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## The Invasion of *Jinn* Spirits: Modernity and the Bedouin

It was clear to her brothers that Mariam was possessed by a *jinni* (sing. *jinni*, pl. *jinn*). Her behavior was erratic; one day she was listlessly sitting cross-legged without uttering a word, and the next getting into aggressive fits throwing harangues at anyone who passed by in language that was either unintelligible or abusive. She fought with her husband, refused to have sex with him, and was nasty toward her co-wife. Even worse, she was suspected to have spread malignant gossip about her cousin that led to the annulment of a marriage proposal. Fortunately, this happened during the summer school vacation – Mariam worked as a special education teacher in town – and her odd state was noticed only by her immediate family and neighbors who kept it as much a secret as one can in a community where most people know one another. The story of Mariam's misfortune was told to me one warm spring day in hushed voices laced with dread. As the night fell, other stories followed, stories of magic, bewitchment, mystery and fear. Hers was a *jinni* of a non-descript nature. The *jinn* who claimed the body of her neighbor down the street had a name, a gender, and a place of origin; the beautiful European *jinniya* who fell in love with him was called Janet.

Spirit possession was an unexpected turn in my anthropological inquiry. At no previous point in time during the twenty five years of my involvement with a Bedouin community in the Negev desert in Israel had I noted a significant presence of *jinn* in people's lives. For the next three weeks I was busily collecting stories of their interference. The local Muslim cleric and a *jinn* expert instructed me about their nature, their properties, and the remedies against them and allowed me to witness the means and ways of their exorcism. I remained skeptical throughout my inquiries because the victims were usually educated professionals in the nascent middle class with the ambition to develop a modern and progressive community.

The rich anthropological literature interprets the belief in *jinn* variously as an arrangement of cultural memory, political strategy, mental illness, 'folk' logic, or individual subjectivity (see Boddy 1989; Bowen 1993; Crapanzano 1980; Siegel 2003;

Gregg 2005; Khan 2006). In this article, I explore the recent encounters of a bedouin community with *jinn* to show how the stories about their sudden appearance are laced with fear of the perceived disorder in communal and individual relationships. As *jinn* are believed to thrive on conflict, chaos and uncontrolled emotions, their emergence might be taken as an indicator of the state of the community at the moment. Modernization of the bedouin society brought a shift in norms and ambiguity about rules and as such the town became a ripe environment for the *jinn* to prey on. I suggest that the sudden invasion of the *jinn* can be attributed to the partial absorption of the various discourses of modernity by the community at large as well as by individuals within it. Modernity came in uneven bundles of components and although the bedouin culture uses many of these components creatively, some are still misaligned with the social structure to which they are applied. Furthermore, as argued by Appadurai (1996), the repertoire of ideas, images, concepts, and narratives that move across groups and cultures in the global terrain do so in an unpredictable fashion. They are mediated by indigenous concepts and practices – in this case the local concepts of health and well being – in the process of which the lines between the rational and the imaginary are blurred.

The Bedouin of the Negev, a desert region in the northern Sinai, a pastoral nomadic society dependent on herding sheep, goats, camels and organized along the principles of a segmentary lineage system, became transformed into wage earning urban dwellers in the course of the last half a century. The process of their sedentarization was gradual and had already started in the times of the Ottoman Empire but it dramatically accelerated in the period following the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948.<sup>1</sup> At first, tent encampments gave way to corrugated iron and wooden plank shantytowns and later to urban conglomerations of ugly cement buildings. Although currently the majority of bedouin live in towns, shantytowns did not completely disappear from the desert landscape. Conscious of the benefits urban centers provide (electricity, schools and health clinics), many others settled in vicinity encircling towns with a ring of slums. The towns are located in desolate corners of the desert far from Israeli population hubs to which they are connected only by a single road. To those who do not expect them, they appear rather suddenly like a mirage amidst plastic bags – the scourge of the Middle East – blown hither and thither by the wind. As they are built in approximately the same period of time

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<sup>1</sup> In the 1940s, some 75,000 Bedouin inhabited the Negev (Marx 1967). Following the establishment of Israel, most of them became refugees in the neighboring Arab countries. The Israeli army moved most of the remaining 11,000 bedouin to a reservation the size of a fraction of their former territory. The reservation was ruled by a military administration, which strictly controlled the movements of bedouin by a system of permits. Expropriation of land by the State, territorial displacement, and restriction on movement eradicated the nomadic and semi-nomadic economy as a result of which most men undertook wage labor in the expanding Israeli economy.

