



**The Distribution of Knowledge and the Material
Presence of Books: The Sidewalk Book Vendors of
Rabat and Casablanca, Morocco**
Anouk Cohen

► **To cite this version:**

Anouk Cohen. The Distribution of Knowledge and the Material Presence of Books: The Sidewalk Book Vendors of Rabat and Casablanca, Morocco. *Ethnologie française*, Presses Universitaires de France, 2019, Business people, 165 (1), pp.23-36. hal-03070364

HAL Id: hal-03070364

<https://hal-univ-paris10.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-03070364>

Submitted on 15 Dec 2020

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

The Distribution of Knowledge and the Material Presence of Books: The Sidewalk Book Vendors of Rabat and Casablanca, Morocco

Anouk Cohen
Laboratoire d'ethnologie et de sociologie comparative
anouk.cohen@wanadoo.fr

Translated from the French by John Angell

ABSTRACT

Many of the books, newspapers, and magazines sold in Rabat and Casablanca are distributed directly by informal vendors in kiosks, on sidewalks, and in small bookshops. The growing number of *kiosquiers*, *terrassiers*, and *bouquinistes* (as they are called locally) suggests that they are not as marginal as their appearance might suggest. This article discusses the critical role of street traders in these two Moroccan cities, many either semi-literate or non-literate, in the circulation of the printed word—and of knowledge.

Keywords: Sidewalk book vendors. Books. Distribution of knowledge. Literacy. Morocco.

The broad avenues that separate the medinas or old cities of Morocco's administrative and economic capitals, Rabat and Casablanca, from surrounding newer zones might seem like unexpected locations to sell books. Displayed on sheets of cardboard along the sidewalks, every possible kind of book can be opened, perused, or purchased, ranging from the Qur'an and other religious tomes to novels, novellas, essays, and technical manuals. Although some formal bookstores exist, numerous "sidewalk bookstores" [Gonzalez-Quijano, 2002 [1998]; El-Alaoui, 2006], often as close as twenty meters apart along urban avenues, transform urban sidewalks into thriving commercial zones. On heavily trafficked downtown intersections, this vast colorful mosaic of printed matter adds visual and intellectual zest to public life.

This profusion of print material inspires two immediate observations: First, literacy artifacts of every description dominate these urban streets and public spaces; second, the print trade involves a multitude of vendors operating a great diversity of sales locations. Their spaces vary from specialized booksellers in shops enclosed behind shop fronts and equipped with doors to *buralistes*,¹ small installations, also equipped with doors, selling an array of items including newspapers, magazines, and books as well as cigarettes and other small consumer goods, *kiosquiers* offering press

publications and books from open booths overflowing into the streets, and "*terrassiers*" whose displays of books, newspapers, and magazines are spread out at the level of the sidewalk. In addition, there are *bouquinistes*, generally located in souks and medinas, selling books and used journals from ten square-meter, U-shaped boutiques, sometimes from behind a wooden counter. In reality, there are two categories of street businesses selling printed materials—those that operate along the streets and in the market squares, such as *kiosquiers*, *terrassiers*, and *bouquinistes*, and those who possess enclosed spaces, such as *buralistes* (or tobacco shops) and formal bookstores.

The present study focuses primarily on the first category of informal urban vendors of printed matter. Despite their ramshackle appearances, the large number of *terrassiers*, *kiosquiers*, and *bouquinistes* indicates their vital role in the distribution of print and knowledge. Located in otherwise lightly trafficked sites on corners of major streets such as Mohammed V and Hassan II Boulevards, in proximity to the railway station, the post office, and numerous business establishments, these easily accessible vendors regularly attract large crowds during busy times of day. The goal of this article is to present my findings about these vendors' crucial role in the circulation of the printed word—and therefore of knowledge—in Rabat and Casablanca.

To understand their day-to-day functioning, I inquired about who the vendors are, how they work, and their relationships with the printed word, particularly books. My first objective was to understand the trajectories of *terrassiers*, *kiosquiers*, and *bouquinistes*, which then led me to examine their work practices and professional skills more closely, as well as details about their operations such as locations, hours, prices, and physical layouts, and finally the reasoning behind their approaches to displaying and classifying their merchandise, as well the atmosphere of their environs. In the process of conducting my study, my focus expanded beyond street vendors to include the people with whom they interacted, including other book vendors, publishers, and customers. I also developed a specific interest in the ways in which *kiosquiers*, *terrassiers*, and *bouquinistes*, who are often semi- or non-literate, enable populations that have limited familiarity with print and modest financial resources to gain access to written language, thereby helping disseminate the ideas of censored authors, conducting businesses organized around the physical presence of books and other printed materials.

