

Quranic Schools

Agents of Preservation and Change

Helen N. Boyle

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Series Preface

This series of scholarly works in comparative and international education has grown well beyond the initial conception of a collection of reference books. Although retaining its original purpose of providing a resource to scholars, students, and a variety of other professionals who need to understand the role played by education in various societies or world regions, it also strives to provide accurate, relevant, and up-to-date information on a wide variety of selected educational issues, problems, and experiments within an international context.

Contributors to this series are well-known scholars who have devoted their professional lives to the study of their specializations. Without exception, these men and women possess an intimate understanding of the subject of their research and writing. Without exception, they have studied their subject not only in dusty archives, but have lived and traveled widely in their quest for knowledge. In short, they are “experts” in the best sense of that often overused word.

In our increasingly interdependent world, it is now widely understood that it is a matter of military, economic, and environmental survival that we understand better not only what makes other societies tick but also how others, be they Japanese, Hungarian, South African, or Chilean, attempt to solve the same kinds of educational problems that we face in North America. As the late George Z. F. Bereday wrote more than three decades ago: “[E]ducation is a mirror held against the face of a people. Nations may put on blustering shows of strength to conceal public weakness, erect grand façades to conceal shabby backyards, and profess peace while secretly arming for conquest, but how they take care of their children tells unerringly who they are” (*Comparative Methods in Education*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964, p. 5).

Perhaps equally important, however, is the valuable perspective that studying another education system (or its problems) provides us in understanding our own system (or its problems). When we step beyond our own limited experience and our commonly held assumptions about schools and learning in order to look back at our system in contrast to another, we see it in a very different light. To learn, for example, how China or Belgium handles the education of a multilingual society, how the French provide for the funding of public education, or how the Japanese control access to their universities enables us to better understand that there are reasonable alternatives to our own familiar way of doing things. Not that we can borrow directly from other societies. Indeed, educational arrangements are inevitably a reflection of deeply embedded political, economic, and cultural factors that are unique to a particular society. But a conscious recognition that there are other ways of doing things can serve to open our minds and provoke our imaginations in ways that can result in new experiments or approaches that we may not have otherwise considered.

Since this series is intended to be a useful research tool, the editor and contributors welcome suggestions for future volumes, as well as ways in which this series can be improved.

Edward R. Beauchamp
University of Hawaii

Introduction

Islamic schools that facilitate memorization of the Qur'an—the Islamic holy book—have existed in the Middle East and Africa since the seventh century AD. These schools share a set of historical roots that can be traced back to Arabia and the educational practices of the Prophet Mohammed. These practices continued and expanded after his death, as Arab armies and then traders spread Islam west and south to Africa, east to Asia, and north into Europe (Bin Omar, 1993). As Islam spread, so too did the schools that taught the Qur'an. Like the religion they promulgated, these schools intermixed with local institutions and took on the distinctive cultural characteristics of the localities in which they were situated (Wagner, 1989, 1991). Indeed, these schools were the bedrock of a system of Islamic education that flourished in many Muslim countries in precolonial times.

The schools are frequently referred to as Qur'anic schools in English because of their focus on Qur'anic memorization. These schools as they persist today constitute an authentically non-Western tradition of education that predates the penetration of European institutions into the non-European world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While Qur'anic schools are historically significant in terms of the role they played in shaping the development of the Muslim world, they are not merely quaint, historical curiosities to be discovered through old manuscripts in the dusty archives of Harvard, Ilorin, or Al Azhar universities. In the early twenty-first century, Qur'anic schools continue to be vibrant actors in the daily lives of millions of children and communities worldwide.

What are Qur'anic Schools?

The archetype of traditional Islamic education across the Middle East and Africa was a one-room school, with a male teacher and several assistants (graduates of his school or advanced, older students) who taught children to

memorize the Qur'an through a combination of recitation and copying activities. Through memorization of the Qur'an, children learned to write and read in the Arabic language. The typical school consisted of students of varying ages, mostly males from about 7 to 20 years. The students and the teacher sat on straw mats or sheepskins on the floor. The Qur'an was usually the only printed text in evidence, if indeed the school was fortunate enough to have one. Students wrote with an inky mixture on a wooden slate called a *luh*. Support for the school came from the community, which supplied the school with space and housing and food for the teacher, and made decisions on the hiring of teachers and on the provision and kind of school resources necessary.

The teacher taught by one-on-one coaching of individual students or by working with small groups of students who were at the same level in their studies. Students also worked in groups (learning circles) and worked independently. Learning was self-paced. As a student completed one verse or chapter of the Qur'an, the teacher assigned him/her a new verse. There were no formal tests, only the demonstration of mastery—reciting and writing the verse properly. Corporal punishment was widely used both to remedy misbehavior and to punish a student for not memorizing or reciting well. Students often came and went, depending on their family's need for help with work around the home; no stigma was attached to dropping out of school. Talented students memorized the entire Qur'an and studied other subjects—interpretation, translation, or Arabic poetry—before perhaps moving on to higher Islamic institutions (Wagner & Lotfi, 1980; Pollak, 1982; Houtsonen, 1994; Eickelman, 1985).

During and after the period of colonization in the Middle East and Africa, Qur'anic schools had to compete for students with the modern public schools introduced by the British, French, and others. By the 1960s, a diploma from a modern government school was more likely to lead to employment in government-sector jobs and to economic advancement than the Islamic school *ijaza*, which attested to the mastering of Qur'anic materials. However, despite the exploding demand for modern public schooling over the last 40–50 years and the inclusion of instruction in the history, rites, and beliefs of Islam in public schools in many muslim countries, Qur'anic schools have not been subsumed or eliminated as a separate and distinct form of education.

In Morocco, for example, approximately 80% of all children still attend some form of Islamic school for a portion of their school years (Wagner, 1998, 1989). Islamic education has seen a steady resurgence in Nigeria (Reichmuth, 1993), where many Islamic schools, especially in the north, now compete with public schools because they offer a full range of subjects in addition to the standard religious instruction. UNICEF estimates that 40% of students in Senegal attend Islamic schools (Kamara, 1995). The significance of traditional Islamic schools, therefore, lies in their current work as much as in their historical roots.

Indeed, these traditional Islamic schools are “perhaps the most important example of indigenous education in today’s world” (Wagner, 1989, pp. 5–6). Whether as the sole source of education or as supplementary “after-school” schools, summer schools, or preschools, Islamic schools reach millions and millions of children worldwide.

Qur’anic Schools Today

The crisis of 9/11 has created a wave of interest in Islamic schools beyond a heretofore limited circle of education specialists, policy-makers, and development workers. Political leaders from Western countries like the U.S. and Great Britain, as well as from predominantly Muslim countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia, began to wonder if these schools were instrumental in supporting global terrorism and whether or not they constituted a threat to the security of existing regimes.

While undoubtedly there are politicized Qur’anic schools that preach intolerant or violent messages, research on Islamic schools in Morocco, Yemen, and Nigeria suggests to me that these types of schools are rare exceptions among the millions of Islamic schools that unfurl their straw mats and open their doors daily in Kan Kan and Labe, Kano and Lagos, Marrakech and Fes, Sana’a and Ibb, Cairo, Jakarta, Detroit, Cape Town, Islamabad, and beyond.

The purpose of this book, then, is to describe several forms of contemporary Qur’anic schools, using examples from Morocco, Yemen, and Nigeria, and in so doing to provide an alternative framework for understanding the role that various types of Qur’anic schools play in both preserving and transforming traditional social, educational, and religious practices in Muslim communities in these countries. As a corrective to both the recent stereotypes generated by 9/11 and the largely negative characterizations of these schools and their methods dating to the early part of the twentieth century, this book presents a more nuanced perspective that encompasses and makes more explicit the value of their particular pedagogy as well as their underlying assumptions about learning, the development and socialization of children, and the process of becoming a member of the Islamic community of practice or *umma*.

The impetus for this book predates 9/11 as does most of the actual in-country research discussed herein, with the exception of Nigeria. Indeed, the original research conducted in Morocco and Yemen focused on the educational methodologies practiced in the traditional Islamic school classroom and on the sociocultural roles of these institutions vis-à-vis their communities. The core data for this book come from an eleven-month ethnographic study conducted on Islamic preschools in Morocco in 1998. Supplementary data come from two smaller research endeavors: a three-month ethnographic study of two Islamic schools in Sana’a (Yemen) (1997), and a needs assessment and subsequent study of parental attitudes from several Islamic schools in

Kano, Nasarawa, and Lagos (Nigeria) (2002/3) as part of a U.S. Agency for International Development literacy and numeracy improvement project.

The Morocco study provides insights into the phenomenon of Qur'anic memorization and the role of traditional Islamic schools in both cultural preservation and change. The Yemen and Nigerian case studies are much smaller than the Morocco study, but they provide useful illustrations and counterpoints both to the Morocco case and to the prevailing literature. In particular, they are helpful in illustrating the variety of Islamic school types and in describing the commonalities found in the pedagogical methods, stakeholder (parent, teacher, student, community member) attitudes, and roles that these schools fulfill across very different contexts and cultures.

Research for this Book

The choices of Morocco, Yemen, and Nigeria are both accidental and purposeful. My Peace Corps experience in Morocco led me to an interest in the Arab world. Walks through the old medina in Tangier, where schoolchildren sat with a teacher chanting the Qur'an, spawned my interest in Qur'anic schools. My experience teaching in the English department at the University in Tetouan, Morocco, exposed me to Morocco's system of higher education. Many of my students were critical of a system they said was introduced by the French and did not serve Morocco's needs, and I began to wonder about the type of system that had been in place before the French arrived. This question led to a master's research into education, with a focus on Qur'anic schooling in Morocco. My subsequent professional work in international development education brought me to Yemen and helped me develop contacts with educators in Yemen. When I took up doctoral work, I decided to pursue my interest in Qur'anic schooling for my dissertation. I was lucky enough to have scholarships for research in both Yemen and Morocco. I chose to carry out a pilot study in Yemen while studying Arabic there, prior to embarking on my dissertation research in Morocco. Thus, the two schools that I studied at Sana'a in 1997 were my first formal sorties into the world of Qur'anic schools. They were very traditional in many ways, despite some modern flourishes. They bore out much of what I had read in the literature about Qur'anic schools, except that they did not seem as stultifying or rigid as some of the common Qur'anic school stereotypes. Continuing on to Morocco directly after the research in Yemen was very interesting. The schools I encountered in the town of Chefchouan (in northern Morocco) had many more variations than those I saw in Yemen. There seemed to be two main types:—very traditional and somewhat “modern” (for lack of a better term). The somewhat “modern” schools—called *kuttab*s in Morocco—were especially interesting. They seemed to be flourishing in Chefchouan. They served close to 700 children and were prevalent in other cities and towns. I got in touch with an

organization called the Green Zawiya Association for Education and Culture (GZA) through their representative in Chefchouan. The president of the GZA gave me open access to the schools, which I attended daily as an observer during my almost eleven months in Chefchouan. I was also an observer at a very traditional Qur'anic school that I came into contact with through a family that hosted me in Chefchouan. This school was called a *msid* in Arabic.

Nigeria

My professional work in international development at a US based non-governmental, non profit organization, led to my work on an educational development project in Nigeria. This project powered on upgrading the quality of literacy and numeracy education in selected districts in three states in Nigeria. As many primary aged students attend private Islamic schools in place of public schools the project included some of these schools within the scope of its work. This provided me with the opportunity to visit and interview stakeholders of several Islamic schools in Kano, Nasarawa and Lagos, Nigeria.

Organization of the Book

Chapter 1 describes the history and characteristics of Qur'anic schooling in more depth, paying particular attention to traditional ideas on learning, understanding, and knowledge that continue to influence contemporary Islamic educational institutions, including contemporary Qur'anic schools. Chapter 2 outlines a new framework for understanding the role of Qur'anic schools as sites of apprenticeship in the social discourse of Muslim communities of practice, through reconceptualizing the learning process in Qur'anic schools as a form of legitimate peripheral participation. Chapter 3 presents research on two Qur'anic schools in Sana'a, Yemen, highlighting the role that these schools play in fostering a sense of holistic health, as they facilitate intergenerational discourse, promote spiritual growth, and build a sense of identity and belonging in children. As the first site of formal research that I conducted on Qur'anic schooling, this experience in Yemen provided food for thought as I moved on to Morocco the following year. The Yemen case pointed out to me the complex and nuanced ways in which Qur'anic schools did more than simply teach religion. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 all focus on Morocco—the core case of this book—and build on the nascent associations between Qur'anic schools and holistic health identified from the Yemen study. Since the Morocco study was much more in depth, it fleshes out the significance of Qur'anic memorization as a form of learning and looks at the ways in which Qur'anic schools foster both preservation and change in their social contexts. Chapter 4 provides details about the research context and looks at the trend toward the development of Qur'anic

preschools, as well as the ways in which these preschools still manage to preserve aspects of traditional educational practices. Chapter 5 gives information on embodiment and memorization, framing the process of memorization as one of embodying the Qur'an and thus facilitating a greater understanding of memorization as a form of learning. Chapter 6 discusses the ways in which Moroccan Qur'anic preschools embody social change and transformation, especially through their use of female teachers, the inclusion of female students, and the elimination of corporal punishment. Chapter 7, using examples from Nigeria, examines the ways in which Qur'anic schools have come to "imitate" public schools in terms of subject offerings and teaching methods and the significance of this trend for traditional Islamic pedagogy, which, in many cases, was more innovative and student centered than that which has replaced it.

This book contains a series of vignettes that are drawn from my field notes, journal, and the interviews I conducted in each of the countries. I have interjected some analytical comments into certain vignettes. In some cases, these comments display a hindsight that was not present in the original journal or fieldnote entry. These interjections make the significance of the vignette and the subsequent discussion of it in the text clearer for the reader. I have chosen to use vignettes because they succinctly capture key moments in the research and illustrate some of my thesis points far better than straight expository writing. I also use them because the reasons for studying at a Qur'anic school are more nuanced and refined than portrayed in the media today. Images of militancy abound in the Western press. However, the average Qur'anic school, whether in Sana'a, Lagos or Fes tends to be both more innocuous and more profound than its image in the Western press. The vignettes serve to introduce readers to the schools through alternative yet, equally valid imagery. The use of illustrations—vignettes—is an attempt to capture the ordinary yet compelling aspects of these schools. Essentially, through the vignettes, I try to capture some of the flavor of Morocco, Yemen, and Nigeria as well as the key characters in my research, the process of integrating myself into the town of Chefchouan, and the ambiance of the Qur'anic schools that I studied at each place. The vignettes are recognizable because they are in italic typeface and are indented from the regular text.

In terms of representing people in the vignettes and the book in general, I use pseudonyms. The Green Zawiya Association for Education and Culture (GZA) is the actual name of the Qur'anic school association that I worked with most closely in Morocco. The president of the association asked that I not use a pseudonym for the association as he was pleased that the GZA schools would be the subject of research. For key "characters" to whom I refer quite often, I have developed first-name pseudonyms. In some instances, I

refer to informants by category—that is, “a *kuttab* teacher,” “respondents from the girls’ school,” “a local government official,” and the like.

Finally, I use several Arabic words throughout the book, for example, *kuttab* and *msid* (both words for Qur’anic schools). All are in italics. The first time I use an Arabic word I give the English definition; subsequent uses are simply italicized. For the word “Qur’an,” within the text I use the former transliteration, which is, I feel, the most accurate because it represents the sound of the Arabic letter qaf (by using the English letter Q) as well as the hamza, a guttural sound (by using the apostrophe). However, for the title of the book, in order to make it more accessible to researchers, who would not locate it unless they spelled Qur’an thusly, I have omitted the apostrophe, spelling it as “Quran,” something more likely to surface for a researcher looking for sources on the subject.

CHAPTER 1

Islamic Schooling

Historical Roots and Current Configurations

There are various discourses that address aspects of the educational significance of Qur'anic schooling. Studies on Qur'anic schools throughout the Muslim world, from Morocco in the west to Indonesia in the east, have tended to fall into three categories: historical, anthropological, and pedagogical (concerned with learning and instruction).

It is important to preface the discussion of Qur'anic schooling below with two notes. First, much, if not most, of the recent literature on Qur'anic schools focuses on the Arab world, a great deal of it on Morocco. As traditional Qur'anic schools developed in Arabia during and after the time of the Prophet Mohammed, the historical roots of Islamic education are in Arabia (Bin Omar, 1993). As Islam spread west to Africa and east to Asia, so too Qur'anic schools spread to these regions, intermixed with local institutions, and took on distinctive cultural characteristics of the locality (Wagner, 1989, 1991). Thus, local customs and adaptations notwithstanding, the historical and educational roots of Qur'anic schools are in the Arab world.

Second, the terms "Qur'anic schooling" and "Islamic education" or "Islamic schooling" are often used interchangeably in much of the literature (Houtsonen, 1991). The terms Islamic education and Islamic schooling are broader than the term Qur'anic schooling as they encompass any level of traditional Muslim education. The term Qur'anic schooling is frequently used to refer to an institution that focuses almost exclusively on facilitating memorization of the Qur'an or some Qur'anic verses. I use the term Qur'anic schooling in this more specific sense and I use the term Islamic school to refer to a school, such as are found in Nigeria, where the Qur'an and religious

subjects are taught in addition to other secular subjects, in varying degrees, such as English, mathematics, science, history, etc. To draw a parallel, Islamic schools are similar in mission to Catholic schools, where religious and secular subjects form the curriculum. In this sense, Islamic is simply an adjective to designate a school whose mission is, to some degree, religious. In the strictest sense, all Qur'anic schools are Islamic schools but not all Islamic schools are Qur'anic, since many teach far more than basic Qur'anic studies and grammar. Finally, I use the term Islamic education to refer to the entire system of traditional schooling from preschool through university level, which could include Qur'anic schools as well as Islamic schools.

There are many other words floating about that designate some sort of Islamic school—*madrasa* is frequently heard in discussions about Pakistan or Afghanistan, *pondoks* in Indonesia, *kuttabs* in Morocco, and *halaqahs*, *masjids*, *msids*, and *medersas* in other places. Most of these terms are derived from Arabic words for school. They were established in particular contexts long ago and carry meanings weighted with the assumptions and history of those places. For example, the word *madrasa* means “school” in Arabic. It is frequently used in Morocco to refer to public schools when people are speaking Arabic. In Pakistan, *madrasa* designates a particular religious school where the Qur'an is memorized. In West Africa, the term *medersa* is a derivation of the word *madrasa* and generally refers to a traditional Qur'anic school. Because these terms connote different institutions in different contexts, I have elected to use the terms Qur'anic schools and Islamic schools. All of the above-mentioned terms can be slotted into one or the other category, depending on the degree to which they combine a focus on Qur'anic memorization with other subjects.

Historical Background

Many historical and descriptive studies have been undertaken by Muslim or Western scholars interested in documenting the background and characteristics of this unique form of schooling in different countries. In particular, Bin Omar has recently delineated the roots and the development of Qur'anic schools, starting at the time of the Prophet Mohammed (early seventh century AD) and progressing through the golden age of Islamic civilization (twelfth and thirteenth centuries AD). He has synthesized a variety of Arabic and English language resources on this topic. In addition, Wagner looks at the development of Qur'anic schools through the current day, often focusing on Morocco. Abu-Talib, a Moroccan scholar, has written on the specific features of Moroccan Qur'anic schools from the past up until today, and Ashraf explores ideas of knowledge and the person in Islamic conceptions of education. Brenner provides a fine, detailed history of Islamic and French schooling in West Africa. These authors provide

relevant background information on how and why Qur'anic schools came into being, information that sheds light on their present status and mission in today's world and specifically in Morocco.

Early Islamic Educational Institutions

The earliest Islamic school was the mosque; the Prophet Mohammed would sit in the mosque and instruct his companions in the sacred texts. The companions would sit around him in a semicircle (so that no one would be behind him). The assembly of learners was referred to as the *majlis* (council) or, more frequently, the *halaqah* (which means learning circle). Learners memorized the Qur'an, which had not yet been written down, and learned about God from the Prophet. This was the principal form of schooling during the time of the Prophet and, after his death, during the time of his companions. *Halaqahs* continued to function throughout the expansion of Islam, well into the ninth century. Teachers would associate themselves with a particular mosque and people would travel from all over to study in a particular *halaqah*. Some mosques even had several *halaqahs*. The curriculum included not only religious subjects during the later periods but also philology, grammar, chemistry, physics, arithmetic, algebra, and geometry (Bin Omar, 1993).

A second form of education during prophetic times was the *suffah* school. *Suffah* refers to a room attached to the mosque in which travelers or homeless people resided. Residents of the *suffah* studied "reading, writing, Muslim law and the memorizing of chapters of the sciences" under the tutelage of the Prophet himself (Bin Omar, 1993, p. 56). In terms of form, since they were quasi-residential, *suffahs* were precursors of the later *madrasas* (boarding schools), where students lived and studied at higher levels (Bin Omar, 1993). *Madrasas* were often located in cities, drawing students from the surrounding rural areas who had excelled in Qur'anic memorization. The city of Fes in Morocco has many beautiful old *madrasas*, which date from centuries ago and attest to Fes's position as the intellectual capital of Morocco.

There is some dispute as to when elementary education developed in Islam, whether during the time the Prophet was alive or after his death. The pre-Islamic precursor of the Qur'anic school taught Arabic literacy, arithmetic, poetry, and history. With the development and expansion of Islam, the mission of the institution changed to include a focus on memorizing the Qur'an. Indeed, as Wagner points out: "One meaning of the word Koran is 'recitation,' and for Moslems, prayer is usually interpreted to mean the recitation of the Koran. Thus, the teaching of proper recitation through the memorization of the Koran has been a central feature of Islamic education" (Wagner, 1991, p. 265). Memorization was, indeed, the main form of preservation of the Qur'an in the years after the Prophet's death, as it was not written down for several years after he died.

Activity during this period of Islamic expansion also led to the development of the science of Islamic jurisprudence. The companions of the Prophet did not have the same authority as the Prophet in making law or deciding on administrative procedures, pressing concerns in the wake of the expansion of Islam into new regions. Establishment of the *madrasa* resulted out of the establishment of the science of jurisprudence to train students in the complex interpretation Islamic texts for legal and administrative purposes. As the mosques were not sufficient to house scholars, residence halls (*khan*) were established near the mosques to house students and teachers (Bin Omar, 1993). By the tenth century, the mosque-*khan* arrangement turned into the *madrasa* and “[b]y the thirteenth century AD, great Islamic universities had been established in Cairo, Tunis, Fes, and elsewhere, drawing advanced students and teachers from the ever-expanding Islamic community (*umma*)” (Wagner, 1991, p. 265).

Mission of Early Islamic Educational Institutions

Formal Islamic education developed out of the need to preserve the word of God in the form of the Qur’an, by ensuring “proper” memorization, and to understand both the Qur’an and the *Hadith* (narratives about/sayings of the Prophet). In the early years after Mohammed’s death in AD 632, the Qur’an had not been written down. An official version of how it should be recited had been agreed upon, but it had not been formally recorded and its preservation relied on the fact that it was memorized by the companions. When it was written down, the earliest Arabic texts lacked vocalization and punctuation. This perpetuated mistakes in the recitation of the Qur’an, which affected the meaning of the message. (Often in Arabic, the difference between two words with the same root might be a matter of which syllable is stressed or where the vowel markings fall.) The rapid expansion of Islam exacerbated the need for schools and teachers throughout the newly conquered territories, so that the Qur’an could be transmitted to the newly converted *exactly as it had been given to Mohammed* (Bin Omar, 1993).

From these Qur’anic schools, educational institutions grew to focus on a wider variety of subjects at higher levels, including mathematics, philosophy, natural sciences, medicine, law, grammar, and literature.

Structure of Early Islamic Educational Institutions

In general, precolonial Islamic education in the Middle East and North/West Africa was organized around a system of Qur’anic schools, *madrasas*, and mosque-universities. Qur’anic schools were found in both urban and rural areas but mosque-universities and, to a large extent, *madrasas* were generally located only in cities. In general, these schools were loosely organized from an administrative point of view. Students studied and progressed at their own

pace in mastering material. There was no set school year and no formal tests. Teachers coached students individually or in small groups, listening to them recite and correcting both their oral and written mistakes. When a student finished at one school—which was usually a matter of deciding that he wanted to move on to another place or teacher—he would be given a letter by his teacher, which was essentially an attestation stating the level attained in his studies. Attestations from famous teachers were sought after and prestigious (Eickelman, 1985; Abu-Talib, 1987). Qualified students could open their own schools in villages and receive children for instruction. Teachers of the Qur'an were given great respect. In Morocco, for example, there is a proverb that says that when fathers bring their sons to the *fqih* (Qur'anic teacher) to learn the Qur'an, they would tell the teacher "if you kill him I will bury him," meaning that the *fqih* had free rein with the child. (Many of my Moroccan interviewees quoted this saying when enlightening me on education in Morocco.) This also points to the great prestige associated with learning the Qur'an. It was considered so important and sacred that learning it was worth almost any punishment. Another folk saying goes as follows: "any part of the body struck while memorizing the Qur'an will not burn in hell" (Wagner, 1983b, p. 184).

Because of their focus on rote memorization of the Qur'an, not to mention their use of corporal punishment, traditional Islamic education was often described as backward, uninspiring to the student, and unproductive socially. In 1911, MacDonald said of Islamic education: "It trains the memory and the power of reasoning—always in formal methods—and then gives to neither any adequate materials on which to work" (MacDonald, 1911, pp. 288–289). More recently, Zerdoumi has characterized Qur'anic education as "... a purely mechanical, monotonous form of study in which nothing is likely to arouse his [the child's] interest. The school thus tends to curb his intellectual and moral activity at the precise moment when it should be developing rapidly" (Zerdoumi, 1970, p. 196).

However, a general description of the structure of learning in Islamic higher education portrays it as very open and well rounded, emphasizing choice, autonomy, access, and personal development:

... its internal structure nevertheless showed an originality which made, for example the Quarawiyyin university comparable to an American college. This originality could be seen: (a) in the material organization of education since the place of learning was open both to the student (in the restricted and classical sense of the term) and also to the ordinary citizen who wished to deepen his knowledge of theology without being hindered by strict and paralyzing administrative procedures; (b) in its independence from the administrative and political authorities; (c) in educational terms, for real importance was attached to the periods of training being imposed, emphasis was placed

on the freedom of choice of the student and on continuing individual efforts to acquire knowledge; and (d) in that the notions of backwardness, wastage, failures, and maladjustment to school, so important in an educational network subject to the modern demands of production were not considerations in this system of education. (Lahjomri, 1985, p. 3417)

In their emphasis on students learning at their own pace, free from notions of uniformity and failure, Islamic institutions of old had already put into practice many educational ideals that are considered relatively progressive in today's "modern" educational systems in the U.S. and Europe. These same features were characteristic of learning at lower levels as well, for example, in the village Qur'anic schools for younger children and in the *madrasas* (Wagner, 1983b).

Ideas of Education and Knowledge in Islam

Education has always been very important in Islamic traditions. Muslims are exhorted in the Qur'an to learn and seek knowledge, both men and women alike. Knowledge (*'ilm*) is referred to in the Qur'an 750 times, ranking it as the third most used term after God (*Allah*—2,800 references) and Lord (*Rabb*—950 references). This testifies to its centrality and importance in religious tradition (Rosenthal, 1970, pp. 20–21). In addition, sayings of the Prophet Mohammed contain numerous references to the importance of seeking and acquiring both knowledge and education.

There are two types of knowledge in Islam: revealed knowledge and knowledge that comes from reason. Revealed knowledge comes from God; knowledge derived from reason comes from the physical universe, the human mind, and history or study of societies, both local and foreign (Bin Omar, 1993). Revelational knowledge is held to be of a higher form than knowledge based on reason because

... it comes directly from God, is unique in certitude, and has a fundamentally beneficial nature ... All true knowledge or science should help us to understand and realize the meaning and the spirit of divine knowledge in its widest sense, for personal and social development. (Bin Omar, 1993, p. 29)

Humans need knowledge derived from human reason to understand and interpret revealed knowledge. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of reason in confirming and expanding existing knowledge.

The Qur'an is the penultimate example of revealed knowledge for Muslims because it is considered to be the actual word of God. Memorization was related to the preservation of the Qur'an in its exact form, as revealed to Mohammed. On a basic level, memorization of the

Qur'an is associated with a knowledge of the Qur'an, although not in the Western sense of being able to understand and explain it but in the sense of being able to recite it. While the young children I observed were unable to explain what they had memorized, they did "know" some of the Qur'an in the primary sense of being able to recite parts of it. Thus, knowledge is a nuanced concept encompassing ideas of mnemonic possession, understanding, and the ability to reason (Eickelman, 1985).

Role of Education in the Development of the Person and Society

The underlying philosophy of Islamic education is that knowledge comes from the development of the whole person, that is, the physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions of the person. This can be demonstrated by looking at three frequently used words in Arabic for education—*tarbiya*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dib*. *Tarbiya* refers to education in its broadest sense, meaning the development of the human personality and the nurturing and rearing aspects of education. *Ta'lim* refers to instruction involving mental activity, which develops reasoning and trains the mind, and *ta'dib* refers to the training of the mind and soul in terms of proper behavior or ethical conduct (Bin Omar, 1993, pp. 5–10).

Bin Omar argues that an accurate definition of the goals of Islamic education must encompass all of the three aspects referred to above. That these aspects cannot be separated is attested to in the Qur'an, which refers to aspects of the soul—the essence of a human being—as *ruh* (spirit), *qalb* (heart), *nafs* (self), and *'aql* (intellect). Education, encompassing the meanings of *tarbiya*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dib*, is concerned with developing the essence of the human being (the soul—spirit, heart, self, and intellect) (Bin Omar, 1993). In more recent European and American traditions, the intellect is often emphasized as the primary focus of education.

Likewise, Ashraf characterizes the difference in educational philosophies between the West and the Islamic world as stemming from different conceptions of man and society in these two cultures. The Islamic concept of education goes back to God teaching Adam the names of all things in creation:

Teaching Adam, peace be on him, the names of things, means making him aware of the essences of creation, in other words of the attributes of God and the relationship between God and His creation. *It is not merely an intellectual awareness divorced from spiritual realization.* It is spiritual realization controlling, guiding and sharpening the intellect, creating in Adam, peace be on him, a sense of reverence and awe for God and making him able to use this knowledge for the benefit of humanity (emphasis added). (Ashraf, 1985, p. 4)

Thus, education—the quest for knowledge—for Muslims necessarily includes religious study; spiritual knowledge is as important as scientific, empirical knowledge and indeed complements it: “Many contemporary Western pedagogical concepts treat education as a separable institutional activity, but this idea is inappropriate to learning in the traditional Islamic context” (Eickelman, 1985, p. 65). Spiritual development is an integral part of education in the Muslim world. The notion of secular is not invoked in schooling in most Muslim countries today and most public schools in the Muslim world still teach Islamic religion in the normative sense.

Eickelman’s work in particular suggests that traditional Qur’anic schools served different (albeit important) educational purposes in their societies and need to be reexamined in terms of their larger cultural role. Traditional Qur’anic education was considered valuable because it passed on sacred, cultural, and religious knowledge. To be learned was to have a certain prestige. Knowledge was not valued as much for economic reasons as cultural reasons. Traditionally, parents sent their children to Qur’anic schools to memorize the Qur’an. The ultimate goal was for the student to memorize the entire Qur’an. This was a very prestigious accomplishment.

There was a high rate of attrition in these schools, as full memorization of the Qur’an took years and was difficult work. Attrition did not result from failure, however. It related more to life circumstances and there were niches in society for people with varying levels of education; hence, leaving school at a certain age did not constitute a failure (Wagner, 1991). The rate of attrition, as Eickelman points out, lent more value to the feat of actually memorizing the whole Qur’an for those who managed to do so.

The high rate of attrition from quranic schools supports the notion that mnemonic “possession” can be considered a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 80). In practice, memorization of the Qur’an was accomplished primarily by the children of relatively prosperous households or by those whose fathers or guardians were already literate. I say primarily, for education was still a means to social mobility, especially if a poor student managed to progress despite all obstacles through higher, post-Qur’anic education (cf. Green, 1976, pp. 218–221). (Eickelman, 1985, pp. 64–65)

Students who stayed in school and reached an advanced level could eventually move on to one of the great mosque-universities like Al Azhar in Cairo or Al Quarawiyn in Fes.

