CHAPTER TWO

THE BUFFI REPRESENTATION OF THE WORLD OF JINN

Generally speaking, three elements constitute the practice of jinn eviction: the belief that determines the moral or ritual condition of the healer; the rite, that is, what is actually done at the shrine; and the instruments used in the ritual like formulas, talismans, and *henna*. Before describing actual rites for jinn eviction at Ben Yeffu and instruments healers use to evict jinns, let us consider first the Buffis’ representation of the jinn world because their practice of jinn eviction is determined by their magico-religious worldview.

A. *Jinn Attributes*

The Buffis seem to hold semi-institutionalized beliefs about *jnun*. They have consistent definitions of their nature and doings. Some of these definitions are grounded in institutional Islam and others are grounded in popular magic. In all the cases I have observed, the Buffis’ beliefs play a practical role in providing a means of ordering and coordinating the healing practice at the shrine. These beliefs are a set of symbols corresponding to abstract ideas that it would be too complex for them to express directly. Moreover, these beliefs underlie the attachment of the Buffis to their particular symbols of power.

The Buffis think that jinns are fiendish and dangerous creatures. They are afraid to address them with the names *jenn* (sing.) or *jnun* (pl.). For them, calling jinns by such names is a means to invoke them. They attempt to avoid using proper names, especially after *al-’asar* prayer when these are thought to leave their subterranean abodes. They think that they may retaliate with brutal revenge. According to Westermarck, Moroccans use euphemistic words like *mluk* (the owners/masters), *sadatna* (our lords), *jwad* (the bountiful/generous), *mselmin* (Moslems), *mwalin al-ard* (the masters of the ground), *ryah* (the winds) to refer to them for fear not to be harmed. In the Buffi maraboutic context, both healers and clients use such expressions to refer to them. They may also use expressions like *sukkan al-ammar* (occupying dwellers), *mwalin nuba* (masters of the turn), *llima kay dakrush* (those without names) to shirk the impending danger of calling them by their proper name, *jnun*. 
In particular, the most popular names used in the Buffi maraboutic context are mluk and mselmin. The word mluk is the plural of the word melk. It is derived from the Arabic words mālik (owner)/malik (king) and the verb malaka in the sense of “possess.” Another word derived from the same root is mlak (property) used by fiqhists and clients to refer to human sperm. “Mlak” are those pieces of fabric women use to clean themselves after sexual intercourses. Cloths stained with sperm are considered key-magical instruments used in charming men towards women. Generally, the word melk has the sense of owner/master. The melk is the master of the corpse it haunts. The shurfa prefer to use the word to connote that they dominate the masters. Thus, they say that they deserve the submission of the ʿamma (commoners) who are threatened by the danger of possession without exception. In the Buffi social context, the shrif is thought to be fortified by the baraka of his forefather though paradoxically enough most healers, I have observed, have suffered from melk possession. Also, Buffi families do have at least a son or daughter who is mentally sick. The explanations some healers give to this are that jinns who cannot attack the healer take revenge upon members of his family. Still, this seems to be contradictory because the family members are also shurfa and supposedly should be immunized (see my analysis below).

The word “mselmin” [Moslems] may be traced together with its cognate “msellmin” to a common ancestral verbal form “salima” meaning “to remain healthy; escape safely.” Another word related by derivation is “taslim,” “to preserve from evil; to surrender, submit.” Also, another word related by derivation is “Islam,” “to attain to safety; submit or resign one’s self to the will of God.” Thus, mselmin and msellmin (surrendering) refer to someone who surrenders to a power superior to oneself. The mselmin “submit to the power of God” and the msellmin are those “people who surrender to the power of saints.” When a maraboutic client presents himself in front of the saint, for instance, he says: “ana ʿaleb tslim” (I ask to surrender!). From where does this meaning stem? As I have mentioned before, the history of the word “msellmin,” according to Halim, comes from the ritual of “royal donation” (inʿam) practiced by the Sultan towards saints. The donations saints used to receive included land and tenant farmers called ʿazzaba. These were to be owned by the shrif. The term used was msellmin, that is, handed by the Sultan to the shrif. The royal decree stated that the shrif who was given the ʿzib would exploit the land, its occupants and the harvest (see Halim, 2000, p. 137). The word “msellmin,” therefore, is loaded with a