Retracing the Itinerary of the Book. An ethnography

This article presents the results of an ethnographic study in Rabat and Casablanca that was conducted during 2006–2007, as well as return trips in 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2015. Over a period of nine years, I met and talked with a large number of *terrassiers*, *kiosquiers*, and *bouquinistes*. In parallel to these interviews, I was also able to observe practices surrounding books in the street for one and one half years. I decided to conduct this study of literacy artifacts and the social and economic relationships surrounding them in order to comprehend the full breadth of the diversity of the printed word.² Retracing the path of the book raised my awareness of the key role of street vendors and the ways in which their merchandise structures their work practices and gestures as they distribute books and as they contribute, each in their own ways, to the circulation of the written word. These reflections are an extension of Christian Jacob's exploration of the connections between the work of the hand and that of the mind in the second volume of *Lieux de savoir* series, where he sought to "reduce the hiatus between manual and intellectual practices, or more specifically, to contemplate the connections between them" [Jacob, 2011: 20].

■ Trajectories

Vendors, Customers, Spaces

As elsewhere in Morocco and other Arabic countries, most publications in Rabat and Casablanca, particularly newspapers and magazines, are directly distributed on the street, on sidewalks, or in kiosks. *Terrassiers*, more modest locations consisting of a few sheets of cardboard on the ground (See photo 1), are often in close proximity to their peers. While *kiosquiers* and *terrassiers* serve primarily lower-income readers who tend to purchase press more than books and whose familiarity with the printed word may be modest, bookstores and *buralistes* target more serious readers who are able to spend up to 120 MAD [approximately 110 euros] for books imported from the Middle East and 250 MAD [approximately 203 euros] for books from France on specific, often professional topics. Many of these customers are teachers, journalists, lawyers, and doctors who tend to purchase books only from sales outlets concentrating on their preferred language—either Arabic or French.³ Bookstores that specialize in Arabic books typically offer imports from Lebanon or Egypt. The clients of French-language bookshops are literate in French and derive social status from owning imported French books that can cost more than the vast majority of *Casaouis* and *Rabatis* can afford.⁴

This binary market is mirrored in the physical locations of publishing houses and bookstores, which are located in specific neighborhoods depending on language. In both Rabat and Casablanca, businesses involved in the production and distribution of Arabic-language books tend to be located in the Habous districts where in addition to books, wholesale goods, from clothing and cooking utensils to fruits and vegetables, are also available. The French-language book trade is primarily concentrated in the central district of Casablanca and the Maârif neighborhood, where other businesses that belong to the old city's culture are located, including cafés (Café de Paris), restaurants (le Petit Poucet, formerly frequented by Jean Genet), and bookstores (the Livre-Service, the Librairie de France, the Librairie Farraire, the Librairie des Sciences, etc.).

Over time, *kiosquiers* and *terrassiers* have gradually moved into the same area as these businesses. The presence of foreign populations, mostly French and Spanish, in this district has been an important factor in their development, and they represent an excellent niche market for pioneering *terrassiers*, *kiosquiers*, and



Photo 1 - Terrassier on the Avenue Hassan II in Rabat (author photo, October 5, 2015).

bouquinistes dealing in foreign-language books, newspapers, magazines, and graphic novels. The presence of printed materials ultimately defined this district, an influence that continues to this day. Instead of traces of the colonial and urban past, their presence reflects the close relationship between their locations and the goods that they sell: These merchants “make place”—in Christian Jacob’s words [2007: 17]—through their *boutiques*, *kiosques*, and *terrasses*.

“J’ai toujours fait ça!” [This is what I’ve always done!]

Most street vendors became booksellers as a legacy from a father or uncle who transmitted the boutique and trade knowledge to a son or nephew who then

learned the trade by imitating their elders’ actions. The trade is almost exclusively transmitted among male family members from generation to generation. Although women are rarely involved in selling books in kiosks and sidewalk stands, many owners’ daughters, sisters, or nieces of work in bookstores, where the men place orders and greet publishers and authors while women greet customers, provide information, and manage book sales. This heritage partially explains why vendors are generally not particularly attached to books—they often work “in the book” because they have “always done this!” or because “there’s no [other] work.”

Ali is a *bouquiniste* at Derb Ghellaf, a vast market known for electronics—cellular telephones, computers,

software, DVDs, televisions, portable MP3 players—as well as a wide variety of other goods ranging from clothing, lingerie, linens, and dishware to fruits, vegetables, and used books. For Ali, it is “better to work in the book trade than sell vegetables—that’s no way to make a living!”

He also finds selling books in the souk an agreeable way to make a living. He particularly appreciates the Derb Ghellaf market because of the work environment and above all the concentration of such a wide diversity of small businesses. For example, he can easily leave a colleague in charge of his stall if he needs to run errands. Another reason Ali is especially fond of the work environment is that the merchandise is well organized. Although Ali professes a certain detachment from the literary content of his wares, Larbi, who operates the stall adjacent to Ali’s, is a regular reader for whom the link between his profession and his passion for books is direct.

Many *bouquinistes*, *kiosquiers* and *terrassiers* are semi- or non- literate, but others, like Larbi and Hassan, a well-known *kiosquier* on the Avenue of the FAR in Casablanca, are widely-read and are often consulted by faithful customers about the most recent books. Hakim, who lives near Hassan’s kiosk, stops by every week to discuss what “books to read.” “Before I met Hassan, I never read. At home, nobody did. And then, with Hassan and other customers, we talked about current events, the newspaper headlines, and we met there and discussed. Hassan introduced me to books published in Egypt and Lebanon. So that made me want to read.” It became clear to me that the relationships between each *kiosquier*, *terrassier*, and *bouquiniste* and his customers was unique.

