



Journal of Social and Political Sciences

Volkan, K. (2023). The Jinn: Islam, Exorcism, and Psychology. *Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, 6(3), 1-14.

ISSN 2615-3718

DOI: 10.31014/aior.1991.06.03.425

The online version of this article can be found at:
<https://www.asianinstituteofresearch.org/>

Published by:
The Asian Institute of Research

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The Jinn: Islam, Exorcism, and Psychology

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Abstract

The belief in malevolent spiritual beings is found in religions throughout the world. Islam is no exception, and this religion includes the belief in beings known as jinn. These beings often cause harm to humans, typically by possessing them. Jinn possession can be understood in several different ways in Islam and there are specific forms of exorcism depending on the type and strength of the jinn doing the possessing. Additionally, several customs related to the prevention of harm from jinn are prevalent in the Muslim world. Mass media, such as horror films or novels may play a role in perpetuating belief in jinn. While jinn possession is considered pathological some people experience secondary gain from being in a possessed state. These gains include getting attention, having their behavior excused as deviating from cultural norms, and experiencing a release of inhibitions. From a psychological point of view jinn possession is similar dissociative identity disorder. Delusional misidentification disorders may also have a relationship to jinn possession. Psychoanalysis suggests that jinn possession is a symbol of repressed unconscious instincts, and psychoanalytic treatment can be understood as a form of exorcism. Object relations psychology suggests that imaginary beings such as jinn are the projection of unwanted bad objects. Traditional healing techniques from Islam can be used in combination with psychodynamic techniques to help those suffering from jinn possession.

Keywords: Exorcism, Jinn, Mass Media, Object Relations, Possession, Psychoanalysis

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of possession is found throughout the world and is often associated with shamanic beliefs and practices (Eliade et al., 2004). Western religions, many of which have shamanic origins, are replete with examples of possession. The ancient Greeks with their Delphic Oracle of Apollo, Northern Eurasian indigenous religions, the so-called Zar cult of Ethiopia, and Old Testament spirits are but a small sample (Van den Stock et al., 2012). In addition to possession by spiritual entities, demonic influence may also include being possessed by unnatural urges and feelings, leading to impulsive sexual and aggressive behaviors. A good example is the female followers of Dionysus, known as Maenads, who lived very chaste lives, but would become violently possessed under the influence of wine (Volkan, 1994).

Beliefs about demons or demonic-like beings have persisted into our current era. A good example is the traditional Islamic belief in jinn¹. These are beings who are separate and distinct from both humans and other spiritual entities

such as angels in the Islamic tradition. Belief in jinn and interaction with these beings plays an important role in Islam as well as in the psychology of Muslims.

2. Islamic Tenets

In order to explore the belief in jinn, however, it is important to understand the basic ideas and beliefs of Islam in general. Samar Jasser (2008) in his chapter on Islam and family structure succinctly outlines the core tenets of the Islamic faith. These are as follows: Islam is a literal monotheistic religion wherein God is a unified being. God may have many different attributes, traits and divine aspects, but he (as he is usually thought of) is considered one God. Although considered a being or entity, God does not have a form which is understandable by humans, therefore we cannot know anything about God's body or physical attributes. Nor can we attribute anything of our human existence as divine attributes. What we know of God comes from the texts revealed by his prophets. The most recent prophet is Muhammad (ﷺ) who revealed the Qur'an. This text explains in detail the practice and guidelines for the Islamic faith.

There are four core tenets of Islam: A belief in angels as the servants of God, belief in all true prophets of God with the most recent being Muhammad (ﷺ), a belief in scripture revealed by the prophets, with the Qur'an containing the final and most important revelations, and a belief in a day of judgement when every human will be held accountable to God for how they conducted themselves during their existence. Other key tenets of Islam include the acknowledgement that there is only one God and no other, honoring one's parents, respecting the rights of others, being generous while not squandering one's money, avoiding killing without a justifiable reason, refraining from adultery, protecting the property of orphans, being honest and just in one's dealings with others, being pure of heart, and being humble, without pretention. Coinciding with the belief in angels is the corresponding belief in jinn who are understood by Muslims to be another class of beings.

3. Jinn in Islam

Belief in jinn is thought to be inherited from the *jahiliyyah* Arabs or Arabs from the *age of ignorance* – the historical period in west-central Arabic peninsula before the advent of Islam in 610CE. These pre-Islamic Arabs held several animistic and spiritualist beliefs including the belief in demonic spirit beings who were able to appear in human form and to possess humans.

The book *Evil Eye, Jinn Possession, and Mental Health Issues: An Islamic Perspective* by G. Hussein Rassool (2018) provides an excellent description of jinn. The word jinn derives from the Arabic *al-Jinn* which means something that is hidden, covered, or concealed. The roots of the word Jinn may be related to several other Arabic words *jannah* (heaven), *janin* (fetus), *mijan* (armor), or *majnoon* (insanity or the covering of the intellect)¹. Jinn are not angels or human, but a separate class of beings. Angels are said to be made from light and humans from dirt or clay, while the jinn were created from smokeless flames. They are thought to be closer to heaven than earth and often, when they are close to heaven, overhear the lower orders of angels who have in turn overheard higher orders of angels who have heard the word of Allah (الله سبحانه وتعالى). The jinn are thought to overhear some divine truth in this fashion, but in an indirect way. When jinn descend to earth, they whisper these overheard truths to people along with 100 lies. In this way jinn distort the words of Allah (الله سبحانه وتعالى) to deceive humans.