(in the 1980s and 90s), there is little that distinguishes one from another. Houses tend to be large enough to accommodate an extended family but their size is deceptive and does not necessarily indicate prosperity. The size of families also tends to be large so it is not uncommon to have a couple of dozen people living under the same roof. With the population of approximately 50,000 – about one-third of the entire bedouin population in the Negev – Rahat is the largest of all the settlements.<sup>2</sup> It is a social mosaic of people of different origins and kin groups, and predictably a fertile site for communal unrest and conflict. Along a practically complete eradication of pastoral nomadism, the settled bedouin experienced a degree of social disruption; urbanity and concomitant new economic configuration had repercussions for social structure. First, the emergent economic differentiation altered the traditional system of stratification based upon kinship. Some fared better than others and while a few descent groups, individual families, even individuals became prosperous and rose in social status, most became trapped in the cycle of poverty, lack of education and structural underemployment. Among other factors, this new economic differentiation and stratification is responsible for the emergence of new political ideologies. The urban Bedouin, particularly those who made it into the middle classes, are in search of a new definition of their identity. This search took them from initial malaise, to a brief experimentation with Palestinian nationalism and most recently to Islamic fundamentalism. Where social change undermined local customs, the resulting vacuum opened the way for a more fundamentalist approach as a counter-force to modernization, westernization, emergent liberalism, but also cultural disintegration. Not only is the Bedouin absorption of modernity fragmentary but so too is the assimilation of Islamic ideology. Nor is it a simple issue. The Bedouin do not have an elaborate spiritual tradition. For a long time they were known among their sedentary agricultural neighbors for their rather rudimentary knowledge of Islam and teased for lack of piety. Being a Muslim increasingly implies a battlefield for contesting and opposing discourses on authenticity, tradition, and modernity. In the process of contestation surrounding 'authenticity' and 'tradition', certain Islamic symbols are actively chosen (or imposed) as crucial markers of cultural similarity with the Islamic world and cultural difference with others. Debates that emerged around the issue of modernization and the meaning of modernity occur in a highly charged political context of conflicting Palestinian and Israeli nationalisms. Many reject westernization and the homogenizing processes inherent in globalization yet they are not positioned outside the structures they so vehemently criticize: they hold government jobs, study at universities, or benefit from state assistance. Modernity is thought possible on the one hand through skills and scientific knowledge, and devout religious practice on the other, both of which imply a break with past traditions. Islam also represents a way of overcoming what the Bedouin label as backward

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<sup>2</sup> In 2009 Rahat became the second largest Arab town in Israel.

and traditional features of their society, while the Islamization of daily life entails the de-beduinization of culture. Bedouin practices, which do not fall squarely in the generic Islamic tradition or contradict it, are discouraged, and the local cultural tradition has gradually been brought into accord with scriptural teaching and Islamized. This process is visible in the performance of ritual, daily dress (the substitution of the colorfully embroidered *thob* dress for a plain *jilbab*), disapproval of the vener-ation of holy men and pilgrimages to the shrines of saints, the denunciation of the use of talismans, etc. Not only Bedouin material culture but also previous efforts to imitate Israeli architecture have been obscured by a more 'Arabic' style borrowed from the Gulf countries – ornamental Quranic inscriptions, pictures of Hassan al-Banna<sup>3</sup>, decorative sculptures of coffee jugs placed over entrances, and spiraling towerlets. These new artifacts are evident manifestations of the influence of the media broadcasted from the Arab states, pilgrimages to Mecca, and visits to Gaza, the West Bank or Jordan. The new middle class is educated, bilingual, technologically sophisticated and integrated into the Israeli labor market. Although education is not its only formative factor, it has guaranteed a leap in economic and social advancement. This is why the retreat into what is called a "traditional" belief system as an explanation for social ailments is puzzling.

