

# The Moroccan Public Oven Project



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### Abstract

#### **Research Question:**

What is the relationship of the Moroccan public oven, as an institution, to its customers and surrounding community? How does the Moroccan public oven function socially within its neighborhood?

#### **Methodology:**

The Public Oven Project is based on 3.5 months of fieldwork conducted in the medina of Rabat, Morocco, from Sept.—Dec. 2005. The project's research is organized as a supplemented case study of a single public oven in Rabat. It consists of in depth ethnographic examination of a public oven and its surrounding community, and a survey of the medina's other public ovens to contextualize the case study's data.

#### **Conclusions:**

Two predominate characterizations of the public oven emerged from this study. The first is that the public oven is used as a pseudo-domestic space by the men of its neighborhood, fulfilling and paralleling many of the roles and uses of the home. Secondly, the baker is given the role of an honorary family member to his customers' families, a role with a complicated set of rights and responsibilities. This project concludes that each of these characterizations is a demonstration of a single phenomenon: that the public oven, as a "community institution" (Radione 2004: 459) which fulfils a domestic task, is a literal and physical extension of its neighborhood's domestic sphere. As a result, this project proposes a new model for conceptualizing Moroccan domestic space and the structure of Moroccan neighborhoods. Rather than consisting solely of private space, this project proposes that the Moroccan home is subdivided into geographically separate private and public spheres. The survey demonstrated that the case study's data is consistent with major trends; however, these trends also have large exceptions. I suggest that these exceptions are the result of modernization and the increasing presence of gas and electric ovens in urban Moroccan homes.



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*Many people made this project possible. First of all, I want to thank the baker for his earth-shattering kindness, generosity, and assistance in this project. I also would like to thank my parents, Alice and Kevin Steiner, Professor Douglas Anderson of Brown University, the Al-Idrissi family, and Dana Deason without all whom this project would not have been possible.*







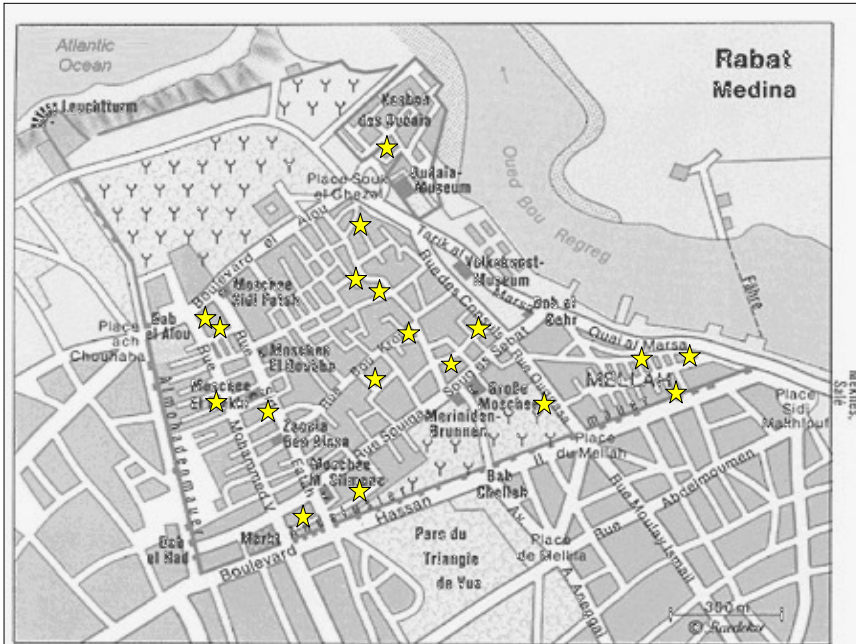
# Introduction

This project is about public ovens. But more than that, it is about people. People who strive to find meaning in their lives, who struggle to provide the best for their families, and who have crazy unachievable dreams. People who fear God, who kiss babies and get lonely, and who work to find out who they are and why they are alive. It is about people whose lives are spiraling dialogues of unanswered questions, complicated problems, and elaborate interactions with the social demands of the culture of which they are a part. But above all, this project is about people who are my friends. It is easy to forget, when we start looking at their lives in terms of patterns, systems and theories, that we are fundamentally studying real people, whose existence is just as conditioned by the surrounding environment of culture and society as our own. I am immensely honored to have become a part of the lives and families of these individuals, and to have come to understand the public oven for the beautiful system that it is.

A public oven, as it is discussed in this project, is a place where a neighborhood's families can take bread and other items which they have prepared at home to be baked for a small fee. The public oven is operated by a baker who heats the oven, takes items in and out, and watches to ensure that nothing burns. Customers usually drop off their bread and other items at the public oven and pick them up baked several hours later. Due to the presence of a public oven in Moroccan urban communities, many people are able to live without an oven in their home. Historically, public ovens have been present in Morocco since the Roman Empire (Rhufain n. d: 2), and are an institution which is deeply socially ingrained in urban Moroccan life.

Today, Moroccan public ovens are primarily located in the medinas, or ancient quarters, of cities. Since medinas are pre-colonial, they are usually pedestrian only as their ancient streets are often far too narrow for cars.

This project is a study of the public ovens in the medina of Rabat: Morocco's current capital. Rabat is a city with a rich history. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Rabat served as a fortified garrison of the Almohad Empire, but it wasn't until the 13<sup>th</sup> century that Rabat was built into a full fledged city by the Almohad caliph Abu Yusuf Ya'qub al-Mansur, who briefly made the town his capital (Navez-Bouchanine 2003: 2). Located on Morocco's Atlantic coast, Rabat's medina is divided into two sections: the main medina and Kasbah Oudaias. The main medina houses most of the district's activity and inhabitants, while Kasbah Oudaias is a smaller fortified area popular with tourists between the main medina and the Bou Regreg River. The medina of Rabat, although deteriorating in parts, is comparatively well preserved (2003: 7), and many of the medina's streets are paved giving it a former but dignified feel. Currently, the medina is



**Figure 1: Locations of the public ovens in Rabat’s medina (Rabat Medina Map 2006).**

home to primarily lower-middle class Moroccan families. After the construction of new developments outside medinas, many wealthier Moroccans migrated out of the medina to the newer neighborhoods (2003:11). Although it has been argued that the medina is a place in which primarily “underprivileged populations...live and work,” (2003: 11) in my experience, while the medina of Rabat is not wealthy, it is a significantly more expensive place to live

than many of the surrounding suburbs and therefore imports much of its labor. The medina is a place where an antiqued lifestyle survives, not because it is ostentatiously preserved and celebrated as tradition, but because a social context is sustained in which this lifestyle continues to make sense. It is in this historical area that the public oven thrives.

As I set out on the public oven project, my primary research goal was to determine the relationship between the Moroccan public oven as an institution and its neighborhood: I wanted to address the questions of what the role of the public oven is in its community and among its customers, and how the Moroccan public oven, as a location and space, functions socially within its neighborhood.

In order to answer these questions as effectively as possible, I organized the public oven project as a supplemented case study of a single public oven. The majority of the project’s 3.5 months of research were spent examining a single public oven in Rabat’s medina, and was primarily based on personal observation, informal discussions, and recorded unstructured and semi-structured interviews with the two bakers, customers, and oven regulars. Using information from the



**Figure 2: The paved streets of Rabat’s medina**

case study, I developed a series of questions and surveyed the medina's other public ovens in order to test my conclusions and determine the extent to which they could be used to apply to other public ovens.

Like any other approach, there are advantages and disadvantages to structuring this project as a supplemented case study. Compared to an in depth survey of all of the public ovens in Rabat—in which time would be spent observing and collecting data in many public ovens—a supplemented case study has several advantages. A case study's research deals with the problem of understanding how and why a single system functions in the way that it does. As a result, a case study is more qualitative, and produces a very different type of information than a survey based project. Since most of a case study's time is spent looking into the operation of a single oven, the researcher has a much closer relationship to his informants, and is able to gain far more rapport than a researcher in survey based ethnography. Whereas a survey based project is focused on and limited to understanding public ovens themselves, a case study provides a holistic sense of how an oven functions within its broader context. My research, for instance, often involved leaving the public oven to visit the baker at home, to watch him play soccer, to meet his mother, to eat in his brother's restaurant, to attend neighborhood funerals, to go running with oven regulars, and to share meals with customers. In short, structuring this project as a case study allowed me to examine not just the public oven itself, but the interwoven network of social relationships and activities which surround and contextualize the public oven. Furthermore, from the perspective of a researcher with a limited but conversational understanding of the Arabic language, the structure of a case study is far more forgiving, as it gave me the chance to get accustomed to my informant's voices and speech patterns, as well as the capacity to understand examples and glean meaning from context.

While a holistic view of a public oven is valuable, there are also a number of disadvantages to using a supplemented case study rather than an in depth survey based approach. A survey produces data which is more quantitative, and thus it creates information which can more reliably predict and explain aspects of public oven operation throughout the medina of Rabat or throughout Morocco as a whole. A survey allows the researcher to carefully understand similarities, trends and variations among many ovens, and allows him to address the questions of why certain patterns exist, don't exist or have specific characteristics. Furthermore, a survey additionally provides a holistic picture of how Rabat's public oven system operates as a whole. For instance, a survey based approach would examine the relationship between public ovens: how they interact, how their borders of use are structured, and how other institutions, such as the bread peel maker or the wood seller, function as an integral part of the medina's system of public ovens. As a result of this project's case study based approach, I will not be addressing in great detail the question of how ovens in the medina interact with one another, and patterns or trends between them, but rather I will focus primarily on understanding the operation of a single oven within its community.

When I first designed the project, I planned to approach my case study of a public oven using a paradigm for the anthropological study of entrepreneurs devised by Fredrik Barth (1972), a Norwegian anthropologist. Barth's approach is best described as an extended economic paradigm. Rather than analyzing the entrepreneur himself, Barth argues that in order to get a complete picture of an enterprise "we need to see the rest of the community as composed of actors who also make choices and pursue strategies"

(1972; 6). As a result, Barth believes that community life must be analyzed by examining the choices which are available to each actor, and the values which are ascribed to those choices. Barth's model of enterprise hinges on the notion that profit and cost should be understood, not only as financial terms, but also must be expanded to include social profits and costs as well. Profit, for instance, could be a financial gain, or alternatively it could be an increase in rank, power, experience, social prestige, or self esteem. The social elements of profit and cost, according to his paradigm, must be considered if entrepreneurial decisions are to be accurately comprehended. Barth argues for a model in which value is understood, not simply in monotonous financial terms, but as a social quantity as well. Thus value as a singular entity exists in many separate social and economic spheres. For instance, Barth argues, if one donates to a political party, one is not simply making a donation, but rather one is exchanging economic value for political influence, a value in a separate sphere. Exchange should then be understood as the process of converting value from one sphere to the next. Barth's model allows a researcher to look beyond an entrepreneur's straightforward economic exchange and see a vastly more complicated network of non-monetary interaction (1972; 5-18).

Although I would imagine that his model is very effective in studying most forms of enterprise, as the project went on, Barth's paradigm turned out to be fundamentally inadequate for the study of public ovens. The problem with the model proposed by Barth is that it is most basically an economic paradigm. While economic paradigms are useful for studying exchanges, they fall short when they analyze relationships. For example, if one is to examine the relationship between a mother and her child, I believe that an economic or an extended economic model is inadequate. One could of course consider the tremendous benefits which a child gains from its mother—such as protection, help, attention, food—or the benefits which the mother gains from her child—such as entertainment, social prestige, or the potential that she is investing in a child who will care for her in her old age—but this analysis on a basic level leaves us with an incomplete picture of the mother-child relationship. A mother-child relationship, or any sort of familial relationship, is about more than an exchange, or individualistically pursuing one's best interests. It is about identity, about love, and about finding meaning and feeling good about ourselves. The key assumption of economic or extended economic analyses—that the social system of study is made up of individual actors each pursuing their own best interests—is often false when one studies relationships. One needs to account for the fact that a mother and child are not separate actors, but are so dependent on one another that their welfare is intrinsically linked, and as a result, by themselves, they cannot be considered independent individual actors. At a minimum, I hope that I can at least capture how the public oven, as an institution, and its relationship with its customers, cannot accurately be reduce to economic terms.

This is a project that I feel good about. I designed and set out to do what I believed was an ideal ethnographic research project. It was interesting. It allowed me to live in a family of customers within the case study's community. Furthermore, since it was a family and neighborhood which I had lived in before, I had the advantage of entering a situation in which I had already built rapport. This project was self funded and I thus did not need to worry about having results or conclusions which were appealing to a sponsor. Since I designed, organized, and undertook this project myself, I had the freedom to alter my questions, methods, and approaches in the field, a freedom which I

used frequently. This project involved 3.5 months of fieldwork, an amount of time in which I was not only able to answer most of my questions, but to develop conclusions of which I am confident. I conducted this project's fieldwork entirely in Arabic and it served as an excellent opportunity to practice and develop my conversational Arabic skills. Since the project was undertaken as a case study, it additionally allowed me to develop a close personal friendship with the head baker, my key informant, and other oven regulars.

There is no one to whom I am more indebted for their assistance with this project than the baker himself. As an informant, the baker not only welcomed me into his oven to sit, help out, make observations, and ask any question at any time about any topic, but he also showed me the utmost kindness and generosity. He was extraordinarily patient with my Arabic, and happily explained things many times to ensure that I understood him clearly. Whenever I hesitated to ask a question, he encouraged me and was more than happy to let me watch him continuously for 3.5 months. After work, the baker took me to his home on many occasions, introduced me to his mother, and took me to watch him play soccer. We spent many wonderful hours together talking about public ovens, God, and everything in between. Throughout the entire 3.5 months of fieldwork, the baker included me in all of the oven's fabulous gourmet lunches and *fitors* (meal breaking the fast during Ramadan) and *never*, in spite of my great protests, permitted me to pay. As a small token of thanks for his vast generosity throughout the project I periodically prepared a variety of items for lunch for the oven. In addition to his magnificent lunches, the baker also fed me enormous numbers of pastries. On one average research day, for instance, I have recorded that, in addition to the usual lunch, the baker fed me: dates, *sufuf* (a powder pastry), two croissants, milk, Poms (a Moroccan apple flavored soda), mint tea, and bread with butter; furthermore, he gave me a bag of unfinished items to take home which included *foqas* (a Moroccan biscotti-like cookie), round cakes, almond moon pastries, two types of *greeba* (a crescent shaped crumbly cookie), two kinds of rolls, dates, more *sufuf*, and an additional croissant. As a friend, the baker's generosity was incredible and overwhelming, and this project's success is largely due to his assistance.

I believe that this project benefited everyone involved materially, socially, and psychologically. My host family in particular benefited materially from my project, as my weekly rent served as a much needed additional source of income. I gave gifts of jellies, books, money, beef jerky, tee shirts, and many other items to the baker, my informants, and oven regulars. Furthermore, the simple act of letting someone talk about their lives has a psychological benefit, and I was told a number of times that simply by listening I was able to help informants think about their lives and feel better about their problems. Additionally, the fact that my informants' lives were so important that I would travel to Morocco to learn about them also appeared to have the effect of improving self esteem, at least for the head baker, who mentioned it several times. One of the joys of this project was watching the baker and customers get excited about my research and take an active interest in giving a surplus of information. For the community as a whole, I am confident that I provided much humor, not only as a foreign man hanging out in the public oven, but as someone who makes mistakes, misses cultural cues, and undoubtedly does a lot of weird absurd stuff. Informed oral consent was gained before conducting observation, interviews, surveys, and taking pictures. While the community as a whole was very supportive of my project, a number of individuals did choose not to participate, and were

given the freedom to do so. All the information presented in this project, including the photos, is used with permission.

My ultimate purpose in undertaking the public oven project was to use it as an opportunity to learn about conducting ethnographic research, and for that it has served its purpose well. This project had its frustrations, problems, and mistakes, but I have worked through them and will be a better researcher because of them. As a result of this project, I now have a fuller and more concrete understanding of the problems and conflicts inherent in ethnographic research and how they can be addressed and overcome. It has provided me with an opportunity to consider objectivity, research methods, and effect of an approach on the outcome of one's research. I designed, created, executed and organized this project from scratch. Although it only contained 3.5 months of fieldwork, the project as a whole, including background research, design, preparation courses in Arabic and anthropological research methods, and writing up my findings, took over a year of intensive non-stop work to complete. At times this project has frightened me. At times it has nearly driven me mad. I have poured my heart and soul into this project, and I have come up with a piece of original research which I am proud of.



## Note on Objectivity

I believe in objectivity. Not only is objectivity is central to anthropological research, but it is important to me personally. I undertook this project as an anthropologist, and as an anthropologist I became friends with my informants. One of my concerns about my research is the potential which these friendships have to undermine my objectivity. Before I begin my analysis of the public oven, I would like to first address my own approach to objectivity, and explain why I have come to think that I can, as a friend to my informants, conduct research with is valuable, accurate, and reasonably objective.

Most basically, objectivity is responsibility of a researcher to ensure that his work is unbiased. To me personally, objectivity functions in two important but distinct ways: as a methodological and as an analytical tool.

As methodological tool, objectivity is a great resource. Questions are one of the anthropologist's most important tools, but they are also both powerful and dangerous because the act of asking a question dictates the language of the response. By simply asking a question, the anthropologist is conditioning the informant's response by providing him or her with the terms and language with which to structure his or her answer. The act of asking a question necessarily conveys the anthropologists own assumptions about the subject matter and forces the informant to frame his or her response in those assumptions. It is important that, as anthropologists, we are aware of the power of our questions, and take steps to limit the unwitting insertion of our own biases into our subject matter. On the other hand, I would argue that objectivity, at least in qualitative research, can be limiting as well. If the goal of conducting qualitative research is to produce the most accurate, most thorough, and largest amount of information from one's informants as efficiently, easily, and ethically as possible, then objectivity is often a poor means to achieve this goal. Fundamentally, qualitative research is conversation between, not just a researcher and an informant, but between two living, breathing, thinking, feeling human beings. I don't know about other anthropologists, but I have never trusted anyone because they approach my personal information, problems, and stories with cold emotionless objectivity. In my opinion, qualitative research—and particularly an in depth case study such as this project—is intensely subjective. It absolutely necessitates building rapport and gaining the trust of one's informants. It involves being friendly, knowing when to smile, and being honest about your feelings. Most of all, it involves ensuring that you are a person around whom your informants feel comfortable, while at the same time being clear about your role as an anthropologist and researcher. From an ethical perspective, I believe it is important that informants not only



feel comfortable with the information which they are giving to the anthropologist, but with the anthropologist as well. As a result, a balance must be struck between monitoring the bias of one's questions and actions, and gaining rapport.

The second function of objectivity is objectivity as method of analysis. An anthropologist needs to recognize him or herself as a culturally constructed creature. It is only natural that a researcher has feelings and passionate ideas about what he or she is studying, but it is important, when one is trying to understand a system, ritual, or belief, that the anthropologist's subject matter is approached as much as possible on its own terms. In his book on research methods, Russell Bernard comments that "objectivity does not mean (and has never meant) value neutrality" (2002: 349). While I agree with this statement, it is also important to recognize that values are culturally constructed, and, in the end, are an impediment to understanding a cultural system on its own grounds. Objectivity, as analytical tool, requires the anthropologist to undergo a mental separation in which he or she creates separate trains of thought to analyze the culture of study. One train should be able to consider culturally dependent questions, including those based on an anthropologist's morals and values, while the other train should be devoted to trying to understand and interpret a culture on its own grounds. Objectivity then, is not value neutrality, but is a means through which a researcher can separate his or her culturally dependent, value-based analysis of a culture from his or her anthropologically significant analysis of a culture based on its own grounds. I believe that feeling a certain amount of frustration, or at times even anger, towards the culture that one is studying is part of culture shock and a natural part of conducting ethnographic research in a foreign environment. It is important that anthropologists have a mental system to understand, rationalize and process their own feelings towards what they are studying. But it is also important that these feelings not work their way into the research itself. Complete objectivity may be impossible, but it should be a reasonable and legitimate goal, both as a methodological and as an analytical tool, for the anthropological researcher.

Throughout this project, my informants gave me a lot of great information. But it was not informant that I would have been able to get if I was pretending that I did not care about their lives. As an anthropologist and as a friend, I have an obligation to analyze and present this information as objectively and accurately as possible. This goal is at the heart of the following research, and a goal which I intend to pursue throughout my anthropological career.

# **The Moroccan Public Oven Project: A Case Study**



**(objectivity begins here...)**



## **Setting the Scene: An Overview of the Public Oven**

The public oven which is the subject of this case study is located at the end of a medium sized market street in Rabat's medina, where chickens, fish, meat, spices, fruits and vegetables are sold. People walking to and from the market make the street in front of the oven busy in spite of its small size.

Worn and loved, the oven at the end of the market street has been around for roughly 200 years. The working space of the public oven doubled in size 70 years ago during a renovation in which an extra room was added. Currently, it is run by two bakers who inherited it from their father and who are the fourth generation of their family to operate the oven. The father of the bakers, a pious and religious man, ran the oven for 45 years before he passed away in 2000. Under the leadership of the father, the public oven prospered, baking the bread of the neighborhood's families, in addition to producing bread and other items for sale in the market. The oven did well financially, and the father raised his eight children, five sons and three daughters, in a house outside of the medina.

In 1976, the father recruited one of his sons to assist him at the oven and the two began working together. When the father passed away, it was assumed that his eldest son, the one who had been working in the public oven for the last 24 years, would continue operating it in his father's place. However, the oldest son did not want to take on the responsibilities of running the oven alone. When he made this clear to his family, the eldest son's younger brother was asked to assist in running the family oven. Although the younger brother did not want to become a baker, he could not refuse his mother's request and thus started operating the public oven with his brother. These two brothers have been running the oven together for the last five years. Even though both brothers split the oven's profits and work, the younger brother has become the head baker, is officially in charge of the oven, and is predominately responsible for paying its rent and bills. Both the bakers and a number of their friends noted that the oven became less profitable after the father passed away. The brothers stopped producing bread to sell in the market, and instead turned to other methods of gaining sufficient income to pay the bills.

The younger brother was almost certainly chosen to become the head baker due to his personal charisma. At 35 years old, he is happily married and has an adorable two-year old son. When his son comes by the oven, he usually feeds him sweets, carries him around in his arms, and hands him to visitors so that they may kiss him on the forehead. The younger brother lives with his wife and son in a small single family apartment which he rents near the oven. Although the oven does not provide a lot of income, the baker

describes himself as happy and relaxed, saying that he eats and sleeps well and is thankful to be able to provide for his family's necessities. The younger brother does not plan on being a baker forever, and hopes to find a position in which he can make more money in order to better provide for his family. As a pious Muslim, the younger brother does not drink or smoke, and makes it a point to pray his five daily prayers in the nearby mosque. Additionally, when not at the oven or with his family, he enjoys playing soccer and running.