According to an early Western source there are reportedly three types of jinn – those who fly through the air, others that prefer to appear as snakes or dogs, and those that move from place to place like humans (Hughes, 1885). Nevertheless, jinn can take any form they like with a marked preference for snakes. Jinn are responsible for medical and psychological problems such as the plague or the evil eye. They are also responsible for natural disasters such as sandstorms - which are caused by jinn fighting each other. However, jinn can sometimes be beneficial providing poets with inspiration and seers with prophecy.

The Qur'an includes a chapter devoted to jinn and warns against the polytheistic worship of them. The Qur'an reports that jinn,

"...live in a kind of parallel universe, sleeping underground by day and emerging at night, where they sometimes appear in the guise of animals or leave tracks in the sparks of fires. This makes wells, caves, drains, and latrines dangerous, as jinns usually live in or pass through them, and it also makes dusk and night dangerous times. Some take up residence in empty or ruined buildings, but a few usually live in each household, sharing space with the humans there and often settling in under the threshold." (Gregg & Matsumoto, 2005, pp. 125-126).

The Qur'an somewhat loosely applies the name jinn to angels, demons, and some human beings, especially those who manifest envy, narcissism, and forgetfulness (Merdin, 2019). However, the most important association of jinn is to *Shaytan* (or Satan, also known as *Iblis*). According to the Qur'an, when Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, Allah (الله سبحانه وتعالى) commanded the angels to bow down to the humans. This bow was not to worship the humans but was as a sign of respect. The angels made their bow, except for Shaytan, who up until then had been a righteous jinn who has kept company with the angels. Shaytan refused to lower himself before what he considered to be lesser beings. This was the beginning of Shaytan's ongoing fight with Allah (الله سبحانه وتعالى). Shaytan vows to turn humans away from Allah (الله سبحانه وتعالى). The conversation between Allah (الله سبحانه وتعالى) and Shaytan in the Qur'an is as follows:

(Allah) said, 'What prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you?'

(Satan) said, 'I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay.'

(Allah) said, 'Descend from Paradise, for it is not for you to be arrogant therein. So get out; indeed, you are of the debased...'

(Satan) said, "Because You have put me in error, I will surely sit in wait for them on Your straight path. Then I will come to them from before them and from behind them and on their right and on their left, and You will not find most of them grateful (to You)." (Rassool, 2018, p. 106)

Jinn are thought to live in human-like societies where they can marry and have children. They are also thought to need to eat and drink, they can experience emotions, and experience death. Many Jinn are non-threatening, however, the further away their association with Islam is, the more evil they become. Jinn are attracted to *baraka* or divine blessedness which is sometimes infused into material objects. Usually, jinn do not interact much with humans. However, they can be mischievous especially if they come across a lone human, they can act like a poltergeist causing a person to become frightened or nervous. Jinn are also quick to anger, and this can cause accidents. An angered jinn may "hit" someone causing them to fall or if they are very angry, experience an epileptic fit. Jinn can cause illness and are sometimes blamed for infertility and difficulties in bearing children.

There are ways to facilitate living peacefully with jinn which have become part of daily life in Islamic countries. Saying *bismillah* (in the name of God) before crossing the threshold of a home, drawing water from a well, or pouring hot water down a drain announces to any jinn present that the person is a believer. Family members and houseguests are not left alone for fear that they may be harassed by jinn. Jinn can be pacified, for instance, by sacrificing a chicken when moving into a new house. The blood of the chicken functions as a gift. Jinn seem to like the smell of incense so keeping this burning makes them happy. Another categorization of the three types of jinn are Muslim jinn (who cause the least trouble), Christian and Jewish jinn, and Pagan jinn. Christian and Jewish jinn can "hit" people, cause serious accidents and illness, and possess people. Pagan jinn are, not surprisingly, the worst type, amplifying the troubles caused by Christian and Jewish jinn. (Gregg & Matsumoto, 2005).

4. Symptoms of Jinn Possession

Although not all Islamic scholars agree, the general belief is that jinn can possess humans and take control of their bodies. Many Islamic traditions have specific exorcism traditions to remove possessing jinn from their human hosts.

It is generally thought that women are more likely to be possessed than men. Possession can manifest in various physical, psychological, and spiritual ways. Physical aspects of possession may manifest as the ability to speak in

unintelligible languages with the possessed person not realizing what they said, the ability to endure painful blows, the ability to lift heavy things, and the ability to run at very fast speeds. Medical complaints can include common ailments, pains, bruising, as well as almost any medical disorder. For women physical problems caused by jinn often include menstrual issues such as heavy bleeding, infertility, and infections. Men possessed by jinn often suffer from impotency and premature ejaculation. Both men and women may have epileptic seizures and speak in tongues. Psychological issues can include depression, anxiety, hysteria, mania, Tourette syndrome, schizophrenia, general destructiveness, and perhaps most importantly, dissociative disorders. It is common in predominately Islamic nations to attribute many of these mental health issues to jinn possession, even by physicians and other educated people.