In what follows, I provide a short account of *jinn* from the perspective of Islamic tradition and its local Bedouin interpretation. The *jinn* have a rank and status in the Islamic universe. The most important textual verification of *jinn* is found in the Quran in Sura 72, titled *Al-Jinn*, as well as in prophetic tradition (*hadith*). The *jinn*<sup>4</sup> are believed to be creatures made by God out of smokeless fire at the beginning of time much in the same way humans were made of clay and angels of light. Like humans, they form communities in the confines of which they conduct their lives: they eat, sleep, marry, produce children who then go to schools, follow careers, and die. In contrast to humans, *jinn* are capable of form changing, fast movement, great acts of strength, and long lives. Some are said to be as old as 1000 years. They know no limitations to time or space and can easily move between historical epochs and places. Like humans, they possess free will and are capable of making moral choices; they are drawn to both good and evil and are endowed with emotions and rational faculties. As with the human world, the word of Islam was sent to *jinn* through the Prophet Muhammad; in other words, *jinn* preexist Islam. Logically then, they follow different religions; some accepted Islam while others remained faithful to Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, or any other of the multitude of religious be-

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<sup>3</sup> Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949) was an Egyptian social and political reformer and the founder of Muslim Brotherhood, one of the largest and most influential 20th century Muslim revivalist organizations.

<sup>4</sup> The *jinn* do not exhaust the world of spirits in Islamic belief. There are also 'afrit, *maridin*, and the most frightening of all, the *ghul*.

liefs. They also have names, gender and distinct personalities.<sup>5</sup> Muslims believe that the *jinn* and humans share the earthly world but lead largely separate lives. While the *jinn* are invisible to the human eye (their name derives from the word *ijtinan*, which means "to be concealed from sight"), they can observe the existence of humans. On occasion, however, the two cross paths whereby the *jinn* enter the spaces inhabited by humans and often assume surreal forms, commonly appearing as a black dog in the least frightening version and as a two-legged donkey with horns in its extreme version.<sup>6</sup> One should never throw a stone at a black dog lest it might be a *jinni* in disguise who would inevitably seek revenge. In other local traditions, the *jinn* inhabit dark and deserted places, caves, and graveyards (Padwick 1924; Gregg 2005; Boddy 1989). The Bedouin believe that the creatures have a liking for all things dirty and smelly but water in particular; stale stinky water serves as a conduit between the world of humans and that of the *jinn*. They cherish darkness, which makes dusk and night dangerous times for humans. One has to be mindful about pouring out a bucket of water, or for that matter sweeping the yard at night, lest by mistake it splashes at a *jinn* lurking in the vicinity. The greatest danger from such disturbance of the *jinn* is that they may in revenge possess the disturber. To avoid misfortune, one is advised to utter the phrase '*bismillah*' (in the name of God)<sup>7</sup> while engaging in any activity that involves dirty water, particularly when in contact with a human body, such as taking a bath (*hamam*), entering a latrine or a toilet. In Bedouin oral tradition, *jinn* are never benevolent, always devious and humans are in perpetual danger as *jinn* can take possession of their body at a whim. *Jinn* do not inspire but seduce to destruction; they 'possess' to destroy, and not to make things possible.

*Jinn* possession can cause a person to have seizures and to speak in incomprehensible tongues. The possessed are unable to think or speak of their own will. Numbness of limbs, a rash on the arms and legs, pulsating veins, stomach or back pain, persistent headache, and nausea can all be signs of possession but so can nightmares, lethargy, or aggressiveness. *Jinn* are also blamed for women's infertility or reproductive difficulties. Not all types of disease and illness are attributed to *jinn* possession. In fact, the Bedouin are not necessarily given to magical thinking and prefer scientific explanations with regard to any abnormal condition. Generally, they seek modern treatment by consulting a medical doctor and follow the course of treatment prescribed by him. However, if the symptoms do not ease as expected

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<sup>5</sup> The most infamous is a *jinniya* (female *jinn*), known in North Africa as Aisha Qandisha who typically appears to men as an irresistible and ravishing woman. Failing to notice her camel's (or goat's) feet, they fall under her charm and soon discover themselves to be impotent with any other woman, including their wife, without Aysha's consent (Crapanzano 1980).

