



# TO THE WITCHES AND GHOSTS AMONG US: CREATING SPACE FOR NON-HUMAN AGENTS WITHIN ACADEMIA

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Master's Thesis for Historical Sociology

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Great Pan is not dead;  
he simply emigrated  
to India.  
Here, the gods roam freely,  
disguised as snakes or monkeys;  
every tree is sacred  
and it is a sin  
to be rude to a book.  
It is a sin to shove a book aside  
with your foot,  
a sin to slam books down  
hard on a table,  
a sin to toss one carelessly  
across a room.  
You must learn how to turn the pages gently  
without disturbing Sarasvati,  
without offending the tree  
from whose wood the paper was made.

*A Different History by Sujata Bhatt*

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## Abstract

One glaring condition of the enlightenment and modernity is that human beings have been placed at the center of the world in majority of academic disciplines, a condition which the Social Sciences have not been spared from. Our laws do not make space for any other agent than the human, resulting in a worldview that is emptied out of magic and external change and within which the divine does not have an agentive role. The project aims to explore how we as scholars can be more accepting of and hospitable of multiple temporalities. Following the guidelines prescribed by grounded theory, I have conducted fifteen in depth interviews with Pakistanis who claim to have had a supernatural encounter of any sort. My analysis, which is divided into four categories pertaining to haunted houses, rural areas, an urban legend and curses, reveals that taking presence seriously aids rather than hampers sociological knowledge and understanding.

## Introduction

I would like to begin my work by talking about the French thinker August Comte, who is often regarded as the father of sociology. An intellectual personality whose ideas greatly influenced the 19th and 20th century, Comte founded the science of society and even created its name of "sociology." Moreover, Comte was also the creator of a new philosophical system called positivism, which proved of great importance not only in philosophy but also in other sciences in the 19th and in the 20th century, when it developed into neo-positivism. In the framework of sociological thinking, Comte's conception can be seen as the first, through the concept of "social dynamics", to give sociology its historical-sociological dimension<sup>1</sup>. Comte understood social dynamics as a theory of progress. First emerging in the period of the French Enlightenment, the theory of progress is based on the idea that human development has a rising character, which arose from a past that was undeveloped and primitive, to the present, which is higher and more advanced, and leads to a future that will achieve the highest maturity and prosperity. Comte, understanding historical development towards progress as an inevitable process, speaks about the "law of three stages". The criterion for distinguishing these three stages is for him the development of the human mind. According to the law of the three stages, human development is divided into three historical periods: the theological stage, the metaphysical stage and the positive stage. The first and longest period is called as the theological stage (from theology - the science of religion), which in turn is sub-divided into periods associated successively with magic, polytheism, and monotheism. The second period is the metaphysical stage. Historically, this era is the period of the development of science and religious reformation. The third – the

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<sup>1</sup> Subrt, Jiri, *The Perspective of Historical Sociology: The Individual as Homo-Sociologicus through Society and History*

positive stage - is associated with Comte's own contribution, with the emergence of positivist philosophy and sociology. Comte imagined the society of the future as an industrial society, based on industrial production, scientifically organized and managed. Comte and his contemporaries considered myth as substantiation of a prelogical mentality, and as representative of the childhood of humanity. They argued non-European civilizations lived and continue to live in a world of fantasy while European society alone became enlightened through reason and science.

I am aware that this theory has been heavily refuted and outlining all the counterarguments is beyond the scope of my research. What I do find interesting is that this despite this myopic distinction it does hold true in certain contexts. While I find it degrading that some societies are deemed to be at the starting line of history while others are considered progressive it is undeniable that certain parts of the world do place myths and entities that can be categorized as 'supernatural'. It is quite amusing to see that this sense of presence, as I shall allude to supernatural entities throughout this project, has resulted in baffling interactions as well as road blocks in western research. My favourite example to cite is an instance from Ranajit Guha's book titled 'Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India'. At one point two peasants, who have already been sentenced to death, are asked why they invoked a riot in their village. Previously, other peasants were questioned and the police (agents of the British Raj) were able to trace the revolt back to these two individuals. However, when these farmers are cross examined the only answer they are able to give is that Thakoor, or God, incited them to revolt. These men are already on death row, they have no motivation to lie or to protect themselves by remaining true to their allies. Yet they insist that their actions were motivated by Thakoor, who appeared to one of them in a dream<sup>2</sup>. Clearly, Thakoor can't be cross questioned the way these men have been and it is

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<sup>2</sup> Guha, Ranajit, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Duke University Press, 1999, 78

difficult to mitigate the power of his words because there is no obvious source that these policemen can control. While the long run saw the proliferation of western education in the subcontinent, and the simultaneous erasure of the likes of Thakoor from the public sphere the moment mentioned above was a triumph for Thakoor and his believers. It is these instances, in which agency is alluded to the supernatural, that I shall be studying in this thesis.

The aim behind my research was to explore the ways in which people discuss their interaction with supernatural entities. I wanted to see what was being said about these experiences and how respondents would relay this information. I wished to analyse why people attributed significance to these events and how these experiences shaped perceptions and influenced actions. I conducted fifteen oral interviews and analysed one existing account in order to find some answers to my questions. My motivation behind asking these questions was the fact that people act based on a variety of factors, and that solely analysing empirical reasons behind actions only revealed half the truth. In order to fully engage with people, it is important to take their beliefs seriously not just during the interviewing stage but also while analysing data. If Thakoor is being cited as the reason behind a riot, then a report on this event should give Thakoor full credit rather than resorting to 'deep religiosity' or psychological reasons as primary motivators. I believe that transcribing and relaying events as they are relayed to us denotes respect for the information received. I interviewed people from an urban setting in Pakistan, focusing on participants from the three big cities, namely Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad. I chose to focus on Pakistan because it is the country I come from and I believed I had an advantage while talking to people because I would know what questions to ask that would directly be relevant to me rather than taking time out to gain knowledge of local contexts. I urge the reader to understand that this does not imply that the only research possibilities for this topic exist in Pakistan. I merely chose Pakistan out of convenience and would like to stress upon how my research is aimed at understanding people

more than anything. I had to carry out these interviews online and requested if the participants cameras could be turned on during the recordings. While gauging their reactions and expressions was very helpful if I follow up with this research in the future, I would like the opportunity to have access to the sites of interaction between the respondents and supernatural entities. As Robert Orsi writes regarding his field visit to a deceased boy's family

*'Every aspect of that evening in the little boy's room— our physical closeness throughout, first in my friend's automobile, then on the sofa in the couple's home, and finally in the boy's room; the currents of conflicting and ambivalent moods, needs, disappointments, and expectations that were moving through us and that we were entering; the fluidity of the images in the frame and their intricate entanglements with the circles of significant others, real and imaginary, actual and desired, that each of us brought into the little boy's bedroom that night; the excess of devotional materiality in the room that had the effect of multiplying the faces that we were looking at and that were looking back at us; the couple's emotional warmth and mostly silent supportive presence and accompaniment; the smell of coffee in the kitchen later in the evening and the sound of the television throughout— contributed to my experience then and informs how I have thought about it since'<sup>3</sup>*

As discussed above, my research involved interviews, for which I specifically requested to meet and converse with people who claimed to have had some sort of supernatural encounter. I kept the definition of what constituted as supernatural fluid, since I did not want to debate the nature of the entity they had encountered. However, I specified that their stories need to have some sort of supernatural agent and excluded accounts that mentioned disappearances or strange sounds. I chose to conduct my fieldwork within an

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<sup>3</sup> Orsi, Robert A. *History and Presence*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018, 198



urban Pakistani setting and approached people who claimed to have been haunted by any presence that they deemed supernatural. Before conducting each interview, I would ask potential participants for a brief summary of the type of entity they encountered and selected those in which supernatural entities acted as agents and influenced decisions. Before beginning each interview, I informed each participant that I would publish these narratives for my master's thesis and asked them whether I had permission to do so. I let them know that they had the choice to terminate the interview at any stage they felt uncomfortable and that they had the option to be published under a pseudonym. Apart from these ethical considerations, my first chapter on methodology elaborates upon rigour in qualitative research as a duty of the researcher. I decided to do a grounded theory analysis of the data I had collected. Grounded theory was developed in the 1960s by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, who argued that findings in qualitative research would be richer if they were grounded in the data that was collected rather than trying to collect data in order to prove a pre-existing hypothesis. I have discussed what grounded theory entails and aims to achieve at length in my chapter on methodology. I chose grounded theory because the primary unit of analysis is the data collected and I thought this aligned well with my desire to truthfully listen to people. I also discuss the practice of coding in qualitative research. While the chapter goes into the details of how one should code, I shall discuss my results here so that the reader is aware of the content and structure of the latter chapters in this project.

Chapter four describes the data I collected while chapter five analyses it. After my conducting two coding cycles I decided to fit the data into four categories. The first concerns supernatural encounters in urban settings such as houses and educational institutes. Here my main focus was on the coexistence of certain supernatural entities with humans. I collected five accounts for this category. The second category was very intentionally constructed; I wanted to collect accounts about the Karsaz Churail (Karsaz Witch) an urban legend who is

rumoured to haunt the district of Karsaz in Pakistan's biggest city, Karachi. This section focuses on how a pre-existing myth can generate more stories and affect people's behaviour or thoughts when they're in this area. I collected three accounts regarding Karsaz and the myth surrounding it. The third category was is rural areas; although all the accounts collected are from people who originally reside in urban areas, the events they experienced took place in rural settings and left a great impression upon these people. I collected three accounts that took place in rural areas. My last section is titled curses and analyses interviews that engage with people who have been cursed by other people. These people were at the receiving end of the most dangerous consequences and were extremely distressed about their interaction with black magic. I have analysed and compared the manner in which people describe these events throughout all four categories.

Because grounded theory demands a fresh set of eyes to analyse data, it is advised to carry out a literature review after one is done with the first cycle of coding and analysis. While my analysis includes references, these were only added after the first round of analysis. While I read many articles to understand certain things, the primary literature I read includes three books. I shall summarise these books and relevant chapters in detail in the chapter titled Literature Review. The first book I read was Robert Orsi's 'History and Presence'. This book radically confronts this intellectual heritage, proposing instead a model for the study of religion that begins with humans and gods present to each other in the circumstances of everyday life. Orsi then asks what it would mean to write history with the real presence of special beings restored. The unseeing of the gods was a foundational requirement of Western modernity. Orsi urges us to withhold from absence the intellectual and spiritual prestige modernity encourages us to give it, and instead to approach history with the gods fully present. This book provided me with a fantastic conceptual framework. After reading Orsi's work and learning so much about presence in a Catholic context, I thought it would be worth

reading about presence in an Islamic context, as Pakistan is heavily influenced by religion. Religious prescriptions have combined with Subcontinental customs in order to produce a unique culture and relationship with presence and the supernatural. The book I chose to read was 'Islam, Arabs and the Intelligent World of the Djinn' by Amira El Zein. This book discusses how djinns are talked about in the Quran and Hadith (sayings of the Holy Prophet). Lastly, I read 'Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among Azande' by Evans- Pritchard which is the result of an anthropological study of the Azande people who resided in Central Africa, in the watershed zone between the Nile and the Congo. Despite it being heavily criticized, I chose this text because I felt it might be a good place to begin my own critique of approaches to so-called 'superstitions'.

## Chapter 1: Methodology

In this chapter I will discuss the methodology employed to both collect my data and to analyse this data for findings relevant to my thesis. I chose my participants through Facebook by posting the following request:

*"Hello! Would anyone like to narrate any sort of encounter you have had that you would classify as supernatural? Alternatively, would you be willing to put me in contact with someone who has had a supernatural encounter? I would like to hear and record these for my master's thesis at Charles University in Prague"*<sup>4</sup>

I posted these in various Facebook groups but mostly chose participants from my alma matter's Facebook group and a group called Creepy Korma. I have conducted fifteen oral in-depth interviews and collected one pre-existing transcript and in the following chapters I have relayed the content of these interviews as well as cross analysed these interviews by drawing comparisons among them as well as the previously mentioned literature to further my understanding of the subject matter. I have also recorded the difficulties I encountered while transcribing and making sense of these interviews, therefore hoping to shed light on the constraints a social scientist and historian must function under while attempting to report the unaltered truth. This chapter focuses on describing the tools I used to help me analyse the material. I discuss grounded theory in length after which I discuss coding in qualitative research. I then move on to ethics in qualitative research starting with the rights of the respondent and ending with ensuring that all research is conducted with rigour.

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<sup>4</sup> Wasif, Zoya, Facebook, 2021

## Grounded Theory

This section discusses the origin, concept and proper use of grounded theory. The main text I have used to develop a better understanding of grounded theory is 'Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis' by Kathy Charmaz. Grounded Theory originated in the 1960s with the need for qualitative approaches to content analysis. It was originally developed by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss during their studies of dying in hospitals. This research observed how dying occurred. It aimed to gauge how and when professionals and their terminal patients knew they were dying and how they handled the news. They engaged in explicit analytic treatment and produced theoretical analyses of the social organization and temporal order of dying, produced analytic ideas in long conversations and exchanged preliminary notes analysing observations in the field. The conclusion of this research project was the discovery of grounded theory in 1967 which aimed to conduct research grounded in data rather than deducing testable hypotheses from existing theories. The significance of such an approach is that it provides explicit, sequential guidelines for conducting qualitative research, offers specific strategies for handling the analytic phases of inquiry, streamlines and integrates data collection and analysis, advances conceptual analysis of qualitative data and lastly legitimizes qualitative research as scientific inquiry. Grounded theory composes of certain key features. Firstly, there is a simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis. Grounded theory involves constructing analytic codes and categories from data one collects, not from preconceived logically deduced hypotheses. One distinct feature of grounded theory is the use of the constant comparative method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis. Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis is also unique to grounded theory. The final analysis needs to include memo-writing to elaborate categories,

specify their properties, define relationships between categories and identify gaps. In grounded theory, sampling aimed toward theory construction, not for population representativeness as it is in quantitative research. The last, and perhaps most important feature, of grounded theory is conducting the literature review after developing an independent analysis; a pre-conceived hypothesis is not driven by the data collected. The book written by Glaser and Strauss challenged several pre-conceived notions regarding qualitative research. It refuted beliefs that qualitative methods were impressionistic and unsystematic. It fused together data collection and analysis phases of research which had not been done while researching in the past. It posed a challenge to prevailing views of qualitative research as a precursor to more 'rigorous' quantitative methods, proving that qualitative research can produce meaningful insights on its own. It questioned the arbitrary division between theory and research as well as assumptions that qualitative research could not generate theory. Grounded theory is rife with elements of Columbia University positivism and Chicago school pragmatism and field research. Let us take a look at both in more detail. The epistemological assumptions, logic, and systematic approach of grounded theory methods reflect Glaser's rigorous quantitative training at Columbia University with Paul Lazarsfeld. This involves codifying qualitative research methods in order to specify explicit strategies for conducting research. This is based on the perception of human beings as active agents in their lives and in their worlds rather than as passive recipients of larger social forces. It is assumed that process, not structure, was fundamental to human existence; indeed, human beings created structures through engaging in processes.

Furthermore, subjective and social meanings relied on our use of language and emerged through action. This type of analysis brought together notions of human agency, emergent processes, social and subjective meanings, problem-solving practices, and the open-ended study of action. Strauss is more interested in symbolic interactionism (influenced by the

philosophy of pragmatism) in Chicago University and worked under Herbert Blumer. Both scholars begin their studies with certain research interests and a set of general concepts and provide vantage points that can intensify looking at certain aspects of the empirical world but may ignore others. They employ sensitizing concepts as tentative tools for developing ideas about processes that they define in their data. In contrast, the logico-deductive model of traditional quantitative research necessitates operationalizing established concepts in a theory as accurately as possible and deducing testable hypotheses about the relationships between these concepts.

In grounded theory, the quality and credibility of a study starts with the data. Therefore, it is very important to know what questions to ask when the data is being collected. It is important to know whether you have collected enough background data about persons, processes, and settings to have ready recall and to understand and portray the full range of contexts of the study. You need to know whether you have gained detailed descriptions of a range of participants' views and actions. It is important to ask whether the data reveals what lies beneath the surface and if the data is sufficient to reveal changes over time. One should be cognizant of whether they have gained multiple views of the participants' range of actions as well as data that enables them to develop analytic categories. Lastly, it is important to consider what kinds of comparisons can be made between data and how do these comparisons generate and inform the researcher's ideas.

The first grounded theory question to ask is what is happening. This question spawns looking at what is happening at either of two levels which are the basic social and psychological processes. Subsequent questions from this concern from whose point of view is a given process fundamental while who considers it marginal. It is important to consider where observed social processes emerge and how participants' actions construct them, who exerts control over these processes and under what conditions. A researcher

should be able to answer what meanings different participants attribute to the processes and how do they talk about it; What do they emphasize? What do they leave out and why? Lastly, how and when do participants meanings and actions concerning the process change?

While constructing data it is necessary to attend to actions and processes as well as to words while delineating the context, scenes, and situations of action carefully. Recording who did what, when it occurred, why it happened (if you can ascertain the reasons), and how it occurred is also fundamental. Identifying the conditions under which specific actions, intentions, and processes emerge or are muted and looking for ways to interpret this data is important for high quality grounded theory. Focusing on specific words and phrases to which participants seem to attribute particular meaning as well as finding taken-for-granted and hidden assumptions of various participants (showing how they are revealed through and affect actions) allow the researcher to engage with the data in depth. My data for this project consists of fifteen interviews and one pre-existing account. While conducting the interviews several considerations had to be made. To start the interview, I had to devise a few broad, open-ended question - encourage unanticipated statements and stories to emerge. Because my respondents were from such varied backgrounds, after ensuring I had their consent to record their responses and use them for my analysis, I asked them what prompted them to react to my request for a supernatural encounter and let them speak freely, reserving my questions for the end. Intensive interview may range from a loosely guided exploration of topics to semi-structured focused questions of which I chose the former approach. When I found something that they said interesting, especially during the latter interviews which is when I was able to detect similar themes I would say 'that's interesting, tell me more about it' rather than asking a direct question. There were times when I had to request clarifying details to obtain accurate information and to learn about the research participant's experiences and reflections. My aim for the interview was to go beneath the surface of ordinary conversation and examine earlier



events, views, and feelings afresh. During my textual analysis I had to bear in mind a few rules. I had to ask what the parameters of the information were and on what and whose facts this information rested. It was important to know what the information meant to various participants or actors in the scene and what it left out. It was important to bear in mind who had access to the facts, records, or sources of the information and who the intended audience was. Lastly, it was important to know whether the information they share affected their actions<sup>5</sup>.

### Coding

I shall now discuss what coding in qualitative research is and the different ways in which it is practised. In layman terms coding is “how you define what the data you are analysing are about”. It involves identifying a passage in the text or other data items (photograph, image), searching and identifying concepts and finding relations between them. The main aim of coding is to organise data so you can examine and analyse it in a structured way. A code is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute. One can find codes in interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journals, documents, literature, artifacts, photographs, video, websites, e-mail correspondence and many other sources. It is wise to carry out coding in cycles. The portion of data to be coded during First Cycle coding processes can range in magnitude from a single word to a full sentence to an entire page of text to a stream of moving images. In Second Cycle coding processes, the portions coded can be the exact same units, longer passages of text, and even a reconfiguration of the codes

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<sup>5</sup> Charmaz, Kathy, *Constructing Grounded Theory, A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*, 2006, SAGE Publications

themselves developed thus far. A code represents and captures a datum's primary content and essence. A concept-driven approach looks at the data with a developed system of codes and look for concepts/ideas in the text. On the other hand, data-driven coding look for ideas/concepts in the text without a preceding conceptualisation and let the text speak for itself. This is the form of coding I have carried out in my research. Both methods require initial and thorough readings of your data and for you to identify several passages of the text that share the same code.

When we reflect on a passage of data to decipher its core meaning, we are decoding and when we determine its appropriate code and label it, we are encoding. Coding is the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis. It is possible to adopt 'simultaneous coding', which is two or more codes, within a single datum. You can think of patterns not just as stable regularities but as varying forms. A pattern can be characterized by similarity (things happen the same way), difference (they happen in predictably different ways), frequency (they happen often or seldom), sequence (they happen in a certain order), correspondence (they happen in relation to other activities or events) and causation (one appears to cause another). Coding is a heuristic, which means that it is an exploratory problem-solving technique without specific formulas to follow; "It leads you from the data to the idea, and from the idea to all the data pertaining to that idea"<sup>6</sup>. Coding is a cyclical act, the second cycle (and possibly the third and fourth, and so on) of recoding further manages, filters, highlights, and focuses the salient features. "Coding is usually a mixture of data [summation] and data complication ... breaking the data apart in analytically relevant ways in order to lead toward further questions about the data"<sup>7</sup>. When major

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<sup>6</sup> Richards & Morse, 2007, p.137

<sup>7</sup> Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, pp. 29–31

categories are compared you transcend the “reality” of your data and progress toward the thematic, conceptual, and theoretical; “categorizing is how we get ‘up ’ from the diversity of data to the shapes of the data, the sorts of things represented. Concepts are how we get up to more general, higher-level, and more abstract constructs<sup>8</sup> . It is the job of the researcher to show how these themes and concepts systematically interrelate lead toward the development of theory. Pre-existing theories drive the entire research enterprise, whether you are aware of them or not “the intersection of one or more actors [participants] engaging in one or more activities (behaviours) at a particular time in a specific place”<sup>9</sup> do have some bearing on the analysis provided. Major units of social organization that can be translated into codes and subcategories are cultural practices (daily routines, occupational tasks, micro cultural activity, etc.), episodes (unanticipated or irregular activities such as divorce, championship games, natural disasters, etc.), encounters (a temporary interaction between two or more individuals such as sales transactions, panhandling, etc.), roles (student, mother, customer, etc.) and social types (bully, tight-ass, geek, etc.), social and personal relationships (husband and wife, party-goers, etc.), groups and cliques (gangs, congregations, families, jocks, etc.), organizations (schools, fast-food restaurants, prisons, corporations, etc.), settlements and habitats (villages, neighbourhoods, etc.) and subcultures and lifestyles (the homeless, skinheads, gay leather bears, etc.).

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<sup>8</sup> Richards & Morse, 2007, p.157

<sup>9</sup> Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006, p. 121

## Ethics in Qualitative Research

I shall now like to discuss the role of ethics not just within grounded theory but qualitative research as a whole. In investigating people's experiences, the researcher enters a relationship with those she or he studied. It is important to be things that should or should not be done regarding the people being observed and written about. A well-known example of unethical research is Humphreys' *Tearoom Trade*<sup>10</sup> which studied anonymous homosexual encounters in semi-public places. This violation of privacy led to the establishment of specific codes of conduct. One general principle in qualitative research is the concept of voluntary participation. This entails that you should not psychologically or physically force your subjects to take part in your research. It is important to remember that a participant's motivation can be violated when you lure the indigent into a study by offering them monetary rewards. One possibility is to solicit interviews without any rewards. Another approach is to contact their service providers and ask if they know of anyone who is willing to be interviewed. A researcher should be aware that what people do in public places is by definition there for all to observe. For instance, if in a published newspaper editorial, I refer to my personal experiences, you don't need my permission to use words that are already public domain. In the case of someone who is below the legal age prescribed by their country of residence, it is necessary to gain consent from a parent or a guardian before proceeding with the research. Protection of the research participants is also fundamental to qualitative research; even if your respondents voluntarily take part in your study, they may not be in a position to fully appreciate the potential harm they could suffer from their participation. Research participants should be informed in advance about the types of questions they will be

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<sup>10</sup> Humphreys, Laud. *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places.* , 1970.

asked and the researcher should remind them they have the option not to answer certain questions or to end the interview whenever they wish. It is one's responsibility as a researcher to minimize potential harm as much as possible. Confidentiality and anonymity to guard interviewees privacy is important as revealing their identities could harm them. Confidentiality means that the identity of the respondent will not be disclosed to anyone. Complete anonymity is impossible as in most cases you meet research participants in person. It helps to create a set of pseudonyms for all your research participants and use them in your notes instead of their real name. Lastly informed consent is necessary and includes written or verbal statements that provide research participants with a general description of the research project along with its potential harms and benefits. A written consent form should address ethical concerns such as, ensuring people know that participation is voluntary, letting them know that no harm will come to the participants (if there is any risk of harm, it should be clearly described) and lastly reiterating that the participants' privacy will be protected (steps that will be taken to ensure protection of privacy should be listed specifically).

