural values, as Carole M. Counihan's 'total social fact,' as a tangle of cultural concerns about aesthetics, processes of production and distribution, and arrangements of power.⁵

⁵Carole M. Counihan, "Bread as World: Food Habits and Social Relations in Modernizing Sardinia," *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (April 1984): 49.

My own speculative portrayal of *khubz* as a site of intersecting cultural meanings is largely parsed out along the contours and interlocking lines that define the various facets of individual and communal identities, with particular attention paid to ethnicity, gender, and religion; other determinant categories are invoked below those broader headings, including those of kinship, wealth and status, and communal obligation. Furthermore, in the interests of delineating an intellectual foundation for further study, the investigation will take as its principal subject an agrarian Moroccan community of ambiguous size, locale, and heritage. The propensity for generalization will be further compounded by the frequency with which assertions draw upon anthropological work conducted in other regions of the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and North Africa. Finally, having understood the imposing limitations of the present study, some broad conclusions regarding *khubz* and its powerful embodiment of crucial Moroccan cultural values point the way forward for the conduct of a more penetrative, more idiosyncratic ethnographic study in the future.

An Introduction to the Anthropology of Food

Over the course of the last one hundred and thirty years, and particularly during the last half century, Western anthropology has witnessed the consolidation and evolution of an academic subcategory concerned predominantly with the role of cuisine and food systems in defining human societies, cultures, and their development.⁶ Scholars of the latter period, deriving inspiration as apologists and critics of Lévi-Strauss' imposition of a structuralist vision of human interaction, have produced a substantive body of literature positing food as a potent site for the creation and reinforcement of cultural values.⁷ The former have postulated that the sum process of producing, distributing, and consuming food plays a pivotal and universal role

⁶Sidney W. Mintz and Christine M. Du Bois, "The Anthropology of Food and Eating," *The Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 31 (2002): 100.

⁷ibid.

in defining and regulating the relationships that constitute social systems.⁸ The latter category has succeeded in advancing the discipline beyond this general cognizance through narrower, microcosmic permutations of inquiry that focus on the importance of single commodities and substances in unique cultural contexts.⁹ As a composite and dynamic whole, the general and localized renditions of this unfolding discourse have posited an enormously insightful explanation for the significance of food in human communities. It summarily takes form within the following axiom: food functions symbolically as a vital repository of shared cultural understanding, as an essential courier for the transmission of meaningful information among the members of bounded social groups, and, per consequent, as a useful touchstone for anthropologists to invoke in attempting to apprehend the patterned behaviors of social groups.

This collective assertion regarding the primacy of food's representative functions as a cache, as a carrier, and as a marker of communally determined cultural value is predicated on its concurrent and essential biological role. As organisms genetically predisposed to satisfying physical needs in the best interests of survival, humans are obliged to eat.¹⁰ Food is sustenance: on the most rudimentary level, it is what every human is subconsciously compelled to consciously consume by virtue of an inherent need to acquire energy, to sustain vital metabolic activities, to preserve the biological existence of the self.¹¹ The close identification of the consumption of food with the continuity of life is self-evident, but its significance is difficult to overstate. The immediacy, the indisputability, and universality of this association inherently inscribe food with the capacity to function simultaneously as a readily accessible

⁸George Gummerman, "Food and Complex Societies," *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1997): 108

⁹ *ibid*, 103.

¹⁰Robin Fox, "Food and Eating: An Anthropological Perspective," *Social Issues Research Center* (2003): 1

¹¹Jon D. Holtzman, "Food and Memory," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 35 (2006): 362.

hub of cultural understanding and as an eminent regulator of social relationships. The manifestly dualistic nature of food serves as a self-justifying rationale for anthropological investigation, given the discipline's teleological aim to cultivate a holistic understanding of the physical and social phenomena that characterize human existence.¹²