<sup>6</sup> Not unlike in Christian tradition (see Christian 1996), children in particular are endowed with a gift of being able to see the *jinn*; if one turns around and sees an unusual form and then one turns around again seeing it gone, it probably was a *jinn*.

<sup>7</sup> Precautions are woven into daily customs and etiquettes.

but recur or magnify and an abnormal state of body and mind continues, there is then reason to suspect interference of the spirits. Importantly, although the *jinn* seem to act in a whimsical and arbitrary fashion, not all people are equally susceptible to possession. The human body serves only as a receptacle for the spirits and individuals have a degree of control/agency over the access they grant. True, a person might be at the wrong place at the wrong time and unwillingly provides an opportunity for the *jinni* to enter his body; nonetheless it is his inner state that makes him a potential victim. Bodies are vulnerable when they are in a state of discord and disharmony. Thus, in a fashion, an unbalanced person facilitates the descent of the spirits and consequently makes him – through actions or emotions – an agent of his own possession. So what was it that caused Mariam's possession?

### **The case of Mariam, the merry working woman**

According to community standards, Mariam married rather late. At the age of 26, she willingly became the second wife of her maternal cousin Ahmad.<sup>8</sup> Like a number of educated girls – she is a graduate of a Teachers College – she married a man whose education came to an end after only four years at school. She married happily and at the ceremony I attended radiated satisfaction and delight. The couple settled in a downstairs apartment of Ahmad's house while his first wife occupied the upper floor with the children she had borne him. Ahmad's wives kept separate households but cooperated when necessary and in the eyes of the community formed a peaceful union. At the end of her first year of marriage, Mariam gave birth to Mahmud about the same time that Muhammad was born to the first wife. The passing years cast some doubt at this apparent marital bliss as the first wife became thinner and left the house less often. Three births later Mariam was still cheerful and happily kept me informed about the ins and outs of life in a polygamous family. If someone was to be possessed by a *jinni* I would have expected it to be the first wife since they are often known to suffer upon their husband's second marriage and therefore I was surprised to hear of Mariam's malady.

The *jinni* might have gone undetected had she not gone on the pilgrimage to Mecca. Indeed, she had delayed the *hajj* for a long time – allegedly under the influence of the *jinni* – giving such excuses as having to take care of her small children, lack of money, or some other problem. Unfortunately, the pilgrimage only worsened her state. The *jinni* is said to have left her at the entrance to Kaaba, the most holy site in Islam, as he had to since *jinn* cannot bear sacred spaces. Inevitably, he caught up with her later but the experience of the pilgrimage left him unsettled, confused, and aggravated. Consequently, Mariam's behavior deteriorated. She began using 'ugly' words that sow unrest – words that were accusatory of others conducting unseemly deeds, repeatedly expressed desire to die, was often listless as if without

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<sup>8</sup> For the rising rates of polygamous marriages, see Jakubowska (2005).

a will of her own and when she came to herself, behaved without the composure required of women, and finally, spoke in a bizarre tongue that could not be understood. As her fitful state continued and word of Mariam's odd behavior began to spread, her husband sought family counsel. The family advised him to call upon the help of sheikh Aodeh, the exorcist.

Mariam, as I knew her, was always a person who explored the furthermost limits of social behavior. She had a lively but loud personality and was often outspoken about people and relations in the community. She also had a wide network of female relatives as well as friends whom she had met at school and at the college. Her job made her commute to the other end of town and Mariam usually took her time coming home by making visiting rounds and drinking endless cups of tea on the way. She did not need to hurry back home as her children were cared for by her co-wife and her husband, who was employed in construction, returned home late. Mariam did not keep an ideal house. People thought that her children were not properly looked after and many wondered on what she was spending the money she earned. Her wide social circle provided information on the latest social events in the community. She always knew about the most recent developments in marriage proposals, amounts of bride-price paid in marriage, the latest fashion, deaths and illnesses. This information is indeed valuable but needs to be cherished, treated with discretion, and used wisely. Mariam had difficulties with this; she was a gossip. She talked too much in a society where reputation is sometimes the only possession and breach of trust can have dire consequences.