The term research is one of the 'dirtiest' words in the indigenous world's vocabulary as it is linked to European imperialism and colonialism. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes

“It appals us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations”<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 2012

Keeping in mind the lens prescribed by decolonial and postcolonial scholarship it is important to ask certain questions during the research process. These questions include, and are not limited to whose research it is, who owns it, whose interests does it serve, who will benefit from it, who has designed its questions and framed its scope, who will carry it out who will write it up and how its results will be disseminated. Throughout my analysis process I found it extremely useful to employ a postcolonial lens and ask the questions demanded by it during the overall task of taking supernatural presences seriously rather than casting a shadow of doubt upon the validity of the accounts I was collecting.

Rigour is a way to establish trust or confidence in the findings of a research study. It allows the researcher to establish consistency in the methods used over time and to present accurate representation of the population studied. Its components are truth-value (credibility); applicability (transferability); consistency (dependability); and neutrality (confirmability). I will look at each one in detail and talk about how I have employed them while researching my topic. Credibility allows others to recognize the experiences contained within the study through the interpretation of participants' experiences. A researcher must review the individual transcripts, looking for similarities within and across all participants. Credibility presents an interpretation of an experience in such a way that people sharing that experience immediately recognize it. Examples of strategies that enhance credibility are reflexivity, member checking (or informant feedback), peer examination, peer debriefing, prolonged time spent with participants and using the participants' words in the final report. I have already mentioned that I have grouped similar experiences under categories that apply to them. Throughout the analysis I have ensured that the reader understands what makes these accounts similar to each other and different from the ones in other categories. Transferability refers to the ability to transfer research findings or methods from one group to an equivalent external validity. In order for a study to be transferable it must provide a dense description of

the population studied by describing the demographics and geographic boundaries of the study and giving a range of experiences on which, the reader can build interventions and understanding to decide whether the research is applicable to practice. This way, other studies may be conducted by using the same data collection methods with different demographic groups or geographical locations. Related to reliability in quantitative terms, dependability occurs when another researcher can follow the decision trail used by the researcher. This trail is achieved by describing the specific purpose of the study, discussing how and why the participants were selected for the study, describing how the data was collected and how long collection lasted, explaining how the data was reduced or transformed for analysis, discussing the interpretation and presentation of the findings and explaining the techniques used to determine the credibility of the data. Strategies used to establish dependability include having peers participate in the analysis process, providing a detailed description of the research methods and conducting a step-by-step repetition of the study to identify similarities in results or to enhance findings. My methodology chapter, at the start of which I have explained my research process, is my way of ensuring that my research is dependable.

Confirmability occurs once credibility, transferability and dependability have been established. Qualitative research must be reflective, maintaining a sense of awareness and openness to the study and results. Techniques researchers use to achieve confirmability include taking notes regarding personal feelings, biases and insights immediately after an interview and following, rather than leading, the direction of interviews by asking for clarifications when needed. Reflective research produces new insights, which lead the reader to trust the credibility of the findings and applicability of the study.

To conclude my discussion on coding and ethics within my research I would like to discuss the issues of reliability and validity within qualitative research and how considerations for rigour shall be taken while I conduct my research. I rely on the advice

given to researchers by Clive Seale and David Silverman in their paper titled 'Ensuring Rigor in Qualitative Research' which was published in the European Journal of Public Health in 1997. Taking the differences between qualitative and quantitative research as their departing point, Seale and Silverman argue that while reliability and validity are concerns that are strongly tied to quantitative research, there are methods that ensure their presence in qualitative studies. This general review is followed by a detailed illustration of selected techniques, including the use of counting in qualitative research, the development of systematic coding schemes with the aid of computer programmes, searching for deviant cases and the use of the transcription techniques of conversation analysis. The examples given are drawn from a variety of studies conducted by the authors. The quality of qualitative research, it is argued "cannot be determined by following prescribed formulas. Rather its quality lies in the power of its language to display a picture of the world in which we discover something about ourselves and our common humanity"<sup>12</sup> The authors disagree with this statement, arguing that it leads to what they term 'methodological anarchy'. They write 'first, it simply makes no sense to argue that all knowledge and feelings are of equal weight and value. Even in everyday life, we readily sort fact from fancy. Why, therefore, should science be any different? Second, methodological anarchy offers a clearly negative message to the audiences of qualitative health research, suggesting that its proponents have given up claims to validity'<sup>13</sup>". the authors make various prescriptions to overcome these dilemmas such as the use of counting in qualitative research, the development, of systematic coding schemes with the aid of computer programmes, searching for deviant cases and the use of the transcription techniques of conversation analysis. They provide an example of how to conduct each within the context of public health research.

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<sup>12</sup>12 Seale and Silverman, Ensuring Rigor in Qualitative Research, European Journal of Public Health, 1997,

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



## Construction of Theory

Charmaz also guides scholars as to how 'theory' is constructed within grounded theory and demonstrates how they move from a process of analysis to the production of a grounded theory. Charmaz argues that many grounded theorists talk about theory but few define it which is why she has taken the task of defining theory upon herself. After providing a working definition of theory, Charmaz seeks to answer whether grounded theorists actually construct theory or not. Since a large portion of my research is devoted to analyses of my interviews and existing transcripts, I believe that this section of Charmaz's book will assist me while I formulate meaningful theories from my collected work. For my methodology section I shall simply summarise Charmaz's example and prescription in order for the reader to be aware of the practices underlying my analysis chapter. As mentioned above, Charmaz's research focuses on how people with chronic illnesses struggled to have a valued self. In her narrative she points out that her research participants struggled for a valued self because they did not want to be invalids. For them, being an invalid meant being an invalid person. This assumption informed the identity goals they made and the actions they took. In order to assess whether respondents had moved up or down what she describes as the 'identity hierarchy' she accounts for these chronically ill people's identity goals and the actions they take, if any, to realize them. These analytic objectives contributed to the theoretical level and density of the analysis. After providing us with this information she goes on to describe how grounded theorists construct their theories. She remarks 'Disagreements about how to do grounded theory and what a completed theory should look like often arise from unsettled notions about what theory means. These disagreements resonate with grumblings-and ideological clashes-throughout the social sciences that grounded theorists echo without necessarily realizing their epistemological underpinnings. Such disagreements may be played

out and intensified in discussions and directions about how to construct grounded theory. When we look beneath the surface, we can discern different meanings of theory among grounded theorists. She touches upon theoretical perspectives in classical sociological theory and cultural studies to exemplify these broader definitions and to identify major themes in them. She begins with positivist definitions of theory, which aim to treat concepts as variables, specify relationships between concepts, explain and predict these relationships, systematize knowledge, verify theoretical relationships through hypothesis-testing and generate hypotheses for research. As mentioned above, these theories can result in narrow, reductionist explanations with simplistic models of action which is what grounded theorists aim to avoid. Glaser's treatment of theory contains strong positivist leanings. Strauss and Corbin's view of theory has some positivist leanings but emphasizes relationships among concepts. For them, as previously discussed, theory means 'a set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena'. Their stance toward constructing theories, however, also acknowledges interpretivist views. An interpretative definition of theory conceptualizes the studied phenomenon to understand it in abstract terms, articulates theoretical claims pertaining to scope, depth, power, and relevance, acknowledges subjectivity in theorizing and hence the role of negotiation, dialogue and understanding and offers an imaginative interpretation. This is the view of theorizing that Charmaz advocates for and the one I shall work towards in my analysis of the transcripts I collect.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

There have been many studies of witchcraft and the supernatural in the European context. These studies do not merely describe witchcraft and go through the various trials and witch hunts that took place in Europe during the early modern period. They ask questions about what the witchcraft trials can tell us about the time period they took place in as well as the sort of concerns people had. Some articles such as 'Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Europe' by Alison Rowlands explore why the overall majority of those prosecuted for witchcraft in early modern Europe were females; she explores questions such as what systems existed at the time, what were the negative beliefs about the practice of harmful magic and association with the devil, what sorts of women were accused and why gendering of witchcraft prosecutions varied geographically<sup>14</sup>. Such macro sociological analyses of witchcraft are also accompanied with micro sociological ones such as Lizanne Henderson's study of witchcraft trials in Aberdeenshire in 1596. According to Henderson's study 'Witchcraft trials can be used as a key to unlocking the everyday experiences, attitudes, beliefs and customs of ordinary people. The confession of a witch by the name of Bessie Dunlop in 1576 revealed information not only about her life and experiences but also of those of the people she knew and lived among'<sup>15</sup>. Studies of witchcraft are so popular that some scholars have based articles critiquing approaches taken by their predecessors. Criticisms of the psychopathological interpretation of witch hunts: A review by Thomas J. Schoeneman<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Rowland, Alison, *Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America, 2013

<sup>15</sup> Henderson, Lizanne, *Detestable Slaves of the Devil': Changing Ideas about Witchcraft in Sixteenth- Century Scotland. A History of Everyday Life in Medieval Scotland*. 2011

<sup>16</sup> Schoeneman, Thomas, *Criticisms of the psychopathological interpretation of witch hunts: A review*, American Journal of Psychiatry. 1982

and Who Were the Witches? The Social Roles of the Accused in the European Witch Trials<sup>17</sup> by Robert A Horsley are examples of such works. While these articles were interesting to read and analyse based on the fact that they were based on supernatural entities they did not help with my project as little has been written about Pakistan. The majority of scholarship surrounding Pakistani supernatural culture has focused on religion. Scholars who do analyse other aspects of belief in the supernatural usually engage in linking these beliefs to gender and education level and are largely quantitative<sup>18</sup>. This is why I haven't included any work that talks about Pakistani contexts in particular. Because my work was focused upon giving agency to supernatural forces, the three texts I chose to focus on predominantly are 'History and Presence' by Robert Orsi, 'Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among Azande' by Evans Pritchard and 'Islam, Arabs, and Intelligent World of the Jinn' by Amira El-Zein.

#### History and Presence by Robert Orsi

One of the primary texts I read for this project was 'History and Presence' by Robert Orsi. Published in 2016, Orsi attempts to write a historiography of Catholicism in the twentieth century keeping in mind how the catholic faith is heavily involved with supernatural entities which he refers to as 'real presences'. In doing so he wants to write history in a manner which goes against David Hume's prediction that a day would come when modern men and women would not be able to even imagine that, once upon a time, humans walked on this planet believing that the gods were really present to them. In the first chapter of his book Orsi posits that before the advent of modern epistemology, before the

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<sup>17</sup> Tolhurst, Robert, Who Were the Witches? *The Social Roles of the Accused in the European Witch Trials*, The Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 1979

<sup>18</sup> Mohammad S.I. Mullick , Najat Khalifa , Jhunu S. Nahar & Dawn- Marie Walker (2013) Beliefs about Jinn, black magic and evil eye in Bangladesh: the effects of gender and level of education, Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 16:7, 719-729, DOI: 10.1080/13674676.2012.717918

arrival of “religion” within the boundaries of Enlightenment reason, ethics, and linguistics, and before the codification of “religion” in national constitutions and diplomatic treaties, the woods, homes, and forests of Europe, its churches, statues, relics, holy oils and waters, and shrines were filled with the presences of spirits, pre-Catholic, Catholic, or a hybrid of the two. These beings were really there. Max Weber famously referred to all this as “enchantment,” which he contrasted with modernity’s disenchantment. Humans lived alongside and in the company of super natural presences. They called on these extra-human presences to witness and to intervene in the affairs of life, domestic and social. From these presences, humans sought protection of their bodies and souls, property, kin, animals, towns, and families. Jesus was there in flesh and blood on the altar, in the Host, in the priest’s hands, and super natural beings were everywhere, experienced in all the modalities of the senses. “There was a time,” says Roberto Calasso, “when the gods were not just a literary cliché, but an event, a sudden apparition”<sup>19</sup>. Things happened between humans and their gods. But that was then. Orsi outlines how the development of the scientific method relegated religious authority and reasoning to the side lines writing that 'there are historical, philosophical, political, and doctrinal reasons for the scarcity of theoretical language for real presences and for the mistrust of them when they do manage to make an appearance, the haste with which they are translated into other terms'<sup>20</sup>.

Tracing the history of how 'polemicists, theologians, jurists, and philosophers mapped other polarities onto presence / absence, including rationality / irrationality, the impossible / the possible, past / present, female / male, primitive / civilized, and dark skin / white skin'<sup>21</sup> , Orsi reaches the conclusion that political and religious freedom from the seventeenth century

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<sup>19</sup> Calasso, Roberto. *Literature and the Gods*. Translated by Tim Parks. New York: Knopf, distributed by Random House, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Orsi, Robert, 45

<sup>21</sup> Orsi, Robert, 41

forward, meant, among other things, liberation from real presences, or superstitions, an argument that resonated well into the twentieth century in the nagging doubt that Catholics were capable of democracy. He takes this as a departure point and in the remainder of his book outlines his study of Catholicism in the twentieth century alongside his attempt to ensure that real presence is taken seriously in his documentation. An important philosophy and ethic he abides by is that 'scholarship entails risk, for the person whose world has been entered by the scholar, but for the scholar, too, whose own certainties ought to be on the line in the encounter. It is because of this risk, however, if it is taken, that scholarship also creates possibilities for engagement and relationship<sup>22</sup>', which is a practice I have let guide the interviews I conducted. I will be using the advice he imparts to scholars as well as comparisons between his observations and mine in this thesis. In this section I aim to merely summarize each chapter in order to provide context for the comparisons I make.

Titled 'Abundant History', chapter two deals with how vast crowds have gathered at the places on earth where the Mother of God had appeared, sometimes to single visionaries, and at other times to groups of people in locations spanning from Knock County in Ireland to Fatima in Portugal. Orsi pays particular attention to Lourdes where Mary appeared to a girl named Bernadette Soubirous in 1858. Pilgrims to Lourdes then and since, most of them gravely ill or disabled (known at the shrine as *les malades*), bathe in water from the spring that bubbled up miraculously from the spot at Bernadette's feet where the Lady told Bernadette to dig during the ninth apparition. Apparitions of the Virgin Mary and the devotional practices that follow them have played an important role in the making of many aspects of the modern world. Orsi disagrees with how such events have been penned by historians and social scientists. He comments on how 'the confident translation of the stories men and women tell of their encounters with the super natural into language that makes these

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<sup>22</sup> Orsi, Robert, 213

stories about something else is based on the pervasive assumption in modern scholarship of the “always already mediated nature of cultural relations” The social determines and accounts for all experience<sup>23</sup>. The key words to look for in these narratives are “produce,” “create,” “structure,” and “construct.” Orsi claims that 'these terms limn an epistemology in which causal explanations premised on some version of social construction, whether political, psychological, or demographic, are sufficient. This is modernity’s ontological singular<sup>24</sup>. Such interpretations share the assumption that what is happening when the transcendent breaks into time is not what appears to be happening to the men and women to whom it is happening, nor is it what they say has happened to them. What participants say, as a matter of fact, does “not faithfully represent actual historical occurrences.” They may be the first to go to when studying an event in history, as the archive of the event, but they are the last to go to for an understanding of it. These encounters with super natural figures really present simply cannot exist within modern scholarship as they exist in the experience of the devout. Anthropologist Michael Jackson refers to this process of translating their reality into our reality as the “inequalities of presence”<sup>25</sup>. The only question that remains, then, has to do with social, semantic, and psychological origins. What in the human brain, in the working of social power, in the depredations of powerless and ignorance, or in the structures of discourse causes, creates, produces, or constructs experiences of the super natural, of the dead, and of the Blessed Mother and the saints.

The next chapter is called 'Holy Intimacies' and recounts the spiritual experiences of three women Orsi has interviewed. The venues of intimacy between humans and sacred figures are a hospital room in the United States in the mid-1990s, small circles of

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<sup>23</sup> Orsi, Robert, 58

<sup>24</sup> Orsi, Robert, 59

<sup>25</sup> Jackson, Michael. *Minima Ethnographica: Intersubjectivity and the Anthropological Project*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

women praying the rosary in an industrial city in the last days of the Second World War, and two homes on either side of the border between the United States and Mexico in the late 1950s. One of the stories has to do with a shrine whose origins are shrouded in mystery and legend, as the past of most Catholic shrines are; another with a mostly forgotten apparition of the Virgin Mary, as the majority of the Blessed Mother's appearances are lost to history and memory; and the third with a Mexican American girl's devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus that went unnoticed amid the surrounding urgencies of migration, domestic violence, the difficulties of speaking one's experiences in a strange tongue, and the challenge of finding work. Orsi remarks on how 'to study the intimacies with the holy that arose in these places and times, it is necessary to go below the surface of what is remembered and authorized as history'<sup>26</sup>. This chapter was particularly interesting to me because I noticed similarities in how Orsi grappled with the material he received while conducting interviews. The chapter's concluding paragraph laments upon how 'very rarely, if ever, do the people we scholars of religion talk with and write about need our protection, because what we are protecting them from is the judgment and condescension of critical theory. In other words, we are protecting them from ourselves'<sup>27</sup>, which I found a succinct way to describe fieldwork experience. In Orsi's work I found an element of empathy which was missing from Pritchard's rather clinical account of witchcraft and the Azande, a text which I shall discuss later in this chapter. Orsi is able to provide valuable research while maintaining the awareness that his 'subjects' are human beings and their stories may not always involve agents that follow scientific laws.

The fourth chapter on printed presence discusses mediums children were exposed to by Catholic schools, how these were created, their significance and the effect they were

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<sup>26</sup> Orsi, Robert, 72

<sup>27</sup> Orsi, Robert, 111



intended to have. This chapter did not prove to be of use for me as I didn't encounter any such accounts during my fieldwork, nor is previous literature on supernatural entities the core of my research (although a brief overview of the literature concerning supernatural entities in an Islamic context is done within this chapter). Chapters five and seven are of particular interest to me because of the further elaboration upon his interview subjects which reinforces my impression of Orsi as a scholar who attempts to take his subjects seriously.

Chapter five recounts the visit to the home of a couple who hosted a picture of Jesus Christ in which, while praying the rosary on her dying son's bedside, the woman noticed that a small circle had appeared in the corner. It further examines relationships between the living and the dying and the dead among Catholics in the United States in the twentieth century; the various ways that Catholics, living and dead, thought and talked about these relationships; and what they did to maintain them, over time, amid broader changes in death and dying in the United States, as well as within Catholicism itself. Barring the importance of analysing the spatial dimensions of an event, which I have included in my methodology section, Orsi asks a question which summarizes the core theme of the article quite remarkably; regarding the family and the visitors to their deceased child's room, he asks 'if it is possible to answer this question in terms of cognitive psychology the workings of the human mind, group psychosis, or mutual hypnosis, do any of these begin to account for the emotional density of the event, the interleaving of memories, desires, hopes, and anxieties that were carried on the senses that night and in all the years after the little boy's death?'<sup>28</sup>.

This mode of inquiry, between deducing causation and focusing on agents outside of the scientific world, is also carried on into chapter seven, which deals with the grim topic of sexual assault of children at the hands of priests and how these individuals reconciled this injustice with their religious faith. While narrating the path towards healing for a victim

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<sup>28</sup> Orsi, Robert, 197

named Monica, Orsi writes 'Monica understands this episode in her life in two registers. Psychologically, she was desensitizing herself to an image that evoked horrific memories of her encounter with evil. Religiously, she was on pilgrimage, not back to the Eucharist, because she had been attending Mass regularly by this time, but toward less fear in church, less shame, toward becoming a more visible presence there<sup>29</sup>. In the one register, Monica was acting; in the other, Monica was being acted upon. Monica was both the subject of her life and subject to it. Orsi ends his book on a prescriptive note for future scholarship. He writes,

'Once the gods return and once their presence is acknowledged, functionalism yields to a messier, less predictable, and perhaps less recognizable past, one that is not bound to a single account of human life or to a single, short period of time or to a single ontology. From the perspective of a metric of presence, it may be that— contra Hume— one day historians and scholars of religion will find it impossible to believe there ever lived on this planet counter parts of theirs who thought it was possible to study history or religion without the gods as interlocutors and provocateurs, as agents of both the given and the impossible, as malignant spirits, as harbingers of excess, as the ones who hold the memories that individual humans and entire societies forget, as bringers of succour and of pain'<sup>30</sup>.

'Islam, Arabs and the Intelligent World of the Djinn' by Amira El Zein

After reading Orsi's work and learning so much about presence in a Catholic context, I thought it would be worth reading about presence in an Islamic context, as Pakistan is heavily influenced by religion. Religious prescriptions have combined with Subcontinental customs in order to produce a unique culture and relationship with presence and the

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<sup>29</sup> Orsi, Robert, 244

<sup>30</sup> Orsi, Robert, 251

supernatural. The book I chose to read was 'Islam, Arabs and the Intelligent World of the Djinn' by Amira El Zein, a scholar, poet, and translator who was the director of the Arabic Program at Tufts University from 2002 to 2008. Not only does it describe the qualities of the 'djinn', who are creatures I shall discuss in my analysis but she views scholarship through a similar view as Orsi which is overtly evident throughout her work. When she talks about her motivation behind writing this book she says 'I was often confronted with, on one hand, Western sources simply dismissing the whole concept of the jinn as superstitions, primitivism, animism, and the like; and on the other hand, contemporary Arab and Muslim sources, which, in general, expand on the predecessors' work, but rarely innovate'<sup>31</sup> adding that 'western scholars in general concentrate on the political and social manifestations of Islam, totally neglecting this concept, while Arab and Muslim contemporary scholars find it enough to reiterate what the Qur'an and prophetic tradition Hadith mention, or try to apply a Western methodology that would lead them to maintain that these "spiritual beings" simply pertain to the domain of fantasy'<sup>32</sup>. El-Zein takes upon the task to look at the concept of the jinn with an open mind and with empathy, letting the sources unfold their meanings. She starts off with explaining the different realms created by God and while referencing both the Quran and the Hadith (sayings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad) explains how Muslims believe God created many worlds and subjected them to humans and jinn to explore them, benefit from them, and come to a deeper discernment of the Divine and a genuine glorification of his wonders. She talks about how the French philosopher Henry Corbin, used the term "imaginal"<sup>33</sup> to describe this belief after rejecting the term "imaginary" because it means unreal, fantastic, or utopian in the West, yet for Islam, it is a world that really exists, 'a

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<sup>31</sup> El-Zein, Amira;. "Islam, Arabs, and Intelligent World of the Jinn". Syracuse University Press, New York. 2017.

