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What is a "Moroccan Qur'an"?

Book Materiality, Commodification and Islamic Authority

The *mushaf muhammadī,* a royal edition of the Qur'an named in honor of King Mohammad VI of Morocco, was issued by royal edict in 2010. It is now widely distributed throughout the mosques of the country. This "Moroccan Qur'an," as it is referred to by the Minister of Islamic Affairs, is characterized by its associated mode of recitation *(warš)*[1], its calligraphic style *(maġribī)*[2], and its ornamentations. Consider, for example, the Surah *Al-Fātiḥa* (The Opening) as reproduced in the *mushaf muhammadī* (Fig. 1) on the one hand, and in the *mushaf* edited and printed by the King Fahd complex in Saudi Arabia, on the other (Fig.2).[3] The textual content, the word of God, is the same. However,

1. In Ian Vandermeulen's recent lecture, we note: "*warš* is the name given to one of the seven canonical readings, *qirâ'a* (a term that corresponds both to the act of reading and reciting). The variations between those have little bearing on the meaning of the qur'anic text, relating primarily to issues of intonation and rhythm—the later referred to as *madd* or *mudud*. Where the variations affect interpretation of the qur'anic text, they affect not so much the semantic meaning, as such, but what we might call the text's mode of address—for example, variation between second and third person plural, *ya'malun vs. ta'malun*. Aside from this example, the variations also have little impact on the written or printed text, although one notable and recurring example is on *mu'minun* ("the believers"), where the *warš qira'a* omits the *hamza* over the *waw,* resulting in a smoother rendering of *muminun,*" (transcription by the author, I. Vandermeulen, "Vocal Arrangements: Technology and Authority in the Revival of *'ilm al-quir'at,*" Centre Jacques Berque, Rabat, 28 January 2019, <http://anrilm.cnrs.fr/non-classe/vocal-arrangements-technology-and-authority-in-the-revival-of-ilm-al-qiraat/#more-570>).
2. "Historically, the style of writing in Morocco is known as *maġribī* which is believed to have reached the North African regions via Egypt and Andalusia […]. While the Andalusians abandoned their style in favor of other Eastern scripts during the Abassid period, Moroccans remained faithful to the orginal Andalusian script […] because it was viewed as the script with which the oldest surviving copies of the Koran were inscribed" (Fawzi 1990: 20).
3. *Mushaf Al Madinah,* King Fahd Complex for the printing of the Holy Book, Medina, 2015. According to the website (<www.quran.net/hadis/Madinah>), fourteen million copies of this copy in Arabic and six other languages have been printed since its founding […]. The

a keen eye will note that the calligraphy *(khatt),* illuminations *(taḏhīb),* the enumeration of the verses and some vocalization signs *(taškīl)* vary considerably. These small material differences (relative to vision and sound) are mere details for the publishers of editions of the Qur'an. However, for the Minister of Islamic Affairs, they are particularly significant in the broader context of economic competition between Morocco and the Mashreq. These details aim to standardize the copies of the Qur'an with only one edition: the King's Qur'an, in a country where the monarch has been constitutionally defined as the commander of the believers *(amîr al-mu'minîn*) since 1962. The king's unique connection to the divine, as indicated in the later title, has been consistently maintained by the majority of political elites allied to the monarchy throughout history, whether these were left-wing nationalist, conservative, monarchist liberal, or Islamist. The Protectorate-era enmeshment of the monarchy, Islam and nationalism was renewed at Independence by the reactivation of Islamic categories of legitimate power, such as allegiance *(bayt),* in order to fight Islamism (Tozy 1999).

This article engages with the relationship between Islamic authority, the materiality of the Qur'an and the commodification of the qur'anic text. It situates this relationship within a broader context of changing text production, the liberalization of religious commodities, and the development of new technologies of information and communication which, in turn, spread multiple and heterogeneous means for Muslims to unify with the Word of God. In Morocco, the recent multiplication and diversification of copies of the Qur'an (Cohen 2010, 2012, 2015) has gone hand in hand with the growing influence of the Islamist Justice and Development Party, which claims to have replaced the King, a descendant of the Prophet, as the safeguards of Islam and its values (Zeghal 2005; Darif 2010). In the wake of the 2003 Casablanca attacks, which were considered symptomatic of the rising dominance of a Wahabi Islam that does not acknowledge any descent-based hierarchy of the faithful, Mohammed VI created a major new religious policy to define reference orthodoxy and strengthen the Crown's monopoly as a religious guide (Tozy 2009). Grounded in a quest for "authenticity"[4] this policy, which is still in effect, defends "the exclusivity of the Maliki rite" *(ibid.),* as an essential component of a re-activated referential system in times of crisis (Tozy 1999; Mouline 2009). The *warš* recitation style, which is little practiced outside North

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Complex has a capacity of ten million copies per year. Established in 1985 near Medina, the Complex may be one of the largest prinitng operations in the world (Albin 2005)

4. The text of the 2003 speech by King Mohammed VI can be found here: <http://www.maroc.ma/fr/discours-royaux/discours-du-trône>. All English translations from French and Arabic texts are the author's.

and West Africa, has been historically adhered to in Morocco, often referred to as Moroccan cultural heritage *(turâth),* and officially linked to the Maliki rite as well.[5] This makes *warš* another crucial component of the new religious policy (Tozy 2013). In Morocco, the relationship of the faithful to official orthodoxy and orthopraxy is crucial to the system of political legitimation (Geertz 1971; Combs-Schilling 1989).[6] This position is similar to other Muslim countries, particularly Saudi Arabia where the state imposes a daily watch to enforce the "Wahabi *habitus*" (Mouline 2011, 2017: 67). In Morocco, the Qur'an, as a book-object, is a central tool of this religious policy.

Official *masahîf* (sing. *mushaf*) have been in production since the time of Caliph 'Uthman. According to tradition, 'Uthman oversaw the review of the Qur'an in the year 653, and instituted the vulgate (Mervin 2016). Later, seeing that numerous non-standard editions were flooding the market, King Fahd I of Egypt ordered the production of a "royal *(amīriyya)* edition." Created in 1924, in Cairo, under the patronage of King Fouad I and Al-Azhar, the first Islamic university, this edition in *naskhî* calligraphy and *hafs* reading is widely distributed throughout the Muslim world by Egypt, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia which host the largest concentration of important printing presses in the region, including in the King Fahd Complex (Albin 2005). Elsewhere in the Islamic world, many Heads of State have made their own *mushaf*. For instance, Haji Muhammad Suharto, the former President of Indonesia, was the first official calligrapher for *Al-Quran Mushaf Istiqlal,* the National Independence Illuminated Qur'an (George 1998). Saddam Hussein, for his part, is known to have written a *mushaf* with his own blood (Carrère & Manget 2018). Even in Morocco, Hassan II (father of Muhammed VI) ordered the production of a royal *mushaf* called the *mushaf hassani*. However, such editions are usually richly ornamented and produced in limited editions, with small print runs, to be offered to distinguished guests. This stands in stark contrast to the *mushaf muhammadi,* of which hundreds of thousands of copies are printed annually (the aim is for a billion a year).

These observations raise several questions. First, given that, theologically, the Qur'an is the unchangeable Word of God, how can a specifically Moroccan

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5. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs makes a direct link on its website between the introduction of *warš* recitaton in the Maghreb and in Andalusia, and Malek ibn Anas, the founder of the Maliki school of thought (<http://www.habous.gov.ma/حمل-القرآن/3892-دخول-رواية-ورش-إلى-الأقطار-والحواضر-المغربية.html>).

6. In Saudi Arabia, orthodoxy and orthopraxis of reference are at the heart of mechanisms of political legitimization (Mouline 2011), such that the performance of prayer, which is the basis of both individual—and group-based—Islam, as well as community cohesion, holds a central place in the construction of the state religion. Morocco seems to follow a similar path.

version of it be conceived and produced through an emphasis on the material transformation of the text's container, that is, the book? What are the political motivations of these physical changes that necessarily engage the senses? Upon which religious values do these changes rely, and how do these values in turn intersect with the logic of the qur'anic market? These questions are at the heart of this study of the Qur'an as a book and not only as a sacred text, as it is usually exclusively considered, as it is focused on its materiality and aesthetics—the notion of aesthetics being here understood in its plain meaning: that which belongs to the one who feels. Consequently, this article aims to examine how political and religious norms inflect economic action, and *vice versa*. The last of these questions has long been asked by anthropologists and recently enhanced and problematized by Daromir Rudnyckyj (2010: 19) in his book on how Islamic practice merges with market ethics in contemporary Indonesia. In line with this work, which defines "neoliberalism as a relatively mundane but increasingly ubiquitous practice of making economic calculation a universal standard for the organization, management and government of human life and conduct" (*ibid.:* 21), this paper considers Qur'an commodification, free market and Islamic authority as a set of concrete practices explored through the production of the book-object.