Compared to his younger sibling, the older brother is shy and less comfortable interacting with the customers. Rather than living in the medina, the older brother lives in Sale, a city near Rabat where the cost of living is cheaper. Every morning he commutes to the oven by taxi. He is 44 years old, and lives with his wife and school-aged son who goes to school in Rabat near the oven. As a baker, the older brother enjoys his work and hopes to stay in the public oven until his death, although he adds that he would accept a more lucrative position if it was offered to him. Additionally, much like his brother, the older baker has taken up running for exercise. He runs regularly with other men from the neighborhood. In his home, the older brother has both an electric and a gas oven which he believes are good for roasting chicken but not for baking bread.

### *The Interior of the Public Oven*

The oven's only entrance is a single door to the street guarded by a heavy wooden chest. To go in or out of the public oven, one must climb or leap over this large chest. Since customers are often gathered outside of the oven, one must often wait for space to form in order to climb over the chest. This chest serves as a counter top and functions to separate the world of the street from the world of the oven. As a divider, the chest is responsible for creating and defining much of the oven's space.

Customers using the oven usually remain in the street, delivering their bread and baked goods to the baker over the counter top.



**Figure 3: The chest which is placed in the doorway.**



**Figure 4: The baking room.**

The ground floor of the public oven consists of a large room which I will refer to as the baking room. Worn wooden shelves line the walls of the baking room where breads rise and other items wait to be placed in the oven or picked up by customers after being baked. On the far side of the room, a clock, a picture of a large mosque, and a framed copy of the oven's certificate of ownership hang on the wall.

Beneath the clock, in the far corner, is a small working space which the baker uses for slicing a Moroccan pastry known as *foqas*. Next to his *foqas* cutting work space, the baker keeps an old stereo on which, early in the mornings, he listens to a recitation of the holy Qur'an. Additionally, in a shelf over his *foqas* cutting work space, the baker keeps a hard copy of the holy Qur'an, and a black cloak that he wears over his work clothes when he goes to the mosque to pray. Old vegetable and chicken crates are used as seats, and two of these crates are generally kept in the baking room. These crates, which are purchased from the nearby market, are also used as fuel for the oven. Other wooden

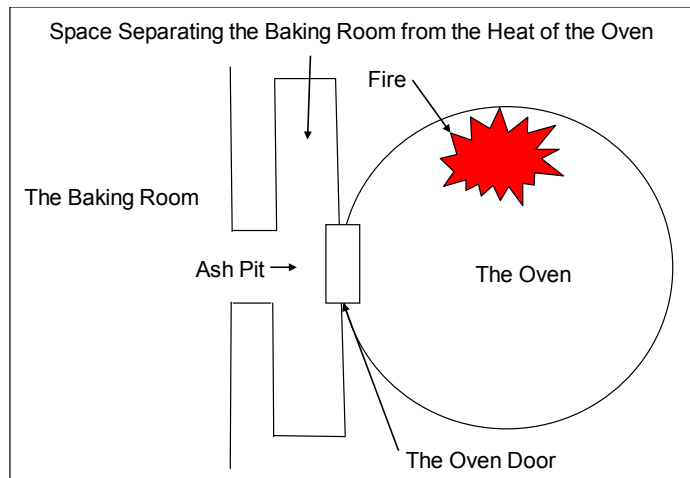


**Figure 5: Bread baking in the oven. Note the stalactites of soot in the upper left corner.**

objects waiting to be used as fuel are kept on the floor, next to the oven's entrance. Most of the floor space in the center of the baking room is left empty so that items waiting to be baked can be lined up on the floor and prepared to enter the oven.

At the edge of the baking room is the oven itself. The oven interior is round and is approximately 10-15 feet in diameter. Bricks line the bottom of the oven while the roof is concave and covered with long stalactites of soot. At the peak of the roof's curve is a hole which leads to the oven's chimney through which smoke can escape. From the door, the wood

burning fire is on the left side of the round oven while bread and other goods being baked are placed on the right. Items entering the oven are inserted through a small metal door which connects the oven to the baking room. As the fire burns, it produces a layer of smoke which hangs along the roof of the oven. The precise height of the smoke in the oven is controlled by opening or closing the oven door, as it is important for the level of smoke to be kept above the bread so that the bread does not take on a smoky flavor. A light bulb is placed in a hole in the oven wall in order to illuminate the interior. The oven itself gets quite hot throughout the day. In order to protect the baking room from the heat of the oven, there is a space of about two feet separating the wall of the oven from the wall of the baking room. Wood and oven cleaning items are kept in this warm space between the walls. When the oven door is opened to control the interior



**Figure 6: A diagram of the layout of the oven, the baking room, and the insulation space in between them.**

smoke level, additional smoke coming out of the door of the oven travels up the space in between the walls and is released through a small hole on the roof. Beneath the door of the oven is a pit approximately three feet deep. As smoke emerges from the oven into the space between the walls, it drops black soot into the pit beneath the oven door. This pit fills with soot and must be cleaned out every three to four years.

Up a staircase from the baking room, on the second floor and above the oven itself, is the preparation room. The preparation room cannot be seen from the street, and is used primarily for making pastries for sale or consumption at the oven, and for preparing meals eaten at the oven. Ragged shelves line one wall of the preparation room



**Figure 7: The preparation room.**

and a wooden work table sits in the center of the room. At the edge of the room is a large trough-like sink which is used for mixing dough. Next to the sink is a small counter on top of which ingredients are usually stored. On the second floor is also the public oven's bathroom: a Turkish toilet enclosed in its own chamber. The toilet has an unheated shower and a faucet which is the oven's main source of water. A small collection of the oven's dishes and silverware are kept near the toilet allowing them to be easily washed by the

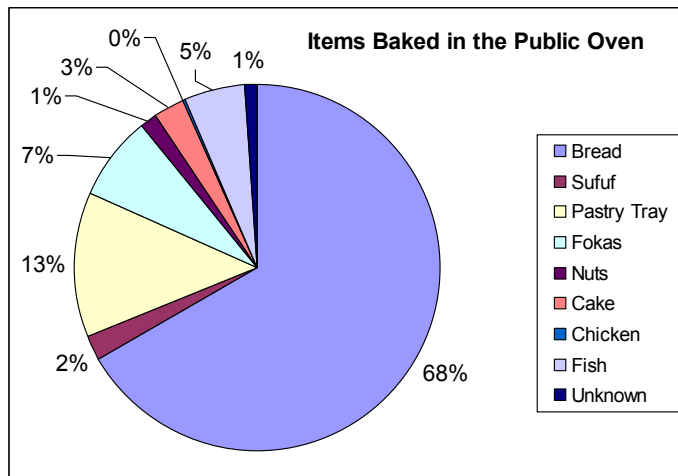
faucet. Meals at the oven, the largest of which is lunch, are consumed almost entirely in the preparation room. During lunch, diners sit around a small table on wooden crates and buckets and eat from a shared pot. A set of stairs on the far side of the preparation room leads to the roof.

The roof of the oven is divided into two sections. Half of the roof has been converted into a covered sitting area and the other half is an open space which overlooks the street below. The sitting area is made up of three couch-beds and a television, and is separated from the rest of the roof, and covered, by corrugated metal dividers. The remainder of the roof appears to be used primarily for storage. Miscellaneous metal items rest on top of the roof of the sitting area, as well as the roofs of nearby houses.



**Figure 8: The covered area on the public oven's roof.**

On a whole, the presence of piles of clothing, stacks of old magazines and pamphlets, and miscellaneous other items throughout the space gives the oven a homey, lived in—if not somewhat messy—feel.



**Figure 9: A breakdown of the items which customers bring to bake in the public oven (N= 563).**

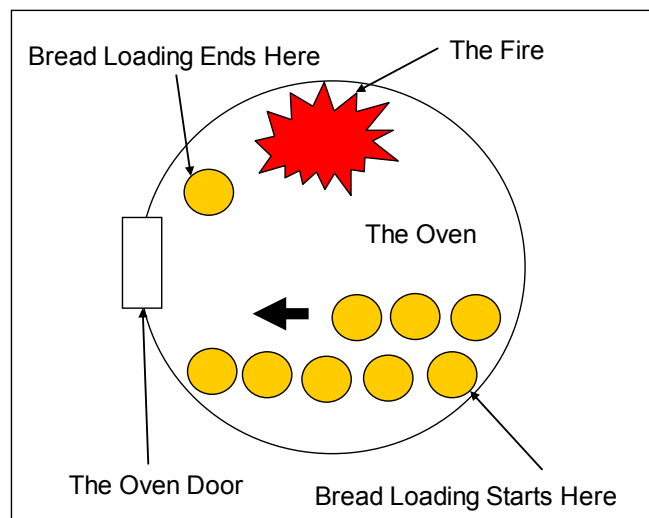
### The Baking Process

The most basic and central purpose of the public oven is to bake family bread. Bread itself accounts for approximately 68% of the items baked in the public oven. On an average day roughly 50-60 families will drop off over 100 loaves of bread to be baked; however, if another public oven is closed, then the volume can jump to as many as 80-90 families bringing in over 200 loaves of bread.

Before baking can begin, the oven itself must be prepared. The first step is cleaning the oven. Although it is sometimes swept out, the cleaning process usually involves attaching a wet rag to a long stick and rubbing it along the round floor of the oven's interior. The concave oven roof is only cleaned when the stalactites of soot become problematic enough to interfere with the baking process. When the oven is clean, large and small pieces of wood are placed on a peel and positioned on the left side of the oven. Paper is added, and a fire is lit by placing a burning piece of paper in the pile. After giving the oven some time to heat up, it is ready to start baking.

Before baking can begin,

The baking process begins by loading the oven. After each loaf of bread has risen sufficiently, it is carefully transferred onto a long peel, poked with knife or fork to prevent ballooning, and deposited into the oven. Although the interior of the oven is round, breads are placed into it in rows and baked in cycles. The first breads are put on the far right in the section of the oven which is the furthest from the fire and hence the coolest. As it is loaded, breads are progressively placed in warmer portions of the oven closer and closer to the fire.



**Figure 10: A diagram of the oven interior and the process of loading the oven.**

Due to the difference in temperature, the first breads put in the oven must be baked for a longer time than the last breads, and as a result breads are loaded and removed in reverse order. The last breads placed in the oven are also the first breads to be finished and removed. Although the oven temperature is not constant, I measured it to be around 350–400 degrees Fahrenheit in a medium to



warm portion of the oven; however, the temperature next to the fire can get as hot as 600 degrees Fahrenheit. Since the air in the oven is hotter than the bricks the bread is placed on, breads baked in the public oven usually must be flipped to ensure that they are baked evenly. When the loaves are finished, the baker again uses the peel to remove them from the oven, and then transfers the hot breads on to the customer's bread boards with his bare hands. Most items removed from the oven, including metal pans, are moved from the peel to the baking room without a hot pad. I believe the baker's ability to comfortably carry exceedingly hot items is the result of a combination of heavily callused hands and a technique of preventing burns by rolling hot items back and forth between different parts of his hands. The oven has the capacity to bake 15-20 loaves of bread at a time, and each baking cycle, from the time the first loaf of bread is loaded until the last loaf is unloaded, takes approximately 30-45 minutes.

### ***Bread Identification and Differentiation***

One of the initial tasks of this project was to determine how each family's bread is identified and differentiated from the bread of the other families. What system is in place to ensure that the breads brought to be baked by particular families are the same breads that are returned to them, and how are these breads kept track of throughout the baking process?

When bread is brought to the public oven, it initially has three identifying characteristics. The first of these is the *wasela*, or bread board, which each family brings to the oven with their bread. Most *waselas* are made of wood; however, some are made of other materials such as baskets, plastic cafeteria lunch trays, or metal pans. The baker has memorized each customer's *wasela*, and is usually able to identify and return it based on memory. When breads rise, it is best to cover them with a cloth so as to prevent the dough from drying out, and the second identifying characteristic is thus the *mendela*, or cloth which the customer's bread comes wrapped in. Each customer's *mendela* is unique: often brightly colored and easily distinguishable from the *mendelas* of the other customers. The third identifying characteristic is the bread itself. Usually customers make the same kind of bread everyday, and the type of bread—along with the number of loaves—is often used to identify bread.



**Figure 11: Baked bread with its *wasela* and *mendela*.**

A baker is usually present when the customers come to pick up their bread, and can therefore identify and return a customer's bread based on the *wasela*. However, there are times when no baker is present, and the customers are asked to identify their bread themselves. In these cases, the customers usually begin by describing their *wasela*, first by saying its material, if it is something other than wood, and then by noting unusual characteristics about the *wasela* such as its notable color, size, or strength. If this is not enough information to identify a *wasela*, then a customer will usually be asked for a description of their bread and in particular the number of loaves. If this is not enough information, or the customer picking up the bread does not know how many loaves he or she made, then the *mendela* will be used to identify the family's bread.

The process of customer pickup is only half of the problem of bread identification. As mentioned above, breads are loaded into the oven and baked in cycles. When loaves are placed into the oven, they must therefore be separated from their *waselas* and returned. Furthermore, since the oven is being run by two bakers, it is often the case that one baker will load the oven, and the other will unload it, and yet in every case the baker is able to match the breads taken out of the oven with the appropriate *wasela*. This process of identification is somewhat complicated. Given that breads are placed into the oven in rows from the coldest part of the oven to the hottest, a load of bread can be thought of as a long sequence of loaves. Before a loaf of bread enters the oven, its *wasela* is placed on the floor to the left of the baker. As the breads are loaded into the oven, the baker loads all of the loaves of each *wasela* into the oven together as a group. To denote a group of bread, or the breads which belong to a *wasela*, the baker slices a pattern on the surface of the breads as they enter the oven. The ultimate purpose of slicing the breads is to keep them from ballooning during the baking process; however, the baker marks all the breads from a particular *wasela* with a single pattern. These identification patterns can be as simple as a single dot or group of dots, or as elaborate as eight pointed stars and flower bud-like incisions along the edge of the bread. Most commonly however, these patterns consist of a simple series of slices and carefully placed dots. The patterns depend largely on the baker's mood and are not associated with particular households or families. The only marking which does have a meaning is a single dot placed, in addition to a pattern, on the edge of a loaf, which is used to indicate that the bread's *wasela* contains only a single loaf of bread.



**Figure 12: If two *waselas* of bread have a distinct difference in appearance, then they can be placed in the oven together and marked with the same pattern.**

Although the pattern sliced on the bread is the primary means of identifying a group of bread, it is not the only means. The other method of denoting a group of bread is based on the bread's basic appearance. If two consecutive groups of bread are made with different types of flour, and appear to have obvious differences, then they may be given the same pattern and placed in the oven together. When removed, even if removed by another baker, the difference in appearance of the bread is sufficient for it to be denoted as its own group of bread.

As loaves of bread are loaded into the oven, their *waselas* are stacked into a pile next to the oven, the first *wasela* on the bottom and the last on the top. Since the breads are removed from the oven in reverse order, so that the last loaf loaded into the oven is also the first loaf to be removed, the *waselas* are stacked in the order that their breads will

come out. Thus, as each group of bread is unloaded from the oven, it is placed on its respective *wasela*. After coming out of the oven, baked breads are left uncovered on their *waselas*, denoting them as separate from the unbaked breads which are covered by their *mendelas*. This system allows the baker to clearly differentiate between the breads which are waiting to be baked and those which have just been removed from the oven.

### ***Other Items Baked in the Public Oven***

Although baking family bread is the focus and purpose of the public oven, bread is not the only thing which families bring to get baked. A wide variety of other items are baked in the oven. A few of the most popular items are listed below.

#### ***Foqas***

*Foqas* is a popular Moroccan pastry which is very similar to biscotti. Much like biscotti, *foqas* are labor intensive to prepare and should be baked three times. The process begins by mixing a thick and greasy dough, usually risen with baking powder rather than yeast, which is shaped into long tubular loaves and baked. When these loaves are cool, they are sliced, and each slice is laid out on a cookie sheet and baked a second time. The *foqas* are then removed from the oven, and each individual piece is flipped, placed on the cookie sheet and baked a third time. When *foqas* is brought to the public oven to be baked, it is usually brought as a dough. The baker is responsible for rolling the dough into tubular loaves, baking and slicing the loaves, laying out the pieces on cookie sheets, baking, flipping, and re-baking them. Although a fee is charged for each baking cycle and the labor of slicing the *foqas*, a major portion of the baker's time is devoted to the labor intensive process of preparing *foqas*.



**Figure 13: Baked *foqas* loaves, ready to be sliced.**

#### ***Sufuf***

*Sufuf* is a sweet which is typically consumed during Ramadan. It is best described as a baked pastry which preserves the ground nature of the flour and is thus eaten as a powder. To make *sufuf*, flour is spread onto cookie sheets and placed into the oven until it turns golden brown. As it bakes, the flour tends to clump up, so when removed from the oven it must be broken down to a powder, usually by crushing it with pieces of wood. This flour is then mixed with sugar, cinnamon, butter, and ground nuts to become a sweet brownish powder that is eaten with a spoon. Although *sufuf* is widely enjoyed, due to the fact that the flour has to be re-crushed into a powder after being baked, it is also labor intensive for the baker to prepare.

*Foqas* and *sufuf* flour, when brought by customers to be baked, are notably difficult to identify. Both *foqas* and *sufuf* flour are baked on the oven's cookie sheets, and both have few or no notable identifying characteristics. In these cases, the baker writes the name of the item's owner on a piece of scratch paper and places it on the cookie sheet with the item being baked. When the *foqas* or *sufuf* flour is removed, this slip of paper is found and used to match the *foqas* or *sufuf* flour with its container. When *sufuf* flour is baked, the identifying slip of paper is placed under the flour, and it is often quite difficult to find—and is sometimes lost—when the flour is broken back down into a powder.

### ***Cookies, Nuts, and Herbs***

A wide variety of Moroccan cookies are baked in the public oven. Most of these cookies consist of a thin dough elaborately wrapped around almond paste and are popular, although similar tasting. Other cookies resemble girl-scout butter cookies. Cookies are generally brought to the oven and picked up arranged on a cookie sheet. Additionally, herbs and nuts are frequently brought by customers to roast in the public oven.



**Figure 14: A wide variety of cookies and pastries are brought to bake at the public oven.**

### ***Entrees***

In addition to sweets, a number of main course items are routinely cooked in the public oven. Fish and chicken are frequently roasted in the oven, along with pizza. One of the most popular Moroccan fish dishes is roasted, salt-coated sardines. Many customers simply bring by a bag of fresh whole sardines which they give to the baker who then them on a cookie sheet, covers them with salt, and bakes them. When served, one removes the sardine's salted skin and eats the meat with bread. A Moroccan entrée pastry called *pastilla* is also often baked in the oven. *Pastillas*, made with a Moroccan version of phyllo dough, are large sweet meat pastries, most commonly made with chicken, pigeon or lamb meat. Additionally, a variety of other items are baked in the oven ranging from hamburgers and *luby*a (a slowly cooked bean dish) to hedgehogs.

### ***Goods Produced for Sale***

In addition to baking family items, the public oven also produces a handful of goods for sale. The oven makes chocolate croissants and rolls which are placed on the chest in the doorway and sold to passersby and customers. Additionally, the bakers usually bake bread for the sick which contains no salt. Although a salt-less bread may sound unappetizing, the oven's recipe produces a bread which, while somewhat bland, is quite delicious. This salt-less bread is for sale and available for public purchase; however, the baker knows which customers are sick or elderly and makes each loaf with a particular customer in mind. These customers do not have an official daily 'order' of



**Figure 15: Croissants waiting to be sold.**

bread, but it is understood that when salt-less bread is made, each customer requires a certain number of loaves. If someone unexpectedly purchases some of the salt-less bread, then the last sick or elderly individuals coming to ask about their bread will be told that the oven is out of the salt-less bread and that they should get their bread elsewhere. On top of these three items, the public oven also produces its own yeasted *foqas* and a crumbly cookie called *greeba*, each of which are sold by the bag full. *Foqas* and *greeba* keep well, so the oven is able to make these pastries once and sell them over the course of several days. In general, the oven produces fewer baked

goods than the demand, and, as result, the bakers are routinely able to sell everything that is made.

### ***Problems***

Like any system, the public oven has its own problems which it struggles to overcome. Great care is taken to avoid losing each customer's bread, and for the most part these efforts are successful. During my 3.5 months of research, I only observed a customer's bread getting lost on two occasions. In one instance, the problem appeared to have occurred after the bread was baked. It is common to put the *waselas* of baked bread next to one another on shelves in the baking room, and sometimes breads get bumped onto a neighboring *wasela*. In this instance, the customer's bread was knocked onto the neighboring *wasela* which was then picked up by another family. When the original customer came to collect her bread, she found her *wasela* empty. Fortunately, the baker remembered which family the neighboring *wasela* belonged to, and went to their house and reclaimed the bread. The baker explains that these errors are very rare, occurring less than once a month, and seemed quite sensitive about it. A larger and more common problem is when baked goods do not come out the way that customers intended. Since bread needs to be left to rise for a certain amount of time before being baked, the baker is usually in charge of deciding when a loaf of bread is ready to enter the oven. Customers periodically complain to the baker that their bread has over risen or not been left to rise for enough time. If a customer does not put enough flour on a loaf of bread, then it will stick to the *wasela* and get torn up when the baker tries to put it into the oven. Another problem, noted by oven customers, is that items sent to the oven are occasionally burned. *Sufuf* flour is particularly easy to burn. Likewise, if the oven has not been adequately cleaned, it leaves unappetizing black marks on bread which many customers complain about. The issue of breads coming out of the oven dirty or with soot on them is one of the most frequent sources of customer complaints. Another problem is making appropriate change. In Morocco as a whole, change is in quite short supply, and this is especially true in the public oven. The oven usually has trouble accepting and making change for even Morocco's smallest banknote, the 20 DH (US\$ 2.20) bill, and many customers

struggled to find sufficient change to pay for their baked items. Long waits for customers trying to pick up bread are another common issue, but on a whole these waits are endured with patience. I have observed customers standing outside the oven, happily waiting, for as long as 52 minutes for their baked goods to be finished.