The succinct elucidation of food's universal role as vital sustenance and its corollary representative significance is intended to serve as a legible introduction to conceptualizing of food in terms of symbolism and imagined meaning. However, the importance of cultural idiosyncrasy in the determination and allocation of value demands the withdrawal of the global vision and rhetoric and the specification of commodity and context. Accordingly, the following occupies itself with unpacking the essential figurative elements of bread in Morocco, taking as its principal milieu the generalized agrarian community that has historically functioned as the salient embodiment of the national identity. Urban, pastoralist and semi-nomadic populations, as well as their treatment of bread, are also considered during the investigation, but are primarily used as reference points for exploring common characteristics of agriculturalists. Furthermore, given the subsequent postulation that certain aspects of modernization have disrupted the normative relationships of the past, this rural, settled social group is construed as unaffected by the influx and imposition of American and European patterns of valuation. Finally, while the glaring dearth of scholarly literature on national valuations of bread necessitates the inclusion of explanatory elements drawn from other cultural and a-cultural studies, their integration will be heavily informed by the identification of parallel characteristics in Moroccan society and hypotheses inferred from prevalent understandings of local norms.

¹²Claude Fischler, "Food, Self, and Identity," *Social Science Information*, Vol. 27 (1988): 276.

As previously alluded to in delineating the proximate association between physical and figurative value, the probability that any particular foodstuff might constitute a value-invested cultural motif for a defined group exists as a function of its nutritive importance in the local diet. Moroccan *khubz* appeals to the anthropologist's imagination because of its historical status as the nation's alimentary staple.¹³ Processed cereals, particularly barley and wheat, have been preponderant in supporting the country's subsistence populace since the days of classical antiquity, as indicated by agricultural documentation made after the installation of the Romans in North Africa.¹⁴ Furthermore, while the administrators of the French Protectorate learned through arduous experience that Morocco's legendary reputation as the empire's breadbasket stemmed solely from the exploitation of the country's northern plains, a recent study conducted in the High Atlas indicates that bread retains its dietary prominence in regions far afield from those fertile soils.¹⁵ Finally, bread and oven remnants discovered by archaeological excavations of temporary Sahouri and Tuareg settlements, situated predominantly on the fringes of the barren desert, round out the prior assertion that *khubz* has historically served as the dietary foundation for the entirety of the amorphous Moroccan nation.¹⁶

The term *khubz*, initially derived from the lexicon of the Ethiopian Abyssinians and incorporated into the literary corpus of formal Arabic via its use in the Qu'ran, has been

¹³Delwen Samuel "Bread-making and Social Interaction at the Amarna Workman's Village, Egypt," *World Archaeology*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1999): 125.

¹⁴Naum Jasny, "The Daily Bread of the Ancient Greeks and Romans," *Osiris*, Vol. 9 (1950): 232-233.

¹⁵Ariane Bruneton, Bread in the Region of the Moroccan High Atlas: A Chain of Daily Technical Operations in Order to Provide Daily Nourishment," in *Gastronomy: The Anthropology of Food*, ed. Margaret L. Arnott (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 1976): 275.

¹⁶Diane Lyons and Catherine A. D'Andrea, "Griddles, Ovens, and Agricultural Origins: Bread Baking in Highland Ethiopia," *American Anthropologist, New Series*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (September 2003): 523.

loosely employed in the preceding sections as an analogous term for ‘bread.’¹⁷ This usage coincides with its historical application in North Africa, where it incorporated and replaced colloquial designations of the foodstuff during the expansion of the Umayyad Caliphate.¹⁸ Its evocation of a foodstuff unbound by specific cultural affiliations has been useful in suggesting the universality of bread’s importance within Morocco’s abstruse national borders. However, bread itself is hardly homogenous across cultural groups: it can be differentiated, categorized, and understood according to a wide range of criteria, including its constituent flours, the presence of various additives (such as oils or herbs), the degree to which the dough is fermented, viscosity prior to baking, methods of heating, final shape, its rigidity or pliability after baking, etc.¹⁹ The diversity of properties that distinguish one loaf of *khobz* from another speak volumes about the characteristics of those who produce and consume them; consequently, the utility of employing the term in elucidating local norms of cultural evaluation is contingent upon specificity.²⁰ With this in mind, unless otherwise noted, subsequent references to *khubz* are intended to evoke round loaves of wheat or barley bread, devoid of additives other than salt and allowed to rise prior to baking in an oven.

The deliberate selection of this set of characteristics for identifying a particular foodstuff as

¹⁷ Waines, 270.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Waines, 261.