■ Becoming a *Bouquiniste* due to Opportunism

Seemingly random circumstances can influence a book vendor’s choice of profession. Larbi is about sixty years old and earned the title *hadjj*⁵ after opening his shop in 1958. When I asked him what caused him to choose this profession, he answered:

You know, in ‘54, they expelled me from school because I didn’t want to read the schoolbooks. I didn’t want to learn, so I read graphic novels. That was all I did! The principal summoned my parents and me and told me to leave school. So I started selling graphic novels to French,

Spanish, Jewish, Italian people in the Maârif district. At first, I sold books in the rue du Jura, but then I opened a shop in the Derb Ghallef Souk. When the French left, a lot of them sold and sometimes gave their books to me.

A large number of foreign residents left Morocco in the 1970s after Moroccanization regulations on foreign and national capital were imposed that were intended to enable the country’s oligarchs to become partners in foreign industrial and commercial firms, many of which were French. The new law required foreign investors to hire Moroccan co-managers for their companies, and some foreign investors who refused to accept these conditions sold or gave away their property and left the country. Larbi does not recall why some departing French nationals sold or gave him their books instead of to other vendors. Moroccans who became *bouquinistes* at the time often managed to acquire the libraries of departing French



Photo 2 - Larbi, *bouquiniste* in Derb Ghellaf market (author photo, April 14, 2007).

nationals who were seeking to reduce the cost associated with shipping their possessions. This is why Larbi continues to exclusively sell French-language books, although, as he pointedly observes, he reads “only in Arabic.” The Arabic music flowing from the radio in his shop contrasts with the older French books lining the bookcases in his shop, particularly *J’ai Lu*, *Livres de poche*, and *Folio*.

An additional reason for the prevalence of these series on Larbi’s bookshelves is that he restocks from discounters reselling French books that originate in the pulp market in France and are shipped to Morocco. Discounters periodically organize sales on the Casablanca markets that are regularly attended by wholesale resellers from souks such as Derb Ghallef and Derb Omar. *Bouquinistes* purchase books wholesale for 5 to 10 Moroccan dirhams (MAD), reselling them for 15 to 30 MAD, depending on the series—*Livres de poche* and *Pocket* books cost 15 MAD, *Folio* and *J’ai Lu* cost 20 MAD, and *J’ai Lu* “rouge” [red] (part of a special “*Aventure et passion*” series) can cost as much as 30 MAD. Regardless of the series, recently published books are priced at 30 MAD. Larbi acquires books by adapting to the discounters’ supply rather than pursuing a specific acquisition strategy. In fact, because of his shop is so small, Larbi’s acquisitions are guided primarily by what is needed to maintain his inventory. Available space determines his visits to discounter markets, resulting in a seemingly random business plan—a competitor might have bought a particular book instead of him, or he might not have the shelf-space or resources to purchase what was on offer at a particular moment. Most importantly, the ability to purchase discounted books made it possible for Larbi to discover French literature.

Larbi is not limited to a single product line, however: A complicated series of events can always lead to a new commercial transaction, and professional trajectories are shaped by a need for balance between customer expectations and potentially less predictable opportunities. *Bouquinistes* are constantly searching for books, sometimes purchasing them from individuals, and they often asked me if I had books to sell. After discussing one of his favorite genres—eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Moroccan history books—Larbi confirmed that, “Books are expensive. Like encyclopedias.” A small minority of his customers are collectors who are always looking for beautiful books and encyclopedias to enhance their personal libraries. I noted that a number of bookstore owners paid weekly calls

to the Derb Ghallef bookstalls, usually on Sundays when their own stores were closed, to purchase books from older series, such as “*J’ai lu rouge*,” that continue to be in demand. Although bookstore owners purchase books from *kiosquiers* and *terrassiers*, they also sell books that they are unable to sell to informal booksellers. I also observed customers who were probably unable to afford new books in a bookstore looking among the kiosks and sidewalk displays for specific works of French literature, usually for school. Many of these customers also report preferring the Derb Ghallef *bouquinistes* at because of their lending policies.

■ Censorship and Flexibility

Since the end of a long-standing ban on books written in Moroccan dialectal Arabic (*Dârija*) and Berber (*Amazigh*), the few books that are published can sometimes be found among *kiosquier’s* or *terrassier’s* displays. Before *Amazigh* was declared the second official language of Morocco in June 2011, following six months of popular uprisings, the authorities long enforced an Arabic-only policy.⁶ Indeed, until quite recently, linguistic pluralism was stigmatized in most Arabic-speaking countries and particularly in North Africa, theoretically to encourage national unity as well as Pan-Arabism. Being multilingual was considered suspect, and minority language speakers were often accused of harboring unpatriotic values [Pouessel, 2008]. It is important to note that the ban on *Dârija* remains in effect [Cohen, 2011]. Authors who distribute books written in Moroccan dialectal Arabic [as opposed to modern standard Arabic] report that nearly all bookstore owners resist carrying their books, but that some *buralistes* are willing to buy and display their books. It is also difficult to distribute books about sensitive subjects such as the King, sexuality, or the Western Sahara,⁷ as well as books promoting critical or fundamentalist religious views.⁸

