

COMPARING EAST AFRICAN ‘JINNOLOGY’ WITH BIBLICAL DEMONOLOGY

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When the Christian anthropologist Paul Hiebert worked as a missionary in India, he found that there was no space in his imagination to make sense of the effectiveness of folk medicine practiced by local folk healers. He further felt “a sense of uneasiness” when he read Luke 7 where Jesus is asked by John’s disciples’, “Are you he that should come, or do we look for another?” (Lk 7:20) and noticed that Jesus’ answer did not involve “rational arguments”. Instead, Jesus answered their question by “curing the sick and casting out evil spirits” (Hiebert 1982:35). Upon reflection, Hiebert came to the following realisation:

“I had excluded the middle level of supernatural but this-worldly beings and forces from my own world view. As a scientist I had been trained to deal with the empirical world in naturalistic terms. As a theologian, I was taught to answer ultimate questions in theistic terms. For me, the middle zone did not really exist. Unlike Indian villagers, I had given little thought to spirits of this world, to local ancestors and ghosts, or to the souls of animals. For me, these belonged to the realm of fairies, trolls and other mythical beings” (Hiebert 1982:43).

A WESTERN TWO-TIERED VIEW OF REALITY

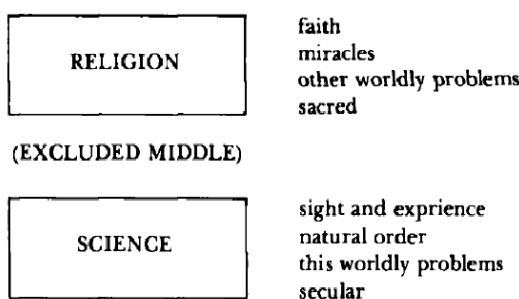


Figure 1 (Hiebert 1982:43)

For the people he ministered to, the middle realm was very real. Western Christian theology, however, being firmly based on “Platonic dualism”, had no answers to their questions: “What is a Christian theology of ancestors, of animals and plants, of local spirits and spirit possession, and of ‘principalities, powers and rulers of the darkness of this world’ (Eph 6:12)” (Hiebert 1982:45)? Hiebert ends his paper with a call to theologians and missionaries to “develop holisitic theologies”,

including a theology of “ancestors, spirits and invisible powers of this world”. In a later paper, Hiebert and Tienou (2006) outline this process of what they call “missional theology”: the first step (“phenomenology”) is a study of the emic view, that is, “to understand how the people see [a certain phenomenon]”; the second step (“ontology”) is a study of New Testament teachings on the phenomenon; the final step (“missiology”) is an application of the findings to the immediate case (Tienou and Hiebert 2006:227).

In this paper, I employ the first two steps of Hiebert’s method of missional theology and compare the spirit world in East Africa, where I lived for three years, with the spirit world of the New Testament. In part one, I use hermeneutic phenomenology – thick description – to describe the spirit world, and spirit possession in East Africa.

The data was collected over the course of ethnographic field work between July 2014 and June 2015 in Somaliland, northern Somalia. The project included in-depth interviews and participant observation, as well as textual analysis of a locally produced movie, the written story of an elder, and selected passages from English translations of the New Testament, the Qur'an and the Hadiths.¹ I label the first part a study in ‘jinnology’, following East African beliefs of spirits as jinn. In part two, I do Biblical exegesis, and offer an overview of New Testament demonology with a particular focus on the role of ‘demons’ and their conceptual relationship with East African jinn.

The topic of this paper is the comparison of these two categories of the spirit world. I ask the following questions: Is it appropriate to include jinnology in demonology? Is there sufficient conceptual overlap to bring the two categories together, or are they essentially different? How do New Testament theology and East African spirit beliefs relate to each other? The wider research question to which this paper contributes is a universal one: What or who occupies the “excluded middle”? Finally, I do this research with two audiences in mind. Firstly, I wonder how the Bible speaks into the world of East Africans. Secondly, for Western missionaries, or Christians in cross-cultural ministry, I wonder how we can think of spirits. The paper is an effort in applying anthropology to missiology.

East African Jinnology

Cosmology

A local *shiikh* (Muslim religious leader) in Somaliland described East African cosmology as such: “There is *Ilaah* (God), angels, jinn, and humans.” The concept of ‘jinn’ is the most interesting

¹ I used the following English translations: New International Version Bible translation, Qur'an interpretation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, Hadiths by Bukhari and Muslim as collected on www.sacred-texts.com and www.quranexplorer.com (all accessed on 9/6/2015).

category for the Western observer, as there is no direct equivalent in contemporary Western cosmology. Several sub-categories are included under ‘jinn’.

