

Visitors from beyond the Grave

Ghosts in World Literature

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THE MOROCCAN *JINN* IN THE ANGLO-AMERICAN LITERARY AND ETHNOGRAPHIC TRADITION

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ABSTRACT: In the Arab culture, the *jinn* (pl. *jnūn*) is a spirit that can assume various forms and exercise supernatural powers. In Morocco, it is a fundamental figure of the local folklore. As such, it has attracted the attention of different field anthropologists throughout the 20th century such as Westermarck or Capranzano, who studied the *jnūn* and their relationship with religious brotherhoods and devoted a monograph to A'isha Qandisha, a seductive *jinniya* or female *jinn* very popular in Morocco. However, *jnūn* have also attracted the attention of literary authors, as is the case of the American expatriate Paul Bowles, who frequently included them in his short fiction and claimed they existed as projections of common belief. More recently, the Anglo-Afghan travel writer Tahir Shah has explored the supposed presence of *jnūn* in Moroccan daily life in his works *The Caliph's House* (2006) and *In Arabian Nights* (2008). I intend to explore the figure of the *jinn* as portrayed by all these authors, focusing on how they contribute to preserve this element of Moroccan folklore while at the same time they (re)produce it for a Western readership.

KEYWORDS: *jinn*, ghost, Paul Bowles, Tahir Shah, Moroccan folklore, Western readership.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the figure of the *jinn* in the Islamic tradition in general and the Moroccan folklore in particular, while analyzing its presence in literary and ethnographic texts from the Anglo-American tradition. The reason why it seems interesting to approach these texts from that double perspective is that Anglo-American ethnography took an early interest in Moroccan folklore in the 20th century, many decades before Moroccan anthropologists started to work on this field. Anglo-American anthropologists would help disseminating certain myths and traditions that would later appear in the literary production of English and American writers who settled in Morocco. In turn, these writers would also partake of Moroccan culture, spreading the Eastern myth for their Western readership, always eager for exotic tales, proving the universal appeal of myths.

Throughout the different sections of the chapter, the origins of the *jinn* will be traced in two of the most important texts of Arabic culture: the Qur'an and *The Thousand and One Nights*; then, I will address the presence of the *jinn* in Moroccan traditional culture and its particular relation to saints and religious brotherhoods, as seen by the anthropologists Edward A. Westermarck and Vincent Crapanzano; the next section will explore the attributes and special

powers of the Moroccan *jinn* and the last sections of the chapter will analyze the presence of the *jinn* in some literary texts by Paul Bowles and Tahir Shah, two writers who settled in the North African country. In the conclusion, I will try to shed some light on the symbolic connotations of *jinn* belief and compare the literary and anthropological views on the subject.

THE *JINN* IN ISLAMIC MYTHOLOGY

The *jinn* (pl. *jinn/jnūn*¹) is perhaps the most conspicuous supernatural being of Islamic mythology and Arab culture in general. Although these creatures are present in pre-Islamic sources, their appearance in the Qur'an marks their importance and present day survival in Islamic cultures. According to the Qur'an, God created *jinn* and mankind so they could worship Him². Just as there are evil men, there are also evil *jinn* who will be punished in Hell if they do not follow God's command, but there are also devote *jinn* that do not hesitate to adhere to the Qur'an³. Surah 55, entitled "The *jinn*," divides mankind and *jinn* into three categories: the disbelievers, condemned to Hell, the ordinary believers, meant for Paradise, and the best of believers, with access to a higher level of Paradise. In this Surah, there is a clear reference to their nature: "He created mankind out of dried clay, like pottery, the *jinn* out of smokeless fire"⁴. However, in a different Surah, it is mentioned that *jinn* were created before mankind, "from the fire of scorching wind"⁵. Here are the foundations of the myth; they are insubstantial beings, "spirits" of air and fire, who occasionally manifest themselves as men, even though they usually dwell in their own parallel, underground world. The world of the *jinn* resembles the human world, with social organization and similar institutions. They are intelligent creatures and they bear a likeness to humans in some ways: there are male and female *jinn* (sing. *jinniya*, pl. *jinniyat*), they eat and drink, they can breed and they profess different faiths: Islam, Judaism, or Christianity.

The most elaborate passage in the Qur'an involving one of these creatures appears in Surah 27, where it is mentioned that King Solomon had "hosts of *jinn*" to do his bidding⁶. When he asked for the throne of the Queen of Sheba to be brought to him, one *jinn* obliged. Literally, the text mentions "a powerful one from among the *jinn*". The Arabic word used for "a powerful one" is *ifrit*.

¹ *Jinn* is plural in Classical Arabic. *Jnūn* is the Moroccan Arabic plural form. The French phonetic adaptation of the word (sing. *djinn*, pl. *djenoun*) is also frequent, even in English-speaking authors.

² Haleem 2008: 344 (51: 56).

³ Haleem 2008: 88 (6: 112); 144 (11: 113).

⁴ Haleem 2008: 253 (55: 14-15).