This work is a part of a broader research project on the ways in which the recent proliferation of Qur'an-books, in increasingly diverse forms and media has, in Morocco, gone hand in hand with a change in the relationship between Moroccan society, qur'anic transmission and Islam at large (Cohen 2010, 2012, 2015, 2016a, b, 2017; Cohen & Mottier 2016; Cohen, Keresteski & Mottier 2017). Following the work of Roger Chartier (1987, 1996, 2005) on the relationship between materiality and "stories of readings," Christian Jacob (2007, 2011) on the production of knowledge rather than on their objectified content, Jack Goody (1979) on writing and its effects on the transmission of knowledge, Brinkley Messick's (1993) on the changing relation between writing and authority in Yemen, Gregory Starrett's (1995, 1998) on the transformation of Islamic education in a context of mass education and mass media development in Egypt, and finally Saba Mahmood (2006) and Charles Hirschkind (2009) on the materiality of forms of Muslim experience and understanding in a context of Islamic renewal, this project examines how the multiplication and the diversification of the physical Qur'an is related to the redefinition of structures of knowledge and authority in contemporary Morocco. The goal is to produce an "ethnography of practice" which enables an understanding of the mechanisms of adherence and the impact of practice on religious subjectivities, in order to break with analyses of religion in terms of representations or beliefs (Pouillon 1979; Asad 2001; Piette 2003).

To this end, the project analyzes the tangible forms through which Islam is manifested, and attends to the social and individual practices to which they are associated. It is with this perspective that I consider the Qur'an as a physical book, inseparable from its role as an indicator and agent of social and cultural transformations (Chartier 1987, 1996, 2005; Johns 1998)[7]. Here, the Qur'an is apprehended from the perspective of the operations and individuals who construct it as an object, rather than through its content which the more common approach.[8] The second goal of my approach is to shift the understanding of such terms as "belief" and "the sacred"—a vocabulary too deeply embedded in the Christian imaginary—by taking into account the impact, effects, and constraints these complex and intractable debates impose in the production and use of the Qur'an book.

The present article is based on research conducted between 2010 and 2017 in one bookshop where I worked for several months in the Habous district of Casablanca, the center of the Arab book trade in the country (Cohen 2016a), and in the Mohammed VI Foundation for the Publication of the Holy Book, established in the town of Mohammedia in order to control the import of books of the Qur'an from elsewhere as well as to produce the *mushaf muḥammadī*[9].

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7. While the Qur'an has been at the center of a large number of studies, few have paid attention to its physical form. Until now, research on the book and its social effects has been conducted mainly in the West. In the Arab world, the history of books resulted in only very few studies, especially in the Maghreb. Furthermore, these studies all focused their analyses on the finished book, on the history of technology, or on the book as a reflection of society (Gonzalez-Quijano 2002 [1998]; Jacquemond 2003; Mermier 2005; El Alaoui 2006; Santini 2006). My emphasis, however, is on production (from the publisher to the user). This approach to the book "in-the-making" neglects none of the actors in this process. Careful attention to concrete practices and inventions of people who are not necessarily familiar with the book and the writing aims to understand who (from the State to the publisher and the illiterate bookseller) is now helping to produce and distribute Qur'ans in Morocco.
8. The question of the materiality of the religious in anthropology stems from the Durkheimian concept of "sacred things" (Durkheim 1995: 35) and was developed namely in the "object god" of M. Augé (1988), and the "god things" of J. Bazin (1989: 253-273) as well as in A. Mary (2012). This legacy has been extended by countless works. Today, many anthropologists, philosophers and historians assume that religious activity is necessarily part of a material culture. It is, moreover, from this observation that researchers like W. Keane (2008), B. Meyer (2009), D. Morgan (2010) or H. de Vries (2008), among others, came to "materialize" or more precisely, to "re-materialize" the study of religious facts. See the introduction by Albert & Kedzierska-Manzon (2016) and our postface (Cohen & Mottier 2016) in *Archives des sciences sociales des religions* for a theoretical perspective on these questions. On the question of the sensory of the religious, see Cohen, Kerestetzi & Mottier (2017).
9. Dahir (Royal Decree) nº 1-15-75, issued on 24 June 2015 on the establishment of the Mohammed VI Foundation for African Ulemas, *Official Gazette* 6372, dated 25 June 2015, folio 5996-6000.

The central argument is composed of three main sections. The first describes the transformation of the Qur'an into a commodity in recent years in Morocco. The second part examines how the commodification of the Qur'an by more and more individuals who improvise as publishers themselves, thanks to the recent introduction of affordable and easy-to-use new technologies, has gone hand in hand with a reconfiguration of the links between religious authorities and the monarch. Finally, the third section explores how publishers' practices question the authority of the king who recently reacted by regulating the Qur'an book market and nationalizing—if not royalizing—the book of the Qur'an in order to build a unique link to the divine: through and by the monarch.

The Qur'an as a Commodity

From the Word of God to the *mushaf*

For Muslims, the Qur'an is the Word of God. "A genealogy of authoritative texts in Islam must begin with a consideration of the Quran as the authoritative original as the paradigmatic text," Brinkley Messick (1993: 16, 33) writes. The written corpus of the Qur'an is indexed by the Arabic word *mushaf,* which is related to the word *suhuf* and means pages that "display the Qur'an in writing." In both classical and modern contexts, this term creates a theological distinction between the individual's copy of the Qur'an and the hypostatized notion of God's speech (Motzki 2001). However, the idea of the Qur'an's eternal co-presence with God remains. This conceptualization of the Revelation has had a considerable impact on the production and diffusion of the qur'anic text and knowledge at large. Indeed, print was not established in the Islamic world until the eighteenth century. The technical difficulties as well as the important economic place occupied by the copyists and the prestige of handwriting are described as impediments to the introduction of print in the Muslim world.[10] However, the resistance to the printing press was mainly due to religious and cultural reasons.

> In its capacity to reproduce versions of the Qurʾān in vast, seemingly infinite quantities, the printing press threatened to unleash the sacred text from the structures of discipline and authority that governed its social existence and ensured its ethical reception (Hirschkind 2005).

10. On the introduction of printing in the Islamic world, see among others Robinson (1993) and, more recently, Chih, Mayeur-Jouen & Seeseman (2015).

The *ulama* elite, doctors of the law, was worried that the Qur'an would be altered by its technical reproduction and that the standardization of the printed form would upset the system of knowledge transmission upon which its authority was founded (Robinson 1993). In the context of qur'anic learning, "as the importance of memorized retention is repeatedly stressed, an interdependence with writing is consistently recognized" (Messick 1993: 29). For Muslims, God's presence remains in the voice as well as in the text. Morocco was one of the last Muslim countries to adopt printing in 1864, more than a century after the Ottomans. According to A. Fawzi (1990: 99), who authored a unique, significant study of the history of print in Morocco:

> Moroccans were far more traditional than Ottomans and unyielding in their attachment to their traditional system and culture. They did not see any reason to change their traditional book system which was closely associated to Islam and the Malikiyah 'Ulama.

A. Fawzi (*ibid.:* 21, 36) also specifies the Moroccan belief in the sacredness of book materials and script as well as the dynamics in the power relations of the long tradition of manuscript production:

> Moroccan 'Ulamas and Sufis alike regarded copying Islamic books as a form of worship which involved maintaining not only the Malikiyah tradition but also the traditional script of the Koran as well (*i.e*. Kufic style, *maġribī*). Furthermore, Moroccan 'Ulamas adhered to the same Islamic belief that the koranic script is sacred and holy as the koran itself […] the implications of such a belief were great in Morocco. It paved the way for a set of religious instructions and appropriate etiquette to control the quality of manuscripts in terms of using better ink, paper, and clear, beautiful script so that the text would add the clarity of Islamic truth.
> […] book business in the era of manuscript-writing in Morocco was class and service-oriented […]. Printing technology was not needed and its introduction in 1864 was an untimely accident […] knowledge and information which previously had been under the control of a small number of people [the 'Ulama, the notables and the Sultans] would now be easily available to large numbers, thus diminishing the power of these groups. It is with such factors in mind that Moroccan decision-makers will hesitate and prolong the adoption of printing in the country.