²⁰ The examples provided by Bruneton and Waines in their respective case studies are illustrative of this point. Aït Mgun, the seminomadic ethnic group that served as the focal point for Bruneton’s investigation of food production in the Moroccan High Atlas, are noted as consuming wheat and barley loaves cut with millet and corn. The latter crops are well suited to growing in the high altitude of the Tessaout Valley, but are sparsely cultivated in the agricultural plots that provide most Moroccans with the ingredients of *khubz* preparation, and are thus largely absent from their diets. Similarly, the transient Sahouri and Tuareg groups residing in the arid provinces of the southeast are known to eschew wheat and barley entirely, relying solely on alternative grains and pulses that don’t require slow and arduous milling. Additionally, both groups have been known to develop and utilize cooking techniques that speak clearly to their experience as nomads. For more information on the Aït Mgun and scattered observations regarding both pastoralist groups, see the cited articles by Bruneton and Waines, respectively.

khubz is meant to provide a lens through which to focus on a specific contingent of the Moroccan nation. Each characteristic realized in a single loaf of *khubz*, including the manners of its production, distribution, and consumption, symbolically correspond elements of this group's cultural makeup, systematically and subconsciously reinforcing enmeshed communal values and norms of social interaction associated with ethnicity, gender, religious belief, kinship, wealth, and communal obligation.²¹ What follows is a cursory survey purporting to identify the associations between *khubz* and those tangled principles and intersecting functions for which it serves as an embodied metaphor.

An Introduction to *Khubz* and Arab Heritage

As the historic dietary staple of this broadly representative segment of the national populace, the conventional loaf of *khubz* just described has acted as a site for the construction and continuous reinforcement of the community's ethnic identity.²² The unique combination of characteristics that define this particular bread acts as a symbolic marker of Moroccan individuality, grouping the producers and consumers of this bread into one ethnic category and differentiating them from nations with divergent dietary habits. More specifically, it is a triumvirate of elements bound within *khubz* that speak to the integration of Arabic cultural dynamics within the communities of native Amazighs: the overwhelming preference for barley and wheat as primary ingredients, the penchant for leavening prior to baking, and the use of an oven to heat the prepared dough.

The development of barley and wheat as prevalent components of the Moroccan diet can be directly attributed to three historical developments transmitted to the nation via Arabic

²¹ Fischler 275.

²² Holtzman, 364.

civilization. From the outset, it is necessary to admit that, according to the previously referenced Roman records, both crops had been cultivated along a fertile strip of land parallel to the Moroccan shore several centuries prior to the influx of Arabic populations. However, this noted reality does little to mitigate the comprehensive importance of this cultural group concerning the incorporation of these cereals in *khubz*. First, archaeological evidence affirms that the cereals themselves, as well as their cultivation, ultimately trace their origins back to the Levant, the nebulous terrestrial region of the Near East that has served, for nearly fifteen hundred years, as a stronghold of Arab-Islamic culture.²³ Second, barley and wheat were invested with exponentially greater significance during the rule of the Islamic Caliphate, which systematically commanded both crops as the imperial currency of taxes and tribute.²⁴ The farmers of the Maghreb responded to the politically expedient and economic interests of the formidable central authority by drastically changing their collective profile of production. Third and finally, this qualitative accommodation of imperial demands was later compounded by the quantitative effects of the Medieval Green Revolution, a process of intensive agricultural development introduced by the Caliphate and characterized by the rapid geographic propagation of novel farming technologies and patterns of land usage.²⁵

If the mutation of the Moroccan preference for particular grains as constituents of *khubz* was induced by pragmatic concerns associated with pressure applied by the Caliphate, the inclusion of leavening in preparation processes and changes in baking technology have come as manners of voluntarily adopting normative Arabic cultural practices. Both phenomena are predicated on the emergence of bread and barley within the local cuisine, as well as the successive waves of migrants emanating from the Arab peninsula and settling amongst native Amazigh communities.

²³ Lyons and D'Andrea, 521. 524-subsequent citation

²⁴ Waines, 271.

²⁵ *ibid*, 273.

