Drew University

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Aliens, Alienation, and Alterity:

On Demons and the People They Possess

A Thesis in Anthropology

by

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Abstract

Aliens, Alienation, and Alterity attempts to synthesize existing theories about personal identity construction and the role of the demoniac, drawing from the works of Janice Boddy, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and Michael Taussig, to name a few. Demons and demonic possession are salient representations of the concept of Otherness, because for thousands of years in a variety of religions, they have been used as rhetorical devices for depicting inversion and profanity of the status quo. Foreign nations, other religions, and nonconforming women all fall under this umbrella. Demons always exist in liminal positions, highlighting the difference between the Inside and Outside, and threatening what is dogmatic and paradigmatic. Today, possession cults exist around the world, and recontextualize the "demon" to our rapidly globalizing and colonial epoch.

Starting with Chapter One, *In the Shadow of Everything*, this archaic demon is fully fleshed out, concluding with a discourse on the Problem of Evil in monotheistic theology. Chapter Two, *Reconciling the Other*, focuses primarily on zayran possession and develops a theory of personal identity centered around the discomfort that South Sudanese women experience within a metonymically patriarchal society. Lastly, Chapter Three, *The Camera People and Their Quest for the White Indian*, identifies the impact of colonization through the lens of *Les Maîtres Fous*, a documentary created in 1955 by Jean Rouch. Here, the possessing spirit is the British colonial regime itself, and reveals the long-lasting implications of displacement and assimilation.

Chapter One

In the Shadow of Everything

"Professor, my dreams grow darker...

Tell me, does evil come from within us? Or beyond?"

– Ellen Hutter, Nosferatu (2024) [1]

Many modern philosophers will have you believe that evil does not exist. They tell us it is a matter of perspective, dehumanization, and incomprehension – one quelled with empathy, compassion, and grace. Is that not the human experience? Our eyes limited beyond the periphery; our sense of touch extending to the ends of our fingertips? Demons occupy these places, just out of sight, just out of reach, and just outside of what is native and right. How can one pin down the essential qualities of something that inherently resists categorization? The project of defining a demon is, as a result, a demanding one.

This chapter seeks to demonstrate demons' unique commonalities across religious, cultural, and geographical boundaries. Specifically, the demons of ancient Greece, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Assyria, Judaism, and Christianity (in no particular order) are examined, and all unexpectedly can be described as "liminal" in every sense of the word. These cross-cutting similarities hint at a more universal quality of human existence, namely, our struggle to reconcile our perceptual limitations and the fear this evokes. Essentially, the "demon" can be utilized as a culturally-specific touchstone to

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[1] *Nosferatu*, directed by Robert Eggers (2024; Prague: Focus Features, 2024), DVD.

examine intersectional socio-political anxieties like gender, geographical and cultural borders, and personal identity.

The Devil in the Details

Demons are easy to instantly conceptualize considering their cultural relevance, but those depictions are varied and intentionally strange. Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, a classic and well-respected source of theological information, defines the word "demon" multiple times depending on its etymological context. Regarding popular Greek belief, the first case-study of this chapter, Kittel writes that "the [daimōn] is a being, often thought of as a spirit of the dead, endowed with supernatural powers, capricious and incalculable, present in unusual places at particular times and at work in terrifying events in nature and human life, but placated, controlled or at least held off by magical means."[2] As "shades," demons "appear in all kinds of places, especially the lonely, at all possible times, especially at night, and in the most varied forms, especially those of uncanny beasts."[3] This definition is quite broad, so the following examples will explore many of its facets.

It makes sense to first turn to Plato or Socrates for answers; Plato often used the term "daimōn" to describe "divine intermediaries or demigods," like a territorial

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[2] Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. 2 (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 8.
[3] Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 6.

guardian spirit, so it's interesting to find that Socrates meant something closer to "a conscience."[4] Take, for example, this quote from Plato's *Apology*:

> You have often heard me speak of something related to the gods and to the *daimones*, a voice, which comes to me, and is the thing that Meletus ridicules in the indictment. This thing I have had ever since I was a child: it is a voice which comes to me and always forbids me to do something which I am going to do, but never commands me to do anything, and this is what stands in the way of being engaged in matters of the state.[5]

It is clear from this excerpt that the *daimon* prevents Socrates from "'doing what his reason or sense has pronounced wrong'" rather than "'doing what his reason or sense has pronounced right,'" which is an important description.[6] Remember this, as Socrates seems to be implicitly getting at the root of the matter. However, from a folk point of view, this is an insufficient explanation. Many more accessible texts from that period illustrate the *daimon* in the context of horror and ghost stories, and as it turns out, dissecting cultural artifacts is far more useful.

The actual Greek *mythology* of demons is more nuanced: after Prometheus stole the secret of fire, which angered Zeus. Zeus said, "The price for fire" is an "evil thing in which they may all be glad of heart while they embrace their own destruction," and thus created Woman.[7] She was fashioned out of mud by Hephaestus, Hermes put in her

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[4] Robert Johnston, "Demon Possession and Exorcism In the New Testament," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 11, no. 2 (2015): 1, https://dx.doi.org/10.32597/jams/vol11/iss2/4/.

[5] Plato, *The Apology of Socrates*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 31c-d.

[6] Brian Willems, "The Ecological Demon, Silent Running and Interstellar." In *Philosophical Approaches to Demonology*.(Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 110.

[7] Robert Newton,"Demons," *The North American Review* 280, 6 (1995): 44.

"a shameless mind and deceitful nature,'" and Zeus "named her Pandora and sent her down to Earth."[8] As the story famously goes, she "opened the urn of evils" and "all the mischief, sorrows, and diseases got out and raced across the world" – thus, demons.[9] We see here the beginning of a trend in this thesis: layers of misogyny draped over mythical history. Such a tale is so Biblically Eden-esque that I'd be remiss if I didn't point it out. This matter aside, evil is thus released unto the world, often in the form of demons.

Hesiod, one of the earliest Greek poets, disagrees with this interpretation. He argues that Zeus had mercy when he saw that the world was overrun, and sent "invisible guardians to watch over us, and *these* were the demons."[10] They are "pure spirits dwelling on earth," souls that did not descend to the Underworld and who should comfort us through their presence.[11] This echoes Plato's claim that demons were essentially messengers to the Gods, and so act as intermediate interpreter beings.[12] Demons are, therefore, essentially guardians of Man, which arguably fits with Socrates's descriptions. Hesiod presents a broader ontological moral question to be examined later in this chapter, namely, how could evil beings be released by a merciful God? In fact, Hippocrates called allegations of possession and demonic harm blasphemous to avoid this question altogether, and determined that diabolical madness was simply hereditary and thus lacked divine causes.[13] Despite these lofty revelations, exorcism was incredibly

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[8] Newton, "Demons," 44.
[9] Newton, "Demons," 44.
[10] Newton, "Demons," 44. My italics.
[11] Newton, "Demons," 44.
[12] Newton, "Demons," 46.
[13] Newton, "Demons," 45.

popular in Greek life. Many, including Xenocrates, believed that demons could

potentially "go astray" and thus be rogue mischief-makers.[14] Perhaps demons *are*

undescended souls, but some of the wicked ones infested the world.[15]

Many surviving Greek folktales that mention demons place them in a liminal

setting, which will be a dominant theme throughout this thesis. Doorways, gates, roads,

and cemeteries are great spatial examples of liminality, but transitory states and rites of

passage are equally applicable. Julia Doroszewska examines this through works set in

Greek suburbs, identifying that the word finds its root in *suburbanus*, which "refers to

features such as sanctuaries, tombs, funeral pyres, villas, or even small towns set on the

outskirts of a city."[16] They are neither countryside nor urban and always exist in the

periphery. Take, for example, Philostratus's *Empousa*, set in the Corinthian suburbs. A

young man named Apollonius is "seduced away from his philosophical pursuits by an

empousa – a *daimon* in the form of a beautiful woman."[17] The story begins with

Apollonius walking on "the road to Cenchreae," where he was met by the succubus,

and closer geographical analysis reveals that to get here, he "likely used the so-called

Cenchrean gate of Corinth" and was in proximity to a cemetery.[18] Thus, all of the

elements of the liminal *suburbanus* are present in this story. Doroszewska writes,

> This scenery, when contrasted to the congested space of the typical urban
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> landscape, evokes the opposition between the close-packed city zone and

[14] Newton, "Demons," 46.
[15] Newton, "Demons," 46.
[16] Julia Doroszewska, "The Liminal Space: Suburbs as a Demonic Domain in Classical Literature," *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 202, no. 1 (2017): 3, https://doi.org/10.5325/preternature.6.1.0001.
[17] Doroszewska, "The Liminal Space," 4-5.
[18] Doroszewska, "The Liminal Space," 5.

the vague spatial organization of the periphery. The former carries

connotations of order, and thus, implicitly, safety and predictability,

whereas the latter triggers associations with burial grounds and other

business deemed unfit for city life, and hence, at least to some extent, with

an isolated area in which order, safety, and predictability are suspended.

This imagery is enhanced by the notion of pollution from the tombs,

which were potentially impure.[19]

We read this tale as taking place during the young man's rite of passage, yet another

indicator of our liminal theme. Apollonius is traveling to begin his education, and

therefore this is both literally and figuratively his initiation to philosophy, which "was

believed to be particularly dangerous."[20] He is interrupted on his path and thus "strays

from the philosophical into the material world, misled by false appearances."[21]

Doroszewska points to similar instances in other ancient Greek literature, like in

Lucian's *Philopseudes* 30-31, which features a protagonist named Arignotus who also

happens to be headed to Corinth as a rite of passage. This time, however, the demon

possesses a (haunted) house, which is rendered impure by an improperly buried corpse.

The house was "ruined and abandoned and most likely located near cemeteries," and

attacks Arignotus with "its ability to transform into various animal forms … a

manifestation of … 'diachronic hybridism.'"[22] This can only be resolved through proper

burial, and is how the story resolves itself. The house's hybridism, best encapsulated by

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[19] Doroszewska, "The Liminal Space," 5-6.
[20] Doroszewska, "The Liminal Space," 6.
[21] Doroszewska, "The Liminal Space," 6. How Platonic!
[22] Doroszewska, "The Liminal Space," 7-8.

Kittle's prior definition, "especially those of *uncanny* beasts," is another example of demons embodying a liminal quality.

Haunted houses, and by extension uncanny or liminal physical spaces, have been the target of architectural and psychological research for years. One such instance, *Structural Deviations Drive an Uncanny Valley of Physical Places* by Alexander Diel, explores these positions and offers some useful scope. Diel's research concludes that "deviations from typical structural patterns of realistic places are rated strange or eerie," and the phenomenon of uncanniness can be related to "categorization-related processes."[23] Haunted houses can be identified as "configurally disordered or anomalous places," which is a useful descriptor as this chapter continues.[24] Demons seem to be able to be defined in the same way, so it makes sense to see the two concepts joined together.

Divine intermediacy, close association with the original sin of women, localization to liminal and uncanny spaces, weaponized sexuality, and rites of passage are thus synthesized under the Greek demon. These will be common liminal themes moving forward, and are especially useful when considering how demons are defined in ancient Egyptian mythology – their demons possessed human-animal hybrid features, which was also quite common in ancient Mesopotamia and Greece.[25] In *Demons (Benevolent And Malevolent)*, Rita Lucarelli writes, "the theriomorphic traits of supernatural beings recall their wildest and most fearful aspects, stressing their

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[23] Alexander Diel and Michael Lewis, "Structural Deviations Drive an Uncanny Valley of Physical Places," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 82, no. 101844 (2022): 12, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2022.101844.
[24] Diel and Lewis, "Structural Deviations," 13.
[25] Lucarelli, "Demons (Benevolent and Malevolent)," 5.

'otherness' in contrast to the anthropomorphic forms, which denote humanization and membership of the civilized world."[26] This detail of diachronic hybridism, as well as more typical and grotesque iconographies involving the combination of multiple animals in the netherworld, will become useful. Lucarelli denotes these hybrid and anthropomorphic deities as "border-crossers," similar to vampires and werewolves.[27]

Ancient Egyptians did not have a word to distinguish between demons and other deities. However, they often wrote the names of malevolent beings in red ink, indicating that they distinctly categorized something identical to demons. In addition, before the New Kingdom period (1550-1070 BCE), these demons "received no cult" unlike deities, likely due to their subordinate relationship with the Gods.[28] Lucarelli thus concludes that these demons fulfill Plato's definition of a *daimôn* as an "intermediate being" between gods and mortals, which tended to be the case among various ancient religions.[29]

Demons in ancient Egypt pre-New Kingdom (1550-1070 BCE) are categorized as either "Wanderers," which "bring chaos into the ordered world or act upon the world of the living by command of the divine," or "Guardians," which "mediate between order and chaos or the sacred and the profane by protecting liminal and sacred places on earth and in the netherworld from impurity."[30] Furthermore, demonic possession also took place in ancient Egypt, and it could occur either while asleep through nightmares or during the day when a traveler got too close to the demon's domain. Lucarelli writes,

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[26] Lucarelli, "Demons (Benevolent and Malevolent)," 5.
[27] Lucarelli, "Demons (Benevolent and Malevolent)," 6.
[28] Lucarelli, "Demons (Benevolent and Malevolent)," 2.
[29] Lucarelli, "Demons (Benevolent and Malevolent)," 2.
[30] Lucarelli, "Demons (Benevolent and Malevolent)," 2.

"Wandering demons also entered and haunted houses, as is evident in a list of the parts of a house to be defended against malevolent influences in a New Kingdom magical spell."[31] Therefore, demons could be "defined by location," including Guardians that inhabited natural places like bodies of water.[32]

It helps this theory to point out that Egyptian demons were viewed as doorkeepers, or guardians of portals.[33] Manal Hammad provides these descriptions, ranking demons as an "intermediate between gods and mankind," playing a "dual role, acting on the borders between order and chaos."[34] Hammad also echoes Lucarelli's claims, writing, "Demons do not dwell in the divine land of light or in temples, but they rather live in night, darkness or in natural places such as deserts pools, rivers, streams, ponds, foreign places, mountains, as well as caves, pits, tombs, as all were considered doorways into the netherworld … Moreover, they were smelly and they fed on waste matters."[35] Each of these qualities is easily encapsulated as *liminal*, just like the Greek characteristics.

The demons Pazuzu and Lamaštu, originating in very early Mesopotamia, contain many of these aforementioned traits. Pazuzu, for example, is identified as "the first demon in Mesopotamia, and probably in the entire Ancient East," and has hybrid human/animal features.[36] Marija Todorovska, author of *Demonic Hybridity and*

[31] Lucarelli, "Demons (Benevolent and Malevolent)," 4.

[32] Lucarelli, "Demons (Benevolent and Malevolent)," 4.

[33] Manal Hammad, "Demonic Beings in Ancient Egypt," *International Academic Journal Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management* 4, no. 4 (2018): 6.

[34] Hammad, "Demonic Beings," 3-4.

[35] Hammad, "Demonic Beings," 4.

[36] Marija Todorovska, "Demonic Hybridity and Liminality: Pazuzu and Lamaštu," Годишен Зборник На Филозофскиот Факултет/The Annual of the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, 76 (2023): 94, https://doi.org/10.37510/godzbo2376091t.

Liminality, shows that Pazuzu's physical form allows it to perform functions "between higher and lower ontological spheres," and is an ambivalent demonic/apotropaic[37] hybrid called upon to oppose his nemesis, the evil Lamaštu.[38] Pazuzu thus carries a dual significance: in the home, Pazuzu is a "constant guest in the houses of people" for his apotropaic properties, but outdoors, is an "untamed loner who wanders around the mountains and deserts."[39] It is also vital to note that one author on whom Todorovska bases much of their conclusions, Heeßel, argues that "Pazuzu is so obviously a foreign (demonic) power, that he does not need to be labeled as a foreigner."[40] This foreigner dynamic ties nicely into the liminal/border crossing theme, as does his localization in places like mountains and deserts.

Similarly, Lamaštu is depicted with monstrous hybridity, but is excluded from "the civilized, ordered community."[41] She "slithers like a snake through the door-cracks and the windows in search for prey," and poses as a wet nurse to "snatch, poison, or strangle" babies with her weaponized breasts.[42] Lamaštu's associated descriptions are particularly interesting because they represent inversions: she is "associated with scorching heat," but also "fever, chills, [and] ice."[43] "When she crosses a river, she makes its waters murky; by leaning against a wall, she smears it with mud," and when she attacks, she "eats the muscles and twists the sinews, makes the faces go green, distorts

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[37] For the layman, "apotropaic" essentially means evil-repellant: Dream-catchers, crucifixes, and garlic (for vampires), and so on.
[38] Todorovska, "Demonic Hybridity," 93.
[39] Todorovska, "Demonic Hybridity," 94-95.
[40] Todorovska, "Demonic Hybridity," 97.
[41] Todorovska, "Demonic Hybridity," 98.
[42] Todorovska, "Demonic Hybridity," 98-99.
[43] Todorovska, "Demonic Hybridity," 99.

the features, causes depression, and burns the bodies like fire."[44] Various types of diseases could be attributed to and thus diagnosed as caused by Lamaštu, particularly fever, dehydration, inflammation, jaundice, etc.[45]

The dirt and grime associated with Lamaštu indicate a sort of impurity and distortion that will become central to this work, but her heat/ice and physical distortion is also incredibly interesting. We are beginning to see inklings of more explicit "inversions," or a sort of paradox, where extreme opposites are somehow unified in these contradictory metaphysical bodies. All of this can be summarized effectively through the word "liminal" as I have utilized it thus far.

The mythological position of these two demons also certainly places them under our "liminal" descriptor as well: Lamaštu is the daughter of Anu, the king of the Gods, and thus is evil yet of divine origin. She was "evicted" from the sky, yet is an "integral, albeit dark part of the Mesopotamian pantheon" despite being called a "foreigner."[46] She "likes to eat meat that is not for eating, and break bones that are not for gnawing," and an exorcist will offer bribes like combs, fibulas, a distaff, etc., "so that she collects her animals and takes off for the wilderness."[47] She "appeared from the marshes" disheveled, "walks in the dung-filled tracks of the cattle," "appears by the window, slithers under the door-pivots," and "enters and exits the house as she pleases."[48] We see once again an emphasis on liminal ontology, geography, and location/relocation.

[44] Todorovska, "Demonic Hybridity," 99.
[45] Todorovska, "Demonic Hybridity," 99.
[46] Todorovska, "Demonic Hybridity," 100. Sometimes, specific foreign places were named.
[47] Todorovska, "Demonic Hybridity," 101.
[48] Todorovska, "Demonic Hybridity," 101.

Lamaštu also represents violations of Mesopotamian gender categories, as she is depicted with poor hygiene, her nudity is "constantly underlined," her hair is matted, and she has "long unclean nails and hairy armpits."[49] Todorovska writes,

> Lamaštu goes outside of the norms of femininity, which makes her an active threat to the civilized society, and what is even worse, to its most precious part, its children … the disjunction of categories and the threats to society are not lurking in any individual, but in specially marked, demonic bodies, which could allegedly be recognized by their hybridity, disorder, deviancy, hypertextualization. This discourse is supposed to bring comfort, by teaching that in order to repel such threats, some specific corporally-structurally distant non-human bodies should be fixed or removed … This again places the demonic not only as an external to the established human categories, but as if it is in between categories that would otherwise be mutually exclusive. The demonic is ontologically, geographically, socially, magico-medically liminal.[50]

Ancient Mesopotamian mythology therefore concurs with our prior conclusions about liminal demons. I suppose it is also interesting to point out that an ambivalent masculine demon (Pazuzu) can be called upon to suppress the evil female demon (Lamaštu), which certainly acts to reinforce patriarchal norms.

Ancient Assyria, the capital of Mesopotamia at the time, had their own fascinating demons called the Sebettu – seven warrior figures "increasingly utilized in

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[49] Todorovska, "Demonic Hybridity," 102.
[50] Todorovska, "Demonic Hybridity," 103.

texts concerned with controlling the periphery, especially its far western edges, during the Middle and Neo-Assyrian periods."[51] The Sebettu were referred to as the "Gods of the West" in an inscription "on the back of a stone female torso excavated from Nineveh," which "marks the Sebettu as foreign, associated in particular with a region with which the king was in direct conflict."[52] This aligns with the foreignity of *empousa*, Egyptian Wanderers, Pazuza and Lamaštu, as well as many of the demons to come. Gina Konstantopoulos's analysis of various recovered inscriptions and texts yields the conclusion that "the Sebettu serve as, depending on one's point of view, either a transition to or a barrier between the gods closely associated with Assyria and those belonging to foreign lands," which provides further validation towards demons defined as liminal entities.[53] They find themselves on the periphery of the Assyrian conventional border, much like demons in Greek, Egyptian, and broader Mesopotamian contexts.

It's worth noting that the chronologically first recorded instance of an exorcism in *The Penguin Book of Exorcism* was inscribed in seventh-century BCE Assyria on a tablet excavated from the Library of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh. The liquid runoff of the treatment, which is performed on a dough effigy, was to be collected into a cup to be "carried away into the broad places," meaning the deserts in which the "Ghost goeth furtively."[54] Demons were "imagined as residing in the desert, and exorcism frequently involved ritually removing the spirit and returning it to the desert."[55] This practice

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[51] Gina Konstantopoulos, "Migrating Demons, Liminal Deities, and Assyria's Western Campaigns," *Advances in Ancient Biblical* (2021): 137. https://doi.org/10.35068/aabner.v1i1.788.
[52] Konstantopoulos, "Migrating Demons," 140.
[53] Konstantopoulos, "Migrating Demons," 142-144.
[54] Joseph P. Laycock, *The Penguin Book of Exorcisms* (Penguin Classics, 2020), 4-5.
[55] Laycock, *The Penguin Book of Exorcisms*, 3.

seems to echo the aforementioned Greek and Egyptian mythology, as demons continue
to be associated with empty, barren, and therefore liminal spaces.

Konstantopolous hinges her analysis on Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's monster theses,
which supply us with our first theoretical foundation before we proceed into
Abrahamic theology. Cohen explains that monsters are "born only at this metaphoric
crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment – of a time, a feeling, and a
place," thus, "The monstrous body is pure culture."[56] He writes,

> "It is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of
> upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be
> born again. These epistemological spaces between the monster's bones are
> Derrida's familiar chasm of différance: a genetic uncertainty principle, the
> essence of the monster's vitality, the reason it always rises from the
> dissection table as its secrets are about to be revealed and vanishes into the
> night."[57]

Monsters are therefore often "disturbing hybrids, whose externally incoherent bodies
resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration" – therein lies the danger
of the monster, "a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash
distinctions."[58] Cohen goes as far as to point out that, "Because of its ontological
liminality, the monster notoriously appears at times of crisis as a kind of third term that
problematizes the clash of extremes – as 'that which questions binary thinking and

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[56] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.
[57] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 4.
[58] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 6.

introduces a crisis.'"[59] What better theoretical perspective to supplement our prior analysis? The Greeks, Egyptians, Mesopotamians, and Assyrians all encapsulate this claim, as will the better-known Abrahamic traditions.