⁵ Haleem 2008: 163 (15: 27).

⁶ Haleem 2008: 240 (27: 17).

For some scholars, the term refers to a different kind of supernatural being while others claim that they are a concrete category of powerful and cunning *jinn*⁷. Ethnologist Edward A. Westermarck called them “the aristocracy of the *jnūn*”⁸. In any case, the features and obedience of King Solomon’s ‘*ifrit* (pl. *afārit*) echo the obedient attitude and attributes of the *jinn* in the cornerstone of Middle Eastern and South Asian culture, *Alf layla wa-layla*, or *The Thousand and One Nights*. In this collection of tales, *jinn* are shown as airy and powerful creatures, capable of covering great distances in a matter of minutes and ready to obey their master when summoned⁹. In the Western imaginary, the *jinn* is associated to the genie in Aladdin’s lamp. However, as Mohammed Maarouf has pointed out, the relationship between the *jinn* and King Solomon, one of the prophets of Islam, cannot be extrapolated to the relation between *jinn* and regular human beings¹⁰. As we will see in the next pages, the relation between *jinn* and humans in Morocco would be completely different.

Whereas regular *jinn* and ‘*afarit* can have either good or evil inclinations, there are some intrinsically wicked spirits in Islamic and Arabic mythology. It is the case of the *marid*, a different category of supernatural being that appears in the Qur’an as well, literally called *shaytan marid* or rebellious devil¹¹. It is considered by some scholars a particularly unruly *jinn*¹².

The last category of *jinn* to be found in Islamic and Arabic literatures is the *ghul* (pl. *ghwal*). Usually translated as “ogre”, the *ghul* is a shape-shifting being that already appears in pre-Islamic texts. They are associated to the darkness of the night and the desert, where they manifest themselves, seducing and driving their victims mad by their constant metamorphoses¹³. This figure is also traceable in *The Thousand and One Nights*, where a *ghula* or female *ghul* attempts to seduce the prince in the story “The King’s Son and the Ogress”.

THE *JNŪN* IN THE CONTEXT OF MOROCCAN TRADITIONAL CULTURE

As the anthropologists Edward A. Westermarck and Vincent Crapanzano point out, *jnūn* are an active part of traditional Moroccan Islam. Regardless of the fact that their relevance might be connected to the absence of ghosts and ancestral spirits in the country¹⁴, they belong to a system of belief that is

⁷ El-Zein 2009: 142.

⁸ Westermarck 1926, vol. 1: 262.

⁹ See, for instance, “The Tale of Sayf al-Muluk”, “The Fisherman and the Jinn” or “Maaruf the Cobbler and his Wife Fatimah”.

¹⁰ Maarouf 2007: 98-99.

¹¹ Haleem 2008: 285 (37: 7-8).

¹² El-Zein 2009: 142.

¹³ El-Zein 2009: 139.

¹⁴ Crapanzano 1980: 17.

intrinsically Moroccan. We need to consider that traditional, unorthodox Islam in Morocco is eminently based on the worship of Muslim saints or *marabouts* (*murābit*). Anthropologist Dale F. Eickelman described the *murābit* as a person, living or dead “to whom is attributed a special relation toward God which make them particularly well placed to serve as intermediaries with the supernatural and to communicate God’s grace (*baraka*) to their clients”¹⁵. There is an implicit connection between saints and *jnūn*. As Westermarck noted in his encyclopedic compendium of Moroccan lore, entitled *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* (1926), saints are said to have the ability to rule over *jnūn* and even recruit *jnūn* assistants¹⁶. Besides, *jnūn* can inhabit the outskirts of a saint’s tomb. In fact, Westermarck and Crapanzano argue that the figures of the saint and the *jinn* are frequently confused in Morocco, and that there were shrines that could correspond to any of them¹⁷.

Saints are usually worshiped by specific religious brotherhoods. These are cults related to a dead saint, whom they considered their head and patron. Even if they wrote from different perspectives, the writer Paul Bowles listed the same brotherhoods in his works than the anthropologists in Morocco: the Darqawa, the ‘Isawa, the Heddawa, the Ḥamadsha, the Jilala and the Gnawa¹⁸. Religious brotherhoods derive from Sufi doctrine, although this doctrine is frequently mixed with previous religious beliefs and may have evolved into simple ritual. The members reach a collective trance state by following the rhythm of the music and the words, a kind of liturgical prayer based on the Qur’an, the *hadith* or certain compositions created by Sufi masters. As Bowles explains in his travel essay “Africa Minor” (1959), “each brotherhood has its own songs and drum rhythms, immediately recognizable as such by persons both within and outside the group. In early childhood rhythmical patterns and sequences of tones become a part of an adept’s subconscious, and in later life it is not difficult to attain the trance state when one hears them again”¹⁹. Some religious brotherhoods, like the Gnawa and the Ḥamadsha, perform violent rites and self-lacerations. In *The Ḥamadsha: A Study in Moroccan Ethnopsychiatry* (1976), the monograph devoted to this brotherhood, Crapanzano explored the role *jnūn* played in Ḥamadsha ceremonies and their presence in the hagiographies of their patron saints. The Ḥamadsha dance to evict *jnūn*, but they also invoke them to achieve the trance state. In this sense, *jnūn* have an

¹⁵ Eickelman 1976: 6.

