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Author (s):	Boutheina Khaldi
Affiliation (s):	American University of Sharjah, UAE.
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Modern Salafism in Bint al-Shāṭiʾ's Journey to the Ḥijāz

Boutheina Khaldi*
Department of Arabic and Translation Studies.
American University of Sharjah, UAE

Abstract

In 1972, the Egyptian literary scholar and Islamic thinker, ʿĀʾisha ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (known by the epithet Bint al-Shāṭiʾ), published a highly informative account of her pilgrimage journeys, ʿUmra and Ḥajj, respectively, under the title, *Arḍ al-muʿjizāt: riḥla fī jazīrat al-ʿArab* (Land of Miracles: Journey in the Arabian Peninsula, 1951 and 1972). The article argues that Bint al-Shāṭiʾ's pilgrimage account should be read in light of the political and economic changes that the Arab and Islamic world was undergoing at that time. Western Imperialism, and the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and its aftermath, gave more impetus to Islamic revivalism, and Bint al-Shāṭiʾ was one of its proponents. Her *oeuvre* on Islam and anti-Zionism attests to her revivalist project. As a Salafist thinker well versed in history, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ advocates a return to the original Islam. Only through that return to the Qur'ān and Sunna and strong devotion to the *umma* can Muslims regain their strength and defeat the State of Israel. Bint al-Shāṭiʾ uses the communal aspect of pilgrimage to readdress the concept of *Jihād* that should not only be confined to Ḥajj and ʿUmra, but equally performed against social and political injustices, such as the marginalization of women and the Israeli aggression against Palestinians. The article thus contends that Bint al-Shāṭiʾ's pilgrimage narrative is a key component of her commitment literature.

***Keywords*:** Bint al-Shāṭiʾ, pilgrimage, *Jihād*, Salafism, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, women's education, Zionism

Introduction

Notwithstanding the ongoing burgeoning interest in the works of Bint al- Shāṭiʾ (1913-1998), no single study has examined her pilgrimage account to the Ḥijāz in full.[1] This article seeks to remedy this lack. Bint al-Shāṭiʾ's travel account is unique. Indeed, it is two travelogues in one. It is comprised of her ʿUmra (lesser pilgrimage) 1951 account titled *Riḥla ilā Jazīrat al-ʿArab* (A Journey to the Arabian Peninsula) and her Ḥajj account from 1972 titled *Liqāʾ maʿa l-Tārīkh* (Encounter with

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Boutheina Khaldi, University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates at bkhaldi@aus.edu.

[1]Richard van Leeuwen "In the 'Land of Wonders': Bint al-Shāṭi''s Pilgrimage: The Hajj and the Construction of Reformist Religiosity," *Muslim Women's Pilgrimage to Mecca and Beyond,* eds., Marjo Buitelaar, Manja Stephan-Emmrich, Viola Thimm (London: Routledge, 2020), 166-79 is more or less a summary of Bint al-Shāṭiʾ's travelogue; See also Ellen Anne McLarney, "The Liberation of Islamic Letters: Bint al-Shati''s Literary License," in *Soft Force: Women in Egypt's Islamic Awakening* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 35-69; *idem*, "The Islamic Public Sphere and the Discipline of Adab," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43 (Summer 2011): 429–49; Mervat F. Hatem, "'A'isha Abdel Rahman: An Unlikely Heroine: A Post-Colonial Reading of her Life and Some of her Biographies of Women in the Prophetic Household," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 7, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 1-26; Ruth Roded, "Bint Al-Shati's "Wives of the Prophet": Feminist or Feminine?" *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 51-66; C. Kooij, "Bint Al-Shati': A Suitable Case for Biography?" in *The Challenge of the Middle East: Middle East Studies at the University of Amsterdam*, eds., Ibrahim Sheikh, C. Aart van de Koppel, and Rudolf Peters (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 1982), 67–72.

History). The two accounts were published in 1973 under the title, *Arḍ al-Muʿjizāt: Riḥla fī Jazīrat al-ʿArab* (Land of Miracles: Journey in the Arabian Peninsula).[2]

What is truly unique about this travelogue is that Bint al- Shāṭiʾ does not offer details on pilgrimage rites and rituals. The travelogue pursues a historical focus instead. While the 1951 travelogue explores the history of the Arabian Peninsula and the profound changes that region underwent in the twenty-year span she is documenting, the 1972 travelogue deals with the dramatic changes that took place in the Arab-Islamic world in the wake of the setback (Naksa) of 1967 and its aftermath.

It is worth noting that the Palestinian question did not establish itself as a major issue in Bint al-Shāṭiʾ's 1951 travelogue. It was only in the Naksa of 1967, with the Israeli occupation of the whole Palestine, that she started to fully grasp the challenge of the Zionist project. In her *al-Isrāʾīliyyāt fī l-Ghazw al-Fikrī* (Judaica in Intellectual Imperialism), she stipulates: "One day after another, my perception of what seemed to be, in the state of shock, a temporary circumstance that will not take time before it comes to an end, and a mistake that will soon be corrected, has changed." [3]