Shaydaan (devils) are “of the same family” as jinn and only differ in behaviour, not in nature/ontology. An informant remarked, “They are the same species (engl.) but have a different ideology (engl.)”. Both were created in fire. *Iblis* (Satan) is the leader of both *shaydaan* and evil jinn. He is not a fallen angel, but an enemy of humanity who he refused to acknowledge as superior. According to the Qur'an, *Iblis* is also a jinn (Qur'an, The Cave 18:50).² Evil jinn possess humans, whereas *shaydaan* have not been heard of doing so. *Cirfil* and *afreet* are kinds of jinn that have special powers.

Qareen are a human person's spiritual twin. There is currently a lack of academic knowledge available about qareen. However, it appears that there is a specific Somali interpretation to the *qareen* which I will elaborate on later. Some Somalis consider *qareen* to be a kind of jinn, while others see them in a separate category.

Roxaan are a uniquely Somali category of spirit. *Roxaan* also are jinn, and descriptions vary widely. Some people say *roxaan* are good jinn, others that *roxaan* are jinn who fly, again others that *roxaan* work for jinn. A person possessed by a *roxaan* spirit is a friend of jinn and has privileged access to their conditions and beliefs.

Traditional African spirits, such as *wadaado*, *mingis*, *saar*, and *borane*, which appear in some of the academic literature on Somalis, are nowadays seen as jinn. They were previously labeled differently due to lack of knowledge, according to local informants. Considering the categories *roxaan* and traditional African spirits, it is apparent that a merging of the two systems of spirits has taken place, instead of them existing parallel to each other. I agree with Molse (2010:282) that for Somalis, ‘jinn’ is “a generic term” for spirits. In Somali everyday life jinn are more important than angels and demons.

Jinn as spirit-persons

Ontologically, Somalis conceptualise the human person as being made up of two parts: the material *jidh* (body) and the non-material *naf* (life principle, self) make up the living *qof* (person, pl. *dad*). Upon physical death, the body is left behind and the non-material part, *naf*, is then called *ruux* (spirit, soul), and enters the afterlife. The semi-autonomous third constituent *qareen* (lawyer, kin) will be

² See also Ibn Ibraheem Ameen (2005:32) and Islam and Campbell (2014:232-3).

treated later. In everyday language, humans are often called *naf* or *ruux*, which indicates that personhood is most closely associated with the non-material constituent of humans.

I became curious when I was trying to define the category *qof/dad* and asked a Somali friend who was considered a *qof* (person). His answer was “*jinn* (spirits/ghosts) and *insi* (human beings), [which are distinguished into] men and women”. How, then are jinn persons? The following is an excerpt of a longer case study which one of my key informants shared with me:

“When [the girl] had stayed in [this city] for a few days, one day around *Casar* (4pm prayers) she went to the market and sprayed herself with perfume. Then she walked along the street. A passenger car came from [another city]. It was driving across the bridge and carried normal passengers, but there was a jinn on the roof of the car - since one can’t see jinn. He carried drugs with him. Then he saw the girl sprayed with perfume walking along the road. He got off the car and entered the girl. So the girl started falling/having seizures. So she was taken to the house. She was treated with the Qur’an. When the Qur’an was read to her, she grabbed me - people with a jinn in them have great strength, women or men can’t hold them if a jinn entered them, the girl’s hand becomes like iron. [...] After the reading of the Qur’an:] Then we told her uncle, “The clan that lives in [another city] and this [jinn] man are of the same family. We’re telling them to come to him. Then he will leave, *inshaa’ Allaah*.” Then we waited for them. It’s about 60km to [that city]. After 15min the men came. At the wink of an eye. It was three men who came, three uncles, who came to drive out the man.”

Jinn as persons. Both humans and jinn share the main features of personhood. Ontologically, jinn were also created by *Ilaah* (God) and have a material *jidh* (body) that can be injured through physical impact. Furthermore, jinn are responsible to *Ilaah* for their deeds, and will be judged on the last day. As one informant put it, “they have high responsibility. At judgment, some will enter *janna* (paradise), some will be thrown into hell”. Jinn also appear to have a non-material constituent that will enter the hereafter. Regarding performative aspects of personhood, the inclusion of jinn into the category of person is evidenced by the Somali belief that the *diya* payment practice finds a parallel in the world of jinn. There also, children are worth as much as adults, as can be seen in Somalis’ anxiety not to hit or run into a jinn child by accident. The effects of this will be explained later in this paper. Religiously, jinn are under the same obligations as humans, namely to worship *Ilaah* and perform duties such as going on *xaj* (pilgrimage). Furthermore, in reports of possession experiences like the one above, jinn are regularly referred to as *qof* (person), as “the man/girl”, by the personal pronouns he or she, and are given proper names.

