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Seeing and Hearing the Book: A Moroccan Edition of the Qur'an

Anouk Cohen

1 Introduction¹

In 2010, the Moroccan Minister of Habous and Islamic Affairs announced the creation of a “Moroccan Qur'an,” which is now widely distributed in the kingdom's mosques. The singularity of the *muṣḥaf muḥammadi*,² as it is still called in reference to King Mohammed VI, lies in its material properties. For example, it is illuminating to compare the sura of *al-Fātiḥa* (the Opening) and verse 19 of the sura *al-Naml* (the Ants) in the Moroccan Qur'an (figs. 5.1 and 5.3) and in the Saudi edition (figs. 5.2 and 5.4). At first glance, the content corresponding to God's word is identical. However, a discerning eye will note that the calligraphy (*khatt*), the illuminations (*tadhīb*), the verse numbers, and the vocalization signs (*tashkīl*) vary. What publishers see as “details,” the minister—a close advisor to the king—sees as “small elements that can generate huge controversy.” These many insignificant distinctions for professionals are a major issue for him. What intentions do they reflect? This question goes to the heart of the reflection on a specifically Moroccan way of seeing, hearing, and acting on the Qur'an.

This question became especially pressing at a time when the myth of the unique commandship of believers³ was being undermined by the growing influence of the (Islamist) Justice and Development Party, which laid claim to safeguarding Islam and its values, as opposed to the king descended from the Prophet Muhammad.⁴ After the Casablanca attacks in 2003, seen as evidence

1 This paper is a translation of an article published in French (Cohen 2017).

2 *Muṣḥaf* (“volume”) is the term used to avoid confusion between the revelation (*Qur'ān*) and its support.

3 The status of Commander of the Believers (*amīr al-mu'minīn*) emphasizes the divine election of the Sultan, the prophet's approval, testamentary support, and the people's adherence. It was also claimed by the Sultan of Oman and, since 2014, by the self-proclaimed caliph of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

4 See Malika Zeghal, *Les Islamistes marocains: le défi à la monarchie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005).

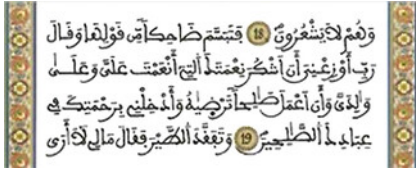


FIGURE 5.1
Verse 19 of the sura *al-Naml* (the Ants) in the *mushaf muhammadi*
MOHAMMED VI FOUNDATION FOR HOLY
QUR'AN PUBLISHING, MOHAMMEDIA, 2013:
388

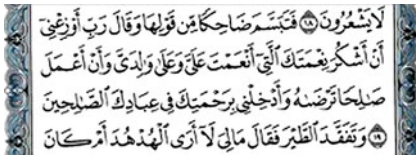


FIGURE 5.2
Verse 19 of Sura *al-Naml* (the Ants) in the
Saudi edition of the Qur'an, by *mushaf Al-*
Madina
KING FAHD COMPLEX FOR HOLY QUR'AN
PRINTING, MEDINA, 2015: 378

of the tightening grip of the strict Islam promoted by Wahhabi Saudi Arabia, Mohammed VI implemented a far-reaching religious policy to define the orthodoxy and strengthen his monopoly as a religious leader. This fledgling program defended the “exclusivity of the Malekite Rite” (2003 royal speech)—an essential component of a reference system reactivated during times of crisis.⁵ In this kingdom claiming the caliphate (the supreme position in Islam), the relationship between the faithful and the official orthodoxy and orthopraxis is central to the political legitimization process.⁶

As in the past, the authority of the divine monarch is established and strengthened by drawing on the religious imagination,⁷ itself fuelled by myths, images, objects, and ceremonies featuring the “mystical body” of the supernatural and immortal king.⁸ While the Moroccan Qur'an is well steeped in this body of symbols, its study calls for an approach that goes beyond representations. The crucial importance of the holy book's materiality and of the five senses it involves is conducive to a reconnection with the other, real or natural

5 See Mohamed Tozy, *Monarchie et islam politique au Maroc* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1999); Nabil Mouline, *Le Califat imaginaire d'Ahmad al-Mansûr: pouvoir et diplomatie au Maroc au XVI e siècle* (Paris, PUF, 2009).

6 Elaine Combs-Schilling, *Sacred Performances: Islam, Sexuality and Sacrifice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

7 Marc Bloch, *Les Rois thaumaturges, étude sur le caractère surnaturel attribué à la puissance royale, particulièrement en France et en Angleterre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983 [1924]).

8 See Ernst Kantorowicz, *Les Deux Corps du roi: essai sur la théologie politique au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989). The book's title refers to a metaphor stating the duality of the king, considered to have two bodies: a natural and mortal one subject to infirmities, and a supernatural and immortal one that has no weaknesses and that embodies the entire kingdom.

body, thus expanding the reflection to an embodied anthropology of the construction of monarchical power in contemporary Morocco.⁹

In the daily practice of the faithful, the Qur'an goes well beyond its textual aspect. More than read, it is recited, listened to, integrated into vernacular exchanges, and contemplated on the ornate walls of mosques and on decorative paintings in houses. In Casablanca, beautiful copies of the Qur'an are often displayed in the living rooms of the domestic help's dwellings. It is a feature of interior decor for the faithful, calling the attention of visitors to the importance of God's word in their homes. A combination of many criteria—format, cover, layout, etc.—create an infinite number of objects that correspond to various uses, depending on whether one wants to keep the book close at hand, study it, or carry it around without damaging it. This is not to mention buyers' aesthetic tastes with regard to their Qur'an, which is not simply a Qur'an: It is "their" Qur'an. The relationship is tactile, intimate, and highly personalized.¹⁰ Reading aloud and listening to or looking at the verses can touch the faithful and move them in the manner of a musical performance, poem, or painting.¹¹ The material forms of the Qur'an thus continually affect them, as they experience it in spiritual as well as practical, sensory, and emotional ways.

From illumination to calligraphy and psalmody, these ornaments are meant to exalt God's word, make it present, and establish a connection with the divine.¹² In Morocco, where the king seeks to mediate this relationship, the movements associated with these practices, the senses that they mobilize, and the sensations that they induce, are subject to increasing regulation at a time when the liberalization of salvation goods and the development of information and communication technologies are spreading many varied ways of uniting with the Word. On the basis of what "governmentality"—in Michel Foucault's sense of the word, that is, a specific way of exercising power based on the corporeal induction of an internalized discipline through material processes¹³—

9 Note the absence of work on these questions, apart from the mentioned research, which embraces a historical and anthropological approach to representations.

10 Cf. Anouk Cohen, "Le livre du Coran à Casablanca et à Rabat," *Archives des sciences sociales des religions* 150: 175–195; Anouk Cohen, "Le Coran et ses multiples formes (Casablanca, Maroc)," *Terrain* 59: 70–87.