Education meant more than social mobility though. As Eickelman points out, cultural capital also had a relational aspect to it. Learning took place not just in a classroom or learning circle; it became part of the everyday life of the student, the family, and the community:

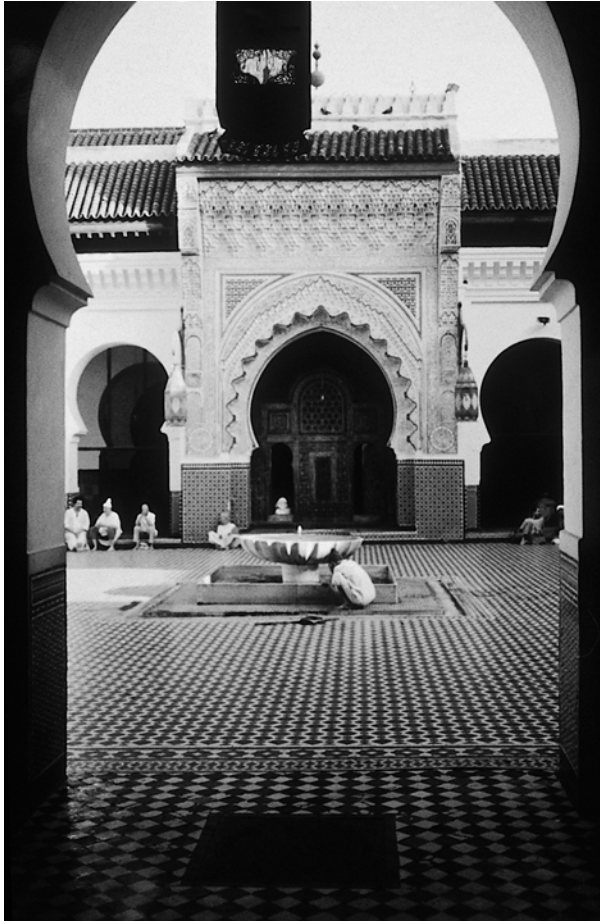


Fig. 1.1 Entranceway to the Great Al Quarawiyn Mosque-University in Fes 1998. Photo credit: Helen N. Boyle.

The notion of cultural capital implies more than the possession of the material resources to allow a child to spend six to eight years in the memorization of the Qur'an; it also implies a sustained adult discipline over the child. Many contemporary Western pedagogical concepts treat education as a separable institutional activity, but this idea is inappropriate to learning in the traditional Islamic context. Students' fathers, elder brothers, other close relatives—including women in some cases (e.g., Waterbury 1972, pp. 31–32)—and peers, especially at later stages of learning, were integrally involved in the learning process. (Eickelman, 1985, p. 65)

Thus, the mode of transmission of traditionally valued knowledge was very important for the relationships it fostered and the cultural capital that accrued to parents and relatives as well as the child.

Contemporary Islamic/Qur'anic Schooling

While there is a great deal of historical information available on Islamic education, there is less information to be found on contemporary Islamic education. Anthropologically or sociologically oriented studies of Qur'anic schools look at their function, both explicit and implicit, in Muslim communities. These studies are fewer, but contribute significantly to exploring the broader cultural and educational roles that Qur'anic schools play in contemporary Muslim societies (Eickelman, 1978, 1985, 1992; Houtsonen, 1991; Lambek, 1993; Antoun, 1993, 1989; Keddie, 1972; L'Eretie, 1912; Michaux-Bellaire, 1911; Brenner, 2001, 1993; Steele, 1991; Spratt & Wagner, 1984). In the post-9/11 world, there is a more conscious scramble to assemble data and information on Islamic education as part of an overall concern with the messages they are communicating to their students about the "West" and about how Islam and Muslims should react to and interact with the "West" in today's world.

Another source of information on Islamic schooling has been international development agencies (U.S. Agency for International Development, UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank), which, even pre-9/11, began to develop an interest in the policy and curriculum aspects of Qur'anic schooling vis-à-vis modern public schooling. In addition to supplying useful data on the current practices and scope of Qur'anic schooling in various countries, research arising from the field of international development has tended to examine whether and how Qur'anic schools can be used to extend or deepen the overall mission and quality of contemporary government-run schools in these countries.

The development literature has the virtue of being slightly pragmatic, in that it is generally concerned with being descriptive and with charting out ways in which the educational mission of Islamic and Qur'anic schools could be supported to improve literacy rates, help the transition of children into the public school system, change their teaching methods, and so on. The schools are generally seen as places where children come together to be educated and as places of opportunity for educational quality improvement and expansion.

This literature encompasses comparative/descriptive studies on the type of education imparted in contemporary Qur'anic schools, its effect on cognitive development and further learning and on Qur'anic school pedagogy, describing classroom characteristics, teaching methods, and teacher/student interaction (Bouzoubaa, 1998; Easton & Peach, 1997; El Sammani, Hassoun, Abdalla, & Gadir, 1985; IPE, 1984; Lamdasni, Benlafkih, Fatihi, Elhosni, & Alaoui, 1993; Wagner & Spratt, 1987; Wagner, 1989).

Mission of Contemporary Qur'anic Schools

The mission of contemporary Qur'anic schools continues to be the development of Islamic religious awareness, specifically through memorization of some or all of the Qur'an. However, because they no longer have a monopoly on the educational landscape in most Muslim countries, contemporary Qur'anic schools have also had to stretch themselves and develop wider missions or new niches for themselves. Because public schools in many Muslim schools teach religion, Qur'anic schools have had to respond to shifting societal needs in order to remain relevant.

Because Qur'anic schools have a limited academic mission by contemporary standards in both Muslim and Western countries, they have often been criticized for not meeting the needs of developing societies seeking to initiate their people into the world economy. In addition, because Qur'anic schools emphasize rote memorization of the Qur'an, they have often been criticized by Western and modern Muslim scholars as backward, uninteresting, and stultifying to students. Miller (1977) suggested that the "reflective" (i.e., rote) nature of the training provided in Qur'anic schools in Morocco actually impeded the mission of modern public schools. More recent research on Morocco points out some of the innovative features of Qur'anic schooling, which belie claims that it is stultifying or without educational value vis-à-vis "modern" educational ideas (Bouzoubaa, 1998; Darwish, 1981; Wagner, 1983a, 1998).

Wagner found reason to be optimistic about the use of Qur'anic schools to promote better-quality learning by pointing out that many of the outcomes of public and Qur'anic schools can be said to have characteristics in common:

In spite of numerous regional differences, Qur'anic schools can be said to teach children how to: (1) learn in a structured setting; (2) respect the teacher; (3) use language and recite in unison; (4) encode and decode an alphabet; (5) be a moral persona and a good citizen; and (6), more recently, do basic arithmetic. (Wagner, 1989, p. 8)

Since Qur'anic schools are often used as preschools for children (e.g., in Morocco), they could prepare students for public schooling by initiating them into the culture, behavior, and expectations of formal schooling, and possibly making them more ready to learn and succeed in school. The similarity of mission between modern and traditional schools extends beyond the behavioral and the content areas as well:

As it happens, many indigenous schools provide, as a by-product of religious training, language, cognitive, and social skills very similar to those which are taught in the contemporary secular school system. (Wagner, 1989, p. 7)

In this sense, the choice of Qur'anic schooling for a child, instead of public schooling, or at least as a supplement to it, would not deprive the child of

the types of developmental skills commonly associated with public schools.

In addition, Qur'anic schools are often sources of literacy. Traditionally, the idea of literacy in the Qur'anic school context included the ability to recite the Qur'an, although not necessarily the ability to decode words and sentences. However, even using the "modern" conception of literacy as encompassing the ability to read and write, Qur'anic schools do provide literacy education:

... Qur'anic school includes a number of common features for literacy instruction: oral memorization of the Qur'an; emphasis on correct (that is, accurate and aesthetic) oral recitation; training in the Arabic script; and strict authoritarian instruction. (Wagner, 1983a, p. 81)

Wagner also raises some questions as to whether rote learning is as detrimental as previously thought. He cites evidence from work he has done with the Morocco Literacy Project, which suggests that prior memorization helps reading acquisition in Arabic. He also cites work by Chomsky, which suggests that being able to orally recite passages before having to decode them helped children who normally had trouble with reading fluency (Wagner, 1983b, p. 187).

Lastly, in Muslim countries where Arabic is not the national language, Arabic literacy at least has the advantage of already being embedded in the culture through the religion. (Muslims worldwide are required to study the Qur'an in Arabic, not in translation, since the Qur'an, in Arabic, is believed to be the direct word of God.) Learning Arabic literacy could be better than imposed Western language literacy (Wagner, 1983a). Often literacy gained in traditional schools is not counted in national measures of literacy. Literacy rates, for example, in Senegal, would be higher if those who could read and write some Arabic were counted as literate.

Many of the parents I interviewed in Morocco and Yemen expressed these perceptions. They felt that sending their children to Qur'anic school better prepared the child for public school or helped to support the work of the public school, particularly with respect to Arabic literacy. Some cited the ability to memorize and recite Qur'anic verses acquired in Qur'anic schools as supportive of public school education, since the Qur'an is taught in most public schools as well. However, most parents emphasized the learning of letters, specifically how to write letters and how to recognize them (for pre-school children) and the knowledge of proper Arabic grammar (for older children). In Nigeria, parents tended to feel that the overall quality of instruction was better in the Islamic school than in the public school. Some parents also alluded to the idea of habituating their children to being in school—learning how to sit in rows and listen to the teacher.

Economic Considerations and the Qur'anic School

Houtsonen conducted a study of traditional Qur'anic schools in a village in southern Morocco. (The study was conducted under the auspices of the Finnish International Development Agency.) He found that parents viewed traditional schools as a very sensible alternative to modern schooling, one that resonated with their desire for community and tradition.

Life in Bounaamane is at a crossroads between tradition and modernity. Tradition in education can be explained both by the poverty and underdevelopment of the region and by the cultural habits of the people. Parents are ambivalent toward Western-style education. On the one hand, they are aware of the links between schooling and employment in the modern sector and are often proud when their children have acquired such skills as literacy and the ability to speak Arabic and French. On the other hand, they have misgivings about the economic implications of modern education and its impact on traditional beliefs and life-styles. The decision not to enroll a child in the modern school is not necessarily economically irrational or based on religious ideas. It can be rational because in the present labor markets and socio-economic situation, modern education is useless and expensive for these people. When compared with modern education, Qur'anic education is cheap and well suited to local social and economic activities. (Houtsonen, 1994, p. 497)

Modern education constitutes more of an expense than many parents can afford. Qur'anic schools are reasonable by comparison, as students do not need books, smocks, and backpacks. Qur'anic instruction relies on a slate and slate pencil or chalk, a much more economically feasible investment for poor families.

In an area like Chefchouan (site of the Morocco research described in this book), where Qur'anic schools are generally viewed as a precursor to public schools (as opposed to an alternative to them), economic considerations are still important. Preschools constitute more of an expense than many parents can afford, since kindergarten and preschools (basically synonymous concepts in Morocco) are generally private and therefore must be paid for. Many of the parents I interviewed mentioned that they could not afford private kindergartens. In their estimation, *kut-tabs* "level the playing field" so that children of low-income people could compete (and succeed) in public schools with children whose parents could afford to send them to a kindergarten or preschool. The Moroccan Qur'anic school association that ran schools in Chefchouan said explicitly that helping low-income children succeed in public school is one of its primary goals.



Fig. 1.2 A contemporary Qur'anic preschool in Morocco 1998. Photo credit: Helen N. Boyle.

Quality of School Experience

Houtsonen maintains that parental considerations for selecting Qur'anic schools as alternatives to public school are not all economic. Parents are concerned with the quality of experience that their children will have in school:

On the basis of his research on Jbala rural villages in northern Morocco, Zouggari maintains that economic and material factors are not as important in the educational decisions of the families as they are usually thought to be. In addition to values and habits, experiences and the expectations of the benefits of education and success at school have an effect on these educational decisions and strategies. (Houtsonen, 1994, p. 493)

The contrast between the structure and values of Qur'anic schools and Western education is striking. In Western education, the focus is on grades (pass or fail), the system is very bureaucratized, classes are age segregated and grouped into levels, and children are expected to progress at a uniform pace. Parents, concerned with the quality of the experience for their children, are quite rational in turning to the Qur'anic school for a more positive experience. In many public school systems in the Arab world and West Africa, there is a high rate of attrition and repetition in the public schools due to the rigid examination process, and children are in constant fear of failing out of the system. There are more students than there are places at the higher levels; hence, the system is designed to weed students out. This is not the case with a Qur'anic school. Although students are weeded out, so to speak, in that many leave at various stages, leaving is a personal choice, often dictated by life circumstances as opposed to an examination. Competition for places is

also absent from this system, providing a more wholesome and affirming environment for children. Wagner points out that:

The development of modern educational methods and institutions in the Third World is often viewed as a key variable in promoting economic growth. Still, the present situation suggests that there may be a lack of fit between modern educational methods and indigenous schooling as it exists in traditional and developing societies. (Wagner, 1983a, pp. 82–83)

This issue of the lack of fit between modern and traditional educational systems is where differing cultural conceptions of education come into play.

Structure of Contemporary Islamic Education

In many ways, Qur'anic schools have changed little over the centuries. In other ways though, they have changed dramatically. Qur'anic memorization has been the core feature of Qur'anic education and this continues to be the case. However, varying by country, it is the form of Qur'anic schools that has changed. In many places, there is a trend toward imitating the structure and teaching methods of public primary schools. That is to say, instead of age-mixed classes, Qur'anic schools (and Islamic schools in general) are sorting children into grades based on age groups; they are bringing in desks and chairs instead of letting children sit on mats on the floors; blackboards are replacing *luhs*, foreign languages, mathematics, and science are creeping into the curriculum; teachers tend to use whole group instruction and lecture; and children do not work with each other as much in peer groups. These changes can be seen from Morocco to Indonesia. Islamic schools, which used to be fairly uniform in structure, including teaching methods, have now developed into a continuum of types, from those that are very traditional to those that are quite modern and almost indistinguishable from public schools. With the exception of Nigeria, the schools that I have researched in Yemen and Morocco fall toward the traditional end of the continuum, even as they evolve and change. Nonetheless, it is interesting to observe how the assumptions and features of traditional Islamic education play themselves out in these contemporary Qur'anic and Islamic schools from Yemen, Morocco, and Nigeria.

CHAPTER 2

Islam, Learning, and Communities of Practice

In this book, I am suggesting that through the process of Qur'anic learning, both Qur'anic memorization and the set of behaviors, practices, and values taught explicitly and implicitly in the Qur'anic schools, children are able to preserve an aspect of cultural and social knowledge central to a community of practice. Likewise, I am suggesting that contemporary Qur'anic schools help children and communities to mediate between the forces of traditionalism and modernism, by fostering and reflecting changes in daily life, social practices, and cultural values within a community of practice.

Situated Learning as a Conceptual Framework

I use the concept of situated learning—a model drawn from educational anthropology—to examine and interpret traditional Qur'anic schooling in light of its function and significance in given cultural contexts. In a model of situated learning, the learning process is described as one of *legitimate peripheral participation*; by gradually increasing participation in an activity, a learner moves from the periphery of knowledge toward the “center” of knowledge—that is, toward mastery. Thus, legitimate peripheral participation is a means for describing the *process* of learning through learning relationships in a community. This concept was developed and described by Lave and Wenger in *Situated Learning*:

... learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a

community. “Legitimate peripheral participation” provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. It concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice. A person’s intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a sociocultural practice. (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 29)

Based on the concept of legitimate peripheral participation and its application to Qur’anic schooling, two suppositions can be drawn. First, traditional Qur’anic schooling is a situated activity requiring a mastery of skill and knowledge and eventual participation in the practices and community of the practitioners. The schooling process thus embodies a form of legitimate peripheral participation. Situated learning is often associated with apprenticeship situations and less so with formal schooling. While Qur’anic schools are formal schools, the learning process within a Qur’anic school can nonetheless be characterized as a form of apprenticeship in the social discourse of Muslim communities of practice. These schools preserve and reshape that discourse, thus asserting their ability to not only be institutions of preservation but also institutes of change. For example, memorization of the Qur’an constitutes the preservation of a traditional skill—the ability to recite some of the Qur’an—that is central to the social life and values of a community of practice. At the same time, by altering their teaching methods to be less authoritarian, for example, as I have observed in Morocco and Yemen, or by employing female teachers, as in Morocco, Qur’anic schools both signal and reflect changing practices and values of the community, which also become part of the discourse that children master as they move from legitimate peripheral participation to full participation in a community of practice.

The second conceptual structure borrowed from this model relates to the community of practice. The theory of communities of practice rests on the idea of “learning as social participation” (Wenger, 1998, #145, p. 4). Participation in this sense refers not simply to joining a group or attending events but to “a more encompassing process of being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities” (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). I am characterizing Islam as a multilevel community of practice. The process of Qur’anic schooling facilitates student participation in social communities (local, national, and international communities of Islam) and thus facilitates the construction of Muslim identity for Qur’anic school students at the local, national, and international levels.

Islam as a Multitiered Community of Practice

A community of practice is characterized by three dimensions: “1) mutual engagement, 2) a joint enterprise and 3) a shared repertoire” (Wenger, 1998, #145, p. 73). Islam meets these three criteria, not just globally, but nationally and locally as well. First, mutual engagement means that people are engaged in “actions whose meanings they negotiate with one another” (Wenger, 1998, #145, p. 73), for example, praying, fasting, and reciting the Qur’an. Next, the idea of a joint enterprise as a characteristic of a community of practice is almost an extension of the definition of mutual engagement. A joint enterprise demands not only negotiated meanings but also negotiated (even tacitly) methods. In Islam for example, this could mean agreement and adherence to rules for praying, fasting, and reciting the Qur’an (for which there are seven accepted recitational styles). Even if the meaning attached to these actions is shared by community members, they do not “freestyle” in implementing them. They follow rules, tacit or explicit, for implementation that signal a joint enterprise. In this way, people are accountable to each other for following the rules (Wenger, 1998, #145, pp. 77–78). Lastly, a shared repertoire speaks to the forms of communication that structure and enable mutual engagement and make it possible to gel into a joint enterprise:

The repertoire of a community of practice includes routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice. The repertoire combines both reificative and participative aspects. It includes the discourse by which members create meaningful statements about the world, as well as the styles by which they express their forms of membership and their identities as members. (Wenger, 1998, #145, p. 83)

In Islam, the greeting “*salaam alyakum*,” which one can hear from Malaysia to the U.S. and from Egypt to South Africa, is one example. Women wearing the headscarf is also an example of membership expressed through a symbol or style of dress that is understood by multiple communities of practice.

If Islam meets the criteria for constituting a community of practice, according to Lave and Wenger, it must also be acknowledged that the community has multiple layers. Islam is a vast and diverse religion, with a core of common beliefs and practices that are interpreted and manifested differently at different levels, both nationally and locally.

All Muslims worldwide are considered members of the *umma*, or community of believers. Much as Catholics worldwide refer to themselves as members of a cross-national group of practitioners who share, if not cultures or languages, a core set of generalizable beliefs, dogma, and practices that allow them a common group identity, so too can Muslims lay claim to

a global community of practice. With Muslims scattered across the globe from North America and Europe, throughout Africa down to the Cape of Good Hope, across the far reaches of Asia and into the islands of the Pacific, the *umma* is diverse both culturally and linguistically.

The common aspects that unite Muslims include a belief in one God (the God of Abraham) and the belief that Mohammed was God's final prophet. Further, they share a belief in the prophets of Judaism and Christianity, the belief that the Qur'an as revealed to Mohammed is the literal and exact word of God, and the belief that there are five pillars or obligations involved in being Muslim. The five pillars are:

1. Witnessing that there is no God but God and that Mohammed is his prophet.
2. Praying five times a day.
3. Giving alms to the poor.
4. Fasting during the month of Ramadan.
5. Making one pilgrimage to Mecca during one's lifetime if one is physically and financially able.

The first pillar is generally considered the most important identity marker for Muslims, as it is what really makes them Muslim. In the religious sense, one is obliged to observe all the pillars to be considered a Muslim; however, the cultural sense of being a Muslim is slightly broader. For example, not fasting or not giving alms to the poor might earn one the label of "bad Muslim" or "one who is not observant." But one is still technically Muslim as long as one believes publicly, and does not actively disbelieve publicly, that there is no God but God and that Mohammed is his prophet. These five pillars and the other basic beliefs mentioned above form a universal core of practice and belief in Islam. While aspects of practice and belief vary by locale, the central tenets of Islam are global. Thus, diverse Muslims from Morocco to Indonesia to the U.S. view themselves as part of an *umma* or community of believers.

Different Islamic countries, with their individual cultural customs, form subcommunities of practice under the global *umma*. In parts of North and West Africa, Morocco, and Senegal, for example, maraboutism (praying to saints—deceased holy people—for blessings) is a popular form of religious practice within the framework of Islam. From the point of view of Islamic doctrine or scripture (the Qur'an and the Hadith, saying of the prophet), maraboutism is not Islamic (Eickelman, 1977) and is indeed against Islamic tenets, since it involves praying to beings other than God alone. Nevertheless, there are saints' tombs all over Morocco and Senegal, and people who strongly define themselves as Muslims pay visits and make pilgrimages to these tombs. One would never find this in Saudi Arabia.

A feature of the Moroccan community of practice is a focus on Qur'anic memorization. In Morocco, the importance of memorization is emphasized to a much larger degree than it is in other Muslim countries, even countries of the Gulf:

Normatively speaking the emphasis in transmitting this knowledge [of the Qur'an] is conservational, especially in Morocco. Even Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) noted that the role of memory was stressed more in Morocco than elsewhere in the Islamic Middle East. It took sixteen years to acquire sufficient mastery of texts to teach on one's own in Morocco, owing to the necessity of memorization, but only five in Tunis. (Ibn Khaldun, 1967, II, pp. 430–431) (Eickelman, 1985, p. 58)

Thus, while traditional Qur'anic schools have declined or disappeared altogether in many Muslim countries, they continue to flourish in Morocco because they continue to embody a valued Moroccan tradition, one that is strongly linked to Moroccan history, culture, and identity.

Within countries, cultural custom can be differentiated again by local communities, ethnic group, geographic locale, etc. Such distinctions can include tribal communities, rural versus urban communities, and northern versus southern communities. Particular practices that are related to religion such as marriage, gender roles and boundaries, and circumcision ceremonies for male children, to name a few, can vary by locality within a country. The way that women dress in Yemen, for example, is a good illustration of the Islamic customs of local communities. Yemeni women from Sana'a cover their faces with a black veil, some so that even the eyes are not visible. In fact, they dress from head to toe in folds of black. In Aden, women cover their hair with a scarf and wear a long *djelleba*, whose color is not necessarily black, but they do not habitually cover their faces. This is a custom left over from when Yemen was two separate countries: North Yemen and South Yemen. Women from the countryside, however, do not wear black. They wear huge, brightly colored wraps that are beige, brown, red, or purple. Some cover their faces and some do not. While one does not see their hair, this colorful wrap is less all-enveloping than the garb of Sana'ni women. The women from these different communities consider themselves Muslim and dressed in accordance with Muslim dictates, even as they are covered to varying degrees, because they are members of local communities who interpret ideas on modesty differently and thus manifest them in practice differently.

Thus, communities of practice in Islam are global, national, and local all at once. By virtue of calling themselves Muslim, Qur'anic school students join the international *umma*, whose core beliefs and practices are also the core beliefs and practices of the local and national communities. The

following section explains the learning process through which students apprentice in the discourse of Muslim communities of practice. Joining a community of practice, therefore, is more than being born and raised in a particular locale, although this is clearly a first step, and a determining one, for many people.

*Legitimate Peripheral Participation—
Learning in Communities of Practice*

The learning activities that constitute legitimate peripheral participation must be intimately related to the life and goals of the community if learning is to occur—that is, they must be a form of *participation* in a community of practice. Participation occurs first at the periphery of practice and then grows as the student or apprentice gains mastery and moves toward the center, toward full practice. Participation is a way of learning: “learning occurs through centripetal participation in the learning curriculum of the ambient community. Because the place of knowledge is within a community of practice, questions of learning must be addressed within the development cycles of that community . . .” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 100).

For example, Qur’anic schools were originally “. . . organized around religious goals and values of the society, and thus were an integral part of the social fabric in which they operated” (Wagner, 1983b, p. 184). Knowledge gained in school could not be separated from human life as a whole and memorization of the Qur’an was part of the process. Data from both Yemen and Morocco indicate that this is still very true today. Learning to memorize the Qur’an was, and still is, a very visible symbol of consciously becoming Muslim and it ensured that the sacred knowledge was passed on in proper form.

In addition, Qur’anic schools that I visited in Yemen and Nigeria, as well as several of the more traditional Moroccan schools, are community-supported institutions, attesting to their place in the community. Many schools exist in mosques, some in *zawiyas* (in Morocco), and many in buildings donated or paid for by the community directly or by a community-supported association.

In addition to the school itself, the community of practice encompasses the family. Eickelman says:

Students’ families and (at later stages of learning) peers were integrally involved in the learning process. A recurrent feature in interviews with men of learning and others who successfully memorized the Qur’an is the participation of their fathers, elder brothers or other close relatives in their education, asking them to recite regularly and disciplining them in case of inattention or error. (Eickelman, 1978, p. 495)

Thus, the memorizing of Qur'anic verses had a relational aspect to it. Learning took place not just in a classroom or learning circle; it became part of the everyday life of the student, the family, and the community:

Many contemporary Western pedagogical concepts treat education as a separable institutional activity, but this idea is inappropriate to learning in the traditional Islamic context. Students' fathers, elder brothers, other close relatives—including women in some cases (e.g. Waterbury 1972, pp. 31–32)—and peers, especially at later stages of learning, were integrally involved in the learning process. (Eickelman, 1985, p. 65)

This could be seen particularly in Yemen, where several students reported reciting the Qur'an for their parents, both for their parents' pleasure and also for their oversight and approval. Even the small *kuttāb* students in Morocco reported reciting for their parents. As many of the parents I interviewed in Sana'a had not attended public school and as many of the parents I interviewed in Morocco were illiterate (not able to read and write), they were not familiar with the type of education their children received in the public schools. Many (most) had not studied science or foreign languages themselves. All had memorized some of the Qur'an. Thus, the Qur'anic school provided a forum where they could still be of help to their children, where they could "check" their work, so to speak.

The values—explicit and implicit—transmitted through the school structure are important as well. Research conducted in the early 1990s in Bounaamane, Morocco indicated that:

The goals and significance of modern education seem to be instrumental in encouraging individualism and competition, whereas the goals and significance of Qur'anic education seem to be more expressive and normative in encouraging a common identity and beliefs. (Houtsonen, 1994, p. 494)

Even for those parents in Bounaamane who believed that modern education was better, they still saw it lacking in areas of value and character formation:

Fathers who had sent, or planned to send, their children to the modern school accused parents who only send their children to the Qur'anic school of having traditional beliefs and not understanding the requirements of modern life. Nevertheless, all of them wanted their children to study at the Qur'anic school first to learn "respect, good behavior, and to love their parents and the Qur'an." (Houtsonen, 1994, p. 495)

Parents I interviewed in Sana'a echoed this feeling as well, saying Qur'anic schools prepared children to be good citizens and moral people. Parents in Chefchouan (Morocco), the site of my research in Morocco, also spoke of

how the *kuttab*s encouraged appropriate behavior, and how they taught children to be respectful. From my observations, I can say that there were not a lot of explicit lectures on manners or morals. There were some to be sure, but in both places (Sana'a and Chefchouan) they tended to be the product of some event—a late arrival or a sloppy appearance—for example, and not a preplanned lecture or lesson on appropriate behavior. Children learned through watching and through practice how to embody community values in their behavior.

Thus, a further key characteristic of learning activities in a situated context is the frequent absence of explicit teaching activities and the presence of peer tutoring or consultation activities: “It seems typical of apprenticeship that apprentices learn mostly in relation with other apprentices” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 93). Situated learning theory focuses on *learning* activities as opposed to *teaching* activities in the strictest sense. “Mastery resides not in the master but in the organization of the community of practice of which the master is part . . .” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 94). Similarly, Qur’anic education relied heavily on students working with each other to master material in the absence of explicit teaching: “Peer learning has been neglected in the study of many educational systems because it is characteristically informal. In Morocco it provided what public lesson circles could not—an active engagement with and practice in the comprehension of basic texts” (Eickelman, 1978, p. 503).

This particular feature still holds true in the traditional schools I visited in Yemen, for example. The very organization of the school day (or fraction thereof) in a Qur’anic school gives the child room to progress at his/her own pace, with an emphasis on learning not teaching. The teacher gives individual attention and then leaves the child with his/her peers to practice the memorization. Children would memorize individually or in groups or pairs and then recite for the teacher. In general, this practice parallels the description that Eickelman provided of early twentieth-century Qur’anic schools in Morocco: “Each morning, the *fqih* [Qur’anic schoolteacher] wrote the verses to be memorized on each student’s wooden slate (*luh*). The child then spent the rest of the day memorizing these verses by reciting them out loud, as well as systematically reciting verses that had been previously learned Memorization was thus incremental, with the recitation of new material added to that already learned Students were not grouped into ‘classes’ based either on age or on progress in memorization” (Eickelman, 1978, p. 493). The Sana’i schools I visited bore this out exactly. The *kuttab*s in Morocco (with their fairly homogeneous age group of children from three to six years of age) tended to have a more uniform method of instruction, with the teacher addressing the whole group. Nevertheless, even within this large-group

instruction, giving greater prominence to explicit teaching than in the past, there was still a focus on individual mastery. Teachers would have each child, in a group of almost sixty, repeat individually to make sure each one had mastered a line of text or a verse.

The focus on learning not teaching in situated learning is consonant with the overall style of Qur'anic schools, where "[t]he religious sciences in Morocco and throughout the Islamic world are thought to be transmitted through a quasi-genealogical chain of authority which descends from master or teacher (*shaykh*) to student (*talib*) to insure that the knowledge of earlier generations is passed on intact" (Eickelman, 1978, p. 492). Indeed, Qur'anic learning styles influence secular learning styles in Morocco and elsewhere. "... [T]he cognitive style associated with Islamic knowledge is tied closely to popular understandings of Islam in Morocco and has important analogues in nonreligious spheres of knowledge ... Knowledge of crafts is passed on from master to apprentice in an analogous fashion, with any knowledge or skill acquired in a manner independent from such a tradition regarded as suspect" (Eickelman, 1978, pp. 491–492).

The emphasis on student motivation and agency in the learning process as well as the respect given to the process of generational passing down of knowledge are key factors in characterizing the learning process in Qur'anic schools as legitimate peripheral participation. Students are apprentices and teachers are masters—students learn by doing, practicing, and performing. **Understanding**, in the Western sense, is not emphasized—that would entail more explicit teaching than goes on in the Qur'anic schools I visited. Instead, **mastery** is emphasized—being able to recite the Qur'an from memory and being able to act within the framework of community expectations.

Access—physical, psychological, and cultural—is a central concept in situated learning theory: "The key to legitimate peripherality is access by newcomers to the community of practice and all that membership entails. ... To become a full member of a community of practice requires access to a wide range of ongoing activity, old-timers, and other members of the community; and to information, resources, and opportunities for participation" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, pp. 100–101). Lave and Wenger relate access to issues of understanding and control.

According to Lave and Wenger, the "technology of practice" in a learning situation must be transparent because "... the artifacts [technology] used within a cultural practice carry a substantial portion of that practice's heritage" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 101). Understanding the technology of practice is not just mastering the techniques of doing something as it is "a way to connect with the history of the practice and to participate more directly in cultural life" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 101). Thus, the term

transparency when used here in connection with technology refers to the way in which using artifacts and understanding their significance interact to become one learning process. They liken the technology to a window, which is both visible in and of itself and invisible in that you see other things through it, unaware of its presence.

Memorization is the technology of Qur'anic schooling. Memorization is the explicit technology of learning; it is an artifact that connects current practice with the historical practice of the group since prophetic times. It connects the past and the present. Wagner refers to this practice as a rite of passage in Muslim countries: "Regardless of the host culture, *kuttab* instruction was considered not only to be sacred, but also as a rite of passage for the child" (Wagner, 1991, p. 266). Implicitly, memorization facilitates participation and leads to learning, to mastery of culturally valued knowledge, such as how to properly recite a verse and perhaps even, at later stages, how to quote a verse from the Qur'an in an appropriate context.

In European and American conceptions of education, a concern with memorization implies a lack of understanding or reasoning about the content of the material. In Qur'anic schools, the demonstration of mastery was not in the ability to explain, a common means of assessing understanding in the Western academic tradition. As Eickelman points out:

"Understanding" (*fahm*) was not measured by any ability explicitly to "explain" particular verses Instead, the measure of understanding was implicit and consisted in the ability to use particular Qur'anic verses in appropriate contexts Thus the measure of understanding was the ability to make appropriate practical reference to the memorized text, just as originality was shown in working Qur'anic references into novel but appropriate contexts in conversation, in sermons, and on formal occasions. Knowledge and manipulation of secular oral poetry and proverbs in parallel fashion is still a sign of good rhetorical style; the skill is not confined to religious learning. (Eickelman, 1985, p. 64)

In the Moroccan context, memorization was the exercise of reason, as were other exercises of mental discipline involved in being a good Muslim:

Two features consistently associated with Islamic education are its rigorous discipline and the lack of explicit explanation of memorized material. Both of these features are congruent with the concept of essentially fixed knowledge which is at the base of Islamic education, at least in the Moroccan context, and the associated concept of "reason" (*'qal*) prevalent in Moroccan society. Reason is popularly conceived as man's ability to discipline his nature in order to act in accord with the

arbitrary [*sic*] code of conduct laid down by God and epitomized by such acts of communal obedience as the fast of Ramadan (see Eickelman 1976, pp. 130–138) . . . *Thus a firm discipline in the course of learning the Qur'an is culturally regarded as an integral part of socialization. In Moroccan towns and villages, the discipline of Qur'anic memorization is an integral part of learning to be human and Muslim* [emphasis added]. (Eickelman, 1985, pp. 62–63)

Thus, memorization in Moroccan Qur'anic schools exists because the activity of learning the Qur'an is mediated by its value in a community of practice: "The practice of the community creates the potential 'curriculum' in the broadest sense—that which may be learned by newcomers with legitimate peripheral access" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 93). Qur'anic schools were, and still are, institutions embedded in the practice of a community. In Nigeria, Yemen, and Morocco, students need to memorize some of the Qur'an to pray, at the very least. Parents and students in Yemen indicated that being close to the Qur'an, through memorization, was a way to foster spirituality and an awareness of the hereafter, important concepts to the school communities in Sana'a. Lastly, while the practice of learning to recite the entire Qur'an has diminished in recent years, the process of memorizing some verses and thus perpetuating the practice of a centuries-old learning tradition is also valued.