For Somalis, jinn personhood has two sets of characteristics. On the one hand, jinn are ‘normal’ persons, just like humans, and can work with humans as equal partners. On the other hand, jinn are the opposite of humans, being evil and dwelling in unclean places.³ Taking these two sides together, I suggest that the world of jinn is a parallel world to the human world, in the sense that the world of the night is parallel to the world of the day.

Jinn as normal persons. Jinn persons share many human features. They have a body, an, albeit invisible, civilisation with a government, people in power, countries, cities, and countryside. The excerpt above assumes that jinn society is structured into clans, they marry and have offspring, they enjoy the smell of perfume and get addicted to drugs, they have military headquarters and fight battles using weapons. They have increased in number throughout history through reproduction, and more recently women have had more children than in the past, as is the case with human women in East Africa. Their societies have various levels of development. They eat what humans like to eat: meat, pasta, rice, sorghum. A *shiikh* told me that they sleep at night, and go about their business during the day. They work in businesses, have animals and farms, but, he added, “all animals and farms are invisible”. The world described is a mirror to the human world, with many of the specifics of Somali society (see also Tiilikainen 2010).

Considering religious aspects of jinn personhood, they were created by *Ilaah* (God), and are divided into good Muslims and evil *gaalo* (unbelievers).⁴ In line with the Qur'an, Somalis believe that they were made to worship *Ilaah* (Qur'an, Scattering [Winds] 51:56), had prophets sent to them (Qur'an, Livestock 6:130), and are accountable beings. They can also convert, as the following excerpt of the same case study quoted earlier shows:

“So we interviewed the jinn: “How are you?” - “Good.” - “Before you went into the girl, were you Muslim or Christian?” - “No, I was Christian then.” - “Ok, when did you turn to Islam?” - “After I entered the girl I turned to Islam.” - “Ok. What will you do when you go out of the girl?” - “This is what I will do”, he said, “since now I've turned to Islam, I will go on Xaj (pilgrimage to Mecca).””

This jinn's conversion was previously associated with hearing the Qur'an read, and resulted in him wanting to fulfil the religious requirements of Islam. I was also referred to several texts in the Qur'an and Hadiths by informants. The Qur'an, The Jinn 72:1-15 is “an account of what a group of jinn said when they overheard a recitation of the Qur'an and realized its truth” (Haleem, 72. The Jinn),

³ The British anthropologist and expert on Somali issues, I.M. Lewis described jinn as creatures “who lurk in every dark and empty corner, poised and ready to strike capriciously and without warning at the unwary passerby. [They are] consumed by envy and greed, and [...] covetous of luxurious clothing, finery, perfume and dainty foods” (Lewis 1966:312).

⁴ Amongst the coastal Swahili, spirits are categorised into Muslim and *kafir*, as well as coastal and interior African spirits (Giles 90).

followed by calling other jinn clans to follow the Qur'an. A Hadith reports how the Prophet Mohamed met a group of jinn and recited the Qur'an to them (Muslim 4:903).

Jinn as powerful persons. Somalis ascribe special powers to jinn. Jinn are able to fly and swim, have great strength and travel at great speed (as indicated in the excerpt above), which an informant explicitly linked to the Qur'anic story of when a jinn, under the command of prophet *Sulayman* (Solomon), transported the throne of Queen Baalqiis (the Queen of Sheeba) to *Sulayman's* palace "in the twinkling of an eye" (Qur'an, The Ants 27:38-40). *Ilaah* gave them the ability to change their appearance and they can take human form (Ibn Ibraheem Ameen 2005: 45).

Somali beliefs, however, go further than that. An old male informant explained that jinn make mobile phones work by transporting messages instantly. A local belief is that every *maska cagalay* (a large lizard native to East Africa) has a jinn, so if you kill a lizard the jinn will attack you. A group of women told the story of a boy in the countryside who was bitten by a lizard and then started growing scales. Due to their abilities, jinn can be useful friends and co-workers of humans. Another episode which was told to me involves a young man who was lead by a jinn on the typical tahriib (illegal migration) route:

"The jinn said to him, "This is what you do: Go to Ethiopia, come to Sudan, from Sudan onwards I will lead you." [...] Then after nine months I heard, "The little one went." Now he's in Malta. He told me, "Other Somali people were caught. They were sent back. But I kept going. When I walked through Sudan, [the jinn] came to me at night time and lead me. He didn't come to other people, this man.***"