11 Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, "Everyday Life, Qur'an," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 80–97.

12 Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

13 See Michel Foucault, "Pouvoir et corps," in *Dits et écrits: 1970–1975*, vol. 2, eds. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 2–5. Refusing to address power in terms of ideology, Foucault looks at the state from the perspective of its practices through the neologism of "governmentality"—a combination of the terms "government" and "rationality."

does the Palace¹⁴ hope to concretely control and shape religious subjectivation? My attempt to answer this question led me, in line with other researchers, to study the tangible forms of the manifestation of Islam and their social uses.¹⁵ More specifically, I have examined how the monarchy mobilizes the book's material specificities in an attempt to frame the relationship of the faithful to the Qur'an and to encourage its transmission according to a specifically Moroccan sensory approach. Thus, more generally, this study conducted between 2010 and 2017 examines how the personal and social relationship to God is "mediated" by the book, and how the materiality of this object is conceived to create a unique link to the divine, through and by the monarch.

The methodology involves analytically considering the development of this relationship by exploring its technical and practical dimensions¹⁶ through a concrete question: How is a Moroccan Qur'an made? My approach, inspired by the "operational chain" approach and embedded in a broader reflection on the ways that the material dimensions of techniques and objects produce "systems of meaning and practice,"¹⁷ delves into the book's genesis. Exploring social codicology as a method encouraged me to devote particular attention to social uses of manuscripts as related to politics and authority. The idea is to understand how the actors involved in its production (from its production to its distribution in mosques and schools) contribute to the object's development and definition. The study focuses on the relationships they maintain, the strategies

The former refers to conduct meant to shape that of individuals, while the second suggests that controlling a person requires defining the person. The state therefore implements material measures to closely discipline citizens' bodies, time, and actions.

- 14 In the Moroccan political system, which is often called "neo-patrimonial" (a highly personalized type of domination geared towards maintaining and protecting existing elites), the term "Palace" (still called *Makhzen*) refers to the King's office, composed of advisers in charge of strategic ministries known as "regal" ones, including that of the Habous and of Islamic Affairs. Meanwhile, the government and the Parliament have limited power subject to oversight.
- 15 See Talal Asad, "Reading a Modern Classic: W.C. Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion*," *History of Religions* 40 (3): 205–222; Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Saba Mahmood, *Politique de la piété: le féminisme à l'épreuve du renouveau islamique* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009); Annelies Moors, "Popularizing Islam: Muslims and Materiality—Introduction," *Material Religion* 8: 272–279.
- 16 Bruno Latour suggests thinking about the development of political project policy like that of a building by focusing on its foundations, the construction materials used, and the movements made throughout the process. See Bruno Latour, *Changer de société, refaire de la sociologie*, trans. Nicolas Guillhot (Paris: La Découverte, 2006).
- 17 Pierre Lemonnier, "Mythiques chaînes opératoires," *Techniques & Culture* 43–44 (2004): 3.

they deploy, and the materials they use to respond to specific and conflicting objectives. The idea is to capture these discrepancies and failures by focusing the analysis on the production mechanisms of a localized and homogenized “make believe,”¹⁸ fuelled in particular by discourses around the image of the calligraphic letter, the sounds emitted during recitation, and their properties.

2 Producing the Moroccan Qur'an

2.1 *Errors and Orthodoxy: The Example of the muṣḥaf muḥammadi*

In 2010, the creation of the Moroccan Qur'an went hand in hand with that of the Mohammed VI Foundation for Holy Qur'an Publishing, under the authority of the Minister of Islamic Affairs, who spoke for the Palace in this area. The foundation was granted “exclusive rights to record, print, publish, and distribute” the Qur'an (decree of its creation in 2010). The Foundation's opening followed controversies that appeared in the press over the circulation of holy books with “mistakes” (*tahrif*). According to an independent publisher in the Habous district, the centre for Arab books in Casablanca, “there are many errors in the Qur'ans we're selling. People outside of the field saw that the Qur'an was selling well and started scanning copies and sending the files to China. But they made mistakes while scanning.”¹⁹ They did not follow the commonly accepted page order and they cut out lines and left unfortunate pieces of dust on the scan glass that might be seen as diacritical signs.²⁰

18 “I understand “belief” not as the subject of belief (a dogma, a program, etc.), but as the investment of subjects in a proposition, that is, the *act* of stating it and holding it to be true [...]. Yet the capacity to believe appears to be receding everywhere in politics [...]. The difference and continuity between politics and religion is thus made clear. But the desire to ‘make believe’ driving the institution in both cases provides a response to a search for love and/or identity.” (Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien: arts de faire*, vol. 1, Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 260.

19 Interviews cited in this article were conducted in French, Arabic, or a combination of the two languages. In the latter two cases, the translations are by the author.

20 The Arabic script “has twenty-eight letters, but actually only has fifteen characters [...]. To distinguish between consonants denoted by the same letter, we use single dots, double dots or triple dots placed on or under the letter [...]. Arabic only indicates the three long vowels with letters [...]. To indicate the three short vowels, it borrowed three Syriac signs that are either subscript or superscript to double the letters or mark a stop on one of them. The common expression ‘diacritical signs’ encompasses all of these points/signs.” (Gérard Troupeau, website:<http://classes.bnf.fr/ecriture/arret/lesecritures/arabe/02.htm>, accessed February 19, 2017).



FIGURE 5.3

Sura *al-Fātiḥa* (the Opening) in the Moroccan edition of the Qur'an, Mohammed VI Foundation for Holy Qur'an Publishing, Mohammedia, 2013: 2.

Disgruntled users of the Qur'an did not hesitate to go to the delegation of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs in their region with copies corrected in pencil. "They're asking us to respond," declared the director of the foundation, "and so His Majesty has pledged to distribute a certified Holy Qur'an to the mosques," namely his copy, stamped with the royal seal and of guaranteed orthodoxy. Error appeared as a political argument justifying the creation of a Moroccan edition of the Qur'an.²¹

In principle, the Qur'an stamping process is strict. While the Bible is subject to copyright (or rather translator rights), the Qur'an does not fall under any official regulations. According to the protocol defined in the 1920s in Cairo by al-Azhar, the leading university of Islamic studies, each stage of production should be subject to control. However, this protocol is more or less strictly followed depending on the regulations in place in each country.²² No regulation existed in Morocco before 2011, whereas in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, editions have been under 'ulama' (Islamic clerics) control for over half a century. According to the director of the foundation, this explains "the errors in the text

21 In Egypt, the concept of "noise pollution" was used as a pretext to standardize the call to prayer (*adhān*), which was at the heart of religious policy in the mid-2000s. See Iman Farag, "Querelle de minarets en Égypte. Le débat public sur l'appel à la prière," *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 125 (2009): 47–66.

