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Global Shinqīṭ: Mauritania's Islamic Knowledge Tradition and the Making of Transnational Religious Authority (Nineteenth to Twenty-First Century)

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Abstract: Today, Bilād-Shinqīṭ or Mauritania is often portrayed as an unparalleled center of classical Islamic tradition supposedly untouched by modernity. While previous scholarship has concerned itself mostly with Mauritania's local intellectual history on one hand and its recent global fame on the other, in this paper, I document instead how, in less than two centuries, Mauritania has become not only a point of scholarly reference and symbolic/representational space of excellence in Islamic knowledge, but also one with an astonishing amount of global reach. Thus, I explore the ways in which Mauritania has continued to asserts its relevance and scholarly authority on a global scale. Drawing on a variety of historical, literary, and anthropological sources, I historicize the rise and mythologization of Mauritania as a peerless center of traditional sacred scholarship. I specifically examine how a number of widely different Muslim actors under changing circumstances continue to invoke, perform and re-invent Shinqīṭ/Mauritania. In documenting what I call *Global Shinqīṭ* over the *longue durée*, rather than simply illustrate how the so-called Muslim peripheries shape central traits of transnational normative Islamic authority, I argue instead that mobility, historical circumstances, and scholarly performance combined are at least as instrumental in the credible articulation of authoritative Islamic knowledge as normative discourses issued by supposedly central institutions, personalities, and religious bodies located in the so-called "heartland of Islam." In so doing, I destabilize the center/periphery framework altogether in order to explore how Islamic religious authority is actually construed and operates under shifting cultural and political conditions.

Keywords: Mauritania; Islam; knowledge; authority; Africa; ulama; Shinqīṭ; globalization; Gulf

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On 12 October 2010, *Al-Sharq al Awsat*, the London-based Arabic daily, published an article titled "Mahzālāt Hīfz al-Mutūn" ("The Joke of Memorization of Classical Texts!"). The author of the piece was none other than 'A'īḍ al-Qarnī (b. 1959), a popular Saudi preacher. In his long paper, al-Qarnī rails against the widespread practice of memorization of Islamic texts (*mūtūn* sing. *mātn*), blaming it on the influence of the pedagogies of Islamic knowledge transmission developed in Bilād Shinqīṭ, the pre-colonial name of what is known today as the Islamic Republic of Mauritania.[1] Al-Qarnī then specifically criticizes "al-Shanāqiṭā" (Mauritanians), not only for their focus on memorization and versification of Islamic classical texts, but also for what he perceives as their overwhelmingly prodigious literary output, etc. Clearly upset by this particular system of pedagogy and knowledge production, the Saudi scholar went so far as to mock the physical appearance of Mauritanian Islamic scholars, describing how "these venerable scholars [shuyūkh] often look like skinny desert locusts because of their exhausting method of learning." al-Qarnī, a Saudi TV personality who paradoxically had made a name for himself by writing so-called Islamic self-help books (al-Qarnī 2008),[2] claims that both the profusion of Islamic texts and their memorization are mere pedagogical *bid'ā* (blamable innovation) "unheard of in the first three blessed centuries when unmediated access to Qur'ān and Hadīth were the only way

of knowing." Moreover, al-Qarnī castigates the influential Shinqīṭ tradition of learning and pedagogy as misguided and, he insists, "wrong, wrong, wrong!" (al-Qarnī 2010a).

While it is unclear what exactly prompted this Islamic personality to pen this charge against Bilād Shinqīṭ, it is intriguing to see how al-Qarnī two weeks later rushed to publish in the same venue a highly deferential, almost obsequious apology to the "people of Mauritania." In sharp contrast to his first tirade, this time al-Qarnī lavished praise on Bilād Shinqīṭ as "the land of religious purity," "piety," and "pristine Islamic knowledge," dubbing it "the last line of defense of the Muslim world against foreign cultural threats." Now painting flattering portraits of renowned Shinqīṭī Islamic scholars, al-Qarnī then expressed his awe and admiration for Mauritania's higher Islamic culture and the "unparalleled intellectual breadth" of its people. Writing, for example, that "even impoverished Mauritanian women looking after their goats in the wilderness" are knowledgeable in Islamic literature, the Saudi scholar finally confessed how one of his former Mauritanian classmates taught him how to craft short classical poems (*arajiz*; sing. *urjūzā*)). Al-Qarnī concluded then his apology with a three-verse poem eulogizing those he now calls "my beloved friends, the people of Shinqīṭ," reiterating once more his deep respect for their "prodigious intellect" and promising to "soon visit Mauritania and sit down with its amazing scholars" (al-Qarnī 2010b).

Although quite puzzling, the whole incident indicates how, regardless of the content of his pronouncements, al-Qarnī takes for granted the global currency of Mauritania as a major source of authoritative Islamic knowledge and cultural influence. Importantly, his contradictory statements illustrate how often Bilād Shinqīṭ is construed, invoked, mythologized and (albeit rarely) challenged by a number of local, regional, and global actors for a variety of objectives and in widely different circumstances. While the Northwestern African former French colony continues to be perceived as marginal to world affairs, its scholars and learning tradition continue to enjoy respect and influence, not only in the global circuits of production of authoritative Islamic knowledge and normative discourse but also in the imagination of global Muslims. As Alex Thurston recently pointed out, "in Islamic scholarly terms, Mauritania punches far, far above its weight (. . .) due to the depth of its Islamic scholarly culture and the image (sometimes heavily romanticized) that outsiders, including in other Muslim societies in the region, often have of Mauritania as a wellspring of pure Islamic learning only minimally affected by 'modernity'" (Thurston 2020).

This paper presents some of the findings of my current research project investigating how Mauritania/Bilād Shinqīṭ has, over time, come to connote excellence in Islamic knowledge and normative authority and to have an astonishing global reach. As a major center of classical Islamic higher learning, Bilād-Shinqīṭ is renowned for its people's mastery of classical Islamic knowledge, including Arabic language, Islamic jurisprudence, Prophetic tradition (hadīth) Qur'ānic commentary, legal theory, etc. Over the last two centuries, the Shinqīṭi *nisbā* (affiliative patronym indicating the country of origin) empowered generations of self-styled Shinqīṭī, in so doing expanding even further the global currency of Bilād Shinqīṭ. Today, from West Africa and the Sahara to Mecca, and from Abu Dhabi to California, bearing the "al-Shinqīṭi" name often signals strong claims to authentic scholarly and religious authority. Back home, Mauritania's Islamic centers continue to attract international students, reinforcing the image of the country as a "global Islamic village" (Hill 2012). My focus here is indeed not on whether Mauritania deserves to be regarded as such a reputable place of higher Islamic learning but rather on how and why such seemingly "insignificant", marginal corner of the Arab world came to occupy a niche place in the landscape of religious knowledge of the Muslim world.

While previous scholarship focused on Bilād-Shinqīṭ's local history and distinctive methods of learning, I seek instead to understand how, over time, it has become a symbolic/representational space of excellence in Islamic knowledge with far-reaching authority. Set mostly in the period between the late-nineteenth and early twenty-first centuries, my broader research examines the outsized influence of Mauritanian Islamic scholars (ulama), religious texts, and institutions of learning (the Maḥāẓīr, sing. Maḥẓārā,) as an entry point for examining the relationship between knowledge and power in global Islam. Situated

at the intersection of history, Islamic studies, and global studies, this project uses primary sources in Arabic and previously underexplored secondary literature as well as newly uncovered data to document how Shinqīṭi networks of learning have been able to articulate locally and then to deploy globally their scholarly culture and authority in different spaces and times, thus exercising a high degree of cultural, religious, and indeed political influence.

This paper ambitions to make several contributions. First, the case study of Bilād Shinqīṭ is a window into the trans-local processes of invention and reconfigurations of Islamic scholarly authority. As such, this case has the potential to reframe the perennial debate over the center/periphery duality in the Muslim world in general and more specifically to rethink the position of African Muslims in these debates. Although the idea of an Islamic world with a core center (the so-called "Arab heartland of Islam") from which both authority and ideology flow towards a gigantic "periphery" (Africa, Asia, the West, Europe, USA, etc.) has lost currency at least among scholars, the mechanisms by which supposedly peripheral Islamic knowledge traditions and highly mobile networks make successful claims to religious preeminence has yet to be fully elucidated and interpreted. Here, I do not seek merely to question the well-worn center–periphery polarity in the Muslim world. Rather, I explore changing modalities and effects of scholarly performance and display of religious authority over time with an eye to the new possibilities opened through the mobility of texts, ideas, and persons between different Islamic geographies.

Second, Mauritania's global religious and intellectual influence is the most obvious example of a much larger influence of West and North African Islamic scholarship on Muslim identity making in global contexts (Wright 2019). Though over the last four decades a sustained research effort has documented the long history of Islamic scholarship in Africa,[3] we know little about the practical ways in which some African Islamic traditions and networks subverted and even reversed the mechanisms through which African societies are being written into the margins of the Islamic world. Existing scholarship seldom focuses on the many articulations between past and present that have ensured the continuing, variegated contemporary influence of places such as Mauritania, a (supposedly) remote corner of Northwestern Africa. The literature is of little help when it comes to surveying the scope, the meaning, and the significance of this country's centuries old global spread. I aim to fill this gap, showing how one particular Northwestern African Islamic culture has been able to maintain and constantly reconfigure its standing as a location of higher Islamic learning and Islamic knowledge transmission through its genuinely global reach, including in the political realm.

Finally, I hope this research will contribute to the growing scholarship focused on the shifting roles of classically trained Islamic scholars ('ulama) in a global context marked by acute tensions over religious leadership of the Muslim community. Some have framed this phenomenon as "the fragmentation of Islamic authority" (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996, pp. 37–79) while others referred to it as "a proliferation of religious knowledge, actors and normative statements of uncertain status" (Kramer and Schmidtke, p. 13). Although scholars such as Muhammad Q. Zaman argued that ulama as "custodians of change" retained their authority in face of the many challenges to their authority (Zaman 2002), the reality is that Muslims, including ulama, have often disagreed about who has the religious authority to define what constitutes "authentic Islamic" and whether this is geographically determined. This is especially true with a backdrop of global politics that politicizes systematically authoritative articulation of Islamic knowledge. *Global Shinqīṭ* adds a new perspective to the oft-discussed question of "who gets to speak for Islam?" as Mauritanian scholars and tradition of learning have been able to successfully claim, project and exert religious authority on a global scale.

This paper thus consists of four sections. The first one historicizes the rise of Shinqīṭ as a remarkable center of classical sacred scholarship. Moving away from more conventional narratives depicting the development of a local Islamic culture as solely an indigenous process, I reframe the history of Bilād Shinqīṭ formation as a center of religious author-

ity created through a combination of local dynamism, high mobility, and transnational outreach.

In the second section, I explore the ways in which Shinqīṭi networks of learning and Islamic scholars formed and started articulating their knowledge tradition in different spaces and times since at least the eighteenth century. While some scholars implied that Mauritania has only recently been construed in the West as "a desert archive" of Islamic tradition (Grewal 2015), I weave a more complicated narrative, documenting how Mauritanian scholars themselves embodied and projected their own Islamic culture on a regional and global stage at least two centuries earlier. My goal here is not simply to tell Shinqīṭ's story from a non-Western perspective, but also to foreground the anteriority of local scholars' role in the global prestige of their knowledge tradition.

While I am mindful of the role that outsiders might have played recently in framing Mauritania as a "utopia" (Grewal 2015), here in the third section I offer many other examples of similar recent processes of mythologization that are not Western centric. I explore further some facets of the twentieth-century globalization of the Shinqīṭi tradition and its rather paradoxical mobilization by widely different actors for widely different if not contradictory political, intellectual, and religious purposes. In the process I show how the myth of Mauritania as a place of authentic Islamic tradition implies the omission and even the erasure of more contested aspects of the historical constitution of this particular Islamic tradition of learning.

Finally, in the fourth and final section, I draw on the case of Shaykh Abdallah Bin Bayyah (b. 1935), a major global Islamic authority, to illustrate how the Shinqiṭī label empowered this Mauritanian scholar to shape important aspects of global Muslim politics.

In considering such a diverse range of actors, dynamics, historical junctures, and processes, I illuminate how patterns of constitution and dissemination of traditional scholarly knowledge and religious authority in the Muslim world have been and continue to be articulated, negotiated, and reconfigured in ways that allow for supposedly marginal Islamic cultures and knowledge traditions to play a role in the making of transnational and indeed global religious norms of authority and charisma. I thus shift the focus away from the holy places in Saudi Arabia and other prominent centers of higher learning such as al-Azhar and comparable institutions as the primary locus of authority and Islamic religious and political power (Bano 2017, 2018). Through what I frame as "global Shinqīṭ," I argue that together mobility, historical circumstances, and scholarly performance are at least as instrumental in the articulation of authentic Islamic tradition as the normative discourse issued by supposedly central institutions and religious bodies located in the so-called "heartland." In passing, I nuance the importance of the role of new Islamic platforms located in the West in the reinvention and rediscovery of "authoritative Islamic tradition" located in foreign countries.

