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Sharon R. Sherman, Mikel J. Koven

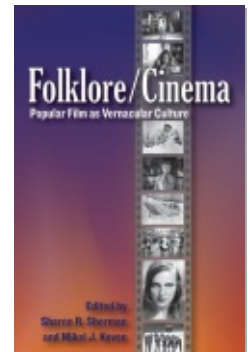
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## From Jinn to Genies

*Intertextuality, Media, and the Making of Global Folklore*

MARK ALLEN PETERSON

There is scarcely a tale in the whole of the *Nights* which does not have its precursors, derivatives or analogous versions. Tales evolve into other tales and they replicate, elaborate, invert, abridge, link and comment on their own structure in an endless play of transformation—but was there ever the first version of any story? It is almost always impossible to tell when a story was first told and when it was first written down, or how it was transmitted, and impossible too to say what the last telling and final version of a story will be. Good stories pay little attention to cultural or linguistic frontiers. (Irwin 1994, 64–65)

### Introduction: Global Folklore

THE TRANSNATIONAL CIRCULATION of people and media that helps define both contemporary and colonial globalization makes it possible for us to speak of global folklore. This chapter explores the emergence of global folklore by focusing on the transformation of the figure of the *jinn* as it moves intertextually from Arab folklore through the transcultural *Arabian Nights* collections into Euro-American film and television, and back into Middle Eastern media and oral performance in transmogrified forms. *Genie* in this essay refers to the Orientalist construct of powerful, wish-granting beings trapped in objects, while *jinn* alludes to the free-willed, invisible beings of Middle Eastern and Islamic lore. My argument is that in the process of traversing time and space through repeated entextualizations, the free-willed, potentially dangerous jinn of Arab folklore have become the enslaved gift-giving genies of global folklore. Like the vampire and the cyborg (Latham 2002), the genie is a mythic figure whose relevance is tied to the emergence and spread of consumer society. As a magical figure that can circumvent hard work, inheritance, successful investment, and other traditional modes of attaining the wealth necessary to fulfill the limitless desires associated with capitalism, the genie

is an important character in modern fantasy. With the increasing (but never completed) replacement of local economic systems of production and reciprocity with common global economic structures—wage labor, income taxation, international trade—the genie came to the Middle East and moved in, coexisting with the jinn, and frequently emerging in hybrid forms—forms which reflect local ambivalences about globalization and consumption.

For several decades, the “performative” approach in folklore has turned away from the classic study of the motifs and structures of folktales to emphasize the situations in which tellers produce folk narratives. Oral performance emphasizes the ways narrative structures and performance conventions are modified to meet the specific exigencies of situated tale-telling. The fixed and commodified nature of films should not cause us to lose sight of the emergent characteristics of tale-telling. As with any oral folktale, a film expresses the social relations, broadly conceived, of the time it was constructed. Like the tale-teller in the Egyptian coffeehouse, the writers, producers, and directors of a film create their story with a particular audience in mind. At the same time, the elements that are rewoven into text after text take on a certain life of their own; the collective body of representations of a particular figure—such as genies—become an intertextual web whose uses change over time but always in patterned ways. The rise of global folklore is thus made possible by the capacity of the global-culture industries to appropriate local images, transform them, and circulate them across ever-wider routes of distribution. But it also depends on the capacity of local culture industries to imitate and transform media to suit local audiences (Peterson 2003). Finally, it also relies on the capacity of people to appropriate materials from the media and integrate them into their oral performances (Peterson 2005b).

### The People of Fire and Air

In Islamic cosmology, the universe is structurally divided into a seen and an unseen world. In the unseen world, angels, devils, and other beings respond to God according to their moral nature. In the seen world, human beings do the same, being divided (individually) into those who accept God and his messengers and those who do not. Jinn occupy a special, liminal status; they are of the earth, yet unseen on it.<sup>1</sup> They can see and hear the unseen angels, but they can also see the human world. Unlike angels, but like humans, their choice to follow or not follow God is partly a matter of will, not inherent in their nature (Martin 1982; Izutsu 1987).



The comedy *Sirr Taqiyyat al-'Ikhfa'* (Mystery of the Vanishing Cap, Niyazi Mustafa, 1959) features a Hollywood-style genie whose antics cause problems for a young reporter and a little boy. (Photo from the collection of Muhammed Bakr.)