In fact, Moroccan book vendors are tightly regulated, and the Ministry of Communication informs vendors which new acquisitions are likely to be banned. Street vendors are typically immune from these limitations and can sometimes sell books that lack official or publisher approval. Jamal, a bookstore owner at the Casablanca bookstore *Livre service*, noted that:

When I import books I am required to have a visa from the Ministry of Communication, which can censor

whatever they want. Before, censorship was more important than it is today. I have sometimes even been notified that particular books were banned directly from the division commissioner. I had to sign the statements and send them back, keeping a copy. At the time, we received at least thirty notices a year, but the last one that I received was in 2002, and there have not been anymore since then. Anything related to the person of the King or the Western Sahara is banned. For example, we weren't allowed to accept dictionaries that did not contain maps showing the [Western] Sahara as part of Morocco. And then some books about religion. Now, things are freer but you aren't going to find any copies of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* or pornography in Morocco! Absolutely none! But now I know what to import and I know what's banned. It's self-censorship.

For *kiosquiers* and *terrassiers*, official inspections usually focus on newspapers and magazines instead of books. Bookstore owners use their less formal colleagues to dispose of books that are banned after they have acquired them. In the end, *kiosquiers* and *terrassiers* serve as de facto purveyors of censored material, although not without taking some modest precautions. Banned books are generally not displayed openly, for example, and when a customer requests them, street vendors extract it from a bag or, in the case of *kiosquiers*, a hidden corner of their modest stalls. Bookstore operators, *terrassiers*, *kiosquiers*, *bouquinistes* are fiercely competitive, but they also cooperate with each other. In reality, operating in the street, where the intense circulation and transactions frustrate official surveillance efforts, allows *kiosquiers* and *terrassiers* to engage in underground practices and distribute almost any type of printed material. Kiosks nevertheless follow certain norms and are required to renew an annual official "authorization," remaining subject to cancellation and confiscation of their merchandise at any time. Mohamed, for example, inherited his *kiosque* permit from his father and pays an annual fee of approximately 1,500 MAD.

By contrast with *kiosquiers*, the status of *terrassiers* is entirely informal. Unlike Mohamed, Hassan, pays no fees for his stretch of *terrasse* or sidewalk. He even claims that, "I'm actually the one who does a favor by selling the political parties' and the Kingdom's newspapers!" Because they have no official obligations towards the government, *terrassiers* enjoy considerably more freedom than their peers, and, as a consequence, are the principal purveyors censored literature. In Rabat and Casablanca and other cities, banned texts

circulate primarily via the street. Like nineteenth-century door-to-door salesmen in France who sustained popular literacy practices by being more familiar with popular tastes than formal booksellers [Chartier and Lusebrink, 1996], Moroccan *terrassiers* and *kiosquiers* allow censored texts to circulate with relative freedom.

■ The Street as a Sales Location

A lending system employed by the *Derb Ghallef bouquinistes* in Casablanca and other souks near universities as well as by certain *kiosquiers* provides access to literacy for people of more modest means. This loan system, which is surely as old as the world's first street vendors, is simple: A book purchased at full price can be exchanged for a second book for a 2 MAD fee for a trade paperback, or for 5 MAD for a "*J'ai lu rouge*," the most sought-after collection. There is no official return date, and, as Larbi tells his customers, "When you finish reading it, just come back." Larbi keeps no records of the books that he lends or borrowing dates: "Things work out," as he says. The practice is particularly helpful for lower-income young people who prefer to borrow rather than to own. This allows books to "pass" from hand to hand until they eventually return to the seller, who is a key agent in a system of transactions that remains outside of the formal economy.

Mohamed is a *kiosquier* known for lending books at the same price as *bouquinistes*. His kiosk is open from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day of the week except Sunday, although he leaves his nephew to keep the stall in the afternoons. He emphasizes the fact that his "work starts at four in the morning" when the Sochepress trucks—the major Moroccan press distributor—deliver the day's newspapers, magazines, and books. Publishers and authors also stop by throughout the day to deliver books. Mohamed avoids accumulating an over-supply of books because "they don't sell as well as magazines and newspapers." He prefers to adjust to customer demand rather than purchasing books that are difficult to sell. One of Mohamed's strategies is to base book orders on what nearby *kiosquiers* and *terrassiers* are displaying. When he sees that particular books are frequently displayed, he buys them at the *Derb Omar* market or the Casablanca neighborhood of Habous so that he can stock them as well. The majority of *kiosquiers'* and *terrassiers'* sales are newspapers and magazines. They generally carry a few academic or religious



Photo 3 - Mohamed, *kiosquier* on the Avenue Mohammed V in Casablanca (author photo, March 15, 2007).

books in their inventory mostly in Arabic, as well as smaller format, practical books such as cookbooks and health or medicinal plants manuals, how-to books, and current events. These are displayed along with copies of the Qur'an, which is commonly for sale in the street. Neither vendors nor the faithful perceive direct contact with the sidewalk to be an affront to the sacred character of the Qur'an.