A major problem the public oven faces is insect infestations. The baker believes that the house next to the public oven attracts insects and rodents and that, through a hole in the wall, ants and cockroaches have entered and infested the public oven. In general, cockroaches are considered more of a problem than ants, which are basically ignored. Although the baker acknowledges that ants at the oven are a problem, they are often allowed to gather on food waiting to enter the oven, including into the dough of the items the oven prepares for sale. Cockroaches, on the other hand, appear to be considered a far greater problem and are quickly removed when they are seen to be climbing on food items. Furthermore, the baker will usually take advantage of any opportunity to kill a cockroach if it emerges into plain sight. Due to the cluttered atmosphere and the presence of crumbs, the public oven is a near perfect environment for insects to thrive. The warm dark space between the baking room and oven itself is the center of the public oven's cockroach infestation. The baker refers to this area as the "kingdom of roaches", saying that it is "like something from Indiana Jones". Since cockroaches cannot survive temperatures in excess of 115 degrees Fahrenheit (Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources N. d.), they generally will not come into the oven itself but will periodically



**Figure 16: The “kingdom of roaches” between the baking room and the oven. This photo alone contains at least 42 visible cockroaches.**

enter the baking room. Customers usually ignore the roaches, but will often shout if they notice one crawling on food.

At one point, the public oven had a rat. The baker believes that, in addition to the roaches and ants, it entered the public oven originally from a hole in wall which leads to the neighboring house. In order to get rid of the rat, the bakers brought two cats to the oven. After they had killed the rat, the bakers decided to keep the cats on as pets. At the time of my research, the cats have been in the public oven for about six years and were considered “part of the

family”. The cats are fed scraps and leftovers from meals eaten at the oven, such as chicken heads, and are occasionally given sardines which customers bring to get baked. During the project, one of the cats gave birth at the public oven. The location of the birth turned out to be unfortunate, as it occurred in the baking room on a high shelf over the *foqas* cutting area, which meant that the cat had to climb over shelves of bread in order for it to be with its kittens. In general, it is considered unacceptable for cats to climb on loaves of bread; however, during this period, the bakers predominately treated the cat with patience and made no attempt to move the newborn kittens.

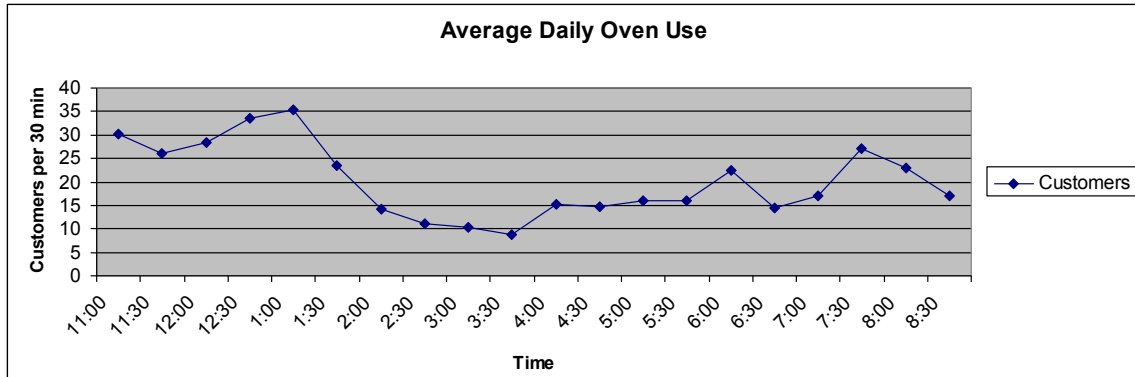


**Figure 17: During the course of this project, one cat gave birth to these kittens.**

### ***Time and Season in the Public Oven***

In the public oven the organization of the day is heavily dependent, as one would expect, on Moroccan eating habits. In Morocco, the average day includes three to four meals. The day begins with breakfast, which most commonly consists of bread with butter, oil, jelly, nutella, or other toppings. Lunch is the largest meal of the day, and is typically eaten at around 1:00 or 1:30 pm. Moroccan lunches can include *tajines* (a Moroccan stew), roasted fish or chicken, beans, or other dishes. Almost all of these lunch items are eaten with bread from a shared dish, making bread a necessary part of most Moroccan lunches. Dinner is eaten in the evening and is usually very light, frequently consisting of leftovers from lunch, soups, or other simple, easily prepared items. A fourth meal is often consumed between lunch and dinner, and much like breakfast, can consist of bread with a variety of spreads and toppings. When families bake bread, they usually try to arrange it so that their bread can be finished in time for lunch, which means dropping off their bread at the public oven in the morning and picking it up just before lunch.

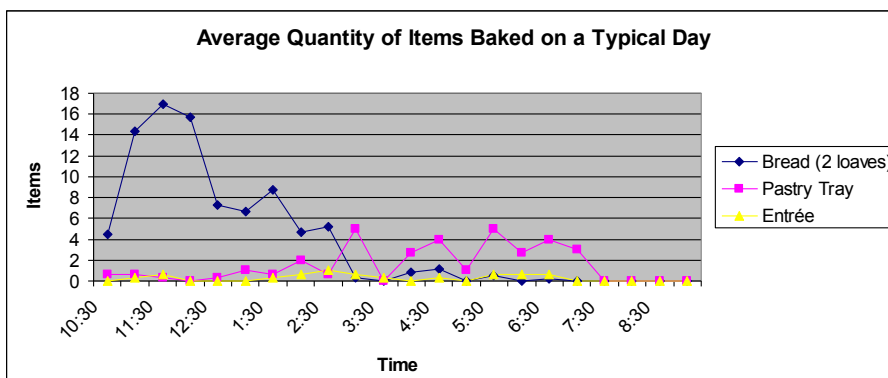
The public oven usually opens between 7 and 10 am: it does not have official hours but rather depends on when the baker arrives. Simply saying that the oven opens is a bit of an over simplification. Typically, the baker will arrive at the oven, unlock the door, and proceed to begin working with the oven door closed. In the early morning, the



**Figure 18:** This chart depicts the average number of customers who come to the oven in 30 min groups over the course of the day. Note that the peak of customer oven use occurs around 1:00 pm, corresponding roughly to the Moroccan lunch time. A second two peaks of oven use occur later on in the evening, at approximately dinner time (Chart produced by combining and averaging five days of data in ordinary time).

floor is often swept, items for sale prepared, and large labor intensive orders are worked on. Although the oven’s front door is closed, it is not locked and customers stop by, dropping off their family’s bread. As the morning progresses, the public oven’s door is left more and more open by subsequent customers until the baker finally decides to open the public oven completely and places the chest in the doorway. At this point, the oven is open and ready for business.

At some point, after the door is opened, the baker will light the fire, which is usually going by 10:30 or 11:00 am. Once the oven is heated, the first task of the day is baking family breads so that they can be finished in time for lunch. The baker, and the other men who eat lunch with him, usually wait to have lunch until about 2:00 pm. This period of the day, just after the lunch rush, is notably quiet as most customers are busy eating lunch with their families.



**Figure 19:** This chart illustrates the temporal distribution of different items coming out of the oven over the course of the day (Chart produced by combining and averaging three days of data in ordinary time).

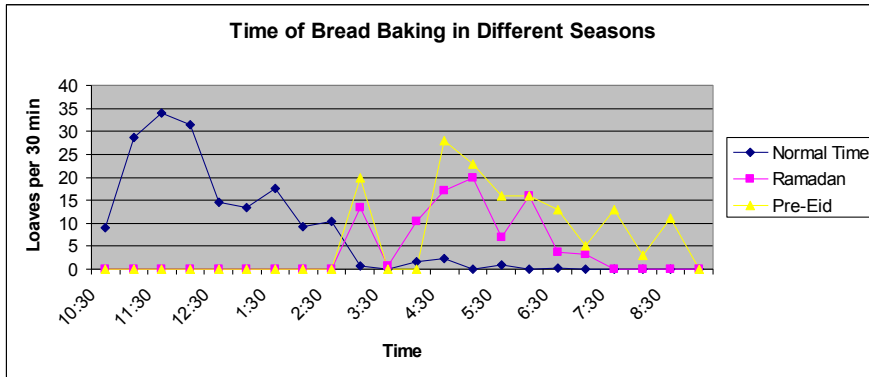
After lunch, the baker usually has a group of remaining family breads to bake, often for those families who work away from the medina, and are thus not home for lunch. By about 3:00 or 4:00 pm, the

baker is finished baking the family breads, and begins working on baking other more long term items such as cookies, *sufuf* flour, or *foqas*, which customers do not need right away. At roughly 9:30 or 10:00 pm, when the work is finished and customers have picked up their breads, the public oven closes.



In Morocco and in the public oven, Fridays are special. Friday is the Islamic holy day, and as a result, many families prepare couscous. Couscous is a grain which is steamed, covered in a broth, and served with vegetables, meat, or chicken. It is usually eaten with either a spoon or one's hands. Since it is a grain, couscous is one of the few Moroccan lunch items which is not eaten with bread. Friday, in the public oven, is a quieter day, as many of the families who would usually bake bread for lunch have couscous for lunch.

The month of Ramadan is also a special time in Morocco and in the public oven. For Muslims, Ramadan is the month in which the revelation of the Qur'an is celebrated



**Figure 20:** This graph illustrates the average number of loaves exiting the oven per half hour on the day before *Eid*, during Ramadan, and during normal time (The Ramadan and Normal Time bread counts are averaged based on data from three days each, while the pre-*Eid* data is from a single day).

through fasting. From morning's first light until sunset, all adult healthy Muslims—with the exception of menstruating or pregnant women, and the elderly—are expected to fast from all food, drink, and sex. At sunset in Rabat a cannon is fired, and the daily fast is broken with a

meal called *al-fitor*. *Fitor* in Morocco is usually a light meal which includes many sweets, a soup called *harrira*, but very little bread. As a result, Ramadan is a slow period for the public oven.

During most of Ramadan, the quantity of items brought to the public oven to be baked is so little that it only makes sense to keep the oven heated for a few hours everyday. Usually, the baker will open the public oven in the late morning, and then will leave or take a nap while he waits for the first families to bring by their bread. At around 2:30-3:30 pm, the baker usually lights the oven and starts baking bread. The public oven remains quiet until just before the fast is to be broken, at which point it becomes busy with those customers who are including bread in their *fitor* meal.



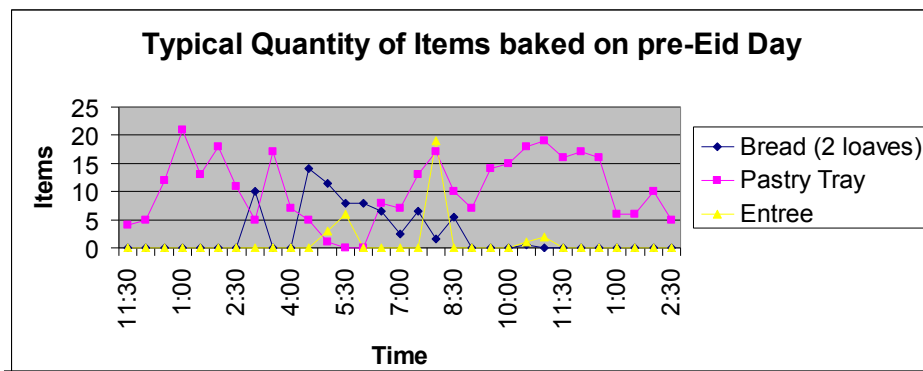
**Figure 21:** The four days before *Eid al-Fitor* are the oven's busiest days of the year.

During this project, *fitor* occurred at around 6:00 pm, at which point the baker

would break the fast at the oven with a number of local men. By 7:00 pm the baking is typically finished and the fire put out, but the public oven remains open until approximately 10:00-11:00 pm while the baker waits for the last customers to pick up their bread and baked goods. After the fast is broken, the public oven becomes a popular location for local men to hang out.

While Ramadan on the whole is a quiet time for the public oven, near the end of the month it becomes exceedingly busy. The end of Ramadan is celebrated by *Eid al-fitor*, or the holiday of breaking the fast, which is, as would be expected, a festival of eating. During the four days before *Eid al-fitor*, the public oven jumps into action and has its busiest days of the year. In these four days it is typical for the two bakers to work 20 hours a day, staggering their shifts so that the oven can be running for as long as possible. Working four 20 hour days back to back is difficult by itself, but to do so while fasting is an incredible feat. On a typical day before the *Eid*, the public oven will bake

approximately 149 loaves of bread, 177 trays of cookies, 53 trays of *foqas* loaves—each of which need to be baked, sliced, and re-baked twice—10 fish, and one tray of nuts. During the entire four days leading up to the



**Figure 22:** This chart illustrates which items are coming out of the oven when on the day before *Eid al-Fitor*. Notice, in comparison bread, the relatively large number of pastry trays which are baked during this period. Also, if we compare this chart to the same chart of an average day in ordinary time (Figure 19, p. 31), then the scale of the relative increase in pastry trays baked before *Eid al-Fitor* becomes apparent.

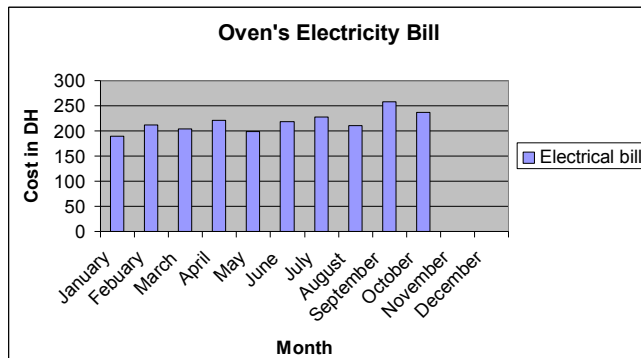
holiday, the public oven will bake an estimated 62,000 cookies and 40,000 pieces of *foqas*.<sup>1</sup> After the busy days of preparation are over, the bakers close the oven and take a three day break.

### ***The Economics of the Public Oven***

Even though the public oven sufficiently provides for the two bakers and their families, it is struggling economically. In Morocco, although the official unit of currency is the Moroccan Dirham (DH), most prices, at least among the baker and his customer's families, are thought of in a unit of currency call a *Riyal*, which is one twentieth of a Dirham. The public oven costs approximately 4000 *Riyal* (200 DH, \$22.00 US) a day to operate, which includes the cost of firewood, upkeep expenses, and ingredients for the items which the oven makes to sell. After this upkeep cost is collected, the bakers split the remaining profit between themselves. On average, each baker collects 1000 *Riyal* (50

<sup>1</sup> These estimates are the result of an intensive count of items coming in and out of the oven over the course of two days. The specific pastry estimates are based on the average number of pastries per tray, calculated from 50 trays of two sizes.

DH, \$5.50 US) for a full day of work. Both of the bakers are the only income earners in



**Figure 23: This graph shows the annual variation in size of the oven's monthly electricity bill.**

their households, and even in Morocco, this is not a lot of money to try to raise a family. When one considers the cost of food, household rent payments, and clothing, money is tight for the bakers but fortunately it is sufficient. In addition to the daily costs of running the oven, the oven also has three monthly expenses: the electricity bill, the water bill, and the rent. The electricity and the water bills are usually about 4000 *Riyals* (200 DH, \$22.00 US) each, per month.

However, the rent is somewhat complicated. Technically the oven is owned by two owners, and the rent is 20,000 *Riyal* (1000 DH, \$110.02 US) per month; however, the actual amount is somewhat less. One owner is paid 6000 *Riyal* (300 DH, \$33.01 US) a month, while the second oven owner receives 5000 *Riyal* (250 DH, \$27.52 US) per month. The remaining 9000 *Riyal* (450 DH, \$49.51 US) is to be paid in bread that is prepared and given to the sick and poor for free. Periodically, the bakers are expected to purchase the ingredients and make batches of bread which are given to the poor as a donation on behalf of the oven's two owners. In order to help out with the large monthly expenses, many oven customers pay for their oven use on a monthly rather than daily basis. Additionally, in order to earn enough money to pay the oven's monthly electricity and water bills, the head baker will often work as a server at occasions like weddings and funerals. In spite of the fact that the public oven, by itself, may not make enough money to pay its bills, it serves its purpose—providing for the bakers and their families, baking bread for the neighborhood, and, as we will see, it fulfills a significant social role for its community.

### Conclusion

As an institution, the public oven runs smoothly. It opens and closes. Families come to drop off their bread and other items to be baked. Breads are kept track of, baked in large groups, and returned to their appropriate *waselas*. Problems develop and are resolved. The organization of time and season in the public oven is heavily dependent on Moroccan eating habits. In spite of its seemingly cluttered appearance and lack of official hours, the public oven has a clearly defined system of operation which allows it to function effectively, limiting its mistakes and curbing its problems. However, for its neighborhood and community, the public oven is far more than simply an effective system, an enterprise, or a way to bake bread.



## The Public Oven as a Family

Within its community, and particularly among its community's men, the public oven serves a unique and surprising role. In her study on Moroccan familial relationships in the town of Sefrou, Hildred Geertz explains that the custom of female seclusion results in a limitation on the freedoms of men. Ultimately, she argues, the effect of the concealment of women is to create a sharp division of space between the public and the private spheres, which not only places women in the home but pushes men out. Geertz explains that "the world of the home...is above all a women's world. The men who live there...come and go with circumspection: the women are at ease" (1979: 330-331). While many women in Morocco today work outside of the home and come and go frequently, this division of space is still a very large part of Moroccan life within the medina. "Men," Geertz clarifies, "find the domestic sphere a complexly structured place where many of their actions are limited by rules of avoidance and by their lack of sufficient information about current situations" (1979: 331). As a result, Moroccan men usually spend little time at home. Generally, "from the time a boy is six years of age or so, he leads a life out in the streets that is quite independent of his family. The men and the boys enter the home mainly to eat and sleep, and spend their waking hours with their friends in school, coffee shops, workplaces, the market, the mosque, and the street" (1979: 333). Many men appear to find this sharp division of space somewhat limiting. Hildred Geertz even goes so far as to suggest that for men prostitution, as an "institution[,] plays a significant compensating role for the frustration of family life" (1979: 333). In a sense, this gendered division of space has created a cultural need: the need for men to develop alternatives to their domestic and family life.

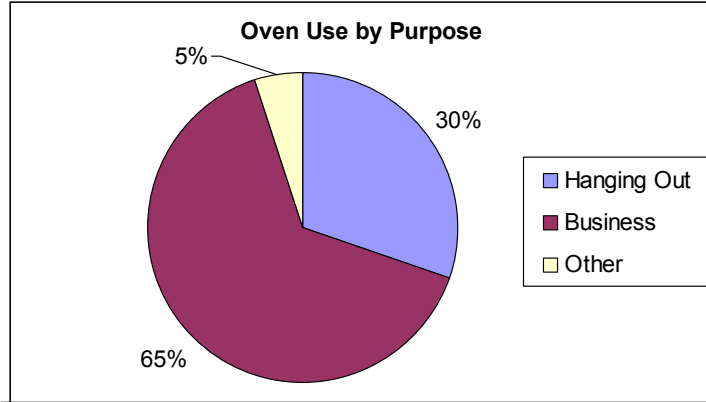
The exclusion of males from the domestic sphere places Moroccan men in a curious situation: they are obliged to develop their meaningful relationships and networks of emotional support outside of their home. "For most Moroccans," Geertz explains, "relaxed, intimate, and satisfying personal relationships appear possible only with persons of the same sex [and, due to men's exclusion from the domestic sphere,] a man's closest friendships appear to be not with his father, brothers, or cousins, but with peers outside the immediate family" (1979: 332). As a result, a male's network of friendship and social support is largely located outside of the home. The discomfort which men experience within their own homes calls for the existence of a separate space where men can go to relax, unwind, and hide from the stress of their domestic lives.

The public oven, as an institution, is this space. It is a place which men and boys of the community enter "like it is their own house," in order to relax, rest, and share in each other's company. It is a place of good conversations, humor, stories and advice. It is

a place where problems are talked through, and a sanctuary where people can hide from the glaring eyes of the outside world. It is a place where there is “always food and tea” and where magnificent meals are prepared and shared. It is a place with beds and a television where one can nap, unwind, or catch a movie. Most of all, for these men, the public oven serves as an exclusively male pseudo-domestic space where they can come, not only to relax, but also to take on domestic tasks and activities traditionally associated with women.

***The Public Oven as a Social Environment***

The atmosphere of the public oven is warm, welcoming, and comfortable: it is a center of neighborhood conversation. As the baker explains, “everyone who comes to the oven has a story,” and stories, along with community gossip, are a vital part of oven discourse. Men use the oven to share neighborhood news and information, and a variety of stories, ranging from funny or shocking experiences, to historical events and parables. In addition to stories, a wide range of other topics are also discussed at the oven, including religious ideas, soccer matches, movie plots, political frustrations, and food. Food in particular is a common theme of oven discussion, and conversations on cooking techniques, food quality, price, recipes, and skills are frequent. Most basically, the public oven is a casual space in which men can discuss and reflect on the topics which are central to and define their lives.



**Figure 24: This chart illustrates the apparent purpose of customers stopping by the public oven. If someone comes to the oven, then there is a 30% chance that they will be using it for an exclusively social purpose (Information for this chart was gathered by observing the oven use by customers on 15 days, N=2432).**



**Figure 25: The public oven is used as a social center for men of the community.**

the topics which are central to and define their lives.

Often the public oven is a place where men will come for advice and assistance in learning. One man, for instance, who was attempting to memorize portions of the Qur’an, would occasionally come by the oven and recite what he knew for the baker. Although the head baker has not memorized the Qur’an, he listens to it as he works early in the early morning, and was able to correct the man’s recitation of the Qur’an on details as subtle as sloppily pronounced letters, incorrect short vowels, and missing words. Another

oven regular, a teenage boy, along with the second baker’s son, will show up at the oven

in order to get help on his homework. Additionally, during the course of my research, several people who were learning English came by the oven to ask me questions and practice their English conversation skills. Moreover, for me at least, the public oven was a place in which many people would stop by in order to teach me about their versions of Islam and thoughts on God. As a neighborhood social center, the public oven serves as an information focal point: a spot where one can take difficult questions in order to get answers from knowledgeable community members.

Additionally, the oven is a place where people take their problems. Taking on the role of a community psychologist, the baker often helps others sort through their frustrations and rethink their dilemmas. “A friendly person,” the baker explains, “comes by, sits next to me, talks about his problems, while I tell him my problems, and that helps people to relax.” The baker sees the very act of reviewing problems as productive in and of itself, as “it is necessary for people to talk and cry to relax well.” As a result, the oven is a valuable social support tool for men and boys: it serves as a place where they can talk their problems through, gain advice, deal with grief, and sort through family conflicts. In these discussions, and in other situations, proverbs are frequently cited and exchanged, and appear to help individuals to think about and come to terms with their troubles.

Humor is a major part of the oven’s social environment. Jokes, often dry, sarcastic and mocking, are commonplace, and they give the oven a friendly and jovial atmosphere. Direct joking insults, along with stereotype based humor, are particularly prevalent. Frequently these direct insults evolve into sarcastic arguments and play fighting. Humor, even in the form of these mock confrontations, not only helps the men to relax, but it helps them to have fun and promotes a sense of lighthearted camaraderie.