Since the Middle Ages, the reproduction and sale of the holy book has divided the different currents of Islam. Some Muslim scholars and intellectuals consider the reproduction and sale of the Qur'an as evidence of renewed religiosity among Muslims. However, according to others, including many religious scholars trained in traditional institutions *('ulama),* the Qur'an is an "inalienable good" in the sense that Annette Weiner (1992) understands this notion, that is to say a good too valuable to the continuity of the group to be

sacrificed in a commercial exchange, without generating a scandal. Despite these debates well summarized by C. Hirschkind (2005) in a paper on media and the Qur'an, it is clear that in recent years the *mushaf* has been marketed and displayed more and more in a manner similar to other commodities. Available in increasingly varied forms and media, it is now connected to modes of consumption and pleasure not previously integral to qur'anic practices of interpretation, memorization and recitation. For example, one comes across *mushaf* perfumed pages, *mushaf* electronic audio pen, *mushaf* online, translations into several languages, etc. In the Habous district's bookstores in Casablanca, the *mushaf* is sold in several different formats: large (24 x 34 cm), medium (20 x 17 and 17 x 24 cm), small (8 x 12 cm), and miniature. Stacked on the floor or next to the till, Qur'an copies are always prominently displayed. Small and medium-sized Qur'ans sell the most, and come in the widest range of styles (Cohen 2012). The combination of different characteristics (format, paper, cover, layout, internal and external decoration, language) generates a multitude of objects. Whereas the content of the revelation admits of no alteration, the materials of which it is composed can be modified by merchants seeking to fulfill users' diverse needs and turn a profit. These needs can vary from memorizing the Qur'an, facilitated by an edition so well laid-out that pages end at the end of verses; to reading the text in a clear writing *(wadîh)*—a model particularly appreciated by seniors; to decorating one's living room with beautiful Qur'an models that are made visible to guests; or protecting oneself thanks to the *mushaf*'s *baraka* (benediction) when placed closed to the heart or under children's pillow, and so on.

Unlike in Egypt, where different models of the Qur'an have been sold in large quantities since the middle of the 1980s (Starrett 1995), in Morocco, the so-called Qur'an boom is relatively recent. It was only at the end of the French protectorate in 1956 that demands for independence included the development of printing and publishing in Morocco. However, it was much later in the 1990s that political liberalization coincided with the advent of a new book industry (Janjar 2006). In the Habous district, the *mushaf* is a driving force. This development has been concurrent with the growth of literacy as well as the expansion of women's rights, including better access to education and a better standard of living in Morocco (El Ayadi, Rachik & Tozy 2007). Thanks to these very recent changes, an increasing number of people have had direct access to the qur'anic text and have become new readers, users or owners. Indeed, the book that these new readers often seek to possess first is the religious book, the Qur'an, the text of reference, the one that many Moroccans want to know above all others. In my book (Cohen 2016a) on publishing, writing and reading practices in Morocco, I showed that

the Qur'an is not exclusively associated with collective recitation or reading conducted by the teacher, the *imam* or the father. It is increasingly recited and read individually in a context where the free market offers a plurality of models. A growing number of practitioners possess their own copy of the Qur'an, even more than one, to which they associate different uses. Sometimes, the acquisition of a printed Qur'an may also be an alibi or a standardized and culturally legible point of entry into the practice of acquiring additional books. In any case, the Qur'an is nowadays a "best-seller" as many booksellers of the Habous district say.

The Book-Object at the Heart of the Qur'anic Market in the Habous District

The *masahîf* sold in "the Habous," as the neighborhood is commonly called, come mainly from Cairo, Beirut, Damascus and, more recently, Riyadh where they are produced by the thousands (Gonzalez-Quijano 2002 [1998]; Mermier 2005). The aim of the Habous booksellers is to sell distinctive models at the best price. In Morocco, as elsewhere in the Arab world, the book price is not fixed. Consequently, the same book can be sold at different prices in the different bookshops of Habous. *Mushaf* sales are an important part of the booksellers' annual revenues as well as their reputation. There are three kinds of bookselling establishments in Habous: five large publishing and distribution houses (wholesale and retail); twenty semi-wholesalers who also sell individually; and finally, about 40 retail establishments.[11] The latter two kinds of traders are also able to publish books. Since 2000, about twenty small bookshops have opened to take advantage of the craze for Islamic books. This dynamic has been facilitated by a lack of economic and juridical regulation. Indeed, until 2010, only one law regulated the book sector, including the *mushaf,* in Morocco, stipulating that "publishing and printing are free" (article 1 of the Press Code). The publisher must simply be registered in the commercial register and have a license number. Thus, the Habous booksellers have evolved in barely controlled, liberal system. They compete to offer in terms of price and quality *masahîf* characterized by beautiful writing (both aesthetic and readable), well-defined illuminations and covers embellished with rich materials. These merchants do not necessarily have a good knowledge of Islam or the Qur'an. Most sell the holy book more by circumstance than by religious conviction. Their choice to sell and produce the Qur'an is generally primarily commercial.

11. Elsewhere, I detail the ways in which the Habous book market functions (Cohen 2016a).

Business strategies combine a continuous search for lower prices and a diversification of the merchandise, in order to sell *masahîf* adapted to different budgets and uses. To make a *mushaf,* merchants use more or less expensive options, depending on their resources. Those whose capital allows it order "exclusive" editions, as they call them, from Egyptian, Lebanese or Syrian colleagues. In order to decrease the book's price, some merchants, especially small booksellers, do the typographical compositions themselves or subcontract to a local graphic designer. In both cases, this work most often involves scanning the pages of a Qur'an designed in the Middle East so as to define a new framework and create a "new product," according to Fouad Korrich, the manager of Dar el-Ilm ("house of knowledge").[12] Through the implementation of these different strategies, the majority of merchants seek to design the best-seller of tomorrow. The logic of profit is not exempt, however, from other religious and social concerns. In the Habous book market, economic and symbolic capitals function in solidarity along a continuum that tends towards one or the other, but never dissociates them (Cohen 2016b).

However, this barely regulated process created error-prone texts on the part of the booksellers. Indeed, as an independent publisher in the Habous district declared:

> There are many mistakes in the Qur'ans that are sold; people who were not in the field, seeing that the Qur'an was selling well, began to scan copies and send the electronic folders to China for printing. But while they were scanning they made mistakes (Interview, 7 April 2013, Casablanca).[13]

They did not respect the commonly accepted pagination, cut lines, or left unfortunate dust on the glass of the scan, likely to be taken for diacritic signs that change the content and meaning. The dissatisfied faithful did not hesitate to go to the offices of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs in their respective regions, with pencil-tipped copies. "They ask us to respond," says Hamid Hamani the director of the Foundation,[14] so His Majesty decided to regulate

12. Forty years old, Fouad Korrich succeeded his father in 2006. Founded in 1955, *Dar el Ilm* was one of the first bookstores in the area. Unlike his colleagues, he had not become familiar with the book trade before taking over the management of the family business. This explains why, according to many booksellers, he went bankrupt in 2009. F. Korrich returned to his initial activity as commercial manager of a telecommunications company in Casablanca.
13. The interviews cited in this article were conducted entirely in French, entirely in Arabic, or in a mixture of both languages. In the last two cases, the translation was done by the author.
14. Before becoming the director of the Mohamed VI Foundation, Hamid Hamni was a professor of Islamic studies at the university in Rabat.

the production of the holy book, in order to halt the commodification that was generating errors, and to distribute an e-certified holy Quran in mosques" (Interview, 5 April 2013, Mohammedia). These are marked with the royal seal and guarantor of orthodoxy, as it is being redefined by the new religious policy. Error appears as a political argument to justify seizing the control of the Qur'an book market. Indeed, the Foundation director considers the separation of religious ethics from economic practice as the root of what he calls "the qur'anic market crisis" in Morocco. In his eyes, this disjunction which aimed to increase publishers profits resulted in a lack of labor discipline. Consequently, Islam was reconfigured according to calculative rationality insofar as Islamic value (respecting the accuracy of the Word of God) was interpreted as a setting for politics, which in turn relied on market logic. In order to understand the mechanism of this rationality, we need first to explore the book production as it was operating before the nationalization of the Qur'an book market in 2010.