Delineating the connection between leavening and the ethnic identification of the Moroccan nation with ancient Arabic society requires a brief digression into discussing the rudiments of plant biology and organic chemistry. Cereals can be taxonomically differentiated from one another according to the presence or absence of gluten, a vegetable protein that functions in bread preparation as a provider of elasticity prior to baking and as a network of structural support after heating.²⁶ Gluten's endowment of this physical property to unbaked dough opens up two distinct possibilities: in a readily apparent sense, pliability creates the opportunity for bakers to shape loaves in conformity with their immediate aesthetic preferences; less perceptibly but of far greater import, as far as present considerations are concerned, is the fact that this 'stretchiness' allows for the expansion of bread vis-à-vis leavening. As microbes, intentionally added to dough or otherwise, engage in the digestion of cereal carbohydrates, they produce carbon dioxide that pushes on the interstices and strands of the existing gluten network, which expands and accommodates the formation of air pockets. The solidification of the distorted grid of proteins via thorough and sufficient heating preserves these air pockets and gives leavened breads their characteristic texture. While this biochemical phenomenon is not constrained to occurrence within particular ethnic communities; however, the choice to implement certain technologies in harnessing the potential for aerobic fermentation certainly is. Maximal exploitation of of gluten's expansive potential in moist, leavened dough is best realized in an oven, loosely defined here as a closed compartment that cooks foods via the application of dry, radiant heat.²⁷ This indirect warming method makes it possible to sustain baking over long periods of time, which in turn permits the fabrication of thicker, airier loaves.²⁸

²⁶ Lyons and D'Andrea, 523.

²⁷ Samuel, 129.

²⁸ Lyons and D'Andrea, 524.

A rudimentary understanding of gluten's essential role in fostering bread leavening and the consequent employment of ovens in exploiting this function is the key to parsing out the relationship between the grains adopted by Moroccans and their relationship to Near Eastern civilization. Cereals containing gluten, including those under present scrutiny, wheat and barley, are not known to be indigenous to any part of Africa. This carries an evident ramification concerning the technologies developed and employed in the production of bread—namely, there is little evidence to suggest that ovens have ever been preferentially employed by the indigenous populations of the continent. However, ethnographers *have* reported the widespread distribution of preserved oven remnants across the whole of North Africa, emphasizing the prevalence of a model known as the *tannur*.²⁹ Thus, one may infer that this archetypal baking apparatus, identified as a technological innovation born in Mesopotamia and refined in the Levant, is a technology imported to Morocco during the rule of the Islamic caliphs.

The profundity and breadth of the epochal transformation that gripped North Africa during the Islamic Caliphate portended a radical material transformation of Morocco's local nutritive staple.³⁰ According to the prevailing theoretical framework propagated by food anthropologists, cuisine functions in consolidated communities as a conservative cultural element, with its serial reproduction perpetuating continuously an ethnic group's conception of self.³¹ Regularity and repetition of food processes render their constituents and products as elements of certainty amid an environment of persistent uncertainty; in the shared

^{29A} *ibid*, 521.

^{29B} The *tannur* typically consists of a clay cylinder or cone, with apertures cut into the top and the base: the former is used for inserting loaves, which are pressed onto pre-heated walls; the latter is reserved for the addition of fuel and the removal of ash. In a variation available to those with access to trade, a metal grill was inserted and fixed to create a partition between two chambers, in order to prevent loaves from falling into the charcoal or wood fire below. For more information, see H el ene Belfet's overview of bread in the Mediterranean.

³⁰ Holtzman 364.

³¹ Lyons and D'Andrea, 517.

imagination of the ethnically bounded community, the supposedly cemented nature of sustenance makes it an essential component of ordering a coherent and stable grid of reference through which to understand the universe.³² Consequently, this progressive reconstitution of Moroccan breads as generic *khubz*, instigated by the adoption of novel ingredients, the divergence from traditional sequences of preparation, and the embrace of foreign technologies, is construed by anthropologists as altering the age-old significance of bread. Pressed by the caliphate's irresistible demands and the populous influence of migrants, the material institutionalization of *khubz* reshaped the cultural significance of bread and turned it into a mutually understood marker of Morocco's novel identification with Arab civilization.

