

## THE JINN – THE CULPRIT OF THE ARABIC WORLD

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### Abstract

The article attempts to ponder on the prevalent religious beliefs, urban (vernacular) legends, everyday customs and traditions related to the figure of the jinn and its origins. The study will discuss the mentioned from the point of view of official Sunni Islam, in order to better unweave the disposition Islam towards superstitions and vernacular beliefs. The aim of study is to provide the generic Islamic concept about the jinn and to place it into a context within the framework of individual interpretations of the interview subjects who reside in Kuwait, are Sunni Muslims, men, and women, between the age of 18-65. The applied resources were the Holy Quran, websites marked authentic for Quran interpretations, and contemporary and past literature written on the subject. Further, several interviews with the local Arabic community, blogs, articles of urban legends, and Ruqyah are the backbones of the present paper.

**Keywords:** Jinn, religious beliefs, urban (vernacular) legends, Sunni Islam, Arabic community

**Diszcipline:** Cultural Anthropology, Ethnography

### Absztrakt

#### A DZSINN - A VÁDLOTTAK PADJÁN AZ ARAB VILÁGBAN

A tanulmány a dzsinn alakjával és eredetével kapcsolatosan elterjedt vallási hiedelmek, városi (népi) legendák, mindennapi szokások és hagyományok bemutatására tesz kísérletet a hivatalos szunnita iszlám szemszögéből, annak érdekében, hogy jobban kibogozhassuk az iszlámnak a babonák és a népi hiedelmek iránti hajlamát. A tanulmány célja a dzsinnről alkotott általános iszlám koncepció ismertetése és kontextusba helyezése a Kuvaitban élő, 18-65 év közötti szunnita muszlim férfiak és nők egyéni értelmezéseinek keretein belül. A felhasznált források a Szent Korán, a Korán-értelmezések szempontjából hitelesnek mi-

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nősített weboldalak, valamint a témáról írt kortárs és korábbi szakirodalom voltak. Továbbá a helyi arab közösséggel készített több interjú, blogok, városi legendákról szóló cikkek és a Ruqyah képezik a tanulmány gerincét.

**Kulcsszavak:** Dzsinn, vallási hiedelmek, városi (népi) legendák, szunnita iszlám, arab közösség

**Diszciplína:** Kulturális antropológia, néprajz

The article attempts to ponder on the prevalent religious beliefs, urban (vernacular) legends, everyday customs, and traditions related to the figure of the jinn and its origins. The paper will discuss the mentioned from the point of view of official Sunni Islam, which is a primary objective in order to better unweave the disposition Islam towards superstitions and vernacular beliefs. Any aspiration to communicate with or seek out the intervention of any non-human entities (i.e. jinn, Shaytan, use of magic, etc.) apart from Allah is extra-norm and shall be considered as a sin of dire consequences to its pursuer. Forbidden are thus also any acts other than the Islamic imperatives (of charity, Hajj, Omrah, prayer, etc.) that are carried out to influence others or the future by means of magic, summoning different beings, fortune telling from coffee (which is extremely overused despite the prohibition), casting different spells, communication with the dead, belief in superstitions, use of talismans, etc. In spite of such Islamic and time-to-time legal prohibitions, such services are still openly offered on social media, and the demand seems to be endless even at the price they are offered. The local group in question are the Sunni Arab Muslims that are above the age of 18, have a Kuwaiti residence, from all genders and professions.

Their census information and initials are published throughout this article with regard to their privacy. I publish the full information of the interview subjects everywhere I have their consent. The

snowball method was used to find the interview subjects.

As it is a very common vernacular viewpoint, talking about the jinn also summons them, and makes them present with the speaker, therefore discussing such subjects is involuntary for most Muslims within the researched community, but even Christians.

Thus, most interview subjects resided to quoting the Holy Quran in the beginning, and only multiple conversations helped get closer to the core of their vision of the jinn. In this instance, such statements imply that peculiar enmeshment of the vernacular and official Islam can be observed through everyday practices, as according to official Islam, mere conversations about the Jinn, do not summon them, make them present by all means, hence, the 'users' of the religion still reach back to the holy Quran and full-time specialists to counter a phenomenon that does not exist from the viewpoint of their official religion.

Shaikh Mohamad Al Naqwi (imam, khatib, public speaker) said; „No, it most probably does not summon the Jinn, but even if it does, the jinn are most welcome. [...]” His answer implied on one hand that Islam considers the Jinn as creatures existing in another, parallel world to others, they are part of everyday life, whilst the Holy Quran effectively protects us from their harm. On the other hand, we can conclude, that summoning the jinn in any shape or form, is part of the vernacular religion only.

Summoning the jinn is a phenomenon like sympathetic magic and is frowned upon by Abrahamic religions.

The interview subjects were slow and suspicious to open up about their personal experiences with the jinn, often they broke out in a confused laughter, making jokes about it and using other means of deflection. „Bismillah!” (بِسْمِ اللَّهِ) they exclaimed most of the time, which means „In the Name of Allah”, and it’s the first line of the Holy Quran (Surat Al-Fatihah; „In The Name of Allah, The All-Merciful, The Ever-Merciful.”).

These initial words of the Holy Quran are recited when Muslims want to travel, go to work, enter their homes, or start or finish their meals. One of its functions is protection against harmful entities or problems (that may be the result of the jinn’s presence).

The aim of the present article is to provide the generic Islamic concept about the jinn and to place it into a context within the framework of individual interpretations of the interview subjects that reside in Kuwait, are Sunni Muslims, men, and women, between the age of 18-65.