Although belief in jinn predates Islam, their inclusion in revelation makes them an article of faith for most Muslims. The Qur'an tells us that while angels were made of light, and humans of clay, jinn were made of "the fire of hot wind" (15:27) or "smokeless fire" (55:15). Actually, the Qur'an notes that Jann, who most commentators take to be the father of the jinn as Adam is the father of humans, is made from smokeless fire. This opens the possibility that jinn may not necessarily be made of fire, just as Adam's descendants are not made of clay but clots of blood. Although humans cannot see jinn, the jinn can see them (7:27). Jinn who possess great powers are called *'afārit* (singular, *'afrit*). Unlike angels, who "do not rebel in what God has commanded them and do whatever they are commanded" (66:6), the jinn have free will, and among them are both those who have submitted to God and those who are evil (72:11–15). Like humans, jinn are mortal, and righteous jinn will enjoy paradise, while evil ones will suffer hell (41:24, 72:15). An evil jinn who seeks to tempt mortals into unrighteousness is called a *shaytān* (plural, *shayāṭīn*); and, of course, a shaytan has links with the Western tradition of Satan.

Middle Eastern folk cosmologies offer more complex versions of the interactions between the seen and unseen forces that coexist within the material world (El-Aswad 2002). Many supernatural creatures in

folktales do not appear in the Qur'an. Padwick (1924) points out that the *ghūl* and the *mārid*, as well as *shayātīn*, *jinn*, and *'afārit*, are often used interchangeably in folktales and everyday discourse. *'Afrīt* also frequently refers to a ghost—the Egyptian comic films *'Afrīt Samarāh* (Samarah's Ghost, 1959), and *'Afrīt am 'Abdu* (The Ghost of Abdu, 1953), are both about ghosts who return to complicate the lives of families.

In accordance with their liminal status, *jinn* dwell in ruined houses, abandoned or isolated wells, graveyards, crossroads, caves, and other places on the borderlands of everyday human social life.<sup>2</sup> When they haunt houses, they are especially associated with the bathroom; some people say a short prayer each time they cross its threshold (Ghannam 2002). *Jinn* can take many shapes, especially a serpent, scorpion, lion, wolf, or jackal, but they may also assume the guise of a particularly lovely or especially ugly man or woman. In folktales and films, animal characteristics often reveal a person's identity as a *jinn*. In the 2001 comedy *Ga 'ana al-Bayan at-Tali* (We Have Just Received the Following Report), reporters investigating a phony miracle worker flee when he shows them his (false) goat legs because they think he is a *jinn*; when they tell their tale to the first man they meet, he reveals his own goat's legs. Whatever form they take, *jinn* are most active at dusk, betwixt and between day and night.

The dangers of *jinn* are the subject of countless folktales and have made their way into local films at least since the 1930s. Although stories are told of good *jinn* rewarding virtuous humans who are suffering unfairly, most *jinn* lore concerns evil examples. Several health disorders are attributed to *jinn*, especially mental disorders (Hammad et al. 1999; Younis 2000). Because *jinn* are dangerous, various rituals and musical performances are employed to ward off or exorcise them (Doubleday 1999, 126), and amulets are sold to protect people from their evil intentions (McGregor 1997, 267). Sorcerers are also often said to employ *jinn*. The widespread *zār* cults of North Africa and the Sudan use music and dance to both invoke and exorcise *jinn*. Midwives are commonly associated with *jinn* and may be asked to help negotiate with them. But anyone may leave a gift at a place known to be haunted by a *jinn* and petition for the punishment of an enemy, good luck for an enterprise, or help winning someone's love (Gingrich 1995).

In the 1988 Egyptian film *Ta'wīzah* (Talisman), for example, a real estate developer hires a sorcerer to command a *jinn* to drive family members from the home they refuse to sell him. In accordance with lore, the *jinn* is usually invisible, and much of his haunting centers around the bathroom, where blood rains from the shower and the floor ripples under

people's feet. The film reflects the ambiguity of jinn in the battle between good and evil. Although he is a terrifying creature with red skin, goat's legs, and bull's horns, the jinn's evil actions are in fact compelled by a spell. The filmmakers dwell in detail on the drawing of magic circles, the knotting and tearing of cloth, and the uttering of spells which coerce the jinn. The prayers that save the family from the jinn's attacks do not seem to harm him so much as free him from his bonds. When the jinn is finally driven off by prayer, he turns on the sorcerer and real estate developer, tearing the skin from one and impaling the other on his horns. Middle Eastern films like *Ta'wizah* reflect regional understanding of jinn as free willed and dangerous occult beings.