¹⁶ Westermarck 1926, vol. 1: 167, 333, 350-364, 389; Crapanzano 1973: 78-79.

¹⁷ Crapanzano 1973: 136.

¹⁸ Bowles 2002: 724; Westermarck 1926, vol. 1: 182-185. Westermarck lists some other cults, but argues that the ‘Isawa, the Jilala and the Gnawa are the most renowned due to their public performances for curative purposes.

¹⁹ Bowles 2002: 724. There are other descriptions of trance rituals in Bowles’s fiction. See Bowles 1952: 270-271; 1955: 312-355.

instrumental function for humans. Besides, they can also assist in the practice of magic and witchcraft.

ATTRIBUTES AND POWERS OF MOROCCAN *JNŪN*

In Moroccan popular culture, we can find three categories of *jinn*: regular *jnūn*, *ʿafarit* and *shayatin*²⁰. They can be easily confused and they are referred to by means of epithets such as “the invisible ones”, “the hidden ones”, “those below the ground”, etc. Westermarck and Crapanzano suggest that these may be connected to the ancestral fear of invoking the spirits by means of naming them²¹. Travel writer Tahir Shah, in his memoir *In Arabian Nights* (2008), quotes his Moroccan maid, who called them “the Changed Ones” and warned him not to name them²².

Even though they are amorphous creatures, when *jnūn* choose to manifest themselves they can adopt different shapes. Westermarck mentions that they often look like men or women, and he also records different cases of marriage or sexual intercourse between a man and a *jinniya*²³. In other occasions, *jnūn* appear as monsters with the body of a man and the legs of a donkey, but more frequently, they disguise themselves as animals: sheep, goats, horses, donkeys, camels, cats, dogs, tortoises, frogs, snakes, hens, cocks, etc. Some humans are unable to see them, but everyone is vulnerable to their doings, especially children, religious persons, brides and bridegrooms, and also dead people, whose corpses have to be protected with amulets and recitations from the Qur’an before they are buried. Since *jnūn* are especially attracted to blood, homicides, witches, and places such as slaughterhouses are very likely to be haunted by them: “Nothing is more haunted by *jnūn* than blood”, confirms Westermarck²⁴.

Bad dreams are said to be sent by *jnūn*²⁵. They can also manifest themselves by causing diseases such as sudden blindness, deafness, organic lesions, barrenness and epilepsy, but also by taking full possession of a human body. Although they are not necessarily evil, *jnūn* are considered whimsical creatures, quick tempered and revengeful. They are said to like water and they dwell in places such as rivers, marshes, springs, wells, fountains, baths, and even toilets and drains. They are also drawn to old cemeteries, grottos and caves, and certain trees as well. In a household, the fireplace and the threshold are the most haunted places. *Jnūn*

²⁰ Plural of *shaytan*, or devil.

²¹ Westermarck 1926, vol. 1: 263; Crapanzano 1973: 136; 1980: 68-69, 95.

²² Shah 2008: 48.

²³ Westermarck 1926, vol. 1: 265-266.

²⁴ Westermarck 1926, vol. 1: 277.

²⁵ Crapanzano 1973: 139, Shah 2008: 47-48.

also exist in the Western world, but Westerners do not believe in their doings²⁶.

These creatures may have a name, as specific supernatural beings, or they might be unnamed. Named *jnūn* do not differ from ordinary *jnūn* in their attributes, but they have more elaborated personalities and some of them are associated to local legends. Knowing the name of the *jinn* is the first step to exorcise it. Among the named *jnūn*, Crapanzano and Westermarck list 'A'isha Qandisha as the most famed *jinniyya* in Morocco. She may appear as a woman of extraordinary beauty with the feet of a camel or a donkey. She is an active seductress and a man can only defend himself against her by driving a steel knife into the earth as soon as he sees her. He is otherwise bound to be married to Qandisha and do her bidding²⁷. Alternatively, she can present herself as an old hag with long pendant breasts. 'A'isha Qandisha has similar features to those of the *ghula*, as she can change her bestial appearance and become an alluring being. Westermarck also included the figure of 'A'isha Qandisha in his atlas of ritual and belief. He explains that she was a popular figure related to Northern Morocco in particular and defined her as a "libidinous" character²⁸. He linked her to the ancient Astarte, suggesting Qandisha was the goddess of love "degraded to a Moorish *jinniyya* of a most disreputable character"²⁹.

According to Crapanzano, another named *jnūn* in Morocco is Hammu Qiyu, a *jinn* that is said to be married to 'A'isha Qandisha. However, male *jnūn* are less developed characters than their female counterparts. Lalla Malika is another well-known *jinniyya*. She is portrayed as a fanciful and elegant being, fond of bright clothes, perfumes and dances. Even though she is also a seducer, she does not attack her followers³⁰. Other female *jnūn* are Lalla Mira and Lalla Mimmuna.