Rock Me, Asmodeus!

Likely the most popular modern Jewish demon, "Lilith," is first referred to in Isaiah 34:14: "And desert creatures will meet with hyenas, and goat-demons will call out to each other. There also Liliths will settle, and find for themselves a resting place."[60] As with any biblical translation, this quote requires some context and clarification. This portion of Isaiah is a prophecy that describes the desert of the non-Israeli world, depicted through Edom, located in modern southwestern Jordan. Edom was said to have been descended from Esau and thus in conflict with the Israelites, and was destroyed as a result of God's "judgment on the nations." It is a symbol of the opposition of the one true God, which positions Lilith as a classic threatening-foreigner entity who takes up residence in this uninhabited land. Lilith herself, however, existed long before Isaiah was written.

Marianna Ruah-Midbar Shapiro, for example, demonstrates that Lilith is traceable to the third millennium BCE in Sumerian writings as a "vampire demoness" or "succubus."[61] Further, she makes an appearance in the Epic of Gilgamesh as a "desert-dwelling being" who is a goddess of "fertility, sensual love and wanton

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[59] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 6.

[60] Isa. 34:14 ISV.

[61] Fiona Darroch, "The Ghosts of Lilith: Haunting Narratives of Witness and the Postcolonial Poetry of Shivanee Ramlochan," *Literature and Theology* 35, no. 4 (2021): https://doi.org/10.1093/litthe/frab029.

sexuality, warfare, sudden death and rebirth."[62] Lilith is also one of many nocturnal

demons in Mesopotamian mythology. The parallels of Lilith's significance in these

earlier religions to early Jewish faith represent an important reality of religion, which is

that it is largely syncretic. Notions and attitudes of the demonic were inherited from

geographically similar cultures, and as will be seen, Christian demonology takes

inspiration from this phenomenon. For now, understand that Lilith was a demon of the

desert and appears in Isaiah, referring to the desert resulting from God's judgment,

which reiterates the geographically liminal nature of a demon and succubus motifs like

with the Greek Empousa and the Mesopotamian Lamaštu.

Another popular Jewish demon, Azazel (עֲזָאזֵל), has quite a bit more controversy

attached. He only appears in three passages, all in Leviticus, and first and foremost

encounters some translation issues. Christian translations like the Septuagint and

Vulgate simply translate this word to "scapegoat," for reasons that will become evident

shortly. Take Leviticus 16; Aaron's sons have just died for their sins (we will return to

this in Chapter Two), and God tells Moses what Aaron is to do next. Aaron must take

two goats from his community, as well as a personally owned bull, and sacrifice them

for absolution. To perform this sacrifice, Aaron was told to"... place lots upon the two

goats, one marked for God and the other marked for *Azazel*."[63] This is the word that has

fallen under scrutiny, but it's hard to see how a goat could be marked *for* a scapegoat.

The point, for the time being, is that the goat set aside for the demon Azazel was sent

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[62] Darroch, "The Ghosts of Lilith."

[63] Lev. 16:8, The Contemporary Torah.

"off to the wilderness" for him, "and the goat shall bear upon it all their iniquities to a land which is cut off."[64] Wilderness is once again reiterated.

The Apocrypha, specifically Tobit and the Dead Sea Scrolls, expand on these wilderness themes.[65] For starters, the Book of Tobit was written in the third or early second century BCE. It tells the story of Tobiah, the son of Tobit, who journeys with the angel Raphael to collect materials to combat the demon Asmodeus. Tobit 8:2-3 reads,

> Tobiah, mindful of Raphael's instructions, took the fish's liver and heart
>
> from the bag where he had them and put them on the embers intended for
>
> incense.
>
> The odor of the fish repulsed the demon, and it fled to the upper regions
>
> of Egypt; Raphael went in pursuit of it and there bound it hand and foot.
>
> Then Raphael returned immediately.[66]

According to the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, the "upper" and "lower" geographic designations of Egypt refer to the flow of the Nile, thus, "upper regions of Egypt" refers to areas to the South.[67] Lisa Haney writes,

> The ancient Egyptians, who were always keen observers of nature, often
>
> associated the Nile Valley with life and abundance and the neighboring
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> deserts with death and chaos.

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[64] Leviticus 16:22, The Contemporary Torah.

[65] For the layman: the Apocrypha are not canonical Jewish texts, but were written in similar time periods and therefore hold useful ethnographical value.

[66] Tob. 8:2-3, NABRE.

[67] "Egypt and the Nile," Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Accessed April 28, 2025, https://carnegiemnh.org/egypt-and-the-nile/.

Kemet or, "black land," denotes the rich, fertile land of the Nile Valley, while Deshret, or "red land," refers to the hot, dry desert. The contrast between the red land and the black land was not just visible or geographic, it affected the Egyptians' everyday lives. The dry climate of the desert, for example, made it an ideal location for cemeteries. There, the annual Nile flood would not disturb people's graves and the dry climate acted to preserve tombs and their contents.[68]
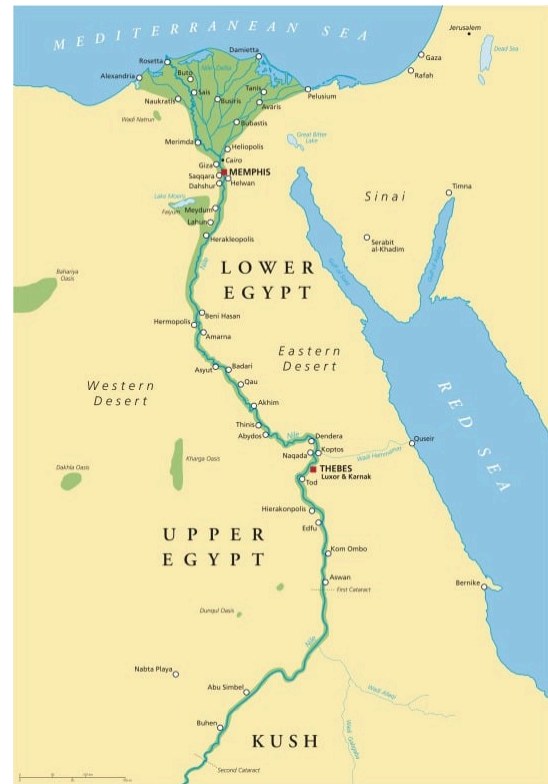
The image above from the same source should elucidate this point. Once again, the role of uninhabited space in designating demonic presence is reiterated. The Qumran manuscript, also known as the Dead Sea Scrolls and 11QApocryphal Psalms (11Q11), has an almost identical detail. They were written between the third century BCE and the first century CE and are comprised of four songs "for the stricken," meaning, possessed by demons. However, only one is particularly relevant to this theme. Ida Fröhlich translates the text in *Magical Healing at Qumran (11Q11) and the Question of the Calendar*. The Apocryphal Psalms "substantiate Solomon's role as an exorcist" and are the

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[68] "Egypt and the Nile."

"earliest text mentioning Solomon in a magical context."[69] Notably, King Solomon is the

son of King David, another tamer of demons.[70] More relevant, however, is that the

exorcized demon is usually "sent away to an area considered impure like the desert or

to the netherworld described… as 'into the great Abyss.'"[71] This description also echoes

the aforementioned Assyrian exorcism practice.

This locative descriptor is important; Jonathan Smith argues that "negative

valence is attached to things which escape place (the chaotic, the rebellious, the distant)

or things found just outside the place where they properly belong (the hybrid, the

deviant, the adjacent)."[72] Thus, the phrase "devil worship" was and still is used to refer

to the worship of foreign deities. There's a vague construction of borders here, both

geographical and cultural, which appears to be at work. Demons represent absolute

externality whether they reside in the wilderness, are sent to reside in the wilderness, or

mark the distinction between internality and externality.

Cohen's monster theses are useful here too; he explains that a monster "prevents

mobility (intellectual, geographic, or sexual)" because, "to step outside this official

geography is to risk attack by some monstrous border patrol or (worse) to become

monstrous oneself."[73] This is why we find demons on, beyond, and from borders. They

threaten their believers into personal, social, and geographical interiority, and thus are

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[69] Ida Fröhlich, "Magical Healing at Qumran (11Q11) and the Question of the Calendar," *Volume Studies on Magic and Divination in the Biblical World* (2013): 42, https://doi.org/10.31826/9781463228026-006.

[70] See 1 Samuel 16:14-23.

[71] Fröhlich, "Magical Healing at Qumran," 42.

[72] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers in Hellenistic and Roman Antiquity," In *Band 16/1. Teilband Religion (Heidentum: Römische Religion, Allgemeines)* (De Gruyter, 1978), 429.

[73] Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, 12.

"difference made flesh, come to dwell among us as dialectical Other."[74] Demons are representative of the outside, but in order to be feared, symbolized, and dealt with, they must also be an "incorporation of the Outside."[75] This is their dialectical nature, because demons imply the necessity of their own extermination, and a threat implies the necessity of the value or society to be preserved or defended. Cohen draws a comparison to the original biblical inhabitants of Canaan, giants who "justify the Hebrew colonization of the promised land," because "representing an anterior culture as monstrous justifies its displacement or extermination by rendering the act heroic."[76] Demonization, manifest.

On Uncanny Apotropaics

Growing up Jewish, the hanging of the mezuzah was ubiquitous for me. My father made a point to put one in every doorway in my house, and in Hebrew school, we were instructed to hang them on our doorposts. The reason *why* often evaded me; Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (one of the most important prayers in the Jewish faith,[77] popularly referred to as the *Shema*), reads:

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[74] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 7.
[75] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 7.
[76] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 7-8.
[77] "Shema and Amidah - Ways of Jewish Living - Edexcel - GCSE Religious Studies Revision," BBC, accessed April 28, 2025, https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z4kg4qt/revision/3.

Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And thou shalt love

the LORD thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all

thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be

upon thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children,

and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou

walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be for

frontlets between thine eyes. **And thou shalt write them upon the

door-posts of thy house, and upon thy gates.**[78]

To the left, I've included a photo of a mezuzah in the front door of my home.

Deuteronomy 11:13-21 reiterates the door-post part, but like in the portion prior, a

justification seems absent.[79] Mezuzahs are common to even secular Jews, so it's

interesting, then, that about three-quarters of adults in modern Israel "believe that the

mezuzah literally guards their houses," and in response to terrorist attacks in Israel in

the 1970s, "representatives of Chabad-Lubavitch started the campaign for the

systematic checking of mezuzahs" with the assumption that "adhering to the mitzvot

would guarantee personal safety."[80] Wojciech Kosior examines these attitudes in *It Will

Not Let the Destroying [One] Enter*, concluding that "culture-comparative analysis shows

that the objects placed on domestic thresholds often bear the function of keeping a

broadly understood evil away" and "both biblical and rabbinic sources explicitly

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[78] Deut. 6:4-9 NIV.
[79] Deut. 11:13-21 NIV.
[80] Wojciech Kosior, ."'It Will Not Let the Destroying [One] Enter'. The Mezuzah as an Apotropaic Device According to Biblical and Rabbinic Sources," *The Polish Journal of the Arts and Culture*, no. 9 (2014): 128.

witness the belief in the anti-demonic function of mezuzah."[81] On the subject of liminality and demons, mezuzahs are a deeply useful topic. In identifying the risks of a demonic incursion, how they are repelled, and where they attack, we can determine a great deal about the nature of demons themselves.

Notice that in the Shema, Jews are also instructed to "bind [these words] for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes…" — this takes the form of Tefillin and Tzitzit, and along with the Mezuzah, forms what Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaqov calls the Triple Yarn.[82] Each of these mitzvot has seemingly apotropaic qualities depending on one's source of religious information, and in combination, they represent a strong multi-layer of protection.

Martin Gordon roots the origin of the mezuzah's "strong anti-demonic elements" in the mystical literature of the medieval period, particularly in the works of Sefer Raziel, the Zohar (the major work of the Kabbalah), and in the Ari's[83] sixteenth-century teaching.[84] Interestingly, Gordon reveals that textually (before the medieval period), there is very little evidence that mezuzot contain any specific power. They represent reminders of a Jew's covenant with God and thus are a mitzvah, but to attribute power to an object would be an act of idolatry. The Torah "implicitly rejects the notion that Divine names are possessed of inherent power," which greatly distinguishes Judaism

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[81] Kosior, "It Will Not Let the Destroying [One] Enter," 129.
[82] Kosior, "It Will Not Let the Destroying [One] Enter," 142.
[83] His real name is Rav Isaac Luria; the Ari meant "The Holy Lion."
[84] Martin L. Gordon, "Mezuzah: Protective Amulet or Religious Symbol," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought* 16, no. 4 (1977): 8.

from other religions in the region.[85] God's name holds no explicit power, so in inscribing the *Shema*, we can't conclude that Mezuzot necessarily possess any apotropaic power.

Many Jewish scholars attribute the prevalence of mezuzot as representative of the story of Passover in Exodus. Specifically, the tenth plague is the target of our analysis. For those unfamiliar, the story goes that the Jewish people were kept as slaves in Egypt and prayed to God for their liberation. Through Moses, God threatened Pharaoh with successive plagues on the land, which included turning the Nile to blood, infestations of frogs, lice/vermin, and flies respectively, a pestilence that killed Egyptian livestock, a plague of boils, hail, locusts, and darkness. The tenth and final plague was the killing of all Egyptian first-born sons, and Jews would be spared if they sacrificed an "unblemished lamb" and smeared its blood on their houses' mezuzot.[86] On that night, an angel of death came upon the land and slaughtered the firstborn child of Pharaoh, which resulted in his releasing the Jews (albeit temporarily). The story continues from here: Moses split the Red Sea, the Jews wandered the desert for forty years and experienced some miracles, the Ten Commandments were given to Moses on Mount Sinai, and so on.

The focus of our examination, however, is on this so-called Angel of Death. Technically, it is called a "maziq," a derivate of the root נזק ("damage"), and means the "'one who does damage, destroys, wastes' or more specifically 'the offender that occasioned damage.'"[87] The word appears elsewhere too, but seems to be similar to *Shedim*, which are often distinguished from demons because they explicitly carry out

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[85] Gordon, "Mezuzah," 10.
[86] Gordon, "Mezuzah" 10.
[87] Kosior, "It Will Not Let the Destroying [One] Enter," 140.

God's will. Notably, Berakhot 3a-b and 62a locates *Shedim* in "ruined houses and secluded places," which echoes our prior analyses on liminal demons.[88] Seeing as the combination of lamb's blood and mezuzot repelled the maziq, Kosior determined that mezuzot contained an "apotropaic function," which is to say, evil-repellant. They write, "The apotropaic function of the mezuzah is fully acknowledged, although the object of its influence remains indefinite."[89]

This conclusion has a serious implication, because if it is indeed apotropaic and the maziq is carrying out God's will, then does it repel God himself? The mezuzah thus contains an "uncanny" meaning: "It is God, who might be the oppressor, repelled only by the 'triple yarn' of precepts."[90] However, Gordon avoids this pitfall entirely, as he points out that when the Jews are instructed to sprinkle lamb's blood on their mezuzot in Exodus, they are told, "And the blood shall be for *you* as a sign," which indicates that the act is not a *deterrent* for the Angel of Death.[91] As I mentioned previously, Gordon concludes that the modern belief in the apotropaic quality of mezuzot is not supported textually at all. This conclusion is part of what leads him to this claim; furthermore, both the Torah and Talmud do not support this belief, and sometimes implicitly reject the notion. The failure to hang one also doesn't result in defenselessness – Gordon writes that "Talmudic principle denies Divine punishment for the omission of a positive command, unless a consistently deliberate rejection of the mitzvah is intended."[92] How, then, does such a mass superstition arise? Gordon has our answer:

[88] Talmud, Berakhot 3a-b, 62a, William Davidson Edition.
[89] Kosior, "It Will Not Let the Destroying [One] Enter," 140.
[90] Kosior, "It Will Not Let the Destroying [One] Enter," 142.
[91] Gordon, "Mezuzah," 11.
[92] Gordon, "Mezuzah," 19-20.

Chazal[93] clearly separated the realm of religion from that of the occult.

They never considered the phenomenon of shedim a theological category,

to be countered by the allegedly anti-demonic potency of *mitsvot*. The

belief in evil spirits – a universal tendency amongst the intelligentsia as

well as the masses, prior to the modern age – was a speculative attempt

(not specifically Jewish) to come to terms with the severe realities of the

human condition, such as illness, physical injury, mental derangement,

death (phenomena which the modern mind understands in clearer terms

as attributable to disease-producing microorganisms, human negligence,

psycho-emotional strain, the natural aging process). Whatever procedures

were prescribed by the empirical method in an effort to counter the feared

demonic threat, such as the inscription of amulets and the pronouncement

of incantations, *mitsvot* were not among them.[94]

Unpacking this theory will have to wait until The Problem of Evil can be properly

engaged with at the end of this chapter. It's clear thus far that demons often entail a

non-religion-specific speculative response to things unknown, and are hard to

theologically pin down, especially in a monotheistic faith. This will be better explained

once Cappadocian theology is introduced, but for now, it is sufficient to point out that

mezuzot are placed in liminal spaces and, to many observers, act like deterrents to

liminal beings.[95]

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[93] The Mishnaic and Talmudic eras, in the last three hundred years of the Second Temple, c. 250 BCE – c. 625 CE.

[94] Gordon, "Mezuzah," 22.

[95] One more thing: this is mostly conjecture, but in reading Hammad's *Demonic Beings in Ancient Egypt* I came across a fascinating detail pertaining to Wanderer demons:

It is important to mention that the expression of demons in Jewish texts changed over time: In *Philosophical Approaches to Demonology*, Benjamin McCraw writes, "Pre-exilic demons are evil in the sense of being vestiges or remnants of a polytheistic neighbor, but the postexilic picture aligns them with an archdemon, unifying the evil spirits into a community devoted to one paradigmatically evil spirit – that is, Satan."[96] This dynamic has already been represented in this chapter through Lilith, a pre-exilic "remnant of a polytheistic neighbor." The Sebettu also certainly played this role for the Assyrians. Thus, McCraw argues, "Many commentators see the post-exilic shift as evidence of Persian influence on the Jewish religion and, most especially, the tradition's demonology."[97] Given this historical context, the unification of Jewish demonology into a "Satan" carries us smoothly into the New Testament.

Kittel's *Theological Dictionary* expands these concepts, writing, "Pseudepigraphical Judaism was also convinced that in the Gentile world and its culture, there is at work an evil will, not of individual men, but of demons."[98] This shift in the geography of demonization, where the worship of other Gods became considered dangerous and demonic, can be attributed to the Septuagint, a key feature of

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"[Egyptians] … outlined the frames of the false doors in their homes by the red paste, a protective color against the evil spirits and demons, so as not to enter the house through these open gates; the false doors." Is it coincidental that the Passover tale of smearing lamb's blood on doorposts to deter the *maziq* has symmetry to this practice? At the very least, the commonality of doorposts in both instances offers more strong evidence of the liminal quality of demons. Hammad, "Demonic Beings," 10.

[96] Benjamin W. McCraw and Robert Arp, "Introduction," in *Philosophical Approaches to Demonology*, ed. Benjamin W. McCraw and Robert Arp (Routledge, 2017), 6.

[97] McCraw and Arp, "Introduction," 6.

[98] Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 16. "Pseudepigraphical" refers to non-canonical writings present in the Septuagint, or the Greek Old Testament, which includes the Apocrypha.

Pseudepigraphical literature.[99] Jonathan Smith refers to the Septuagint translation of

Psalm 96, "For all the gods of the peoples are demons," which was used particularly by

Apostle Paul. He describes,

> 'Devil Worship' functions primarily as a locative term which establishes
> outer limits or distance much as wild men or monsters are depicted as
> inhabiting the borders of antique maps. In the same way as in archaic
> traditions, the dwelling place of demons is in wild, uninhabited places or
> ruined cities — that is to say, beyond city walls or where walls have been
> broken or allowed to fall into disrepair — so 'Devil Worship' lives either in
> the realm of the pagan (bearing in mind the etymology of the word) for
> whom the civilizing walls have not yet been erected, or in the realm of the
> heretic who, to employ one standard Talmudic metaphor, has 'broken the
> fence.'[100]

Thus, while the aforementioned Jewish tradition viewed the "uncivilized" qualities of

the demonic as "ignorance," Christians carry the connotation of incivility as

"perversity."[101] Smith draws this belief from Semitic and Greco-Roman traditions,

arguing, "This appears to be a transformation of archaic military rituals for devoting an

enemy to your god (e.g. the *herem* and *euocatio*) thereby 'civilizing' him."[102]

Demonization, in Smith's words, is a "measure of distance," or "locative category," in

the spirit of Mary Douglas, who will be engaged with properly in Chapter Two.[103]

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[99] Smith, *Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers in Hellenistic and Roman Antiquity*, 426.
[100] Smith, "Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers," 427.
[101] Smith, "Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers," 427.
[102] Smith, "Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers," 427.
[103] Smith, "Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers," 427.

The Devil's Gateways

Kittel's dictionary makes the important point that, as we move chronologically from the Old to New Testament, "references to demons except in the case of the possessed" become "comparatively infrequent."[104] Exorcism also fundamentally changed in the New Testament: Jews might have consulted exorcists who utilized incantations and cures written by Solomon, but Jesus simply commands the demons to "come out." Jesus granted his twelve apostles this power of exorcism, which adds some more nuance to this mythology.