### The Thousand-and-One Incarnations of One Thousand Nights and a Night

The transmogrification of such fearsome jinn into the gift-giving genies of Hollywood films begins in the colonial period with the appropriation by Western print capitalism of the most widely circulated collection of jinn tales, *'Alf Layla wa Layla* (One Thousand Nights and a Night). *'Alf Layla wa Layla* is an intertextual opus. Scholars have identified sources or parallels between stories in *'Alf Layla wa Layla* and Arab and Asian folktales, as well as ancient Near Eastern mythology, Indian folklore, traditions of the prophet Mohammed, and Ottoman literature.

In spite of its polyglot nature, the work has a number of themes that weave through all or most of the tales. Primary among these is the inability of men to control women (Malti-Douglas 1997; Najmabadi 2000a, 2000b) and, more generally, the inability of men to control their own lives and futures. Stylistically, *'Alf Layla wa Layla* is notable for its capacity suddenly to juxtapose diverse elements: the visible and the invisible, the small and the great, the mundane and the fantastic, life and death. Indeed, as Beaumont notes (1998, 127), all these juxtapositions are present in the very first lines of Shahrazad's first tale.

Jinn loom large in *'Alf Layla wa Layla* as agents for these themes. A jinn appears in the framing story—an encounter with a jinn and his human slave/wife convinces Shahriyar of the uncontrollability of women and hence drives his transformation into mass murderer. Shahrazad's first tale concerns a merchant whose life is ransomed from a jinn by three fantastic stories. Padwick (1924) points out that the jinn in *'Alf Layla wa Layla* represent a more urbanized class than those in North African and Arab folktales. There is a greater emphasis in *'Alf Layla wa Layla* on the magical powers of the jinn, who can build palaces overnight, produce



The film *Ta'wizat* (Talisman, Muhammad Shebl, 1988), while borrowing many elements from the American horror genre, offers a more traditional and terrifying jinn.

(Photo from the collection of Muhammed Bakr.)

jewels the like of which no one has ever seen, and transport people in the wink of an eye. These mighty jinn serve many functions. They are guardians of treasure; vengeful spirits; agents of justice or punishment; instruments of sorcery, wives, and kin; and, of course, slaves of rings and lamps. Above all, they are powerful narrative devices for explaining the sudden changes in fortune for which the text is famous. It is these urbane and almost cosmopolitan jinn, articulate and magically powerful, who move into the European imagination.

### *From 'Alf Layla wa Layla to The Arabian Nights*

European translators have continued to emulate the anonymous Arab authors and redactors, revising and interpolating stories as they write. The most influential, Galland's *Mille et une nuits* and Burton's *Thousand and One Nights*, are less translations than reconstructions. Galland

inserted into the text both the Sindbad cycle, taken from another Arabic manuscript, and several stories taken from a Syrian Christian living in Paris—including the most influential story of jinn in European literature, the tale of Aladdin and his marvelous lamp. Two of the tales that have become iconic of *The Arabian Nights* as a whole are thus not in fact part of any known medieval manuscript of *'Alf Layla wa Layla*. They reflect a good deal of Galland's own imagination (Larzul 2004) and have strong parallels with some European folktales (Coote 1880). They were subsequently translated into Arabic and incorporated from the nineteenth century on into the most popular versions of *'Alf Layla wa Layla*.<sup>3</sup>

In creating *The Arabian Nights*, the changing media industry has, over more than two centuries, expanded *'Alf Layla wa Layla* into a vast trove of tales and versions of tales expressed in every medium devised by human technology. From books to motion pictures to comics to tape cassettes, *The Arabian Nights* has become a centerpiece of global folklore. I have argued elsewhere that media industries are systems that appropriate cultural forms, reproduce them in transformed ways according to particular modes of production, and return them to public circulation in retextualized and remediated shapes (Peterson 2003). These systems are selective. Of all the jinn in *The Arabian Nights*, there are only two tales, representing key aspects of jinn, that have been routinely appropriated and transformed by Western media. The first is the dangerous jinn released from the bottle from the "Tale of the Fisherman and the Jinn," and the second is the slave of the lamp from the "Tale of Aladdin and the Marvelous Lamp." Of all the possible ideas about jinn, then, Western media culture came to focus on two: jinn are potentially powerful for either good or ill, and jinn are tied to objects.