The Text *versus* the Book

One Revelation, Two Qur'an Book Markets

While the Bible is subject to copyrights (or rather translator rights), the Qur'an does not meet any official regulation. As Bassam Kurdî, director of the Arab Cultural Center,[15] a dominant Moroccan-Lebanese publishing and distribution house in the Habous district, explains: "Copyright does not exist in the Qur'an. You're not going to pay God copyright, who's the author? It's God! So you do not pay copyright" (Interview, 23 February 2010, Habous district). There are, however, "production and writing rights" *(huqûq al-kitâba)* that protect the physical characteristics of *mushaf,* such as, illuminations *(tadhîb)* or calligraphy *(khâtt),* if publishers have requested a calligrapher. These rights indicate that the originality of a *mushaf* lies in its material characteristics.

In the Habous district, according to the type of Qur'an books sold, this difference is based on ornamentations or writing. While the models that conform to the reading of *hafs* are mainly reproduced in "print writing," that is, in *naskhî* calligraphy (generally adopted for Arabic fonts), the models that

15. In 1958, after his departure from Lebanon, Bassam Kurdî's brother-in-law founded the bookstore in the Habous district. From the age of 15, Bassam Kurdî worked there every summer at the cash desk. Weary of pursuing his studies, he became more involved in business activities, where he was given more responsibility. In 1978, the distribution house expanded its activities into editing and publishing. Today, the Arab Cultural Center is located between Casablanca and Beirut.

conform to the reading of *warš* are mainly printed in "handwriting" in *maġribī* calligraphy.[16] The "*hafs* Qur'an" as the booksellers call them reproduced in "print writing" mostly conform to the Egyptian edition created in 1924 in Cairo. According to publishers, these qur'anic models are not associated with the same uses as the Qur'ans with "handwriting" and *warš* reading, which is the most widespread reading method in Morocco. The *hafs* Qur'an are mainly purchased by customers who seek to "give a gift" or "decorate" their interiors with beautiful Qur'an models, according to Fouad Korrich. "Since they do not buy them to read, they do not care," he adds (interview, 20 February 2010, Casablanca). Except for a few clients, especially young people for whom the *hafs* Qur'an is more readable because they were exposed to print writing through textbooks, literature, and newspapers, the vast majority of customers use *warš* Qur'ans in *maġribī* calligraphy.

It is indeed this model that the Habous booksellers claim to sell the most, especially to people over forty years old who learned the sacred text in qur'anic schools from a wooden board *(lūḥ)* following the *warš* reading and the *maġribī* writing rules. Furthermore, it is this model that donors (the main customers of Habous merchants) buy in the hundreds to offer to mosques where the *imam* generally adopts the *warš* reading. Indeed, Qur'an as *waqf* is one of the main forms of commoditization. Thus, two types of markets are organized in the Habous: the "print writing"/*hafs* reading, Qur'an market and the "handwriting"/*warš* reading Qur'an market. Behind the editorial and commercial distinctions linked to specific religious, calligraphic and artistic traditions, others of a political or even ideological nature are emerging between these countries. For instance, Saudi Arabia (mostly Hanbalite and inspired by Wahhabism) is suspected by the Moroccan monarchy of wanting to propagate its aesthetic relationship to the sacred text—and thereby *its* vision of Islam—by distributing thousands of Qur'an books for free based on a materiality (both visual—calligraphic, especially *naskhî* and ornamentation style—and oral—given the recitation method, especially *hafs*) which is different from that adopted by Morocco. This is why the king wanted to regain control of this market, according to the director of the the Mohammed VI Foundation for the Publication of the Holy Book (interview, H. Hamani, 15 April 2013, Mohammedia). Thus, we see how the material characteristics of a text can be thinking as a way of dividing a society.

16. The expressions "printing" or "handwriting" are misleading. Almost all *masahîf* produced in the world and imported to Morocco are handwritten, scanned, retouched and printed after being verified and certified. This is the way producers have found to preserve the accuracy of the Qur'an while exploiting the economies made possible by digital technologies. This method of manufacture preserves the physical characteristics of ancient manuscripts, such as the calligraphic style and vocalization marks, which have, to the present day, supported the reading and recitation of the Qur'an.

The preference of a majority of customers for *warš* reading, in a price range of around 20 dirhams for a medium format, led the Habous publishers to primarily produce this model of book which is more familiar to Moroccan users. Different modes of action are utilized in pursuance of this aim. Small publishers, with small capital, pirate the *mushaf;* that is they reproduce an edition without having bought the rights to the calligrapher or the publisher. To this aim, they scan the pages of the book and modify the decorations from desktop (DTP) software such as Photoshop or In-Design. These transformations aim at designing a different model from the one copied, in order to circumvent piracy accusations. The most frequently hacked version of *warš* reading in *maġribī* calligraphy is known as the "Zwiten *mushaf*." Until recently, this edition's rights belonged to the publishing-distribution house Dar Al-mushaf al-sharîf in Cairo (Fawzi 1990). It was made in 1929 by a famous *faqîh* (jurist) and calligrapher known for his writing and his knowledge of the Qur'an. Named Zwiten, this calligrapher was a professor at al-Qarawiyyîn, the renowned university of Islamic studies in Fez. According to Mohammed Maghraoui, a specialist in Moroccan traditional arts and a professor at Mohammed v University in Rabat, this edition is used as a model because "it is the oldest copy of the Qur'an lithographed with the verses' enumeration in Morocco" (interview, M. Maghraoui, 8 December 2013, Rabat). That is why, he adds, the status of "authentic" Qur'an has been conferred to it. Until today, the Zwiten *mushaf* is the original model of *masahîf,* the most reproduced in Morocco, either by scanning or handwritten copy. It is a sort of canonical book different from the one prevailing in the Mashreq.

The New Clerics: Publishers and "Cheap" *Ulamas*

While the majority of Habous merchants imitate Dar al-mushaf al-sharîf's model, some have created their own editions using the services of a calligrapher. In the aftermath of legal cases against them, the publishers proceeded with more or less caution. Nevertheless, the process of printing the holy book is very strict. According to the protocol defined by Al-Azhar in the 1920s, there must be a control for each production stage (Albin 2005). However, the strictness of Qur'an publishing and distributing regulation varies by country *(ibid.)*. Unlike Egypt, or Saudi Arabia where the production and distribution of the Qur'an books have been centralized in the King Fahd Holy Qur'an Printing Complex since 1985, it was only in 2010 that the Moroccan State

developed specific legislation on the *mushaf*.[17] Before this date, publishers operated in a loosely-regulated, if not anarchic, system. Consequently, before, many did not put required controls into effect and produced incorrect copies. However, most publishers did pay considerable attention to the correctness of their *mushaf* knowing that they would not be able to sell copies outside Morocco if these were not accurate. They were also aware that thousands of Qur'an copies had been already destroyed because of errors or omissions. These destructions represented an important financial cost for publishers. Finally, if a bookshop was known to sell inaccurate *masahif,* it could lose all its clients. In order to avoid these costly repercussions and to produce a beautiful model of *mushaf,* some wealthy publishers created "their own scripture," so to speak, by hiring calligraphers to handwrite the text. Only big publishing houses could afford this practice. Indeed, a minimum of 3,000 copies needed to be printed for this practice to be financially viable. The cost of the calligrapher varied depending on his reputation (between DH 5,000 and DH 50,000) which, in turn, was generally based on his participation in exhibitions in Morocco or elsewhere. Generally, three or four years were required to copy the text. Then, publishers would request one or two *ulamas,* doctors of law, to verify its accuracy. Once the text was free of errors, a certificate of correctness *(shahada)* would be delivered and signed by *ulamas* in exchange of a remuneration commensurable with the reputation of the institutions to which the *ulama* belonged as well as with their influence (on the radio, television or internet). The *ulamas* enlisted to do this job could be from Morocco or elsewhere. According to Bassam el Kurdi:

> The *shahâda* is like a Schengen visa, all the countries will not so easily give it. You have more chance that your Qur'an goes through if you do check in Lebanon rather than in Egypt by Al-Azhar. But it does not have the same value if it is delivered by Al-Azhar or by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs of Lebanon or Djibouti! (Interview, 23 February 2010, Casablanca).