1. Historicizing Shinqīṭ

Two competing frameworks explain the actual history and significance of the Islamic scholarly reputation of Bilād Shinqīṭ/Mauritania. The first one, often touted by Mauritanian scholars and authorities, refers to the local knowledge tradition as essentially "timeless" and "peerless."[4] The second one argues the opposite, suggesting instead that the increased visibility and renewed success of the Mauritanian Islamic tradition of learning is born out of the late twentieth-century preoccupation with authentic Islam, especially Western Muslims' increasing demand for tradition, orality, and desert-bound Islamic knowledge that Mauritania and other countries have recently come to represent (Grewal 2015, pp. 165–69). Moving beyond these two competing framings, I show instead how the distinctly Mauritanian tradition of classical Islamic scholarship developed over time before reaching its golden age in the early nineteenth century. I then demonstrate how despite the existence of a respected Shinqīṭ scholarly diaspora on the routes of the Hajj before and during the eighteenth century, the reputation of Shinqīṭ as a major center of Islamic classical learning and spirituality only took hold in the global imagination of Muslims beginning in the

second half of the nineteenth century in places such as Cairo, Istanbul, and the Muslim holy lands (Medina and Mecca). I rely here on a wealth of primary sources to document how generations of learned pilgrims and itinerant intellectuals (al-Salim 2005) performed their Shinqīṭī identity in the main intellectual centers of the Middle East where they deployed their scholarly prowess). In so doing, they enshrined and cemented the reputation of their homelands as major centers of sacred knowledge and piety, transforming them into a veritable label. Later generations continued to build quite successfully on the work of these pioneers, with far-reaching religious and political consequences.

1.1. Deep Learning in the Sahara

The history of the development of Islamic knowledge production and transmission in what is today Mauritania and its wider region is extremely well documented. There is overwhelming evidence of the profundity and growth of an indigenous Islamic culture in the region for at least the last four centuries.

Islam arrived in the Northwestern African region around the eighth century. Arguably born in an island off the Atlantic cost of today Mauritania, the eleventh century Almoravid reformist and educational revolution that later swept North Africa and then went far beyond. This movement reputedly enshrined in the region the Sunni Maliki school of law, Ash'āri theology and Sufism (al-Nahwi 1987; Pettigrew 2019). A new social structure centered around clerical and learned lineages emerged around the seventeenth century in this part of the northwestern Sahara where societies are organized in strict specialized tribal units: clerical tribes devote themselves to knowledge and prayer, while warrior tribes specialize in political affairs and wars. Within each tribe, occupational groups (slaves, freed slaves, bards, blacksmiths, herders, etc.) are largely the dominated classes and servants (Stewart 1973). A vibrant intellectual life developed around an original Islamic higher learning system of traditional Islamic schools (Maḥāẓīr) run by devoted, powerful clerical lineages (Nouhi and Stewart 2016; El Hamel 1999). This meant that memorization of the Qur'ān, mastery of Arabic language, and the study and practice of Islamic jurisprudence intensified, while important centers of advanced Islamic scholarship emerged in major Saharan trading towns as early as the sixteenth century. Yet, the golden age of Islamic scholarship in the region is often dated back to the nineteenth century (Ould Abdallahi 2016). There is ample evidence of the emergence in the region of an autonomous Islamic written culture that generated its own texts, all the while adapting the Islamic classics to its peculiar nomadic environment, including in Arabic, poetry, Islamic law, sufism and jurisprudence. This generated a massive literary output. This legacy, mostly still in manuscript form, today shows how Bilād Shinqīṭ asserted what Charles Stewart calls a sort of "scholarly hegemony" in the region.[5] One simple indication of this is the fact that the two volumes of the fifth installment of Northwestern University's famous Brill series of "Arabic Literature of Africa" is entirely devoted to Mauritania, while previous individual volumes in the series collected together the heritage of entire regions: West Africa, East Africa, and so on (Stewart and Ahmad Salem 2016). Earlier assessments of the Arabic writings from Mauritania identified nearly ten thousand manuscripts, roughly half of which are original works penned by local scholars (Rebtsock 1999). According to Charles Stewart, the ḥassaniyya-speaking[6] world produced its own grammarians, jurists, theologians, poets, etc. Judging by the number of commentaries written on their work during the last two centuries, local scholars such as Mukhtar b. Buna (d. 1805) in grammar and logics, and Sidi Abdullah b. al-Hajj Ibrahim (d. 1878) in legal theory, etc., have come to rival and replace their Andalusian and Middle Eastern predecessors in local curricula. If anything, this scholarly capacity to reproduce knowledge and writing of Islamic jurisprudence signaled a localization and indigenization of classical Islamic works. (Stewart 2018).

Such tradition of intellectual productivity has been often ignored by the Arab and Muslim public. However, things changed as soon as Mauritania becomes independent and started the tedious process of accession to membership in the Arab league in the late 1960's.

Mauritania quickly became synonymous not only with classical Islamic knowledge but also with popular tradition of poetry and versification—hence, the sobriquet *Balad al-milyūn shā'ir* (The Land of Million Poets) coined in 1967 by al-Arabī, the prestigious Kuwaiti monthly cultural magazine. The striking number of poets reflected the total population of the country (Zabbal 1967). The outsized influence of Mauritanian poets in the Arab world and West Africa plays an important role in the making of religio-cultural authority and Islamic knowledge as Abubacar Abdulkadir has recently shown (Abdulkadir 2018).

Today, the Shinqīṭ/Mauritanian traditional Islamic educational system continues to thrive without interruption. In this process, centuries old trans-local connections played a key role.

1.2. Trans-Local Connections

Though the global role of mobile Mauritanian scholars in building the reputation of their country as an important center of Islamic learning is sometimes mentioned, their trajectories are often neither historicized nor closely examined in the longue durée. All too often the study of the past is disconnected from the examination of the present of this phenomenon and vice versa. Yet, the Shinqīṭī scholarly culture was formed and consolidated through regional and global interactions. Shinqīṭī scholars produced working understandings of their Islamic culture in relation to a wider world of intellectual exchanges. They also continued over the last two centuries to insert themselves, their works, and their institutions of learning in transnational circuits of knowledge and religious authority. I offer here a few examples of how such trans-local processes occurred at the same time West Africa, the Maghreb, the Middle East and, much later, the West.

The most remarkable thing about Mauritanian Islamic networks is their sustained vibrancy in close interaction with their wider environment. This contrasts strongly with the reputation of this country as a remote, even cut off, cultural center. Alluding to the early mobility of Shinqīṭī scholars, Ghislaine Lydon linked this vibrancy to the enduring "thirst for knowledge" (Lydon 2010) in this nomadic society as evidenced by the astounding productivity of its scholars and their travels in search of sacred knowledge. As Lydon puts it elsewhere: "The Prophet Muhammad encouraged all Muslims to seek knowledge as far as China. The Shānāqiṭā [future Mauritanians] historically have more than taken the Prophet at his world." (Lydon 2004). As a territory straddling West Africa and the Maghreb, Bilād Shinqīṭ did indeed bridge the shores of the western Sahara through scholarly networks and exchanges, effectively engaging with both Arab and African Islamic scholarly and spiritual eco-systems.

1.3. Bridging the Saharan Divide: Shinqīṭ between Sub-Saharan Africa and the Maghreb

The influence of Mauritanian Islamic scholarship in North and West Africa is evidenced by the most recent research on the West African written culture. Using a comparison between the thematic content of Islamic manuscripts collections, respectively, in Timbuktu and Mauritania, Charles Stewart and Bruce Hall urged reconsideration of our perception of the geography of classical Islamic knowledge production in the region. Specializing in Mauritania's Islamic history, Charles Stewart argued that, unlike in other regions, the considerable number of writings on both grammar and legal theory (usūl-al-fiqh) in Mauritanian manuscripts signals a preoccupation with original writing on one hand and an effort to adapt Islamic law to local concerns on the other hand. According to Stewart, in sharp contrast with Mauritanian ones, Timbuktu's manuscript collections include very few texts focused on grammar or jurisprudence. Moreover, Stewart argues, during its golden age in the sixteenth century, Timbuktu's scholarly scene was dominated by roughly two elite scholarly lineages: the Baghayogo and the 'Aqīṭ. Moreover, both families "seem to have catered to external commercial interests rather than to a local Islamic culture." Stewart insists that almost two third of Aḥmad Bāba's (1556–1627) literary output was written while the prodigious Timbuktu scholar was "detained" in Morocco. Finally, Islamic knowledge production in Timbuktu ceased almost abruptly in the seventeenth century. However, the

decline of Timbuktu scholarship after this was "hardly the fate of the greater Hāssāniyya speaking world where the Islamic learning that we have come to associate with the Niger Bend was being nurtured and expanded" (Stewart 2018, pp. 220–38). Stewart thus concludes that historical evidence shows that "the true locus of scholarship long identified with Timbuktu rather resides in the Sharan nomadic schools (Maḥāẓīr)" of Mauritania and western Sahara (Stewart 2018, p. 238).

Drawing on his expert knowledge of Timbuktu's famous libraries (in which he did extensive research, most notably on Islam and slavery in the Sahel) (Hall 2009), Bruce Hall now urges the scholarly community to "rethink the place of Timbuktu in the intellectual history of Muslim West Africa" (Hall 2018). Referring to the extent of intertextuality in West African jurisprudential writing—or how often West African writers cite other West African writers—as an indication of the influence and the extent of interconnected reading communities, Hall demonstrates that Timbuktu, after its zenith in the sixteenth century, ceased to be an important site of intellectual production. The highly successful international marketing efforts employed to showcase Timbuktu's heritage seem to have obscured the simple historical fact that indeed "the richest region of West Africa for Arabic manuscripts is almost certainly Mauritania. The Manuscripts of Timbuktu (and Northern Mali more broadly) are actually best understood as part of a wider Mauritanian-Centered intellectual context." (Hall 2018, pp. 240–41).

In addition to their dynamic scholarly activity and massive literary output, Shinqīṭi/Mauritanian scholars and institutions of learning (Maḥāẓīr) have also been important agents of religious change in both the Maghreb and West Africa. Their pivotal role in the spread of major Sufi organizations in both regions is well documented. Three examples illustrate the influence of Shinqīṭī sufis and their wide network of associates both the north and south of the Sahara.

In the Maghreb, scholars such as Spencer Trimingham (Trimingham 1968, p. 76), John Voll (Voll 1973), Sean O'Fahey (O'Fahey 1994) drew on Moroccan primary sources to document how Kamal al-Din b. Habibullāh Limjāidrī al Ya'qūbī al-Shinqīṭī (d. 1789) was the first mentor and teacher of Ahmad b. Idrīs al-Fāsī (d. 1837), a key religious figure of the early nineteenth-century Muslim world. Ibn Idrīs al-Fāsī's influence appears to have stretched from North Africa to the Hijaz with lasting legacy in places such as his native Morocco, Medina, Sudan and, most importantly, Yemen, where he died. After receiving spiritual education and mentorship from Limjaidri al-Shinqīṭī, who was a frequent visiting scholar in eighteenth-century Morocco, Idrīs al-Fāsī went on to become a major global Sufi leader. His own pupils established major brotherhoods, namely the Sanūsiyya, Khātimiyyā, and the Rāshidiyyā, from which several other sub-orders emerged and spread later.

Yet, the most influential Hassaniyya-speaking Islamic scholar in the Maghreb indisputably remains the famous Saharan sufi and resistance leader al-Shaikh Mā al-'Aynayn b. Muhammad Fadhel al-Qalqami (1831–1910). Born in the Hodh, in today eastern Mauritania, Mā al-'Aynayn embarked on a journey to the Hajj sometime at the end of the nineteenth century and settled in Southern Morocco a few years later. Raised in a prestigious family of the Qadiriyya Sufi order, Mā al-'Aynayn, a prolific writer, powerful sufi master, and political leader received strong support from the royal family to establish a major religious and economic center in Smāra, western Sahara. From there, he supervised and led a fierce armed resistance to colonization in Mauritania, all the while garnering scholarly prestige, enormous followings, and political influence in Morocco and Mauritania.[7] According to H.T. Norris, Mā al-'Aynayn established close links with the 'Alawite dynasty in Morocco (. . .) In return he was granted many privileges, including a site for a Zawiya in Marrakesh (. . .) He found himself involved in dynastic feuds which were threatening the internal stability of Morocco. He aided [King] Mawlay Hafīz to evict his brother (. . .) At the end of his career he regarded himself not as a loyal client [of the King] but as a maker of kings (. . .) He considered himself first and foremost as a Shinqītī, a Zawaya leader to whom the unfettered freedom of the desert and Hassaniya dialect, which he spoke, were matter of pride (Norris 1964, p. 6).