Bint al- Shāṭiʾ ascribes the Arab defeat against Israel, what she refers to as "the dejected reality that the Muslim *umma* (community of believers) lives through,"[4] to the Western imported ideologies embraced by the Arab world.[5] She espouses instead Islamic revivalism based on the tenets of *Salafism.* Only by returning to the pristine Islam of *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (the righteous forefathers) who lived with-- and immediately after-- the Prophet Muḥammad could Muslims regain their strength and be on par with the West. "The past should guide us (*yahdī khuṭānā*)," Bint al-Shāṭiʾ argues.[6] Modernity is not incompatible with Islam. Indeed, it is an integral part of it, she elucidates.[7] The regression of Muslims is not ascribed to Islam *per se,* Bint al-Shāṭiʾ contends, but to extraneous elements that were accrued by later Muslim generations that drifted away from true Islam, which need to be purified. [8]

Bint al- Shāṭiʾ urges the Arab Islamic community to come together to defend itself against what she calls "Zionist cancer" which, in her estimation, is "associated with intellectual imperialism which has destroyed our homes and torn our unity asunder trying to prepare for the Nakba (disaster) a generation with a lost identity and divided loyalty."[9] She propounds the Islamization of the Arab-Israeli conflict as the only alternative to overcome the Arab defeat and unite the *umma*. Islamic

[2]Dr. Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Arḍ al-muʿjizāt: riḥla fī jazīrat al-ʿArab* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1973).

[3]Dr. Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *al-Isrāʾīliyyāt fī l-ghazw al-fikrī* (Cairo: Maʿhad al-Buḥūth wal-Dirāsāt al-ʿArabiyya, 1975), 8. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

[4]Dr. Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Maʿa l-Muṣṭafā* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1972), 11.

[5]Dr. Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *al-Shakhṣiyya l-Islāmiyya: Dirāsa Qurʾāniyya* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm lil-Malāyīn, 1986), 16; See also Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, "Arab Intellectuals and al-Nakba: The Search for Fundamentalism," *Middle Eastern Studies* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1973): 189.

[6]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Maʿa l-Muṣṭafā,* 12.

[7]Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Tajdid, Islah and Civilisational Renewal in Islam* (Washington DC: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2018), 1-40.

[8]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *al-Shakhṣiyya l-Islāmiyya*, 14; Beth Baron, "Islam, Philanthropy, and Political Culture in Interwar Egypt: The Activism of Labiba Ahmad," *Poverty and Charity in Middle Eastern Contexts,* eds., Michael Bonner, Mine Ener, and Amy Singer (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 230; Marilyn Booth, ""May Her Likes Be Multiplied": "Famous Women" Biography and Gendered Prescription in Egypt, 1892-1935," *Signs* 22, no. 4 (Summer 1997): 831.

[9]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *al-Isrāʾīliyyāt,* 9. On *Jihād* in Islam, see Noor Mohammad, "The Doctrine of Jihad: An Introduction," *Journal of Law and Religion* 3, no. 2 (1985): 381-97.

identity (*huwiyya Islāmiyya*), an inclusive concept that does not have national borders, should supplant an ethnic one (*huwiyya qawmiyya*) to counter the Jewish state created by Israel.[10] For as Bint al- Shāṭiʾ stipulates: "It is only in the adversities of the present that the past manifests itself. We can breathe the fragrance of history with the Prophet Muḥammad only mixed with the dejected reality that the Muslim community lives through." [11]

By interweaving the Israeli occupation of Palestine, "the dejected reality that the Muslim community lives through," into a religious framework, viz., the travelogue, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ seeks to galvanize the Arab-Islamic world and revitalize and renew its national consciousness. She purports not only to cultivate individual piety, but also to effect socio-political change. Scholarship for Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, to borrow her own words, is thus an act of devotion, "*jihād wa-ʿibāda* carried by the pen."[12] She stipulates: "Let my words inflame the anger of my fellow compatriots and my Islamic community against Zionism's presence in the land of prophecies…They are the only ones whom I ask to defend us against this viral disease and protect our honor from the shame of the Zionist occupation. The only resort left for me, in this critical period of our history, is to struggle with the pen."[13]

Bint al- Shāṭiʾ's oeuvre should be considered and studied as such. This article thus argues that Bint al-Shāṭiʾ's pilgrimage narrative is a key component of her commitment literature, what she refers to as "*adab al-jihād,*"[14] and it provides a strong heuristic for comprehending the true essence of Islam as perceived by her. Aware of the wisdom of Ḥajj "to foster a shared sense of identity and communal belonging (*tarsīkh shuʿūrinā bi-waḥdat al-intimāʾ*) to the Qur'ān community (*ummat al-Qurʾān*),"[15] Bint al-Shāṭiʾ positions the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a cause for all Muslims everywhere.

While displaying animus toward the state of Israel and its ideology, Zionism (Ṣuhyōniyya), Bint al-Shāṭiʾ criticizes Saudi reactionaries for resisting modernity and deviating from the progressive nature of Islam. Only through their return to the Qur'ān and *Sunna* and devotion to the *umma* could Muslims regain their strength and defeat the State of Israel.

2. A Lifelong Journey with Islam

At an early age, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ received a traditional education in a *kuttāb* (Qurʾānic School) and at home.[16] She memorized the Holy Qur'ān, studied the fundamental principles of Islam and the Arabic language and sciences. Formal religious education during that period was not an option for

[10]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *al-Shakhṣiyya l-Islāmiyya*; see also Dan Stoenescu, "Palestinian Nationalism: From Secularism to Islam," *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review* 7, no. 2 (2007): 319; Rashid Khalidi, "Arab Nationalism: Historical Problems in the Literature," *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 5 (Winter 1991): 1363-73; Yvonne Haddad, "Islamists and the 'Problem of Israel': The 1967 Awakening," *Middle East Journal* 46, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 284.