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<sup>32</sup> *ibid*

<sup>33</sup> "Henry Corbin, Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam, trans. Leonard Fox (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 1995), 1.

world as ontologically real as the world of the senses and the world of the intellect, a world that requires a faculty of perception belonging to it, a faculty that is a cognitive function, a noetic value, as fully real as the faculties of sensory perception or intellectual intuition. This faculty is the imaginative power, the one we must avoid confusing with the imagination that modern man identifies with 'fantasy'<sup>34</sup>. El Zein goes on to explain the similarities and differences between djinns and humans, which I drew upon a lot for my chapter on djinns. She discusses how Jinn are addressed in the Qur'an as nations endowed with rational faculties. Jinn and humans have mental faculties that allow them to access knowledge, perceive the truth, and distinguish them from all other living beings in the universe. These two intelligent species are described as discerning the Word of God through reasoning, while the rest of Creation grasps it instinctively. The Quran is addressed to both Djinnat and humans and it is assumed that both are capable of learning from it. However, the numerous instances of the correspondences between jinn and humans do not imply in any sense that both species could ever be equal. In all Muslim sources, humans are depicted as superior to jinn. Even though djinns are able to observe humans, the humans who are able to observe, communicate and eventually control them are deemed highly intelligent and spiritual. As mentioned above, intelligence and learning is a key component of Islamic teachings. The stories of Sufis seeing jinn are abundant in Sufi literature and popular medieval culture as well<sup>35</sup>.

#### Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande' by Evans-Pritchard

Another important text I read for this project was 'Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande' which is the result of an anthropological study of the Azande people who

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<sup>34</sup> El-Zein, Amira, 43

<sup>35</sup> El-Zein, Amira, 74

resided in Central Africa, in the watershed zone between the Nile and the Congo. The traditional Zande homeland today lies across the frontiers of three modern African states: the Republic of the Sudan, Zaire, and the Republique Centrafricaine. In Evans Pritchard's day, all these territories were under colonial dominance: the Sudan was Anglo-Egyptian, Zaire was the Belgian Congo, and the Republique Centrafricaine formed part of the vast expanse of French Equatorial Africa. Evans-Pritchard, engaged in ethnographic survey work for the Government of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, perforce concentrated his research on the Sudanese Azande. I was extremely excited to read this study because Pritchard represents the inception of the field of social anthropology, and while his work has been subject to sharp criticism by anthropologists who succeeded him, the subject matter does shed light upon topics that I am interested in and seeks to explain them in a way that I wish to avoid. While I'll be discussing the experience of conducting fieldwork as a native anthropologist in my methodology as well as analysis section, in this section I will be using Pritchard's work as a foil (as he as a foreign anthropologist) as well as a medium to draw comparisons between certain observations about the Azande and my research. Pritchard specifies on the very first page of his report that in a Zande context, witchcraft is a hereditary phenomenon passed down within kin and easily identifiable within a man's body once an autopsy is conducted. Pritchard deduces that this 'witch organ' is the small intestine<sup>36</sup>. This conclusion as well as the consistent use of terms such as 'Coincidence' and 'Real Origin'<sup>37</sup> to assess witchcraft as described by the Azande already indicate that Pritchard is trying to define his surroundings rather than understand them. An 'us' verses 'them' dichotomy is established in the first few pages of the report, where the 'us' signifies Western Europe or, more specifically, Western European modes of thought. The assumption that he is addressing a Western European

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<sup>36</sup> Evans-Pritchard, EE. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among Azande*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937. 2, 15

<sup>37</sup> Pritchard, Evans, 11

audience is seen when he is detailing how the Azande perceive witchcraft in relation to how Europeans initially framed it. He writes

‘Azande do not perceive the contradiction as we perceive it because they have no theoretical interest in the subject, and those situations in which they express their beliefs in witchcraft do not force the problem upon them. A man never asks the oracles, which alone are capable of disclosing the location of witchcraft-substance in the living, whether a certain man is a witch. He asks whether at the moment this man is bewitching him..... If he is a witch, it is of no significance to you so long as you are not his victim. A Zande is interested in witchcraft only as an agent on definite occasions and in relation to his own interests, and not as a permanent condition of individuals<sup>38</sup>.

Even the titles of the chapters regarding witchcraft indicate the employment of methodological tools that focus mostly on the motivations of subjects. Chapter two is titled 'The Notion of Witchcraft Explains Unfortunate Events' and details how witchcraft is associated with misfortune and responded to with anger instead of awe. The reporting of these events is done while casting a shadow of doubt upon what the respondents are saying. One such account is detailed below

'One can only obtain the full range of a Zande's ideas about causation by allowing him to fill in the gaps himself, otherwise one will be led astray by linguistic conventions. He tells you 'So-and-so was bewitched and killed himself' or even simply that 'So-and-so was killed by witchcraft'. But he is telling you the ultimate cause of his death and not the secondary causes. You can ask him 'How did he kill himself?' and he will tell you that he committed suicide by hanging himself from the branch of a tree. You can also ask 'Why did he kill himself?' and he will tell you

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<sup>38</sup> Pritchard, Evans, 4

that it was because he was angry with his brothers. The Cause of his death was hanging from a tree, and the cause of his hanging from a tree was his anger with his brothers. If you then ask a Zande why he should say that the man was bewitched if he committed suicide on account of his anger with his brothers, he will tell you that only crazy people commit suicide, and that if everyone who was angry with his brothers committed suicide there would soon be no people left in the world, and that if this man had not been bewitched, he would not have done what he did do. If you persevere and ask why witchcraft caused the man to kill himself the Zande will reply that he supposes someone hated him, and if you ask him why someone hated him your informant will tell you that such is the nature of men<sup>39</sup>

While the third chapter details the process of consulting a poison oracle regarding potential witches in the community and is interesting to read simply because of the painstaking detail with which Pritchard documents the ritual, chapter four poses an obnoxiously scientific question; 'Are Witches Conscious Agents?'. His departure point for this chapter is that since witchcraft it is not a man's fault that he was born with witchcraft in his belly he may be quite ignorant that he is a witch and quite innocent of acts of witchcraft. To conclude this chapter, he writes 'judging from these private conversations with Azande after they have received a fowl's wings, I would say that it is mainly difference of temperament which decides the emotional reaction to an accusation of witchcraft. In public everybody reacts in a like manner for, however offended a man may be, he ought to act with standardized meekness'<sup>40</sup>. The urge to come up with a conclusion reminds me of Orsi's conclusion to the third chapter of his book where he writes 'what happens if instead of translating these stories into the alien categories of social and cultural theory, we say that

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<sup>39</sup> Pritchard, Evans, 24

<sup>40</sup> Pritchard, Evans, 60

these lives are this way, just as our lives are, or may be, another way, whatever way that is?'<sup>41</sup>.

The next three chapters of Pritchard's investigation study witch doctors, what they do, their initiation process and their position in society. Witch doctors are not an alternative to oracles. They perform séances at the homestead of men who suspect they are being targeted by witchcraft and while engaging in dances are able to answer questions as to who might be tormenting a man. These answers need to be confirmed by the poison oracle before any action is taken against the witch in question. Pritchard's says that the main function a séance serves is to reflect the host's social position. As far as determining the culprit is concerned Pritchard says 'it is fairly easy for the witch-doctor, because there are a number of stock enmities in Zande culture; between neighbours, because they have a greater number of contacts and hence more opportunities for quarrelling than those whose homesteads are separated by considerable distances; between wives, because it is a commonplace among Azande that the polygamous family spells friction among its members; and between courtiers, whose political ambitions are bound to clash'<sup>42</sup>. If this statement gives the impression that Pritchard does not take the witch doctor's very seriously, his other comments in these chapters confirm it. He describes the seances as 'long-winded, rambling, broken discourses'<sup>43</sup>. He faces some difficulties in getting access to the witch doctors, who want to keep their methods secret saying that 'in spite of the methods of investigation which I employed; my informants did not communicate their entire knowledge to me, even indirectly, and suggests that there were other departments of their knowledge which they did not disclose'<sup>44</sup>. Despite pitting two doctors who were tutoring his servant Kamanga against one

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<sup>41</sup> Orsi, Robert, 110

<sup>42</sup> Pritchard, Evans, 83

<sup>43</sup> Pritchard, Evans, 80

<sup>44</sup> Pritchard, Evans, 70



another he is still not able to get complete information. In the sixth chapter one notices that he details all of Kamanga's reports in his writing including the parts witch doctors did not want the general public to know of. Even when Pritchard satisfies himself with the confession that some practices of witch doctors are fraudulent, he grudgingly admits that 'nevertheless, I feel strongly that we must allow the Zande witch-doctor a measure of intuition and not attribute his utterances solely to his reason'<sup>45</sup> and 'we have to bear in mind that, in spite of the trickery of witchdoctors, their methods are, within a limited compass, successful'<sup>46</sup>. In the final chapter of this section, Pritchard is determined to categorize witch-doctors in a category that fits his understanding of society. Here one is able to see Pritchard at his most patronizing; he uses concepts such as Emil Durkheim's division of labour in society in order to make sense of a system vastly different from the Western European one. While he admits that 'they display great cleverness, but also in their all-round competence in social intercourse, in their quick grasp of new situations, in their knowledge of custom, in their economic knowledge, and in their power to impress and manage men', he concludes this by writing that 'the Zande witch-doctor, in spite of his extra knowledge, is as deep a believer in magic as his slightly less-informed fellows'<sup>47</sup>.

The next three chapters detail the Zande's interactions with the oracles, who are the final authority on witchcraft and whose judgement is often binding. The first chapter details the process of consultation with the poison oracle regarding matters such witchcraft and adultery. The process involves a consultor, who is being directly plagued by a problem or who wishes to know whether the future holds any harm for him, and an operator who directs questions towards the oracle. The oracle is not a tangible presence 'it is not alive; it does not breathe or move about. It is a thing. Azande have no theory about it; they do not know why it

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<sup>45</sup> Pritchard, Evans, 87

<sup>46</sup> Pritchard, Evans, 109

<sup>47</sup> Pritchard, Evans, 117

works, but only that it does work. Oracles have always existed and have always worked as they work now because such is their nature<sup>48</sup>. The operator (women are not permitted to partake in this ceremony) presents questions to which the answer can either be 'yes' or 'no' and after each question feeds poison to a fowl. If the fowl dies the answer is 'yes'. There are specific rules as to what sort of fowl can be used (mostly males are used because females reproduce), a specific recipe for the poison and instructions on its storage and restrictions (sexual and dietary) on the men before they perform the procedure all of which Pritchard describes with intricate detail. In these chapters Pritchard seems a lot more aware of his writing and position as an anthropologist. He admits that 'it will at once occur to a European mind that a likely reason why one fowl dies and another lives is because more or larger doses of poison are administered to the one than to the other, and he is likely to jump to the conclusion that the verdict depends on the skill of the operator. Indeed, a European is prone to assume that the operator cheats, but I believe that he is wrong in this assumption<sup>49</sup> and while he refutes European logic with a risk analysis as to why an operator wouldn't cheat, it is much better than his previous judgement on witch-doctors. His awareness of his position as a researcher is also evident in instances when he is trying to define the poison oracle. One common answer he receives is 'mbismo' on which he comments 'here we are up against the difficulty that always arises when a native word is translated by an English word. I have translated the Zande word mbisimo as 'soul' because the notion this word expresses in our own culture is nearer to the Zande notion of mbisimo of persons than any other English word. The concepts are not identical, and when in each language-the word is used in a number of extended senses it is no longer possible to use the original expressions in translation without risk of confusion and gross distortion. In saying that the poison oracle has

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<sup>48</sup> Pritchard, Evans, 151

<sup>49</sup> Pritchard, Evans, 153

a mbisimo Zande mean little more than 'it does something' or, as we would say, 'it is dynamic'. The tenth chapter in his research documents all the other oracles that exist in Azande life and in doing so highlights his attention to detail and sets the tone for the final section of the book.

The concluding chapters of this book act as a summary of witchcraft and oracles while using the lens of magic to discuss these elements of Zande society. This paradigm shift makes all the difference; now that the departing point of Pritchard's study is magic and he is not concerned with defining or explaining it to another (Western) reader, one is able to take full advantage of Pritchard's extraordinary attention to detail. When he is able to keep his own reservations regarding real explanations to things to one side, he is able to come up with rich observations such as 'to them (Azande), the difference between a sorcerer and a witch is that the former uses the technique of magic and derives his power from medicines, while the latter acts without rites and spells and uses hereditary psycho-physical powers to attain his ends. Both alike are enemies of men, and Azande class them together. Witchcraft and sorcery are opposed to, and opposed by, good magic'<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> Pritchard, Evans, 177

## Chapter 4: Description of the Data

This chapter details the content of the interviews I conducted. I have gone over data collection methods and other technicalities in my methodology chapter. Here I have merely grouped the data into four broad categories. It should be noted that I did not collect the data keeping these categories in mind; I collected information from the people who responded to the call for interviews and later created groups on the basis of what sort of experience they narrated. This chapter is divided into four groups; haunted buildings which mostly focus on urban metropolises, hauntings in rural areas, curses and witches. I realise that the groups of urban and rural hauntings create categories that lend themselves to social and political analysis, I have mostly done so due to convenience and will attempt to make adequate comparisons between both categories during my analysis. A few names have been altered on the interviewee's request.

### Haunted Buildings

I collected five accounts about haunted buildings; three of them are in houses while two are in educational institutes. The first is by a man named Adil Yosuf, who recounts how his childhood home, where his parents still reside, is haunted. He currently lives abroad and refuses to visit the house, situated in Karachi, Pakistan's port city. His was a two-storey building with upper portion under construction. Construction was on hold for years due to personal reasons. The walls had been erected however they had not been plastered. There was timber on the floor and just doors and window openings without frames. Several things happened in that room and that house. He reports hearing the second-floor door bang at around three in the morning as well as any guest being terrified of spending the night (those who would stay the night would have a very disturbed sleep). He mentions waking up to his

brother playing video games at 3 AM on the computer in his room but upon double checking he found his brother soundly asleep in another room. He would have family members complain about not being able to sleep while staying over. One prominent figure in his narrative was a cook who was actually blind and elderly (quite impressive, he was a very good cook, he would only make breakfast but he was more part of the family). He was very religious and kind. He would refuse to sleep in the room dedicated to staff. He would sleep in the garden away from the main house. He and Adil used to get along really well so Adil asked him why he wouldn't sleep in his room. He said it was loud, even though it was very secluded. Upon being asked what he meant, he said people talk to him at night and don't let him sleep. He said they fight all the time. Now his room was not quite on the second floor but there was another staircase leading towards staff rooms from that floor so he used to be pretty close to that floor. Adil told him about everything he had seen. The cook said there are others living upstairs, some good, some not so much but asked me not to go upstairs at night again. He said we were safe because the good ones were protecting the family. The cook used to wake up at 3am to pray and would be seen circling the house praying. The house was quiet when he was with Adil's family. He had heard the cook read ayahs from Quran loudly at night. Adil said he felt really bad because he thought the cook was really scared, given that he couldn't see, spoke to his mum and asked for the cook to be moved into a room in the main house. But he even refused to sleep there and continued to sleep in the garden. He once told Adil that the 'others' don't like him much. Sadly, Adil was the one who eventually discovered he cook lying dead on the floor in the staff bedroom (which he never used). This event traumatised him so much he eventually moved from the house and refuses to move back.

The second account was publicly published on Twitter by Kayhan Suleiman. He describes his experience of living in a house in Islamabad, Pakistan's capital city, which had strange occurrences. The house had been emptying for twenty years before his family moved

in and he was around 9 years old at the time. The long list of instances he recalls include seeing doppelgangers of family members, seeing strange creatures which are described in vivid detail such as 'it was male. It had eyelids as big as my hands. A face that had been stretched and pulled from chin and forehead. Imagine enlarging features to disturbing proportions', hearing odd sounds and visitors being afraid of the house.

The next account I collected was from a lady named Kausar from Lahore, the cultural capital of Pakistan and my hometown. Unlike the other two respondents who were in their late 20s/early 30s, this lady was in her late 60s and recalls incidents that took place around thirty years ago. She is the only one in these accounts to describe the presences in her house as djinns and details how they were co-existing in her house alongside its usual residents. She mainly alludes to them as being a nuisance and cites this as the reason for having them removed. She got in touch with an 'expert' in the field of djinns and sought his help in removing them from her place. She said that he taught at a university and was known to help people out with such predicaments. Even on the way to her house he was constantly receiving phone calls and was particularly worried while attending one. Upon asking what had happened, he replied that the djinn in a lady's house had thrown acid on her back. When they arrived at Ms Kausar's house, the Doctor, as she alluded to him, told her that he had received a lot of complaints from the particular area she lived in. He said that twenty years ago the entire area was a forest and the recent construction in the area was infringing on some djinns homeland. He went into her house and started murmuring in a low voice, warning them that he would hit them if they bothered Ms Kausar too much. He then proceeded to tell Ms Kausar that they only retaliate when they feel there is a threat to them, so if they ever annoyed her too much, she should inform him rather than taking action on her own. To her astonishment, he also told her that her room was the djinns favourite one in the house. She said that they still remained in the house but did not pose a threat to her after the doctor's visit. She also

details how a more lethal variety of djinns plagued her sister in law's house and how they tore apart her wardrobe and would leave minor burns on the bodies of residents.

The last story which involves a house is Aman Ahmed's. Also hailing from Lahore and in his early twenties, Aman describes the period in his life from the ages for twelve to fifteen as one where he experienced a variety of unexplainable things. One of these was related to the house he lived in at the time; to this day he maintains that 80H Model Town was haunted. He recalls hearing his mother calling out to him but upon going to her room being met with an empty room or being told that she had not called him. He recalls his cousin being afraid of the house and all these occurrences stopping when he and his family relocated (not because of the occurrences) in 2014. An interesting aspect of this story was that Aman alluded to a time in his life when he experienced supernatural incidents, meaning that these weren't restricted to 80H Model Town. He talks about the summer of 2011 when he was on vacation in Dallas, Texas for a month and describes seeing a doppelganger of his sister Ammal in a green dress when she was supposed to be out shopping. Aman also describes how he and his friends experienced an incident in his school in 2010 while rehearsing for a school play. His school, Aitchison college, was an old building from the colonial era and was situated next to some woods. There were rumours floating around that there was a ghost in the woods. And there was a story passed down to generations that there was a janitor who lived in Aitchison who had a daughter called Sheila and that she fell off the amphitheatre into the woods and died- and the legend went that Sheila haunted those woods which is why no one could go there. Aman and his friends decided to test this theory and he narrates what he saw when he was in the middle and some of his friends had deserted them

*"It was a large, thick, well-built uhh monster. Yeah it was a thick monster that had two horns coming from its head and it was giant size, it wasn't the size of a regular human being and it was fixed in place and looking away from me. I'm looking at this thing and walking towards*

*it. A couple of guys came behind me and they screamed. They ran and I was the only one who was trying to approach the place so I walked towards the thing, the monster that was fixed in place and uh uhhhh the. From behind where the light was coming I see a guard was approaching and coming towards me because I wasn't allowed to be in the woods. So I ran in the opposite direction and most people were scattered around the woods and I remember having to run out of the woods and the image is still in my head. The woods were scary as hell. The only light in the woods was the searchlight in the distance that stationed guards would use. Later on when we recalled the story and the ones who didn't see it called bull shit but the ones who saw it believed it; we knew what we saw. There were a lot of contrary explanations such as light shining on a tree and so and so- but trees don't take such shapes and forms so I've always maintained that that was something"*

Another account of a haunted institute is by a girl who prefers to stay anonymous. She attended university at Kinnaird college for women which was established in Lahore in 1913. Similar to Aman's story, there were already rumours that certain parts of the college were haunted, yet there was no backstory to this other than the fact that they were very old. She describes how she was in the science building and she noticed a shadow form over her shadow while wind caressed her back, even though she was in an enclosed space and there should have been no wind. This presence wasn't restricted to the science building and seemed to follow her after their interaction. She reports;

*"Nothing more happened when I was in the premises but as soon as I sat in the car outside the gate I started smelling something really bad. I asked the driver if he could smell it, but he couldn't. I even opened the window, but I could still smell it. I recited 4 qul (quranic verses) till I got home, and it got stronger, I asked my mother if something was smelling but she no and I told her about my experience and the weird disgusting smell. I was the only one smelling it. No one else could.*



*It stayed with me till my mother sprinkled some prhai ki hui (recited upon) rose water on me, and told me that while she was walking with an auntie who lives in the same street as us, she brought up the topic of the smell, and auntie told her that it's because a jinn is right with me, and that the same happened with her daughter(who also used to go to Kinnaird college) and a buzurg (elder) told her that and gave that prhai wala rose water to sprinkle on her (she also gave some for me)"*

She also describes how a friend of hers was stuck in an elevator on campus. She heard a laugh and in the huge mirror behind her saw her doppelgänger standing next to her but the eyes were blood red and that she was so scared and could only recite ayats (verses) in heart as her body and tongue was frozen. And she said that if we hadn't opened the lift at that time, the entity would have hurt her more, it had its arm over her shoulders and squeezing hard, she had marks on her left shoulder. The friend fell very ill the next day and refused to use the lift, even in the company of people.

### Karsaz Churail

I have titled this section churails which means witches in Urdu and Hindi. Karsaz is a district in the city of Karachi that is rumoured to be haunted. The rumour is that a bride's groom died on the Karsaz road. She was truly heartbroken by the incident and also passed away. Now legend has it that the bride still roams the street where her husband allegedly died. The Karsaz churail story started many rumours about the Karsaz area. Currently, social media is flooded with people claiming they've sighted ghosts in the area. The most famous sighting is of a child hanging from the window of uninhabited houses. Regardless, the most well-known ghost story and the real attraction of the Karsaz road will always be the Karsaz churail bride. Initially, when the rumours about the Karsaz churail started to grow, the

road used to be very dark and deserted. This vibe added to the legend of the Karsaz churail, and the myth became stronger. Presently, many restaurants and residential areas have opened up in the area, making the Karsaz road very vibrant. However, many ghostbusters still travel to the site to spot one glimpse of the Karsaz churail. When I started researching, I explicitly sought accounts for the Karsaz churail because this is a well-known urban legend and I wanted to see whether narration styles were different for an area that was already known to host a supernatural entity. I collected five accounts, out of which I have decided to discuss and analyse three.

The first interview is with a lady in her early thirties named Rabia Gohar. She narrates the experience of her friend Saba as she left Rabia's house to travel back to her own. Karachi is Pakistan's biggest city (it is bigger than New York City) and it takes a long time to get from one place to the other. This is why Rabia's husband Faris came to pick her up in a motorcycle rather than a car; it would have taken a long time till they were back home and he did not want to attract the attention of burglars. They were on the Karsaz expressway when Saba reported she saw a woman who looked identical to her except for the fact that she had an enormous grin on her face. Faris warned Saba not to look at the creature directly as she would not be able to withstand it. The creature floated along with Saba for what seemed like eternity. During this time Saba felt faint and nauseous, she did not recover from this feeling till she reached back home. According to Rabia to this day, Saba is still terrified to look in the mirror, she doesn't travel on bike anymore, she has the fear of travelling after 9 pm, she can't sleep or stay alone even if it is broad day light. Her fear of being so close to that entity has a deep impact on her mental health.