Nevertheless, for economic reasons, most of the publishers preferred to ask local and "cheap" *ulamas*. This option was also more convenient for the publishers as they could more easily follow the *ulama*'s work and coordinate any exchanges between them and the calligrapher. The latter had to correct the errors on the manuscript if needed. These local *ulamas* were usually *imams,* scholars or ordinary faithful who claimed direct access to the main religious texts. In an Islamic context where (unlike Christianity) there is no organized

17. For the text of the Dahir (Royal Decree) of 23 February 2010, see: <http://www.habous.gov.ma/fr/files/BO_fondation_Mohammed_VI_edition_saint_coran.pdf>.

clerical hierarchy, it is the clerics who decide whether a copy of the Qur'an is accurate or not. However, in Morocco, until recently, the *ulama* corps was heterogeneous, non-hierarchical, and each of its members sanctioned only his own knowledge to judge in the matter, sometimes in opposition to each other. Yet a public institution to control qur'anic knowledge existed in Rabat, the capital. Named Dar el Qur'an, it was founded during the reign of Hassan II, when the king created his own edition of the Qur'an in the 1970s. However, publishers rarely used the institution's services and were not required to do so. "It took too much time," a publisher of the Habous district says, "One *ulama* lived in Rabat, another one in Taroudant, another one in Marrakech […]. The time they needed to read the manuscript and give their agreement, I would have already sold many Qur'ans!" Some publishers are not even aware that this institution exists.[18]

From these observations, we can draw three main conclusions. First, prior to the regulation of the Qur'an book market in 2010, there existed a constant tension between the religious and the economic values of the Qur'an or, put another way, between the text and the book. Publishers engaged in the international free market, seeking to be responsive to the economics of the capitalistic system, they had to contend with the juxtaposition of these connected yet competing values. This tension between symbolic and economic values of the Qur'an runs through the entire process of Qur'an pricing. Second, publishers did not rely on the State to verify their editions. They preferred enlisting foreign or self-proclaimed clerics so that the religious discourse was not monopolized by the kingdom's *ulamas* and thereby by the monarch. Rather, religious discourse spread, represented by a variety of actors operating in a highly plural—and thus competitive—field. Consequently, the State was no longer confined to production by orthodox standards. The ongoing democratization and direct access to religious texts changed the situation. Now that content production belonged to everyone, the State's own standard production could not compete with publishers who possessed flexible, ready means of carrying out the required actions. Thus, publishers played a crucial role in the production and distribution of the Qur'an.

Through choices made during the process of production—including the type of religious actors requested—the publisher was able to transform the economic and religious values of the Qur'an. Choices of layout or calligraphy directly influenced modes of learning and conveying the Qur'an. Consequently, publishers' interventions were decisive in the relationship that practitioners could have with the holy book. The publisher had considerable authority over the qur'anic text. Thus, recent shifts in modes of producing and

18. For more details on the Qur'an publishing protocol, see Cohen (2016b).

commodifying the Qur'an mirror broader changes in the nature of knowledge and the social organization of its transmission. More specifically, we see how these shifts redefined the place of Islamic and political authorities within the religious transmission. It was this calling into question of royal authority that had led to the creation in 2010 of the Mohammed VI Foundation and established in the aforementioned royal decree its "exclusive authority in charge of the registration, printing, publishing and distribution operations" of the Qur'an in the country.

How Do We Make a Qur'an Moroccan?

From the "Moroccanization" of the Qur'anic Market…

The Foundation's main mission is to control the import of qur'anic editions from the Mashreq. According to the Habous booksellers, the recent war in Syria (the main producer of Qur'ans) has brought about a drastic reduction in the variety of models and the number of copies produced and imported into Morocco. These unfortunate circumstances have, in a sense, served the Foundation's mission, which is to reduce the circulation of copies that do not conform to the writing and recitation rules defined by the Palace.[19] To this aim, a new commercial regulation has been established, consisting of several stages. First, publishers submit an import application and fill in a form, providing information on the quantity purchased, the reading method, the calligraphic style, the format, the type of cover and the colors of the desired model for each edition. Thus, the (visual and sound) materiality of the book is strictly controlled. Once the authorization is obtained—a far from automatic process according to publishers—five copies of the edition must be submitted to the Foundation, which sends these to the members of its own scientific committee composed of *ulamas* requested by the palace. After several weeks, once they have checked the copy and added their comments, the *ulamas* send it back to the Foundation, where an employee prepares a summary for the publisher who immediately sends the information to the Mashreq producers. Once the required changes have been made on the text itself, the publisher submits the completed book to the *ulama* in charge, this time to check the container

19. In the Moroccan political system—often described as "neo-patrimonial" (a type of highly personalized domination and oriented towards the maintenance and the protection of the elites in place)—the term "Palace" (still called *Makhzen*) designates the cabinet of the king composed of His Majesty's advisers in charge of the strategic ministries known as "regals," including that of Habous and Islamic Affairs. The government and the parliament hold a limited and controlled power.

(that is to say, the book-object: formats, pages, colors, layout, etc.). It is only after this final phase of control that the publisher is given the authorization.

Before engaging in this long protocol, spread out over months, the Habous publishers examine the "road map" supplied by the Mohamed VI Foundation, "in order to clarify the norms that the Foundation deems necessary to respect for the importation and the writing of the *mushaf mohammedi,* as well as the parts and quarters, textbooks, and qur'anic tables that can be authorized" (as mentioned at the beginning of the road map).[20] This road map lays out the rules to be applied, mainly with respect to the Qur'an's visual and sound materiality.[21]

Ms. Soulami, director of Dar Soulami, one of the main Qur'an publishing and distributing houses in Morocco declares:

> When I sent the road map to the Lebanese and the Egyptians, they got crazy. With all these new rules, they did not understand anything. I myself did not understand anything: to me if the *kasra* [brief vowel marked by a sign which is written below the letter] is there or there, it is the *kasra,* it is not a mistake because it does not change anything when you read, it is always *kasra*. But they had to adapt to the Maghreb market, because of what is happening in the Middle-East: we North Africans are the only ones to buy. So, they did the needful with their imams (Interview, 7 February 2017, Casablanca).[22]

According to Ms. Soulami, it took six months for Middle Eastern producers to adapt to the new regulations. In addition, the road map states that copies of *warš* Qur'an are the only ones allowed to be used in mosques. This is a crucial issue for Middle Eastern producers seeking to meet the expectations of their clientele, which are mainly based, as we have seen, on Qur'an donations to mosques in Morocco. Consequently, many of these had to redefine their catalogue and assign an important place to the *warš* recitation (which

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20. "Road map," Fondation Mohamed VI, 2014, Mohammedi. Translations from Arabic to French are the author's.
21. Here are some examples from the "road map": 1) Conformity to the uthmanian writing *(rasm);* 2) For issues of disagreement, the most relevant drawing/writing books must be followed; 3) The Levantines traits/writing used in the writing of *masahîf* are accepted (Fondation Mohamed VI "road map"). It should be noted that there is a residual parallel market composed of believers who bring from their pilgrimage copies of *hafs* Qur'an in order to "feel" again, they say, the strong emotion of the place and the lived experience. This document—the "road map"—was sent by the foundation to the Moroccan publishers, one of whom gave it to me although it is not supposed to be circulated.
22. Widad Soulami, about 40 years old, took over their father's company with his brother, Abdelmounim Soulami, some fifteen years ago. Founded in the mid-1950s, Dar Soulami is one of the oldest bookstores in the area. In 2006, Abdelmounim Soulami founded the Imarsi printing press and appointed his sister to head the publishing and distribution company.

