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The Jewish Djinn in Northern Morocco. Old and New Neighborhoods

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Abstract. In northern Morocco, Jewish djinn appear in various Muslim accounts of possessions and cures of afflictions, which present them as more dangerous and impure than other djinn or project onto them characteristics that resemble the stereotypes that Muslims have of Jews. Despite their marginality, these stories are the reflection of an old neighborhood between Muslims and Jews in Morocco, which was altered by the departure of the latter after the creation of the state of Israel. In spite of this emigration of the Jewish population, these Jewish djinn remain deeply rooted in various contrasting ritual spaces in Moroccan society today: among *fakīhs* who practice *rukya* and Qur'ānic recitation; in the universe of brotherhoods such as the Gnawa, a tradition of old slave descendants; and in sanctuaries that still maintain specific days for patients possessed by Jewish djinn. In the northern Moroccan city of Tetouan, where I have done ethnographic work, these ideologically heterogeneous religious universes share similar rhetorics about the dangerousness of Jewish djinn. These definitions of Jewish djinn reflect a deep-rooted historical presence but also expose new images of Jewishness in Muslim-majority Arab societies. This ethnographic case allows us to draw some reflections for cross-cultural comparison on the representation of human diversity in the neighboring universe of djinn and non-humans, as a metaphor for intercommunity conflicts and tensions.

Keywords: exorcism, interfaith relationships, Jewish, djinn, Morocco, shrines, Tetouan

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Еврейский джинн в северном Марокко: старые и новые соседства

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Аннотация. На севере Марокко еврейские джинны фигурируют в различных свидетельствах мусульман об одержимости и исцелении от болезней. В подобных рассказах они описываются как более опасные и нечистые, нежели дру-

гие джинны, или же на них проецируются характеристики, напоминающие стереотипы, которые мусульмане имеют о евреях. И хотя подобные истории скорее маргинальны, они отражают специфику старых соседских отношений, сложившихся между мусульманами и евреями в Марокко, которые изменились в связи с переселением последних вслед за основанием государства Израиль. Несмотря на эмиграцию еврейского населения, еврейские джинны сохраняют свою закреплённость за разнообразными ритуальными пространствами в современном марокканском обществе: меж факихов, практикующих рукоя и чтение Корана; в универсуме братств, таких как Гнава, – традиции потомков прежних рабов; в святилищах, которые все еще выделяют специальные дни для пациентов, одержимых еврейскими джиннами. В северном марокканском городе Тетуан, где было проведено этнографическое исследование, эти идеологически разнородные религиозные универсумы разделяют схожую риторику об опасности еврейских джиннов. Маркирование еврейских джиннов в подобном ключе отражает как глубоко укоренившееся историческое присутствие, так и раскрывает новые образы еврейства в арабских обществах с мусульманским большинством. Проанализированный случай предлагает нам взглянуть с целью кросс-культурного сравнения на репрезентацию человеческого разнообразия в соседней с нами вселенной джиннов и не-людей как на метафору межобщинных конфликтов и напряженности.

Ключевые слова: экзорцизм, межрелигиозные отношения, еврейство, джинн, святилища, Тетуан

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Are geniuses in principle the enemies of men? Not absolutely: they constitute a world that lives next to that of mortals. They are neighbors, not anything else; but neighbors of a very special kind [my translation from the original French]
(Basset 1920: 89)

This paper starts from an initial question: the way in which the representation of non-humans (gods, devils, spirits or genies) can be read as a projection of the type of relations between humans. Thus, the power relations between humans of differentiated groups living in neighborhood are also projected into a universe of non-humans; but this universe of non-humans does not constitute a separate world, since it in turn is conceived in a neighborhood relationship with humans, where the boundary between the world of the visible and the invisible is crossed. Thus, in the Muslim case, this neighborliness between worlds implies that the *djinn*¹ or genies recognized by the Qurʻān can penetrate the bodies of humans, but they do so in a different way according to the membership and identity of both humans and non-humans. In a sense, the history of that neighborliness among humans has also been marked in the history of those representations of non-humans. The case I will use to illustrate this connection is the representation of Jewish genies in the Muslim universe of Morocco, based on ethnographic work in the city of Tetouan. My question arose precisely from the observation that in the exorcist and worship rituals in that city, Jewish genies were defined by Muslims

as the most potentially dangerous genies. I will now present the roots of this worldview.