The second story in this series is narrated by a girl in her early twenties. Her name is Hina Imtiaz and she narrates her friend's experience at Karsaz

*'This happened with my best friend, he was coming back from a project with his assistant who was driving his own car behind him, when they turned for Karsaz from Sharah Faisal, right there my friend saw a graceful woman in white clothes, she was dressed up as if she was coming back from a wedding, since there is a Shadi (wedding) hall not so far away from that point, my friend thought she might have had her car broken or something, he said she did not seem to be the call girl kind that you usually find around the streets at these odd hours, so he slowed down a bit to see if her car was broken or she needed help.. what he saw next froze his blood, that woman turned and had the creepiest grin ear to ear on her face, and she had black holes for eyes, with a pale white face, she didn't exactly turn, it was just her neck moving slowly in synchronization with the turning of the car, my friend was on call with his assistant and he asked him if he saw that, the assistant said \*there is no one there\* he could not see anything, my friend recited dua and told the assistant to speed up and not look back, they drove off, my friend said he was so psyched out that he felt in a blink of an eye that she will be sitting next to him or at the back seat, so he kept looking around, he could not see her in the back view mirror even'*

Hina also mentions two other people (a friend and a friend's relative) encountering the same being at Karsaz and concludes that this is a regular happening there.

The third story is Alia Chatta's who is in her late teens. She reports that she already knew about the rumours regarding Karsaz but didn't let them bother her since she would commute through Karsaz every day. However, two night time incidents shocked her to her core. She reports:

*'The first time around I was coming home late from a friend's house. It must've been around ten or ten thirty when I got into the car and we drove onto main Karsaz road. I remember my father complaining that I had taken too long meanwhile I argued that it wasn't. As we were driving a Corolla driving at full speed overtook us. Perhaps the driver was under influence*

*because that car out of nowhere flipped upside down and crashed barely inches away from us. The front portion of it was entirely crushed, the last thing I saw was shattered glass littering on the road. We still don't know if the driver survived or not. Road raging is possible but a could a car flip when there are not even any bumps?*

*Regardless I had the experience of passing by once again late. Many years later. The second time was even stranger since I experienced it first-hand. I had been hanging out with some friends and ended up leaving quite late. Around eleven. My driver arrived to pick me up around eleven and seconds after I got into the car it begun raining cats and dogs. Karachi just being Karachi. The storm was so rough the visibility faded and the rain thundered against the roof so hard I genuinely thought it would collapse. People were desperately looking for a way to escape the rain. The moment we reached the road near nursery the car stopped moving. The driver couldn't figure out what was wrong apparently and went outside in the thundering rain to check leaving me alone in the car. I tried calling home but there was no service. All of a sudden, the car begun to slide backwards slowly. At that moment I felt my life flash right before my eyes, it felt as if I was free falling despite there being no slope? Luckily or unluckily, it crashed into a car right behind us. Their headlights were damaged but it stopped the car from a bigger crash. I was frozen still in my seat however until I heard the owner of the car and the driver arguing outside. In a cold sweat I realized this was the same spot I had seen the car crash years ago'*

### Rural Areas

I will now describe the three accounts I received from rural settings. Although I was initially uncomfortable with the idea of creating a division between rural and urban dwellers

due to their lives being vastly different, I eventually created this category based on differences in the accounts I received. In order to minimize the differences between my respondents, I chose to focus on events that took place in rural settings from a city dweller's perspective. Two out of three accounts are experiences of city dwellers who were in a rural setting when they encountered the supernatural. Although one respondent was residing in the place, he had his experience in, he is educated along the lines of a city dweller and currently lives in an urban setting. Since I was conducting these interviews remotely, it was quite difficult reaching out to people who are currently residing in villages. It is also worth mentioning that the lifestyles in the four provinces of Pakistan, Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) vary greatly and because of different languages and dialects they have very distinct cultures. I have tried to include stories from Punjab, Sindh and KPK and was unable to find a respondent from Baluchistan. This theme warrants further investigation beyond the scope of this thesis, and if I do get the opportunity to continue this project, I believe that personally speaking to people dwelling in rural areas would add a lot of depth and quality to my analysis.

The first account is by a man in his late twenties who prefers to stay anonymous. He lives in Karachi and narrates the experience of his cousin who went hunting with his friends in the Cholistan dessert in Sindh. The province of Sindh is mostly covered with deserts and apart from Karachi and Hyderabad it does not host a lot of big cities. They knew it was going to be a long journey and due to shortage of resources they might even face problems there but despite all odds they collected gallons of petrol, water and food to spend the next days of their journey and left on their jeep. He said on the way while crossing local villages people told them not to travel in that area at night and warned them that others have sighted 'chalawa' which is a cultural term to describe a type of *jinnat* who are swift footed and can jump and travel long distances in a flash. They can even show up in a human form and then

disappear in a glimpse but it is advised not to follow them, look back at them or go to them in any case as it might cause harm. None of the guys believed these stories. They were driving through a deserted silent path at night with acres of barren land on either side, not a single bush or a plant could be seen, when they suddenly realized there was a woman dressed in red bridal dress standing at a distance. They immediately knew it couldn't be human as there wasn't any dwelling around from where she could have come. She was dressed in local bridal dress and was standing alone at that time staring intently at the jeep. They drove past her and no one looked back to see whether she had disappeared or was still standing there. A few moments later, they saw an old man standing on the side of their path. He had a white cloth wrapped around his body and held a stick in his hand. The woman kept on appearing after every few minutes and so would the old man. Sometimes alone and sometimes together. This continued until sunrise, just as the locals had said.

The next account is by a man of the same age group who is also from Karachi. We will refer to him as M Khan. He recounts the experience of his mother-in-law when she was young. He prefaces his account by mentioning that he and his wife are both medical doctors doing their post-graduation and born and bred in Karachi with Urdu as their first language, therefore already identifying himself with a certain area and preparing the reader for the narration to come. The event took place when his wife was about 6-7 years old and her family decided to take a trip to the Northern areas of Pakistan. He mentions that 'Gilgit & Baltistan along with Kashmir are some of the most beautiful places in the world with tall ice capped mountains and captivating valleys and above all with the solitude and calmness in contrast to the busy and polluted air of the cities is a welcome escape from the daily routine'. Towards the end of their trip, they were unable to find a suitable hotel and eventually got one at a very distant place which was very sparsely populated. There was hardly anyone residing in the hotel at that moment and they got a room on the 2nd floor. He reports the following:

*"My mother-in-law couldn't find a beautiful lady's handbag she bought on one of her earlier shopping trips. They looked everywhere in the room and in their travel bags which sounded very strange as they took much care locking all their stuff when they left and she distinctly remembered putting it in one of the travel bags and locking it up, then where did it go? It was already late night so they decided to sleep with hopes of giving it one more try in the morning before leaving.*

*That night my mother-in-law woke around 2am at night and felt the room's temperature to be unusually cold when something caught her eye which gave her chills. She saw that the large window near the bed was open and there was a woman sitting on the window sill facing her. She was attired in traditional northern clothing even wearing a traditional Hunzai woman cap and had a blank expression on her face. The eerie part was that she had my mother-in-law's handbag in one hand and with her other hand was slowly gesturing calling her near as if to come and take her bag. My mother-in-law started reciting Duas (prayers) and drew the blanket over her face and kept it as such. After sometime she felt that the heaviness and cold in the room had gone but she couldn't sleep for the night.*

*When everybody woke up in the morning, she was shocked to see the window locked and her handbag lying on the side table near the bed. She told everyone after which they started packing and left. The thing which concerned her was that how the lady got there when everything was locked, how she got the bag in the first place and above all who was she and whether she was evil."*

The last account in this category is by a man named Hamza Arshad who lived in a small village in the north-eastern area of Pakistan, adjacent to Indian border. He currently resides in Lahore. Before the Partition of Subcontinent, many Hindus used to live in the area.

They continued to live side by side with Muslims for centuries without any strife. But after Partition, Hindu families opted to migrate to India. His grandfather migrated to Pakistan in 1950, three years after the freedom. He built a house at the place where Hindus used to cremate their dead before partition. People of the village forbade him to build house there, but he, being an ex-soldier, knew no fear. Hamza reports

*"When I was in my teens, I began to see weird things. I often saw a crawling skull in our garden and backyard. We had planted so many trees and flowery bushes there, and the place had become a tiny grove. Often in the small hours, when thick darkness prevailed on the atmosphere (as there was no electricity in our village then), midst dead silence, I felt myself awake... Awake and fully conscious. I felt the presence of something crawling on the floor in my room. In spite of darkness, I could see, or I was made to see, a skull moving. I could hear scraping sound that chilled the marrow of my bones. Its upper teeth were visible but lower jaw was deformed and its hollow eyes seemed to look at me. I couldn't shriek. My whole body became numb. I felt chill, very chill. The skull moved towards a Vachellia Nilotic tree which we locally call 'keekar'. It disappeared beside it somewhere, as I couldn't chase it due to fear and darkness. I witnessed this ghastly sight randomly, but mostly on moonless nights.*

*After a while my condition used to become normal. I was terribly afraid, but I couldn't recount these events to anyone. But I couldn't go near that keekar tree even during the day. I can't call these events hallucinations because I felt I was awake and undergoing that terrible experience. I remained afraid during my high school time. Later, my father cut down some trees, including that keekar tree to build new rooms. When the earth was dug for foundations, some bones and a skull were discovered. I was stunned to see that it was the same skull that I used to see at night."*



The final category I chose to create was for instances when people have reported being cursed by someone else. I have collected five instances in which respondents claim that while they had not encountered any supernatural being they had been cursed by another person. Some people have very explicitly described the dark magic that was cast their way while others have identified a person but not detailed their methods. At first, I was vary of including curses in my research but due to five people contacting me I decided that enough people categorised curses as a supernatural incident for me to pay attention. In this section I shall describe what the respondents said to me while in the following one I will analyse the content of these interviews. All accounts have been collected from people in urban settings.

The first account is by a woman in her mid-thirties named Ayza Alam. Ayza suspects that her mother-in-law has done black magic on her which has caused her marriage to deteriorate. She reports that she and her husband were head over heels for each other when they met ten years ago but when they got married things took a turn for the worse. Her husband would often complain that he felt heavy in her presence but when he would go to his mother (this was a joined family system) he would feel fine. She claims that their sexual life was not going well and that they would constantly bicker. Her own health was ameliorating as she would constantly experience sharp body aches and once it got so bad that she complained to her mother-in-law about it. Her mother-in-law recited Surah Naas upon seven chilli's and the pain went away. Ayza noticed her physical appearance becoming worse and says that each time she would think about praying or showering something prevented her from doing so; she would clean herself for prayers and would suddenly notice dirt on her body. Ayza is currently still looking for cures to this ailment and says that professionals who are able to remove curses are too expensive to consult.

The second account is by a boy named Ali Memon in his late teens. Hailing from Lahore, Ali discusses his parents' failing marriage and attributes this to his mother's aunt cursing the family. The reason behind this was that she wanted his mother to marry her son but she fell in love with his father instead. Ali says that his parents were madly in love with each other and quite materially prosperous when they got married but soon after things started going downhill. He says that his parents would constantly fight and his father would complain about a bad smell clouding his mother that no one else could sense. His father lost his job and they had to move from Islamabad to Lahore and to a much smaller house. His parents had also considered a divorce. He says that his mother consulted a specialist in Medina and he said that he would help her out but never responded beyond this. His mother recites verses on a daily basis and if she skips a day, they face negative consequences.

The third account is by a girl named Saher Binte Haider in her late twenties from Lahore. She reports the experience of a family friend who was cursed with black magic. She says:

*"So my mom's friend lives in a joint family system with each floor designated for each bahu (daughter in law). Her jeth/jethanis (sister in laws) had a separate floor in the same house. So she fixed her son's engagement with her sister's daughter (niece) after which her jethanni got furious and cut ties with her. It's because her jethanni wanted aunty (my mom's friend) to choose one of her 2 daughters for her son. Aunty's son wasn't interested in their daughter and was in love with khala ki beti (his cousin on his mother's side). Some time passed by and they started preparing for the wedding. That's when one day her bahu to be started getting sick very often. She would call my mom and share every detail in fear and confusion. Please note that my mom's friend is a gem of a person, a very God-fearing person who wouldn't hurt anyone. She said her niece's body freezes and her voice starts changing. They took her to imam of masjid in our area several times after which he*

*confirmed that her niece has been possessed and someone was doing black magic. After a few days he found out that it was her jethanni who had hired someone to do black magic on her niece. I don't know how but these imams (seers) get visuals of people doing the deed and he said following were the words of her jethanni "In*

*ko basnay nahi dongi ink betay ka ghar tbah krdongi" (I won't let them rest I'll ruin their household). The imam Sahab told them not to confront the jethani at all as it could worsen the situation. He asked to continue treatment silently. Just get her roohani ilaaj (spiritual treatment) which they did for 2-3 years.*

*They got married (I attended their wedding also) and the bride moved to Saudi Arabia with her husband. All went fine but as soon as she visited Pakistan, she started experiencing the same things as soon as she landed on airport. They continued her treatment once again, and in the meanwhile she got pregnant. I remember I was also pregnant back then and our due dates were same so we were in touch with them and she was doing completely fine.*

*One morning when it was her 7th month my mom got call from her friend that her bahu is not feeling well and they're rushing to the hospital. On the way, she delivered her baby and it was a still birth.*

*It was definitely a tough time for them but they stood strong and strengthened their ties with Allah. Soon everything was fine and her bahu was blessed with a healthy child afterwards".*

The fourth interview is with a girl called Sana Adnan. She is in her late teens and also lives in Lahore. She reports:

*"One of my cousins was diagnosed with colon cancer and he died within six months of his diagnosis. Just days before his death, his 5-year-old son also died in an accident. A couple of years later, one of our close relatives came to our house and while talking to my mother she confessed that the boy (my cousin) misbehaved with her one day and she did black magic on him to eliminate him and his "nassal" (family). My mother was shocked to hear this. This*

woman is very well known in our family by taweez (Taweez worn by some Muslims contain verses from the Quran and/or other Islamic prayers for the protection from magic and diseases. The Taweez is worn by some Muslims to protect them from evil also. It is intended to be an amulet. The word taweez is used to refer to other types of amulets), dam darood (Anyone who believes that the mere recitation of Quranic verses and blowing it on water, or burning pieces of paper with some instructions has magical properties) etc but no one could believe that she would stoop this low. She then asked my mother to end my brother's engagement and get him married to her daughter. My brother is very handsome and successful. My mother refused her gently that she cannot do this. The woman left and the next day my brother got sick. He stopped eating and meeting with people. He locked himself in one room and he became extremely weak. My parents would switch doctors to get diagnosis but all in vain. All of his reports were normal but he looks like he is about to die. Pale white complexion with bones visible confined in a dark isolated room. My mother then consulted an aalim (seer) who says that someone has done black magic on him. The rituals started for him and he starts getting better. Alhamdullilah he is better now but we are extremely worried. This is such an unfortunate thing to have someone like this woman in close relation. You can't confront such people because of the fear that they will do it again out of rage. You cannot stop them from visiting you because of the same fear. Our family had some very mysterious and accidental deaths over the past decade and it is reported by witnesses in the family that this woman directly threatened them of the worst before they died".

The last account is by a girl named Anamta Choudry in her early twenties. Anamta is from Karachi and reports that her neighbour did black magic on her entire family with damning consequences for her mother. The lady had two sons and her husband was abroad. Her cousin lived right across the street and she admitted that the lady did totkas (home remedies) in qabristan (graveyard) for the issues she faces. She would request favours from

her neighbours such as asking them if they could store certain things of hers in their house and would never ask for these things to be returned. Once, the lady requested Anamta's mother to make a dessert that her son really liked. However, she soon sent the plate back saying her son was not hungry anymore. Anamta reports that 'Ammi hadn't even put their returned food to the wok and still it tasted so bitter as if somebody had added a rat kill to it. Everyone at our place had it and felt something was off but didn't sense what it could be. Next day my youngest sister fell terribly ill. She almost died of a bad jaundice'. Then, her mother was diagnosed with cancer. Strangely though, before her diagnosis her mother had a nightmare in which someone dug their nails into her back and slapped her on her neck. Her neck was where the cancer ended up being identified. The house itself started depressing her mother which is why they moved to her aunt's house where her mother became stable. However, when they moved back into the old house her mother's health deteriorated and she started resembling a skeleton. The family was advised to employ spiritual healing but didn't believe in such methods. The only reason Anamta decided to share this account was because she was at a loss for explanations and this is more of a theory, she has rather than an actual accusation.

## Chapter 5: Analysis of the Data

### Haunted Buildings

To describe the spaces in this section as 'haunted' is in itself misleading which is why I will begin by clarifying that this term has been employed purely to distinguish this category from the rest. In the preceding chapter I discussed five interviewees who experienced presences in either their homes or educational institutions. This chapter will attempt to answer what each person thought they were experiencing and why, based on answers given in their interviews and their narration styles. It also explores what (if anything) each person chose to do about the situation they encountered and whether these solutions fall in line with those proposed for similar predicaments in the literature I have previously reviewed. I will follow the sequence I employed while describing the content of the interviews in the previous chapter. Before I start analysing the content, I have collected I would like to draw upon a section of my literature review. In the fifth chapter of his book, Robert Orsi talks about relationships between the living and the dying, placing a family with a deceased son and the constantly transforming picture of Jesus in his room at the centre stage. Recalling the experience of visiting this household with his friends, Orsi writes 'not once did we did think we were in a haunted house. With the exception of my friend's girlfriend, who was Jewish, all of us had grown up Catholic, in the culture of presence. We had all been to shrines before. Had we thought in a moment of silliness or unease that we were embarked on an occult adventure, the coffee cake and coffee would surely have brought us back down to earth and to our senses. Nor was this a trip to the church's periphery, to which so many super natural phenomena had been relegated in these years. The boy's mother had made it clear to

all her visitors, including us, that she was a faithful and obedient Catholic<sup>51</sup>. I have tried to use such wisdom in this portion of my analysis; while listening to these five accounts I have attempted to be cognitive of what was not being said but implied by these five informants. In this segment, and throughout my report, I wish to convey that there are far deeper motives for people to share such accounts with others than just making sense of them.

The first account is Adil's and is definitely the one that resembles being 'haunted' the most. He is the only respondent to use the adjective 'creepy' to describe the events he experienced and the main message I received from the interview was that his encounters led him to move away from the house and eventually leave Pakistan. His narration was very similar to a witness recounting an event to a police officer or lawyer; all events were neatly summarized and the purpose behind sharing them was crystal clear: these were all the reasons as to why he moved out. The supernatural plays a very direct role as an agent in this case and most incidents are recounted directly as opposed to the ones recounted by the other four respondents, in which some acknowledgement is given to the fact that they know their accounts don't make sense and at other times firmly defend their experiences. As far as Adil's story is concerned, his opinion on matters is rarely expressed and his main reaction to his stories is his fear and eventual trauma due to his cook's death. Out of all five accounts, Adil's account ended with the biggest tragedy; his cook was found dead in the house. In fact, the cook is the only person in Adil's account who identifies an agent behind all the chaos in the house. He told Adil that he refused to sleep inside the house because 'he said there are others living upstairs, some good, some not so much but asked me not to go upstairs at night again He said we were safe because the good ones were protecting us. Although he doesn't use the term 'djinn' explicitly, his description matches the preferential nature of djinns that Amira El Zein writes about. El Zein says “Intermediary beings such as the jinn, on the other

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<sup>51</sup> Orsi, Robert, 194

hand, are more complex, multifarious, intricate, and hesitant between obscurity and glow. They are go-between beings. Like humans, they could at any time shift toward goodness or toward evil”<sup>52</sup>. It is also interesting to note how the cook was the only one who explicitly tried to solve the problem by going around the house and reciting Quranic verses. I asked Adil whether he ever considered tackling the problem in a more direct manner, especially after the cook's death. He replied that while the house was definitely very scary, his family did not have the means to relocate, in fact the occurrences that took place did not seem to affect them too deeply. Even he was not very concerned with most incidents till the cook was found dead, and he alludes to the trauma of this as the key factor influencing his decision to leave.

Another person who experienced presences in his house was Kayhan Suleiman. Taken from a public twitter thread, Kayhan's story to me seemed like a more vivid version of what Adil narrated. If Adil had one instance of seeing his brother when he wasn't actually there, Kayhan was able to give three such instances. I found it interesting that Kayhan chose to share this story on a public platform and to put his experience under everyone's scrutiny because instead of claiming that he believes in supernatural entities Kayhan prefaces his story by clearly stating that he is not superstitious. He writes 'I am going to start this thread by prefaceing it with I am not the sort of person who would typically believe in djinns, neither is my family. Sure, our religion insists on it so we are more welcoming of the idea but for us it was our experiences that gave us little choice. I still can't say If what we experienced was objectively real, or if there's a logical explanation for it so you don't have to believe what I say - we struggled a lot with it ourselves, still do. We've just filed it under the tab - knowledge is not absolute. We'll never know'<sup>53</sup>. Throughout his tale, Kayhan will interject

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<sup>52</sup> El Zein, Amira, 14

<sup>53</sup> Suleiman, Kayhan, Twitter



and write things such as 'I know it sounds unbelievable' or continue to prove that he does not believe in the occult. I sympathise with Kayhan because I see a narrative structure in which the subject has to be cognizant of their audience and perception to their potential reactions to such a degree that the experience itself is rife with proof. Stories such as Adil's are rare- his was a story in which he was confidently able to provide reasons for his relocation. Kayhan's story, on the other hand, seems as concerned with appearing credible as he is with detailing what actually happened; he seems to be convincing the reader as well as himself that the following events are true. While Adil's story has a purpose, where he tells me his reasons for leaving, Kayhan's story is a collection of anecdotes. He walks the reader through multiple stories and is able to provide vivid descriptions such as the time he describes a figure on his bed. These characters are a recurring feature and to corroborate his story he describes how other people in his family had not only similar experiences but saw similar things. His cousin claimed to have seen the same creature he saw in his bed, his aunt and him both encountered and heard a wolf like humanoid creature and another aunt and his mother claimed to have seen two bald children. The sites for such encounters would also be the same; a mango tree in the garden and the second floor of the house seemed to have been popular locations for these creatures. Similar to Adil and later Aman's experiences, there were also doppelgangers of family members at times when they weren't in the vicinity; his grandmother saw his father despite him being out of the city and his sisters would often hear each other even though the other would not be at home. Another similarity with Adil's story was the visitors to the house were afraid of it and unlike Adil, Kayhan is able to supply numerous instances of visitors, such as his cousin and his sister's friend having their own encounters. There seem to be too many people involved in the story to say that it is made up. He reveals their identities which seems to imply that if one wishes they can crosscheck this story which really adds to its validity.