Jesus performs several exorcisms in the New Testament, notably in *The Miracle of the Gadarene Swine* and *The Exorcism at the Synagogue in Capernaum*. However, it is worth noting that more than sixty such tales are present in the Synoptic Gospels.[105] Furthermore, Mark 1:28 indicates that Jesus's powers as an exorcist popularized him in the first place.[106]

One of the most useful details in the New Testament can be found through The Miracle of the Gadarene Swine, which appears in Matthew 8:28-34, Mark 5:1-20, and Luke 8:26-39. In this story, Jesus arrives "to the other side of the country" where he is met by two possessed men from the "tombs."[107] They both identified Jesus as the son of God, to which Jesus replied, "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit. And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many" (Mark 5:8-9). He then cast the demons out into a herd of pigs, which ran into the

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[104] Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 16.
[105] Johnston, "Demon Possession and Exorcism," 2.
[106] Johnston, "Demon Possession and Exorcism," 3.
[107] Matthew 8:28 AV.

lake and drowned. Once again, the demons originate from an uninhabited space (the tombs) and flee into an uninhabited space (the lake). Furthermore, in being of a singular body but identifying itself as *many*, we see yet another instance of monstrous hybridity. Eugene Thacker extends this reasoning: not only is Legion "… an affront to and parody of the Trinity, in which a single One is incarnated in Three," the demonic "also challenges divine sovereignty … in its refusal to be organized at all. We do not know how many demons there are, nor even if it is more than one voice that speaks 'Legion' … The demons are, in a sense, more than Many [a potentially countable entity], but never One."[108]

The Gadarene demoniac, written "Gerasene" in the Gospels of Mark and Luke, can be dissected in a variety of ways, all of which supplement this thesis. Duncan Reyburn recontextualizes the Gerasene demoniac[109] using René Girard's mimetics in *The Politics of Possession*. He notes that the possessed man "bruised himself with stones night and day (Mark 5:5)," and, "the mention of him living amongst tombs and stoning himself cannot be accidental: the demoniac, in effect, sees himself as one destined for death by stoning at the hands of a crowd caught up in mimetic fervor."[110] Girard himself points out, "the demoniac 'provides a spectacular mime of all the stages of punishment that Middle Eastern societies inflict on criminals who they consider defiled and irredeemable. First, the man is hunted, then stoned, and finally he is killed; this is why

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[108] Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet* (Zero Books, 2011), 28-29.
[109] An odd detail; the Gospel of Matthew refers to this region as the Gadarenes, whereas the Gospels of Mark and Luke refer to it as the Gerasenes.
[110] Douglas Reyburn, "The Politics of Possession: Reading King James's *Daemonologie* through the Lens of Mimetic Realism," in *Philosophical Approaches to Demonology*, ed. Benjamin W. McCraw and Robert Arp (Routledge, 2017), 266.

the possessed live among the tombs.'"[111] In this way, Cohen's monster theses are reified; the demonic monster's body is constructed entirely of its culture. It is allegorical, "imitating the violence of the Roman Empire," and perhaps more importantly, represents "a collective concern and a symbol of a particular political orientation toward power and rivalry … The problem is not with individuals, then, but with the manner in which the crowd supports its own biases through the scapegoating of victims."[112]

Another famous reference to demons is contained in The Exorcism at the Synagogue in Capernaum and reveals something particularly unique and subtle about demons. Encountering Jesus in a synagogue, a possessed man cries out,

> "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"
>
> "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!"
>
> The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.[113]

Once again, Jesus needed only to demand the demon to come out. More interestingly, however, the demon identifies Jesus as the son of God. For those unaware, Jesus never once identifies himself as the son of God throughout the entire Bible. Robert Johnston calls this the "Messianic Secret," writing, "Jesus commands the demons to be silent and not disclose his real identity. The title Holy One of God was not the self-designation that

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[111] Reyburn, "The Politics of Possession," 266.
[112] Reyburn, "The Politics of Possession," 266-267.
[113] Mark 1:24-26 NIV.

Jesus preferred, which was Son of Man."[114] We thus can see that demons possess some form of divine knowledge, thus complicating their theological position.

This information is useful, particularly when sorting demons into a theological hierarchy and considering them from a parabolic sense, but I think in terms of possession and exorcism, the demon-as-trickster is a more applicable theme. Take, for example, Tertullian's *Apologeticus*, a key early Christian demonological text written in 197 CE, which portrays demons as trickster entities preoccupied with the (ultimately foolish) attempt to subordinate God's will.[115] They are winged deceivers who pose as Gods, falsely prophesize, receive blood sacrifices, are inflictors of physical and mental sickness, and feast on "'the fumes and blood' of pagan sacrifices."[116] The word "Pagan" seems to echo many of the claims made earlier in this chapter, as it refers not to a specific religious group, but the vague non-Christian "Other." Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria (395-373 CE), uses the same sort of language, describing demons as fallen angels posing as pagan gods, shapeshifters jealous of humanity, and helpless to Christians. Jonathan Laycock writes, "the demons in this text are only a foil Athanasius uses to display the triumph of Christians," which certainly reiterates the aforementioned claims of McCraw, Smith, and many others.[117]

Seeing as true Christians render demons helpless and demons pose as pagan gods, non-believers are particularly vulnerable to incursion and manipulation.

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[114] Johnston, "Demon Possession and Exorcism," 3.

[115] In an important reference to the beginning of this chapter, Tertullian argued that the demon Socrates claimed to have been guided by in his Apology was, in fact, a fallen angel who rebelled against God. See Laycock, *The Penguin Book of Exorcisms*, 22.

[116] Laycock, *The Penguin Book of Exorcisms*, 23.

[117] Laycock, *The Penguin Book of Exorcisms*, 33.

Vulnerability to temptation is a telling symbol for any given Christian society and is useful in this analysis when juxtaposed with Tertullian's misogyny. He called women "the devil's gateway," which was hardly a controversial belief at the time.[118] Jeffery Ewing writes,

> ... women were seen as having natures more subject to sin and demonic influence. In the development of Catholic thought in early modern Europe, women were seen to: 'be less rational and to have less control over their bodies. They were therefore viewed as more easily tempted and deluded, serving as a convenient gateway for Satan. Early modernists also believed that women's sexuality was insatiable, and that their wombs might wander into their brains and cause hysteria. All of these notions rendered women more susceptible to the influence of spirits, be they demonic, disembodied, or angelic.'[119]

Ewing's analysis centers around Lilith's revisionist mythology in Pauline theology (which stems from Folk Jewish mythology) and Eve. In a stunning twist to my prior descriptions, Lilith was, essentially, retroactively made to be Adam's first wife. In the Alphabet of Ben Sira 78 (written 700-1000 AD), we read,

> When God created the first man Adam alone, God said, 'It is not good for man to be alone.' [So] God created a woman for him, from the earth like him, and called her Lilith. They [Adam and Lilith] promptly began to

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[118] Jeffery A. Ewing, "Women as 'the Devil's Gateway': A Feminist Critique of Christian Demonology," in *Philosophical Approaches to Demonology*, ed. Benjamin W. McCraw and Robert Arp (Routledge, 2017), 75.
[119] Ewing, "Women as 'the Devil's Gateway,'" 80.

argue with each other: She said, 'I will not lie below,' and he said, 'I will

not lie below, but above, since you are fit for being below and I for being

above.' She said to him, 'The two of us are equal, since we are both from

the earth.' And they would not listen to each other.[120]

Lilith, for now-likely obvious reasons, has been co-opted in the modern-day as a symbol

by feminists. After this dispute, she fled the Garden of Eden and Eve was created from

Adam's rib cage as is written in Genesis. Adam's "first wife" was *literally* demonized for

refusing to be subordinate to him.

This is not the only narrative of Lilith; Robert Newton in *Demons* explains that

Adam was also displeased with her because she was made of mud, unlike Eve.[121] Eve

adds further nuance to this point, as she was created from Adam's rib and specifically is

given the role of "helper."[122] Her role in the consumption of the forbidden fruit also

condemns her; in the words of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, "'though the devil tempted Eve

to sin, yet Eve seduced Adam.'"[123] Tertullian writes in *On the Apparel of Women*, "You are

the devil's gateway: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant

enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of *your* desert

– that is, death – even the Son of God had to die."[124]

This point on the ribcage is incredibly pervasive. The *Malleus Maleficarum* (1489),

which became an authority on witches and was widely used throughout medieval

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[120] Alphabet of Ben Sira 78.
[121] Newton, "Demons," 44.
[122] See Genesis 2:4-3:24, NIV.
[123] Arthur C. Lehmann, James E. Myers, "Psychosocial Interpretations of Exorcism," in *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion*, ed. Pamela Myers-Moro (Mayfield Publishing Company, 1996), 194.
[124] Newton, "Demons," 48.

courts, spends considerable time asking why women are "chiefly addicted to Evil Superstitions." It explains, "The natural reason is that she is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations [...] she was formed from a bent rib, that is, a rib of the breast, which is bent as it were in a contrary direction to a man. And since through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives."[125] It seems that in this mythology, women occupy the space of a demon. They are abominable, imperfect, and deceptive; St. John Chrysostom is cited, arguing, "It is not good to marry … What else is a woman but a foe to friendship, an unescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted with fair colours! … When a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil."[126] Beyond being innately monstrous, we can see that they are also ontologically evil because they are intrinsically a deterrent to the faith of men. They must be presided over and never be given autonomy, lest they defy the "divinely ordained" patriarchal authority of Saint Paul. We can thank Eve for all of this: "… any attempt by women to subvert or to assume that authority can be seen as an illicit reversal and hence as witch-like behavior. The first example of the subversion of divine authority, of course, is attributed to Eve in her disobedience."[127]

Eve seems to have "ruined everything"; she foiled the Divine Plan, and we can blame "Barbarians and dark ages and madness and every misfortune to punish us all" uniformly on her.[128] Women are thus prescribed an innately derivative and subordinate

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[125] Henry Krämer and Jeffrey L. Kidder, *Malleus Maleficarum / Translated with an Introduction, Bibliography and Notes by the Rev. Montague Summers* (John Rodker, 1928), 44.
[126] Krämer and Kidder, *Malleus Maleficarum*, 43.
[127] Lehmann, "Psychosocial Interpretations of Exorcism," 193.
[128] Newton, "Demons," 48.

nature in the Old Testament. Jeffery Cohen puts this best in his *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*:

> The difficult project of constructing and maintaining gender identities
>
> elicits an array of anxious responses throughout culture, producing
>
> another impetus to teratogenesis. The woman who oversteps the
>
> boundaries of her gender role risks becoming a Scylla, Weird Sister, Lilith
>
> ('die erste Eva,' 'la mere obscure'), Bertha Mason, or Gorgon.[129]

The subordination of women is something systematically justified throughout history, and the way in which philosophers and imagined "great thinkers" do so deserves our consideration. In many instances, women are portrayed as "less fully developed than man;" Arthur Lehmann writes, "'Because of lack of heat in germination, her sexual organs have remained internal, she is incomplete, colder and moister in dominant humors. She has less body heat and thus less courage, liberality, moral strength.'"[130] Beyond the farcical notion prefaced, this is interesting – the notion that the anatomical design of women holds negative spiritual and emotional significance. I argue, and this will become far more substantiated as this thesis proceeds, that this vulnerable-interior perspective on women goes hand-in-hand with their requirement to stay in the home, to preserve their interiority and thus purity (often through virginity), and the patriarchal demand for control over women's bodies and autonomy.

Lehmann theorizes this through Mary Douglas, a name that will be thoroughly examined in the next chapter. In short, Douglas explains that what our body emits and

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[129] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 9.
[130] Lehmann, "Psychosocial Interpretations of Exorcism," 194.

secretes is "considered polluting" because it "'traversed the boundary of the body'" and therefore is defined by its liminal quality.[131] Take, for example, blood, feces, vomit, spit, etc. In having internal sexual organs and thus "more" bodily openings, women are seen as more susceptible. This gender-relations topic will re-emerge in Chapter Two in more depth, as zayran possession (my primary focus of the chapter) *only* appears in women. It is of note that it is believed in the Sūdānīc communities, considering in that chapter, menstruating women are more susceptible to demonic incursion and perform pharaonic circumcision to better defend their notion of interiority.

The ultimate implication of a witch, demon, or other infernal creature is that it represents something necessarily untrue; a profane rejection of Truth itself. They tempt, defy, violate, and threaten from beyond what is hegemonic. How can they exist in a monotheistic theology with a perfectly just and good God? Returning to the Old Testament, 1 Samuel 16:15-23 describes an "evil spirit from God" that would "come over" King Saul and could be tamed by the playing of the lyre. The Complete Jewish Bible translation reads on line 23,

> So it was that whenever the [evil] spirit from God came over Sha'ul, David
> would take the lyre and play it, with the result that Sha'ul would find
> relief and feel better, as the evil spirit left him.[132]

This tale explains how David came to become Saul's armor-bearer, which in Samuel 17 famously resulted in his fight against Goliath. David would eventually become the second King of Israel, and his son Solomon would go on to have a fascinating

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[131] Lehmann, "Psychosocial Interpretations of Exorcism," 194.
[132] 1 Samuel 16:15-23 Complete Jewish Bible.

relationship with mysticism and demonology. However, a more important question arises from this passage: it seems as if the presence of an evil spirit is instrumental in God's plan for David and his descendants. In monotheistic theology, demons pose an awkward threat to the belief that God is universally good, or that demons are universally evil. If you haven't noticed already, the Egyptian and Assyrian religions also struggle with this problem, but for monotheists it is more troublesome. If all things come from a universally good God, why does evil exist at all? From this question, many Christians respond that evil therefore can't be ontological. In being evil, demons are an oppositional threat to God's will, yet they necessarily must be created and guided by Him. Is the evil spirit plaguing King Saul therefore truly *evil*?

I have one more point to make before I proceed, which is to address the potential counterclaim that demons might have always been intentionally allegorical and only the poor, uneducated masses might take such fairy tales seriously. In *Demons, Evil, and Liminality in Cappadocian Theology*, Morwenna Ludlow provides useful historical context. For example, Ludlow points out that Saint Augustine "grew up in an age when men thought that they shared the physical world with malevolent demons," and "Peter Brown's work on 'popular' piety has shown the prevalence of the belief in demons in late antiquity … he argues that one reason for Christianity's success was, in effect, that it took a belief in demons seriously and offered to do something about them."[133] Ludlow also points out, "Recent research has shown that a belief in demons was by no means

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[133] Morwenna Ludlow, "Demons, Evil, and Liminality in Cappadocian Theology," Journal of Early Christian Studies 20, no. 2 (2012): 181-182. https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.2012.0014.

restricted to the undereducated, lower-class monks in the Egyptian monastic communities," which ought to quell this matter for now in general.[134]

Between Good and Evil

Recall my previous quotation of Tertullian's *Apologeticus*; that demons pose as Gods and falsely prophesize, receive blood sacrifices, inflict physical and mental sickness, and feast on "'the fumes and blood' of pagan sacrifices."[135] "Pagan" is a word that sticks out, as it refers not to a specific religious group, but the shadowy non-Christian Other. As it turns out, this rhetoric is not uncommon throughout the history of demonology. Take, for example, the Sebettu mentioned earlier in this chapter. Their attribution with the margins of society, especially in regions associated with direct conflict, "is rooted in their dual nature as divine and demonic beings."[136] Such a dual nature begs the question: how can they possibly be *both*? Are those not contradictory terms?

Cappadocian theology, as described by Morwenna Ludlow, famously attempts to answer this question. Their struggle to do so is quite telling of the broader theological discussion. They take familiar Christian premises: God made two kinds of rational beings, humans and angels, and angels have a "different, finer kind of embodiment than humans."[137] When Satan fell, he brought others down with him, thus producing demons, and demons that "epitomized sin" and encouraged humans to "follow

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[134] Ludlow, "Demons, Evil, and Liminality," 182.
[135] Laycock, *The Penguin Book of Exorcisms*, 23.
[136] Konstantopoulos, "Migrating Demons," 138.
[137] Ludlow, "Demons, Evil, and Liminality," 183.

them."[138] However, because demons were originally created by God, "these evil beings are ultimately under God's power … Christ's death on the cross was both the means of their defeat and a sign of their final, eschatological capitulation to God."[139] Demons derive their essence from God, and so He has ultimate power over them.

One Cappadocian theologian makes an interesting point: "Following Paul in 2 Cor 6.14, Gregory asserts that there can be nothing in common between light and darkness: there is a 'distinct and irreconcilable contradiction' between them; there is 'an opposition of the parts drawn up against each other'; it is 'impossible and inconsistent' for there to be κοινωνία [common] between them."[140] For good and evil to simultaneously exist appears to be a paradox. Ludlow writes, "it is precisely the shock of that co-existence that makes evil Evil: it ought not to be."[141]

If we accept that evil needs good to exist, then demons occupy a strange position. Their wills may be completely evil, but they are created by God and exist, which means they have at least ontological goodness. According to Ludlow, "... for the Cappadocians, demons occupy a liminal space: their wills are utterly opposed to God and thus evil, and yet these wills exist in a nature which is part of God's good creation. They are 'between good and evil,' not in the sense that they are mid-way between both, but in the sense that their existence paradoxically seems to entail the co-existence of both."[142] Demons are, therefore, a sort of living paradox, perhaps a walking contradiction.

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[138] Ludlow, "Demons, Evil, and Liminality," 183.
[139] Ludlow, "Demons, Evil, and Liminality," 184.
[140] Ludlow, "Demons, Evil, and Liminality," 188.
[141] Ludlow, "Demons, Evil, and Liminality," 189.
[142] Ludlow, "Demons, Evil, and Liminality," 189.

The weird dimensions that demons occupy are plentiful given this logic. Take, for example, the ability of demons to evoke the sin of envy and anger: "Envy encourages humans to aspire to be something which they are not and cannot be; anger causes them to imitate and replicate the anger of an opponent even when there is no rational cause."[143] Demons therefore have the ability of false mimicry, where they can bring about "something that simultaneously is and is not what it seems to be," which "typifies the liminal or hybrid state in which demons are thought to dwell."[144] These sins also exist relative to other people, which places demons in the space *between* the self and the Other.

Demonic possession also represents this liminal capacity because of their aforementioned "peculiar constitution" – they can be both "inside" and "outside" of their victims, which contributes to the Cappadocian belief in a more "'porous' concept of the self."[145] Demons also appear to be "both in and out of divine control," because they are described as autonomous, rational agents with free will but respond with complete submission to God's will during exorcism. Jesus can cast them out with ease, and in the name of God, his apostles can do the same. Furthermore, they are deceivers, yet are the only agents in the New Testament to reveal the truth about Jesus's identity. They act oppositionally to God, but can't resist his will? This seems strange.

Ludlow concludes with an interesting point, which finally echoes where I left off in Uncanny Apotropaics. They write, "Popular religion, which held that the δαιμόνες [daimon] should be feared and appeased, was regularly condemned by philosophers as

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[143] Ludlow, "Demons, Evil, and Liminality," 198.
[144] Ludlow, "Demons, Evil, and Liminality," 198.
[145] Ludlow, "Demons, Evil, and Liminality," 200-201.

δεισδαιμονία or *superstitio*—"superstition" here relating not to an irrational belief in the supernatural (for Martin rightly argues such a concept is anachronistic), but to an irrational failure to accept the fundamental harmony of the cosmos."[146] Just like with the Jewish people who hang mezuzot out of a folk belief in their apotropaic nature, and the Greeks (excluding Plato, seemingly), those who fear demons in Cappadocian theology are responded to intellectually in the same way. It would be controversial, perhaps blasphemous to fear the will of God, *especially* if it is perceived as evil. As a result, from a monotheistic position, how can one justify the existence or fear of evil at all?

The last interesting part of this Cappadocian discourse is the existence of pagan "Gods," or from their perspective, demonic deceivers. The non-idolatry clause of the Old Testament takes this form, particularly from Gregory of Nyssa. He claims, "they act as if they were god(s), when they are not," by posing as semi-divine deities.[147] Take Hercules, for example. He is a demi-God, being half-human, which conflicts with classic Christian belief: "There can be no degrees of divinity in Christian theology … Hercules is, in fact, not divine at all, but a created demon. Thus, the poets' stories of hybrid demi-gods fall short of the truth … yet nevertheless do reflect something of demons' hybrid or in-between nature."[148] Once again, demons exist in a confusing, often contradictory liminal position intended to alienate an Other. Greek, Egyptian, and Assyrian mythology continues to echo this position. These arguments are useful for our discussion of the Problem of Evil, of which St. Augustine of Hippo provides one of the first explanations.

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[146] Ludlow, "Demons, Evil, and Liminality," 190.
[147] Ludlow, "Demons, Evil, and Liminality," 208.
[148] Ludlow, "Demons, Evil, and Liminality," 208.

Most modern discourses on the topic first refer to David Hume's summarization of the Problem as "Epicurus's old questions."[149] He quotes, "'Is he [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?'"[150] St. Augustine supplies a now-classic counterclaim: "'God gave human beings free will, which was misused by the first man and woman, leading to punishment by God in the form of physical evil.'"[151] We have already reviewed this through Eve, but the Problem of Evil isn't resolved here because God's omniscience implies that he would know that humans would misuse free will before it happened. Calvinists particularly deal with this problem because the freedom to sin seems to contradict preordination. Cappadocian theology also falls victim to this, because it seems as if demons and humans alike possess rationality and free will, which demons and humans often use to sin and subvert. Ludlow explains, "Eschatologically, demons will submit utterly to God; in the meantime, they, like humans, have been allowed some use of freedom and rationality."[152]

This common denominator between humans and demons is fascinating in its own right. Are humans not *also* profane and inclined to sin? This blurred distinction is important, and will emerge as these chapters continue. It happens that possessed people are often liminal, or marginalized, as well – at least in the popular Christian context,

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[149] Hickson spends a great deal of time analyzing this claim, concluding that Hume likely misattributes this quote because "there is no extant Epicurean work containing this text." See Hickson, "Brief History of Problems," 6.

[150] Michael W. Hickson, "A Brief History of Problems of Evil." In *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil* (Wiley, 2014), 6.

[151] Hickson, "Brief History of Problems," 9.

[152] Ludlow, "Demons, Evil, and Liminality," 202.

disobedient women are generally in contract with the Devil, as are deviants of every

variety. Foreigners, their gods, and so on are all aligned with the demonic. A classic turn

of speech was to blame a disbeliever's immorality on demons and possession, so

ultimately, what *really* is the difference between a demon and a bad person?

As one might expect from religious morality, claims about goodness and evil are

often rooted in historical myth. Take, for example, Immanuel Kant, who writes in

Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone,

> That 'the world lieth in evil' is a plaint and old as history, old even as the
>
> older art, poetry; indeed, as old as that oldest of all fictions, the religion of
>
> priest-craft. All agree that the world began in a good estate, whether in a
>
> Golden Age, a life in Eden, or a yet more happy community with celestial
>
> beings. But they represent that this happiness vanished like a dream and
>
> that a Fall into evil (moral evil, with which physical evil ever went hand in
>
> hand) presently hurried mankind from bad to worse with accelerated
>
> descent; so that now (this 'now' is also as old as history) we live in the
>
> final age, with the Last Day and the destruction of the world at hand.[153]

The claim that man is inherently evil, that humans are in rapid decent, and the

millenarianism that follows, is a classic one, often linked to writers like Thomas Hobbes.

Historian Mircea Eliade brings these myths sharply into perspective, and provides a

significant piece of framework going forward: "To relate a sacred history is equivalent

to revealing a mystery […] Once told, that is, revealed, the myth becomes apodictic

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[153] Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (Harper & Row, Publishers, Incorporated, 1960), 15.

truth; it establishes a truth that is absolute."[154] Man naturally lives in the world of the

profane, but by "imitating the gods" and continuously actualizing "paradigmatic divine

gestures," both he and the world are "sanctified."[155] If we take myth to be this, and

nothing more (by this I mean inherently lacking actual empirical validity), it is an

essential window into a person and culture's absolute truth. Myths like what Kant

reproduces here are reactionary ones – they are calls for a *return*, as this is what

"descent" implies. When Kant divides the world into good and evil, the profane and

sacred, the Golden Age and the Modern, we can extrapolate a great deal. Juxtaposition

and a bipolar reality are necessarily unstable, which this discussion should make clear,

and demons happen to fall on the fault lines. The distant, the uncomfortable, the

contradictory, and the confusing are all synthesized under this trope.