22 Michel Albin, "Printing of the Qur'an," in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 264–276.

itself: the letter that should be extended this way or that. It's very precise." This is why, in addition to the board of directors headed by the Minister of Islamic Affairs, the foundation consults with a "scientific body" composed of clerics.

While publishers flagged poorly designed books created by incompetent booksellers eager to quickly produce as many copies as possible, the foundation's director decried editions produced without oversight from institutional clerics, with poorly written and possibly heretic texts.²³ At this point, what qualifies as an "error" is debatable. The director explained: "It is necessary to question the members of the scientific body who are familiar with the rules of writing." The "error" would refer to a heterodox use, contrary to norms established by the clerics of the foundation. What are they, and what discussions did they spark, particularly with the calligrapher (*khattāt*), the illuminator, and the graphic designer?

3 The Search for Originals ... from the Palace

In 2006, the Minister of Islamic Affairs asked a famous Moroccan calligrapher to write the *muṣḥaf muḥammadī* in accordance with the rules of the dominant recitation in Morocco (*Warsh*²⁴) and "Moroccan-Andalusian" calligraphy

23 The conception of the revelation in Islam imposes specific constraints on the reproduction and dissemination of the holy book. The late adoption of the printing press in the Muslim world, nearly four centuries after its advent in the Christian world, illustrates this. This resistance mainly stemmed from clerical opposition: The fear was that the Qur'an might be altered by its technical reproduction and that standardization of the printed word might upset the knowledge transmission system at the basis of their authority (see Francis Robinson, "Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print", *Modern Asian Studies* 27 (1), 1993: 229–251). In Qur'anic learning, the written word, combined with oral practices, is an aide-memoire enabling its correct incorporation. To date, virtually all the books of the Qur'an produced in the world have been written by hand, scanned, retouched, and printed after being checked and certified. This is how producers responded to the technological change and preserved the Qur'an's accuracy. This production method—which bears a resemblance to lithography—maintains the physical attributes of old manuscripts, such as the calligraphic style and vocalization marks that have supported Qur'anic reading and recitation. See Anouk Cohen, "Éditer la Révélation. Le Coran dans le Maroc contemporain", *Genèses* 105, 2016: 57–75.

24 *Warsh* is the name of one of the seven canonical readings (*qirā'a*, a term encompassing both the act of reading and reciting). The variations concern vocalization points, signals of verse pauses or ends, and pronunciation details, which account for the distinct ways of orally presenting the text. Today, with the exception of large areas of West and Central Africa, where *Warsh* recitation is widespread, the *Hafs* recitation is the most renowned.

(*maghribī*).²⁵ For months, the calligrapher copied the verses on paper plates according to the “Qur’an of Zwitter,”²⁶ considered by Royal Library experts to be the oldest lithographed copy in Morocco with numbered verses. It remains the original model most reproduced by scanning or handwriting.²⁷ It is a canonical book that differs from the standard edition, in line with the Egyptian copy developed at al-Azhar in 1924 in different styles of calligraphy (*naskhī*) and of recitation (*hafṣ*), often referred to as “Eastern” in Morocco.

The selection of the artist was no less significant than that of the copy: having become the “Palace calligrapher” during the reign of Hassan II (1961–1999), he learned *maghribī* by reproducing the writings inscribed in the kingdom’s oldest mosques. Following in his father’s footsteps, he wrote the decrees and deciphered the manuscripts of the royal and sultanic archives. This time-consuming work allowed him to deepen his knowledge of Moroccan-Andalusian calligraphy in accordance with the conventions adopted by the monarchy. It is thus to this calligrapher that Mohammed VI, like his father Hassan II, turned to copy “his Qur’an.” Contrary to the *muṣḥaf ḥassanī*, which was to be offered to distinguished guests, the *muṣḥaf muḥammadī* was placed under serial and industrial production. The calligrapher had to produce an original book for the new king: “The writing had to be even more beautiful, more refined,” he explained to me.

Once the work was completed, the calligraphic tablets were given to two clerics chosen by the Palace and known for their command of calligraphy and recitation. One was a native of the Fès region who was around eighty years old and had “learned by heart the Qur’an in all its versions [that is, the seven Moroccan recitations]” following the traditional method of the *lawḥ* (a Qur’anic tablet that combines writing and recitation) used throughout the Islamic world, particularly in Morocco.²⁸ His father and grandfather, described

25 It was copied in the Kufic style, which is known for its great clarity and was used in the first Qur’anic manuscripts. *Maghribī* was developed in the tenth century to replace the *naskhī* script from the central territories of the caliphate. It is characterized by an angular and geometric style that differs from the flexible and rounded *naskhī* adopted for printing, typewriting, and computers. The latter is therefore better known.

26 This is an edition that was produced in 1929 by a famous *faqīh* (jurist) and calligrapher recognized for his writing and knowledge of the Qur’an. Until recently, the rights to it belonged to *Dar al-muṣḥaf al-sharīf*, in Cairo. See Abdulrazak Fawzi, “The Kingdom of the Book: The History of Printing as an Agency of Change in Morocco between 1865 and 1912” (PhD diss., University of Boston, 1990). Named Zwitter, this *faqīh* was a professor at al-Qarawiyyīn, a major university for Islamic studies in Fès.

27 Cohen, “Éditer la Révélation.”

28 Dale Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power in Morocco: The Education of a Twentieth Century Notable* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

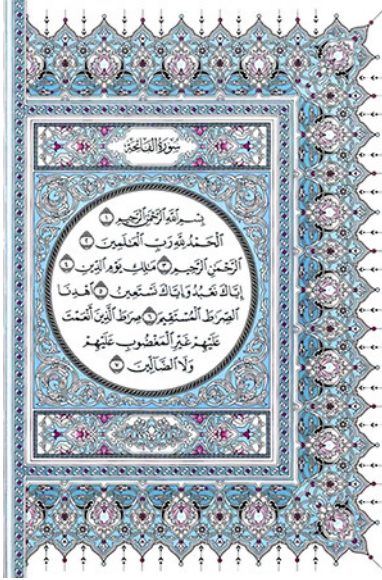


FIGURE 5.4
Sura *al-Fātiḥa* (The Opening) in the Saudi Arabian edition of the Qur'an, by *Mushaf al Madinah* KING FAHD'S COMPLEX FOR THE PRINTING OF THE HOLY QUR'AN, MEDINA, 2015: 1

as *shurafā'* (descendants of the Prophet), had memorized the Qur'an before him in its entirety. A former teacher at the Faculty of Letters in Rabat and author of famous works on Qur'anic recitations, he was a member of the renowned al-Azhar Auditing Committee. The latter was a former student of his who was around sixty years old and also from Fès, but who had only mastered the most common recitations. Less well known than his elder, he nevertheless had an established reputation thanks to his study of the uses of the *lawḥ* in the kingdom's Qur'anic schools (*madrasa*), commissioned by the Palace. Like his master, he was heir to, and one of the last witnesses of, the *qadīm* ("ancient" or "patrimonial") ways of transmitting the Qur'an according to recitation and writing methods specific to the country.