[11]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Maʿa l-Muṣṭafā,* 11.

[12]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Arḍ al-Muʿjizāt*, 99.

[13]Dr. Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Aʿdāʾ l-Bashar* (Cairo: al-Majlis al-Aʿlā lil-Shuʾūn al-Islāmiyya, 1968), 181; see also Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *al-Shakhṣiyya l-Islāmiyya*, 12; Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *al-Isrāʾīliyyāt,* 10.

[14]Dr. Bint al-Shāṭiʾ, *Turāthunā bayna māḍin wa Ḥāḍirin* (Cairo: Maʿhad al-Buḥūth wa-Dirāsāt al-ʿArabiyya, 1968), 121.

[15]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Arḍ al-Muʿjizāt*, 121.

[16]Dr. Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *ʿAlā l-jisr bayna al-Ḥayāt wal-Mawt* (Cairo: Al-Hayʾa l-Miṣriyya l-ʿĀmma lil-Kitāb, 1986), 22-3.

Bint al-Shāṭiʾ; women were admitted to al-Azhar University only in 1962, and indeed, Bint al- Shāṭiʾ was the first woman ever to lecture there.[17]

Bint al- Shāṭiʾ's informal religious education along with her academic training at Cairo University as a graduate student under the tutelage of her professor and later husband, Amīn Khūlī (d. 1966), shaped her interest in Qur'ānic studies. As Bint al-Shāṭiʾ expounded: "Since my professor Amīn Khūlī showed me the spacious horizon to which I aspired in my Qurʾānic studies and guided me into the difficult path to disclose the secrets of the miraculous eloquence of the Qurʾān, I have spent my academic life with the Prophet."[18] Bint al-Shāṭiʾ's journey in her study of Islam would not be complete without a journey to the Ḥijāz. Prompted by both religious obligation and intellectual motivation, she admits that a physical journey was necessary to gain full knowledge of the Ḥijāz and its history. As she expounded: "We, those who studied Arabic sciences and Islam, should be pleased if our journey could be extended to the regions of the peninsula that we lived all our lives studying its language and poetry, fancying its desert, narrow mountains passes, and campsites, and accompanying its poets and vagabonds." [19]

Bint al-Shāṭiʾ was driven by a fervid curiosity to know and explore the way Arabia adopted modernity and engaged with it, and the challenges it encountered. It is interesting that for her authenticity is only achieved by "see[ing] with my own eyes."[20] We discern here a tendency to locate the authentic outside books. The desire for unmediated experience is thus desired and pursued through an authentic engagement with the place, which is the Ḥijāz. Bint al-Shāṭiʾ perceives herself as part of an intellectual community and an active female contributor—not just a consumer— to the ongoing intellectual climate of ideas. She authors her own sojourn and records her own perspective *qua* woman. As *une écrivaine engagée* whose role is to effect change, she engages in social and political issues that are affecting the Islamic *umma*. In doing so, she proffers the reader new valuable insights into the pilgrimage literature and the Ḥijāz.

3. "The Land of Miracles" Past and Present

As a modernist Salafist, evoking the past is essential for Bint al- Shāṭiʾ as it is "only in the adversities of the present that the past manifests itself."[21] The dejected reality of the Muslim community entails undergoing a *return* to the pristine Islam to understand what went wrong along the way, she argues. Bint al-Shāṭiʾ's travel narrative transfers the reader squarely back to the past and lets the reader personally discern the un-Islamic practices that have been accepted unquestionably in the name of Islam and led to the stagnation of the Muslim *umma*. By bringing the past to life, she enlightens the reader about the true essence of Islam and implicitly censures the patriarchy for steering away from the path of true Islam.[22]

As the cradle of Islam and Arab civilization, Arabia was the first area to be affected by the changes the Islam made. Arabia has been the "land of miracles" (*Arḍ al-Muʿjizāt),* Bint al- Shāṭiʾ explains. The first miracle can be traced back to the early 7th century when the Prophet Muḥammad received his first revelations in Mecca, the spiritual center of Islam. The miraculous Qur'ān, as Bint al- Shāṭiʾ stipulates, is a liberating text that "directed history and liberated man. It is the light that delivered humanity from ignorance (*layl al-Jāhiliyya*) to the noble ideals of truth, benevolence, and

[17]Hatem, "'A'isha Abdel Rahman: An Unlikely Heroine," 11.
[18]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Maʿa l-Muṣṭafā,* 11.
[19]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Arḍ al-Muʿjizāt*, 13.
[20]Ibid.
[21]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Maʿa l-Muṣṭafā,* 11.
[22]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Arḍ al-muʿjizāt*, 7.

beauty."[23] The emergence of Islam thus "revolutionized the entire realm of human life and its religious, intellectual, social, political, and economic aspects."[24]