The applied resources were the Holy Quran, websites marked authentic for Quran interpretations, and contemporary and past literature written on the subject. Further, several interviews of the local Arabic community, blogs, articles of urban legends and Ruqyah are the backbones of the present paper.

As cornerstones of the belief system of the local community are the Holy Quran and the Hadith, these scriptures are definitive to everyday life, and customs in this geographic area. Therefore, the mentioned texts are referred to, quoted, and explained in the paper wherever it is necessary. The language of communication with the interview subjects was Arabic and English, however, they were all published in English only.

### The Jinn (جِنّ / جُنّ)

### The Jinn in the Holy Quran and other Sunni Islamic resources

The Jinn are complex creatures appearing in the Holy Quran and other sources from preceding eras.

The popular contemporary translation of the word is to „hide” or „conceal”, however, the Encyclopedia of Islam (B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat, J. Schacht, 1991, 546-550) offers a different alternative to a wider scope of interpretation:

„They were created of smokeless fire (Quran LV, 14), while mankind and angels, the other two classes of intelligent beings, were created of clay and light. [...] Their relation to Iblis the Shaytan, and to the Shaytans is obscure. In the Quran, XVIII, 48, Iblis is said to be a jinn; but according to the Quran, II, 32, he is said to be an angel. In consequence there is much confusion, and many legends and hypotheses have grown up on this subject. [...] The Arab lexicographers try to make the word jinn derive from ’idjtinan’, ’to be hidden or concealed’ (see Lane, s.v., djinn and Al-Badawi, on II, 7). But this ethymology is very difficult, and the possibility of explanation through borrowing from Latin (*genius*) is not entirely excluded. The expression „naturalem deum uniuscuiusque loci” (Serv. Verg. G., i, 302) exactly expresses the formal localization of the djinn (cf., e.g., Nöldeke, Mu’allakat, I, 74, 78 and ii, 65, 89) as well as their standing as semi/divinities in old Arabia (Robertson Smith, Rel. of Semites, 121; Ger. Tr. (Stübe), 84. ff.)” (B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat, J. Schacht, 1991, 547.)

The word *genius*’ in this context is postulated in classical resources as the ’natural divinity of humankind, of one thing or all places’ („naturalem deum uniuscuiusque loci”). Contextualizing the before mentioned, the jinn in pre-Islamic Arabia seems to be the divinities of certain locations. The word *genius*’ thus refers rather to extraordinary capabilities in the original book (Servius, Georgica)

as brought to light by the Encyclopedia of Islam. As authors that are later to be recited will demonstrate, this character of a semi-divinity was accepted into the lore of Islam as the ever-existing, harmful entity that humankind must fend against. The harmful characteristic is attributed to the pagan origins under the interpretation of this article.

When asked, Shaikh Mohamad Naqwi (imam, khateeb, public speaker) said, that Islam considers the jinn as an ever-existing entity. To the inquiries as to why certain pre-Islamic (pagan) phenomena take up particular roles in the Islamic lore while others are rejected and ostracized, M.N. emphasized that it's most probably because the jinn pose a great danger to all, and we must protect ourselves through Islam, the Holy Quran. The jinn is ever present, existing since the time humanity came into existence, and they have sworn to let mankind stray away from God. They cause illness, mental health problems, marriage problems, crime, and so on. For that reason, the jinn have a particularly important place in human life and Islam, in order for us to be able to take the necessary protective measures against them.

In conclusion, the jinn went from a pagan semi-divinity to a monotheistic harmful entity, the evil itself. It is inevitable to emphasize that Islam connects pagan (pre-Islamic) deities, divinities, and practices with evil, and the phenomena that in anthropological terms can be described as survival phenomena is what represents what's evil for mankind.

To venture further into the Islamic context of the jinn, they, as well as human beings, worship the one God but have free will to follow any religion. "And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me". (Surat Al-Dhariyat, verse 56.). In the 72nd verse of the Quran, the jinn defy their belief in false gods, and venerate the Prophet Mohamed for his monotheism. Hence, jinn still can follow any religion other than Islam, they can con-

vert or revert out of their free will. The ones rejecting to follow the One God are called *Shaytan*. Shaytan was the jinn that refused to prostrate before Adam, therefore he was ostracized from Heaven.

„So the angels prostrated all together— but not Iblis, who refused to prostrate with the others. Allah asked, “O Iblis! What is the matter with you that you did not join others in prostration?” He replied, “It is not for me to prostrate to a human You created from sounding clay moulded from black mud.” Allah commanded, “Then get out of Paradise, for you are truly cursed. And surely upon you is condemnation until the Day of Judgment.” Shaytan appealed, “My Lord! Then delay my end until the Day of their resurrection.” Allah said, “You will be delayed until the appointed Day.” Satan responded, “My Lord! For allowing me to stray I will surely tempt them on earth and mislead them all together, except Your chosen servants among them.” Allah said, “This is the Way, binding on Me: you will certainly have no authority over My servants, except the deviant who follow you, [...]” (Al-Hijr 30-42).

The Encyclopedia of Islam and the recited Quranic verses imply that Shaytan is a jinn – „So they prostrated themselves, except Iblis. He was one of the Jinn [...]” (Surat Al-Kahf, verse 50) and he, being superior to Adam (him and the angels were created from clay and light, while Shaytan – Iblis - was created from fire), refuses to prostrate before man. Shaytan is between divine and human, therefore he cannot prostrate before a human being, thus he defies God's Order, who forsakes him, and orders him out of Heaven. Shaytan's determination in consequence is to let mankind stray away from the path of God which is clearly represented in Islam, as well as vernacular beliefs and practices.