A Short Introduction to *Khubz* and the Gendered Division of Labor

Even as this novel iteration of primary sustenance bound together and systematically differentiated a heterogeneous Moroccan society from its continental fellows, *khubz* established itself as an effective mechanism for pragmatically sustaining and conceptually representing its valuation of certain roles and norms of social behavior. The association between normative conduct pertaining to *khubz* and the reinforcement of esteemed social principles is most legible in considering gender, a category of identity and consequent anthropological analysis frequently demarcated by conceptual dualism. The agrarianism that defines the social structure of many Moroccan communities is supported by and continuously promotes a binary gendered ideology, taking as its integral rationale principally divergent and polarized views of men and women. This preeminent communal outlook on sex is translated and inscribed within two archetypal and historically static social roles, which are saturated by

³² Fischler, 278-280.

behavioral obligations and rights in concentric spheres of household, kinship, and community.

The manner in which *khubz* embodies rural Moroccan society's apprehension, evaluation, and construction of gender is most readily manifested by the organization of labor that characterizes local systems of production. The chain of successive and requisite operations that ultimately yields vital nourishment is carried out in two separate physical spaces, in two distinct temporal phases, in accordance with two respective (but mutually informative) valuations of man and woman. The first sequence, consisting generally in the procurement of cereals from the earth, is the prerogative of the former: they typically take responsibility for ploughing the fields, sowing the seeds saved from previous agricultural cycles, and the harvest of grains.³³ In Moroccan communities principally concerned with subsistence, these activities are politicized via the contestation and negotiation of land distribution and usage; subsequently, they function as further representations of male authority within the domain of community politics.³⁴ Male landholders and sharecroppers alike devote this combination of labor and political leverage to establishing and maintaining control over cereal production, in order to provide their respective households with sufficient alimentary resources.

In the patriarchal arrangement implied by this masculine monopolization of political rights in the field, the latter sequence of *khubz* production occurs in the other half of this roughly sketched binary system, falling into the category of domestic obligations dictated to women through the exercise of masculine power. Mothers, wives, and daughters are obligated to preoccupy themselves with the transformation of those raw resources into a comestible good, which successively entails the storage of grains, milling via techniques of various efficacy,

³³ Lyons and D'Andrea, 517.

³⁴ Gummerman, 105-106.

and the baking of *khubz* itself.³⁵ The loaves ultimately produced by these successive and arduous processes are primarily intended to nourish the members of the nuclear family, although obligations of kinship and hospitality (to be taken up shortly) often impose secondary considerations when it comes to consumption.³⁶ In any case, given the previously elucidated correlation between food and life, the symbolic significance attributed to this sum permutation of female labor reveals itself under the pressure of a relatively cursory analysis. Within the subsistent society hitherto discussed, the obligatory engagement of women in the production of *khubz* for a household's benefit can be taken as representative of their reproduction of life itself.³⁷

The systematic division of labor employed in facilitating the provision of *khubz* is probably predicated, in part, on the teachings of numerous accounts of Qu'ranic exegesis, which postulate the existence of an innate and divinely willed complementarity between the sexes that facilitates the continuation and perfection of life.³⁸ However, the dichotomous structuring of *khubz* production in agrarian communities transcends this Islamic evaluation of gender: in a broader sense, the patriarchal arrangement exists as a reflection and a means of reinforcing normative allocations of power on the basis of gender. The prevailing conceptualization of this phenomenon reflects the stark division of labor in its own dichotomous terms, construing the exercise of gendered roles in terms of action in discrete physical spaces: men are presented as acting predominantly in the public and political domain, in view of the social body at large; women are understood, in kind, as functioning exclusively within a private, domestic sphere of little interest to the community. According to the discursive reading of this arrangement, decisions taken by the active parties of the former category function as determinants of choice in the latter group, thus eviscerating the possibility of choice on the

³⁵ Bruneton, 285.

³⁶ Waines, 269.

³⁷ Samuel 125.

³⁸ Counihan, 52.

part of women.

When applied as an interpretive framework in the present discussion, this understanding of patriarchal distribution of influence and authority might lead one to the resolution that women are precluded from exercising any significant agency in their successive roles as stockers, as millers, and as bakers; the production of *khubz* on a household-by-household basis would thus become an imposition and perfunctory realization of a collective masculine will.