Kayhan's story is the first-time religion is brought to the table. While Adil's cook recited Quranic verses in order to shield himself from the 'others', Kayhan further bolsters the validity of his story by mentioning that two religious scholars had commented on how there was a family of five living in the house with them. He adds that the scholars said 'they did not want to hurt us. They had grown used to us so we shouldn't worry and think of them as almost - but not necessarily offering protection'<sup>54</sup>. Even though Kayhan writes that he is not a religious person at the beginning of his account, I find it interesting that he chose to share this information. Two interesting things happen once religious authority is introduced to the equation. Firstly, Kayhan is able to justify why he and his family spent such a long time in this house as the scholar has said that the family of five did not mean any harm and past experience had proven that no bodily harm came to any family members except the first cook the family hired, whose hands were often bruised. The observation that they didn't experience anything extremely negative is made clearer towards the end of the story when Kayhan and his family moved out the next tenants were not having a pleasant experience; 'after we moved our landlord lady's sons called my dad very seriously worried asking if we had had any strange experiences in the house because they weren't having a good time. My dad was like I told your mum numerous times but they're harmless. The son said I think they don't like us'<sup>55</sup>. Although it is not explicitly mentioned, it does seem as though religious authority was able to convince the family that these experiences weren't detrimental. Kayhan ends his account on a positive note writing 'I talk about this house lovingly and calmly because well I grew up there but know that most people were shit scared of that house. Not in a visual sense of the way that oh this is an old house; it has some dark corners - it was a fairly average looking house - but more like you genuinely felt like you were being watched or followed in it you felt like

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<sup>54</sup> ibid

<sup>55</sup> idid

you were the one intruding on someone else's territory<sup>56</sup>. The second interesting religious aspect of this story is how Kayhan started reciting verses 'like any good Muslim boy' when he heard murmurs outside his window at night. This shows that despite not being a practicing Muslim, the idea of presence and religion are so deeply intertwined that religion seems like a useful combatant in such a scenario. This made me wonder that perhaps these experiences and religion are interconnected because they are perceived as 'facts' even to the passive observer. They are real to them even if they are not active participants in the religion. Here is where things get more interesting; reciting verses actually works! The murmurs DO cease once Kayhan begins reciting. I realise that this is a very fragile situation to which a lot of psychological explanations could be ascribed. My point is not that one explanation is superior to another; I do not mean to discount a psychological solution or to show that it is fallacious. Rather I want to highlight how agency is being directed towards a phenomenon that does not have scientific backing. Even if there is a neurological explanation behind it, I feel that taking a subject seriously and accounting for their truth in a scholarly study is important. If a final report on this account would conclude with a paragraph explaining the psychology of fear, I think it affects the qualitative nature of the rest of the study. The fact that Kayhan thought reciting the verses is an important detail and if it is omitted the account he is trying to narrate loses its value. As scholars, it is important to preserve what our interviewees are saying rather than to find faults within it. As Orsi said 'scholarship entails risk, for the person whose world has been entered by the scholar, but for the scholar, too, whose own certainties ought to be on the line in the encounter. It is because of this risk, however, if it is taken, that scholarship also creates possibilities for engagement and relationship<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid*

<sup>57</sup> Orsi, Robert, 231

The next story is Ms Kausar's. Her house was inhabited by djinns and she sought professional help in order to get them removed. I can confidentially say the presence she was experiencing was a group of djinns because this is the stance she maintains throughout her interview. She also ensures that this detail is not scrutinised too deeply; upon being told what the project was and that it would be submitted and defended within a university she remarks that djinns do exist because the Quran mentions they do and that she is not sure whether a younger or Western audience will appreciate this fact. I found this remark, stressed upon at two other points during the interview, quite interesting because she was aware of the divide between presence and absence that not only exists within certain cultures but also within the very specific domain of Western academia. Furthermore, because she does not need convincing as to what is going on, she is willing to seek help in order to get these creatures removed from her house. She was recommended a university teacher who had past experience with such matters. In the interview, the fact that he was teaching at a university was stressed upon. This makes me think of the Azande and their witch doctors. Zande witch doctors make a living by performing seances and training apprentices<sup>58</sup>. Ms Kausar's doctor (she called him the doctor because he was a professor NOT because he was a witch doctor) took no fee for his assistance and was helping a number of people in the same situation. In fact, as later stories further highlight, there is no official body one can consult when they are sure that they're in the presence of a supernatural creature. In most cases, someone is referred to them and the solutions, at least in the cases I witnessed, are along religious lines. Another interesting aspect of this interview was how Ms Kausar kept stressing on the fact that this man taught at a university and at one point in the interview added that he was a very respectful and helpful person. It seemed as if his education bolstered the fact that what he was dealing with was a legitimate problem and not just consoling someone in discomfort. To me,

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<sup>58</sup> Pritchard, Evans, Chapter 6

this is similar to what Kayhan did when he mentioned what the religious scholar had told his family. As stated earlier, this need to legitimise implies not only an awareness of western scepticism but also a fear of being regarded as 'uneducated' hence the emphasis on the fact that he was a doctor. None of the conclusions in this story are 'religion is correct'. Although Ms Kausar says she believes in djinns because the Quran says they exist, majority of her story focuses on her own experience and, as we have seen with the insistence that the Doctor was an educated man, she reasons in a (for want of a better term) modern manner. Both she and Kayhan are aware of the reaction their experiences may be met with and both seem forced to tell two things at once; what actually happened and that they are not crazy. In fact, after narrating her own account she recounted how a family member had experienced something similar, and in this experience a lot more extreme acts were committed by the djinn, who had burnt all her clothes. After conducting these interviews and then reading Pritchard's text, I couldn't help but wonder whether this story would have been narrated differently if it had been told a few decades ago; would the stories be as brazen as what the Azande disclosed to Pritchard? I recall chapter seven of the study being related to the place of witch doctors in society. While I reacted to this quite negatively in the literature review, I do think that interview subjects are becoming increasingly aware of such 'sociological' considerations and that this has serious ramifications for sharing and studying people's experiences. It is in order to conserve real conversations that scholars like Orsi and El Zein advocate for a different lens while researching. Interestingly, Ms Kausar is also the only respondent whose story is in line with the specifications made by El-Zein. When I conducted my literature review after collecting my data, I saw similarities between Ms Kausar's account and El-Zein's book when she writes 'In spite of all the correspondences mentioned above between jinn and humans, a foremost distinction between both remains. Although the subtle jinn can see humans and intervene in their lives, the latter cannot perceive them in the

manifest realm, except in rare instances as mentioned in the Qur'an<sup>59</sup>: “Surely, he sees you, he and his tribe, from where you see them not<sup>60</sup>. Kayhan saw figures which he was able to explicitly describe. Another point made by Ms Kausar that is supported by El-Zein is that only men who possess a certain level of intelligence can see the djinn, which is what she tries to do when she tells us about the Doctor's scholarly credentials. This is supported by El-Zein when she says 'It is thought some holy and saintly spiritual humans have the ability not only to foresee things through their imagination but also to be in two places at the same time through their extraordinary imagination and their power of concentration. They are called the 'abdal or “spirit guardians<sup>61</sup>'.

In their paper 'Possession and the Djinn', Najat Khalifa and Tim Harde inform the reader that 'Djinn are said to inhabit caves, deserted places, graveyards and darkness<sup>62</sup>. Kayhan mentioned at the start of his story that his house had previously been empty for twenty years while Adil says that the upper portion of his house was empty. As a child I used to constantly ask my parents why we wouldn't move to a bigger house once my siblings were born and they warned me that if a house was too big djinns would occupy the rooms that weren't frequently used. Although when I grew older, I realised (and they admitted) that it was not feasible to move into a bigger house I know the reason they provided was not fabricated. I have definitely heard of people ensuring the location is not too isolated from other people when they buy a house. Therefore, when the doctor told Ms Kausar the reason behind her house being inhabited by djinns was that she lived in an area that was formerly populated by them, we both knew it was not an attempt to make her feel guilty for encroaching on their land. Throughout the interviews so far, the idea El Zein expressed of

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<sup>59</sup> El Zein, Amira, 70

<sup>60</sup> Qur'an 7:27

<sup>61</sup> El Zein, Amira, 74

<sup>62</sup> Khalifa N, Harde T, *Possession and the Djinn*, Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, 2005, 351

djinns being intelligent beings, 'Jinn are addressed in the Qur'an as nations endowed with rational faculties. Jinn and humans have mental faculties<sup>63</sup> that allow them to access knowledge, perceive the truth, and distinguish them from all other living beings in the universe. These two intelligent species are described as discerning the Word of God through reasoning, while the rest of Creation grasps it instinctively'<sup>64</sup> is maintained. They don't interact with, or eventually attack, the humans they come into contact with. Instead, as Ms Kausar's example shows, they were there first and continue to exist there. They only retaliate when they are provoked, the Doctor warned Ms Kausar not to threaten them directly but to tell them that he would deal with them himself. If not, she might have been met with a fate similar to that of her relatives or the woman who had acid thrown on her back.

The fifth account in this section pertains to Aman Ahmad who is also in his early twenties and lives in Lahore. In stark contrast to Kayhan, Aman prefaces his interview by saying that he believes in the supernatural; he is not exactly sure what he believes in but he definitely believes that there are forces beyond our comprehension. In Aman's case, the events he experienced were not restricted to a specific place but are linked to a period in his life. He starts off with an event in his school, which I shall discuss last because I would like to link it to the next interview. The second event he recalls pertains to the house he lived in when he was in his early teens. Referred to by its address, he maintains that 80H was haunted. He is the first one to use this specific word, I have accounted for the fact that Adil and Ms Kausar are older than him but it is interesting how Kayhan doesn't use this word, which leads me to believe that he does take what the religious scholars said into regard. Aman's story also includes a relative, his cousin Shahmir, who was afraid of the house. He says that his siblings were quite scared of going to the kitchen alone and that to this day they discuss how the

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<sup>63</sup> Ibn Manzur, 6:118

<sup>64</sup> El Zein, Amira, 55

always felt like they were being watched in that house and how they felt this was not the case in the house they currently live in, where they moved in 2014. I found it interesting how adults, namely Aman's parents, didn't feature in these conversations. A recurring feature of 80H Model Town was that Aman would hear his mother calling him but when he would go up to her room, she would either not be there or would be confused as to why he was there, claiming that she had not called him. I asked Aman how come he had never talked to his parents about these events and would only discuss them with his siblings. He answered that while he was living in the house, he would constantly rationalise what was going on in order to not feel too scared but when his family had moved out, he would discuss the house with his siblings because there wasn't any specific event or sighting that they could talk about. It was just this general feeling of always being watched that they would reminisce about. They would not try to understand what happened, especially since they weren't directly being threatened; it was enough for them to just remember what the experience of living there was like and to know that they were not the only ones who felt wary while living there. Aman says that out of the three stories that he has, this is probably one he shares the least because the other two startled him a lot more.

Aman's experiences were not limited to one particular place. While he was living in 80H Model Town, he went on summer vacation to Dallas, Texas where he spent a month with his family. He recounts seeing a doppelganger of his sister Ammal in a green dress when she was supposed to be out shopping at the start of their trip. Towards the end of the trip, he says Ammal came home with the exact same dress. If there's any moment in his narration when Aman sounded terrified it is probably this part. With the story of his house, he had his siblings to share the perplexing moments with and would constantly rationalise certain things to himself. In this instance, even his sister is perplexed by his reaction and he has no one to validate what has just happened. This made me think about how lonely and isolating such



experiences can be; in Kayhan and Ms Kausar's accounts they experienced validation through family members seeing the same things, in Kayhan's case, and an expert confirming doubts in Ms Kausar's case. Adil had a similar encounter and, as we have seen, the story culminates in him leaving the house. Adil's cook had a number of direct interactions and they drove him to the brink of madness and resulted in his death. Through these stories, I realised the importance of having a shared experience as opposed to going through the entire thing on your own. I think perhaps the reason this is the story he shared with people the most is because of the cathartic purpose narrating it serves. Throughout my analysis I will identify similar stories and try to explain how isolation affects the perspective and narrative a person employs.

The first story in Aman's narration is regarding an event in his school. He starts the story by mentioning that the school, Aitchison college, was a very old one thereby reaffirming the fact that old places were prone to being haunted. There was a rumour that the woods on his campus were haunted and that the ghost of an ex-security guard's daughter, Sheila, haunted them as she had died on the premises. This is the first, and perhaps only story where a ghost is mentioned. In fact, in the entire section, Aman's story was one I was easily able to link to Western horror movies I had seen in the past. Anyway, he and his friend's decided to test this theory and went to the woods in the evening after play rehearsals. He says that towards the end a lot of people had abandoned them and it was just him and a few other boys. He says that they all saw the silhouette of a monster in the distance with big horns. They were frozen in their spot and it did not move towards them. Soon they saw the security guard's flashlight in the distance and were prompted to flee because they would be in trouble if they were caught, as the woods were forbidden to students. As was the case with his siblings, Aman would recall this event with the boys who experienced it just in order to reaffirm that it had happened. When he says that he believes in the supernatural at the start of

this account he mentions that he doesn't exactly know what category he believes in, unlike Ms Kausar who believes in djinns because they are mentioned in the Quran. He knows that what he experienced was not 'bullshit' and these discussions with other people involved in the events seem to reaffirm his belief.

The last interview of this section was between me and a student from Kinnaird college in Lahore in her early twenties. Similar to Aman's account, she also mentions how Kinnaird college was relatively old and that rumours of certain parts being haunted were already circulating. Unlike Aman however, she doesn't identify the source of the presence; it is assumed that because the building is an old one no backstory is necessary. I do not mean to digress, as discussing this would involve an entirely different literature review, but I have noticed that even in Western horror movies most of the haunted buildings are quite old. It is interesting how supernatural entities (or at least the ones discussed here) seem to be associated with the past; most of them seem to have inhabited the spaces they 'haunt' in the past rather than appearing randomly. There are two interesting aspects about the Kinnaird student's story. The first concerns her own experience in the science lab. She, like Aman in 80H Model Town and Ms Kausar, does not see anything but definitely feels a presence around her. One could easily dismiss this as her being aware of the rumours surrounding this building, but like the other interviewees, she is also aware that her story is a unique one and worth reporting and classifying as a supernatural encounter. In the science building she saw a shadow over her own and she felt wind caress her back. However, this presence seemed to follow her back home. She could constantly smell something foul while others around her would not. When she tells her mother about it her mother's friend (who she met later that day) says that it is a djinn and that she must sprinkle rosewater on her daughter as was recommended to her by an elderly woman. It is this casual manner of giving advice that is in sharp contrast with the heavily guarded secrets of the Azande; only witch doctors were privy

to the magical properties of medicines and often charged an exorbitant fee to train apprentices in their craft<sup>65</sup>. On the other hand, the knowledge transmitted from the elderly lady to the student was done out of goodwill; it almost seemed as if someone was prescribing a cure for something as mundane as a headache. This is also the first story in which I heard that a djinn had followed the subject from its original destination. I did not read anything like this in El Zein's book or other papers but I was told by the subject that the rosewater definitely helped and made the odour drift away. Again, even if it had been something completely unrelated, I find it interesting how the solution to a problem came from rosewater that had been recited upon and how the subject maintains that this is what helped them. Like Kayhan, the student had no reason to promote the existence of the supernatural, in fact she even admits that she did not find or experience anything at other sites on the campus that were rumoured to be haunted.

A second interesting aspect of this interview is that like most other interviewees, the student also shared an account of what her friend experienced. In a similar vein as Ms Kausar, the friend's experience was far more harrowing than the interviewees. She describes how her friend got stuck in an elevator and saw a distorted version of herself in the mirror. Time seemed to stop and she felt like she was in the lift for an entire fifteen minutes. This left a lasting impact on her and she would not use the lift, even in the company of a group. Through this story and Ms Kausar's narration of what her relatives endured, the subjects seem to be saying 'not only did I experience something but it could have been lethal'. My understanding is that these accounts were included in order to highlight their sense of relief at how they narrowly escaped a very dangerous scenario and ought to be recognized for this. At this point, I would like to raise a comparison that shall be examined in detail in the next section; singular events, such as Aman seeing his sister's doppelganger and the student's

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<sup>65</sup> Pritchard, Evans, Chapter 5

friend seeing a distorted version of herself, are a lot more jarring for people than encounters that are shared, such as Aman and his classmates when they went into the woods, or encounters that are more frequent, such as those that took place in Ms Kausar and Kayhan's respective houses.

While there is a possibility that Aman or Adil could have read Kayhan's account online, there is no connection between the people I interviewed. I find it fascinating that despite their belief systems there were similar elements in their stories. Doppelgängers were present in Adil, Kayhan and Aman's accounts and figures with distorted proportions were a part of Kayhan and the Kinnaird student's stories. The feeling that someone else was in the room was a common feature in both Aman and the Kinnaird student's stories. The fact that some people experienced more extreme encounters than others in the same location was a common feature in all but Ms Kausar's story, though even in her case there were people towards whom djinns had dealt a much harsher blow. All these participants chose to classify their experience as supernatural, even the ones who were ambivalent implied that there was no logical explanation to what they had experienced. The way in which the stories were narrated suggested that these people had thought long and hard about their experiences; they understood that their accounts would be met with reactions of doubt and came armed with narration styles that were quite difficult to refute. Whether it was a firm belief in the supernatural or the argument that a variety of other people shared the same views and had the same experiences, these interviewees seemed to cope with what they went through by sharing these experiences with varied levels of confidence. It seemed to help them feel less isolated while experiencing something that definitely might have raised eyebrows and lead to some form of marginalization.

### Karsaz Churail (Karsaz Witch)

In this section I decided to continue with an urban setting but shifted my focus to a popular urban myth rather than incidents pertaining to specific households and institutions. As I detailed in the previous chapter, the Karsaz Churail is rumoured to haunt the district of Karsaz in Karachi. The fact that she is clad in bridal attire is very interesting to me. While I carried out a literature review after collecting my data, it was difficult to ignore other points of reference while I listened to these interviews. I shall refer to what Judith Halberstam has coined the 'silly archive'. In their book 'The Queer Art of Failure', Halberstam goes against 'high' theory and advocates for low theory 'and popular knowledge to explore alternatives and to look for a way out of the usual traps and impasses of binary formulations'<sup>66</sup>. One of the points made in this book is that movies (especially animated ones) convey messages that contain revolutionary aspects if we are willing to look for them. Halberstam advocates for learning from these sources as opposed to traditional learning, which contains information that is safeguarded by a powerful hegemon (the University) and usually advocates for conformity. In this spirit, I shall discuss how a particular Bollywood movie, *Bulbbul*, discusses churails and highlights the popular myths of revenge associated with them. The story starts in the nineteenth century in a village in Bengal Presidency. *Bulbbul* is married off to Indranil, the Bado Thakur (Elder Lord), when she is barely five years old. She is close with Satya, Indranil's youngest brother, who is closer to her age. *Bulbbul* and Satya grow up together, playing and telling each other stories of a demon woman ("churail"). Indranil's mentally challenged twin brother Mahendra shows a strange appeal toward *Bulbbul*. In flashbacks, it is revealed that Binodini had been jealous of Indranil and *Bulbbul*'s marriage, and had repeatedly hinted to Indranil that *Bulbbul* had feelings for Satya. With his mind

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<sup>66</sup> Halberstam, Judith, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 2

poisoned, Indranil sends Satya to London to separate those two. Bulbbul and Satya had been working so far on a story together, the manuscript of which Satya hands over to her before leaving for London. Heartbroken, she throws the manuscript into the fireplace and lights them up. At this time, influenced by Binodini, Indranil goes to Bulbbul's room, happens to take out some of the burning pages. Upon reading them, he becomes positively convinced of Bulbbul's feelings for Satya. Enraged, he beats and mutilates her feet with iron bars. On top of that, while she is bedridden, Mahendra rapes her, accidentally suffocating her while caught up in his sadism. However, following this, there is a supernatural change in Bulbbul — she comes back with a mission to help the women in the village fight back against injustice. She goes through a symbolic transformation each time, represented by a blood red moon, which indicates that the goddess Kali had given her a chance to return to fight back. She begins to punish the men who abuse and murder their wives or take advantage of other girls by killing them though the villagers think those as doings of the churail, who is distinguished by her backward feet. It is also revealed that she killed Mahendra following this transformation as punishment for raping<sup>67</sup> her. The theme of marriages turning sour is very important here and the transformative effects of marriage are made clear in a very visceral manner through this film. It is this image and backstory of a churail that I would like to convey before analysing data from the three interviews I carried out.

The first account in this section is by a lady in her early thirties named Rabia Gohar. She narrates the experience of her friend Saba as she left Rabia's house to travel back to her own. Saba describes travelling back to her house with her husband Faris but upon reaching Karsaz expressway she felt something floating besides her. She describes the creature as being a doppelganger of her with a huge grin. While the rumour about Karsaz road specifies

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<sup>67</sup> Mani Jha, Aditya). "Bulbbul and the 21st century global Gothic: How the Netflix Original imbibes the genre's characteristic tropes". 2020. Firstpost.

that the churail is dressed like a bride, this is not mentioned in Saba's account. She is warned by Faris not to look directly at the creature. Even though no one has dictated what to do in such a situation, Faris seems to know how to react intuitively. I find this interesting because even in the accounts in the previous section, narrators started reciting verses intuitively, like Kayhan did when he heard murmuring outside his window. This is the only account I've received in which supernatural presence itself had a physical impact on the narrator. She starts to feel very faint and the road doesn't seem to end. She says that the figure finally disappeared when they exited Karsaz road and that she did not recover till she had finally reached home. Unlike the narrators in the previous accounts, this encounter definitely traumatised Saba and she made sure she never ended up on that road again. It also affected her mobility as she refused to travel on motorcycles and did not stay out of the house beyond nine pm. In short, she is avoiding everything associated with that night. It is interesting to note that while this entity caused Saba physical harm and she had a witness in the form of Faris as well as established stories about Karsaz at her disposal, she chose not to report it. In fact, the cursory search I conducted revealed that many people have had an experience on Karsaz road but the official reporting was delegated to blogs and YouTube channels. Legal institutions are either uninterested or have never been approached about the events at Karsaz road.

The second account is also a report of someone else's first-hand experience. Hina Imtiaz is in her early twenties and reports that her friend was coming home late from work and saw a lady dressed in bridal attire. At first, he dismissed it due to lots of wedding halls being located in Karsaz, but soon he saw how big her grin was, a common feature in both his and Saba's encounter and started getting worried. He called his assistant, who was in the car behind his, to ask what he should do and the assistant replied that there was no one on the road apart from their cars. This made the friend panic and drive faster because he intuitively

knew that the 'creature' he saw would probably get inside the car. I find it interesting how both him and Faris intuitively knew what to do; they weren't paralyzed by fear unlike Saba, who was on the receiving end of the worst effects. While Karsaz is an area that's darker side is well known and documented it is interesting to note what aspect each interviewee wanted to focus on in their narration. Rabia wanted to highlight the harrowing experience Saba went through and the aftereffects it had on her daily life, Hina's focus seems to be corroborating the fact that Karsaz is indeed haunted. After narrating her friend's story, she briefly mentions how another friend as well as a friend's relative encountered the same entity at Karsaz road. While Rabia is convinced that the previous experiences at Karsaz road speak for themselves, allowing her to focus more on her friend's mental state, Hina still feels that the account she is narrating must be supported with evidence.

