

ethnographic parenthesis C }

Baking or Learning?

Together with the women of the household I was sitting in the kitchen when the two daughters returned home. In spite of the school holidays during the summer, they were learning throughout the morning—as part of a voluntary tutoring program organized by an NGO. For this reason, they had neglected tasks which they should have taken over in the household. Their mother Zahra was somewhat annoyed and complained about their unwillingness to do the things she asked them to do. While studying was good and important, there would be other things they needed to learn and take care of, she said. For example, she continued, they still would not be able to bake bread properly, unlike herself when she was their age. This could be undoubtedly understood as an accusation, raising all the obligations and meanings for the care of the family that are implied with baking bread. “How do you imagine what it will be like, if you have never learned how to bake bread properly, she asked her daughters. As if one day there would be bakeries in the village selling bread...

The mother touched on things that she held important in order to run a household, to raise a family and to fulfil the role of being a good wife and mother. For her those were things of significance that she wished to pass on. She herself did not have the chance of going to school, her reading skills were very rudimentary, and she did not speak Arabic fluently. Being in her thirties, she was just born slightly too early to benefit from the school system. Her daughters would have the best education and considerably more opportunities compared to any former generations growing up in the High Atlas. These opportunities also entail possible frictions and misunderstandings. They may involve a new skillset or tasks about which previous generations do not necessarily have knowledge or experience about. How

will they navigate these changes? And beyond that, which of the structural and infrastructural changes will have what impact on their actual lives? And to tie it back to the statement from the beginning: Would it mean that they will not live up to their role as women if they cannot, or, no longer have to, bake bread?