The public oven is also a center of a variety of entertainment activities for the men of the neighborhood. Often odd or unusual spectacles are brought to the oven, and frequently these are followed by a group of male spectators. In one instance, a man



**Figure 26: The body and organs of the slaughtered hedgehog, just before being placed into the oven.**

brought a live hedgehog to the oven, took it to the roof, and with the help of the baker, slaughtered, skinned, and baked it. Killing and skinning a hedgehog is a long process, and it attracted a group of spectators who, after the animal was killed, removed and played with several of its organs. These spectacles are curious and unusual, and as a result they are fantastic entertainment for those hanging out at the oven. Men also come to

the oven to play games. The most popular game at the oven is a version of checkers called *dominga*, which has different rules

governing the movement of kings. The baker has a cardboard checkerboard and pieces for the game, and neighborhood men periodically come to the oven with the specific purpose of using the board and playing the game. Additionally, one of the oven regulars

purchased a television and installed it in the sleeping room on the roof of the oven. The television, which was not connected to a satellite, was used to watch soccer, local programming, and movies, and men frequently come to the oven in order to sit with their friends and watch the television. As a community social center, the public oven is a place where the men of the neighborhood can come to relax, laugh, develop meaningful relationships, and be entertained; however, a number of occurrences also take place in the public oven which demonstrate its role as a pseudo-domestic space.

### ***Men Working in the Public Oven for Free***

One of the more curious phenomena of the public oven is that men who hang out at the oven often do work for free. Frequently individuals will come by the oven and spend hours at a time helping the baker, without the expectation that they will get paid or receive any reimbursement for their labor.

Many men who work for free at the public oven do not even stay for its meals. At any one moment during the day, there are usually between one to three men working at the oven for free. The head baker does not pay the men who help out at the public oven because, he explains, they come when they want to and don't work hard; therefore, it is not suitable to pay them. When asked why he does not get paid for his work, one of the men who hangs out at the oven explained that he does not get paid because "it is not official work. I only help [the baker]" while another man sitting nearby clarified, "if he wants to do [something to help



**Figure 27: This man, working in the oven without getting paid, is bagging the oven's *foqas* for sale.**

out] then he will do it, but if he doesn't want to do it then he won't." An individual's relationship to the baker appears to be a major motive for the free assistance, as one informant explained, "I work for nothing. He is my friend and my brother." I believe it is important to draw a distinction between what we would consider 'volunteer work' and the work done for free at the oven. Unlike volunteers, those who help out at the oven do not appear to consider their work as something kind, good, or altruistic, but rather as an activity done out of their relationship with the baker. In other words, the phenomenon of men assisting at the oven for free appears to be closer to a son helping his parents clean up after dinner or running errands for his family than to traditional volunteer work. Those who help out for free at the oven are rarely thanked or given any sign of appreciation by the bakers. Most of the work taken on by men who come to the oven consists of activities which are easy and require little or no skill. Frequently, when a customer comes to the oven to pick up their bread, they will be helped by one of these men who will find the customer's bread, accept the customers' money and place it in the oven's cash drawer. The fact that the neighborhood men are trusted to have access to the oven's cash draw



and to accept customers' money is a significant phenomenon which I will discuss in greater detail later. In order to load or unload the oven, the baker needs to sit in the warm space between the baking room and the oven itself. Often, men hanging out at the oven will move baked and unbaked bread to and from the baker so that he does not need to stand up. These tasks help the baker significantly, and smooth out the daily operation of the oven. Additionally, the men working for free help the oven prepare its *foqas* for sale by laying out the sliced *foqas* pieces on cookie sheets and packaging the finished *foqas* pieces into bags. Tasks which require even minimal skill, such as slicing things, breaking up the *sufuf* flour, or taking things in and out of the oven, are usually done by one of the bakers. On rare occasions, often when the bakers aren't looking or aren't present, men working for free will attempt more skilled tasks, such as lighting the oven's fire, moving things in and out of the oven, and breaking up baked *sufuf* flour. The fact that community men provide free assistance to the baker in the public oven, and do it out of their personal relationship with him, in much the same way one would assist in household chores, hints at the social use of the oven as a pseudo-domestic space.

### ***The Oven as a Household***

When the baker talks about the public oven itself, he often refers to it as a "home", a metaphor which underlines the oven's use as pseudo-domestic sphere. But the classification of the public oven as a home is not simply limited to words; rather the oven's use models that of the domestic sphere in several ways.

The clothing of both of the bakers in the public oven highlights the use of the oven as a domestic space. Although the head baker lives approximately 100 yards from the oven, he wears a separate set of clothing to walk to and from the oven. Usually, his work clothes are worn under his street clothes, and he simply takes off layers when he arrives at the oven. During the summer, this often means changing from longer to shorter shorts and from a more formal shirt to a tee-shirt. The baker explains that the public oven, and particularly the area that one needs to sit to operate the oven itself, is dirty and filled with soot, and he doesn't want his clothes to get soiled and smoky, adding that his working clothes are also more comfortable. When asked why he doesn't simply wear his baking clothes on the walk to work, the baker explained that the more casual clothes would be inappropriate for the street. As a space, the oven, much like a home, is separated from the street by its more casual dress code. Additionally, the head baker keeps a *jallaba* in the baking room which he wears when he performs his daily prayers at the nearby mosque. The baker says that he wears the *jallaba* because it is more 'Islamic' than his tee shirt and shorts, and moreover, because he is worried that the smell of his smoky clothes will be distracting to other people praying. The second baker, although he lives further away, is less particular and usually wears his baking clothes to work. However, when it is warm, the second baker will often take off his shirt and wander around the public oven wearing only shorts. Before leaving the oven again, the second baker puts on a shirt, also denoting the oven as separate and special space. Both bakers, although they can be seen from the street when in the baking room, are comfortable dressing notably more casually at the oven than they would be if they were walking on the street, demonstrating that the oven is considered a portion of the private sphere.

Another way the use of the public oven imitates the use of the domestic space is in the notions of cleanliness under which the oven operates. Many items which are

dropped on the floor in the public oven are considered still safe to eat while the same items dropped on the street outside the oven would be deemed too dirty to eat. Loaves of bread are often placed on the baking room floor without incident. Cookies and pastries that customers bring to the oven regularly fall on the ground when they are being moved from the cookie sheets to the customer's container. The customers usually watch this process, but I have never seen a customer complain about the baker mixing the items which have fallen on the floor with the rest of their order. The idea that the oven is a clean space, a space in which one can eat food dropped on the floor, differentiates it from the public environment of the street, again indicating that the oven functions as a private pseudo-domestic space. Conversely, powdered items, such as *sufuf* flour, which fall on the floor are considered dirty and are swept away rather than mixed with the other clean *sufuf* flour. This distinction is probably the result of the fine grain of the *sufuf* flour which means that dirt cannot be simply dusted off, but mixes into the substance itself. Additionally, other activities which one may only do at home, such as clipping one's nails, are also undertaken in the public oven.

### ***The Exclusion of Women***

For men, the public oven is a sanctuary, a place where they can hide from their problems, their female dominated homes, and their families. As a result, it necessitates the exclusion of women. But what does this exclusion entail? How is the private male space of the oven created, and what happens if that space is violated? Under what circumstances are women allowed in the public oven, and how are they treated when they are there?

The private male space of the oven appears to be created, at least in part, by the chest placed in the oven's doorway. Although the public oven has many female customers, and female customers who maintain friendly, humor-based relations with the two bakers, these women will almost never enter the oven beyond the doorway. Since the only way in or out of the public oven involves climbing over the chest, the chest creates a clear boundary between the public street and domestic space of the oven. Early in the morning, before the baker puts the chest in place, women will actually enter the oven to bring the baker their baked goods. Although they never stay long, this presence of women in the early morning indicates that it is the chest itself which creates the male space of the oven. When the chest is in place, this is a very different matter. The female customers whom I interviewed explained that they would never enter the public oven or hangout there because it would not be respectable. In Morocco, "sexuality is considered to be a natural, God-given drive. It is not felt to be a matter for inner control but rather for exterior regulation, mainly on the part of the social community," (Geertz, H 1979: 332). The notion that sexual desires should be regulated socially, suggests that the need to preserve a private male space, and the notion that one's 'respectability' depends on not violating this gendered space, are social means maintained to control sexuality. On one occasion, I did witness a violation of the oven's male space. A teenage girl came to the oven and wanted to talk to the head baker who was upstairs in the preparation room. After shouting for several minutes without a reply, she hesitantly climbed over the counter and sprinted upstairs. The entire time she was in the public oven, she bounced up and down on her feet as if to indicate impermanence. When she tried to leave, the second baker stood in her way and told her she had to kiss him in order to get out. After a

moment, she gave him a light kiss on the cheek and, as she climbed over the doorway chest to leave, another boy gave her a light slap on the butt. Although the entire interaction was done jovially, the message was clear: the boundary defining the public oven as a male space is a sexual one, and violations of that boundary are punished by instances of uncontrolled sexuality.

Occasionally, women are invited to enter the oven, and in this case they are given a special status as “guests”. Usually when a guest arrives at the oven, the heavy doorway chest is removed so that they may enter the oven more easily. When these guests come into the oven, they are taken upstairs to either the preparation room or the sitting area on roof where they cannot be seen from the street. Over the course of my research, the second baker’s wife came into the oven several times as a guest. Even though she is the second baker’s wife, and thus has much more to do with the oven than men who hang out in it, her gender gives her guest status. When a guest is in the public oven they are entertained only by the people who extended the invitation, and their privacy is important. No one else is permitted to enter the room or portion of the oven where the guest is, and usually food is served to them while they are at the oven. I observed the protocol for entertaining guests at the oven when, with the approval of the baker, I invited a female American friend to come to the public oven and join us for *fitor*, or the meal breaking the daily fast during the month of Ramadan. An elaborate meal was prepared for her. When my friend arrived at the oven she was taken to the preparation room and was specifically seated on top of a crate next to the wall, a position which I have come to understand is the seat of honor for meals in the oven. While eating, the conversation was entirely focused on my guest, and she was asked many questions about how she liked the food, what she thought of the public oven, how she liked Morocco, etc. One oven regular came late to the meal, and attempted to leave when he saw that he had walked in on a guest. When the meal was over, the baker made a point of wetting a cloth so that my guest could wash her hands without using the faucet and seeing the oven’s often dirty toilet. After dinner, I suggested we sit in the room on the roof of the oven, and the oven regulars quickly cleaned it before we were allowed to go sit upstairs. Throughout the entire experience, an effort was made to hide the reality of the oven and present it as something more refined, clean, and sterile than the original. Furthermore, the focus of attention on and conversation with my friend, along with the assumption that guests should not be disturbed by ordinary oven activities, all served to hide the social reality of the public oven. While women can and do enter the public oven as guests, they are presented with, not the oven itself in all of its dirt, casual conversations and humor, but with a constructed illusion which hides this reality from them. In a sense, this illusion, which emerges out of the demonstration of hospitality and the construction of the guest status for women, protects the oven as a male space and a pseudo-domestic sphere from the threat caused by a female presence. The public oven as a pseudo-domestic space, and a sanctuary in which men come to relax, is dependent on it being an exclusively male environment. Not only does a female presence undermine the oven’s role as a male sanctuary from women and the Moroccan home, but it also threatens the mandate of men to perform traditionally feminine domestic tasks.

### ***Men Taking on Women’s Roles: Lunch in the Public Oven***

Lunch is the largest meal in Morocco, and the daily lunches prepared in the public oven are the center of its social life. Ordinarily, five to eight lunch regulars, and often a few other men, come to the public oven to enjoy lunch, which is a spectacular event. Magnificent, enormous, and ornate gourmet meals are prepared daily, and eaten on a small table in the preparation room. My personal favorite dish is roasted chicken *smen*, which consists of chicken, onions and potatoes mixed together and roasted with an aged clarified Moroccan butter called *smen*. Other popular lunch dishes include salt roasted sardines, lentils, Moroccan pizza (without cheese which is too expensive), meat and eggs, fabulous *tajines*, roasted fish, in addition to various cold salads made of tomatoes, roasted peppers, and eggplants. Moroccan food is usually eaten from a communal pan or platter with bread. Oddly enough, the majority of bread consumed in oven lunches is commercially made and purchased from a nearby store, although occasionally extra loaves of the salt-less bread for the sick, or pieces torn from the loaves of bread of the customers, are used for lunch. The head baker likes to end each lunch by drinking soda, his favorite of which is Poms, an apple jolly rancher flavored soda, which is purchased cold from a nearby store.

The fabulous lunches served in the oven are a source of pride for the baker and lunch regulars, who believe that the oven lunches are far superior to the food they usually eat at home.

Lunches in the public oven are also an opportunity for men to perform traditional feminine domestic tasks. Once, the baker asked me if I knew why the lunches in the public oven were so much better than the food he usually eats at

home. “It is because there are no women here,” he said, and thus he and other men could come to the oven and “be artistic” in their cooking. In Morocco, where cooking is considered part of the domestic sphere, and therefore dominated by women, most men don’t have the opportunity to cook in their own homes. As a result, many men who come to the oven come to cook. Lunches in the public oven are prepared by a variety of people, usually one of the lunch regulars or bakers, but they are rarely prepared by the same person more than a few days in a row. A lot of pride is taken in the ability to cook well, and as a result lunch preparation takes on a somewhat competitive nature in which chefs try to prepare meals which are the most economical and delicious, and then critique them while eating. In some cases, these meals are prepared by multiple people who cooperate or prepare separate dishes. Other traditionally feminine domestic tasks, such as cleaning dishes, and sweeping, are also undertaken by men in the oven, but unlike cooking, they



**Figure 28: Lunch is the center of the oven’s social life. Here, men in the oven consume a *tajine*.**

are done out of necessity rather than pleasure. Often, men who are not part of the regular lunch group prepare and join in lunch as guest chefs. Certain members of the group, such as the second baker, have developed a wide reputation within the community for their cooking skills; however, it appears that, due to female dominance of the domestic sphere, much of their opportunity to cook is located exclusively in the oven.

Most of the lunches prepared in the public oven cost between 400-800 *Riyals* (20-40 DH, \$2.20-4.40 US) all together, which is divided among the diners. Usually, the lunch regulars pay approximately 100-200 *Riyals* (5-10 DH, \$0.55-1.10 US) for lunch, depending on how many people show up. Several of the lunch regulars are unemployed and thus are not charged anything for the meal, while the others happily make up the difference. As a result, the cost of lunch is determined, not on how much diners eat, but how able they are to pay, as one lunch regular pointed out, “we help each other.” Lunch is often used as a demonstration of hospitality. As mentioned above, during my entire 3.5 months of research I was offered lunch at the oven every day and never permitted to pay.

### ***The Oven as a Family***

In addition to the common description of the public oven itself as a house, the metaphor of the family is used to describe the community of men who hang out at the oven. The baker himself refers to the men who frequent the oven as *usrat al-furan*, or ‘the oven family.’ Oven regulars also use the metaphor of the family to describe the public oven. An oven regular, when asked why he comes to the public oven, responded “I just come to sit with the family. This is my second family.” Other oven regulars say that they “grew up in the public oven,” one of them adding that at the oven “we live like a family and we are like a family.” The characterization of the public oven community as a family, by both the baker and the oven regulars, supports my interpretation that the social nature of the oven is that of an exclusively male pseudo-domestic sphere. When describing an oven regular, the baker explained that “if there was not the environment of the family here [in the public oven], then [he] would not be here now.... We have a family environment here before anything else.” This familial environment provides comfort, emotional support, and friendship to the men that frequent the public oven and it is this familial character on which the social setting of the oven rotates. One interesting aspect to the repeated characterization of the public oven as a family is that the men appear to see themselves as ‘brothers’ and thus equals to one another rather than thinking of their relationships as a typical familial hierarchy. The head baker, who would logically be the ‘father’ of the oven family, explains his relationship to one of the oven regulars, saying that “his father is like my father and his brother is like my brother [the second baker]”. Even outside of the public oven, the oven ‘family’ spends time doing activities together. Both bakers, in addition to at least six men who frequent the public oven, are runners, and the group goes running together several times a week. A complicated route has even been established which involves stops for sit ups, push ups, pull ups, and ends in a race to the oven door. The public oven’s toilet includes a cold water shower, providing the bakers a place to rinse off before continuing to work.

### *Sleeping in the Public Oven*

In many traditional Moroccan homes, people sleep on couches placed along a room's walls. During the day time, these couches are a sitting and entertaining area, and



**Figure 29: The public oven's beds.**

at night they can be easily covered with a sheet and slept on. One of the most surprising characteristics of the public oven is the presence of beds, which are doubly used as couches. These beds are on the roof of the oven inside a corrugated metal and plastic shack which serves as the oven's sitting and sleeping area.

The baker explained to me that the current use of the public oven as a sleeping space

is a continuation of much older tradition. Historically, the gates of Moroccan medinas, or old

walled cities, would be closed at night to ensure the safety of the city. When these gates were shut, it was often the case that people who lived outside the medina would get stuck inside and with nowhere to sleep. Public ovens were traditionally a place where these unfortunate travelers would be taken in and given a place to sleep for free. As a result, the public oven served as a sort of a traveler's shelter for those who found themselves locked in the medina at night. Whether this explanation is a legend or historically accurate, I am unaware as I have thus far been unable to find a source which either proves or refutes this claim; however, this historical description is logical given the current use of the public oven as a place to sleep. Before the oven's preparation room was added in 1930, the baker explained that people would sleep on the floor of the baking room. Additionally, the baker says that there were many more people who slept at the oven when it was run by his father. Today, one must know the baker well in order to spend the night at the oven, and there are only three people who sleep at the oven with regularity. Sleeping at the oven is completely free: those who sleep there are not expected to provide assistance at the oven in exchange for a place to sleep.

Briefly looking at who these three individuals are, and why they sleep in the public oven illuminates much about how and why the oven is used as a place to sleep. The first individual who sleeps at the oven is a young man in his late teens who likes to surf. He grew up very happily in the medina as one of the oven's customers; however, when he was 11, his family decided to move to Temera, a town about an hour away. At 11 years old, the boy was distraught: he did not want to move away from his friends to a new town where he couldn't even surf. In short, his family's decision to move forced him to pick between his biological family and his oven family. After some thought, his choice became clear and when his family moved he told them that he was not going with them. He has been living at the oven for approximately six years since his family moved away.

Although he visits his parents frequently, spending approximately three nights a week sleeping with them, his real home is the public oven. Until the final days of this project, the young man was unemployed. He would eat his meals and sleep for free at the oven, and, in exchange for the free meals, he is expected to help the bakers, if he has time. If he is around, the bakers will often ask him to run errands and do other related tasks.

Another man who sleeps at the oven regularly is in his twenties and works in a nearby gym. Although he also grew up in the medina of Rabat as one of the oven's customers, his family moved to Sale where his mother and his six siblings live. Sale is quite close to Rabat; however, getting to the medina every morning from Sale is difficult. As a result, he spends two to three nights a week sleeping at the oven. Additionally, sleeping in the public oven gives the man independence from his family, which he thinks is important. While he also sleeps at the oven for free, he pays a small price for lunch and is thus not asked to provide the same level of assistance to the bakers as the young man.

The last man who regularly sleeps at the oven was a friend of the bakers' father. He is soft spoken and quite old. Historically, homes and businesses in the medina did not have running water and would get their water from a system of public water fountains. Even toilets could not be flushed without using water obtained from the public water fountain, and this last man's job was to deliver water from the public fountain to houses and businesses throughout the medina. Today, with the exception of a few hold out households, running water has been installed throughout the medina of Rabat and the public fountains have been turned off. After losing his livelihood, this last man started turning to other sources of income which included doing household jobs for various families and killing chickens. Today, he makes money by guarding parked cars and begging. Since he is well known and liked in the market nearby the oven, and an integral part of the community, he has the uncanny ability to go into the market and come back with money and handfuls of vegetables various vendors have given him for free. He sleeps at the oven four to six nights a week, and spends the remainder of his time visiting his mother and siblings who live in Sale.



**Figure 30: The TV, located on the covered area of the roof with the beds, is a center of social activity in the public oven.**

These three individuals are similar in several important ways. Each of these men is closely tied to, and integrally part of, the public oven's neighborhood, either by growing up in the community, or by working there for decades. Additionally, each of these men has a home outside the neighborhood, but nowhere to stay while in the medina itself. Certain characteristics of a travel's shelter do appear to be maintained in the modern public oven by the simple fact that all of those who sleep in oven have homes outside the medina. For each of these people, spending the night at the oven

saves them the time of commuting daily from their homes outside Rabat to the medina. But additionally these similarities suggest that the public oven, as a pseudo-domestic sphere, can actually become a real home in the event that one no longer has a place to sleep.

During the day, the beds on top of the oven become a center for social activity. One of the men who often sleeps at the oven purchased a TV as a gift and placed it on the roof. He explained that it was “so that [the bakers] could watch it with [him. The TV] is open to everyone. [That way,] when there is a soccer match, [anyone] can come and watch it.” In addition to soccer, the television is used to watch gory movies and cartoons, which are widely enjoyed by the men who hang out in the public oven. Furthermore, the bakers often need to work long hours, and the beds on top of the oven are a place where they can relax and nap when the oven is not busy, which is particularly useful during Ramadan. The roof is an especially popular place to hang out and relax after *fitor*, the meal breaking the daily Ramadan fast.

### ***Taboo Activities***

As a pseudo-domestic sphere, the public oven is a place where men can come to do things privately that they would be uncomfortable or unable to do in their own homes: it is a space where men can engage in culturally taboo activities. In Morocco, which activities are considered taboo, and how taboo they are, depends largely on the community’s predominately shared interpretation of Islam, and the Qur’an which is considered to be the unchanging word of God and the foundation of Islamic moral and ethical thought.

The most common taboo activity which occurs at the oven is the consumption of marijuana in various forms. Unlike alcohol which is specifically prohibited by the Qur’an, marijuana is not mentioned, and thus its status is less clear. As a result, marijuana consumption is generally considered to be more acceptable than the consumption of alcohol, and there are many Moroccan men who would never touch alcohol but are quite comfortable using marijuana regularly. Nevertheless, marijuana is illegal in Morocco and considered by many Muslims to be religiously unacceptable. In the public oven, marijuana is consumed in a variety of forms. It is smoked in the form of hashish and kif, and—as would be expected in a public oven—it is frequently baked and consumed in the form of various pastries. Traditional Moroccan pastries, such as *greeba* and cake, can be prepared with marijuana; furthermore, even marijuana *sufuf*—a mixture of dried marijuana leaves, ground almonds, honey, and *sufuf*—can be prepared and eaten as a green paste. Most commonly, marijuana is prepared and consumed individually, but occasionally a batch of marijuana pastries is prepared and consumed by a large group of people in the public oven.

