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## Without Bounds

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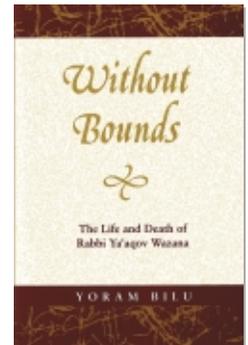
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## Casablanca



**W**azana was a local hero whose life was spent tucked out of sight in the remote periphery of Morocco, far away from the cities of the north and the coast. His home in the region of Tifnoute, where the tiny Jewish communities nestled within the Berber tribe villages, was one of the most extremely isolated, inaccessible parts of the country. Only once, during his youth, was this bucolic existence interrupted, when the lure of progress, and the promise of economic betterment under French occupation, drew Wazana to Casablanca (Dar el Beida).

His adventures in the big city with its industry, permissiveness, secularity, and “Frenchness,” form a marked contrast to his existence in Assarag, the tiny, traditional mountain village. Accounts of his stay in Casablanca make little reference to any healing activity. In Casablanca Wazana found himself among broad boulevards, sprawling street cafes, wealthy Jewish traders, beautiful women, and European-style palaces where the French officers quartered. In this liberal metropolis, with its cosmopolitan ambiance, Wazana’s expertise was most needed to deal with romantic cases: helping brokenhearted lovers win back their mistresses, reuniting lovers, restoring women who had eloped or been kidnapped to their families.

Eliyahu Tubul joined Wazana in Casablanca and was the only informant to observe him in action there. There was one incident which impressed Tubul (a young man at the time) in particular. Alternative secondhand accounts of the case were provided by other informants as well. The case concerned the wife of a senior French officer who abandoned her husband and fled home to her parents in Paris. Owing to her father’s position as a general, the incident caused considerable embarrassment

in government circles and placed the husband in an extremely awkward position. The officer unburdened himself to the son of a prosperous Jewish merchant and was advised to seek out Wazana. At the meeting, the officer was initially suspicious and even contemptuous of the village Jew in his white *jellaba* and red *tarboosh*. His tune changed when the mediator, in Wazana's name, promised unequivocally that "if he doesn't bring your wife back, you can have him beheaded." That night, Wazana and Eliyahu Tubul returned to the officer's house. Tubul, who could not rid himself of a sense of foreboding ("after all we were in Casablanca and the officer's wife was a world away—in France"), provided an extremely dramatic description of this meeting:

We sat down and the officer asked Rabbi Ya'aqov, "How many months will it take to bring her here?" The officer didn't understand about those things. He thought Wazana would bring his wife by ship, and that it would take three or four months. Even the airplanes, those flying chickens, take two or three days. Rabbi Ya'aqov asked him the time and the officer replied, "Ten minutes to ten." Rabbi Ya'aqov then said, "At precisely ten o'clock your wife will arrive." The officer went into the next room and came back with his gun. He thought Rabbi Ya'aqov was making fun of him. But Rabbi Ya'aqov stayed calm and told the officer, "prepare a meal for her." When the officer was busy making the meal, Rabbi Ya'aqov took out some paper and wrote something, then he lit a fire, and suddenly the woman appeared.

It is easy to imagine the officer's bewilderment at the appearance of his wife. He hastened to photograph Wazana while muttering to himself, "He is my savior, I believe in him and I will pray to him." He immediately rang his equally astonished father-in-law, who reported the events that evening in Paris: "My daughter was in the house, with all the windows and doors shut, nothing could come in. Suddenly she disappeared. How did she get out?"

The educated member of the Wazana family, Rabbi Shmuel Suissa, who had also lived in Casablanca for a time, gave the story a more romantic flavor. In his elegant turn of phrase, he described a pair of French lovers—a French general's daughter, and a twenty-year-old nobody—"In those days there was something known as *noblesse oblige*, in other words, a general's daughter could only marry a general's son." Enraged at his daughter's involvement in this second-rate match, the father banned the union and removed his daughter back to France, leaving her lover languishing in Casablanca, "The boy was so desperately in love he wanted to die." The youth asked Wazana to intervene, and he agreed to orchestrate a

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clandestine meeting between the two. Through the power of his magic the girl was indeed snatched to Casablanca, for one last, brief reunion with her lover: "He saw her, he kissed her, and she returned to Paris. Vanished!"