Access in the sense of control, as used by Lave and Wenger, addresses the concept of "legitimate" in the phrase legitimate peripheral participation. Legitimate means that participation is accepted, and that the learner has access, not just in physical terms but in cultural terms as well. The learners' role as a participant on the periphery is understood and accepted. Access is given by the community in a sense, in that they define what legitimate peripheral participation is. With the great emphasis placed on learning in Islam, being a student and being a Qur'anic school student are worthy and thus legitimate endeavors. Indeed, I can think of no Muslim to whom I spoke, in any country, whether in a formal interview or a casual conversation, who did not approve of memorizing the Qur'an. Even adults who had bad school experiences or who were not religious tended to nonetheless feel that being able to recite even a very little of the Qur'an from memory was good, if only for literary and cultural reasons, and did not regret the time spent in Qur'anic school.

Qur'anic school knowledge is demonstrated in events of practice and not through school-based tests or the like, as pointed out above. Lave and Wenger point out that: "...learning to become a legitimate participant in a community involves learning how to talk (and be silent) in the manner of full participants" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 105). Mastery is linked to

the use of material in a community of practice. In the early part of the twentieth century, Qur'anic school students learned the discourse of Islam in Morocco through memorizing Qur'anic verses and then learning when and how to apply them in particular settings. The application of these verses indicated mastery of the discourse of Muslim identity, of belonging to the community of practice and being able to participate fully in it:

Firmer control [over material mastered or memorized] was achieved as students accompanied their fathers, other relatives and occasionally their *fqih* to social gatherings. On such occasions they heard adults incorporate Qur'anic verses into particular contexts and gradually acquired the ability to do so themselves, as well as to recite specific sections of the Qur'an without regard for the order in which they had memorized it. (Eickelman, 1978, p. 495)

Children learn Qur'anic verses not just to conserve them but to use them as they grow into their conscious roles as members of the Islamic community of practice in Morocco. For example, Eickelman says: "...the measure of 'understanding' appropriate to Islamic knowledge is its use, often creative, in wider social contexts than those provided by the milieu of learning itself or by the abstract manipulation of memorized materials in 'classroom' situations" (Eickelman, 1978, p. 492). Mastery—the result of learning—is demonstrated in the context of everyday life: "...popular oral poetry in North Africa takes this shape, just as *effective public speech involves both the skillful invocation of Qur'anic phrases* and the more mundane but memorizable stock of knowledge drawn from poetry and proverbs [emphasis added]" (Eickelman, 1978, pp. 491–492). Indeed, Hassan II, King of Morocco, and a skilled speaker in standard Arabic, routinely worked Qur'anic verses into his speeches, always finding just the appropriate verse for the occasion or the theme of his speech (Al Ayadi, personal communication, 1990). The use of Qur'anic verses is still very apt in Morocco. It is still a respected quality, indicating a certain attainment and knowledge, and is thus still valuable cultural capital. This value is another factor in the persistence of Qur'anic schooling in Morocco.

Lave and Wenger point out that "...change is a fundamental property of communities of practice and their activities" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 116). Qur'anic schools, by contrast, have been characterized as static and unchanging. However, contrary to current accusations that Islamic schools have been virtually unchanged for centuries, these institutions adapted to changing circumstances during the course of their development. Both the role of the teacher and the educational institution expanded and changed over time:

While the first teachers taught individuals or small groups of students, over the course of several centuries, Islamic schools became diversified and highly specialized institutions for young children, adolescents, and adults, while at the same time retaining the basic elements of traditional curriculum and pedagogy. (Wagner, 1991, p. 265)

Eickelman also stressed that

. . . an intellectual tradition which emphasized fixity and memory, as is characteristic of many traditions or religious knowledge, can still be capable of considerable flexibility. In practice, there is a considerable variation over time and place throughout the Islamic world as to the exact bodies of knowledge to be included in the religious sciences. (Eickelman, 1978, p. 490)

Contemporary Qur'anic schools in Morocco have demonstrated the ability to adjust and adapt to the changing of society. They have persisted through changes in certain forms of regulation by the central government and ensuing curricular changes (mainly in the more urban schools) such as the introduction of more numeracy activities and nationalistic songs as well as blackboards, visual aids, and more flexible discipline. In Nigeria, in many cities, towns, and villages, Qur'anic schools have actively incorporated new subjects to become, in essence, Islamic primary schools and not just Qur'anic schools.

Thus, in sum, I am suggesting that students in Qur'anic schools begin the process of joining the local, national, and international communities of practice of Islam. This happens because the Qur'anic school is a site of social participation in which one can begin to move from the periphery of practice toward the center. One key element of this movement is learning to recite some (or ideally all) of the Qur'an from memory.

Cast in this way, the Qur'anic schools that were the subject of research for this book are places of situated learning, where students act as apprentices in the social and cultural discourse of Muslim life in their respective settings: local, national, and global. The conditions that characterize legitimate peripheral participation are present, to varying degrees, in the schools I have observed in very different contexts. The following two chapters take the ideas developed here and apply them to data from Yemen and Morocco in order to distinguish the learning process taking place in those schools from pervasive descriptions of indoctrination and intellectually stultifying rote learning found in a good deal of the literature to date on Qur'anic schools.

CHAPTER 3

Qur'anic Schools and the Preservation of Social, Spiritual, and Emotional Health

Examples from Yemen

Qur'anic schools have typically been characterized as institutions of conservation. They are repositories of tradition and are hence relatively stable and unchanging. Rites, rituals, traditional knowledge, and traditional practices are all preserved within the institution of the Qur'anic school. My research in Morocco, Yemen, and Nigeria has borne this notion out in many ways. These institutions do conserve tradition. However, the ways in which they do so are more complex and interesting than they have heretofore been characterized. In addition, the schools also have a healthy disposition toward change, in all cases being relatively unafraid to incorporate new methods and even new subjects. Drawing from research in Yemen, this chapter deals with the various ways in which Qur'anic schools act as agents of cultural, educational, and religious preservation in Sana'a. This chapter provides a further illustration of the notion of learning as legitimate peripheral participation, whereby students become members of the community of practice of Islam, locally (in their neighborhoods or city), in the country, and also in the global community of believers. In so doing, this chapter presents an example of how an alternative framework for characterizing Qur'anic school teaching and learning better captures the complexity of what they do and why they are valuable to communities of practice.

A street in Sana'a . . .

Abdullah parks the sport utility vehicle across the street from the darkened concrete building. He takes a few minutes to put a kind of

“club” device around the brakes. It is a clear night, with a velvet blue sky and a golden half moon overhead. Both the sky and the moon compliment and reflect the youthful, chanting voices wafting out of the windows on the second floor. One can hear them clearly on the street below, their sing-song rhythms rising and falling.

A centuries-old learning tradition is embodied in these voices. Juxtaposed with computers, satellite dishes and even sport utility vehicles and “clubs”, this tradition of learning to recite the Qur’an from memory is still vital in Yemen. We climb the darkened stairs to the terrace and enter a Qur’anic school for boys in Sana’a.

What role do these centuries-old educational institutions play in early twenty-first century Sana’a, Yemen? Data suggest that these schools play a role in maintaining a holistic sense of health and well-being, both at the level of the individual and society. They do this by preserving and refreshing the community of practice in Sana’a, specifically in the mosque communities associated with particular schools. The previous chapter discussed the theoretical underpinnings of situated learning. This chapter looks at the more concrete ways in which situated learning takes place and the outcomes it fosters, with particular focus on the preservation and maintenance of both individual and social health. I use the term health in a holistic sense to mean overall balance and well-being. Health is more than the absence of disease in this case and more than simply a physical state. The term “health” in this context implies a holistic vision of physical, emotional, social, and spiritual health, to better parallel the traditional focus in Islamic education on the whole person—the spirit, or soul, the heart, and the body, not just the intellect.

In particular, I am suggesting that the process of situated learning that takes place in two Qur’anic schools in Sana’a where I was a regular observer/researcher is evidenced by the ways in which the schools (1) facilitate intergenerational discourse (i.e., a form of social health), (2) promote spiritual growth (spiritual health), and (3) encourage a sense of identity, confidence, and belonging in children (emotional health). In looking at these three areas, the concept of holistic health emerges as a loom upon which to weave together distinct ideas about the roles of Qur’anic schooling into a larger whole that captures some of the complexity of their role in preserving Islamic, Yemeni, and Sana’ni cultural, educational, and religious traditions.

Background on Education in Yemen

In Yemen, traditional Qur’anic schools still exist, both in cities and in the countryside. In the countryside there are places where Qur’anic schools are the only educational institutions available; rural Qur’anic institutions

are generally run by a community collective. In cities they exist alongside public schools, are usually run by an association of some sort (charitable, religious, etc.), and act as public school supplements—that is, children attend after public school hours or during the summers.

Public schools are relatively new institutions in Yemen. While there were some schools that developed under Turkish rule and the Imamate, more widespread public schooling generally came into being after the revolution of 1962 (Dorsky & Stevenson, 1995). The exception to this is the city of Aden, which under British colonial rule had a more developed and widespread system of public education.

Before the widespread introduction of public schooling, traditional Qur'anic schools predominated as educational institutions. The main purpose of these schools was to teach children to memorize and recite the Qur'an, thus learning to read and write as part of this process. Public schooling is still not widespread in Yemen in the sense that many children still do not receive a public school education. In addition, a large portion of the "older generation" received no public schooling at all, but did attend Qur'anic schooling for some period of time. Thus, the notion of public schooling as being integrally necessary to raise one's children is not deeply rooted in society, especially in the more rural areas.

Qur'anic schools in Sana'a have adapted to the new times, while still preserving the core of their original mission. For example, blackboards and notebooks have replaced the traditional *luh* (a whitewashed board) that students used to write on, and the timing of classes has been adjusted to accommodate the public school schedule. In addition, traditional Qur'anic schools have adapted to the competition from public schools by offering sports and other activities to students. One teacher even told us that the Qur'anic school staff helped students with their public school homework so that students and parents would not view Qur'anic schooling as an activity impeding students' work in public school. Parents and teachers also mentioned the use of Qur'anic schools as summer schools, since attendance at traditional Qur'anic schools increased during the summer months as students had more free time. In these various ways, traditional Qur'anic schools have managed to retain an educational role in Sana'ni communities, even if they are no longer the sole source of formal education.

The Setting

The Qur'anic school for boys that I studied with a colleague from Sana'a University in 1997 served roughly fifty students of varying ages, from approximately seven to sixteen years old. All of the students that we interviewed attended public school as well as Qur'anic school. The Qur'anic school held classes between *Maghreb* and *'Isha* (the two evening prayer

times, which fall between 6:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. during the autumn/winter months). There were two teachers, both in their early twenties: one a university student and one a university graduate. The school was associated with the nearby mosque and was run by a private association (as are most Qur'anic schools in Yemen) that hired the teachers and oversaw the general administration of the school. This association gave me and my Yemeni colleague Abdullah (of the earlier vignette), a letter of permission to conduct classroom observations. We observed classes at the school three times a week for two months and interviewed a sample of students and parents (fathers) as well as the two teachers. We observed the same classes, both taking field notes in English; Abdullah conducted the interviews in Arabic, with me listening and occasionally inserting a question. They were all tape-recorded, transcribed, and translated.

The boys' school consisted of five classrooms on the second floor of a building, two of which were used for classes. One was used as a teachers' room (where we conducted interviews) and the others for private study. The walls were decorated with sheets of wrapping paper and various posters, some glorifying Islam or giving information about Islam; some were more militant and political, commenting on the situation in the Middle East. None were anti-American. The classrooms had blackboards, although in one room the board rested on the floor, having come off the wall. The students sat at sturdy wooden bench desks, which accommodated three, sometimes four, students. The classrooms opened onto a main hallway that had a rack for shoes at one end and a stage at the other end. Prayers were conducted in this main hallway. Off the hallway was an open-air terrace where extracurricular activities, such as plays, were held.

In addition to this school, I was able to gain access to a second Qur'anic school in Sana'a, one that served only girls. It too was run by an association. The administrator in this association personally introduced me to the director of the school for girls and she welcomed me to conduct observations, although only once a week for a period of about one month. Hence the amount of data from the girls' school is less than that from the boys' school. As girls are more cloistered in Yemen, carrying out research at a girls' school was more problematic than at a boys' school. I had to find a Yemeni woman to accompany me as a research associate because Abdullah could not enter the school, and I could not tape-record the girls' voices, for example, in case I were to play the tape for men. I observed classes with a female university graduate in the social sciences whom I met through a friend; we both took notes. She posed the interview questions to the interviewees in Arabic and also took notes in Arabic on their responses, with me jotting down notes in English and inserting follow-up questions occasionally.

This school also served roughly fifty girls, although the age range was older than at the boys' school, ranging from fourteen or fifteen years of age to the early twenties. Indeed, some of the girls in attendance at this school were married and had children and were not currently students in the public school or university system, although some had been in the past. Classes at this school tended to be held earlier in the afternoon, between roughly 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. There were at least four teachers in this school, most of whom had been students in the school as well. These teachers tended to be in the same age range as their pupils. The school was very neat and clean with four classrooms and a principal's office. The classrooms were carpeted and the walls were white. Each room had a window. There was absolutely no furnishing in any of the classrooms; the girls and the teachers sat on the floor. In a couple of the classrooms, there was a poster of a prayer in hand-written Arabic taped on the wall.

“Healthy” Education from an Islamic Perspective

As outlined in Chapter 1, the concept of education in Islam implies purposes different from that in the more recent traditions of education in the West. The underlying philosophy of Islamic education is that knowledge comes from the development of the whole person, the physical, intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions of the person, as is demonstrated by looking at three frequently used words in Arabic for education—*tarbiya*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dib*. *Tarbiya* refers to education in its broadest sense, meaning the development of human personality, the nurturing and rearing aspects of education (emotional and social health). *Ta'lim* refers to instruction involving mental activity, which develops reasoning and trains the mind (intellectual health), and *ta'dib* refers to the training of the mind and soul in terms of proper behavior or ethical conduct (spiritual and moral health) (Bin Omar, 1993, pp. 5–10). In more recent European and American traditions, the intellect is often emphasized as the primary focus of formal education, while spirituality, because of its connection with religion, is not seen as a necessary component of education. This is most definitely not part of the Islamic tradition of education and most certainly not what Sana'ni parents expressed as sufficient in terms of education for their children.

Public schooling, mentioned earlier, is relatively new in Yemeni society and it has brought about many changes. One of them is the introduction of “modern” school discourse, which focuses on the intellectual well-being of the student, with emphasis on subjects such as science, foreign language, technology, etc. Education for social health—that is, teaching children how to fit into society and get along with others—is emphasized in Western countries through both the implicit functioning of the school and some explicit instruction. However, this type of education for social health becomes

slightly more muddled in societies where the medium (i.e., the Western-looking school) cannot quite be the message due to cultural differences. Thus, while modern education is appreciated, and often pursued as a route to economic development and prosperity, it is viewed by our subjects as educationally incomplete, like *ta'lim* without *tarbiya* or *ta'dib*.

The next subsections illustrate and discuss the research findings through a series of vignettes drawn from our field notes, coupled with data from the interviews. The vignettes are designed to give the reader a sense of context and mood and, hopefully, some insight into the motivations and attitudes of the interviewees.

Social Health: Qur'anic Schools and the Promotion of Intergenerational Discourse

I use the concept of intergenerational discourse to describe one aspect of the role of traditional schooling, related to *tarbiya*, to the overall raising of the child and to *ta'dib*, the teaching of morals and ethics. I equate this idea of intergenerational discourse with social health—the maintenance of ties, through common experiences and shared knowledge, with the sizable strata of Sana'ni and Yemeni society who have not studied in a formal school and for whom the idea of public schools is unknown and even intimidating. Thus, by discourse, I mean not simply a way of speaking, but the sum of behaviors and understanding of how to “be” in the world, in a particular setting or culture. Intergenerational refers to the communication and understanding that occurs between generations. Intergenerational discourse, in this definition then, is a type of mutual understanding and communication that spans generations, and represents links of understanding across rapid social and cultural change, of the kind occurring in Yemen.

Eickelman speaks of Qur'anic schooling as providing a forum for “sustained adult discipline” over the child (Eickelman, 1985, p. 65). For the schools in Sana'a that we looked at, I would substitute the word “influence” for discipline—Qur'anic schools help adults exercise sustained influence over their children in a rapidly changing society, because they provide a “site” for shared discourse between parent and child, or grandparent and child, with respect to education. I suggest that parents and grandparents who have never attended public schools are not literate in its discourse and are unable to share this discourse with their children or grandchildren. Qur'anic schools are much more familiar; most Yemeni adults know some of the Qur'an, at least enough to pray, and most know what kinds of things (manners, morals and religious practice, etc.) the school is trying to teach and how to reinforce these lessons at home. This is not the case with, say, science homework, English, or even world history.

The following vignette illustrates some examples of the teaching and learning of what I have termed intergenerational discourse.

Fouad, the teacher, is a young man, very dynamic and also openly humorous in his teaching style. He starts to explain a point of pronunciation and to ask students for examples of where this rule is applied in verses that they know. He smiles as he teaches and he uses big gestures, jokes, parodies of bad pronunciation, and tone of voice to convey what he is explaining. He mixes tajweed (pronunciation lessons) with commentary about the verses quoted as examples. He is intense and enthusiastic, and the students, especially the slightly older ones, are just about hopping out of their seats to be called upon.

This evening, two boys enter the class late while Fouad is teaching. One is big—maybe 12—and the other smaller—maybe 9. They pass a few paces into the room and Fouad orders them to halt. He jokes with them, asking them if they are late because they were fasting and had to break fast. It is not Ramadan and they most certainly were not fasting. They smile sheepishly. This is his subtle, humorous, and mildly sarcastic way of telling them they should not be late. He then tells them to exit and enter properly. They go outside and enter again, the small one whispering “salem alikum,” the traditional and expected greeting, and the older one not saying anything. Fouad points to the door with a flourish and says “machi” or “get out of here.” They giggle and so does the class; Fouad is smiling. The boys spin around, exit, and enter for the third time, with the older boy saying “salem alikum” in greeting to the teacher. They are then allowed to take their seats.

This vignette illustrates many rich examples of the teaching and learning of intergenerational discourse in the Qur’anic school classroom. One key point in this vignette is the teaching of manners. An integral part of the mission of Qur’anic schooling, as expressed by parents, teachers, and students alike, is the teaching of manners, morals, and how to interact with people in general, especially elders. Knowing how to talk to people, to relate to them, is seen as part of what formal educational institutions should teach, a mission that is only properly fulfilled in the Qur’anic school. For example, in the above vignette, intergenerational discourse is taught through the process of making the two boys enter the classroom in the appropriate way. The lesson could apply to the house, the café, or any other place. This practice of greeting people appropriately is something valued by parents and community members and provides an area of shared understanding and behavior in the rapidly changing environment of Yemen.

Parents and students echoed these sentiments in interviews. One parent said, in response to a question about the benefits of Qur’anic schooling for children:

In fact, Qur'anic schools, in addition to their purpose of learning, have a great role in the education of children Islamically. Kids learn in these schools how to behave appropriately in each situation. They learn how to pray, how to be polite with others, for example, to learn what to say when coming and leaving the class. So Qur'anic schools concentrate on teaching the Qur'an and educating students to behave according to what they learn in schools.

In fact, the point this parent makes can be illustrated in the girls' school as well. When the class is in session and a new girl enters, she goes around and says "*salem alikum*" to everyone in the room while shaking their hands. This aspect of manners, of how to behave with others, was universally stressed. The female teacher of the Qur'an at a school for girls said, in response to a question about what students gain from Qur'anic schools:

Knowledge, manners and moral lessons in different aspects [of life]; developing Arabic language skills, learning rules and regulations in different areas, as well as learning the meaning and the interpretation of the Qur'an.

I suggest that this type of learning of manners, morals, and how to behave—how to deal with others—constitutes a form of intergenerational discourse in that it represents the perpetuation of the values of parents and previous generations in a rapidly changing society. Although modern mathematics or science might be out of the realm of the majority of parents, and represents an area of discourse that cannot be shared, the morals, manners, and way to behave that are stressed in Qur'anic schools are the types of lessons that parents can understand and reinforce; both the parent and the child share this discourse of learning and the parent can be part of the child's learning to a much greater extent. While I cannot say that public schools do not teach manners, the prevailing perception among the parents I interviewed was that they do not give manners the emphasis that the Qur'anic schools do.

Also, in a society that has great respect for the wisdom of elders, there is a certain responsibility associated with being older. In the above vignette, the older boy did not set a good example to the younger boy and his classmates by omitting the expected greeting and leaving it to the younger one. They were sent out of the classroom again so that the older boy would recognize his responsibility to fulfill social norms and greet people in this situation.

In addition, there is a verse in the Qur'an that says when you enter a place, you must greet the people there. Students memorize this verse. However, in the Qur'anic school situation above, they were instructed in putting this verse into practice. The teacher, by not allowing them in the

room until they greeted the others in an appropriate way, was instructing them in the social and cultural practice of Islam in Yemen.

The lesson continues . . .

The call to prayer from the minaret of the mosque next door sounds out. Fouad has the boys stop what they are doing and listen. It is a beautiful sound, drifting in through the window with the moonlight and the night air. The class is silent, listening. As the call ends, Fouad asks one boy to recite the appropriate prayer that follows the call to prayer. The boy recites it. Class resumes.

Fouad continues, asking for examples, moving back and forth from the board, calling on boys, and offering comments on the boys' pronunciation as they give him examples. He jokes with them and quizzes them when they answer. He gives positive feedback when someone gives a good example, or demonstrates he knows the point.

Class continues in this manner until Fouad decides it is time for prayer. The boys tend to pray after the official prayer time (signaled by the call to prayer) so that the class time is not curtailed. Fouad asks who would like to lead the prayer. A bunch of hands shoot up, waving to be noticed and selected. He chooses one boy and then most of the boys scramble out into the hallway. One stays behind in the classroom. He will pray later, since praying with the class is not obligatory. They line up in rows, facing the stage, which is on the eastern side of the building. Abdullah, as a visitor, is given a place in the first line. Fouad circulates, making sure they are all lined up. The boy leading the prayer starts. He recites the obligatory verse and then one of his own choosing. As prayer leader, he is free to choose any verse and Fouad leaves this to him. They pray.

The above vignette illustrates the integration of religious practice into everyday life, another element of the type of knowledge necessary for social health. These practices have a wide application and do not relate simply to praying or fasting, two of the most well-known practices of Islam. As the above vignette shows, knowing how to lead the prayers and knowing what to say after the call to prayer constitute important practices that children learn in Qur'anic school and then apply in their lives. The educational lessons learned in the Qur'anic school classroom—how to enter a room, how to greet people, how to pray, how to lead the prayer, how to recite properly, etc.—are familiar to parents and constitute a way of behaving or practice in which they expect their children to share. Thus, in order to relate to people on the social and cultural levels, a knowledge of religious practice is vital.

Qur'anic schooling figures in the intergenerational sharing of knowledge, part of what I characterize as socially healthy behavior, in that many

activities that parents share with their children are related to religious practice. For example, one student, when asked whether his parents encouraged him to enroll in Qur'anic schools, said:

Yes, when I was six years old, I used to go with my father to the mosque to pray. Then he took me to Qur'anic school to learn the Qur'an and the Hadith.

Fouad's instructing the boys to be silent during the call to prayer, and to recite the appropriate prayer after the call to prayer was finished, is an example of the integration of elements of the practice of Islam into the life of students. This is another element of social and cultural practice that parents expect of their children, and which they do not see being emphasized in the public schools.

The practice of allowing the boys to take turns as prayer leader is also a teaching strategy, helping them learn to fulfill this role, how to stand right, how to lead, and how to set an example for the very young ones. (It is also something of an honor that students can report back to their parents, who are not familiar with public schooling rituals and practices.)

Students spoke of the interest their parents exhibited in their progress in Qur'anic schools and of how their parents followed their progress. For example, a student, when asked how he knew his parents were proud of him, responded:

Through reading the Qur'an at home. They sit and ask me to recite what I learned. I tell them what I learned in the school. I tell them "my teacher said such and such."

Respondents from the girls' schools replied in the same manner: that they would recite the Qur'an at home for parents or family members.

It is important to stress here that the parents we interviewed were not against public schooling at all. They simply perceived it as being incomplete in an educational sense. In general, they stressed the importance of learning modern subjects like science, for example, but likewise mentioned the gaps they perceived in public school education in relation to the kinds of cultural values they wanted their children to acquire. The values they commented on tended to relate heavily to the social and cultural practice of Islam, along the lines of the examples given above about greeting people, pausing for the call to prayer, knowing how to line up and stand for prayer with a group of people, knowing how to lead the prayer, and so on. For example, one father said:

In fact I do not say that learning in public schools is not good because there are many benefits students can get from public schools The

teacher in public schools does not care about the students' behavior. I mean whether he behaves in an Islamic manner or not. There is one teacher for the Islamic education class in the public schools, who teaches the Qur'an as a part of that class. In addition, teachers in public schools focus more on providing knowledge to students but do not have time to focus on practices, such as learning how to pray, because there are hundreds or thousands in public schools. Students in Qur'anic schools learn how to read and memorize the Qur'an besides learning Islamic morals and the Islamic way of life. Such practicing is very rare in public schools.

Thus, in Yemen, the idea of learning the Qur'an without learning all of the unspoken elements of social and cultural practice that go with it is unthinkable. Since the discourses of Qur'anic and public schooling are very different, emanating as they do from very different sources, indeed different cultures with vastly differing world views, Qur'anic schools are necessary to fill the gaps in public education. That public schooling does not sufficiently emphasize development of more than the intellect, in the opinion of the parents I spoke to, is a problem. That it is not practice oriented is another interesting comment and suggests the element of learning by legitimate peripheral participation—moving toward mastery from the periphery to the center, with an emphasis on learning and not on teaching, as suggested by the father above.

In sum, I suggest that traditional Qur'anic schools create the space for intergenerational discourse around education and learning for parents and children and, in this way, provide a bridge between past and present and a way of educating children for healthy social interaction with parents and peers.

Spiritual Health

Educational systems based on the form and structure of Western and/or colonial systems, as can be found in Yemen, are not perceived as putting the kind of focus that tradition and culture demand on the education of the spirit because they are based on notions of a division between the religious and the "secular." Conceptually, Muslims do not divide life into categories such as secular and religious. Eickelman, for example, says that mass education (on a Western model), even when it includes religion, has created an impersonal relationship between students and the curriculum: "Even while teaching that Islam permeates all aspects of life, the formal principles of Islamic doctrine and practice are compartmentalized and made an object of study" (Eickelman, 1992, p. 647). In this sense, what was once spiritual education becomes *ta'lim* not *ta'dib*; it becomes "religious studies"—that is, an intellectualized pursuit alone, minus the spiritual element.

In Yemen, which was closed off from much of the outside world for so long, spirituality is still seen as a legitimate focus of education, even a necessary part. Spirituality is not seen, however, as simply “religious education,” as the passing on of doctrinaire knowledge (although there is certainly plenty of this). When I speak about the education of the spirit, I do not simply mean the acquisition of religious doctrine. This is a readily identifiable role of Qur’anic schooling and indeed has often been seen as the only real role these schools serve. In contrast my interviewees characterized the education of the spirit as fostering an awareness of the presence of God in daily life, of divine mystery, of life and death, and of transcendence and peace. Thus, the spiritual education that parents and teachers spoke about generally referred to a greater awareness of the presence of God in the world and in people’s lives and the role of this knowledge in living life, dealing with its many ups and downs, and preparing for death. This type of learning is about a journey, and acquiring spiritual knowledge can be described as a journey from the periphery toward the center.

Spiritual wellness, then, is seen as a sort of preventative medicine, leading to emotional strength to deal with life’s hardships and disappointments by fostering a sense of inner security, a sense of identity, and an appreciation of one’s importance in the universe as a human being. In this sense, spiritual awareness was linked in people’s minds to emotional health and balance.

Indeed, teachers, parents, and students all mentioned, in one form or another, the importance of spiritual awareness, the importance of developing a “relationship” with God, and of well-being they feel when hearing or reciting the Qur’an. For example, both male and female students cited a contentment that they feel when reading the Qur’an. At the girls’ school, the girls expressed the following sentiment, which was recorded as field notes, since I could not tape-record the girls:

Students feel that they are sisters in this [the Qur’anic] school. They feel that they are very happy, especially when reading the Qur’an because the angels are with them. They don’t have the same feeling in public school.

The above is a “consensus comment,” offered by a student in the girls’ school after she surveyed others, in response to our question of how students feel when reciting the Qur’an. A boy from the Qur’anic school summarized his feelings in the following way when asked how he felt reading the Qur’an:

I feel happy; I feel peaceful and contentment and self-secure because I feel I am sitting in front of my God reading his book. I feel happy and relaxed.

Teachers also emphasized this area of spiritual development as a positive aspect of their work and a positive outcome for students. One female teacher described her feelings about teaching the Qur’an:

. . . I am proud of that for some reasons; one of them is that I am in contact with Allah through his holy book. Another reason is that I feel that I achieved some of my duties and I am very happy when I teach the Qur'an.

Spirituality was related to being a healthy person in terms of social interaction as well, as the teacher continued:

. . . Moreover, the child will receive a good education, especially in the spiritual aspect. So, he will be a good member in society.

She makes the direct, implicit link between spiritual awareness and positive social outcomes; she links spiritual maturity with being a good citizen, an important assumption in Islamic societies. Her response was characteristic of all our interviewees. The Qur'anic teacher from a boys' school, in response to the same question about the benefits of Qur'anic schooling, said:

There are many benefits. Education according to Islam is the main benefit. Students improve their personalities in Qur'anic schools. Their belief and trust in Allah become stronger. They will be able to read the Qur'an and memorize it in an appropriate way. Furthermore, they will be able to use and practice what they learn in their lives. They learn Islamic morals and practice them. They learn theory and practice in Qur'anic schools; students try to practice what they learn; to move from theory to practice or to practice what you learn is appropriate for a Muslim person. Qur'anic schools work hard to raise students to be good persons in society. This person then lives in peace with enough strength to face all difficulties in life.

A parent echoed these ideas:

There are so many advantages [of sending our kids to Qur'anic schools] and the most important is that they are taught to know their religion by being in contact with Allah. [And] because we can find our needs, whatever they are, mentally, physically, spiritually . . . in the Qur'an.

An awareness of the hereafter and of the temporality of human life was also a part of the spiritual benefit that people saw as coming from learning the Qur'an. One female student said that she feels reading and memorizing the Qur'an has many benefits for people in this life and on the day of judgment. In contrast, she sees the main purpose of public schools is to give students certificates that benefit them only in this life. A parent said:

I see Qur'anic learning and memorization for my kids as very important. I prefer my son to memorize the whole Qur'an more than

obtaining a Ph.D. Because I understand that such learning and memorization will benefit him in his life and the hereafter.

In a sense, this father is characterizing Qur'anic memorization as the most practically applicable knowledge he can give his son.

Emotional Health

The development of confidence as a person and a student, both in public and Qur'anic schooling, is related to the development of spiritual awareness. As the soul is seen to be an integral part of any kind of learning, subjects suggested to us that the nurturing of the spirit, which they associated with Qur'anic schooling, has positive effects that necessarily spilled over into other aspects of life, like being a good citizen as the teacher above mentioned or even in finding success in other walks of life—that is, professionally or in public schools.

One male teacher whom I interviewed added a commentary after the interview that was extremely powerful. He said that Qur'anic schools offer children a sense of safety and engender within them positive feelings about themselves. He said that children develop trust in themselves, a kind of trust that helps them overcome problems and helps them to be strong. To illustrate what he meant, he used the example of suicide and how suicide rarely happens in the Muslim world. He suggested that this is attributable to a sense of security that people have from being part of the Islamic community, some of which is learned in Qur'anic school. While there are no data to “prove” a causal relationship between low suicide rates and Qur'anic schools, this is nonetheless a powerful perception.