The Encyclopedia of Islam proceeds to explain the nature of the jinn further, broken down to

Islamic and the vernacular point of view, the latter by country, further reinforcing its point of view on the transformation of the character of the jinn from a pagan divinity to the villain of a monotheistic religion.

1. „The djinn in pre-Islamic Arabia were the nymphs and satyrs of the desert, and represented the side of the life of nature still unsubdued and hostile to man. [...] But in the time of Muhammad djinn were already passing over into vague, impersonal gods. The Arabs of Mecca asserted the existence of a kinship (nasab) between them and Allah (Ku’an, XXXVII, 158), made them companions of Allah (VI, 100), offered sacrifices to them (VI, 128) and sought aid of them (LXXII, 6).
2. In official Islam the existence of the djinn was completely accepted, as it is to this day, and the full consequences implied by their existence, were worked out. Their legal status in all respects was discussed and fixed, and the possible relations between them and mankind, especially in questions of marriage and property, were examined. Stories of the loves of djinn and human beings were evidently of perennial interest. [...] There are many stories too, of relations between saints and djinn; cf. D.B. Macdonald, *religious attitude and life in Islam*, 144. ff.
3. The jinn in folk-lore. The transition to this division comes most naturally through the use of the djinn in magic. Muslim theology has always admitted the fact of such a use, though judging its legality varyingly. The Fihrist traces both the approved and the disapproved kinds back to ancient times, and gives Greek, Harranian, Chaldean and Hindu sources. At the present day, books treating of the binding of djinn to talismanic service are an important part of the literature of the people. All know and read them, and the professional magician

has no secrets left. In popular stories too, as opposed to the tales of the professed litterateur, the djinn play a large part.” (Lewis, Pellat and Schacht, 1991)

Robertson Smith, and Macdonald attempt to provide a rationalized explanation as to how the character of the jinn developed from being a pagan transcendent entity to the creation of Allah, and a crucial further somewhat “tamed” figure of Islam.

„In fact, the earth may be said to be parceled out between demons and wild beasts on the one hand, and gods and men on the other. To the former belong the untrodden wilderness with all its unknown perils, the wastes and jungles that lie outside the familiar tracks and pasture grounds of the tribe, and which only the boldest men venture upon without terror; to the latter belong the regions that man knows and habitually frequents, and within which he has established relations, not only with his human neighbors, but with the supernatural beings that have their haunts side by side with him. And as man gradually encroaches on the wilderness and drives back the wild beasts before him, so the gods in like manner drive out the demons, and spots that were once feared, as the habitation of mysterious and presumably malignant powers, lose their terrors and either become common ground or are transformed into the seats of friendly deities. From this point of view, the recognition of certain spots as haunts of the gods is the religious expression of the gradual subjugation of nature by man.” (Robertson Smith, in Macdonald 1909, 134.)

The Encyclopedia, Macdonald and Smith seem to agree that the jinn evolved and developed in pre-Islamic Arabia, whilst being accepted by the followers of Islam as an ever-present entity, embodying beliefs around malintentions and harm, which are connected to the unseen and the invisible.

The unseen postulates as the godly plan, that neither the jinn nor humans have access to or

permission to know it. Further, the jinn belong to a parallel world that is invisible and forbidden to human. The borders between worlds are clearly drawn.

Vernacular beliefs in Arabia and Islamic scholars widely accepted the existence of the jinn, which became parts of everyday human lives even through such intimate acts as sex and marriage as mentioned before (MacDonald 1909). It's not only that the jinn "made it" to the bedroom of believers but such acts also were frequent subjects of legal arguments;

„Around the possibility of marriage between mankind and the Jinn an immense literature has gathered. The general position is that such marriages have frequently taken place and are lawful; some few canon lawyers, however, deny their legality on qur-anic grounds. According to the present code of Ottoman law, following the school of Abu Hanifa, such marriages are illegal; one reason alleged is because a Jinni may appear in either sex. But these legal doubts the broad belief of the Muslim people laughs to scorn. Probably every Muslim has heard of or been in some relation to some man or other, who was known to have married a female Jinni.” (Macdonald, 1909, 143.)

In conclusion, the jinn are not only related to Shaytan, but Shaytan is a jinn himself, and the jinn consider themselves to be above man. They are invisible, but are able to take on any form to deceive human beings and divert them from the righteous path. They are able to see people, but people can only see them, if they want to be seen by them. They can follow any religion as they will, they can convert, revert, marry, take on human form, or possess humans to marry them and use them for their own purposes. They, just as mankind from the Islamic point of view, are supposed to follow Islam. The jinn are able to reach Heaven, but are forbidden to set foot beyond a certain point. If they try it, and with the intention to eavesdrop, meteorites will strike them.