Unlike in bookstores, prices charged for books by *kiosquiers* and *terrassiers*, whose customers are mostly low-income readers, do not exceed 30 or 40 MAD. Bookstore prices can be as high as 300 MAD, particularly for French imports. This explains why *kiosquiers*, *terrassiers*, *bouquinistes* sometimes sell photocopied

books imported from France or the Middle East after binding them like the originals and respecting their formats and cover designs.

Street sales require only a modest investment and inventory and, although bookshops are physically separated from the street, *kiosquiers* and *terrassiers* are in open spaces that allow passers-by direct contact with books, newspapers, and magazines while they pursue their urban itineraries. Although the boundary between different categories of informal vendors can be difficult to establish, purchasing a book in a formal bookstore seems to involve more intentionality than buying one on the way home from work, perhaps on impulse, from a sidewalk kiosk. Like their merchandise,

the locations and morphology of the *kiosques* and *terrasses* explains this difference. Newspapers and magazines attract customers who might also be attracted by carefully arranged, colorful, modestly priced books arrayed on the ground. This insight has increased publishers' attention to the external appearance of books in order to capture the low-income consumer market.

■ Expertise and Professional Creativity

The Demand for Color

According to Leila Chaouni, director of the Moroccan publishing firm *Éditions Le Fennec*, colorful covers attract customers and facilitate the work of

street vendors, many of whom have rural backgrounds and are semi-literate:⁹

In the beginning, I wanted to publish serious-looking books like Gallimard and only use white covers. But many people warned me, asking 'What do you think the *kiosquiers*' and *terrassiers*' base their business on?' Colors are their frame of reference—'Hand me the green one! That red one needs to show better—it's selling well!' You can't just switch to white!

With few exceptions, every publisher in the region now adheres to this principle. Colorful interior illustrations correspond to cover patterns of relatively neutral inter-locking geometrical shapes that are interchangeable between different genres.



Photo 4 Example of book covers “Passage of miracles”
Ruelles Midaq

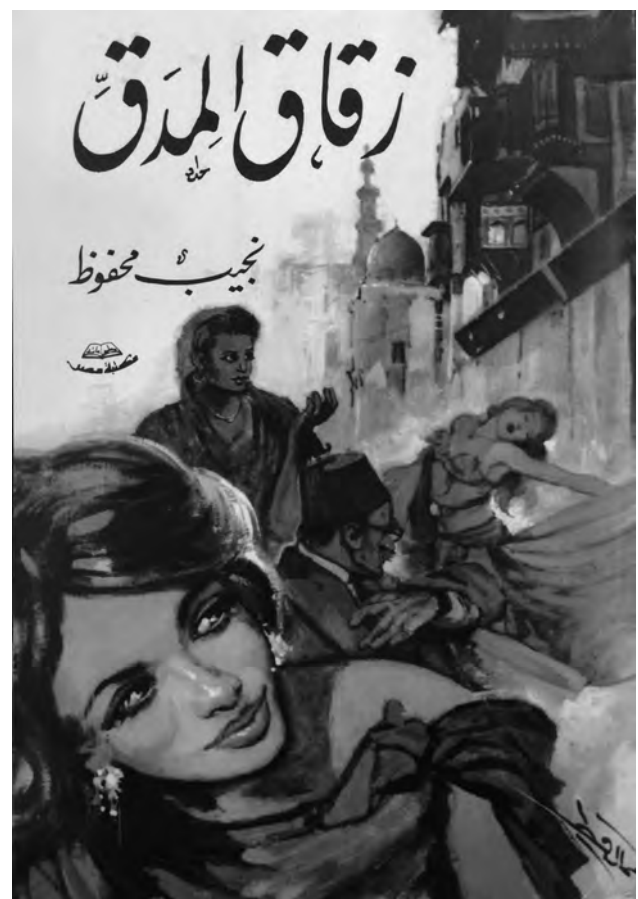


Photo 5 Example of book covers “Islam and Faith, A System
of Values” Mohammed Shahrour

In this way, publishers can create simple covers without being forced to hire layout artists for cover designs who digitally retouch or rework downloaded images or illustrations from fine art books. Upmarket publishers sometimes order “standard images” painted by professional artists, while others design covers displaying figurative illustrations derived from a book’s contents. Until the mid-1990s, publishers simply embossed covers with author names and titles in Arabic calligraphy against pale yellow, green, or brown backgrounds, but more recently, they use a range of strategies to focus on books’ appearance. Most book covers currently published in Morocco feature colored drawings that complement content and guide both vendors and customers, either by establishing a direct connection between the title and the illustrations or—for those who are not fully literate—by using colors as cues.

Every vendor has his own technique: Some use mnemonic techniques to select, display, and sell books according to format, binding, and materials, while others use author names, titles, or topics associated with a particular color. For example, the *kiosquier* Mohamed distinguish contemporary Islamic publications from classical religious books called *mujallad* (from the word *jild* or leather, now often replaced by leatherette) using bindings and the gilded parts of book covers. In this way, he is able to differentiate between books that are part of the Arabic literary, linguistic, and religious heritage and are called *turâth* (*turâth* meaning cultural legacy), the Qur’an, commentaries and exegeses, poetry, and literature.