The best precaution to avoid *jnūn* is reciting short prayers or invoking the name of God in the proximity of their favorite spots³¹, or by sprinkling salt near such places. They also have aversion to benzoin, different incenses, iron and steel, and silver, as well as to some spices such as coriander seed³². Even though they are attracted to fireplaces, they prefer darkness to light, and they are said to be terrified of burning candles. Loud music and sounds they also tend to avoid. Westermarck argues that nothing is more effective than some pious words; the

²⁶ Sukayna, the seer that the narrator visits in Tahir Shah's *In Arabian Nights*, reflects that when bad things happen, Westerners think is at random, even though misfortunes are caused by *jnūn*, cf. Shah 2008: 202.

²⁷ Crapanzano 1973: 144; 1980: 68-69, 165.

²⁸ Westermarck 1926, vol. 1: 392.

²⁹ Westermarck 1926, vol. 1: 393, 395-396.

³⁰ Crapanzano 1973: 146-147.

³¹ Westermarck 1926, vol. 1: 270.

³² Shah 2008: 245, 256; Crapanzano 1973: 138; Westermarck 1926, vol. 1: 302-312.

convention of saying *bismillah*³³ before a meal comes from the habit of saying it to prevent *jnūn* from eating with you³⁴.

In case these prophylactic measures fail and a *jinn* manages to control or make someone ill, the person is required to follow a series of rituals to please the spirit, like wearing certain colors or burning a specific incense. They also require certain sacrifices, food or visits to some shrine. But nothing is more effective than a performance of a religious brotherhood. The Ḥamadsha and the Gnawa are popular for performing their trance ceremonies (*ḥadra*) to please and appease *jnūn*. These brotherhoods also treat illnesses caused by these spirits, and they can also help people who have been possessed by them. The 'Isawa and the Jilala also execute curative performances. The Ḥamadsha specializes in dealings with 'A'isha Qandisha and "hold her responsible for their trance"³⁵. In fact, she is an important character in the biography of their patron saints, Sidi 'Ali and Sidi Ahmed. According to the legends, Sidi 'Ali was magically transported by Sidi Ahmed to the palace of the king of Sudan, where he captured 'A'isha Qandisha and took her with him back to Morocco. In 1980, Vincent Crapanzano published *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan*, telling the story of his informant, a Meknes tile-maker who was convinced he was married to the seductive spirit. Crapanzano points out at the symbolic function of 'A'isha Qandisha, who represents the main subject of Moroccan folklore: women and female spirits enslaving men³⁶.

JNŪN SEEN BY LITERARY AUTHORS

American writer Paul Bowles (1910-1999) found a source of inspiration in Moroccan cultural traditions, which have a prominent position in his fiction and non-fiction writings. Without being a professional anthropologist, Bowles shared the same interest for the heterodox cultural manifestations and the beliefs of common people. During the five decades that he spent in the country, he accumulated a considerable amount of cultural knowledge in terms of language, tradition, ritual, and further interaction with its native population. There are recurrent ethnographic elements in Bowles's writings. Besides exploring the belief in magic and witchcraft and the importance of dreams, he was attracted by the cultural manifestations that were unique from his point of view, such as the cult of the saints, the practices of the religious brotherhoods and their trance rituals, and the belief in *jnūn*. Thus, anthropology works as an undercurrent that permeates part of his fiction and non-fiction, where he tried to adopt "the point of

³³ Literally, "in the name of Allah", the first word of Surah Al-Fatihah, the first one in the Qur'an. The complete verse is *Bismillahi r-rahmani r-rahimi*, "In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy!" (Haleem 2008: 3).

³⁴ Westermarck 1926, vol. 1: 312.

³⁵ Crapanzano 1973: 44.

³⁶ Crapanzano 1980: 102.

view of the primitive mind”³⁷. In this sense, Bowles was deeply influenced by the sociologist and ethnologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939) and his ideas about the “primitive” mind. In *La Mentalité Primitive* (1922) he stated that abstract thinking and reasoning — as perceived by Westerners— were unrelated to the mentality of the “primitive” peoples. According to Lévy-Bruhl, the behaviour of the “primitives” was permeated by a common belief: human beings, divine creatures, spirits and invisible forces coexisted in the same world. For Lévy-Bruhl this “primitive mentality” was essentially mystic, and this peculiarity had important effects on the way in which “primitives” thought, felt or acted. This also explained why rituals, dreams, and omens were fundamental in “primitive” cultures, as means to approach and communicate with non-human forces and creatures³⁸. These assumptions were related to *la participation mystique*, a notion that Bowles found particularly appealing. This was a mystic force that linked animals, objects and plants to the “primitive” mind and made that coexistence of the visible and invisible possible³⁹. Bowles transferred this idea to his fiction, trying to reproduce the “primitives’” reality as he considered they perceived it, a reality ruled by a different logic.