Given his resistance to colonial rule and his political influence, in early twentieth-century France Mā al-'Aynayn was often regarded as a political leader. Yet, H.T. Norris insists that though he might have been "the last of the warriors saints" (Norris 1968, p. 115) with a massive following, he still found the time to write around three hundred texts of various lengths that dealt with virtually all areas of classical Islamic knowledge (Norris 1964, p. 117).

With regard to the influence of Shinqīṭī sufi masters in sub-Saharan Africa, Zachary Wright has shown how Muhammad al-Hafiz b. al-Mukhtar b. al-Habib al-Shinqītī (1759–1830) introduced the Tijāniyyā Sufi order in Africa (Wright n.d.). According to Wright, al-Shinqīṭī, a jurist and Hadīth scholar "of great renown," met the brotherhood's founder Shaykh Ahmad al-Tījanī in the Hijaz, then followed him to Fes only to become "the preeminent instructor (*muqaddam*) of the Tijāniyyā in Mauritania" later. Wright then explains how al-Hafiz's own students later acted as patrons of some of the most prestigious West African political and religious figures, such as "al-Hajj Umar Tall, al-Hajj Malick Sy, the founders of the Sokoto Califate and, last but not least, al-Hajj Ibrahim Niasse (d. 1975), arguably the most influential African Sufi Shaykh of the 20th century" (Wright 2020; Seesemann 2004). Today, scholars are unanimous that the Tijāniyyā is the largest Sufi order in West and North Africa and their diasporas in the West.

While playing an instrumental role in their immediate environment, the scholars of Bilād Shinqīṭ's presence and religious activism prospered in the Middle East from the nineteenth century onwards. After all, the Shinqītī label as we know it first appeared and spread there.

1.4. How the Middle East invented Bilād Shinqīṭ

Today, Mauritanian Islamic scholars traveling abroad are eager to claim their Shinqīṭī nisbā to boast of their religious and intellectual credentials. Yet, the very label of al-Shinqīṭī has been adopted mainly in the Middle East and most likely before the eighteenth century. Back then, one became Shinqītī only once one reached the Middle East. As the renowned scholar Sidi Abdulah b. al-Haj Brahim (d. 1878) explains in his book on the history of Shinqīṭ (al-'Alawī [1791] 2016, p. 113), this is probably because the caravans to the Hajj sailed from Shinqīṭ towards the holy lands, and typically traveled via the Maghreb and Egypt. Many pilgrims coming from the region as a whole were Ḥassāniyyā speaking traditionally trained Islamic scholars. By then, many Shanāqiṭā had already settled in the Hijāz and were leading an active social and scholarly life. We owe one of the oldest detailed mentions of Shinqīṭī scholars' presence in the Arab East to Mūrtadā al-Zābīdī (d. 1791). The much-celebrated Cairo-based Islamic scholar and historian kept meticulous records of his interactions with dozens of Africans, a great number of whom were from Shinqīṭ. They typically met al-Zābīdī when going through Egypt on their way to and from the Hajj. As a testimony to the existence of an active diaspora in the holy lands, al-Zābīdī mentions, for example, how a certain 'Abd al-Rashīd al-Shinqīṭī had settled in the Hijaz in the 1780s, where he protested the fact that Shinqīṭī residents of Medina were denied access to the pious endowments of the Māghribis because they were regarded as solely sub-Saharan Africans. According to al-Zābīdī, al-Shinqīṭī used a fatwa (Islamic legal opinion) to seek (in vain it seems) a decision from the Sultan of Morocco to confirm that the people of Shinqīṭ were indeed "pure Maghrībīs" [*min khūllaṣ al-maghāribāh*]. Beyond this particular case, al-Zābīdī, who often kept in touch with his Saharan peers and Sufi "brothers" through correspondence, speaks highly and fondly of them, offering many details about their knowledge in Arabic language, poetry, Islamic jurisprudence and, last but not least, Sufism, an important area for al-Zābīdī (Reichmuth 2004).

However, the reputation of Shinqīṭ did not grow solely as a result of the scholarly activities of the diaspora or the pilgrims' occasional display of fine classical Islamic knowledge and spirituality. Using historical opportunities afforded to them in various contexts, few human agents of change played a seminal role in the global intellectual and religious reputation of Bilād Shinqīṭ.

2. Becoming Shinqīṭī

I contend that the reputation of Shinqīṭ as a major center of Islamic higher learning and of mastery of Arabic language and Islamic scholarship took hold more firmly in the nineteenth century. Back then, intellectuals from Bilād Shinqīṭ toured the Middle East where they employed, performed and enacted their scholarly credentials, inserting and establishing themselves in powerful networks and scholarly communities at key historical junctures. This was happening in the second half of the nineteenth century, a time in which the Muslim world was undergoing major cultural transformations which allowed these Shinqīṭī representatives to cement the reputation of their homelands and knowledge traditions as important players in the global circuit of classical Islamic knowledge. This is precisely how Shinqīṭi global standing was further consolidated and increasingly enacted in various global and local settings over the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries.

2.1. Peripatetic Lives: Shinqīṭ on the Move

Despite the geographic isolation of their homeland, its limited economic resources, and small population, Islamic scholars from Bilād Shinqīṭ/Mauritania have been able to articulate and employ their knowledge tradition across the Muslim world at least since the eighteenth century. This mobility allowed these desert scholars to make a name for themselves in global networks and wider scholarly communities. This traveling activity intensified and took on a whole new meaning in the proverbial ages of print and steam.[8] As the Muslim world was undergoing major transformations in the wake of shrinking distances and high mobility, key representatives of Shinqīṭī scholars used their travels and encounters to partake more actively in the rapidly globalizing system of Islamic knowledge production and dissemination.

Although a number of such individuals could be mentioned here, no one would be comparable in terms of notoriety and impact to a certain Muhammad Mahmud b. T'lāmīd al-Turkuzī al-Shinqīṭī who died in Cairo in 1904. This scholar did more than anyone else to embody and perform the Bilād Shinqīṭ scholarly identity in the nineteenth-century Muslim world and beyond. Al-Turkuzī led a highly productive career between 1860 and 1905, first in Mecca, and then in Medina, Istanbul, and Cairo (with Ottoman-sponsored travels to libraries in Madrid, London, and Paris) which set the stage for the globalization for the Shinqīṭi scholarly brand and its increasing prestige in the following centuries.

Al-Turkuzī al-Shinqīṭī's story is truly extraordinary. Born around the year 1829 (or maybe ten years earlier given the uncertainty about his date of birth) in south-central Mauritania, he was raised and trained in classical Islamic sciences in his homeland.[9] In 1858, he embarked on a journey to the Hajj, from which he would never return. Once in the Middle East, al-Turkuzī employed his Shinqīṭi skills creatively. He positioned himself in significant ways at the center of the vibrant cultural scene of the second half of the nineteenth century. There, he achieved distinction through a highly creative, indeed unusual enactment/embodiment of a characteristically Shinqīṭī scholarly identity built on a particular set of skills developed in Islamic schools (Maḥāẓīr) back home. These were and still are today: (1) memorization of Qur'ān, hadith and key texts; (2) full investment in the mastery of the entire spectrum of Arabic language and traditional Islamic studies; and (3) An exceptional ability to compose classical poetry. In addition to these standard fields of interest, al-Turkuzī had a solid manuscript culture coupled with a passion for book copying, collection, and edition. As I will show, the latter specialism would prove extremely valuable as he moved around the Middle East in that particular period.

Al-Turkuzī led a peripatetic life. His travels took him literally from the heart of the Saharan desert (from his native Tagānt region) to the intellectual salons of Muhammad b. 'Awn, the Sharif/emir of Mecca, where he played an eminent role of literary critique around the year 1860,[10] then to Medina, where he settled and taught for over two decades. He soon found himself in the palace of the Ottoman sultan in Constantinople where, following the advice of the famous reformist Ministry of Education, Munīf Bāshā (1830–1910), one of al-Turkuzī's associates, Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876–1909) entrusted him with all the

ulama of the empire, giving him two important cultural missions in Europe: first, to tour the European libraries in order to identify missing Arabic manuscripts (1887); and second, to represent the Ottoman empire at the second International Orientalists Congress to be held in Stockholm in 1888. While he accepted the first mission after meeting with one of its main organizers, famous orientalist Carlo Landberg (1848–1924),[11] he later declined to go to Stockholm arguing that the Sultan has not kept promises he had made to him earlier (al-Shinqīṭī 1901, p. 9).[12] Al-Turkuzī had to go back "home" to Medina where he resided. As Henri Peres, a French orientalist put it in 1937: "Anyone else would have been honored to be entrusted with this mission. However, for his part, Al-Shinqīṭi did not hesitate instead to list a set of pre-conditions: first, he demanded that the Administrator of the Waqf in Medina be fired; second, he required to be accompanied by a muezzin and a Muslim cook." According to Pires, who does not offer any evidence of this, the "Sultan, more amused than shocked with this strange Mauritanian [sic], promises him literally everything" (Peres 1937, pp. 55–56).

The incident only increased Al-Turkuzi's reputation, despite the bitter note on which his visit to Istanbul ended. In addition to the success he continued to enjoy as a leading hādith scholar and one of the best philologists and experts of Arabic of the era, al-Shaykh al-Shinqīṭī's work took on a whole new dimension when he settled in Cairo from 1889 until his death in 1904. There, he became a major scholarly figure working closely on the edition of major Islamic classics (*al-tūrāth*), while Rashid Rida praised him regularly in *al-Manar* and mentioned how he had helped Muhammad 'Abduh in many ways including in improving 'Abduh's magnum opus, *Risālat al-Tawhid* (see below). 'Abduh subsequently helped appoint al-Turkuzī to the first ever created al-Azhar's Chair of Arabic language. Al-Turkuzī left a lasting impression on an entire generation of influential early twentieth-century intellectuals and literary icons such as Ahmad Hassan al-Zayyāt (al-Zayat 1923), Taha Hussein (Hussein 2010), Ahmad Taymur (Taymur [1968] 2019), and other early twentieth-century pioneers of literary renaissance.[13]

Al-Turkuzī career exemplifies how Shinqīṭi scholars located themselves at the center of Islamic knowledge production and global networks. Despite his success and enduring reputation as the "leading scholar of Arabic language and Hadīth of his time" as his biographers insist (al-Zirkilī 2002, p. 89; Taymur [1968] 2019, pp. 287–83; al-Zayat 1923, pp. 247–52; al-Shīllahī 2007), on more than one occasion al-Turkuzī had to push against many attempts to dismiss his scholarly authority in the name of the center-periphery framework. He seemed more than confident in his added value to the intellectual Muslim world of his time. Moreover, he routinely lamented the poverty of knowledge in places such as Medina and Mecca, sometimes accusing his interlocutors of "plain ignorance" [al-jāhl al-murākkāb].[14] This confrontational style ultimately cost him his stay in Medina and led to his 1890 deportation by Ottoman authorities to Cairo. Instead, Al-Turkuzī praised the knowledge tradition in his native land as being unparalleled. In so doing, he was fully aware that he was at the very least creating what Dahlia Gubara called "a normative sense" of his homeland as "a place of scholarship in its own right . . . [a place] very far from a notion of a periphery awaiting orthodoxy from distant and revered centers" (Gubara 2014, p. 296).[15]

The imposing figure of Muhammad Mahmud al-Shinqīṭī eclipsed almost entirely that of another Shinqīṭī who lived in Cairo at the same time and was building his own parallel career. Ahmad al-Amin al-Shinqīṭī (d. 1913) left his native Mauritania at an unknown date and arrived in Cairo from the Hijaz via Syria, Russia and Turkey, sometime toward the end of the nineteenth century (Frede 2012). He then settled in Cairo for a highly productive career as literary expert and editor of Arabic and Islamic classical literature at Al-Khanjī, a renowned publishing house. Al-Amin al-Shinqīṭī edited a great number of important pre-Islamic poetry anthologies and Islamic law treatises. Realizing how valuable his new hire was, Amin al-Khanjī offered him an apartment on the premises of his printing company (al-Sāyyīd 1954).