The Physical Presence of the Book

Most of these kinds of books are clearly designed for mass distribution and are relatively inexpensive (between 30 and 100 MAD), although the printing is of high quality. With colorful cardboard covers and surfaces that are occasionally glittered, they are of medium format (17 x 24 cm) and are rarely longer than one hundred pages. Vendors differentiate between the covers of contemporary Islamic books, some of which have cardboard covers and called “*kutub sulufan*,” and softcover books called “*kutub war’qa*” (from *waraq*, the Arabic word for paper). Softcover books come in several types, including *Kutub war’qa*, which exist in several categories, from novels, stories, and essays to religious volumes (which are distinguishable by their covers). Unlike novels (*riwâya*), novellas, and

short stories (*qissa*), whose first-edition covers feature colored drawings, the covers of *kutub war’qa diel-dîn* (which are related to religion) are more esthetically sober with embossed calligraphic script against uniform pastel beige, green, or brown backgrounds. The differences between these three categories of Islamic books—*mujallad*, *sulufan*, and *war’qa*—are mirrored in their appearance, enabling vendors to easily sort and display them separately.

Mohamed organizes books according to topics using clues on their covers (drawings, photos, paintings), type of script (calligraphy or not), and material composition. Some cases are more obvious—if a cover carries images of salads, couscous, or tajines, he knows that it is a cookbook... Colorful, flexible covers are easily identifiable as essays or literature. Smaller formats with finer-grained covers indicate publication in Lebanon or Egypt, whereas Moroccan books have specific characteristics due to local production techniques, including their format (medium, or 17 x 24 cm for essays and small, 14 x 21 cm for novels and short stories). Moroccan books also rarely exceed one hundred-fifty to two hundred pages and are usually printed on 80 gsm [standard letter weight] paper (which is tax-exempt) with covers in 300 gsm paper that is soft, plasticized, and matte. After identifying books, Mohamed uses easily recognizable publishing company logos instead of subjects to categorize them.

Like *kiosquiers* and *terrassiers*, *bouquinistes* in the medinas and souks also use color and format to organize their wares. In Casablanca, they are clustered in a corner of the Derb Ghallef souk. Like other Moroccan markets, these stalls are arranged according to specialty. The area occupied by the *bouquinistes*, which is near the electricians and locksmiths, consists of nine stalls selling books and used journals that are open from 9 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., except for Fridays, the “day of prayer.” *Bouquinistes* specialize not only in a particular domain, such as school textbooks, literary works, or journals, but also in a specific language. A few sell only used Arabic-language books, but most sell French-language books. Vendors are intimately aware of competitors’ inventories and willingly refer customers to each other.

Like his colleagues, Abderrahmane’s stall is a narrow, cluttered space with walls covered in shelves overflowing with books arranged both horizontally and vertically for optimal use of space. The resulting abundance gives books a similar appearance to many other

items on sale in open-air markets. Looking for a specific book on Abderrahmane's crammed bookshelves, I was unable to discern his system of organization, but when I asked for help, he immediately pointed to a specific area and declared, "Pocket books are over there!" Abderrahmane organizes his books by series by according to formats and colors. "Here are the Pocket editions, there are the red *J'ai Lu*, and here are the 'great novels,'" Abderrahmane pointed out, referring to their size. He added, "*Harlequins* cost 10 MAD, great novels, 25 MAD, *Livres de poche* [small-format trade paperbacks], 20 MAD, and *Folios*, 25 or 30 MAD." Despite the impression of disorder, his books are arranged pragmatically following strict categories that facilitate daily work.

Observing Abderrahmane's interactions with customers confirmed his deep familiarity with his inventory. When I asked him why some books are more expensive than others, he replied, "because they're new!" i.e., "in good condition." Displayed on the most accessible table in his shop, I found books by well-known authors who were fluently cited by Abderrahmane, including Barbara Cartland, Agatha Christie, Driss Chraïbi, Tahar Ben Jelloun, and Naguib Mahfouz (in French). In fact, it became clear that although he is not literate in French, he organizes his boutique and prices his books according to three criteria: Author celebrity, physical appearance and characteristics, and condition. Although he lacks specific knowledge about the contents of his inventory, he perfectly masters books as physical objects, and this knowledge and expertise enables him to identify and categorize every item, including the fact that some authors have published several books within a given series.