For a short time, Wazana enjoyed resounding success in Casablanca. By helping to resolve romantic problems he acquired a reputation and riches, but his activities also exposed him to dangers undreamed of in his protected mountain home. All descriptions of this period stress the great secrecy under which he operated. His stay in Casablanca seems to have been marked by movement from place to place, hiding with people who helped conceal his identity. According to Eliyahu Tubul, "Rabbi Ya'aqov used to hide and do everything in secret." On one occasion Eliyahu himself fell prey to sorcery (*skhur*), and was forced to beg the woman hiding Wazana at the time to let him meet his friend. The secrecy under which Wazana worked is evident from the consistent way that the stories of his activities in Casablanca end. The French officer story, for example, ends with the delighted husband announcing Wazana's role in the affair to his outraged father-in-law, who had arrived hot-foot from Paris in search of his daughter. The general responded by publicizing his son-in-law's photograph of Rabbi Ya'aqov throughout Morocco, promising a handsome reward for information leading to Rabbi Ya'aqov. Even though the ending does not contain an explicit threat, the general's action bears every sign of a campaign to seize a wanted criminal. It appears that Rabbi Ya'aqov did feel threatened since from then on he took great care to conceal his activities.

The negative reaction to Wazana's activities is very plainly presented in another ending of the same story. This time the husband publicizes the story and the police chief of Casablanca quickly orders Wazana's arrest and imprisonment. However, the powers used by Wazana to deliver distant lovers also allow him to escape from under lock and key. The next day, when the guards came to open the cell door, they found their commissar inside, and Wazana nowhere in sight. In yet other versions, Wazana's power enables him to assume different disguises, and even make himself invisible in order to dodge his pursuers.

Why was Wazana hounded so relentlessly by the authorities in Casablanca? Perhaps the answer lies in the laconic statement made by the police commissar on Rabbi Ya'aqov's capture: "This sorcerer has the power to turn this country upside down!" Wazana is seen as wielding the power to bring turmoil to the social order with his supernatural activities, and as such, he is a liability to the authorities. The anarchistic tenor of his activities, with their disregard for the constraints of reality, whether in terms of the laws of nature or of social proprieties, is a thorn in the side of the government. Furthermore, for the first time it appears that Wazana was inside a framework which did not unanimously take his powers for granted. In far off Tifnoute, spells were fatalistically regarded as a basic,

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incontrovertible aspect of reality. In Casablanca, the French had difficulty accepting their usage, either from the Christian viewpoint, which regarded them as the dark power of Satan, or by the upholders of enlightenment and progress, who thought sorcerers peddlers of superstition spawned by ignorance. For all of these reasons, sorcery had to be uprooted. What is more, Wazana's activities touched on tension spots between Jews and Arabs whose expressions were far more rancorous than anything ever encountered in Tifnoute. According to the informants, Jewish families whose daughters had been kidnapped by Muslims used to commission Wazana to find them. And his success in this area drew down such fury from the Arabs that several plots were hatched against him.

We can therefore deduce that Wazana's presence near the center of government, and his conflict with the authorities, represented a predicament for both parties. In the end he was banished from Casablanca, a ruling he seems to have accepted, making no effort to return. In retrospect, his stay in Casablanca represents a transient and anomalous episode in Wazana's life. From that time until his death, he remained in the Western High Atlas, his native landscape. Yitzhak Peḥima, Wazana's close companion at the end of his life, described the blend of possibilities and trouble the city symbolized: "Wazana could have gone to Casablanca or to Marrakech. He could have gone anywhere and made millions—millions! But he couldn't. They made it so he couldn't work there—he could only work in his own area." As we later see, this dilemma, which is essentially about proscription and crossing borderlines, encapsulates the essence of Wazana's experience as portrayed by the informants who knew him.