Although Ahmad al-Amin al-Shinqīṭī was much younger (he was between forty-two and fifty at the time of his death in 1913) than Muhammad Mahmud al-Turkuzī, they did not get along, as evident in the mixed portrait al-Amin painted of Muhammad Mahmud (al-Shinqīṭī 1911, pp. 373–75). For the two Shinqīṭī scholars had quite different profiles and reputations: al-Turkuzī was a towering figure with vast experience, a transnational reputation, and powerful associates, as well as a prestigious position at al-Azhar Mosque University. Contrary to his younger countryman, al-Turkuzī al-Shinqīṭī's contribution is documented in the archives of the late nineteenth-century Muslim world including in the majority of bibliographical dictionaries as well as in the autobiographies of the many literary luminaries who crossed his path. al-Amin al-Shinqīṭī for his part engaged far less in scholarly debates, except to defend his Sufi brotherhood, the Tijāniyyā (al-Shinqīṭī n.d.).

While he clearly did not match al-Turkuzī's scholarly record, reputation and influence, Ahmad al-Amin nevertheless led an "astoundingly productive publishing career" (Norris 2007). He subsequently played a crucial role in inventing Shinqīṭ not only through his own intellectual standing and networks in Syria, Russia, and Egypt, but also through the success of his influential book *al-Wāsit fī-Tārājīm Udāba Shinqīṭ [The Anthology of the biographies of Shinqīṭ poets]*, the first ever published anthology of Mauritanian classical Arabic poetry (al-Shinqīṭī 1911). The volume also doubled as the first ethnographic survey of Bilād Shinqīṭ's society, scholarly culture, folklore and customs.[16] Pleased with the Shinqīṭi poetry he heard from al-Shinqīṭī, al-Khanjī insisted that his employee create a collection of it for publication. As al-Shinqīṭī wrote in the preface of the first edition to the book: "I received a request to write this book from someone I am eager to please and whom I cannot turn down, my friend al-Sayyid Muhammad Amin al-Khanjī" (al-Shinqīṭī 1911, p. 6).

Beyond their own achievements, it is no coincidence that the two Shinqīṭīs I just portrayed made a name for themselves and their homeland precisely during the historical moment of the second half of the nineteenth century in Cairo. As Ahmed El Shamsy has shown in a recent groundbreaking monograph (El Shamsy 2020), at the time classical Islamic scholarship and Arabic literature were being excavated as a result of a conscious effort by proponents of an Arabic and Islamic revival to harness modern print technology for their renaissance project. Back then, a group of editors and intellectuals brought a number of forgotten works of classical Islamic literature (i.e., that published before 1500) into print form. In so doing, those who were engaged in this vast enterprise would define for posterity what would become the classical canon of Islamic thought. In Cairo, the epicenter of this activity, many individuals went to great lengths to find and publish classical books, disseminating them and using them to reframe religious, linguistic, ethical, and religious debates. In this context, the skillsets of the scholars from Bilād Shinqīṭ, whom El Shamsy duly features in his book (El Shamsy 2020, pp. 140, 169, 106–8, 126, 133, 154–55, 158), proved extremely valuable. It allowed them to be highly visible as the intellectual history of the modern Arab and Muslim world was being radically transformed in the context of the "print revolution."

Armed with their marketable training in classical poetry, Arabic language, manuscript culture, philology, rhetoric, grammar, and so forth, which constituted the backbone of the Maḥāẓīr curriculum, these two Shinqīṭī scholars thus held a strong comparative advantage. They proved to be useful not only to their colleagues, the printing industry, orientalists, and even Ottoman authorities, but also to modernist reformers such as Muhammad 'Abduh who placed the revival and teaching of classical Arabic language and republication of the classical books at the center of his agenda (El Shamsy 2020, pp. 147–57). Mohamed Mahmud al-Shinqīṭī was an invaluable asset and intellectual ally as 'Abduh specifically sought his friendship, generously sponsored his stay, appointed him to Al-Azhar, and tasked him with highly complex projects such as launching new editions of the classics of Arabic language. The most ambitious of those projects was the edition of *al-Mukhāssās*, the massive (seventeen-volume) dictionary composed by 'Alī ibn Ismā'īl, known as Ibn Sīdah, or Ibn Sīdah al-Mūrsī (1009–1066), a renowned medieval linguist and lexicographer who lived in Muslim Iberia (Ibn Sīdah 1888–1903). We also owe them the current edition of Abd

al-Qahīr al-Jurjani Al-Jurjāni (1009–1078) magnus opus, Asrār al-Blālāghā (al-Jurjani 1902). ʻAbduh and al-Turkuzī al-Shinqīṭī teamed up[17] in order to reedit a set of other books of rhetoric and Arabic, most notably the works of medieval authors such as Abū Hilāl al-ʻAskarī (920–1005). Rashid Ridha documented ʻAbduh and al-Shinqīṭī's intellectual friendship in *al-Manar,* framing the relationship not only as a model of ulama collegiality but even as an expression of the true "virtues of the authentic ulama" [Sajāyā al-ʻulāmā] (Ridha 1898).

The intellectual standing of the Shinqīṭī émigrés in nineteenth-century Cairo allowed them to solidify the positive image of their homeland as an "archive of tradition" and classic Islamic knowledge almost a century before such label could even be used to refer to the twentieth-century Western fascination with the Shinqīṭī pedagogy (Grewal 2015, p. 158). Such notoriety is thus hardly a recent invention. In fact, generations of Shinqīṭī scholars continued to succeed in the Middle East in the following centuries without being specifically "used" either as a reservoir of a specific type of knowledge or to respond to particular market demand. The Mayaba family that I portray below is representative of this trend. Their trajectory showed new facets of the global spread of Shinqīṭī learned communities and even of the increasing politicization of their scholarly authority.

2.2. The Mayaba Brothers: From Knowledge to Politics

The Mayaba are a notoriously learned family hailing from a prestigious Saharan scholarly lineage (Tājākānet) mostly present in eastern Mauritania today. Fleeing their native country in 1908, shortly before the French troops completed the occupation of Bilād Shinqīṭ (in the process changing the name of the country to Mauritania), four Mayaba siblings first settled in Morocco, where they immediately garnered the support and sponsorship of Sultan Mulay ʻAbd al Hāfiz (1875–1912). In 1912, however, protesting the advent of the French Protectorate in Morocco, they moved eastward yet again, this time to the Hijaz, where at least three of them ended up playing key roles as celebrated Islamic scholars, teachers, and in some cases as high ranking regional and national political figures. The elder Mayaba brother, Muhammad al-Khādīr (also spelled *al-Khīdr:* 1868–1935), held the position of Chief Mufti for the Sunni Maliki legal tradition in Medina for many years. As Farah al-Sharif points out, there he enjoyed a thriving scholarly milieu in which he taught knowledge seekers from across the world and penned many important treatises on the most pertinent topics of the time (. . .) When, following complex colonial political maneuvering, the Al-Saud family invaded the Hijaz in 1925, the scholar al-Khādīr had already accompanied the founder of modern Jordan, Sharif Abdullah bin al-Hussein, to found the Emirate of Transjordan in 1921 (El-Sharif 2018).

Famous for his expertise in hadīth, al-Khādīr is also known for his 1926 anti-Tijani pamphlet, *Mujtāhā al-Khārif,* one of the most discussed texts in an otherwise crowded anti-Tijāniyyā polemical literature (Mayaba [1926] 2003).

After al-Khādīr's passing in 1935, his own son, Muhammad al-Amin (1905–1990) took over (successively) as Chief justice of the Kingdom of Jordan, member of the senate, Chair of the Jordan ulama association, Minister of Education, and finally Head of the 1954 commission tasked with rebuilding Jerusalem. Muhammad al-Amin Mayaba later served as Jordan's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, where he died in 1990 (al-ʻAqilī 2016). His uncle, al-Khādīrs' younger brother, Muhammad Ḥabīb Allāh b. Mayaba (d. 1944), who had stayed behind in Saudi-controlled Hijaz, had a dispute with King ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz over the Wahhabiya, which he rejected (Ahmad 2015). Fearing for his life, the Shinqīṭī scholar moved to Egypt and settled in Cairo, where he lived until his death. On his arrival in Cairo, he was quickly appointed as Professor of *usūl al-dīn* (principles of the religion) and hadīth at al-Azhar Mosque University. He left an impressive bibliography that includes the six-volume *Zād al-Muslīm fimā-Ittāfāqā ʻalāyhi al-Bukhāri wā-Mūslīm,* one of the most influential hādith collections of the twentieth-century Sunni world (al-Shinqitī 1954–1956).

Many other Shinqīṭī scholars followed similar paths to successful transnational careers (al-Salim 2011). Among those, two figures with connections, respectively, to Rashid Ridha

modernist networks on the one hand, and to the Saudi Wahhabiya establishment on the other, deserve special mention here. Although they are both known in the sources under the same name (as Muhammad al-Amin al-Shinqīṭī), they had different identities, intellectual statures, and politics. They were not only totally unrelated but also lived decades apart and in different places. I portray them here successively to show the diversity of Shinqīṭī scholars' trajectories and the ways in which their religious activities and politics are shaped by both circumstances and context.

2.3. Shinqīṭī Ulama, Salafism and Islamic Education in the Twentieth-Century Arabic Peninsula

One of the least known Shinqīṭī transnational figures is certainly Muhammad al-Amin b. Vāl al-Khāyr al-Hāsānī al-Shinqīṭī (1876–1932). Born in the Trarza region in what is today southwestern Mauritania, Vāl al-Khayr completed his training in Qur'ān, Hadīth, and Arabic language at an early age. Resisting his family's pressures to renounce his travels, at the age of twenty-five he finally embarked on a *rīḥla* (journey) in search of knowledge, a journey that led him to western Sahara, Morocco, the Hijaz, and then to Iraq and Kuwait. In his travelogue published recently (al-Shinqītī 2015), he relates how he headed to the holy lands through Egypt, where Muhammad Mahmud al-Turkuzī not only hosted him, but also introduced him to Muhammad 'Abduh and impressed him with his vast knowledge during lengthy literary exchanges focused on Mauritanian poetry (al-Shinqītī 2015, pp. 153–79). Using his influence, al-Turkuzī actually secured visas for Vāl al-Khayr to travel to Mecca (al-Shinqītī 2015, p. 180). There, Vāl al-Khayr stayed on after the pilgrimage to complete his studies with Medina-based Shinqīṭi and Moroccan scholars. Abu Shu'āyb al Dukkalī (1878–1937), the father figure of Moroccan Salafis (Boukars and Wehrey 2019, p. 40) and himself a former student of al-Turkuzi al-Shinqīṭī, took Vāl al-Khayr under his wing and taught him core tenets of modern Salafiyya, namely the importance of the thought of Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328), the focus on Hādīth as an authoritative source, etc. When local notables from southern Iraq urged al-Dukkalī to send them a teacher, he wrote to Vāl al-Khayr, who was then on tour in Bahrain and India, instructing him to go to a town near El Basrah where a local community that had moved there decades earlier from Najd (in what is today Saudi Arabia, and the birthplace of Wahabiyya) urgently needed a school instructor (al-Shinqītī 2015, p. 188).

Not wanting to return to what was by then French-occupied Mauritania (al-Shinqītī 2015, p. 189), Vāl al-Khayr moved to the strategic Iraqi town of al-Zubāyr in 1908. There he ultimately established his permanent base. At the time of Vāl al-Khayr al-Shinqīṭī's first visit to the region, al-Zubair and the Kuwait emirates, both mostly populated with migrants from Najd (today Saudi Arabia), were closely linked. As detailed in many local histories of the region (Dulayshī 1981) Shinqīṭī quickly became a dynamic imam and reformist preacher. In both Iraq and Kuwait, al-Shinqīṭī quickly emerged as a Salafi firebrand. His sermons in local mosques focused on Salafi themes such as the denunciation of practices such as tomb visitations, veneration of saintly figures, occult practices, and legal conservatism (*tāqlīd*). In 1913, al-Shinqīṭī traveled to Kuwait, where he joined the Jamī'yyā al-Khāyriyā, a reformist cultural organization with strong support from Rashid Ridha's networks. During that time, he became an intellectual sensation. Moving back and forth between Iraq and Kuwait, he not only continued to critique traditional religious practices, local ulamā, and foreign occupation, but did so even more harshly. As a Kuwaiti scholar recently pointed out.

> Shaykh Muhammad al-Amin al-Shinqīṭī had a great cultural, political and social influence on both entities [Iraq and Kuwait]. Originally from Mauritania, he played a pivotal role during the first world war in convincing Kuwaitis and Zubāyri youth to fight for the Ottomans by issuing a fatwa calling for jihad against the British. He personally took part in the battles of al-Shu'ayba, Kut al-Zayn and Sihan, in which a number of Kuwaiti youths fell (Alebrahim 2018, p. 135).