The essence of it—that Qur'anic schools help students to develop self-confidence and a sense of security—was expressed by almost all subjects. The teacher also suggested that, in addition to suicide, Qur'anic schools help students avoid other kinds of less extreme bad behavior such as drug use, youthful violence, or things like that. Interestingly, this was a perception expressed by the students themselves. For example, one boy looked startled when I asked why he liked reading the Qur'an, as if the answer was obvious. He patiently told me:

Because it is the only way to keep me away from doing bad things. Too many youths are running away in the streets and everywhere doing bad things.

Others said essentially the same thing. They derived strength from a healthy sense of spirituality, some part of which was developed through their Qur'anic schooling.

Thus, the development of spiritual awareness, seen as part of the Qur'anic school mandate and mission, is perceived as having positive effects

in helping students be at peace with themselves and their world and is related to the development of emotional health (confidence and security). Qur'anic schools in Sana'a are seen as implicitly countering what Eickelman would call the objectification of religious imagination or the standardization of belief that is taught in public schools.

The feelings of well-being that subjects expressed above, related to Qur'anic schooling, also related to the practical details of how Qur'anic schools work—that is, how they teach. Some of the above discussions about the confidence that comes from spiritual awareness and security also relate, in my opinion, to the kind of affirming environment that children experience in Qur'anic schools. This again puts the focus on *tarbiya*—the overall development of the child—as opposed to simply *ta'lim* or intellectual development.

For example, in contrast to the public school mission, which is often perceived as “weeding students out,” Qur'anic schools provide a great deal of one-on-one attention to children. They allow children to learn at their own pace without the fear of “failure” or being “weeded out,” as long as they make a good faith effort in the classroom. In addition, I observed a great deal of cooperative learning and peer tutoring in Qur'anic schools, practices that also provide a supportive environment for students, both those being tutored and those receiving tutoring.

The environment is conducive to these kinds of practices because the discipline is flexible. Students are allowed to move around freely and to work together. While obvious disruptions are dealt with as discipline problems, learning activities and the noise that goes with them are accepted. This is very much in contrast to the public school environment, where children are expected to sit still and be quiet for the most part. I did carry out one observation at a public school, in addition to relying on common knowledge and expert descriptions of the public school classroom from Abdullah, my co-researcher, as well as professors or lecturers from Yemeni universities, many of whom had studied in the U.S. and had children who attended public school in the U.S. Thus, they had a comparative perspective on the typical classroom practice in both countries. It was difficult to access public schools, and so I was limited to the one visit. In addition to acknowledging that I was not able to carry out prolonged classroom observations in the public schools in Sana'a, it is important to acknowledge that public school classrooms, especially those in Sana'a, have large numbers of students and this also contributes to the lack of flexible discipline and thus the different environment. The Qur'anic schools that I observed had much smaller classes, by about two-thirds, than the public school class that I observed.

At this point, it is useful to describe the general events of the Qur'anic school class as a background for the following points. The teacher (in both

the boys' school and the girls' school) would ask the students to come forward, one at a time, or, as I observed in the girls' school, in small groups, if they were working on the same material. (In these instances, each one recited for the teacher individually while the others in the group listened.) The teacher asked the student to recite what they had memorized. The student would start to recite and the teacher would correct pronunciation and prompt them when they forgot. There was a general air of coaching about these activities. Other students practiced individually or in groups, some rested or read to themselves as well. (Too much resting met with a rebuke.)

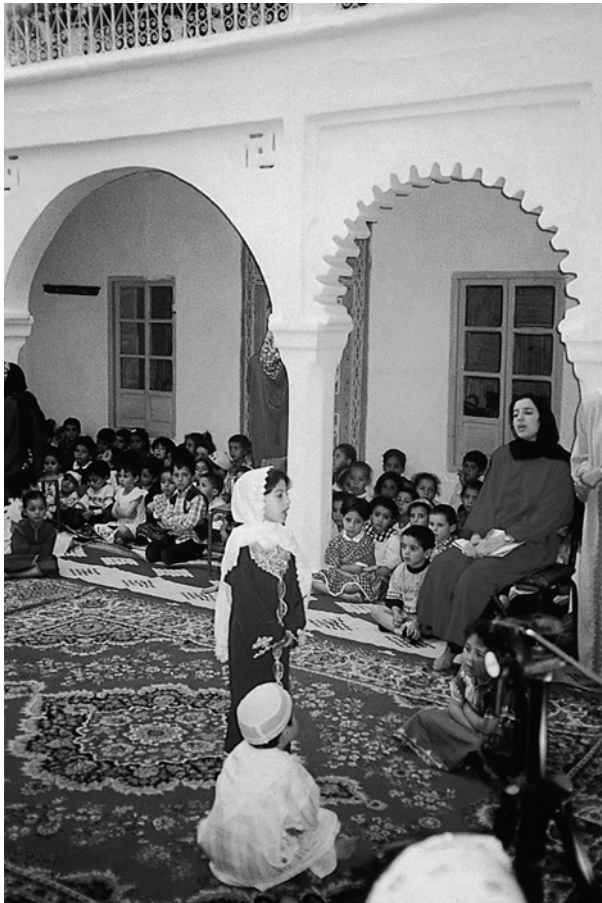


Fig. 3.1 A little girl demonstrating mastery of a Qur'anic verse at a community recital 1998. Photo credit: Helen N. Boyle.

Abdulaziz comes forward to ask a question with his Qur'an. He refers to the teacher as "ustath (teacher) Ahmed." Ahmed answers the boy's question and the boy goes back to his chair. There is no asking of permission. Things are very open in that way. The children seem to feel very free to approach the teacher or ask him a question.

The boys in the back—the older one and the boy in the tweed jacket—are reciting one to the other, helping each other. Two small boys also share a book and recite.

. . . a new boy is called. Ahmed smiles as this new boy says something to him, regarding his level of readiness. Ahmed smiles at Abdullah, sitting next to him taking field notes, and tells him what the boy said in a kind of "listen to this one" manner. Ahmed prompts the boy and the boy begins. Shortly, he is sent to sit down—apparently not ready. He is sent to the older boy to be tutored. The older one begins coaching the younger one on voice intonation and saying the lines for him to repeat. A few minutes pass. The older boy signals the teacher that the boy he was coaching is done. He sort of gestures and the small boy he was coaching sits down in a new seat.

This vignette shows a boy interrupting the teacher without asking permission to ask a question, something I recorded many instances of, further demonstrating the approachability of the teacher. Also, in both schools, for example, I noted that the interaction between teacher and student, while one of respect, was also much more informal than in the public school classroom. Students tended to call the teachers by their first names alone or to address them as "ustath (teacher) Ahmed" or "ustath (teacher) Fouad" in the boys' school. The atmosphere in both the boys' and the girls' Qur'anic schools seemed less authoritarian than I had expected. Students were allowed some social interaction, were not stigmatized (although sometimes disciplined) for not being ready or not reciting perfectly, were offered help and support when the material was difficult or not mastered correctly, and did not seem to fear their teachers or fear being either stigmatized or punished. Students themselves generally expressed positive opinions about their experience in Qur'anic schools, although most of their commentary focused on the rewards of learning the Qur'an as opposed to simply being in the school.

In addition, the above vignette contains an example of students studying together, another very frequent occurrence, as well as a formal example of peer tutoring, something that also occurs rather frequently. Making mistakes was not treated as a failure, merely as a condition needing more practice or perhaps some extra help. The student who was not ready would come forward again when he became ready. There is no set number of chances to "get it right," although a student would be egged on by the

teacher if he delayed unduly or was not ready because he fooled around too much. These types of behavior, attesting to the overall open environment in the classroom, were observed quite regularly in both schools.

In addition, teachers expressed their perceptions of themselves as learners and demonstrated actions based on this idea in many instances. For example, I observed Fouad sitting on the floor with his students, despite the availability of desks, because he said it made him feel like one who learned like the rest of them. In addition, I observed Fouad practicing his own recitation, as he had assigned the students to do, in order to demonstrate that he too needed to practice and could still improve. He played the role of an elder setting a good example for the younger students. In the girls' school, the teacher also worked on her own recitation as the students were practicing theirs.

Thus, these classrooms that I observed seem designed to foster a certain amount of autonomy and cooperation, especially in contrast to the more rigid public school classroom environment that I observed. While physical punishment did occur in the boys' school (raps on the hand to varying degrees of intensity for too much non-work-related fooling around or talking), the schools were remarkably relaxed and dynamic places offering students a healthy atmosphere in which to learn and to grow.

Conclusion

The role that Qur'anic schools play in the education of children, that is, the boys' and girls' schools that I studied in 1997, can be illuminated and discussed using the concept of health as a framework for discussion. From this brief study in Yemen, I found that these Qur'anic schools focused not just on the explicit task of facilitating memorization of the Qur'an but on developing a socially, spiritually, and emotionally healthy student vis-à-vis Yemeni society and culture at the end of the twentieth century. Students' parents identified the Qur'anic schools as providing knowledge and skills complementary to those learned in the public schools. They regarded the public schools as positive and necessary for the development of the intellect but lacking in attention to other areas of their children's development that they expected formal education to foster, namely social and spiritual growth. In addition, my field notes suggest that the affirming environment found in the two Qur'anic schools studied, as well as the focus on spiritual development, fostered a healthy sense of confidence and security among students. Education in Yemen is thus divided in practice between public schools (for *ta'lim*) and Qur'anic schools (to emphasize *tarbiya* and *ta'dib*) in order to provide a "balanced diet" for the healthy development of the child. While these boundaries between the two types of schooling are not etched in stone and there is certainly some overlap in both directions, the distinctions do help illuminate the importance of Qur'anic schooling in Sana'a.

In addition, the method of learning in these two Qur'anic schools in Sana'a reflects many of the principles and practices associated with the theory of situated learning. Students do move from the periphery of knowledge toward the center of knowledge—social, spiritual, and emotional—as they study. Through this process, they gradually become more proficient practitioners of Islam and more conscious or explicit members of the community of practice of Islam in their neighborhoods, their country, and the global *umma*. Situated learning allows us to better capture and describe the emphasis on social, spiritual, and emotional development that these two Qur'anic schools in Sana'a foster than a discussion of straightforward subject matter acquisition would. In contrast to the idea of Qur'anic memorization as stultifying, situated learning helps to describe the broader range of outcomes that go with memorization and that sustain these communities of practice, as illustrated by the Yemen example.

CHAPTER 4

Qur'anic Schools and the Preservation of a Moroccan Tradition

To understand the significance of the Moroccan schools discussed in this chapter, it is important, even necessary, to know and “feel” something of the context in which they function. Morocco and Chefchouan, a small town in the north of Morocco, constitute the social and cultural milieu in which these particular Qur'anic preschools function. Both are described briefly below, with more attention paid to the more immediate community of Chefchouan. The historical background on Morocco that has been included uses the colonial period as a starting point, since this was the period that saw a new form of schooling introduced into the country, one that forever changed the traditional schools that had been the major source of instruction for children.

The second section of this chapter deals primarily with the contours of French and Islamic schooling in Morocco from a comparative perspective. It describes briefly their histories and how they coexist today, as a preface to discussing, in the final section, some of the more precise roles that Moroccan Qur'anic schools play today, in a world of seemingly diminished need for their particular type of education.

Thus, the third and final section looks at ways in which Qur'anic schools work to preserve and even embody a connection with the past, with traditional learning and Moroccan traditional life, even as they have adapted to the dominance of public schools on the educational landscape, a fact that has diminished their role as the primary institutions of formal schooling in Morocco. As with the previous chapter on Qur'anic schools in Sana'a, this section connects the idea of preservation to the

idea of joining a community of practice, in essence giving an example from Morocco of how Qur'anic preschool learning can constitute a form of legitimate peripheral participation. Many themes from the Sana'a chapter are found in Morocco, but the setting of Morocco and the fact that Qur'anic schools are essentially preschools means that these themes play out in different ways. Again, because of the heavy association of Qur'anic schools with cultural, social, and religious preservation, it is too easy to overlook the complexity of the process and the less obvious content of the preservation itself.

Morocco: Historical Background

Morocco, an Arab, Muslim country on the northwest corner of Africa, was taken over as a French protectorate in 1912, in a deal that left Britain to pursue its claims to Egypt while granting Morocco to France. Within this arrangement, Spain obtained the right to occupy the north of Morocco, including Chefchouan. Thus, while Morocco's official second language is French, in northern Morocco there are more people, especially older people, who speak Spanish but not French. The period of the protectorate lasted until 1956.

In general, the north of Morocco has been poorer and less developed than other regions (and less favored by the monarchy) because it has a somewhat different history from the rest of Morocco and because of its reputation as a rough and rebellious area (Gaudio, 1962). However, because of its particular history, including Spanish colonization, northern Morocco (the region of Chefchouan) has always had strong links with southern Spain.

The Monarchy and Government

From 1961 to 1999, Morocco was ruled by Hassan II, who did much to unify Morocco psychologically into one nation. He had a talent for promoting traditionalism and modernization at the same time. He encouraged Qur'anic schooling, for example, while expanding public schooling. He co-opted Islamic fundamentalist movements by declaring himself the first Islamicist in Morocco. His classical Arabic was impeccable, and he could always quote an appropriate passage from the Qur'an for any event or speech (El Ayadi, personal communication). (Speaking well in classical Arabic and being able to quote the Qur'an extensively and appropriately are two admired skills; both attest to his excellent Islamic education.) In keeping with his ability to balance between East and West, his French was also flawless. His eldest son, Mohammed VI, became king at the age of thirty-six in 1999. He is of a different, softer temperament than his father and belongs to a new generation. He is young, vigorous

and good looking, imparting a new air of glamor and modernity to this age-old kingship. Still, he has been careful thus far to maintain monarchical rituals and to assert himself as a leader of the faithful. He maintains the power of his father at present, although he is known to admire King Juan Carlos of Spain and his kingship, and there is some optimism that he will nudge Morocco further toward an authentic constitutional monarchy at some point.

The Current Political "Climate"

In 2003, Morocco had a population of just over 31 million people, a third of whom were under fourteen years. The Moroccan economy is based largely on agriculture and mineral exports, particularly phosphates. While Morocco has many natural resources, a fairly stable political system, and is experiencing more political openness than in the past, it still faces certain problems. These include high unemployment (around 19% officially), a huge gap between the relatively small rich minority and the larger number of poorer people, and an extremely low female literacy (39.4%) rate. In addition, Morocco is still trying to assert its claim over the Western Sahara, and in the recent past has had to be vigilant against the spillover of violent fundamentalism from Algeria.

These problems notwithstanding, Morocco seems remarkably stable. The death of King Hassan II did not cause a toppling of the monarchy; unemployment and other social ills have not caused unrest as predicted by many Western political scientists (Entelis, 1997, 1989; Munson Jr., 1993). A Casablanca businessman who funds many GZA Qur'anic schools in Morocco said to me:

Morocco can't be compared to Algeria or Tunisia. Morocco is something else; it didn't start just yesterday. Why has this society remained? Why are these cities [Fes and Marrakech] still majestic? Because we have been always, thanks to God, living in solidarity.

Indeed, many other countries in the Middle East and North Africa, for example, Algeria and Egypt, have become either more xenophobic, fearing outside influences, or have experienced much more social violence. Combs-Schilling attributes Morocco's stability and lack of xenophobia to its ability to maintain what she calls its "selfhood":

Xenophobia is not much prevalent in Morocco, although it is alive and well in other North African and Middle Eastern countries, especially in those that indiscriminately adopted Western models at the expense of their own selfhood during the 1960s and 1970s (A.H. 1380s and 1390s). The leadership of these countries experienced

wide-scale popular disenchantment when the First World models did not bring First World economic and political power, as the case of Iran, Egypt, and Tunisia demonstrate. (Combs-Schilling, 1989, pp. 293–294)

Morocco by contrast has remained stable both politically and culturally. That is to say that a strong sense of Moroccan identity and culture has tended to stabilize the political climate, differentiating Morocco from, say, Algeria, as the interviewee above suggests.

Combs-Schilling describes the general atmosphere in Morocco as one of cultural self-assurance:

Morocco not only survives, it thrives. The arts flourish, the intellect soars, commerce expands. Painters, poets, novelists, and commercialists are in abundance and produce remarkable combinations of old and new, past and future, of what is particularly Moroccan and what is quintessentially human. (Combs-Schilling, 1989, p. 292)

This is not to say that fears of Western hegemony do not exist among the Moroccan population. They certainly do. However, the political climate of Morocco, which reflects a level of cultural comfort and security (among other things), is very different from that in other countries with similar economic conditions.

Islamic fundamentalist parties have had some growth in Morocco (particularly the banned Justice and Charity party), but fundamentalists have never discredited former King Hassan II or his son, the current King Mohammed VI, as a “leader of the faithful” in the minds of Moroccan citizens. While politically active, Moroccan fundamentalists tend to operate within the broad contours of “the system” as it exists. This is to say, they tend to be neither violent nor radical and are not generally “at war” with the government (Munson Jr., 1993; Entelis, 1997). The Casablanca suicide bombings of 2002 were a shock to many Moroccans, generating much more public condemnation than sympathy for the perpetrators, all Moroccan, and their cause, generally thought to be support for Al-Qaeda and the destabilization of the Moroccan government.

To conclude this section, Morocco is passionately Islamic and notoriously moderate: an anomaly to the West’s characterization of Islam as a cultural and political force (Munson Jr., 1993; Entelis, 1997). It has a long history and a rich, complex, and diverse cultural makeup. Islam is one of the key unifying factors across Morocco’s different regions and cultural groups. From the monarchy on down, Qur’anic schooling in one form or another is part of growing up Moroccan and is a mechanism for asserting traditional values, often in nontraditional ways. The presence of traditions, such as

Qur'anic schooling, is part of Morocco's ability to maintain its stability and balance between East and West.

Chefchouan

"A little town hangs in a cleft between peaks." (Willcox, 1971, p. 71)

Les bornes kilométriques se succèdent sur cette route de Tétouan qui embrasse la montagne, sans que la ville "sainte et mystérieuse" montre ses minarets pourtant si proches. La cordillère rifaine la protège et la cache aux yeux de l'étranger comme un père exclusif renferme, pour la garder, la plus belle de ses filles. (Gaudio, 1962, p. 79)

Chefchouan (or Chouan, as it is frequently referred to for short) is a picturesque town of about 30,000 people tucked into the Rif mountains of northern Morocco. Chefchouan's population is made up of (1) the descendants of people who immigrated from southern Spain (Andalusia) centuries ago when the Muslims were driven out, (2) the local Berber people, and (3) Moroccans from other parts of Morocco who settled there, mainly for work (i.e., civil servants such as public school teachers and the like).

The north of Morocco and the Rif area in particular has a reputation for being rough, secretive, and not especially open to strangers, Moroccan or otherwise. This reputation comes largely from the nature of two of the largest sources of commerce and income in the area: smuggling (contraband goods from Spain) and hashish cultivation and distribution. While Chefchouan does have its share of tourists, and it is touted in the guidebooks as one of the prettiest towns in Morocco, it is nowhere near the number of tourists that flood Fes and Marrakech, the two major tourist cities in Morocco. Chefchouan tends to attract younger tourists, who are not intimidated by its slightly remote location, the difficulties in getting there, not to mention the lack of real luxury accommodation.

There are roughly two sections of town—the old section and the new section. The old section—known as the old *medina*—is still the heart of the city, with the town square Uta Hammam, and the main mosque, with its lovely octagonal minaret, located there. The old town is a walled town; people stream in and out, to and from the newer section of town, through gates in the wall. Many old town neighborhoods take their names from the gate to which they are nearest. All of the Qur'anic preschools I visited in Chefchouan are situated in the older section of town. There are kindergartens in Chefchouan, and those I was familiar with were all in the new city except for one.

The old *medina* of Chefchouan is a Mediterranean blue and crisp white collection of adjoining but asymmetrical, flat-roofed, whitewashed



Fig. 4.1 A backstreet in the old medina of Chefchouan, Morocco 1998. Photo credit: Helen N. Boyle.

houses and shops, all two or three stories high. Old houses are adorned with big wooden doors, some extremely old, with heavy iron doorknockers. Filigreed wrought iron latticework grates cover the windows. The blue on the houses and shops comes from an indigo wash, applied over the whitewash on the lower portion of the buildings. This indigo wash cuts the sun's glare for the people at street level and, so it is said, repels mosquitoes. The color gives the streets an illusion of coolness, even when it is swelteringly hot.

The houses are separated by narrow, uneven cobblestone streets, which wind under shabby but graceful archways and, like a maze, twist and turn into little alleyways that suddenly open onto small plazas. Laundry billows

from clotheslines on the flat rooftops, and neighborhood women wave and lean over the roof walls to chat with each other. Within neighborhoods (and even across different neighborhoods) people tend to know each other.

Naguib Mahfouz's description of a street in the old *medina* of Cairo is as apt for Chefchouan (or Fes, Rabat, or Marrakech) as it is for Cairo:

What an excellent street . . . like a labyrinth! Every few meters it turned to the right or left. No matter where a person stood, he was always confronted by a curve, behind which an unknown world lay concealed. Narrowness gave the road an unassuming, familiar character, like that of a pet animal. A man sitting in a shop on the right could reach over and shake hands with his neighbor on the other side Bunched together on shelves and benches [in the shops] were sacks of green henna, red cayenne, and black pepper—along with flasks of rose water and perfume, colored wrapping paper, and diminutive scales. Hanging from the rafters was a decorative fringe of candles of diverse sizes and colors. The fragrance of different perfumes and colognes filled the air like the aroma of a distant dream. (Mahfouz, 1992, p. 264)

The old section of Chefchouan boasts a tiny museum housed in an old Portuguese fort/prison in Uta Hammam. This museum, housing some photographs, textiles, wood and pottery crafts, is dedicated to the Andalusian culture, which is found in southern Spain and northern Morocco. During colonization, the Spanish took over the fort; tourists could clamber onto the old prison ramparts and wander through the dank old cells where prisoners (mainly rebellious Moroccans during the colonial period) were locked up. Outside the *qasbah* (old fort), in the square, one can always find sellers of baskets and second-hand items with their wares spread on the ground. Cafés line the square and are filled with Chefchouani men and some tourists, mainly Spanish but also European and the occasional American or Japanese.

Women generally do not sit in cafés in Chefchouan, especially not in the more traditional old city, as it is not considered respectable. (However, during the hot summer months one can see groups of girls or families in some cafés in the evenings in the new section of town. Rules are more relaxed in the summer months due to a general vacation atmosphere and the very hot climate; the latter makes getting out in the evening, when it is cooler, more of a necessity.) In general, female socializing includes a lot of visiting at each other's homes and sometimes meeting in the market and the *hammam* (Turkish baths). Women tend to do the housework, laundry, and cooking in the morning and save visiting, needlework, and the like until after the mid-afternoon prayer (generally sometime after 3:00 p.m., depending on the time of year).

Lastly, the old town boasts of several *zawiyas* (gathering places) that are usually associated with different Sufi brotherhoods. People meet to recite the Qur'an and pray in these buildings. During colonialism, *zawiyas* were often meeting places from which to organize against the French and Spanish. They are also considered scholarly meeting places for the *'ulama* (scholarly community in Islam). *Zawiyas* used to house travelers as well. On the inside, they are actually quite similar to mosques and were indeed used for the same general purposes. Many of the Qur'anic preschools, which are run by the Green Zawiya Association for Education and Culture (GZA), are housed in *zawiyas* in Chefchouan, Fes, and Tetouan. The two schools in Chefchouan most frequently visited for this research were held in two different *zawiyas* not far from the main square, Uta Hammam. Every morning and afternoon, groups of little children, some with a parent accompanying them, would emerge from the narrow streets of the old town into the square and head to one of the two nearby GZA *kuttab*s.

The new section of town, which directly adjoins the older, enclosed section, houses the post office, government offices, the police station, a couple of gas stations, some schools, and many newer houses and shops. The streets are wider and sunnier, some lined with palm trees. Most of the buildings are still white, although without the indigo wash. Most houses are still grouped into neighborhoods, and rooftop conversation, or at least a friendly wave, is still possible between women as they hang out the laundry. (Rooftops and balconies are generally considered women's domains. This comes from the days when women were less free to go outside. Roofs and balconies were their means of getting out of doors. These are also the places where laundry is generally done and hung out to dry and where slaughtering of animals and some cooking—mainly grilling meat—are done.) Yards are not common—some villas (stand-alone houses) have gardens, but most playing is done in the streets and lots within the neighborhoods, as in the old section of town. The new section is growing rapidly. Since there is more space between buildings, the Rif mountains, green, brown, and black, some with their peaks in the clouds, are clearly visible from almost any vantage point in the new section.

Shopping for produce and meat in Chefchouan is done at a main *souk* or open-air market area in the new section. Much of the produce in the open-air *souks* is brought in daily from the countryside by farm families and sold directly to the town residents. Other types of household goods are bought at small neighborhood shops (the type that are known as “mom and pop” shops in the U.S.), which are located everywhere throughout both the new and old sections.

In 1955, a travel writer described Chefchouan as remote:

... a mountain village called Xauen (pronounced Shau-un), softly brilliant in its colouring, fragrant with flowers and inexpressibly remote. (Gunther, 1953, p. 66)

In 1998, it could no longer be described as impossibly remote. While it was (and is) somewhat off the beaten path and although there is no train service to Chefchouan, it is accessible by bus to the major cities in Morocco. It is an hour and a quarter by grand taxi, on a curvy two-lane road through the mountains, to the nearest city Tetouan (itself rather small and provincial). From Tetouan, one can easily change taxis for the additional hour drive to Tangier, one of Morocco's major cities, at the head of the Straits of Gibraltar, only a few miles from Spain. Taxi and bus travel to Chouan is not luxurious (or even comfortable, especially for those prone to motion sickness), but it is abundantly available and not prohibitively expensive. In addition, teleboutiques (shops where one can make phone calls) are to be seen everywhere in Chouan, as they are in most Moroccan cities and towns, and satellite dishes abound, bringing programs from all over the world, including Egypt, the Middle East, Europe, and even the U.S.

Still, Chefchouan is a much different place than the bustling urban centers of Morocco, with their cyber cafés, movie theaters, and chic boutiques. In 1998, Chefchouan had no ATM machines, no internet facilities, no movie theaters, two newsstands, and no stores that took credit cards (except for a couple of tourist shops, which did so with great difficulty). Although a bank machine was installed in 1999 and cyber cafés also arrived shortly thereafter, life in Chefchouan is still traditional in many ways. For example, as mentioned above, women and girls do not sit in cafés in Chefchouan, where they might in Rabat and Casablanca; more men and women tend to wear the traditional Moroccan dress in Chefchouan than in the major urban centers and the pace of life is slower.

The following section discusses the ways in which Qur'anic (*msids* and *kuttabs*) and public schools have come to share space in Morocco's educational landscape.

Public Schooling in Morocco

The French were the first to introduce European-styled schools into Morocco. Since French principles of colonization involved strong tendencies toward assimilating natives into French culture (Watson, 1982), the institutions implanted in the French colonies were replicas of French institutions in France. In particular, the local school systems, which the French created in their colonies, were based chiefly on the encyclopedist

principles of *rationalism*, *universality*, and *utility*, reflecting the roots and core philosophy of France's own system. Rationality required that school subjects have an ordered rational structure, be rigorous and scientific (as opposed to spiritual or intuitive). Universality demanded that all students acquire a broad base of knowledge from all areas (without early specializations or concentrations, like memorizing the Qur'an) before moving on to a specialization. In addition, this principle required a tightly controlled, centralized curriculum to ensure standardization. National examinations theoretically lead to promotions based on merit, and the examinations are also completely standardized to ensure uniformity and fairness (Holmes and McLean, 1989). Indeed, even today all schools in Morocco have identical requirements and students acquire knowledge in the same order, at the same pace nationwide.

The principle of utility demands that rational knowledge be applied for the improvement of society. However, the application of the utility principle, which justified many forms of vocational education, was never viewed as highly as the more theoretical types of studies. Therefore, with the exception of language study, much of what is studied in Moroccan schools even today is not particularly skills-based or practitioner-oriented. Children leave school with a good deal of theoretical knowledge but little idea of how to apply it or connect it to daily needs and problems. Given the focus on pure reason and the lack of prestige associated with the practical application of knowledge, university graduates are typically qualified for no particular work when they graduate, despite having a great deal of theoretical knowledge. Years ago, most graduates went into teaching. Those jobs are no longer automatically available and the process of obtaining certification (i.e., gaining a certificate from an *Ecole Normale Supérieure*) is very competitive. While Morocco is engaging in educational reform efforts and initiatives, the highly centralized system, which is still largely theoretical and prescriptive, remains in place today.

Public schools in Morocco, as in many places, are seen as avenues to economic prosperity and social mobility, even though jobs are scarce and unemployment is high, even for university graduates. Public schools are valued for teaching children other languages that allow them to function in an ever-shrinking world and allow them to communicate with a wide range of people from other countries. They are valued for passing along knowledge that is perceived to help children go to university, obtain government jobs, work in tourism, start small businesses, and the like. Public school success is highly valued. Religion—Islam—is taught as a subject and the Qur'an is memorized, but the focus is not as intense as in Qur'anic schools, where Qur'anic memorization is really the central focus, especially in the early years.

As a result of the prestige associated with public schooling and the economic rewards associated with it, public schools have attracted students away from Qur'anic schools in huge numbers. Relatively few Moroccan children attend a Qur'anic school exclusively as their only form of formal education. Those who do most likely live in rural areas where public schools are not as easily available, given that the population is more spread out and one does not exist in every hamlet and village.

Islamic Schooling in Morocco

Qur'anic schools have existed for over a thousand years in Morocco. They have withstood efforts to eradicate or marginalize them by both French colonialists and contemporary Moroccan educators concerned with developing a "modern" national system of education. In a 1968 royal address, King Hassan II encouraged Qur'anic schooling, in the form of preschools, as an authentically Moroccan way to start off a child's education. Subsequent royal addresses in 1986 and 1992 also voiced support for the idea of Qur'anic preschools.

Precolonial Moroccan education was typical of traditional Islamic education, as described in Chapter 1. It was organized around a system of local, community-run Qur'anic schools. Qur'anic schools were found in both urban and rural areas. Children attended Qur'anic schools first and, if the family could afford it and the child showed promise, he (not he or she) was sent to attend one of the *madrasas* in the nearest city or sent directly on to one of the mosque-universities located in Fes or Marrakech. Generally, more boys studied and pursued education, although there are some examples of Qur'anic schools that existed for girls (Abu-Talib, 1987). Village, town, and neighborhood Qur'anic schools were financed by community members, and the Qur'anic schoolteacher (*fqih*) received lodging and food from community members. He usually held other positions within the community (*imam* in the mosque, traditional healer, tailor, etc.) to earn money, in addition to his teaching duties (Spratt & Wagner, 1984; Pollak, 1983).

Currently, there are two types of Qur'anic schools in Chefchouan, distinguishable by using the words *msid* and *kuttab*. These words in Arabic are often used synonymously, although the word *kuttab* generally suggests young children (ages 3–6) more strongly than the word *msid* (Abu-Talib, 1987). However, many of the interviewees for this research used both these words interchangeably when talking about one institution. While differing in many respects, both types of contemporary Qur'anic schooling in Chefchouan—the "*msid*" and the "*kuttab*"—do have their roots in the more homogeneous system of Qur'anic education that existed in Morocco for hundreds of years, before French colonialism began in 1912. However, the

msid can be described as a “traditional traditional school” and the *kuttab* as a “modern traditional school.”

Lastly, note that the labels “*kuttab*” and “*msid*,” used to designate the two different models of schools I found in Chouan, are somewhat imposed. In essence, I grouped one category of schools I observed under the label *kuttab* and one under the label *msid*. I arrived at this system of designation from hearing most of the female Qur’anic schoolteachers with whom I spent time refer to their place of work as a *kuttab*. Since the GZA personnel in Chouan tended to self-identify their schools as *kuttab*s, I did so as well; however, the same schools were occasionally referred to as *msids* by parents and community members and even GZA personnel or administrators. (Indeed, the second GZA brochure that came out in the summer of 1999 was entitled *The Msid*.) Lastly, with respect to the label *kuttab*, there is a song that young children sing (frequently) in the GZA schools: the first line is (translated) “We are the children of the ‘*katatib*’ (plural of *kuttab*),” another example of self-identification using the term *kuttab*. By contrast, the *fqiḥ* (traditional Qur’anic schoolteacher) in the school I visited referred to his school as a *msid* and I never heard him call it a *kuttab*. Thus, from my observations, I came to use the label *msid* to indicate a “traditional traditional” school and the label *kuttab* to indicate a “modern traditional” school in order to clearly distinguish the two models.

There are four main differences between these two types (*msid* and *kuttab*) in Chefchouan:—(1) the type of teacher employed, (2) the age of the children in the school, (3) the learning materials used, and (4) the teaching methods employed. The age of the children also dictates some differences in the depth of subject matter taught, although the core curriculum in both is the Qur’an.