The experience of *jinn* possession made Mariam a changed person. It also changed the relations in her polygamous family. She became mindful of her children, started to spend more time at home and developed a better working relationship with her co-wife who cheered up considerably. But she remained fearful. Even after the treatment was successfully completed she was afraid of being alone at home and took to reading the Quran frequently. With her newly found conscientiousness she instantly recognized the symptoms of possession in her sister-in-law.

### **The case of Sabiha and her mood swings**

Perhaps for Muhammad, Mariam's brother, the *jinn* are more real than for others because they have brought misery into his house and his family, the family he had desired more than anything else and had fought long and hard for. It was not easy to marry Sabiha, the girl of his dreams. They were born to related lineages and grew up in houses within sight of one another. Usually, such a close relationship is an asset when considering marriage because kinship and physical proximity are believed to promote solidarity, but not in this case. His brothers advised against the marriage. They had nothing against the girl but were generally not fond of women in that family. One must take a look at the behavior of the mother to know how the daughter will turn out, they said. He fought with his brothers about marrying

Sabiha and fended off doubts on the part of her family that was equally skeptical about the wisdom of his marriage proposal. Muhammad was at that time a meager construction worker and they had hoped for a better marriage prospect for their daughter who was a university student. Sabiha was flattered by the dedication with which Muhammad pursued her but rather non-committal as is proper for a well-raised girl. Finally, he won and married the girl he loved but this was not to be a match made in heaven. Soon afterwards he became alarmed by the noticeable difference in her behavior; from a nice girl who gladly helped out in the parental household she was changed into an unpleasant woman who neglected her duties. She was rigid in bed if she shared it with him at all, and was suspected of mistreating their young daughter. There was also the puzzling difference between the way she spoke with him on the phone with sweetness and concern and the way she acted while at home where nothing pleased her. When at home she looked for an excuse to fight and was inconsistent with her demands, for example, she insisted on them taking a vacation together, but once they had done so, she refused to leave the hotel even for a meal. Sabiha cannot explain her own behavior either but something makes her act this way the minute she gets close to home. For a while it was thought that her mood swings resulted from the pressure of combining her studies at the university with domestic life but the summer vacation brought no relief. Even then she used any excuse to be away from home, leaving the child under the care of her mother-in-law. When she did stay at home she wore a rather sour face.

Muhammad was desperate. He considered himself to be a caring husband and a devoted father. There was little he could do but divorce Sabiha or beat her as her brothers advised him to do. He could also send her back to her father, which he would rather have avoided since he deeply respected his father-in-law but he would have to unless the sheikh could chase the *jinni* away. This would not be the first case of *jinn* possession in his wife's family. The body of Sabiha's sister was also invaded by a *jinni* whose presence manifested itself by a persistent rash on her hands that would not go away after medical treatment. Muhammad recalls how her body instantly reacted to the very presence of the sheikh. First she began to shake and then went rigid but his intervention helped. Encouraged by this experience, Muhammad fetched the sheikh. Sabiha was asleep at the time and did not wake up throughout his administrations, wondering later where the bruises on her body had come from. Her state of mind improved and she felt happier after the treatment; unfortunately for her and Muhammad the effects only lasted about a week-and-a-half, after which she lapsed into her former state.

Is this simply a case of unrequited love? The case of a smart girl with ambitions who married a good hearted but not well educated man with whom she could not find fulfillment? The discourse of love as the driving force behind marriage came to the Bedouin society as part and parcel of modernization. Marriage used to be regulated by family politics. A successful match determined access to pastures, formed

political alliances, and extended or cemented relations within lineage and outside of it. Romantic love, although celebrated in poetry and songs, had little to do with it. As the society individualized and greater pressure was put on fission than on fusion, the notion of romantic love as a prerequisite for marriage gained strength along with the notion of marital compatibility. To the distress of both Muhammad and Sabiha, both discourses are only partially and unequally absorbed.