The first theme is central to *'Alf Layla wa Layla*. In Western literature, though, the more general idea of the phenomenal world coexisting with an invisible world whose inhabitants can bring our best efforts to naught is subordinated to a particular focus on the choices made by the fisherman. In the tale, the fisherman releases a jinn who, furious that no one has freed him before now, threatens to kill his benefactor. The fisherman tricks the jinn back into the bottle so he can negotiate more favorable terms. The tale of the jinn in the bottle has gained its greatest popularity as a metaphor circulating in headlines and news stories. The metaphor of the dangerous jinn who, once let out of the bottle, may reward but may also destroy us, seems to be most commonly used today to describe the "nuclear genie" but can refer to all manner of other things as well, from the emerging hydrogen fuel industry (Pinkerton and Wicke 2004) to steel tariffs (*Wall Street Journal* 2003), gene therapy (McLean 2001), the



Internet (Walker 2003), political regimes (Negus 2002), and even technology itself (Lightman, Sarewitz, and Desser 2003).

This version of the jinn—free willed, powerful, and therefore potentially dangerous—has not passed readily into the movies. In my review of some eighty *Arabian Nights*-inspired movies, I have found the fisherman and the jinn sequence only once, in the 1940 classic *The Thief of Bagdad*—although it certainly has appeared in some animated shows for children. However, at least one fearsome jinn has made its way into Hollywood horror films via Wes Craven's *Wishmaster* series (*Wishmaster* [1997], *Wishmaster 2: Evil Never Dies* [1999], *Wishmaster 3: Beyond the Gates of Hell* [2001], and *Wishmaster 4: The Prophecy Fulfilled* [2002]). Although the filmmakers claim to have based their scripts on "ancient Persian mythology," theirs is no Arabian jinn like the one in *Ta'wīzah* but a Hollywood genie bound to grant wishes. Like a shayṭān, though, he twists people's wishes around to destroy them.

### Genies from the Dream Factory

*Arabian Nights* tales were being filmed as early as the turn of the twentieth century. In Hollywood—and in Western popular culture generally—master narratives quickly emerged in popular *Arabian Nights* representations of jinn. In the first, which I call the "brass bottle" narrative, some member of a modern society finds a jinn, plunging himself or herself into a multitude of problems. The second master narrative consists of the many versions of Aladdin, in which the eponymous hero defeats an evil wizard and wins the caliph's daughter with the aid of a jinn bound to a magic lamp. In each of these narratives, the Arabian jinn is transformed into the genie through bringing not just the powers but the agency of the jinn under control.

There are dozens of film versions of Aladdin with its enslaved jinn, beginning with a French silent in 1900. In the Galland, Burton, and other early versions, the story of Aladdin and the marvelous lamp is long and complex. It features three villains (the sorcerer, his brother, and the jealous *wazir*), and two jinn, the slave of the lamp and the slave of the ring. Filmmakers have streamlined and condensed these multiplicities. In the original tale, and its most faithful film versions, possession of the lamp allows Aladdin to accomplish virtually anything; the only limits are his imagination and his morality. The danger is that the lamp can be stolen, and the powerful jinn will then have to obey the new owner. Filmmakers were faced with the dilemma of producing dramatic tension in a situation where the jinn can solve any problem. In addition to the theft of the

lamp, then, filmmakers began to limit the jinn's powers—primarily by reducing the unlimited benefits of the lamp to a mere three wishes. This choice has the added advantage of introducing an additional narrative tension: the possibility that wishes will be squandered or misused.

The brass bottle narrative takes its name from a novel by F. Anstey, originally published in 1900. It was made into a successful play (1911) and filmed at least three times (1914, 1923, 1964). In the story, unsuccessful architect Horace Ventmire buys an ancient brass bottle at an auction in hopes of impressing the Orientalist father of his fiancée, who disapproves of their engagement. Breaking the seal of Solomon which is stoppering the bottle, Ventmire releases the jinn Fakrash al-Amash, who has been imprisoned for three thousand years.

Fakrash's eagerness to reward his benefactor seriously complicates the young man's life. The essence of the gag is the incapacity of a jinn to do anything for someone living in a "surveillance society" (Foucault [1977] 1995), where the origins of gold bars, suitcases of money, palaces (or housing developments), and so forth must be documented so the wealth can be taxed. Indeed, Ventmire's resistance to accepting assistance from the jinn because of the penalties he *may* suffer if his wealth is discovered by authorities is a very model of "the nexus between power relations and practices of the care of the self" at the heart of Foucault's arguments about surveillance and self-discipline (Vaz and Bruno 2003, 272). It contrasts dramatically with Aladdin, whose self-aggrandizement is part of his strategy to marry the caliph's daughter. This irony is compounded by the social and cultural incompetence of a jinn whose knowledge of the history of the world has a three-thousand-year gap in it.