4 Forms, Norms, and Discords

Drawing on their experience and fame in Morocco and within the Palace, the two clerics were quick to flag the calligrapher's mistakes. "It is imprecise," they said, before proposing to copy a new Qur'an with the help of an additional cleric appointed by the minister according to the same criteria that had guided his selection of the first two, rooted in a local system of writing and recitation practices. However, because of the additional cleric's frequent visits to Saudi Arabia and his preachings, he was deemed a Wahhabi by his peers, who believed that

he was chosen in order to encourage him and his growing number of followers to adhere closer to Malekism. Finally, associating him with the foundation's scientific body despite his embrace of a doctrine that differed from that of the kingdom would burnish the regime's image as tolerant and open.

For several weeks, the calligrapher met with the clerics, bringing them tablets rewritten in accordance with their corrections, which mainly focused on the shape of the letters. "For example," said the eldest cleric, "*dhālika*—you cannot write it like that in the Qur'an [he traces the word on a sheet of paper (fig. 5.6)], you cannot leave any blanks. The line should not be so long, even if it does not change the meaning. There should be no excessive reading." For everything is pronounced in *maghribī* ("Moroccan-Andalusian") calligraphy. The length of the letter's line indicates the intensity of its vocalized sound, and the line itself is considered a "void" to be filled. This is why the "space" between the letters was scrupulously checked by the clerics, who defined each one's size, enabling expression of the artist's talent: "When you take the letter," says the calligrapher, "you transform it decoratively and write it in your own way. In Moroccan-Andalusian calligraphy, there are no [measurement] rules as there are in Eastern writing. Each calligrapher knows the shape of the letter, but when he wants to make it in the painting, he traces it according to the shape of the painting." The clerics also forbid forms deemed confusing to the reader: "For example, the tail of the *rā*' should not be so long and touch the next letter," the calligrapher explained. "I will write the word *al-ḥamdu li-l-llāh* here decoratively (fig. 5.7); and there (fig. 5.8), thinking of the Qur'an," he said. "In the first drawing, we see the form and beauty [...]. But," he concedes, "since the letters are tight, they are difficult to read. That is why," he continues, "in the second drawing, we leave the distance for the *lām*, and start writing the *hā*'." Each letter has its place."

These writing rules were the subject of long discussions between the clerics, who did not always agree on the norm that should be adopted: "One would say that the accent should be placed just above the letter and not next to it, even by a millimetre, while I thought it shouldn't," said a cleric. To decide, they compared tablets that one of them had collected years ago in the country's Qur'anic schools. When they failed to agree on the shape of a letter, the clerics picked the one that most frequently appeared in the tablets, considered to be the most trustworthy transmission system since they are based on a personal relationship between masters and students. In order to establish and set writing norms, they also set the size of the *kalam* ("pen")—a key and highly personalized tool in the art of calligraphy: "It could not be over a millimetre. This was a bit difficult: I was so used to drawing letters freestyle. In addition, I was using a reed *kalam*, so bringing it to a millimetre size was difficult. I ended up writing with a fountain pen, which doesn't deform," explained the calligrapher.

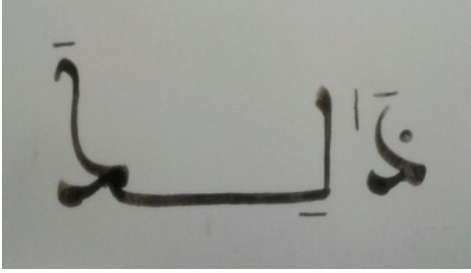


FIGURE 5.5
The word *dhālīka* traced on paper

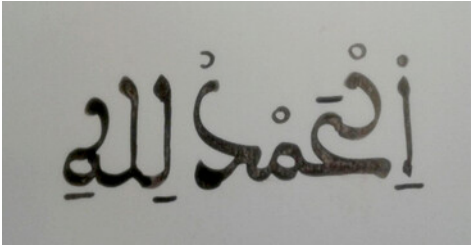


FIGURE 5.6
The word *al-ḥamdu li-l-lāh* written
“decoratively” by a calligrapher

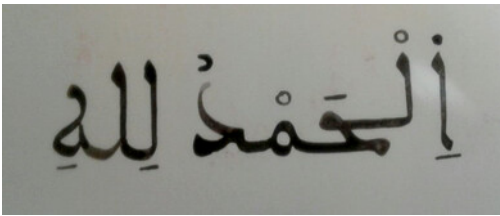


FIGURE 5.7
The word *al-ḥamdu li-l-lāh* written
by a calligrapher “thinking of the
Qur'an”

Meanwhile, the artist had a whole other idea of his task, and was concerned with reproducing the Qur'an in his “best handwriting.” In his soul, he said, “the calligrapher traces the letter with a decorative intention.” He sought beauty and refused to integrate the clerics' corrections several times: “They said that it was an error and that more or less spaces needed to be placed between the letters. They said that my writing style was unclear and did not respect the Qur'an, but they are the ones who were not respecting it when they asked me to make my writing less beautiful!” He and clerics were defending two opposite writing styles: one style prioritized clarity, and the other, a refined line. The cleric claimed: “The calligrapher ultimately recognized that we were right,” and followed the set rules.

Once the tablets were finished, the illuminator drew the vegetal compositions around the text. The clerics did not supervise this work because they considered it to be accessory, unlike the minister, who believed the structure of the contours and colours of the illuminations should “reflect the taste of Moroc-

cans,” as did the foundation’s director. The kingdom’s ancient mosques have unique aesthetic features that the illuminator copied by imitating the strokes of his father, who had joined the Palace before him. A familiarity between the place of worship and the book was sought. These two prayer spaces thus shared a “known feel.” The idea was for prayer in the mosque and “in” the book to elicit the same sensation: to simultaneously feel close to God and to the monarch. The materiality of the letter and of the illuminations gave the king a physical presence, and intrinsically reflected the Qur’an’s and his sacredness.

After the illuminator finished the decorations on separate tablets, a graphic designer combined them with the text to create a “clean book without any stains,” sometimes causing disagreements with the clerics, the calligrapher, and the illuminator. One cleric noted that a sign had been eliminated: “It was an accent, not a stain”; the calligrapher complained that a reformatted letter no longer complied with the aesthetic rules of *maghribī* calligraphy: “It was too rounded, like Western writing”; finally, the illuminator noted: “You cannot have this branch go over this one. Moroccan ornamentations draw on the laws of nature.” When faced with a dilemma of this kind, the graphic designer always sided with the clerics, following the strict instructions of the Minister for Islamic Affairs.