was quite new given that the *hafs* reading is the one most produced). Thus, only the most persevering of the publishers, at the head of institutions able to finance the design of new editions following the new rules of the commercial game, could continue to take advantage of the flourishing Qur'an book market in Morocco. The market laws intertwined with a political program of state monopoly of the Word of God, aiming for a material homogenization of the Qur'an. Together, they thus contributed to weaken the commercial place of a mode of recitation, *hafs,* which is considered unorthodox relative to the redefinition of Moroccan orthodoxy and orthopraxy focused on Maliki rite and *warš* reading, which consequently encouraged the development of the *warš* Qur'an market (observable through the ongoing diversification of editions available in different formats, colors, materials, etc.). Thus, it appears as if there is a recognition of the power of the free market by the kingdom.[23]

Towards the Royalization of the *Mushaf*

As discussed earlier, Mohamed VI also created a national edition of the Qur'an in *maġribī* calligraphy and *warš* in order to preserve the Malikite rite. In 2006, the Minister of Islamic Affairs asked Mohamed Maâlmine, a famous Moroccan calligrapher, to write the *mushaf mohammadi* following the rules of the dominant reading method in Morocco *(warš)* and Moroccan-Andalusian calligraphy *(maġribī)*. The calligrapher copied for months the verses on sheets of paper according to the Zwiten Qur'an. As with the choice of the copy, that of the artist is significant: to receive the title of Calligrapher of the Palace under the reign of Hassan II (1961-1999), this individual had learnt the *maġribī* by reproducing the writings in the oldest mosques of the kingdom. Following his father, he wrote the decrees and deciphered the manuscripts of the royal archives, unreadable for an untrained eye. Since this long-term work had allowed him to deepen his knowledge of Moroccan-Andalusian calligraphy in accordance with the conventions adopted by the monarchy, it was therefore

23. To counter the influence that countries (such as Saudi Arabia, which distributes thousands of copies of the Qur'an based on standards different from those prevailing in the kingdom) distribute these holy books free of charge, Mohammed VI is not content to defend only Moroccan territory. He also tries to extend authority into neighboring countries, particularly in West Africa, where a Malikite Islam is practiced as in Morocco. To this end, he distributes thousands of royal editions, especially in mosques where the faithful use the book object to recite, read and interpret the text. A study in progress in Dakar considers the global politics of His Majesty with regard to hegemony over the African Islamic market of the Qur'an and its material connections as a means to a pan-African politics. On this point, see S. Himnat, "Morocco's Religious 'Soft Power' in Africa: as a strategy supporting Morocco's stretching power in Africa," 2018, <https://mipa.institute/5642>.

to him that Mohammed VI turned to copy "his Qur'an," as his father Hassan II had also done. Unlike the *hassani mushaf,* which is destined to be offered to distinguished guests, the *muhammadi mushaf,* as discussed, has been the subject of serial and industrial production. For the new king, the calligrapher had to produce a new book: "The writing had to be even more beautiful, more refined," he explains (interview, a calligrapher who attended the writing of the *muhammadi mushaf,* 22 January, 2017, Casablanca).

Once the work was done, the calligraphic boards were given to two clerics chosen by the Palace and known for their mastery of *maġribī* calligraphy and *warš* recitation. One, called Mohamed Hmitou, from the region of Fez, about 80 years old, had "learned by heart the Qur'an in all its versions [that is to say the seven reading methods]" (interview, Mohamed Hmitou, 9 March 2017, Rabat) following the traditional method of the *lûh* (qur'anic board that combines the writing and recitation) used throughout the Islamic world, particularly in Morocco (Eickelman 1986). His father and grandfather, described as *shorfa* (descendants of the Prophet), had memorized the Qur'an in its entirety before him. A former professor at the Faculty of Letters of Rabat and author of famous works on the Qur'an recitations, he was part of the renowned Al-Azhar Audit Committee. The other cleric, one of the former students of Mohamed Hmitou, was about sixty years old and also from Fez. He, instead, had only mastered the most widespread recitations. Less well-known than his mentor, he nevertheless enjoys an established reputation thanks to his study of the uses of the *lûh* in the kingdom's qur'anic schools, ordered by the palace. Like his teacher, he is the heir to and one of the last witnesses of *qdim* ("ancient"/"patrimonial") ways of transmitting the Qur'an according to the country's own methods of reading and writing.

Armed with their experience and fame in Morocco and in the palace, the two clerics did not hesitate to report the mistakes made by the calligrapher. "It lacks precision," the clerics said before proposing to write a new Qur'an. For several weeks, the calligrapher met the clerics, provided with the boards rewritten according to their corrections, which were mainly relative to the form of the letters. "For instance," the elder cleric says, "*dhâlika* ('that') we cannot write it like that in the Qur'an [he draws the word on a sheet], we must not leave an empty space. The line should not be so long, even if it does not change the meaning. It is to not read excessively" (Interview, Mohamed Hmitou, 9 March 2017, Rabat) (Fig. 3). Because everything is pronounced in *maġribī* calligraphy, according to famous Islamic treatises such as Mohamed el-Manouni's *tārīkh al-wirāqa al-maghribiyya,* the length of the line of a letter is equivalent to the intensity of the sound to be made when it is vocalized and the line itself is considered as an "empty space" that can be filled. This is why

the "space" between the letters has been scrupulously checked by the clerics who have defined a size proper to each of them, similar to a dotted note in a musical score. Once the boards were done, Ali Tahia, the illuminator and also calligrapher of the royal court, began to draw the vegetable compositions around the text. This work was not supervised by clerics who considered it useless, unlike the minister for whom the illuminations contours and colors had to "remind one of the taste of Moroccans," as the director of the Mohammed VI Foundation also said (interview, Ali Tahia, 7 April 2013, Casablanca). We can also see these aesthetic particularities in the ancient mosques of the kingdom where the illuminator copied the decorations by imitating the gestures of his father who had joined the palace before him. Thus, a familiarity between the place of worship and the book was sought.

These observations lead us to two conclusions. The object, considered as the container of the word of God, can be modulated according to changing rules, both economic and political: here redefined to represent an authentic Moroccan-ness that was supposed to activate a properly local way of being connected with God. Finally, in this mediation, institutional clerics play a central role. The Palace's effort to incite them to act as guarantors in the production of new material and sensory Qur'an norms reveals the importance and concern attached to the clerics. The importance given to their judgment is evidence of the king's desire to see them legitimize his positions and sanctify his actions, as signified by the priority given to the form of the letters intimately linked to the sounds to be emitted. The "good letter" aims at the "good recitation," that is to say, the correct way to sound the text through the voice.[24]

Reciting, Memorizing and Gesturing the Qur'an in a Moroccan Way

"Good recitation" or cantillation, intended to regulate the exact restitution of sacred texts in order to prevent dangerous deviations, has led to the establishment of *tajwîd* as a branch of the qur'anic sciences.[25] *Tajwîd*—"the jewellery of recitation" (Shiloah 1991: 91)—is a system devoted to the voice and sounds a reciter makes, as well as to the art of chanting according to the rules and laws of phonetics represented by different colors in the Qur'an *tajwîd,* as this category of didactic books is called. Because the Arabic consonants are

24. For more details on the way the *mushaf muḥammadī* has been conceived of and produced by the palace in order to render it local, rather than universal, see Cohen (2017).
25. See Nelson (2001) for works on technical aspects of Qur'an recitation. See Rasmussen (2010) on the relation between Qur'an recitation and music.

inert, this science considers the treatment of the vowels which modify those consonants under different aspects as a fundamental aspect of interpretation.