The story offers a hybrid narrative of elements from the "Tale of the Fisherman and the Jinn" and "The Tale of Aladdin and the Marvelous Lamp." The crucial difference between the Aladdin stories and brass bottle ones lies in the power and agency of the jinn. In the Aladdin tales, the jinn is the slave of the lamp and must obey its owner and, especially in post-World War II versions, offers only three wishes. In the brass bottle narrative, the jinn is initially free willed and powerful but limited in its understanding or competence. The brass bottle theme is employed in a number of films and television shows, including *Where Do We Go From Here?* (1945), the Three Stooges' vehicle *Three Arabian Nuts* (1951), *The Wizard of Baghdad* (1960), *Wildest Dreams* (1990), *Bernard and the Genie* (1991), *The Genie from Down Under* (1996), *Kazaam* (1996), *The Incredible Genie* (1997), and *The Genie from Down Under 2* (1998). But its most influential transformation was almost certainly the Sidney Sheldon television

series *I Dream of Jeannie*, which ran from 1965 to 1970 and successfully merged the brass bottle and Aladdin themes.<sup>4</sup>

In *I Dream of Jeannie*, astronaut Tony Nelson (Larry Hagman) is stranded on a desert island after his spacecraft malfunctions. He discovers and opens a decorative bottle, releasing a two-thousand-year-old blonde female genie in a harem costume (Barbara Eden), who was trapped in the bottle long ago by the evil Blue Djinn. The genie, whom Nelson calls Jeannie, keeps the astronaut alive and healthy until rescue arrives. Nelson warns Jeannie that she can have no place in his world, but she stows away in his bag when he is rescued. Over the next five years, Jeannie greatly complicates Nelson's life in at least four ways. First, she is in love with him, so she jealously ruins all his relationships (they marry during the show's fourth season). Second, she was socialized into the world of *the Arabian Nights*, so she uses her powers inappropriately in the twentieth-century United States. Third, Nelson's work is highly secret, so he is under even greater surveillance than most people, including routine psychological evaluations. Finally, Jeannie's own world keeps impinging on Nelson's in the form of relatives, invisible dogs, and genies in training.

This last aspect of the program required the producers and writers gradually to evolve a cosmology. Initially Jeannie serves her master out of gratitude, but over time she becomes a "slave of the lamp" in the Aladdin style, such that she must serve whoever possesses the bottle—a useful plot device. Over the five years of the series' run, and in its 1985 and 1991 sequels, viewers learned that genies live in a separate plane centered in a transcendental Baghdad and that they can only dwell in the mortal world so long as they have a master. A crucial element in this cosmology is that it removes the last vestiges of Islam from the genie mythos. In *'Alf Layla wa Layla*, jinn routinely call on God, declare themselves believers, and look to divine revelation as the ground for moral action. Early *Arabian Nights* films often replicated this discourse as part of their characterizations of genies, but by the early 1970s, the genie had become entirely secularized. These transformations influenced almost every subsequent entry in the brass bottle genre, not only the movies already mentioned but also imitative television series such as the British *Pardon My Genie* (ITV 1972–73), the animated *Jeannie* (CBS 1973–75), and the unsuccessful ABC series *You Wish* (1997).

The Aladdin and brass bottle narratives also dovetail in the most successful of all *Arabian Nights* movies, Walt Disney's *Aladdin* (1992). In this world of minarets but no mosques, genies are *by their nature* bound to their lamps, and they must grant three wishes to whoever controls the

lamp. Their servitude is symbolized by the manacles they wear around their wrists. The rules that circumscribe genies are not only a limitation to create greater drama but become the key narrative device on which the plot turns when, at the climax, Aladdin plays on the villainous Jaffar's lust for power to trick him into wishing himself to become a genie—thus gaining unlimited power but losing his agency to do evil.

### Global Genies, Regional Jinn

Hollywood is not, of course, the whole of the world's film industry, but it is arguably the most influential. Regional film industries routinely imitate and appropriate elements from successful Hollywood films, inflect them for local tastes, and distribute them in regional markets. If the jinn made a circuitous route to Hollywood film via European literature, the transformed genie has in turn made its way to the Middle East via international circulation of Western media, as well as local productions. One of the first and certainly the most successful of these was the 1949 film *'Afrīta Hanem* (The Lady Genie), written and directed by Henri Barakat.