However, critical scholars have suggested that this normative apprehension of gender and power in patriarchal societies is deeply flawed, that this mode of presentation obfuscates the nuances imported by contextual specificity and, consequently, inhibits the explanation of cultural minutiae that anthropology takes as its aim. This collective objection to a normative treatment of gender, power, and space has certainly problematized the matter, opening up breathing room for the suggestion that household food preparation is simultaneously a function of male political repression and an expression of female political agency.³⁹ With regard to Moroccan *khubz*, there is evidence to suggest that women are able to leverage their roles as producers in achieving political objectives. The frequency of collective grain processing and *khubz* baking, predicated on the difficulty of milling and the scarcity of requisite resources, allows women to formulate and sustain networks of reciprocal exchange wherein men have no purview.⁴⁰ Exchanges of pertinent information and the necessity of interdependence allow certain women to secure widespread support that, in turn, allows them to exercise power as mothers and wives in the influence of sons and husbands.⁴¹ When paired with its normatively perceived status as the compulsory female response to entrenched expectations of patriarchy, this contextualization of *khubz* production reiterates the foodstuff itself as concurrently representing feminine conformity with and rebellion against a male

³⁹ Gummerman, 119.

⁴⁰ Bruneton, 279.

⁴¹ Macphee, 386.

monopoly on power.

A cursory Introduction to *Khubbz* and Islamic Faith

The remarkable and unwavering influence that food exerts in guiding the daily behaviors of individuals and collectives in subsistence economies instills nutritional staples with the potential to serve as an instrumental vehicle in the performance of ritual.⁴² Comestibles perceived as preeminently valuable social goods become focal points of ceremonial deeds, functioning most discernibly as sacrificial offerings to the heavens. Whether presented by priestly figures on behalf of the community or extended in a private context for the benefit of an individual or household, proffered foodstuffs are frequently construed by anthropologists as mediums for communicating nourishment to the gods in exchange for divine favor. While ritualistic activity, and outright sacrifice in particular, are conspicuously lacking in the practical exercise of Islamic belief, the physical centrality and representative capacity of *khubbz*, coupled with the supremacy of spiritual concerns in Moroccan communities, intimate that associations might have developed between these two poles of existence. More specifically, one might expect to find certain Islamic values inscribed within and embodied by baked bread, given the importance of this representational association in the two other Abrahamic systems of faith.

The indisputable centrality of the Qu'ran in the determination of Islamic norms requires that this study of *khubbz* and its religious associations take the transcription of divine revelation as its initial point of inquiry. However, the Prophetic text provides no definitive insight regarding the matter, due in no small part to the near absence of *khubbz* within the account itself. As previously articulated, this imported word is mentioned but once in the entirety of

⁴² Fox, 18.

the book, which complicates the identification of patterns and subsequent drawing of inference. The difficulty of the matter is further compounded by the context of its employment: its sole mention arrives in a narrative devoted to Joseph and his activities in Egypt, which is itself borrowed from a foreign religious tradition. Within the Qu'ranic account of this story, which lightly amends certain elements of the Old Testament original, the imprisoned son of Jacob is asked to interpret the dreams of a fellow prisoner, who tells of birds pecking at a basket of *khubz* that he bears on his head. Joseph responds in a frank and comprehensible manner, informing his confidant that the dream foretells his execution in the coming days by the command of the royal authority. However, the prisoner guards his premonition and disappears from the narrative promptly thereafter, taking with him the reader's hope of apprehending a greater truth. Presumably, he is sentenced to death in the temporally continuous unfolding of events that characterizes the surah, but that assumption leaves the would-be exegetist scratching the head at an insurmountable interpretative roadblock.