Of the two, the “traditional traditional” school—the *msid*—most closely resembles precolonial Moroccan Qur’anic schooling, because it adheres to the form and practices of traditional Qur’anic schooling. The “modern traditional” Qur’anic school (the *kuttab*) adheres to the central mission or practice of a traditional Qur’anic school in that it continues to focus on facilitating Qur’anic memorization. But, while the essential mission of the Qur’anic school has not changed in substance in these newer institutions, it has changed in degree. Nowadays, children memorize a few chapters of the Qur’an while in the *kuttab*. This is because they stay in the Qur’anic school for approximately two years, after which they go on to the public school. In addition to Qur’anic memorization, the primary curricular focus, children learn some letters and numbers, do a small amount of writing on the blackboard or on a slate, and learn a number of chants and invocations and some national songs as well. The *kuttab*s, unlike the *msids*, have borrowed more

liberally from outside educational models and are more prevalent. Hence, there is more focus on them than the *msids* in the subsequent section and following chapters. The following chart presents a comparison of the two institutions.

Msid

1. Students use a whitewashed wooden slate called a *luh* on which to write
2. Students are seated on the floor around the *fqih*; the *fqih* himself sits on the floor
3. Still accepts corporal punishment as a disciplining technique, although less so than it was in the past
4. Serves students of varying ages in group classes—not age-segregated classes
5. Utilizes a good deal of one-on-one coaching as an instructional technique
6. Allows students a great deal of independent work time to write and memorize verses before presenting them to the *fqih*
7. Utilizes peer tutoring among students, with older children helping out and quizzing the younger ones as an instructional technique
8. Fosters a sort of master/apprentice relationship between the *fqih* and the student over time (this is for the students who generally stay on to memorize the whole Qur'an)
9. Allows students to progress by material mastered, moving on to a new verse or text once they have memorized the one before

Kuttab

1. Teachers use a blackboard and students use pencils and notebooks
2. Students are seated at desks, in rows, facing the teacher or the blackboard
3. Does not use corporal punishment
4. Groups students in classes by age and level
5. Utilizes whole group instruction as the primary technique
6. Children generally not allowed independent work time or time to work with each other
7. Does not generally utilize peer tutoring or group work
8. Does not foster a master/apprentice relationship between the teacher and the student; the relation is generally more impersonal but slightly less authoritative
9. Sets a more defined pace for students' work and achievement and relies on formal tests for assessment; there is a great deal of "failing out" and there is little acceptance of varied rates of achievement

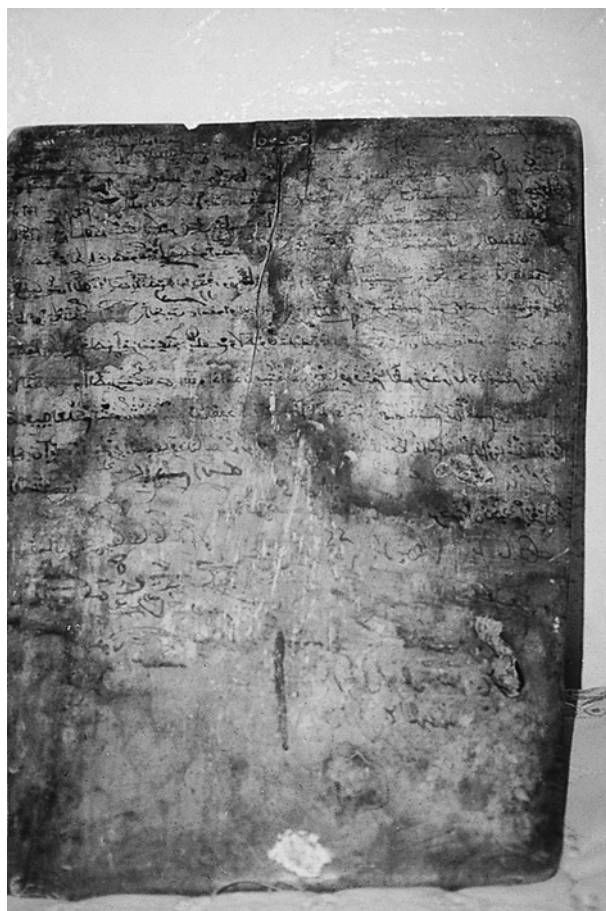


Fig. 4.2 An old “luh” as used in traditional *msids*. Photo credit: Helen N. Boyle.

A point of emphasis is that *kuttab*s, “modern traditional” schools, do have their roots in the traditional, centuries-old Qur’anic schools in that they have maintained the focus on Qur’anic memorization as their “raison d’être.” Leila, a supervisor of the *kuttab*s run by the GZA in Chefchouan, characterized them as a “continuation” of the *msids*. Also, the structure of their activities, while not identical to that of the *msid*, has more in common with the traditional classroom environment than with a “maternalle” (the French word for kindergarten or nursery school). Maternelles typically have toys for the children to play with and posters on the walls, and their curriculum does not emphasize Qur’anic memorization to the degree that the *kuttab*s do. They tend to be financed by charging tuition or fees for

attendance. Kindergartens do exist in Chefchouan and do teach a little of the Qur'an, but their origins are not the same as the traditional schools. Kindergartens or maternelles were not confused with Qur'anic schools by community members. Kindergartens are known as *rawd*s in Arabic whereas Qur'anic schools are known as *msids* or *kuttabs*.

As mentioned in the introduction, many *kuttabs* in Chefchouan are run by an association called the GZA. This association is funded by Moroccan businessmen and civic leaders and was started by Mr. Mohammed Ben Souda, whose brother had been a councilor to the late King Hassan II. Mr. Ben Souda's brother refurbished a *zawiya* in Fes connected with his family, and Mr. Ben Souda decided to turn it into a Qur'anic school, as it might have been in the old days. The association then decided to expand, opening more *kuttabs* in Fes, before moving to Tetouan, Chefchouan, and other towns. The schools run by the association are numerous in the north of Morocco and there are some in the south, in Marrakech, as well.

Indeed, *kuttabs* have been expanding rapidly. They define their mission as helping to support children's entry into public schools. In so doing, they have carved a niche for themselves so as to coexist with public schools. *Msids*, by contrast, have done this less well. While some exist as "after-school" schools and summer schools, *msids* as schools that children attend full time are on the decline in Morocco. Indeed, the *msid* that I studied in 1998 has since closed its doors for lack of pupils.

The *Kuttab*: A Moroccan Islamic Tradition

Kuttabs play an important role in preserving a hallowed Moroccan tradition of education and in preserving religious knowledge. Contemporary Qur'anic *kuttabs* do this because (1) they embody the Qur'an itself through the young children who memorize it and (2) they embody the concept of the traditional school, even as they deviate from it in certain respects. In doing these things, they vivify Moroccan traditions by giving them concrete form and "body"; they keep people actively in touch with manifestations of Moroccan traditional practice and identity. The GZA president told me once that the GZA, with all its "modern" innovations in Qur'anic schooling, is really seeking to make Morocco like it was hundreds of years ago, when you could hear the Qur'an being chanted at almost any street corner. He did not mean to return to the old days in terms of everything, but he did mean that Qur'anic knowledge would be much more prevalent, as it was in older times when *kuttabs* were found in every neighborhood, when the voices of students were heard daily as they memorized and recited their lessons, and when merchants and shopkeepers, who had studied some of the Qur'an, chanted it as they went about their work. The spirit of the traditional schools lives through hearing the Qur'an recited as one walks through the streets where *kuttab* students still study.

As the Qur'an is first and foremost an oral document, it is meant to be recited, to be chanted. Memorization—the key function of the *kuttab* (and the *msid*)—preserves the *spirit* of Qur'anic learning. *Kuttab*s draw on and embody a long history of Qur'anic schooling, despite the fact that they are not the same as the *msids* of old. They may be “modern traditional” schools and not “traditional traditional” schools, but they are still inheritors of the tradition of Moroccan Qur'anic schooling, giving life to its mission. The same expert who said that *kuttab*s are in the blood of Moroccans commented:

As I said before, Qur'anic *kuttab*s, which are an official institution, are a profound tradition that we cannot do without. I mean by tradition something we have to conserve, since it is our identity and our origin; it is something from which we make a start. It teaches us praying and fasting and everything.

Morocco's strong tendency to preserve its traditions and to rely on them, to use them in life-giving ways and not to regard them as quaint anachronisms, is prominently on display in this quotation. In essence, he is saying that *kuttab*s have “worked” for Morocco in the past and as such are needed now. They cannot be jettisoned because one cannot shed one's origins. He does not say that they cannot change or evolve, but simply that they cannot be separated from Morocco as a community of practice.

Traditional *msids* still exist in the countryside and in rural towns like Chefchouan. Still, their numbers are diminishing as parents choose to send their children to public schools. In Chefchouan, the *msid* I visited consistently was only well attended in July, after public school got over but before many families went on vacation in August. (The age range of children attending during the summer months was mixed, with children from ages seven to fourteen.) Given the demands of public schooling, children could not manage to attend the *msid* consistently. When faced with a choice between attending the *msid* or attending the public schools, parents have tended to opt for the public schools, recognizing the need to learn foreign languages and sciences, for example, which are not taught in the *msid*. King Hassan II saw this in 1968 when he endorsed the idea that Qur'anic schools should become preschools: the tradition would remain but the form would change to work with public schooling.

The changeover was a slow process, as are most social change processes. *Kuttab*s did not abound overnight and the government did not really orchestrate the change from an administrative or financial point of view. In Chefchouan, the GZA schools are really the first Qur'anic preschools that can really lay claim to the tradition of the *msid*. This is largely because of their focus on memorization. This degree of memorization is not found in a typical kindergarten.

The institutional body of the *kuttab*, not without some controversy, has begun to wear the mantle of the more traditional *msid*, albeit with alterations. (Indeed, although *kuttab*s are abridged in terms of the number of years a student studies in them, they reach a larger number of students than the old *msids*, largely because of the influx of girl students who were not present fifty years ago.) Even the *fqih* from one of the three remaining *msids* in Chouan acknowledged that the *kuttab* can facilitate memorization:

... yes, it is useful [the *kuttab*], because God has given children a capacity for memorization. If the child pays attention, he can memorize anything he hears. There is a saying by Abu Zaid El Kiraoui that goes: “learning in an early age is like engraving on stone.” However, if a person learns when becoming old, he is likely to forget, particularly if he doesn’t practice now and then.

This *fqih* said he had no objection to other kinds of schools as long as they teach correctly, so that teachers do not make mistakes when reciting the Qur’an and do not pass on errors to the children. While believing the *msid* to be a “better” institution than the *kuttab*, the *fqih*’s comment does reveal his belief that facilitating memorization (correct memorization) is important and any institution that does this is thus beneficial.

This *fqih* and others I spoke to were nostalgic for the days when *msids* were well attended and *fqih*s had many students. The *fqih* in Chouan said he does not believe that the *kuttab*s are a complete substitute for the *msids*, but he acknowledged their expediency in the current system. (He himself sent several of his sons to public school so that they could find work and be employable. Only his two youngest study with him in his *msid*.) While some experts I spoke to did deride the *kuttab* for being a nursery school and said that the female teachers are not nearly as qualified as the *fqih* is, most agreed that the *msid*’s reach is fading. Interestingly, many experts I interviewed who were skeptical of the *kuttab* and who praised the *msid* sent their children to public school and not to a *msid*.

As *kuttab*s are proliferating while *msids*, especially in towns and semirural areas, are fading, *kuttab*s are taking up the mantle of the old traditions and as such they, as institutions, embody Morocco’s long tradition of Qur’anic education. I am not suggesting here that it is necessarily desirable to have the “modern traditional” school prevail over the “traditional traditional” one. Personally I find the teaching methods in the old *msids* (minus the corporal punishment) to be more enlightening than the “modern” methods used in the *kuttab*s. The *kuttab*s I observed often tried to imitate the “chalk and talk” method that one often sees in the public schools. On the other hand, the *msids* use many instructional strategies that are more student-centered, such as peer tutoring, group work, one-on-one

coaching with the teacher, and so on. In my opinion, *kuttabs* would do well to try to imitate their precursors in terms of instructional methods. However, this does not change the fact that *kuttabs* now do embody the tradition of Qur'anic education in Morocco because they retain the traditional focus on Qur'anic memorization, albeit abridged, and their numbers are growing.

In addition to Qur'anic memorization, traditional schools were associated with inculcating good behavior—Islamic behavior—in their students. In part, as I outlined above, this was due to the fact of memorizing the Qur'an. However, in part it was due to the institution of the school itself, especially its focus on correct behavior and discipline, as the previous chapter on Yemen also alluded to. According to my interviewees, *kuttabs* (1) keep kids off the streets (out of trouble and away from bad influences) and (2) explicitly teach respectful, Islamic behavior to children. As these ideas were typically associated with the mission of the traditional school, I am suggesting that the institution of the *kuttab* embodies, in a newer format, this mission.

A Safe Haven from the Streets

The school represents a place of enlightenment and a haven from bad influences. This came through very clearly in my interviews, where people constantly juxtaposed the *kuttab* with the street. I was struck by how parents in Chouan referred to the *kuttab* as having a protective role in keeping their children off the streets. The street represents the outside, the uncontrolled. It is a place of potential danger, a place of other magnetic forces that might influence their children and pull them in the wrong direction. By sending their children to the *kuttab*, parents are directing them away from the street and into something safe and beneficial.

The following array of examples illustrates how the street is viewed and how the *kuttab* is seen as countering the influence of the street, thus acting as a kind of haven. Ahmed, a Chouani father, says:

His time should not be squandered and we want him to benefit from everything possible. We don't want his eyes opened onto the street but rather focused on his lessons.

A mother, Oumkaltoum, says:

It teaches children the Qur'an and '*adab* (how to behave, from the same root as *ta'dib*), it keeps them away from the street. They don't remain in the district just playing and fighting with each other. This is my opinion and I thank the people who have contributed to this good deed [the establishment of the GZA *kuttabs*].

Fatima, a mother with three daughters, says:

Well, it is a place from which they benefit. Instead of remaining in the street, playing and learning bad things, they find this place where they acquire a good education and where they learn a lot of things.

Naima believes that her son is better prepared for school, more so than he would be if he remained playing in the street:

Children don't remain in the streets. They learn *'adab* (how to behave) and politeness. They learn very well, writing and everything. He knows something before getting to school. It is not the same as being in the streets. They learn very well the Qur'an.

Latifah, who is illiterate, equates being in the *kuttab* and not on the street as a move away from illiteracy:

In order to learn the Qur'an, and not to remain in the streets, and to learn so as not to be like me.

The modern *kuttab* thus embodies a haven of good influence that is part and parcel of the tradition of the *msid*. It is a place for learning and for developing a sense of the difference between good and evil.

The GZA leadership is quite explicit in characterizing its mission as helping to keep children on the right path, and out of the streets as well. A GZA financier says:

If the parents have the possibility to send their children to preschool, they won't keep them in the street during this period. The parents who don't have [this possibility] leave their children wandering in the street and waiting for the age of seven when they can go to school.

The GZA sees itself as rescuing lower income children from the street. (Low-income children have fewer opportunities to do things that would take them off the streets—like attend a kindergarten—hence the GZA focus on them.) When the above interviewee talks about the possibility of sending a child to preschool, he is speaking of the financial possibility. Paid preschools or kindergartens (*rawd*s) are expensive and out of the financial range of the majority of Moroccan parents. As the GZA *kuttab* classes are offered free of charge, the GZA sees itself as offering a haven to low-income children to keep them off the streets.

The streets in Chefchouan, or Morocco in general for that matter, are not what I would characterize as dangerous, vis-à-vis American standards. Chouan especially is a small town and is quite safe, even for tourists. I do not have actual crime statistics, but from my experience living there I would guess that there is a small amount of petty theft and some drug use.

I have never heard of any violent crime in the time I was living there and I have the distinct impression that violent crime is rare, almost unheard of. Thus, the dangers that parents see in the streets are not the guns and violence that American parents fear, but areas of exposure to drug use (smoking hashish), selling hashish, smoking cigarettes, swearing/blaspheming, and the like, which are traditionally done outside the home away from the eyes of elders. (For example, it is often considered disrespectful for men to smoke in front of their parents and even younger siblings. The father might know that his son smokes and he might even smoke himself, but at the same time he would not expect his son to display this habit in front of him. Hence, smoking might be done in the street, in a café, or somewhere else outside the home.) Thus, the street—outside the home or school—is seen as a place where children will be tempted by and perhaps succumb to “unhealthy” habits, in the holistic sense.

Learning How to Act

Traditional schools also assured the correct socialization of children into accepted modes of behavior (Eickelman, 1985; Houtsonen, 1991; Houtsonen, 1994; Lamdasni, Benlafkih, Fatihi, Elhosni, & Alaoui, 1993; Talbani, 1996). I have already mentioned the idea of Qur’anic memorization acting as a compass for children. Another aspect of the mantle of the *msid* that has passed to the *kuttab* is the idea of teaching children how to behave properly. In Morocco, behaving properly is related in a holistic sense to practicing one’s religion and participating constructively in the community of practice. (Showing respect for elders is one example of proper behavior, not swearing is another, and greeting each person in a room as you enter is a third example.) Collectively, this type of proper behavior is termed *’adab* and is related to one of the words for education in Arabic, *ta’dib*, which expresses the idea of educating someone’s behavior.

’Adab was something learned in the *msid*. One father, Jamal, reminiscing about the good things he found in the *msid*, said:

The *fqih* used to teach children to kiss his hand [traditional greeting of respect] and to respect him. If you respect the *fqih*, you’ll respect your father, then you will respect a man who is old. I mean, you’ll have good conduct in the streets.

(He is speaking of the work of the *msids* when he was young. At this time there were definitely more boys than girls in these institutions, hence his use of the male pronouns exclusively. He also alludes to conduct in the streets, which is typically more the province of men than women.) The *fqih* inspired a certain awe, a certain fear, and thus a certain kind of respect that was thought to translate into other situations.

The *kuttab* teachers do not inspire as much fear, since corporal punishment is forbidden and the teachers are generally not harsh or fierce with the children. Still, according to many parents (and GZA officials and teachers), the principles of *'adab* are still taught in the *kuttab*. Zohra, a young mother, says:

Q: Apart from the Qur'an, does he learn anything else?

A: Yes, learning and *'adab*.

Q: What do you mean by *'adab*?

A: It is good when he comes home and kisses your hand.

Zohra also mentioned that a kindergarten to which she had sent her older daughter had allowed her to write with her left hand, something the mother did not consider appropriate. (The left hand is associated with cleaning oneself; parents often discourage using the left hand for eating or writing, for example.) Another mother, Oumkaltoum, gave an example in the same vein:

They learn *'adab*, which is something better than remaining in the street just playing and dirtying their clothes. They kiss you both when they leave and when they come back. When she [the daughter] gets up in the morning she says good morning. When we were that age, we didn't know these things.

Another mother, Meriam, said:

They [*kuttab* teachers] tell them not to shout at their parents and they tell them to say "good morning" and "salaam alaykum" [peace be on you, traditional Islamic greeting] to their parents.

Ahmed, a father cited earlier, noticed this as well:

Q: Can you give me some examples about the things you have noticed that he has learned there [in the *kuttab*]?

A: There are many things. Though we haven't told him to do this, he says *bismillah* [in the name of God] when he starts to eat. When he wakes up he says "Good morning daddy." Also, when he comes back from the *kuttab* he embraces me and says "I've arrived, Daddy." When he wants to go out, he says "Goodbye Daddy, I am going out." I say to him "May God bless you (laughter)!"

Undoubtedly, some of this is the natural maturation and socialization process, as the children see more of the society around them and how it operates. Still, I did witness the teachers emphasize the process of teaching children how to greet people. For example, they were supposed to say

“*salaam alaykum*” to the class upon entering and the class was supposed to respond “*alaykum salaam*”, the traditional reply.

I had a group of little girls who used to kiss me goodbye upon leaving the *kuttab* each day. Since the 50–60 kids in the class took their shoes off upon entering the *zawiya*, they all had to put them on again before leaving. Most did not know how to tie their shoes yet and the youngest had trouble even getting them on; hence, dismissal time was always a little chaotic. Kissing me goodbye was considered very polite on the part of these little girls, but it eventually began to take up time when the teachers wanted to get everyone out the door; hence, occasionally one teacher, whose class I observed most frequently, would tell the girls to forget the kissing stuff and just get going! Politeness had its limits with that number of kids! This anecdote notwithstanding, elements of *’adab* were taught and practiced within the *kuttab* and, according to parents, were practiced outside of it as well.

The GZA has consciously maintained this explicit focus on imparting correct behavior to students. A GZA financier expresses the GZA mission in the following way:

Our strategy is that the child learns the Qur’an and the respect of the other during three or four years. The Qur’an, learning and respect, this is the true education. The child should know what to do and what not to do. This is our curriculum and this is what we tell the teachers to do. We start by teaching children to read, to respect people, to respect the family, to respect the parents, to respect religion and to respect the culture of Morocco.

The GZA president says:

Concerning education, the powerless children, whose parents cannot send them to kindergartens between the ages of 3 and 7, end up in the street. There the child learns to take cigarette butts, to blaspheme and say dirty words. Now, you can’t find a bad mannered child at our schools. Even those who didn’t use to kiss their parents’ hands, start to kiss the *fqih*’s hand. So, they put in practice at home what they learn here.

(There is a *fqih* who presides over prayers at the original Green Zawiya in Fes, and it is this man to whom Mr. Ben Souda is referring when saying that the children start to kiss the *fqih*’s hand.) Thus, implicit in GZA’s vision of educating children is the notion of teaching them how to behave in a culturally Moroccan/Islamic way. Kissing the hands of elders and parents, showing respect by greeting people with “*salaam alaykum*”, paying attention to their personal appearance, saying good morning—all of these are aspects of polite cultural behavior that are associated both with Moroccan culture and Islam in the minds of Moroccans.

In addition to traditional manifestations of polite Moroccan Islamic behavior, the *kuttab*s do deal with other aspects of 'adab. On one occasion a male *kuttab* student had taken his little sister across the street and up a block or two from his house without his mother's permission. Somehow this became common knowledge. (The town is small and the parents, teachers, and students cross paths outside of school quite frequently). The next day in the *kuttab*, a good ten minutes of the lesson was given over to explaining what the boy did and telling him it was wrong. It was done gently but clearly as he was only four or five, but it was nonetheless an example of explicitly teaching 'adab. In another example, one day a boy was similarly chided for asking for *dirhams* (Moroccan money) from tourists in *Uta Hammam* (the town square). One of the teachers saw him doing this—something not considered proper behavior—and the incident was made the topic of discussion in class, as an example of unacceptable behavior.

This is not to say that these *kuttab*s are the only institutions that try to teach 'adab. Kindergartens and even primary schools do this to a certain degree, but not in conjunction with the heavy and explicit focus on Qur'anic memorization that is the other hallmark of traditional education. Thus, the only institution that combines the two foci, besides the traditional *msid*, is the "modern traditional" *kuttab*. That the *kuttab* tries to perpetuate 'adab attests to its close association with traditional Moroccan education. The *kuttab*, like the *msid*, perpetuates traditional Moroccan notions of what education should be and do.

In sum, the Qur'anic *kuttab*s provide an opportunity for children to memorize the Qur'an as their ancestors did. While many aspects of the school experience are different from those experienced by children fifty years ago, some are quite similar. Through this process of attending Qur'anic school, children participate in a learning process whereby they come to know and enact a set of shared values that reflect the belief system of a community of practice. The *kuttab* is a first step in getting them ready to consciously assume their place in the Moroccan Islamic community of practice when they are older.

The *kuttab* embodies the protective function of the traditional school. While the primary source of immunity from anything evil is memorization of the Qur'an, the *kuttab* as an institution acts as a barrier between the child and the street, between the child and bad influences. Much as we in the West say "idle hands are the devil's playground," the *kuttab* keeps children busy, focused on Qur'anic memorization and other good things, rather than leaving them idle, to be exposed to the potential danger of the streets.

*Kuttab*s as institutions embody a long tradition of Moroccan education that has survived efforts to eradicate or marginalize it. Although changing in form, the core mission of Qur'anic memorization and the teaching of

'*adab* remain the cornerstones of the *kuttab*. In this sense, they renew Morocco's indigenous educational tradition, something that is a well-known part of Moroccan culture and history. As heirs (with the contemporary *msids*) of Morocco's traditional educational institutions, *kuttab*s are the embodiment of the past carried into the present, of the past animating the present without being a slave to it. In sum, Chouani *kuttab*s contribute to the preservation of the ability to memorize and recite some of the Qur'an and the honored Moroccan educational tradition that brings this about. In doing so, they renew the Moroccan Islamic community of practice in Chefchouan.

CHAPTER 5

Embodying the Qur'an Through Memorization

An Example from Morocco

Because of their focus on rote memorization of the Qur'an, not to mention their use of corporal punishment, Qur'anic schools have often been described as backward, uninspiring to the student, and unproductive socially (MacDonald, 1911; Zerdoumi, 1970, to name a few). Memorization of the Qur'an, the defining mission of these schools, has for the most part been looked upon as a process whose only purpose is indoctrination into the practices and beliefs of Islam, and to promote sustained "discipline" over the child (Eickelman). I am suggesting, however, that Qur'anic memorization—the memorization of the penultimate and sacred text of Islam—is an educational process whereby the Qur'an becomes embodied within the person of the memorizer, usually a child. Memorization, in this case, is a process that seamlessly unites the physical and the mental in the formation and enactment of religious and cultural practice. Seen in this light, memorization is more than the following of tradition, more than sustained discipline or indoctrination, and even more than the passing on of religious rituals. The embodied Qur'an serves as a source of ongoing knowledge and protection to the child as he/she journeys through life. As such, Qur'anic memorization constitutes the beginning of an Islamic education; memorization is not the end goal of Islamic education, but its first step. Thus, embodiment, used as a conceptual framework for Qur'anic memorization, allows for a more complex and nuanced understanding of Islamic education and its use of memorization as a method of study.

Memorization as a Form of Learning

Aisha, a mother whose child studied at a *kuttab* in Chefchouan, when asked what she liked about the *kuttab*, attested to the value of memorization in and of itself, comparing the *kuttab* with a kindergarten to which she had sent some of her older children:

I like everything. I swear, children *learn* the Qur'an. I sent my first children to a kindergarten but they didn't *memorize* the Qur'an. My daughter [at the *kuttab*] now is only three years old and she has *memorized* more than ten verses. In kindergarten, though we pay, they don't *memorize* this much [emphasis added].

While clearly valuing Qur'anic memorization and feeling that the kindergarten did not give the expected return, it is also very interesting to note that she uses the terms "learning" and "memorizing" synonymously. In her opinion, if her daughter did not memorize she did not learn. The ability to recite memorized material proved to Aisha that her daughter had learned something!

Likewise, the mother of the family that I spent a great deal of time with in Chefchouan, Khadija, was constantly scolding her kids to "go memorize your lessons." She was always referring to public school lessons—French, mathematics, science, etc. She too used the term memorization as synonymous with learning. She wanted her kids to learn their lessons so that they would be prepared to answer questions in class. Even though she used the verb "to memorize," it was clear that she was not telling her kids to commit every line of their lessons to memory, although there was probably some memorization involved. Thus, in an educational context in Morocco, memorization and learning are often used in the same sense.

In order to understand the significance of Qur'anic memorization/learning and the still strong role of *kuttab*s in Chefchouan, the question of how understanding and reason relate to the idea of memorization is central.

Understanding

In Islamic education, memorization is generally considered the first step in understanding (not a substitute for it) as it ensures that sacred knowledge is passed on in proper form so that it can be understood later. Wagner quotes the philosopher Al Ghazali, who pointed out five centuries ago that memorization of the Qur'an as a first step to learning did not necessarily preclude comprehension later on:

[The] creed ought to be taught to a boy in the earliest childhood, so that he may hold it absolutely in memory. Thereafter, the meaning of it will keep gradually unfolding itself to him, point by point, as he grows older.

So, first, is the committing to memory; then understanding; then belief and certainty and acceptance. (Wagner, 1983b, p. 185)

Thus, memorization was the first step in a lifelong enterprise of seeking understanding and thus knowledge. It did not seek to replace understanding with dogmatism, but to plant the seeds that would lead to understanding. The same idea is echoed by historiographer Ibn Khaldun, cited as part of a project report on *kuttab* innovations:

Ibn Khaldoun suggests that this system took advantage of children's submissiveness in order to teach them what they would only be able to understand later: "Only children are capable of learning a text that they don't understand now and will understand later," he wrote. (Bouzoubaa, 1998, p. 3)

The idea that memorization did not preclude understanding but was a precursor to it is an important distinction since much of the criticism that is leveled at traditional Islamic education centers on the emphasis it places on memorization.

Reason

Furthermore, in the Moroccan context, Qur'anic memorization equaled the exercise of reason, as did other exercises of mental discipline involved in being a good Muslim:

Two features consistently associated with Islamic education are its rigorous discipline and the lack of explicit explanation of memorized material. Both of these features are congruent with the concept of essentially fixed knowledge which is at the base of Islamic education, at least in the Moroccan context, and the associated concept of "reason" (*'qal*) prevalent in Moroccan society. Reason is popularly conceived as man's ability to discipline his nature in order to act in accord with the arbitrary code of conduct laid down by God and epitomized by such acts of communal obedience as the fast of Ramadan (see Eickelman 1976, pp. 130–138). Thus a firm discipline in the course of learning the Qur'an is culturally regarded as an integral part of socialization . . . In Moroccan towns and villages, the discipline of Qur'anic memorization is an integral part of learning to be human and Muslim. (Eickelman, 1985, pp. 62–63)

Reason is equated with discipline. Memorization is a form of discipline. Eickelman is speaking of traditional *msids* (another word for Qur'anic schools) from the early part of the twentieth century in the above quotation. Still, his observation rings true for today's *kuttab* students as well. The

process of memorization of the Qur'an is a demonstration of behavior that involves mental discipline. This in turn is a manifestation of behavior based on reason. By contrast, hanging out in the street is the opposite of discipline, and many parents cite kuttabs as helping their children to avoid the danger of the streets.

Embodiment as a Framework

The great precursors of embodiment as a theory are Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu. Although differing in theoretical orientation, what Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu have in common is a conception of the body as a site of cultural production. Whether a perceptual setting in relation to the world or the site of unconscious practice (*habitus*), for both Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu the body was not "a brute fact of nature" (Csordas, 1994, p. 1) but *a crossroads for cultural production*. Implicit in their theories is the elimination of the Cartesian mind/body separation that is characteristic of Western epistemological tradition. In this tradition, the body is associated with nature and the consciousness (mind) with culture.

Medical anthropology took up and elaborated upon these ideas of the mind/body relationship. Embodiment—the idea of looking at culture as emanating from an embodied mind or a "mindful body" (Lock & Scheper-Hughes, 1987)—evolved in reaction to traditional Western concepts of body and mind, in which the two are strictly separated from a theoretical point of view. They contend that medical anthropology has failed to problematize the body and assert that:

We lack a precise vocabulary with which to deal with mind-body-society interactions and so are left suspended in hyphens, testifying to the disconnectedness of our thoughts. We are forced to resort to such fragmented concepts as the bio-social, the psycho-somatic, the somato-social as altogether feeble ways of expressing the myriad ways in which *the mind speaks through the body, and the ways in which society is inscribed on the expectant canvas of human flesh* [emphasis added]. (Lock & Scheper-Hughes, 1987, p. 10)

Their work is essentially a critique of Western medicine's neglect of the mind/body interaction, or rather of the West's insistence on their separation. Alternatively they suggest that the body is a playing field for moves of political power and social control, citing the phenomenon of the bound feet of Chinese women, anorexic and bulimic women in today's society, debates over reproductive rights as well as the uses of torture and even over-medicalization of symptoms and conditions. In doing so, they are pointing out even more explicitly that the body is a subject of cultural production, and not simply an object of it.

In his 1988 Stirling Award Essay, Csordas picks up on this idea of the mindful body and extends it beyond medical anthropology or anthropology of the body to religious practice. His object is “to reformulate theories of culture, self, and experience, with the body as the center of analysis” (Csordas, 1994, p. 4). He refers to the body as “the existential ground of culture” (Csordas, 1990, p. 5) and illustrates this idea in talking about his work among charismatic Christians. It is true that in this postmodern era, the body is a concrete starting point for examining human cultures—all living humans have a body. The body is “a basic and ramifying feature of the human condition” (Strathern, 1996, p. 2). Thus, I would have to agree when Csordas says: “Why not then begin with the premise that the fact of our embodiment can be a valuable starting point for rethinking the nature of culture and our existential situation as cultural beings” (Csordas, 1994, p. 6). Embodiment seeks to bridge, blur, and even collapse the theoretical mind/body dichotomy by changing our conception of the body as only a “brute fact of nature” in order to look at it, one could say, as a “brute fact of culture” as well.

In this same vein, Strathern offers the following fairly concrete definition of embodiment:

Embodiment has to do with the body, but it implies that it is something else, other than or added to the physical body itself, that is embodied, and such a “thing” often turns out to be an abstract social value, such as honor or bravery. Embodiment thus has to do with values that in some ways are also disembodied or may be thought of separately from the body itself. *Embodiment*, in other words, is a term that belies itself by combining the abstract and the concrete together. (Strathern, 1996, p. 195)

Through this definition, he seems to be setting embodiment as a mediator, a transmitter, a porous membrane, between the ideas of the physical and the social body. In this sense, he has not collapsed the Cartesian duality but rather has bridged it or has woven the two sides together to form a whole out of two once separate pieces.