The baker believes that the primary danger of taboo activities is not the activities themselves, but the effect that they can have on the surrounding community. People, the baker believes, should have freedom to choose between right and wrong and, he explains, “it is not possible for me to be their father and their mother and tell them what they can and can’t do. I can only...tell them that this hurts your body.” This emphasis on an individual’s freedom of choice, and the notion that their behavior should be self rather than externally restrained, further highlights the fraternal equality present in the characterization of the public oven as a family. The baker’s perspective is based strongly



in his conviction that “if a person approaches his life...acknowledging a path of good and evil, then a day will come when he picks the path of good.” As a result, the baker believes that it is important for people to have the opportunity and freedom to try taboo activities so that, when they finally decides to give up the ‘path of evil’, they do it for the right reasons. In other words, “if you eat a lot of marijuana...you become sick and you don’t eat it again.”

Since people are going to do taboo activities anyway, and since the baker regards these activities to be a greater danger to the community than to the individual, it makes sense to provide a private space in which taboo activities can be done without putting the community at risk. The baker explains that, if people want to do taboo activities, then “it is better for [them] to come here [to the oven] than to run into problems with the police or to encourage people” on the street. Doing forbidden activities in a private place where “no one sees you but yourself” is an important aspect of the oven’s role as a center of taboo activities and of its role in protecting the surrounding community as a whole. One of the major dangers of taboo activities is the threat that they have to create familial problems, and the public oven is a place where one “can do [these activities] without making it a scandal, without [one’s] mother or father needing to sleep with” the knowledge that their child has done forbidden activities. The oven’s use as a space for taboo activities protects the integrity of the neighborhood, the community, and families. The baker’s only stipulation is that he “[doesn’t] want problems” with the police, families, or others.

Although it is rarer than marijuana products, alcohol is also consumed in the public oven. When consumed at the oven, alcohol most commonly appears to be drunk in large social groups on the roof, while watching television. Usually only a few people in the larger group will drink, and the purpose for those who do drink is generally to get drunk and enjoy the associated physical effects rather than the pleasure of the drink itself. Additionally, although smoking is common throughout Morocco, it was also cited by the baker as a taboo activity which occurs in the public oven.

In addition to smoking, alcohol and marijuana use, a variety of taboo sexual activities occur in the public oven as well. The baker explains that the public oven is a place where “a person who isn’t married can come with a girl” and engage in romantic endeavors and sexual intercourse. In this case, a man will bring a girl into the oven, as an invited guest, and will take her to the roof where they will be left alone. Usually, the man will serve his guest a meal, and then, as I understand it, they will engage in intercourse. However, the ability to use the oven for this purpose is reserved for unmarried men. If a married man had sexual intercourse with someone other than his wife, it “would break up the marriage” and thus cause problems for the baker and the man’s family. Additionally, the public oven also serves as a space in which other sexual activities, such as masturbation and watching pornography, occur.

One surprising taboo activity which my informants claim takes place in the public oven is the consumption of pork. Pork is specifically prohibited by the Qur’an, is difficult to find in Morocco, and—unlike alcohol or marijuana—does not produce interesting physical effects. But pork is a delicious meat, and it is apparently roasted on occasion in the oven and eaten by some of the men who come to hang out.

The public oven serves as a sanctuary and refuge in which men of the community can come to do taboo activities, protecting both those who do taboo activities and the community itself from the threatening scandals, problems and social conflicts that the taboo activities could cause. Both of these protections require creating and protecting a private space in the public oven. With very few exceptions, taboo activities in the public oven occur in the sitting/sleeping area on the roof. The baker explains that the roof is used because, from the street, it is almost impossible to tell if there is anyone up there. Not only can individuals on the roof not be seen from the street but, unless it is the dead



**Figure 31: Structures on the roofs of homes, such as this one, are often used for taboo activities.**

of night, they also cannot be heard. As a result, the roof is a near perfect private place for taboo activities to occur. A second reason the room on the roof may be used is so the oven itself will not be disgraced. Many Moroccan homes I have visited, including the family I stayed with while researching this project, have small structures on their roofs that are also used for taboo activities. The idea is that, when someone wants to do a taboo activity, they can go up to the roof and, since they are going outside and are technically not in the house, they can perform taboo activities in a separate special room

without disrespecting or dishonoring the home. Since the room on the roof of the oven is also used for taboo activities, it is possible that there may be a similar system of respect for the public oven, as a pseudo-domestic space, although this is not acknowledged by the baker.

### ***Conclusion***

Once, the baker explained to me that in his opinion it is a mistake to try to understand the public oven as a “system”, a business or an economic institution. The public oven, he said, is most importantly and fundamentally a space. As a space, the public oven functions as a home for the neighborhood’s men. It is a place where men can come to relax, laugh, get advice, and to discuss and reflect on the issues that dominate their lives. It is a place delineated as private by its relative dress code and standards of cleanliness. It is a space which is exclusively male and structured using the metaphors of house and family. At the oven, men take pride in preparing artistic and elaborate meals and thus in their performance of feminine domestic tasks. Beds in the public oven serve as a place where community members who no longer have homes in the area can sleep. Additionally, the public oven is a private sanctuary where men can do taboo activities in secret without harming their families or hurting their community. As we have seen, for neighborhood men, the public oven serves as an articulately and well defined pseudo-domestic space, providing them with a place to relax and an escape from their feminine dominated homes.



## **The Baker as a Family Member**

The baker also has a domestic role in his customers' families. This role was mentioned by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz in his analysis of the Suq of the city of Sefrou, who comments in a footnote that "the baker's activity...is ideally viewed as part of domestic life, and thus he is, so to speak, an honorary family member" (1979: 310). Geertz's characterization of the role of the baker in his community, at least at the oven observed in this case study, is extraordinarily accurate; however Geertz does not elaborate on his point. This relationship between the baker and his customers is far from simple or straight forward, but rather is an elaborate and complicated bond held together by an intricate system of rights and responsibilities on the part of both the baker and his customers.

### ***Baker-Customer Relations***

The baker has a close relationship to the families of the neighborhood, a relationship which is atypical of the ordinary relationship between customers and their merchants or service providers. One of the simplest ways that this special bond is conveyed is through the baker-customer interaction which occurs in the public oven. Rather than treating each other with polite formality, the baker and the customer often respond to one another with an informality which, at least to a non-Moroccan, frequently appears to edge on rudeness. This informality is similar to the sort of casual banter that would normally exist between siblings. It is ok, for instance, for the bakers and the men working at the oven to call customers 'stupid'. When a customer has a problem and starts shouting, it is not uncommon for the baker or the men in the oven to shout back or mock the customer. Even with informalities of shouting, mocking, or sarcastic comments the baker is usually able to maintain a friendly and jovial tone in the baker-customer interaction. However, this is not always the case. On one occasion, a woman became so frustrated and upset with the fact that her bread was not left to rise sufficiently, that she started shouting at the bakers and eventually broke into tears. When she started crying the second baker, and another man in the oven, laughed at her, and in the following days she continued to come to the oven as if the incident had not happened. Although the woman appeared to be hurt and extremely frustrated by the ordeal, the fact that she returned and continued using the oven normally is an indication of the depth of the attachment and bond between the baker and his customers. A portion of the informal treatment of customers may be the result of the large number of men helping out at the public oven for free. Since returning or accepting baked goods generally requires no skill, it is a task

often undertaken by these unpaid workers. If one is not getting paid, then there is no reason not to respond to an angry customer with an insult or a shout.

Customers, in turn, are also often informal in their interactions with the baker. Occasionally male customers will tackle the baker, rub his head, pull his ears, or tickle him. This type of behavior is far more fraternal than what one would usually expect from an ordinary economic interaction. Customers will often mock the baker by referring to him by nicknames such as “Mr. Stupid.” Although nicknames are a common part of daily Moroccan interaction, the customers’ frequent use of disrespectful and potentially offensive nicknames toward the baker indicates a level of comfort between the baker and his customers.

Most customers have an intricate knowledge of how to use the public oven system, and will manipulate it to get what they want. When some customers come to the oven, they pound on the counter, and shout loudly in order to get attention or service. Customers are generally quick to complain if an item is taking a long time to bake or if it comes out wrong. Although the baker may respond to complaints with annoyance or sarcasm, complaints are generally listened to. One of the most common ways to get one’s bread baked faster is to claim that the bread has a lot of yeast. Breads made by Moroccan families using the public oven are made with live yeast and generally tend to use much more yeast (as much as a ¼ cup of yeast for 2 loaves of bread can be used) than is called for in the American recipes I am accustomed to baking, and, as a result, Moroccan loaves have much shorter rising times. If too much yeast is added and if allowed to rise for too long, it is possible for breads to over rise and collapse in on themselves. Ordinarily breads in the public oven are baked in the approximate order that they are received, but by adding a lot of yeast to breads, or claiming that their bread has a lot of yeast, customers can get their breads baked first. Usually the baker can tell when loaves of bread have too much yeast, and will bake them accordingly. Some customers will additionally ask the baker to prepare certain items for them, one of which is sardines. Often customers will show up with a bag of sardines and expect the baker to arrange them on one of the oven’s cookie sheets, salt and bake them. The typical informality between the baker and his customers is indicative of their close relationship.

In his free time, the baker enjoys playing soccer, and customers frequently show up to support the baker and watch his matches. When I went to one of the baker’s soccer games, I was surprised to discover that the customer’s jovial mocking of the baker continued at the game. The customers jokingly explained to me, as we watched the baker, that he didn’t really know how to play soccer. One customer added that “he runs like a camel” and another called him “shamu”. Although the soccer game was so far from the public oven that a bus had to be taken, the fact that these customers came all the way to the baker’s game, and felt comfortable making jokes about his performance, indicates a bond which, if not familial, is at least extraordinarily close, and atypical of the normal bond between a merchant or service provider and his customers.

The close relationship between customer families and the baker is not merely limited to mocking or sarcastically poking fun at each other. When the head baker is baking something for himself at the oven, he will occasionally show what he is making to customers and ask for advice. While the act of asking advice from a customer could undermine the credibility of an ordinary baker or merchant, as it has the potential to expose his mistakes or problems, for the baker in the public oven the relationship with his

customers is close enough so that this does not seem to be an issue. Another example of the close relationship between the baker and his customers is the practice of letting debts ride. It is often difficult for customers to find change small enough to pay the baker, and if this is the case, the baker will almost always return his customers' bread and let them pay when they are able, demonstrating a level of trust between the baker and his customers. Additionally, children commonly come by the oven with their mothers, or alone to pick up their family's bread, and if the child is young, the baker will frequently pick it up, talk to it and ask for a kiss. The fact that the baker is able to pick up and play with the children of his customers, as if they were his own children, also potentially indicates a near familial level of trust and intimacy. This level of trust and intimacy is an important part of the baker-customer interaction. As one customer put it, when explaining that "ordinary stores do not have as close a relationship with the people as the public oven," she "know[s] him first as a neighbor and secondly as the baker."

### ***Systems of Generosity***

The baker has an extraordinarily close relationship with his customers, and one which is far closer than that of ordinary merchants or service providers. But, what about this relationship indicates that it is specifically familial; that would indicate that he is an "honorary family member" (Geertz, C 1979: 310)? The first indication of the baker's honorary familial status is his role as the center of a neighborhood system of generosity.

One aspect of the baker's role, and of his relationship to the customer families, is his ability to take portions of what customers bring in to bake at the oven. Usually, when a customer brings in a tray of pastries, peanuts, or *foqas* to be baked, the baker will grab a handful to eat and share with the men at the oven. If a customer is baking several loaves of flakey *rif* bread, the baker may take an entire loaf for himself or to be given as a gift to others. During lunches, if the bread for the sick and the purchased bread runs out, the baker will often rip pieces of bread from the loaves of various customers to eat with the meal. Taking portions of the bread and goods brought to be baked occurs not only when the customers aren't looking, but in front of the owner of an item as well. The baker explains that it is ordinary and expected for him to take some of what the customers bring, and discusses it as if it is his right. Although the baker says he will not take things from the trays of new customers who have just started using his oven, he believes that taking some of what the customers bring is essential for developing "good relations" with them. There are even some customers that, if he wanted to, the baker says he could take everything that they brought to the oven on a particular day for himself and it would not be a problem. However, in practice, the baker almost always takes only a small amount of what a customer has brought in. The baker explained that at one time the price of baking bread at the oven was a quarter of the bread that you baked, so if you baked two loaves of bread then you would give half of a loaf to the baker. The baker would collect portions of the customers' baked bread and take them to the market to sell or trade them for what he needed. Although customers pay in cash today, this comment indicates how the baker can view taking his customers' baked goods as a right, or a form of additional payment. Interviewed customers also indicated that it is normal and completely expected for the baker to take portions of what they sent to the oven to be baked, further underscoring the perception on the part of both the customers and the baker that the baker has a right to help himself to his customer's baked goods. Both bakers appear to have the right to take

goods from customers for themselves; however, this right is specifically limited to the bakers. Occasionally, men hanging out in the public oven will try to take pieces of a customer's goods without being offered them first by one of the bakers, and while it is usually all right, there were instances in which customers acted defensively. Additionally, the baker does not appear to be comfortable with other people snitching pieces of customers' baked goods, although he will readily offer them to the men at the oven, and is usually happy to give someone a piece of something if they ask him for it. This indicates that the right to take baked goods given to the baker is not merely a sign of the generosity of the customers, but is a right specifically attributed to the role of the baker. In addition to merely taking some of what a family produces, if the baker sees an item that he likes, he explains that he can also offer to pay a family for the ingredients and order the item to be prepared for him.

What is curious about this phenomenon is the notion that the baker, not only has the ability to take some of his customer's baked goods, but that he has right to take them, and a right which emerges out of his role as a baker. The fact that it is stealing for men in the oven or others to help themselves to a customer's baked goods, whereas it is not for the baker, indicates that the baker has a certain degree of ownership over the baked goods of his customer. The definition of family, as the group of people who own an item brought to the oven, is expanded to include the baker as an honorary member of the household. In a sense, when the baker takes items from his customers, he is not stealing because the goods which he is taking, while they also belong to his customers, are *his*. Unlike other merchants or service providers, the daily welfare of a neighborhood is dependent on the baker, as it is through the baker that families produce bread, the basic staple of the Moroccan diet. As a result, the family trusts the baker not only with their bread but also, to a certain extent, with their daily welfare. It is this relationship of trust, as we will see, which forms the backbone of the baker's role as an honorary family

member in his customers' families.

The baker's right to take family baked goods is not the only way that his role as an honorary family member is expressed, but additionally the public oven is the center of a system of generosity which underscores the sense of familial obligation that customers feel towards the baker. One major source of customer generosity is wood. The public oven is heated using a wood burning fire, and as a result, the oven is in continual need of wood. Ordinarily, scrap wood is purchased from wood sellers and used to heat the oven. However, a significant portion of the necessary



**Figure 32: Wooden objects, such as these, are donated by customers and burned as fuel for the public oven.**

wood is donated by the customers. When customers have large wooden items that they would like to get rid of, they usually bring them by the public oven and give them to the

baker. In addition to crates and purchased wood, this means that doors, tables, windows, carvings, and even old books and magazines are burned to heat the public oven. The bakers estimate at times that the majority of wood burned in the oven comes from customer donations. The fact that customer families give the baker donations of wood to operate the oven implies a personal concern on the part of the families as to the welfare of the public oven and the baker. As one customer put it “if I have an old table...then I will send it to [the baker] to be used as firewood. I do a lot to help him. We work like a family.” The personal concern for the welfare of the baker and the public oven, and donations to ensure its subsistence, are an example of a perceived responsibility which customers have towards the baker, as an honorary family member.

Customers give the baker much more than simply wood. The baker explains that, if a customer wants, then gifts to the baker can be counted towards one’s zakat, or obligatory religious donation. Many families will give the baker gifts of money on holidays. In addition to money, gifts of clothing are common. Both old and new clothing is given to the baker by his customers’ families. Since the oven is a dirty smoky place, the baker can wear the heavily used clothes which are donated while at work in the oven. The donation of clothing indicates a personal concern on the part of the customers for the welfare of the baker. One of the most surprising moments of my research was discovering a pair of my old running shoes on a shelf in the preparation room. Two years before beginning this project’s research, I spent a semester in Morocco on a study abroad program in Rabat. When the program finished, I left a heavily used pair of my running shoes with my host family, and over the course of two years they found their way into the public oven, which demonstrates, not only the bizarre fact that the baker and I have the same shoe size, but also the baker’s role as a focus of community generosity. Additionally, other used objects, such as televisions and tape players, are also given to the baker by his customers’ families. The fact that the baker is given so many gifts from families, in addition to inheriting items from them, further highlights a personal concern on the part of customers for the welfare of the baker.

The most frequent gifts to the bakers are gifts of food, and these occur almost daily. Customers will often bring trays of cookies, coffee, pastries, *rif* bread (a flakey fried bread), or *harasha* (a fried cornmeal bread) to the bakers. Some customers will also bring the bakers delicacies such as home cured olives or meat.

In some cases, entire meals are prepared and brought to the public oven as gifts. The most common of these donated meals is the Friday couscous. In Morocco, couscous is traditionally eaten on Friday, the Islamic holy day. On Fridays, in place of the usual lunch prepared by the bakers or oven regulars, plates of couscous, which were made by customers in their homes and donated to the public oven, are eaten. As many as four or more full platters of couscous can be delivered to the public oven on any particular Friday which amounts to quite a feast. In



**Figure 33: Two plates of donated Friday couscous are consumed by men in the oven.**



addition to the public oven, couscous is also donated to mosques and schools on Fridays. These donations suggest that a neighborhood may have similar concerns for the welfare of the workers of these other institutions as well. Leftovers from family meals and large family events, such as weddings and funerals, are also often brought to the public oven, especially if the meal or event included something particularly delicious that a family wanted to share.

During Ramadan, these gifts of food to the oven go up dramatically. Since Ramadan involves a strict daytime fast, lunch is not consumed in the public oven; however, *fitor*, the evening meal breaking the fast, occurs in its place. Families with members who are too sick to fast will usually prepare food to be donated to the public oven for *fitor* throughout Ramadan. Traditional *fitor*, for most neighborhood families, consists of a relatively light meal which commonly includes a *harrira* (a Moroccan soup), boiled eggs, *rif* bread, *harasha*, and a variety of sweets. *Fitor* at the public oven is an elaborate and full meal. Due to donations, the oven's *fitor* usually includes 5-6 different pots of *harrira*, *shebekeya* (a fried honey coated sweet), dates, figs, *rif* bread, pastries, coffee, milk, and occasionally *sufuf* in addition to one or several main course items prepared by the bakers, such as Moroccan pizza, or a *tajine*. These large and dramatic donations of food all serve to highlight the attempts of the customers' families to ensure the welfare of the baker and the public oven.

The baker is also quite generous to his customers. Many of the neighborhood's children come to the public oven and ask for money periodically, in order to buy things or enjoy themselves. The request of the children has a similar feel to the way that a child would ask his father for money. Although the baker doesn't always give neighborhood children money, he does so often enough and they come back frequently. The notion that customer's children would ask him for money suggests that the baker has a perceived responsibility toward the welfare of the children of his neighborhood, a responsibility which exists as a result of the honorary familial relationship which the baker has with his customers' families. The public oven often prepares and bakes chocolate croissants and buns to for sale. Although the items are for sale individually, customers will often come by and take one without paying for it and walking away. This can, in a sense, be considered the reverse side of the generosity relationship highlighted above. If the baker is an honorary family member to his customers, and can help himself to their baked goods, then that also implies that the customers can help themselves to the baker's baked items as well.

### ***Tiqa***

A major aspect to the baker's role as an honorary family member in his customers' families revolves around the Moroccan notion of *tiqa*. *Tiqa* is a concept which is difficult to translate into American culture. Basically, *tiqa* refers to the special type of confidence that you need to have with someone in order to trust them with your space. If a person is a *sahib tiqa*, or an owner of *tiqa*, this means that you trust him to be alone in your house, in your room, or with your car. Part of this trust involves being confident that they will not steal or damage your belongings, or disrespect the space. However, this description doesn't adequately capture the full significance of *tiqa*, because *tiqa* as a concept must be understood within the context of Moroccan culture. One of the most definitive characteristics of Moroccan society is the clear division and separation between

public and private spaces. Usually, Moroccan homes are focused inward so that from the street “all that is visible of the houses are high dirty-white walls, broken by closed wooden doors and, above the street level, a few small barred windows” (Geertz, H 1979: 318). Private space is inwardly focused, hidden from the street, and often defended by large doors with multiple locks. As a result of this division, private space in Morocco is more than just private, it has a deeply personal significance. *Tiqa*, as a cultural concept, should be understood in light of the deeply personal role that private space plays in Moroccan society. Among his customers, the baker is a *sahib tiqa*, or an owner of *tiqa*, and, as a result the baker has the ability to freely enter the homes of his customers.



**Figure 34: Moroccan homes are focused inward, so that little is visible from the street.**

Private space in Morocco is closely guarded. Not only is it often hidden behind few windows and heavy doors, but it is socially guarded as well. When one enters a Moroccan home, one enters it either as an inhabitant or a guest. Inhabitants can come and go as they please, whereas guests fall into an intricate and articulate tradition of hospitality, are usually presented with tea or food, and are given the host’s full attention. While hospitality is an exceedingly important part of Moroccan culture, it is also a means of protecting and defending the domestic sphere. As a host demonstrates generosity to his guests, for instance serving them food or tea, this generosity in and of itself emphasizes and reinforces the guest’s status as a guest and thus an outsider. Usually guests in a Moroccan home are not left alone or given free reign to wander through the house, but rather are taken to a specific room and entertained by their host. While this hospitality is undoubtedly kind and generous, at no point is the guest ever really trusted with the host’s domestic space. When the baker enters the home of one of his customers, he enters it not as a guest but as an inhabitant, or in his words, as “one of the owners of the house”. Rather than being entertained, he is left alone to freely wander around his customers’ homes. Instead of being offered food, the baker is permitted and expected to go into the kitchen and raid the fridge. If the baker wants to watch television or sleep, he is able to go where he likes and watch television or sleep. The baker is welcome to join families at meals with or without previous warning. Since most Moroccan meals are eaten from a single dish in the middle of the table, the presence of an additional diner is rarely a problem. Furthermore, the baker often uses facilities in the homes of his customers which he does not have at the oven or his own home. When he needs to dry his laundry, for instance, the baker usually brings it to the house of one of his customers where he can hang it up to be dried, since his house does not have a roof or enough space to dry laundry indoors. Moreover, when the baker prepares something that needs to be refrigerated, he will place it in the refrigerator of one of his customers to be picked up later on. The baker, as a *sahib tiqa*, is trusted with his customers’ private space and can

thus enter the homes of his customers, not as a guest, but as an inhabitant of the family's domestic space. In my host family, my mother made it a point to cover her hair with a scarf when in the presence of men who were outside the family. Every time the baker came over, however, she would never don her scarf, acknowledging not only that the baker is not a guest, but in the words of one oven customer, he is "one of the family".