The prophet *Sulayman* was mentioned several times during interviews as the prime example of a human who had jinn at his service, in correspondence to the Qur'anic account in Sheba 34:12-3. Their services, Somalis believe, include bringing news from far away, working as spies, telling a sick person how he can be helped, and providing medicine. In another case study, a pharmacist, when urinating in a forest, was saved by a jinn from the attack of a hyena, and subsequently started a work relationship with the jinn which involved diagnosing patients and identifying quality medicine. According to the informant, "many people came and were healed through their cooperation".

Humans and jinn can start romantic relationships and get married, even though accounts are rare. A popular story on youtube and Somali websites which was referred to me by several people is about a man from Erigavo who married a jinn woman and enjoyed many material benefits from her clans-folk who lived in a forest. However, the informant warned, "a relationship is not good. [...] *Sixir* (sorcerers) can become friends of jinn - there is no other way to befriend a jinn than through *sixir* (black magic)".

Jinn as dirty and dangerous persons. Jinn dwell in dirty places and are thus unclean persons who are associated with the other side of ritual purity and safety. I was told that jinn live “where people don’t live”, namely “in dirty and dangerous places”, such as rubbish dumps, ruins, mountains, termite hills made of red sand, toilets, under trees at night time, and in forests. The number of jinn in a city increases when blood is shed and when the city is not kept clean. Jinn reside in the dry riverbed, at the rubbish dump and enter houses through the vent over the door. One informant told me that when humans see a rubbish dump, jinn see a city. Jinn are said to be particularly active and powerful during *casar* (4-6pm) and *magrib* (6-8pm).

In Somaliland, jinn are said to live in the *Nasa Hablood* mountains near Hargeisa. On the road that passes the hills, they are active. Tiilikainen (2010:170) notes that jinn can create shadows and lights to distract drivers on that road. One of my informants remembered an incidence when “one time, a man was on the road and picked up a girl who wanted a lift. As he was driving, he looked at her feet. They were like donkey feet. So he was scared.” Tiilikainen (2010:170) further notes that mountains are seen as places of spirits, which explains why Somaliland’s north-eastern mountain range appears frequently in jinn narratives. In Burao, almost all of the informants were unaware of special places where jinn reside. Generally, they are believed to sit on signposts and monuments when relaxing from flying. However, one informant revealed the place of their military headquarters, and two living quarters, one on the place of a former rubbish dump and the other in war ruins that have been filled with rubbish. Finally, an older religious leader explained that jinn guard areas of mineral resources such as “petroleum and uranium … so nowadays, if someone wants to get the petrol, he needs to read the book [ie, the Qur’an] and then make peace negotiations, then they’ll let him drill for oil”.

Jinn as evil persons. The general view of jinn is that they are evil, dangerous, and should not be trusted. In contrast to the previously mentioned comment by a *shiikh*, several other informants noted that “jinn work at night time and sleep during the day” (see also Tiilikainen 2010:170). Evil jinn are said to love bloodshed and sociopolitical upheaval. But not only evil jinn must be distrusted. In the case study mentioned above, before accepting the jinn’s help to go on *tahriib*, the young man had sought my informant’s advice:

“[The young man said,] “The man who used to be in the girl came to me.” I was surprised. “The jinn came to you?” - “Yes. This is what he promised me: ‘I will lead you.’ What shall I do?” I told him, “Stay here. Don’t go to him. Stay here.””

Despite the fact that this particular jinn had turned to Islam, proven himself to be trustworthy, and helped expel an evil jinn, the advice was to keep a distance from him. Throughout one interview, a female informant explained about jinn: “He wants every person to go to hell. He doesn’t want to go there by himself. He hates every good person.” The evil in jinn is often put in the context of the

religious Muslim vs *gaalo* (unbeliever) dichotomy. Jinn are said to hate the Qur'an, try to keep people from performing proper prayers, and are "friends with Christians".