These observations lead to three conclusions. First, the actors involved in the Book’s production had different, and even contradictory, visions of what the Moroccan Qur’an should look like, not to mention the vision of the king himself. Second, the object considered to hold the revealed work was modulable according to changing rules, which were redefined here to convey an authentic Moroccan approach that would elicit a uniquely local way of relating to God. Finally, institutional clerics played a central role in this mediation. Wariness over their role was palpable, revealing the minister’s effort to have them serve as guardians in the creation of new material and sensory norms around the Qur’an. The deference granted to their judgement bore testament to the king’s desire for them to both legitimate his positions and bless his actions, and to prioritize the form of letters as intimately linked to the sounds to be made. The “right letter” was thus targeting the “right recitation,” that is, the correct way of vocalizing the text.

5 Reciting the Qur’an in “Moroccan Style”

5.1 *The Meanings of Sound*

“The right recitation,” or cantillation, the main goal of which is to regulate the exact restitution of the sacred texts in order to prevent dangerous deviations,

led to the establishment of the science of *tajwīd* as a branch of Qur'anic studies. *Tajwīd*, “the adornment of recitation”²⁹ focuses on the voice and its broadcasting, as well as the art of chanting according to phonetic rules and laws indicated by different colours in the *tajwīd Qur'an*, as this category of didactic books is called (fig. 5.10). Since Arabic consonants are inert, this science is key to processing the vowels in different, customized ways.

The explanation of one of the foundation's clerics is eloquent in this regard: “Muslims are concerned with pronouncing the holy Qur'an as closely as possible to THE way it was revealed to the prophet.” This way reflects specific rules that conform with the *tajwīd* methods specific to canonical recitations. He continues: “There is moussaaaaa, moussééé, moussi,” he recites, while drawing a crescent that represents a scale of intensity ranging from the sound “a” to the sound “i”—it depends on the recitation. The recitations are not alternative versions of the text, but rather minor variations in its vocalization. Sometimes differences of vocalization lead to divergent interpretations. This is why clerics pay very close attention to the way each letter is vocalized. This calls for the greatest level of precision in forming letters and placing diacritical signs.

Concerns about interpretation also drive the regulation of voice stops, which differ between the Moroccan Qur'an and the standard edition. This variation is crucial since the transmission of the message depends on the way the text is paced. Stopping at the wrong place in a sentence could produce a heretical meaning. Thus, the delicate modalities of the sound declination of a single vowel or connecting line have cognitive properties.

6 The Collective Recitation of the *ḥizb*

However, the foundation's director does not see interpretation as the key issue in determining the “right” sound to make. What is important is the recitation of the *ḥizb*, which must respond to a collective movement: “Moroccans must be able to pray together without any problem during the *ḥizb*,” he says. The *ḥizb* (“party”—in reference to the sixty sections of the Qur'an) refers to a collective recitation performed in the mosque twice a day, after the prayers of dawn and sunset (so that the Qur'an, composed of sixty *ḥizb*, is recited in its entirety every month). At other times of the day, worshippers silently listen to the imam's

29 Amnon Shiloah, “La voix et les techniques vocales chez les Arabes,” *Cahiers d'ethnomusicologie* 4:1991, 91.

voice. Historically rooted in Morocco,³⁰ the recitation of the *ḥizb* is barely practiced in the Middle East, where rigorist Muslims call it *bid'a* (“innovation”). The foundation’s director laments that this conception is increasingly widespread in Morocco. Imams sometimes even refuse to recite the *ḥizb* in their mosque even though it is part of their training under a ministry programme. The stakes are high, with the ministry’s website claiming that the *ḥizb* practice is inseparable from Moroccan identity.

This recitation lasts about twenty minutes and is led by the imam. “While he reads by heart [i.e. recites], explains a young practicing Muslim, we read the book.” Kneeling in a circle around the imam, the faithful use the book so as not to make mistakes. “This is so that we don’t forget anything,” he adds. The book plays a central role in a ritual initially intended for rote learning of the Qur’an according to a correct diction acquired through repeated and collective recitation. “Except that now,” the director of the foundation argues, “the faithful no longer pray from the same book. Some recite in an Eastern style, and others in a Moroccan style. Some stop while others continue, then some kneel while others remain standing because they have not seen *al-sajadāt*—there is a disagreement.” *Al-sajadāt* (“prostrations”)—flagged in the text with a medallion—inform the worshipper when to bow down to the ground. Their number varies depending on the edition: eleven in the *muṣḥaf muḥammadī*, versus fourteen in the standard edition. Thus, the material components of the book set the Qur’an both in sound and in motion according to precise rules so as not to disturb the collective performance of the ritual. This is why, in a bid for “standardization,” the foundation, its director explained, widely distributed the *muṣḥaf muḥammadī* in mosques. The objective was for the faithful to pray from the same book focused on regulating vocal sounds, body movements, and meanings associated with prayer. Establishing standards of writing and ornamentation would mould a specifically Moroccan Qur’anic intonation, sound, and movement.

7 Sounds in Circulation

To this end, the monarchy uses media outside of books—mainly radio and television. In addition to prayers broadcast at the usual times, programmes devoted to learning the recitation of the *muṣḥaf muḥammadī* are broadcast

30 Anis Fariji, “Le recto tono dans la récitation collective du Coran dite “lecture du hizb”: une image sonore d’un espace sacré étendu”, *Hespéris-Tamuda*, L II (2), 2017: 179–200.

several times a week. It is therefore around the book that the policy of sound “standardization” has mainly centred, from its production to its marketing.

In order to stop the circulation of copies of the Qur'an that do not conform with its rules, the foundation annually produces (through the royal printing house) around a million copies of the *muṣḥaf muḥammadi* to be distributed in mosques. In addition, it controls copies imported from the Middle East through the enactment of new regulations. Distributors are now required to submit a form specifying the recitation, calligraphic style, format, cover type, and colours of models imported from the Middle East, where the books are designed and/or printed. Prior to issuing this lengthy protocol, they provided Middle Eastern printers with the foundation's “roadmap” of applicable rules. “They didn't understand anything,” says one distributor, “but they had to adapt. With what's going on over there right now, we're the only ones buying.” Only Egyptian and Lebanese producers (both publishers and printers) leading organizations capable of funding the design of new models aligned with the new trade rules were able to continue to take advantage of Morocco's flourishing Qur'an market. Economic dynamics thus favoured—at least for a while—the policy of erasing recitations deemed unorthodox, and enabled the development of a Qur'an market aligned with the Palace's requirements at the regional level.