“Few orientalists, physicians and scientists admit that there are some kinds of epilepsy for which modern clinical medicine cannot discover the cause and the aetiology is of unknown origin. They failed to acknowledge the true cause of some kinds of epilepsy. However, there are Western-oriented physicians that acknowledge this kind of epilepsy. It is worth noting that not everyone who has epilepsy is possessed by the Jinn, because epilepsy may have organic or physical causes.” (Rassool, 2018, p. 128)

Differential diagnosis of jinn possession considers inclusion of several signs and symptoms that when present indicate jinn possession rather than more mundane medical or psychological problems. These signs and symptoms include having a strong rejecting attitude when the call to Islamic prayer (*adhan*) is sounded, or the Qur’an is cited or read. If during a recitation of the Qur’an a person loses consciousness, has an epileptic fit, or talks over the recitation this is indicative of jinn possession. Other symptoms are thought to include frequent nightmares or disturbing dreams, especially involving ghosts, apparitions, or other negatively associated creatures. The possessed person may also talk loudly or moan and groan in his or her sleep. Supposed symptoms of jinn possession which are perhaps less strongly differential include a tendency to avoid others while exhibiting out of the ordinary behavior, emotional lability in the form of being quick to anger or to weep from no apparent cause, paralysis of a limb with no medical cause (conversion symptoms), talking to oneself while sitting on the toilet for long periods of time, and constant headache with no medical cause (Ameen, 2005).

5. Exorcism of Jinn

An excellent source of information on the exorcism of jinn comes from *Ibn Taymiyah’s Essay on the Jinn* (Philips, 2007). There are three main categories of people with regard to jinn possession and exorcism. The first group are those who deny that jinn can possess humans. The second group are those who believe in jinn possession and seek to exorcise the jinn using amulets, charms, talismans, and non-Islamic incantations. The last group are those who believe in jinn possession and who faithfully follow the precepts of Islam and use proper Islamic methods to exorcise jinn.

According to Ibn Taymiyah it is thought to be obligatory for Muslims to exorcise jinn if one comes across someone so afflicted. Muslims, in general, are enjoined to do seven things: “visiting the sick, following funeral processions, wishing well for one who sneezes, fulfilling oaths, helping the oppressed, responding to invitations, and spreading greetings of peace” (p. 71). Additionally, Allah's Messenger or the Prophet, Muhammad (ﷺ) is reported to have exhorted Muslims to help others whether they are an oppressor or are oppressed. If someone is an oppressor, then preventing them from oppressing others is considered to be helping the person. The requirement to exorcise jinn who are oppressing others through possession derives from this direction. Anyone exorcising jinn needs to do this correctly, which mostly involves the use of prayer:

“...Islamic based prayers, words and phrases should only be used in the way they were used by the Prophet (ﷺ) and his Companions. When commanding the Jinn to righteousness, and prohibiting it from evil, it should be done in the same way that man is ordered and forbidden” (Phillips, 2007, p. 73).

Additionally, preaching to possessed person is very common. This includes reminding both the possessing jinn and the possessed person of the power of Allah (الله سبحانه وتعالى), strengthening their faith, etc. The written word may also be used to perform exorcisms:

“It is permissible to write something from the Book of Allah (the Qur'an) with ink made from allowable substances for the afflicted or sick and the writing may also be washed and drunk...”. (Philips, 2007, p. 105)

The act of exorcism may require scolding and threatening the jinn. Though not usually allowed, evoking Allah's (الله سبحانه وتعالى) curse may be acceptable, as the Prophet (ﷺ) reportedly did this when battling with Ibis (Shaytan). If a person exorcises a jinn in an Islamic appropriate fashion, they do not suffer any negative consequences if the jinn being exorcised is injured or dies. In this case the jinn is thought to suffer negative consequences because it has oppressed itself by not following the tenets of Islam. However, if a person seeks to cure jinn possession by using an amulet to cause another jinn to harm, kill, or imprison the possessing jinn, this can backfire and cause the jinn involved to instead hurt or kill the exorcist and possibly cause their wives, children and even their animals to become sick.

If the possessing jinn is an *ifreet* (a powerfully evil jinn) a weak exorcist can possibly be harmed. In this case the exorcist needs to shield themselves by seeking refuge in Allah (الله سبحانه وتعالى), performing formal prayer, and ceasing anything sinful which might help the ifreet gain control over the exorcist. Ibn Taymiyah says that:

“Such a person is a soldier of Allah (Mujāhid fee Sabeelillah) and exorcism is among the greatest forms of Jihad, so he should beware not to help his enemy to overcome him by his own sins. If the circumstance is beyond his ability... so he should not expose himself to tribulation by taking on what he is unable to handle”. (Philips, 2007, p. 80)

Therefore, a person may be excused from trying to exorcise a jinn if they do not feel they have the capacity to be successful.