„Indeed, We have placed constellations in the sky, and adorned it for all to see. And We protected it from every accursed devil, except the one eavesdropping, who is then pursued by a visible flare.” (Surat Al-Hijr 16-18)

„Indeed, We have adorned the lowest heaven with the stars for decoration and for protection from every rebellious devil. They cannot listen to the highest assembly of angels for they are pelted from every side, fiercely driven away. And they will suffer an everlasting torment. But whoever manages to stealthily eavesdrop is instantly pursued by a piercing flare.” (Surat As-Saaffat 6-10)

Pagan Arabs thought that the jinn are able to see the „unseen” (Macdonald, 1909), making considerable efforts to fathom the sacred secrets of the transcendent as opposed to the official Islamic stance on the matter. „When We decreed Solomon's death, nothing indicated to the subjected jinn that he was dead except the termites eating away his staff. So, when he collapsed, the jinn realized that if they had really known the unseen, they would not have remained in such humiliating servitude.” (Surat Al-Mulk 5)

Conclusively, Islam rejects the pagan viewpoint that the jinn would be able to see the unseen or eavesdrop the godly plans (as explained above). Scholars of the official religion keep innervating followers to turn to God and his word, the Holy Quran only, and utilize no tools other than what is prescribed to them by the holy scriptures which clearly outlines Islam's opposition to the pre-Islamic era. „When you recite the Quran, seek refuge with Allah from Satan, the accursed. He certainly has no authority over those who believe and put their trust in their Lord. His authority is only over those who take him as a patron and who –under his influence–associate others with Allah in worship” (An-Nahl 98-100), and although the jinn are between deities and humans, it is forbidden to seek their help by all means, which, to the contrary

is a great part of magical practices of magicians and occultists throughout the Islamic world.

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Iblis mislead mankind when Adam was created, and since then the aim of the jinn that follow Shaytan is let human kind astray from the righteous path of God.

„And Satan will say to his followers after the judgment has been passed, „Indeed, Allah has made you a true promise. I too made you a promise, but I failed you. I did not have any authority over you. I only called you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me; blame yourselves. I cannot save you, nor can you save me. Indeed, I denounce your previous association of me with Allah in loyalty. Surely the wrongdoers will suffer a painful punishment.” (Ibrahim 22)

The jinn don't have enough power to influence humans against their will, and they are unable to apply force of any sorts. „I only called you and you responded”. (Ibrahim 22) The jinn only inspire man to commit evil acts, and make evil appear righteous.

In polytheistic Arabia, gods were female, in a sharp contrast to the monotheistic Islam in which women cannot be preachers or fill in religious positions, God is male. Monotheism seemingly established the basis of modern patriarchy, which represented itself on religious platforms, according to which men are the sole providers. Important aspect is the transformation from polytheism to monotheism through which polytheism is represented as a false belief system, an evil faith, that is from Shaytan. Iblis mislead mankind when Adam was created, and since then the aim of the jinn that

follow Shaytan is let human kind astray from the righteous path of God.

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Instead of Allah, they only invoke female gods and they 'actually' invoke none but a rebellious Satan cursed by Allah – who said, „I will surely take hold of a certain number of Your servants. I will certainly mislead them and delude them with empty hopes. Also, I will order them and they will slit the ears of cattle and alter Allah's creation.” And whoever takes Satan as a guardian instead of Allah has certainly suffered a tremendous loss. „Satan only makes them false promises and deludes them with empty hopes. Truly Satan promises them nothing but delusion.” (An-Nisa 117-120).

Thus, polytheism in the given context is a false belief from Shaytan, and those who follow false gods, follow Shaytan who deluded them, and they are cursed by Allah.

In conclusion, for Muslims, the Quran and the Hadith are the righteous path, the Prophet Mohamed is their role model. Muslims reach back to their scriptures throughout all and any situations that require guidance, as these scriptures are the most important authorities that direct all aspects of life. In Islamic context, every single word of the Quran is straight (directly) from God (Allah)

himself, therefore it represents the most perfect and superior truth to all Muslims. Any other statements that oppose the Quran are considered either misunderstandings, misinterpretations, mistakes, or the work of Shaytan. If a Muslim diverts from the Islamic way of life, commits a sin in Islam, it is often referred to as the work of Shaytan, or possession by the jinn.

### The ever-present evil in mankind

Both mankind and the jinn have received free will from Allah who accurately instructed them about right and wrong. The Holy Quran provided exact orders and directions for all aspects of life, and also, individuals must be able to distinguish right and wrong based on conscience, as many interview subjects recalled („*You have a mind, you know what is right, what is wrong*” – M. 45-year-old male, Yemeni interview subject).

Among Sunni Muslims, it is a prevalent vernacular belief that a jinn is sitting on the left, and an angel is sitting on the right side of every human. The angel is providing the right suggestions, and the jinn (all interview subjects used Shaytan and the jinn interchangeably throughout all interviews, clarifications were only received when they were prompted) is trying to compel the individual to stray from God's path. (29-year-old Palestinian woman, R.). All interview subjects have concluded that sinning can only be the work of the devil. Sin is due to the individual's incapacity or unwillingness to adhere to the Islamic way of life, listening to the devil instead of the angel. (41-year-old Syrian woman, F.).

„*See, if we are sitting here, and we are bored, what are we doing? We are talking about other people. Is it right or wrong? (It's wrong. The author). So it means, that because we are bored, we are weakened, and we listen to Shaytan (Iblis, the author), and we do the wrong thing. But possession is different.*” (R).

R. was referring to the evil (jinn or Shaytan) that is attempting to compel human beings to do the

forbidden or act unrighteous even by such a miniscule deeds as everyday gossiping, which is, along with slandering, forbidden in all Abrahamic religions. People however being fallible, tend to still talk about the non-present out of weakness or boredom despite the prohibition. Therefore consciousness, and constant reminders through prayers and regular readings of the Quran to a Muslims are primary in everyday-life.