Muslim-Jewish neighborhood in Morocco

Morocco is a Muslim-majority country with a significant Jewish presence from ancient times until the second half of the twentieth century (Zafrani 2000). And Tetouan, as the city of my ethnographic analysis, comprised a significant percentage of Jewish population, mainly of Sephardic origin². This history of coexistence was imprinted on the imaginary, which was re-configured during the second half of the twentieth century in the wake of the Arab-Israeli conflict, reinforcing communal divisions between Muslims and Jews that colonisation had essentialised (Levy 2003: 369–370). The history of the Maghreb is characterised by a long interaction between Judaism and Islam, and this has also been reflected in the imaginary of the *djinn*. Despite the subordinate position of Judaism under the status of *dhimma* (protection) until the end of the 19th century and the persecutions suffered throughout history (Kenbib 1994), there was a flow of knowledge and shared ritual spaces such as shrines. In these spaces, Muslims and Jews still draw on the power of their own or other saints through rituals (Ben-Ami 1990; Levy 2003: 374). Jewish and Muslim communities in Morocco have also historically shared very similar conceptions of possession and exorcism rituals, performed by rabbis, in a manner similar to that of Muslim *fakīhs* (Bilu 1980: 29).

But throughout the twentieth century, the growing conflict between communities and the traumatic departure of the Jews would also explain a recess in the performances of Jewish otherness. We might think that the progressive departure of the Jewish community from Morocco since the 1950s for political reasons might also have contributed to its fading in certain cofradic rituals such as the Gnawa. Kapchan observes that Jewish entities have ceased to appear in ceremonies, either because there are very few Jews left in Morocco, or because Jewish genii are particularly difficult to control, since they drink wine and deal with forbidden substances (Kapchan 2007: 235).

In this paper, I will show how this historical neighborhood with the Jews was reflected in the Muslims' imaginary and experience of the world of the *djinn*. We can think that the look from the Muslim side analyzed here projects what I.W. Lewis defined as the hegemonic group's fear of the magical or potentially threatening forms of the subordinate group³: the power of its magic, or the Jewish *djinn* themselves. This fear was maintained and even reinforced after the reversal of this power relationship, when the Jews were no longer protected during the colonial period; and especially after the Jewish diaspora, when Israel became the symbolic referent and emerged as a political power that would generate multiple rejections in Morocco, as in the

rest of the Arab world, as a result of the Palestinian conflict. But this is an open history, full of ambivalences and new presences. Moroccan Sephardim, scattered in different parts of the world, return punctually to make pilgrimages to saints (*hillula*) and after years of tensions, the states of Morocco and Israel signed a Declaration of normalization of their relations in December 2020, with the endorsement of the United States, which recognizes in the declaration Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara. It remains to be seen in the future how all these changes will be reflected in the ritual sphere and in the Muslim reinterpretation of Jewishness.



Fig. 1. Students of the Jewish Schools of Tetouan visiting the palace of the Khalifa. 1949
(Archivo Municipal de Cádiz, Fondo Varela)

These two groups, Muslims and Jews, with all their internal diversities, were indeed neighbors until the middle of the 20th century. The classic author of French colonial ethnology René Basset observed that the djinn are like neighbors to humans, and in this sense his characterisation is also a metaphor for the history of the Maghreb. Basset collected Maghrebi legends about the Islamization and Arabization of the Amazigh regions of North Africa, according to which the Berber djinn who supported the local queen al-Kāhina in the 7th century in her fight against the invaders, were defeated by the djinn of the Arabs and the God of Islam imposed himself on them as well as on humans (Basset 1920: 92). Thus, the history of humans runs parallel to that of the djinn, who would also have their own history. We can think, then, that the changes in the images of the Jewish djinn are also a reflection of this particular history between Muslims and Jews in Morocco. According to the

work of Aomar Boum (2013) on the Muslim memory of the Jewish presence in the past, there is a great generational difference between the older generation that had human Jews as neighbors and the new generations that were born after the creation of the state of Israel and that have received much more negative stereotypes about absent human Jews who are no longer their neighbors in flesh and blood; but whose image will be expressed in the other neighbors still present in Morocco, the Jewish djinn.

Historical references to Jewish djinn in Morocco and Tetouan

In some situations, the world of djinn has embodied the representation of external enemies bringing natural disasters or even disease, as was the case with epidemics that have reached Morocco throughout its history. From various medieval sources, epidemics and plagues were identified as the attack of an army of djinn, and the disease penetrated the bodies like an arrow launched by the djinn (González Vázquez 2020). In ancient accounts this causality attributed to the djinn, also Jewish, is already pointed out. Al-Banānī, commenting on a plague of Fez in 1744, relates this story told by al-Hattab in reference to a plague in Egypt in 881: “There was [the case] that a woman, after she was pierced, reported that one of the Jewish djinn struck [her], [and] another told her husband after being pierced that a djinn had pierced her” (Stearns 2011: 149).

In the plague that struck Morocco in 1798–1800 an incident occurred in Tetouan when the Sufi *darqāwi* Aḥmad bin ‘Ajība criticized the confinement of the city by the authorities, a decision that attributed the causation of the plague to contagion. In contrast, bin ‘Ajība maintained that the plague was caused by djinn.