Since jinn are invisible but able to see humans, and due to their special abilities, they have a certain degree of power over humans, which they are said to use in order to cause harm. One informant took the Qur'anic verse that states that jinn were created from "smokeless fire" (Qur'an, Al Hijr 15:26-7; Lord of Mercy, 55:14-15) to mean that they were created in hell. The average person's attitude to jinn is illustrated in a well-known low-budget film produced in Burao (Sooraan and Jawaan). A jinn is depicted as standing in a dry riverbed in the middle of a pile of rubbish, but invisible to humans. He is male and dressed appropriately to Somali standards, except for his long hair and sunglasses, which make him appear morally suspicious. He is then seen changing appearance instantly from human to snake and back. When he shows himself to the main character of the film, the human acts extremely frightful, intimidated and submissive - postures that are looked down upon by Somalis. The jinn wants to give his daughter to the human in marriage, but the daughter assumes human form during the night, while turning into a lizard during the day. Eventually, the main character consults a *faaliye* (diviner) to release himself from obligations towards the jinn.

Twice, I experienced the real life attitudes of fear towards jinn. In the context of an interview, a female informant was hesitant, almost afraid to talk about jinn and explained that if you think too much about them, you put yourself in danger. When, in another interview with an elder in the countryside, the topic came to jinn, he was reluctant to answer, changed topics, and when I kept probing, lowered his voice: "We can't see them. They are hidden from us. But they are here. Not far from us. Wherever there are humans, there are also jinn. Some jinn and humans know each other. Some humans know the jinn language. But we shouldn't learn. We should be afraid. They can see us, we can't see them. So we're afraid. Don't study it. Don't go close to them. Say, *Nabad gelyo* (a farewell greeting). It's dangerous. Don't look for them. Don't come close to them." He then stopped the interview.

Jinn possess humans and attack their personhood. Among my informants, the greatest threat coming from jinn was perceived to be that they enter humans, possess their bodies and attack their personhood. There was no doubt that jinn possess people, as "it says so in the Qur'an". The danger of becoming possessed is that the possessed human's personhood is being challenged. One succinct statement deserves to be repeated here: "When a jinn enters a human, he beats up/kills his *qof* (person) or *naf* (life principle, self)". Both evil and good jinn possess humans, and "when the Qur'an is read, the [Muslim] jinn reads along". However, even if they are in agreement about reading the Qur'an, "there is still no peace, because two normal people always fight". The underlying assumption is that inter-personal conflict is inevitable. The jinn is said to affect a human's *naf*, but not their *jidh* (body).

Possession is identified through the following symptoms. A possessed person “falls” (has seizures), becomes sick, cries loudly, talks without sense, has extra-human strength, and doesn’t pray.

Furthermore, one informant reported a case where the jinn “kept [the human] from washing, combing his hair, putting on oil, using medicine. They love it when the person is dirty. And he takes a knife from the kitchen when everyone sleeps and the person wants to harm himself. That’s what they do - they take over the brain/mind”.⁵ The metaphor of taking over the mind, and making him behave in ways that contradict what Somalis see as proper norms, supports the interpretation that a battle over personhood is being fought.

Reasons why jinn possess humans are numerous. Firstly, it was explained that “if you run into a jinn or hit him with your car or pour water over him, because we can’t see them, then he gets angry, especially if you hit a child or someone from his family”. A place of particular danger is termite mounds, since “that’s where their children are”. Similar instances were sometimes labeled “abuse and oppression”. One motivation for possessing a human, then, is revenge. Secondly, as was seen in an earlier excerpt of the case study, jinn are attracted to humans who use perfume, since their own city is located in the smelly rubbish dump. Thirdly, *sixir* (sorcery) can lead to jinn possession. Fourthly, jinn possess humans if they are in love with them. Finally, the next section of this paper treats the topic of the kind of jinn possession where the jinn acts as a representative of a human, particularly in matters of unreciprocated love.

Like elsewhere in Africa, spirit possession is gendered and primarily associated with women (Giles 2005:431). There was a consensus among our informants that women are more vulnerable to attacks by jinn due to their “sins and bad deeds, gossip, and uncleanliness, which leave them unprotected”, as a male informant put it. Others added women’s inconsistent praying. Giles notes the “perceived female nature and character, social roles, and lesser involvement in orthodox Islam”, as well as the fact that spirits are more attracted to women “both because they like female attributes and possessions (perfume, jewelry, fine clothes, etc) and because possessive spirits are frequently male” (Giles 2005:432).

Furthermore, there are certain personal characteristics that leave a person more vulnerable to attacks by jinn. An informant shared the following personal experience with me:

“[After seeing a jinn make money disappear:] I was shocked. A shock fell on me. Fear. Then the jinn living in the girl [a ‘good jinn’] said, “Don’t fear. If you’re afraid, she [a female jinn] will enter you.” Then we started the ablutions. When you have performed the ablutions, the jinn doesn’t come to you.”

⁵ See Johnsdotter (2011:743-4) and Molsa (2010:283) for further symptoms they observed in diaspora Somali contexts.