Bowles wrote to a friend that his chauffeur had crashed his car after a *jinn* attack, mentioning it quite casually: “The *djinn* seized the steering-wheel and jerked it out of his hand when he was changing gears”⁴⁰. Critic Allen Hibbard has argued that, while Bowles did not believe in magic himself, this was one of the aspects that made living in Morocco so appealing. But he reacted to these generalized beliefs as a “dispassionate observer”, then took those amazing stories, “run them through the mill of his imagination, and retold them to Western audiences, ever aware of the appetite for exotic tales”⁴¹. In any case, Bowles’s ethnographic knowledge was consistent and informed, showing a deep understanding of the Moroccan lore. For instance, he tells us of the presence of *jnūn* in the fire, also recorded by Westermarck⁴², in the short story “He of the Assembly” (1960): “I looked in the fire and I saw an eye in there, like the eye that’s left when you burn *chibb* and you know there was a *djinn* in the house”⁴³.

³⁷ Bowles 1972: 261.

³⁸ Even though Lévy-Bruhl’s theory of a double mentality was refuted, among others, by Claude Lévi-Strauss and Clifford Geertz, it had a wide influence in its day. Postcolonial critic V.Y. Mudimbe lists Lévy-Bruhl as one of the anthropologists responsible for reducing people to the status of mere objects with his theories, especially considering that he used to work by proxy following the model of natural sciences of the time (Mudimbe 1988: 75-76).

³⁹ Lévy-Bruhl 1923: 35-36, 163-164.

⁴⁰ Letter to Peggy Glanville-Hicks, November 5, 1951. Miller 1994: 242.

⁴¹ Hibbard 2004: 54-55.

⁴² Westermarck 1926, vol. 1: 314.

⁴³ Bowles 2002: 244.

In the short story “Things Gone and Things Still Here” (1976), Bowles’s discusses at length the figure of the spirit: “For people living in the country today the *djinn* is an accepted, if dreaded, concomitant of daily life. The world of *djenoun* is too close for comfort”⁴⁴. He tells about their underground ecosystem, their ways, their intercourse with humans, their presence in rivers, drains, and other places where there is running water, always maintaining a subjective, casual approach, as if he were writing about some real events, an attitude that critic Arthur Redding called a “studied cultivation of detachment”⁴⁵.

The figure of the *jinn* also appears in “The Wind at Beni Midar” (1962). The core of the story is the conflict between popular belief and “modern” thinking. Driss is a soldier who despises manifestations such as *jnūn* and Jilala rituals and he thinks the government should eradicate such superstitions. His superior agrees and argues that “modern” education will kill those beliefs. One day, Driss loses his rifle and, not finding a better excuse, he blames a *jinn*. Even as a non-believer, Driss is apprehensive of his own act: “It was the first time he had had anything to do with a *djinn* or an *affrit*. Now he had entered into their world. It was a dangerous world”⁴⁶. When his superior hears the story, he is outraged and decides to teach him a lesson: he convinces him that the only solution to find the weapon is to ask a Jilali in trance where the *jinn* has placed it. When Driss learns he has been the victim of a trick, he decides to punish his superior and goes to see a witch who prepares some powder for him. When Driss pours the powder into his superior’s drink, his soul is “torn out of his body” and his power “truly broken”, so he has to be taken to some mental institution⁴⁷. Initially, Driss impersonates the new nationalist: a “modern” Moroccan that believes in the institutions and despises superstition. When lacking a better answer, he involuntarily turns to superstition, undergoing what we may call a cultural lapse. Wit overcomes superstition when his superior answers applying reason, tricking him into believing there was a supernatural solution for the loss of the rifle. But, surprisingly, when Driss learns he has been taken for a fool, he does not rely on reason to punish his superior, but again turns to superstition and gets a magic concoction from a local witch. It seems that Bowles is trying to emphasize that the “primitive mentality” lies beneath the rational surface, even in those who despise popular belief. At the same time, he presents us with characters that react differently towards magic and belief. Whether they believe in these supernatural elements or not, some of them use superstition in their own benefit, knowing the effects it provokes on other people. Bowles denied that the marvellous or the

⁴⁴ Bowles 2002: 479.

⁴⁵ Redding 2008: 111.

⁴⁶ Bowles 2002: 256.

⁴⁷ Bowles 2002: 274.

mystical had any presence in his writings⁴⁸. He was exploring the works of the “primitive” mind and the effects of believing in supernatural phenomena, while at the same time showing that there were natives working outside this apparatus that took advantage of their superstitious fellows.