Sometimes extreme measures may be needed to exorcise a jinn even if this harms the person who is possessed. These extreme efforts might even include killing the body of the possessed person:

“For, surely Satan corrupts and ruins the mind of one possessed and inflicts punishment on their bodies; it might even rape them. Thus, if they can only be repelled by killing them, it then becomes permissible to do so.”. (Philips, 2007, p. 87)

Removing a jinn from a possessed person may require beating them repeatedly. However, in this case it is thought that the possessed person does not feel the beating with the punishment only being felt by the jinn:

“Even when some are struck over three or four hundred times with severe blows on their feet, the effects of which would normally kill a man, only the Jinn feel it. The Jinns will scream and yell, and inform those present about many things”. (Philips, 2007, p. 99)

It is forbidden (*haram*) to question jinn or anyone who talks with them, or to believe anything they say. Since fortune tellers and others who dabble in the occult are thought to be given prophecies by jinn it is haram to visit them. The only exception is if by talking with the fortune teller you are seeking to expose their lies and deceptions. It is also fine to listen to jinn to better understand their falsehoods, and thereby protect yourself and others from believing what they say. It is the same way Muslims may speak to people who practice other religions in order to perceive what is wrong with their views. Since jinn are known to mix some truth in with lies it is thought better to listen to them without believing or disbelieving anything they have to say.

With regard to the exorcism of jinn, the best-case scenario is when the jinn accepts Islam and leaves the possessed person. Ibn Taymiyah gives an excellent exemplar of this kind of resolution to a Jinn possession:

“In the month of Sha'bân of this year (i.e. 1407 A.H./1987 C.E.) local and national newspapers have published brief as well as detailed articles on the events surrounding the declaration of Islam by a Jinn which had possessed a Muslim woman in Riyadh. The Jinn had previously declared its Islam to brother 'Abdullâh ibn Mushrif al-'Amri of Riyadh who had recited the Qur'an over the possessed young woman and communicated with the possessing Jinn. In the course of his communication, al-'Amri reminded the

Jinn of Allah, preached to it and informed it that oppression is a major sin which is haram (forbidden). When the Jinn informed him (al-'Amri) that it was a Buddhist, he invited it to accept Islam and leave the young woman. The Jinn was apparently convinced by his (al-'Amri's) invitation and declared its Islam in his presence. 'Abdullâh and the young lady's relatives then rushed to bring her to me [to] hear the Jinn's declaration of its Islam. When they did so, I asked the Jinn about its reason for possessing the woman and it informed me by speaking with the young woman's tongue, but with a man's voice, not that of a female. This took place while the woman was sitting in a chair beside me in the presence of her brother, her sister, 'Abdullâh ibn Mushrif and some Shaykhs who witnessed it and heard the Jinn's statements. It openly declared its acceptance of Islam and informed us that it was of Indian origin and that it followed the Buddhist religion. I advised it to fear Allah, to leave the young woman and to avoid oppressing her. It consented saying: "I am convinced about Islam." I then advised it to invite its people to Islam, as Allah had guided it and it promised to do so. Its final words before leaving the woman were, "as-Salâmu 'Alaykum (Peace be with you)". The young woman then spoke with her own voice expressing feelings of well being and relief from her difficulties. She came back to see me a month or so later along with her two brothers, her maternal uncle and her sister, and informed me that she was well and in good health and that the Jinn had not returned to her - may Allah be praised. I then asked her how she used to feel when it was present in her and she replied that she would experience bad, anti-Islamic thoughts and a leaning towards Buddhism and books written on it. However, after Allah saved her from it, these thoughts disappeared and she returned to her original state, which was far away from such deviant inclinations". (Philips, 2007, pp. 110-111)

6. Cultural Practices Related to Jinn

There are many cultural practices related to the jinn. Here I present some examples from my own experience. I come from an ethnically Islamic family on my father's side. My father grew up in the Turkish community of the island of Cyprus off the coast of the Turkish mainland. During the time when my father was growing up Turks were under the influence of Atatürk's reconceptualization of Turkey as a secular power in the Middle East and religion was not something that was emphasized. Many Turks in subsequent generations have never read the Qur'an. Even though the Turkish side of my family were decedents of a highly placed Islamic cleric I have been told that the serious practice of Islam didn't continue in our family past my great grandmother's generation. Nevertheless, even secular Turks like members of my family, as well as many non-practicing Muslims who live in Islamic nations retain many customs related to the belief in jinn. I relate a few of examples of these customs below.

One such custom that is particular to Cypriots is the burning of olive leaves which is called *tutsu*. This typically happens during family gatherings or other celebrations. The leaves are usually placed in a metal pot and lit on fire. The smoke from the burning leaves is then fanned over those present. Like the burning of incense, the fragrant smoke from the burning olive leaves could be pleasing to the jinn. The burning of olive leaves is also thought to provide protection from jinn in general and the evil eye in particular. Belief in the evil eye is common in Turkey and throughout the Middle East. The evil eye is cast by someone who is jealous or envious of someone else who has something they do not deserve. Receiving a look from this evil eye can cause all sorts of problems such as accidents, illnesses, and possibly death. Traditionally, Islam does not condone the use of amulets or talisman to ward off evil, instead Muslims are supposed to rely on the power of Allah (الله سبحانه وتعالى) as exalted by a *dua* - a prayer, holy incantation, supplication to, or request for, help from Allah (الله سبحانه وتعالى). However, amulets (known in Turkey as *nazar boncuğu* or *nazarlık*) are also commonly used to ward of the evil eye. These amulets are typically made up of a blue circle of glass with a circle of white, and another circle of lighter blue that has a black dot in the center. This looks somewhat like an eye and the talisman itself is often confusingly called an 'evil eye' itself when in fact it is used to ward off the evil eye. In Islamic countries a common custom is to append the *mashallah* مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ (which is a saying for warding off the evil eye meaning 'God willed it') or another *dua* to the amulet. In Christian countries such as Armenia a cross or another Christian symbol is often appended to the amulet.