The explanation of one of the clerics of the Foundation is eloquent in this regard: "Muslims are careful to pronounce as much as possible the holy Qur'an according to how it was revealed to the Prophet" (Interview, Mohamed Hmitou, 9 March 2017, Rabat). This means following specific rules in accordance with the *tajwîd* methods that are specific to canonical recitations. He continued explaining: "There is *moussaaaaa, mousséé, moussi*" he recited, then drew me a crescent representing a scale of intensity from the short "a" sound to the long "e" sound—depending on the recitation. The recitations are not alternative versions of the text but refer to minor variations in vocalization. However, different pronunciations of the same word may lead to divergent interpretations. This is why clerics pay close attention to the way each letter is sounded by the voice. This implies the greatest precision as to the form of the letters and the location of the diacritics. This concern for interpretation also requires the adjustment of the voice stops, which are distinct in the Moroccan Qur'an and in the standard edition. This is a crucial variation, since the transmission of the message depends on the manner of punctuation of the text. Stopping at an inappropriate place of the sentence might produce a heretical meaning. Thus, the delicate modalities of sound declination of the same vowel or of a ligation line have cognitive properties.[26]

However, according to the director of the Foundation, interpretation is not the essential purpose of the "right" sound to make. What matters is the *hizb* recitation's run, which must answer to a collective movement: "Moroccans must be able to pray together without problems during the *hizb,*" he says (interview, H. Hamani, 10 February 2017, Mohammedia). The *hizb* ("Party," referring to the sixty sections of the Qur'an) refers to a collective recitation performed at the mosque twice a day, after the prayers of dawn and bedtime (so that the Qur'an, composed of sixty *hizb,* is fully recited over the course of a month). At other times of the day, practitioners quietly listen to the *imam*'s voice. Historically rooted in Morocco, the *hizb* recitation is rarely practiced in the Middle East where rigorous Muslims call it *bid'a* ("innovation") (Fariji 2017). This conception is more and more widespread in Morocco, the director of the Foundation deplores. It even happens that *imams* refuse the *hizb* recitation in their mosque even though it is part of a specific training program recently organized by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. The stakes are high since

26. See Osborne (2016) on the recitation of the Qur'an and the possibilities for understanding meaning across the sound and experience of the text.

the practice of the *hizb* is inseparable from Moroccan identity, according to the ministry's website.[27]

This recitation of about twenty minutes is led by the *imam*. "As he reads by heart [that is to say, recites]," a young worshiper explains, "we read the book." Kneeling in a circle around the *imam,* the worshipers reach for the book so as not to make mistakes. "It's to not forget anything," adds the practitioner met in a mosque of Casablanca (interview with Anonymous, 2 April 2017, Casablanca). The book occupies a central place in the ritual, which was initially intended for rote learning of the Qur'an following a correct diction acquired through repeated and collective recitation.[28] "Except that now," the director of the Foundation retorts, "the faithful no longer pray from the same book; one recites the oriental version, the other the Moroccan. Then one stops while the other continues, then he kneels while the other is standing because he has not seen *al-sajadât,* there is a disagreement." *Al-sajadât* (prostrations)—indicated in the text by a medallion—tells the faithful when to perform the gesture of inclination to the ground. Their number varies according to the editions: eleven in the *mushaf muḥammadī,* fourteen in the standard Cairo edition.[29]

Thus, the material components of the book serve not only to set the sounds but also to indicate gestures to perform while reading the Qur'an according to precise rules which make it possible not to disturb the collective performance of the ritual. This is why, in a desire to "homogenize," the director says, the Foundation has widely distributed the *mushaf muḥammadī* in mosques so that worshipers may pray from the same book dedicated to regulating the sounds of the voice, body movements, and the senses associated with prayer. By establishing writing and ornamentation standards, indeed a properly Moroccan intonation, sonority and qur'anic gesture are established as a model. To this challenge is added another, intimately linked to the first one: memorizing the Qur'an.

To memorize the Qur'an, following the traditional method still dominant in Morocco, the child, once he masters the alphabet, learns the Qur'an by reproducing the verses written out by his teacher. His wooden board held vertically, the child repeats the text aloud after his teacher while copying it. Here writing, subordinated to a set of oral practices, is an *aide-memoire* that allows correct incorporation by using mnemonic markers such as patterns of intonation and rhythm as well as visual cues relating to the shapes of the

27. <http://www.habous.gov.ma/3780-القراءة-الجماعية-والحزب-الراتب-في-المغرب/حمل-القرآن.html>.
28. On *hizb* recitation in Morocco, see Fariji (2017).
29. This difference relies on verse breaking variations.

letters.[30] This type of memorization *(hifz)* far exceeds the learning of the text: it aims at transforming the learner in the strong sense of the term. The child must literally possess the Qur'an (Eickelman 1978), incorporate it (Ware 2014), as the common expressions in Morocco suggest: "having the Qur'an on the lips" (Eickelman 1986: 48) or "bearing the Qur'an in his heart" (Fortier 1998: 218). This embodiment of the Word of God must give moral and ethical value to the pupil whose physical body, impregnated by the sacredness of the Word, is seen as the transforming agent of the spirit (Gade 2004).

In Morocco, as in other Muslim countries, the rote learning of the Qur'an is based on mnemonic markers (Eickelman 1978) which are similar to the processes developed in ancient Greece and Rome to facilitate the memorization of texts, sacred or otherwise, through places and images (Yates 1986 [1975])[31]. The intonation, the rhythm or the visual association between the shape of the letters combine in a synaesthetic teaching aiming to support an exact and optimal incorporation of the Qur'an. Thus, we can better understand why the physical properties of the text that configure the specific ways of seeing, hearing and reciting it are a major issue. On this point, we should notice that the "great reciters," the *huffâz,* meaning those who know the Qur'an by heart and recite it, usually use only one edition. This is the method recommended by teachers to their students, who are encouraged to use the book as a mnemonic object. For instance, many worshipers have a particular interest in graphic composition, preferring that pages end at the end of the verses rather than in the middle (Cohen 2012). During their memorization, the page is associated with an image (another meaning given to the word *rasm,* "calligraphy"), that is, to fix visually in one's memory in order to retain the *sura*. On the page, everything counts, say the reciters: the style of writing, the layout and the decorations.

These ornamentations along with the writing style are closely connected to mnemonic techniques. Illuminations remind the practitioners, for instance, of the order of the *sura*. In modern Qur'ans reproduced on the model of ancient copies, the movements of the sacred text are marked by gold and red illuminations, *surah* headings, medallions or rosettes. Through a set of pictures we can see how the illumination in the Qur'an is always organized in connection with the text. Figures 4 and 5 show how the title of a *surah* is

30. Graham (1987) and Hirschler (2013) both discuss the intertwining of orality and writing, a typical feature of learning in Muslim contexts. An article in preparation by an ethnomusicologist, Anis Fariji, and myself, examines the sensory dimension of learning the Qur'an by heart in a qur'anic school of Salé, in Morocco.

31. This is not typical of modern Morocco. The markers we find reproduced in modern copies of the Qur'an reenact those of the manuscripts whose traditions of course may display significant regional variances.

distinguished from the text by an ornate frame in shades of blue in the Saudi edition (Fig. 4) and in shades of brown in the Moroccan edition (Fig. 5). The medallions we see in Figures 6 and 7 mark the end of a verse following the Arabic numeral in the Saudi edition (Fig. 6) and the European numeral in the Moroccan edition (Fig. 7). Finally, the ornamentations we can see alongside the text and running into the text in Figures 8 and 9 in the shape of a *mihrab,* in the Saudi edition (Fig. 8) and of medallion in the Moroccan edition (Fig. 9), are a cue for a physical action: *sajda*. Both indicate the ritual bending required at the end of some passages of the Qur'an.

Thus, among its many attributes, the Qur'an book functions in and of itself as a mnemonic device. This was also the case, as Mary Carruthers (1990) has shown, for books, especially the Bible, in Europe in the Middle Ages. The Qur'an is another good illustration of ways in which the materiality of the book (its pages, its colors, its textual decorations, its calligraphic style, etc.) and memory are linked and support each other in the construction of knowledge. Until today, all the *masahîf* including the *mushaf mohammadî* respond to this "memory technology," to borrow Carruthers's expression *(ibid.)*. In Morocco, where the role of memory is emphasized more than elsewhere, we might expect that the book-object plays a more important role than elsewhere in qur'anic learning. In fact, through the material transformation of the Qur'an meant to remind one of Moroccan culture, it is precisely *this* memory technology that the king is attempting to make local. In other words, it is the whole manner of possessing the sacred text that is made Moroccan.[32]

This "royalization" of the Qur'an aims at producing a national "aesthetic style" (including sight and hearing) that binds the society to the sacred text and Islam at large. Through this "aesthetic style," the king's goal is to govern the sensory engagement of practitioners with the Qur'an and each other, as well as to generate particular sensibilities. In today's world marked by the mingling of people and objects, where markets and media now spill over the boundaries of nations resulting in a fragmentation of identities and a destabilization of social hierarchies as well as a challenge of all knowledge and faith, the "royalization" of the ways of possessing the Qur'an is a means to refocus Moroccan Islam with its reliance on market laws. To this end, two spaces are at the core of the king's religious public policy: the mosque and the public school. A schoolbook for Islamic learning is being produced by the Ministry of National Education to familiarize the younger generation, in particular, with the Moroccan Qur'an's appearance. In a few years this will be the only Qur'an authorized in schools. These observations reinforce the

32. For more details on this *moroccanization* of the Qur'an following the palace's rules, see Cohen (2017).

idea that there is, for the king, a supposed sensory and even affective power of textual and oral matter, as configured in the book, on the formation of the religious subject.