M. explained the same question as follows: „*See Kinga, God gave us a mind why? He gave us a mind to differentiate between right and wrong. You have a mind, so you can know. Always. So, it is the work of Shaytan. He is always there. And also, God created Shaytan and the jinn before us but they are still below us. So those who do bad things, are doing against God, as we are all a little piece from God. This way, we can never understand him fully, but those who do bad things, can only follow Shaytan. All the bad things on this Earth are the work of Shaytan.*”

It is prevalent that M. assumed intentionality of consciousness at Creation to human beings. He explained that even without knowing the teachings of the Quran, people's consciousness shall tell them what's the right way. Humans received a mind to understand, distinguish, differentiate between right and wrong, and if one follows the path of Islam, they will never abandon righteousness. All people are a small piece from God, therefore we all know the difference between right and wrong. Deciding to do the wrong thing therefore can only be due to listening to the wrong suggestions from the jinn (Iblis).

- *So how do you know if something is the work of Shaytan or the jinn, if they are both trying to lead you away from God and make you do bad things?*
- *It's easy to know, it has very obvious signs. Those who are possessed by the jinn will act abnormal, their movements will be strange, they will be talking strange and will do strange things. If it's the work of Shaytan, the person will act normal, but simply choose to do bad things. It's always the person's choice. If you are*



*possessed by the jinn, you have no choice, as it has taken over your mind and body.* (F.)

Being possessed, and simply following the wrong suggestions are however two entirely different phenomena. Being possessed means that an entity has taken control over the mind and the body of the individual, who has no choice over the course of actions taken, therefore no responsibility either. Defendants often use it as a defense at court as it happened to me even on one instance;

- *Why did you do it?* (the author).
- *The devil was playing on my mind.*

The defendant answered this to my question after being caught and taken to court for assaulting me. Shaikh M. N. explained later, his answer was assumably a lawyer's suggestion to decrease liability over his actions, as it is widely believed and accepted, that if a jinn possessed the human body, the human being himself has no or limited responsibility over his actions, therefore claims of possessions are often used as a defense tactic. In this case, the defendant's claims were not given credit, which shows the extent of individual judgment based on the person's Islamic literacy and common sense applied in each situation.

Another interview subject has shed light on the nature of the jinn from a different perspective.

- *Please mention an example of experiencing the jinn's work.*
- *Well, my mother always checks on us to see if we are sleeping. Once it was close to Fajr, and I wasn't sleeping, and I heard my mother coming, so I hid under the blanket. I heard her walking in, and I felt that she was standing at the headboard. After about 3 minutes, I decided to check what's happening, as I didn't hear my mother leaving the room. I walked into her room, and I saw her sleeping deeply. I asked her if it was her, the next morning, but she said she didn't come to my room. I think it was the jinn.* (R.)

Fajr is the first Islamic morning prayer before sunrise. As per popular belief, the jinn like to appear before humans at the border of light and

dark, day and night. They often appear before people in their bedroom, they pretend to be people the others know, they trick the one's who see them. On one occasion relatives of R. had a marital argument, as the husband was blaming the wife that she didn't bring the tea he asked from her, while the wife swore that he didn't ask for anything, she didn't even enter the room. The argument was settled by agreeing that the jinn played with their senses.

A. A. (40-year-old Kuwaiti woman) recalled the below incident: *„You know, we always cover our food, and never leave anything outside. Once, I just forgot to cover the fresh food outside, the lids weren't on the pots properly. I heard clanking the entire night, I was scared a lot. I gathered courage, I went to the kitchen, and I found all the lids on the floor. I put them back properly, so that the jinn are not tempted.”*

It is a common understanding within the community in question that the jinn are enticed by food. Throughout my personal experiences and my research, I observed two coping mechanisms. One of them is leaving food outside for the jinn, so they are happy and satisfied, and the other is the opposite; keeping everything immaculate. Always putting food away neatly, never leaving any leftovers, crumbs outside, never leaving food uncovered, therefore the jinn are not tempted to appear. One strategy attempts to cope by acceptance and cooperation, the other strategy aims to keep the jinn as far as possible.

When I asked R. (42-year-old Lebanese woman) if she could recall any incident related to the jinn, she provided a unique, wider scope of context, which revealed that even within Islam there is a plethora of undeciphered perceptions and interpretations related to the jinn.

*„For example, our Islam is different from the Islam here (in Kuwait, and the Gulf countries), because we are „Druze”*

- *This means that we do things different, and we think different. For example, I had a cousin, who was able to*

*tell you many things that you would be surprised. He was 4 years old, and they had a builder over, to repair their bathroom. When he saw this man, he said „They betrayed me! They killed me!”. The man looked at him, absolutely surprised, and my cousin’s parents asked him, if he knew who he was, and he answered that it’s not him. His parents were taken aback. He asked him, do you have a big picture on your bedroom wall of your brother? He answered yes. He is dead, he said. It was impossible for him to know this. The builder’s relative fought in the Civil War in Lebanon, and he had to catapult from his plane, but he got stuck with his parachute in a tree. His own troop shot him, because they thought he was an Israeli soldier, while the Israelis also were shooting at him. He died there. This is why I say we see things different.*

- *So what happened there?*
- *Well, here, people would say that it is the jinn, but we know that it is a memory from his previous life. Many people believe in this Kinga, even Freud proved it through hypnosis. [...]*

The interview has clearly shown how these individuals may use the fusion of official religion and vernacular practices or even modern beliefs to construct viable explanations to phenomena they otherwise cannot interpret;

R. emphasized that in the specific context (Lebanese Druze), the same phenomena that would be interpreted by Islamic specialists of Kuwait as the work of the jinn (the case of the shot air force-service member) can be represented in a different, modern, spiritualistic/scientific context (previous lives, reincarnation, Freudian experiments, new-spiritual movements). The boy was seeing things he wasn’t supposed to see; a dead person’s past, and the vision was invoked by a person that the boy has never met previously, and he had no chance ever hearing the narrative before. When asked, other interview subjects, after a little or no thinking, said that it’s probably the jinn’s work, as the boy was not supposed to see the past of a dead person. Also, Islam does not support the idea of

reincarnation and previous lives. However, with the renaissance of new-spiritualism also affecting scientific interest and research, new methods of interpretation became available to decipher a phenomenon that is difficult to understand. Reincarnation, and multiple lives are still widely under research on the other hand, therefore scientifically the possibility of reincarnation, previous lives, and especially being able to tap into the memories of those lives are unproven just yet. Such ideas fall under the scope of the individual’s personal belief system.