In Tetouan, the threats suffered by the city since the war with Spain in 1859 generated various interpretations in this sense. It is worth reproducing here a text written by Tuhami Wazzani (1903–1972), a prolific Tetouanese figure who reconciled tradition and modernity, Sufism and reformist nationalism. Among his works is an article entitled “The war that the “Yenn” declared on the Tetouanis”: “The devastations that Tetouan went through had their origin in the fact that the genii dominated the people; if, on the contrary, it is the people who subjugate the genii, the city becomes populated. Among the djinn there are Muslims, Jews and Christians, but never polytheists. Most of the [djinn] inhabitants of Tetouan and its surroundings are Muslims and have their Jewish and Christian colonies. When they fight people, they do so united under the “League of Djinn”, and if there is a truce in hostilities, then individual life goes on [my translation].”⁴

The sentence of Wazzani that correlates the emptying of the city with the predominance of the djinn deserves our attention, since in the conflict of 1859 we know that a part of the Muslim population of Tetouan left the city

for fear of the Christian attack, while the Jewish population remained, thus the idea of the collaborationism of the Jews with the Spaniards was born.

These ideas are possible in a worldview where djinn inhabit places uninhabited by humans (caves, ruins, abandoned houses) or places with impurities *ḥammām* and slaughterhouses). At that time several '*ulāma*' warned against the danger that threatened the Muslims through those protected (Muslims and Jews) by foreign powers, whom they accused of drinking alcohol and other depraved behaviors, considered impure (Kenbib 1996: 294).

The representation of the djinn here is a depiction of humanity and human-to-human relations. The Finnish ethnologist Edward Westermarck collected abundant references to the djinn in his ethnographic notes on Morocco at the beginning of the 20th century. In his texts he mentions that "it is the Jewish djinn who attacks people who are afraid" (Westermarck 1926 II: 273). In this sense, the presentation of the djinn also takes on a moral connotation, as the spirits prey on those who have no faith or those who are in a difficult situation. Westermarck detailed the following oral histories in the tribe of Anjera (near Tetouan), and concerning the Jewish djinn: "A person who drinks alcohol, a boy who prostitutes himself, and a grown-up man who practices passive pederasty, will always, both in this world and the next, wash his face with the urine of Jewish *jnûn* (Andjra)." (Westermarck 1926 II: 272).

Westermarck's example deserves several comments: it shows that a number of practices such as alcoholism, prostitution and passive homosexuality are impure in the Muslim symbolic universe⁵, so that the Jewish is also assimilated by analogy to the impure⁶. This question of impurity also appears in the literature on the Gnawa cults of African slave descendants. Westermarck tells of having seen in Marrakech how the Gnawa made the sick eat rubbish on Saturday, which is when the Jewish djinn appear (Westermarck 1899: 257). In the same vein, the aforementioned Wazzani also refers to the attack of the Jewish djinn on Saturday, and their specific demands, that Muslim victims should offer them sacrifices with food specific to Moroccan Jews: "The Jewish "yenn" is used to get excited on Saturdays, and chooses a Muslim man or woman, usually slaves, as a victim. They have to prepare for the djinn the "sejina" – the stew that the Jews usually eat on Saturdays – and serve it to them on the day they dedicate to "Ad Dardaba" [Gnawa's possession cult]."⁷

In the Gnawa brotherhood of former slaves and freedmen, rituals are a complex reflection of the African diaspora, its transformations, adaptations and contact with different human groups (El Hamel 2008). Jews also feature in them. The literature on the Gnawa world reproduces these clichés about the impure Jew, while also attributing to them the force of blessing. The body-djinn of groups considered inferior or marginalised can bring about both good and evil, depending on the circumstances.



Fig. 2. Gnawa at the wedding of the Khalifa of the Spanish Protectorate. 1949
(Archivo Municipal de Cádiz, Fondo Varela)

The Jewish djinn in Gnawa adorcism⁸

In the rituals observed by Bertrand Hell in the last third of the 20th century, those possessed by Jewish djinn, the *sabtiyyin* (“those of the Saturday”), embodied clichés about Jews, such as greed, usury and uncleanness. Various types of Jewish genii, with different names, embody these qualities through the possessed: Pacha Zatu makes the possessed rush into the latrines, who try to ingest the excrement; Tagir causes the possessed to speak Hebrew and represents a Jewish merchant who does not work and enriches himself through usury, drinks alcohol, and when he demands a sacrifice it must be performed in a Jewish cemetery and the animal must be slaughtered without invoking the name of God (Hell 2002: 272). Thus, the possessed who express impure or defiant behaviour attribute their conduct to possession by the *sabtiyyin*. In one of the cases described by Hell, the neighbors of Kébir, an alcoholic and dissolute man, tell the anthropologist that his attitude was caused by Jewish djinn, who entered the victim while he was working for years in a slaughterhouse, collecting filth and in contact with impure substances such as blood (72).