❖

The creation of a Moroccan Qur'an is part of a far-reaching reorientation and disciplining of religious knowledge and authority: it is a part of a great homogenization of Islamic knowledge and authority. The creation of a royal Qur'an is sought to produce a heightened orthodoxy, brought about through a re-centering of Moroccan Islamic tradition considered as a new orthodoxy and orthopraxy in the country. To this end, royal policy is responding both to the growth of market logics and practices that cross borders, and to the internationalization of Saudi readings of Islam, which do the same. It is akin to the creation of a tariff system. Domestic producers are given an advantage because any new edition of the Qur'an sold in the country will have to meet particular specifications which would be expensive for importers. The creation of or emphasis on local tastes that fuel this market benefits the king's authority and economy, by claiming that local tastes and traditions symbolized by particular aesthetic features of the product can only rightly be satisfied by local producers within a local spiritual economy and a local structure of authority. Thus, religious values are rendered compatible with the integration of financial markets, production systems, and labor markets across national borders; all processes that support Moroccan state policy.

From a mode of textual, material and aural communication, the goal is to realign the visual and sound uses of the Qur'an as they evolve in a field of circumscribed and easily controllable practices. The creation of a royal Qur'an is expected to serve a generative role, centering, substantiating and dispersing popular experience and imagination so that a sense of religious identity considered to be authentic is born. To what extent, we might ask, will this attempt succeed? This question will be the focus of my future research. For now, far from seeking to grasp whether this royalization of the Qur'an is effective or not, I have tried to show how a religious policy can build on material and aesthetic choices related to the Qur'an as a physical book in order to produce a Moroccan way of writing, decorating, voicing and conveying the Word of God: indeed, by making a local text characterized by its universality.

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Figures

Fig. 1. — Sura *Al Fâtiha* (The Opening) in the Saudi edition of the Qur'an, Mushaf Al Madinah



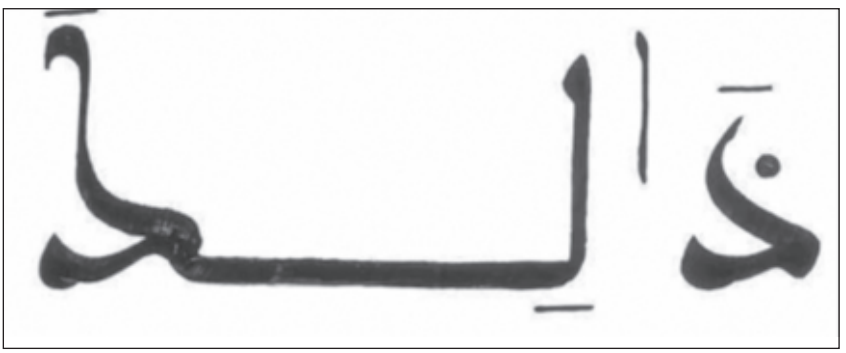
Qur'an, Mushaf Al Madinah, Complexe du roi Fahdpour l'impression du Saint Coran, Medina, 2015, p. 1.
Photograph: Anouk Cohen, Rabat, 2019.

Fig. 2. — Sura *Al Fâtiha* (The Opening) in the Moroccan edition of the Qur'an, Mushaf Mohammadî



Fondation Mohammed VI pour l'édition du Saint Coran, Mohammedia, 2013, p. 2.
Photograph: Anouk Cohen, Rabat, 2019.

Fig. 3. — The Word *dhâlika* Drawn on a Sheet of Paper by Mohamed Hmitou



Photograph: Anouk Cohen, 2019.

Fig. 4. — The title of the Sura *Mâ'ida* (The Table) in the Saudi edition of the Qur'an, Mushaf Al Madinah



Complexe du roi Fahd pour l'impression du Saint Coran, Medina, 2015, p. 106.

Fig. 5. — The Title of the Sura *Mâ'ida* (The Table) in the Moroccan edition of the Qur'an, Mushaf Mohammadî



Fondation Mohammed VI pour l'édition du Saint Coran, Mohammedia, 2013, p. 105
Photographs: Anouk Cohen, Rabat, 2019.

Fig. 6. — Medaillon marking the End of the First Verse of the Sura *Mâ'ida* (The Table) in the Saudi edition of the Qur'an, Mushaf Al Madinah



Complexe du roi Fahd pour l'impression du Saint Coran, Medina, 2015, p. 105. Photograph: Anouk Cohen, Rabat, 2019.

Fig. 7. — Medaillon marking the End of the First Verse of the Sura *Mâ'ida* in the Moroccan edition of the Qur'an, Mushaf Mohammadî



Fondation Mohammed VI pour l'édition du Saint Coran, Mohammedia, 2013, p. 105. Photograph: Anouk Cohen, Rabat, 2019.

Fig. 8. — Ornamentations in the shape of *mihrab* in the Saudi edition of the Qur'an, Mushaf Al Madinah



These ornamentations in the shape of *mihrab* (semicircular niche in the wall of a mosque indicating the *qibla*) in blue and black, on the right of the text, and in black in the text, indicate the ritual bending required at the end of some passages of the Qur'an in the Saudi edition, Mushaf Al Madinah, Complexe du roi Fahd pour l'impression du Saint Coran, Medina, 2015, p. 251.
Photograph: Anouk Cohen, Rabat, 2019.

Fig. 9. — Ornamentations in the shape of Medallions in the Moroccan edition of the Qur'an, Mushaf Mohammadî



These medallion-shaped ornamentations, on the left of the text and in the text, indicate the ritual bending required at the end of some passages of the Qur'an, in the Mushaf Mohammadî, Fondation Mohammed VI pour l'édition du Saint Coran, Mohammedia, 2013, p. 253.
Photograph: Anouk Cohen, Rabat, 2019.

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Abstract

This article engages with the relationship between Islamic authority, the materiality of the Qur'an and the commodification of the qur'anic text in Morocco. It situates this relationship within a broader context of changing text production, the liberalization of religious commodities, and the development of new information and communication technologies which, in turn, propagate multiple and heterogeneous means for Muslims to unify with the Word of God in a country where the monarch has been constitutionally defined as the commander of the believers. From the study of the creation in 2010 of a Moroccan edition of the Qur'an, which differs from others in its recitation method *(warš)*, calligraphic style *(maġribī)* and the foliage compositions surrounding the text, this article aims to examine how aesthetic, political and religious norms inflect economic action, and vice versa. To this end, it considers Qur'an commodification, free market and Islamic authority as a set of concrete practices explored through the production of the book-object.

Keywords: Morocco, book-object, economy, politics, Qur'an, religious materiality, senses.

Résumé

Qu'est-ce qu'un « Coran marocain » ? Matérialité du livre, marchandisation et autorité islamique — Cet article examine les modalités suivant lesquelles l'autorité islamique, la matérialité du Coran et la marchandisation du texte coranique s'articulent dans le Maroc contemporain. Il situe ces relations dans un contexte plus large de modification de la production de textes, de la libéralisation des biens religieux et du développement de nouvelles technologies de l'information et de la communication qui, à leur tour, répandent des moyens multiples et hétérogènes permettant aux musulmans de s'unir à la Parole de Dieu dans un pays où le monarque est constitutionnellement défini comme le commandeur des croyants. Partant de l'étude de la création en 2010 d'une édition marocaine du Coran, caractérisée par sa méthode de récitation *(warš)*, son style calligraphique *(mag˙ribī)* et les compositions de feuillage entourant le texte, cet article examine comment les normes politiques et religieuses influent sur l'action économique, et inversement. À cette fin, il considère la marchandisation coranique,e néolibéralisme et l'autorité islamique comme un ensemble de pratiques concrètes explorées à travers le processus de production de l'objet livre.

Mots-clés : Maroc, Coran, économie, livre-objet, matérialité religieuse, politique, sens.