A related custom has to do with bringing a new child into the world. Right after a child is born, its grandparents or other family member will provide a *nazar* for the baby. Typically, among Turkish people, but also many other peoples of the Middle East, the amulet is pinned to the baby's crib. Members of the family will be anxious about the baby until this occurs. The belief is that the amulet will protect the baby from the evil eye and the malignancy

of the jinn. The custom is so strong among the Turks that not following it causes a bit of anxiety. I have heard from other Middle Eastern people that the practice and the anxiety over providing an amulet for a new baby is much the same.

Another custom among the Turks is to throw a bucket of water on the street behind a vehicle that is embarking on a long journey. Ostensibly this is to ensure that the journey is smooth like flowing water. Turks will say "*su gibi git, su gibi gel*," which means "go like water and come back like water." Throwing water on parting can also be thought to purify or cleanse the travelers, perhaps of any negative influence of the jinn. Throwing water may be related to other traditions in Islamic countries that pertain to jinn. One common belief previously mentioned is that one shouldn't throw hot or boiling water down a drain, but this can also apply to putting water down a toilet, sewer, or even on the ground. This is because jinn are said to dwell in places like sewage pipes or in the earth. The hot water may hurt or kill the jinn living there causing their compatriots to seek revenge on the human who was responsible. If it is necessary to pour the hot water down the drain it is recommended to say *Bismillah* (بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ - "In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful") before pouring the water to warn any jinn that may be living there.

Another Turkish custom is to place shoes on the ground in an upright position. A common belief among many Muslims is that if shoes are upside down angels will not enter the house or Allah (الله سبحانه وتعالى) will not watch over the house. A house without angels or without protection from Allah (الله سبحانه وتعالى) allows evil jinn to exert destructive influence over those who live in the house.

7. Mass Media and Jinn Possession

Mass media can play a significant role in shaping belief in and perception of demonic possession, with movies like *The Exorcist* (Friedkin, 1973), and *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (Derrickson, 2005) or novels like *Come Closer* (Gran, 2003) that center around the phenomenon of demonic possession. There have also been a number of popular films that concern jinn directly such as *Jinn* (Ahmad, 2014), *Magi* (Karacadag, 2016), *Musallat* (Mestçi, 2007), *Red Sands* (Turner, 2009) and the *Wishmaster* series (Angel, 2001, 2002; Kurtzman, 1997; Sholder, 1999). Mass media may prime people to append supernatural explanations to many types of phenomena. Likewise, those who already believe in the supernatural will seek out media with supernatural content, presumably to reinforce their beliefs. Mass media with horror themes (which would include demonic and jinn possession) can provide a benign masochistic experience via the simulation of something that is threatening. This initially provides negative stimulation which eventually becomes positive as a person learns to cope with the simulated threat (Clasen et al., 2020). It is possible then, that the experience of horror media that depicts demonic possession could fuel a belief in jinn because the stimulation experienced from the media could function as a reinforcer of the belief.

8. Secondary Gain and Jinn Possession

Nicholas Spanos puts forth a persuasive argument regarding the secondary advantages gained by those diagnosed with possession. These benefits include gaining attention, having their behavior excused as deviating from cultural norms, and experiencing a release of inhibitions (Spanos & Gottlieb, 1979). Herschel Prins (1990) makes a similar case, suggesting that some individuals value possession states because it allows them to evade responsibility for behaviors that would be condemned or even punished in their culture. Moreover, Prins suggests that susceptibility to possession can be heightened by medical or psychiatric conditions, as well as culturally specific experiences.

The idea that possessed persons, especially Islamic women, could behave in ways that are not socially acceptable while in a possession state is compelling. Online social media sites such as YouTube provide an unprecedented glimpse into possession. There are many videos posted that claim to depict jinn exorcism. Some examples of this kind of video include the Youtube video "*Jinn (Demon) leaving someone's body in Salaah (prayer) during the recitation of the Shaykh*" which is an example of the spontaneous expulsion of a jinn during a prayer recital (Living Islam Productions, 2015) and the YouTube videos "*Scary Exorcist Video (REAL!) with English subtitles 1 & 2*" that show the exorcism of a young Indonesian woman by an Islamic cleric (lhr0cks, 2008a, 2008b). The latter video is especially interesting in that while in a possessed state the woman can speak and act in ways that would normally

be thought of as unacceptable. She can growl, act aggressively and assertively. The jinn supposedly possessing the woman further states that it is protecting her, wants to be her friend, and is comfortable in her body. The cleric and his assistants then begin reciting the Qur'an and very lightly beating the woman to drive out the jinn. The cleric reminds the jinn that Muslims are not allowed to oppress each other and that if it accepts Islam, it will have many friends. The jinn then states it will go home. The cleric says that Allah (الله سبحانه وتعالى) will forgive it and it should make friends with Muslim jinn. What is interesting from a psychological point of view is that throughout the exorcism the woman is being touched by a male cleric and being held down by other men. This amount of positive and caring male attention by men who are not the woman's husband would only be allowable in the context of the exorcism. Near the end of the video the cleric alludes to the problems the jinn has created with the woman's husband. Since the jinn claimed to be protecting the woman, we might assume that the husband was not a source of positive male attention. Therefore, it is possible to understand the possession and exorcism as way that the woman can act independently and assertively as well as obtaining positive and caring interaction with men that would otherwise be forbidden.