It's essential that such a density of demonic myths converge upon parallel ideas.

They are obviously contextually dependent, being that their bodies are comprised of

culture, but as Konstantopoulos explains, "certain methodological tools and

frameworks facilitate their consideration as more universal expressions of the liminal

and the Other, regardless of different cultural and historical contexts."[156] Jonathan Smith

concurs, begging exactly the question I hope to pursue:

> … the chief question that ought to preoccupy scholars should be: why is it
>
> that the demonic, associated with the marginal, the liminal, the chaotic,
>
> the protean, the unstructured appear cross-culturally as so rigidly

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[154] Mircea Eliade, "Myth," in *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion*, ed. Arthur C. Lehmann (Mayfield Publishing Company, 1996), 35.
[155] Eliade, "Myth," 36.
[156] Konstantopoulos, "Migrating Demons," 133.

organized a realm? A full and satisfying answer to that question must

await future scholarship…[157]

My first thesis statement thus presents itself: The "demon" comprises significant

commonalities across religious, cultural, and geographical boundaries, and therefore

can be utilized as a basis to examine intersectional sociopolitical themes like gender,

geographic and cultural borders, and personal identity. Demons are particularly good at

this, not only because they are clearly representative of these themes, but they are also

physically embodied through demonic possession in very real and empirically observable

ways.

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[157] Smith, "Towards Interpreting Demonic Powers," 437.

Chapter Two

Reconciling the Other

"Midway upon the journey of our life

I found myself within a forest dark,

For the straightforward pathway had been lost."

– Dante's *Inferno* [158]

In both the Old and New Testaments, demons are generally referred to as

"unclean spirits." This might seem like a strange choice of words to the cursory eye, or

perhaps variable to any given translation. As it turns out, this term is interchangeable

and not strange at all; Kittel's *Theological Dictionary* explains this from its Jewish origin:

> It is not accidental that the name 'spirit of uncleanness' or 'spirit of
>
> defilement' is used [...] Uncleanness is contracted at its abodes, especially
>
> graves. Horror of these places colours the name, which is used especially
>
> for demons in necromancy.[159]

The liminal nature and localization of demons thus offers a strong segway into a

discourse on cleanliness and purity. If demons represent liminal contradictions

(self/other, outside/inside, etc.), then it would also make sense to find demons located

on the fault lines of purity/impurity, because demons are generally *synonymous* with

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[158] Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), 1. This is Canto 1, the opening words of Dante's *Inferno*, as he finds himself in a liminal place too.
[159] Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 13.

impurity. Furthermore, note that not only are demons contracted through their abode, but their uncleanness is also contracted by proximity, thus denoting an infectious quality. They are unclean, and they also defile. Demons intersect a variety of these terms; purification, and by the same equivocation, *sanitation*, thus are our focus in this chapter.

Take, for example, Tobit 8:2-3, which explains the use of fumigation and a fish concoction in the act of exorcism. Such a practice was in line with medicinal treatment in the region, according to Nigel Allan in *The Physician in Ancient Israel: His Status and Function*. Allan describes how "Both the magical and medical uses of the fish were well known to both writer and audience… ."[160] The first-century Roman-Jewish historian Flavius Josephus notably expands the demonic canon and writes in Antiquities 8:45-49 how God enabled King Solomon to "learn that skill which expels demons, which is a science useful and *sanative* to men. He composed such incantations also by which distempers are alleviated. And he left behind him the manner of using exorcisms, by which they drive away demons, so that they never return."[161] The equation of demonic exorcism to otherwise medical practices should indicate further equivocation to demons as "unclean." Notions of purity and pollution often resulted in the conflation of physical and psychological conditions with the demonic.

The New Testament offers a similar conflation, and not just in the use of vocabulary: recall the Miracle of the Gadarene Swine, which appears in Matthew

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[160] Nigel Allan, "The Physician in Ancient Israel: His Status and Function," *Medical History* 45, no. 3 (2001): 384, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0025727300068058.
[161] Flavius Josephus, *The Genuine Works of Flavius Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (University of Chicago, 1737), Antiquities of the Jews – Book VIII 8:45-49.

8:28-34, Mark 5:1-20, and Luke 8:26-39. In this story, Jesus is met by possessed men from

the "tombs" (Matthew 28). Here, the abode of the demon is central to this analysis. They

both identified Jesus as the son of God, to which Jesus replied,

> Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.
>
> And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My
>
> name is Legion: for we are many.[162]

He then cast the demons out into a herd of pigs, whose herd ran into the lake and

drowned. "Unclean" is used yet again, but more interestingly, the demons are cast out

into a herd of pigs. Pigs were considered unkosher, and thus unclean or abhorrent.

In the effort of a cross-cultural account, a distinct case study of a modern

possession practice would be useful to understand how this theme manifests in today's

world. Specifically, notions of the "unclean" will be expanded upon and applied in this

chapter through zayran possession, particularly in South Sudan. In modern America,

possession is an incredibly popularized yet mostly misunderstood cultural

phenomenon. Upon closer examination of various real-world practices, a much more

intricate and nuanced form of realization and hegemonic critique is revealed, especially

within marginalized communities. Zār spirit possession stands out as a robust

representation of this belief, and the epistemological theories derived from studying zār

possession are further reinforced through cross-comparison. Exorcism, and to a

significantly greater extent, *mollification*, serve as captivating methods of cultural and

political expression, group therapy, and for some, are essential for understanding

personal identity.

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[162] Mark 5:8-9 NIV.

Jinn and the Anti-Society

The first modern case study of this thesis takes root in Hofriyat, a village on the Nile close to Sudan's capital, Khartoum. Many anthropologists throughout history have noted the existence of the "zār cult" in the Middle East. Long misunderstood,[163] the zār can also be seen across neighboring countries as far as Egypt and Israel, which has been accentuated today through immigration and migrant labor.

The origins of zār, including its etymology and practice, are widely disputed. Many researchers are unaware that there are multiple "forms" of zār in the same region, leading to minor, yet meaningful misunderstandings. In *Changing Masters*, G.P. Makris identifies the zār ṭumbura and zār boré in the Khartoum area, but at the same time argues, "the zār spirit in the Sudan has never been homogeneous and internally undifferentiated. Rather, it has always come in many forms which constitute a flexible 'zār cult complex.'"[164] Makris distinguishes the two forms in several ways: ṭumbura is seen as Indigenous and boré is "thought to have come from Egypt or somewhere else abroad."[165] Ṭumbura is "related almost exclusively to slave-descendants and other subordinate groups of non-Arab Muslims who call themselves Sūdānī," but boré is associated with Northern riverain Arabs "despite the fact that it has always attracted slave-related individuals too."[166] In ṭumbura, the zār spirit is "a single entity that

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[163] See Richard Natvig, "Oromos, Slaves, and the Zār Spirits: A Contribution to the History of the Zār Cult," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 20, no. 4 (1987): 671, https://doi.org/10.2307/219657.

[164] G.P. Makris, *Changing Masters: Spirit Possession and Identity Construction among Slave Descendants and Other Subordinates in the Sudan* (Northwestern University Press, 2000), 11.

[165] Makris, *Changing Masters*, 12.

[166] Makris, *Changing Masters*, 12.

assumes many forms when it appears to the devotees in the context of the ceremonies," whereas in boré, "devotees talk about a repertoire of spirits whose number has never been constant."[167] Lastly, and among some other crucial differences, in ṭumbura the spirit assumes a form representative of the group's "collective Self," but in boré, the spirits are "representations of the Other."[168]

Perceptions within and outside of this possession system tell us a great deal and hold some interesting self-contradictions. For example, the participants of zār boré view their cult as "inherently beneficial and self-evidently Islamic," whereas despite their theoretical similarities to ṭumbura, boré practitioners view those of ṭumbura as "'something difficult… nasty or unpleasant'" practiced by the Indigenous and the "tough black Islamised slaves."[169] In addition, non-Muslims may still believe in zayran spirits in less rural parts of Sudan, leading to further theological complications.[170]

Janice Boddy, the core ethnographer for this case study, focuses almost entirely on zār boré. As I mentioned, both practices are attended almost exclusively by women, with more men participating in ṭumbura. Men in zār are interesting; Hager El Hadidi identifies, "Zār and other spirit-possession activities in the Nile Valley and North Africa have continued to provide a focus and a rationale for various groups to associate for different purposes at different times. Black slaves and their descendants, women in

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[167] Makris, *Changing Masters,* 13.
[168] Makris, *Changing Masters,* 13. This will be returned to in Chapter 3.
[169] Makris, *Changing Masters,* 56.
[170] Susan M. Kenyon, "Zār as Modernization in Contemporary Sudan," *Anthropological Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (1995): 108. https://doi.org/10.2307/3318050.

multiple generations, and gay men have formed such associations."[171] The point of distinguishing zār practices in Sudan provides an integral purpose in forming an understanding of national and hierarchical identity in the region.

Since Turco-Egyptian rule, later accentuated by British colonization, fault lines have existed between perceived native slave descendants (called Sūdānīc) in the South and Arab freemen in the North. The word Sūdānī carried a derogatory connotation and was used by Northern urbanites to refer to the native population, but was reappropriated in a nationalist movement that resulted in Sudan's independence. Markris writes that this "... divested the term of its derogatory implications and put it at the center of the nationalist discourse."[172] Notably, the movement did not change the negative perception of those descended from slaves, who thus lacked any heritage at all: "In other words, the subordinate classes remained in the same position but with no name to define them."[173] Markris argues, echoing Comoroff, "a rigid distinction is made, in terms of their clientele, between 'the people of ṭumbura [and] the people of bori.'"[174] This distinction falls along the lines of who is Sūdānī (subordinate) and who is Arab (dominant).

Despite these differences, much of the mythology of zayran spirits remains the same across the two sects. While our analysis focuses on the boré because of an unfortunate lack of ethnography on the ṭumbura, the bulk of the theory and utility of this case study remains consistent and valuable. It might be most comfortable and

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[171] Hager El Hadidi, *Spirit Possession, Music, and Healing Rituals in Egypt* (American University in Cairo Press, 2016), 66.
[172] Makris, *Changing Masters,* 37.
[173] Makris, *Changing Masters,* 37.
[174] Makris, *Changing Masters,* 56.

generalizable, then, to begin this ethnography with familiar territory: dissecting this culture's possessing demon.

Zayran spirits stem from Islamic jinn, more specifically red jinn (colloquially referred to as the "red wind"[175]), who are said to be "pleasure-seeking, capricious, ambivalent beings that bring milder forms of illness which, though initially distressful, never result in death or severe mental dysfunction."[176] "Ambivalent" is an important word in this description, as central to zār spirit possession is the notion of adorcism,[177] also known as mollification, as opposed to exorcism. The spirit is transformed into a positive and helpful entity through a process of identification and appeasement because zār practitioners believe that zayran spirits cannot be exorcised. They are permanent afflictions and therefore must be appeased in the attempt to develop a cohabitable relationship.[178]

Boddy's representation of the systems of belief and epistemological frameworks implicit in Hofriyati citizens is integral to this analysis. Take, for example, her description of "metonymy":

> … for Hofriyati, meaning was immanent in qualities shared by persons
>
> and things, and could not be described independently of them. Thus,
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> rather than resting on dualistic relations, as when a symbol stands for
>
> something else that constitutes its meaning, Hofriyati cultural logic was

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[175] Kenyon, "Zār as Modernization," 111.

[176] Janice Boddy, "Spirits and Selves in Northern Sudan: The Cultural Therapeutics of Possession and Trance," *American Ethnologist* 15, no. 1 (1988): 10, http://www.jstor.org/stable/645483.

[177] Ioan M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: an Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (Penguin Books, 1971), xvii.

[178] Natvig, "Oromos, Slaves and the Zār Spirits, 679.

constructed through metonymy: everything was part of something else,

each fragment of meaning led to another, and then another, in a recursive

chain of significance that did not resolve to an underlying explanation but

stood as its own truth.[179]

This symbolic interconnection works especially well with Boddy's methodology, as she

is an interpretive and symbolic anthropologist who finds her roots in researchers like

Clifford Geertz. Geertz described culture as "'… a historically transmitted pattern of

meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in

symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their

knowledge about and their attitudes toward life.'"[180] Furthermore, Geertz argued that

"… man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun…," which

is to say, our goal in anthropology should be to interpret cultures and their symbols

within their own context.[181] Interpretive anthropologists find value in every level of

culture as text to be extrapolated from, so they are especially equipped to process the

Hofriyati tradition and demonic possession in general.

Core to Boddy's theory is her claim that Hofriyati women are "overdetermined"

in their identities. She demonstrates, as I will represent, that gender roles are established

and enforced through almost every social convention, reiterating concepts of interiority

and femininity, especially regarding reproduction. A key example, for example, is

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[179] Janice Boddy, "Speaking About Anthropological Theory: Janice Boddy," in *A History of Anthropological Theory*, ed. Paul A. Erikson and Liam D. Murphy (University of Toronto Press, 2008), 91.

[180] Alyssa Baker, "Legacy of Clifford Geertz," *No Limits; Infinite, Boundless: Space* (2016): https://spacelyss.wordpress.com/2016/03/06/legacy-of-clifford-geertz/.

[181] Baker, "Legacy of Clifford Geertz."

pharaonic circumcision – essentially the "closing" of the female genitalia, which Boddy

observes to be the cultural transformation of a child into a woman. She writes that, for

Hofriyati, "genitalia are ambiguous and by themselves, inadequate determinants of a

child's future gender identity," and "A child is formally initiated to its gender between

the ages of five and ten, when, as villagers say, he or she has developed a minimal

degree of reason, self-awareness, the ability to recognize and follow Allah's laws. It is

then that the child is circumcised."[182] Gender roles are not explicitly established for

children apart from naming,[183] and the ritual of circumcision "marks the start of sexual

segregation for the child."[184] Boddy writes, "Boys and girls who once played together

happily are now unseemly chums. I overheard one mother chastise her eight-year-old

daughter for continuing to play with boys: "Get out of the street," she said, "Do you

think your cousin will want to marry you if he sees you every day?"[185] The takeaway,

ultimately, is that

> … feminine dispositions are being inculcated in young girls, dispositions
>
> which […] are inscribed in their bodies not only physically, but also
>
> cognitively and emotionally, in the form of mental inclinations, 'schemes
>
> of perception and thought.' But alone the trauma of pharaonic
>
> circumcision is insufficient to shape the feminine self, to propel it in
>
> culturally prescribed directions.[186]

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[182] Janice Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zār Cult in Northern Sudan* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 57.
[183] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 57.
[184] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 59.
[185] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 59.
[186] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 57.

The ritual of Pharaonic circumcision is not only impactful on the individual level, but Boddy also observes that it is a practice that is reproduced by women that "brings sharply into focus the fertility potential of women by dramatically deemphasizing their sexuality. In insisting upon circumcision for their daughters, women assert their social indispensability … as the mothers of men."[187] Intercourse naturally becomes challenging after circumcision, and a slew of harmful negative side effects result which are rarely discussed publicly to avoid ostracization. After surgery, children become "social persons," and "assume the responsibilities of life as Hofriyati women and Hofriyati men."[188] The act of circumcision thus marks the beginning of the development of the gendered self, and a woman's immersion into the cultural symbols that surround Hofriyat existence.

Routine life in Hofriyat and ritualized behaviors are tightly bound in Geertz's "web." For example, notions of "clean" meat are tied directly to wetness. While villagers abstain from consuming chicken, as they do not bathe in water and often roll around in their filth, pigeons are perfectly acceptable because they do bathe.[189] The symbol of pigeons goes even further, as unmarried women perform a "pigeon dance" at weddings, involving the bobbing of one's head and clothing that evokes wing-like imagery.[190] Furthermore, wealthy members of the community performed the now-outdated practice of scarring the cheek-bones of their daughters in a T-shape,

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[187] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 55-56.
[188] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 56.
[189] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 61. Their word for pigeon is "*hamām*," which is a cognate for the word bath, "*hamāmm*."
[190] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 61.

intended to represent the tracks of water birds.[191] These examples go on, but to reiterate

them all would be to exhaustively restate a large portion of Boddy's text. In summation,

associations of desirable women to water birds are pervasive, as is the symbolism of

water and blood. This highly symbolic language is common in Hofriyat, and far more

examples exist to mention in this context. "Proper" women must attain the

aforementioned cultural values, and as a result are, "in a sense, objectified, transformed

into a symbol, a superb condensation of her culture's salient values."[192]

Wetness-as-cleanliness is tied directly to notions of enclosure and interiority as

well. Brides prepare themselves for their wedding in such a way to avoid sweating (as it

is viewed as "despicable"), and the word for "prostitute" is *Sharmūta* (which means

"shred to tatters"), whereas the word for meat hung to dry is *Sharmūt*.[193] Enclosure and

interiority of blood is another powerful motif; ethnomedical treatments in the village

also utilize this idiom, as swelling is defined as "coming apart."[194] A woman's

menstruation is perceived as losing a limited amount of fertility, and so menstruating

women are seen as more susceptible to the invasion of a jinn.[195] You may recall such

sentiments from the Christianity of Chapter One, where women were considered

"incomplete" and exposed to infiltration because of their genitalia.

Pharaonic circumcision can therefore be viewed both literally and figuratively as

the "closing" of a woman, and also makes her less susceptible to jinn. Boddy explains,

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[191] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 62.
[192] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 66.
[193] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 65.
[194] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 72. "Head-ache" is literally "open head," or "*rās maftūh*."
[195] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 62.

"Women's bodies are both metonyms and icons of the enclosed, fertile, moral village, repositories of its salient values and more vulnerable than men to their rupture. A threat to women's fertility is a serious threat to their gendered sense of self, but also the community as a whole."[196] This interiority extends to the division of labor as well – something else that applies to many other patriarchal societies. Labor pertaining to the inside of the home, like fetching water, cooking, and cleaning, are women's tasks, while men's tasks are traditionally exterior.[197] Even the structure of one's home uses this symbolism; Boddy writes,

> Enclosed areas within the village are generally considered clean and protected places … Clean spaces, interior spaces, these are social areas. They are places of relative safety where one is least likely to be possessed by malevolent spirits ("black" jinn), thence driven mad. Jinn of all types (including *zayran*) frequent open areas such as the desert, ruined houses, and rubbish heaps.[198]

Note the striking similarities between these beliefs and those of liminality in the first chapter. The invasion of borders, whether physical or gendered, are synthesized by the threat of demonic incursion.

Several more liminal metonymic symbols abound in Hofriyati life that are worth mentioning: a woman experiencing possession symptoms will be isolated in a room, and a bowl of Nile water is placed in the doorway "so as to prevent dangerous

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[196] Boddy, "Spirit Possession Revisited: Beyond Instrumentality," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 17, (1994): 416-417, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2156020.
[197] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 67.
[198] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 70.

influences from penetrating the highly charged space within."[199] Burial customs include the absolute closure of bodily orifices; in the afterlife, a body is "reconstituted in perfect corporal form: uncorrupted, self-contained, needing no nourishment," whereas profane, earthly lives "requires openings: door-ways, mouths, vaginas, eyes, ears, marriages, indeterminacies in social structure."[200]

This brings us to Boddy's theory of identity. Boddy proposes that identity is divided into two categories: personhood and individuality. "Personhood," she argues, is our socially constructed identity, which reproduces the norms of the social order. Pharaonic circumcision is a perfect depiction of this: it compels women to personhood. Conversely, an "individual" is a moral critic who envisions a different social order. Traditionally, people oscillate between these two modes, but in Hofriyat, Boddy argues that social norms are ingrained in their language and social lives. They have an overdetermined personhood because they lack socially acceptable methods to reject the normative culture.

What of possession? Diligent readers may have noticed that, almost halfway through this thesis and despite its title, I have hardly touched on the subject. Most writers on spirit possession, including in Sudan, agree that such symptoms occur in reaction to the violation of a taboo or traditional role/boundary. Interiority, purity, and sexuality are all entangled within these borders. This portrays the experience of possession as something deeply existential: if a woman's identity and thus quotidian life is structured around their ability to be what a woman "is" and do what women

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[199] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits,* 106-107.
[200] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits,* 107.

"do,"[201] and something occurs that fundamentally violates one's autonomy within their system, an existential problem arises.

It should be stated that these women do not jump to conclude that they are possessed. Boddy writes, "People exhaust all medical and holy options before they accept that the symptoms are originating from an angry zār, as it is a permanent condition."[202] It is also important to establish that, according to Boddy, "Phenomena we bundle loosely as possession is part of daily experience, not just dramatic ritual. They have to do with one's relationship to the world, with selfhood – personal, ethnic, political, and moral identity."[203] Seeing as the condition is permanent, it is easy to see how it could be entwined with daily life. Indeed, possession is not necessarily limited to the trance state, rather, they "phrase their experiences as illness."[204] Note again, the blending of the two was prevalent throughout the New Testament mentioned earlier in this chapter. The symptoms of dysphoria, a word Boddy finds applicable in her analysis,[205] are perceived as illness, and that illness is eventually conceded to be the result of a spirit invasion.

At this juncture, the goal of the afflicted is to understand how to appease this spirit. In some instances, a *sitt al-'ilba*, or "Lady of the box," will be hired to perform a ritual using incense designed to connect the possessed to the spirit world while they dream. These dreams are interpreted, and depending on the symbols present in the

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[201] In the context of Sudan, and many other places in the world, fertility is a great example.
[202] Kenyon, "Zār as Modernization," 113.
[203] Boddy, "Spirit Possession Revisited," 414.
[204] Boddy, "Spirits and Selves," 13.
[205] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 145.

dream, possession is apparent.[206] Once the victim is diagnosed as possessed, a *shaykha* is

called. *Shaykha* are women who have been possessed in the past and are trained to

communicate with the spirit world. In a process that may take several hours or days,

the *shaykha* attempts to ascertain the spirit's identity, which is crucial to the path of

appeasement.[207]

This diagnosis of possession is a deeply important and personal moment. Boddy

writes, "A woman's subjective recognition that she is truly possessed emerges as a

product of social discourse involving herself, curer, spirit, and ultimately the entire

community. Gradually such conversations naturalize the spirit's existence within or

'above' her body."[208] Furthermore, possessed women have almost certainly attended

similar rituals since they were young, so they are already relatively informed about the

identities of the various spirits, the process that takes place, and how the *shaykha*

operates.