Because of his staunch opposition to the British presence in Iraq and Kuwait after WWI, local authorities, especially the Kuwaiti emirs, started monitoring his activities closely, accusing him of fostering civic disobedience in his preaching. Vāl al-Khayr was

subsequently invited by the emir of Kuwait, Shaykh Mubarak al-Sabah, to stop his anti-British campaigns in the mosques of the country. The emir, who had struck an accord with Great Britain in 1899, had become wary of Shinqīṭī and his associates' anti-colonial discourse and ultimately banned *al-Jam'īyā al-Khayriyā* altogether.[18] Retreating to the region of al-Qāsīm in Najd, Saudi Arabia, Val-al-Khayr deepened his Salafi credentials with some of the local Wahhabi ulama. There, he also met with King Abdul Aziz b. Saud in the house of a mutual acquaintance (Dulayshī 1981). Vāl al-Khayr spent the last twenty years of his life in al-Zubāyr (1909–1932) but was a frequent visitor in Najd and Kuwait, where he was close friend of many of the notables and scholarly families of the region. Today, al-Shinqīṭī is remembered and celebrated as one of the most important Islamic reformers of the twentieth century in this part of the Gulf. The *Mādrarsāt-al Nājāt* (School of Salvation), the school he founded in 1921 in al-Zubāyr, still exists today and is often credited for being the first to introduce modern Islamic schooling in the region. Generations of students graduated from this institution and went on to become the nascent modernist elite of Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. For that reason, the figure of Vāl al-Khāyr al-Shinqīṭī remains ubiquitous in the historiography of Islamic reform and education in the region (for a detailed his of Mādrarsāt-al Nājāt, see al-Nassīr [2010] 2016, pp. 351–69 and 673–77).

Yet, Muhammad al-Amin al-Shinqīṭī (Vāl al-Khāyr) is not to be confused with another influential scholar, Muhammad al-Amin b. Muhammad al-Mukhtar al-Shinqīṭī (d. 1973). A towering figure of Qur'ānic studies and Islamic theology, Muhammad b. Muhammad al-Mukhtar (known in Mauritania as Abbā b. Kh'tūr) was an accomplished Islamic scholar when he embarked on his journey to the Hajj in the late 1940s (al-Shinqīṭī 2005). Settling in the Hijaz at the request of local Saudi notables, he quickly became one of the most respected 'ulama and teachers of the land. Today, al-Amin al- Shinqīṭi is renowned in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere for his multi-volume Qur'ānic Tāfsīr [exegesis of the Qur'an] titled *Adwa al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'ān bi-al-Qur'ān* (al-Shinqīṭī 1995). He also rose to the pinnacle of the Wahhabi religious establishment, becoming one of the very few non-Saudi scholars to access full membership of the country's rather exclusive Council of Senior Scholars (Hay'āt Qibār al-ulāma). Al-Shinqīṭī is also known for being one of the founders and main teachers of The Ryad Scholastic Institute (Ma'hād al-Riyād al-'ilmī) as well as of the Islamic University of Medina, an institution created for international students and essentially a launchpad of global Wahhabism (Farquhar 2016). Al-Shinqīṭī himself played a major role in Salafi/Wahhabi international outreach. His preaching (da'wa) tour in Africa included a stop in Mauritania, the only time he visited his country since migrating to the holy lands.[19] A great number of writings centered on al-Shinqīṭī's work and life are published regularly in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. However, very few show any awareness of how instrumental his role has been in some of the key events of Saudi Arabia political history. Given his moral authority in the Kingdom, al-Shinqīṭī was reportedly tasked in 1964 by his peers with the delicate mission to convince King Saud Ibn Abdul Aziz al-Saud (1902–1969) to abdicate his throne in favor of his younger half-brother Prince Faisal Ibn Abdul Aziz al-Saud (1906–1975). The latter had pressured the Saudi ulama to issue a fatwa supporting the move (Ahmad 2015, p. 124).

In a recent short article tellingly titled "How Mauritania exports religion to Saudi Arabia," Alex Thurston and Michael Farquhar state rightly that, beyond the case of al-Amin al-Shinqīṭī, "the long history of Mauritanian migration to the Hijaz gave rise to a substantial presence of Mauritanians studying [and] teaching in that region's mosques, administering schools and Waqf foundations, or giving lessons in their home[s]." The authors further show how since at least the 1920s Shinqīṭi scholars continued to rise in the Saudi Kingdom's religious establishment without ever "converting" to state-sponsored Wahhabi Islam nor renouncing their genuinely West African adherence to Sunni Mālīkī law, Sufism, and the Ash'āri creed (Farquhar and Thurston 2018).

Obviously, Saudi Arabia is a major global Islamic scene of the production and dissemination of Islamic knowledge and ideas. The country has always been a favorite destination for scholars from all corners of the Muslim word. Chanfi Ahmed has thoroughly docu-

mented how African Muslim scholars have for centuries been actively involved in the intellectual and religious scene in Islam's holy lands (Ahmad 2015). What might surprise some is that Mauritania, a small, remote, sparsely populated,[20] and little-known corner of Northwest Africa and the Muslim world exerted a uniquely powerful influence in the heartland of Islam. It might be even more surprising to learn that Shinqīṭī female scholars, whose work has often been erased or dismissed from Shinqīṭī historical records (see Section 2 below), made a name for themselves in places such as the holy city of Medina. Such "hidden figures" have only recently started to emerge in the scholarship. Khadija bint Muhammad Vall al-Samsadi al-Shinqīṭī (d. 1947) is a case in point. This female Sufi figure (she belonged to the Tijaniyya Sufi order) and foremost scholar was nicknamed *al-Qari'a al-Shinqīṭīyya* (meaning: the highly persuasive woman from Shinqīṭ), for her ability to engage and systematically win scholarly arguments against her male counterparts. During her life in Medina, to which she migrated sometimes in the 1930s, she was known for actively defending the role of women in the production of authoritative Islamic knowledge using evidence from the Qur'ān and the Hadīth (al-Qalqami 2009, p. 429; Tawla 2018).

The influence of Mauritanian scholars in Saudi Arabia only increased after the era of these pioneering figures. According to Alex Thurston and Michael Farquhar, Mauritanians' contribution to "the development of the Saudi religious sphere" is remarkable (Farquhar and Thurston 2018). The export of Islamic scholars is a vibrant sector in Mauritania. A number of countries (such as Qatar and the Emirates, etc.) have signed agreements with the Mauritanian government since the late 1970s allowing them periodically to hire traditionally trained judges, imams, counselors, preachers, etc., to serve in their countries. Data I complied in 2006 put the number of Mauritanian émigrés to the Emirates at four thousand persons. Nearly 60 percent of those are religious workers employed as imams and religious personnel (Ould Ahmed Salem 2007). Beyond Africa and the Arab peninsula, Mauritanian Islamic intellectuals remain present in many other Muslim countries and the diaspora in the West. In Africa, Europe, the USA, and elsewhere, a veritable mythology of Bilād Shinqīṭ and its knowledge tradition emerged in places as diverse as mosques in American cities, religious seminaries, presidential palaces, the halls of the United Nations headquarter and, indeed, on the internet. Global political events and global social/religious changes have only magnified this mythology. Yet, the multidimensional and even paradoxical character of this transformation is often either overlooked or misinterpreted.

3. Bilād Shinqīṭ: From Reality to Myth and Back

The status of Mauritania as a global center of higher Islamic learning has been both a multidimensional phenomenon and, occasionally, a double-edged sword. Previous sections of this paper have shown how this reputation is neither a twentieth-century phenomenon, nor the sole result of the recent invention of a Mauritanian myth. Yet, Zareena Grewal aptly documented how Western Muslim converts increasingly mobilized the Mauritanian refence in an attempt to address the "crisis of authority" and other anxieties pervading US mosques in the early twenty-first century (Grewal 2015, p. 40). Many far more influential players (including powerful superpowers) are now invoking the Shinqīṭi Islamic tradition for political and other purposes. Here, I thus propose a primary mapping of these various actors and facets of the various—contradictory uses to which the myth/reality of Bilād Shinqīṭ is being put, according to circumstances. I also explain in passing how the mythology around Bilād Shinqīṭ tends to obscure more controversial aspects of the local history and social context in which the Islamic learning system in Mauritania itself emerged and developed in the first place. While entirely disconnected from the mostly flattering, positive Shinqīṭī reputation in international Muslim religious and scholarly networks, those aspects have nevertheless been highly contentious inside Mauritania itself.

3.1. Beyond the "Desert Archive"

Although the reputation of Bilād Shinqīṭ as a locus of an authentic classical tradition of learning dates back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it took on new forms in

the wake of the so-called crisis of authority and diversity of sources of Islamic authority in the twentieth-century West. One of the most impactful representations of Mauritania as "diasporic homeland" for western Muslim communities is closely related to the trajectory of an American convert, Shaykh Hamza Yusuf Hanson, arguably the most influential Western Muslim intellectual of the era. Although Yusuf, a white Muslim convert from California born (in 1958) to a Christian family, received an eclectic training in various countries including Algeria, Spain, Syria, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, his connection to Mauritania and the Islamic education he received there left a unique and lasting impact on his intellectual and religious formation. After studying for several years "at the knee of Mauritanian shaykhs" (Grewal 2015, p. 159), Yusuf came back to the USA to take the American Islamic public sphere by storm. Quickly becoming the most popular Islamic speaker and preacher in the country, he contributed tremendously to framing the *Rihla* (journey) in search of knowledge in Mauritania as the best way to connect with an Islamic tradition that he describes as reminiscent of the first times of Islam. One character in particular dominated Yusuf's discourse about Mauritania: Shaykh "Murābit al-Hajj" Muhammad b. Vahfou (circa 1911–2019), a renowned Shinqiṭī Islamic scholar based in a remote village of the Assābā region in southeastern Mauritania. "I have never met somebody who embodies the spirit of Islam more than this human being," said Hamza Yusuf more than once.[21]

Yusuf galvanized and inspired hundreds of Western Muslim youth, who subsequently traveled and graduated from the Maḥāẓīr system, only to bear testimony to its unique qualities. Among Western Muslims and converts, especially in the US Muslim community, traveling to Mauritania in search of sacred knowledge quickly became a source of credibility on the Western circuit of Islamic preaching.

Much has been written about Hamza Yusuf's idealization of the Northwest African nation and the ways in which he extols the tradition of learning there, especially after he co-founded The Zaytuna Institute, the first Islamic Liberal Arts College in the USA openly inspired by the Mauritanian approach to knowledge transmission (Korb 2013). In her book, *Islam is a Foreign Country,* Zareena Grewal argues persuasively that:

"Hamza Yusuf single-handedly altered the religious imagination of thousands of mosque Americans by shifting attention away from the postcolonial Arab states toward the little-known country of Mauritania which he constructs as a utopia (. . .) Mauritania is Yusuf's utopic counter-point to the US, a modern dystopia (. . .) In US mosques in the nineties, Yusuf's personal transformation in Mauritania inspired a new vocabulary of authenticity based on the past and charged with the symbol-laden desert (. . .) with simultaneous representation of Mauritania as ahistorical, apolitical, and highly exoticized terms" (Grewal 2015, p. 165).

Although Yusuf's depiction of Mauritanian scholars and institutions of learning reproduces the orientalist "trope of the noble savage" (in Grewal's opinion) (Grewal 2015, p. 166), he also "describes Mauritanian culture as a pedagogical one, as an archive of traditional knowledge mediated by individual learned teachers and spirituals models, distinguished by their teaching abilities and trained minds" (Grewal 2015, p. 167). In so doing, Yusuf not only puts Bilād Shinqīṭ at the center of a new "transnational moral geography" (Grewal 2015, p. 168), but also "frames the desert of Mauritania as utopic margin of the postcolonial Muslim world." (Grewal 2015, pp. 168–69). Yet, Grewal did not elaborate further on the obvious fact that Hamza Yusuf's ability to convince others of the importance of Mauritanian tradition of learning stems from his own embodiment and even staging or performance of the erudition and charisma he learned to master in the Mauritanian desert. After all, as Yusuf himself told me and others in January 2020, "the product of the Maḥzāra tradition is a human being. It's not the knowledge that is so much the focus, but it's actually the transformative power of the knowledge. You don't study to earn a living; you study to learn how to live" (Yusuf 2019).