In addition to customers trusting the baker with their private spaces, the *tiqa* relationship between the baker and his customers functions in the reverse as well: the baker has the ability to leave the oven in the care of customers and trust that nothing will be taken. Often the men who hang out in the public oven are left to run it while the bakers run errands. These periods of unattendance can range from a few minutes to hours on end. While the people who come to sit at the oven can wait on customers, return their baked breads and accept new ones, the baker is usually needed to put things in or out of the oven or to light it. When the baker leaves the public oven, there appears to be two relationships of *tiqa* at play. To begin with, the baker trusts the specific men he leaves in the oven to not steal things, to not harm the oven, and to protect it from trouble. In addition to these men, the baker also trusts the customers themselves not to disrespect the oven while he is away. The public oven is even occasionally left completely empty, although never for more than a few minutes at a time. During Ramadan in particular, the public oven is frequently left alone or in the care of the men who hang out in it. Due to the fact that fewer loaves of bread are baked during Ramadan, the public oven is open for much of the day but will only have its fire going for a few hours. As a result, there are long periods during the beginning and the end of everyday when the bakers do not need to look after the fire, and it is during these periods that the bakers will often leave, entrusting the public oven to the men who hang out in it. I have even been left alone to watch the public oven and wait on customers myself; however, rarely for periods longer than an hour.

The concept of *tiqa*, it appears, can be metaphorically extended to include trusting someone with your possessions. As a result, the baker's status as *sahib tiqa* means that he is often expected to look after a variety of items that customers would like to store in the public oven. One customer, for instance, usually leaves his keys in the public oven when he goes running, and another stored his bicycle at the oven for several weeks. These requests are common. While the baker is trusted to ensure that the items stored at the oven are safe, he may also, in the case of the bicycle, use it periodically. Furthermore, when the notion of *tiqa* is extended to include possessions, then the bread which is brought to the oven itself can also be considered under the realm of *tiqa*, as the baker is trusted to not harm each family's bread, to let it rise sufficiently, to bake it adequately, and to avoid burning it. This *tiqa* relationship is one which is mutually beneficial for the baker and his customers.

### ***Duties of Tiqa***

The baker, as an honorary family member, has many rights. But along with those rights come responsibilities, and expectations. One of the primary duties of the baker is to help his customers, when necessary, by doing odd jobs around their homes which they could not do themselves. One customer explains that "if I needed help with something then [the baker] would help me. If I, for instance, bought a refrigerator, then he would help me to move it into my house." The baker appears to only be asked to assist families

when they have a task that they cannot do by themselves, or when the family members who are able to do a task are absent. In my own host family, for example, one day the kitchen sink broke. After it became obvious that I could not fix it myself, and my host brothers were not home, my host mother sent me to get the baker to look at the sink. In this context, the baker functions as a community handyman, assisting his customers with repairs and other tasks that they could not do themselves.

Another responsibility which the baker, as a *sahib tiqa* and an honorary family member, has is assisting to resolve familial conflicts among his customers. The baker explains that “if there is a problem [in one of the customers’ families], then I am considered a family member and I come to help out as a family member would”. Many men come to the public oven to talk about their problems, and when the baker learns of a conflict in his customers’ homes, he will sometimes attempt to resolve it. Additionally, the baker may hear about a familial conflict through various rumors, and when he does, he will frequently go to ask both sides for their point of view and try to resolve the conflict. In most cases the baker is not invited by either member to resolve a conflict, but merely hears about it and attempts to intervene. The fact that he works to resolve conflicts without an invitation, when he thinks it is necessary, indicates that the baker views his role as a conflict mediator as a responsibility, and a responsibility which emerges out of his honorary family member status.

One of the most unusual tasks the baker assists with is the cleaning of dead bodies. When someone dies in Morocco, it is common for the family of the deceased to clean the body and prepare it for burial; however, this is a very personal and intimate activity which many families do not know how to do appropriately. After a man dies, his body is cleaned by three men who cover him from his navel to knees with a towel, scrub him, and press on his stomach in order to clean out his bowels. The baker learned how to clean the dead when his father passed away, and since then has been helping neighborhood families with the process when necessary, which is approximately once a month. While he describes washing bodies as emotionally draining and discusses it as an activity which he doesn’t enjoy, the baker helps to clean dead bodies when necessary. Cleaning dead bodies is a very intimate event and it is likely that this is a duty which emerges out of the baker’s status as a *sahib tiqa*. Although there are those who charge money for the service of washing a dead body, the baker helps families do it for free believing that it is an important spiritual activity which a family should undertake itself. As an honorary family member, the baker is responsible for assisting his customers with odd jobs around their homes which they cannot do themselves, resolving familial conflicts, and helping families to clean the bodies of the deceased.

### ***The Baker as a Distributor of Tiqa***

The baker, as a *sahib tiqa*, is involved in a second industry: the distribution of *tiqa*. When families need someone trustworthy who they do not know to enter their homes, they will often contact the baker for his advice and recommendations. One of the most important decisions of this nature that a family faces is the selection of a spouse. Many Moroccan marriages are arranged through a process in which “both the men and the women of families [are] actively involved,” and in which the couples themselves often have very little say (Geertz, H 1979; 364). Marriage in Morocco is considered a connection between two families, and as a result, “the familial context of the person, the

network of personal ties, benefits, and claims that could be created by the marriage, are of far greater importance in everyone's mind than the personal attributes of the candidate alone" (1979; 372). In the consideration of marriage choices, detailed information on the potential husband or spouse and their families is extremely important, particularly in regards to the potential family's class or economic level. Since the baker is an honorary family member to each of his customers, he is approached from time to time by families pursuing a husband or spouse in the neighborhood, and asked for information about the potential partner and their family. The baker gets asked for advice most commonly when a family unfamiliar with the neighborhood decides to look into marrying one of the customers. But the arrangement of marriages is not the only situation in which the baker functions as a distributor of *tiqa*.

Another circumstance in which families require someone with *tiqa* to enter their homes is when a family decides to hire a maid. During my research, one of the customers' families decided that they wanted to hire a live-in maid. In this situation, the baker explains that "there is a lot of fear of finding a girl who is not safe and who takes things", and as a result, he is usually asked "to look for a person...who has *tiqa*." When the family approached the baker, they explained why they needed a live-in maid and what they were looking for, and they asked the baker to try to find someone with the appropriate criteria. When the baker finds someone, he usually lets each of the families know and arranges a meeting. Most commonly, the baker explained, the family that wanted a maid discusses the issue and makes an agreement with the potential maid's father who decides the terms of employment and collects the money for her work. In addition to finding live-in maids, the baker is also asked for information about local houses for rent or sale by families that are considering moving into the neighborhood.

While providing advice on potential spouses to families and assisting in finding maids are done for free, the baker's status as the owner of *tiqa* is can also be made profitable. When he is not in the public oven, the baker often works serving and preparing food for events. These events require that the servers be left alone or unsupervised in the houses of those who are hosting the party, and as a result, it is important the baker has a reputation of *tiqa*. Furthermore, since the baker is the local owner and dealer of *tiqa*, he is often asked to assemble a trustworthy team of workers who will assist him in catering. This request is similar to the act of asking the baker for assistance in finding a maid or spouse, as these situations are times when families ask the baker, as a *sahib tiqa*, to recommend others who are trustworthy to enter their homes. The baker usually caters concerts, circumcisions, hajj sending off parties as well as funerals and weddings which may last several days. For an average event, the baker usually makes 2000-4000 *Riyal* (100-200 DH, \$11.00-22.00 US) a day, but can make as much as 10000 *Riyal* (500 DH, \$55.01 US) for a single occasion. Compared to the 1000 *Riyal* (50 DH, \$5.50 US) which the baker makes on average for a day of work at the public oven, the money received from helping to cater a party can be very significant. Usually, the baker will need to work at one or more events every month in order to earn enough money to pay the public oven's electrical bills and rent.

### ***The Baker as a Middleman***

Among his customers, the baker is in a unique situation. As a *sahib tiqa* and an honorary member of all of the neighborhood families, the baker stands at a pivotal



**Figure 35: Cookies and pastries such as these can be exchanged between customers using the baker as a middleman.**

position at the center of his the community. He knows the problems and living conditions of everyone in the neighborhood, is trusted by all, and as a result he often functions as mediator and middleman for interaction between neighborhood families. One of the baker's rights, as mentioned above, is the right to request that his customers prepare specific dishes for him in exchange for the cost of the ingredients. While the baker does use his ability to

order various specialties of different customers for himself, the baker also uses this right on behalf of other customers. If one customer likes what

another customer bakes, then the first customer can mention it to the baker. The baker then will order the desired item from the second customer, who will prepare it and bring it to the oven. The baker can then give the desired item to the first customer in exchange for the cost of ingredients. Since the customers may not feel comfortable requesting that they bake items for each other, the baker is used as a middleman to organize and supervise the exchange.

As a middleman, the baker has a role in the collection and distribution of charitable donations and zakat, or required almsgiving. Zakat is often paid around religious holidays, and can be paid in cash, or with various food items necessary to celebrate a holiday. Within the neighborhood, the baker knows which families are in need, and as a *sahib tiqa*, is trusted by the community. When one wants to pay zakat or make a donation, the donation can be brought to the public oven and given to the baker, who then delivers it to one of the neighborhood families in need. The baker has many stories about families who, because he was able to bring them gifts of zakat, were able to celebrate holidays that they otherwise would not have been able to afford to celebrate.

Another method through which the public oven is used to distribute charitable donations is through the production of bread for the poor and sick. As part of the oven's lease, the baker is required to pay a portion of the monthly rent in salt-less bread for the poor and sick which is to be prepared and given to the needy for free. In this arrangement, the bakers are the middlemen in preparing and delivering, at their own expense, the monthly donations of salt-less bread to the poor. This is an arrangement which was continued from the bakers' father, and it



**Figure 36: The salt-less bread for the poor and the sick rises.**

is an agreement which the head baker has mixed feelings about. On one hand, he believes that it is “very good” to start a system of generosity which continues charity after one’s death; however, the head baker also resents the fact that the responsibility of preparing bread for the sick was placed on his shoulders. It appears that much of the head baker’s reason for taking over the oven after his father’s death has to do with specifically fulfilling the responsibility of preparing this bread for the poor. Although it is a good and pious thing to do, the baker believes that it is a mistake to force all of one’s descendents to return to the public oven to take over the charitable responsibilities of their ancestors. The baker’s role as a middleman has allowed the public oven to become a community center of charitable activity.

### ***Conclusion***

In addition to the public oven being a pseudo-domestic space for the neighborhood, the baker has the unique status of being part of each of his customers’ families’ domestic sphere: an honorary family member to the community. As an honorary family member, not only do the customers take an active interest in the welfare of the baker by giving him gifts, but the baker maintains a partial ownership over his customers’ baked goods and has a right to help himself to them. Furthermore, the baker has a *tiqa* relationship with his customers and is therefore able to enter their houses as if they were his own. Along with these extra rights come duties. The baker is expected to assist the families of the neighborhood by doing odd jobs in their homes which they couldn’t do themselves, resolving familial conflicts, and cleaning the bodies of dead relatives. As a *sahib tiqa*, the baker has a role as a community distributor of *tiqa*, and thus is asked for advice in arranging marriages, finding domestic help, and for his assistance in catering parties and events. Additionally, the baker serves as a middleman in his neighborhood organizing the exchange of baked goods and the distribution of donations. As we have seen, the baker’s role as an honorary family member is intricate and filled with many rights and responsibilities on the part of both the baker and his customers.





## Conclusion

I have illustrated how the public oven and the baker function in their community, but, although the discussion of these roles is fascinating, like most anthropology the important question of this project is why. Why are public ovens and bakers given such an unusual role in their neighborhoods? What does this illustrate about the structure of traditional urban Moroccan communities, and how does this role serve as a solution to the cultural demands of urban Moroccan society?

This ethnographic case study has characterized the public oven in two ways. The first is that the public oven functions as a pseudo-domestic space for the men of the community. As such, it is a place where men come to hang out, spend their free time, and relax. It is a spot where men help the baker by working for free. It is a space in which men have the opportunity to take on traditionally feminine domestic tasks, and a space in which elaborate meals are shared. It is a place with beds on which men of the community nap and spend the night, and it is a sanctuary in which men can perform taboo activities which would otherwise threaten their families and the integrity of the community as a whole. These phenomena highlight the oven's use as a pseudo-domestic space.

The second characterization is that the baker is considered an honorary family member to the families of the neighborhood. This relationship is founded on *tiqa*, or the ability to trust an individual with one's personal space. As an honorary family member, the baker has a right to take portions of the baked goods of his customers, and is often presented with gifts of food, clothing, wood and other objects. The baker is able to enter his customers' houses and use them as if he lived there, and is able to leave his oven unattended in the care of customers. When necessary, the baker has a responsibility to help his customers with odd jobs they cannot do themselves in their homes, and to intervene and resolve familial conflicts. As a trusted individual, the baker helps to clean the bodies of dead community members, and caters special occasions. If the families of the neighborhood need a trusted person to enter their homes, such as a spouse or a maid, they can ask the baker to find someone or make recommendations. As an honorary family member to the neighborhood's families, the baker serves as a trusted middle man in exchanges between his customers, such as the exchange of baked goods, the payment of zakat, and the preparation and distribution of charitable donations in the form of free bread given to the poor. Each of these privileges and responsibilities is an example how the baker takes on the function and role of an honorary family member within his community.

When juxtaposed, these characterizations are quite similar. Both deal with the role of the public oven and the baker as a communally used portion of the domestic sphere. In

one the public oven takes on the role of a domestic space shared by the community, while in the other, the baker takes on a domestic role as a family member shared by the community. These attributes are not independent of one another, but rather are two complimentary aspects of a single phenomenon: the public oven is an extension of the community's domestic space.

In order to understand why this is important, we must look at the larger context of Moroccan society within which the public oven functions. The public oven is part of a system of “community institutions” (Radione 2004: 459), which serve to fulfill domestic roles. Within a traditional medina, “each neighbourhood ha[s] a centre that cater[s] to daily needs such as a small mosque...bakery[, public] bath[,and] public fountain” (2004: 459). In a traditional Moroccan neighborhood, many of the functions of the domestic space are located outside the home in community institutions.

Up until recently, most homes in Rabat's medina did not have running water, and as a result, water had to be obtained through a system of public water fountains spread throughout the city. Although some people obtained water themselves, the baker explains that water carriers were employed to carry water to houses and businesses for a fee. Up until the fountains were turned off in Rabat, they were a domestic institution central to the medina's daily life.



**Figure 37: This fountain in the medina of Rabat has been turned off.**

The public bath, as a community institution and a social space, has been examined in depth by a number of scholars (Graiouid 2004; Kilito 1992). Similar to the public



**Figure 38: The public bath, much like the public oven, is a center of neighborhood social activity.**

oven, the public bath is a complex social institution which has “manifold functions besides allowing people to...bathe” (Staats 1994: 5). As a space, the public bath is a center of neighborhood social activity much like the public oven. Since both men and women use public baths, either at separate locations or separate times, the baths are a social site for both genders but particularly women. The “women's [bath] is an important place not only for relaxation but for the exchange of news and information,” and is a significant social site in that it occurs in a context in which there are few or “no other public

gathering places for women” (1994: 5). While men can gather in the bath, the public oven, cafes, and a number of locations, the fact that women traditionally only have the public bath in which to gather and share information causes the women’s bath to serve a role as an intense and hyperactive social space for Moroccan urban communities. Additionally, much like the public oven, women are even described as sharing meals at the public bath (1994: 3). For women, the bath appears to have a similar function to the public oven, and is an integral part of urban domestic life. The neighborhood mosque can additionally be considered a community institution which fulfills a domestic role.

When one adds the public oven to this list of institutions, we can see that much of traditional domestic life has been relegated to community institutions. With so many domestic activities removed from the home, what role does the house itself have? Due to the presence of these institutions, the Moroccan urban house has a far more limited role in daily life. A Moroccan home is a private environment in which one sleeps, stores ones’ possessions, entertains guests, prepares food, and uses the toilet. As a result, for urban Moroccans, life and living does not just take place in the private environment of the house, but rather it takes place in the neighborhood as well: in the shared community institutions which form a portion of the domestic space.

In other words, it is not that the public oven or other community institutions are simply shops or economic establishments which are *similar* to domestic environments, but rather it is that these institutions *are* actually a portion of their neighborhood’s domestic space. This project has fundamentally demonstrated that the public oven, as a community institution, functions as a literal and physical extension of its community’s domestic space. The oven itself, as we have seen, serves as an extended and common piece of a neighborhood’s domestic space for men of the neighborhood, allowing them a space to relax, converse, sleep, cook, eat, and perform taboo activities. As the owner and leader of this domestic environment, the baker himself actually becomes a portion of every family’s domestic space in the form of taking on the role of an honorary family member.

The traditional urban Moroccan home then consists, not just of the private sphere, but of geographically separate public-domestic spheres as well. In other words, while Morocco may have a sharp distinction between private and public space, it should not be assumed that private and domestic space are correlated with one another. In a sense, an urban Moroccan community is like a group of friends living together in a shared house. While each person may have their own definitively private space, communal kitchens, bathrooms, and sitting areas are likely to be shared by all.

The results of this case study suggest a new model for the conceptualization of Moroccan space and neighborhoods. In addition to the notion that Moroccan space can be divided into private and public, the results suggest that a third category—communal space—should be added to address the reality of spaces which are definitively both domestic and public. This new category of communal space could provide a useful paradigm for the exploration of Moroccan social relations and the construction of Moroccan communities.

This case study has presented us with an elaborate and articulate understanding of the role of the public oven as a literal and physical extension its neighborhood’s domestic sphere. We have seen how the oven can function as a home for its community’s men, how the baker can function as a family member for his community’s families, and how

these findings could suggest that the public oven, and other community institutions, form a third category of Moroccan space which is both domestic and public. Before we accept the results and conclusions of this case study as accurate, it is important to first question and analyze whether the case study's public oven is typical of public ovens in general, or whether it represents an isolated case. It is only with this process of questioning that we can approach the results of this study with a measure confidence.



## **The Survey: Public Ovens in Rabat's Medina**

A case study can give us a thorough understanding of how a particular system functions; however, the study's results only describe a single case. One of the primary issues of conducting a case study is then determining to what extent the results of a case study can be extended to explain other systems. This case study, in particular, discusses the public oven as a domestic space shared by its community: both in terms of the public oven's role as a domestic social environment in which the neighborhood men can hang out, and in terms of the baker's status as an honorary family member to his customers' families. To what extent can the conclusions of this project's case study be extended to explain the social position of Moroccan public ovens in general? How has modernization and the implementation of increased technology in the home impacted the public oven's role as a shared domestic space? What aspects of the observed public oven system are characteristic of Moroccan public ovens as a whole, which aspects are unique to the oven that was the subject of this case study, and—most importantly—why?

Public ovens in Morocco are currently undergoing a transition. As an enterprise, public ovens have been present in Morocco since the Roman Empire and, as we have seen, they have developed a role as a community institution which functions as a shared portion of a neighborhood's domestic space. However, much like the public baths, this communal domestic space is contingent on the public oven's performance of the domestic task of baking the neighborhoods bread and baked goods. As electric and gas ovens are placed in households, it should be anticipated that the public oven's role as a shared neighborhood domestic space will be undermined. When the public oven loses its position as a portion of shared domestic space, I predict that the public oven will cease being an exclusively male neighborhood social environment, that the baker will lose his honorary status as family member in his customers' families, and that the oven will take on the form of a more typical economic institution. As this change occurs, I would also anticipate that it will be accompanied by a change in oven use: rather than using the oven out of necessity, customers will increasingly begin to use the public oven out of concern for quality or the preservation of a tradition.

In order to determine if the data and conclusions of the case study could be extended and applied to public ovens in Rabat, or Morocco as a whole, and to determine the effects of modernization on the public oven system, I conducted a survey of the public ovens of Rabat's medina. In this project's case study, I argued that the public oven functions as a domestic space shared by its community, an interpretation which I



**Figure 39: This map of the medina of Rabat depicts the locations of all the public ovens of which I am aware. Note that most are spread relatively evenly throughout the medina, and are located near major market streets or exits.**



supported by citing patterns of behaviors and observations. If my interpretation is accurate, then the patterns of behavior and observations which I cited should be common trends among the other public ovens in Rabat. The goal of the public oven survey is then to test my interpretation by translating a number of key patterns and observations into a group of simple, concrete, easily answered questions which could serve as indicators as to whether the public ovens in Rabat as a whole function as shared neighborhood domestic spaces. The survey asked 14 questions which covered a variety of topics, including the public oven's use as a shared male-only domestic space, as well as the role of the baker in his customers' families. Each tested indicator can demonstrate one of two things. If it turns out that a tested pattern of behavior or observation is commonplace in a significant number of surveyed public ovens, then it can be considered to be a trend. After a trend is identified, the question is, to what extent is the trend followed, and what does that, in return, say about the process of modernization of public ovens as a whole? If, on the other hand, it turns out that a tested pattern of behavior or observation taken from the case study is rare or non-existent among the other public ovens in Rabat, then we can regard the observed phenomenon to be an isolated incident limited to the oven observed in the case study. When an isolated incident is identified, the question of why it occurs should be asked. Human behavior can be thought of as occurring in response to a variety of cultural or social needs, and as such, does an isolated incident represent a response to a unique cultural or social need, or does it alternatively reflect a different response to a common cultural or social need? As a result, this survey serves to indicate, not only if the data and interpretations gained from the case study are accurate, but also to hypothesize on the effect that modernization and the increase of technology in the home will have on the social use of the public oven.