The ideas of Csordas and Strathern in particular—the body as the existential ground of culture and the joining of the abstract to the physical—form a conceptual bridge for me, which links the physical and mental activities inherent in Qur'anic memorization and recitation. In short, Qur'anic schooling involves the engraving of the abstract onto the physical in ways that both preserve and transform the process of schooling itself.

Embodying the Qur'an—How and Why

In days past, when written literacy was not a common skill and when written texts were not plentiful or readily available, Qur'anic memorization had a very practical purpose. It preserved the Qur'an exactly as it was

given to the prophet Mohammed by God so that it could be shared with, and taught to, people who did not read or write. (Since the Qur'an is said to have come directly from God to Mohammed, it is considered in and of itself divine and therefore exact, immutable, and absolute.) Indeed, preservation of the Qur'an exactly as it was given to the prophet Mohammed was the key impetus for the widespread practice of memorization up until the middle of the twentieth century.

Qur'anic memorization has typically been associated with recitation. Someone who "knows" the Qur'an is generally someone who has memorized it; this knowledge is first demonstrated by being able to recite it. (This neither precludes nor assumes the ability to understand it as well.) In addition to demonstrating knowledge on the part of the reciter, the oral recitation of the Qur'an traditionally allowed it to be a presence in the lives of those who could not read it themselves. People could appreciate its beauty and power through hearing it being recited, and this is still true today. Indeed:

One meaning of the word Koran is "recitation," and for Moslems, prayer is usually interpreted to mean the recitation of the Koran. Thus, the teaching of proper recitation through the memorization of the Koran has been a central feature of Islamic education. (Wagner, 1991, p. 265)

One can recite from reading a text or from memory. When there were fewer texts available, recitation often depended on memory. With the wider availability (and affordability) of written and recorded texts and the increase in literacy rates, the ability to recite the Qur'an is not as dependent as it used to be on sheer memorization.

Memorization was important for other reasons beyond preservation and recitation. Memorization is also a part of religious practice, a necessity in being able to perform one's prayers, a means of learning a great deal about classical Arabic (through knowledge of its penultimate text), as well as a source of spirituality and pleasure.

In the current context of Chefchouan, one can regularly listen to the Qur'an being recited on TV or video, on cassette or CD. A significantly larger number of people are literate (43.7% of adults in 1995—56.6% of men and 30.97% of women—as compared to an overall adult literacy rate of 20.7% in 1970) (United Nations Development Program, 1998a, b). Islamic studies are taught in the public school system. In short, multiple delivery "channels" are available for people to listen to and to learn to recite the Qur'an.

Despite all this, my data suggest that in Chefchouan and in Morocco as a whole, it is still important to communities—as expressed through the voices of national decision makers or local experts, teachers, and parents—that children memorize some of the Qur'an. In Chefchouan, the demand for Qur'anic preschools is very high and growing. The *kuttab* more than holds its own in terms of attracting students.

It is true that Qur'anic memorization in the contemporary *kuttab* is much abridged from days past, with pupils memorizing at most the first *hizb* (chapter) of the Qur'an. Nevertheless, parental interviews attest to the importance that parents still attach to their children correctly memorizing some of the Qur'an. For example, the majority of Qur'anic school parents, when asked if they would send their children to a modern *rawd* (kindergarten) in Chefchouan if cost were not a consideration, said no. The main reason parents gave was that the children do not memorize as well in the *rawd*s. The significance accorded to both memorization and the institution of the *kuttab* in Chefchouan has remained and perhaps increased.

While many would argue that the value of Qur'anic memorization is religious indoctrination, this argument folds back upon itself, since one major criticism of the *kuttab*s is that children do not understand what they are memorizing and teachers do not even attempt to explain the material. Hence, there are no points—rules, practices, beliefs—contained in the memorized materials that are drilled into children so as to indoctrinate them. At most, in the schools observed for this study, “indoctrination” went as far as touting reverence of God and love of the Prophet Mohammed, which are equally emphasized in public school religion classes in Morocco as well as in community and family life. Clearly, then, the memorization of Qur'anic verses on the part of preschool children observed did not serve to indoctrinate them into an uncritical acceptance of the tenets and beliefs of Islam. That being the case, Qur'anic memorization had to serve another, more nuanced purpose with respect to the education of children in Morocco.

In short, my research leads me to suggest that memorization of the Qur'an, even in this abridged form that one finds in the *kuttab*, is significant not because children understand what they have memorized, nor because it is a step on the road to memorizing the full Qur'an, but because this relatively brief exercise in learning has the lasting effect of embodying the Qur'an in the beings of these *kuttab* students. The embodied Qur'an preserves not just the words or the grammar, which are not in danger of being lost or mixed up, but the living spirit of the document vis-à-vis Moroccan practice. In this sense, I use embodiment as a conceptual bridge to reconcile the ongoing significance accorded to memorization and the schools that facilitate it, with the widely diminished practical need for memorization as a means of textual preservation or as a means of indoctrination.

Interview respondents, in particular, often used bodily expression to convey the level of bodily-rootedness of the Qur'an within the beings of those who memorize it. Typical were references to the Qur'an's presence in the mind or the heart of the child. The Qur'an is embodied in the interaction between the minds and bodies of the *kuttab* students; it is embodied in their ability to recall and bring to life in recitation whole chapters of the sacred text. More importantly, the memorized text stays with the children as

a part of their beings and as a source of knowledge and spiritual renewal as they grow older and more consciously assume their places as practitioners in a community of practice.

How does this embodiment occur? How can we understand it? I use two metaphors that came through quite consistently in my research: children who memorize something early in life never lose it because it is engraved in their consciousness as something engraved in stone; and children who have memorized some of the Qur'an have been given an inner compass that can provide them with direction later in life.

Fatima, a Chouani mother with three preschool-aged daughters, expresses the core of these two ideas—permanence and direction—which were also expressed by GZA administrators, other parents, and Qur'anic school alumni from different eras. Fatima was asked the reasons as to why she considered *kuttabs* as important institutions:

I have many reasons. The first one is that I like the Qur'an very much and all that is related to it, such as *Tafsir* [commentaries] and *Ahadith* [sayings of the prophet]. Also, since we are Muslims, the first thing children should know is that Allah the Gracious is our God and our creator and that Mohammed (peace be upon him) is our prophet and our model in life, and that the holy Qur'an is our constitution. *Although children won't perceive things as such, they should learn some verses of the Qur'an so as to adapt themselves to it. If they learn the Qur'an at an early age, they will always yearn for it when they become old.* Moreover, if they memorize something at an early age, they will never forget about it, in spite of the fact that [public] schools cut [some time devoted to] this learning of the Qur'an. At the beginning, I forgot what I learned, but when I grew up and started to know that as Muslims we should conserve these verses, I returned to the Qur'an and I didn't find any difficulties in memorizing it. Actually, I rememorized what I had forgotten and I improved [emphasis added].

This quotation eloquently sums up the idea of embodying the Qur'an. Children habituate themselves to it early and it serves to guide them later on; it comes back to them since it is preserved within them. Fatima suggests that even without understanding the Qur'an at first, the child will look at what he/she has memorized and this memorized text will answer some longing in the child-turned-adult.

Engraved in Mind and Heart

The idea of using the term engraving to describe Qur'anic memorization came from a proverb I heard several times in Morocco. Indeed, several of my interviewees (experts, parents, a *fqih* [traditional teacher], and a couple

of female teachers) used it during the interview. This metaphor of engraving was used in King Hassan II's 1968 speech, in which he encouraged the growth of the *kuttab* as a preschool. This proverb has two variations:

At-ta'limo fi as-sighar ka an-naqshi alla al-hajar (Learning while young is like engraving in stone)

Al-hifdo fi as-sighar ka an-naqshi alla al-hajar (Memorizing while young is like engraving in stone)

Again, this demonstrates the strong association of memorization with learning. The two are used, for the most part, interchangeably.

Engraving is an appropriate metaphor to capture the essence of Qur'anic memorization because it evokes some of the beautiful calligraphic carving of Qur'anic verses found in Islamic architecture. Calligraphy on buildings is usually done in plaster or marble, pale or off-white, and it is lacy and intricate, placed above eye level so that the head tilts up to gaze on it. Indeed, much of Arabic art revolves around the written word, often avoiding the use of figural images, such that the idea of calligraphic engraving brings alive for me some of the beauty and durability associated with Qur'anic memorization:

The primacy of the word in Islam is reflected in the virtually universal application of calligraphy. Writing is given pride of place on all kinds of objects—objects of everyday use as well as entire wall surface, mosque furniture, the interiors and exteriors of mosques, tombs and al-Ka'ba, the most famous sanctuary of Islam. (Safadi, 1978)

In Morocco, for example, one finds beautiful, calligraphic verses from the Qur'an engraved on buildings, both old and new. On *madrasas*, mosques, some *zawiyas*, public buildings, and even homes, Arabic calligraphy delights the eye. The old *madrasas* (colleges/boarding schools) of Fes, in particular, are full of examples of this amazing stone calligraphy, but even new buildings, monuments, and sometimes private homes have Qur'anic verses etched deeply into their structures. Whether in marble, plaster, alabaster, or gypsum, calligraphic verses swirl around the interior perimeters of buildings, both old and new, drawing the eye upward and causing the mind to marvel at the intricacy of the engraving.

The engraving metaphor parallels the process by which children learn to appreciate, read, and comprehend visual art. Calligraphic writing can be very difficult to read because it is complex and its letters are bunched up and intertwined. However, its beauty, swirling patterns, and graceful shapes can be appreciated at any age, by the literate or illiterate. When one learns to read, one can decipher words from the intricate letters and read the verses so beautifully engraved on the walls and contours of one's surroundings. As one learns more complex concepts and grows in perspective and

understanding of the world and the self, one can comprehend meaning and deeper meaning embedded in the plaster curls, the stone curves, and the alabaster lines that form the beautiful calligraphic piece.

The little *kuttab* students are like these buildings, which hold a verse or two or ten or twenty on the walls of their minds, over which they can let their minds' eyes wander as they grow. They can appreciate the beauty of words—the rhythm, the rhyme, the intonation (much as American children might be able to recite and enjoy nursery rhymes and poems or songs whose meanings are not actually clear to them). As the words of the Qur'an are engraved on the mind of the child, they can be retrieved, uncovered, and rediscovered. The meaning of the words unfolds itself over time, providing insights on how to live. Central to this entire process is engraving. Memorization is the basis for recollection: it is the process of engraving the sacred verses onto the physiology of the person from childhood.

Cast this way, engraving can be a violent process. It involves cutting into material, carving, and chipping away little shavings of stone, metal, or wood. Indeed, memorization is a rigorous process that requires practice, repetition, and the physical expenditure of energy to go on repeating verse after verse. One way in which traditional Islamic education has facilitated the process of engraving has been to use pliable materials, materials that give way to the carving quite easily, thus reducing resistance to the engraving. Thus, the engraving metaphor extends to the quality of the materials to be engraved upon. In terms of Qur'anic engraving, the child is the material upon which the engraving will occur. Many of my respondents expressed the idea that children need to be young to really memorize effectively. The young mind is softer and more malleable, it has not hardened yet, and can still be engraved upon. Hassan, a father, expressed the reason for sending his child to the *kuttab* in the following way:

The child learns faith and Islam and other simple things, because if a person doesn't learn that at an early age, he/she won't know that when becoming old.

The effectiveness of the memorization and associated *kuttab* learning depends on the age of the memorizer. The proverb states that learning while *young* is what brings about the engraving on stone. Young children are more receptive to the engraving process. This is one reason why Qur'anic learning in Morocco is not left until one is grown and can comprehend verses as they are memorized. While the comprehension is better when one is older, the capacity to memorize and retain the verses in one's mind is diminished. The older mind is a less pliable material on which to engrave.

While the president of the Qur'anic schooling association that participated in this study does not use the engraving metaphor in this particular

quotation, he nonetheless evokes the permanence of Qur'anic knowledge if memorized when young:

So, when a 3 and a half year old memorizes parts of the Qur'an, he will not lose it. What he has memorized cannot be removed. For our generation, who is now 50, 55, or 60 and who started their education at a *msid* before going to a French or non-French school, they have memorized a part of the Qur'an. This part, which they memorized at the *msids*, remains till now, and whenever they need to remember it, they just have to take the Qur'an and read a little. It is as if what they learned is stored in a computer and it is easy to retrieve. But for a man who has never learned the Qur'an, he may find it difficult to do so. So, we cared that a child, when he goes to study French, English or whatever, will already have stored that part of the Qur'an in his computer so as to use it whenever he wants.

For these fifty-, fifty-five-, and sixty-year-olds, the Qur'an is embodied because it is so deeply engraved (or recorded on their hard drives) that it can be called up years and years after committing it to memory. Hassan, the father cited above, echoes the Qur'anic schooling association president's computer metaphor by using one of his own—the child as a blank piece of paper: “A small kid is like a whole piece of paper, you can write anything on it.” Ink seeps into the absorbent paper and cannot be erased. Whether a paper, stone, or computer represents the child, all of these images invoke the idea of the permanence of Qur'anic memorization when it is embodied in the child.

As Qur'anic verses engraved in marble are subject to erosion from nature's elements, so too are Qur'anic verses engraved on the human mind subject to erosion from social elements. However, the wind and rain and other elements that erode the carving on a piece of stone have to work twice as hard if the material is deeply engraved. In Morocco, conventional wisdom suggests that Qur'anic verses can be more deeply etched on the pliable material of the child than on the more brittle, less malleable material of the adult. Hence, eroding from memory the verses learned by a young child is a more difficult process than eroding those same verses from the memory of an adult who has memorized them as an adult. Thus, to parents in Chefchouan, the effort expended to memorize the Qur'an at an early age, the difficulty, and sometimes the “violence” of the engraving process is worth the effort since the verses engraved on the young child are less susceptible to erosion by the elements in adulthood.

The bodiliness of Qur'anic engraving is evident in quotations from interviewees, especially parents. I have included two quotes by two different fathers, Ahmed and Mourad, as examples of the many that used the idea of engraving on either the mind of the child or the heart:

Now, it is still the beginning. The child's *mind* is empty when he is small and it can record anything either bad or good. We send him to the *kuttab* so as to keep him away from the street, and so that he could speak and stay with people.

He will benefit from that [the *kuttab*] as far as religion is concerned. That will help him even when he becomes a young man, since the Qur'an can't be forgotten. It is good to have the Qur'an in one's *heart*.

Even Ali, a father whose appreciation for the *kuttab* was, first and foremost, as a means of preparing his child for primary school by teaching reading and writing, could not help but add:

But, religious subjects are good as well. I cannot deny them. As soon as a child learns them and puts them in his *mind* they remain there.

The following statement from a school headmaster, known in Chefchouan for his religious knowledge, makes Qur'anic memorization part of the blood:

The child imitates his parents while praying or while reciting the Qur'an; this is in our *blood*. Hence learning the Qur'an in an early age, conserving it and relying on it while asking forgiveness, all these are in the Moroccan *blood* and in the *blood* of all Muslims. I mean we don't use it or not use it [knowledge obtained in the *kuttab*], it is part of us and part of our depths. You know, we wake and we live by the Qur'an and the Moroccans declined when they deviated from it and when they left off memorizing the book of God, since it is the reason behind the existence of the *umma*.

His comment about the memorized Qur'an being in the blood (where it is conserved and relied on) reinforces the idea that the Qur'an becomes embodied—a part of the physical entity of the learner—where a combination of the work of many bodily components (brain and mouth and blood and heart) bring it forth living. His rejection of the idea of consciously using knowledge gained in the *kuttab* further testifies to the significance of memorization as a cultural and religious living artifact. These sentiments on the part of various interviewees illustrate a belief in the Qur'an being physiologically linked to the body and to the receptiveness of the young mind.

Compasses

Embodiment casts Qur'anic memorization in a decidedly more positive light than referring to it as mindless rote learning that leads to a blind acceptance of certain ideas and tenets, as has been done in the past (MacDonald, 1911; Michaux-Bellaire, 1911; Miller, 1977; Zerdoumi, 1970; Talbani, 1996). Clearly there is a desire to pass on values and ideas through

Qur'anic school, a desire to set children on a good path. (This is essentially true for all schooling, religious or otherwise.) However, my data suggest that casting Qur'anic memorization as simply mindless rote learning that indoctrinates children into Islam does not reflect the views or expectations of parents and communities. There is, of course, a path that community members and parents would like to see their children take, and this is the path of Islam. However, they see Qur'anic memorization as a way of giving children a source of direction to this path, but not a way of guaranteeing their children's adherence to this path.

I use the term compass, as in a spiritual and a social compass, to try to capture the sentiments expressed by people in explaining why Qur'anic memorization is desirable or even important. I also use the term compass because it is useful in distinguishing between the practice of Qur'anic memorization that I observed in Chefchouan and the process of forcing ideas onto someone, with no room for debate, which is more in line with the definition of indoctrination.

Unlike the engraving metaphor, no respondent actually used the word compass in talking about Qur'anic schools. However, they spoke of memorizing the Qur'an as giving direction, helping their children to find or come closer to God and to be good or stay on the right path, hence my decision to use the word compass as a means of describing the perceived results of Qur'anic memorization for children in Chefchouan.

Since the children do not comprehend the meaning of the verses they have memorized, parents are not alluding to a conscious process of decision making—that is, the child realizing that doing a certain thing is against the Qur'an and therefore not doing it. They are speaking more of a kind of blessing or protection that comes from embodying the Qur'an. This is in line with Al-Ghazali's and Ibn Khaldun's comments that understanding unfolds over time. For the child, even without comprehension, the embodied Qur'an is believed to provide spiritual direction by virtue of it being the word of God, and thus sacred and holy. The child carries it and it provides direction, much like a compass.

A compass, because of its magnetic pull, will seek the north. One orients oneself with a compass by finding the north. One can follow other directions with a compass since it does not ensure that one will only proceed in one direction. A compass does not negate free will and the process of making choices about which directions to follow. Rather, it provides a point of reference from which to make choices, much like the Qur'an.

The pull toward the magnetic north can be interfered with by other magnets—smaller ones perhaps that pull the compass needle in the wrong direction away from the magnetic north. Likewise, the Qur'an, because of its magnetic pull, which comes from its divine essence, will pull the child

in the right direction as he/she grows; it is stronger than other magnets, although other magnets can interfere and lead one off course. There is no guarantee that the child will not go astray, but learning the Qur'an is one way of giving the child a compass—a spiritual compass—to help him/her find the desired path.

Aisha, a Chouani mother, describes Qur'anic memorization in the following way:

It is good, since it teaches human beings to go in God's path. When a boy or a girl learns religion, they follow God's path and they know what is between them and God; they know what is in this life. If a child learns at [public] school, he/she will reach a certain level, get angry and leave. This is not the case with the Qur'an. The more children learn it, the more it gets into their hearts. The *kuttab* is better than school.

In one's heart, it is a source of guidance and inspiration, a compass to direct them away from bad influences. Aisha was not alone in alluding to the Qur'an getting into one's heart—to it being embodied in the student. The fact that it is embodied in the heart or mind of the child through memorization is what allows it to act as an internal compass.

In Morocco, Islam is a major social as well as spiritual force. One role of the *kuttab*, through transmitting the Qur'an, is to help children to be good. In this sense, the engraved Qur'an acts as a social compass as well as a spiritual one. My interviews suggest that parents and community members/experts do view the embodied Qur'an in and of itself as providing moral guidance, which overlaps both the spiritual and social realms of life. The Qur'an has many lessons within it about how to behave in daily life—for example, honoring one's parents, giving charity, being modest, avoiding pork, avoiding alcohol, not accepting interest on loans, being fair in business dealings, not stealing, and so on. While children might not understand these lessons immediately, again the idea is that they will grow to understand them later.

One very concrete example of the embodied Qur'an acting as a kind of compass is referred to indirectly in the former King Hassan II's speech of 1968. This speech attested to the value of the *kuttab* as a Moroccan tradition and laid out the idea that the *kuttab* should be a preschool for children (Bouzoubaa, 1998). This speech explicitly referred to a social benefit in sending a child to the *kuttab*, with its primary focus on memorization. The king's argument was that if one memorizes, one can pray. If one prays, one goes to the mosque. If one goes to the mosque, one engages with the community of practice in one's town, one's country, and even the global *'umma*. Hassan II expressed it as follows:

... but the importance [of going to the mosque and seeing people pray] lies in the fact that they see the greatness of Muslims and their

togetherness. Also, they adopt that impression [of togetherness] that will always remain engraved in their minds.

The Qur'anic school association president picks up on this idea that memorization is the first step in being able to join the community of practice in a comment he made about what would be the minimum acceptable result for a *kuttab* student.

Since the age of 3 and a half years old until the school age of 7, if a child is clever, he will memorize seven *hizbs* (*chapters*) [of the Qur'an], if his intelligence is average, he will memorize three *hizbs*, and if he is not intelligent at all, he will memorize a *hizb* or some *surahs* (verses) so as to pray.

Praying is a basic ritual of worship, and spirituality is in itself considered a source of direction. Thus, it is the manifestation of having a spiritual and social compass. With just a little of the Qur'an engraved in their memories, children will be able to pray as adults, manifesting a social good and, spiritually, drawing them closer to God.

Prayer is also something that allows Moroccan Muslims (largely male Muslims) to come together in a community on Fridays. As the children are small, they are still exempt from actually praying five times a day. Thus, "good" behavior is fostered through the process of memorization because it allows one to pray and to participate in the community.

Conclusion

This chapter posits that Qur'anic memorization is valuable because it is a process whereby children come to embody the Qur'an (or parts thereof). Embodiment as a theory advances the notion that bodiliness is an inescapable part of the creation of culture by suggesting that the mind and body are intricately linked and as such both are implicated in the processes of mental and physical activities that constitute cultural production. I use embodiment as a framework to look at how contemporary Qur'anic schools link abstract ideas of learning, worship, and moral direction to concrete bodily things such as memorizing and reciting the Qur'an. Embodiment frames the process of Qur'anic memorization in such a way as to clarify its role in the life of Muslim children and communities in Morocco.

Qur'anic memorization has been portrayed as a process of mindless rote learning and indoctrination into Islam. My research suggests that viewing it in this way reduces its significance in the lives of Muslims by implying that the process of learning *ends* with the process of memorization. Embodiment theory facilitates a description of the ongoing learning process that *begins* with Qur'anic memorization. Memorization, then, is an

investment in a lifetime of potential learning, one that will provide guidance and direction to the student beyond the school years. The Qur'an is living as an oral text through the mental and physiological capabilities of the students' bodies, to translate what has been engraved in their minds to their lips, where it comes forth living, to be shared as recitation or in prayer and to be reflected upon over a lifetime, as a source of understanding, inspiration, and learning.

Likewise, embodiment helps to explain the ongoing significance accorded to memorization and the schools that facilitate it even as the practical need for memorization as a means of textual preservation is practically nonexistent.

To conclude, memorization of the Qur'an, even in this abridged form, is significant not because children understand and begin to follow what they have memorized, nor because it is a step on the road to memorizing the full Qur'an, but because this relatively brief exercise in learning has the lasting effect of embodying the Qur'an in the beings of these *kuttab* students. Memorization can thus be conceptualized as a process of (1) engraving some of the Qur'an (a pure "good" as knowledge revealed from God) onto the minds and hearts of the *kuttab* students so that it stays with them as a living oral document and (2) through the engraving process, providing the students with an internal compass that helps them find direction, spiritually and socially, throughout their lives. Since memorization enables one to pray (either in the mosque or in the home), the whole process of memorization enriches and renews the Moroccan Islamic community of practice.

CHAPTER 6

Embodiment and Change

Qur'anic School Transformation in Morocco

While the “modern traditional” schools, that is, the *kuttab*s described in Chapter 1, are heirs of the “traditional traditional” schools, they have introduced, to a certain degree, many innovations in the form of the school itself and the content taught. These innovations include hiring female teachers, a new pedagogical orientation (away from corporal punishment), an abridged curriculum (as concerns actual Qur’anic memorization), a decreased emphasis on writing, and the addition of some arithmetic. These changes are characteristic of other *kuttab* organizations and not exclusive to the GZA (Bouzoubaa, 1998; Wagner & Lotfi, 1980; Wagner, 1998; Lamsdasni et al., 1993).

To members of the Green Zawiya association for education and culture, these innovations do not change the essence of the mission of their schools, which is facilitating some Qur’anic memorization. A GZA financier summed up his idea on the durability of Qur’anic schools over time, despite changes, in the following way:

Q: Why do you think Qur’anic schools have persisted?

A: It is God who wants them to remain, “We have created the Qur’an and we are going to preserve it” (Qur’anic verse). The Qur’an will never change. God wants these schools to remain, and other people will come and innovate them. Nothing that God has created will ever fade away.

In essence, his vision of the “modern traditional” schools is that the core content (the Qur’an) remains the same, but the form of the teaching and learning environment can respond to changing times and circumstances

through innovation. The immutability of the Qur'an does not make the institution of its transmission similarly immutable. With this attitude, the GZA has made many changes in the age-old *msid* model, which are discussed below.

The actualization of the transformations discussed below has created a new role for the *kuttabs* as agents that embody many of the changes and transformations that are occurring in Moroccan life at the end of the twentieth century. In characterizing them as agents of change and transformation, I am suggesting that the age-old association of the Qur'anic school (*kuttab* or *msid*) with stasis and conservation is only partially true. The *kuttab* is an agent of change, able to borrow from other educational traditions, for example, from the public school methods that came to Morocco via French colonization. As such, the *kuttab* is very representative of Morocco itself, balancing between East and West, remaining authentically Moroccan and Islamic while being able to borrow and innovate.

I have characterized the *kuttab* as embodying cultural transformation since many of the changes are related directly to the idea of the person—either teacher or student—as an embodied being. The physical body is the representative terrain—the subject—of many changes within the *kuttab* and within society as a whole. Thus, the following sections look at the *kuttabs* as embodying “modern” ideas about religious education and Moroccan traditions through the (gendered) bodies of the teachers and students.

The “New” Body of the Teacher

The most noticeable difference between the “modern” *kuttabs* and the traditional *msids* is undoubtedly the introduction of female teachers. (I refer to female teachers as *girls* not women because the term woman in Arabic is generally used for married females. The term girl (*bint* in Arabic) is the proper way to refer to an unmarried female regardless of age. The majority of GZA teachers are unmarried.) My findings indicate that objections to the hiring of female teachers centered on the girls' low level of Qur'anic knowledge and *not* on their gender per se. By contrast, favorable comments on the hiring of female teachers focused on the gender of the teacher in and of itself as an important qualification. (This is an interesting twist in a world where women have often had to demonstrate twice the competence to break into a traditionally male profession and where female gender is often looked upon as a liability in doing so.) This is to say that female “embodiment”—being physically, culturally, and mentally female—was (1) not expressed as a disqualifying factor in being a Qur'anic schoolteacher and (2) was even looked upon as an advantage. Teaching the Qur'an as someone with a female, not male, body was not considered a breach of Moroccan tradition nor anything contrary to Islam.

The Range of Opinion

There are very conservative elements in Morocco who perceive of women's employment as somewhat undesirable and who are more partial to the tradition of having a man teach the Qur'an. Nadia, a GZA teacher in Chefchouan, briefly alluded to some people who were opposed to female Qur'anic schoolteachers when the GZA schools in Chouan first opened in 1996:

- A: The past and the present are different. In the *msid* of the past, there were a man and some children. Now the *msid* is modern with a girl teaching. People were surprised that girls were teaching there. Some even opposed. They said that girls couldn't teach in the *kuttab*. But why?
- Q: Why did they oppose?
- A: They said that girls couldn't teach the Qur'an. Well, they opposed totally, perhaps even the girls working at all.
- Q: They preferred a man to teach the Qur'an?
- A: Yes, a man is a *fqiḥ*; they say there is no such thing as a *fqiḥa* [ostensibly the female form of *fqiḥ*; this is not really a word in Arabic] (laughter).
- Q: What about at your home, have they said anything to you [about your work being inappropriate], your father or anyone?
- A: The opposite. They encouraged me to teach.
- Q: Who were those people who were opposed to girls teaching the Qur'an? Can you classify them?
- A: The "brothers" [Muslim brothers]. They said that we should wear a veil (laughter).

Generally though, comments like this were fairly rare and seemed not to reflect the dominant perceptions of parents, teachers, and experts. Indeed, no one whom I interviewed strenuously or completely objected to female teachers teaching the Qur'an. Most favored it and some favored it with reservations that were not necessarily related to gender. Objections such as the one in the above quotation had either abated or had been answered by the time I arrived in Chefchouan.

Two of the Qur'anic school supervisors whom I spoke to (Leila and Ouafaa, both female, of course) did express the following reservations about female Qur'anic schoolteachers that rested solely on their gender. Leila commented that she thinks a girl might not be capable of memorizing the entire Qur'an. Ouafaa expressed the opinion that the *fqiḥ* is a much more lofty and respectable character than the female teacher and that she prefers the *fqiḥ* to teach the Qur'an. Mitigating these "negative" responses, both did defend the female teacher in another segment of their respective interviews. Leila said she thought female teachers were better with young



Fig. 6.1 Modern traditional Quranic kuttab in Chefchouan, Morocco 1998.

children than the *fqih*, and Ouafaa tied her comment on the respectability of the *fqih* in with a basic criticism that female teachers should wear the headscarf all the time. Ouafaa covers her head completely when in public and believes this is mandatory in Islam. In her opinion, with the *fqih* there exists no contradiction between being inside and outside the classroom. However, with the female teachers the children could see the contradiction because their teacher does not wear a headscarf in the street and wears one in the *zawiya*. Presumably this would be remedied if the girls veiled themselves all the time. In a casual conversation with Leila, I asked why she did not cover her head all the time and she replied: “Islam is here [pointing to her heart] not here [fingering her hair].” By contrast, Ouafaa clearly saw certain traditional ideals as being intimately linked to what she perceived as



Fig. 6.2 Photo credit: Helen N. Boyle.

proper gendered behavior, and attributed any possible contradictions as linked to gender alone. She did defend the teachers though, saying they should not be criticized but encouraged in their learning of the Qur'an.

Female Qur'anic memorizers and teachers are not entirely new in Morocco. Two GZA respondents mentioned the story of an older woman, who taught classes on Qur'anic memorization for girls and answered questions concerning the Qur'an and religious laws and customs for females. Her lessons included Qur'anic memorization, religious subjects, and handicrafts. However, this was neither a very common nor a widespread role for women. Those who did fill it were usually older women, known for their piety, who had had the opportunity to memorize some or all of the Qur'an.

By contrast, the “modern” *kuttab* teachers are generally young, unmarried females who have attended public school for the majority of their education. None of the girls I spoke to had spent a lot of time in the *msid* as a child, although most spent at least a few months there. Their educational backgrounds were not focused on Islamic studies or the Qur’an and most had only memorized what they learned through the GZA. Some teachers had their baccalaureate (high school diploma) and some had attended the university for a few years. (One girl from Tetouan actually had a BA and a master’s degree, but she was the exception.) In 1998, the GZA established a policy that new hires would have to have at least a baccalaureate. Still, without having memorized the whole Qur’an, without degrees or diplomas, these girls are not learned in the traditional Islamic sense of being knowledgeable about religious matters or members of the scholarly community (*’ulama*).

In fact, the introduction of female teachers has occasioned comment among the *’ulama*, or scholarly community, although not of the same negativity as that attributed to the “Muslim brothers.” *’Ulama* is a rather amorphous term in that it can be very broad, since there is no official membership roster and no official organization to join. Thus, some of the experts I interviewed in Chefchouan, Tetouan, and Fes could be considered *’ulama* members. Certainly, Sidi Anwar the GZA head in Chefchouan, and his counterpart in Tetouan are, as well as many others that I interviewed. Other “experts” I spoke to (GZA and non-GZA) might not consider themselves *’ulama*, but rather traditionally educated people who have proven themselves to be good Muslims (through gaining a good reputation in their town, displaying wisdom, good judgment, knowledge of the Qur’an, and things like this).

Among this group there were mixed views on the hiring of female teachers. However, criticism on the hiring of female teachers did not center on the idea of gender—the teacher as someone transmitting knowledge through a female body—as much as on the lower level of knowledge possessed by most of the girls in comparison to the *fqih*. In short, the idea of a female being the mediator of Qur’anic knowledge did not seem to be as much of an issue as the girls’ level of competence. Even a *fqih* I interviewed in Chefchouan, a very traditional, conservative and learned man, said:

I have told you, if the teacher has learned the Qur’an well, that teacher can teach children the major first things (pause). If the teacher is qualified, he or she will carry out the mission as far as the Qur’an is concerned. Students can memorize many groups of verses, as well as many things related to religion. Yes, if there is improvement, inspections and teachers with ability and qualifications in these *kuttab*s, they may be good.