The second miracle was the discovery of oil in 1938 which brought about modernity through the Western foreigners who came to extract the oil. To be sure, Egypt's reception of modernity was different from that in Saudi Arabia. While modernity in Egypt was a *fait accompli*, it was viewed with suspicion by the Saudi conservative society.[25] A conservative modernist herself, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ extols King ʿAbdul ʿAzīz (r. 1932-1953) for "resisting the seduction of the West (*finat al-firinja*)"[26] by "accommodating modernity within a true sense of authentic Islamic identity and culture."[27] Cognizant of the Imperialist underpinnings of modernity, King ʿAbdul ʿAzīz placed restrictions on the movement of foreign laborers.[28]

By disentangling modernity from Westernization, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ, like King ʿAbdul ʿAzīz, argues that Saudi Arabia can adopt modernity without losing its own important cultural value system. "The adoption of modern science and technology," according to Bint al-Shāṭiʾ, "meant reclaiming the Islamic heritage, since modern European science had its origins in classical Islamic learning."[29] "Americans have not defeated the Arabs," she contends. "Filled with doubt and caution, piercing black eyes are still following those strangers, guarding the heritage of the Arabian Peninsula, Arab customs and traditions, and Islam from the pretexts for invasion."[30] Tradition and modernity can co-exist, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ declares. As a matter of fact, modernity can strengthen-- and be strengthened by that same tradition and its strengths.

4. Claiming Intellectual Authority for Herself

In all her publications, including her travelogue, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ does mention her academic credentials and affiliation. She is a Professor of Qur'ānic Studies at Qarawiyyīn University in Fez. In a television interview, the Egyptian poet and television presenter Fārūq Shūsha (d. 2016) asked her why she always affiliates herself with the Qarawiyyīn University when she has multiple affiliations.[31] Bint al-Shāṭiʾ responded that she does so "intentionally to confront those…who deliver formal opinions about Islam and write on Qurʾānic exegesis when they are not qualified to teach a Qurʾān lesson in the lowest elementary school (*katātīb*)." She further added: "There is a principle in the Islamic School to which I belong that says: 'Indeed this knowledge is faith, so carefully consider from whom you take your faith.'" [32] By reminding the reader of her expertise and erudition in a domain that has been culturally perceived as an exclusive male prerogative, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ not only

[23]Ibid.

[24]Mazheruddin Siddiqi, "Islam: A Revolution," *Islamic Studies* 17, no. 3 (Autumn 1978): 203.

[25]Israel Gershoni, The Evolution of National Culture in Modern Egypt: Intellectual Formation and Social Diffusion, 1892-1945," *Poetics Today* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 327; Boutheina Khaldi, *Egypt Awakening in the Early Twentieth Century: Mayy Ziyādah's Intellectual Circles* (Palgrave, Macmillan, 2012), 27-32.

[26]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Arḍ al-Muʿjizāt*, 56.

[27]Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 18.

[28]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Arḍ al-Muʿjizāt*, 55-6.

[29]"Modernism," *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito, accessed 12 January 2023, http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1537

[30]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Arḍ al-Muʿjizāt*, 55.

[31]Shūsha's interview with Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miYJaR3Y1DY

[32]Ibid.

gains the attention of the reader, but also legitimizes her own claim to authority as a female Muslim scholar (*ʿālima, faqīha*) and a credible knowledge producer.

In a similar vein, in a lecture she gave at *Umm Dirmān* Islamic University in Sudan in 1967 on Islamic conception of women's liberation, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ corroborates the egalitarian form of Islam by drawing examples from Ḥadīth, the narrative records of the sayings or customs of the Prophet Muḥammad. Religious matters are "not only the jurisdiction of male theologians,"[33] she argues. Indeed, Muslim women were the producers of religious knowledge as manifest in a Ḥadīth account by the Prophet Muḥammad encouraging his followers (*ṣaḥāba*) to seek out the opinion of his wife ʿĀʾisha *Umm al- Muʾminīn* [mother of the believers] on various religious matters.[34] By comparing herself to the Prophet's wife ʿĀʾisha and to other renowned women in Islamic history, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ asserts her authority in the field of Islamic studies, a field that had remained an exclusively male domain.[35]

To help her readers navigate through her travel narrative, Bint al- Shāṭiʾ provides them with a *dalīl* (A Road Map). She divides this map into four sections: "The Night of the Arabian Peninsula," "The Genuine Dawn," "Behind Walls," and "Encounter with History." In full command of the history of the Ḥijāz, Bint al- Shāṭiʾ plays a tour guide (*dalīl*) role. She orients the reader and takes that individual on a journey through time. She is both the guide and an authoress who holds epistemic authority over the reader and directs that person where she wishes that reader to go.

Interestingly though, Bint al- Shāṭiʾ uses the plural form "*adillāʾ*" (guides) to refer to Bedouin Arabs. She states that "Bedouin Arabs are masters of the desert (*sādat al-ṣaḥrāʾ*). They are guides (*adillāʾ)* experienced in unknown paths and roads in the desolate desert."[36] Like Bedouin Arabs, Bint al- Shāṭiʾ is also an experienced guide. She guides the reader through the history of Arabia. Indeed, she is the master of Arabia and the *Amīrat al-Ṣaḥrāʾ* (The Princess of the Desert), a title bestowed on her by King ʿAbdul ʿAzīz Āl Saʿūd.