The identity and mythology of the pantheon of spirits is a crucial gateway into

understanding the actual ramifications of zār possession. In *Zār as Modernization in*

Contemporary Sudan by Susan M. Kenyon, an in-depth analysis of the spirit identities is

undertaken. Kenyon performed her ethnographic research in the town of Sennar of the

boré.[209] Here, zār spirits are described in terms of seven boats:[210] three boats are

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[206] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 154.
[207] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 155.
[208] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 155.
[209] Kenyon spells this word "burei" – I keep Markris's spelling for consistency's sake, but this is worth noting.
[210] Note that the identities, popularity, and inclusion of additional spirits is in continuous flux. Zār religion changes with the locality's sociopolitical and diachronic context, and so these descriptions should not be taken as an accurate modern representation.

non-African, named *Derewish* (which indicates those who brought Islam to the Middle East), *Pashawat* (Egyptians and Turks, who administered the country through the Ottoman and Anglo-Egyptian periods), and *Khawajat* (light-skinned, European "officials" or traders, who have been active in this part of Africa for the last 200 years). Three other boats are African spirits, being *Habbashi* (a generational spirit; a collective term for all peoples of contemporary Eritrea and Ethiopia), *Ziruq* (tribal people to the west and south), and perhaps the most powerful, the generally named *Zār of the Arabs* (generic Muslim pastoral nomads), who causes the others to aggression. Finally is the seventh boat, dubbed "the Ladies," which draws female spirits from the other boats, and who are distinct as the only female boat.[211] Kenyon makes an important observation, that zār spirits "are always foreigners, represent what is alien, … there are no ancestor spirits."[212] The identities and qualities attributed to zayran spirits change constantly and adjust geographically, and seeing as all zayran spirits are foreign, Kenyon observes, "the performances of zār can be read as texts of social and cultural relevance in which the perspective may well contrast with that of the dominant political and patriarchal hegemonies."[213] This is fundamental to both Kenyon and Boddy's analysis, as the two agree that zār possession is a far more political ritual than most would originally assume. Also, notice the commonalities between this observation and the foreignness of the Sebettu, the pagan aspects of Christian demons, and so on. Evil's

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[211] Kenyon, "Zār as Modernization," 111.
[212] Kenyon, "Zār as Modernization," 111. Thus, the title of Boddy's book, "Wombs and Alien Spirits."
[213] Kenyon, "Zār as Modernization," 111.

foreign nature remains consistently present throughout these analyses and will be

reaffirmed as more cases are discussed throughout this thesis.

The structure of zār gatherings is also crucial to understanding its implications.

Boddy explains that these rituals are "more than just a cure; it is also referred to as a

'party' … it can be a great deal of fun, mixing comedy, satire, and intellectual challenge

in a heady atmosphere where nothing is quite as it seems."[214] In Kenyon's ethnography,

she describes how the ceremonies themselves and accordant trance states are "… highly

structured ritualized situations and is controlled by a person who has special powers in

zār, usually the *umiya*."[215] Combined with "special incense," the *umiya* chants to the beat

of drums or another percussive instrument and targets a specific spirit or "boat."[216] The

spirit compels its body to, in Kenyon's words,

> … do something unconventional while never actually entering a trance
>
> state … The person in trance may dance, or enact some activity (grinding
>
> wheat, or examining a patient with a stethoscope, or strutting around in
>
> arrogant fashion) in character with the possessing spirit, but rarely speaks.
>
> The possessing spirit communicates through an intermediary, usually the
>
> leader, who interprets the message for the person possessed.[217]

The individual who is possessed changes throughout the ceremony, with various types

of identified spirits involved, creating a sort of theatrical dialogue *between* participants.

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[214] Boddy, "Spirits and Selves," 12.

[215] Kenyon, "Zār as Modernization," 112. *Umiya* is functionally synonymous to Fakhouri and Boddy's *shaykha*.

[216] Hani Fakhouri, "The Zār Cult in an Egyptian Village," *Anthropological Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (1968): 51, https://doi.org/10.2307/3316878.

[217] Kenyon, "Zār as Modernization," 112.

This social nature is particularly notable in more urban and populated centers like Cairo, where many anthropologists have described participation as a night at the cinema, as if for entertainment. Furthermore, note the description "strutting around in arrogant fashion" – this will become strikingly relevant in the next chapter.

These trance behaviors, the "something unconventional" or enacted activity that Kenyon described, are especially interesting when extrapolated. For example, Boddy recounts how mundane objects become transformed in this process. She writes, "... an orange or a piece of bread, when eaten with knife and fork by a Westerner zār during trance (which normally Hofriyati would not do), becomes something other than villagers' food, or a metaphor for Hofriyati gender dialectics: interior/exterior, fluid/substance, and so on. Its 'natural' associations are stripped away, deconstructed."[218] This cultural deconstruction takes hold in a multitude of forms, ranging from wearing men's clothing or specific colors or fabrics, to sacrifice, to abstaining from riding in a car.[219] On this, Boddy writes, "Zār being in the human world has all the appearance of a well-staged burlesque; spirits' actions are both exaggerated and cliché. Their stereotypical behaviors direct attention to the semantic pole of meaning, thereby eliminating or suppressing any hint of human motivation."[220]

Boddy dubs this practice "anti-society" — a "counterreaity," wherein social values and objects are placed on display and "played with, reassessed … [and] opened up to other interpretations."[221] In being a religious ceremony, these women are

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[218] Boddy, "Spirits and Selves," 20.
[219] Boddy, "Spirits and Selves," 20.
[220] Boddy, "Spirit Possession Revisited" 149.
[221] Boddy, "Spirit Possession Revisited," 156-157.

permitted to engage in such counter-hegemony, which "formulates an alternative view of the world in response to an elite's implicit domination of discourse."[222] The underprivileged and marginalized are given a constructive platform, and the possessed are enabled to "apprehend the broader context of the contexts which engulf her and of the dispositions she embodies."[223] Brazilian Candomblé exhibits many similar qualities, which in Boddy's words, "plays with and across social, spiritual, and physical boundaries [...] it resists formal analysis, for one can never stand outside its game; it is 'an interplay of identities that are constantly being tested, circulated, transformed.'"[224] Just like the demons of Chapter One, borders of all sorts are emphasized and deconstructed through their existence and threat.

It's interesting to consider the effects of globalization on the zār cult – as men increasingly leave home to acquire social mobility, the exterior man/interiorized woman trope is emphasized.[225] Kenyon explains that today, zār is extended to justify "little foibles" like "occasional cigarette-smoking," which would usually be considered inappropriate. Issues like "barrenness," "failure in school," and "stomach disorders" are all interpreted in terms of possession.[226] This leads us to our next, probably more relevant conclusion about zār possession: beyond representing a strong social network and a solution for the isolation that prevalent interiorization causes, zār is a coping

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[222] Boddy, "Spirit Possession Revisited," 157.
[223] Boddy, "Spirit Possession Revisited," 157.
[224] Boddy, "Spirit Possession Revisited," 424.
[225] See Kenyon, "Zār as Modernization," 109.
[226] Kenyon, "Zār as Modernization," 116.

mechanism for dealing with new experiences.[227] Thus, the idiom of zār *is* the process of modernization.[228]

Psychological interpretations of possession match this conclusion, too. In *The 'Zār' Possession Syndrome Among Ethiopian Immigrants to Israel: Cultural and Clinical Aspects*, Eliezer Witztum and Nimrod Grisaru write, "We believe that the phenomenon of the zār allows these women to cope with stress and difficulties in their own ways, to prevent the stigma of mental illness while at the same time enjoying some positive labeling with all of the benefits and secondary gains associated with it."[229] These conclusions directly match our revelations from Chapter One, that demons are representations of anxiety of the Other. Through possession, marginalized people can find their footing and personally reform and rearticulate the paradigms thrust upon them.

Demons on the Assembly Line

This realization about zār possession is advanced when compared with completely different possession cults, thus providing further validity to the broader demon hypothesis. In *The Production of Possession: Spirits and the Multinational Corporation in Malaysia*, Aihwa Ong observes incredibly similar cultural interactions and draws almost identical conclusions as Boddy and Kenyon. Ong observes how

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[227] Kenyon, "Zār as Modernization," 116.
[228] Kenyon, "Zār as Modernization," 116.
[229] E. Witzum, N. Grisaru, and D. Budowski. "The 'Zar' Possession Syndrome Among Ethiopian Immigrants to Israel: Cultural and Clinical Aspects," The British Journal of Medical Psychology 69, no. 3 (1996): 224, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8341.1996.tb01865.x.

experiences like childbirth,[230] when women "resist their assigned roles as mothers and wives,"[231] and "when women are in transition from one phase of life to another,"[232] present opportune times for a spirit attack. She concludes that this must mean "spirit beliefs reflect everyday anxieties about the management of social relations in village society,"[233] which reiterates *many* aforementioned sentiments about zār.

Malay communities, Ong shows, perceive possession as "the greatest threat to social norms, and taboos enforce some degree of self-control in order to contain that threat."[234] Furthermore, echoing Janice Boddy, Ong writes, "In everyday life, village women are also bound by customs regarding bodily comportment and spatial movements, which operate to keep them within the Malay social order. When they blur the bodily boundaries through the careless disposal of bodily exuviae and effluvia, they put themselves in an ambiguous situation, becoming most vulnerable to spirit penetration."[235] The comparison to life in Hofriyat is plain to see.

The target of Ong's research, however, was the interactions of multinational corporations on possession culture in Malaysia. She writes, "For Malays, the places occupied by evil spirits are nonhuman territories like swamps, jungles, and bodies of water. These amoral domains were kept distant from women's bodies by ideological

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[230] Aihwa Ong, "The Production of Possession: Spirits and the Multinational Corporation in Malaysia," *American Ethnologist* 15, no. 1 (1988): 31. http://www.jstor.org/stable/645484.
[231] Ong, "The Production of Possession," 31.
[232] Ong, "The Production of Possession," 31.
[233] Ong, "The Production of Possession," 31.
[234] Ong, "The Production of Possession," 31.
[235] Ong, "The Production of Possession," 31.

and physical spatial regulations."[236] Note, as I do excitedly, overlap with Chapter One's liminal locations. Fascinatingly, Ong describes,

> The construction of modern buildings, often without regard for Malay concern about moral space, displaces spirits, which take up residence in the toilet tank. Thus, most village women express a horror of the Western-style toilet, which they would avoid if they could. It is the place where their usually discreet disposal of bodily waste is disturbed.[237]

A disruption of culturally defined barriers of purity, in this instance, a result of globalization and factory labor, resulted in dysphoric episodes culminating in spirit attacks. These "bathroom" spirits are not a novel concept unique to Malaysians – Bloody Mary is a great example, who is conjured in a bathroom mirror. Japanese contemporary legend contains at least four vengeful bathroom spirits: Hanako-san, Aka Manto, Teke-teke, and Kuchisake.[238] Demonology and scatology are also often unified in late antique Judaism, and "Rabbinic literature even attests to the existence of a *shed shel bet ha-kise*, a 'demon of the toilet.'"[239]

Zār spirits also threaten bathrooms; Boddy writes that the word *dastūr*, which is a synonym for zār, "colloquially means 'permission' and is shouted upon entering a

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[236] Ong, "The Production of Possession," 33.
[237] Ong, "The Production of Possession," 33.
[238] Elísabet Kristjana Grétarsdóttir, "Haunting the Bathroom Vengeful Ghosts in Japanese Contemporary Legends" (PhD diss., Iceland: University of Iceland, 2012), 11, https://hdl.handle.net/1946/11628.
[239] Krzysztof Kinowski, "Hector M. Patmore – Josef Lössl (Eds.), Demons in Early Judaism and Christianity. Characters and Characteristics (Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 113; Leiden – Boston, MA: Brill 2022),"*The Biblical Annals*, 13, no. 1(2023): 257. https://doi.org/10.31743/biban.14844.

latrine so as to appease resident jinn."[240] This should not come as a surprise, as I have already mentioned that orifices and the inherent transgression of borders involved in the bathroom are seen as risky incursion-zones in this community. It's interesting, then, that the physical liminal border and social liminal border are unified through demonic possession in this instance. Boddy concurs with this position, arguing that "doors and other openings" connect Hofriyati principles to "the worlds of entities, cultures, and ideas beyond the physical and conceptual precinct" of the region.[241]

Furthermore, perhaps unintentionally reiterating Boddy's conclusions, Ong argues, "… the imagery of spirit possession in modern settings is a rebellion against transgressions of Indigenous boundaries governing proper human relations and moral justice."[242] In addition, Ong demonstrates, "Spirit possession episodes may be taken as expressions both of fear and of resistance against the multiple violations of moral boundaries in the modern factory. They are acts of rebellion, symbolizing what cannot be spoken directly, calling for a renegotiation of obligations between the management and workers."[243] As a capitalist critique, Ong demonstrates how the invasion of multinational corporations has resulted in possession episodes in Malaysia and the overarching causes of possession in both rural and urban settings. Ong also succeeds in expanding our theories on possession beyond places familiar with Islam.

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[240] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 342.
[241] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 342.
[242] Ong, "The Production of Possession," 33.
[243] Ong, "The Production of Possession," 38.

The Profane Other

Anthropological and psychoanalytical theory tethers these ethnographical claims to broader theories of identity and personhood. Border-crossing, bodily waste, and liminal places are best synthesized through Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Douglas asks us to consider dirt as "matter out of place," or, "something transgressing borders."[244] Basic psychology informs us that humans have an innate pattern-making tendency that orders our perceptions into efficient categories, or "schema." This innate conservative bias generated through repeated experience inherently struggles to categorize "ambiguous," "discordant," and "anomalous" things.[245] These things that evade categorization and transgress borders, much like a demon as defined in Chapter One, "offend against order…," and furthermore, "Eliminating [dirt] is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment."[246] Douglas explains, "There is nothing fearful or unreasoning in our dirt-avoidance: it is a creative movement, an attempt to relate form to function, to make unity of experience."[247] Because notions of cleanliness function on a relative scale per society relative to sociocultural norms, an individual's schematic understanding of cleanliness is shaped by regular, perhaps Durkheimian "inoculations." Douglas puts this best:

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[244] Kia Ditlevsen, "The Purity of Dirt: Revisiting Mary Douglas in the Light of Contemporary Consumer Interpretations of Naturalness, Purity and Dirt," *Sociology* 17, no. 1 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038520934980.

[245] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Routledge, 1992), 36-37.

[246] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 2.

[247] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 2.

We can recognize in our own notions of dirt that we are using a kind of

omnibus compendium which include all the rejected elements of ordered

systems. It is a relative idea. Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is

dirty to place them on the dining-table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is

dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on

clothing; similarly, bathroom equipment in the drawing room; clothing

laying on chairs; out-door things in-doors; upstairs things downstairs;

under-clothing appearing where over-clothing should be, and so on. In

short, our pollution behavior is the reaction which condemns any object or

idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications.[248]

Interiority, especially, is defined by implication through dirt. Out-doors and in-doors,

for example, are a function of dirt. Outside dirt is not considered "dirty," per se, but

once dirt has entered one's domicile, it must be quickly expelled. Demons, I argue, are

an excellent symbol of dirt and this confusion or contradiction of "cherished

classifications." As can be seen clearly in Sudan and Malaysia, Jinn combine the fear of

demonic possession with taboo violation, the arbitrary construction of borders, notions

of interiority, and a relationship with similar biological symbols like blood and food

purity. The demons described in Chapter One accomplish this analogy well because we

have already concluded that they can be found in liminal places and themes across

religious, cultural, and geographical boundaries.

Conveniently, Douglas finds herself in the context of the Torah, particularly

Leviticus, when justifying her claims. It is in this book that kosher law is established,

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[248] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 35-36.

and furthermore ideas of pure and impure (often translated as "abhorrent") food are solidified. To elucidate, return to Aaron's eldest sons, mentioned briefly in Chapter One. Named Nadab and Abihu, Exodus 24 notes the two as among the major leaders of Israel who, in the same passage, have a vision of God:

> Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of lapis lazuli, as bright blue as the sky. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.[249]

Leviticus 10 delivers some unfortunate news for Aaron:

> Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.[250]

Why did these men die? And what of this "foreign" fire? Moses gives us a partial answer in the next passage:

> Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.[251]

In Leviticus 6:13 and 9:24, we are told that only fire from the brazen altar of the Tabernacle, thus holy fire, was to be used. Exodus 29:37 reads, "Whatever touches the

[249] Exod. 24:9-10 NIV.
[250] Lev. 10:1-2 AV.
[251] Lev. 10:3 AV.

altar shall become holy." In many ways, the altar was a place of atonement, where

innocent non-human life could be sacrificed. Nadab and Abihu betray this command,

and light fire from outside of the tabernacle ("each took his pan, put fire in them, and so

on"), thus introducing something exterior and profane, which results in their death.

That alone should pique the curiosity of this analysis; the "foreign" fire, often translated

to "alien," is explicitly unholy. To make matters more interesting, God commands

Aaron through Moses to sacrifice those bulls and goats, *and designates one to act as a*

scapegoat for the demon Azazel. "And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto

a land not inhabited; and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness."[252]

Why does God command an offering to a demon? This seems blasphemous, or at

the very least inconsistent with the very principle of monotheism. More likely, it is a

symbolic process of purification: by sending the sins away to a desolate, inaccessible

place, they are displaced. It's important to remember that the Torah chapters

surrounding this one represent similar sentiments: just after, we are instructed on

nakedness, sexuality, abhorrent and defiling things, and processes of purity.[253] God

commands, "You shall not copy the practices of the land of Egypt where you dwelt, or

of the land of Canaan to which I am taking you; nor shall you follow their laws." Other

surrounding chapters instruct us on how to properly kill and consume an animal, rules

on entering and exiting the camp and tabernacle, instructions on atonement, the

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[252] Lev. 16:21 AV.

[253] I'd be remiss if I didn't note that this chapter, Leviticus 18, specifically focuses on incest, sex with a menstruating woman, and sodomy, among other things. This behavior apparently defiles the land, and was performed by the Egyptians and Canaanites that preceded them. This chapter also references Molech (or Molach), another demon: "Do not allow any of your offspring to be offered up to Molech, and do not profane the name of your God: I am יהוה."

impurity of the emission of semen, and the "impure discharge" of a menstruating woman. God's laws of the Sacred and Profane are thus clearly defined, and we are to be faithful, lest we are consumed by fire. What is holy and unholy is clearly drawn apart – In Leviticus 10:10, God says through Moses after describing the scapegoat, "And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean."[254]

This "drawing apart" is an intentional process in Leviticus; Douglas points out, "… the Hebrew word of kadosh, which is usually translated as Holy, is based on the idea of separation. Aware of the difficulty translating kadosh straight into Holy, Ronald Knox's version of the Old Testament uses 'set apart.' Thus the grand old lines 'Be ye Holy, Because I am Holy' are rather thinly rendered: 'I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt; I am set apart and you must be set apart like me.'"[255] Our creation of sacred binaries, and thus binary morality, is thus tied both explicitly and implicitly to God itself. Everything that exists can be sorted neatly (we hope) into a broad, all-encompassing realm. Douglas explains, "… This kind of disease is caused by adultery, that by incest; this meteorological disaster is the effect of political disloyalty, that the effect of impiety. The whole universe is harnessed to men's attempts to force one another into good citizenship."[256]

The "drawing apart" from God isn't unique to Jewish texts; Christian texts imply the same thing. Recall my previous equivocation of demons and uncleanliness: Mark Johnston writes,

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[254] Lev. 10:10 AV.
[255] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 8. For context, she is quoting Leviticus 11.46.
[256] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 3.

The interchangeability of these terms is obvious from so many examples that I will cite only two representative instances. In Mark 3:15 Jesus grants his twelve apostles the authority to cast out demons, while in Mark 6:7 he gives them authority over the unclean spirits. Mark 7:25 tells us about a Greek woman who was possessed by an unclean spirit, while in the next verse she begs Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter. The significance of the epithet unclean spirit may be that it had the effect of *separating a person from the worship of God.*[257]

Douglas thus unifies this schematic-holy border construction into a coherent, more cross-cultural thesis: "… I believe that ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created."[258] Imagine, for example, the opposition of above and below: at what point is something defined as "above?" Certainly this question is a relative one, but a distinction must be drawn in each relative instance, perhaps best visualized with a border representing the "middle." The clearer the border, the easier it is to distinguish the two. The concept of "exaggerating" difference, or drawing that clear schematic border-line in the first place, is symbolized existentially through Leviticus, and so violations, impurities, and profanities are rendered moral and existential violations.

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[257] Johnston, "Demon Possession and Exorcism," 2. My italics.
[258] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 4.

Diel's research on haunted houses mentioned in Chapter One further bolsters Douglas's schematic claims – they define uncanniness as "elicited by stimuli deviating from familiar patterns or norms," and extends this to discordant physical spaces that specifically possess qualities of disgust, ambiguity, a lack of lighting and occlusion resulting in anxiety, and an unexpected lack of social presence.[259] Despite a general lack of research in this field, Diel's literature review palpably echoes Douglas's claims. Our interpretations of physical spaces, social spaces, and bodily spaces are all synthesized.

Combined with Boddy's overdetermination hypothesis, which also focuses on this existential border construction and interiority, we are left with a strong theory. To return to prior vocabulary, the Person is defined as "interior," or native, or enclosed in a border, and the Individual is what forms when interiority is rendered polluted. The transgression of the borders of personhood thus represents an existential crisis, as if the world-as-one-knows-it is fundamentally deconstructed, and those schematic borders must be dialectically re-evaluated. Boddy's claim is that Hofriyati women have an incredibly reinforced constructed boundary as a result of their metonymy and thus perpetual religious socialization and taboo-reinforcement. As this thesis progresses, other possession cults will portray a similar process of hyper-interiorization and their dramatic and mimetic battle with the outside world.

Psychoanalysis offers a great deal of clarity for this anthropological theory, as the inner-workings of the mind of the individual are often ignored in favor of broad, cultural claims. Freud's topography of agencies as they relate to his opinions on religion are useful to this discussion, and will set us up to consider his more appropriate

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[259] Diel and Lewis, "Structural Deviations," 2-3.

successor, Lacan. Many are familiar with his concepts of id, ego, and superego; the ego

(and to some extent superego) are conscious states, and the id is an unconscious state.

The ego is rooted in the "reality principle," whereas the id is governed by the "pleasure

principle," two concepts that will be defined and returned to shortly. For now, it is

enough to say that this reality principle seeks to engage things "'as they are,'" which,

according to Freud, finds itself at odds with "the bonds of illusion."[260] These "bonds"

include things like religion, which is why Freud views religious symbolism as, in his

idiom, "a projection of infantile needs for a benevolent father figure who compensates

for the harshness and injustice of existence."[261] However, it's interesting to point out that

Freud also concedes, "Art (which like religion, falls under the category of illusion),

beauty, and eros are shown to be necessary forces in the formation of cultures by which

we engage with the external world."[262] When juxtaposed, the contradiction is clear, and

ultimately, Freud's discarding of the products of culture makes him incapable of

acknowledging any productive benefit of religion. Seeing as zār possession is a

constructive religious practice that aids people in coming to terms with the world as it

is, a more inclusive psychoanalytic framework is called for.