The dearth of Qu'ranic references to *khubz* is certainly beguiling, and renders the book impotent as a means for investing Islamic principles within the burgeoning metaphor. This deficiency becomes a special point of speculative interest, however, when contrasted with the abundance of manners in which *khubz* is employed in al-Bukhari's compilation of *hadith*. The usage of *khubz* is frequent, manifold, and effective therein: by my count, it occurs in eighteen distinct reports of the deeds and dicta of the Prophet Mohamed, with many of the recollections offered on multiple occasions to substantiate claims to their veracity. These chronicles of word and action can be divided into three distinct categories, with each grouping correspondent with a particular teaching intended to guide the Muslim faithful in apprehension and obedience of Allah. The first permutation is allegorical, wherein *khubz* functions as a metaphor for the blessings that believers receive in Paradise. The second

variation is intended to provide a standard of behavior for treating the guests of a household, which seems to prevail within Moroccan norms of hospitality. Third and finally, *khubzis* repeatedly invoked in the *hadith* as the currency of almsgiving during the life of the Prophet and, as a consequent, can be seen as embodying Islamic principles of social justice and egalitarianism.

The potential of *khubz* to serve as a powerful idiom of Islamic precepts of conduct is initially suggested by its employment as a pedagogical device in teachings on virtue and heavenly reward. Initially, the Prophet himself uses *khubz* as an allegorical device in attempting to foster understanding of an incomprehensible phenomenon, the day of Resurrection: in one iteration, he proclaims that the earth will be a bread upon that day, a loaf kneaded by Allah that provides ‘entertainment’ for the people of Paradise; in a subsequent *hadith*, Mohamed is quoted as teaching that the people will be gathered ‘on a reddish white land...like a pure loaf of bread made of pure fine flour.’ Furthermore, biographical accounts related by the Prophet’s foremost disciples strengthen this figurative association between *khubz* and the heavenly reward reserved for the virtuous: multiple informants assert that Mohamed himself never ate a ‘thin, nicely baked wheat bread until he died;’ others still declare that he and his family, following the migration from Medina, did not eat their fill of wheat bread for three successive days until, again, his final passing. The implication, of course, is that Mohammed *did* receive that perfect loaf after his death, upon his ascension into heaven. Taken in tandem with the prophetic vision of the final Judgment and the ensuing opening of Paradise, these accounts exploit the popular perception of *khubz* as a supreme earthly good in describing the ultimate spiritual reward to be allotted to the virtuous in Paradise.

While the *hadith* cited are intended to render a human cognizance of an unfathomable

metaphysical reality, subsequent references to *khubz* in *Sahih al-Bukhari* function as palatable teachings on the earthly realization of virtuous conduct. In the lesser of the two sets, *khubz* appears in numerous accounts as a good to be shared between the members of an infantile Islamic community. *Khubz* is continually presented in narrative accounts as a primary component of *tharid*, a meat-based stew that constitutes the perfect meal. It is served in a variety of contexts, particularly during wedding banquets, to well-regarded guests as a gesture of hospitality, as a benevolent offering intended to reinforce ties of kinship and community. In a manner that echoes the traditions of early Jewish and Christian communities, table fellowship among the first disciples of the Prophet is representative of union, of collectivity and coherence, of a setting apart of the communal self from the ‘other’ nebulously composed of non-believers.⁴³ Commensality of this kind, taking *khubz* as its focal point, marked out membership in the fledgling Muslim community, reinforcing integral social relationships in the face of pressures imposed from beyond communal boundaries.⁴⁴ In this scenario, *khubz* takes on a figurative function as the primary sustenance of the delicate community of believers, a marker of commonality, a porter of mutual concern that encourages consolidation and interdependence.

The behavioral norms recommended by this category of *hadith* manifest the pragmatic rationale of the Prophet, who needed to take as a primary concern the initial coalescence and survival of the Muslim community. The normalization of generosity and reciprocal exchange that ensured the community’s continued existence provides the foundation espousing a higher teleological aim, succinctly manifest within a second class of *hadith* that take *khubz* as a point of thematic similarity. In another collection of stories purported to document the *sunna*, the benevolent offering of *khubz* is reconstituted as the giving of alms, an essential act that

⁴³ Friedenreich, 521.

⁴⁴ Fischler 275.

comprises one of the five pillars of Islam. The example set by the Prophet in giving bread to the hungry, in spite of his own poverty, exhorts Muslims to support the destitute, the orphaned, and the wayward-in short, to those who have no means of reciprocating an expression of generosity. This compulsory expression of generosity is understood to serve as a mechanism of redistributing social goods from those who have to those who have not: it is effectively an early example of morally motivated welfarism, recommended by the leader of the religious community as a means for achieving the just human equality intended in the moment of creation. The giving of *khubz* becomes the provisioning of life to those faced with death, in order that they might continue and continue to carry out the divine will.