The Gnawa ritual incorporates symbolic elements characteristic of the Jewish imaginary. The incense, used to attract Jewish djinn during the trance nights, is made with *hasalban* and a black *jawi*, a color historically identified with Jews in Morocco; and alcohol is used to sprinkle the possessed instead

of the usual orange blossom water (Hell 2002: 272). The body of the possessed also embodies Jewish attributes, imitating professions, colors and dress associated with Moroccan Jews until well into the twentieth century. So the dancer wears around his head a black ribbon (color of Jews) or a leather band, with scissors and a needle, because he/she is like a cobbler (Jewish corporation) (Pâques 1991: 310). Similar descriptions were presented a century earlier by Michaux-Bellaire and Salmon (1905: 202) for the Gnawa of Qsar al-Kabir, in Northern Morocco. The sick who attributed their ailments to Jewish genii practised possession on Saturday, dressed as Jews, got drunk, ate the *sakhina*, and in a trance threw themselves into the latrines to ingest excrement.

But all this symbolism is polysemic. If the group considered inferior is dangerous, it can also be protective because of its special powers. There are examples of this in the ethnographic literature. In Sidi 'Ali, a sanctuary near Meknes, a possessed Gnawa performing the rite of the knives, invoked Si Mimun. In the mouth of his genie the possessed man demanded that the people give *ṣadaqa* (gift) and surrender to the *siyyid* (saints), otherwise the *bani israil* would leave. Here the *bani israil* are the Jews; and in this context a positive sense is attributed to them, stating that, should they leave the country their *baraka* would also leave, causing the rivers to dry up and the lands to become barren (Claisse 2003: 149). This reference has to do with the role recognized to the Jews as germinators of the earth in some rites that benefited the whole Maghrebi society. This protective function was attributed, for example, to the Jewish ritual of the Mimuna, the feast that closed the Jewish Passover or Pesah, celebrated from the 14th to the 22nd of the month Nisan. Lalla Mimuna was the distributor of fertility, luck and abundance, also for the Muslims, who invited their Jewish neighbors to recite libations over their fields (Zafrani 2000: 243).

Jewish djinn in Tetouan in the 21st Century

In this section I present my own original materials based on my fieldwork in Tetouan and other parts of northern Morocco that are consistent with the stereotypes discussed so far. What I want to emphasise is that these data have been collected in completely antagonistic religious settings. This precisely indicates that certain narratives cut across different religious practices.

The first case refers to the practice of *rukya* by *fakīhs*. It is a ritual in full revival, dedicated to expelling the djinn from the body by means of Qur'ānic recitation, and which responds to reformist literary rhetoric that criticises adorcism and labels as superstition the visits to shrines, the use of amulets and other itineraries considered deviant (*bid'a*) by this rigorist vision.

The second space I discuss is a shrine visited mainly by women who attribute their afflictions to a djinn but also by the followers of the Gnawa cult.

To solve their problems, people go there to make sacrifices and offerings to the djinn to please them, or in some cases, hoping for an invisible judgement on the djinn, with the understanding that the shrine is also a court (*maḥkama*), with a specific day for each type of djinn.

The Jewish djinn defined in the *rukya*. In the Islamic world, there are multiple ways of managing the intrusion of the djinn into the human body. The legality of these ritual forms has been discussed throughout history from different interpretations of Islam. From the most esoteric to the most legalistic, in a tension that has also reached modernity. Since the emergence of reformist visions such as Salafism from the 19th century onwards, attacks will be launched on institutionalized religious forms such as saints, the cult of tombs or certain ecstatic brotherhoods (Sirriyeh 2014). This tension will increase with the more recent revival of literalist views during the last quarter of the twentieth century, which will also bring about a revival of Islamic medicine (*ṭibb al-nabawī*) and the emergence of *rukya* as one of the most effective and legitimate ways of managing the human relationship with the djinn (Mateo Dieste 2013: 181–185). At the same time, this revival has taken place in an Islamic world very sensitive to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has generated negative and simplistic images of the Jewish. It is in this new globalized context that we must interpret the local meanings of Jewish djinn in Muslim-majority countries such as Morocco. As I have already explained, we cannot obviate this previous history of stereotypes that I have exposed so far. But this revival would have exacerbated certain social images that are precisely going to be expressed in the world of the djinn and their interaction with humans.