Like Mohamed the *kiosquier*, Abderrahmane is far more familiar with books' exterior than with what lies inside them. Color and format are used to distinguish books from each other, classify them, and organize them, as well as to assign prices, all of which derive from professional expertise.¹⁰

Passers-by frequently exchange articles with each other and hold conversations in front of the magazine and book displays along the sidewalks. The public presence of so much printed matter encourages discussions about current events that range from political to moral to religious and are sometimes led by the

vendors. This role is one illustration of the status of *kiosquiers*, *terrassiers* and *bouquinistes* as "public figures," to use Mitchell Duneier's term for street book and magazine vendors in a New York neighborhood in the late 1990s. Such figures are active participants in urban intellectual life and help maintain the social order [2000]. As central figures in the urban distribution of printed matter, street vendors in Casablanca and Rabat provide readers who are not always highly literate access to literacy artifacts and processes that encompass censored authors and minority languages. My explorations of *kiosquiers*'s, *terrassiers*'s, and *bouquinistes*'s daily work confirms that books remain important features of the lives of the large number of non-literate and semi-literate vendors who are responsible for the circulation of print—and ideas—in these two Moroccan cities. Publishers have become highly conscious of the singular methods used by *terrassiers*, *kiosquiers*, and *bouquinistes* to organize books according to physical characteristics, and their work habits and practices shape and are shaped by publishers' cover layout and marketing decisions. Because the material presence of books plays such an important role in the distribution of print, publishers, *kiosquiers*, *terrassiers*, and *bouquinistes* are ultimately partners in creating and promoting the popular esthetics of the book.

Presiding over their printed wares on urban sidewalks and using every available means to organize and sell them, these vendors maintain also close connections to more formal sales channels and exert a significant influence over the cultural lives of Rabat and Casablanca. Far from being in a submissive position with respect to intellectual and institutional authorities, they are what de Certeau labeled "poachers" [De Certeau, 1990] who appropriate knowledge objects and make them available in original ways, including diversion and subterfuge, because "knowledge does not exist without the actors who practice them, and beyond their immediate finality, such practices reflect the subtle distribution of roles, skills, and authority in a given community" [Jacob, 2011: 20]. This distribution of roles and expertise in the circulation of knowledge in Rabat and Casablanca is the domain over which the *terrassiers*, *kiosquiers*, and *bouquinistes* preside amid the teeming markets, streets, and sidewalks of two Moroccan cities. ■

I Notes

1. The same word is used for the point of sale and the vendor.

2. This approach is the subject of my 2016 book. Anouk Cohen, *Fabriquer le livre au Maroc*, Paris: Karthala, “Terres et gens d’islam.”

3. It was estimated in 1998 that there was one French reader for every three Arabic-language readers in Rabat and Casablanca [El Yazami, 1998]. This ratio favors Arabic due to Arabization policies.

4. For a detailed study of the world of Moroccan books—in the sense in which Howard Becker [1982] uses the notion of “Art Worlds,” as networks of actors who cooperate in the existence of a work of art, see Cohen (2016). The Moroccan book business has four principal characteristics: It is young and changing, and it is urban and divided into two distinct linguistic domains. The current development of a new publishing market is linked to the recent growth in literacy rates and school attendance in the country. Averages mask vast differences between cities and rural areas and between capitals, which are highly literate, and the rest of the country. The Moroccan book market is developing within a specific urban framework, essentially the axis between Rabat and Casablanca. These two northern cities contain 90% of the publishers and the most highly developed network of bookstores. I chose them as sites for my ethnographic analysis for these reasons. It is also along this axis that the largest literate segments of the populations, who

read and write principally in two languages—Arabic and French. In addition to being young and urban and in a period of great change, local publishing is divided between Arabic-speaking and francophone sectors, a division that permeates the entire distribution chain, from fabrication of distribution and reception. A very small minority of publishers and wholesale or retail distributors, as well as authors and readers, work and read in both languages.

5. The name used to refer to Muslims who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

6. Although Morocco’s first language was *Amazigh*, it had no well-defined status until recently beyond functioning as a daily common language for rural vernacular Amazighophone communities living amid urban communities. Since the royal speech in 2001 and the establishment of the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture in 2008, Amazigh has been formally recognized. As noted earlier, following popular uprisings, Mohammed VI designated Amazigh as the second official language of Morocco on June 17, 2011.

7. The Western Sahara is an area in Northwestern Africa that shares a border with Morocco to the north, with Algeria to the northeast, Mauritania to the south, and with the Atlantic Ocean to the west. A non-autonomous territory according to the United Nations, this former Spanish colony does not have definitive legal status more than thirty years after the Spanish departed in 1976. It is claimed by both Moroccan and by the Sahrawi Democratic Arabic Republic (SDAR), which was founded by the Polisario Front in 1976. The Polisario

Front was militarily, financially, and diplomatically supported by Algeria, with the goal of total independence for Western Sahara. Since the 1991 cease-fire, Morocco controls and administers approximately 80% of the territory and, behind a long security zone, the Polisario Front currently controls the remaining 20%.

8. The gap between what should be kept secret and what should be revealed has become imperceptible. From one day to the next, the authorities’ attitude vacillates between indulgence and rigidity amid overall arbitrariness. According to a journalist who resides in Casablanca: “With Hassan II, the red lines that you could not cross were clear. Since the beginning of Mohammed VI’s reign, things are vague. We know that they exist but we do not know where they are. We only understand retrospectively, once we’ve gone past them.” For more information, see Cohen [2011].