This humanistic concern with communal well-being and its association with spiritual virtue are amply substantiated in the folklore concerning Sidi al-Ghazwani, a Moroccan Muslim living in Boujad during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. According to the cult of belief traditionally propagated by the residents of the city, al-Ghazwani is the foremost of the *marabouts*, an ambiguous group of wise and holy men venerated by local Muslims and believed to possess knowledge and supernatural grace (*baraka*) that could be exercised on behalf of the community. In a myth that typifies this locally acculturated rendition of Islam, the saint, solitary and travelling, is approached by a stranger and asked to provide nourishment to a group of poor, hungry people. As befits and bolsters his holy status, the *marabout* obliges the stranger's humble request, calling forth *khubz*, butter, and honey from the earth and offering them to the wanderers, who eat their fill. Illuminated by a prior understanding of those *hadith* that tell of the Prophet and the giving of *khubz* as alms, the tale of al-Ghazwani and his exercise of *baraka* for the good of the needy is immediately discernible as representing the pattern of social behavior that is appropriate for devout Muslims. Nearly a millennium later, and far removed from the region of Hiyza that Islam takes as its place of birth, *khubz* continued to function as a figurative locus for religious

principles regarding with divine benediction, the primacy of social distribution, and the spiritual virtue of generosity.

This suggestion that *khubz* plays a dynamic role as a representation of intersecting Islamic values in Moroccan society takes into brief consideration a sampling of quotes attributed to various Moroccan communities, predominantly those of Amazigh ancestry, as part and parcel of distinctive agricultural rituals. Prior to engaging in seasonally cyclical agrarian processes, such as ploughing, seed sowing, and harvesting, farmers belonging to these groups call on Allah to bestow *baraka*, divine benediction, upon their cereal crops. Their invocations of blessing are associated with good health, long life, security, peace, and general communal fortune, portending a belief that the grains themselves serve collectively as the conduit for the transmission of divine favor. This supposition is an extrapolation of that postulated by Edward Westermarck, the pioneering sociologist responsible for obtaining the quotes in question, who proposed that crops serve equally as mediums for communicating blessings from the communities to future harvests.

A Conclusion for an Introduction to *Khubz* and Moroccan Identity

From the outset, a fear of gathering information in any haphazard, partial, or evidently insufficient manner drove me to eschew the conduct of field research that typifies ethnographic field studies and forms the basis of anthropological discourse. In addition to its preponderant dependence on a generalized characterization of Moroccan society, the paper relies heavily on studies on bread conducted in divergent contexts, such as those conducted in Sardinia, Iraq, and Ethiopia. That said, I would stipulate my work was conducted with an eye towards its extension through the longer term, having received grant funding to remain in Morocco during the coming summer. Disparate strands of academic theory were weaved together into something resembling a coherent framework of understanding and analysis for

later use; thus, the conclusions proposed should be taken as tentative, as temporary, as stepping stones for the progress of further research. These suppositions are threefold: first, *khubz* functions as a clear and recognizable marker of Morocco's Arabic heritage, given that the round, leavened, oven-baked loaf owes both its constituent ingredients and preparation method to the horticultural and technological possibilities and preferences of the Ancient Levant. Second, *khubz* can be taken as a primary site of a patriarchal society wherein normative processes of production simultaneously repress women and allow for the exercise of feminine resistance, given an entrenched division of labor that excludes women from decision-making in the public space but allows for vital, intra-household exchanges of information that may be employed in influencing male politics. Third and finally, *khubz* presents itself as a popular idiom for the charitable giving that underpins networks of kinship and the realization of social justice in an Islamic context, consolidating communal networks of reciprocal exchange and promoting welfare and equality in the name of submission before Allah. Taken as a sum, these three observations further corroborate the notion initially derived from a critical reading of Choukri's *For Bread Alone*, that *khubz* exists as a communally-understood and indisputably significant symbol of Morocco's national identity.

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