One of the methods to tame, expel or eliminate the djinn that enter the body of a person is the Qur'ānic recitation performed by a *faḳīh* and accompanied by various rituals known as *rukya*⁹. Although *rukya* was already practiced by the Prophet Muhammad himself, its recent emergence has been taking place in different parts of the Islamic world, also as an effect of recent globalization through the mass media and new contexts of social contact between Muslims and non-Muslims as a result of migratory displacements (Oparin 2020; Böttcher, Krawietz 2021).

The *rukya* ritual is also a performative act that contributes in private settings or through the mass media to an exercise of defining Jewishness. Before dealing with psychosomatic afflictions, the *faḳīh* tries to determine the casuistry of these afflictions, and to rule out whether they are strictly physical afflictions or whether they are the action of a djinn, magic (*sihr*) or the evil eye (*'ayn*). His investigation of the client's body then focuses on determining the identity of the djinn who has possessed the person. This last aspect is very relevant because it is connected to the central argument of this article. In the Qur'ānic recitation of exorcism, the diversity of djinn is dramatised and the Jewish djinn is defined. The level of danger of the djinn de-

pends on its proximity to Islam. Hence, the Muslim *djinn* is conceived as less harmful than the non-Muslim *djinn*; the Muslim *djinn* will be more tameable, because he will be more fearful of the Qur‘ān and its powers. By contrast, Christian, Jewish and atheist *djinn* are more difficult to expel. So the most serious crises are interpreted as a consequence of this threatening otherness (Aufauvre 2009: 100–101).

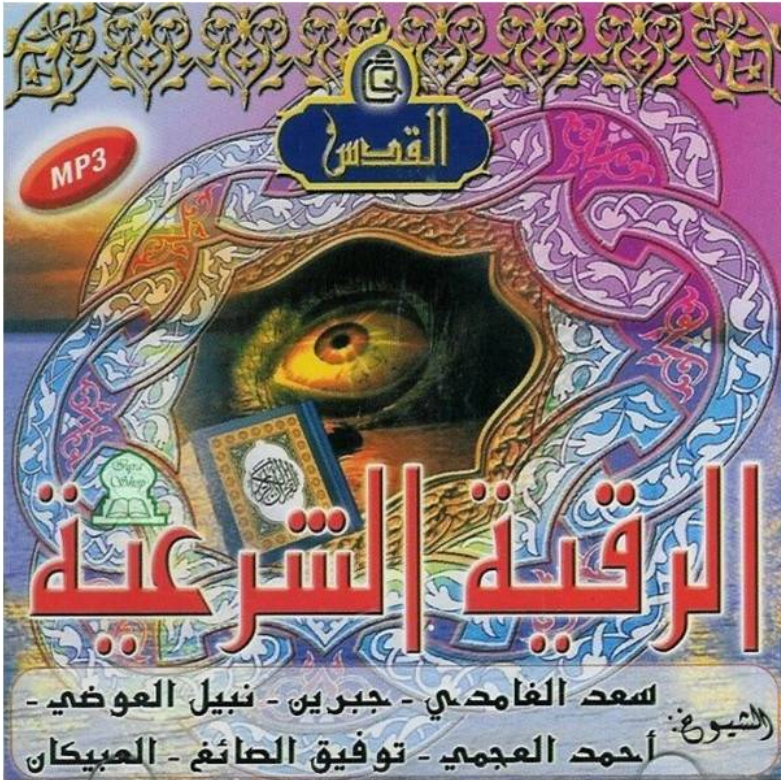


Fig. 3. Recitation of *rukya* recorded in CD format. Tetouan, 2010 (J.L. Mateo Dieste)

The *fakīhs* consulted in Tetouan¹⁰, as well as the treatises on exorcism and recitation for healing purposes (*rukya*), use a series of indicators to define the *djinn*. In Qur‘ānic exorcism, the *fakīh* engages in a dialogue with the possessed person to identify the *djinn*, which group he/she belongs to, whether he/she is Muslim, Christian and Jew, his/her name, and his/her sex. The body of the possessed person is a first indicator used by the *fakīh*, who analyses the external signs, such as the colour of the skin or the shape of the eyes. If the *fakīh* determines that the body contains a *djinn*, he then proceeds to ask about its name, its sex, its religion, the reasons for having occupied the human body, whether it is a single *djinn* or several, whether it is under the orders of a magician, and in which part of the body it is installed.

The *faḳīth* stands in front of the person, places his right hand on the forehead of the client, and proceeds to a dialogue: “What is your name, are you a Muslim, are you a Christian, are you a Jew?”. The cases I have observed in Tangiers, Tetouan and Catalonia also respond to this explanatory logic: the most severe convulsions, resistances and battles come from bodies to which a non-Muslim *djinn*, especially a Jew, was attributed. Maarouf also observed these reactions in Ben Yeffu, where the Jews (*yehudi*) are the most dangerous *djinn*, the most difficult to expel because they have no word, and their oath is required up to seven or more times (Maarouf 2007: 102–103).