8 A Significant Disagreement: The Case of the *tajwīd Qur'an*

Due to pressure from the clerics, the foundation prohibited miniature Qur'ans (which were mostly used as talismans) and encased copies (generally offered at marriages and birth rites). These models are also prohibited in conservative countries such as Saudi Arabia. Editions with text in colours to highlight the names of God and recitation rules were also prohibited, even though they were popular among the faithful, who increasingly wanted to learn the Qur'an “by themselves.” Shortly after their ban, endorsed by the minister, the intervention of a Moroccan publisher from the Habous neighbourhood created waves. “The ban on the *tajwīd* Qur'an is something I could not accept!” The Lebanese producer was incensed: “The *tajwīd* Qur'an was blocked for over six months. There were no more on the market. It was a scandal. Booksellers were selling it at high prices. So I asked the foundation to prove to me that this ban came from the king himself or from the government.” Stonewalled by the foundation's director, the publisher took advantage of the inauguration of the 2013 Casablanca International Publishing and Book Fair to meet the head of government: “I sneaked into the crowd,” he said, “and I offered him a *tajwīd* Qur'an. He thanked me,

so I asked him why this Qur'an could no longer be sold in Morocco. He said, "But that's impossible: there's a special note about this Qur'an!" I swore to him that the foundation had banned it. Then I sent him a file containing all my exchanges with the foundation, and within a week I obtained authorization to import the *tajwid* Qur'an!" The head of government had apparently requested that the institution lift the ban. The director complied with the request from the minister, who faced the clerics' obstinate opposition.

This dispute highlights both the haste with which the new trade regulations were implemented—the head of government not having been informed of the measure on the eve of the book fair—and the difference of opinion within the regime between the minister and the head of government (also secretary of the Justice and Development Party) on the position to take towards the *tajwid* Qur'an, or rather on how the Qur'an should be memorized and transmitted. While the king and his advisers only considered standards defined by institutional clerics as valid, from the head of government's perspective the Qur'an had to be learnable independently and directly, without an imposed state mediation. This episode also illustrates the monarch's concern with being seen as absolutist at a time when he had to demonstrate openness and flexibility towards the ruling Islamic party.

In addition to the highly collective and socialized dimension of the uses of the Qur'an, which is most emblematically expressed in the *hizb* ritual, where the use of sounds and movements is supposed to create a homogeneous Moroccan religious identity, another issue closely linked to the first is apparent: learning the Qur'an by heart.

9 Ways of Learning

9.1 *Moving the Lips in the Recitation of the Qur'an*

According to the traditional method still widespread in Morocco, once children have mastered the alphabet, they learn the Qur'an by using tracing paper to reproduce the verses written by their master. With their wooden tablet (figs. 5.11 and 5.12) held vertically, children repeat the text out loud after their teacher while copying it. More deeply rooted in Morocco than elsewhere in the Islamic world,³¹ memorization (*hifz*) thus goes far beyond learning the text: It aims

31 Dale Eickelman, "The Art of Memory: Islamic Education and its Social Reproduction," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20 (4), 1978: 485–516; Brinkley Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

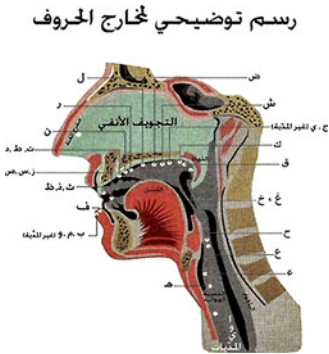


FIGURE 5.8

Drawing showing the articulation of letters at the end of a *tajwid* Qur'an

DAR AL-MAARIFAH, DAMASCUS, 2003: 64

to transform the learner in the deepest sense of the term. The child must literally possess the Qur'an³² and incorporate it,³³ as is implied by the expressions commonly used in Morocco: "[moving] his lips in silent recitation of the Qur'an"³⁴ or "carrying the Qur'an in his heart".³⁵ This true embodiment of the Word of God provides moral and ethical value to the pupil, and his physical body imbued with the sacredness of the Word is seen as the transforming agent of the mind.

In Morocco, as in other Muslim countries, rote learning of the Qur'an is based on mnemonic markers³⁶ similar to ones developed in ancient Greece and Rome to facilitate the memorization of texts, both sacred and not, through "places" and "images".³⁷ Here, intonation, rhythm,³⁸ and the visual association between the shape of the letters and the morphology of the animals³⁹ combine into synesthetic lessons supporting an exact and optimal incorporation of the Qur'an. This explains why the physical properties of the text, which shape the specific ways of seeing, hearing, and reciting it, are a major issue. It should

32 Eickelman, "Art of Memory."

33 Rudolph Ware, *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge and History in West Africa* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

34 Eickelman, *Knowledge and Power*, 48.

35 Corinne Fortier, "Le corps comme mémoire: du giron maternel à la ferule du maître coranique," *Journal des africanistes* 68 (1), 1998: 218.

36 Eickelman, "Art of Memory."

37 Frances A. Yates, *L'Art de la mémoire*, trans. Daniel Arasse (Paris: Gallimard, 1986 [1975]).

38 It is noteworthy that poetry is a mnemonic practice deeply rooted in the learning of the Qur'an. In Morocco, as elsewhere, it sets the rhythm considered fundamental to the recitation and comprehension of the text. See Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

39 Romain Simenel, "Figuration, Prosody and Poetry: how Text comes to Mind in Southern Morocco", intervention au 114e congrès annuel de l'American Association Anthropology, Denver, 2015.

be noted in this regard that the “great reciters,” called *ḥazzāb*, who know the Qur’an by heart and recite it, generally only use one edition. This is the method that teachers recommend to their students, who are encouraged to use the book as a mnemonic object. Many worshippers are particularly interested, for example, in graphic composition, and prefer that the pages end at the end of verses rather than in the middle.⁴⁰ During their study, the page is associated with an image (another meaning given to the word *rasm*, or “calligraphy”) that is visually fixed in their memory to retain the suras. Everything on the page matters, say the reciters: the writing style, the layout, and the decorations.⁴¹

The medallions, rosettes, and sura titles do not just fulfil a decorative, symbolic, and spiritual function.⁴² By marking the end of a verse or the beginning of a sura, they facilitate its memorization. Besides reminding practitioners of the order of the verses, medallions signal a physical action: the prostration required at the end of certain verses. From this perspective, the ornamentations, which have the “function of attributing mnemonic salience to variations” of the text,⁴³ engage believers’ relationship with God in a more participative than contemplative way. As in Romanesque art in the Middle Ages, “the differentiated treatment and calculated distribution of these ornamental aspects mean that they both hierarchize what they affect and accompany (in the musical sense), guide and punctuate their ritual investment. [...] In this sense, the ornamental, in the absence of an explicitly discursive and symbolic meaning, has at least an (intensive and qualifying) expressive meaning that is experienced and even acted upon.”⁴⁴

Thus, the Qur’an is in itself a mnemonic “technology of memory” in Mary Carruthers’ sense of the term,⁴⁵ that is, a visual grammar of images that serve as a mnemonic trigger for the text, particularly in the medieval European Bible. Carruthers also showed how a disciplined, trained, and educated memory transforms knowledge into experience, allowing a work to become insti-

40 Anouk Cohen, “Le Coran et ses multiples formes (Casablanca, Maroc),” *Terrain* 59 (2012): 70–87.

41 An article in progress examines the cognitive origins of the iconic writing of the holy book in the context of the study of the Qur’an by self-proclaimed clerics in Casablanca.