The *fqih* emphasizes the utility of the *kuttab* teacher in teaching the “first things” such as groups of verses and religious rules and practices (how to wash

for prayer, how to pray, 'adab, etc.). Most of my "expert" interviewees agreed with the idea that it is useful to have girls teach these things in the *kuttab*.

These experts/'*ulama* were more concerned with the watering down of traditional knowledge and saw the female teachers as symptomatic of this because of their low level of Qur'anic knowledge. However, they did not blame the girls for this trend toward shorter periods of learning in traditional schools, but instead blamed the need to go to public school in order to "get ahead." Thus, they tended to feel that the *kuttab* with female teachers and some early memorization was better than nothing, and even desirable, from a pragmatic point of view.

Experts/'*ulama* did tend to think that females were better with the young children who attend Qur'anic schools nowadays and that, in this sense, employing females was sensible and appropriate. This was because of the historical association of the *fqiḥ* with corporal punishment, something that was looked on with disfavor by most, if not all, of my respondents.

All of the GZA officials I spoke to emphasized the idea of rescuing low-income girls by giving them a respectable job and keeping them away from the temptations of the street. This added an extra nobility to the idea of employing female teachers. It is harder for girls to find work in Morocco than men, since the unemployment rate is so high. Girls have a more limited range of options to choose from and must always think about conserving their honor and not placing themselves in compromising situations. Mr. Ben Souda mentioned that the girls who taught in the GZA *kuttab*s gained good reputations from their work:

No, thanks to God, all the girls in [the GZA *kuttab*s] in Fes, Tetouan and Chouan are held in high esteem and have developed their personalities as they spend all their day reading the Qur'an. The Qur'an contains the way they should follow and so on and so forth. Now, we have reached a certain level where, when a man wants to get married to a "good" girl, he is advised to go to this association [in order to marry one of the teachers].

Teaching the Qur'an is an honorable job, one that confers on them a certain respectability. In this sense, hiring low-income female teachers contributes to the maintenance of high moral standards and conduct within the community.

Thus, for the vast majority of expert/scholar/GZA respondents, female gender per se was not a negative factor in a Qur'anic teacher. Lack of knowledge, in comparison to the *fqiḥ*, was seen as a liability but not gender per se. I emphasize this because there is an important distinction. The transmission of the Qur'an by a female was not the heart of the objection for a highly significant group of people. GZA teachers can certainly memorize more of the Qur'an, perhaps the whole thing (as one of them already has), if given

the opportunity and instruction. Lack of knowledge vis-à-vis the *fqih* is a training problem, one that has a solution and is not inherent in the gendered body of the teacher.

In contrast to the reserved enthusiasm of *'ulama* and/or experts that I interviewed, parents were very enthusiastic about the hiring of female teachers. Generally, parents considered this an improvement over the *fqih*, who is traditionally associated with corporal punishment and fear on the part of children. Parents considered female teachers to be better handlers of children, more in tune with their needs and a lot nicer! The female teachers represented a way for parents to have their cake and eat it too: their kids were learning the Qur'an but in a gentler and developmentally "appropriate" way. Most of the parents I spoke to were planning to send their children to public school. Thus, they did not need a *fqih* to teach their children over a long period of time in the *kuttab*. The female teacher had memorized enough to teach their children in the course of two years. Thus, they felt that their children would learn as much from these girls as they would from a *fqih* in the two years that they would remain in the *kuttab* and would have a better preschool experience with the female teachers.

While I have outlined the range of opinions on the hiring of female teachers above, it is worth looking in more depth at the ways in which people used Islam, the Qur'an, traditional gender roles, and traditional sources of authority to frame the changeover to female teachers. This is to say that the opening of new doors to females is a "modern" and transforming trend; however, explanations for its acceptance in the realm of Qur'anic schooling lay in traditional arguments with a fresh or modern twist. The two most prevalent were the Qur'an itself as a textual authority, which does not distinguish between female and male learners and teachers, and assumptions about the nature of being female that are rooted in traditional gender roles.

"The Qur'an is the Same"

Most of the parents I interviewed were illiterate; most had not attended school and some had attended the *msid* when they were younger. Even without a lot of school experience (in the *msid* or the public school) to draw on, these parents had a keen appreciation of the difference between the *fqih* and the female teachers and some clear and well-justified reasons for preferring the females.

The most striking reason put forth was that Islam does not make any distinction in terms of who has the right to transmit knowledge, teach, or learn. Amal, a mother who had been to school and could read and write, summed up her take on this quite succinctly for me:

- Q: Do you prefer your child to learn with a *fqih* who memorizes the whole Qur'an or to learn with girls who don't memorize the whole Qur'an? What can you say about this?
- A: In the Qur'an, there are no *fqihs* and no girls. The Qur'an is the same. I myself read the Qur'an. The Qur'an is our religion and the woman is like the man and the *fqih* is like any other one.
- Q: The *fqih* is a man and one whom children fear.
- A: I learned with a *fqih*, but it is all the same. My daughter learns with the [female] teacher the same Qur'an that I learned with a *fqih*.

Another mother, Naima, echoed this sentiment:

- Q: Don't you think that it would be better if your children learned with a *fqih* and not with girls?
- A: She recites what is in the book in her hand. What the *fqih* says is also said by a woman (laughter), it is the same.
- Q: But the *fqih* is a wise man who has memorized the whole Qur'an.
- A: Even a woman can memorize everything (laughter). She reads the Qur'an that is in her hand the same way the *fqih* reads.

The Qur'an as an eternal and divinely inspired document is unchangeable, no matter who teaches it. Its nature and its language will not change if memorized with a female instead of a male teacher. In keeping the Qur'an as the core of the *kuttab* curriculum, other things around it can change in response to new ideas and changing times. A third mother, Fatima, echoed this idea of the importance of the core curricula more than the gender of the teacher:

- Q: Who do you think is better in teaching the Qur'an? *Fqihs* or female teachers?
- A: I think the Qur'an should be memorized regardless of who teaches it (laughter, as she was not buttonholed into choosing one or the other, as we, the interviewers, had expected).

By far, parents were the most enthusiastic about employing female teachers. A good deal of their comfort level with female teachers is encapsulated in the above comments—a pragmatic assessment that the Qur'an is the same no matter who teaches it.

I found mothers to be the most articulate in making this point, perhaps because they were in a sense defending themselves—their gender's ability to instill religious knowledge. But I encountered the same accepting attitude on the part of fathers too, who were more concerned with the material transmitted to their children than with who transmitted it.

GZA officials were also proponents of the hiring of female teachers. Madame Ben Souda, the wife of Mr. Ben Souda, the GZA president, who is

herself active in the association, said that the important thing is the moral character of the teacher, whether male or female:

Q: But, don't you think it is much better if a man teaches religion?

A: No, even a good woman can do it. I think they are the same if they are good.

The most important thing is being virtuous, whether one is male or female, if one is going to teach the Qur'an. The moral qualities that GZA recognizes as important in a teacher are not exclusive to one gender or another, so the teacher's gender is not a qualifying or disqualifying factor.

Thus, the introduction of females into the ranks of Qur'anic school-teachers constitutes a transformation in the character and ambience of the old *msid* and mirrors the reality of Moroccan society where doors are opening more and more to females in the work force, in academia, in universities, and the like. While religious work is still the traditional province of men, the hiring of female teachers is an opening. Going straight back to the original source of knowledge, the Qur'an, one can argue successfully that sacred knowledge can be transmitted through a male or a female being. In other words, the Qur'an treats teachers as equal by virtue of their merit not their body. If the Qur'an does not make this bodily distinction, then there is no problem with female teachers. In short, since perceptions about appropriate gender roles change slowly, I doubt that we will be hearing female *muezzins* (the people who give the call to prayer from the minaret of the mosques) or female *imams* (prayer leaders) anytime soon. Nonetheless, employing female teachers still signals the transformation and sharing of a religious role that was once reserved almost exclusively for men. What is more, this transformation is justified by referring back to the Qur'an itself for authority.

Of Women and Children

One key reason to turn to female teachers is the widely held belief that they are better with young children than men. This perception is not an assessment of "goodness" tied to a specific gender. Rather it is a combination of (1) a pragmatic assessment based on the realities of existing gender roles and experiences in Moroccan society and (2) certain beliefs about the female nature being gentler and more patient than the male nature vis-à-vis children. Females carry out the bulk of day-to-day child care activities in Morocco within the home. Given the large extended families that one often finds in Morocco, a female need not be a mother herself to have had a great deal of exposure to young children and daily child care responsibilities. In addition, many respondents spoke of the female as being inherently more patient and more attuned to the needs of the child

than the *fqih*. Thus, through a combination of nature (female-ness) and nurture (gender role conditioning and experience), being a female was not seen as a disadvantage for the GZA teachers and indeed was actually cited as an advantage. While they might not be perceived of as completely qualified from the point of view of their limited Qur'anic memorization, in comparison to the *fqih*, their actual biology and gender role experience was considered to give them an advantage in teaching children. In this sense, their bodiliness, far from limiting their ability to pursue a job, has actually enhanced it.

One reason for the notion that girls are better qualified to teach in the *kuttab*s than the *fqih* is certainly attributable to the age of the children. The children are quite young, generally from three to six years old. At this age, it is considered that children need a maternal figure. There is a certain parallel in the idea that these children are being nurtured into the *umma* (global community of believers, which comes from the word mother) by representative mother figures. (There is, of course, an element of sexism in this argument too, as it could imply that girls would not be considered qualified to teach older children.) However, the widespread approval of parents and GZA officials for the hiring of female teachers says more to me about the adaptation of ideas on child development, discipline, and educational psychology into the world of Qur'anic schooling than it does about the sexism in automatically assigning women to work with small children because men do not have the patience for it.

Amal, a mother with a child at the *kuttab* in Chefchouan, is very willing to trade the *fqih*'s deeper knowledge of the Qur'an for a more nurturing atmosphere for her daughter:

Q: If the *fqih* has more of the Qur'an [memorized], what does the [female] teacher have more of?

A: Affection, like a mother's affection. When she sees a girl or boy crying she treats them like their mothers. We can't find that with a *fqih* who always has a stick in his hands, and that's all.

The fact that GZA, and other associations or communities that run *kuttab*s, has decided to change a traditional educational practice of having a *fqih* teach the Qur'an attests to the Moroccan ability to balance the old and the new, and to introduce innovation without losing the original. The value attributed to Qur'anic memorization is so deeply embedded in Moroccan Islam that transformations in traditional practice compliment but do not threaten it.

From an economic point of view, women might represent a better investment risk for the GZA. Unemployment in Morocco is very high. There are probably male high-school-leavers or graduates who would teach

in a *kuttab* for the same salary that the girls are earning. However, the wife of a GZA official told me that men would probably leave the position if another came along. The girls all live with their families and the amount they are paid is sufficient to give them spending money for new *djellebas* (outerwear/coats) and to help their parents out a little. They are not generally looking to move on, to buy property, or to secure a higher position, so they are more likely to remain in the job.

More than this, however, I think it would be harder for the GZA to introduce men into the *kuttab*. If the *kuttab* is using men, why not a *fqih*? The girls present a much more graceful way to jettison the old methods that the GZA dislikes—corporal punishment, sternness, and fear—in favor of a warmer and more relaxed ambience. Because the teachers are female, they are absolutely free to manifest those qualities associated with being female in Morocco (and elsewhere), which are now considered more appropriate in an early childhood educational setting. A male would not be able to manifest such a change in ambience within the *kuttab* as easily, due to typical gender roles and expectations. Thus, the very bodiliness of the female teachers ushers in a new learning environment within the *kuttab*, one that parents and the GZA approve of. A GZA official with some background in education explained the transformation to female teachers as a whole new pedagogy in itself:

Q: Is the issue of beating the only reason behind your choice to follow the new model?

A: No, no, not beating alone. A male doesn't teach as a female. Why? Because the child leaves his mother at home and finds another female in the *kuttab*. There is an emotional relation. We have made use of this relation to make the child learn. The child feels the tenderness of the teacher as if it were his mother. In contrast, he is scared to see an old *fqih* with a beard. *Therefore, the choice of a female teacher is a pedagogy in itself* [emphasis added].

A GZA financier with a great deal of input into the design of the GZA *kut-tabs* described the female as a better educator because of her gender and, interestingly enough, because of her educational background:

Q: Can you tell me the reasons behind your being for the choice of female teachers?

A: I have told you the reasons at the beginning . . . the woman is a better educator than the man can be.

Q: But the *fqih* has characteristics like dignity.

A: This is what we don't want (laughs).

Q: It is not a problem that the teachers memorize only a little of the Qur'an and the *fqih* knows more?

- A: The *fqiḥ* has no educational idea; he hasn't been to [public] school and she [the female teacher] knows what education is and how to teach.

In saying that the girls have an idea of how to teach, he refers to their public school experience, something a *fqiḥ* normally does not have since he has usually been educated in a traditional *msid*. From their inception, the public schools have tried to embrace “modern” methods. The GZA, many experts, and the teachers themselves tended to think that the “modern” methods of the public schools were more appropriate for teaching young children and more in line with the types of qualities the female teacher was expected to manifest—gentleness, understanding, and motherliness. In essence, the above interviewee is saying that the girls will emulate the public school methods they have seen from their own student days and will import these ideas into their teaching in the *kuttab*. (I think that the *fqiḥ* actually had very good, sound pedagogical methods, minus the corporal punishment, ones that the public schools in Morocco could learn from. However, the GZA sentiments were almost completely focused on the negative aspects of how traditional *msids* were run.)

The Body of Learners

The *kuttab*s accept both male and female students. The girls sit in rows on one side of the room and the boys in rows on the other side. Usually the rooms are small and these two gendered columns of fidgety preschoolers end up a bit intermixed after an hour or so. I asked one GZA member, who is a noted scholar, historian, and poet, about the integrated classes.

- Q: Concerning some general policies of the association, can you explain why you have decided to accept both boys and girls?
- A: Well, human beings are made male and female. Furthermore, females have got the right to learn the same as males. If education was limited to boys, how can we justify the marginalization of girls? If it was limited to girls, how can we justify the marginalization of boys?
- Q: In the past, the majority of the *msid* students were male.
- A: The majority were males. There were some girls whose parents permitted them. Here in Tetouan, there was a “*fqiḥa*,” Lalla Ghayla. She was a religious teacher and a member of the *'ulama* at the same time. She used to teach girls at home and answer religious female questions.
- Q: Can we consider this mixture of boys and girls a modern aspect of the *kuttab*s?
- A: At the level of religion, mixing is accepted at this age. You know the association is religious and Islamic in nature. So, it should

comply with the rules of our religion. Both the girls and the boys are not even six years old. There is no need to separate them [at this age].

Indeed, Islam puts no bar to female learning and it is actually encouraged. What has prevented female learning in the past is, in part, the tradition of gender segregation. There are some lines in the Qur'an that allude to women limiting their contact with men to a list of close relatives. Some of the more rigorous traditions of segregation and veiling are actually pre-Islamic Arab customs that are not demanded in Islam. Thus, in a regulated, "safe" setting, there is actually nothing intrinsically wrong about the intermingling of genders. By safe, I mean a setting where no loss of honor or perceived loss of honor would occur. In the past, standards were more rigorous—simply talking to a male non-relative could be compromising. However, there was also, I believe, a lack of will to create "safe" situations and a lack of trust on the part of parents that certain situations were indeed "safe," such as public schools.

Nowadays, fears about the relative safety of a situation have diminished and a wider set of situations are considered safe or acceptable for the mixing of boys and girls, most prominently Moroccan public schools. Thus, there is more will on the part of communities to create places where girls' learning opportunities are not sacrificed due to questions of honor.

In the old days, mainly boys were sent to the Qur'anic schools, even at young ages. Girls were not thought to need the education as much. The idea that they do need education, and that this is important to society as a whole, is embodied in the bodies of the learners in these "modern traditional" kut-tabs who are both boys and girls in almost equal numbers. A member of parliament from the north of Morocco had the following to say when asked about why "modern traditional" schools are now almost completely co-ed.

In Islam there is no difference between a male and a female in learning. The Prophet (PBUH) said: "Learning is a religious duty of any Muslim male or female." I am against the idea that girls should stay at home. The girl has got the right to learn and be educated, because if she doesn't learn, she will be an uneducated, ignorant woman. She will be an unsuccessful wife and won't raise her children well.

Again, a transformation in the makeup of traditional learning is justified from within, from the writings of Islam, but with a modern twist. In order to excel in a traditional role, a woman should have some education. While the majority of wives and mothers in Morocco are illiterate, today some form of education is tied into the notion of being able to fulfill a traditional role.

As a note, the *fqih* in Chefchouan also accepted girls in the *msid*. He too seemed to feel that the fact of being female should not disqualify one for attendance at the *msid*. (It would never have disqualified one from the right to learn in theory, but would have created a problem for the learner to go to the source of knowledge—that is, to go out in public to a school with boys present.) The idea of male and female learners together in a regulated setting did not bother him. He had a young woman in her early twenties studying the Qur'an in his *msid*, along with his sons, one of whom was about 18. The young woman wore a headscarf. The setting was controlled. There was neither loss of honor nor breach of responsibility on his part. The younger daughter of the family I lived with went to the *msid* from time to time (mainly summer and school holidays); she studied in the company of male students in the *msid* with no reservation on the part of the *fqih*. (She was eleven years old.)

In conclusion, the body of learners is completely mixed in the *kuttab*. While it is not a huge issue at the early ages, it has symbolic importance in signaling the political will to equalize access to learning space, in this case traditionally male learning space, and traditionally religious subject matter for girls. However, the fact that parents think it important to actually make the time to send their girls to acquire knowledge, to better prepare them for school, does speak of their attitude toward education for their girl children. This signals a desire to at least start girls off on the same footing as boys. Whether parents will be able to follow through on this when the children are older is another question. (Female labor is often needed in the home and this makes it difficult to send a girl to school and lose her labor.) But the idea that they should start off with the opportunity to prove themselves at school, to see if they can read and write, is significant and this relatively new idea is embodied by the co-ed *kuttab*s and the co-ed *msids*.

The Seat of Learning, the Seat of Discipline

Discipline was a very key characteristic of the traditional *msid*. The *fqih* was renowned for his manner of disciplining students. This discipline always played itself out on the body. Students were beaten for misbehaving, for not memorizing well, and for making mistakes in their work. A proverb stating that “no part of the body struck while learning the Qur'an will burn in hell” testifies to the acceptability of beating students.

Stories about the disciplinary methods of *fqihs* abound. I had one seventy-year-old man show me the scar on his leg from where he was beaten by a *fqih* as a boy. A Moroccan short-story writer (and a former colleague of mine from my Peace Corps teaching days) had published a collection of stories, *Graffiti*, one of which was about the educational

experiences of several Moroccan male friends. The *fqih* is portrayed as the “bad guy” in this story, someone very harsh with his students. (Many of the English speakers I knew through the Fulbright program in Morocco advised me to read this short story when they heard the topic of my research.) This is a stereotype many Moroccans agree with, even while respecting the knowledge of the *fqih*. Many people related tales to me of scary experiences they had had with the *fqih*. (This reminded me of stories one hears in the U.S. about the disciplining tactics used by nuns in Catholic schools.)

This tendency toward corporal punishment—punishment of the body—is not unique to Islamic education. Western traditions also used heavy doses of corporal punishment up until the early middle part of the twentieth century. Advances in educational research and child psychology led to conclusions that bodily punishments were actually harmful to the learning process and harmful to the child. Gradually, most institutions, certainly public schools in the West, outlawed the use of corporal punishment. This mind-set that corporal punishment is not the best way to bring about learning has certainly seeped into popular beliefs about education in Morocco. While still not completely disavowed, parents, teachers, and the general public do not embrace the heavy-handed treatment that is traditionally associated with the *fqih*. A magistrate who also acts as a GZA official told me:

Before, the *fqih* was a merciless person. He [the *fqih*] couldn’t help beating the student; hence, our [the GZA’s] choice [to hire female teachers] comes as a result of psychological studies [that show beating to be harmful to the child].

Now, in defense of *fqihs*, it should be said that they were not all mean people who wanted to beat little children. The beating—bodily discipline—came about because it was a fairly widespread, even universal, belief less than 100 years ago that corporal punishment was an efficient way to make children learn and behave. Islamic teachers and community members (parents) believed that the material being memorized was so important that any means to bring about memorization was justified.

Indeed, one indication of this change in opinion is the opinion of the *fqih* from a *msid* in Chefchouan. He is a very conservative man, known to be traditional and devout. He is the *imam* at a local mosque in Chouan. I asked him about corporal punishment because I never saw him hit any student and it seemed to me that he had no need to, as the children did not really misbehave in his presence. He said:

Our ancestors were wrong concerning the beating of students. The beating leads absolutely nowhere. We can influence the students by

talking instead of beating. Threatening is acceptable, but not beating (laughing). We don't even beat our own children, how can we beat the children of other people?

A *fqih* from outside of Chefchouan expressed his general displeasure with corporal punishment, and then qualified it to say:

If I want to discipline a child, I don't hit him more than three times in the appropriate place and I keep the small kids away so as not to see and be affected.

(By appropriate place he means a place where the child will not be physically harmed. For example, children are not hit in the head or chest, but might be struck on the hands or the soles of the feet.) It is interesting that he acknowledges that small children should not be frightened. Bodily fright could result in ineffective learning and in a feeling of alienation from schooling.

What is interestingly implied in these two quotations is that the body is acknowledged tacitly as the seat of learning and not just the seat of discipline. Children need to be comfortable in body and mind to learn. If they are tense, afraid of being hit, and in pain from being hit, they will not learn. If they are scared, their body will make mistakes in the formulation of Qur'anic verses. They will mispronounce, skip sections, misplace the pauses, and so on. Mental discipline is not so separate from bodily discipline in the newer style of *kuttab* in Morocco.

Mental discipline is a part of Qur'anic memorization. Children are expected to concentrate, pay attention, and absorb. Aspects of bodily discipline are intricately linked to mental discipline. The following vignette from my fieldnotes provides an illustration of the link between mind and body in Qur'anic learning.

The lazy afternoon sun poured in through the small windows. Sixty plus kids sat tightly packed in the room, boys on one side and girls on the other. The scraggly aisle up the middle was rapidly disappearing. I was tired of sitting cross-legged (Indian style, as it was called when I was younger) and marveled that the kids could sit this way for so long. They were squirming and whispering and touching each other; I kept fidgeting myself. The lesson was in its second hour and everyone seemed tired. The teachers had taken their break, which essentially meant that they chatted a bit while the kids sat doing nothing. When it was time to begin again, Riem got up for her ritual reorganization. She pulled and tugged little ones back into neat rows and announced that everyone had to stop making "faouda" (noise/fidgeting). "Fold your hands, fold your legs," she repeated over and over as she straightened

the rows. All the little arms crossed rapidly over all the little stomachs. She never told them to sit up straight, I realized, only to fold their arms and legs. I noticed that some of the children tended to rock back and forth gently while reciting, with their arms crossed over their stomachs.

I was amazed by this scene, which repeated itself day after day. Sixty kids less than six years old in such a small space and they were so good! For example, children are supposed to fold their hands when memorizing and reciting. They are supposed to sit cross-legged. One command that the teacher is always repeating to the children is “fold your hands.” They are supposed to sit in rows and not fidget. These are ideals and, of course, sixty preschoolers in a room do fidget, make noise, touch or hit each other, and the like, but for the most part the kids had amazing discipline. They sat fairly still and generally kept their hands pretty much to themselves. There was rarely any fighting, which I found amazing for such young children sitting so close together. While they were allowed to get up and go to the bathroom if necessary, there was never a mass exodus to the toilets. They sat for two and a half hours with no stretch time and no playtime. When there were breaks, they sat (noisily) in their same spots.

The teachers are expected to keep the kids in order and to remind them of proper bodily positions (hands folded in front of them and crossed legs), neat rows, etc. Sometimes a supervisor, who makes the rounds to the different GZA schools in Chouan, stops in and watches a lesson. She will invariably comment on the conduct of the children—whether their hands are folded, whether their legs are crossed, and whether they are in neat rows.

Teachers and supervisors do not use corporal punishment to bring about organization, nor are they intolerant to disorganization, up to a point. They do allow the children to squirm and fidget—the children do not sit frozen, afraid to move. When the rows of children become too unrecognizable and when the fidgeting becomes too pronounced, the teachers simply reorganize the kids, tell them to fold their hands, cross their legs, and be quiet.

Children are still taught the importance of bodily discipline and its relation to mental discipline, but are made to understand this in a gentler way than in the past. The body is not the only seat of discipline and the mind is not the only seat of learning. By forswearing corporal punishment, there is a much more explicit acknowledgment of the interrelatedness of the two in memorizing the Qur'an and in learning to be a member of the community of practice in Morocco. Children embody discipline at first through their posture and their positions, and then through the fact of

being able to memorize and recite. These things involve the whole being, a symbiosis between body and mind (as discussed in the section on embodying the Qur'an).

As adults, they can manifest discipline through other communal acts that unite the discipline of body and mind, such as fasting, praying, abstaining from illicit relations, and the like. The body is intricately linked to the exercise of reason—which involves the manifestation of discipline in daily life. Mental discipline is called for in making oneself give charity, avoiding bad thoughts, gossip, etc.

In conclusion, the body—the gendered body and the body as a seat of learning and discipline—is the subject and creator of changes that are taking place within the *kuttab* and the larger culture. Using traditional texts (mainly the Qur'an), women are defining new roles for themselves in the realm of religious education, much as new realms are opening up to women in Moroccan society as a whole, and some of this redefinition is happening through community groups such as the GZA. These new female roles are changing the traditional school in many ways, while leaving its core mission of Qur'anic memorization intact. The *kuttab*s also embody changing beliefs and ideas about education in Moroccan society as a whole. The conscious decision to include girls as students in the *kuttab*s reflects (1) the Moroccan government's policies mandating compulsory education for girls as well as boys and (2) communities' willingness to change traditional practice and open up "space"—temporal, physical, and cultural—for girls within educational institutions that used to serve mostly boys. The elimination of corporal punishment also reflects communities' willingness to reexamine and change traditional practices as well as changing perceptions about the relationship between mind and body in the learning process.

CHAPTER 7

Islamiya Schools in Nigeria

Moving Toward Public School Pedagogy

This chapter is about Islamic schools in Kano, Nasarawa and Lagos states in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country. Nigeria is strong, vibrant, and much more diverse than either Morocco or Yemen, religiously, culturally, and linguistically. Access to "Islamiya schools," as they are called in Nigeria and thus the data that inform this chapter, were obtained through my association with a U.S. Agency for International Development funded project, which provides assistance to educational institutions, including Islamic schools, that serve children at the primary school level. The term Islamiya is the arabic equivalent of the adjective "Islamic" in English. This project, called LEAP (Literacy Enhancement Assistance Project), has provided me with the opportunity to visit, observe classes, and interview teachers and students in several Islamiya schools in Kano, Nasarawa, and Lagos states.

This chapter is more descriptive than analytical as the project is ongoing and the series of planned studies on Islamic schools and the impact of the project on these schools is ongoing. However, the descriptions provided below of Islamic schooling in Nigeria are a fitting place to end. In the previous chapter, I looked at the ways in which Qur'anic schools in Morocco have transformed themselves to what I call "modern traditional" schools. What is happening in Nigeria is, in some ways, a very logical next step in the change process, where schools become no longer only Qur'anic schools but Islamiya (Islamic) schools that have more in common with the public schools of their respective countries than the traditional Qur'anic schools, whose mission they often perpetuate, albeit in a much augmented and changed form.

In truth, all Qur'anic schools are Islamic schools and all Islamic schools facilitate Qur'anic memorization. Especially in Nigeria, it is probably more accurate to think of a continuum of Islamic institutions ranging from archetypal Qur'anic schools to modern schools that teach English, math, technology, science, and traditional Islamic subjects, including memorization of the Qur'an. Islamiya schools fall closer to public schools on that continuum. Thus, the schools that I call *Islamiya* are those that have adopted a wider curriculum than just the Qur'an and that are generally the sole source of education for children. Thus, they do not implement a strictly Qur'anic course of study, but have introduced math, science, history, and other subjects that are part of the Nigerian national curriculum. In addition, children attend these schools fulltime in place of public school.

To be sure, there are Islamic schools in Nigeria that fit the archetype of the traditional Qur'anic school of old. And there are also Islamiya schools that have retained a heavy focus on Qur'anic memorization (six to ten periods/week out of forty-two class periods) but that teach other, modern subjects as well as Islamic subjects. Indeed, even in those schools with an expanded roster of subjects, memorization has tended to remain the primary method of instruction, even for non-Qur'anic subjects.

Nigeria provides a useful counterpart to both the Morocco and Yemen models of Qur'anic schooling discussed in previous chapters. In Morocco, Qur'anic preschools predominate, although one finds Qur'anic schools as "after-school" schools or summer schools as well. In Sana'a, a large urban area, as in much of Morocco, demand for public schooling is high and Qur'anic schooling has evolved into a supplemental school, one in which students study after their public school classes. In Nigeria, with declining public school quality in many places and the growing politicization of religious difference in a country almost equally divided between Muslims and Christians, Islamiya schools are emerging as credible and desirable alternatives to the public schools. However, in so doing, they move further and further down the change continuum toward an instructional pedagogical model that is almost indistinguishable from that of the public schools. The implications of this evaluation for traditional Qur'anic pedagogy are significant. In this chapter, I describe the teaching and learning environment and methods in the Islamiya schools that I visited, posing (but not, at this point, fully answering) the question of why, as schools move from more traditional to more "modern" (i.e., Western looking), they are willing and even eager to sacrifice key elements of Qur'anic school pedagogy rather than apply that pedagogy to new subjects they are importing?

Background on the LEAP Project

The goal of the USAID funded project, referred to above, is to improve literacy and numeracy instruction in schools in Kano, Nasarawa, and Lagos

states. The project has designed a series of interventions to improve teaching and learning, including policy level support to local government areas, pedagogical support to schools, and promotion of community involvement in school improvement and governance. Almost one-third of the schools served by the project are Islamiya schools.

At first, there was skepticism as to whether Islamiya schools would be interested in receiving any U.S. government assistance at all. In keeping with the findings of my work in Morocco, once again I was struck by the ways in which Islamiya schools were open to new ideas and ways of doing things. While there was a good deal of suspicion at first, with a staff of local Nigerians working to reassure school leaders and State Primary Education Boards and the Islamic Education and Social Affairs Board in Kano supporting the project, schools soon began to participate actively. In many cases, the Islamiya schools were more assiduous in utilizing project interventions than the public schools. In particular, the project aired an interactive radio instruction program three days a week. There were programs for children in grades 3–6. Data show that Islamiya schoolteachers actively prepare for the programs and follow them in their classrooms.

Fieldwork in February of 2002 and July of 2003 allowed me to get a sense of the type of teaching and learning that take place in Islamiya schools. Information was collected through semistructured interviews (teacher, student, and parent), informal conversations and school and classroom visits (observation), as well as limited student assessment, using an instrument developed by a testing consultant working on the project at eight schools.

Teaching and Learning in Islamiya Schools

It is the aspect of teaching and learning in Islamiya schools and the change pattern that has occurred over time, as these schools have evolved from traditional Qur'anic schools to Islamiya schools, that most interests me. The rest of this chapter deals with the question of why traditional Qur'anic pedagogy has been or is being eclipsed, not only in Nigeria but in Morocco and other places as well, by what I will call "public school pedagogy." By this I mean the type of lecture-oriented, "chalk and talk" teaching that is so pervasive in school systems all over the world, especially developing countries. While many school systems are working to make instruction more active and student-centered this basic "frontal" group lecture and dull method is what came to replace traditional Qur'anic school pedagogy in so many places.

These "New" ideas on education came to Nigeria and large parts of West Africa through the introduction of Western-looking schooling by the colonial powers. In addition, scholars and travelers from the region who formed strong links with institutions of higher education in Cairo and Saudi Arabia (Brenner, 2001) also imported models that were gaining authority and influence in those

countries. Many hybrid models emerged: Franco-Arab schools that taught the French language and Qur'anic studies as well as Islamic schools that taught math, science and foreign languages, in addition to as other combinations. While the combination of subjects taught in a given school evolved, depending on the educational philosophy of various stakeholders and decision makers, one trend is clear. Aside from retaining the process of memorization as a learning “technology,” most of the methodology of traditional Islamic teaching vanished.

Traditional Qur'anic school pedagogy, despite its heavy use of corporal punishment, relied on a host of more student-centered learning methods, including peer tutoring, group work, independent work, one-on-one coaching, self-paced learning, and a focus on mastery not on testing. It is curious that while the content of traditional Qur'anic schools—Qur'anic memorization—is still a central feature, it is the only one that has remained constant in some of the Islamiya schools in Nigeria. Memorization is frequently used as the learning technology in all subjects. (This is true for public as well as Islamiya schools.) Yet, students are seated at desks and chairs, a blackboard is used instead of a *luh*, students are in age-grouped classes, and their role is to listen and learn, sit still, be quiet, copy, repeat, recite, and listen to the teacher.