### ***The Sample: Public Ovens of Rabat***

The medina of Rabat has 18 public ovens of which I am aware.<sup>2</sup> They are spread relatively evenly throughout the medina, although most public ovens appear to be located either near a major market street or near an exit to the medina. This suggests that public ovens tend to be located at bottleneck points in a neighborhood at which people gather to either shop or leave the medina. All of the medina's 18 public ovens are wood burning, and all bake family bread; however, they represent a wide variety of shapes and forms of the public oven. Some ovens, such as the public oven in the case study, are small hole-in-the-wall operations, are heavily dependent on baking family breads, and are run by only one or two bakers; whereas a number of other ovens have large commercial kitchens, are primarily dependent on producing bread for sale rather than on baking bread for families, and are run by teams of as many as eight bakers. The head bakers of Rabat's public ovens have been working in their ovens for an average of 18 years, yet the bakers range from working in their oven for as little as 4 months to as long as 40 years. Most of Rabat's public ovens have been run by the current head baker's family for several generations. On average, the public ovens of Rabat have been in their bakers' families for a little over three generations; however, several public ovens have had longer legacies, with one in its

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<sup>2</sup> As a part of this project, I mapped Rabat's medina and counted all of the public ovens; however, I was only able to count those which were open and running at the time I walked by. Several public ovens were found only after I completed the survey and walked by to notice them open later. It is therefore possible that one or more public ovens is unaccounted for in my map or survey.

ninth generation of operation by a single family. Such long terms of employment for the bakers, in addition to the fact that public ovens are typically part of a generational legacy, suggests that the position of baker is not only a permanent career for most Moroccans, but also a career which is kept in the family and preserved over the course of generations. These tendencies, both of the bakers to work in the public oven on a permanent basis and of the bakers to preserve the public oven as a source of work for their families, may be a side effect of Morocco's high unemployment rate of 10.5% (CIA World Factbook). Out of the 18 public ovens in the medina, 16 participated in the survey. One oven chose not to participate in the study, while the remaining oven had an elderly, hearing impaired baker who was unable to understand my questions and participate in the survey.

### ***Potential Sources of Error***

This public oven survey was conducted with care; however, like any survey, its results should be taken with a grain of salt. Good anthropological research should initially include a discussion of the research's methodology and possible sources of error. While I took steps to approach the survey as objectively as possible, trying to ensure that the survey was simple and straightforward, I will be the first to admit that the results of this survey may contain a number of inaccuracies. Given the fact that I speak Modern Standard Arabic at a conversational rather than fluent level, and that many bakers speak only Moroccan Arabic, I attempted to limit language confusion by composing written questions in Arabic in advance. The questions which I composed were then brought to the baker who was the subject of the case study and checked for accuracy, clarity, and rewritten to primarily incorporate vocabulary which is shared by Modern Standard Arabic and Moroccan Arabic.<sup>3</sup> At each oven where the survey was conducted, I showed the informants a written copy of my questions while reading them aloud, to ensure that all informants responded to questions which were clear, simple, and identical. Additionally, in order to make the results of the survey clear, I phrased my questions so that they could be responded to with either concrete numbers or a yes or a no. However, while this clarity makes the data easy to analyze, it also can add error to the results. For instance, a question such as "does anyone ever come to the oven and help the baker for free?" can receive seemingly contradictory answers, such as "no, not often," or "yes, sometimes," which could easily mean the same thing. Although I attempted to clarify these answers when conducting the survey, it is very possible that vague responses are present as a source of error. Another major potential source of error is the possibility that my informants may have given false responses to the survey questions. Often the line between what can or cannot be seen as a true or false statement is culturally dependent. In his analysis of Moroccan social relations, Lawrence Rosen explains that in many cases "statements by which [Moroccans] seek to characterize their existing ties or future commitments are not, standing alone, subject to evaluation as true or false" (1984; 120). Rosen likens the process of Moroccan social interaction to the bargaining process, suggesting that "Moroccans see virtually all but the most absurd statements implying obligation as serious and intentional but as being no more true or false than a price quoted in the marketplace" (1984; 118). As a result, it is possible that many informants may have responded to my survey questions about their commitments, roles, and social ties to the

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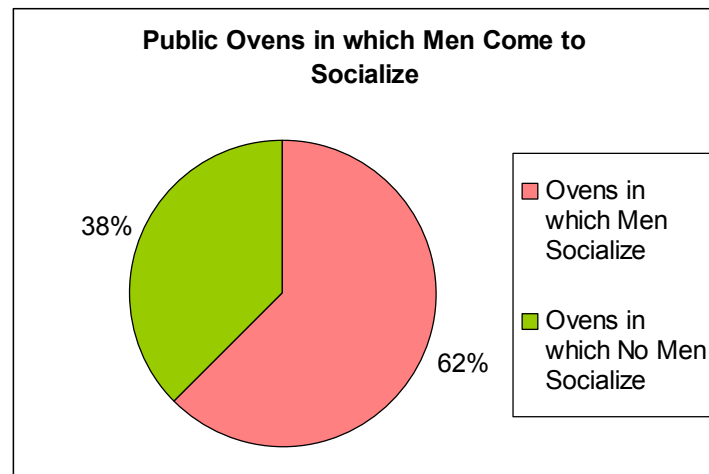
<sup>3</sup> Moroccan Arabic is an unwritten dialect. Texts written in Morocco are primarily composed in Modern Standard Arabic; however, much of the vocabulary of Modern Standard and Moroccan Arabic is shared.

community with responses that were intended to be invitations to negotiation, rather than seen as objectively true or false. In other words, particularly in the Moroccan cultural context, it is very possible that a number of informants were responding less to my questions and more to me as a researcher; providing responses that reflect not so much the reality as it exists but a proposed reality that corresponds to how they feel their ovens should exist, to what presents the oven in the best light, or to what responses they think I am looking for. While I attempted to eliminate researcher bias, and to phrase my questions in a way which was not culturally weighted, the innate potential for error in the survey responses is an unfortunate but significant possibility. As an anthropologist, I have an obligation to approach my informants' responses with a certain skepticism, but there also comes a point at which I must approach my data with a degree of faith: faith that my informants' responses are accurate, honest, and given with the best of intentions. After all, if we are not willing to take a leap of faith and give informants the benefit of the doubt, then why ask for their input at all?

### ***Trends among Rabat's Public Ovens***

Most of the indicators which were tested in this survey turned out to be trends. Since the survey's sample size is not large, consisting of only 16 public ovens, I considered every tested observation or pattern of behavior which was shared by five or more separate public ovens to be a trend for the purposes of this analysis. One of the most predominate results of the survey is that, while many of the indicators of the public oven's function as a shared domestic space are trends, most of these indicators additionally had significant numbers of exceptions. I hypothesize that many of these exceptions demonstrate a decline, due to modernization, of the oven's communally shared domestic space. Since the oven's shared domestic space is dependent upon the public oven performing a domestic task, the presence of gas and electric ovens in a community should lessen the need for the public oven to act as an extension of the domestic sphere. One risk to this hypothesis, since the survey was based on the case study's public oven, is that it tends to hold up the case study's public oven as an epitome of tradition against which all other public ovens are judged.

One of the first and most basic indicators as to whether an oven is used as a pseudo-domestic space is whether or not local men come to the oven and hang out. Out of the ovens surveyed, 62% reported that men come by and spend time in the public oven due to its "social atmosphere". The fact that a majority of the public

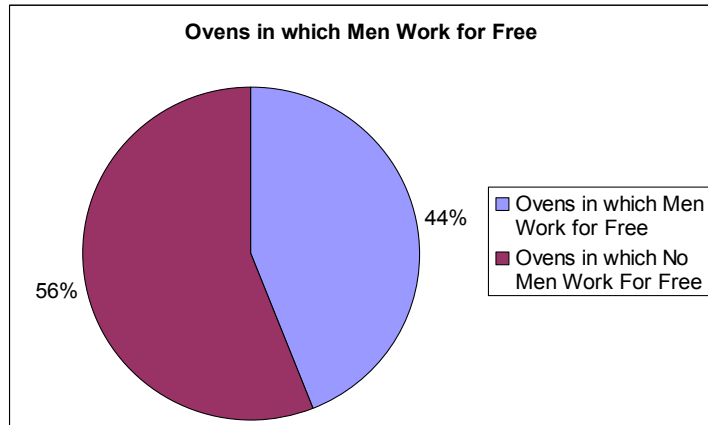


**Figure 40: This chart illustrates the proportion of ovens which reported that they are locations where men come to hang out (N=16).**

ovens in Rabat's medina are used as a social environment for men indicates that the oven's role as a central social space is a major trend, but not a unanimous one. A number of factors could affect the use of the oven as a community center. It is possible that some neighborhoods in which ovens are located have other social sites which are more popular than the oven. Additionally, many of the more modern industrial ovens may be less likely to have a relaxed environment which would make spending time in it pleasant. In any

case, the large number of ovens which serve as social centers indicate that this custom is nevertheless alive and well.

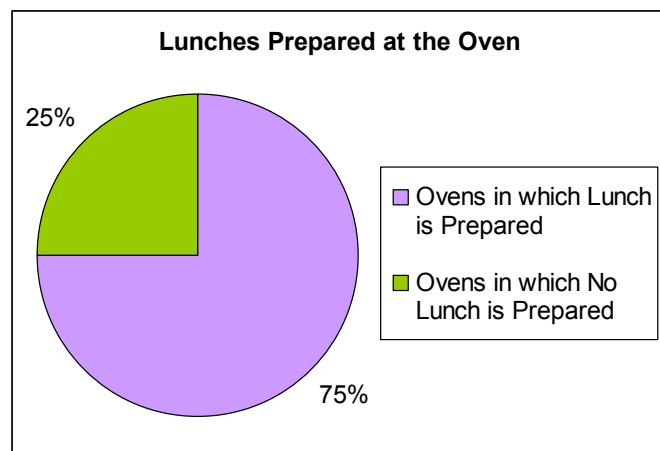
Another phenomenon which can indicate the oven's role as a pseudo-domestic space is the presence of people who help out the baker in the public oven for free. Men assisted in 44% of ovens for free, while the other 56% reported that they received no help from the community. What is curious about these numbers is how poorly they correspond with the number of ovens in which men come to hang out at. Apparently, a



**Figure 41:** This graph depicts the proportion of ovens which reported that men come to the oven and help out for free (N=16).

significant portion of the public ovens which are used as a social gathering space do not receive assistance from the men who spend time at the oven. However, a significant portion of the public ovens surveyed do have individuals who come to help out the baker in the public oven for free, which indicates that this custom is also a legitimate, although potentially dying, trend in the public ovens of Rabat.

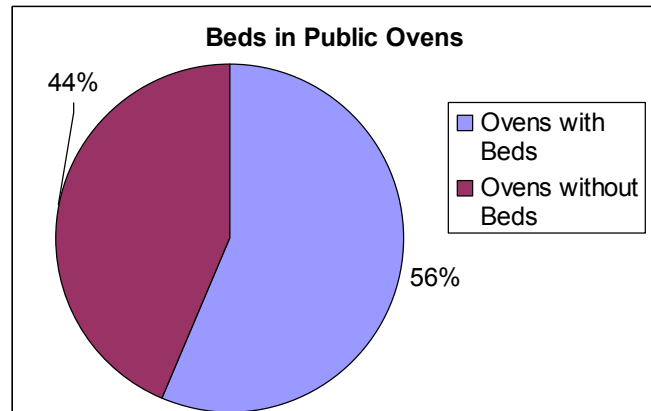
In the case study's public oven, one of the major aspects of the oven's use as a pseudo-domestic space is the preparation and consumption of lunches in the public oven. Out of the ovens surveyed, 75% explained that they prepared lunches daily in the public oven, while 25% indicated that they did not prepare lunch in the public oven. Those ovens which did not make lunch indicated that their lunch was either brought daily from home or purchased from local shops. While the majority of the public ovens did prepare their daily lunch at the oven, half reported that these lunches were for the bakers only; the other half



**Figure 42:** This chart illustrates the percentage of ovens which reported that they prepare lunch in the public oven (N=16).

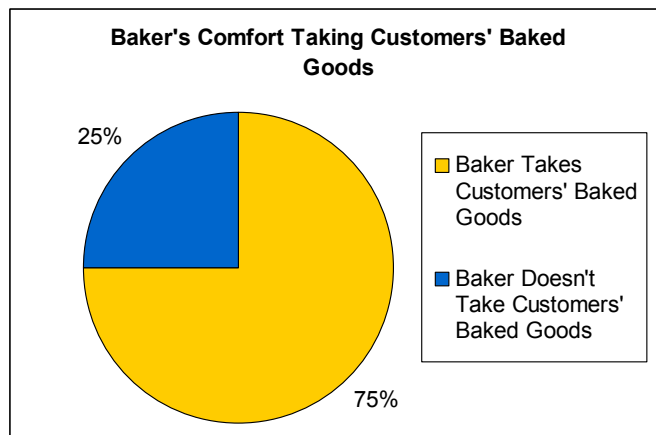
indicated, much like the oven in the case study, that their lunches were prepared for a wider group of the oven's neighbors, friends, and regulars. Although the number of ovens that prepare lunch as a daily social event is in the minority, overall we still can say that this custom is a trend.

Another portion of the public oven's use as a pseudo-domestic space is its role as a place where men, who are in the community but do not have a home to return to, can come and sleep. A majority of 56% of the public ovens surveyed reported that they have and maintain beds within oven. In a number of cases, the bakers stated that they sleep in the public oven's beds themselves, because getting between the oven and their official homes outside the medina is too complicated to do everyday.



**Figure 43:** This graph shows the proportion of public ovens which have beds (N=16).

Other ovens noted that their beds had a use which was much closer to that of the case study's oven, in that their beds were used by oven regulars and community members who did not have a place to stay in the medina, rather than by the bakers themselves. In any case, the survey results indicate that the public ovens, at least in Rabat, frequently have beds located within them.

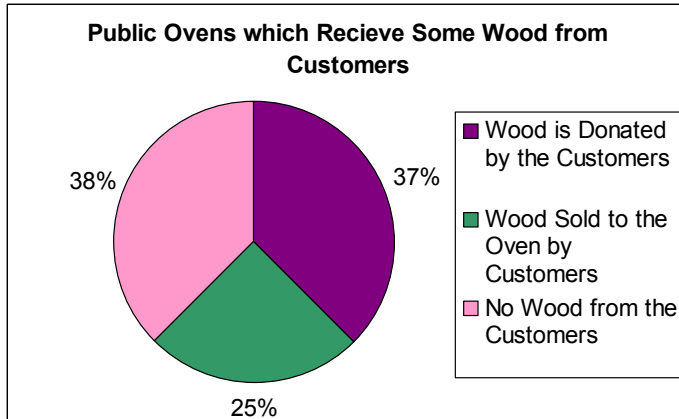


**Figure 44:** This chart depicts the percentage of ovens which reported that the baker is comfortable taking a portion of his customer's baked goods (N=16).

A central indicator as to whether or not the baker is considered an honorary family member in his customers' families is whether the baker feels comfortable taking a portion of his customers' baked goods. Overall, 75% of the bakers in Rabat included in the survey indicated that they feel comfortable taking some of their customers' baked goods and do so on an ordinary basis. In other words, a strong majority of Rabat's bakers consider the act of taking a portion of their customers' baked goods normal, revealing that this is a

relatively strong trend throughout the public ovens in Rabat.

Another aspect of the baker's position as an honorary family member within his customers' families is the notion on the part of the customers that they have a responsibility to assist the public oven and the baker. A major sign of this assistance is customers' donations of wood to the public oven. Among the public ovens included in this survey, 37% reported that a portion of the wood the public oven uses is donated to



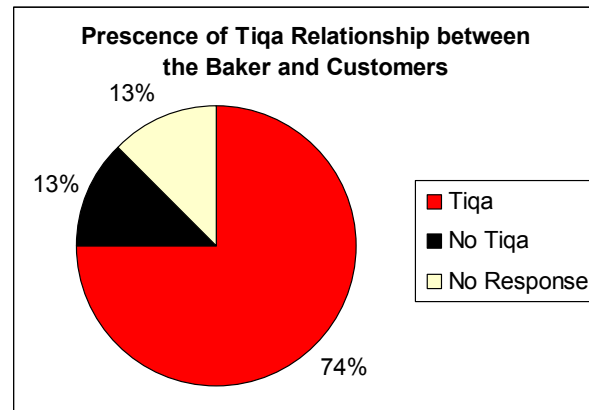
**Figure 45:** This graph demonstrates the fraction of public ovens which reported that they receive wood from their customers, either for free or at a cost (N=16).

the oven by customers. Another 25% of the ovens explained that they often received wood from their customers, but not as a donation, rather this wood is sold to the oven by its customers. A remaining 38% of the ovens surveyed explained that all of their wood is purchased from wood sellers, and that they did not receive any assistance from

customers. While a relatively sizable portion of the public ovens surveyed indicated that they received donations of wood,

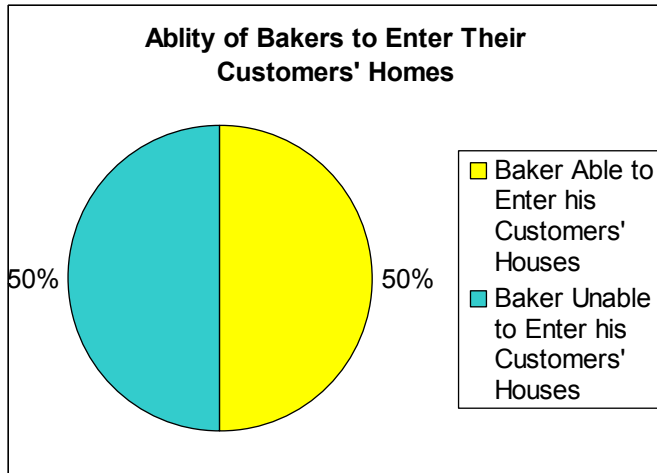
demonstrating that a trend of this activity does exist, in total this proportion is a small one. The large proportions of ovens which both purchase some wood from customers and received all their wood from wood sellers may each indicate their own evolving trends.

The heart of the baker's role as an honorary family member lies within the *tiqa* relationship which the baker has with his customers' families. Out of the bakers surveyed, 74% said that they had a *tiqa* relationship with their customers, 13% said that they did not have a *tiqa* relationship with their customers, and the remaining 13% did not respond to the question. In this case, a strong majority of bakers claimed to have a *tiqa* relationship with their customers, indicating that the presence of a *tiqa* relationship between the baker and his customers is a major trend in the relationship between bakers and customers. Since *tiqa* is defined as the ability to trust someone to be alone with



**Figure 46:** This chart reveals the proportion of public ovens which reported that they have a *tiqa* relationship with their customers (N=16).

one's space, it is expected that all of these bakers should feel comfortable entering the houses of their customers whenever they like. However, when the bakers were asked whether or not they felt comfortable entering the houses of their customers, like the bakers in the case study, only 50% of the bakers indicated that they felt comfortable entering and using the houses of their customers whenever they liked. Although the fact that 50% of the bakers surveyed in Rabat reported that they feel comfortable entering their customers' houses demonstrates that this is a major trend, the difference between the number of bakers who claim to have a *tiqa* relationship with their customers and those who actually feel comfortable entering their customers' houses is significant, and could indicate a number of things. On one hand, the difference could be a sign that some bakers acknowledge that they have a *tiqa* relationship with their customers and could enter their



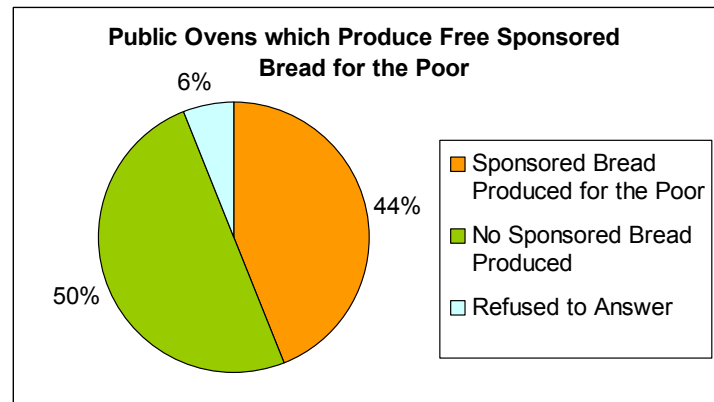
**Figure 47: This graph illustrates the percentage of bakers who reported that they are able to enter the houses of their customers (N=16).**

houses but are too shy, much like the second baker. Or, it is possible that the notion of *tiqua*, like many concepts in Arabic, is relative and thus the individual rights of a *tiqua* relationship may depend on its specific case and context. In any event, both *tiqua* relationships and the ability of the baker to enter the houses of his customers appear to be major trends present throughout the public ovens of Rabat and not simply limited to the oven which was the subject of the case study.

The final indicator of the extent to which bakers are considered honorary family

members in their community is the presence of sponsored bread which is baked and given for free to the poor. Since sponsored bread is paid for by a donor, the baker's production of this bread demonstrates his role as a trusted middleman for charitable activities. Out of the ovens surveyed, 44% produced sponsored bread for the poor, indicating that the production of sponsored bread is a major trend. Fifty percent of the public ovens surveyed did not produce sponsored bread for the poor, and 6% refused to answer the question.

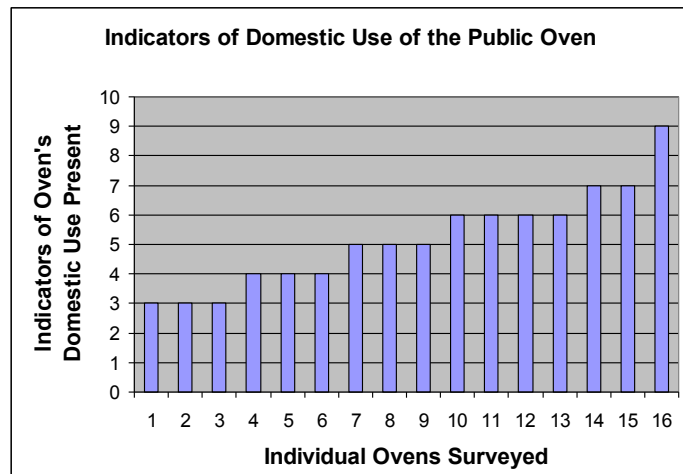
Many of the public ovens included in this survey shared trends that were not present in the case study's public oven. One of the most predominate trends among the public ovens surveyed was the production of bread for sale in small stores throughout the medina. These small stores order bread to be produced daily and delivered to them. The bakers then prepare and bake a large quantity of bread which is delivered to the stores around the medina. Most public ovens which bake large quantities of bread for sale additionally employ a bread delivery person whose job it is to transport the bread to all of the oven's customers throughout the medina. This bread transportation is usually undertaken with bread delivery vehicles which can range from wooden carts, to motorcycles attached to large bread filled baskets towing a small trailer of bread. This type of public oven activity has the potential of producing a relatively large amount of money compared to simply baking family bread. Since this major trend does not exist in



**Figure 48: This chart depicts the proportion of public ovens which reported that they produced sponsored bread which is given to the poor for free (N=16).**

the case study's public oven, its presence indicates that the case study's oven is not an epitome of tradition but a modernizing institution in and of itself.