In the last decades of his life, Paul Bowles was seen by Western journalists as a major expert on Moroccan cultural manifestations. In his interviews, he was frequently asked about the *jinniya* ‘A’isha Qandisha. If Westermarck explained that she was connected to the rites of the Ḥamadsha and to the ancient rites of the goddess Astarte, Bowles reached the same conclusion by means of direct observation and possibly through his readings. He described her as a beautiful grown-up woman who tried to seduce handsome young men. In 1974 he affirmed that it was a character that induced “mass psychosis”⁴⁹. In 1981, he described her as a “vestigial Tanit”, a pre-Islamic deity that was transformed into a personification of evil by Muslims. He showed his anthropological knowledge by explaining that she was a “beautiful but dreaded spirit” who frequented haunted men with the sole purpose of ruining them. He also compared her to La Llorona, the Mexican evil spirit who lives in the banks of streams and calls men at night⁵⁰. Besides, he mentions that the Ḥamadsha leave sacrifices for her in form of chickens, like they do with saints, and lists some ways of getting rid of her: formulas from the Qur’an, a knife with a steel blade or even a magnet⁵¹.

‘A’isha Qandisha appears for the first time in Bowles’s short fiction in “He of the Assembly” (1960). The *jinniya* is a fearsome figure, a threat in the mind of the protagonist, full of *kif*:

Aïcha Qandicha can be only where there are trees by running water. She comes only for single men by trees and fresh moving water. Her arms are gold and she calls in the voice of the most cherished one [...] when a man sees her face he will never see another woman’s face. He will make love with her all night [...] Soon he will be an empty pod and he will leave this world for his home in Jehennem [hell]⁵².

The Anglo-Afghan travel writer and documentary maker Tahir Shah (b. 1966) has been living in Morocco since 2006 and has used the Moroccan

⁴⁸ Caponi 1993: 143.

⁴⁹ Caponi 1993: 78.

⁵⁰ La Llorona is a “ghostly female figure who appears narratively in difficult circumstances, wailing in search of her lost children”. Locke *et al.* 2008: 558. The connection between La Llorona and ‘A’isha Qandisha can be an example of polygenesis; considering how distant their locales are, we can assume that the origin of both myths is unrelated.

⁵¹ Caponi 1993: 105, 131.

⁵² Bowles 2002: 249-250.

background as a source of inspiration for some of his books⁵³. Unlike Bowles, Shah does not speak the local language and he is frequently drawn to examples of Oriental exotica. However, he does not embody the classic Orientalist writer because he incorporates the voice of the Other in his writings, always choosing interlocutors from different sociocultural backgrounds. Moreover, being an Anglo-Afghan citizen and a Muslim, Shah is half an Oriental, half a Western subject. He sees himself as the bridge between cultures, a storyteller with the power to reduce or erase the gap between East and West⁵⁴.

The Caliph's House: A Year in Casablanca (2006) is a travel book that tells us about the author's experiences in Morocco renovating and living in a luxuriant but dilapidated old villa called Dar Khalifa, "the caliph's house", where he moved with his wife and children. For Shah, the house symbolizes his Oriental fantasies, "a fantasy inspired by the pages of the *Arabian Nights*" or "a secret about to be revealed"⁵⁵. The book takes a humorous approach to Moroccan daily life and culture, and the author's struggles to decipher and coexist with the new environment. *Jnūn* have a prominent presence in this narrative: Dar Khalifa has been vacant for a long time and now they are outraged at being disturbed. Even though the narrative does not pretend to be a scholarly compendium, it is very interesting to trace all the data related to *jnūn* and then compare it to the anthropological evidence Westermarck had found eighty years before.

Shah is familiar with *jinn* mythology: he explains that God created *jnūn* after mankind, from fire, and that they share the Earth with mankind. He elaborates by saying that they resemble humans in the sense that they are born, get married, bear children and die. Their peculiarity is that "most of the time they are invisible to humans, but they can take almost any form they wish"⁵⁶. He specifies that they usually appear in the hours after dark, something confirmed by Westermarck⁵⁷, and they often adopt the form of cats, dogs or scorpions. For Shah, most *jnūn* are wicked: "nothing gives them greater pleasure than injuring man for the discomfort they imagine he causes to them"⁵⁸. He also notes that they live "in animate objects"⁵⁹, a confusing statement I have been unable to confirm elsewhere.

⁵³ Shah has authored at least fifteen travel books and novels that keep track of his journeys through Africa, Asia and the Americas. Aligning himself with travel writers such as Bruce Chatwin and Wilfred Thesiger, whom he considered a mentor, Shah avoids tourist landmarks in his works and turns instead to everyday life details, celebrating otherness and diversity.

⁵⁴ Shah 2008: 366.

⁵⁵ Shah 2006: 2.

⁵⁶ Shah 2006: 15. See also Shah 2008: 11.

⁵⁷ Westermarck 1926, vol. 1: 300.

⁵⁸ Shah 2006: 16.

⁵⁹ Shah 2006: 15.

Shah describes that in Morocco “an empty house invites [...] the wicked forces”⁶⁰, confirming something that Westermarck had already observed: “Certain houses are haunted to such a degree that nobody dares to live in them”, especially those places that have been vacant for a long time⁶¹.