　　　Lacan fills these gaps by grafting three "planes" known as the Imaginary, the

Symbolic, and the Real onto Freud's topography of id, ego, and superego. In doing so,

he extends Freud into the cultural realm and attempts to, in addition to understanding

"physical agencies," describe "correlative cultural forms that both reflect and condition

[260] James J. DiCenso, "Symbolism and Subjectivity: A Lacanian Approach to Religion," *The Journal of Religion* 74, no. 1 (1994): 47, https://doi.org/10.1086/489286.
[261] DiCenso, "Symbolism and Subjectivity," 47-48.
[262] DiCenso, "Symbolism and Subjectivity," 47-48.

psychical states."[263] The Imaginary is "associated with identification, fixation, narcissism, and dyadic relations," and the Symbolic is "associated with language, cultural laws, differentiation, and pluralistic relations." Most important to Lacan, however, is the Real, which is "that which is at any given time beyond the scope of full symbolization; for example, it designates the givenness of the drives and any experience that cannot be fully integrated into cultural or personal systems of symbolization (e.g. traumatic and mystical experiences.)"[264] Lacan is unique because he views the human experience of reality as "always symbolized in one form or another" which is "always beyond full assimilation into discourse," because the Real must be transformed into symbolization anyway.[265]

This fundamentally constant symbolization results in what Lacan identifies as a "'mirror stage,'" when the "'visual *Gestalt*'"[266] of a subject's "'own body,'" or "'salutary *imago*,'" is manifested and the ego is therefore first developed as what Freud called the "'narcissistic object.'"[267] It is in this period, which emerges early in childhood, that the human "'fixes upon himself an image that alienates himself,'" and even beyond the mirror stage, the ego "continues to be shaped and conditioned by identifications that compromise its status as objective mediator of reality."[268] DiCenso explains, "... the ego builds its self-image on an identification with an external form, and yet in doing so it closes itself off from genuinely transforming relations of reciprocity."[269] This theory

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[263] DiCenso, "Symbolism and Subjectivity," 49.
[264] DiCenso, "Symbolism and Subjectivity," 48.
[265] DiCenso, "Symbolism and Subjectivity," 48-49.
[266] For the layman: an organized whole, essentially a summarized representation.
[267] DiCenso, "Symbolism and Subjectivity," 50.
[268] DiCenso, "Symbolism and Subjectivity," 51.
[269] DiCenso, "Symbolism and Subjectivity," 51.

associates itself with Mary Douglas's theory of personal identity quite well, particularly because Lacan views reality as "'defined by contradiction,' that is, by difference, otherness, and negativity."[270] Douglas's claim about "exaggerating" difference could very well be explained through Lacan's mirror stage. Our symbolic representation of the world is transformed through, in DiCenso's words, "encounters with others within social worlds of communication and in relation to the Real in points of breakdown or types of experience that exceed and transform established forms of symbolic understanding."[271] Incredibly fitting for this chapter, Lacan views Freud's aforementioned religious "illusion" alternatively as a "self-transforming mode of being."[272] The Real can only be "known," so to speak, through symbolization, and religion seems to do this quite effectively.

Our transformation through these "encounters with others" extends to "biases, power structures, and ideological formations" as well, which is why religious symbolization is so important to Lacan and why he interacts so well with Douglas and Boddy.[273] DiCenso explains, "Many forms of religious symbolization include the built-in-irony or self-overturning (reflexivity) that is characteristic of the symbolic in Lacan's sense of a mode of being and of expression. Analysis of religious language from a variety of traditions might serve to illustrate these points."[274] Fortunately, this thesis has already done so in a number of ways and will continue to do so.

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[270] DiCenso, "Symbolism and Subjectivity," 53.
[271] DiCenso, "Symbolism and Subjectivity," 53.
[272] DiCenso, "Symbolism and Subjectivity," 54.
[273] DiCenso, "Symbolism and Subjectivity," 55.
[274] DiCenso, "Symbolism and Subjectivity," 55.

Thus, I propose an ambitious hypothesis, with the axioms that personal identity is a schematic construction defined by its relationship with the Other, [275]and the demons involved in spirit possession are defined as monstrous liminal, unclean, and contradictory beings. The individual and culturally specific details that comprise a religious demon should be indicative of that individual's and culture's composition, because what a community perceives as unclean, essentially evil, and invasive is summarized through their demons, which therefore act as an ubiquitous touchstone. We can infer the core of cultural *and* personal anxieties through the myths and experiences of demons and possession.

Lacan is especially useful for this thesis because of his principle of *das Ding* – "the Thing." In his seminar titled likewise, Lacan begins with the principle that, "it is obvious that the things of the human world are things in a universe structured by words, that language, symbolic processes, dominate and govern all."[276] This paper's prior assumptions implicitly support this principle, like Boddy's metonymy, and the final chapter to come is predicated on it as well.

Lacan asks us to imagine our sensory organs as discontinuous – this should not be challenging to accomplish, as our hands feel the world through nerve *endings*. Consciousness must, as a result, "come to terms with that outside world,"[277] or rather, that which is outside of our nervous system.[278] In the meantime, that which is just *within*

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[275] Or in Lacan's words, Contradiction

[276] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis (Book VII)* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 45.

[277] Lacan's wording is incredibly clever here, as our coming to "terms" is the act of signifying through words – "makes a sign and which is of the order of writing," and so we are both literally and figuratively coming to terms.

[278] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, 50.

our reach, the "raw, original, primitive" external world, is "inscribed" as signs and symbols as described previously.[279] Subjective experience is thus constituted by lack – what Lacan calls the Thing.

That discontinuous world has incredible value in this context. On the aforementioned closure of orifices in Hofriyati burial, which juxtaposes holy and profane existence, Boddy explains, "It is through such apertures that humans establish communication, that individuals are linked to one another and situated in the sensible world. Humans must, however grudgingly, admit their imperfectibility and their need for other humans – kin, nonkin, even other cultures."[280] Our open mouths, ears, noses, and so on, are inherently receptive, incorporative, and communicative. This description is fascinating; we are incomplete and porous, like the Cappadocian Self from Chapter One, and this renders us susceptible and exposed. It makes sense that these are all potential sites of demonic incursion, but they are also essential to our very existence as material beings. Our inherent reconciliation with the Thing implies our profanity.

Essential to Lacan's *das Ding* is a Freudian word evoked numerous times in this lecture by Lacan: *Nebenmensch*. In German the word translates to "an other person," but in the field of psychoanalysis, has deep implications: Andrew Payne writes, "The notion of *Nebenmensch* thus associates two features of the other: his or her ability to hold together as a nucleus irreducible to its attributes and his or her allergy to analogical identification on the basis of my experience of my own body."[281] As you can likely

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[279] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, 47-50.
[280] Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits*, 117.
[281] Andrew Payne, "Lacan's Thing with Architecture: Rimming the Void/Petrifying Pain," in *Lacan + Architecture*, ed. John Shannon Hendrix and Francesco Proto (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 2.

already see, *Nebenmensch* is very relevant to our theory of a constructed self, because it encapsulates our defense of our notions of interiority and exteriority. The held-together nucleus, which ties back to Lacan's visual *Gestalt*, is done so through schematic borders. The "Other" implies difference, thus, interiority (self) and exteriority (other).

What is fascinating about Freud's *Nebenmensch* is he argues that the question of "what is real and what is not" is "subject to a deontological question (what is good and what is bad) from the start," which seems to degrade much of our understanding of ethics and rationality. This is a radical claim: Payne quotes Freud directly, who explains that the "'function of judgment'" involves "'two sorts of decisions'"; "'It affirms or disaffirms the possession by a thing of a particular attribute, and it asserts or disputes that a presentation has an existence in reality.'"[282] The first sort of decision, to affirm the possession by a thing of a particular attribute, can be summarized as the decision of consumption, so to speak, "'"It shall be inside of me" or "It shall be outside of me."'" Freud concludes, "'The original pleasure ego wants to introject into itself everything that is good and to eject from itself everything that is bad,'" which implies, "'What is bad, what is alien to the ego and what is external are, to begin with, identical.'"[283] Reality-testing has a similar premise because it is a question of "whether something that is in the ego as a presentation can be rediscovered in a perception," which is, as a result, 'once more a question of internal and external.'"[284] If we accept this argument that all

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[282] Payne, "Lacan's Thing," 4.
[283] Payne, "Lacan's Thing," 4.
[284] Payne, "Lacan's Thing," 4.

judgment can be reduced to either expulsion (*Ausstoßung*) or affirmation (*Bejahung*),[285] Douglas's schematic borders suddenly hold much more significance.

It happens that demons degrade our understanding of ethics and rationality as well. The Problem of Evil encapsulates this because the very *existence* of demons questions the reality of infinite goodness and divine knowledge. Yet they are essential to the project of Christianity itself – without evil and the source of sin, without the struggle between the holy and the profane, why be Christian at all? Recall Eliade's explanation of: Man naturally lives in the world of the profane, but by "imitating the gods" and continuously reactualizing "paradigmatic divine gestures," both he and the world are "sanctified" – we see this methodology again through Freud.[286] Lacan's *das Ding* is that thing which is to be found again, the native rediscovery of perception, thus sanctifying or expelling whatever is not defined through apodictic truth.

Now that this has been explained, we can properly understand what Lacan means in the following passage,

> The *Ding* is the element that is initially isolated by the subject in his
> experience of the *Nebenmensch* as being by its very nature alien, *Fremde*.[287]
> … That's what Freud indicates when he says that 'the first and most
> immediate goal of the test of reality is not to find in a real perception an
> object which corresponds to the one which the subject represents to
> himself at that moment, but to find it again, to confirm that it is still
> present in reality.' The whole process of the subject is then oriented

[285] Payne, "Lacan's Thing," 3.
[286] Eliade, "Myth," 36.
[287] *Fremde* simply means Alien.

around the *Ding* as *Fremde*, strange and even hostile on occasion, or in any

case the first outside.[288]

That hostile and naturally alien, untamed Other from the Outside, that which threatens unwelcome intrusion and must be expelled (or reflexively incorporated, in the case of religious symbolization like zār), and that which is summarized through uncleanliness and impurity is all entirely encapsulated through demons and demonic possession.

We are left with a geographically and culturally broad, multidisciplinary, and powerful conclusion: spirit possession is a productive and social act of personal identity reformation by repressed people, which functions as a summarizing symbol of taboo and purity, a religiously acceptable platform for hegemonic critique, and a creative act of self-expression through deconstruction by cliche and satire. Seeing as demons are definable by their liminality, this conclusion should make intuitive sense. If their existence is allegorical to human tensions as described in Chapter One, then possession is the acting out of those tensions. Its social consequences are reflexive deuterolearning; a reformation of the Lacanian symbolized Ego.

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[288] Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, 52.

Chapter Three

The Camera People and Their Quest for the White Indian

"Paien unt tort e crestiens unt dreit.

Pagans are wrong and Christians are right."

– Chanson de Roland [289]

I've ignored the zār ṭumbura, mentioned briefly at the start of Chapter Two, long enough. There is a fundamental difference between the two zayran cults that I intentionally skimmed over: in ṭumbura, the possessing spirit is representative of the collective self of the community. We've left the realm of the individual to a critical extent, because rather than have the invading spirits represent a multitude of Others from the Outside, here, the spirit is a singular force that assumes many shapes "without compromising its singularity."[290] Furthermore, this singular force with many forms represents "ethnic or quasi-ethnic groups … in which the Sūdānī were actively involved, not as subhuman slaves or victims of foreign domination, but as active agents (usually soldiers) participating in the shaping of their own history."[291] They are thus possessed, not by an "alter" per se, but by a sort of disconnected sense of nativity. This is fascinating, and provides the question for the chapter to come: can man's demons be defined and summarized by a lack of a sense of *belonging*?

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[289] As translated in Sharon Kinoshita, "'Pagans Are Wrong and Christians Are Right': Alterity, Gender, and Nation in the *Chanson de Roland*,"*Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 1 (2001): 1. https://doi.org/10.1215/10829636-31-1-79.
[290] Makris, *Changing Masters*, 195.
[291] Makris, *Changing Masters*, 206-207.

That theory of dislocated nativity is further supported by Makris's claim that devotees are "able to transform themselves from what they are being seen as – 'speaking animals' with no religion, history, or descent – into an image which is 'much closer to their own senses of themselves'; that is true human beings and 'original people of the land.'"[292] As discussed previously in Chapter Two, formerly enslaved people were considered subaltern because they had a perceived lack of history and connectedness with ancestors. It seems that by internalizing this, they acquire illness through the idiom of possession, and can "cure" it through ṭumbura.

Our definition of demons is thus extended far beyond what one might expect at a cursory glance. In a functionalist sense, this cult is identical to every other cult discussed thus far. In the same way boré reconciles an Other, this cult transforms the Self into an "active agent in history rather than the Other" — the Self prior to initiation therefore perceives *themselves* as the alter, and reclaim their belongingness.[293] The ontological realness of the ṭumbura spirit provides further elaboration; participants view the spirit as transcending "space and time" and thus "achieve some sort of presence and permanency in the life of past and present cult devotees."[294] Makris makes the vital point that through this "'truth' and concreteness," Sūdānī devotees derive their own sort of truth and concreteness.

It's notable how synergistic Markris's conclusions are with Eliade's framework about apodictic myth. Makris writes about the ṭumbura possession ritual as "projecting into a timeless past a collective identity that has been created through subordination

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[292] Makris, *Changing Masters,* 209.
[293] Makris, *Changing Masters,* 209.
[294] Makris, *Changing Masters,* 213.

and stripping it of its negative connotations" – a sort of sacred naturalization of collective identity – this is eerily familiar, but in this instance represents a fundamental reclaiming of autonomy and agency.[295] Importantly, unlike in bore, ṭumbura is perceived as a permanent fix, given that the member retains a sense of community. Initiation is celebrated and results in a positive self-identity.

Analysis of ṭumbura also interacts well with Douglas's conclusions; Makris portrays possession disease as a "broken body" that, after ritual, is consolidated and "becomes again whole."[296] Furthermore, and more in the vein of Lacan, that wholeness involves the subject being "Reconstituted into a moral being and imitated into a moral community the patient is cured," where ṭumbura becomes a "'personal symbol' in and through which the collective historical experience of the Sūdānī subordinates is articulated through the 'cultural patterning' of the possessed person's consciousness and the refashioning of the body and its boundaries."[297] The melting together of morality, nativity, and border-construction is thus unified in this ritual.

Like most religions, the attendance and relevance of zār change with the world around it. For example, Kenyon observed that the boré spirits of Khawajat and Pashawat, colonial spirits, "now possess people less frequently."[298] With the age of globalization, and thus the absence of men in the home for the sake of social mobility, women are "forced by circumstance" to assume more roles outside of their traditionally interior realm.[299] This has resulted in higher involvement, as well as new "ethnic and

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[295] Makris, *Changing Masters,* 209.
[296] Makris, *Changing Masters,* 215.
[297] Makris, *Changing Masters,* 215.
[298] Kenyon, "Zār as Modernization," 112.
[299] Kenyon, "Zār as Modernization," 112.

intra-ethnic tensions" caused by rapid urbanization. Perhaps more interestingly, after the establishment of Shari'a law in Sudan and thus the criminalization of the zār cult, possession rates "actually went up as a result" because "zār provides a well-established outlet from the stress the stricter laws brought," and "provides a forum for women to voice indirect opposition."[300]

The *decline* of zār ṭumbura is a key focus of Makris's book, and contextualizes the chapter to come. The modernization of Sudan, like in much of the rest of the world, has resulted in greater inclusion, access to social mobility, and a general acknowledgment of human rights. Many ṭumbura participants have migrated to boré, which is more popular, urban, and lacks the connotation that ṭumbura carries. Makris ties this to the decline of ṭumbura in every ethnic group except for one: the Nuba, who are "suffering more than other regions from repressive strategies of Islamization and ethnic cleansing."[301] He asks,

> Why don't they go to boré? Improbable… In boré the Nuba spirit is the
> Other, is it not? Could Nuba women… be possessed by a Nuba Other
> alongside women from the North? Impossible… It happens, of course, all
> things can happen."[302]

This probability of a Nuba woman possessed by a Nuba Other is undeniably compelling. The Other has continually been the focus of this thesis, but the very concept of an alter being possessed by an internalized sense of alterity should raise eyebrows – or should it? In zār boré, the only people who can become possessed are interiorized

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[300] Kenyon, "Zār as Modernization," 112.
[301] Makris, *Changing Masters,* 375-376.
[302] Makris, *Changing Masters,* 375-376.

women who seek permissible community with similarly isolated women. The Malay women on the assembly line also fulfill this quality, as do the stereotypical hysterical women (or, in many cases, witches) from medieval Christian possession tales. The Devil's Gateway indeed! They are possessed by the Other, but don't they *also* find themselves as paradigmatic and hegemonic subjects? This is the question Chapter Three pursues.

Thinking the Unthought

Les Maîtres Fous, which translates to *The Mad Masters*, was released in 1955 by Jean Rouch, a French documentarian. It takes place in Accra, Ghana, just a few years before their independence from the British was attained. "Master" offers a somewhat loose interpretation, as it is an honorific and thus connotes respect. A Mad Master, therefore, is a contradictory one, which scorns as it reifies. The film's subjects are Songhay spirit possession participants; migrant workers from Nigeria performing the "Holi Hori." The Songhay add something incredibly unique to this thesis, because rather than being possessed by a shadowy and impossible religious specter, their demons are historical representations of their colonizers.

One striking element I noticed on my first watch of the film was that many men made direct eye contact with the camera, and having just read *Of Mimicry and White Man: A Psychoanalysis of Jean Rouch's Les Maîtres Fous* by Kien Ket Lim prior to the viewing, I immediately felt that much of his critique was well-deserved. He writes,

The Songhay priests have a far longer view: gravely aware of the power

cinema can bring. [...] So they invited Rouch "to come and film their

ceremony which they planned to use as part of their ceremony."[303]

On this, he describes,

The camera becomes a Pandora's box; anyone holding it as such a box

shall be qualified as a fellow tribal member of the Camera People; and by

definition, this is a people always present in the wrong place – or rather,

always turning the right place into some very awful one, simply by their

presence.[304]

I felt deeply uncomfortable as these men stared back at me through my laptop screen.

They are anthropological specimens, usually drawn apart on a dissection table, but in

this instance made me aware of myself. *I* am a member of the tribe of camera people,

objectifying these men in an attempt to extract meaning. The very presence of the

camera inevitably transforms a place and its inhabitants' behavior, but I feel inclined to

point out that their impermanent eye contact presents a unique position. Some of the

men are preoccupied with their possession trances, as they foam at the mouth, walk like

soldiers, and depict various colonial military archetypes. We must ask: when one is in a

trance, how aware are they of the world around them?

Lim's analysis defines itself by its focus on perception and the gaze of the Other.

He emphasizes the original reception of *Les Maîtres Fous*, quoting Marcel Griaule, "'If

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[303] Kien Lim, "Of Mimicry and White Man: A Psychoanalysis of Jean Rouch's Les Maîtres Fous," *Cultural Critique*, no. 51 (2002): 55.
[304] Lim, "Of Mimicry and White Man," 57.

we could not pluck out our eyes… we could at least burn the film.'"[305] More important than perturbed intellectuals, however, is the reception of the film by African students as racist.[306] The counter-claim that Rouch was "invited" to this place is certainly problematic, and the intent of the possessed had not been properly explored. Lim sees horrible implications of this, arguing, "It is hard not to see that they are also producing an ethnographic documentary about the callous Camera People and their hunt for visuality."[307] Lim describes one of the film's most famous scenes, the moment of slaughtering and consuming a dog, as a "sublime moment," wherein "the priests and the gaze upon themselves unite into one singularity, assuming a new presence by mumbling to Rouch through their frothing mouths: 'White Father, don't you see we're eating a dog?' By which they are equally asking, 'Don't you see we're filming?'"[308] Lim's entire paper represents a stunning refutation of generally held beliefs and attributions of *Les Maîtres Fous* and must be addressed. In the anthropologist's hunt for possession, do we simply expose ourselves as colonialists hungry to represent primitive savagery?

My problem with Lim's argument is that he seems to miss an entire dimension of this possession cult, namely, "us:" the audience. This feels almost ironic to say, as his focus is on men committing horrors because they *know* they have an audience. He even develops a complex dialectical analysis rife with Lacanian dream symbolism, incorporating a Western gaze, but forgets that the imagined audience, the "gaze," is not a distinct phenomenon to the Camera People's presence! In fact, *Of Mimicry and White*

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[305] Lim, "Of Mimicry and White Man," 41.
[306] Lim, "Of Mimicry and White Man," 42.
[307] Lim, "Of Mimicry and White Man," 58.
[308] Lim, "Of Mimicry and White Man," 58.

Man largely adopts the role of critiquing Paul Stoller's *Horrific Comedy: Cultural Resistance and the Hauka Movement in Niger*, yet Stoller's argument centers around Hauka's emphasis on this very audience.

As colonized people, the Songhay are *already* familiar with white men transforming "the right place into some very awful one, simply by their presence," to take a phrase from Lim. In fact, their entire possession ritual is designed to critique this pressure. Rouch's presence is thus allegorical, particularly at this point in history. We can learn a great deal from this sort of art, which tells us both about its subject, its viewer, and the relationship between the two. We already know that possession is both an expressive and performative medium that acts out the tensions beyond and within civilizational borders – so why not extend this methodology to our modern, colonial, and globalized epoch?

Songhay did not originally include the Hauka spirit family. Hauka emerged as a reaction to French occupation, enslavement, and colonization in the West African former empire.[309] In *Mimesis and Alterity*, Michael Taussig quotes a different essay by Stoller, explaining that "the movement spread 'an intolerable affront to French authority'" and took the form of "'the presence of an open dissidence, a society that members of which openly defied the social, political, and religious order. It is here that we discover the most original aspect of the Hauka movement: their total refusal of the system put into place by the French.'"[310] Jean Rouch claimed that the Hauka movement

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[309] Paul Stoller, "Horrific Comedy: Cultural Resistance and the Hauka Movement in Niger," *Ethos*, 12, no. 2 (1984): 174.
[310] Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (Routledge, 1993), 240.

died out once the colonial powers left in 1957, but Stoller explains, "Much to the delight of audiences," the Hauka "… continued to ridicule the European with their outrageous mockery. The 'force' of the European continues to be strong in all the regions of the Republic of Niger."[311] On the "original" intended audience, Stoller imagines the experience of a French colonial administrator being "aped" by a possessed Songhay:

> The medium's body is contorted. His eyes are bulging, and like all Hauka, he froths at the mouth. And to add insult to injury, he speaks a mixture of Pidgin French and Songhay. The result of this complex of symbol messages is a combination of fright, for the Hauka is a terrifying sight, and burlesque, for the Hauka mocks the identity which he or she represents.[312]

This perhaps "intended" audience is gone now that the occupying forces have left, yet the cult and its interactive element remain. Stoller personally accounts one of his experiences, describing being publicly picked out and mocked by "The Doctor," a possessing spirit within a man who wears a pith helmet and carries a hypodermic syringe. This experience, however, is not unique to white or even foreign audience members. In another instance, Stoller recounts an interaction between "Commandant Bashirou" and a young woman and man in the audience, incorporating ridicule, yanking the young woman from the audience, and spitting on her.[313] One can see from these examples some clear facts: in being a comedy of sorts, Hauka relies on evoking a response and engaging with onlookers. These public gatherings are characterized by

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[311] Stoller, "Horrific Comedy," 184.
[312] Stoller, "Horrific Comedy," 178.
[313] Stoller, "Horrific Comedy," 181.