What is curious about the results and exceptions to trends in this survey is that the process of public oven modernization represents a process of slow transformation. It is not simply that some public ovens have become completely modern economic institutions while other retain a traditional use of space, but that elements of both systems are simultaneously present to a certain extent in all of the public ovens surveyed. This survey highlighted nine trends present in the public ovens of Rabat. All 16



**Figure 49:** This graph illustrates the number of indicators of the oven's use as an extension of neighborhood domestic space that each oven reported to have (N=16).

public ovens surveyed contain between three and nine of these trends, and on average, the public ovens surveyed had systems which followed five out of the nine trends. In other words, one could have an oven in which it is usual for the baker to take his customers' baked goods, in which customers bring by wood for free, and in which beds are present, but which contains no other indicator of the oven's use as domestic space. It is not that there are modern and traditional ovens, but that most ovens are somewhere between the two, containing both relics of the oven's domestic role in the community and indications of it becoming a completely modern system.

### ***Isolated Observations***

In addition to trends, the survey also revealed a number of isolated observations, which appeared to be present in just the case study's public oven, or patterns which only occurred in a handful of other public ovens.

The first of these isolated observations is the presence of pets or cats in the public oven. As it turns out, the public oven within the case study is the only oven in the medina with cats or pets of any kind. As explained earlier, the cats in the public oven were obtained in order to get rid of a rat which had moved in. This is an example of an isolated observation which exists in order to fulfill a social need which is unique to the public oven in the case study: the need to get rid of a rodent. Since most other public ovens do not share this need with the oven in the case study, they do not need to have pets at the oven.

A second, and more surprising isolated observation was the phenomenon of the baker's role in helping out at special events. The case study demonstrated how the baker's *tiqa* relationship with his customers allows him to earn extra money by catering various events for customers, such as weddings, funerals, circumcisions and other events. One indicator tested in the survey was intended to determine if other bakers use their role



as a *sahib tiqa* to gain extra money by working at various events in the homes of customers. The response from the surveys was overwhelmingly negative. Not a single oven, other than the oven used in the case study, had a baker who, in addition to the public oven, worked to help cater various events for his customers. This demonstrates that such an activity as helping families to cater events is an isolated observation and unique to the public oven observed in the case study. In this case, I would suggest that working for customers' at various events is a unique solution to a common cultural need created by modernization. As families in the medina increasingly stop using the public oven, the profit produced by baking family bread is no longer sufficient to cover the rent and operating expenses of the public oven. As explained above, most public ovens produce bread that is distributed to neighborhood stores and sold, which covers the remaining operating expense. Out of the ovens surveyed, 81% baked items for sale, which appears to supplement an oven's ordinary income sufficiently enough to pay for the oven's operating expenses. Although the public oven in the case study did supplement its income by baking a handful of items for sale, its preparation of items for sale is limited and as a result the baker had to work in other areas. Since he is a *sahib tiqa*, catering one-time events is a position which the baker is very well suited for. As a result, the baker working as a caterer for his customers' parties is a custom which is new in that it responds to a new problem facing the public oven, but traditional in that it responds to that problem using a method heavily dependent on the baker's role as an honorary family member.

Although it was not isolated to a single observance, a second and fascinating pattern among a number of public ovens observed was the presence of women. Three of the 16 public ovens surveyed (19%) contained women, and one public oven was owned and managed by a woman. When the woman's father died, he left the public oven to her to run, and she comes to the oven every day to supervise the baking. As the owner of the public oven, she hires, directs, and pays bakers to work there. She explained to me that the oven doesn't make enough money to pay both her and the baker, so she manages the public oven without a salary and takes whatever occasional profit it produces. The presence of a woman working in and managing a public oven would seem to be acceptable only if the public oven is modernized to the point that it functions as more of an economic institution than a shared portion of a neighborhood's domestic space.

### ***Conclusion***

The survey demonstrated two things. Among the public ovens of Rabat's medina, indicators of the oven's use as an extension of a neighborhood's domestic space are present, and present in such a quantity that they are indicative of major trends. These major trends suggest that the conclusions of the case study are well founded, and describe real wide spread social patterns rather than an isolated case. As a result, the concept of communal space, and the notion that domestic space can extend literally and physically into the public sphere, appear to be viable, accurate concepts.

However, the survey showed us something else as well. The public oven is a modernizing institution, and it appears that its role as communal space is dying. In addition to the presence of trends which indicate that the public oven functions as a shared domestic space for its community, for any given trend, there are also a considerable number of ovens which do not follow it. Every public oven represents its

own system, acting under its own cultural, social and personal pressures and needs. The presence of electric and gas ovens in homes, as well as the growing presence of women in the workforce and public sphere appears to be placing new pressures on the public oven, pressures which push ovens away from their role as a communal space and towards a more modern role of an economic based enterprise.

The most valuable thing that we can take from this project is the concept of communal space. Although it appears to be on the decline in the public oven, communal space provides an interesting perspective through which to analyze Moroccan gender relations and the structure of Moroccan communities. In terms of gender relations, the concept of communal space allows us to see that it is not so much that women traditionally dominate the domestic sphere while men dominate the public sphere, but that each gender has its own unique spaces within the Moroccan home. In the case of the public oven and the public bath, we have seen that communal spaces are gendered, reserved for individuals of a particular sex. Communal spaces, and the fact that many households share a portion of their domestic space with the surrounding community, highlight the potential importance of using the neighborhood as a unit of anthropological analysis. Given the apparent decline in the use of the public oven as a communal space, is communal space itself dying? Or is it simply migrating into other modern institutions which do not serve a domestic function, such as the restaurant or the cafe? These are questions which I hope can be addressed by future anthropologists.

This project, as a case study and a survey, has given us a fascinating and intricate look into the function of the public oven in its community as a shared extension of the domestic space of its neighborhood; however, the results of this study should be taken with a grain of salt. Most basically, a case study is representative of a single data point, and although I attempted to ensure that the supporting survey was as accurate and unbiased as possible, in the end, the public oven project survey has a large potential for error and is only based on 16 samples: it is certainly not statically significant. A case study can describe with relative certainty what is occurring within its sample, and while a case study's results can suggest a paradigm, model or conclusion to be understood in broader context of a society or culture as whole, it certainly cannot prove it. I hope that this project can someday—in conjunction with other work—contribute to a trend of evidence which can be used to establish new paradigms, develop and support new questions, and finally, pioneer new knowledge of the complex, multifaceted, and ever evolving structure of Moroccan culture and society.



## Glossary of Foreign Terms<sup>4</sup>

***Dominga***: A Moroccan version of checkers with different rules governing the movement of kings.

***Eid al-fitor***: The holiday which ends the month of Ramadan.

***Fitor***: The meal which breaks the daily Ramadan fast.

***Foqas***: A biscotti-like Moroccan cookie.

***Greeba***: A flakey Moroccan cookie.

***Harasha***: A type of Moroccan cornmeal bread.

***Harrira***: A Moroccan soup traditionally consumed during *fitor*.

***Jallaba***: A body length Moroccan clothing item.

***Lubya***: A Moroccan bean dish prepared by leaving a pot of beans and animal fat in a public oven overnight to be slowly cooked by the cooling oven.

***Mendela***: The cloth used to cover and identify bread in the public oven.

***Pastella***: A Moroccan entrée pastry usually made with chicken, pigeon, or lamb.

***Rif***: A type of flakey Moroccan bread.

***Riyal***: A unit of Moroccan currency equal to 0.05 Moroccan Dirhams.

***Sahib tiqa***: An owner/possessor of *tiqa*.

***Shebekeya***: A type of pastry that is fried in honey and is traditionally eaten as part of *fitor*.

***Smen***: A type of Moroccan clarified butter which has been heavily salted and aged.

***Sufuf***: A Moroccan pastry which is served in the form of a powder.

***Tajine***: A Moroccan stew-like dish.

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<sup>4</sup> Note: Since Arabic plurals are less regular than English ones, and since the plural form of words, in an English transcription, may look very little like its singular, I have used the English “s” to pluralize the above terms

***Tiqa***: The ability to trust someone with your space.

***Usrat al-furan***: "The oven family".

***Wasela***: The wooden board on which bread is carried to the oven and identified.



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<sup>5</sup> Sources which informed this project's thought, development, and research, but were not included in this final write up.

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## Appendix A: Public Oven Customer Demographics

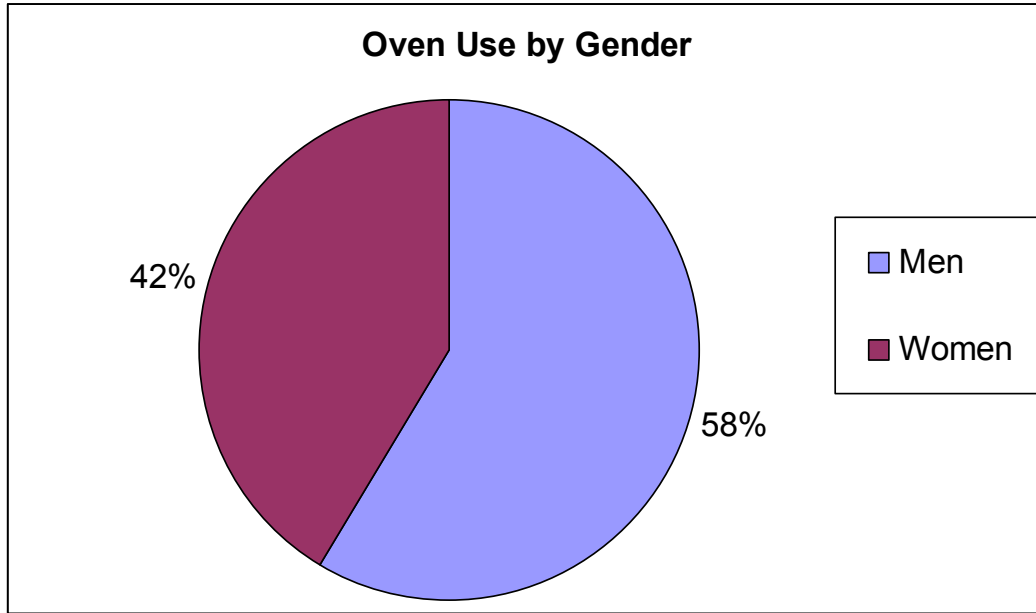


Figure 50: This chart illustrates the gender distribution of oven users in the case study's public oven (N=2715).

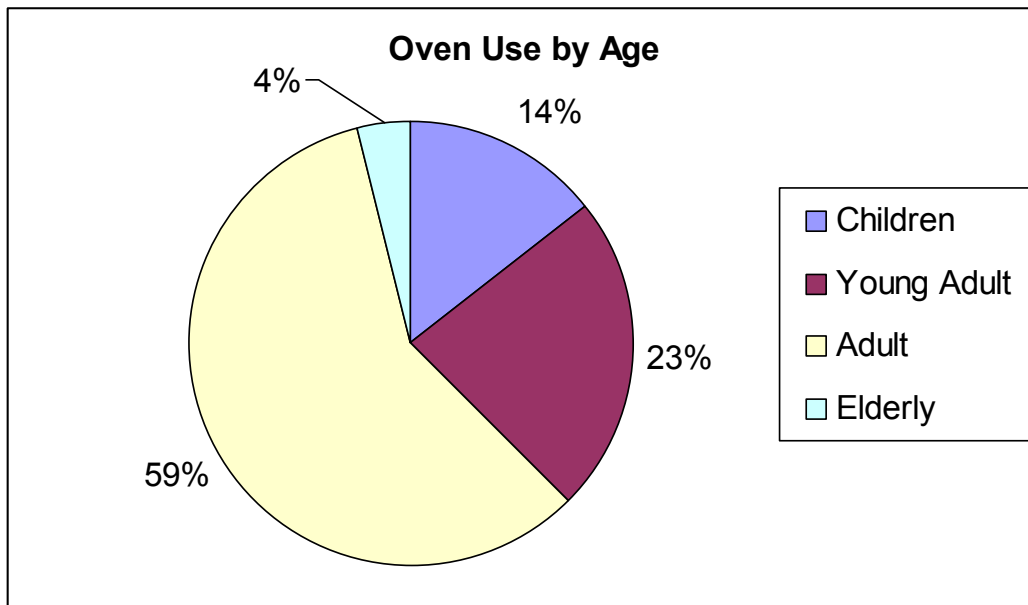


Figure 51: This chart demonstrates the age distribution of oven users in the case study's public oven (N=2717).

## Appendix B: Ramadan in the Public Oven

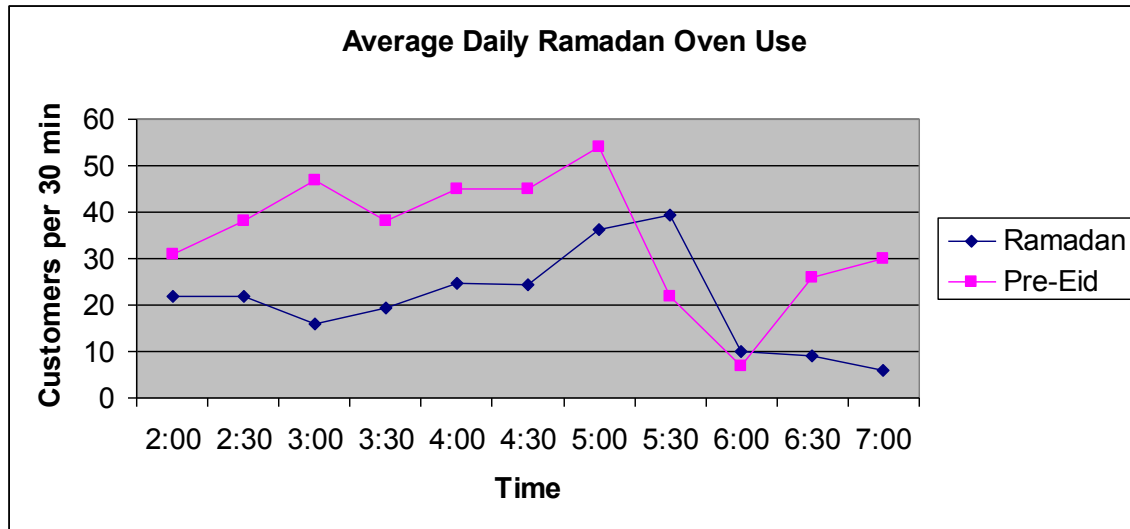


Figure 52: This graph depicts the number of customers coming to the oven at 30 min intervals on the day before *Eid al-Fitor* and during Ramadan. The data representing oven use during Ramadan is a combined average taken from four days of data, whereas the pre-*Eid* data represents the oven use on a single day. Notice that customer use peaks just before *fitor*. During Ramadan the time of *fitor* progressed from roughly 6:00 pm to 5:30 pm, and this change is reflected in the data above. Additionally, we can see that during Ramadan, customer use drops dramatically around *fitor* and then stays low, while on the eve of *Eid al-Fitor* the customer use increases again after *fitor*.

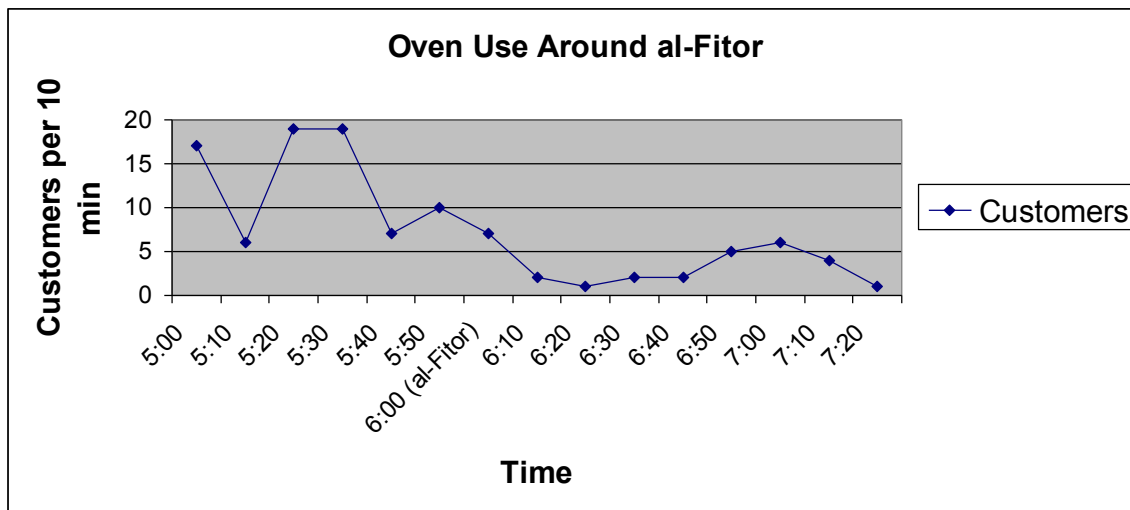


Figure 53: This graph depicts the number of customers using the public oven at 10 min. intervals around the time of *fitor* on a day in Ramadan. From this graph we can see that the largest decrease in customers comes 10-20 min. before the fast is broken, which suggests that a large group of people comes to the oven to pick up their bread or food sufficiently before *fitor* to return home and break the fast on time. Additionally, we can see that the low point of oven use doesn't occur until 20-30 min after *fitor*, indicating that another group people does not pick up its bread or entrée items until after the fast is broken.

## Appendix C:

### Public Oven Recipes

#### *Foqas*

*These little cookies are delightful, and also like eating a full stick of butter. They are a lovely accompaniment to tea, and they keep well for months. Many Moroccan families make a large batch of foqas, and keep them around the house to serve to guests for as long as they last. Try substituting nuts, apricots, M&Ms, or your favorite candy in place of the gummy bears.*

2 eggs  
1.5 cups sugar  
1.5 cups oil  
1  $\frac{3}{4}$  tsp. baking powder  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  cup gummy bears  
2  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup all-purpose flour

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
2. In a large bowl, mix the eggs, sugar, oil and baking powder until smooth.
3. Stir in the gummy bears.
4. Then add the flour, a cup at a time. When the mixture starts to get thick, move it to a flat working space and knead in the remaining flour.
5. Shape the oily dough into logs 1-2 inches wide and arrange them onto a cookie sheet, leaving room between the logs so that they can expand and not bump into each other.
6. Bake the dough logs until the edges begin to turn golden brown, about 15-20 min.
7. Remove the logs from the oven, and sprinkle them with water. A tbsp of water per log should be sufficient.
8. When cool, slice the logs into pieces about half an inch thick. Lay each slice flat on a cookie sheet, and bake for 10-15 min. or until the pieces begin to lightly brown.
9. Remove the cookie sheets from the oven and set aside until cool enough to touch.
10. Carefully flip each slice and return to the oven.
11. Bake for another 5-10 min, or until the pieces are lightly browned on each side.



**Figure 54:** Trays of baked *foqas*.

## *Greeba*

*Out of all the pastries I have eaten in the oven (and, believe me, I have had a lot), these crumbly cookies are by far my favorite. They keep for months and, not only are they delicious, but they have enough fat to get you through an entire winter. Give them as a gift to the neighbors, serve them with tea, or eat them alone at a scrumptious snack: these cookies are amazing.*

4 ½ cup flour  
1 ½ cup powdered sugar  
9 tbsp. softened butter  
½ cup oil  
1 tsp. baking powder

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees
2. Place all ingredients in a bowl and stir together.
3. At this point, the mixture should still be a powder. Move to a flat working surface, and knead for 3-4 min, breaking up clumpy pieces. You will find that the mixture is a powder until pressure is applied, at which point it becomes solid and dough-like.
4. Work the kneaded powder into a circle and pack until solid. It may take one or two attempts, but try to shape the dough into a flat circle, about an inch high, and pack it tightly into place. Slapping the dough with your hand often helps. If it is too crumbly to work with, knead the dough for a few more minutes. And if that is insufficient, try adding a little more oil.
5. When you have formed a non-crumbly solid stack of the powdery dough, then use a cookie cutter to cut out pieces and place them on a cookies sheet. Most commonly, *greeba* is made in a crescent shape, an effect achieved by using the rounded edge of an upturned glass. If the cookies crumble before you can place them on the cookie sheet, then the dough was not packed tightly enough. Re-shape the dough into a new flat circle and try again.
6. After the cookies from the first packed dough round have been cut, shape the remaining scrap dough into another flat circle and repeat the cutting process until all the dough is used.
7. Bake for 25-30 min or until the cookies become a light golden brown.

# Moroccan Bread

*Almost every family that comes to the public oven has their own unique technique of making bread, but there are many patterns. Since bread is usually eaten with tajines or similar dishes, it tends to have a thick crust and a firm texture which can sop up sauces without getting too soggy. Included below is a bread which would be typical of the kind brought to the public oven. This recipe has been adapted to deal with the limitations and needs of the modern American kitchen.*

- 2 cups warm water
- 1 tsp active dry yeast
- 2 cups whole wheat flour
- 1 tbs sea salt
- 1 tbs anise seeds
- 1 tbs sesame seeds
- 2-3 cups unbleached white bread flour



**Figure 55: A loaf of Moroccan bread being shaped.**

1. Begin by stirring the yeast into the warm water until it is completely dissolved.
2. Add the wheat flour to the water, and stir. Continue stirring for at least a minute after the mixture is smooth. Then cover with saran wrap or a moistened cloth and leave to rise for approximately 30 min.
3. When you return to the mixture, bubbles should have formed on its surface. Add the salt, anise, and sesame seeds and stir to mix.
4. Then add the remaining flour, a cup at a time. When the dough is too thick to stir, transfer it to a flat floured working surface and knead. The primary motions of kneading should involve pressing the dough flat, folding it over the top of itself, and pressing it flat again. Think of kneading as a process of trying to incorporate as much flour into the dough as possible. As you work the dough, you will find that it gets sticky periodically, which is a sign to add more flour. Knead the dough in this way for 8-10 min.
5. When finished kneading, lightly grease a cookie sheet. Shape the kneaded dough into a flat round loaf, about  $\frac{3}{4}$ -1 inch high, and place on the cookie sheet. Cover with saran wrap or a lightly moistened cloth, and let rise for 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  hours.
6. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
7. To see if the dough is finished rising, poke it lightly. The dough will bounce back if it is not done rising. When the dough is risen, remove the saran wrap or moistened cloth. At this point the dough may be very delicate, so treat it with care. Slice the surface of he



dough lightly with a sharp knife, or poke it several times with a fork to prevent ballooning.

8. Place the cookie sheet into the oven and bake for 20-30 min, or until the loaf is beginning to become lightly golden brown around the edges.

9. Leave the bread to cool before serving.