While a study of Hamza Yusuf's representation of Mauritania's "scholastic tradition" is beyond the scope of this paper, it is obvious that his and other Western Muslims' idealistic discourse on Mauritania is hardly unique. Other global and national players have been

using the myth of Shinqīṭī to advance more political, sometimes radically opposed, agendas. One of the most striking examples of this paradoxical use of the myth of Shinqīṭ appeared in the context of the War on Terror, where the reference to Mauritania served starkly contradictory purposes.

3.2. Shinqīṭ and the War on Terror: A Double-Edged Sword

In the post-September 11, 2001 world, Mauritania's outsized religious influence proved to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the Mauritanian government and its foreign partners relied on the country's theological authority to counter the Islamic justification of jihad. On the other hand, terrorist networks attracted many graduates of the traditional local Islamic school system where a few local and foreign extremists also received part of their religious education.

Mauritania's status as an Islamic traditional knowledge powerhouse has been deemed a valuable asset by its own government, which relied heavily on local Islamic scholars (Wehrey 2019; Boukhars 2016) to undertake a successful deradicalization program of dozens of extremist detainees from 2010 to 2012. The country later became a showcase for effective religious deradicalization in the troubled Sahel region (Ould Ahmed Salem 2020). Its western partners soon started to praise its efforts as a remarkable success. Assistant Secretary of State Bisa Williams in the Obama administration saluted Mauritania's success in countering violent extremism (CVE, in the War on Terror parlance). Like many others, the American diplomat linked this success directly to Mauritania's strong reputation as a center of Islamic learning, a center whose scholars "are well-equipped to respond to assaults on the practice of Islam and espouse messages of peace" (Simpson 2016).

Yet, the truth is that many Mauritanian scholars and former Maḥāẓīr graduates have also been linked to international terrorism, where their religious knowledge rather than their fighting skills seem to have been their main comparative advantage. This trend is also well-documented.

3.3. Criminals Minds?

As a Carnegie Endowment for International Peace report pointed out, "relative to its population size, no other country in the Sahel and Sahara region produces as many jihadist ideologues and high-ranking terrorist operatives as Mauritania does." (Bouceck 2009). While the accuracy of such a statement is difficult to assess, it is clear that Mauritanians who lend their support to international or regional jihadi groups are hardly respected ulama or established religious authorities, but rather religious students. Yet, they seem to have an internationally competitive Islamic knowledge skillset. At the height of the spread of domestic radical Jihadism in Saudi Arabia in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a handful of Mauritanians started to emerge there as active militants in local cells. While this is hardly surprising given the international character of most extremist organizations such as al-Qaida, as Bouceck explain it is however interesting to note that Saudi security sources believe Mauritanians' "language skills and theological knowledge are prized by elements among extremist leaders and they are deployed to recruit other Arabs and Muslims, as well as less religious Saudis." (Bouceck 2009).

In the early 1990s, a handful of traditionally trained Mauritanian cadres courted and joined Usama Ben Laden's organization, mostly as religious advisers, imams, and preachers. An example is Mahfouz Ould al-Waled aka. Abu Hafs al-Mauritanī was reputedly part of Bin Laden's inner circle in Sudan, acting mostly as a religious counselor (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States 2004, p. 130). At the time of the 9/11 attacks, he was the director of the Kandahar Islamic Studies Center in Afghanistan and sat on al-Qaeda's Shura Council. After the US attack on Afghanistan in 2002, Al-Mauritanī fled to Iran, where he spent the following decade under house arrest. He was later transferred to Mauritania, and eventually released in July 2012 with the approbation of US authorities. Abu-Hafs owed part of his notoriety to his role in recruiting another member of the organization, Muhammadu b. Slahi. The latter was arrested in

2002 and sent to Guantanamo via Jordan after US investigators established he had met and interacted with some of the 9/11 attackers. Although the US authorities were never able to establish his responsibility in the attack, he admitted to being trained in an al-Qaida camp in Afghanistan in the 1990s. Slahi also admitted to having met some of the 9/11 attackers in Germany (he advised them to go to Afghanistan instead of Chechnya) and to having acted as imam in at least two mosques in both Germany and Canada. These places of worship were later linked to terror plots, including the 9/11 attack and the so-called Millennium plot thwarted by the US in 2000. Slahi thus became one of the most renowned Guantanamo Bay prisoners and was detained there for fourteen years before being released without charges and sent back to Mauritania in October 2016. While still in Guantanamo, Salahi authored and published his memoir, *Guantánamo Diary* (Ould Slahi 2015) the first and only book published by a Guantánamo detainee while still in detention. The book is a *New-York Times* best-seller now translated into over twenty languages. It has recently been adapted into an award-winning Hollywood motion picture titled "The Mauritanian" (Catsoulis 2021).[22]

During the conflict in post-2012 Mali, Mauritanian nationals figured prominently among the Islamic brigades, battling the government and giving sermons on jihadi platforms online. A former preacher in Nouakchott, Hamada Ould Mohamed Khayrou co-founded the *Harākīt al-Tawhid wā al-Jihād vī Ghārb Ifriqīyā* ("The Tawhid and Jihad Movement in West Africa", MUJAO), an al-Qaida In the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) affiliate (Abu al-Ma'āli 2012; Ould Mohamed 2012).

Other Mauritanian scholars hiding behind enigmatic pseudonyms (but always eager to use the al-Shinqīṭī nisbā) have used the Mauritanian trademark of classical Islamic erudition to make a name for themselves on hard-core jihadi websites, becoming the most vocal and prolific theologians of international jihad. A certain Abu al-Munzīr al-Shinqīṭī, whose real name is unknown, stands out as the most prolific and learned such online activist. Academics working on jihadism credit him [or them, since this might be an alias for a group of people] with a decisive influence on the concepts, the terminology and religious thinking adopted by extremist groups on virtually all global jihadi scenes before and after the Arab Spring. Abul-Munzīr reportedly persuaded several jihadi groups to adopt the name "Ansar al-Sharia" or some version of it in places as different as Syria, Libya, Yemen in Egypt, Tunisia, etc. (Wagemakers 2012; Ryan 2013).

In Mauritania, local Islamic schools (Maḥāẓīr), known to be freely accessible to all seekers of sacred knowledge, have become one of the favorite religious centers for those jihadists eager to strengthen their theological credentials. The most striking example is that of a one-time al-Qaida number two, Abu Yahya al-Libi (d. 2012) who boasted frequently of his theological training (Walsh and Schmitt 2012). Press reports emphasized how the advanced education he received in Mauritania in the 1990s qualified him uniquely for a top rank in the organization. Although named second-in-command to al-Zawahiri, the Supreme leader of al-Qaida in the 2010s, al-Libi insisted on styling himself as a theological enforcer (BBC 2012).

Collectively, the sections above show how diverse actors invoke Mauritania/Bilād Shinqīṭ for different purposes in different contexts and time-periods, pointing to the many ways in which Mauritania emerges in the global Muslim imagination as a useful myth. Yet, this same Bilād Shinqīṭ mythology obscures its social history and its rather complex political economy in Mauritania itself, as I will know demonstrate.

3.4. The Hidden Face of the Myth

Mythologization and idealization are important processes not only for what they reveal, but also for what they erase, omit, or silence. The historical emergence and development of Islamic culture in Mauritania indeed has some facets that are found nowhere else in most internal or external depictions of its influence. As Zareena Grewal rightly points out, while Mauritania looms large in American Muslims' religious imaginations as a result of Yusuf's mythmaking, most Muslim Americans know little of the history or politics of

this fabled country. Many might be surprised to learn it is the poorest in the Arab League or that it has been ruled by a series of brutal military juntas since independence" (Grewal p. 167).[23]

More relevant here is the complicated relationship between Islamic knowledge and social hierarchies in Mauritania. The country's prestigious Islamic reputation in both mainstream and extremist circles alike coexists with a long history of slavery and ethnic division. This is after all a multi-ethnic country of plural cultural heritage. The country's main ethnic groups are on the one hand the Biḍān (Arab-speaking people including Arabic-speaking former slaves, the ḥ'rāṭin)[24] and non-Arabic-speaking Afro-Mauritanian populations on the other hand. As evidenced by post-colonial tensions over ethnic inequality, identity remains a significant feature both within and between these two groups which, despite their differences, are all based on a complex caste-like system.

Within the Arabic-speaking Biḍān group, the only one claiming the Shinqīṭī label, clerical and warrior lineages predominate in social authority and political power, while the H'rāṭin sit at the bottom of the social structure along with others castes such as bards, herders, and blacksmiths. While warriors are historically in charge of political power and the management of war, clerical lineages (Zawāyā) are responsible for instruction, religious affairs, and Islamic knowledge production. Shinqīṭī scholars thus hail exclusively from the Zawāyā tribes. This social make-up and the legacy of slavery in the country (Mauritania was the last country on earth to abolish slavery, in 1981) are not unrelated to the development of the dynamic local Islamic culture. The clerical lineages of Mauritania could not possibly develop such a high level of learning if not for the slave system that was until recently widely practiced in the country, especially among Zawāyā lineages. This caste-like system allowed Zawāyā to free themselves from the many tasks of Saharan nomadic life and to develop the vibrant Islamic culture so closely associated with the image of the country. Yet, as H'rāṭin and anti-slavery activists are now claiming,[25] the religious elite worked tirelessly not only to exclude lower castes from access to Islamic schooling, but also to defend and maintain those provisions of Islamic law that allowed slavery to remain unchallenged for centuries. As I have shown in great detail elsewhere (Ould Ahmed Salem 2013a; Stille 2017), when the government requested that the main ulama of the country issue fatwas (legal opinions) in favor of the 1981 abolition, the overwhelming majority of the scholars consulted declined to do so. Several scholars advised the government to sponsor a compensation program in favor of the former masters, should the authorities move ahead with an abolition law. This is why a compensation provision ended up being included in the Abolition Law passed in July 1981. This explains how the post-colonial abolitionist movement in Mauritania progressively focused on the critique of clerical lineages and their role in using Islamic knowledge to prevent the emancipation of the H'rāṭin and the end of the vestiges of slavery. Events that took place recently in Mauritania show how deeply these issues shape local political debates.

For example, on 27 April 2012, Biram Dah Abeid, a locally famous abolitionist, held a demonstration near his neighborhood mosque and proceeded to burn a set of classic Islamic legal texts that he alleged have been used for centuries to justify slavery and social hierarchies in Mauritania. Predictably, Abeid was arrested the next day and crowds of demonstrators demanded that he be put to death for blasphemy. The book burning generated a national uproar but also launched an intense debate among religious scholars, politicians, and activists. The incident subsequently triggered counterdemonstrations by Abeid's supporters. Interestingly, the Islamic book burning took place after the Friday weekly communal prayer and with the blessing of an imam of H'rātin descent (Okeowo 2014). Two years later in December 2014, Muhammad W. Mkhaïtir, a young activist hailing from a lineage of blacksmiths, made an incendiary posting on Facebook in which he criticized the Zawāyā group and even Islam itself (including the Prophet Muhammad) for their alleged "congenial racism" and specifically for their demonization of traditional occupational groups such as the blacksmiths (lim'ālmīn) (Bullard 2014).

Both activists were promptly thrown into prison but continued to deny vehemently that they were apostates or heretics. They both explained that they intended to take a stand against the ways in which local ulama have continuously manipulated Islam and Sharia in order to sanction the oppression/marginalization of former slaves and other occupational groups. To them, desecrating some symbols of Islam was meant to attract attention and advocate for social justice. The two "defendants" were ultimately able to escape harsh sentences such as the death penalty or life in prison. Both apologized for their misdeeds and were subsequently freed after serving prison time: less than a year for Abeid (without trial) while Mkhaïtīr spent five years on death row before benefiting from a presidential pardon made under intense international pressure.

Another hidden feature of the Shinqīṭ mythology relates to the partial omission of women's contribution to Islamic scholarship in the country and even to their exclusion from local intellectual histories. I already mentioned how scholars recently brought to light the case of Khadija bint Muhammad Vall al-Samsadi al-Shinqīṭī, who had a brilliant career in 1940s Saudi Arabia. However, overall, although female Shinqīṭī scholars have contributed to all areas of classical Islamic scholarship, learned women are "easier to locate in oral traditions than in libraries," as Ghislaine Lydon aptly puts it (Lydon 2004, p. 68). Khadija b. al-'Aqil, who lived in the early nineteenth century, taught Aristotelian logic to the celebrated grammarian al-Mukhtar ibn Buna, and to Abdel Kader Kane, who in the nineteenth century led an important Islamic reform movement (known as the Torodo Revolution) in the Futa region (Robinson 1973). Yet, her work is mostly lost today (Lydon 2004, pp. 68–69). The role women play in Islamic education is often mentioned in oral histories of local knowledge transmission, including in the majority of prestigious ulama's autobiographies. Debates about the role of women in knowledge production and Sufis' orders have been a running theme in local religious history for quite some time (Frede 2014).