9. Psychological Meaning of the Jinn

There have been a number of psychological studies examining the phenomena of jinn possession. George Sidney Brett in his *A History of Psychology* maintains that before the seventh century Arabic psychology consisted largely of demonology and jinn lore (1921). Abdeladim Daou (1978) writes about the stages of "jinnophobia" and how this plays out symbolically in Moroccan architecture. Fear of the jinn and haunted places form a symbolic contractual relationship with the jinn. Violating this contract leads to mental or somatic disorders. Emma Varley and Saiba Varma (2018) examine the how the association of jinn in hospitals is related to state and sectarian violence in the Pakistani controlled area of Kashmir. The jinn become the voice for unspoken anxieties in architectural spaces where human and non-human worlds meet in order to serve existential and political ends.

Tobie Nathan (1986) asserts that psychotherapists need to consider their patient's cultural background. In treating Arabic and African patients, he uses an orthodox Freudian approach. However, when a patient's belief system includes jinn and other supernatural phenomena, he will also use traditional healing modalities.

There are several reports of jinn possession and how this relates to Western conceptions of psychopathology. These reports typically include diagnoses of agitation, amnesia, delirium, depression, hysteria, panic attacks, post-partum depression, psychosis, and sleep paralysis. Many, if not most, of the clinical studies recommend incorporating indigenous belief in jinn into the understanding and treatment of mental health issues (Al-Noor et al., 2018; Bakhshani et al., 2013; Bouhlel et al., 2013; Bragazzi & Del Puente, 2012; Callegari et al., 2016; Cheng, 2017; Dein, 2013; Dein & Illaiee, 2013; Djaziri, 2013; Hanely & Brown, 2014; Khairat et al., 2023; Kuittinen et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2017; Lim et al., 2015, 2018; Mohia, 1986; Mullick et al., 2013; Napo et al., 2012; ul ain Khan & Sanober, 2016; Van Den Berg et al., 2015; Vinea, 2016; Zouari et al., 2010).

10. Dissociative Disorders and Jinn

As I have written previously, demonic possession (which includes jinn possession) can be recognized as a psychological phenomenon (Volkan, 2020a). More specifically, Jinn possession can be understood as a form of dissociative disorder and could be diagnosed specifically as dissociative identity disorder (DID). This condition represents an extreme manifestation of dissociative mental illnesses, though milder forms of dissociation may also be related to jinn possession. Dissociation can function as a defense mechanism in the face of overwhelming trauma that typically occurs during childhood. This trauma can be a single significant event or an ongoing and prolonged experience. In the case of DID, the child lacks a safe haven from the trauma and resorts to severe dissociation as a means of escaping distressing and abusive situations. When dissociation happens repeatedly and/or if the child has a predisposition or talent for dissociation, the fragmented experiences may converge into distinct personality centers. The earlier the trauma occurs in childhood, the more severe the dissociation tends to be. Therefore, it is not unusual to find that many cases of demonic (including jinn) possession involves individuals who have suffered childhood severe trauma, such as emotional, physical, or sexual abuse (Hansen et al., 1992; Hill & Goodwin, 1993; Ivey, 1993, 2002). From this standpoint, one or more alternate personalities, referred to as

"alters," can become associated with a demonic presence such as a jinn. The notion of an alter being a jinn could also be suggested to the individual with DID by therapists, counselors, clergy, popular culture, media, or written materials.

11. Delusional Misidentification Disorders and Jinn

Other psychological diagnoses that might be related to jinn possession are the delusional misidentification disorders Capgras syndrome and Fregoli delusion (Volkan, 2020b). These disorders are often related to organic dysfunction and schizophrenia. Unlike DID however, these disorders are typically related to the perception of jinn in others rather than being possessed oneself.

Capgras syndrome, which has also been called the illusion of doubles, is the delusion that someone else, usually a close family member, has been replaced by an imposter who looks identical to the known person. In other words, the person who you know well is not believed to be that person but someone else. In this sense, Capgras might be in play when someone is perceived as being possessed by a jinn.

The imposters in Capgras syndrome are frequently close relatives of the victims but can also include other individuals, such as doctors, nurses, and even inanimate objects. These imposters, like jinn, are possessing these other people in the Capgras sufferer's life.

Capgras syndrome and other delusional misidentification syndromes (DMS) are now widely believed by modern clinicians and researchers to have an organic basis, specifically associated with cerebral dysfunction, though this can be exacerbated by the sufferer's psychology. Nevertheless, psychoanalytic concepts like projection and splitting could play a role in Capgras syndrome. When an individual is unable to integrate repressed or negative aspects of themselves, they may project these onto another person who then embodies these characteristics as a *doppelgänger*. (Christodoulou et al., 2009).