- *Or... here is something else, again, it didn’t happen to me, and I don’t really believe in these things, I am not comfortable talking about them, as I have no such experiences. So, I had a cousin who told me that she has experienced strange things, the jinn kept playing around with her.*
- *What do you mean?*
- *They let her things disappear, ate her food too. She ended up leaving food outside for the jinn.*
- *And did the jinn eat the food?*
- *Yes, always.*
- *Does everyone leave food outside for the jinn?*
- *Many people.*
- *What else?*
- *One day, she got really fed up, and she wanted to be pretty for the day, she was doing her makeup, and the jinn took her favorite eye pencil! She got really angry and told the jinn: „Now, it is really too much! This day is really important to me, I want to be pretty, put my pencil back! She went to the other room, and when she came back, she found her pencil where she left it previously.*
- *Do you think it was really the jinn?*
- *I think so, but I wasn’t there. But these things keep happening to her.”*

The jinn are ever- and omnipresent in the life of all Muslims. Their existence and presence are just as self-evident as breathing air. No Muslim would

ever question the existence of the jinn. They may disagree on the extent of the interference of the jinn in everyday life, but no one of them would ever deny it. Even such miniscule things may be attached to the activity of the jinn as disappearing leftovers or small objects.

Attending a kashta (desert barbeque) I had the opportunity to observe that the one cooking, will always bury the oil, and the organic waste (45-year-old Egyptian man, A.). Being asked why they are doing it, they told me that one reason is that the jinn are always present around us, especially at night, and that we share a world. No one would be pleased if they threw waste around their house. The other reason given is that the jinn love to eat up the leftover food that people leave around, it entices them. To prevent it, it's better to hide the leftovers and the waste. A. often spends nights and days in the desert, and he is convinced that the jinn are all around us at all times. He recalled multiple instances when his dog ran into the night, chasing the jinn, explaining that many animals are able to see the jinn. Also, the jinn can appear in forms of different animals.

*„Djinn appear to men in many different forms, most often in the guise of animals, such as; — a black cat (without any light markings), a goat (kid, or he-goat), a black dog, a duck, a hen with chickens, a buffalo, a fox; or else in human shape; either as men of ordinary size or dwarfs, and sometimes as men of gigantic stature (many who claim to have seen them describe them as quite white, thin, and as tall as a minaret or a telegraph pole); they also appear with the features.*

Another prevalent belief that I often encountered is that most nightmares are caused by the jinn. This belief is also approved by official Islam. According to Islam, our soul leaves the body when we are sleeping, and the jinn uses our vulnerability in our dreams to either possess humans or to compel them to do evil. „I used to see dreams (and was so much perturbed) that I began to quiver and have temperature, but did not cover myself with a

mantle. I met Abu Qatada and made a mention of that to him. He said: I heard Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) as saying: A good vision comes from Allah and a (bad) dream (hulm) from devil. So when one of you sees a bad dream (hulm) which he does not like, he should spit on his left side thrice and seek refuge with Allah from its evil; then it will not harm him.” (Sahih Muslim 2263a, Book 42, Hadith 9).

It is clearly stated in the above section, that bad dreams are coming from Shaytan himself, the precaution of Muslims of not telling bad dreams of others, is implying the firm belief, that mere words, and talking about the evil is able to summon it, bring it to presence (as emphasized at the beginning of the paper), which as per written evidence seems to be a vernacular belief.

According to the Holy Quran (Chapter 12, *Sūrat Yūsuf*) the dreams of true believers that come from God will come true near the Day of Judgement, whilst telling one's dreams (vision in this instance) is not suggested, as it can harm the listener or the speaker. (In this chapter, the brothers plot to kill Yusuf not much after he tells his dream to his father, who warns him against talking about his vision). However, in this chapter it is also emphasized, that the brothers plot against Yusuf because they think that he is being favored by their father, and not as a result of talking about his vision. Since bad dreams are from Shaytan, the recommendation of official Islam is to listen to or recite certain sections of the Quran. If one is to complain about nightmares, they are certain to receive these verses by all means as a protective measure against evil.

It can also be observed on various occasions, that Muslims set the Quran on audio playback when leaving their homes, as it protects their place from harmful entities (jinn). The day usually starts with cleaning and the use of bokhoor which is similar in function to the incense in use by Catholics. The bokhoor is used multiple times a day, due to its pleasant scent and its protective, cleaning qualities

attributed to it by Muslims (in vernacular tradition it's even used for cleansing. They lit the bokhoor and the individual must stand over it with their legs apart, and even pass over it. They use it after weddings, when they assume that someone received the evil eye, or as simple precaution as well).