In short, the Islamiya schools that I observed in Nigeria (as well as Morocco and even Yemen) seem to have adopted public school pedagogy in its entirety and combined it with the heavy focus on memorization found in traditional Qur'anic schools. The factors responsible for this are unclear; certainly, the overwhelming strength of the colonial powers swayed many colonized people to conclude that the imported educational systems were superior and would produce more social and economic development. While people clung to the centrality of religious knowledge, there was a desire to import new knowledge and learning and, by implication, the methods used in teaching those new subjects.

Islamiya Schools in Nigeria

Nigeria is eager to meet its goal of universal primary enrollment and universal basic education. Given that millions of children in Nigeria attend Qur'anic/Islamiya schools, the government has, sensibly, made the decision to try to ascertain the level of quality and the content of the education provided by the multiplicity of institutions that call themselves Islamic, in an effort to count the students in these schools as “enrolled” in primary education and receiving a basic education.

The Transition from Qur'anic to Islamiya

The variety of Islamic schools in Nigeria is enormous. In Kano state, the government has established an Islamic Education and Social Affairs Board (IESAB) to help Qur'anic/Islamiya schools move toward a set of basic

standards, issued by the IESAB in conjunction with the State Primary Education Board, that will allow them to “count” as primary education providers. These standards include the teaching of English, as well as the host of public school subjects found in Nigeria, such as math, science, history, etc.

Many Qur’anic schools favor this idea. However, there are those that do not, having neither the motivation nor the capability to integrate these subjects into their existing course of study. Nonetheless, many schools were eager to participate in this changeover process.

In Kano, several agencies had a link to Qur’anic and Islamiya schools. The State Agency for Mass Education (SAME) supported schools in providing basic skills (i.e., vocational training, literacy, etc.). The IESAB had been set up to help Islamic schools (of all varieties) move from traditional Qur’anic to modern Islamiya formats. The State Primary Education Board oversees all primary educational institutions and thus has a stake in the ways in which Islamiya schools teach and whether students are held to acceptable standards.

School Structures and Curricula for Transition

In support of the “standardization” process, UNICEF had developed a basic skills math and English language curriculum that was offered to Qur’anic schools in Nigeria. During my visits to schools in Kano, an escort from SAME reported that of the 101 Qur’anic or Islamiya schools that signed up to participate in the UNICEF integrated program, only thirty-six were actually implementing some part of the program. Two out of the three schools we saw were either implementing the Ministry of Education (MOE) curriculum, seemingly without the UNICEF curriculum, or, at the very least, were implementing much more than the UNICEF curriculum alone.

With the state government ostensibly supplying texts and even teachers, many Qur’anic schools evolved quite rapidly into Islamiya schools, as defined above. Many are still in transition. Two of the schools I visited in Kano had multiple classrooms, followed the MOE curriculum for Islamiya schools (not the UNICEF curriculum), had teachers for different subject matters of varying certification, and demonstrated relatively poor teaching methods for non-Qur’anic subjects (i.e., memorization based). One school had boxes of public school student books for all subjects. Children in both schools were somewhat age mixed in classrooms, although not to the degree you would see in a traditional Qur’anic school. They were generally grouped by level—that is, into grades. Both schools also reported that they did test children, in written and oral form, in order to measure progress and to promote them.

The Qur’anic school that I visited in Kano with a representative of SAME was an archetypal Qur’anic school. The *malam* (traditional teacher) from that school ran a one-room institution. He joined the UNICEF integrated program, and offered the program’s English and math curriculum on

Thursdays and Fridays. He had facilitators who came in to teach those subjects because he could not do this himself.

As part of the project, I also visited three schools under the more direct auspices of the IESAB in Kano. The schools were all multiclassroom schools that taught a variety of subjects in addition to Qur'anic memorization. Children were grouped roughly by age into grades. Some served grades 1–6. They followed the MOE Islamiya curriculum, had teachers with varying degrees of certification, taught multiple subjects, had grade levels, and conducted exams to pass students from level to level. Attendance at the school did render students eligible to take one of the three government exams that would allow them to go on for higher studies at a government middle or high school.

One Islamiya school principal reported that his school had been teaching other subjects (English, math, etc.) for four years. This predates the UNICEF integrated curriculum. The principal confirmed that the school followed the MOE Islamiya curriculum. During that same visit, the principal also added that he had teachers whose salaries were paid by the government, that the school had received one training from UNICEF but no materials, and that the students from this school were eligible to take one of three exams at the end of their studies at the school: the common entrance exam, the Islamic school exam, or the Qur'anic memorization exam. Depending on which they passed, they could go onto one of these tracks for further study.

I also visited two schools in Lagos, both on Lagos Island, which were slightly different from the schools in Kano, although there was a core of similarity. Both seemed to have a large population of students whose primary source of schooling was another institution—that is, a public or private primary school. One ran instruction from 9:00 to 2:00 for students whose only source of instruction was the Qur'anic school. The second did not have a population of full-time students and only served students who attended public or other schooling for their main instruction.

The first was a small multiclassroom school. The full-time students attended from 9:00 to 2:00 daily. The school taught a variety of subjects and had a staff of five teachers with varying degrees of certification. (The head teacher earned his degree from Al Azhar in Cairo; another had a certificate from Ilorin University.) However, the school was following its own curriculum and not any Ministry curriculum. Children studied the Qur'an first, then Islamic jurisprudence, Islamic issues, general studies (all other subjects), and ended the day with songs and poems. The Qur'an segment lasted about forty-five minutes, and the general studies about one hour. General studies included English, math, and geography/social studies. The teacher generally covered one of these topics each day in the general studies segment of the day, with some repetition of a subject throughout the week. For example, a math teacher came in twice a week. The level of math instruction

was not high, and indeed the teacher made a point of correcting himself to call the math teacher a numeracy teacher, instead.

The head teacher reported that the taught method used to teach English in this school as “straight translation.” He taught the English class himself and was quite competent in English. His method was to give the students translated phrases and words to memorize. Students have to buy books from the market for the general studies courses and they purchase the regular public school books; some Arab countries donate books as well. Students have written and oral exams. Often they have to complete a phrase from the Qur’an or read passages in English or Arabic and explain them.

Generally, this school seemed to offer less time to English and math than the Kano schools (with the possible exception of the very traditional school), but it did offer them nonetheless. The second Lagos school seemed to employ more interactive methods, as I watched a part of a lesson where the *malam* called on students to recite and answer questions. However, the school did not offer non-Qur’anic subjects like English or math. In addition to its population of after-school students, the school had eight resident students who boarded at the mosque and studied advanced Islamic subjects.

Student Learning

On subsequent visits to the same schools in Kano, a group from the project administered short, English assessment exercises to a selection of Islamiya students from grades 3 and 4. The tests asked students to identify letters by sounds, identify words, and tested their comprehension of sentences. In general, the Islamiya school students could consistently point to the right letter when they heard the associated sound, but had some problems with word identification and the most difficulty with comprehension.

At public schools in Kano, the project group administered the exercises to a small sample of students from grades 3 and 4. At one of them, a model school, the students seemed to do much better on the exercises in comparison to the Islamiya students. At the second school, which was much bigger and not a model school, the students did not seem to do much differently than their Islamic school counterparts.

Across the board, comprehension seemed to pose the greater problem, and students in all the schools had difficulty with simple questions that we asked them in English, like “what is your name?” Even those Islamiya schools that had been teaching English for a while seemed to have students with very low levels. This was especially true in Kano and less true in Lagos, where students are generally exposed to more English in day-to-day life.

Gender Issues

The Islamiya schools in general had noticeably higher numbers of girls than boys. Roughly, the Islamiya schools in Kano were two-thirds girls and

one-third boys. This difference was ascribed by one informant to the notion that these schools are safer for girls and will keep them close to their religion. This informant said that there is not as much worry that boys will be influenced away from their religion. We also thought that parents might feel that an Islamiya education serves girls better because their primary role will be to marry and have children. Given this scenario, parents might not have felt it necessary or wise to make the greater investment in public schooling for girls. Likewise, we were told that the public schools have more boys than girls. Classroom visits to two public primary schools in Kano seemed to bear this out.

In Lagos, in the first school observed, we were told that the gender breakdown for full-time students is 55% girls and 45% boys. There were mostly female students in the school on the Saturday that we visited. The second school reported a higher number of male students, which would make sense if males outnumber females in the public schools and this school draws its population of students from the public schools.

Instruction

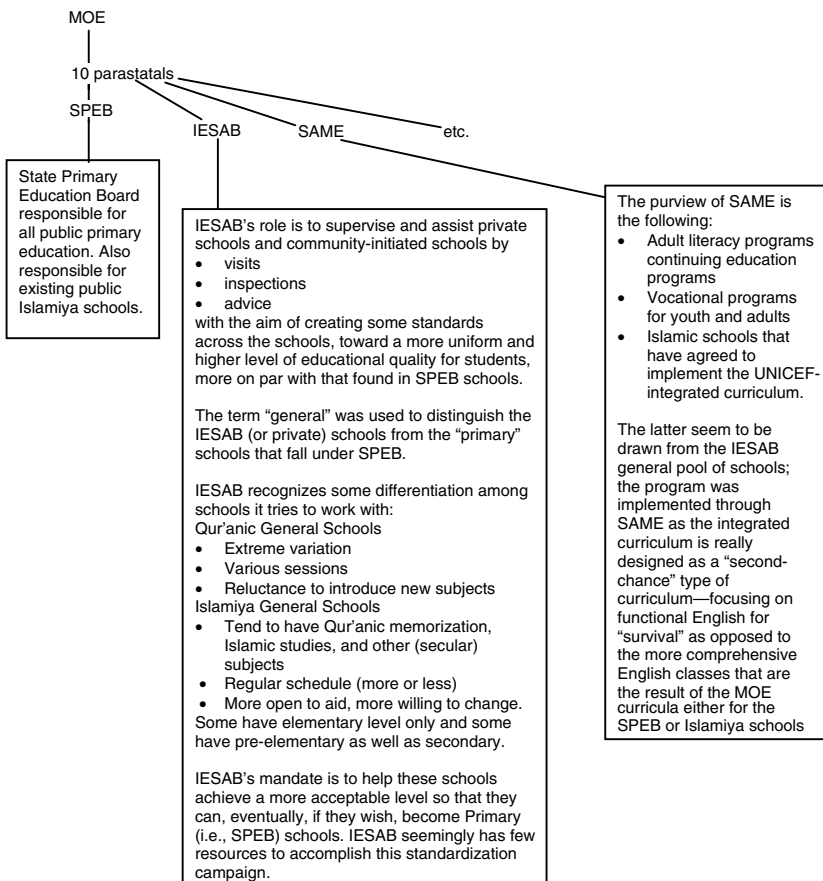
It is important to note that the teaching in the Islamiya/Qur'anic schools I visited was quite poor across the board. This perception is based on both classroom observations (although limited in scope) and self-reporting by teachers, during the interviews, on how they teach. In general, teaching seemed based on reciting for the purpose of memorization and on copying. For example, in an Arabic class, I sat through a lesson where the teacher had the children recite a small verse over and over for fifteen minutes. The verse had children say the names of animals in Arabic and then say the names of the same animals in Hausa. It was a translation exercise: the students had written the verse in their notebooks and the notebooks were corrected. However, the teacher had the students do nothing else for the whole time that I sat in the back of the class. She did not quiz them, mix up the order of the animal, call them to the board, or ask them the animal names in Hausa to translate back into Arabic. An English class in other schools was much the same. The English class had some board activity; however, it mainly involved the copying of sentences and the pointing to words, not the use of the language in any meaningful way. To give a final example, the Qur'anic schoolteacher in Lagos described his method of English instruction as translation. He gave phrases in Arabic and Hausa and translated them for the children, who memorized the translation.

Although the observations were limited in scope, combined with the limited student assessment exercises carried out through the project (described above), it does not seem unreasonable to say that while some

Islamiya schools may have made the leap to a more expanded curriculum, their overall model of classroom instruction has not followed suit.

Policy Environment

I was able to interview the director of IESAB in Kano. The interview was useful in that it did shed some light on the policy environment emerging in Kano in terms of Qur'anic and Islamiya schools. This issue of who governs Islamiya/Qur'anic schools is slightly confusing, as the State Primary Education Board does run some Islamiya schools (approximately 495), which are relatively new, and IESAB and SAME also seem to have some jurisdiction over the rest of the population of Islamic schools (approximately 7,000). The director of IESAB characterized the structure and division of duties in Kano as follows.



Conclusions

Education in both Islamiya and public schools in Kano and Lagos was fairly poor. In both types of schools, teachers relied heavily on “chalk and talk” methodologies, lectures, copying activities, and rigid discipline. It seems that as schools move along the continuum from being traditional Qur’anic schools to more “modern” Islamiya schools, they jettison the elements of traditional pedagogy that distinguished Islamic education from modern Western education.

While discipline was often pervasive and severe in traditional Islamic schools, there were other aspects of teaching and learning that could be considered student centered today. These include peer work, group work, self-paced learning, one-on-one coaching, and independent work. The general ethos of Islamic education—the development of the whole person and the preparation of children to join local, national, and international communities of Islam—has been circumscribed by a set of teaching methods that renders practice (legitimate peripheral participation) in context difficult, if not, at times, impossible.

The combination of memorization as a learning technology for nonsacred subjects and the teaching of “secular” subjects has left children in a space where they have memorized or “learned” a great deal, but can apply little to their daily lives. What they learn, while studying secular subjects like math, science and language is then considered fixed and immovable, rather than mutable, “shapable,” or applicable to the immediate context of their lives. Qur’anic memorization renders the Qur’an embodied, carved on the mind of the child. However, this technology was not meant for all subjects, only those with the sacred importance and immutability of the Qur’an. Memorization of the Qur’an prepared one for a lifetime of Qur’anic discovery. Memorization of “secular” subjects has the opposite effect, leaving children with chunks of information they cannot understand or relate to.

The teaching methods of traditional Islamic schools would be far more appropriate for the teaching of the types of “secular” subjects that Islamiya schools are now trying to teach in ever greater numbers. However, the particular conflux of historical events and attitudes that rendered traditional Qur’anic pedagogy “unsuitable” have in effect caused schools to lose a singular feature of Islamic education—its traditional pedagogy—that could help schools to impart a better education to children. Public schools as well could learn from traditional Islamic pedagogy, had it not been practically eliminated in favor of the more Western-looking methods that characterized colonial educational institutions in much of Africa.

Conclusion

Islamic schools exist all over the world and serve millions of children in some educational capacity. In Nigeria, Islamiya schools are popular and provide a comprehensive education to children in place of public schooling. In Sana'a, Yemen, Qur'anic schools supplement the work of public schools, providing "after-school" schooling to young people in areas that foster healthy social, spiritual, and emotional development. In Morocco, Qur'anic schools are popular and widespread, serving children from the ages of three to six, facilitating some Qur'anic memorization and preparing children for a public school education. These schools are diverse, innovative, and, above all, significant as agents of preservation and change in the countries and societies in which they flourish.

The premise for this book has been that it is important to look at Qur'anic schools in the light of *why* and *how* communities value them, and in the light of what major players within the schools themselves see as the mission of the Qur'anic school. This book is a step in the larger process of looking at what Qur'anic schools do, what they do well, what areas could use improvement, and why they are popular and well attended. This book centers on the frameworks of situated learning and embodiment help to illuminate, describe, and further an understanding of the roles of Qur'anic schools.

Roles

The institution of the Qur'anic school combines the often-competing forces of cultural preservation and transformation that are sweeping across many countries in the Middle East and North Africa. The urge to modernize, compete efficiently in the global economy, and go on-line, for example, is juxtaposed in many societies with an urge to preserve traditional life, resist cultural imperialism and Westernization, and maintain religiosity in daily

life. Qur'anic and Islamic schools mediate and balance between these competing urges since they tend to be both traditional and modern, or attuned to the modern world, at the same time.

Qur'anic schools draw on a centuries-old educational tradition and are true to that tradition in the preservation of their main purpose—Qur'anic memorization. Yet, much has changed within the Qur'anic school in response to modern realities. In GZA Qur'anic schools (and many more across Morocco), the teaching force has been feminized and modern ideas about how children learn and the importance of the educational environment in facilitating learning have been incorporated into the instructional system. Many schools, although not the school for boys in Sana'a that I observed, have done away with corporal punishment and have opened up traditional educational space to female students, a population frequently not served by Qur'anic schools in the past. This is true in both Morocco and Nigeria, where classes are mixed. In Nigeria, Islamiya schools seemed especially popular with parents of daughters. Even in Yemen, while no gender mixing was noted in Sana'a, the presence of a school for girls attests to the consciousness that educational space needs to be made available to girls and not only boys.

Because they are both traditional and modern, Qur'anic schools are cultural and educational crossroads. Crossroads are places where people meet, where paths intersect, where new paths begin, where conversations occur, where directions are sought, and, often, where travelers rest before moving on. This metaphor extends well to Qur'anic schools. Culturally, they are located at a place where the paths of tradition and modernity intersect. A new path combining traditional and modern education emerges from the place where the two intersect. Teacher and student meet in the Qur'anic school, directions (lessons) are given and learned, and students “rest” in the Qur'anic school, as they transition between the home and the public school (as in Morocco) or between traditional life and modern life as represented by the public schools (as in Yemen). Even in Nigeria, by maintaining a focus on religious learning, in conjunction with “modern subjects,” Islamiya schools play an intermediary role between tradition and modernity. In short, Qur'anic schools are crossroads because they blend the traditional with the modern, much as two roads merge at a fork and become one. In this way, Qur'anic schools play an active role in the change process occurring in many societies. They are not resisters, as might be thought at first, but innovators and mores.

Preparation for Social Life . . .

The theory of communities of practice gives context to the application of embodiment theory to Qur'anic schooling. Qur'anic schooling—schooling

of any sort for that matter—does not take place in a vacuum. Schooling is intimately linked to the lives and practices of learners and families. For example, memorization as a process of embodying the Qur'an has meaning only if it is situated within the values, social life, and culture of a community or communities. In speaking of Qur'anic schools as crossroads, I am implicitly suggesting that they play a role in preparing children for social life in their communities—local and national as well as global. If Qur'anic schools combine the traditional and the modern, if they are a crossroads where these two paths meet, then on some level they teach children how to walk these paths.

Both the local communities for the studies described in this book and the national communities demonstrate a desire to see valued traditional knowledge and practices embodied in the next generation of children. They also demonstrate a desire to help those same children acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to do well in public school, perhaps go to college, and find employment. It is hard to separate preparation for social life at the local level from preparation for social life at the national and even international levels. Much of what goes into making children ready to participate in their local communities also spills over into preparing them to be good national and global citizens.

... at the Local Level

Qur'anic schools prepare children for social life at the local level in several ways. First, they facilitate Qur'anic memorization, thereby engraving some of the Qur'an into the bodies of Qur'anic school students. My data from Morocco suggest that the role of the Qur'anic school in embodying the Qur'an within the bodies of students is most important to parents and communities. Memorization of the Qur'an is clearly a desired outcome in Yemen and Nigeria as well.

The embodied Qur'an acts as a point of reference, a compass, as children grow older, understand more of what they have memorized, and make decisions on the direction of their lives. Parents and community members want their children to follow the path of Islam and to be good citizens in their immediate communities and also in their national and global communities. The compass acquired in the Qur'anic school helps the growing child to navigate along the paths of tradition and modernity, find direction and orientation, and make decisions on which way to go and which path to choose. While I applied the compass metaphor only to Morocco in the text of this book, the metaphor is apt in the other contexts as well. There is a strong belief on the part of parents and students that Qur'anic memorization is an element in setting children on the right path, in "vaccinating" them against ill health, if you will. Parents in Nigeria cited the religious

focus of Islamic schools as the main reason for selecting them, despite school fees and the often poor infrastructure.

Qur'anic schools provide discipline for children, keeping them from the idleness of the street and explicitly teaching them culturally valued forms of behavior, including how to be polite, how to greet elders, how to pray, how to wash for prayers, and other aspects of traditional knowledge and behavior. Parents in a small and traditional community like Chefchouan, or an urban community like Sana'a really want to see their children internalize and exhibit these traditional behaviors, even as they want them to go to public schools and learn math and science, French and English.

At the local level too, Qur'anic schools in Morocco play an additional role of providing a source of income for educated girls from low-income families, thus contributing to the economic livelihood of the family unit and offering the girl a chance to get out of the house, expand her horizons, and acquire some personal income. The work and the income give her more social and economic independence than she would likely have otherwise.

Both the money and the mobility associated with having a job are most immediately felt at the local level in Chefchouan. These in turn influence attitudes most directly at the local level. Community members see these young female teachers going to work each day and become accustomed to it. Young boys and girls grow up associating Qur'anic learning with a female teacher. These role changes influence local perceptions of female roles and abilities and also prepare a new generation to conceptualize female roles as perhaps encompassing more than their parents did.

... at the National Level

At the national level, Qur'anic schools embody the continuation of a valued traditional institution. As such, they represent a link with times past, with cultural roots, and with Moroccan, Nigerian, or Yemeni identity. Qur'anic schools are one source of forming a Moroccan, Nigerian, or Yemeni Islamic identity in children. In Morocco, for example, this is critical to the political culture at the national level, where the monarchy draws its legitimacy from its ancestry from the Prophet Mohammed. In Nigeria, they foster a sense of Nigerian Islamic identity in a country of diverse Muslim ethnic and linguistic groups. Because they offer a tangible link to the past and render a service, especially to lower income parents, I believe in Morocco they are a source—one among many, to be sure—of political stability.

Qur'anic schools offer students the opportunity to participate in a very Islamic rite of passage, one that their parents and grandparents probably experienced, albeit in a form more similar to that of the *msid*. In Morocco, as Qur'anic memorization was particularly emphasized in precolonial educational traditions, this exercise in memorizing the Qur'an in the

contemporary Qur'anic school still allows students to partake of a very Moroccan form of learning. Maintaining tradition is an important aspect of social life in Morocco, Sana'a (Yemen), and Nigeria. This is especially true given the often overwhelming exposure to Western values, customs, and cultures that comes with TV, internet, and other forms of media.

Increasingly, social life in Morocco, Yemen, and Nigeria, even in small towns and rural areas, includes some public education for children or at least some education in subjects other than traditional religious ones. In Morocco, Qur'anic schools offer children, both girls and boys, some preparation for primary school, familiarizing them with the idea of being in school, sitting in rows, listening to the teacher, reciting out loud (individually and in a group), learning letters and numbers, and even learning how to write some letters and numbers. Hence, learning how to behave in school and becoming familiar with the culture of schooling is increasingly important for children in Morocco nationwide, and Qur'anic schools are playing a larger and larger role in this nationwide preparation. In Nigeria, Islamiya schools provide a forum for "secular" education that is not entirely secular. The culture of the school is Islamic and Nigerian, but the school prepares children for further schooling or even work by imparting literacy and numeracy skills, among other things. Even in Yemen, the Qur'anic school-teacher expressed a consciousness of the importance (and likely permanence) of public schooling when he said that teachers in the school often helped students with their public school homework.

Likewise, at the level of any of these nations, learning to read and write is also an aspect of being prepared for social life at the turn of the twentieth century. Years ago, literacy was broader than simply being able to read and/or write (Wagner, 1989, 1983a, b; Wagner, Messick, & Spratt, 1986). In precolonial days, a person who had memorized the Qur'an was considered literate. As Qur'anic schools have changed over time, so has the concept of literacy. Today, the definition of literacy, especially coming from the national level of educational goals and policy, has shifted to focus much more on reading and writing rather than memorization and recitation. This shift in definition has filtered down to influence and even co-opt perceptions of literacy at the local level. This shift in perception has caused the GZA to emphasize the reading and writing of letters in addition to Qur'anic memorization. Indeed, many Moroccan parents that I interviewed wanted to see even more emphasis in the Qur'anic school on writing. Thus, laying the groundwork for acquiring literacy or fostering greater literacy, as in Yemen and Nigeria (particularly Arabic language literacy), is an important aspect of the role of the modern Qur'anic school at the national level.

I must emphasize here that there is still much prestige associated with being able to recite the Qur'an correctly from memory. Literate or not, a

person who has memorized the Qur'an is considered *learned*. That is to say that while the definition of literacy has narrowed, the concept of being learned still very much encompasses traditional knowledge. A *fqih* or a *malam* is respected as a learned person. (Ironically, while traditional conceptions of literacy often focused on Qur'anic recitation, it was in the traditional *msid* in Morocco that I saw the most focus on writing. In the Qur'anic school, the more modern institution, neither reading nor writing were emphasized as much as Qur'anic memorization, probably in part due to the age of the children and the lack of in-depth training for the teachers on how to teach reading and writing. The GZA was working very hard to better train teachers to teach letters and numbers.)

. . . and Lastly the International Level

The issue of preparation for social life in the global *umma* is really part and parcel of learning to participate in local and national Islamic communities of practice. In the Qur'anic or Islamiya school, students are introduced to Islam in a formal institutional setting for the first time. They are expected to fulfill certain assignments in order to formally learn about Islam, such as memorizing chants about the pillars of Islam and the five prayer times, not to mention verses from the Qur'an. All of these things are geared to help the students identify themselves as Muslims—not just as Moroccan Muslims or Yemeni or Nigerian Muslims but simply as Muslim. Whether they change their place of residence within their countries or emigrate to some place outside their countries, students will, hopefully, have internalized their social compasses in order to stay on the path of Islam whatever the setting. In this way, in the Qur'anic school, students begin to become aware that they are part of something beyond Kano, Lagos, Sana'a, or Chefchouan, and beyond Nigeria, Yemen, or Morocco. Thus, in the Qur'anic school they begin to participate in the social life of being Muslim in the global sense.

Policy Implications for the Growth of Qur'anic Schools in Morocco

As the three countries cited in this book are seeking to reform and improve their educational systems, Qur'anic schools constitute valuable resources upon which to draw in the areas of school preparation and innovative instructional methods. For example, the Moroccan government, in the person of the king, has for a long time encouraged the growth of Qur'anic schools as an authentically Moroccan form of education that will prepare children for primary school. The government has nominal oversight with regard to Qur'anic schools, but this does not translate into real day-to-day decision-making influence or power. Qur'anic schools might receive MOE inspectors once a year to observe a class, but these

inspectors do not have real control over the educational process in the Qur'anic school. This is mainly because Qur'anic schools, such as those run by the GZA, are generally privately funded and not financed from government revenues. The government simply does not have the resources to assume the kind of direct control over Qur'anic schools that it has over the public school system, for example. Thus, while government policy encourages the growth of Qur'anic schools as preschools, the government has not yet made a move to direct or control the content or educational process within the Qur'anic school in any more than a nominal sense. The same is true in Yemen. In Nigeria, the governments (state governments) are beginning to try to exert some influence and control over Qur'anic schooling, as they facilitate the process of bringing Qur'anic schools into the fold of Islamiya schools, setting standards and providing support for expanded curricula. This is probably a much more cost-effective method than trying to build and staff additional public schools or trying to redirect parental demand from Islamiya to public schooling.

The question of teacher training and in-class pedagogy is a very important area for policy discussion as well. In my opinion, the fact that “modern traditional” schools or Islamiya schools are adaptable and unafraid of change is NOT to say that all of the changes they have adopted are necessarily improvements on the *msid* model. The GZA more or less encourages the use of teaching methods that are the same as those used in the public schools as opposed to those used in the *msids*. Teachers in the Moroccan public school system tend to use few active learning strategies in the classroom; likewise, classrooms tend to be teacher rather than student centered. For example, in imitating public school teaching methods, Qur'anic schools have jettisoned the traditional coaching/apprenticeship model of instruction used in the *msid*.

Despite its close association with corporal punishment, the *msid* nonetheless provided a very individualized education, tailored to the child's needs and abilities. Instructional strategies such as peer tutoring and group work, individual writing work with the *luh*, and one-on-one instruction with the *fqih* provided the student with a variety of learning “channels” and suited a wider variety of learning styles than the current Qur'anic schools and public schools, both of which use a much more teacher-centered instructional model. Thus, if the government of Morocco seeks to more systematically utilize the Qur'anic school system to better prepare children for primary school, educational authorities might consider encouraging the use of traditional pedagogical methods such as are found in the *msids* in both Qur'anic school and public school classrooms.

This has occurred to an even greater extent in Nigeria, where the introduction of new subjects has ushered in the use of teaching methods

linked (in people's minds) with those subjects. Hence, traditional pedagogical methods found in Qur'anic schools are not simply modified but discarded in favor of the less student-centered methods found in Nigerian public schools.

Only Yemen seems to have retained its traditional methods with some modification. While the school for boys did use corporal punishment, it was not as severe as it had been in the past. Ideas on relating to students, encouraging them, and being nice and cheerful had infiltrated both the boys' and the girls' schools that I observed. However, the actual teaching was still very much one on one and peer work was still highly encouraged.

Recommendations for Further Study

While Qur'anic schools might represent an untapped resource to educational policy makers in Morocco, Nigeria, and Yemen, it would be a mistake to build policy and initiate reform efforts that involve Qur'anic schools without also undertaking further research. For example, right now, the assertion that Qur'anic schools do prepare children for primary school in Morocco is somewhat anecdotal. GZA officials have queried primary school teachers on an ad hoc basis as to whether GZA Qur'anic school students are better prepared than their peers. According to the GZA president, and Yasima, a GZA supervisor in Fes, public school teachers have given the GZA positive responses. There is, however, a dearth of actual evidence as to whether Qur'anic schools actually better prepare children for primary school. Do Qur'anic school students know their letters and numbers better than children who do not attend a Qur'anic school? Are those same children more advanced in other areas like religion (a public school subject)? Do they have better verbal skills? Are they better reciters? Is their behavior better? Do they have better social skills? How do Qur'anic school students compare to children who attend kindergartens? It is important to address these questions if Qur'anic schools are to figure institutionally in Morocco's educational reform efforts.

Likewise, the LEAP project in Nigeria offers a chance to see whether Islamiya schools do provide a higher quality of education than public schools and, if so, why? (Or, why not?) Are Islamiya schoolteachers more willing to incorporate student-centered teaching into their repertoire than public school teachers, because of its strong association with traditional teaching? What is the best way to reassert Islamic pedagogical practices and transfer them to public school teachers?

The area of traditional pedagogy is one that deserves further study. *Msids* employed and still employ many instructional techniques that are considered quite "modern" by educators today. Research on how to encourage the transfer of these "new" old methods into mainstream

educational institutions—public schools and Qur’anic schools—could be quite valuable and could potentially greatly improve teaching and learning in all three countries.

The potential of Qur’anic schools to expand and improve pre-primary education in Morocco or improve educational quality in Nigeria or Yemen depends on policy makers appreciating *why* parents opt to send their children to these institutions in the first place. This book looks at Qur’anic schools in the light of what roles they play in community life, as a first step in exploring the potential of Qur’anic schools to systematically work alongside the public education system in improving education in Morocco. Thus, the book is a starting point not only for understanding the role(s) that Qur’anic schools play in community life in Morocco, Sana’a (Yemen), and Nigeria but for exploring how aspects of traditional Qur’anic pedagogy can be “reintroduced” into mainstream Moroccan education and in documenting what learning effects Qur’anic schools have on school preparedness and school achievement.

Final Thoughts . . .

Qur’anic schools embody the Qur’an within the beings of Qur’anic school students. Through Qur’anic memorization, some portion of the Qur’an is engraved on the minds and hearts of Qur’anic school students. They are not yet meant to understand the meaning of what they are memorizing and parents expect this will come as their children grow. Understanding becomes more likely since the students have the Qur’anic verses already engraved on their minds and hearts. Thus, the material is accessible to children for further reflection and consideration as they grow. In addition, the embodied Qur’an acts as a spiritual and social compass for Qur’anic school students as they grow up. Memorizing the Qur’an does not guarantee good behavior, but rather gives the students a point of reference (a compass) from which they can gauge direction and make decisions.

Second, Qur’anic schools renew and give life to indigenous educational tradition, institutions that are well-known parts of each country’s culture and history. They teach culturally valuable behavior (*’adab*) and by so doing represent the living past, the continuation of Moroccan or Yemeni or Nigerian identity through traditional practice.

The Qur’anic school is not just an institution of preservation. For example, the contemporary Qur’anic school in Morocco has institutionalized female teachers as the norm, using traditional texts, mainly the Qur’an, to support a move away from the male *fqih* as teacher. In addition, in all three countries, girls are no longer a marginal student population in the Qur’anic school, reflecting community and national priorities attached to the education of female children. Lastly, the Qur’anic school has actively

embraced “modern” educational trends, largely coming out of Western educational research, which disown corporal punishment and link much more closely the mind/body connection in the overall learning process. In Morocco, it has become increasingly popular as a preschool institution, transmitting traditional knowledge, but also preparing children for primary school.

In sum, Qur’anic schools and their partial offspring, that is, Islamiya schools, have proven themselves remarkably adaptable to changing times and circumstances, while still retaining a core of their traditional identity. Although strongly associated with history and tradition, local communities and associations like the GZA have transformed them by incorporating new ideas into their basic structures. The fact that they have been able to blend the new and the old so well reflects a talent for reconciling tradition and modernity in ways that resonate in Islamic communities of practice as authentic and meaningful.

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