On close examination, it becomes evident that Capgras sufferers often exhibit other delusional misidentification syndromes (DMS) and psychotic/schizophrenic symptoms. Many patients experience an expanded form of Capgras syndrome, where multiple delusions coexist. In this type of Capgras syndrome the sufferer themselves may believe they are possessed by a jinn. Similar to some symptoms of jinn possession, some of these delusions manifest somatically, leading to the patients perceiving bizarre and alien changes in their own bodies. Furthermore, the patients' sense of self can undergo delusional alterations. These symptoms bear resemblance to those observed in schizophrenia, and it is not surprising that many people diagnosed with Capgras syndrome are also diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. Distinguishing between Capgras syndrome and schizophrenia can become challenging upon closer evaluation, as the symptoms often overlap. Alternatively, the Capgras symptoms may represent an additional manifestation of the underlying schizophrenic illness. In fact, research indicates that a significant proportion of schizophrenia cases, potentially as high as 40%, exhibit misidentification symptoms (Sinkman, 2008). It is possible that the initial delusions emerge as a result of DMS sufferers' attempts to explain their peculiar abnormal perceptions (Christodoulou et al., 2009).

As expected, the primary treatment for Capgras syndrome typically involves the use of antipsychotic medications. However, in cases where antipsychotic medication provides only partial effectiveness or no improvement, electroconvulsive therapy has been demonstrated to be beneficial.

12. Erotomania, Fregoli Delusion, and Jinn Possession

Another DMS Fregoli delusion, is the belief that multiple individuals are, in fact, a single person with the capability to change their appearance. Typically, these different people are familiar to the individual and are often perceived as hostile or persecutory. Therefore, Fregoli delusion might be similar to the belief that a jinn is shape shifting into different forms or possessing different people. Fregoli delusion is often considered a variant of Capgras syndrome and is thought to share similar neuropathology. However, due to its frequent comorbidity with psychotic disorders, it has been challenging to directly attribute the delusional misidentification to the organic pathology (Mojtabai,

1994; Novakovic et al., 2010). Treatment for Fregoli delusion typically involves psychotherapy and neuroleptic medication, which can alleviate the symptoms of the disorder.

Aside from psychoses, Fregoli delusion has been linked to various other disorders such as erotomania (stalking) and instances of violent behavior. Heloise Delavenne and Frederico Garcia (2011) documented a case involving a paranoid schizophrenic woman who firmly believed that her boyfriend could assume the identities of other people to secretly track her. The theme of erotomania is central to one of the most popular tales from the Islamic world that has a connection to jinn. The story of Manjun and Layla is perhaps the most famous love story in the Islamic world.² The story dates from around the tenth century and its story is recounted in Ruqayya Khan's chapter *Oedipus in Egypt: A twentieth-century rendition of Majnun Layla* (2008). This is a classic tale of love and devotion that revolves around the tragic romance between two young individuals named Qays ibn al-Mulawwah and Layla.

A young man, Qays falls deeply in love with Layla, a beautiful and virtuous woman. Their love blossoms in their youth, but societal norms, and especially Layla's father prevent them from being together. As a result, Quays becomes an outcast, wanders the desert, writes poetry, and is consumed by his passionate unrequited love for Layla. This continues even after Layla is married off to another man. Quays becomes known as *Majnun*, meaning "possessed by jinn" or "madman" in Arabic, a name that reflects his erotomania directed towards Layla.

Despite the separation, Layla longs for Quays. Her heart aches for him, yet her father's expectations bind her to conform to his will and marry another man. The story of Majnun and Layla is filled with themes of unrequited love, longing, and Oedipal strivings (Khan, 2008). It also serves to equate jinn possession with erotomania or an obsession with a love object that is unobtainable.

13. Psychodynamic Explanations of Jinn Possession

According to Sigmund Freud, there is a relationship between demonic possession and the unconscious. Freud viewed the demonic as a symbol of repressed unconscious instincts. Both the demonic and the unconscious serve as containers for socially unacceptable behaviors, representing urges that strive to overcome repression and manifest symbolically.

Freud had a longstanding interest in the occult and wrote a significant paper on demonic possession (Freud, 1923). In addition to the interpretation cited above where demons are projections of negative and unacceptable wishes stemming from repressed urges, Freud also understood demonic possession as an attempt to replace a complex relationship with a father. The Devil (i.e., Satan or Shaytan) and God are entities that originate from a child's ambivalence towards their father, who can be both kind and caring or feared and hated. For Freud, the Devil and God represent the child's projected experience of their father. In this sense jinn possession serves as an attempt to find a substitute for a predominately hostile father.

Henri Ellenberger (1981) suggests that psychoanalytic treatment can be seen as a primitive form of medicine, where the unconscious functions similarly to spirit possession, and psychoanalysis itself resembles an exorcism. Gavin Ivey (2002) also questions the core distinctions between psychoanalysis and exorcism. The dissociation of the demonic, arising from repressed urges, leads to a sense of detachment from consciousness. The aim of "exorcism" in psychoanalysis is to heal this dissociation by facilitating an encounter between the conscious and unconscious. This involves working with the projected unconscious, which takes the form of demons both internally and externally. As Freud stated, "Spirits and demons... are only projections of man's own emotional impulses. He turns his emotional cathexes into persons, he peoples the world with them and meets his internal mental processes again outside himself" (Freud, 1919, p. 152).