"*Amara*" in Arabic means "to command." Hence, "*Amīr*," is a commander and prince. Prince, as an honorific title, is often accorded by literary critics to the best men of letters such as Aḥmad Shawqī (d. 1930) who was named *"Amīr al-Shuʿarāʾ"* (The Prince of Poets) and Prince Shakīb Arsalān (d. 1946) who, in addition to being a prince by blood, was "*Amīr al-Bayān,*"(The Prince of Eloquence). Bint al- Shāṭiʾ was accorded the same honorific title. In doing so, King ʿAbdul ʿAzīz creates a kinship with Bint al- Shāṭiʾ through a shared Arab-Islamic heritage. While he exercises his political power as the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques in Mecca and Medina, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ exercises cultural and intellectual power.

Saʿūdīs first knew Bint al-Shāṭiʾ as an active contributor to *al-Nahḍa l-Nisāʾiyya* (the Women's Awakening), a monthly Islamic journal founded by the well-known Egyptian Islamic activist and writer Labība Aḥmad (d. 1951). No wonder the journal received financial support from King ʿAbdul

[33]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, "The Islamic Conception of Women's Liberation," trans. Nazih Khater, *al-Raida* 125 (2009): 43. It is important to note that parts of the pilgrimage travelogue related to the status of women are repeated in the lecture.

[34]Ibid., 42.

[35]Ibid., 38.

[36]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Arḍ al-Muʿjizāt*, 22.

ʿAzīz.[37] Like King ʿAbdul ʿAzīz, *al-Nahḍa l-Nisāʾiyya* advocated Islamic revival and "disseminated a brand of Islamic nationalism that countered the secular variety."[38]

5. Women's Liberation Is Not a Foreign Concept

During Bint al- Shāṭiʾ's ʿUmra pilgrimage in 1951, she realized that Arabian women are viewed as second-class citizens. She refers to them as "*ḥarīm* (harem) *al-Jazīra."*[39] They were confined to a domestic sphere as though "solid barriers are erected around them" (*sudūd ṣammāʾ maḍrūba ʿalā ḥarīm al-Jazīra*).[40] Their seclusion reinforces their already marginal role in the Arabian society. "The labyrinth of ignorance forced upon them in the name of religion" (*matāhat al-jahl al-maſrūḍa ʿalyha)* is the cause of their social backwardness.[41] Not surprisingly, Bint al- Shāṭiʾ waits until her second Ḥajj pilgrimage in 1972 to write about these women going to schools.[42]

While conservative interpretations of Islamic law in Saudi Arabia, combined with deeply entrenched societal norms, continued to relegate Saudi women to a subordinate status, upper and middle class women in Egypt had already succeeded in breaking free from what Bint al-Shāṭiʾ calls "the *ḥarīm* cage" and "the labyrinth of blind illiteracy" to "broader horizons of light and awareness."[43] Understandably, Egypt's encounter with Western ideas, beginning with Napoleon's 1798 expedition, was earlier than that in Saudi Arabia.[44] This interaction was followed by a print culture where women began to assume an unprecedented place.[45] Renowned Egyptian Islamic reformers, such as Sheikh Muḥammad ʿAbdu (d. 1905) and Qāsim Amīn (d. 1908), absolved Islam of women's backwardness by arguing for the emancipation of women based on a new interpretation of the Qur'ān.[46] The abolishment of the practice of seclusion, education for women, and uncovering the face were the major topics that inspired these reformers.[47]

In her discussion of women's seclusion in Saudi Arabia, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ does not break new ground. She reiterates the views of Muḥammad ʿAbdu and Qāsim Amīn about the harem as a coercive practice passed on and consolidated by the Turks to curtail women's power and control them.[48] While exposing the practice of Saudi women's seclusion to rigorous criticism, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ

[37]Beth Baron, "An Islamic Activist in Interwar Period," in *Women, Philanthropy, and Civil Society*, ed. Kathleen D. McCarthy (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 226.

[38]Ibid., 233.

[39]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Arḍ al-Muʿjizāt*, 122.

[40]Ibid.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Ibid; Juan Ricardo Cole, "Feminism, Class, and Islam in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13, no. 4 (Fall 1981): 387.

[43]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, "The Islamic Conception of Women's Liberation," 42; On Egyptian women's legal rights under president Gamal Abdel Nasser, see Mervat F. Hatem, "Economic and Political Liberation in Egypt and the Demise of State Feminism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, no. 2 (1992): 232.

[44]Jaime Kucinskas, "A Research Note on Islam and Gender Egalitarianism: An Examination of Egyptian and Saudi Arabian Youth Attitudes," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 4 (2010): 762.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Iqbal Baraka, "The Influence of Contemporary Arab Thought on the Women's Movement," in *Women of the Arab World*, ed. N. Toubia (London: Zed Books, 1988), 55.

[47]Cole, "Feminism, Class, and Islam in Turn-of-the-Century Egypt," 392.