Firstly, showing fear makes humans vulnerable to jinn attacks, which points to the existence of a perceived struggle. Secondly, ritual impurity is a weakness that jinn exploit. Impurity is not only effected by failure to perform ablutions, but also by watching plays and listening to music, by using drugs and neglecting regular prayers. Negligence in religious practice increases the danger of being harmed by jinn. However, a number of the informants reported that most people who are possessed have a good knowledge of the Qur'an, and that "a jinn doesn't touch an ignorant woman who doesn't know the Qur'an and who doesn't pray, but if a woman learns the Qur'an and prays, he attacks and starts war".

Qareen jinn and love possession

I first came across the notion of *qareen* (Somali for lawyer/attorney or relative/kin) when a friend was telling me about a meeting that had been poorly announced by its host. Upon my question, "So who was present at the meeting?", he was told, "He and his jinn", a phrase used in a context when someone is alone. Later on, my language helper framed jinn possession in the following way:

"Every person has a 'jinn friend' who can become a 'jinn enemy'. If two people are in love with the same person, then they argue with each other. When the two go on their separate ways, then it can be that the jinn of the one boy who really loves the girl enters [possesses] the girl, after which she gets sick. Then she goes to all the doctors and in the end she goes to the *cilaaj* [Islamic healing clinic] where she is tested/checked with the Qur'an. Then the jinn cries out, "I am 'so-and-so' or, I am Mustafa. I love her, I want her, but she rejected me!" This happens a lot. Sometimes people only find out who is in love with them when they go to the *cilaaj*."

The teaching of the Qur'an and the Hadiths on *qareen*. As noted earlier, a *qareen* is a category of jinn. Islamic primary sources on *qareen*, however, are scarce, and to our knowledge no academic research has been conducted in this area. In the Qur'an, *qareen* are mentioned twice, both in the context of human transgressions. The key verse says, "We assign an evil one as a comrade [*qareen*] for whoever turns away from the revelations of the Lord of Mercy" (Qur'an, Ornaments of Gold 43:36; cf Qaf 50:27). Additionally, there is only one Hadith on the topic, in which the Prophet Mohamed is quoted as having said, "There is none amongst you with whom is not an attache [*qareen*] from amongst the jinn. They (the Companions) said: Allah's Messenger, with you too? Thereupon he said: Yes, but Allah helps me against him and so I am safe from his hand and he does not command me but for good" (Muslim 39:6757). The common interpretation of these sources is that a *qareen* is "the demon permanently assigned to each person during his/her life whose job is to seduce human beings" (dawatussalafiyah.wordpress.com). A *qareen*, then, is a human person's evil, spiritual twin. *Qareen* are always evil and always stay with 'their human', serving as *Iblis*' agent to cause the human

to sin. The closest description to what I found in Somaliland comes from the website of a Jordanian self-declared Islamic exorcist who states that *qareen* are “evil and very powerful” and “know you better than yourself”, but that it is possible for a human to capture their own *qareen*, who then serves his master by getting information about any person in the world, curing illness, finding lost and stolen things, influencing another human to do whatever he wants, and foreseeing the future (brotherrahman.net).

Somali notions of possessing your lover, and the role of *qareen*. In 1966, Lewis (1966:311) observed that both female and male Somalis expressed the emotions resulting from unreciprocated love by claiming to be possessed by their rejected lover. Molse’s contemporary work with the Somali diaspora in Finland (Molse 2010:286) confirms that the belief that “a disappointed girl or boy can possess the lover, causing suffering to the afflicted person” has remained relevant. Some of my informants attributed this act of possession to *qareen*, others were unfamiliar with the term, others again said it was his/her jinn that possessed the beloved. In my observation, *qareen* possession is among the most common kinds of jinn possession in Somaliland.

To Somalis, a *qareen* is not only a jinn that is with a human person all the time, as Islamic scholarly interpretation suggests, but more closely connected to the human themselves. It is in the person, and part of the person. One of the informants emphatically claimed, “Everyone has a qareen, not a jinn! It’s a different type of jinn”, while another added, “It’s not a jinn, but something that’s in the human person.” The fact that a *qareen* carries the name of their human indicates that a *qareen* is not simply assigned to their host, but is identified with them. Furthermore, Somalis do not believe that a *qareen* is always evil. During the interviews, *qareen* were frequently labeled “jinn friend”, whilst acknowledging that they can become a “jinn enemy”. As one man put it, “some are good and some are bad and cause problems”, and another added, “we don’t know whether [a certain *qareen*] is good or bad”.