Whether projected outward or experienced from within, the jinn as a demonic unconscious force becomes an antagonistic enemy, a monstrous "other" with malicious intentions. If left unexplored, it tends to grow more aggressive, hostile, and dissociated.

14. Object Relations and Jinn Possession

In his insightful paper on the psychodynamic aspects of demonic possession and satanic worship, Ivey (1993, 2002) presents an object relations perspective. Object relations theory explores how early relationships with caretakers, usually the mother and later the father, are internalized as mental representations by infants. These representations involve the ambivalent experience of objects or part objects, such as the breast, based on drives' vicissitudes. Over time, these part objects develop into integrated representations of whole objects, typically starting with the mother or primary caretaker. The mother/caretaker is then experienced ambivalently as both good and bad, and these ambivalent representations merge into a more realistic representation of the mother/caretaker. However, if early experiences are predominantly frustrating, anxiety-provoking, and filled with hatred, the bad object representations are kept separate from the good ones as a defense mechanism. Projection is employed to externalize the bad object, preserving the internalized good object and reducing anxiety. The projected bad object becomes an external demon or jinn. If the individual cannot project the bad object outward, the internalized bad object becomes the inner demon or jinn that possesses the person. The lack of integration between the representations of the good and bad objects leads to dissociation. In cases of severe trauma resulting in dissociative disorders, the object representations can consolidate into dissociated personalities.

Ivey emphasizes a crucial distinction between involuntary and voluntary possession. Those who feel possessed against their will experience possession symptoms as *egodystonic*, causing acute anxiety. In these cases, the internalized bad object generates the egodystonic symptoms. The presence of the jinn feels separate from the person's self-awareness, as the split-off bad objects seem to have an independent existence. They are perceived as an "other," threatening to overpower the good and take control of the person's thoughts, motivations, and behaviors, leading to significant anxiety.

Conversely, some individuals who experience jinn possession invite it voluntarily. In voluntary possession, there is an identification with the externally projected bad object. The individual attempts to reclaim the projected bad object and merge it with the internalized good object. Initially, symptoms of voluntary possession may be *egosyntonic*. However, once the bad object is internalized, it may pose a threat to the good object, causing a shift from egosyntonic to egodystonic symptoms. Thus, voluntary possession can become involuntary. Individuals can oscillate between projecting and internalizing the bad object.

Many of the object dynamics involving projection and internalization described above can be observed in cases of presumed jinn possession. This is true even when the perceived presence of a jinn, as experienced by clinical professionals, manifests as noticeable personality and behavioral changes characterized by hostility and aggression. The cultural manifestations related to jinn possession are also important considerations regarding treatment. The use of traditional healing techniques from the possessed person's culture can be combined with psychodynamic techniques. In this way psychoanalytically derived therapy can be also be 'ethnopsychiatric' (Nathan, 1986).

Unlike some depictions of demons in other cultures, jinn are not necessarily evil, but exist and behave on a spectrum from good to evil. Where a jinn exists on this spectrum is highly correlated to the jinn's relationship to Islam. Perhaps when a jinn possessing a person affirms faith in Islam its projected father-image transfers to Allah (الله سبحانه وتعالى), who then represents an integration of split off objects into a 'good' whole. This might account for the attempt in Islamic exorcism to bring jinn to Islam, rather than just removing jinn from possessed persons or destroying them. The exorcism ritual then enables a person to co-exist with the unintegrated aspects of his or her personality, while encouraging integration of these aspects into one's identity. This has important ramifications for treatment of jinn possession or psychological syndromes related to jinn possession.

15. Conclusion

Belief in jinn is an important aspect of Islam and is important for understanding the Muslim worldview. The jinn phenomenon is multifaceted and complicated in expression, with jinn being able to take on many different forms and act in complicated ways. Jinn possession can be related to several psychological syndromes and diagnoses,

most notably dissociative disorders and possibly delusional misidentification disorders. In the Islamic world, traditional methods of dealing with jinn possession can be integrated into psychological or psychiatric treatment in order to facilitate personality integration in the possessed person. Likewise, a psychological understanding of jinn phenomenon might inform those performing Islamic exorcism so that it can be seen as providing psychological help in addition to having a religious benefit.

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Notes

Note 1. I will use the word jinn to indicate both the singular and plural throughout. The English word genie is a derivation of the Arabic jinn. However, the name Genie or Jeanie is of Hebrew origin and means “God is gracious”.

Note 2. People in the Western world may know the theme of the story and the name Layla from the Eric Clapton/Jim Gordon song of the same name. Interestingly, the song is autobiographical in the sense that the story of Manjun and Layla played out in Clapton’s life when he fell in love with Beatle George Harrison’s wife Patti Boyd. However, unlike the original story Clapton eventually married Boyd, though that marriage did not turn out well (Boyd & Junor, 2008; Clapton, 2007; Derek & The Dominos, 1971).