The cases of Mariam and Sabiha should not make the impression that only women, or in particular obstinate young women who attempt to shed social conventions, are in danger of *jinn* possession. Women indeed constitute the majority of victims for a good reason; they occupy a vulnerable position in a patrilineal society and in turn make men vulnerable. Through marriage, they provide links between kin groups that are essential to the formation of networks of mutual assistance. This is the source of their personal empowerment, but also structural weakness. Patriarchal ideology demands from a woman unequivocal dedication to the family of her husband while emotive attachments oftentimes pull her towards her family of origin. The social bonds they forge are fragile and broken women are caught in the web of conflicting interests and divided loyalties while their intermediary position makes them distrusted by either side. Women's structural liminality is exacerbated among the middle class with its newly acquired model of the individuated nuclear family and the desire for privacy. Unfortunately, this model is awkwardly positioned in a system that makes women ultimately dependent on their male relatives, foremost their fathers and brothers, in the case of divorce, abandonment, or widowhood. Furthermore, as noted in anthropological literature (Lewando-Hundt 1984), Bedouin women are prone to express distress and unhappiness through illness, as illness is a socially legitimate reason to seek and receive attention from others, most notably male family members.

It is also clear that the development of women's education and employment is shifting expectations with regard to gender roles and the propriety of women's behavior. In her study of magic practices in Morocco, Kapchan (1996: 236) states that:

in discussing magical practices, women are exploring the furthermost limits of social behavior, vicariously entering into possibilities offered by acts of transgression. Talk of magic stretches the limits of moral license by exercising maximal liberty in verbal performance.

I suggest that spirit possession among the urban Bedouin performs the same function. It allows women to act according to a different code while dispensing responsibility for doing so. This is, however, not to say that women are the only victims as the family saga of spirit possession continues.

## The case of Najwa's misbehaving husband

Najwa married well, a handsome lawyer from a prestigious but traditional Bedouin family. They led a somewhat itinerant life. Yusef worked in a law firm in the city of Beer Sheva and Najwa taught elementary school in Rahat. Life in the city did not suit either of them and she felt uncomfortable staying with her in-laws, a polygamous "old fashioned" family, so eventually they compromised by renting a house in Najwa's old neighborhood. It took a while before Najwa became pregnant with their first child and then a difficult pregnancy was followed by the premature birth of a baby girl who spent the first months of her life in an incubator. Although Najwa's next pregnancy was welcomed, it was followed by a sudden change of behavior in her husband. Yusef avoided her presence, hardly ever spoke to her, refused to share a bed with her, and worst of all began drinking alcohol. Najwa was very concerned. She knew from similar cases that her domestic situation was likely to deteriorate and might end in divorce and that the life of a divorced woman was grim. She approached her brothers who appealed to Yusef's conscience, sense of responsibility, and Islamic morality. Yusef stubbornly refused to listen to anyone and made no attempt at changing his behavior. At her wits end, Najwa sought the counsel of sheikh Aodeh. As expected, the sheikh detected the presence of a *jinni*, or rather a female *jinniya* who had fallen in love with Yusef and had possessed his body. It was not easy to expel her for she liked Yusef and refused to leave him. The sheikh argued that Yusef was a married man and that his wife was concerned. "She should not be", answered the *jinniya*, there is enough room for four women in Yusef, alluding to the Bedouin practice of polygamy. It was only when the *jinniya* started using vulgar and sexually suggestive words, some of them in English, 'fuck you' for instance, that sheikh Aodeh lost his patience. First, he clutched Yusef's throat and made the *jinniya* speak in Arabic. She stopped resisting and left Yusef's body peacefully after which Yusef returned to his former good-natured self.

Anxiety about impending fatherhood, especially after the distressing experience of the birth of the previous child is interwoven here with sexual temptations and Islamic justifications for male promiscuity. The reference to foreign women is not arbitrary because the town has a growing number of legally sanctioned marriages and even a greater number of clandestine relations with non-Arab women. The rapid influx of Russian Jews in the wave of immigration to Israel that took place in the 1990s found its way also into Rahat. Some Russian women – one can speculate that those who found themselves on the margins of the Israeli society – entered into polygynous marriages but by no means are they the only foreigners who marry Bedouin. Other European women, including NGO employees and volunteers for example, as well as wives brought from the countries where young men had studied or worked have become part of the community. These women are assigned a greater sexual drive and freedom which are believed to threaten the established sexual mores in the community. Their presence also introduces an element of potential

competition with indigenous women, to which the *jinniya* inhabiting Yusef's body alluded.