Furthermore, a *qareen* can leave the person they belong to and can be sent or by their own initiative enter another human, working as an advocate for ‘their human’ by causing the possessed human trouble. The most common reasons for *qareen* possession are unreciprocated love and jealousy. It is significant to note that the *qareen* speaks for his/her human. I therefore suggest that as the world of jinn is parallel to human society, so a *qareen* is parallel to his/her human on an individual level.

My case studies suggest that often, sorcery is involved in the process. The rejected lover may act purposefully as, according to another informant, “people talk about sending their jinn into the other person” which turns love into “a power play”. More often, however, *qareen* possession happens unintentionally, and is mentioned in the context of *cawri* (casting the evil eye, coveting) with which it shares characteristics and functional dynamics. Another informant summed it up, “If you see a beautiful girl and you say to yourself, ‘Mashallah’, then your *qareen* is firmly attached to you. But if

you say to yourself, ‘Wow, this one is so beautiful’, if you say that to your will, then he follows [the girl]. [...] He himself doesn’t know that, but his *qareen* follows the other person.” He later added, “That’s the [evil] eye - one kind of the eye.” The spirit, here, is a personification, a manifestation, of the tension between two people.

Comparing East African Jinnology to Biblical Demonology

First-Century Mediterranean Cosmologyⁱ

Popular:

God
Spirits (angels, demons, Satan)
Humans

Complicated:

	Angel of the Lord (OT) – God? Jesus?
‘Angels’	Archangels (1 Thess 4:16)
	Ministering angels (Heb 1:14)
	Evil (fallen) angels (Matt 24:41)
	Satan
Evil spirits	Satan’s angels
	Dominion, Authorities, Powers (1 Cor 15:24)
	Demons, unclean spirits (Synoptic Gospels)
	Elements of the world (Gal 4:3; Col 2:8)

It would be wrong to consider spiritual beings to be irrelevancies or minor doctrine in the New Testament writings. Guy Williams argues that “the apostle [Paul]’s views on [the spirit world] were comparable to those of his Jewish contemporaries, regarding the spirits as underlying features of his cultural background... spiritual beings form an integral part of [Paul’s] letters” (Williams 2009:54-5). Paul’s letters “regard demons not so much as ideas as cultural axioms. Their existence is basically taken for granted” (Williams 2009:150).

What he’s saying is that it’s actually incorrect to only look for the instances in which demons or spirits are mentioned – for first century Mediterraneans, spiritual forces underlie pretty much everything. We have to keep in mind that Paul is not a product of modernity. There is no reason to assume that he did not share this worldview with his contemporaries.

Characteristics and Activities of Demons in the New Testament

The Case of Demon Possession in Luke 8:26-39.ⁱⁱ Two themes relate strongly to Somali beliefs about spirit possession, namely uncleanness/defilement and power.

In Lk 8:26, Jesus enters Gentile territory, a region of uncleanness. It is in that place of uncleanness that the NT records its strongest instance of demon possession. The presence of unclean pigs (8:32) further emphasises the place's impurity. The demon does not live in a house, but in the tombs and in solitary places (8:27, 29). The man is possessed by demons called "legion", a name that draws a connection to unclean Romans. The parallel story in Mark 5 labels the demon "an unclean spirit" which is the most common label for troublesome spirits in the gospels. His uncleanness is also expressed through this nakedness and mental confusion (8:27).

In regards to power, the demons have complete control over the man's "speech and actions" (Garland 2001:Chapter 24), and enabled the man with super-human powers to break "chains and shackles" (8:29). Their effect on the herd of pigs shows that the demons are evil and cause frantic destruction (8:33). However, Jesus' arrival introduces a greater power to the scene. The demons' appropriate response is fear, as expressed in the demoniac's loud crying, falling down, and begging not to be tormented (8:28). Jesus addresses the demons, and establishes his control over them by demanding to know their name (8:30) (Malina 1992:Luke 8:26-39). In the following, a clear command structure is in place (8:29, 32) in which the demons ask for permission without battle, "only a bargaining about the most painless capitulation" (Garland 2001:Chapter 24). Ultimately, the demons will receive punishment and be banished to the abyss (8:31).

In the following, I will address some of the questions that arise from the East African material and related them to New Testament theology.

Are unclean spirits persons? A number of observations:

- Unclean spirits don't have a material body.
- They are not described as procreating.
- They are accountable beings.
- Sometimes they have names.
- They speak and answer questions.
- They exhibit a degree of agency.

- They are never *labelled* persons.
- We have a lot less information about them than my Somali informants shared with me. I would suggest that it is meant to be that way.