The third account in this series is by a girl in her late teens named Alia Chatta. Alia was already familiar with the rumours surrounding Karsaz. She starts her interview the same way Kayhan starts his account; she directly says that it is up to the audience to decide what is going on based on the evidence she is about to present. Its posed as 'well what better explanation could there be for these events?'. Interestingly, Alia doesn't encounter the figure that the other two respondents did. She witnessed a car accident that she claims was an impossible one and many years later, felt like she would have been met with the same fate had the car behind her not been there. What Alia seems to have experienced is an invisible force tugging at her car and the fact that there was an accident at the same spot has convinced her that she miraculously escaped a lethal fate. While Alia seems to challenge the reader to reach their own conclusion and while she definitely has a story to share, when I compare this event and the previous two to the accounts shared about haunted buildings I felt that the burden to make a strong case definitely lay on the former category. The accounts in the previous category were a lot more vivid; there were more examples, more argumentative



tools employed and most importantly the interviews lasted longer. With the Karsaz churail I felt that knowledge of the rumours associated with the setting was taken for granted and that having a location with a known past is a huge advantage; people are able to relay more crucial information rather than being taxed with the double responsibility of recounting an event and making sure this narration is being taken seriously. Another theme throughout these accounts and the ones that follow in the section on rural areas is that they appear during travel or on the roads. These can be considered as liminal spaces that are not 'safe' as being at home. Even in the home the implication is that is the residence of the djinn too suggesting the concept of ownership is important in these experiences.

### Rural Areas

Although I collected these accounts from people who do not or no longer reside in rural areas, this part of the research is where I felt most like an anthropologist. I have only experienced the rural areas of Pakistan on trips I have taken making it more or less uncharted territory; I am not very familiar with the specific details of the local cultures of each region and can only talk about them by comparing how different they are to one another. However, I refrained from researching these cultures and their features for two reasons. Firstly, I did not want to digress from the topic at hand which was to examine how people discussed the supernatural as opposed to how culture influences beliefs about the supernatural. Secondly, since this was a grounded theory project, I entered the interview knowing very little about the local cultures and was presented with the option to include them in my analysis after my first coding cycle. I chose not to pursue this option as I had found a dearth of other valuable information that I felt met my research aims more directly. Perhaps if I continue with this research and take this to a PhD level it would be interesting to see what role culture plays in determining one's relationship with presence but for the time being I have discarded culture

as a category. As I did in the previous section, I will be conducting this analysis in the order I presented the description in.

The first account is by a man in his late twenties who prefers to stay anonymous. He lives in Karachi and narrates the experience of his cousin who went hunting with his friends in the Cholistan desert in Sindh. Because we were discussing someone else's experiences I thought that my option to ask questions was severely limited. However, during the second round of coding I picked up on the fact that I had been given the opportunity to analyse how a third party treated these experiences. I was touched to see that, like the Karsaz incidents, the tone of the reporter was serious throughout and a lot of care was taken to ensure that the reporting was done in a professional manner that didn't ridicule the person whose original experience it was. He did not try to add his opinion on any matter and due to the fact that he just recounted his cousin's words and did not try to convince the listener that this account was true because of his cousin's credibility I also felt that he was respectful to my sentiments. It was as objective as an interview can get with his primary concern being relaying the event to me. Since he is from Karachi, Sindh's capital city, he also had a lot more knowledge of the local lore than I possessed. In the story itself, the narrator's cousin and his friends are hunting in the Cholistan desert and are warned by the locals not to travel at night as a local type of djinn called a chillawa would roam the desert. They warned them that chillawa's are swift footed and can jump and travel long distances in a flash. They can even show up in a human form and then disappear in a glimpse but it was advised not to follow them, look back at them or go to them in any case as it might cause harm. This is exactly what the boys experienced and, while it is not mentioned, they do end up following the advice they were given and keep driving on despite the recurring appearances of the bride and the old man. Towards the end of the account, it is admitted that when the sun rose the chillawa vanished 'just like the locals had said'. To me this is a slight admission that they were right and that their advice should

have been taken seriously. When I compare this incident to Karsaz road I realise that the description given by the locals was spot on; while Karsaz road definitely had something present there because of three narrated experiences, this incident took place exactly how the locals had predicted. I think it is the only story which deeply aroused my curiosity; it excited and scared me that I might actually run into a chillawa if I was in this area. It really made me wonder how such an interaction would shape my way of viewing the world. I definitely think that this particular site holds a lot of research potential for discourses on the supernatural. Interestingly enough, one of the apparitions haunting the boys was a bride. She was clad in a local bride's attire and was staring at them intently. I have already discussed the significance of brides and the stories created around them in South Asia. Here I would just like to add that unlike the Karsaz bride, this one and the old man posed no threat to the group. They were able to escape the situation when the sun rose and, in this case, reciting Quranic verses did not help them in any way as the chillawa did not disappear. This makes me wonder what people's relationship with the supernatural is. In the case of the Karsaz churail there was harm caused to the people who interacted with her or there was a potential threat. With the djinns, even though they were provoked before causing harm, they definitely had the potential to do so. In this case the chillawa did nothing but linger. I wonder what it is that makes us so wary of such entities. We have gradually come to a point in time where we have started appreciating the cognitive functions of animals and are including plants and nature within our sphere of empathy. I'm curious as to why supernatural creatures, especially the ones that mean no harm, are treated with such caution. I do think that if I were to conduct future research, I would probably make this question the leading philosophical one I aim to answer.

The second account is by a man of the same age group who is also from Karachi. I will refer to him as M Khan. He recounts the experience of his mother-in-law when she was young. He prefaces this account by mentioning that both him and his wife are currently

studying medicine. I found this interesting because he is not narrating his personal experience but something his mother-in-law went through. It seems like there is a burden on the entire chain of narrators to have sound reasoning abilities. I noticed the same respect for the person who endured the experience here as I did with the previous narrator's cousin. Of all the accounts in this section the participant in this one is the furthest removed from the setting in which they experienced their encounter. Hailing from Karachi, which is at the southern end of Pakistan and Hunza which is deep in the heart of northern Pakistan. The respondent's distance from this setting is apparent through his description of the northern areas; he needs to create an image in order to relay the rest of his story. Even his descriptions of the hotel are quite detailed which further adds to the sense of foreignness from the setting. He narrates how his mother in law's bag went missing and how she woke up in the middle of the night to see a Hunzai woman sitting at the window sill and wearing her bag. The next day the window was closed and the bag was on a table. Like the chillawa in the previous account, the figure viewed did no harm to M Khan's mother-in-law. She is reported to have recited some verses while hiding under her quilt, hence cannot confirm whether these helped or not. Now that I have discussed two events in which the supernatural entities described did not harm the participants in any way, I want to explore potential reasons for them reaching out to me to appear for an interview. In my introduction, I mentioned that I wanted to discuss incidents where the supernatural acted as an agent and motivated human behaviour such as moving out of a house or avoiding a certain area. These two accounts mainly provide for good stories for their narrators. However, upon comparing them to other accounts I realised that the supernatural does serve an implicit function here; further exoticizing rural areas and deepening the gap between rural and urban areas. I find it interesting how these singular events are imprinted in the respondents' minds in a much more significant way than the people who live in houses with supernatural beings present and interacting with them on a

much more frequent basis. Even Adil, who was affected by these events the most, took a considerable amount of time to move out. While those participants were coexisting with the entities they discussed, these two associated them with the foreignness of their setting. The fact that both the bride and the Hunzai woman were clad in local attire grounds them within a specific setting. It was unfortunate that I was hearing about these experiences through other people because I definitely would have liked to know whether the two people who experienced it would be willing to return to these sites just to ensure that their eyes had not been playing tricks on them. I did notice that much like the previous accounts I have discussed; these respondents are also seeking external validation by sharing their story as much as possible and perhaps gaining support for these stories because the settings described are as foreign to most listeners as they were to the respondents.

The last respondent in this section was a man called Hamza Arshad. While he currently lives in Lahore, in his childhood he lived in a village in North East Pakistan on the Indian border. He explains how this place used to be populated with Hindus before the partition of the Subcontinent and that they chose to migrate after the creation of Pakistan. Even if he had not provided a detailed account of why the Hindus chose to migrate, it is assumed that most people in Pakistan who have attended school are aware of the partition of the Subcontinent and its legacy. He explains how his grandfather was advised not to build a house in an area that Hindus would use for cremation but did so anyway because he was an ex-army officer and knew no fear. This is the reason he gives for being haunted by a skull in his garden. It is very tempting to link this narrative to historical guilt and to comment on the collective memory and trauma of partition. The narrator himself wants to forge a link between history and the recurring appearance of this skull. The skull is a unique feature of this story. It is also worth noting that these events could have fit better in my section on urban settings because the narrator encountered the entity more than once and he did reside in the

place where he had his experiences. However, the unique history attached to this story made me classify it under rural settings. He uses similar strategies as Kayhan did during his narration and says that he understands if the listener thought he was hallucinating. He goes on to describe how his father wanted to build a few more quarters and when he dug up the area near the tree where the skull was sighted, they discovered a skeleton with the same skull. He ends his interview by saying that it has been forty years and he has failed to find an explanation for this, indirectly saying that he is open to suggestions but the explanation he has provided above seems to make the most sense. I asked him whether this motivated him to leave the house and he replied that he was too young when all this was happening but he was relieved when he and his family moved to Lahore.

The interviews in this section prove that a single incident or entity can be just as formative as interacting with multiple entities overtime. The location in the first two stories is important because the participants were not just experiencing an alien event but were doing so in a unfamiliar setting. This definitely increases the significance of the event and forms some sort of opinion of the place at hand. Hamza Arshad's story is another example of how one tries to make sense of what they have experienced, especially if it is an event one has gone through alone. Connecting his encounter to a larger historical event is interesting as well as how he maintains that the supernatural aspect of this story is just as important as the historical context he is providing when he proves that what he is relaying is not a mere hallucination.

### Curses

The final section in my analysis studies interviews with people who believe that they or someone close to them had been cursed. From the four sections under analysis, I noticed that the interviewees in this category were facing a lot of serious, long-lasting effects after being

cursed. When I say cursed, I mean that these people were the victims of black magic at the hands of another human. The supernatural element in this section is the act of performing magic and the effects this magic has upon its subjects. Although I was initially double minded about interviewing candidates who said they were victims of black magic, as opposed to interacting with a creature that could be deemed supernatural, I wanted to be a broadminded researcher and after receiving replies from five people who were willing to recount instances of black magic, I decided that I should pay attention to people who classify magic as supernatural. Four out of five respondents reported that they were still victims of black magic making their narratives sound a lot more urgent and marking them with a tone of fear and despair. After reading Pritchard's study on witchcraft and the Azande I saw very obvious comparisons that could be made between his work and the accounts in this section. The most obvious aspect was the intent behind cursing someone; in Pritchard's study he describes witchcraft as a hereditary phenomenon whereas in the accounts I collected, curses were the product of very intentional magic. In Zande culture, witchcraft could easily be verified once an autopsy was performed as it was believed to be present in the small intestine<sup>68</sup>. Anyone could inherit the witchcraft organ though it was common to inherit it through one's paternal family. This high probability of being a witch is why whenever someone is confronted by a man who has consulted an oracle, he apologises for his actions instead of defending himself<sup>69</sup>. In the interviews I conducted, it seemed as though all practitioners of black magic were aware of their actions and acted out of malice or jealousy. They were taking out their frustrations on someone who they believed had defied them. Interestingly, in both cases the confirmed or suspected people were either relatives or neighbours. Pritchard predicts that people who live within close proximity of each other are

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<sup>68</sup> Pritchard, Evans, 1937, 15

<sup>69</sup> Pritchard, Evans, 1937, chapter 3

the ones who would be most affected by what was going on in the other's life which is why they would react to certain situations with witchcraft. In four of the accounts collected, I noticed that the cause of the curse was due to the interviewees decision to marry and was mostly because they had married someone who was not pre-selected for them. This underscores the importance of marriage in a Pakistani context. In the sections on witches and rural areas, we saw that some of the supernatural beings were dressed as brides. In this section, we understand how marriage does not just involve two individuals but an entire host of family members with opinions strong enough to potentially ruin a marriage. Because Azande tradition took allegations of witchcraft seriously, there were proper institutions for people who thought they were victims of such practices to resort to. While magic was an integral part of their culture, the poison oracle and witch doctors existed solely to cater to victims of witchcraft and to confirm their suspicions<sup>70</sup>. Even if the reasons behind the Azande's relief are a psychological effect of the presence of certain institutions to validate their fears, it was clear that in comparison the victims I interviewed were clearly tormented by the plight they were in. There seemed to be no legal body to incarcerate the people who were allegedly causing them harm causing most of them to live in constant fear.

The first person I will discuss in this section is Ayza Alam. As elaborated upon in the previous chapter, she suspects her mother-in-law of cursing her because she did not approve of her as a daughter in law. She narrates how her marriage is failing while constantly stressing upon how her husband was jovial in the presence of his mother as opposed to in her presence. While her husband's disposition towards her is described in general terms over the years she interestingly mentions an incident when her mother-in-law cured her headache by reciting verses on some chilli. This is presented as proof of her mother-in-law being the cause of all the hardships she is enduring. Like the people residing in houses with other beings

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<sup>70</sup> Pritchard, Evans, 1937, chapter 9



present, I felt that that because there were recurring events rather than a singular one, she is more interested in describing her general plight rather than paying too much attention to detail. However, unlike these respondents, I noticed that there was a degree of isolation she was experiencing that was unique to anything I had heard before. I would compare it to Aman seeing a doppelganger of his sister when he was in Texas but one should bear in mind that this was one incident. Ayza, on the other hand, is being repeatedly tormented; she has been isolated from her husband and is unable to seek spiritual refuge because she isn't in the right physical condition to pray. Even the specialist she tried to consult charged her a fee that was beyond her means, which is in sharp contrast to the assistance Ms Kausar was offered. While this can be compared to the fact that witch doctors in Zandeland also charge a certain fee, it can be argued that the main authority on witchcraft in the Zande culture are the oracles who require a sacrifice of fowls. These fowls are available at every household because they are considered a necessity<sup>71</sup>. Performances by witch doctors are optional and not essential to vanquish witchcraft. There are also a number of people willing to assist men when they are consulting the poison oracle and they do so without charging a fee. Ayza has been completely cut off and her mother in law's magic has penetrated deep into her life. I found it interesting how Ayza is able to say that her mother-in-law is cursing her and then detail what she has been going through. It does sound like her marriage is failing and she is battling depression because of it. However, Ayza thinks there is more to the story and rests on evidence such as her mother in law's motive and an incident where she cured her headache. There seems to be a lot less focus on proving that these are the actions of her mother-in-law, which contrasts with the focus placed by narrators such as Kayhan and the Kinnaird students to prove that they were not hallucinating. It made me realise that there are differences between recalling an event that took place in the past and narrating something that one is currently going through.

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<sup>71</sup> Pritchard, Evans, 1937, chapter 4

The emphasis in this account is more on being heard and having her story told rather than proving that it is indeed her mother-in-law who is performing black magic on her.

Considering the fact that, unlike the Azande, Pakistan doesn't have a legal body to deal with the mother-in-law even if it is proven that she is guilty, the stakes attached to mentioning her name are not very high. It is therefore futile engaging in providing evidence which is why Ayza chooses the opportunity to tell her story as a cathartic outlet rather than a means to seeking justice.

The second person I interviewed was Ali Memon. He describes his parents' failing marriage and attributes this to his mother being cursed by her tai (aunt). He is confident that this is the case because a religious scholar from Medina confirmed his mother's suspicions and offered to help her but never showed up. His confidence is displayed by the fact that he begins his account by declaring that his mother is being cursed by her Tai. He too paints a general picture of how his parents' marriage and financial situation was in the past and contrasts it with the gloomy situation they are currently in. The curse, in this case, has affected all aspects of his family's life; the marriage has turned sour and their finances have dwindled. Even though his mother is the main victim of the curse it is clearly affecting him and the rest of his family as well. He reports that his mother recites verses every day in order to ensure things do not go from bad to worse. It is quite tragic to see that despite having some form of confirmation, his mother is unable to seek help that will truly put an end to the situation she is in and must resort to verses to maintain some form of stability.

The next account is by Sahar Binte Haider's. Sahar describes what a family friend of hers has gone through after his wife was cursed by his mother's sister-in-law. What is interesting about a third person sharing a story about curses is that they are taken seriously enough to be portrayed as curses rather than the storyteller having to find other explanations behind what they are narrating. While her friend faced a lot of hardships during his stay in Pakistan,

including a miscarriage, these events stopped taking place once the family moved to Saudi Arabia. When they came back to visit Pakistan it is reported that the wife started feeling unwell at the airport which shows that the curse was definitely situated within Pakistan and that her previous experiences were definitely not because of a bad time in her life. There is also sound proof that the curse was placed upon the wife by the mother's sister-in-law as a seer confirms this and reports that her exact words were 'I won't let them rest I'll ruin their household'.

Now that we have gone through three accounts that are centred around marriage, I would like to reiterate a few points. Firstly, unlike the people who were living in haunted houses, the people who have been cursed are more preoccupied with making sure their story is heard rather than ensuring that the person on the receiving end believes them or not. One reason behind this is that the people they claim are cursing them face no legal ramifications, therefore even people like Ayza who has no confirmation from another source that it is indeed her mother-in-law who is tormenting her, are able to tell their stories without the burden of proof. Secondly, they need to tell these stories for cathartic purposes; the curses these people are under have taken over all aspects of their life. Ayza is isolated from her spouse and spiritual outlets, Ali lives in a household where there is constant fighting and financial uncertainty and Sahar's friend's wife is unable to set foot on Pakistani soil. This isolation, coupled with the fact that there is no higher authority to help these people, means there is a lot they need to unburden themselves of. It is also worth mentioning that the woman in Sahar's narrative is better off than Ayza or Ali's mother; even though the curse still applies in Pakistan, it is a land that she seems to have left behind. Out of these three transcripts, Sahar's is the most concise one which seems to reveal that if people, such as Ayza and Ali, are narrating situations they are currently enduring, the narration style does change and there is more of an emphasis on garnering the listeners sympathy than making them believe that a

certain person is responsible for their plight. Lastly, it is interesting how all three victims of black magic in these accounts identify as women. Their relation to the person who is cursing them varies in all three accounts, but even in situations such as the one Sahar narrated, in which the person cursed was the nephew's wife because he refused to marry her daughter, it is interesting how the nephew does not have to bear the brunt of this rejection. While a deep analysis of the institution of marriage is beyond the scope of my thesis, questions regarding the fundamental role and association of women and marriage are worth asking. In the accounts by Hina Imtiaz and the narrative taking place in Cholistan, the figures seen by the people involved were clad in bridal clothes. Through these stories, there is evidence for the fact that brides definitely have an axe to grind and they provide some context for the bridal attire worn by these supernatural figures.

The fourth interview in this section is by a girl named Sara Khan. A relative (she does not mention the relation she has to her) told her mother that she had performed black magic on a recently deceased relative. She then asked for her brother's hand in marriage despite her brother already being engaged. When her mother politely rejected the proposal, her brother became very ill; his doctors reports were indicating that nothing was wrong but he looked like he was about to die. They contacted a seer and his health improved after he confirmed that Sara's brother had been cursed. Despite returning to normalcy, her family is still terrified. The fact there is proof of black magic being practised on the brother as well as the presence of someone known to practise black magic is of no help in order to alleviate this stress. Sara concludes her account by saying 'It is such an unfortunate thing to have someone like this woman in close relation. You can't confront such people because of the fear that they will do it again out of rage. You cannot stop them from visiting you because of the same fear. Our family had some very mysterious and accidental deaths over the past decade and it is reported by witnesses in the family that this woman directly threatened them of the worst before they

died'. It is sad to see that despite the curse being lifted, there is no formal way to put an end to the fear that exists within Sara's head. When this is contrasted with the Azande, it is important to note that they were not able to formally put an end to witchcraft. Rather, through acknowledging the reality of witchcraft, they were able to prevent fear of it by ensuring that whoever was responsible for witchcraft was identified and, if their witchcraft resulted in death, executed. The fact that no mechanism exists to cater to people cursing others has resulted in people living in constant fear of waiting for the other shoe to drop. The last account I collected is an interview with a girl named Anamta Choudry. Anamta is the only one who has not experienced black magic at the hands of a relative. She claims that a neighbour has cursed her entire family. While this relation is in line with the rule of proximity defined by the Azande, it is interesting to note that with direct family members, the curse was also directed towards one individual. Even in Ali's case, he is describing what his mother went through rather than experiencing something directly. While Anamta's mother bears the brunt of the curse, her sister also fell seriously ill because of a meal the neighbour sent to their house. This is the only account in which doubt about the identity is expressed; Anamta says she has a suspicion that her neighbour is cursing her family out of jealousy and goes on to describe all that her family has endured. Anamta's account is similar to the one's I heard in the first section. She explains what has happened and indirectly challenges the listener to provide an explanation that makes sense. Firstly, she contextualises the jealousy by mentioning that the woman's sons and husband had died while Anamta's family was doing quite well. Then she talks about how the woman was known to engage in certain forms of magic. She then talks about how the woman sent back a dish Anamta's mother had sent to her place and the dish was already sour. Her sister fell very ill after eating it and almost died. Then her mother was diagnosed with cancer. Surprisingly, her mother had a nightmare before the diagnosis in which someone slapped her neck. The diagnosis revealed that the cancerous

spot was in her mother's neck. Her mother was very depressed at home and went to stay at her aunt's home while she received treatment. The treatment went well but, just as in Sahar's story, her mother's health deteriorated when she returned back home. Anamta ends her account with saying that spiritual methods of healing were recommended to her family but they did not pursue them because they didn't believe in such methods. It is almost like this statement was tinged with regret. Through this narration structure it is evident that Anamta is someone who wants the story to be taken seriously. It is worth noting that the premises for the curse are jealousy not complications with arranging a marriage. It seems as though the importance of marriage in Pakistan is understood so deeply that any other reasons behind suffering a curse would be met with more scrutiny. While the people narrating the stories, with the exception of Sahar, are definitely suffering, at least they are not under any pressure to prove that they are being cursed by a certain person; it is understood that the irked this person with relation to marriage and is assumed that the accusation is probably correct. Anamta, on the other hand, needs to detail exactly why she thinks he neighbour cursed her, which provides for a narrative structure in line with the people residing in houses with other beings present. These people don't have marriage as a motive, an event taking place in an area unfamiliar to them or an event taking place in an area with a history of such occurrences to bolster their claims which is why they need to ensure that their story is corroborated with sufficient proof.



## Conclusion

In her book 'All About Love; New Visions', Toni Morrison concludes with a chapter on spirituality and its healing qualities. In this chapter she writes

The presence of angels, of angelic spirits, reminds us that there is a realm of mystery that cannot be explained by human intellect or will. We all experience this mystery in our daily lives in some ways, however small, whether we see ourselves as " spiritual" or not. We find ourselves in the right place at the right time, ready and able to receive blessings without knowing just how we got there.<sup>72</sup> Often, we look at events retrospectively and can trace a pattern, one that allows us to intuitively recognize the presence of an unseen spirit guiding and directing our path

We are able to see a variety of things when we employ such a consideration to our research and daily interactions. If we view our own encounters and ones, we hear about through such a lens, we are able to engage in sociological research that can truly understand why people behave in certain ways and what implicit messages are conveyed through the way they talk about the world around them. One key finding of this research is that the way in which people narrate a story is dependent on a host of factors. These are the location and context within which an event takes place, a person's belief system, the timing and duration of the event and the other parties involved in the event. After analysing these reasons, it is possible to understand one's motivation behind narrating a certain story and understand their needs better.

The context and location of an encounter plays important part in determining how people respond to it. I observed that people who experienced events in their houses, such as

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<sup>72</sup> Hooks, bell, 2000, 236.