Finally, in addition to these tensions, non-Arabic-speaking Afro-Mauritanian ethnic groups (roughly a quarter of the population) do not identify with the Bilād Shinqīṭ label despite their contribution to Mauritania's Islamic scholarship and spiritual life as scholars and Sufi leaders. Hailing from the Senegal River valley, such groups tend to identify mostly with religious denominations and the Sufi brotherhood that dominate the Islamic scene in neighboring Senegal. To them, Bilād Shinqīṭ is an Arab label which does not include them as non-Arab sub-Saharan Africans.

While these aspects remain absent from the depiction of the Mauritania as a locus of Islamic higher learning and spirituality, it is obvious that the global Islamic status of the country has clearly had a heavy human cost that has only now being questioned locally in a context of intense social tensions. Such political debates are, however, unlikely to change the dynamism of the local Islamic knowledge tradition. Indeed, quite the contrary: H'rāṭin and members of lower castes (including blacksmiths) over the past decade has themselves actively begun to seek access to sacred Islamic knowledge, taking control of places of worship (mosques) and literally overwhelming the Maḥāẓīr. Yet, this process is only now beginning to yield some modest results and is likely to take few generations to bring about a social revolution (Ould Ahmed Salem 2013a; Stille 2017).

The hidden face of Shinqīt and its domestic political implications does not seem to affect the enduring reputation of Mauritania. Domestic politics seems especially disconnected from the ways in which Mauritanian global clerics with transnational ambitions and followings engage in global politics. Moreover, while previously Shinqītī scholars often accidently found themselves in the throes of politics abroad, the trend has recently taken a new dimension as evidenced by the trajectory of the renowned Mauritanian scholar, Shaykh Abdullah Bin Bayyah (b. 1935). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to engage with Bin Bayyah's remarkably long global career, I show here how this figure has come to epitomize the influence of Mauritanian scholars in the twenty-first century, taking it to unprecedented levels in terms of religious authority, politicization, and global reach.

4. Shinqīt and the Politics of Global Religious Authority

On August 13, the U.S. government proudly announced that it had brokered a "peace deal" between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, with Bahrain as a junior partner. While the Trump administration heralded the signing of the deal as a decisive step towards lasting peace in the Middle East, the announcement sent shock waves through Muslim publics around the world. Given the place of Palestine and especially Jerusalem in Muslims' imagination, the debate over the accord is quickly couched in religious terms. While those who opposed the agreement deemed it offensive, if not "blasphemous," to name it "the Abraham Accords," the parties to the agreement seemed to have anticipated the religious objection. The UAE authorities' effort did not stop there, however. The President of the Emirates High Fatwa Council, Shaykh Abdullah Bin Bayyah, rushed to stamp the accord with a supportive fatwa (legal opinion), in the process praising the Emirati leadership profusely for their work for the *maslaha* (common good) of the ummah (Muslim community) and, ultimately, for the Palestine cause. Moreover, Shaykh Bayyah argued, since judging of the opportunity of international agreements falls under the exclusive purview of the "ruler," the Emirati move is consistent with the principles of "Islamic law" (Emirates News Agency 2020). Naturally, the Emirati Fatwa Council, which Bin Bayyah has chaired since its inception in 2018, has been supporting every decision the government has made as part of a highly controversial international post-Arab Spring policy agenda.

Strikingly, many negative reactions to the Abraham Accord centered not so much on the Emirati decision to normalize relations with Israel but rather on Shaykh Abdullah Bin Bayyah's willingness to grant UAE controversial policies his highly authoritative approval. After all, in the words of Thomas Parker and Wala Quisay, "In 'ulūmī/scholarly circles, Shaykh Bin Bayyah is known as one of the greatest geniuses alive in the field of 'uṣūl al-fiqh (the methodology of jurisprudence) and is considered by some even to be a mujtahid (qualified to issue new Islamic rulings"). Parker and Quisay explain how Bin Bayyah's national background only increases his aura: "for Muslims in the West, [Bin Bayyah] is an embodiment of the symbolic authority of Mauritania, which in the Western Muslim imagination exemplifies one of the few places still untouched by modernity, mostly because of the great [number] of du'āt and imams in the West who did their studies in the West African nation" (Parker and Quisay 2019).

Bin Bayyah's latest political moves left experts of global Islam and politics flummoxed. Those who have been following the cleric's transnational trajectory came up with two competing explanations: for some, the Mauritanian global scholar represents a typical case of a "scholar-for-hire," while for others, Bin Bayyah is acting on deeply held doctrinal religious beliefs and, therefore, is literally shaping global and regional political agenda to serve his religious and political visions for the Muslim community. While fully unpacking these contradictory readings of Bin Bayyah's actions is beyond the scope of this paper, I summarize this debate here mainly to show how the embodiment of the Mauritanian brand of authoritative traditional Islamic scholarship uniquely empowered Bin Bayyah in global politics.

4.1. Beyond Obedience

Some analysts suggested that in subordinating himself to autocratic regimes, Bin Bayyah and other ulama single-handedly precipitated a "crisis of authority" in the Muslim world (al-Azami 2021), including among Western Muslims who until then regarded him as an independent cleric. However, others have regarded the Mauritanian scholar's decision to side with the rulers of the United Arab Emirates and other powerful regimes as perfectly consistent with his recent pro-government positions and past political career. In 2018, the Mauritanian scholar had sparked quite a controversy for his role as chairman of the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies (FPPMS).[26] The UAE-sponsored international body of Sunni ulama (which includes the Rector of *al-Azhar*) devoted the bulk of its 2018 annual meeting's final statement to praising the "UAE's positive role in global peace and tolerance" at a moment where the Saudi/Emirates-funded brutal war on Yemen was in

full swing. In November 2020, the same Council took the unusual step to publish a fatwa proclaiming The Muslim Brotherhood "a terrorist group" in line with the UAE position (Anonymous 2020). Far from being an outright ideological shift, siding with autocratic governments is often said to be perfectly consistent with Bin Bayyah's past career as state politician and Cabinet Minister in the single-party regime that ruled his native Mauritania for nearly two decades from 1960 to 1978. A traditionally trained Islamic scholar, Bin Bayyah nevertheless assumed several government positions in Mauritania (Minister of Justice, Vice President of the ruling party, etc.) first under President Mokhtar Ould Daddah (d. 2003) who was overthrown in a military coup in 1978, prompting Bin Bayyah to flee his country in 1981.

The following part of Bin Bayyah's life is typical of the Shinqītī scholar who migrates or flees abroad, only to lead a successful global career. While his trajectory conforms to that model, Bin Bayyah went further than any other previous Shinqītī in terms of both global religious and political influence. Taking up a full-time position as a Professor of Islamic jurisprudence in Jeddah in the 1980s, he quickly rose to fame for his expertise in legal theory and the so-called jurisprudence of Islamic finance, inter-faith relations, Islamic legal theory, and what he calls "the jurisprudence of reality" (fiqh al-wāqī').[27] His work is today dissected by Islamic studies academics interested in Islamic thought, Sharia, and political Islam.[28]

Bin Bayyah has however always been working with Muslim and non-Muslim governments alike. In his desire to brand himself as a global mufti, he adopted a more neutral, modern last name, quickly shedding the Shinqītī suffix (if he ever used it) to signal his universal ambitions and intra-Muslim "ecumenism." Sensing very early on the nature of the needs of the new global Muslim community and those governments confronted with the threat of terror in the name of Islam, Bin Bayyah effectively positioned himself to cater to the growing global demand for the jurisprudence of religious tolerance, inter-faith dialogue, moderation, religious freedom, deradicalization, Islamic finance, Western Muslims, etc. In addition to his work with the government of Saudi Arabia, he published many books, legal opinions, and statements on subjects as varied as Islamic finance, the jurisprudence of Muslims in the West, terrorism, and religious freedom.[29] He was one of the founding members of the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR). However, Bin Bayyah's work took an even more global turn in 2006 when he launched the London-based Global Center for Guidance and Renewal (GCGR)[30] with assistance from Hamza Yusuf and a number of influential Saudi scholars. By 2009, Bin Bayyah ranked thirtieth on the list of the five hundred most influential Muslims in the world (Esposito and Kalin 2009, p. 74). The scholar shot to yet more global fame in 2010 when his own GCGR co-organized the Mardin Conference (in Mardin, Turkey). Bin Bayyah and his sponsors sought to revisit and even re-write Ibn Taymiyyah's famous "Mardin fatwa", which extremists have interpreted as dividing the world between an "Abode of War" (*Dār al-Hārb*) and an "Abode of Islam" (*Dār al-Islām*). Devoted to revisiting the fourteenth-century legal opinion, which ideologues of jihad had used to justify violence, the gathering understandably became the object of intense international scrutiny. The Mardin conference concluded with a "New Mardin Declaration," which proposed a new reading of the original Mardin fatwa. It gave Bin Bayyah the opportunity to confirm his status as the leading Islamic scholar of moderation, inter-faith coexistence, and anti-radicalism.[31]

In recent years, Bin Bayyah has teamed up with his student Hamza Yusuf, as the latter became a major voice for neo-traditional, moderate Sunni Islam in the USA, especially since his co-optation as an adviser in the George W. Bush's White house after the 9/11/2001 terrorist attacks. Ever since, Bin Bayyah has been a frequent visitor to the USA, where he conveys his brand of traditional Islam, moderation, and fine scholarship with a Sufi bent[32] in places as varied as university campuses, think tanks, the United Nations, and various US Muslim organizations (al-Azami 2019b). Bin Bayyah's influence grew steadily in the presidential palaces and academic circles in North America and the Middle East. He is one of the most recognized Islamic scholars in both the Middle East and the West. In 2014, the

former US President Barack Obama praised Mauritania's most global scholar for initiating a new "Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies" and for proclaiming that: "We must declare war on war so the outcome will be peace upon peace". (Temple-Raston 2014) Bin Bayyah thus became the only Islamic scholar ever publicly quoted by a sitting President of the United States (The White House Archives 2014). Known in some circles in the US as "Hamza Yusuf's teacher," Bin Bayyah created an alliance of global Muslim clerics and government to confront ISIL (Islamic State in the Iraq and the Levant) (Bin Bayyah 2014b) with carefully crafted fatwas against violence and for the rights of religious minorities including "The Marrakech Declaration" (Bin Bayyah 2016).

4.2. Is a Shinqītī Scholar Shaping Global Muslim Politics?

While his alignment with powerful government's policies casts Bin Bayyah as the mouthpiece of sitting rulers and established authorities, alternative analysis of his trajectory offers a nuanced reading of his politics. Rather than being a classic case of alliance between venal ulama and unjust emirs, Bin Bayyah's support for some regimes is sometimes said to be the result of some deeply held conservative, doctrinal positions which have the added advantage of offering the cleric new opportunities to influence international policies. The Arab Spring proved to be one such important opportunity.

Over the years, with Egyptian Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Bin Bayyah has, without a doubt, become, one of the most authoritative Islamic scholars alive. However, unlike his Egyptian colleague, the Mauritanian shaykh has always been opposed to uprisings, radical political changes, especially revolutions. In the context of the 2011 Arab Uprising, Bin Bayyah early on championed a counter-revolutionary Islamic project. After being al-Qaradawi's deputy in the Doha-based International Union of Muslim Ulama (IUMU)[33] for over a decade (until 2013), Bin Bayyah officially distanced himself from the organization and its Qatari sponsor after the 2011 Arab Revolutions. Following his resignation from IUMU, the famous Mauritanian scholar then swiftly joined the United Arab Emirates, whose ruling family has been courting him for years to lead their religious state apparatus (al-Azami 2019a). In so doing, Bin Bayyah started advocating what some called "the theology of obedience" (Parker and Quisay 2019). According to Parker and Quisay, who suggested this terminology, the global influence of Bin Bayyah offers him the opportunity to garner worldwide influence among governments all the while upholding his religious beliefs on the necessity of favoring stability and peace over democratization. They regard Bin Bayyah as believing that the "combination of access to both the West, in terms of the Muslim audience and policy-makers, and the Middle East, in terms of sharī'ah and fiqh councils and governments, translates into an ability to influence policy on an international level" (Parker and Quisay 2019).