I would argue that they have less personhood than in East African jinnology, and our knowledge about them is much less embellished.

Do we need to be afraid?

Let me answer this very briefly. In the NT, “when [evil spirits] are mentioned, Scripture describes their defeat” by Christ (Beekmann & Bolt 2012:66). There is no reason for fear. I suggest that for many East Africans, the promise of deliverance from evil spirits has a greater impact than the promise of forgiveness of sins.

Are there good and evil spirits?

At first sight, the Bible seems to describe demons as purely negative. There are no good forces amongst demons: “If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand?” (Lk 11:18). That’s the perspective that you get from most of the theological literature that I’ve read. However, Forbes has suggested that “the Pauline universe … has a complex and fluid structure” with overlapping categories (Forbes 2002:72-3).

What does he mean by that? Let me quote Williams one more time: “At times Paul allows that *multiple* spirits come from God. [In 1 Cor 14:2] we may read: “(the one speaking in tongues) speaks mysteries by a spirit” … Meanwhile in 14:12 Paul says that the Corinthians are “eager for the spirits” … This common sense translation is usually avoided by translating “spiritual gifts” … Paul writes of such gifts in 14:1 but uses an entirely different word… Overall, then, we see that Paul uses *precisely the same terms* to designate the spirits as he does the Holy Spirit.” (Williams 2009:24-5)

The question that this material raises for me is: Can we think of a multiplicity of good spirits instead of just thinking of the one good Holy Spirit of God? Can we maybe think of the Holy Spirit as many holy spirits?

Could we go a step further (on a tangent), and apply the argument of Kalpana Ram, an anthropology lecturer at Macquarie University, to the East African material and the Biblical material? In her book ‘Fertile Disorder: Spirit Possession and Its Provocation of the Modern’, she examines concrete experiences of spirit possession in India and argues that:

“A society that understands emotions as “ghosts” rather than as “psychology” comes closer, I would suggest, to understanding the phenomenology of emotions. We would be justified in saying that the emotions are latent in the situation (a father’s death, an elopement) rather than locked up in [a woman’s] subjectivity” (Ram 2013:105).

What she’s suggesting is that emotions are better conceptualized as spirits than as psychological states because they are not internal to a person but latent in a situation. Would this help us to explain the East African phenomenon of ‘love possession’, and Biblical phrases such as the spirit of fear, the spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline (2 Tim 1:7)? The evangelical theologian Everett Ferguson (1984) notes early Christian sources which seem to understand passions and sins as manifestations of demons: “The early Christian prophet Hermas says “evil speaking is a restless demon”, and again, “presumption and vain confidence is a great demon” … The identification of sinful impulses with demons was much developed in early monastic literature. Human passions were objectified and personified as demons … the Dead Sea Scrolls [assign] an angel of righteousness and an angel of wickedness to each person” (Ferguson 118-9). This is an area that needs to be further developed.

Conclusion

Where do jinn fit into Biblical cosmology? There are several surprising similarities and significant differences between the Biblical description of demons and Somali beliefs about jinn. The demon’s uncleanliness, preferred dwelling places, super-human strength, and final banishment to the abyss are clear similarities with East African descriptions of evil jinn. As differences, the jinn’s material body, and the degree of personhood that is ascribed to them stands out.

Overall, evil jinn fit fairly well into Biblical categories of unclean spirits. The realm of evil jinn is a space where the Biblical faith can engage East African beliefs and fears of evil spirits.

I think it is the area of good jinn and good spirits that deserves more attention.

While the Bible helps me understand East African experiences with spirits, observing and thinking about jinn possession in East Africa also (to some degree) informs my understanding of the Biblical account.

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ⁱ Rom 8:38 "I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons (footnote: heavenly rulers), neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Includes angels, demons, and powers

1 Cor 15:24 "Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power."

Eph 1:20-21 "he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked"

Col 1:16 "For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities;all things have been created through him and for him."

Gal 4:3 "we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces (footnote: principles) of the world."

Paul mentions demons only in one occasion:

Col 2:8 “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces (footnote: basic principles) of this world rather than on Christ.”

1Cor 10:20-21 “the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons.”

Unclean spirits and evil spirits

ⁱⁱ **26** They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes,^[b] which is across the lake from Galilee. **27** When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. **28** When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!” **29** For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

30 Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

“Legion,” he replied, because many demons had gone into him. **31** And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

32 A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission.**33** When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

34 When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, **35** and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus’ feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. **36** Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. **37** Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.

38 The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹ “Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.