In *'Afrīta Hanem*, the penniless nightclub singer Asfour (Farid Al Atrache) is in love with the gold-digging dancer Aliaa (Lola Sedki). She is pursuing the foppish, Europeanized Mimi Bey (Abdel Salam Al Nabulsi), who can afford the three-thousand-pound dowry set by her father, who owns the nightclub where both Asfour and Aliaa work. The heartsick Asfour encounters a mysterious old man who tries to convince him that money does not buy happiness and that his poverty conceals a wisdom he cannot fathom. When Asfour resists this message, the old man sends him to a cave where he finds a magic lamp and releases the *'Afrīta Kharamana* (Samia Gamal), who can only be seen by him. She insists that he is her lost love, the shayṭān Asfarot, and that she is "a servant in his hand." This line is a direct quotation from *'Alf Layla wa Layla*; it is what the Slave of the Ring (who does not appear in any Hollywood version of the tale) says to Aladdin when he frees him from the Cave of Wonders.

In spite of their initial terror of her, Asfour and his friend Bo'o (Ismail Yasseen) begin to find the *jinnayah* useful. She transforms their home into a palace and allows them to live in luxury. Unlike most Hollywood genies, though, her agency is never fully subordinated. When Asfour attempts to use money she gave him as a dowry for Aliaa, Kharamana transforms the wad of cash into a deck of cards, and Aliaa's father throws Asfour out. With Kharamana's help, Asfour starts his own club. When he tries to hire a dancer, Kharamana summons (or conjures up) a human



Genie from an unidentified Egyptian film ca. 1950.

(Photo from the collection of Muhammed Bakr.)

doppelgänger of herself, a peppery young woman named Semsema, to fill the job. Asfour begins to fall in love with Semsema, but when his club prospers, Aliaa returns to woo him. When Kharamana attempts to show him that marrying Aliaa is a mistake, he sends the 'afrīta away. All the wealth wrought by her magic vanishes, and Aliaa deserts him. Asfour struggles to make his club a success without magic and win back the love of the jilted Semsema.

*'Afrīta Hanem* offers an instructive example of the way local film industries imitate and appropriate films in global circulation but transform them as they inflect them for local audiences. While the idea of the

jinnayah bride is an old theme in Arabic folklore, this film seems to have been more strongly influenced by the 1945 Aladdin film, *A Thousand and One Nights*, where Aladdin (Cornell Wilde) enters a spooky cave with his comic-relief sidekick, Abdullah (Phil Silvers), and releases a female genie named Babs (Evelyn Keyes). No one but Aladdin can see Babs, and her amorous crush on him leads her to interfere in his romance with the sultan's daughter. Some of the cave scenes in *'Afrīta Hanem* are near duplicates of the earlier U.S. film, and there is an interesting inversion of the doppelgänger theme where Babs duplicates not herself but Aladdin so that she and the princess can both have him as a lover.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, there are interesting regional differences. In the U.S. film, Babs is bound to obey the owner of the lamp and thus lacks any real menace. The Egyptian protagonists, however, are initially terrified of Kharamana, and they remain nervous about her throughout the film. Although she is an agent for good, the similarity between jinn and shayāṭīn is played up several times in the film. She is marked as physically different by great arching eyebrows (which also indicate when Samia Gamal is being Kharamana and when she is being Semsema). Islam forms a significant backdrop in the film, not only in the exclamations of the main characters ("Allah!") but in the ways they evaluate the morality of their actions. The old man—who in one scene carries a Muslim rosary—is clearly a divine messenger: an angel, or perhaps a saint. And the complex plot device of doubling Kharamana and Semsema allows the filmmakers to have their love triangle without actually marrying a human to a jinn, an act specifically forbidden by a *hadith*. In spite of these differences, this is clearly a film about a Hollywood-style genie who, freed from her lamp, must serve its possessor. Its success spawned a number of other films, including *Al-Fānūs as-Sahry* (The Magic Lantern, 1954), and *Sirr Taqiyyat al-'Ikhfa'* (Mystery of the Vanishing Cap, 1959).

As the genie entered the Middle Eastern social imagination, it became especially associated with consumer goods making their way into the market. Many new goods carried both high status and steep prices, and the genie was a powerful device for imagining what one would do with such goods if they were somehow within reach. Thus, Kharamana may prefer to put Asfour in a palace, clad in turban and robes, but she is perfectly adept at conjuring well-tailored business suits and late-model automobiles, the kinds of goods Asfour prefers.

Genies and jinn coexist in Middle Eastern media. Where genies appear primarily in comedies, jinn appear primarily in horror films and psychological dramas. In addition to *Ta'wīzahh*, already discussed,

examples of horror films include *'Anyāb* (Fangs, 1981). Clearly inspired by *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), and Britain's Hammer horror films, this movie is essentially about Western-style vampires, mildly indigenized by referring to the master vampire as an *'afrīt* or *shayṭān*. More imaginative are the psychological thrillers like *Al-'Ins wa al-Jinn* (Humans and Jinn, 1985), where a jinn falls in love with the human woman whose house he inhabits, or *Al-Mar'āh Alaty Ghalabat ash-Shayṭān* (1973), where an urbane *shayṭān* follows a woman about, commenting on her life and actions and seductively urging her to put her own needs and desires above those of her family.