42 Martin Lings, *The Qur’anic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination* (London: World of Islam festival, 1976).

43 Carlo Severi, “L’univers des arts de la mémoire: anthropologie d’un artefact mental,” *Annales* 2 (4), 2009: 476.

44 Jean-Claude Bonne et al., “Y a-t-il une lecture symbolique de l’ornement?,” *Perspective* 1 (2), 2010, 29.

45 Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990).



FIGURE 5.9
Recitation of the Qur'an in a Moroccan school, Salé
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tutionalized in the language and imagination of individuals. Could it be this technology of memory that the Palace sought to model through the material reconfiguration of the Book? In other words, was it the way of incorporating the text and making it one's own that had to become Moroccan, standardized, and nationalized? Disciplining the senses, and defining and controlling ways of seeing and hearing the Qur'an, were in fact placed at the heart of a policy deployed in mosques and schools.

9.2 *Disciplining the Senses in Mosques ...*

Every year since 2012, hundreds of thousands of copies of the Moroccan Qur'an have been placed in mosques to counter an increasingly common practice: donations of holy books to places of worship. The faithful who wish to "do *sadaqa*" ("almsgiving") offer tens, hundreds, and even thousands of them to "feel close to God."⁴⁶ The imam of the mosque to which they wish to donate typically indicates what edition should be purchased. However, the donors can also decide which model they would like to acquire and distribute. As a result, many versions abound, as the director of the foundation emphasized above. Until recently, the supply of equipment and liturgical objects to mosques was free, as was their construction. According to the 2006 census of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, benefactors have funded nearly 80% of mosques. Since the new decree passed in 2008, benefactors must now request permission before opening a mosque and secure approval for the hiring of the religious staff they are responsible for paying. Thus, the management of mosques, which used to be informal, is now at the heart of a "faith bureaucracy"⁴⁷ tasked with streamlining a system that used to be based on inherited interpersonal relationships. This management is similar to the control system implemented in Saudi Ara-

46 Anouk Cohen, "Le livre du Coran à Casablanca et à Rabat," *Archives des sciences sociales des religions* 150 (2010): 175–195.

47 Mohamed Tozy, "Des oulémas frondeurs à la bureaucratie du 'croire.' Les péripéties d'une restructuration annoncée du champ religieux au Maroc," in *La Bureaucratiation néolibérale*, ed. Béatrice Hibou (Paris: La Découverte, 2013), 129–154.



FIGURE 5.10
Students and their Qur'anic tablet in a Moroccan
school, Rabat
© ANOUK COHEN & ANIS FARIJI, 2019

bia, which “imposes the Wahhabi habitus” daily.⁴⁸ In this country where baseline orthodoxy and orthopraxis are at the heart of the political legitimization process,⁴⁹ the practice of prayer—the foundation of Islam for individuals and groups, and of community cohesion—plays a central role in the development of the state religion. Morocco seems to be following the same path.

Regional delegations have indeed recently been carrying out regular checks, closely watching how the imam recites the Qur'an and correcting errors made by the faithful. The “Imam’s Guide,” recently produced by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, stipulates the norms for the call to prayer, which is to be proclaimed “the Moroccan way [...] in a natural tone and free of any foreign imitation.” No restrictive law has been applied, but controllers remain vigilant: “If Qur’ans are not compliant, either because they are torn or because they use an Eastern recitation, the controllers notify the delegate, who retrieves the Qur’ans that we then replace ourselves with the *muṣḥaf muḥammadī*. The goal is for the faithful to have a Qur’an to pray with,” explains the manager of the mosque department. Substitution is the strategy for turning the *muṣḥaf muḥammadī* into the dominant version. “We must gently correct without creating conflict,” he adds.

The main objective of this “correction” is, as aforementioned, the collective recitation of the *ḥizb* to support the memorization of the Qur’an according to the correct recitation method. In both Rabat and Casablanca, Islamic literacy and instruction courses, delivered in mosques and attended by an increasing number of generally educated men and women, are another major goal.⁵⁰ Young people rarely participate in these courses, as they often prefer to read

48 Nabil Mouline, “Les prétentions hégémoniques du wahabbisme,” in *Islams politiques: courants, doctrines et idéologies*, eds. Sabrina Mervin and Nabil Mouline (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2017), 67.

49 Nabil Mouline, *Les Clercs de l’islam: autorité religieuse et pouvoir politique en Arabie Saoudite (XVIIIe–XXIe siècles)* (Paris: PUF, 2011).

50 El Ayadi et al., *L’Islam au quotidien: enquête sur les pratiques religieuses au Maroc* (Casablanca: Prologues, 2006).

and listen to the Qur'an on their mobile phones,⁵¹ as do many older worshippers. Currently available mobile phone applications provide users with several recitations and explanations of certain terms. Moreover, unlike those who learned the Qur'an at Qur'anic school, many young people of faith would rather buy a Qur'an with the Eastern recitation they have become familiar with because Egyptian radio and television channels dominate Moroccan airwaves. The Eastern model also uses the style of writing they are used to reading in newspapers, books, and textbooks.

But the director of the foundation, who espouses the ministry's policy, is not worried: "We learn the Qur'an in the mosque. It is not a problem that more and more young people listen to the Qur'an on television or radio, because generally when they go to mosque, the imam is reciting it in the Moroccan way." Not everyone agrees with this assessment, especially the foundation's clerics, who lament: "At Qur'an chanting contests held in Morocco and around the world, we began to notice that our young people recited a lot in the Eastern style." Faced with the decline of Moroccan recitation and of *maghribī* calligraphy, which the clerics believe would protect the Qur'anic text from any falsification introduced by new means of production in *naskhī* calligraphy (Eastern writing), the foundation sought to reach children as early as possible: in schools.

9.3 ... and Schools

Since the mid-2000s, religious instruction has diversified and now includes Qur'anic schools, Islamic education classes taught by volunteer teachers in their apartments, literacy classes for adults in charities, kindergartens, etc. In these mostly private schools, the blackboard, notebook, and small books of the Qur'an (containing the shortest suras that children learn first) are increasingly replacing the wooden tablet. The direct and interpersonal student-teacher relationship is being replaced by cognitive mechanisms in which print plays a central role. Until recently, however, teachers in private schools (or semi-private schools when they are subsidized by the state) were completely free to use the teaching materials of their choice. Many taught from textbooks using Eastern calligraphy and recitation: "It's easier for the pupils," a teacher in an elementary school in Casablanca stated. These textbooks include pictures showing what movements to make during prayers, following the generally accepted Middle Eastern practice among worshippers of prostrating with their arms alongside their body rather than crossed at their chest, as is often seen in Morocco.