In July 2007 I accompanied a Moroccan *faḳīth* who was doing *rukya* in Barcelona and he took me to visit his *rukya* teacher in a popular neighborhood of Tangier. There I attended an Islamic exorcism, in which a *faḳīth* recited a *sūra* in front of a group of six women, accompanied by their families. One woman’s turn came and after reciting the Qur’ān to her, the *faḳīth* asked her for the identity of the *djinn* who possessed her. That is, he asked the *djinn* himself who he was. And he replied that he was a Jew. After identifying him the *faḳīth* engaged in a bodily struggle with that *djinn* who occupied the woman’s body. The *djinn*-woman resisted with all his/her might as the *faḳīth* tried to insert the finger of the possessed woman into a plastic bottle of blessed water. The water spilled into the room, as the *faḳīth* continued to recite and attempt to convert the Jewish *djinn*; while the woman stretched out her hands and feet, snorting, clutched by her husband, until she collapsed exhausted on the carpet. This performance implied the conversion of the Jewish *djinn* and the triumph of Islam. The woman and her husband were a Moroccan couple residing in Belgium. The ritual thus signified a return to the right path and a moral lesson to fight against evil. In a sense, this *rukya* offers a revival of Islam and it is no coincidence that before starting the collective ritual, the *faḳīth* pointed out the right way to follow, ordering the audience to take out and give him any kind of amulets they had with them because it was a deviant practice.

Visiting the shrine of the ‘Awyna: “every djinn has its own day”. In contrast to this expansion of the *rukya*, other ritual forms are branded by critical *‘ulāma* and other actors as illicit and deviant. Among these forms are the shrines, historically feminine spaces (Mernissi 1995). Many of these places are experiencing a process of decline in relation to previous times, due to the delegitimization suffered either from “orthodox” visions of Islam, or from modernist and rationalist critics who treat these practices as false, charlatanism and directly a fraud or a health hazard.

However, there still remain numerous strongholds that resist the onslaught of these tensions in the religious field, and in Morocco many sanctuaries are visited and are very active as places of worship, pilgrimage and therapeutic ritual. This is the case of the following ethnographic example.

Outside the wall of the old city of Tetouan there is a sanctuary, the ‘Awyna¹¹, where visitors go to try to cure their physical, personal and spir-

itual afflictions. The main characteristic of this place is that people offer sacrifices to entities and *djinn* at various altars, and they do so on different days depending on whether they are Muslim, Jewish or Christian *djinn*. In other words, each entity and religious group of *djinn* has its own day. In fact, the local elder *muqaddam* explains that at the former shrine he managed until recently on the outskirts of Tetouan (Jama‘a Tasiast), visitors came to make offerings such as the *sakhina* plate mentioned above, offered specifically to Jewish entities.

It is important to note that the ritual scenario itself comprises a dual spatial distribution between the sanctuary of Sidi ‘Abd al-Qadir Tabbin and the sanctuary of the ‘Awyna. On one side, we find the sanctuary that houses the tomb (*darīh*) of Sidi Tabbin, a saint of Andalusian origin who came to the city in the twelfth century. On the other side of the road and down some stairs is the sanctuary of the ‘Awyna, invisible from the street. There is an old fountain that was restored by the Spanish during the colonial era. The fountain springs inside a covered space, which in turn houses a quadrangular mausoleum covered with a dome. In reality, this space does not house any saint, but various non-human entities that govern the genies and have various altars where visitors deposit their offerings. And in this cult, water plays a central role as a therapeutic and purifying element. This structural duality between a Sufi-like male saint and other non-human entities, mostly female, in caves has been noted in other Moroccan settings such as Sidi ‘Ali (Claisse-Dauchy, de Foucault 2005; Bartel 2016).



Fig. 4. Cenotaph of Sidi ‘Abd al-Qadir Tabbin. 2021 (J.L. Mateo Dieste)

At the ‘Awyna shrine, people possessed by Jewish *djinn* come on Wednesdays, according to the current supervisors; this practice contrasts with the reference to Saturday in other authors and places. Those possessed by Muslim *djinn* attend on Fridays and those possessed by Christian *djinn* on Sundays. In between observations of the rituals practised by the clients, who come regularly to the shrine, the *muqaddama* tells us significant stories about Jewish *djinn*, again expressing stereotypes about Jewish humans.