The three guardians who work for Shah in Dar Khalifa are experts on *jnūn*. In fact, they become Shah’s translators of cultural traditions. As soon as Shah and his family move into the house, they provide a long list of warnings to avoid enraging the *jnūn*: to sleep inside a circle drawn with coal, to close the windows, to restrain themselves of singing, laughing, speaking loud, or entertaining impure thoughts. And above all, they are advised to avoid the toilet at night⁶², for *jnūn* are particularly fond of current water. ‘A’isha Qandisha also appears in *The Caliph’s House*, even though she is called just Qandisha and Shah initially mistakes her with a male *jinn*. To appease Qandisha, the writer is advised to leave for her plates of couscous and meat at night. According to Westermarck, food offerings to please “the masters of the house” —another euphemism for *jnūn*— are frequent⁶³. Shah agrees, even though he is certain that the guardians are the final beneficiaries of the offering.

To contain the *jinn* situation, the guardians throw handfuls of salt in the corners of the rooms and recite verses from the Qur’an. One of them also draws squares on the walls, amulets that are frequently used to prevent the evil eye⁶⁴. Like Westermarck, Shah also notices the *bismillah* formula as a protective mechanism to avoid *jinn* attacks⁶⁵. Likewise, Shah observes that the call of the muezzin from the nearby mosque is seen as a “powerful purging force in itself—as if he was blessing us five times a day”, even though he feels that the voice through the loudspeakers sounds quite irritating⁶⁶.

But these prophylactic measures only keep *jnūn* at bay. To eject them forever, the guardians are convinced of the effectiveness of performing a big sacrifice and killing a goat in every room of the house. Westermarck and Crapanzano confirm *jnūn*’s fondness of blood⁶⁷, a substance containing *baraka*⁶⁸ that is frequently employed in the concoction of cures and magical potions. Shah even

⁶⁰ Shah 2006: 8.

⁶¹ Westermarck 1926, vol. 1: 296.

⁶² Shah 2006: 18-19.

⁶³ Westermarck 1926, vol. 1: 317-318.

⁶⁴ Westermarck 1926, vol. 2: 455-460.

⁶⁵ Shah 2006: 114.

⁶⁶ Shah 2006: 394.

⁶⁷ Westermarck 1926, vol. 1: 264; Crapanzano 1973: 50.

⁶⁸ *Baraka* is defined by anthropologist Clifford Geertz 1968: “blessing, in the sense of divine favor”. It is a quality attributed to saints, descendants of the Prophet, even members of brotherhoods, and places and objects associated to them. Those close to these people, places and objects are blessed by proximity. *Baraka* might cure an illness, secure protection or simply bring good luck. According to Geertz, it is also associated with magical power.

tries a local remedy, spreading some blood from a slaughterhouse in his face to make the *jnūn* in his house visible. Always advised by his guardians, he also takes the decision to visit the tomb of the saint Sidi Abdur Rahman. He defines that kind of shrines “as a focal point for anyone hoping to be healed or to attain *baraka*”⁶⁹, insightfully noticing that, compared to most of Arab countries, the cult to the saints is especially strong in Morocco. He also explains that it is frequent to hear tales of people so afraid of *jnūn* that they move into shrines and refuse to go back to their houses. In *Tuhami*, Crapanzano explains how Tuhami, who firmly believed that he was possessed and married to ‘A’isha Qandisha, visited shrines and tombs obsessively, where he spent long periods of time.

Crapanzano indicates that, to identify an attacking *jinn* it is necessary to call in an “exorcist-seer”⁷⁰. They are frequently women, as it is the case of Sukayna in *In Arabian Nights*, or the unnamed sorceress in Sidi Abdur Rahman in *The Caliph’s House*. This sorceress assures that the *jinn* had taken possession not only of the house, but also of its owner, and identifies her as a powerful and murderous female spirit. She recommends an exorcism performed by the religious brotherhood of the ‘Isawa from Meknes. According to Crapanzano, the ‘Isawa, like the Ḥamadsha, usually perform rituals to exorcise *jnūn*, although their ceremonies are less violent than the former ones, who slash their heads while in trance. Complying, Shah invites a large number of ‘Isawa to Dar Khalifa to perform a ceremony: “In each, they performed the same ritual, spraying the corners with milk, salt and blood. They danced back and forth, rustling the bouquet of smoking leaves as they chanted a solemn mantra”⁷¹. The ceremony is completed with the performance of the *ḥadra*, the dance in which the participants reach a trance state. After that, *jnūn* are appeased and the author and their family can resume their lives undisturbed.

In Arabian Nights: A Caravan of Moroccan Dreams (2008) reads as the continuation of *The Caliph’s House* and takes up where the previous narrative finishes. Although *jnūn* come back to haunt the narrator, their presence is not as determinant as in the previous work. This time, the subject of the book is the author’s search of a narrative voice; Shah feels the need to become a storyteller, as his father and grandfather before him. The oral tales he collects from different Moroccan interlocutors serve him as a source of inspiration and as a demonstration of the maintenance of an oral tradition in present-day Morocco, a culture that mirrored “the make-believe world of *A Thousand and One Nights*”⁷². If *jnūn* worked as an extended metaphor of the challenging relations between East and West and the author and his environment in *The*

⁶⁹ Shah 2006: 223.