[48]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, "The Islamic Concept of Women's Liberation," 39, 37.

argues against the many temptations of liberation. She rebuts the equation of woman's liberation with the "elimination of all distinctions between men and women, the distortion of sex, and the disruption of standards and values."[49] Bint al-Shāṭiʾ affirms gender differentiation while still underlining the equal value of women and men within a complementary gender system.[50]

It is also worthy of note that she applauses Western women expatriates for taking on the challenge to accompany their spouses to the Arabian Desert to work in the oil industry. She argues: "They acquiescently left behind the comfortable life they lived in their home countries, following their husbands to that desolate and remote place to provide them with emotional support and help them overcome harsh working conditions… With their fine fingers, they wiped off the sweat dripping from their husbands' foreheads."[51]

Notwithstanding the significant gains for Western women in parts of the public sphere, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ points out that the private sphere of the Western family is still regulated by traditional gender roles.[52] Albeit modern and educated, she states, the Western woman "fully understands her role in life and is cognizant of her traditional responsibilities toward her man and homeland." Polarization between man and woman, however, should be avoided, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ stipulates. Man and woman "perfect each other and need each other to realize their full existence…Their joint life does not fall apart by having a conflict over power and authority." In doing so, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ actually criticizes feminism and perceives it as a way to only advance Imperialism.[53]

She also states that, unlike Western women who contributed to their nation building through their roles as mothers and wives, Egyptian women were ignorant of their responsibilities toward their husbands and nation.[54] She excoriates them for not being supportive of their husbands. In lieu of encouraging them to improve their socio-economic status by looking for better job opportunities in Saudi Arabia, they were pressured into living and working in Cairo.[55] Bint al-Shāṭiʾ associates the Egyptian women's lack of support of their husbands with their lack of proper education, a point that Qāsim Amīn thoroughly discusses in his book, *Taḥrīr al-marʾa*.[56] The absence of love between husband and wife, he argues, results in a wanting family. "A husband's lack of love for his wife was a result of her intellectual backwardness and inadequate upbringing. A wife's lack of love for her husband, on the other hand, was due to her lack of experience of a true love."[57]

Bint al-Shāṭiʾ also underscores the importance of female education in building a sound family and nation. She strongly disavows the assumption that modernity entails the renunciation of traditional gender roles. Indeed, education helps women become enlightened mothers and wives and good Muslims. In doing so, she draws on her own experience as a wife and mother. The intellectual compatibility between her and her husband and mentor, Amīn Khōlī, made their relationship successful. "Modernity and domesticity" in Bint al-Shāṭiʾ's estimation--as Ellen McLarney rightly

[49]Ibid., 40.
[50]Ibid.
[51]Ibid., 63.
[52]Dr. Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, "*al-Asbāniyyāt fī l-Madrasa wal-Bayt*" [Spanish Women at School and Home], *Al-Hilāl* 12 (1947): 125-29.
[53]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, "The Islamic Concept of Women's Liberation," 38-9.
[54]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Arḍ al-Muʿjizāt*, 65.
[55]Ibid., 64-5.
[56]Qāsim Amīn, *Taḥrīr al-Marʾa* (Cairo, 1899).
[57]Ibid., 32-3.

pointed out-- "are complementary, reflecting an image of ideal Islamic womanhood that would become a staple of revivalist discourse."[58]

6. Revisiting the Hagar Narrative

To expound on the high position that women in general, and mothers specifically, hold in Islam, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ adduces as an example the narrative of the historical figure Hāǧar (Hagar), the Prophet Abraham's second wife and Ismāʿīl's mother.[59] The incident where she ran seven times between the hills of Ṣafā and Marwa to find water for her thirsty son Ismāʿīl, after having been abandoned by her husband, Abraham, in the desert, is commemorated in the Ḥajj and ʿUmra in the rite of *saʿy* between Ṣafā and Marwa. "The *saʿy* of Hagar," as Bint al-Shāṭiʾ points out, is "cherished by Islam and by the generations before Islam and this is why it has become a Ḥajj and ʿUmra rite."[60] Hagar's struggle to save her son is "an act of worship and a pious deed."[61]

Bint al-Shāṭiʾ reminds the reader of the esoteric aspects attached to this rite. Indeed, it attests to the supreme importance of women in Islam. As a mother, Hagar, like other characters who are women, has helped shape Islamic history by raising prophets.[62] Even though she was a slave and a woman of color ill-treated and oppressed by Sarah, the wife of the Prophet Abraham, God does not leave her to perish in the desert. He granted her dignity and protection. She "must live to be part of history and struggle to be the subject of it."[63] To be sure, "Hagar entered religious history with the worries of her motherhood," Bint al-Shāṭiʾ explains, and "gave Mother's Day in the Arab World its real value and meaning."[64] Through her perseverance and faith in God, Hagar proved that women's role in building civilizations is no less important than men's. Honoring Hagar in Islam by institutionalizing her leadership in the form of the Ḥajj and ʿUmra serves as a clear reminder that Muslim women should be revered and honored.

7. In the Footsteps of Their Foremothers

Until 1956, Saudi women were denied an education because of the clash between modernists and reactionaries. Notwithstanding King ʿAbdul ʿAzīz's efforts to implement a policy of modernization and reform, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ points out that his efforts were met with opposition from religious scholars.[65] What she found ironic, however, was that while technological progress was eventually accepted, despite initial resistance, women's education was still banned.[66] Bint al-Shāṭiʾ argues that modernity cannot be sustained without changing traditional habits of thought and social practices that have relegated women to a subordinate position and deprived them of education which is an essential instrument for modernization and social change.