The first account refers to the case of a girl who was beaten by a Jewish *djinn* and was unable to marry. The *muqaddama* explains¹² that when the girl was a child she was possessed (“beaten”, *madruba*) “*min al-yihudi*”, “by the Jew”. He beat her in the bathroom, a liminal and dangerous space in stories about *djinn* in Morocco. And when the girl grew up, then she could not marry because the Jewish *djinn* would not let her. One day the *djinn* asked her to bring some pieces of clothing. If she wanted to marry someone, she had to wear ash grey (*r-madi*) clothes on the day of the marriage, which was the colour of Jewish clothes. We asked her if the *djinn* spoke Arabic, and the *muqaddama* said “*la, bil-yihudiya*” (“no, in Hebrew”): “*If he hit her, he is not an Arab*”, implying that an Arab *djinn* is less annoying than a Jewish *djinn*. Moreover, the Jewish *djinn* was bothering her and beating her because he was looking for money, in accordance with the stereotype of the usurious Jew.

In the second example, the *muqaddama*¹³ recounts the case of a client. A *djinn* was living in her body, and the woman went to the shrine to complain to the Bacha Hammu, a powerful red genie linked to blood. In that case, it was expected that the Bacha Hammu would act as a “court”¹⁴. In a dream experienced by the *muqaddama* herself, she tells us that the Bacha Hammu spoke to the *djinn* inhabiting the woman, and discovered that it was a Jewish *djinn*, namely a captain in the Israeli army who also runs a clothing shop for the military. In the negotiations, the Jewish *djinn* explained to Bacha Hammu that he needed a quarter of an hour to go to Israel, to Tel Aviv and back. In other words, the reference to the Jewish world already took on a transnational dimension, locating the *djinn* in Israel and no longer among the Sephardic culture of Tetouan. Accounts of this style highlight political aspects of the imaginary, such as those revealed by Rothenberg’s work (2004). Another fellow researcher referred me to similar accounts in other areas of Morocco such as Fez, which are even more explicit, stating that the Israeli secret services of the Mossad use Jewish *djinn* as informants¹⁵. This idea of *djinn* as agents and informants is common among *fakīhs* and other specialists such as the *muqaddamas* of shrines and brotherhoods like the Gnawa or seers who obtain their information through these *djinn*. In fact, the *muqaddama* of the shrine performs ritual and emotional support functions for the visitors and she may have visions in dreams and trances in which she communicates with one or more *djinn* with whom she has established a pact, as Rausch (2000) observed in his ethnography of Casablanca on the seers.



Fig. 5. Offering candles to the jinn. ‘Awyna. 2021 (J.L. Mateo Dieste)

This dream of the *muqaddama* projects a whole world of images where dream and reality merge. Thus, these stories construct and reproduce mental representations and stereotypes about Jews. The stories circulate in the sanctuary and are performed in the rituals of animal sacrifices (chickens, goats) and votive objects (candles, milk, incense). The visitors embody the *djinn*, who emerges during the visit, making the women scream, provoking belching or arousing emotions; the presence of the *djinn* is imprinted on the body that circulates around the sanctuary making counter-clockwise circumvolutions. And so during the ritual, people dramatise the classification system that legitimises the existence of the *djinn* and the boundaries between religious groups.

Conclusion: non-human worlds as a metaphor for social relations

It is also very significant that two contrasting ritual settings such as the *rukya* room of a *faḳīh* that signals the danger of superstition and promotes a neo-conversion, and a shrine that is the site of sacrifices to the *djinn* share common images about Jewish *djinn*. Despite their notable ritual and ideological differences both places are the arena of performative rituals. Both rituals of exorcism and adoricism are rituals of affliction, but like all ritual processes, they also transmit symbols and regulate social relations, as part of a cognitive

system that is dramatized in the ceremonial setting (Turner 1977, 1987). These rites display Jewish *djinn* behaving in accordance with certain stereotypes circulating among Muslims, but finally these images also reflect generational differences on the memory of the Jewish presence in Morocco (Boum 2013).

In this paper, I have shown the revealing role of rituals as a mirror of stereotypes and images about otherness. In this way, these classification systems about humans acquire a performative and exemplary character. The methodology proposed by works such as Rothenberg's should allow us to study possession in these contemporary spaces in which humans objectify their social relations by essentialising their non-human neighbors. When a male Jewish *djinn* enters the body of a Muslim woman, he is not just crossing any barrier but challenging the sexual barriers that mark the boundaries between neighboring groups, expressing the idea of the threatening other (Rothenberg 2004: 94). The example offered by the *muqaddama* of the 'Awyna in Tetouan also follows this powerful rhetoric that precisely highlights group boundaries, when the young Muslim woman is possessed by the Jewish *djinn* who asks her for gray clothes and behaves in a usurious manner.

Authors such as Lambek (1980) have remarked that possession is not only an act of "representation" but a production of knowledge resulting from everyday interactions between the possessed and the therapists. Nor is it the hidden expression of a marginal world of the sick or afflicted, but a system of communication that affects the everyday and taken-for-granted knowledge of a large part of society. This is precisely one of the ideas that can be extended to the Moroccan case, and which has also been presented in this way by Drieskens (2008) in Egypt.