David Warren for his part suggested that, in articulating and defending a "jurisprudence of peace" to counter the Arab-Spring's "jurisprudence of Revolution," Bin Bayyah is far from being simply a "scholar for hire," someone allegedly providing "ex post facto legitimization" to powerful conservative governments. Instead, in Warren's reading, the Mauritanian cleric is in fact pursuing a religious and political agenda rooted in a full-fledged political theory of "Islamic autocracy" duly developed in his scholarship. The "jurisprudence of peace" is therefore part of Bin Bayyah's long held assumptions about the perils of democracy and the "merits" of authoritarian rule.

Bin Bayyah is thus not simply acting on behalf of powerful governments against compensation. Rather, he is advocating for his own political interpretation of Islamic law and Muslim government (Warren 2020). Moreover, as Warren argues, contrary to what some might have thought, Bin Bayyah anti-revolutionary positions do not stem from his adherence to political conservatism and traditionalism. Rather, his "justification of Islamic autocracy is deeply indebted to modernist rhetoric and idioms of consultative government, representation, and accountability" (Warren 2020). While such theory conceives of democracy as "the empowerment of the majority," it gives "little consideration to the rights of the individual in the face of state power" (Warren 2021, p.74). This interpretation

thus casts a new light on the Mauritanian cleric's religious activism. Instead of merely serving powerful rulers and their controversial policies, "Bin Bayyah's jurisprudence of peace (. . .) cohered with the UAE's foreign policy goals and efforts to create a new state brand (. . .) of peace and tolerance" (Warren 2021, p. 74). He thus appears to be "actively shaping" the United Arab Emirates policies at a crucial moment in history at which both "Doha and Abu Dhabi should be considered central nodes in the transnational Muslim moral geography alongside historical scholarly centers such as Cairo, Medina, or Qom" (Warren 2021, p. 3).

Bin Bayyah therefore seems to be deliberately establishing himself at the center of ongoing struggles over changing topographies and geographies of religious and political authority in the Muslim world. At the very least, his trajectory illustrates how Mauritanian ulama locate themselves at the heart of global circuits of Islamic authority and international politics.

However, Mauritanian global scholars' politics is hardly homogenous. For example, Muhammad al-Hassan Dedew (b. 1963), another famous global Shinqītī Islamic figure and expert of Hadīth, tends to lean on the Muslim Brotherhood. Often presented as the "spiritual leader" of the Mauritanian Islamist party Tawassoul, Dedew's influence is genuinely global. This popular cleric close to al-Qaradawi and Qatar is perfectly at ease leading a "*glocal* career" between his homeland, the Gulf, Turkey, Malaysia, West Africa, etc. (Ould Ahmed Salem 2013b). Other Mauritanian global figures could also be mentioned here. Shaykh Mohamed Sidiya Ould Jdoud (nicknamed "al-Nawawi" after a famous classical Hādith scholar) whose Islamic school (Maḥẓārā) in Mauritania is a favorite destination for Salafis from all over the word, is one of the most important representatives of quietist (apolitical) Salafism. As such, his peers coopted him to be Vice Chairman of their newly created International Association of Muslim Scholars during its founding meeting in Kuwait in January 2010 (Ould Mohamed 2012).

5. Conclusions

Mauritania might be peripheral to world affairs, but its robust Islamic culture and Islamic networks are central to transnational Islamic trends and ideas. In this paper, I traced the influential political economy of Mauritanian Islamic scholarship. I took a moderately long historical view in order to illuminate the ways in which Shinqīṭ/Mauritania's identity is being enacted in the global Islamic public sphere from the 19th century to the 21th century. The local Islamic high culture did not evolve in isolation but rather in interaction with its wider environment. I showed how Bilād Shinqīṭ's reputation increased over time on many continents, in starkly different conjunctures and circumstances. I uncovered the dynamics of transformation of an Islamic cultural world known for the mastery of the main components of classical Islamic knowledge such as encyclopedism, memorization of the core Islamic texts, mastery of the Arabic language, especially poetry, mobility, global outreach and local continuity. I described how Shinqīṭ's scholarly authority has historically emerged and how it continues today to be articulated, performed and even re-invented by a variety of actors in different contexts for a range of objectives. Generations of Mauritanian/Shinqīṭī scholars have asserted their Islamic culture and authoritative knowledge on a global scale without interruption over the course of the last two centuries. These figures have consistently been more instrumental to the reputation of Bilād Shinqīṭ than, say, its rediscovery by recent Muslim western converts or its supposedly timeless and peerless history of Islamic classical learning. The spread and global outreach of Shinqīṭ Islamic scholars, texts, and methods of learning resulted in an increasingly idealized image of Shinqīṭ at home and abroad. I illustrated how Muslims elsewhere have come to look to a somewhat imagined Bilād Shinqīṭ as one of the most authentic centers of learning and religious authority. Mauritania's Islamic culture continues to exhibit a high degree of resilience and global relevance. Islamic scholars and Muslim public intellectuals from Mauritania are often seen today as the embodiment of an authentic, classical, desert-bound Islamic discursive tradition. (Ould Ahmed Salem 2021). Through *Global Shinqīt*, I document

the ways in which Muslim Saharan societies assert their relevance and scholarly authority on a global scale, showing ultimately how the so-called peripheries of the Muslim shape central traits of what we have come to identify as global Islam. Global Shinqit shows that whomever wants to "speak for Islam" ought to be able to successfully claim, project and exert their scholarly and religious authority on a global scale. To do so require them however not so much to speak from a given locale or institutional platform, but rather to be able to use opportunities afforded to them by a combination of factors such as the solidity of their indigenous tradition of learning, the intellectual circumstances of the time, a high degree of mobility, some adaptability and a considerable amount of political clout.

More research is needed to fully document the trends illustrated here mostly through personal trajectories. Aside from a more systematic prosopography of Mauritanian global Islamic scholars, additional investigations could explore the Maḥāẓīr (religious schools) including through their successive transformations as well as through the trajectories of some of their many graduates. The dissemination and influence of the Maḥāẓīr's classical curricula deserves a closer study. However, "Global Shinqīṭ" is not only related to the work of classically trained individual scholars (ulama). Reconstructing a full picture of "Global Shinqīṭ" means covering the activities and experiences of regular teachers, qadis, preachers, spiritual advisers, librarians, etc. Similarly, other forms of evidence will need to be explored. In the framework of my larger project, I specifically collect more data on the currency of Bilād-Shinqīṭ as incarnated in cultural objects and intellectual products. For example, I explore the global reception of original Shinqīṭī texts and books which have never been systematically studied. I mentioned the success of Muhammad al-Amin al-Shinqīṭī's influential multivolume Qur'ānic exegesis, *Adaw' al-Bayān* and Muhammad al-Habib Mayaba's hadīth collection, *Zād al-Muslīm.* I expand the list to include other titles such as *Mushtahā al-Khārif*, the famous al-Khādīr b. Mayaba's anti-tijāni pamphlet, one of the most controversial books ever written on the Tijāniyyā. Such exploration of high impact Mauritanian Islamic literature includes Sid'Ahmed al-Amin's book *al-Wāsit*. This seminal work has been instrumental in building an enduring image of Bilād-Shinqīṭ as a coherent and rich intellectual center of classical poetry and classical Islamic knowledge. The volume also shaped Mauritanians' own vision of their literary past and cultural identity. I thus investigate how and why the trope of Bilād Shinqīṭ remains as powerful in the popular media, including on the internet, as well as in scholarly circles in today's Islamic Republic of Mauritania itself. The phenomenon takes many forms both at the popular and the state levels.

Approached through these various angles, *Global Shinqīṭ* proves to be a useful lens to assess some of the momentous transformations affecting the authoritative in Islam and especially the relationship between knowledge, scholarly performance, and Muslim politics. Moreover, since a considerable part of the religious power in global Islam hinges on the ability to determine what type of learning tradition represents authoritative knowledge, this case study could help understand how the power of religious authority is imagined, construed, employed, contested, transformed, and politicized.

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Notes

[1] Bilād Shinqīṭ literally means "The land/country of Shinqīṭ". Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, Shinqīṭ (Shinguiṭī) is a former Caravan city located in today Northern Mauritania (Adrar region). The small village is today renowned for its collections of rare Arabic manuscripts, learned families and medieval architecture. See (Kane 2007).

2 ʻĀʻiḍ al-Qarnī is the author of a mega best-seller titled: *lā-Tahzān* [Do not be depressed!], an adaptation of Dale Carnegie's self-help books. See (al-Qarnī 2008).

3 For a reassessment of scholarship on Islam in Africa, see (Kane 2016) and Kane's contribution in this Special Issue.

4 Such characterization is ubiquitous in the public sphere and the medias in Mauritania and elsewhere. See Section 3 below.

5 Charles Stewart was the first to develop and document this line of argumentation. See (Stewart 2018).

6 ḥassaniyya: Saharan Arabic dialect spoken in today Mauritania, southern Algeria and Morocco, Northern Mali.

7 Scholarship on al-Shaikh Mā al-ʻAynayn intellectual and political career in Arabic and French is far too extensiveto be listed here. For a bibliography, see (Boubrik 1999).

8 On the tremendous changes brought by this era, see, for example, (Gelvin and Green 2013).

9 As he insists in a few places in his poetry, he was first and foremost trained by his mother, his father, uncle, older brother, not to mention his "wonderful, pious, incomparable masters." See (al-Shinqīṭī 1901, p. 9).

10 There he made a name for himself for his scathing reviews and fierce critique of others scholars' work. For a list of the scholarly controversies in which he was embroiled, see (al-Shinqīṭī 1911, p. 389). See also al-Turkuzī's own book (al-Shinqīṭī 1901, pp. 2–5).

11 On this figure of orientalism and Arabic studies, see (El Shamsy 2020, pp. 17–19)

12 An account of this story is available in al-Turkuzī own writings. See (al-Shinqīṭī 1901).

13 For a collection of such testimonies, see (al-Shinqīṭī 2007).

14 The expression is ubiquitous in his polemics with Medina scholars. See (al-Shinqīṭī 1901).

15 Gubara writes about the eighteenth-century African scholar émigré to Cairo, Muhammed ibn Muhammed al-Kishnāwi (d. 1741) from Katsina, in what today is Nigeria.

16 For a first presentation and partial translation in French, see (Miské 1970).

17 Mahmud Muhammad Shaker (d.1997), a famous Egyptian manuscript expert mused that al-Turkuzī al-Shinqīṭī must have been the one doing the heavy lifting and certainly not Abduh (Shaker 1991, p. 8). For a recent study of al-Jurjāni, see (Harb 2020). Avigail Noy entirely omits al-Shinqīṭī's central role in the edition of this key text, mentioning only the "endeavor of Muhammad ʻAbduh and Rashid Ridha." See: (Noy 2018, p. 11).

18 For a detailed account of this period and the dealings of Val-Khayr al-Shinqīṭī with the Kuwati authorities, see (al-Rushāyd [1926] 1978, pp. 206–7 and 240–44.).

19 The bibliographical literature on al-Shaykh al-Shinqīṭī is voluminous. See (Maāzī 2016; al-Shinqīṭī 2007).

20 The total population of Mauritania was around one million people in 1960.

21 See his Yusuf's many YouTube videos about his experience with this shaykh. One example is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOsAlxJqgxI&feature=youtu.be (accessed on 1 September 2020).

22 The Mauritanian, Director: Kevin McDonald, starring Jodie Foster, Tahar Rahim, Benedict Cumberbatch. Foster won the Gloden Globe 2021 of best actress for her portrayal of Nancy Hollander, Slahi's Chicago-based lawyer.

23 In fact, military rule in Mauritania began only in July 1978, eighteen years after independence.

24 The word is also sometimes spelled ḥarāṭīn. In any case, sing. ḥartani, fem. ḥartāniyyā.

25 On the history and transformation of social movement of the H'rāṭin, see (Ould Ahmed Salem 2018); on the politics of ethnicity and Islam in Mauritania, see (Jourde 2017).

26 Arabic: *Muntadā Ta'zīz al-sīlm vi al-Mujtama'āt al-Muslimā.*

27 On this foundational theme in his thought, see (Bin Bayyah 2014a).

28 In addition to the works cited below, see for example: (March 2009, pp. 230–45 and pp. 264–72) and (Larsen 2018, pp. 89–100).

29 For a more complete bibliography of Bin Bayyah, see (Warren 2020, pp. 73–120). See also Bin Bayyah's bilingual (Arabic-English) website available here: http://binbayyah.net (accessed on 10 July 2021).

30 Arabic: *al-Markaz al-'Ālamī li-l-Tajdīd wa-l-Tarshīd*.

31 For a comprehensive account by an academic expert of Taqī al-Dīn Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328), see (Michot 2011).

32 Bin Bayyah hails from a family that belongs to the Shāzilīyyā Sufi order.

33 Arabic: *al-Ittihād al'Alamī li-'Ulamā al-Muslimīn.*

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