### **Exorcising *jinn***

Sheikh Aodeh is not afraid of *jinn*. His power comes from personal charisma and the knowledge of the Quran, which he knows by heart and of which *jinn* are aware. He is interested in whether the *jinn* are killed as the result of his administrations. He followed special training in exorcism and has recently opened a practice in a nearby mosque, a practice that is solely dedicated to exorcism. His is not the only practice in the area but it is a very successful one. Sheikh Aodeh receives as many patients as he can accommodate in his schedule – 4 or 5 a day. Those he cannot treat immediately are either put on a waiting list or referred to other sheikhs. Sheikhs vary in their reputation and specialization and command different degrees of authority over the spirits. Minor cases of affliction can be treated by sheikhs with less experience while more serious ones demand the attention of a powerful healer. Sheikh Aodeh enjoys great respect among humans and *jinn* alike and some patients choose to wait their turn. In fact, the practice is run like a modern psychotherapy clinic. Appointments are made ahead of time, patients arrive in a small waiting hall to be admitted to the treatment room at the scheduled time, and after completing the therapy exit through a different door, all of which assures confidentiality and privacy. The sheikh is proud of the modern way in which he manages the clinic. His clientele consists of members of the emergent middle class and his patients are teachers, accountants, and businessmen. He understands their concern for discretion as *jinn* possession is an indication of mental dysfunction and thus should be hidden from the public eye. If disclosed, it might affect their personal reputation and honor. Once the domain of kin groups, honor in the middle class has been transformed into a personal rather than collective property. The privatization of reputation, along that of material possessions and space, compels to secrecy and withdrawal behind high fences and closed gates.

On the occasion of exorcising Mariam's *jinni*, Sheikh Aodeh started the examination by placing his right hand on the patient's head and reciting the Quran. This procedure can assert the *jinni*'s kind, strength and resolve. As mentioned before, *jinn* are endowed with different personalities and are differently embedded in a patient's body. Each requires different treatment. The sheikh usually puts headphones on the victim's ears and plays Quranic recitations for anywhere between 15 to 60 minutes after which the afflictions usually go away. If this fails, he increases the volume and the duration of treatment (up to 3 hours at full volume). This weakens the *jinni* who starts to shake, opens and closes his eyes, and eventually begins to talk for *jinn* are compelled to speak as the result of having listened to the Quran. The sheikh asks him who he is, what his name is, and who sent him. However, it is thought useless to engage in a long conversation with the *jinni* and the sheikh makes haste. It helps

to convert the *jinni* to Islam because it is then easier to expel him/her from the victim's body. If the *jinni* still refuses to leave, a more drastic approach is necessary. The sheikh strikes the legs, arms and hands of the victim with his own hand, a plastic tube, a sandal – the latter hurts the dignity of the *jinni* and he usually gets resentful of such treatment. In the most difficult cases he might apply electric shocks. Sheikh Aodeh emphasized that the victim is not conscious of what is happening and does not experience pain. The *jinn* are known to be physically strong and sometimes it takes a couple of people to pin the victim's body to the ground.

In Mariam's case the sheikh did not go beyond Quranic recitations. Sensing the strength of the *jinni* that possessed her, he referred her to a more powerful healer in the West Bank. The *jinni* caught wind of it and – since *jinn* know the skills of their adversaries well – became afraid. He started speaking as soon as the four of us (Mariam, her husband Ahmad, her brother Muhammad and me) started driving her to the appointment. Mariam's body went limp and while words came out of her mouth she was not conscious of what she said. The *jinni* moaned in an odd voice that was thickened with fear, dreading the encounter with an exorcist and his own inevitable disappearance in two hours, which is the time it took to get from Rahat to our destination. He knew every person in the car, private details of interpersonal relations (such as the nickname Muhammad uses to address his sister), and the road we took. Questioned about his identity, he admitted to be a 200 year-old Jew by the name of Tzvi. As *jinn* are known to lie, Muhammad asked questions. Who owned the land we were passing through at the moment? After a minute of concentration, during which Tzvi tried to remember, he answered that it belonged to Abu Zbal (a fictitious name, such as Jones). Muhammad retorted, 'it belongs to the Jewish state now'. 'The state is (here a disparaging adjective)', he answered, which brought doubts about his identity, as no Jew would say such a thing about Israel. As Tzvi, if that was really his name, was getting increasingly worried about his imminent demise he became more aggravated but nonetheless stayed sharp in the ability to observe his surroundings. He detected Muhammad's efforts to record the conversation on a mobile phone, a phone that was hidden from his sight, which made him curse and threaten to suffocate Mariam. The atmosphere in the car was tense and we all yearned for the journey to end.