Thus, the projection of human differences into the world of non-humans is not merely a classificatory act, but is also a performative act, in the sense that it generates bodily and moral effects. This idea is extremely useful for analysing Moroccan representations of human-to-human neighborliness and human-to-*djinn* neighborliness.

Possession is a phenomenon that offers the possessed person the possibility of embodying an otherness and is itself a representation of the world, where the *genii* are a double of humans (Gibbal 1992: 8; Stoller 1995). In these processes, some authors have found very eloquent cases that evoke inter-religious tensions. In Lahore (Pakistan) Khan (2006) analysed the case of a Sunni family who lived with Sunni *djinn*, with whom they had a dialogue through one of the girls in the house, and who protected them from the threats of other *djinn* who embodied qualities attributed to the Shi'is. Here the *djinn* illustrated the daily tensions between religious communities in the area in the 1990s. The possession and the universe of *genii* thus constitutes a revealing map of historical changes and inter-group relations, as in the classification system of the Swahili spirits (Giles 1995: 97; Larsen 1998: 132) and the East African *zār* (Boddy 1989; Kenyon 1995: 111).

All these works, like the Tetouanese ethnography discussed here, show the dynamic character of classification systems, which incorporate social changes, such as collective migration, power relations and reproduce stereotypes and boundaries between social groups. And these tensions between human neighbors are expressed in the neighborhood with the *djinn*.

Footnotes

¹ The transliteration of Arabic terms was done according to the Encyclopaedia of Islam (EI) Second Edition published by Brill.

² Teodoro Ruiz Cuevas (1973: 66) calculated that at the beginning of the twentieth century some 16,000 Muslims and 6,000 Jews lived in Tetouan. The latter lived segregated in the *mellah* neighborhood, which comprised 372 houses and 17 synagogues. In the Spanish Protectorate census of 1945 the Jewish population recorded in the entire area was 14,196. The departure from Morocco began around those years, as the 1950 census already indicated that the Jewish population had decreased to 7,872. On this process of departure, see Cohen (2017).

³ Here Lewis refers to other paradigmatic situations, multi-ethnic societies in which the spirit-gods of the dominated are conceived as a threat by the dominant groups (Lewis 1989: 104), as already shown by Gough (1958) with the Nayar, and the fear of the upper castes towards the ancestral spirits of the lower classes. See also Caro Baroja (1990: 271), on slaves and women in the Sahara.

⁴ Wazzani (1949: 149).

⁵ These practices are included in the category of *zinā*. It is relevant that Westermarck makes the distinction about passive homosexuality, which is taken up by the Arabic language, and which has to do with an identification of the passive role with femininity, in contrast to the active homosexual position.

⁶ Authors such as Maarouf (2007: 120–121) have also noted this negative image of Jews projected in the world of the *djinn*.

⁷ Wazzani, op.cit.

⁸ I will use this term as defined by De Heusch (1971).

⁹ On these rites and their more recent practices in Europe, see Hoffer (2000) and Khedimellah (2007), or Spadola (2009) for the case of Morocco.

¹⁰ Interviews with five *fakīhs* of different profiles in the city of Tetouan, April-May 2010.

¹¹ ‘Awyna means “little spring”. Inside the sanctuary there are several pools of water where visitors bathe their feet and bodies to purify themselves and protect themselves from the *djinn*. These rituals are already reported by the Spaniard Valderrama (1954) in colonial times.

¹² *Muqaddama*, 14 June 2019, fieldwork notes, in collaboration with Araceli González Vázquez.

¹³ *Muqaddama*, 13 March 2019. I thank Khalid Rami for his translation and participation in this observation.

¹⁴ This practice of the *maḥkama* occurs in other places in Morocco, such as Buya ‘Omar (Naamouni 1995) or the shrine studied by Maarouf (2010). It is a court of saints and *genii* who judge the *djinn* who possess the person who comes to the shrine.

¹⁵ Note that at the beginning of the Covid pandemic, on March 22, 2020, Iran’s spiritual leader ‘Ali Khamenei declared on television that Iran’s enemies were sent through the *djinn*, on the orders of the U.S. secret services. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQND14enUHc> [Retrieved on 8 February, 2022]. In case there was any doubt, Ayatollah Ahmad Abedi reinforced the argument by adding in an interview that “the Jews, and in particular the Zionists, pursue metaphysical matters to a large extent. Their intelligence service, Mossad, does such things undoubtedly”. “There are devils from among *djinn*, but the effect they can have is limited”, official web of ‘Ali Khamenei, khamenei.ir, 18 April 2020. <https://english.khamenei.ir/>

news/7485/There-are-devils-from-among-jinn-but-the-effect-they-can-have#_ftn1 [Retrieved on 8 February, 2022].

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