Kayhan and Aman, had a calmer response to the entities they encountered as opposed to people who experienced events in unfamiliar settings such as the group of boys who were driving through the Cholistan dessert. The fact that these events took place in a setting that was only inhabited for a brief period of time meant that these events were associated with the foreign setting itself. The fact that the chilawa in the Cholistan account was clad in local bridal attire and the woman spotted by M Khan's mother-in-law was wearing a dress popular in Hunza adds to the association of these beings with the setting they were present in. The attention to detail in these accounts is indicative of the fact that the people experiencing these events were experiencing a host of Familiarity with the setting one is in is a key factor in determining their reaction to an event. Another related observation is that people were a lot more alert in settings where rumours surrounding presence existed. Alia's encounter seems a lot more like she was having car trouble, yet because of stories of the Karsaz churail, such as the ones narrated by Hina and Rabia, she was hyper alert to everything she experienced here, even though she didn't necessarily believe in the supernatural.

A second factor that determines one's narrative style is one's belief system. The accounts narrated by Kayhan and Alia were prefaced by them stating they did not believe in the supernatural. While they narrate their stories, they say that it is up to the audience to decide what the cause of the events they have experienced are. Even though they claim they do not believe in the supernatural the accounts they narrate seem to be an attempt to convince the listener that there seems to be no other explanation behind what they have experienced, hence it really could be supernatural presences. On the opposite end of this spectrum are accounts such as the one narrated by Ms Kausar. She says that the Quran states that djinns exist, therefore she believes in their existence. She doesn't doubt anything the doctor who is assisting tells her and through a comparison with El Zein's work we see that the explanations the doctor gives are in accordance with what the Quran says. In the section on curses, apart

from Anamta, no one states whether they believe in black magic or not. However, they all seem to be in agreement over one thing; resentment over issues related to marriage are quite common and these reasons are enough for one to curse another person. None of the interviewees had to explicitly state that the reason behind the curses was that marriage was an important institution in their family. Such accounts are more focused on relating what they are enduring rather than proving their allegation is correct. This brings me to my third point; the time and duration of the event being narrated is important. Whereas most accounts I recorded were narrated in past tense, four of the accounts under the curses section were events that the narrators were still enduring. The tone of narrators varied from being helpless (Ayza Alam) to them being extremely fearful (Sara Khan). The narrators who would recall events were under more scrutiny which is why they had to ensure that the accounts were not met with disbelief. They do this in a variety of ways such as ensuring the listener they are rational people, detailing how other people went through similar events and using religious authorities to verify what they said. Another important aspect is the duration of the event; in the narrations about singular events such as Karsaz and rural areas (barring Hamza Arshad's account) a lot of attention to detail is present. Saba's experience (as recounted by Rabia) recounts each emotion she experienced while the figure floated next to her and M Khan provides detailed descriptions of his mothers-in-law's location and trip itinerary. People who experience recurring events tend to focus more on the general rather than the specific; even the specific events that populate their accounts are provided to prove their main thesis. Lastly, the people involved with the narrator are important and affect the tone of their narration. People like Kayhan, Aman and Hina were confidently able to say that other people had gone through a similar experience and were convinced that they were not hallucinating. People such as Ms Kausar, Sara and the Kinnaird student had confirmation that they were experiencing supernatural forces through knowledgeable sources, which resulted in them

being confident narrators. Accounts that are experienced alone tend to have the most effect on the narrator. When Aman saw his sister's doppelgänger his sister denied playing any tricks on him. He has admitted that out of the three encounters he has had, this one has been the most widely shared. Ayza's experience is the most isolating of the ones I've collected; she was isolated from her husband and faith as well as facing a financial barrier towards help. I noticed that when the incident narrated is experienced in isolation, the narrator is a lot more focused on sharing their experience in order for people to simply hear it rather than to present proof of presence. These encounters clearly leave them very distressed and they need an outlet where they are able to express their fears.

This research project is very dear to me; through conducting this research I feel that I have not only improved my research and writing skills but found a way of being in this world in which I am better at identifying people's needs and empathise with the state of mind they are in. I learnt that if a person says they moved to a different country because of a djinn, that they avoid a certain area of the city or country because they saw a churail there or that their marriage was deteriorating because they are under a curse this is not an invitation to remind them that the world we live in is governed by scientific laws. This project has aimed to move away from the idea of development that scholars like August Comte have proposed and wishes to speak against the disenchantment of the world that Max Weber apprehends. If we let these people speak uninterrupted and provide them with a space free of judgement, we are able to observe how they think, what they believe, how they relate to other people, what they fear and ultimately why they act in certain ways. The djinns and churails in the accounts I heard helped me understand people in a more intimate manner.

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## Appendix

Aman Ahmad

I have multiple stories. I believe in the supernatural, always have. Always believed in- I don't even know exactly what I believe in I just believe that the encounters that I've had are not bull shit. So I'll start at the youngest- the first experience I had. So when we were in school, when we were in eighth grade right, that was when I made friends with my friend raza so I made friends during the same class section. I narrated the English play of prep school that year- the middle school English play. They dressed me up like a lion because it was jungle book and this is where I met most of my good friends ghani, tabraiz, raza, tun we're all involved with this English play this is 2010, or 11- mostly closer to 11. At this time there was a famous song called Sheila ki Jawani which you may be aware of- famous Indian song. So we have this building in our school called the amphitheatre where we'd practice this play and where this play was going to be held. So behind the amphitheatre there were these woods where no one would go into- it was a big school and there were woods available. A lot of these play practices would happen at night, around 6- 7 o'clock when the sun would set. There were rumours floating around that there was a ghost in the woods. And there was a story passed down to generations that there was a janitor who lived in aitchsion (the school) who had a daughter called Sheila and she fell off the amphitheatre into the woods and died- and the legend goes that Sheila haunts those woods which is why no one can go there. So one night during maybe the last or second last practice we decided to test this theory. So we're all 12 years old at this point and the whole squad of the play lines up in front of the amphitheatre at the entrance of the woods. There's still light here but not in the woods. There's maybe 30 or 40 of us and we said 'let's do it'. So we were entering the woods and more than half of the people ran away from the entrance. It was me, Mustafa Yazdani, Faisal Yazdani, Raza and a few other guys who actually went in there and persevered into the woods. So we enter the woods and there's no light anywhere-there's a straight line and woods on the right and left. So I start going right, periodically people are running off (as kids do) it's a very scary mahol (environment) and at some point we got split up and I was alone. So while I was alone I see a light in the distance and I see this figure way off in the distance. It was a large, thick, well-built uhh monster. Yeah it was a thick monster that had two horns coming from its head and it was giant size, it wasn't the size of a regular human being and it was fixed in place and looking away from me. I'm looking at this thing and walking towards it. A couple of guys came behind me and they fucking screamed. They ran and I was the only one who was trying to approach the place so I walked towards the thing, the monster that was fixed in place and uh uhhhh the. From behind where the light was coming I see a guard was approaching and coming towards me because I wasn't allowed to be in the woods. So I ran in the opposite direction and most people were scattered around the woods and I remember having to run out of the woods and the image is still in my head. The woods were scary as hell. The only light in the woods was the searchlight in the distance that stationed guards would use. Later on when we recalled the story and the ones who didn't see it called bull shit but the ones who saw it believed it; we knew what we saw. There were a lot of contrary explanations such as light shining on a tree and so and so- but trees don't take such shapes and forms so I've always maintained that that was something (that was something). In retrospect the Sheila story is probably bull shit and carried over for the past 5-10 years with a different name it was a school legend. So that was my first experience with the supernatural. The funny thing is all my experiences happened roughly around the same time.

The next one is over a longer term. The house I grew up in, 80 H block Model Town, moved in 2004 and moved out 2013, so I had the bulk of my childhood years here. We lived upstairs, the girls room was there, the boys room and my parents room. Downstairs we had white stairs that would go downstairs, on the ground floor we had my dad's study on one side, a guest room on the opposite corner and in the middle we had a lounge called the black lounge because all the furniture was black. The kitchen was also downstairs. Growing up my younger siblings would be too scared to go downstairs to get water or a snack- so I had to guide them. My entire childhood, I could not help shake the feeling that someone was watching me. Especially in the black lounge I'd look through the

windows and I'd see shadows, which I rationalised to be my own as it would walk beside me. Anyway, I could never shake the feeling that I was being watched, I just figured it was a normal feeling and another thing that would happen was that oftentimes when I was playing video games I would hear my mom calling out to me. Most of the times it was here but occasionally I would hear her voice call out to me but when I'd go to her room she'd say 'No I didn't call you'. I used to think I'd misheard but this was very frequent. One day, I was probably 8, I hear her call out and I go over to her room and it was locked. I went back and resumed my video game. Half an hour later I heard somebody coming up the stairs and it was my mom and I asked her where she was and she said she had been out for the last two hours. Somebody was calling my name with my moms voice but it was not my mom! I freaked out a little but then I thought it must be something with the pipes and the walls and voices being carried over... I don't even know what I was thinking at the point. From then on this happened often, I'd hear them, my mom, call out my name but it wasn't her. I chalked it up to another normal thing. I never paid any attention to it. Sometimes when my cousin would come over we'd wrestle in my sister's room because she had a really thick mattress and Shahmir was always scared of the house, he said there's something wrong here. One time in my sisters room he swore he saw something pass through the window. I thought it was normal and that Shahmir was being a scaredy cat. So I lived in the house till I was 14 and I think a 14 year old has enough awareness. Till 14 I felt like I was being watched and there were shadows in the window. I'd started getting really into horror stuff such as the exorcism and I'd often had to comfort my sister Amal who would have episodes and say she'd seen something. Then we moved out and into my grandparents place where we had a little portion and all of it stopped. I thought it was because we had a smaller portion which is why this was the case. Then we moved into my new house and there was none of it! No shadows, no mom calling me and that is when I came to the conclusion that 80 H Model town was fucking haunted. I maintain it and will do so till I die- there was something going on there, something was watching me and it was spooky shit but only in retrospect because when I was there it was so normal to me

So my third big story is summer of 2011 when the whole family was in America where we spent three months. Two of those months we were in a house in Dallas and we chilled out there. It was build in the 60s so not ancient but old. It had a hallway; the first room was a washing room, second room was where me and my younger two siblings stayed, bathroom in front of that and my parents room at the end. One day I'm in my room and I wanted to watch wrestling on the big tv in the lounge. so the hallway I just described had a tv lounge if you turned right from the washing machine. So I get off the bed and open the door which leads to the hallway. Right next to the door was a walk in closet with a light on top. I'm exiting the room and from the corner of my eye I see that the closet light is on and my sister is there with short hair wearing a green dress. I don't pay any attention to it and walk to the lounge. I open the door and my sister is there watching TV. I RUUUUN back to the hall and the closet and the light is off and no ones there. I freak out and go to the lounge and my sisters there with her typically long hair (falls to her back) and ask her if she was in the closet and she said that she had just gotten back from shopping and was watching tv. I couldn't understand what was going on. This was early on in the trip. A month and a half later (trips about to end) same thing happens. I get up to watch wrestling and out of the corner of my eye I see the exact same scene. I turn around and look at her directly: it is Amal, in a green dress and short hair. I look at her freak out. She asked me what happened and told me that she's gotten the haircut and dress today and I could not believe it I'd seen this exact scene a month prior. I was in such disbelief I started surfing the Internet and searched 'how to contact spirits'. And then I got really scared when a couple of nights later when I went to the lounge and said if there's anyone here show yourselves. Nothing came of it but it was all very spooky. I remember when we moved into the house and the maintenance guy said it was from the 60s and I asked 'oh so is it haunted' and he said 'yeah it's definitely haunted'.

So yeah that is my recollection of the supernatural experiences I've had. I still maintain that 80H is haunted and someday I want to buy it. I definitely believe in something I don't know what but probably ghosts. I can't speculate on what it was but it definitely happened.

Threat?



Never threatened or even an inkling of being threatened- it just felt like they were there. It was very normal to me I never put my finger on a presence it was a feeling

Did you ever try to explain your way around it through other accounts or discuss it with people around you?

I was always into horror movies and books but I never shared most of the house experience. I shared the woods and Dallas incidents but not the houses because I fishy realise there was anything funky going on. Even later on I never searched up accounts, it was always just a me thing. There was a lot of bonding with my younger brother about it because we definitely saw eye to eye so it was definitely a shared experience

Conclusion or reminisce about it?

Earlier on it was us trying to reach a conclusion but now we mostly reminisce about feeling something there all. The. Time.

Did the elders know (parents)?

You know what, never. I feel like once (maybe) and they were just like 'what??'

I haven't had this convo with my parents I probably should, maybe they experienced something.

### Anamta Choudry

I have never shared my observation with people outside my immediate family. The reason for sharing is to get any advice that may help us out if this situation. I am not giving out exact details of the person we doubt.

We used to live in a very old building, built somewhere around 1938 so maybe that's the reason, we have had a lot of young people pass away in that building but we never thought of paranormal things until we got affected. And we had an extremely jealous neighbour living two apartments away from us. As Ammi or abbu would get back from work or us sisters would achieve something academically she would always stare and say how come you guys manage. I can never really climb up so many stairs and this age. Even Such simplest of things. My parents used to be very active professionally and fitness wise. The lady had two sons and her husband was abroad. Her cousin stays right across the street and she admits that she does totkas (home remedies) in qabristan (graveyard) for the issues she faces.

When her husband came back after leaving his job in the other country he got diagnosed with kidney failure and later was on dialysis then passed away. Her one son passed away of cancer six months before her husband and the other son died a few years ago of the same kind of blood cancer. She was known for doing utaar when someone got sick in her house. She would ask other neighbours to keep some meat in their freezers for a few days and they would notice their fam members severely ill until she didn't take back whatever she had them keep.

My father helped her husband a lot in assisting with hospital visits and in emergencies, etc. Then after her husband's passing, my father was diagnosed with a failure in one of his kidneys while other worked partially. Alhamdulillah he is stable.

Then my mother in the same year that her second son died, got diagnosed with cancer. But here's a strange thing. She came to our in the same week as her son's passing and requested Ammi to make her ill son (let's call him Abdullah) this special dish Ammi used to make. She said he loved ammi's version of this dish and really wants to have it. Since we all grew up together almost, Ammi eagerly made him what he had requested and sent a plate over for him. In just some time she returned it saying he doesn't want it and he hasn't had it so you guys can have it. After just having received the plate, the entire wok full of the dish went bad. Ammi hadn't even put their returned food to the wok and still it tasted so bitter as if somebody had added a rat kill to it. Everyone at our place had it and felt something was off but didn't sense what it could be. Next day my youngest sister fell terribly ill. She almost died of a bad jaundice but Alhamdulillah she received after a long time.

Even though we lived there for over twenty years, the place suddenly started feeling very gloomy. Ammi didn't want to live there. A few weeks after her son's death, our family physician suspected Ammi had cancer which she couldn't get treated until it became stage 4.

But again before this a strange thing happened that scared Ammi for life and she no longer wanted to stay there. She was sleeping when she felt someone slap her hard on her shoulder and dug their nails scratching through her back. She thought maybe one of us sisters had accidentally hit her in our sleep but when she tried getting hold of the hand it felt like a skeleton. She was terrified and woke up abbu. And he said you might have had a bad dream. It's nothing, go back to sleep. And that's the same side of her neck she got cancer after a few days.

We didn't sell off the house but my aunt is a widow and has no other family members and my Ammi only has her after our nanis (grandmother) passing away so Ammi moved in with her. We all did. Ammi got treated and became stable.

Now after many years we returned, my sisters got covid and Ammi was already immunity compromised, so khala and abbu came back with her. We had been planning to have that place cleaned up for us as it had turned into a store. When ammi went there Ammi could eat and drink with no problem at all. They stayed for a week and ammi's health declined. By the time they came back, ammi's throat had choked. Her cancer had recurred and spread so much. We got the scan done and there was much spread. All doctors have now given up on her as cancer is spreading to distant sites and she tried different therapies, all have failed and her cancer is only increasing. She had turned into a skeleton.

We do pray ruqya though sometimes it's difficult to keep regular as she isn't well. We also visited deoband shershah and they gave us amulet and lamp to light at specific times of the day and another things to amulet kind of thing to burn close to her everyday. But we don't believe in these techniques of spiritual healing.

### Adil Yosaf

Our house was a 2 storey building with upper portion under construction. Construction was on hold for years due to personal reasons. The walls had been erected however they had not been plastered. There was timber on the floor and just doors and window openings without frames. Pretty creepy right off the bat. We had a staircase leading up to the 2nd floor and then a door which would take you to the rooftop.

My room was next to the staircase and the staircase used to creep me out because it disappeared into the darkness of top floor which had no lights.

A lot of things had happened in that room and that house.

I used to study till 3-4am. This one time I heard the second floor door banging at around 3. I thought maybe someone went up and forgot to lock the door during the day. Without giving it a second thought, I grabbed my phone turned on the flash and went upstairs to check. Mind you the door was on the opposite side of the floor so I had to cross the entire floor, empty rooms, timber on the floor to get there. I checked the door and it was locked. That's when I heard a noise behind me, it clearly felt like someone was walking and coming out of one of the rooms, then I heard the same noise again but this time on the timber. I completely froze and realised what I had done, I never come upstairs at night and everyone was asleep, why did I do it? My legs were shaking because I knew I would have to go across the floor, cross that room and run down the stairs. I don't remember how I did it but I ran, I got to my room and my heart almost gave in.

I had my desktop computer in my room next to the bathroom. My little brother used to play games on my computer during the day but no one was allowed in my room at night.

I was asleep in my bedroom when a bright light woke me up. I opened my eyes and saw someone sitting on my computer chair, the screen was on but I couldn't see the face. Assuming it was my little brother, I scolded him and told him to turn off the computer. I didn't get a response so I asked him why he wasn't responding? This figure got up and that's when I realised it was much, much taller than anyone in my family. He got up, walked across the bed and left the room. The screen was still on so I went out to talk to my brother and kind of scold him for not listening.

I went out immediately and there was no one outside. Like I mentioned in the previous post, my room is next to the staircase to 2nd floor all other rooms on first floor are pretty far from my room. There is no way he could have disappeared right away.

I went to his room because I was in shock. He was fast asleep, in fact snoring.

I came back to my room and the screen was still on so I definitely wasn't dreaming plus the dark figure was very tall.

I checked the time and realised it was 3:30am. Things like this always happened around that time.

I could see the staircase from the window behind my bedhead. And while studying at night I had seen figures walking up the stairs to second floor. No one from my family ever dared to go upstairs at night. I used to smell food at night as well.

Another incident where we had hired a cook who was actually blind and elderly (quite impressive, he was a very good cook, he would only make breakfast but he was more part of the family). He was very religious and kind. He would refuse to sleep in the room dedicated to staff. He would sleep in the garden away from the main house. We used to get along really well so I asked him why he wouldn't sleep in his room? He said it was loud, even though it was very secluded.

I asked him what he meant, he said people talk to him at night and don't let him sleep. He said they fight all the time.

Now his room was not quite on the second floor but there was another staircase leading towards staff rooms from that floor so he used to be pretty close to that floor. I told him about everything I had seen, he said there are others living upstairs, some good, some not so much but asked me not to go upstairs at night again. He said we were safe because the good ones were protecting us.

We had a cousin's wedding and majority of the family members stayed with us so I had to share my room with my cousins. I thought they slept well at night because I didn't wake up at night from any noise but they told me in the morning that they didn't get any sleep and eventually left the room to sleep elsewhere. I asked them why? They said they after out chatter, they were ready to sleep but one by one they started waking up because it felt like someone was pulling their pillows. Initially they were blaming each other but then they heard loud cries of cats. They tried to wake me up but I was fast asleep and wouldn't wake up (I am a light sleeper). Terrified, they left the room. Similar incidents had happened to my friends who had come for sleepovers. We never shared these incidents with anyone so there was no way they knew about this or were making this up. People eventually stopped staying with us in our house, they would come during the day but refused to stay.

The cook I mentioned used to wake up at 3am to pray and I would see him circling the house praying. The house was quiet when he was with us. I had heard him read ayahs from Quran loudly at night. I felt really bad because I thought he was really scared as well given that he couldn't see so I spoke to my mum and asked for him to be moved into a room in the main house. But he even refused to sleep there and continued to sleep in the garden. He once told me that the 'others' don't like him much, I told him to leave and we will continue to support him as he was family, he said he didn't want to leave us alone here. Sadly, I was the one who eventually discovered him lying on the floor in the staff bedroom (which he never used). It was so traumatising, I left the house and country not long after that. I have not been back to that house in 15 years, my family still lives there but they come to visit me whenever I go to Pakistan.

### Ayza Alam

I have been shrugging this thought for a while but I just came across a post about shaadi and magic and it started to hug me again. But I am scared to think on those lines so want a perspective. Kyunke kisi pe jadoo ki najaiz Tohmat lagana bhi Itna hi Haram hai jitna jadoo haraam hai.

So I and my husband were head over heels with each other and got married 10 years ago. My MIL who is a sweet-talker manipulative (I used to adore her and trust her more than my mom) didn't want her kids to get married and all my husbands other siblings are still single. Khair both of us got married after much trouble. Now some interesting facts.

- We had our first baby after 3 years. Before that I was working and continuing my studies and somehow got very little time to spend with my husband. My MiL used to encourage this routine (because it kept us away from each other).

- in the very first week of my shaadi I used to get very sharp pain in my stomach EVERY NIGHT. I would be fine all day long but as soon as it would be bed time I would get very intense excruciating pain so much so that I wouldn't be able to sleep but it would subside on its own by morning. My medical reports were normal. Then my MIL did my nazar with 7 mirchen (she claimed she recited Surah naas on them) and the pain went away.

- My husband was the first and only man I have ever slept with but since wedding night to this day he complains that he feels I am too loose and doesn't feel connected to me while having Sex. At the same time I would always feel disconnected too and as much as I love him, would always feel tired when we had to have sex and felt detached.

Likewise he complained he felt "bhaari" when I am around. He always gets backache when sleeping in our bedroom but sleeps very well in my MiLs bedroom or elsewhere in the house. However he also sleeps well on our room when I am away at my moms.

- when I left work after my first born and started to spend more time at home that's when we began to fight very crazily. My mil made sure I don't do any of my husbands chores including cooking and he would eat with his parents only. We would often fight on petty things and began to grow apart. In this time I also stopped feeling like taking care of myself, I put on weight, stopped praying namaz and my skin and face became dull (I was better looking than my husband). For days I wouldn't even feel like taking a shower. My hair used to get such bad knots that it would be almost impossible to brush them out.

- I spent time at my moms last year when I was expecting my second born and that's when I decided to take charge of my life and I and my husband discussed over our issues. I make a lot of effort to keep myself calm and take care of myself consciously but I am still unable to pray regularly. I either forget or get lazy, and if somehow I reach the prayer mat, something or the other happens and my namaz or Wuzu breaks.

- I pray ruqyah on phone in my room and while my relationship with husband have hit slightly better due to a lot of hard work, our sexual life is still a mess, and at times he suddenly picks fight over his sexual deprivation.

- i often wake up with unknown Bruises and marks over my body.

I have had my blood work done multiple times and have no underlying conditions and so is the case with my husband. I do have reasons to believe that we might be under a spell but I am not sure. I once contacted a raaqi and he asked for 70k. I can't afford to spend money and I can't go anywhere physically.