Genies and jinn also coexist in children's media. Every issue of the children's magazine *Majid* features an illustration of a genie rising from a lamp and presenting a computer to a delighted Arab boy. The image marks a regular feature in the magazine describing Web sites, in English and Arabic, intended to be fun or educational for children. Elsewhere in its pages, the magazine may well illustrate a traditional folktale featuring a jinn.<sup>6</sup> Jinn and genies cohabit the pages of many other children's magazines as well, including *Bolbol*, *Al Arabi Alsaghir*, and *Alaa Eldin*. One regular feature of *Alaa Eldin* is a comic strip featuring the adventures of a contemporary Egyptian Aladdin—in blue jeans and a red button-down shirt—and his genie Morgan, who watches television and sometimes drives an enchanted Model T Ford. The connection between the genie and consumer commodities is a crucial theme.

### Speaking of Jinn

Global folklore cannot be considered folklore if it remains purely a product of international and local culture industries. But it does not. Once media texts are in circulation, people borrow from them, interpolating elements from popular media into their own oral performances (Peterson 2005b). If stories about genies become syncretic with local beliefs about jinn in Middle Eastern film, oral tales of jinn are also influenced by genies. This is well illustrated in a story recorded by Farha Ghannam:

One day in 1994, Amal, a five-year-old girl, sat on my lap to tell me a story. "Praise the Prophet. Once upon a time there was an old woman who used to live in an apartment that was as small as that table [Amal was pointing to a small table in the living room]. Each time the old woman swept the floor, she found either one pound or fifty piasters that she kept hidden in a place by the window. The old woman was saving to buy a larger apartment. But one day a thief stole all the money she had saved. She was very sad.

An 'afriit [demon or ghost] appeared and asked the old woman what she would like to have. She asked for a larger apartment. The 'afriit asked her, 'Would you like an apartment with a balcony?' She answered 'yes.' He asked her, 'Would you like a television set, a fan and a bottle of water?' [Amal was describing some of the things that were in front of us in the living room.] The old woman said yes. Then he asked her, 'And would you like some pictures of Samira Sa'id and Latifa?' [These are two popular female Moroccan and Tunisian singers whose posters are decorating the wall of the living room.] The woman again answered yes. The 'afriit brought all these things to the old woman. She was very happy and cried out with joy. That same day, however, she smelled the birshaam that was hidden behind the television set [this birshaam is a type of drug that is often believed to be produced and circulated by the United States and Israel; it is a pill that is taken orally and not sniffed as Amal implies]. This caused her heart to collapse [*gham ala albaha*], and the old woman died." (2002 43–44)

Amal's 'afriit has the agency of a jinn and the desire to reward the goodness of the believer. Like a genie, he is the provider of consumer goods. And like the genie, his incompetence in dealing with the complexities of global society makes his gifts unreliable. There is, literally, a "poison in the gift" of consumer goods (Douglas 1990). Amal's tale is therefore not one where the genie ultimately cures things through magic, or even by simply undoing his spell. As often occurs with jinn, their dealings with mortals are a matter of life and death.

## Conclusion

Every text is shaped by its immediate context of production and the historically produced political, social, and economic conditions circumscribing that context. Amal's tale is contextualized by her family's unsuccessful search for a larger apartment than the one-bedroom flat where they currently lived and into which her parents had been relocated by a government urban-renewal project. Her fantasies are shaped by the movies and soap operas she loves to watch but that "contradict the material realities of Amal's life and create desires that cannot be satisfied even through some magical means" (Ghannam 2002, 44). 'Afrita Hanem is shaped by postcolonial efforts to imagine an Arab modernity that helps mediate contradictions among nationalism, modernity, and Arabic classicism (Armbrust 1996). Disney's *Aladdin* is structured in part by America's changing attitudes toward Iran and Iraq in a post-cold war world (Nadel 1998).



At the same time, texts are comprised of elements drawn from a larger intertextual matrix. Through a series of choices made by text producers in different times and places, the lamp-bound jinn of Aladdin has come to stand, metonymically, for all jinn. As the genie, it has undergone a series of transformations as it is reproduced in different texts. Bereft of personal agency, set loose from its religious underpinnings, and tied to the notion of unlimited human desire that is at the heart of modern economic concepts about human nature, the genie has become an increasingly universal tool for exploring the contradictions between consumer desire and moral values, contradictions that are everywhere different and yet, in an increasingly globalized world, everywhere the same.