"verbal sparring matches with their audience."[314] It is a dialogue, vaguely reminiscent

of insult comedy, where the possessed interacts verbally and physically *with* Lim's

"gaze." This is the detail that Lim misses originally, which is that an audience has *always*

been involved, particularly a white and colonial one. He almost makes this point,

quoting Jean Rouch to make a separate argument:

> Film is to them nothing but another form of possession, magic, or sorcery
>
> that provides the same sort of intensity as cult experience. Some of the
>
> children who follow the Hauka find it even more worthwhile to hang out
>
> at a possession than a movie for their weekend pastime.[315]

Before I continue, I feel I should point out how similar this description is to that of

zayran possession. This is why Stoller's analysis of "horrific comedy" is so important –

comedy can not exist in a vacuum, it must be observed and interacted with.

At the end of his film, Jean Rouch portrays radical juxtaposition: after having

witnessed the "horrors" of the Hauka, we are shown the next day their quotidian lives.

They labor, socialize, and live amongst everyone else. Between this footage, he flashes in

clips of the Holi Hori that the audience (we) were just subjected to. I think the best

representation of this is his depiction of the Doctor's Wife. Rouch says, "he is a boy who

may be a little effeminate and uses a lot of Vaseline for hair but he is an excellent

salesman." Just earlier, we witnessed "Madame Doctor" beginning the butchering of the

sacrificed dog to be consumed, dressed as a woman, and who is referred to by Rouch

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[314] Janet McIntosh, "Reluctant Muslims: Embodied Hegemony and Moral Resistance in Giriama Spirit Possession Complex," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 10, no. 1(2004): 93.

[315] Lim, "Of Mimicry and White Man," 55.

using feminine pronouns. This grotesque scene, both Lim and I argue, *intentionally*

offends its audience – if only we could interview these subjects. Recall Lim's critique of

this scene, the "sublime moment," wherein "the priests and the gaze upon themselves

unite into one singularity…". Perhaps he is right, albeit flowery and rhetorical; the men

know they are being watched, but they *always* have.

Thus far, I've neglected to mention that *Les Maîtres Fous* was banned from two

distinct populations: the Ghanaian (British) government banned the film, and Rouch

banned its viewing from participants of the film itself. The latter of these two is a

peculiar one, as when screening it with participants, Rouch found that it produced a

sort of "'electroshock … to show a man a film of himself in trance.'"[316] He determined

such screenings were potentially harmful, which we will get to shortly – for now, the

British Ghanaian government is more pertinent.

Throughout the Holi Hori, Rouch flips back and forth to a unique detail: a

sculpted effigy of sorts, of the British-colonial Governor-General of Ghana. He, an

inanimate mound, presides over the ceremony and is often involved by the participants.

There is a moment where an egg is broken over the figure, "in imitation of the real

Governor-General's plumes cascading over his ceremonial helmet," according to

Taussig, which the British government "'equated … with an insult to the Queen and to

her authority,'" according to Rouch.[317] It's interesting, Taussig points out, that the Hauka

were "jailed in 1935 for mimicking the white man who possessed their very bodies, and

Rouch's film was banned in the 1950s for mimicking that mimicking."[318] I think there is

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[316] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 243.
[317] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 242.
[318] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 243.

an important conversation to be had here, especially in the context of Christianity and zayran anti-society. Demons evoke a long history of demonization, witch hunts, and repression that seems central to the identity of both the hegemon and the alter.

Eugene Thacker's explanation of the demonic in *In the Dust of This Planet* points out the liminally agitative quality of demons that I identified in Chapter One, arguing, "Opposition is also the structure that comes to define the Medieval Church against its foes, the role that the Church councils accord various activities, from witchcraft to necromancy, as threats to both religious law and religious political authority."[319] Thus, that demonical opposition is "as much political as it is theological, resulting in the famous witch-hunts, persecutions, and inquisitions of the early Renaissance. […] Statanic means 'against God,' 'against the Sovereign,' or even 'against the divine.'"[320] The Hauka fulfill this position quite well as a threat to some metaphysical political entity. They make the Sovereign uncomfortable through their mimicry – a mad master indeed.

Thacker points out that in the 19th century, Satanism was viewed largely as a poetic form utilizing "inversion": take, for example, the Black Mass. He writes, "Every element of the Black Mass, from the blasphemous anti-prayer to the erotic desecration of the host, aims at an exact inversion of the Catholic High Mass."[321] Such a detail is found in Joris-Karl Huysmans' *Là-bas*, and while he claims his story records a real event he personally witnessed, regardless of its validity, the point resonates. Simple art analysis demonstrates this concept quite well: juxtapose, for example, Antonio Canova's

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[319] Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet*, 13.
[320] Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet*, 13.
[321] Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet*, 14.

The Three Graces and Albrecht Dürer's *The Four Witches*.
Dürer directly inverts the Graces in a number of plainly
visible ways; the smooth women are made lumpy and
saggy, thus their femininity is subverted. Their innocent
whispering appears to be a devious conspiracy, and their
once elegant form and posture are distorted.

In *Demonolatry*, a 1595 work by Nicholas Rémy, this
pattern is pointed to directly. Another key text for hunting
and burning witches, along with the *Malleus*, *Demonolatry*
points out that witches perform a "preposterous inversion"
when they dance, always facing away from each other.[322]
Rémy posits,

> ... it may simply be that they love to do everything
> in a ridiculous and unseemly manner. For they turn
> their backs towards the Demons when they go to
> worship them, and approach them sideways like a crab; when they hold
> out their hands in supplication they turn them downwards; when they
> converse they bend their eyes toward the ground; and in other such ways
> they behave in a manner opposite to that of other men.[323] (61)

Rémy is, in a sense, writing an ethnography about himself and witch-beliefs, assuming
that witches never existed to begin with. His book arduously cross-compares various

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[322] Nicolas Rémy, *Demonolatry*, trans. E. A. Ashwin (John Rodker, 1930), 61.
[323] Rémy, *Demonolatry*, 61.

eye-witness accounts of witches and demons, just like this thesis, but lacks

self-awareness and skepticism. Demons and purported witches *represent* an inversion of

the status quo, of the established order, and this is not coincidental. They are often a

tactic to root out and justify violence against subversive people, particularly disobedient

women. Ultimate wrongness reifies what is "right."

Such inversion is present depending on the perspective of who views the Hauka,

as they are intended to both be terrifying and mocking. Taussig explains that for the

Songhay, "It's the ability to become *possessed*, the ability that signifies to Europeans

awesome Otherness if not downright savagery, which allows them to assume the

identity of the European and, at the same time, stand clearly and irrevocably

eye-bulgingly apart from it. What's being mimicked is mimicry itself – within its

colonial shell."[324] They are a thus dialectical image, one which threatens and questions,

mimics and mocks. By being both the alter and mime, the Hauka accomplish "evil" in

the idiom of what was explained at the end of Chapter One: the most radical form of

evil is that which exists in an awkward, contradictory, often liminal way. The Hauka

exist on the *lim* of difference, by simultaneously signifying and contrasting.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, one would expect that if the

Songhay spirits are indeed representative of their sociocultural pressures, their

pantheon would shift in accordance with changing geopolitics. Stoller's article includes

a detailed historical account:

At the onset of French colonial rule, the possession cult of Songhay, which

did not yet include the Hauka, was a well-organized social institution

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[324] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 241.

consisting of an elaborate cult-on-earth and pantheon of five spirit

"families" which mythically reflected the socio-cultural experience of the

Songhay. Possession dance, in large measure, had been the sociocultural

institution which, through the expression of its complex of symbolic

forms, had maintained links between the Songhay and their ancestors.[325]

The complex tapestry of spirit "families" *incorporated* the Hauka spirit family. In a

trance, the Hauka embody symbolic representations of elements of their colonization,

and thus daily lives, just like with the zār complex. Zār boré provides women a forum

to "express discourses other than that which is politically correct," which starkly

contrasts Lim's critiques:

> … as can be inferred from Stoller, the natives may not, and structurally
>
> cannot (since they are not white men), learn of the existence of their
>
> so-called resistance. If all our critics are correct in their speculations, this
>
> "resistance" must have sprung out of the misrecognition of the white man,
>
> who happens to discover the gaze from an unlikely place.[326]

Our argument could not be more different from Lim's strawman. How could he assume

that these men are unaware of the consequences of their behavior, nor their reception by

their audience, or the comedy and mockery of their acts? At the same time, he claims

that their *awareness* of the colonial gaze is what motivates their actions!

Consider Foucault's description of "madness": he conflates madness with "the

Other," describing, "of that which, for a given culture, is at once interior and foreign,

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[325] Stoller, "Horrific Comedy," 174.
[326] Lim, "Of Mimicry and White Man," 52.

therefore to be excluded (so as to exorcise the interior danger) but by being shut away (in order to reduce its otherness)."[327] The Hauka fit in amazingly in this definition because their ability to "assume the identity of the European and, at the same time, stand clearly and irrevocably eye-bulgingly apart from it." They are simultaneously interior and foreign, and so represent an even greater threat to authority than inversion or contrarianism.

Foucault's language of exorcism is surprisingly pertinent to this context, and adoricist cults thus represent a radical reversal of this portrayal of modern European psychiatry. These forms of possession provide an acceptable medium through which one can portray, interiorize, and externalize "madness" as Foucault sees it – albeit their cults are often classified by hegemonic power structures as savage and thus "shut away to reduce its otherness." Ellen Corin's conclusions from her research on Zebola possession ritual mirror this: "... possession is interpreted as an idiom or a language given by the culture to allow individuals to articulate their personal experience in such a way as to give it a meaning amenable to the group."[328] Madness is thus turned on its head through adoricist possession.

Homi Bhabha defines this method as "mimicry," drawing in part from Foucault's philosophy: "... the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power."[329]

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[327] Robert J.C. Young, "Foucault on Race and Colonialism," *New Formations*, no. 25 (1995): 3.

[328] Ellen Corin. "A Possession Psychotherapy in an Urban Setting: Zebola in Kinshasa." *Social Science and Medicine, Part B: Medical Anthropology* 13, no. 4 (1979): 327.

[329] Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28, no. Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis (1984): 126.

Bhabha fittingly cites Lacan as well, comparing this mimicry to "camouflage," which is to say, "not a harmonization of repression of difference, but a form of resemblance that differs/defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically."[330] Stoller's aforementioned conclusions about comedy, bolstered by similar arguments made by Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard, point to exactly this: "... the outrageousness and pretentiousness of joking as 'privileged license' and 'permitted disrespect.'"[331] This is the dimension of power that Lim seems to indicate, but at the same time diminishes.

In the same vein as Stoller, Bhabha points out, "The visibility of mimicry is always produced at the site of interdiction. It is a form of colonial discourse that is uttered inter dicta: a discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed; a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them."[332] They are, in Foucauldian terms, thinking the unthought in an extremely liminal sense. Our "between the lines" and "both against the rules and within" is perfectly encapsulated through this ecstatic religious experience. The border-transgressor, the demon that exists between good and evil, between the profane and holy, is on full display in *Les Maîtres Fous*.

Imprinted Alterity

In *Reluctant Muslims: Embodied Hegemony*, Janet McIntosh's subjects are found along the Kenyan seaboard in the town of Malindi. Kenyans view these people, the Giriama, as primitive because "many of them have refused to convert to Christianity or

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[330] Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," 131.
[331] Stoller, "Horrific Comedy," 184.
[332] Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," 130.

Islam and continue to engage in Indigenous divination and healing rites."[333] They have

been pressured to convert for over forty years, and those pressures manifested

themselves spiritually, by way of possession.

Many Giriama describe being "tormented by possessing Muslim spirits who

hold their bodies hostage until they agree to capitulate to the spirit's demand that they

embrace Islam."[334] We can thus categorize them as adorcist, which makes the practice

similar to zār in some ways. The most notable of these somatic reactions manifest as

food-avoidance patterns, wherein,

> Those possessed complain that they lose their appetite in daylight hours
>
> during the months of Ramadan, that they experience illness if they do eat
>
> during these hours, and/or that if they eat certain at any time, including
>
> the palm-wine and bush rats that are emblematic of Giriama culture, they
>
> will experience uncontrollable vomiting. Such conditions may endure for
>
> months or years on end – a chronic state of possession-induced
>
> discomfort.[335]

How do we reconcile this? McIntosh represents this as somatizing "a pervasive

discourse of the region,"[336] which is certainly reflective of our aforementioned theories.

What is strange, however, is that this takes the form of both "concession to and rebellion

against Muslim power."[337] Indeed, many concede to their symptoms and simply convert

in an attempt at appeasement. Furthermore, and perhaps more vitally, McIntosh

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[333] McIntosh, "Reluctant Muslims," 93.
[334] McIntosh, "Reluctant Muslims," 93.
[335] McIntosh, "Reluctant Muslims," 93.
[336] McIntosh, "Reluctant Muslims," 93.
[337] McIntosh, "Reluctant Muslims,"93.

describes that others accept the premise of Swahili discourse that their differences in blood are too great, and they *cannot* become Swahili.[338]

McIntosh points to Foucault's claim that "hegemony routinely imprints itself on the body" – she infers, "if illness and other forms of embodied dis-ease can reflect broader forms of social injustice, then perhaps Giriama possession is a physical instantiation of their beleaguered socio-religious status."[339] From this context, spirit possession appears to represent a strong challenge to unitary models of the self. Quite the contrary, it offers "a folk-model of the person in which one body may be host to several agents," and certainly opposes what McIntosh calls "conventional Western ideals of rational selfhood."[340] It's worth mentioning that Boddy's Personhood/Individualhood is supported by this realization because at the very least the Giriama posit this sort of dualist selfhood. Her reactionary social personhood and defiant individuality are plain to see, but here, possession takes the form of a possessed person's *reaction* to their possession, not the possession itself. They can either accept the new and hegemonic order, or suffer the consequences, or by accepting the exclusionary rhetoric of the hegemon, they exclude themselves and thus are caught in a peculiar position of discomforting self-exclusion.

Although this narrative appears to depict the Giriama as helpless to a dominating Islamic presence, a historical analysis severely complicates things. In a dissertation titled *Local Agricultural Knowledge Construction Among the Giriama People of Rural Coastal Kenya*, Randall D. Beckloff explains, "the Giriama have a long history as a

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[338] McIntosh, "Reluctant Muslims," 97.
[339] McIntosh, "Reluctant Muslims," 106.
[340] McIntosh, "Reluctant Muslims," 109.

proud people who have resisted domination by other peoples," and in 1914, the they

"took up arms against the British colonizers who had been pressuring them for years to

work on local plantations."[341] However, "the revolt was brought to a relatively quick

and bloody end," and perhaps most importantly for this thesis, "In many ways the

Giriama have never recovered from this blow."[342] Beckloff uses this case study as an

opportunity to discuss Western intellectual hegemony and colonial domination, which

will be returned to at the end of this chapter.

Foucault's definition of madness, that which is "at once interior and foreign,

therefore to be excluded," presents an interesting combination with the Giriama.[343] Their

demons *are* a foreign transgression of their interiority, but their adorist somatization and

incorporation represent paradigm *acceptance*, *not* defiance and public critique like the

other possession cults. Foucault's theory of power is especially strong in this instance:

> What gives power its hold, what makes it accepted, is quite simply the fact
>
> that it does not weigh like a force, which says no, but that it runs through,
>
> and produces things, it induces pleasures, it forms knowledge, it produces
>
> discourses; it must be considered as a productive network which runs
>
> through the entire social body much more than as a negative instance
>
> whose function is repression.[344]

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[341] Randall D. Beckloff, "Local Agricultural Knowledge Construction Among the Giriama People of Rural Coastal Kenya" (PhD diss., The University of Georgia, 2009), 11, https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/beckloff_randall_d_200905_phd.pdf.
[342] Beckloff, "Local Agricultural Knowledge," 11.
[343] Beckloff, "Local Agricultural Knowledge," 11.
[344] Young, "Foucault on Race," 14.

Aihwa Ong's research on Malay possession from Chapter Two presents this in the form

of another Western medical critique, and is worth referencing in full to conclude this

point:

> In Third World contexts, cosmopolitan medical concepts and drugs often
>
> have an anesthetizing effect, which erases the authentic experiences of the
>
> sick. More frequently, the proliferation of positivist scientific meanings
>
> also produces a fragmentation of the body, a shattering of social
>
> obligations, and a separation of individuals from their own culture.
>
> Gramsci has defined hegemony as a form of ideological domination based
>
> on the consent of the dominated, a consent that is secured through the
>
> diffusion of the worldview of the dominant class. In Malaysia, medicine
>
> has become part of hegemonic discourse, constructing a 'modern' outlook
>
> by clearing away the nightmarish visions of Malay workers. However, as a
>
> technique of both concealment and control, it operates in a more sinister
>
> way than native beliefs in demons. Malay factory women may gradually
>
> become dispossessed of spirits and their own culture, but they remain
>
> profoundly dis-eased in the 'brave new workplace.'[345]

This "diffusion of the worldview of the dominant class" is exactly in line with

Foucault's thinking and presents a useful framework going forward. The Cuna are a

fantastic example of this, as their schematic, genetic, and patriarchal interiority adheres

to an adopted Western (and thus regionally hegemonic) paradigm. It's also important to

point out that while the Giriama may seem like an exceptional case of somatic illness,

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[345] Ong, "The Production of Possession," 40.

almost every instance of possession outlined in this thesis includes persistent and sometimes severe dis-ease. Global hegemony can manifest itself religiously, physically, economically, culturally, and politically. This leaves us in a strange position, as it seems an important case study has been left out: what of the colonizing Western man? Where does he find himself in all this, and where do his demons lie?

Manifest Destiny

Ethnography has evolved into a post-modern epoch. The miraculous "untouched tribes" of the Earth are long gone, as exposure to ethnography renders them sullied. Pollution, expansion, and satellite technology transform all land into Our domain, to be molded into our own image or picked apart until all that remains are bones.

Our relationships with each other now comprise ethnography – the effects of globalization, the recession of an existing group of people, the expansion of another, and so on. In his book *Mimesis and Alterity*, Michael Taussig explores this and develops a "particular history" of a Panamanian tribe called the Cuna, beginning with their first contact with Christopher Columbus. He demonstrates, Cuna ethnography "testif[ies] to an almost drug-like addiction to mime, to merge, to become other- a process in which not only images chase images in a vast, perhaps infinitely extended chain of images, but also becomes one matter."[346] This addiction to mimicry is not unique to the colonized and subaltern, because it is undeniably something the Camera People do as well. It would be deeply racist and mistaken for one to suggest that colonized people inherently desire to be like their mighty and infallible oppressor, although many Western explorers

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[346] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 42-43.

and early anthropologists motivated to justify expansion and exploitation might

attempt to convince you otherwise. As *Camera* People, we have already identified our

tribe as occupied with chasing images. Perhaps Taussig's most striking parable in this

vein is written through R.O. Marsh, a man "obsessed with the search for white Indians

in the Darién while searching for rubber plantation lands at the bequest of those colossi

of early twentieth-century U.S. industrial capitalism, Henry Ford and Harvey

Firestone."[347] This will be returned to shortly, but first, some exposition is in order.

Understanding the project of the construction of the Panama Canal is essential to

this ethnography, as it played a few important social functions: for one, a "'rigid caste

society'" was implemented, reinforcing Western stereotypes of lazy and uncivilized

black men.[348] White men were paid in "gold" (the U.S.'s gold-backed currency), whereas

"silver," or the Panamanian balboa, was paid to the natives and non-whites. Taussig

explains, "Gold and silver came to divide this new cosmos as effectively as Apartheid

did in South Africa," and while the "color line" was hardly ever mentioned in print, it

"'cut through every facet of daily life in the Zone.'"[349] It's interesting to note, then, that

as European "blood," particularly of the French, "entered into the composition of the

Cuna," Baron Erland Nordenskiold's early 19th century ethnography mentions that

"'miscegenation with Negroes … has never taken place.'"[350] Replicated through the

cultural exchange of employment in the construction of the canal, Cuna men

"apparently entertained no objection to the intercourse between their women and the

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[347] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 140.
[348] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 145.
[349] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 146-147.
[350] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 148.

Frenchmen in the eighteenth century," so it's safe to assume that this specific racial

exclusion is exceptional.[351]

Returning to our methodology from Chapter One, I excitedly note Taussig's

quoted description of the "most dangerous [Cuna] spirit, the *nia* (or devil), which causes

madness and suicide as well as illness, [which] can assume any form but is '... often

described as short, squat, and black, with a huge penis [and] appears to people in

dreams as a *waka*, that is, as a non-Indian foreigner, of whom the paradigmatic example

is a Spanish-speaking black.'"[352] Taussig himself points out, "[the] imaginative effort

that has gone into this creation of inside and outside, Cuna and non-Cuna, in a racist

pattern of global history," and "the historical confluence of soulful power rippling

through an alteric mosaic creating sexually charged boundary-markers."[353] Immediately,

there is much to unpack. As told in Chapter One, Eliade and others key us in to the

deep significance of myth, in this case, a heavenly race-fantasy. Taussig focuses on the

black phallus, charged with "demonic power," which "alerts one to the sexual fear and

excitement of the boundary created out of mimesis and alterity under specific colonial

histories."[354] In the vein of Douglas, this penis obviously threatens a boundary imposed

around Cuna women, who retain the interiority of the community.