During her 1951ʿUmra pilgrimage, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ wondered why women lagged behind and "were impeded from seeking knowledge when the pursuit of knowledge in Islam was an obligation of every Muslim, both male and female." The answer was: "religious scholars fear that her education

[58]McLarney, "The Islamic Public Sphere and the Discipline of Adab," 433.
[59]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Arḍ al-Muʿjizāt*, 73-7.
[60]Ibid., 77.
[61]Ibid.
[62]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, "Islam and the New Woman," trans. Anthony Calderbank, *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 19 (1999): 200.
[63]Elsa Tamez, "The Woman Who Complicated the History of Salvation," *CrossCurrents* 36, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 136.
[64]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Arḍ al-muʿjizāt*, 102.
[65]Ibid., 121.
[66]Ibid.

is an excuse for moral corruption" because "when women learn how to write and read, there is no guarantee that they will not send and receive love letters, which will lead to temptation and error (*al-ghiwāya wal-ighwāʾ*)."[67] Bint al-Shāṭiʾ censured the warped view of Islam by providing a counter-history to that dominant narrative. "Woman's chastity was and will remain in her hands," she contends. "It should not be imposed upon her from outside. In Islam, she is, like [every] man, equally responsible (*mukallafa kal-rajul sawāʾ bi-sawāʾ*)."[68]

As a religious authority well versed in the Qur'ān, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ does not want people to confuse Islam with tradition and think that because of Islam women are denied the right to education. To be sure, Islam is not a misogynistic religion. "I know that it is Islam that has liberated (*ḥarrara*) our minds (*ʿuqōlanā*) and hearts (*ḍamāʾiranā*)," Bint al-Shāṭiʾ stipulates. Education is indeed "[a woman's] lawful human right, earned by her birth into the human species," she argues. "This right is outside anyone's will, for no creature can distort the woman's humanity and force her to live her life as a mute and dumb doll."[69]

In her 1972 Ḥajj pilgrimage, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ was invited to visit King ʿAbdul ʿAzīz University in Jeddah to witness the unprecedented social reforms that had changed Saudi women's lives in a twenty-year span. King ʿAbdul ʿAzīz's, and later his son King Fayṣal (r. 1964-1975), biggest battles against ignorance and stagnant thinking bore fruit.[70] Saudi women now go not only to primary schools, but also to universities. The type of education they received, however, reinforced the traditional dichotomy of gender roles. Saudi women were educated to be good wives and mothers as King ʿAbdul ʿAzīz stipulated in his 1959 formal speech: "We have decided to bring into effect the desire of the ʿUlamāʾ in Saudi Arabia, and to open schools to teach our girls the science of our religion from the Qur'ān…and other sciences which are in harmony with our religious beliefs … The schools will not have any negative effect on our belief or behaviour or customs."[71]

By referring to the religious and domestic subjects covered by the curriculum, King ʿAbdul ʿAzīz nudges reactionaries to accept female education and reassures them that it is commensurate with Islamic tradition and suits their nature as homemakers, teachers and nurses. Understandably, until 2002, it was the Department of Religious Guidance that oversaw female education while the Saudi Ministry of Education controlled males' education.[72]

In the same vein, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ points out that women's education is not a foreign concept. It is an integral part of Islam, which has liberated women. "We don't owe this to foreign concepts borrowed from the modernized West," she states. As a matter of fact, women's education is "an Islamic liberal concept determined fourteen centuries ago in the Qurʾān which was the last message from heaven."[73] Bint al-Shāṭiʾ argues that by investing in women's education, Saudi Arabia "reconnected what was severed from the Muslim *umma*'s past when Muslim women made history" by often taking part in the scientific, academic, and political life of their times.[74] What Saudi women have achieved in the domain of education is indeed "a continuation of the legacy of their female

[67]Ibid., 122.

[68]Ibid.

[69]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, "The Islamic Concept of Women's Liberation," 39.

[70]Ibid., 121.

[71]Cited in Haya Saad al-Rawaf and Cyril Simmons, "The Education of Women in Saudi Arabia," *Comparative Education* 27, no. 3 (1991): 288.

[72]Amani Hamdan, "Women and Education in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and Achievements," *International Education Journal* 6, no. 1 (2005): 44.

[73]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, "The Islamic Concept of Women's Liberation," 38.

[74] Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Arḍ al-Muʿjizāt*, 123.

predecessors, the companions and followers of the Prophet Muḥammad, and of generations of Muslim women that succeeded them who reached the rank of sheikh in Arabic science and Islamic studies."[75] "One of those women," she stipulates, "even became a Muslim caliph, ruling over Egypt and Syria, namely Queen ʿIṣmat al-Dīn Shajarat al-Durr, who led a triumphant and decisive campaign in our conflict with the Crusaders."[76] Bint al-Shāṭiʾ ascribes the regression of women's status, and hence the *umma*, not to Islam but to what she calls "the persisting residue of ancient ages."[77]

8. Remembering Jerusalem

As a committed intellectual, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ resorts to what she calls *"jihād fikrī"* (intellectual struggle) to help change not only the reality of Saudi women by underlining the role of women's education in building stronger families and communities, but also the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, a major concern for the Muslim *umma*.[78] Second only to the holy Islamic sites of Mecca and Medina, Jerusalem occupies a very special place in the hearts of the entire Muslim community. Bint al-Shāṭiʾ holds King ʿAbdul ʿAzīz in high esteem. A modernizer but still a conservative king, a founder of an Islamic state and the custodian of the faith, King ʿAbdul ʿAzīz used the Ḥajj as the ultimate symbol of the communal solidarity of Muslims to call upon Muslims to ward off "the shame of the Israeli occupation of Palestine" (*ʿār Isrāʾīl*) through armed *Jihād.*[79]