## Notes

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1. Jinn is both the singular and plural form, although *jinni* as singular occurs in some colloquial dialects.
2. Westermarck records that among Moroccans it is commonly believed that every place has its resident jinn (1930, 280).
3. In his essay on the translators of *The Arabian Nights*, Borges (2000) points out that what is interesting and important about all of them is the “displacements” between their texts and those that preceded them. While claims of fidelity to a putative original text are important to every translation, it is the infidelities that make each version interesting and successful. Moreover, Borges emphasizes, every translation is an adaptation to a context. A faithful translation would necessarily be a scholarly, philological work. Burton’s intention was to “interest nineteenth-century British gentlemen in thirteenth-century Arabian serialized stories” (Waisman 2003); Lane’s was to make them appropriate for those gentlemen’s wives and children to read; and so forth.
4. In several interviews, Sheldon has affirmed that the 1964 production of *The Brass Bottle* (in which Barbara Eden played Ventmire’s fiancée) was his inspiration for the television series.
5. For another account of this film and its relation to literary appropriations from *ʿAlf Layla wa Layla*, see Ouyang (2003).
6. *Majid*, published weekly since 1979 by Emirates Media, Inc., is probably the most popular children’s magazine in the Gulf region, with a total circulation of about 150,000 per month. For more on *Majid*, see Douglas and Fedwa Malti-Douglas (1994) and Peterson (2005a).

## Filmography

- '*Afrīt am 'Abdu* [*The ghost of Abdu*] (1953). Hussein Fawzy  
 '*Afrīt Mirātī* [*My demon wife*] (1968). 100 min. Faṭīn Abdel Wahāb  
 '*Afrīt Samārah* [*Samarah's ghost*] (1959). Hassan Redā  
 '*Afrīta Hanem* [*The lady genie*] (1949). 97 min. Henri Barakat  
*Aladdin* (1992). 90 min. Ron Clements and John Musker  
 '*Anyab* [*Fangs*] (1981). Muhammad Shebl  
*Bernard and the Genie* (1991). 70 min. Paul Weiland  
*The Brass Bottle* (1914). Sidney Morgan  
*The Brass Bottle* (1923). 60 min. Maurice Tourneur  
*The Brass Bottle* (1964). 87 min. Harry Keller  
*Al-Fānūs as-Sahry* [*The magic lantern*] (1954). Faṭīn Abdel Wahāb  
*Ga'ana al-Bayan at-Tali* [*We have just received the following report*] (2001). Sa'id Hamed  
*Genie from Down Under* (1996). ABC [Australia]/BBC  
*Genie from Down Under 2* (1998). ABC [Australia]/BBC  
*I Dream of Jeannie* (1965–1970). NBC  
*The Incredible Genie* (1997). 90 min. Alexander Cassini  
*Al-'Ins wa al-Jinn* [*Humans and jinn*] (1985). Muhammad Rāḍī  
*Jeannie* (1973–1974). CBS  
*Kazaam* (1996). 93 min. Paul Michael Glaser  
*Al-Mar'āh Alaty Ghalabat ash-Shayṭān* (1973). Yehya Al-Al'amy.  
*Pardon My Genie* (1972–1973). ITV  
*The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975). 100 min. Jim Sharman.  
*Sirr Taqiyyat al-'Ikhfa'* [*Mystery of the vanishing cap*] (1959). 96 min. Niyazi Mustafa  
*Ta'wīzah* [*Talisman*] (1988). Muhammad Shebl  
*The Thief of Bagdad* (1940). 106 min. Ludwig Berger, Michael Powell, and Tim Whelan  
*A Thousand and One Nights* (1945). 93 min. Alfred E. Green  
*Three Arabian Nuts* (1951). 16 min. Edward Bernds  
*Where Do We Go From Here?* (1945). 74 min. Gregory Ratoff  
*Wildest Dreams* (1990). Chuck Vincent  
*Wishmaster* (1997). 90 min. Robert Kurtzman  
*Wishmaster 2: Evil Never Dies* (1999). 96 min. Jack Sholder  
*Wishmaster 3: Beyond the Gates of Hell* (2001). 90 min. Chris Angel  
*Wishmaster 4: Prophecy Fulfilled* (2002). 90 min. Chris Angel  
*The Wizard of Bagdad* (1960). 92 min. George Sherman  
*You Wish* (1997–98). ABC

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