Indeed, not all practices are like that of Sheikh Aodeh. Upon arrival in front of a rather ordinary house in a crowded Palestinian village we were immediately led to the sheikh. We not only had an appointment but we also came from far away and because of it were given special consideration. The yard was teeming with people – patients and their relatives and guardians – who, chatting and commiserating, sat in groups prepared for a long wait. Tzvi went quiet and we almost carried Mariam into the house. Ushered into a plain room, we placed her on the only chair that stood in the middle. Just like Aodeh, the sheikh began the session by engaging in a conversation with the *jinni*, the details of which I no longer recall being confused by what

followed. Her body began shaking, fell of the chair in convulsions, and the men had to pin it to the floor. Once she was immobilized, the sheikh pressed two sticks on Mariam's throat – one in front and one in the back, long enough for the *jinni* to abandon her body but short of strangling her. After the pressure on her throat was released she vomited profusely and was told to rest, forget about her experience if she could, remain silent about it if she couldn't and read the Quran as often as possible. When the session ended Mariam looked tired but in control of her body and mind. We discretely left a monetary donation and received further instructions. If the treatment did not accomplish the desired effect, the victim must read the Quran for 40 days and apply olive oil to the ailing parts of the body, all of which should make the *jinni* shrink. Alternatively, the victim must wash her hands, sometimes even her entire body in water mixed with olive oil over which Quranic phrases had been read, or drink the miraculous water from the well of Zamzam.<sup>9</sup> If the *jinni* still refuses to leave, the treatment must be repeated from the beginning.

I am not sure whether the *jinni* that possessed Mariam is gone forever or whether she can be harmed again. She believes that he might be around, invisible but present. The sheikh who diagnosed the spirit's presence in her body was able to determine that he came from beneath the floor of her bathroom and advised her to destroy it completely and throw the rubbish away. This she did.

If there is a debate among Islamic clerics regarding the humanitarianism of the methods of treatment applied, it is not noticed in the town. Both victims of possession and the witnesses to it insist that the treatment is painless. Methods recommended by Islamic scholars (Aziz 2001) to exorcise spirits are more gentle: recalling God and the frequent recitation of the Quran (*dhikr*), blowing into the victim's mouth, cursing the *jinn* and commanding him to leave.

### **The trouble with *jinn***

Why all the trouble with *jinn*? The actions of *jinn* spirits are invoked to explain a variety of unusual feelings and behaviors, unexplained ailments, emotional conflicts or disturbed interpersonal relationships. Any discourse of disharmony is accompanied by the appearance of stories of *jinn* possession. With a great deal of sociological insight, the Bedouin ascribe the rise of *jinn* to the problematic relations developing in their community. Perhaps this is the consequence of thoughtless mimicry of the West, unselective modernity, and disjunctions between the environment, economy, culture, and politics in the context of Arab-Jewish relationships. There are anecdotal cases of what I term political *jinni*, or *jinn jehudi*, the Jewish *jinn* who are known for their viciousness and unrelenting hostility towards host bodies. *Jinn jehudi* are also difficult to exorcise since they refuse to convert to Islam, some say because they find

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<sup>9</sup>The well of Zamzam is located in the al-Haram mosque in Mecca. According to Islamic belief, it contains a miraculously generated and miracle-making water.

it a too difficult and cumbersome religion to practice. The character ascribed to them reflects the perception held by the Bedouin about the larger framework in which they exist, the framework that disembedded them, to use Giddens' term (1990), from an autonomous political self-regulatory system, economic resources, and cultural selfhood. Yet they are not passive recipients of imported ideas and discourses. Like other local communities (Tsing 2000), the Bedouin also draw from the plurality of cultural centers. Interacting with various metropolis (Arab, Israeli, European), they adopt certain forms and cultural perspectives into personal repertoires internalizing the values allegedly contained in them and indigenizing them one way or another.

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