51 El Ayadi et al., *L'Islam au quotidien: enquête sur les pratiques religieuses au Maroc* (Casablanca: Prologues, 2006).



FIGURE 5.11

Page from a textbook showing the movements to make during prayer

DAR ATTAKAFA, CASABLANCA, 2003: 46

The Ministry's Department of "Traditional Education" has taken steps to counter these practices, which are considered to be violations of the norm.⁵² The aforementioned roadmap states: "The only doctrine that must be followed for school textbooks is that of the *muṣḥaf muḥammadī*." However, the State has not legislated in this area either, fearing a confrontation with human rights organizations. In order to ensure compliance with the new rules, the department's inspectors frequently visit schools to check both the teaching methods and learning materials used. However, many of the "houses of the Qur'an" (*dār al-Qur'an*), as their patrons commonly call them, are not monitored: "New ones are built every day," a departmental employee explains. Once again, economic levers are used to pressure them: Deviant schools stop receiving public subsidies.

In addition to private schools, state educational structures also receive special attention. A textbook for Islamic courses prepared by the Ministry of Education in consultation with the foundation includes excerpts from the *muṣḥaf muḥammadī* alongside passages from the standard edition. Introduced in the elementary school curriculum in 2016, this new textbook aims to accustom the younger generation with the physical appearance of the *muṣḥaf muḥammadī*

52 As part of the reform, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, which now consists of four departments—Islamic affairs, mosques, traditional education, and preaching—has seen its staff almost quadruple. See Tozy, "Des oulémas frondeurs."

without abruptly breaking with students' writing and recitation habits. According to the head of the department, the reform requires a smooth transition: "You can't impose Moroccan-Andalusian calligraphy on someone who doesn't even write well; most teachers write like Middle Easterners. So we try to get them used to it, so that the student will at least be able to read the Qur'an every time he goes to the mosque." These observations reinforce the idea that the Palace considers the materiality of the book (and the textbook) to have effective power over the training of religious subjects.

10 From Praxis to Ideology: The Listening Bias

Besides the book, members of the ministry attribute properties to sounds, establishing a close link between the way the Qur'an is recited and the influence of a theology and doctrine. The director of the foundation has eloquently expressed this: "Eastern recitation helps teach children to jettison Maleikism. For example, when we say to a child, 'Don't read it this way—stop here and not there,' we're gradually touching on something else: It's dogma without being dogma. That is why our goal is not to spread the *muṣḥaf muḥammadī*. It's something else: politics and extremism. Virtually all the houses of the Qur'an in Morocco conduct an Eastern recitation. They take in orphans, give them food, and then they teach them Wahhabi dogma. They are then sent to Saudi Arabia and return like bombs!" Thus, hearing is not neutral. It is an act linked to a specific ideology adopted by the faithful, as are its characteristic sounds.

The new management of mosques and schools shows the relationship that the institution has clearly established between praxis, doctrine, and extremism: extending the letter in a given spot, stopping at the right time, bowing in a specific way, etc. These physical and sensory movements are emphasized, and they are at the origin of the creation of a Moroccan edition of the holy book meant to discipline the application of the Qur'an. It is as if the State assumed that protest from Islamist worshippers first and foremost related to the ordinary use of an object central to their daily lives and to the imprinting in bodies of specific movements and senses. The State is seeking to shape these ways of moving and connecting to the word of God that the book's material components activate.⁵³

53 To this end, the *muṣḥaf muḥammadī* and its French and English translations are also distributed in Europe and West Africa.

11 Conclusion

The *muṣḥaf muḥammadī* is seen as a tool to standardize ways of seeing and hearing the Qur'an. The object is supposed to give rise to a shared sensory experience and produce a type of knowledge capable of concretely transforming religious biases according to strict orthodoxy. Through the development of a hegemonic "aesthetic formation,"⁵⁴ the monarch seeks to govern the sensory engagement of the faithful with the Qur'an, which is conceived here as an effective graphic, mnemonic, and cognitive system. Reading the *muṣḥaf muḥammadī* is seen as a form of allegiance to the king, to such a point that rejecting "his Qur'an" would be tantamount to separating from Allah.

The idea behind the material reconfiguration of the book and the creation of a more sensory rather than intellectual relationship to the text is to reorient the visual and audible uses of the Qur'an so that they evolve within a defined, limited, and easily controllable field of practices.⁵⁵ At stake are the affirmation of the religious authority of the monarch as commander of the faithful and the creation of a religious subjectivity meant to play a unifying role. This involves both the development of certain sensory norms and the erasure or anaesthetization of other norms.⁵⁶ In reaction to the standardization of belief resulting from a deterritorialization of religious products, which is symptomatic of a separation between culture and religion,⁵⁷ the monarchy is currently working on (re-)connecting religious and cultural markers. At this stage of the analysis, one main question remains unanswered: Will this fledgling policy succeed in "making believers walk"?⁵⁸ This is a question to be pursued in a future study on the

54 According to Birgit Meyer, it refers to that which "captures very well the formative impact of a shared aesthetics through which subjects are shaped by tuning their senses, inducing experiences, molding their bodies, and making sense, and which materializes in things." Birgit Meyer, *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion and the Senses* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 7.

55 On this subject in the Jewish context, see the study conducted by Jeremy Stolow in the United States: Jeremy Stolow, *Orthodox by Design: Judaism, Print Politics and the Artscroll Revolution* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2010).

56 Jojada Verrips, "Aisthesis and An-aesthesia," *Ethnologia Europea* 35 (2006): 27–33.

57 Olivier Roy, *La Sainte Ignorance: le temps de la religion sans culture* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2008).

58 Michel de Certeau, *La Fable mystique: xvie–xviiie siècles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), 57–58. "All authority is based ... on the reality it is supposed to declare. It is always to something real that believers 'walk' and are produced." The excerpt from De Certeau's chapter was quoted by Jean-Pierre Warnier in a presentation (December 2013) where he provided the following analysis: "Certeau offers to deconstruct the way in which the historical institution, teachers, publishers, etc. produce the reader as a believer of these events made real

concrete uses of the *muṣḥaf muḥammadī* by believers who are open to a globalized world of practices and probably more ingenious and incredulous than this policy might suggest.

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in the present by the scholarly accounts of them. This 'makes the reader walk.' The reader walks—not always, but most of the time. This is how history unfolds between science and fiction."

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