Entering a Muslim household wearing shoes is also considered an outrageous disrespect as it brings dirt in the house, and the jinn love dirty places (such as toilets and bathrooms). Reaching for the food, or eating it using one's left hand is a certain sign of the presence of the jinn with the individual, or, rudeness at the least. „If anyone of you eats, let him eat with his right hand, and if he drinks, let him drink with his right hand, for indeed the devil eats with his left hand and drinks with his left hand.” (Ibn ‘Umar)

As per the explanations of M.N., we were advised in the Hadith to use our right hand for all the good things we do, and the left for the less pleasant actions, therefore we shall follow. *“Apart from the jinn, there is also a pragmatic reason” - he said – “About 80 percent of the human population, if not more are right-handed, and being humans, we are comfortable to do everything with our dominant hand. Now, imagine... Someone just coughs or sneezes, and covers their face by the right hand, then goes and shakes hands with you, or offers food from the same hand. It is not only that we are instructed to follow, it's not only about the jinn, it's a very pragmatic way of life, we're very practical people. Keep the unpleasant and unclean things for the left hand, and shake hands, offer food, eat by, etc. the right one. This way, these things are surely not mixing up.”*

Related to this simple custom, an abundant context of the Islamic and vernacular customs and beliefs can be observed. The vernacular belief is that the jinn occupy the left side, therefore they use their left hand for everything unpleasant to protect themselves from the jinn, but my interview subjects never brought up any hygiene concerns throughout the interview other than shaikh M.N. Whilst official Islam also agrees with the

connection of the jinn and the left side to an extent, with examples like the one above, we are offered a rather profane explanation of everyday practices. Only within this one example, 2 dimensions, the transcendent belief system, and the profane use could be described and observed.

The left side is generally attributed to the jinn by the Muslims interviewed. The jinn of the Islamic world exist and strive in filth, and therefore immaculate cleanliness of one's attire and space has absolute priority. Thinking even of the *Wudhu*, the ritual wash before prayer, the opposition between the cleanliness and divine, and dirt – evil is undeniable. When Muslims perform *Whudhu* in preparation for prayer, they are also getting ready to connect to the divine and to rid the evil. Washing the crotch area, the face, ears hands and soles with water are mandatory before each prayer, unless someone didn't break the previous *Whudhu* (didn't commit an unclean, unislamic act). The *Wudhu* is broken by any act that is extra-norm to Islam, such as smoking, the consumption of alcohol, etc.

The jinn live at empty, horrific places, such as abandoned ruins, secluded locations of the desert, caves, dump yards, etc. If a water resource is not available, the believer wanting to pray, can use a certain sequence of movements to clear their face and hands in the sunlight, which is a repeated reference to the connection between divine, cleanliness and light, whilst the jinn are attributed to darkness and filth. Such places with dirt, must be avoided by Muslims. „Even in daytime precautions have to be taken with regard to certain places such as water-closets, remote corners where rubbish is piled or where dirty water overflows, at the foot of trees, quiet dirty corners on river-banks, the base of walls above the gutter, enclosed dark places in houses (like lumber-rooms) etc.” (Lewis, Pellat and Schacht, 1991)

With regards to places assigned to the jinn, the most infamous urban legend of Kuwait is the jinn-

wedding. The different variations of the same narrative are well known among the Muslims of Kuwait and other countries as well. The event had a great press-popularity, several publications and videos can be found on the web, detailing the events that happened to a popular Kuwaiti singer, *Nourah Ali*, who arrived at a wedding as the star singer. On her arrival, the house was lavishly lit, the music was on, the guests were having the time of their lives. Nourah started to feel dizzy, ran from the room in panic and fainted. When regaining consciousness people started to ask her what happened, and she told them that she noticed that the wedding she attended, wasn't a wedding for humans, but the jinn. The crowd that gathered to help her didn't understand what house she was mentioning. When she looked up, she saw that the building that she just left was in ruins, it had no lights, the music wasn't on, and no guests were arriving or leaving. When I asked my interview subjects whether they think the narrative was true, they all said that they are not sure, but probably yes, as these kinds of things keep happening, and they are real. Also, the narrative presents all aspects of the jinn's world and nature. The jinn wedding appeared in a secluded area in a ruined house, and the jinn appeared to the singer in a human form, let alone that she was invited. A misleading mirage appeared in front of Nourah, and only small things (such as goat legs) were the tell-tale signs that she was misled by the jinn. What appears in the narrative, is that even good willing people might be misled and deceived by the jinn, they can divert our sense of reality, therefore, we're never truly safe, and precautions are always necessary.

Another video (our objective is to understand the contemporary representations of the jinn; therefore, the authenticity of the materials is not discussed here) is presenting the interaction between a man and a woman at a secluded building. Throughout their conversation, the woman keeps repeating that she has married a jinn. The woman wears

an abaya (traditional robe of Muslim women), her face turned to the corner, speaking in an eerie, weak voice. The man tries to interact with her, but when he realizes what he is facing, starts reciting the holy Quran, to apply protecting measures against the jinn, exclaiming „*Subhan Allah! The legs are not human legs!*”, which is a sure sign that the creature is a jinn. As previously mentioned, it's not only possible that the jinn appear before us in human form or that they possess a human being, remaining concealed, but they can also marry and have children and intercourse with humans for instance in the Arabian nights.

„Stories about the jinn and sexual and amorous liaisons and marriages with humans strongly infiltrate this narrative. Not only do these worlds exist side by side, but they also interact and communicate. The recognition, acceptance and tolerance of the existence of the world of the jinn are so naturalized, that sexual and romance attachments with them are also expected and accepted.” (Ghanim, 2018, 52.)

„The book called *Al-Fihrist*, a catalogue raisonne of Arabic literature of about 1000 A. D., gives a separate section to "Names of Those of Mankind Who Loved the Jinn and Vice-versa." It is really sixteen titles of books of their love stories. Similarly, in the numerous collections of love stories there are chapters given to "Lovers of the Jinn."” (Macdonald, 1909, 144.)

