

Care and conveyance: Buying baladi bread in Cairo

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ABSTRACT ORIGINAL

The Egyptian government has long subsidized bread as part of its program of social support. Most Egyptians eat this subsidized bread, known as baladi bread, daily. We examine everyday practices of handling baladi bread as casual care. Scholarship on care has drawn attention to the multiple ways in which care can be practiced around a range of human and nonhuman others. Casual care signals a mode of practice that constitutes care but that is not necessarily performed by its practitioners as such. It is intentional but also habitual, deliberate but also perfunctory. We look at people's casual care for baladi bread during the understudied phase of conveyance, between the moment of purchase and arrival at home. Practices of handling and selecting bread help produce the quality of the baladi bread that people are eating. While past bread riots have underscored the political salience of this bread, casual care elucidates what goes on between these moments of crisis, revealing the role of people's day-to-day actions in producing a general level of satisfaction with subsidized bread. This analysis draws theoretical attention to how care is practiced, opening up space for thinking about kinds of care that are not all that careful in their enactment. © American Anthropological Association 2019.