⁷⁰ Crapanzano 1973: 162.

⁷¹ Shah 2006: 334.

⁷² Shah 2008: 9.

Caliph's House, in *In Arabian Nights* the author portraits the local society and culture through their oral tales.

ON THE EXISTENCE OF *JNŪN*: POPULAR BELIEF AND SYMBOLIC CONNOTATIONS

In the works of Paul Bowles and Tahir Shah, the presence of *jnūn* and other cultural manifestations is as important as the reflection on their existence. Repeating some local opinions, Shah reflects that, since *jnūn* appear in the Qur'an, Moroccans will continue to believe in them. As part of the Islamic faith, they are the "backbone" of Moroccan culture⁷³. The author maintains that one cannot live in North Africa "without being affected by ingrained superstition. It's everywhere"⁷⁴. For him, living in Morocco implies a challenge; to learn to coexist with superstitions, "learn to appreciate the culture and to navigate through treacherous water"⁷⁵. He responds by trying to adapt himself to this lifeway, respecting such superstitions "as an expression of a mature culture" even if he is unconvinced about their existence. Shah attempts to reach a middle ground, "a no man's land in which one believed but did not believe"⁷⁶, in a conscious exercise of suspension of disbelief.

On the other hand, Bowles's position towards the figure of the *jinn* seems more complex. He talked about the existence of *jnūn* in an interview in 1965: "I believe in the existence of them as projected by common belief... Obviously they do not exist outside the minds of people who believe in them"⁷⁷. That is, he believed in the mystic participation that made possible that the rest of the "primitive" community believed in them. The emphasis is placed in the common belief: what gives the necessary strength to something previously impossible is the fact that everybody is willing to believe it. Quite similarly, for Westermarck *jnūn* were "personifications of what is uncanny in nature". He asserted that, by believing in *jnūn*, people were responsible for their existence, as they seemed "to have been invented to explain strange and mysterious phenomena"⁷⁸.

When asked if he believed in the *jinniya* 'A'isha Qandisha, Paul Bowles resorted to an explanation influenced by the "primitive mentality": he thought Moroccans believed in 'A'isha Qandisha, but he did not believe in 'A'isha Qandisha herself. "To me there's no difference between belief in a legend and belief in the thing itself. Once people believe in something, it becomes part of

⁷³ Shah 2006: 173-174.

⁷⁴ Shah 2006: 92.

⁷⁵ Shah 2006: 24.

⁷⁶ Shah 2006: 106.

⁷⁷ Caponi 1993: 17.

⁷⁸ Westermarck 1926, vol. 1: 389, 26.

the truth for them”⁷⁹. In a similar way, Crapanzano argues that for Tuhami, ‘A’isha Qandisha was as real as a human being, but she was real in a different way. She and the rest of *jnūn* were not mere projections of the Moroccan psyche, they were rather “elements in the idiom through which the Moroccan articulates his world”⁸⁰.

Bowles was not a mere collector of experiences and beliefs and he did not attempt to create a discursive framework to encapsulate the Other within. He was rather exploring the possibilities of myth and the relation between the unconscious and certain cultural manifestations, inspired by the works of Lévy-Bruhl. At the same time, he maintained a detached attitude towards traditional cultural manifestations, instead of enacting the “Rousseauesque fantasy”⁸¹ of going native that some of his Western characters tried to experience with catastrophic consequences.

Nowadays, the belief in *jnūn* and the ailments caused by them is still widespread in Morocco. Such belief, especially deep-seated among the uneducated classes, can have perverse consequences, as Mohammed Maaruf has pointed out. According to him, the healing processes developed by religious brotherhoods to evict *jnūn* reproduce a dialectic of domination and submission, perpetuating a cultural discourse of master and disciple relations⁸². For Crapanzano, the belief in saints and *jnūn* enables “a radical shift of responsibility from self to the Other”⁸³, a mechanism that foments fatalism in Moroccan society. Compared to their views, Bowles’s and Shah’s approaches might seem patronizing and Orientalist, a way of presenting to their readership a manufactured, picturesque portrait of Morocco. While Shah seems to embody the naïve observer, eager to embrace Oriental eccentricity, Bowles would always maintain a distance with the culture he had known so intimately. However, theirs is always a respectful portrait. After all, as Crapanzano has pointed out, the subjective Other represented by anthropologists and by writers is “the empty space of desire that can be described only metaphorically”⁸⁴. Partaking of the same subjects that professional anthropologists researched in Morocco, both authors show a conservationist attitude that aligns them with the discipline of anthropology, while at the same time popularizing Moroccan traditions for their Western readership.

⁷⁹ Caponi 1993: 105.

⁸⁰ Crapanzano 1980: 15.

⁸¹ Caponi 1993: 77.

⁸² Maaruf 2007: 5-10.

⁸³ Crapanzano 1980: 20.

⁸⁴ Crapanzano 1980: 9.