Naturally, from an Islamic standpoint intercourse with or through the jinn is not acceptable, and it is classified as possession. The folklore, or vernacular interpretation is that the popular forms of *Ruqyah* (popular in this case means any methods that are not prescribed by the Scriptures or accepted by Islamic laws) are effective methods to rid of the jinn, hence, it is forbidden in official Islam. Despite the prohibition, even imams offer their services, some of them even for money (which is forbidden) to help people get free from their assumed or real possession by the jinn.

An article, published by the European Journal of Medical and Health Sciences, goes into great detail as to means and criteria to recognize possession, while making a considerable attempt to prove that traditional, Islamically approved Ruqyah shall be a standard complementary part of general treatment of mental illnesses, as most mental disorders do fit the jinn-possession criteria set up by the authors. Their claim is based on the findings of a study done on three non-Muslim patients of mental disorders. The group hypothesized in agreement with Islamic principles that the symptoms of mental disorders result from the inter-psyche conflict between the human psyche and the jinn psyche let it be a Muslim or a non-Muslim patient. The authors also recommend, that people diagnosed with mental illness are also to be screened for jinn-possession. The conclusion of their research and article was that the main clusters of mental disorders (without details) in symptoms show significant overlapping with their criteria developed for jinn-possession screening. The research done and the attempts made, show the extent of the presence of the jinn and their effect on our everyday lives.

As per modern Islamic medicine research, most mental disorders develop as a result of the jinn's actions. Some individuals, state to practice Ruqyah, and ask astronomical amounts for their assumed services. The highest amount demanded and paid for such a procedure was around 16 000 KD (about 16 million HUF). In these cases, (not considering ethical concerns), the enmeshment of vernacular and official Islam can be observed through everyday practices. Although the specialists of official Islam and the country's laws make tremendous efforts to fight off such customs, they are still on the rise, due to the popularity of vernacular beliefs opposed to official Islam, attached to the jinn.

Kuwaiti oral historian, Reem ALAli working at the Yarmouk Cultural Center Kuwait said, that

occasions called Al Zār even at the beginning of the 60's were gatherings of women, and were believed to be used for the removal of harmful entities. (The Zār is a term for a demon or spirit (Jinn in this context), assumed to possess individuals, mostly women, causing discomfort or illness). Reem proceeded to explain during the interview, that the Zār occasions in Kuwait were either formal or informal social get-togethers that served as an outlet for women to share their problems with others, using their gathering as an outlet for stress. They gathered in a house, where they were attempting to rid of the jinn, or remove any harmful entities, curses. These occasions were prohibited after some time, and they are not permitted today. This informal social institution does not exist in a form that is within the norms of the Islamic community, therefore it is under the scope of vernacular beliefs.

The form of Ruqyah process through which the imam is touching the possessed individual or does anything other than reciting the Quran are also extra-norm to Islam. According to official Islam's point of view, the only effective protection against the Jinn is the Islamic way of life, and, mainly, practicing the five pillars of Islam, (which are monotheism - there is only one God, and the prophet Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, prayer five times a day – salat, charity - zakat, pilgrimage – hajj, and fasting – sawm), and the recital of Quranic verses.

### Summary

In summary, the official point of view of Islam is that any acts that are not prescribed by the Quran or the Hadith, or those that are prohibited by the same scripture are extra-norm to Islam, however the individuals practicing their religion often enmesh boundaries between vernacular and official rituals, practices and beliefs, not always being able to distinguish between cultural and religious phenomena. Such enmeshment seems to be on the rise despite the efforts of Islamic institutions and

laws. For a Muslim the most important religious authorities to turn to with questions regarding everyday life such as marriage, bringing up children, social or financial matters, or questions related to Islam, are the Quran, the Hadith, imams and khatibs.

Mosques are not only places of practicing religion, but also are important semi-formal social institutions that provide venue for meetings and discussions between actors of the local community, the centers of discussing everyday matters, religious questions. Their role in maintaining group coherence, directing community life, interpersonal interactions are undeniably the most important. The authority of the words of an imam are rarely questioned within local communities, therefore their guidance is crucial in the matter of fending against the jinn, identifying possession, and so on.

The cited resources imply the conclusion that the character of the jinn existed in pre-Islamic Arabia and that it is not only a survival phenomenon in anthropological terms, but also the related, and introduced social practices, vernacular religious customs and traditions survived and developed throughout the centuries. Official Islam and full-time religious specialists accept and emphasize on the existence of the jinn and their world, but refuse the related vernacular customs and traditions, which are considered extra-norm to official Islam. Theological arguments between schools and denominations of Islam, further complicate understanding and distinguishing between vernacular and official religion for an outsider (i.e. Duruz). Thus, throughout my research, I also reached back to the holy Quran and websites branded authentic, to maintain a unified, standard way of brief analysis and description of official religious standpoints. During interviews I attributed significance to which Islamic school does the individual identify with, as long as it was significant to understand the interview subject's identity. As per my observations in the last 10 years in Kuwait, due to the ethnical

fragmentation of the country, different cultures, religions and their schools are in constant interaction both on formal and informal grounds. The result of intercultural interactions is not only the constant conflict of different viewpoints, but also the enmeshment of the knowledge of different Islamic schools, cultures, vernacular practices on an individual level that result in a Babels of customs to be unveiled and better understood.

This paper aimed to serve an insight to the prevalent vernacular phenomenon present in the Sunni Islam community in Kuwait, emphasizing on the contrast between official religion and vernacular beliefs and practices.

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