The Cuna depict their land as "preternaturally female" in their origin myth,

which is something Americans should be familiar with.[355] Take John Gast's 1872

painting of manifest destiny, entitled *American Progress*, for example, an image

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[351] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 148-149.
[352] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 149.
[353] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 149-150.
[354] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 150.
[355] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 171.

ubiquitous in Middle School social studies textbooks. We have already encountered the

patriarchal Christian view of women as the "devil's gateway" and the Hofriyati culture of female interiority. Pure, untouched, might I say, *virginal* land *must* be defended by the exterior-facing, defensive, and reactionary man in this paradigm. Both spiritually and physically,

cross-contamination (or, pollution, impurity, uncleanliness) is menacing. Taussig quotes

Emile Durkheim to elaborate, and I feel that it is especially poignant in the context of

zayran possession (special vulnerability in menstruation) and Christian possession:

> '… evil and impure powers, productive of disorders, causes death and
>
> sickness, instigators of sacrilege. The only sentiments which men have for
>
> them are a fear into which horror generally enters. Such are the forces
>
> upon which and by which the sorcerer acts, those which arise from
>
> corpses or the menstrual blood, those freed by every profanation of sacred
>
> things, etc. The spirits of the dead and malign genii of every sort are their
>
> personified forms.'[356]

The relationship between Cuna men and women is an interesting one, reminiscent of

Hofriyat. While women represent cultural interiority, marked by signature nose-rings

and traditional molas, Taussig explains, "for at least a century" men had "been decked

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[356] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 150.

out in Western attire," including ties and felt hats by the time of Marsh's expedition[357]

They do this on special occasions, "when curing or carrying out chiefly duties," and

"when being photographed by influential outsiders."[358] Observe this image to the left, a

fantastic visual juxtaposition of masculine and feminine

Cuna identity.[359] The exclusion of black people from

Cuna "miscegenation," to take a word from

Nordenskiold, but inclusion of the white European,

therefore gains further nuance. One would expect

female interiority to remain consistent along

Cuna/Non-Cuna lines, but that clearly is not the case.

The Cuna community has a particularly relevant form of

spirit possession called *kiatakkalett*, which involves

possession by an outside spirit. These spirits appear in dreams, and "self-destruct" the

"seductive distinction between 'inside' and 'out'" through erotic power, which, to take a

phrase from Taussig, binds dreaming "to that always-present, interiorized alterity

shaped by longing for the Other, such as the Other who comes in ships."[360] I will quote a

particular dream, told by Rubén Pérez to Baron Nordenskiold, to illustrate an instance:

> "In one dream [Rubén] saw a large ship entering across the bay and
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> making fast alongside the quay. A handsome woman stepped ashore and
>
> came to him, intent on making love. He kept dreaming this same dream.

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[357] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 185.

[358] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 185.

[359] Avon Neal and Ann Parker, *Molas: Folk Art of the Cuna Indians* (Barre Publishing, 1977), 171. Found on Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 187.

[360] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 130.

In fact during the day he used to go down to the beach and even far out

into the water to see if the ship was coming. Medicine cured him."[361]

We are told that Pérez's grandfather "attached a lot of importance to this dream, and

advised this grandson to let him know in good time if he was ever troubled by a similar

one, which suggests that such a dream is not only a notable and perhaps culturally

standardized phenomenon, but the cause of anxiety as well."[362] Nordenskiold describes,

"'In the old days … Cuna Indians made a practice of killing people who habitually

dreamed in this fashion,'" sometimes poisoning or even burning those afflicted, as there

was a mythical threat of one's village to collapse and to be "swallowed up" into the

ground if untreated.[363] Inside/Outside imagery is abound. The baron points out from

this observation that there seems to be a certain kind of paradox in Cuna culture, as I

have already illustrated in the last example, between Cuna conservatism and their

susceptibility to "novelty."[364] The best instantiation of this is in the molas, or traditional

wear of women and "international sign of Cuna identity," which integrates

"mousetraps, lunar modules, and baseball games into the traditional scheme of their

appliqued shirt-fronts."[365] The battle between interiority and exteriority is often

contradictory.

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[361] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 130-131.
[362] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 131.
[363] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 131.
[364] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 131.
[365] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 132.

Matter Out of Place

R.O. Marsh's tale weaves two racist and strange pursuits together: his quest for a white and blond Cuna Indian, and his role in the Cuna rebellion in 1925. Taussig explains, "This search was rationalized, if not motivated by a patently eugenicist and weird physical anthropological concern with the mysteries of whiteness at a time when there was considerable anxiety about immigration and 'racial mixture' in the U.S. – a concern serendipitously shared by Cuna Indians…"[366] This shared concern in racial purity is a fascinating one, because both Marsh and the Cuna people he meets are aligned in their utter hatred for the black man. It seems that he is preoccupied with justifying some kind of ur-history, that if he can find a noble white person in a jungle of savages, so too must be the rest of the world. So too must Jesus Christ, the son of God, be a fair-skinned Caucasian. If race is just geographically phenotypical, and not a signifier of moral purity, myths of racial superiority lose much of their credibility.

Marsh brings with him many Western commodities, the most glaring of which is a 370-pound trunk filled with gifts for the Cuna people. Inside, it contains civilizing and modernizing equipment, something sacred that they accept excitedly. Along his warpath, Marsh gives grateful Cuna men "presents such as guns, knives, and pants and hat," and women "cloth for clothing."[367] While the men were given implements to mimic the white man, women continued to be relegated to the role of traditional alterity. They must fashion the foreign cloth into native attire.

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[366] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 152.
[367] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 154.

The truth about the traditional molas, the "international signifier of Cuna identity," is that the materials to manufacture them "all come via traders from the outside," thus dating "traditional" garb to no earlier than the mid-nineteenth century.[368] A late seventeenth-century record informs us that women wore very simple garments called clouts, but sometimes Spaniards would trade them old clothes that were held in high regard by locals.[369] We see here a story as old as time: the myth of traditionalism. What is defended as native, natural, *ab original*, is done so to maintain our sense of what is "right." It is deontological – Eliade's apodictic truth by which one's world is sanctified. The interiority that Cuna women represent is constructed – but of course it is; the boundary of inside and outside always is.

Another great detail in Marsh's quest is how he exclaims the superiority of Cuna Indians in contrast to what he calls, "… the mongrel negroes who were pressing in on them from all sides."[370] He depicts the Cuna as independent (interior) and resistant to, in his words, "'the replacement of the attractive free Indians by a degenerate population of negro semi-slaves.'"[371] We see here another myth, this time a capitalist one, that portrays those accepting of the colonial expansionist project as well-to-do and hard-working in contrast to savages to be "repressed and canalized by the civilizing process."[372] Marsh's word choice is telling when he describes black people as "pressing in on them from all sides" – he is projecting his anxious fantasy of white replacement, and in universalizing the "problem" of immigration, he finds justification. It's ironic to

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[368] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 154.
[369] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 155.
[370] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 155.
[371] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 156.
[372] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 156.

see an American colonizer, *particularly* an American, engage in such behavior. He must assert his own nativeness to justify such anxieties despite the factual contradiction of such an assertion.

Marsh's journey through the Darién is especially fascinating because, despite the virgin wilderness he portrays, he is constantly in the shadow of past occupation. He follows a map created by U.S. Marines in 1871 which "proves to be extremely inaccurate," he is encouraged to pursue white Indians through reports by the United Food Company and the Sinclair Oil Company, and his base camp is a product of a German World War radio station-turned secret submarine base-turned U.S. army radio station.[373] The "wild mountain-Cuna Indians" he initially makes contact with speak perfect English![374] It seems Marsh is engaging in a sort of cognitive dissonance, as his perception of the "native" Cuna remains unsullied. They are symbolic of a sacred order; Taussig points out, "the black is cast as historical jetsam, matter out of place, the irrationality of history, while the Indian roots an order, an order of nature – as against history: matter in place."[375] We see here a culmination of each of these chapters: historical myth, the demonization of outgroups, matter out of place, transgressed borders, and so on.

It's even more shocking that Marsh begins his adventure with a bizarre hallucination as he comes upon Yavisa, the first settlement of his first expedition. He describes the "negro settlement" of "'some fifty ramshackle bamboo huts beside the

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[373] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 157.
[374] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 158.
[375] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 159.

stream – black babies everywhere, flies, mangy dogs, garbage, rubbish, and mud.'"[376] The subtext of uncleanliness and thus impurity, which I have expounded on numerous times, is easy to see. The village's occupants "struck him as superstitiously afraid of the Indians of the interior whom, they said would kill any negro who ventured above the Membrillo tributary," to which Marsh calls them "'degenerate blacks, less civilized than when they came from Africa.'"[377] Again, we are struck by the crystal-clear irony of his racism. He impunes these people who enforce their racial superstitions, but at the same time applauds the Cuna drive to do so *and* is motivated by personal anxiety over immigration into America! To make matters even more compelling, in dramatic juxtaposition, Marsh has his vision:

> 'Across the narrow clearing were walking three young girls, perhaps
> fourteen to sixteen years old. They wore nothing but small loin-cloths.
> And their almost bare bodies were as white as any Scandinavian's. Their
> long hair, falling loosely over their shoulders, was bright gold! Quickly
> and gracefully they crossed the open space and disappeared into the
> jungle. I turned to the negro headman in amazement. *White Indians*!'[378]

This epiphany spurs Marsh. His suspicions of the presence of White Indians are validated, and it's important to also note that these White Indians are young, undressed girls. I do not doubt that Marsh found them to be sexually desirable; Taussig calls this an "eroticization of the whiteness of Indians," and refers to numerous other times that

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[376] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 160.
[377] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 160.
[378] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 160.

Marsh repeats this sort of vision.[379] When his research yields no real results, his text "nevertheless provides hallucinatory encounters with 'ordinary' Cuna women, albeit 'light-skinned.'"[380] The strangeness of these visions tells us a great deal about his fixation and conquest.

After convincing the Cuna people of their imminent extinction or enslavement if they did not capitulate to "'train themselves to meet the white man's civilization on its own ground,'" local chiefs became "more than willing to send delegates with Marsh to seek aid in Washington, D.C." and thus sought out "white" specimens among them.[381] He was given full permission to "'wander around the village,'" collecting data and taking photographs that otherwise had been prohibited to outsiders, thus transforming themselves into what Taussig calls "ethnographic curios."[382] As Marsh wanders into the interior valley of the Darién, an unmapped, supposedly untouched place (but of course, native people live here, and it is hardly miles away from the nearest White civilization), he adopts the aforementioned Cuna desire to retain tight interiority in the land through his desire to defend his (might I add, hallucinated *and* fantasy) "'little friends, the Indian girls with the Swedish complexions.'"[383] The threat of the encroaching black man threatens what has become "his" valley!

> 'I had ceased to care if Akron got its rubber or not. I didn't want this
>
> lovely wild valley to be overrun by thousands of degenerate Jamaica
>
> negroes like those who worked on the Panama Canal. I didn't want its

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[379] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 162-163.
[380] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 164.
[381] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 166.
[382] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 167.
[383] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 173.

harmless and attractive Indians oppressed and exterminated. It was "my"

valley.'[384]

This dramatic tale comes to its bizarre conclusion with a Cuna uprising against what

Marsh perceived as the "'negroes' of the Panamanian government."[385] This is not the

first time Marsh had a brush with such politics; in 1910 he "tried to manipulate

Washington and the Panamanian Congress, threatening military occupation and

annexation if the mulatto Carlos Mendoza was elected president instead of a white

man."[386] He claims he "'led'" this uprising, comprised of two attacks, and had a "large

part in planning," resulting in the murder of twenty-two Panamanian soldiers at a

garrison. Marsh tells his audience that for these battles he was in "'Indian dress,'" a

seemingly ubiquitous detail that Taussig tells us should not fly under our radar. He

writes,

> What is this 'Indian dress' he is dressed in? … They are wearing
>
> Western-style long pants, white shirts, ties, and felt hats – the standard
>
> attire then and now for a well-dressed Cuna man. … Was this get-up in
>
> European trousers and shirt (perhaps with tie) Mr. Marsh's disguise,
>
> crouching in his war canoe mimicking an Indian mimicking a white
>
> man?[387]

Reference, again, the photo of a Cuna man and woman.[388] The juxtaposition is striking.

We can see in complete visuality the contrast between the exterior-facing men and the

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[384] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 173.
[385] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 175.
[386] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 151.
[387] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 187.
[388] Refer back to page 110 if needed.

interiorized women. Is this what Marsh is referring to? The only alternative, Taussig

argues, is, "perhaps [Marsh] dressed in drag, not mimicking the men but the women –

the overwhelmingly dominant referent of 'Indian dress' instead? We shall never know.

All we know is that finally … mimesis and alterity melted into each other … *For now he*

was a white Indian himself!"[389] Marsh's metamorphosis is complete. He became what he

hunted for. In his callous hunt for visuality, just as Lim described, he produced an

ethnographic work on himself. We also have an example, I think, that is the inverse of

our example of the zār boré Nuba woman and the Hauka. We first present subaltern

possession, and now, I argue, colonial possession, finding that perhaps they are the

same yet opposite. The possessed become possessed by themselves, thus rendering the

Other into the Self.

Taussig's point in his work is to express history as a system of mimetics and

alterity – man's impulse to both mime what is deemed alike and repel what is deemed

unalike. His particular history claims that our cultural exchanges throughout history are

driven by this dialectical weave. I'm reminded of the *Nebenmensch* from Chapter Two

and Freud's function of judgment; all judgment can be reduced to either expulsion

(*Ausstoßung*) or affirmation (*Bejahung*). Where, as Lacan says, language and symbolic

processes "dominate all," we see commonality with Foucault's definition of power as a

pervasive hegemonic dialogue.

Taussig seems to implicitly accept these equivocations, as in the same vein as

Foucault's "negative instance of repression," he asserts,

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[389] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 175.

> … civilization does more than repress mimesis, understood either as imitation or as sensuousness. On the contrary, civilization sniffs out the enemy… racism is the parade ground where the civilized rehearse this love-hate relation with their repressed sensuousity, with the nose of the Jew, their 'instinct' for avarice, the blackness of the negro, their alleged sexuality, and so forth. There is furthermore a strange mapping of what is defined as sensuous excess whereby the 'minorities' spill out, escape the grid of the normative, and therefore conceptually itself. As sheer substance, matter out of place becomes matter with a vengeance, sensuousity shredding the very notion of conceptuality.[390]

Our definition of civilization thus appears to be an internalized community, one with borders (citizens and aliens, ingroups and outgroups) and concerned not *just* with repression. This shredded notion of conceptuality returns us to the disturbing hybridity from Chapter One; depictions of Otherness that, to reiterate Cohen, "always rises from the dissection table as its secrets are about to be revealed and vanishes into the night."[391] This love-hate relationship is repeated too, as we see female demons like Lamaštu depicted naked and sexual but her sexuality is weaponized, like a Siren. Lilith, too, is a succubus and goddess of fertility. The black *nia* of the Cuna does the same, as both are sexually provocative yet threatening as a result. What escapes our "natural" border is what makes them disturbing, uncanny, and threatening.

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[390] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, 67.
[391] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 4.

Becoming Like *You*

In *Of Mimicry and Membership: Africans and the "New World Society,"* James G. Ferguson confronts anthropologists with an uncomfortable letter, written by two Guinean children found dead in the landing gear of a plane headed to Brussels. In it, they humbly beg Europeans for help "to become like you."[392] Ferguson points out, especially in a post-colonial era, "What does one do with the cultural other who wants to become like you?"[393] The challenge posed to anti-imperialist anthropologists is that these pleas appeal to the racist colonizer's sense of superiority and inferiority. Indeed, the Cuna *agree* with Marsh in his racism and capitulate to his requests in exchange for a brush with modernity. Ferguson argues that this instance provides yet another counterclaim to past analyses of the Hauka: what may have appeared to be "an illustration of the defiance and autonomy that may be present even in the very act of imitation" struggles to hold up when we encounter instances of "produced desire," to quote Foucault yet again.[394] It is here that Ferguson echoes a claim that Lim also made: the film *Les Maîtres Fous* was banned "because it was regarded by Africans as racist."[395] To be clear, Ferguson and Lim are not arguing that mimicry doesn't "involve themes of parody, appropriation, and resistance," but rather, "we risk misreading (as magical appropriations and resistances by a localized "African" cultural system) practices that are better understood in the context of the politics of membership in the 'world

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[392] James G. Ferguson, "Of Mimicry and Membership: Africans and the 'New World Society,'" *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 17, no. 4 (2002): 552.
[393] Ferguson, "Of Mimicry and Membership," 553.
[394] Ferguson, "Of Mimicry and Membership," 554.
[395] Ferguson, "Of Mimicry and Membership," 557.

society.'"[396] The Giriama bolster this claim as well, representing people who quite literally become dis-eased from a hegemonic paradigm. How are we to proceed, having demonstrated the very physical and pervasive power that colonialism continues to have? It reverberates and stays in the hearts and souls of the people affected, generations after. These are the scars of colonialism and globalization, and as Ferguson reminds us, they make *us* deeply uncomfortable (and of course, they should).

If it hasn't been made clear yet, the problem demonstrated in all of these instances is the creation and instillation of Otherness. This point is best described in *Don't Cry For Me Africa*, where John F. E. Ohiorhenuan writes how "Africa's 'specialness' reflects a deeply ingrained paternalism."[397] Ohiorhenuan points to a long history of neoliberal policymaking made for Africa and not *by* Africans. He describes the "global intellectual hegemony," in which "Africa is caught in a paradigm trap."[398] As such, "the leadership of a group that is maintained not so much through coercion, but via a culture that projects the values and symbols of the leading group as universal, as mere 'common sense.'"[399] This perspective is instrumental to this analysis. Ohiorhenuan describes a kind of cultural imperialism, where modern and Western neoliberal philosophy becomes the standard "mode" of political organization. In being treated as children, this paradigm represents Africans as an "Other," something that deviates from what is "correct" and that requires correction. *They do not belong*. How can

[396] Ferguson, "Of Mimicry and Membership," 557-558.
[397] John Ohiorhenuan, "Don't Cry for Me Africa,"*Transition*, no. 102 (2010): 148.
[398] Ohiorhenuan, "Don't Cry for Me Africa," 150.
[399] Ohiorhenuan, "Don't Cry for Me Africa," 150.

a phenotypical, geographical, and cultural member of what *the Other perceives to be the Other*, much like the possessed Giriama, possibly exist?

Randall Beckloff thus returns into view; they specifically describe a "process of domination attempted to recreate the continent into a European likeness" that "stems from Western ethnocentrism that defines the African as an inferior other who needs to be remade into a Western image."[400] The Cuna men dressed as Westerners should ring a bell. Beckloff cites another author, Mahia Maurial, who explains how "'…modern minds consecrate a reductionism that assumes Western information as the only one valid form of knowledge, while simultaneously denying Indigenous ways.'"[401] This sort of logic can be reduced to fit neatly into Lacan's *das Ding*, wherein Western thought constructs itself as *Bejahung's* root of rediscovery.

This brings to mind a brief essay's analysis from *It Came From The Closet* called "A Demon-Girl's Guide to Life." S. Trimble examines William Friedkin's film *The Exorcist* (1973) from a queer lens, and the following passage feels far too poignant to paraphrase:

> … what Barbara Creed refers to as the 'monstrous feminine,' a cluster of representations of women in horror that are projections of masculine anxieties. The vampire, the witch, the breeding alien, the aging psychopath– they bleed and bite and ooze and shape-shift, queering the categories that preserve the patriarchal order of things. Regan MacNeil is one of them: the possessed girl who collapses the boundary between self

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[400] Beckloff, "Local Agricultural Knowledge," 3-4.
[401] Beckloff, "Local Agricultural Knowledge, 3-4.

and other and, like Eve before her, admits the devil into the world of men. Horror plays with white patriarchal nightmares and taps our ambivalence about normality, which means the potential for radical storytelling is always there. We watch, awestruck, as the world we recognize comes apart at the seams."[402]

The Exorcist carries almost every theme that this thesis has sought to explain: the demon Pazuzu[403] that afflicts Regan is picked up by a white male anthropologist in a desert in a foreign desert-land (Iraq), and it causes Reagan to contort her body, speak in a deep voice, swear, vomit, masturbate with a crucifix, and so on. In tapping into the patriarchal nightmare, so to speak, the "hero" of our story inevitably is men in robes and lab coats who will put her straight. I particularly appreciated Trimble's quotation of Stephen King, who argued, "The film addressed 'all those parents who felt, in a kind of agony and terror, that they were losing their children and could not understand why or how it was happening.'"[404] Reagan's revolt and defiance frightened her parents and traditional institutions, and Trimble's point, ultimately, was that she felt a particular connection to Reagan. She calls this "reparative reading," which is a concept pulled from queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: "a way of naming how marginalized audiences creatively engage with stories that aren't meant to sustain us."[405]

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[402] S. Trimble, "A Demon-Girl's Guide to Life," in *It Came From the Closet: Queer Reflections on Horror*, ed. Joe Vallese (Feminist Press, 2022), 12-13.

[403] I find it important to note that Pazuzu is often depicted with animal and human parts, reiterating Rita Lucarelli's claims from Chapter One.

[404] Trimble, "A Demon-Girl's Guide," 16.

[405] Trimble, "A Demon-Girl's Guide," 19.

This conclusion is not unlike similar conclusions in the field of possession and exorcism. In *Psychosocial Interpretations of Exorcism*, Arthur Lehmann concludes by suggesting,

> the eruption of demonology is coincident with social situations where there is an oppressive social structure, a loss of trust in the efficacy of social institutions, and a seeming inability to cope with the evils of the social structure. In this situation, then, we see the personification of social evil in evil demons, and a displaced social protest in the form of accusations of witchcraft and personal experiences of possession. Being possessed of social evil is personified, while the accused, accuser, and exorcist act out the symbolization of the social dilemma in safely displaced form, since active social protest and reform seem impossible.[406]

This represents a vital position in this thesis: possession is not a mystical religious process unique to an Orientalist perception of Africans. It is perhaps easy to see in Africa, because they may not "belong" even in their own self and community. Makris demonstrates this quite well with his epilogue, where he describes attending a sort of ṭumbura reunion-ceremony lacking the previously spiritual experience of affirming self-identity. The discourse of Sūdānī identity remained prevalent, but what he recorded earlier in his book was replaced by a "coming together of old-timers whom life had led on different walks," who were "so deeply sedimented in their bodies, so thoroughly

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[406] Lehmann, "Psychosocial Interpretations of Exorcism," 250.

enmeshed in their separate everyday experiences that they had no need to make them visible, to make them an object of contemplation."[407]

Possession exists everywhere else in the world, in many forms and historical contexts. Reconciliation with the Other, whether it is achieved through conquest, extermination, or assimilation, is prevalent everywhere we look. *This* is the human experience, one of limited perspectives, dehumanization, and incomprehension. We find an ally in our friend Lacan, who, upon viewing *Les Maîtres Vous*, did not respond as the other anthropologists did. Rather than seek to pluck the film from his eyes, Rouch himself notes, "Only Dr. Jacques Lacan remains composed: these people in *Les Maîtres Fous*, he opined, were very, very normal."[408]

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[407] Makris, *Changing Masters,* 379-380.
[408] Lim, "Of Mimicry and White Man," 46.

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