- I would also like to add that initially a lot of my clothes went missing randomly and maid only cleans the room in my presence. My wedding ring also went missing from my closet while all other jewellery in the same pouch is there as it is

### Sana Adnan

One of my cousins was diagnosed with colon cancer and he died within six months of his diagnosis. Just days before his death, his 5 year old son also died in an accident. A couple of years later, one of our close relative came to our house and while talking to my mother she confessed that the boy (my

cousin) misbehaved with her one day and she did black magic on him to eliminate him and his "nassal". My mother was shocked to hear this. This woman is very well known in our family by taweez (Tawiz worn by some Muslims contain verses from the Quran and/or other Islamic prayers for the protection from magic and diseases. The Tawiz is worn by some Muslims to protect them from evil also. It is intended to be an amulet. The word ta'wiz is used to refer to other types of amulets), dam darood (Anyone who believes that the mere recitation of Quranic verses and blowing it on water, or burning pieces of paper with some instructions has magical properties) etc but no one could believe that she would stoop this low. She then asked my mother to end my brother's engagement and get him married to her daughter. My brother is very handsome and successful. My mother refused her gently that she cannot do this. The woman left and the next day my brother got sick. He stopped eating and meeting with people. He locked himself in one room and he became extremely weak. My parents would switch doctors to get diagnosis but all in vain. All of his reports were normal but he look like he is about to die. Pale white complexion with bones visible confined in a dark isolated room. My mother then consult aalim who says that someone has done black magic on him. The rituals started for him and he starts getting better. Alhamdulillah he is better now but we are extremely worried. This is such an unfortunate thing to have someone like this woman in close relation. You can't confront such people because of the fear that they will do it again out of rage. You cannot stop them from visiting you because of the same fear. Our family had some very mysterious and accidental deaths over the past decade and it is reported by witnesses in the family that this woman directly threatened them of the worst before they died.

### Sahar Binte Haider

Sharing a true story that actually happened in my mother's very close friend's family. It's 100% based on true events.

So my mom's friend lives in a joint family system with each floor designated for each bahu.

Her jeth/jethanis had a separate floor in the same house. So she fixed her son's engagement with her sister's daughter (niece) after which her jethanni got furious and cut ties with her. It's because her jethanni wanted aunty (my mom's friend) to choose one of her 2 daughters for her son. Aunty's son wasn't interested in their daughter and was in love with khala ki beti.

Some time passed by and they started preparing for the wedding. That's when one day her bahu to be (niece) started getting sick very often. She would call my mom and share every detail in fear and confusion. Please note that my mom's friend is a gem of a person, a very God fearing person who wouldn't hurt anyone. She said her niece's body freezes and her voice starts changing. They took her to imam of masjid in our area several times after which he confirmed that her neice has been possessed and someone was doing black magic. After a few days he found out that it was her jethanni who had hired someone to do black magic on her niece. Idk how but these imams get visuals of people doing the deed and he said following were the words of her jethanni "In ko basnay nahi dongi ink betay ka ghar tbah krdongi". The imam Sahab told them not to confront the jethani at all as it could worsen the situation. He asked to continue treatment silently. Just get her roohani ilaaj which they did for 2-3 years.

They got married (I attended their wedding also) and the bride moved to KSA with her husband. All went fine but as soon as she visited Pakistan, she started experiencing the same things as soon as she landed on airport. They continued her treatment once again, and in the meanwhile she got pregnant. I remember I was also pregnant back then and our due dates were same so we were in touch with them and she was doing completely fine.

One morning when it was her 7th month my mom got call from her friend that her bahu is not feeling well and they're rushing to the hospital. On the way, she delivered her baby and it was a still birth

It was definitely a tough time for them but they stood strong and strengthened their ties with Allah. Soon everything was fine and her bahu was blessed with a healthy child afterwards

### Kinnaird Student

I've been in kinnaird for four year's now. Never encountered any kind of supernatural problem, but I have heard many horror tales, and in my quest for adventure visited every nook and cranny, all the empty and lonely corners and places( I love to spend time at places like this all alone). Namely speaking of the one's I have heard and some of my friends experienced the first floor of science block, The huge creepy tree at the back of Art block, The lift in Amaltas (a sort of tree).

For the lift and the tree I never experienced anything there. I always get to college really early in the morning, tend to use the lift all alone , go sit at the most empty place till class, nothing every happened!

But I guess something got offended?

It was end of March (last year), mids were ongoing I forgot my notebook in physics lab on the first floor of science block. A senior found it and put it in the small room attached to it where the equipment was kept( don't why she didn't bring it and just give it to me since we had the last lecture together as well). Next day I was panicking, the exam of the subject was on the next day (and also the college was empty as well) Khair (anyway) She told me that she found it kept it in the room, So I told my friends to wait for me in the cafe while I quickly grab it from the lab.

One step in, and I started getting the chills, all the way to the lab I felt like someone was tailing me. I quickly got into the room, saw the notebook grabbed it and I kid you not in front of me there was a huge shadow growing in my shadow.

My soul left my body for a sec, and just as my mind started to work and I was about to recite Ayat ul Kursi, the door shut close. And it was so loud I felt the room shake. Having dealt with black magic for so long it did not phase me as much as it would back when I was in school so I quickly in a loud voice started to recite Ayat ul Kursi, and while doing that I simultaneously played surah baqarah at full volume on my phone. While reciting I felt someone caress my back and a huge bang from outside like the chairs were being thrown. The door opened on its own, 6-7 mins in of the recitation, I took a quick glance while hightailing out of the room, everything was in place!!

I didn't mention it, and kept assuring myself it might have happened because of the wind, and science block classes (MashaAllah) also don't have a handle to open the door from inside. So if it's windy and door shuts close you have to wait for someone to save you or pray the door magically opens!

But as I calmed down all thorough out the study session I could only think if it was the wind then the lab doors would have closed not the small rooms, and the wind won't open them back while caressing my back and presenting a creepy shadow in my own.

Nothing more happened when I was in the premises but as soon as I sat in the car outside the gate I started smelling something really bad. I asked the driver if he could smell it, but he couldn't. I even opened the window, but I could still smell it. I recited 4 qul till I got home, and it got stronger, I asked my mother if something was smelling but she no and I told her about my experience and the weird disgusting smell. I was the only one smelling it. No one else could.

It stayed with me till my mother sprinkled some prhai ki hui (recited upon) rose water on me, and told me that while she was walking with an auntie who lives in the same street as us, she brought up the topic of the smell, and auntie told her that it's because a jinn is right with me, and that the same happened with her daughter(who also used to go to kc) and a buzurg (elder) told her that and gave that prhai wala rose water to sprinkle on her (she also gave some for me).

But that was it, nothing ever happened since then. Shukr Allhamdulliah.

Another incident, my friend reckons she saw a doppelgänger of herself and got really creepy vibes in the lift when she got stuck in there. I believed that because I just got out of my Islamiat class and was heading towards the lift with a classmate(who was a Christian), I don't remember exactly what led to conversation but I was telling her the meaning of Ayat ul kursi and its benefits as she was in the isl class due the economics ma'am being absent and got curious about it.

Long story short, she presses the button, the lift opens, my friend stumbles out panicking. I'm like yr kya hua, tum yahan kya kr rhi ho? (Hey What Happened what are you doing here?). I sat her down with me on the bench in front of the lift and then she told me everything!

She said that she got into the lift, and all of a sudden the lights started flickering and it got stuck, then she tried calling for me and another friend( it was our first year, second week in, and only us three friends knew each other at that time) (pitiful I know) , but the call wouldn't go through, she was stuck for 15 mins, even showed me the record of her trying to call us and the help no in the lift. She said she heard a laugh and in the huge mirror behind her saw her doppelgänger standing next to her but the eyes were blood red and that she was so scared and could only recite ayats (verses) in heart as her body and tongue was frozen. And she said that if we hadn't opened the lift at that time, the entity would have hurt her more, it had its arm over her shoulders and squeezing hard, she had marks on her left shoulder!!

I helped her to her class which was right next to the lift ,and on instance of my Christian class fellow who thought she was just exaggerating took the lift, nothing happened with us ( Allhamdulliah) But I definitely believed her, as I have heard some things about it and I also have known her since 5 grade. She wasn't one to scare or make things up. And she also fell ill with a high fever next day, and never used the lift again even when in a group.

### Alia Chatta

If you live in Karachi you must've come across the strange incidents surrounding Karsaz road. Many people have reported being haunted while passing by late. Do they hold any truth? That is for you to decide on your own. I commute through Karsaz every day but nothing seems odd during daylight hours. At night however the vibes are very eerie. I say because I have seen it with my own eyes not once but twice.

The first time around I was coming home late from a friend's house. It must've been around ten or ten thirty when I got into the car and we drove onto main Karsaz road. I remember my father complaining that I had taken too long meanwhile I argued that it wasn't. As we were driving a corolla driving at full speed overtook us. Perhaps the driver was under influence because that car out of nowhere flipped upside down and crashed barely inches away from us. The front portion of it was entirely crushed, the last thing I saw was shattered glass littering on the road. We still don't know if the driver survived or not. Road raging is possible but a could a car flip when there are not even any bumps?

Regardless I had the experience of passing by once again late. Many years later. The second time was even stranger since I experienced it first hand. I had been hanging out with some friends and ended up leaving quite late. Around eleven. My driver arrived to pick me up around eleven and seconds after I got into the car it begun raining cats and dogs. Karachi just being Karachi. The storm was so rough the visibility faded and the rain thundered against the roof so hard I genuinely thought it would collapse. People were desperately looking for a way to escape the rain. The moment we reached the road near nursery the car stopped moving. The driver couldn't figure out what was wrong apparently and went outside in the thundering rain to check leaving me alone in the car. I tried calling home but there was no service. All of a sudden the car begun to slide backwards slowly. At that moment I felt my life flash right before my eyes, it felt as if I was free falling despite there being no slope? Luckily or unluckily it crashed into a car right behind us. Their headlights were damaged but it stopped the car

from a bigger crash. I was frozen still in my seat however until I heard the owner of the car and the driver arguing outside. In a cold sweat I realized this was the same spot I had seen the car crash years ago.

### Rabia Gohar

OK so my sisters wanted to know about the karsaz incident that happened to my friend and her husband in 2019 when I visited khi and both husband and wife came along to meet me( my friend 'saba ' along with her husband 'faris ' ) so they live in North nazimabad and I was in DHA , its atleast 40mins drive without traffic from my place to theirs . Acha tu saba came to see me and waapsi mai her husband came to pick her up , baato baato mai we couldn't realise it was 1:30 am and raasta kaafi lamba tha, since khi k halaat are a bit uncertain once its late tu he had come to pick his wife on a motorcycle (motorbike doesn't attract muggers thus lesser risk of street crimes) acha ji, I offered them to stay since I didn't like them leaving this late but they refused and said its fine for them and it won't be such an issue ofcourse they'll recite ayat ul kursi and they left.

So, there came the KARSAAZ ROAD, they were talking to each other about something (personal) which kept them busy until this horrendous creature caught their attention and left them traumatised for life.

I'll narrate " mai bike per bethi hui thi and

bike chal rahi hai with achi khaasi speed, aik dum mere bilkul sath mai bulkul meri hi jaisi larki hai jo ussi speed k sath hawa mai hai , aik second ko mujhe samajh nahi aaya k sheesha kahan se itnay barray Road per aagya mainey zara si neck turn ki towards her direction tu faris ne bola 'saba nahi' , khauf k maaray meri body bejaan si honay lagi lekin woh cheez mere sath jaisey mere bilkul godh mai ho, move karrahi mujhe woh qpni ankh k paas mehsoos horahi thi and jaisey mujhe hi dekh rahi ho, mujhe khauf se vomit and behoshi wali feeling aanay lagi,

"faris" mai ne bht mushkil se bulaya , awaaz jaisey nikal hi nahi rahi thi, kahuf itna k mere and faris k moo se kuch nikal hi nahi sak raha tha, Road jaisey khatam honay ka naam hi nahi le rahi thi, bike ki speed faris ne bht zyaada increase kardi, lekin woh cheez ub bhi ussi speed se hawa mai mere saath chal rahi thi, meri tbyat itni kharaab horahi thi k neck mai meri jaisey jaan khatam horahi ho, mujhse jo hoska mainey parhna start kardiya , lekin woh cheez tub bhi wahin ki wahin,

"so jaao" faris samajh gya tha k mai behsoh horahi hu kahin bike rokni na paray, mainey eyes close ki husband k shoulder per

sir rakh diya "ya Allah mai behosh hogyi tu yahan is mohtarma meri hamshakal k sath rukna na parja ye, bus aisa laga kitne ghanatay guzar gaye hain is Road per. Aakhir ko mujhe faris ki awaaz aayi saba, sub theek hai hum nikal aaye hain aagay.

Gher kareeb hai. Aankhein kholne ki himmat mere ander tub bhi nahi thi, jub tak k gher k samny nahi aayi. Aankhein kholi and ander bhaagi.

Gher aaker faris aur mai itney khauf zada thy k kuch discuss nahi kiya.

Subha uth k faris ne mujhe bataaya,

k woh jo bhi cheez thi bilkul tumhari shakal ki thi bus uski smile bht barri thi jo k lagaatar wide smile hi kaarahi thi, faris ne bola k bus Allah

ne bachaaya maine aik nazar us cheez ko dekh k dobara nahi dekha , k

accident hojyga , mai lagaatar ayatul kursi parhta raha and tumhe mana kiya k uski taraf mat dekhna, shayad tum bardaasht nahi karpaati,



To this day , saba is still terrified to look in the mirror, she doesn't travel on bike anymore, she has the fear of travelling after 9 pm, she can't sleep or stay alone even if its broad day light. Her fear of being so close to that entity has a deep impact on her mental health.

### Hina Imtiaz

This happened with my best friend, he was coming back from a project with his assistant who was driving his own car behind him, when they turned for karsaz from sharah faisal, right there my friend saw a graceful woman in white clothes , she was dressed up as if she was coming back from a wedding, since there is a shadi hall not so far away from that point, my friend thought she might have had her car broken or something, he said she did not seem to be the call girl kind that you usually find around the streets at these odd hours, so he slowed down a bit to see if her car was broken or she needed help.. what he saw next froze his blood, that woman turned and had the creepiest grin ear to ear on her face, and she had black holes for eyes,with a pale white face, she didn't exactly turn, it was just her neck moving slowly in synchronization with the turning of the car , my friend was on call with his assistant and he asked him if he saw that, the assistant said \*there is no one there\* he could not see anything, my friend recited dua and told the assistant to speed up and not look back, they drove off, my friend said he was so psyched out that he felt in a blink of an eye that she will be sitting next to him or at the back seat, so he kept looking around, he could not see her in the back view mirror even.

When he was telling us this story , he reenacted the whole thing in a slow motion pace the way it happened with proper facial expression of that smile, and it gave us such bad goosebumps.. every time i tell someone this story i think of my friend's face..and even his face was so scary tou i imagine k asli wali ka kaisa hoga...

Another friend had encountered the same being at karsaz too, he was on his bike and he drove right through her.

Someone else narrated their relative's encounter at karsaz and the description of the being matched to that my friend had seen, so this is an occasional happening over there.

### Anonymous

Today's story belongs to my cousin. He was very fond of hunting and adventures so one day he made a plan with his friends to visit Cholistan dessert. They knew it was going to be a long journey and due to shortage of resources they might even face problems there but despite all odds they collected gallons of petrol, water and food to spend the next days of their journey and left on their jeep. He said on the way while crossing local villages people told them not to travel in that area at night and they even warned us that others have sighted ' chalawa' ( a cultural term to describe a type of jinnat who are swift footed and can jump and travel long distances in a flash and can even show up in a human form and then disappear in a glimpse but its advised not to follow them, look back at them or go to them in any case as it might cause harm—don't know the reality behind this personally).

Anyhow none of the guys believed these stories. So my cousin narrates:

'It was a deserted silent path with acres of barren land on either side and not even a single bush or a plant could be seen. The only thing lighting our path was the headlight of our jeep and we were enjoying the serenity and calmness of nature when we suddenly realized there is a women dressed in red bridal dress standing at a distance. We immediately knew it couldn't be any human as there wasn't any civilization around from where she could have come. She was dressed in local bridal dress and was standing alone at that time staring intently at our jeep. Her calmness gave us further chills and we

totally ignored her and moved past her and no one looked back to see whether she had disappeared or was still standing there. Everyone thanked God they had safely crossed whatever it was... But we hadn't travelled a few more Kilometres till we saw an old man standing on the side of our path now. He had a white cloth wrapped around his body and held a stick in his hand. He too stood alone in the wilderness just staring at them pass. We ignored him too and drove on reciting Quranic verses. We sped up the jeep and hadn't crossed a few more kilometres till we saw the same women again standing in our path. There was no way she could have travelled so far and so fast so we really freaked out.. we came on the verge of crying.. as she kept on appearing after every few minutes and so would the old man. Sometimes alone and sometimes together. But always standing by our path and staring at us with a deep look and a cunning smile. It continued until sunrise and those 'chilawa' as the locals said kept scaring us. Thankfully they didn't harm us and we finished their journey safely only with a story to freak out over for the rest of our lives'

### Hamza Arshad

I belong to a small village in the north-eastern area of Pakistan, adjacent to Indian border. Before Partition of Subcontinent, many Hindus used to live in our area. They continued to live side by side with Muslims for centuries without any strife. But after Partition, Hindu families opted to migrate to India. My grandfather was in the British Army during British Raj and he was quartered in Hyderabad State that is now in India (that is one reason why all us brothers and sisters know English though our native language is Punjabi). He migrated to Pakistan in 1950, three years after the freedom. He built a house at the very place where, before migration, Hindus used to do cremation. People of the village forbade him to build house there, but he, being an ex-soldier, knew no fear.

Most of our life remained peaceful and tranquil. But when I was in my teens, I began to see weird things. I often saw a crawling skull in our garden and backyard. We had planted so many trees and flowery bushes there, and the place had become a tiny grove. Often in the small hours, when thick darkness prevailed on the atmosphere (as there was no electricity in our village then), midst dead silence, I felt myself awake... Awake and fully conscious. I felt the presence of something crawling on the floor in my room. In spite of darkness, I could see, or I was made to see, a skull moving. I could hear scraping sound that chilled the marrow of my bones. Its upper teeth were visible but lower jaw was deformed and its hollow eyes seemed to look at me. I couldn't shriek. My whole body became numb. I felt chill, very chill. The skull moved towards a Vachellia Nilotic tree which we locally call 'keekar'. It disappeared beside it somewhere, as I couldn't chase it due to fear and darkness. I witnessed this ghastly sight randomly, but mostly on moonless nights.

After a while my condition used to become normal. I was terribly afraid, but I couldn't recount these events to anyone. But I couldn't go near that keekar tree even during the day. I can't call these events hallucinations because I felt I was awake and undergoing that terrible experience. I remained afraid during my high school time. Later, my father cut down some trees, including that keekar tree to build new rooms. When the earth was dug for foundations, some bones and a skull were discovered. I was stunned to see that it was the same skull that I used to see at night. We buried them at some other place. Now I am fifty years old. But still I can't explain these events. This memory terrifies me still

### M Khan

I don't have any paranormal experiences of my own. The incident I'm about to narrate was told to me by my wife and happened to my mother-in-law.

A bit of a background about our family. I and my wife are both medical doctors doing our post-graduation and born and bred in Karachi with Urdu as our first language.

This happened when my wife was about 6-7 years old and her family decided to take a trip to the Northern areas of Pakistan. Gilgit & Baltistan along with Kashmir are some of the most beautiful places in the world with tall ice capped mountains and captivating valleys and above all with the solitude and calmness in contrast to the busy and polluted air of the cities is a welcome escape from the daily routine.

So coming back to the story, they packed and left in early morning for a week's trip which included the parents and my wife with her 3 elder siblings (2 sisters and brother). They enjoyed a lot on their trip especially at the famous Hunza and Kaghan valleys.

At one point, with a day remaining of their trip they couldn't find a suitable hotel and after much hassle got one at a very distant place with very little population and residences around. There was hardly anyone residing in the hotel at that moment and they got a room on the 2nd floor. Now this room had 2 windows, one larger facing one of the beds at some distance from the foot end and both of these were locked. As there was a day remaining they decided to do some shopping and left in the afternoon and returned around 10pm. They immediately took to packing their stuff.

My mother-in-law couldn't find a beautiful ladies handbag she bought on one of her earlier shopping trips. They looked everywhere in the room and in their travel bags which sounded very strange as they took much care locking all their stuff when they left and she distinctly remembered putting it in one of the travel bags and locking it up, then where did it go? It was already late night so they decided to sleep with hopes of giving it one more try in the morning before leaving.

That night my mother-in-law woke around 2am at night and felt the room's temperature to be unusually cold when something caught her eye which gave her chills. She saw that the large window near the bed was open and there was a woman sitting on the window sill facing her. She was attired in traditional northern clothing even wearing a traditional Hunzai womam cap and had a blank expression on her face. The eerie part was that she had my mother-in-law's handbag in one hand and with her other hand was slowly gesturing calling her near as if to come and take her bag. My mother-in-law started reciting Duas and drew the blanket over her face and kept it as such. After sometime she felt that the heaviness and cold in the room had gone but she couldn't sleep for the night.

When everybody woke up in the morning, she was shocked to see the window locked and her handbag lying on the side table near the bed. She told everyone after which they started packing and left. The thing which concerned her was that how the lady got there when everything was locked, how she got the bag in the first place and above all who was she and whether she was evil. They tried asking the receptionist about it and he had no clue either as he started working there recently.

### Ali Memon

My mom was supposed to marry her cousin and she refused to marry later after graduation so her tai did black magic on her and my dad

Initially everything was good and my parents visited 4-5 countries after marriage, my brother was born after a year

Life was smooth and perfect until a few years later my dad began to insult my mom for minor faults and he started making fuss over everything and blaming mom and this was time when my parents came to Pakistan and we settled in Islamabad. Long story short

My parents who were totally in love with each other went nuts,

Once my mom saw in her dream a messy old woman with long dirty hair telling her your husband will lose his job and never get it again so after few days my dad resigned and it has been 13 years he never got a job since then, Now due to financial crisis we moved to Lahore and things started to get worse than ever my parents started fighting on daily basis and sometimes it was intense

and before every fight she would see her tai in her dreams. At this point my mom contacted few alam and all of them told about black magic on my mom and dad both and it was done on purpose to get them divorced. Since many years has passed it was getting stronger

My mother got bruises on her whole body for no reason, almost our whole family get sleep paralyzed (till now) and we were sinking in every aspect we shifted from 1 kanal to 4 marla house in just 1 year after we came to Lahore

We contacted so many molvis and most of them said it was too severe to tackle, every time my dad was near mom she would say he smells so bad and we all were like no she doesn't and same goes for dad

He stated hating mom till a point came he gave her one divorce and then after some time ruju kar leya, My mom started sleep walking she would sit at some unusual places like kitchen floor, in store room and talk to a wall.

Now my sister is epileptic, my brother has severe anger issues. He won't even get a proper job, my mom is broken due to my dad's behavior and my dad he is just cold and mean and totally isolated from society no friends no family nothing

He likes to stay in his room alone isolated

My mom again contacted some alam in Madina. He assured her everything will take a U-turn after he comes and remove that entity from our family

But he never came. My mom recites kul shareef and few duas on daily basis

If she skips a day we face immediate bad effects