9. According to the official report *50 ans de développement humain au Maroc* (2006) [Fifty Years of Human Development in Morocco], nearly 43% of the population over 10 years old is illiterate. This statistic masks greater disparities, however, between cities (29% of the total population) and rural areas, which represent 61%. Furthermore, the illiteracy rate is declining among young people, particularly between 10 to 15 years of age—the rate was 36% in 1994 and 13% in 2007. See *50 ans de développement humain au Maroc* (2006), for complete data.

10. See Cohen (2016) for more information about the relationship between oral and written language in urban Moroccan settings.

I References

BECKER Howard, 1988 [1982], *Les Mondes de l’art*, Paris, Flammarion.

CERTEAU Michel DE, 1990 [1980], *L’Invention du quotidien, t. 1 : Arts de faire*, Paris, Gallimard, “Folio essais.”

CHARTIER Roger et Hans Jürgen LUSEBRINK, 1996, *Colportage et lecture populaire. Imprimés de large circulation en Europe. XVI-XIX^e siècles*, Paris, IMEC Éditions.

COHEN Anouk, 2011, “La langue du silence dans le Maroc urbain contemporain,” *Revue d’Histoire des religions*, 3: 245–263.

COHEN Anouk, 2016, *Fabriquer le livre au Maroc*, Paris, Karthala, Coll. “Terres et gens d’islam,” (à paraître).

DUNEIER Mitchell, 2000, *Sidewalk*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

EL-ALAOUI Soraya, 2006, *Les Réseaux du livre islamique. Parcours parisiens*, Paris, CNRS éditions.

EL YAZAMI Abdelali, 1998, *Enquête sur la lecture au Maroc*, Rabat, Association marocaine des professionnels du livre.

GONZALEZ-QUIJANO Yves, 2002 [1998], *Les Gens du livre*, Paris, CNRS éditions.

JACOB Christian, 2007, “Faire corps, faire lieu,” in *Lieux de savoir. Espaces et communautés*, t. 1, Jacob Christian (dir.), Paris, Albin Michel: 17–39.

JACOB Christian, 2011, “Introduction,” in *Lieux de savoir. Les mains de l’intellect*, t. 2, Jacob Christian (dir.), Paris, Albin Michel.

POUESSEL Stéphanie, 2008, “Écrire la langue berbère au Royaume de Mohammed VI: les enjeux politiques et identitaires du tfinagh au Maroc,” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la méditerranée*, 124: 101–128.

(2006), *50 ans de développement humain au Maroc. Perspectives 2025*, Casablanca.

I RÉSUMÉ

Terrassiers, kiosquiers et bouquinistes à Rabat et à Casablanca. Circulation du savoir et matérialité du livre

À Rabat et à Casablanca, capitales administratives et économiques du Maroc, une grande partie de la production éditoriale, des journaux et des magazines est écoulee directement dans la rue, sur les trottoirs et dans les kiosques. Le nombre élevé de kiosquiers, terrassiers et bouquinistes (suivant la terminologie employée localement) indique que leurs commerces ne constituent pas un mode de diffusion marginal contrairement à ce que leur aspect précaire pourrait laisser croire. Le but de cet article est de mieux cerner le rôle crucial que ces marchands de rue, souvent analphabètes ou illettrés, jouent dans la circulation de l'écrit dans ces villes marocaines.

Mots-clefs : Marchands de livres. Circulation du savoir. Matérialité. Analphabétisme. Maroc.

I ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Zeitschriften- und Buchhändler in Rabat und Casablanca. Wissensvermittlung und die Materialität von Büchern

In Rabat und Casablanca, jeweils Verwaltungs- und Wirtschaftshauptstadt Marokkos, wird ein großer Anteil der schriftlichen Produktion, Zeitungen und Zeitschriften direkt auf der Straße, auf Bürgersteigen und in Kiosken verkauft. Der hohe Anteil von Zeitschriften- und Buchhändlern auf der Straße zeigt auf, dass ihr Handel keine marginalisierte Verkaufsform ist, auch wenn die prekäre Lage dies vermuten ließe. Ziel dieses Artikels ist es, die zentrale Rolle dieser Straßenhändler, die häufig keine Schulbildung haben oder Analphabeten sind, für die Verbreitung von Schriften in den marokkanischen Städten aufzuzeigen.

Stichwörter: Buchhändler. Wissensvermittlung. Materialität. Analphabetismus. Marokko.

I RESUMEN

Libreros de terrazas, de kioscos y libreros de viejo en Rabat y Casablanca. Circulación del saber y materialidad del libro

En Rabat y Casablanca, capitales administrativas y económicas de Marruecos, gran parte de la producción editorial, periódicos y revistas se despacha directamente en la calle, en las aceras y los kioscos. El número importante de libreros de terrazas, de kioscos y libreros de viejo (según la terminología empleada localmente) indica que sus negocios no constituyen un modo de difusión marginado, al contrario de lo que sugiere su aspecto precario. El objetivo de este artículo es definir mejor el papel crucial que estos vendedores de calle, muchas veces analfabetos o iletrados, cumplen en la circulación del escrito en estas ciudades marroquíes.

Palabras-clave : Vendedores de libros. Circulación del saber. Materialidad. Analfabetismo. Marruecos.