A Salafist thinker well versed in history, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ seeks to understand the present by the past. In the same vein, she seizes the Hajj to reflect on the Arab-Israeli issue. By tracing it back to the time of the *Hegira* (622 CE), she avers the age-old and intractable Arab-Israeli conflict. Her Islamist discourse on the Jewish--and by extension Zionist and Israeli-- threat to Islam and Muslims is expounded in her *Aʿdāʾ l-Bashar* [Enemies of Humanity] and *al-Isrāʾīliyyāt fī l-ghazw al-fikrī* [Judaica in Intellectual Imperialism]. In her two works, she underscores the continuous tradition of Jewish opposition to Islam from the early Islamic period until more recent times. In *Aʿdāʾ l-Bashar,* she states: "In Yathrib [Medina], Jewish gangs alighted like voracious wolves on the most fertile region in Northern Ḥijāz not taking into account this Meccan boy [the Prophet] who --after only half a century-- would enter a long and bitter war against the Jewish evil and endure the burden of *Jihād* to cleanse the Medina and its surroundings from that destructive malicious evil."[80]

By bringing the past to life, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ urges Muslims to follow the Prophet's example in dealing with the Jewish threat. *Jihād* is the answer and antidote, she contends.[81]

9. The Poetics of Resistance

On the Day of ʿArafa, which holds both religious and historical significance as the day on which God perfected Islam and approved it as a way of life, and the Prophet Muḥammad delivered his Farewell Sermon (Ḥajjat al-Wadāʿ), pilgrims keep vigil on Mount ʿArafa and supplicate God to bestow His forgiveness and wisdom upon them. Amidst their supplications, they also pray for Palestinians in their struggle against the Israeli occupation. This empathy among Muslims is a required component of faith, as *Jihād* is an individual duty held to be incumbent upon every Muslim.

As a political activist, whose role is to galvanize Muslims into action, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ opts for poetry to foster more awareness about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and provide a firm basis for

[75]Ibid.
[76]Ibid.
[77]Ibid.
[78]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *al-Isrāʾīliyyāt fī l-Ghazw al-Fikrī,* 10.
[79]Ibid; Ochsenwald, "Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Revival," 275-76.
[80]Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Aʿdāʾ l-Bashar*, 11.
[81]Ibid., 11, 13.

collective action. The Palestinian question ceases to be only a Pan Arab question. By Islamizing the conflict, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ arouses the sympathy not only of the Arabs, but also of Muslims everywhere.

A powerful medium for expressing emotions, her ʿArafa and the Feast of the Sacrifice (ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā) poems are very poignant. They convey anger and elicit a strong resistance. ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā is celebrated throughout the Muslim world as a commemoration of the Prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice everything for God's sake. Since defending one's religion and land is the duty of every Muslim, martyrdom is perceived as an act of devotion. Like the Prophet Muḥammad's journey through the heavens and his encounter with God (Miʿrāj), Palestinian martyrs also ascend to heaven as a reward for their piety and devotion.

Bint al-Shāṭiʾ's poems serve to expand the religious consciousness of the Muslim *umma* and create a sense of unity in a time of crisis. In doing so, she exposes not only the pain of the Palestinians, but also records their tragedy and gives new voice to their resistance: "[Our children] won't say we were here/ We have amused ourselves or we have forgotten what has befallen us/ They won't say we have forgotten the injustice done to us / We have entertained ourselves with tales from here and there, / jokes we used to chew/ to shy away from grief/ They won't say in our ʿĪd/ we have neglected for a moment our tragedy/ as if we were unaware of its dimensions/ as if we didn't see its extent." [82] The Palestinian tragedy thus becomes "*maʾsātunā,"* a Muslim communal tragedy.

To conclude then, Bint al-Shāṭiʾs travel narrative is indeed unique. As a polyphonic text, it gives voice to women and the Palestinians who share marginalization and disempowerment. By so doing, it provides a strong heuristic for comprehending the true spirit of Islam, which is based on the principle of *Jihād* (religious/spiritual struggle). Bint al-Shāṭiʾ thus unravels the different aspects of *Jihād*.

Jihād should not only be confined to Ḥajj and ʿUmra, but equally performed against social, moral, and political evils. The marginalization of women is a case in point. Bint al-Shāṭiʾ stipulates the restoration of the woman's leadership position in Islam. Self-defense against Zionist aggression (armed *Jihād*) is another aspect of *Jihād*. Bint al-Shāṭiʾ thus seizes the communal aspect of the Ḥajj to enjoin Muslims everywhere to support the Palestinian cause and the cause of women.

In doing so, Bint al-Shāṭiʾ performs *Jihād* not only as a pilgrim but also as a committed writer who uses the power of her pen to promote Islamic revivalism based on the tenets of *Salafism.* By presenting herself as a social and political activist, she legitimizes her claim to authority, not only as a female Muslim scholar (*ʿālima, faqīha*) and a credible knowledge producer, but also as a social and political reformer.

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[82] Bint al- Shāṭiʾ, *Arḍ al-Muʿjizāt*, 132-33.

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